



This exhibition invites you on a journey to the Mediterranean Sea from the years 1400 to 1800. In this period, Venice—an astonishing city built on hundreds of small islands off the coast of Northeast Italy—stood at the crossroads of a vast trade network connecting Africa, Asia, and Europe. To maintain its status as an international emporium with markets full of ceramics, metalwork, spices, textiles, and other goods, Venice acquired overseas territory to its east and cultivated close ties with the Ottomans, whose empire became the wealthiest and most powerful in the Eastern Mediterranean after their conquest of Constantinople (now Istanbul) in 1453 and widespread expansion in the sixteenth century.

This ambitious cross-cultural exhibition explores a major chapter in world history. Featuring more than 150 works of art in glass, painting, print, silk, and other media, it draws from the vast and varied collections of seven Venetian museums: Ca' Rezzonico, the museum of eighteenth-century Venice; Gallerie dell'Accademia, a museum of Venetian painting; Museo Correr, a museum dedicated to Venetian art, life, and culture; Museo Fortuny, the former home and workshop of Mariano Fortuny (1871–1949); Museo del Vetro, a glass museum; Museo di Palazzo Mocenigo, a study center for the history of costume, textiles, and perfume; and Palazzo Ducale, the doge's palace. The Venetian loans are joined by objects from a museum at the University of Zadar in Croatia. Taking a wide view of two Mediterranean superpowers, the exhibition explores their relationship in artistic, culinary, diplomatic, economic, and political spheres. The works of art are organized thematically; together and individually, these objects tell fascinating stories.



Fig 1: Gentile Bellini. Portrait medal of Sultan Mehmed II, ca. 1480. Cast bronze; diam. 3 3/4 in. Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia—Museo Correr, Numismatics, Cl XXXIX n. 95

While acknowledging that Venice and the Ottoman Empire went to war seven times over territory, this exhibition emphasizes that, during periods of peace—which far outnumbered times of conflict—the two powers forged a close relationship rooted in trade and diplomacy. Many intriguing works of art resulted. The show highlights motifs shared by Venetian and Ottoman art and demonstrates how Venetians and Ottomans admired and sought one another's luxury goods and gave

them to each other as gifts. To cite a few examples, Ottoman sultans liked Murano glass and portraits of themselves by Venetian artists (fig. 1), while Venetian women wore Ottoman clogs (fig. 2) and perfumed their homes with incense burners from Ottoman lands. The exhibition also includes objects recently excavated from a Venetian ship that sank in 1583 en route to Constantinople, giving us insight into the exact goods,



**Fig 2:** Ottoman Turkish artisanship. Bath clogs, 17th century. Wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, studded leather; 2 3/4 x 9 1/8 in. Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia—Museo di Palazzo Mocenigo, Cl. XXIV n. 0119

such as glass windowpanes and brass chandeliers, that Venetians took to the Ottoman court and market.

The exhibition concludes with an enchanting coda: a gallery devoted to the exquisite creations of Mariano Fortuny, a Spanish artist who lived in Venice during the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He developed printing techniques to imitate the shimmer and bold patterns of historical silks and velvets. Through his sumptuous textiles, exemplified by a fabric with gold tulips (cover), Fortuny evoked the bygone era of Venice and the Ottoman Empire.



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## Organized by the Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia and The Museum Box









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Cover: Mariano Fortuny textile factory, Venice. Fragment of printed cloth, first half of the 20th century. Printed silk velvet; 60 1/4 x 45 7/8 in. Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia—Museo Fortuny, T0006



