

Museums in Istanbul, Turkey

General Note

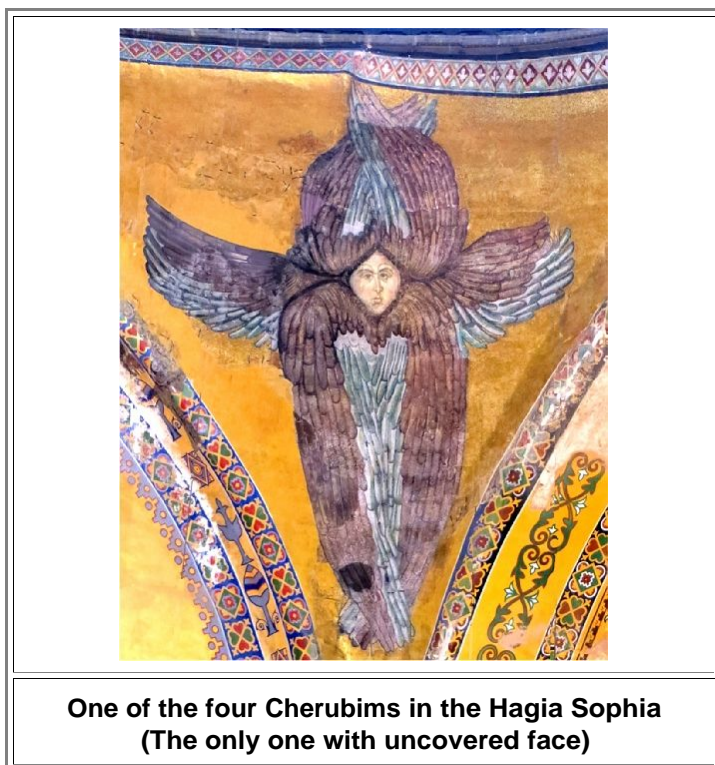
Istanbul is full of museums. Discounting buildings that are museums (like the Hagia Sophia, Topkapi palace, ...), I visited, for example, the:

- Cistern
- Mosaic museum
- Oriental Art museum
- Archaeological museum
- Askeri museum
- Chora church
- Yedikule Fortress
- Museum of the history of Science & Technology in Islam
- Maritime Museum

Istanbul is also full of weird people (usually from somewhere else). It also used to be the residence of belligerently looking guys you didn't want to meet:



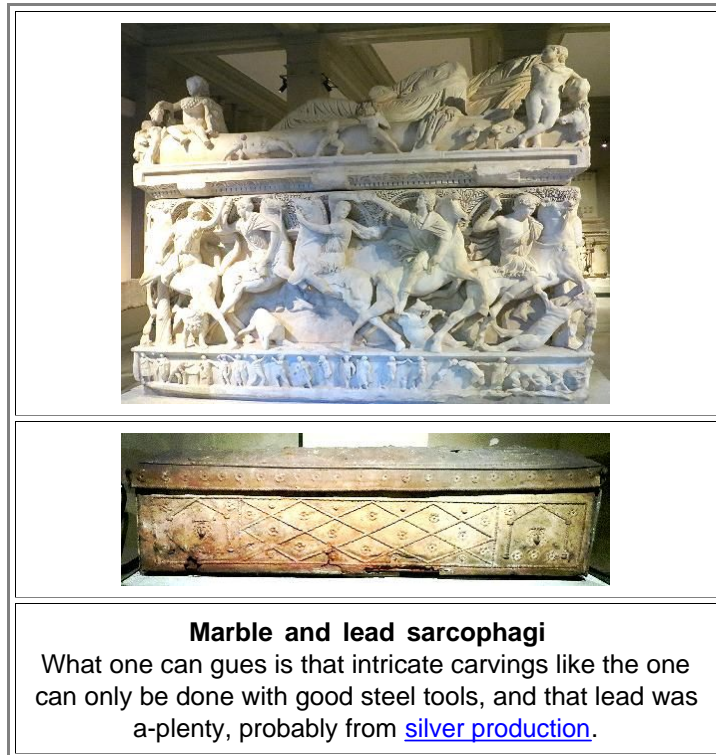
These are about the only pictures (from a book) that you will find in the **museum of oriental art** (or anywhere else). So be glad that the guy below watches over you (provided you are a Christian, of course):



- If you can live with very short to non-existent explanations for the objects displayed, I can recommend all these places without further reservations. However, as far metals, steel and swords are concerned, only the Archeological and Askeri museum plus some exhibits in the Topkapi palace are of some interest. To make a long story short: While there are plenty of extremely interesting exhibits concerning metals or metal uses, you don't learn much about the history of metals, steel and swords - and this includes the museum of the history of science & technology in Islam that misses a great opportunity to highlight some of real Ottoman achievements.

The Archeological Museum

- ▣ The archeological Museum is a huge complex of buildings near the Topkapi palace and full with breathtaking objects, in particular marbles. Outstanding are the sarcophagi; mostly made from elaborately carved marble but on occasion also made from lead. They all date roughly to 500 BC. [1](#)



Marble and lead sarcophagi

What one can guess is that intricate carvings like the one can only be done with good steel tools, and that lead was a-plenty, probably from [silver production](#).

- The Turkish museums still have a healthy if somewhat indelicate disposition towards their objects. They show what people want to see, and this includes the content of sarcophagi. Meet **King Tabnit**:



SAYDA KR-LLI TABNIT'IN MUMYASI (İÖ. 500 civarı)
MUMMY OF SIDONIAN KING TABNIT (About 500 BC;

King Tabnit; not at his best

▀ The scenes on the marble sarcophagi are rendered in extremely precise detail; it once more suggests the use of good steel tools to me. The sculptures were also painted, here is an example:



Details of marble carving on some sarcophagus
Large pictures in [this link](#)



A bit of gossiping instead of killing people or animals for a change.

("You won't believe this and don't tell anybody but Aphrodite - she is such a slut - betrays poor Hephaistos with all of the Athens soccer team...")

They also have a breathtaking collection of marble sculptures - here is an extremely relaxed and haughty Artemis:



Artemis.

That's all very nice - but *how about metals*? Unfortunately, the picture on the "[Metals in Museums](#)" starting site says it all: Forget it!

Not that they don't have lots of interesting metal and metal-related objects. You just don't learn much from the labels. In defence of the museum I have to say that the labeling of most objects seems to be pretty old. The museum staff, faced with the (impossible) task of changing many thousands of labels, elected to go instead for a number of posters, places in between exhibits, that give (mostly good) background information.

● Here is one example of what you can expect to find with respect to metals:



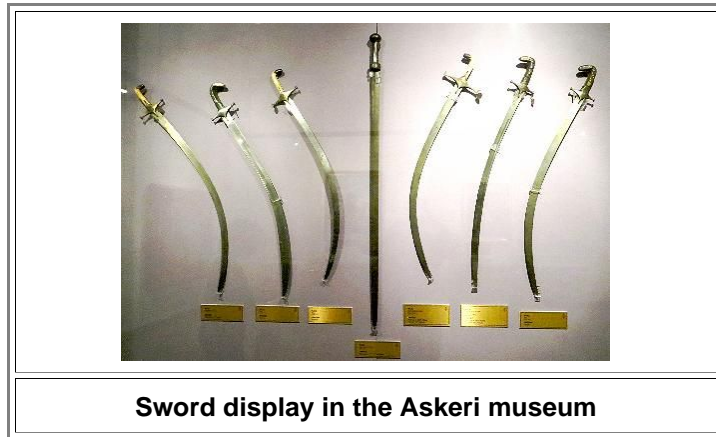
● The label shown is just for one of objects (the bulls) but the others ones are rather similar. In other words: you get no information whatsoever about these objects. That is also true for most of the other (often marvellous) things in the museum.

I'm pretty sure that the cows are part of a standard found in [Alaca Höyük](#). Compare those cows to their [cousins in the Metropolitan](#), and you start to ask questions. You just don't get answers.

Nevertheless: Go and visit that museum! It is definitely worth your while - for up to a whole day! But now let's proceed to the Askeri Museum

The Askeri Museum

▶ The Askeri (= Military) Museum is full of military hardware, including a lot of swords. Here is one example:



● I won't show any more of this because you (and in particular I) will be better off if you buy the [book to the show](#). Unfortunately, the swords, it seems, have often been polished and wootz patterns are invisible or hard to see. It is definitely worthwhile to go and see the collection, however.

▶ The Askeri Museum has more to offer. First, it graphically reminds you that what you were taught about history was always biased, especially if it concerns military exploits. While "the West" tends to see **Attila** and his huns a bit on the critical side, or perceives the fall of Constantinople to the 21-year-old Sultan Mehmed II in 1453 as a sad event, the Turks beg to differ. I have already given you [an example of this](#), here is a second one:



● This is a small part of a monumental painting in the museum; the whole painting [is here](#).

▶ The Askeri museum is also home to a military band in the old style. It performs once a week and that is something you should not miss! In this context you also learn that military music owes much to the Turks! The guys dress up, and the band includes a few warriors in full (heavy metal) regalia like this one:



Turkish warrior

■ In my general area you can't go out anymore during the summer season without encountering some Roman and Viking enactors, thrashing it out with sword and shield, a medieval market, or knights in full armor doing a tournament at some festivity. Enacting the past, often with scientific interest, has become a major activity.

- The Turks, it turns out, enact their past - to some extent in the Askeri museum. A particular interesting technical part of that past is the famous **composite bow**, enabling riders to shoot from horseback with tremendous punch and accuracy. Ask the Romans about that, who first encountered that "high tech" weapon! Some of the guys let me try my hand with a composite bow made in the old (very complex) technique. It was a unique experience!



Prof. Föll takes aim

1) A lot of the good stuff comes from a necropolis near Sidon, Lebanon, and was dug out in 1887, when the Osman empire ruled the place. Ironically, the Turkish government wouldn't dream of giving the loot back to the Lebanese, arguing that the place was Turkish then. They do, however, want back some stuff that is presently in German museums and got there by

contracts, bribing or cunning. Obviously, taking stuff on gunpoint is OK; otherwise it must be returned