



## News Release

### **Constantinople to Istanbul: V&A charts 1,600 years in UK-first show**

*Constantinople to Istanbul: One City, Two Empires*

Gallery 39 and North Court

7 November 2026 – 9 May 2027

In partnership with Koç Holding

With support from the Huo Family Foundation

- **Will take visitors on a journey across one of the world's great cities, dropping in on its best-known landmarks, from the Hippodrome and Hagia Sophia to Topkapi Palace and the Galata Tower**
- **Rarely seen objects dating back to 4th century, drawn from the V&A collection as well as national and international loans**
- **Tells the story of an imperial city over more than a millennium through its globally important art, its everyday luxuries and the staging and re-staging of power**
- **Reveals the awe-inspiring past of the largest city in Europe, capital to two great empires in unbroken succession, the first Christian, the second Muslim**

Today, the V&A announces *Constantinople to Istanbul: One City, Two Empires*, a major exhibition opening in November 2026 that will explore 1,600 years of extraordinary artistic production in one of the world's most influential cities. Spanning AD 330 to 1922, it will bring together remarkable works of art, design and architecture to reveal the enduring creative legacy of an imperial capital that shaped the Mediterranean world and far beyond. The first exhibition in the UK to tell this story in full, it offers a compelling new perspective on a city defined by artistic excellence across more than a millennium.

The city once called Constantinople and now called Istanbul was the imperial and religious capital at the heart of two successive empires: the Byzantine (AD 330–1453) and the Ottoman (1453–1922), and the exhibition will explore their distinct yet connected traditions of art and design, built across sixteen

centuries. It will follow changes in patronage and production that reflect the ups and downs of the city's history, and the lasting impact its creative output had in the Christian and Islamic worlds.

**Tim Stanley, Curator of *Constantinople to Istanbul*, said:** *“Creating this exhibition has been an exciting adventure, bringing together two worlds that are usually kept well apart – the Byzantines and the Ottomans. Their capital – known first as Constantinople and then as Istanbul – was and is one of the greatest cities in the world, and the artistic ideas generated there in its double history as an imperial capital still play a major role in the world. By combining the stories of these two empires and the amazing art they both produced, we have been able to release the stories of Constantinople and Istanbul from their separate boxes and let them enjoy the limelight together.”*

The exhibition showcases over 200 objects across four main sections, including rarely seen decorative arts such as fine silks and textiles (including historical dress), ceramic tiles, mosaics and tableware, precious metalwork and jewellery, as well as sculpture and architectural furnishings, works on paper, manuscripts and paintings. The exhibition will bring together famous and rarely seen objects from the V&A collection and significant national and international loans, with many on display in the UK for the first time, including the **Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul, Vehbi Koç Foundation's Sadberk Hanım Museum, Benaki Museum, Treasury of San Marco in Venice, British Museum** and **British Library**.

Through creative staging and immersive design, the exhibition will transport visitors to the bustling streets of the city, evoking key sites of leisure, culture, trade and worship, from the Hagia Sophia and the Hippodrome.

#### **Highlights announced today include:**

- A unique 11th century miniaturized **trptych** designed to be worn around the neck, intricately worked in cloisonné enamel. This exquisite example of Byzantine goldsmiths' work depicts a Byzantine courtier named Constantine, who is shown kneeling at the feet of Christ. On loan from the Wyvern Collection

- The **Lincoln Typikon**, a lavishly illustrated 14<sup>th</sup> Century manuscript of the Convent of the Virgin of Sure Hope, on loan from Lincoln College, Oxford and on display to the public for the first time in 60 years
- A unique **Portrait of Sultan Mehmed II**, painted in 1479 by Venetian artist Gentile Bellini, on loan from The National Gallery, London
- A **jewelled belt of ivory** from the tomb of Sultan Selim II (d. 1574). Belts and girdles of precious materials played a major role in Ottoman court dress. On loan from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul
- A **velvet and silver-thread horse cover** part of a stunning outfit for a mount ridden in a parade about 1600. On loan from the Benaki Museum
- **The 17th-century procession scroll** from the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, which depicts an Ottoman imperial procession, portraying it in great detail for the benefit of a foreign diplomat
- One of the earliest surviving long-necked **tanbur** lutes (**c.1750**), decorated with ivory, tortoiseshell and mother-of-pearl from the V&A's collection
- Fine silk examples of **18th and 19th century high-status Ottoman dress**, Üçetek entari. On loan from the Vehbi Koç Foundation's Sadberk Hanım Museum

### **About the exhibition:**

**Grand Beginnings** will explore Constantinople's refounding in AD 330 as the capital of a unified Roman Empire under Constantine the Great. It will introduce the city's strategic location and the infrastructure that underpinned its success, from advanced water systems to fortified walls whose power was reinforced by icons and relics. The section will also evoke the Hippodrome, the social and political centre of the city, where chariot races served as imperial spectacle and propaganda. Highlights include mosaics and architectural fragments from early palaces and churches of the city; fine cameos of semi-precious stones and carved ivories showing the Hippodrome and its rituals; and western manuscripts showing the city just before and after the 1453 conquest.

The exhibition's second section, **Heaven and Earth** will explore how art and architecture were put into service of Christianity and how Byzantine emperors adopted sacred imagery to project power and authority while ensuring the survival of classical art and ideas. It will look at the visual culture of Byzantine churches, including the great 6<sup>th</sup> century Hagia Sophia, one of the most

important buildings in the world, bringing together a rich range of liturgical objects including reliquaries, icons and manuscripts to show the religious material culture. It will also include fine examples of work produced in the imperial workshops, commissioned by emperors and their courtiers, with highlights that include fine jewellery, metalwork and textiles.

Then **Power and Reach** will examine how the Ottoman court projected authority in peace and war through visual spectacle. It will highlight the role of luxury materials such as silk, precious stones, ivory, silver and gold in shaping imperial identity, brought to life through grand public processions. Objects from the court including ceramics, clothing, furniture and metalwork including jewellery and armour will be shown alongside paintings and works on paper by Ottoman and European artists, capturing the splendour of the empire.

Finally, **Life in the City** will explore the city as a cosmopolitan centre of diverse languages, faiths and artistic traditions. It brings together rare objects to reveal both religious coexistence and the rhythms of urban life, from coffee houses and bathhouses to music and leisure. This section also traces shifting tastes in the 19th century, when Parisian and other styles increasingly shaped fashion, design and modern identity of Istanbulites.

The exhibition concludes with the influence of Byzantine and Ottoman art on 19th-century Europe, highlighting prints, textiles and mosaic examples from the V&A's collection, including work by Owen Jones and William Morris.

**Support for the V&A is more vital than ever. *Constantinople to Istanbul: One City, Two Empires* is in partnership with Koç Holding, with support from the Huo Family Foundation. The publication has been supported by the Ruddock Foundation for the Arts.**

-ENDS-

**For further PRESS information please contact [press.office@vam.ac.uk](mailto:press.office@vam.ac.uk)  
A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from [pressimages.vam.ac.uk](http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk).**

## Notes to Editors

- The exhibition *Constantinople to Istanbul: One City, Two Empires* run from 7 November 2026 – 9 May 2027
- The exhibition has been curated for the V&A by Senior Curator Tim Stanley and Project Curator Bella Radenovic
- It will be accompanied by a new V&A publication

## Social Media

Instagram: @vamuseum

Facebook: @VictoriaandAlbertMuseum

Tiktok: @vamuseum

## About V&A South Kensington

The V&A is a family of museums dedicated to the power of creativity. V&A South Kensington is a world of extraordinary global creativity, with unmissable exhibitions, experiences and educational programmes for all. One of London's most iconic buildings, it is home to national collections of art, design, fashion, photography and furniture to theatre, performance, architecture, and ceramics, as well as the UK's National Art Library. It is a place where everyone can experience a story of creativity that spans 5,000 years and every creative discipline, which brings that story to life through programmes and activities for all ages and specialisms, and world-leading research and conservation.

## About Koç Holding

Established in 1926, Koç Group is Türkiye's largest industrial group, with over 120,000 employees and operations in more than 60 countries, accounting for approximately 7% of Türkiye's GDP. Koç Holding is the only Turkish company listed in the Fortune Global 500. Marking its centennial this year, Koç Group is proud to be the partner of *Constantinople to Istanbul: One City, Two Empires* exhibition. Koç Family members were honoured with the World Monuments Fund's Hadrian Award in recognition of their support for culture and the arts through the Vehbi Koç Foundation, and their contributions to the preservation of Türkiye's rich cultural heritage. The curatorial collaboration between the Sadberk Hanım Museum, an affiliate of the Vehbi Koç Foundation, and the V&A

reflects Koç Group's enduring commitment to supporting culture and the arts at the international level.



### **About the Huo Family Foundation**

The Huo Family Foundation's mission is to support education, communities and the pursuit of knowledge. Through its donations, the Foundation hopes to improve the prospects of individuals, and to support the work of organisations seeking to ensure a safe and successful future for all society. The Foundation aims to make art more accessible to all through its support for galleries, museums and centres for the performing arts. <https://huofamilyfoundation.org/>

*the*  
HUO FAMILY  
FOUNDATION