In 1453 Byzantine Constantinople (now Istanbul) falls to the Ottoman Empire, which then ruled for 622 years in lands surrounding the Mediterranean and Black Sea. This empire encompassed parts of Asia, Europe, and Africa. In 1459 Sultan Mehmed II builds a palace on a promontory overlooking the sea and the Bosporus river, formerly the site of the Greek acropolis of Byzantium. It is expanded on and serves the Sultans for the next 400 years. It houses the residence of the Sultan, the administrative center of the empire, the archives, treasury, mint, mosques, a hospital, and university. At one time it contains 4000 people. It is a self-contained city designed so that one never need leave. Daily life is strictly ruled by customs and ceremonies. The Sultan is the political as well as religious leader of the Ottoman Empire.

You are a member of the Ehl-i Hiref: the Community of the Talented (Hiref means artisan, craftsman, tradesman). In records of 1526 there are 40 societies with over 600 artisans that make up the Ehl-i Hiref, encompassing the workshops of masters of weaving, wood work, stone work, metal, calligraphy, painting, ceramics, and leather. You are paid per day according to your responsibilities and skill level, and payday is once a quarter. The Sultan is generous to the craftsmen, rewarding them with objects and additional salaries outside of the regular pay schedule. As part of the prestigious Ehl-i Hiref you are part of the palace administration of Sultan Suleyman I. You are a member of the imperial guard and army and go on campaigns with the Sultan. Sultan Suleyman I more than doubles the territory of the empire by 1550. It now stretches from Iran to Austria. Istanbul is one of the richest cities in the world of its time. Artists and artisans have come from all the Ottoman empire. This blend of Islamic, European, and Asian styles creates the “classical” Ottoman style of decorative and illustrative arts.

In the Ottoman tradition a Sultan was trained in a practical trade and Sulyeman I is a goldsmith. He is very involved in the construction and
decoration of the palace and supervises its production closely. The codification of the style evolves from the involvement of the Sultan, the proximity of the workshops and shared projects, the blend of cultural influences, and the influence of a few artists and their styles. While there are set aesthetics, it is also a period of experimentation as the style evolves. In addition the designs produced by the Ehl-I Hiref are disseminated back into the empire and beyond.

As the master of a (carpet, textile, tile, stained glass, stone work, iron work) workshop in Istanbul in the 1520s you have been contracted to produce a (carpet, textile, tile, wood work, stone work, glass work) for an addition to the royal palace. It is your job to design the product you will supply to the palace. You will start with the geometry of the design structure, create the patterns and motifs, and then the color palette. You will use the technology and tools that approximate those used in the 16th century.