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**The Place and Importance of the Tughra Form in Turkish Calligraphy: The Example of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent**  
Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Tuğrası Örneğinde Türk Hat Sanatında Tuğra Formunun Yeri ve Önemi

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to examine the tuğra form, an important element of Ottoman calligraphy, in terms of its place in Turkish calligraphy, historical development, usage areas, and design features. In this context, it is emphasized that the significance of the tuğra goes beyond its function in official documents, serving as an art piece reflecting the artistic sensibilities of its era. Tughras are typically designed in a curved form consisting of the sere, beyze, tuğ, and hançer parts, including the name of the sultan, his father's name, and the phrase "el muzaffer daima." The composition and ornamentation of this text depend on the skills of the artisans of the era and the opulence of the reign. The earliest curved tughra examples that can be found are seen in documents of the Great Seljuk Empire. Later, the use of tughras continued in the Anatolian Seljuks and the Ottoman Empire. Officially, the use of tughras ended on November 1, 1922, with the abolition of the monarchy. The tughra served as a title in official correspondence in the Ottoman state and represented the sultan's signature and the seal of the state. As such, tughras appeared on official documents such as orders, decrees, land deeds, diplomas, as well as on coins, stamps, registration books, dynastic emblems, flags, and official architectural monuments. Additionally, calligraphy works in the form of tughras were created with verses from the Quran, prayers, the Basmala, hadiths, aphorisms, and personal names. The tughra of Ottoman Sultan Orhan Bey, which included the names of "Orhan and his father Osman," laid the foundation for all Ottoman tughra designs. In this study, the tughra of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, produced in the Istanbul Palace Workshop during the 16th century, which is considered the brightest period of the Ottoman Empire, was examined. This tughra, currently on display at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, was analyzed in terms of its text, calligraphy design, composition features, and illumination patterns. The tughra's design features prominently include the use of gold and navy blue. Illumination patterns feature saz-style dagger leaves, double tahrir-style hatayi designs, stylized carnations, and cloud motifs. Due to these design characteristics, it is believed that the tughra was created in the style of Kara Memi, the chief illuminator of the era. As a result of the research, it was concluded that tughras were not limited to being merely official documents

but also represented significant art pieces that reflected the artistic sensibilities of their time.

**Keywords:** The tughra, Ottoman calligraphy, Turkish calligraphy, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, Metropolitan Museum of Art

## Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Osmanlı hat sanatının önemli bir ögesi olan tuğra formunu, Türk hat sanatındaki yeri, tarihsel gelişimi, kullanım alanları ve tasarım özellikleri açısından incelemektir. Bu bağlamda, tuğranın sadece resmi belgelerdeki işlevi değil, aynı zamanda dönemin sanat anlayışını yansıtan bir sanat eseri olarak önemi vurgulanmıştır. Tuğralar genellikle sere, beyze, tuğ ve hançer kısımlarından oluşan kavisli şekilde tasarlanır; padişahın adı, babasının adı ve "el muzaffer daima" ibaresini içerir. Bu metnin yazılması ve süslenme şekli, dönemin sanatkarlarının yeteneklerine ve saltanatın zenginliğine bağlıdır. Ulaşılabilen ilk kavisli tuğra örnekleri Büyük Selçuklu İmparatorluğu belgelerinde görülmektedir. Daha sonra Anadolu Selçukluları ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda tuğra kullanımı devam etmiştir. Resmi olarak tuğranın kullanımı 1 Kasım 1922'de saltanatın kaldırılması ile sona ermiştir. Tuğra, Osmanlı devletindeki resmi yazışmalarda başlık olarak kullanılmış, padişahın imzası ve devlet mührünün temsilcisi olmuştur. Bu kapsamda tuğralar, emirler, fermanlar, tapular, diplomalar gibi resmi belgelerde; madeni paralar, pullar, kayıt defterleri, hanedan armaları, bayraklar gibi diğer nesnelere ve resmi mimari anıtlarda yer bulmuştur. Ayrıca, tuğra formunda yazılmış ayetler, dualar, besmele, hadisler, özlü sözler ve kişi isimleri şeklinde hat sanatı eserleri yapılmıştır. Osmanlı Sultanı Orhan Bey'in tuğrası, 'Orhan ve babası Osman'ın isimlerinin yazıldığı bir formu içerdiği için tüm Osmanlı tuğra tasarımının temelini oluşturmuştur. Bu çalışmada Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun en parlak dönemi olarak kabul edilen 16. yüzyılda İstanbul Saray Nakışhanesinde üretilen 1555-60 tarihli Kanuni Sultan Süleyman tuğrası ele alınmıştır. Günümüzde New York Metropolitan Sanat Müzesi'nde sergilenen bu tuğra, metni, hat tasarımı, istif özellikleri ve tezhip desenleri açısından incelenmiştir. Tuğranın, tasarımında altın ve lacivert rengin yoğun olarak kullanıldığı görülmüştür. Tezhip desenlerinde saz yolu üslubunda hançeri yapraklar, çift tahrir tarzındaki hatayi desenler, stilize

edilmiş karanfil ve bulut motiflerine yer verilmiştir. Bu tasarım özellikleri nedeniyle tuğranın dönemin saray baş müzehhibi Kara Memi'nin üslubunda yapıldığı düşünülmüştür. Araştırmanın sonucunda, tuğraların sadece resmi belge olma özelliği ile sınırlı kalmadığı, aynı zamanda dönemin sanat anlayışını yansıtan önemli sanat eserleri olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tuğra, Osmanlı hat sanatı, Türk hat sanatı, Kanuni Sultan Süleyman, New York Metropolitan Sanat Müzesi

### **Introduction**

Calligraphy, in its most general sense, is the art of using letters and writing tools to create visual art. It is fundamentally based on the idea of beautifully writing the script. This art form is unique to the Islamic world and has acquired its shape and character through the national taste and traditions of Muslims. The foundation of the script in Islamic civilization is the Arabic alphabet, and therefore, calligraphy works are typically written using the Arabic script. The enthusiasm, effort, and meticulousness of Muslim artists to write the Qur'an with the utmost beauty befitting the word of Allah have made calligraphy one of the most important branches of Islamic arts (Serin, 1999, p. 19). As expressed in the saying, "The Qur'an was revealed in Mecca, recited in Egypt, and scribed in Istanbul," calligraphy reached its pinnacle during the Ottoman Empire (1281-1924) (Bektaşoğlu, 2009, p. 22). Particularly, in the atelier of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, the calligrapher Şeyh Hamdullah (d. 1520) refined the six writing styles known as "aklâm-ı sitte" in the Ottoman style. During the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, calligraphy reached its zenith; it continued to develop with Ahmed Şemseddin Karahisari (d. 1556), who trained numerous calligraphy students and designed new scripts while revising the old ones, including Hafız Osman (d. 1698) (Kvernen, 2023; Berk, 2006, p. 65). Renowned calligraphers like Kazasker Mustafa İzzet Efendi (d. 1876), Nazîf Bey (d. 1913), İsmail Hakkî Altunbezer (d. 1946), Ahmed Kâmil Akdik (d. 1941), and Hamid Aytaç (d. 1982) (ketebe.org) produced exceptional works in harmony and composition, and calligraphy, an art form within the book arts category, continues to be preserved today by artists like Hasan Çelebi (b. 1937) and the students they have mentored (Kvernen, 2023; Yazır, 1989, p. 311).

Islam places great importance on the Qur'an and books in general. The avoidance of representational arts in Islamic art played a significant role in the development of calligraphy (Binark, 1975, p. 16). Consequently, calligraphy, along with other book arts such as illumination, miniature painting, marbling, and bookbinding, flourished in parallel with the development of the empire, resulting in the creation of rare and exquisite works of art. Calligraphic works are most commonly found in the Qur'an, calligraphic panels with hadiths and sayings, hilyes describing the physical and spiritual characteristics of Prophet Muhammad, and kıt'as featuring poetry, ghazals, and aphorisms. Apart from examples on paper, calligraphy was present in other mediums such as tombstones, inscriptions on mosques, soup kitchens, inns, baths, and palaces, as well as on wooden and metal tablets, swords, necklaces, brooches, rings, fabrics, and ceramics. Another significant area of calligraphy's application was in official correspondence within the state (Binark, 1975, p. 17; Serin, 1999, p. 23). The script used in this area was the diwani script developed by the Ottomans. The dîvânî script takes its name from the Ottoman Imperial Council (Divan-ı Hümâyun) (Serin, 1999, p. 274). Due to its formality and security in official correspondences, it is more intricate and complex in design than other calligraphic scripts, almost resembling a cipher. The diwani script is meticulously designed through detailed arrangements and compositions that are nearly impossible to imitate.

The tughra form was used as the heading in official correspondences during the Ottoman tradition. The Tughra, a sort of state seal and signature of the sultan that contained the sultan's name and his father's name, was first introduced during the reign of Ottoman Sultan Orhan Bey, and it evolved into its current form during the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror. It reached its peak in terms of composition during the reign of the 10th Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent. In 1922, with the abolition of the Ottoman Sultanate, the official use of the tughra came to an end (Umur, 1980, p. 11).

### **Aim and Significance**

The aim of this study titled "*The Place And Importance Of The Tughra Form In Turkish Calligraphy With The Example Of Sultan Suleiman The Magnificent*" is to examine the tughra form, an essential aspect of Ottoman calligraphy, and

explore its historical progression, areas of application, composition, and layout features through the example of the tughra of Suleiman the Magnificent dated 1555-60.

### **Method**

This study delves into the origin and purpose of the tughra, its design, composition, layout features, its place and significance within the art of calligraphy, using qualitative research methods. To define the research subject and establish a detailed theoretical framework, printed and electronic sources related to Ottoman Calligraphy and tughra were examined. The gathered documents and visuals were analyzed using a descriptive and illustrative method (Tarkun, 2000, p. 29), scrutinizing how the tughra form went through a design process, and how it functioned as both an official seal on documents and as a work of art. The visual example for analysis is the tughra of Suleiman the Magnificent, representing the sample for this study.

### **Scope and Sample**

The scope of this study encompasses the works in the tughra form that were reinterpreted during the reign of every Ottoman sultan throughout the empire's history, showcasing developments and changes in terms of composition and layout features. The sample for this study is the tughra of Suleiman the Magnificent, created during the reign of Sultan Süleyman, which represents the period of Ottoman history when the highest level of artistic production occurred in parallel with the empire's peak in social and economic aspects. The tughra in question, dated 1556-60, is preserved in the archives of the New York Metropolitan Museum as a rare piece of art (inventory number: 38.149.1). The study accessed the artwork through the museum's publicly accessible digital archive. The tughra was examined in high resolution to explore its text, calligraphy design elements, composition, and design features.

### **Limitations, Assumptions, and Research Questions of the Study**

The limitations of this study titled "The Place and Importance of the tughra Form in Turkish Calligraphy: A Case Study of the tughra of Suleiman the Magnificent" include the restricted availability of printed and electronic

publications within the scope of the subject. Additionally, tughra examples are often historical and rare works of art, leading to their preservation in museums and archives, making access to original pieces time-consuming and requiring special permissions for researchers. Moreover, examples of tughra within Turkey may not have been transferred to digital platforms. The tughra form discussed in this study is an example displayed in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, which has been digitally preserved and made accessible to researchers worldwide.

### Research Questions

When and in what style was the tughra Form first used?

What are the design elements of the tughra form?

What is the significance and place of the tughra form in Turkish calligraphy?

In this article, after providing an overview of the history of calligraphy, the historical development of Ottoman calligraphy and renowned calligraphers are presented. Subsequently, under the title "The tughra Form in Calligraphy," the historical progression, place, and importance of the tughra form in the Ottoman context, as well as its design, composition, and layout features, are discussed. The tughra of Suleiman the Magnificent, which constitutes the sample of this study, is examined separately under its own section, where general visual and composition details of the original tughra in the Metropolitan Museum of Art are presented through individual images. Its design and composition features are analyzed. As a result of this analysis, the place and importance of the tughra form in Ottoman calligraphy are revealed based on the example of the tughra of Suleiman the Magnificent.

## 1. Findings and Discussion

### 1.1. Tughra Form in Turkish Calligraphy Art

Among the various calligraphy styles that developed as separate styles from the six primary calligraphy forms (naskh, thuluth, muhaqqaq, rayhani, tawqi', and rıqa) (Çetin, 1989; Kvernen, 2023) in the Ottoman Empire, "ta'lik, Nasta'liq, diwani, diwani jeli, and siyakat" are included. The most commonly

used script is "jeli ta'lik." ta'lik script was primarily used to write couplets with a natural-sized "ta'lik" pen, approximately 2 mm wide. Ta'lik script originated in Iran and was introduced to the Ottomans through the Akkoyunlu dynasty during the 15th century. Over time, it became widely used in official correspondence from the central administrative unit of the Ottoman Empire, the Divan-ı Hümâyün. As a result, it came to be known as "diwani" script (Alparslan, 1994, p. 445) (Image 1). During the 16th century, within the Ottoman palace, diwani script evolved into a more elaborate and ornate style, becoming known as " diwani jeli " 8 (Image 2). This script featured highly embellished, majestic, complex, and intricate strokes. It was commonly used in the official correspondence of the state's high-level affairs. Both diwani and diwani jeli scripts required a separate skill for writing and reading due to their difficult letter and word additions. The upward incline of the line endings made these scripts challenging. Therefore, they were employed in official correspondence to prevent widespread knowledge and alterations of state matters (Derman, 1997, p. 430; Yıldız, 2012, p. 60, 61; Kvernen, 2023; Binark, 1975, p. 22).



Image 1. *Diwani Script Example, Ferman of Mehmed IV, dated 1659 (Derman, 1998, p. 177).*



Image 2. *Diwani Jeli Script Example, Berat of Ahmed II, dated 1694 (Derman, 1998, p. 181).*

Which was the official script of the Ottoman state, was used in records kept in the Divan-ı Hümâyün, such as fermans, berâtnâmes, ahidnâmes, şikâyetes, and ahkâm defters. However, it was designed specifically for use within the palace and its usage outside was prohibited. Notable diwani and

diwani jeli calligraphers include Sâmi Efendi (d. 1912), Kâmil Akdik (d. 1941), Mehmed Şefik Bey (d. 1880), İsmail Hakkı Altunbezer (d. 1946), Mehmed İzzet Efendi (d. 1904), Halim Özyazıcı (d. 1964), and Hamid Aytaç (d. 1982) (Yıldız, 2012, pp. 60-61).

The tughra, which is featured as a heading on the diwani texts, is a distinct form of calligraphy within Ottoman calligraphy and is primarily seen in official documents such as fermans. The tughra can be considered a separate art form on its own (Blair, 2006, p. xxiii). The tughra, which is the official seal and written order of the Ottoman sultans, effectively served as the signature of the sultan. It has been in use since approximately 1324, starting from Orhan Gazi's reign, and its official usage ceased on November 1, 1922, with the abolition of the Sultanate (Umur, 1980, p. 11).

The term "tuğrağ" appears in Kaşgarlı Mahmud's *Dîvânî Lügat-it-Türk* translation as "tughra," and it carries meanings such as "the sultan's seal" and "royal order" (Umur, 1980, p. 11). In *Oğuzca* (Old Turkic), the "ğ" at the end of the word became lost during the translation process into Ottoman Turkish, resulting in the word "tughra." In addition, it is noted that the term is also synonymous with the Persian word "nişan" meaning "sign" and the Arabic word "tevki" meaning "signature" (Bektaş, 2009, p. 77). Furthermore, words such as "alamet," "nişan," and "tevki" have also been used with the meaning of "tughra" (Umur, 1980, p. 17). In *Ottoman Turkish Lexicon*, the term "Tuğra-yı Hümayun" (Imperial Tughra) is used as the equivalent of "Sultan's of tughra".

Ottoman sultans effectively controlled the state bureaucracy. The Divan, which was responsible for issuing and recording the Empire's official government orders and decrees, played a crucial role. Documents with tughra, prepared in Topkapı Palace in Istanbul, were specially designed to reflect the power and magnificence of the ruler on behalf of the sultans (Denny, 2011, p. 294).

Records indicate that tughra was used in the Great Seljuk Empire, Anatolian Seljuks, and the Ottoman Beylik, and its form was curved. However, in the Mamluks, a non-curved version of tughra was used. The tughra of Orhan Bey, which features the special writing of Orhan and Osman's names (Image 3), served as the basis for the form of all Ottoman

tughras. In the earliest examples of tughras, only the name of the Sultan's father and his own name, "Orhan bin Osman," were written, where "bin" means "son of." Starting from I. Bayezid, the addition of "han," from II. Murad the addition of "muzaffer," and from Mehmed the Conqueror the addition of "ever victoriorus" was made to these names (Image 4).



Image 3. The First Tughra of Ottoman Sultans of Orhan: "Orhan ibn Osman" (1324) (Umur,1980, p. 30; Bozer, 2007, p. 17)

Image 4. The Tughra of Mehmed the Conqueror: "Mehmed ibn Murad, the ever-victorious Khan" (Umur,1980, p. 30; Bozer, 2007, p. 17)

In Ottoman tradition, the term "tuğra çekmek" was used for the art of writing the tughra. The calligraphers who specialized in scribing tughra were called "nişancı," "tuğrakeş," or "tuğra nüvis." The nişancı would examine the official document and ensure that there were no legal violations before finally scribing the tughra. In the late 18th century, specific calligraphers solely responsible for scribing tughra, known as "tuğrakeş" or "tuğranüvis," were appointed to the palace (Umur, 1980, p. 22). While the term "tughra" is widely used today, historical records related to the Ottoman history more commonly used other terms such as "tevkii hümayun," "tevkii refii humayun," "nişanı humayun," "şerifi tevkii," "refii hümayun," "nişanı hümayun," or "tuğra-yı meymun" (Uzunçarşılı, 1942, p. 106).

The oldest surviving Ottoman tughra, belonging to Orhan Gazi, was created only with black ink and was not embellished with illuminated. However, from the beginning of the 16th century, important Ottoman documents featured illuminated tughras executed by a specially trained palace official known as "tuğrakeş" (Denny, W., B. 2011, p. 294).

Tughras served various purposes. Initially, they were drawn on official documents such as berat, menşur, ferman, hükümetname, and vakfiye. Later, they were also used on coins, record books, and as dynastic emblems. Tughras with the form of a dynastic emblem appeared on flags, stamps, official build-

dings, warships, and other structures. Additionally, tughra forms were used decoratively, creating compositions in the shape of tughra with verses from the Quran, prayers, basmalas, hadiths, names, and various other texts.

The most significant use of the tughra form is in the sultan's tughras. When the sultans ascended the throne, they generally used the same tughra form they chose during their accession ceremony throughout their reigns. After determining the tughra shape, the sultans had their seals made accordingly. One of these seals remained with the sultan, another was given to the grand vizier, the third seal to the treasurer of the Enderun Palace, and the fourth to the sultan's mother. The sultan's tughras were usually placed on rings made of emerald or gold. By wearing the tughra seal as a ring, the sultans would use it to stamp and approve documents (Umur, 1980, pp. 22-24). Uzunçarşılı, mentions that there was another seal called "tek beyzeli pençe," which closely resembled the tughra. These seals were used by high-ranking officials such as viziers, governors, and sanjakbeys to authenticate their decrees (Uzunçarşılı, 1942).

The tughra form was first used on coins in 1403 during the reigns of Emir Süleyman and Çelebi Mehmed, the sons of Yıldırım Bayezid. From the reign of Sultan Murad III to Sultan Mehmed IV (1570-1687), only the tughra form was used on coins. While tughra stacks and forms generally have similar outlines, there are variations in the text, particularly in the names and father's names of the sultans. Some tughra examples feature illumination decorations according to the artistic style of the era, while others are created as calligraphic artworks. Illuminated (müzehhep) tughras are more common on paper documents such as firmans, while examples of calligraphic tughras are more often seen on architectural elements (Umur, 1980, pp. 22-24)

With the inclusion of the title "Shah" in the tughra text along with Yavuz Sultan Selim's tughra, the tughra text took the form of "Selîm Shah bin Bâyezîd han el-muzaffer dâimâ." In Suleiman the Magnificent's tughras, the title "han" was used not only for the sultan but also for his father, and the tughra text became "Süleyman Shah bin Selîm Shah Han el-muzaffer dâimâ." (Derman, 2012, p. 337). By the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566),

the tughra had matured in its classical dimensions and form (Denny, 2011, p. 294).

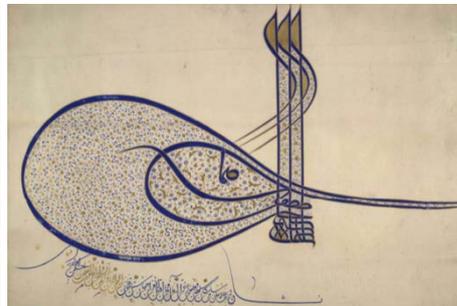
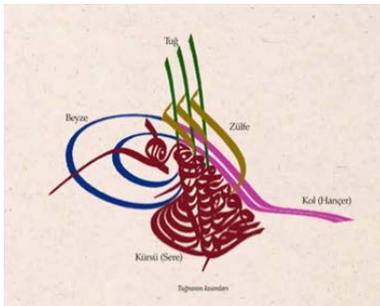
The tughra composition consists of four parts:

**Kürsü or sere** (The monogram proper) : The main part of the tughra where the names of the sultan and his father, "Shah," "ilhan," "el Muzaffer," and "bin" are placed. In earlier tughras, this part was rectangular, but starting from Sultan III. Murat, the upper part began to narrow and took on a triangular shape. With Sultan IV. Mustafa's tughra, the ground base took a circular shape.

**Beyze** (The loops on the left): In the tughra, the beyze is divided into two parts: the inner and outer. It consists of two wide rings interlocked towards the left side of the sere. It is formed by the inner nesting of the letter "nun" from the words "bin" and "han" in the tughra text. With the addition of the word "el Muzaffer" to the tughra, the letter "rı" from this word separated the bezels, extending solo towards the left.

**Tuğ** (The straight shafts) and **zülfe** (The S-shaped flourishes): Three vertical lines extending upwards from the sere towards the left slightly form the Tuğs. These Tuğs are made up of the letter "elif." The curvatures extending to the right from the Tuğs are called zülfes.

**Hançer** (The projection on the right): Starting from the upper part of the beyze and extending downwards to the right over the sere, two long lines are called "hançer" or "kol" (Image 5, 6).



**Image 5.** Tughra Form (Berk, 2013. p. 102).

*Image 6. Tughra of Suleiman the Magnificent, dated 1520-66 (Britishmuseum.org, 2023).*

In Ottoman calligraphy, two calligraphers who played a significant role in the development of the tughra form are worth mentioning. The first one is Mustafa Rakım Efendi, who introduced innovations to the tughra form and established his own aesthetic approach. The second one is Hattat Sami Efendi, who further refined and elevated the tughra form to the pinnacle of aesthetics (Image 7, 8) (Berk, 2013, p. 103; Berk, 2007, 428).



*Image 7. Tughra form of Sultan Abdulhamid I before Mustafa Rakım Efendi, Emirgan Fountain (Berk, 2006, p. 82).*

*Image 8. Tughra form of Sultan Mahmud II, drawn by Mustafa Rakım Efendi, Topkapı Palace, Bab-ı Humayun (Berk, 2006, p. 83)*

## **2.2. New York Metropolitan Museum of Art Suleiman the Magnificent Tughra**

In the Ottoman Empire, a total of 37 sultans have reigned. Among them, the 10th Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent, had the longest reign in the history of the Ottoman Empire, spanning from September 30, 1520, to September 7, 1566, for a remarkable 46 years. The name "Kanuni" was given to him in reference to his reputation as a lawmaker and just ruler, while Western sources referred to him as "Magnificent" or "The Great." He also held titles such as "Sahib-i Kiran, Sahibü'l-Aşeret el-Kâmile, Gazi, and Şehid." In the tradition of divan poetry, he used the pen name "Muhibbi" to write poems (Atalar, 1981, p. 426, 436).

One of the finest examples of tuğras created for Suleiman the Magnificent is preserved in the archive of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York

today. This work, which is approximately 450 years old, holds immeasurable value and has reached the present in complete and intact condition. Produced in the peak period of Ottoman calligraphy, during the 16th century, in the Palace atelier in Istanbul, the work is most likely the creation of Kara Memi, who was probably the chief illuminator/calligrapher of that period. Although there is no definite information about the calligrapher, it is evident that the illumination work belongs to Kara Memi (Denny, W., B. 2011, p. 294).

The style of painter/ illuminator Kara Memi is rooted in the Mehmed the Conqueror period. During the reign of Mehmed the Conqueror, there was an artist group called Ehl-i Hiref in the Palace Nakışhane (Palace atelier), which consisted of designers, calligraphers, painters, miniaturists, engravers, illuminators, weavers, armorers, jewelers, and others. These artists and craftsmen were responsible for producing all kinds of artworks and gifts commissioned by the palace. In addition to Turkish artists, there were also artists from various other nations such as Hungary, Georgia, and Iran, who worked as salaried artists in the Nakışhane. Through these artists, Ottoman art reached its peak during the reigns of Suleiman the Magnificent, Selim II, and Murad III in the 16th century.

After the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, where I. Selim defeated the Safavid ruler Shah Ismail, many prominent artists were brought from Iran to Anatolia and Istanbul. Among these artists, Shah Kulu emerged with a distinct style known as the "saz style" or "hatayi style," using motifs such as grasshoppers, Simurgh birds, angels, and twisting leaves. According to Ottoman documents, Shah Kulu's most talented student and successor as the head of the Nakışhane was Kara Memi (Kel Mehmed), a nakkaş of Anatolian origin. In the mid-16th century, Kara Memi added stylized flowers like tulips, carnations, lilies, cherry blossoms, and roses to his stylistic repertoire. These symbolic flowers became the most distinctive feature of the Ottoman style in almost every artistic context.

Kara Memi's signature tulips and carnations are found in various artistic mediums such as silk fabrics, İznik tiles, metalware, miniatures, paintings, illuminations, and bookbinding designs. They are also present in the decoration of the tughra, which is the subject of this work.

## 1.2. New York Metropolitan Museum of Art Suleiman the Magnificent tughra (Denny, 2011)

**Inventory Number:** 38.149.1

**Place of Creation:** Istanbul

**Date:** 1555 – 60

**Technique:** Ink, opaque watercolor, gold, and paper

**Dimensions:** 52,1 cm × 64,5 cm

**Inventory Record:** Rogers Fund, 1938

**Provenance:** The artwork was previously owned by E. Beghian in London until 1938 when it was sold to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (metropolitanmuseum.org, 2023; Courtney, 2016) (Image 9).

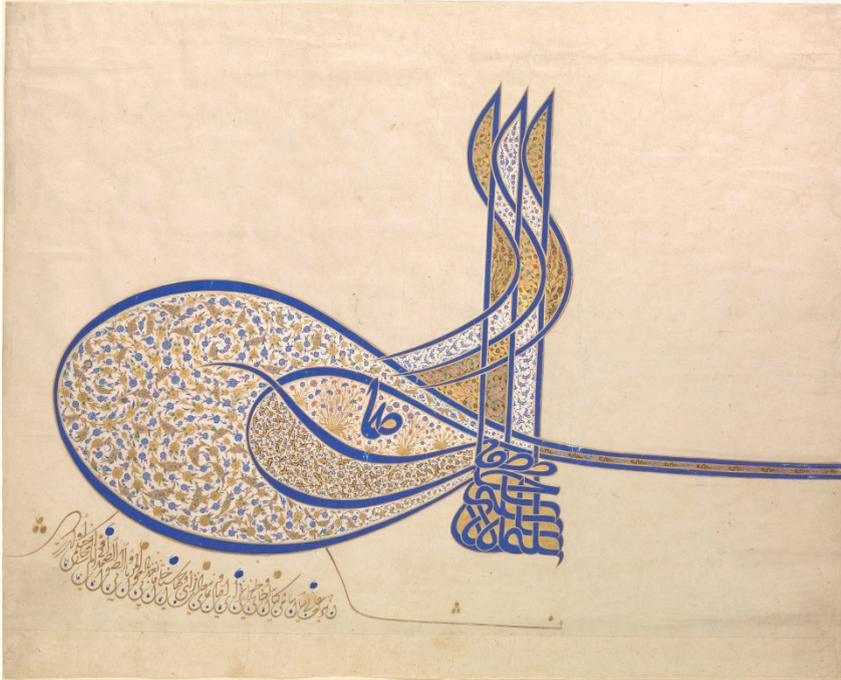


Image 9. Tughra of Suleiman the Magnificent, New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, Inventory number: 38.149.1 (metropolitanmuseum.org, 2023)

Tughra of Suleiman the Magnificent is considered a masterpiece in terms of composition, arrangement, structure, and harmony. It stands out with the harmonious use of gold and lapis lazuli, which are still utilized as symbols of the Sultanate in contemporary times. The tughra has been meticulously crafted on cream-colored marbled paper using lapis lazuli and gold (Image 9). During the Ottoman era, the use of shellac on paper enhanced its durability, protecting the tughra from potential damage over time.

The sections forming the text of the tughra are written using lapis lazuli, obtained from the lapis lazuli mine, for the blue color, and gold for the embellishments. The lower part of the tughra's text is written in diwani script with yellow beaten gold. Great importance has been given to the symmetry and geometric designs of the zulfas (the downward extensions) in the arrangement of the tughra. Islamic geometric designs in the arrangement have been transformed into the structure of the letters, creating an aesthetic coherence.

Despite its significance, the tughra's size is relatively small, measuring only 52.1cm × 64.5 cm. In these limited areas, every space between the elements in the arrangement is adorned with delicate and symmetrical illumination patterns.

### **1.2.1. The Design Features of Tughra in Calligraphy**

Tughra of Suleiman the Magnificent, housed in the Metropolitan Museum, is considered one of the most magnificent examples of Ottoman Sultan's tughra. Dating back to 1555-60, Suleiman the Magnificent's tughra is a masterpiece of calligraphy and illumination from the peak of the Ottoman classical period. Unlike the later examples with excessive illumination, its illumination features a simple and classical style. The tughra's text reads as "Sultan Süleyman Han, son of Sultan Selim Han, may he be ever victorious" (Denny, W., B. 2011, p. 294).

The text of the tughra is written in lapis lazuli, giving it a navy blue color, and both sides of the script are outlined with gold. The background of the area containing the text is painted with burnished gold and then sealed. This technique highlights the splendor of navy blue and gold. The writing in the

sere part of the tughra is arranged in a harmonious manner, resembling a basket weave pattern found in Islamic geometric designs (Image 10).

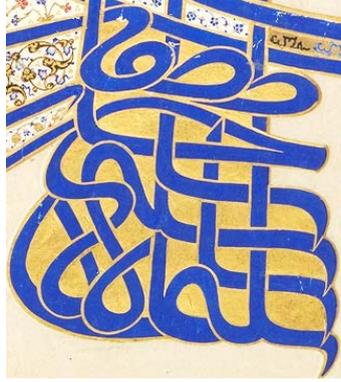


Image 10. Tughra text in the sere section - detailed description (metropolitanmuseum.org, 2023)

The process followed in writing the tughra is as follows: "The name of the ruler is written at the bottom of the tughra, starting from the upper part of the last letter of this name, going to the left in a curve with the word 'bin' (son of) and above the ruler's name, his father's name is placed, and the last letter 'nun' of the word 'han' forms the second curve. The letter 'r' in 'muzaffer' (victorious) at the top extends from right to left and forms a branch in the middle of the curve, and on top of this, the phrase 'daima' (forever) is added." (Bektaşoğlu, 2009, p. 77). (Image 11, 12, 13, 14)

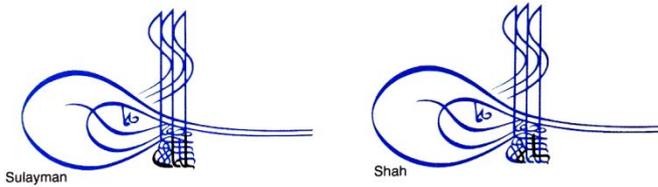


Image 11. Tughra composition 1st and 2nd stages (Blair, 2007, p. 510)

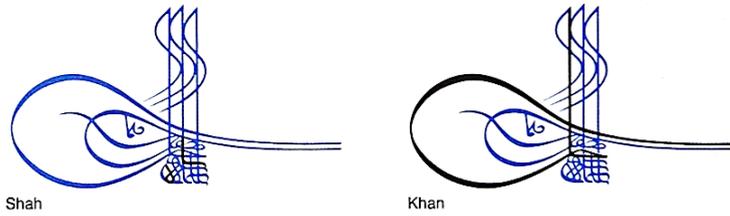


Image 12. Tughra composition 3th and 4th stages (Blair, 2007, p. 510)

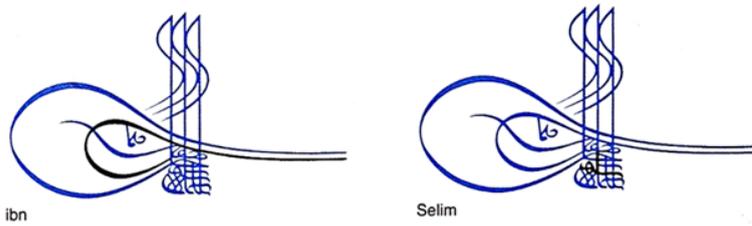


Image 13. Tughra composition 5th and 8th stages (Blair, 2007, p. 510)

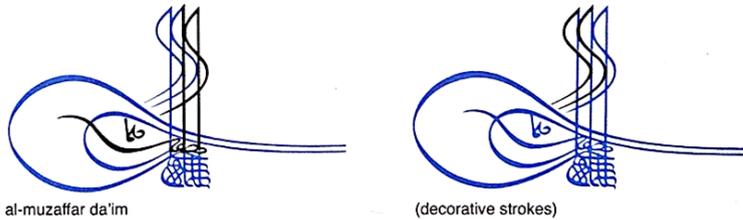


Image 14. Tughra composition 7th and 8th stages (Blair, 2007, p. 510)

In the tughra, the "beyze", "tuğlar", and "zülfeler" are present as harmonious design elements with the "sere". These areas are written or painted with lapis lazuli and adorned with gold "tahrir" (outlining). The "zülfeler" passing over the tuğs are curved like fluttering banners (Image 15) and weave through the tuğs to reach the beyze in a herringbone pattern (Image 16). The curvature of the beyze varies, forming an aesthetically pleasing oval shape (Image 17). The "hançer" part tapers to the right and the background between the two arms of the black-blue is painted with gold and decorated symmetrically with small black-blue clouds.



Image 15. Calligraphic details of tuğ (metropolitanmuseum.org, 2023)

Image 16. Calligraphic details of tuğ and zülfe (metropolitanmuseum.org, 2023)

Image 17. Calligraphic details of beyze (metropolitanmuseum.org, 2023)

### 1.2.2. The Illumination Design Features of the Tughra

In Suleiman the Magnificent's tughra, illumination designs are placed on symmetrical circular spirals in the Kara Memi style. These designs include leaf motifs in saz style, gold or colored hatayis, double tahrir hatayis, rosebuds, carnation flower clusters, floral patterns, pencils, clouds, and çintemanis. In the illuminated areas, gold backgrounds are filled with needle burnishing to create volume and tonal variations. The white backgrounds of the tughra are adorned with gold çintemani designs (Image 18).



Image 18. Illumination details of the tughra (metropolitanmuseum.org, 2023)

The entire illumination of the tughra reflects the Kara Memi style, with particular emphasis on the "daima" inscription in the inner beyze, surrounded by clustered carnations and outer beyze featuring saz yolu style dagger leaves and hatayi motifs, which are significant indicators of his artistic style. The composition in this area has evolved in two distinct designs, focusing on the

tail of the letter "ra." In the upper part, the remaining space after the "daima" word is adorned with Kara Memi style clustered carnations and hatmi flower motifs, enhanced with golden çintemani patterns (Tekiner, 2022, p. 250). In the lower section of the inner beyze, a composition of black hurde rûmî is applied over a golden background, complemented with negative-style blue clouds and golden çintemani patterns (Image 19). As for the outer beyze, symmetric spirals contain a row entirely painted in gold featuring saz yolu style dagger leaves, hatayi patterns, and bud roses, while the parallel spiral is adorned with negative-style hatayi, bud roses, and penc patterns, all in blue. The complementary color in this area is the red tones of the bud roses (Image 20).



*Image 19. Illumination details of the inner beyze (metropolitanmuseum.org, 2023)*

*Image 20. Illumination details of the outer beyze (metropolitanmuseum.org, 2023)*

In the middle section of the tuğs, there are elaborate illumination designs on a gold background, featuring symmetrical spirals of classic forms in blue, red, and pink colors. In the intersections between the inner and outer tuğs and zülfes, spring branches are depicted in a negative black form on a gold background. The intermediate spaces on the ground color are adorned with navy blue and red negative hayati patterns. (Image 21).



*Image 21. Illumination details of the tuğ and zülfe (metropolitanmuseum.org, 2023).*

## 2. Conclusion

In Islam, significant emphasis is placed on books and the Qur'an. The avoidance of representational arts such as painting and sculpture led to the flourishing of calligraphy, illumination, miniature painting, marbling, and bookbinding in the Ottoman Empire, giving rise to exquisite works in these domains. The finest examples of calligraphy are seen in the Qur'an, hadiths (sayings of Prophet Muhammad), hilye (calligraphic descriptions of Prophet Muhammad), Esmâ-i Hüsnâ (the ninety-nine names of Allah), poetry, and calligraphic compositions containing wise sayings. Additionally, calligraphy examples found their place in inscriptions on buildings, tombstones, woodwork, metalwork, tile decorations, and brickwork. Various styles of script were employed in calligraphy, one of which was the diwani script developed by the Ottomans and used for official correspondence within the state bureaucracy. The emblem used as a title or letterhead in official correspondence is known as the tughra. The tughra also served as the signature of the sultan and a representation of the state seal. Moreover, the tughra has been utilized as a design element in different contexts within Ottoman art. These include compositions of verses, prayers, basmala, hadiths,

and names in the form of the tughra. Initially used on official documents like decrees, land deeds, diplomas, and commendations, tughras later found their place on coins, ledger records, dynastic insignias, flags, and more. Tughras in the form of dynastic symbols were also commonly seen on official monuments, warships, buildings, and postage stamps.

In the Ottoman sultanate, the most significant use of tughras was in the form of sultanic tughras. Tughra arrangements and forms were generally created with similar outlines. When sultans ascended to the throne, they often utilized a specific arrangement of the tughra that included their name, their father's name, and the phrase "eternally victorious" written in Arabic calligraphy. Sultans typically maintained the use of this tughra arrangement throughout their reigns. After designing the tughra, sultans would have special seals made and used these seals to stamp official documents. During the era of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, a period when the Ottoman Empire was at its social and economic peak, the most unique and valuable examples of tughra forms were produced. During this period, under the artistic contributions of the chief court illuminator, Kara Memi, tughras were designed in the saz style. In the Kara Memi style, intricate tezhip designs, detailed symmetrical hatayi motifs, crescents, rosettes, intertwined helices, and penç motifs were utilized in ways of unprecedented intricacy. Another innovation introduced by Kara Memi in the Ottoman court style was the use of stylized flowers such as tulips, carnations, lilies, irises, cherry blossoms, and roses in his designs. These stylized flowers became a distinguishing feature of the Ottoman classical style in almost every artistic context. These tulips and carnations, acting as the signature of the illuminator, were not only evident in various silk fabrics, Iznik tiles, metal objects, miniatures, illumination, and bookbinding designs of the time but were also present in the decoration of the tughra, which is the focus of this study. The tughra created for Suleiman in 1550-1560 is currently preserved in the archives of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Crafted in the Palace atelier in Istanbul, this approximately 450-year-old piece is designed in a highly balanced Kara Memi style composition dominated by colors like gold and lapis lazuli that reflect the splendor and power of the state. Therefore, the tughra is not only a formal document but is also considered a masterpiece of

illumination and calligraphy, created with intricate craftsmanship and design principles. As demonstrated by this example, the Tughra, which was the official symbol of the Ottoman sultanate, has evolved into an emblem or letterhead, playing a crucial role in today's corporate identity. Serving to formalize documents and bearing the weight of authority, these documents encompassed a wide range of fields, from land deeds to diplomas, from declarations of war to peace treaties, from marriage contracts to inheritance records. Ottoman tughras, in addition to their role in official records, are adorned with aesthetic elements such as symmetry, harmony, style, and artistic intricacies. Through this study, it is concluded that Tughras, which are a part of the rich cultural heritage of the Ottoman Empire, hold immense significance in reflecting the empire's power and grandeur, while also preserving the artistic sensibilities of their time and bringing them into the present day.

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