



## Research Article

# Miniature applications of symbolic expressions in Yunus Emre poems

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### Article Info

**Received:** 6 November 2024

**Accepted:** 16 June 2025

**Available online:** 30 Sept 2025

### Keywords

Depiction

Icon

Miniature

Poetry

Symbol

Yunus Emre

### Abstract

Since the dawn of humanity, human beings have resorted to various means to communicate their thoughts and express themselves. Among these means, the use of form, color, and composition in narration has played a significant role throughout history. This form of expression brings us to the concept of symbols. A symbol is an expression that transforms shapes which cannot be perceived through emotions into tangible, concrete forms. Writings, which are an integral part of daily life, are a whole of symbols. They consist of various signs and their meanings. Just as the emotions in a poem are made concrete through the use of letter and word symbols, these emotions can also be depicted in descriptions. These symbols, which explain the feelings and values of societies, also guide them. Symbolism, or the study of symbols, interprets and explains events, objects, commonly used expressions, and words, often from religious, philosophical, and aesthetic perspectives. With this viewpoint, the goal is to convey the conceptual expressions found in Yunus Emre's poetry through symbols in miniature language, while also increasing the awareness of his poetry. The subject of this work is the depiction of Yunus Emre's poems in miniature technique, using symbols to explain the semantic integrity of the poetry, which will be one of the first studies in this field. As a result of a meticulous team effort, the "Symbolic Expressions in Yunus Emre's Poems: Miniature Applications" consists of 15 original pieces. The symbolic expressions in Yunus Emre's poems are materialized and turned into works, which form the main theme of this article. Presenting these poems in miniature technique and demonstrating the applications of Yunus Emre's poetry and miniature art in different artistic disciplines can lay the foundation for transmitting these works to future generations.

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### To cite this article

Perçem, E. (2025). Miniature applications of symbolic expressions in Yunus Emre poems. *Journal for the Interdisciplinary Art and Education*, 6(3), 175-194. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16948017>

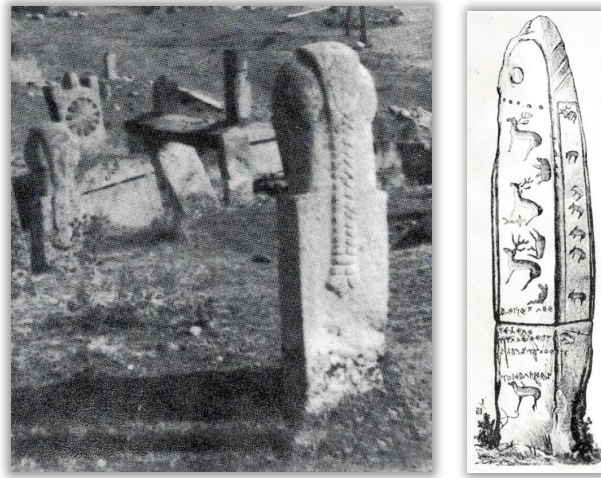
## Introduction

Today, the reinterpretation of traditional arts through contemporary interpretations plays a significant role in transmitting cultural heritage to younger generations. Miniature art, in particular, is increasingly finding a place in interdisciplinary studies, combining its symbolic narrative power with literary texts. In recent years, the relationships established between visual arts and literature have opened up new interpretations in artistic production. In this context, the visualization of poems through symbols both deepens the understanding of poetry and contributes to the innovative presentation of traditional arts. The reinterpretation of cultural values through artistic forms is attracting increasing interest both in academia and art education. Presenting the works of esteemed poets like Yunus Emre through visual narratives is a significant reflection of this interest. UNESCO's declaration of 2021 as the "Year of Yunus Emre and the Turkish Language" has rekindled academic and artistic interest in Yunus Emre's poetic legacy. This development encourages efforts to integrate traditional arts with literary heritage.

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### Miniature (Depiction) and Symbol (Emblem–Icon)

Turkish miniature art possesses a richly illustrative, descriptive, and symbolic content. In this context, symbolic expressions form the core values of the miniature. Looking at the history of symbols, we can observe that Turks attributed symbolic meanings to everything (figures 1-2)<sup>2</sup>; entities in the world of existence, human-made objects, abstract forms, and mythical beings constitute the icons used in miniature art. These figures form mental images as soon as the words are uttered.



**Figure 1-2.** Tombstone Symbols among Turks

The word *miniature* was referred to as "**nakış**" (ornamentation) during the Ottoman period and widely replaced the word for painting with the term "**tasvir**" (depiction). The word originates from the Latin *miniare* (meaning "to paint in red"), passed into Italian as *miniatura*, then into French, and eventually into Turkish. Miniatures are explanatory illustrations created in handwritten books to make the text more comprehensible.

The art of depiction developed into a unique branch of art in contrast to Western painting and was widely practiced in manuscripts. While in the West, manuscript illustration has its roots in antiquity, in the East, it dates back to the pre-Islamic period, namely to the Uyghurs, and found application throughout the medieval period.

In the Islamic world, the art of depiction developed alongside calligraphy and, from the 13th to the 19th centuries, became the dominant form of illustration across many fields—from medicine to city miniatures<sup>3</sup>. Miniatured manuscripts, created to illustrate handwritten works related to science, history, and literature and many of which are now regarded as valuable historical documents—enable us to trace the customs and traditions, clothing, and cultural practices of their time<sup>4</sup>. It has also continued to function as a supplementary element for various scientific disciplines. The popularity of Turkish painting art within Ottoman art stems from its close integration with daily life<sup>5</sup>.

Miniature art presents forms drawn from nature and stylized into motifs, symbols, or ornaments as a composition to the viewer. It is possible to observe all the details required by the themes found in the texts of manuscripts within miniatures. However, these forms are abstracted from their real appearances and positions, and rendered with a simplified expression this has become a defining characteristic of Turkish miniature art. Just like in other branches of Islamic art, this feature has been preserved and maintained in the art of depiction to this day.

One of the most important features of miniature art is the depiction of the emphasized figure, object, or item in large scale and placed at the center. Instead of being arranged according to linear perspective and their perceived distance from the viewer, elements are positioned based on their importance within the depiction. The effort to portray many events within a limited space stems from this preference. In these illustrations, significant figures are depicted as large and vividly colored, while less important ones are drawn smaller and with minimal coloring in the background. For this

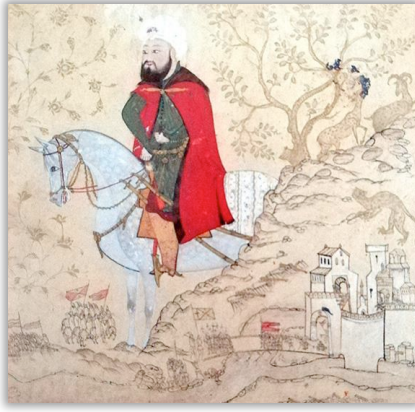
<sup>2</sup> Beyhan Karamağralı, *Ahlat Tombstones*, (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Banu Mahir, *Ottoman Miniature Art* (Istanbul: Kabcı Publishing, 2012), 15.

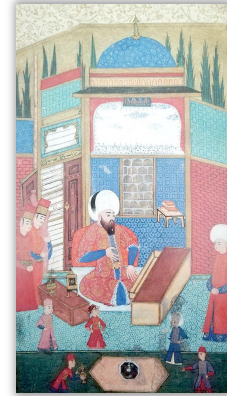
<sup>4</sup> Cahide Keskiner, *Drawing and Painting Techniques of Nature in Miniature Art* (Ankara: Ministry of Culture and Tourism Publications, 2004), 11.

<sup>5</sup> B. İnel, *A Perspective on Ottoman Miniature Art and the Pioneers of Painting Art* (Art in Turkey, 1999), 40-41.

reason, miniature art is also referred to as “importance perspective”<sup>6</sup>. In Figure 3, the depiction of Sultan Mehmed III from the album paintings of the artist Nakşi has been rendered in a notably large scale<sup>7</sup>. The soldiers emerging from the Castle of Eğri are depicted much smaller and without color. Similarly, in Figure 4, from the manuscript *Şemâilnâme-i Ali Osman*, Nakkaş Osman’s depiction of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent is rendered larger, while the prince and the gardeners are illustrated significantly smaller<sup>8</sup>. Another feature of this miniature is the depiction of both interior and exterior spaces from the same perspective.



**Figure 3.** Large-size drawing of Sultan Mehmet III



**Figure 4.** Large-size drawings of Suleiman the Magnificent and His Prince

Since the beginning of humanity, people have used various ways to convey their thoughts and emotions to others. Among these ways, expression through form, color, and composition has held a significant place<sup>9</sup>. This form of expression appears as a symbol (emblem-sign). The concept of a symbol refers to concrete representations that make things not perceived through emotions more comprehensible. Alternatively, symbolism is the attempt to express intangible abstract concepts and spiritual phenomena through visually appealing symbols. The word “symbol”, which entered Turkish from the Latin word *symbolum*, corresponds to the Turkish words *timsal* or *remz*<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 5.** The symbol of Hz. Mevlana spreading what he received from God to the People, (Illustration: Yasin Urhan Archive, 2015)

<sup>6</sup> Aslıhan Tonguc, Renewal of Tradition: Analysis of “Fatih Portraits” in the Context of Miniature, Gaze, and Different Modes of Seeing. (Journal of Social and Cultural Studies, Vol. 5, No. 9, 2019), 193-216.

<sup>7</sup> Editor: Serpil Bağcı, Ottoman Painting Art, (Istanbul: Mas Printing, 2006), 184.

<sup>8</sup> Bağcı, Ottoman Painting Art, 147.

<sup>9</sup> Selçuk Kürşad Koca, The Language of Symbols in Turkish Cultural History, Doctoral Dissertation (Sakarya: Sakarya University Institute of Social Sciences, 2012), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ferit Devellioglu, Ottoman Turkish - Turkish Encyclopedic Dictionary, (Ankara: Aydın Publications, 2013).

The writings found in manuscripts are a collection of symbols. They consist of refined signs and their meanings. These meanings are expressions that explain and evoke emotions and values. In miniature art, symbolism-the science of symbols-has transformed into an art form that interprets and explains events, objects, traditional expressions, and words, often from religious, philosophical, and aesthetic perspectives.

In relation to this topic, in Figure 5, a miniature depicts Mevlâna receiving the commands of God with his right hand and conveying them to the people with his left. The symbol here is the double-headed eagle, which represents the Seljuk Empire.



**Figure 6.** Silence, the Servant Contemplating Allah, (Illustration: Hilal Arpacioğlu Archive, 2008)

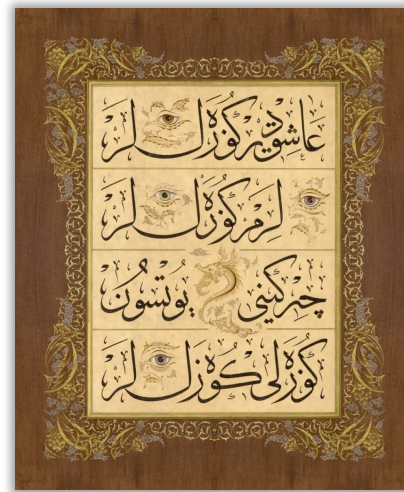


**Figure 7.** Symbolization of prayer movements with tulip flower, Reyhâni Calligraphy: Hüseyin Kutlu

In Figure 6, in the artwork titled *Sukut* (Silence), a tulip representing a person reciting the word of God is depicted bowing its head in contemplation of the greatness of Almighty God. In Figure 7, inspired by the verse on prayer, the artist symbolizes the five daily prayer movements of Muslims through the tulip flower<sup>11</sup>. While the tulip is a symbol of God, it is also emphasized that humans should be in unity with God during their prayers.



**Figure 8.** The Path of Love, Illustration: Çiğdem Bektaş, (Selçuk University, Faculty of Fine Arts Archive, 2008)



**Figure 9.** Symbols Used Instead of the Words Eye and Dragon. Poem: Muhammed Lutfî Erzurîmî. Calligraphy-Illumination-Illumination: Ersan Perçem, 2004

<sup>11</sup> Hüseyin Kutlu, Tulip Exhibition Album, (İstanbul: Asır Printing, 2001), 10.

In Figure 8, Yunus Emre is depicted carrying firewood between the forest and the door of his sheikh, Taptuk, for 40 years as a way of reaching God. His long years of service, carrying wood to his master's door, matured him spiritually; every word he heard from his teacher later turned into poetry that flowed from his lips. In Figure 9, in a poem by Efe Hazretleri, the lines '*The Lover Sees the Beautiful with the Eyes, My Eyes See the Beautiful, Let the Ugly Be Swallowed by the Dragon, Let the Beautiful Be Seen by the Beautiful Eyes*' emphasize symbolic elements like 'eyes' and 'dragon' to enhance the poetic impact.

### Symbols (Remiz) Used in Depictions

When examining the miniatures we have created, it is also important to consider the historical meanings of some of the symbols (remiz) we used. In Sufism, the tulip (*lâle*) is a symbol of God. The tulip, which came from Central Asia to Anatolia, became the most sacred flower of the Turks and, by extension, of Islam. In Sufism, the tulip symbolizes God. In Islamic art, it has long been used because, in the *abjad* (numerical) system, the words "Allah," "Hilal" (crescent), and "Lâle" (tulip) all correspond to the number 66<sup>12</sup>. The rose, in Sufism, symbolizes divine beauty and also represents the beloved of God, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It is frequently encountered as a symbolic motif in Turkish-Islamic decorative arts. Beşir Ayvazoğlu explains the rose as follows: "In Arabic, the word for rose is '*ward*.' The letter '*Waw*' in this word refers to the perfected ones (*kâmil*) who are the inheritors of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); the letter '*Ra*' points to the Prophet's names '*Rauf*' (kind) and '*Rahim*' (merciful); and the letter '*Dal*' alludes to '*Dai*', meaning inviter or caller to faith"<sup>13</sup>. The wheat ear has become a symbol of rebirth and abundance. The Tuba Tree is believed to be a great tree in Paradise, with its roots above and its branches below<sup>14</sup>. Süleyman Uludağ also defined the Tuba tree as a tree in paradise and as happiness. He also described the term *Tuba makamı* (the Tuba station) in Sufism as "the station of intimacy with the Truth (God) and being in peace and tranquility in the presence of the Divine"<sup>15</sup>. He described it as such. The Emerald Phoenix (*Simurgh*) in Sufism symbolizes multiplicity (kesret) through the expression "thirty birds," and the unity (wahdat) of those thirty birds becoming one the sovereignty of the Simurgh. It is a symbol of a person's self-discovery and enlightenment; of attaining strength, abundance, beauty, healing, and immortality. The dragon is one of the symbols that has been reflected in Turkish culture from pre-Islamic times to the present. According to Necmettin Ersoy, "the motif of the snake/dragon biting its own tail, which we often encounter in the art of ancient civilizations, the Far East, and Seljuk ornamentation, reflects the image of eternal cyclical motion"<sup>16</sup>. Beyond miniatures, the dragon has been used within Turkish culture as a symbol of power, strength, and might. In architectural contexts, the dragon was also considered a talisman used to prevent evil and enemies from entering<sup>17</sup>. miniatures, the dragon symbolizes the *nafs* (the ego or carnal self), in other words, evil — and it is symbolized that if the *nafs* is not defeated, the inner eye (heart's eye) that perceives divine knowledge will not be opened. The lion is a commonly seen symbol in Anatolian Turkish architecture. According to Pilici, "The lion symbol, above all, represents strength, power, sovereignty, nobility, and courage for humans"<sup>18</sup>. When this power is considered as the *nafs* (ego), the struggle of the human being becomes more difficult. The Tree of Life the sanctity and symbolism of the tree in nature has existed since ancient cultures and has continued to the present day. As humankind has lived intertwined with nature, the tree has become a structure with many different functions and benefits. "The tree symbol, by emphasizing the sanctity, fertility, and continuity of the world, is associated with the idea of creation and the concept of absolute immortality. Thus, the world tree becomes the tree of life or the tree of immortality"<sup>19</sup>. The tree, seen as a symbol of life rising toward the sky, represents the universe, paradise, immortality, reproduction, and abundance. The cloud, in its most well-known

<sup>12</sup> Beşir Ayvazoğlu, Fire Flower Tulip (Istanbul: Istanbul Municipality Culture Inc., 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Beşir Ayvazoğlu, The Book of Roses, (Istanbul: Publication No. 78, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Şükrü Haluk Akalın, Recep Toparlı, Nevzat Gözaydın, Hamza Zülfişar, Mustafa Argunşah, Nurettin Demir, Belgin Tezcan Aksu, Beyza Gültekin, Turkish Language Association Turkish Dictionary, (Ankara: Turkish Language Association Publications, 2005), 549.

<sup>15</sup> Süleyman Uludağ, Dictionary of Sufi Terms, (Istanbul: Islamic Research Series 19, Marifet, Pub. No: 45, 1991), 493.

<sup>16</sup> Necmettin Ersoy, Symbols and Interpretations (Istanbul: Donence Printing and Publishing, 2007), 159.

<sup>17</sup> Gönü Öney, First Anatolian Seljuk Architecture and Handicrafts, (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Cultural Publications, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Aliona Pilici, From Symbol to Icon in Historical Process: Logo, (Istanbul: Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Institute of Social Sciences, Proficiency in Art Thesis, 2008), 34.

<sup>19</sup> Ramazan Işık, Beliefs Related to Trees Among Turks and Associated Cults, (Elazığ: Fırat University Faculty of Theology Journal, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2004), 93.

symbolic forms, represents rain and plenty. Clouds, which are invisible to the touch and constantly changing, possess a mysterious nature<sup>20</sup>. Throughout history, such symbols and emblems have been frequently used in our ornamental arts, with references made to written texts or miniatures to enhance expression. In this article, the miniature artist was first asked to perceive the main idea that Yunus Emre aimed to emphasize in his poems and to create designs by using or generating appropriate symbols accordingly. As a result, the effective use of different artistic disciplines in a shared space was achieved, and the power of expression was strengthened.

### Applications of Some Yunus Emre Poems with the Art of Illustration

Mustafa Tatçı states that the concepts in Yunus Emre's poems are abstract and generally processed with the art of personification<sup>21</sup>. These couplets spoken by Yunus for the maturation of a person describe the spiritual journey of the person in this world. In this spiritual journey, miniature artists have also tried to portray the struggle of the self and the love of God by transferring the couplets onto paper surfaces. In this study, the aim was to transform the abstract expressions in the lines of poetry into more concrete, visually perceivable works, and 15 poems were chosen and depicted using the miniature technique. The application of the selected Yunus Emre poems with miniatures is explained and described below in order,

#### The Problem Is Where I Was

“Oh friends, oh brothers, ask me where I was,  
If you listen, I will tell you, I was in the eternal homeland.  
My tongue says from eternity, God is one, God is the Messenger,  
While I did not know this, I was in a strange position.  
Before any calamity was said, before any arrangement was made,  
I was not separate from God, I was in that great council.  
Yunus, your lover soul, with the eternal lovers,  
I was in the court of God, in the voyage and in the dance”<sup>22</sup>.



**Figure 10.** The Question Was Where Was I, Description, Design, and Implementation: Zeynep Tekeci Genç Jali Diwani Calligraphy: Murat Okumuş. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper 30x70 cm

The design depicts Yunus Emre's journey with the prophets. In his poem, Yunus Emre expresses that he is on a

<sup>20</sup> C. Gibson, *How to Read Symbols? Illustrated Guide to Symbol Reading*, (Istanbul: Yem Publishing, 2004), 13.

<sup>21</sup> Mustafa Tatçı, *Yunus Emre Divan* (Ankara: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism, General Directorate of Libraries and Publications, 1990), 3-5.

<sup>22</sup> Tatçı, *Yunus Emre Divan*, 175.

journey by asking, “Ask me where I was.” He begins recounting the lived events mentioned in the Qur'an starting from *Qalu Bala* (the primordial covenant). He narrates the stories of the prophets from Adam to Muhammad (peace be upon him) as if he had been present during those events. He says he was with Prophet Noah during the flood, with Prophet Joseph in the well, and with the Prophet Muhammad on the night of Mi'raj.

### I'm Painted In Color

*“I am burnt in your love until I become ashes  
I am painted in your color, I will not fade, Ayruk  
Let my soul burn, let my love burn in its wood  
Let my tears flow, I will not wipe, Ayruk”<sup>23</sup>.*



**Figure 11.** I Was Dyed in Its Color, Description, Design, and Implementation: Ersan Perçem-Şükran Şavlı. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 35x50 cm

The poetic expressions of Yunus Emre, which begin with his entrance into the dervish lodge of Taptuk (bottom right section), are depicted as concluding at his tomb located in the lower left corner. During this symbolic timeline, the interwoven tulips represent Yunus (the small tulip) becoming similar to God (the large tulip).

In the poem, Yunus declares: “O beloved! I have burned with your love until I turned to ashes. I have taken on your color, I have come to resemble you. I shall no longer fade, lose my hue, or be corrupted!”

As he says, “Let my soul burn more and more in the fire of love,” it becomes clear that both tulips symbolize love through flames.

### Curtain

*“Hear, my friends, love is like the sun  
A heart without love is like a stone  
A stone heart does not grow poison on its tongue  
A word spoken softly resembles war  
A heart with love burns, softens and turns into a candle  
Stone hearts are like a darkened, steep winter  
Be at the gate of the sultan, be at the title deed of the saint  
The star of lovers always resembles a sergeant  
Pass Yunus, what need is this steed  
A man needs love from the front, he resembles a dervish”<sup>24</sup>.*

<sup>23</sup> Editor: Yavuz Kartallıoğlu, Yunus Emre Institute Turkish World, (Vol. II, Issue, January-June 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Kartallıoğlu, Yunus Emre Institute Turkish World, Vol. II, Issue.



**Figure 12.** Curtain, Description, Design, and Implementation: Ersan Perçem-H. Güler Yağcı. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 35x50 cm

In the miniature, the tulip in the center symbolizes God (Allah, exalted is He) and is likened to a white sun. This sun — representing the divine light (*nūr*) — illuminates those with awakened hearts (*the eye of the heart*), and they, in turn, radiate light to their surroundings. The people depicted on the left, however, symbolize those who have not been touched by this light; their hearts have turned to black stone, representing spiritual blindness and hardness.

On the right side, the white-colored **Simurgh** (the legendary phoenix-like bird) represents pure-hearted individuals who strive to conquer their *nafs* (ego). In contrast, the black dragon depicted on the left side symbolizes the *nafs* itself and its inherent evils.

Yunus Emre proclaims: “O friends, listen! The love of God is like the sun. Wherever it enters, it brings light. A heart without love is like a hard, coarse stone — difficult to shape or refine. O Yunus, free yourself from all fearful thoughts. Leave behind your doubts. Love is the first step on this path. Only then can a person become like a dervish.”

Here, the *dervish symbol* placed above the tulip represents the transformation of the individual — through divine love — into a true seeker on the Sufi path.

### Five Times

*“A person who says he is a Muslim should know what the condition is  
He should obey God’s command and pray for a while  
He should sit with the sun and raise his head and dip his hands in the water  
Both the devil’s neck should be broken and the soul should die  
If you pray, your prayer should be with God and your supplication should be  
In the hereafter, you should find ‘honor and coquetry’  
So that you pray, whatever you wish for, you should find  
You should be free from the devil and the servants should be free  
Those who pray the afternoon prayer are pure and alive  
They are those who always understand God, they should understand  
In the evening, three obligatory prayers are in the pure sin  
Oh, in your deeds, there should be a candle and a candle  
To the night prayer the ready loves the ready, the Qadir  
Your faith is incomplete, your faith must be pure and pure  
Whoever has not taken this word and has not prayed a single time  
Know that he has not become a Muslim, he must enter Tamu”<sup>25</sup>.*

<sup>25</sup> <https://hadislerleislam.diyinet.gov.tr/sayfa.php?CILT=2&SAYFA=175>



**Figure 13.** Five Daily Prayers, Description, Design, and Implementation: M. Banu Bayrak, Jali Diwani Calligraphy: Murat Okumuş. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 34x55 cm

Based on this poem by Yunus Emre, the miniature we designed aims to capture a simple yet profound expression through symbols. While designing the composition, the minarets hallmark of Islamic architecture and the station of the call to prayer was used. The calls to prayer echoing one after another from the minarets represent the five daily prayer times and also regulate the hearts of the believers. These continuously recurring times are imagined as parts of a wheel of time, each represented in proportion to the duration it occupies within the day.

#### Reward

*“Those who dive into the pool of Kawthar, Those who die before they die,  
Those who consider themselves enemies, Perch on the branches of the pipe,  
Who will open a door to someone as a friend, Let the enemy escape from your hand,  
The mouth of a dolphin will scatter the silver, Do not touch the wise man”<sup>26</sup>.*



**Figure 14.** Reward, Description, Design, and Implementation: Rûmeysa Demircan. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 44x67 cm

*Tûbâ* is a tree imagined in the culture, art, and literature of Muslim nations as rooted in the Paradise of “Wasilah,” the station of the Prophet Muhammad, with its branches extending from the highest level down to all layers of Paradise.

<sup>26</sup> Mustafa Tatçı, *Yunus Emre* (2013)

In the design of this work, it is depicted that those who consider their ego as their enemy and perform acts of worship during their earthly lives will ultimately reach the ʿĪṣā tree. To represent worldly life, houses, trees, and clusters of grass were used. The mosque and the ship in the design symbolize those who have left behind worldly life and overcome their ego.

According to a narration, ʿĪṣā is the name of a tree in Paradise; all the homes in Paradise are made from its branches, which hang over the houses. When the dwellers of Paradise desire its fruits, the tree leans toward them, and they eat from it as much as they wish.<sup>27</sup>

### Deception

*“The silver you have earned  
They have punished your soul  
Tomorrow, each of them  
Must turn into a scorpion and sting  
Oh Yunus, the Most Gracious  
Reach your soul to the friend  
What do you feed this body of yours  
The arrow of death should be enough”<sup>28</sup>.*



**Figure 15.** Deception, Description, Design, and Implementation: Zekine İnat. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 35x50 cm

Yunus Emre, who emphasizes that worldly life is transient, that we will eventually leave behind our possessions and move on to the afterlife, conveys that this worldly life is nothing but an illusion. He states that the wealth and riches we hold are not blessings, but in fact punishments to our souls.

Inspired by Yunus Emre's verses, modern structures such as skyscrapers and buildings were illustrated to highlight the deceptive magnificence of worldly life. To emphasize wealth, the color gold was predominantly used in these structures. Satellites were added to point out that mankind's presence extends not only on Earth but also into space. Following the depiction of these grand worldly achievements, the scorpion is shown beginning to rage. Surrounded by flames, the scorpion releases its venom upon these fleeting riches of the world, symbolizing how they ultimately poison humanity.

<sup>27</sup> Ali Erbaş, ʿĪṣā (İstanbul: TDV Islamic Encyclopedia, Vol. 41, 2012), 316-317.

<sup>28</sup> Y. Bakı Yazıcı, Yunus Emre, Göldeste, (1992).

### Struggle Against the Self

*"Hear, my friends, love is like the sun  
A heart without love is like a stone  
A stone heart does not grow poison on its tongue  
No matter how softly it speaks, its words are like war  
A heart with love burns, softens and turns into a candle  
Stone hearts are like the darkened, steep winter  
Be at the gate of the sultan, be at the title deed of the saint  
The star of lovers always resembles a sergeant  
Pass Yunus, what need is there for this steed  
A man needs love from the front, he resembles a dervish"*<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 16.** Struggle of the Self, Description, Design, and Implementation: Zeynep Yazıcı. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 50x70 cm

In order for a person to attain truth, they must first battle their own ego. When one realizes their own frailty before succumbing to pride and begins this inner struggle, the veils of truth begin to lift, revealing the essence within. In this way, a person sheds their ego and reaches the truth.

The dragon is likened to the ego that believes all greatness lies within itself. Its act of biting its own body symbolizes the inner struggle of man against the self. Through this act, the beauty hidden within is revealed, and greenery begins to sprout from the earth. At the very top of the design, the tulip symbolizes the ultimate truth to be attained: Allah (Glorified and Exalted be He).

### The Way of Love

*"I walk from place to place  
I ask the Sheikh from mouth to mouth  
Who knows my condition in a foreign land  
Come see what love has done to me  
Or take my hand and lift me up  
Or make me reach your peace  
You made me cry a lot and make me laugh"*

<sup>29</sup> Kartallıoğlu, Yunus Emre Institute Turkish World, (Issue: 2, January-June 2020).

Come see what love has done to me  
 I walk in a foreign land  
 I see the Friend in my dream  
 I wake up and become Majnun  
 Come see what love has done to me  
 Poor Yunus, I am helpless  
 I am a lover from head to toe  
 I am a vagabond from the land of the Friend  
 Come see what love has done to me”<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 17.** The Path of Love Depiction Design and Application: Tuba Yaprak Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 50x65 cm

Yunus Emre’s journey is a journey toward Divine Love. The name of this path is *Sufism* (*Tasawwuf*). Sufism is a gradual path that a human, bearing earthly attributes, must traverse in order to attain a perfected state. This spiritual path in Sufism is expressed through seven stages, each manifested in the realm of meaning (*māna*) with different symbolic colors. These colors, in essence, represent *divine light* (*nūr*). The luminous colors, as stages, are ordered as follows:

- Nafs al-ammārah* (*The Commanding Self*): Blue – rebellion.
- Nafs al-lawwāmah* (*The Self-Reproaching Self*): Red – remorse.
- Nafs al-mulhimah* (*The Inspired Self*): Yellow – repentance.
- Nafs al-muṭma’innah* (*The Tranquil Self*): White – gratitude and praise.
- Nafs al-rāḍiyah* (*The Content Self*): Green – annihilation of self.
- Nafs al-marḍiyyah* (*The Pleasing Self*): Black – being in harmony with Divine will.
- Nafs al-ṣāfiyyah* (*The Pure Self*): Pure color – symbolizing union with the Divine.

The stages that Yunus Emre passes through to reach the station of *nothingness* (*fanā*) are illustrated. Birds transforming and taking flight from his hands symbolize the maturing of the soul at each stage, ultimately turning into the legendary *Simurgh* (*Phoenix*), signifying the manifestation of God’s names (*al-Asmā’ al-Ḥusnā*) within the human spirit and its transformations.

The cosmic void represents the universe and timelessness, while the golden line along the edge symbolizes a fleeting glimpse of this world—suggesting that *divine love* is an experience to be lived only in this earthly realm.

<sup>30</sup> Mustafa Özçelik, *Our Yunus* (Nar Publications, 2013), 158-159.

**Could you ask?**

*"I asked yellow dewdrop  
Your gas is yellow  
What do you ask, bey dervish  
I fear God"<sup>31</sup>*



**Figure 17.** Were You Able to Ask? Depiction Design and Application: Tuba Yaprak. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 30x50 cm

In this stanza, Yunus Emre engages in a dialogue with a yellow flower. However, in order to be able to converse with a flower, a person must first be cleansed of their negative traits and become, in terms of inner meaning, as beautiful and refined as a flower.

To achieve this, one must discipline the lower self (*nafs*) and rid it of its undesirable qualities. Only then does the Divine Name (*Ism al-Ḥaqq*) manifest within the person, and everything they hear, see, and speak comes from the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*). Just as Yunus Emre speaks with the flower — it is, in fact, a conversation with the Divine.

**Like Rustem**

*"These nine lions, seven universes and four dragons  
I will fight with them, I will be Rustem, I will be an epic"<sup>32</sup>*



**Figure 18.** Like Rustem Depiction Design and Application: Ayşenur Özdemiray. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 30x50 cm

<sup>31</sup> D.K. Wannig & M. Özdemir, Nature in Traditional Turkish Folk Poetry (Erzurum: Atatürk University Journal of Turkology Studies, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Emel Copur Nalçagil, The Lion Metaphor in Divan Poetry (Rumeli Journal of Language and Research, 2020), 285-302.

The four dragon elements mentioned in the couplet have been reduced to two dragon figures in the composition. The nine lion figures are symbolically placed among the vegetal motifs that surround Yunus during his spiritual battle (Cenk). In this way, while Yunus is encircled by dragons and engaged in struggle, he is also surrounded by the lions hidden within the background of plant motifs.

The contrast between the dark and light ground reflects the shadowed and illuminated sides of the heart. Through this inner battle, Yunus aspires to become a hero — like Rustam — and to transform his journey into an epic.

### My Life Has Come and Gone

*“My life has come and gone like this year  
And it came to me like this, like the opening and closing of an eye  
God is witness to this word, this soul is a guest to the dead  
One day it will come and go like a bird flew out of a cage  
They likened the poor son of Adam to the sower  
Some sprout, some fade away, like scattering seeds  
My inner self burns for something in this world  
As if the sky reaped the crops for those who died while being brave  
If you visit a sick person, give them a drink of water  
Tomorrow, the cashew will come to you like God’s wine  
If you see a poor person, give them a drink of wine  
Tomorrow, the cashew will come to you like God’s wine  
Yunus Emre, two people will remain in this world  
It turns out that Hızır and İlyas have drunk the Ab-ı Hayat”<sup>33</sup>.*



**Figure 19.** My Life Has Come and Gone Depiction Design and Application: Zeynep Uysal. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 40x55 cm

The circular form depicted at the center of the miniature represents the brevity of human life, as expressed in the first three lines of the poem — life passes in the blink of an eye, and no matter how much one indulges in worldly pleasures, they will ultimately pass on to the eternal realm.

The blue color surrounding the golden ground, along with the designs on its surface, symbolizes the cyclical nature of the world and the various occupations and preoccupations of human beings on Earth.

The third layer conveys the notion that after worldly life comes the afterlife, where a person will receive the consequences of whatever they did in this world.

<sup>33</sup> Tatçı, Yunus Emre Divan.

The green wheat ear at the top of the miniature symbolizes a person who dies young, while the golden wheat ear at the bottom represents the mature, wise human being — the *‘ārīf*, the one who has reached spiritual enlightenment.

### Shari‘ah is the Path to the Reached One

*“I love You from the heart  
I have a path from this path  
Sharia-Tariqah is the path to the one who arrives  
Truth-Knowledge is from the moment  
You say I am in me, I am not in me  
There is a me in me, I am from me  
Poor Yunus's eye has become a trap for you  
A servant at your door is from the Sultan”<sup>34</sup>*



**Figure 20.** Shari‘a Is the Path for the Seeker Depiction Design and Application: Naciye Detseli. Jālī Naskh Calligraphy: Murat Okumuş. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 40x60 cm

The design of the artwork is based on the line *“There is a ‘self’ within me, deeper than myself”* from Yunus Emre’s poem titled *“I Love You More Than Life Itself”*. This verse serves as the conceptual core of the composition.

The main theme of the piece revolves around a dragon and a flowering tree. The dragon, depicted in black, symbolizes the darker inclinations within a person — the ego (*nafs*), while the blossoming spring branches represent the virtuous, good aspects of the inner self.

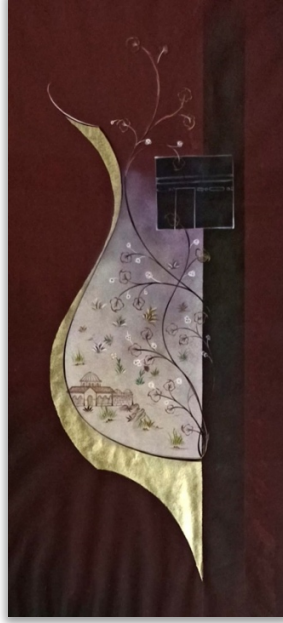
At the center of these contrasting elements, a circular form blending gold and blue has been illustrated to represent the world itself.

### Friend's House

*“I have no decision in this, I came to go in this  
I am a merchant, I have many goods, I came to sell to the buyer  
My madness is the drunkenness of friends, lovers know what I am  
I am a devsurum, I came to end my unity  
I did not come for the cause, my job is for love  
The house of the friend is hearts, I came to make hearts  
Yunus Emre fell in love, he died from the pain of the beloved  
At the door of the real man, I came to offer my soul  
Be my teacher, I am his servant, I am the nightingale of the garden of friends  
I came to my teacher’s garden, to sing with joy*

<sup>34</sup> Burhan Toprak, Yunus Emre Divan (Istanbul, 2006), 160.

*Souls who have knowledge in this, know in the moment  
 I came to offer my state with my teacher, with knowledge  
 I did not come for the fight, my job is for love  
 The house of the friend is hearts, I came to make hearts”<sup>35</sup>*



**Figure 21.** The House of the Friend Depiction Design and Application: Hümeýra Özdemir. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 40x60 cm

The tulip, which forms the main theme of the design, is used to represent Allah (cc). The garden of friends is depicted through the flowers within the tulip form. The Kaaba, as the house of the Friend, symbolizes the heart and is therefore included in the design; it has been implemented in accordance with the meaning of the phrase “I came to build hearts.”

**It is the ego (nafs) that leaves a person stranded on the path.**

*“If you look at the truth, your ego will be your enemy  
 Now, go and fight with your ego  
 The ego is the one who puts you on the path, the ego remains on the path, follow the ego  
 What business do you have with anyone, walk with your ego  
 If you wish, you will be safe from the evil of this world  
 Abandon this arrogance and hatred, wear a cloak, walk like a dervish  
 No one will enter your garden, no one will hurt your rose  
 There is your beloved, walk hand in hand in the garden  
 Yûnus, now you speak pleasantly, you will explain with your tongue  
 When you sell advice to the people, be a man, walk pleasantly on your path”<sup>36</sup>*

<sup>35</sup> Çopur, The Lion Metaphor in Divan Poetry (Rumeli Journal of Language and Research), 285-302.

<sup>36</sup> Mustafa Tatçı, Yunus Emre Divan, Doctoral Dissertation (Ankara: Gazi University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Turkish Language and Literature, 1990).



**Figure 21.** It Is the Ego That Leaves a Person Stranded on the Path Depiction Design and Application: Eyüp Özdemir Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 31x41 cm

It is the ego (nafs) that leaves a person stranded on the path. This expression carries a Sufi meaning; it emphasizes that the greatest obstacle in a person's spiritual journey is their own ego (self, desires).

In the illustration, the tree represents worldly life, and the dragon—symbolizing the ego—becomes a figure that struggles to dry up or destroy it.

It is emphasized that in order to live a happy and peaceful life in this worldly existence, a person must constantly struggle against their ego.

#### Oman in the Layer

*"I am the sea of love, the seas are amazed by me  
The sea is my drop, the ocean is my particle  
For my path to the friend is the realm of eternity, my knowledge  
This tongue of mine tells me from God, neither a servant nor a sultan  
Mustafa was created, his face is light, his heart is pure  
He made loyalty to God a promise of grace for me  
Yûnus Emrem, on this path, informs me of your deficiency  
The one who is intoxicated calls me to the dervish slander"<sup>37</sup>*



**Figure 22.** The Ocean in a Drop Depiction Design and Application: M. Banu Bayrak. Technique: Gold, acrylic, and watercolor on textured handmade paper. 34x55 cm

<sup>37</sup> Mustafa Tatçı, *Yunus Emre Divanı*, 20

The sea, known as the large body of water covering the earth, has been the subject of imagery with its endless appearance and being the living space of some creatures. In some religions and mythologies, water has been accepted as the reason for the existence of life. In Sufism, when explaining the unity of being, the sea represents "Allah, the absolute being, his infinite station of being and unity. Sufis have mostly used the image of the sea to explain that existence is one and that multiplicity remains apparent"<sup>38</sup>. In Sufism, the sea represents the unity of God with its vastness, width, eternity, depth and abundance; while the waves represent the multitude of creation.<sup>39</sup> The sea is the symbol of One, that is, unity, and the drop is the symbol of the servant, that is, the created human being.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is associated with the sea and water in terms of the abundance of his mercy, the universality of the religion of Islam that he preached, his being the most superior of creation, and Islam's abolition of previous religions. "Dürr-i yektâ, dürr-i yekdâne" meaning the only pearl of the world and "Dürr-i yetim" meaning the only pearl in mother-of-pearl<sup>40</sup> The combinations are used to refer to the Prophet Muhammad through metaphor and comparison.

The first two couplets were decisive in the composition of the miniature design prepared based on Yunus Emre's poem. Based on the multiplicity-unity, part-whole relationship used in many places in Sufism, an ocean was designed inside a drop, inspired by Yunus who said, "The ocean is mine, the particles are my droplets, the ocean is mine." Yunus, who said, "Mustafa created the face light and the heart pure, He made loyalty to God a promise of generosity for me," indicates that generosity originates from the existence of our Prophet (pbuh). "If you were not there, I would not have created the worlds."<sup>41</sup> The sacred hadith has been the source of inspiration for many literary works in verse and prose. While designing the composition of the work, the Mosque was placed inside this "sea of love" to represent our Prophet (pbuh), the reason for the existence of all the worlds. The circles formed by interlocking were conceived as the world. Mountains, hills, clusters of flowers and grass, clouds and natural elements were used to express human elements with houses placed in small clusters. A dark blue background covering the whole of the work was preferred, and no other background color was used except for the drop form. With this transparent background, it was tried to reflect the meaning of the world more than its visible and audible appearance.

## Conclusion

Miniature painting is the applied form of illustrative art on paper. Throughout its historical course, it has been used to support texts in manuscripts and has evolved into an art form. The expressive power of illustration, a vibrant branch of art, has been used to support the expression found in Yunus Emre's poems. These poems often revolve around the human struggle with the self in the worldly realm and divine love; artists have created illustrations focusing on these two themes.

Artistic language has been used to emphasize that the words Yunus Emre presented to the Islamic world through poetry continue to enlighten humanity even after 600 years. The aim of these illustrations is to make the abstract expressions in the verses more tangible and visually perceivable. Fifteen poems have been selected and illustrated using the miniature technique on paper surfaces.

The chosen papers were handmade and selected to suit the theme, while gold leaf and acrylic paints were used in the application. During the preparation of the illustrations, the semantic integrity of the text was preserved. Conceptual expressions from Yunus Emre's poems were chosen and expressed through new symbols and signs. While creating these works, a unique style was pursued, free from external design influences and without detaching from classical miniature technique or its own cultural and spiritual roots. In producing these new symbols and forms, the attempt was also to develop a cultural technique.

<sup>38</sup> Mahmut Gider, The Concept of the Sea in the Divans of Bâkî and Fuzûlî, (Journal of Ottoman Studies, Issue 3, 2017), 22-36.

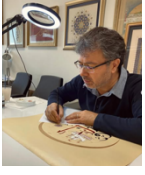
<sup>39</sup> İskender Pala, Encyclopedic Dictionary of Divan Poetry (Ankara: Akçağ Publications, 1995), 137.

<sup>40</sup> Pala, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Divan Poetry* (Ankara: Akçağ Publications, 1995), 155.

<sup>41</sup> Yusuf Nebhânî, *Envâr-ı Muhammediyye* (circa 1900), 13.

Through symbolic forms used in miniature art, references were made to both give meaning to the past and ensure the continuity of tradition, as well as to remind people of their spiritual journey in this world. The thoughts Yunus distilled from the Qur'an and Hadith have been made concrete through Islamic arts, revealing the richness of both our intellectual and artistic world.

### Biodata of Author



**Lecturer and Artist Ersan Perçem** was born in 1976 in Erzincan, Türkiye. He graduated in 2001 from Marmara University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Traditional Turkish Handicrafts, with a major in Illumination (Tezhip) and Miniature Arts. In 2005, he began his academic career at Selçuk University, Faculty of Fine Arts, in the Department of Traditional Turkish Arts. He completed his Master's degree in 2010 at Selçuk University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Traditional Turkish Arts. Between 2004 and 2005, he received training in miniature art from Taner Alakuş. In 2005, he studied illumination (tezhip) under İnci Ayan Birol, received training in marbling (ebrû) from Sadreddin Özçimi in 2010, and earned certifications in thuluth and naskh calligraphy from Hüseyin Kutlu in 2015. From 2016 to 2023, he contributed to the "İstanbul Mushaf" project, prepared under the auspices of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, by producing designs in various historical styles for illumination, binding, and lectern decorations. Between 2003 and 2015, he worked at the Applied Turkish-Islamic Arts Library as an illumination artist, and since 2005, he has been teaching Illumination and Miniature Arts at Destegül Fine Arts Center. In 2015, he also began teaching Islamic calligraphy (Hüsn-i Hat). Since 2007, the number of students who have received formal certifications (ijazah) in illumination and miniature from him has reached 30. He currently continues his academic duties at the same faculty and pursues his work in calligraphy, illumination, and miniature arts on weekends at Destegül Culture and Arts Association. He is married and the father of four children.

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