

MINIATURE PAINTERS IN THE OTTOMAN PERIOD
The Craftsmen Organisation and the Social Position of Artists

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The study of Turkish artistic culture reveals that manuscript illustration (such as miniature painting, gilding with gold, and marbled paper making) occupied a significant place within the plastic arts. By the time the Turks converted to Islam, plastic arts were interpreted in terms of Islamic culture and had acquired an identity based on Islamic values. The creativity of the artist who confronted the ban on figure representation induced a new branch in plastic arts by means of over-stylisation of humans, animals, floral designs etc... The paintings which originated in this cultural structure were made to illustrate and complemented a text with colour and gold paints in a fine and detailed manner. These paintings were the size of the leaf of a book and were called miniatures and they constituted the sole form of painting during the Ottoman period.

A sociological analysis based on the social roles and status of miniature painters, on the process of acquiring these roles and on social functions of the artifacts would give significant hints to the understanding and evaluation of the painting culture of the period. In this context, the purpose of our study is to examine the organization of painters in the Ottoman period.

In our previous studies, we have examined the stages that socio-artistic system has undergone during the social evolution process as explained by Kavolis (see Ulusoy 1994) and the central tendencies behind each of these stages. In this study however, within the scope of our purpose, we are going to compare the central tendencies of craftsmen organization in the general social structure, specifically referring to painters of Ottoman period with generalizations that Kavolis made about the stage of "classic civilizations" that coincide with this period.

Kavolis makes the following generalizations about the art system which emerged in this period by stating that the stage of classic civilizations is characterized by the bureaucratic administration of the state and the development of commerce and elite literacy.

1. This stage led to the development of art workshops characterized by a systematic division of labor.

2. Crafts organizations that reminiscent of the guilds arose and restricted the differentiation between social status of the artists within their own craft union.

3. Artists were full-time professionals during this period.

4. Individual art workshops were generally under the control of the state and the religion. This meant that the artist was, in a sense, a factory laborer.

5. The production of art was generally a collective work however, individual production was allowed.

6. Training of an artist was systematic and relatively prolonged but it did not encourage originality.

7. The role of the artist was often inherited from the family. However, the means of acquiring it by displaying talent was not inhibited.

8. Women were alienated from artistic production since art was used to symbolize the social control and status in order to serve the state and religion.

9. Architects and poets occupied a higher status with regard to painters.

Here is presented a summary of the comparison of the above sociological generalizations with the positions of painters in the Ottoman period:

Ottoman miniature painters: Ehl-i Hiref

With Fatih Sultan Mehmet (the Conqueror) Ottoman history entered a new epoch where art was prominently appreciated. In this period, it was observed that majority of the artists were organized in professional associations reminiscent of the guilds (Ahi unions) instead of being left alone. Ehl-i Hiref referred to craftsmen performing an artistic work. Hiref is the plural of Arabic word Hirfet meaning an

art to live on, or an occupation. In the old documents, "Erbab-i hiref" is mentioned as having the same meaning (Pakalin 1946 : 509).

In Ottoman society, craftsmen were organized within Ahi unions, in the form of professional associations. These organizations united artisans of each craft under the spiritual direction of a single master and made them into faithful disciples loyal to the rules of the profession (Sencer 1982:284).

The philosophy of Ahi unions derived its sources from mysticism of Islam. The word itself means fraternity, trustworthiness etc. Ahi unions which emerged in 13th century are religious and economic organizations that include various professions (Akkutay 1984:19).

Ahi unions are one of the associations regulating the economic, social and cultural life. At the periods when the Turks were settling in the Anatolian towns, the production of handicrafts and commerce in the region was organized on the basis of guilds established by the Byzantines. Consequently, Ahi unions emerged as the outcome of solidarity among Turkish craftsmen and merchants coming from Asia, for the production of sound and standardized goods in order to be able to compete with indigenous (Rum and Armenian) merchants and craftsmen of the region. Ahi unions, different from guilds that were established by the state for the purpose of performing public duties, were founded as a result of the organization of profession groups beyond the state authority. However, in the following time period, an indirect control has been imposed on them due to the attempts of the state to supervise the quality of goods produced by the artisans. (Ekinci 1991:11) Within the scope of the predetermined principles, the State often inspected the craftsmen with concern for the standartization of the quality of goods and for equal prices and it punished those artists who violated the standards or who were found to be deceitful. (Akgündüz 1992 IInd book : 296, IVth book: 327-328, Uzunçarşılı 1965:138). The Ahi principles concerning the style and speed of the work that were determined by various fütüvvetname accounted for the cooperative structure of Ahi unions and their reciprocal duties and dependencies. They also carried out the function of conserving master standards and pattern of the craft. (Lewis 1984:34, Akkutay 1984:19).

In the Ahi unions, organization according to profession was essential. Initially, Ahi organization comprised tanners, saddlers and shoemakers and afterward, grew into a multifarious social organization as to include butchers, cooks, bakers, tripe cookers, grocers, yoghurt-makers, cream-makers, vinegar-makers, pickle-makers, helva-makers, sherbet-makers, tailors, thread producers, silk manufacturers, shir-makers, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, potters, pan-makers, bookbinders etc., all artisans and all those who wanted to be a member.

In the Ottoman period it was observed that miniature painters were united under Ahi organization in the same manner other artists have done. (Arseven 1973:226). We have already reported that Ahi unions existed to defend both the craftsmen and the consumer of arts. Therefore, the fact that painters were organized within this framework can be interpreted as differentiation between the producer and the consumer of arts as well as institutionalization of the role of the artist. However, there was no differentiation between crafts and fine arts since artists named as blacksmith, fimsmith or goldsmith in today's terms, were counted among the craftsmen. The result was that functionality of art for practical purposes prevailed over "art for art" and in this context, artists were regarded as craftsmen. In other words, a painter was no different from a bricklayer in this period (And 1978:103).

Ahi organization spread almost to every city, town and village of Anatolia. This meant a wide-spread standardization in production.

Each craft in Ahi organization had a patron chosen from among prophets or great men who are known to have practiced the same craft (Ekinçi 1991:30). And quotes (1978:103) the statement of Evliya Çelebi that the patron saint of miniature painters was "Semrahim". Nevertheless, Celal Esad Arseven argues (1973:226) that painters had no patron saint since religion prohibited figural representation.

Generally, each group of craftsmen had a market called by the name of their profession. People who practiced the same profession were united in the same place. According to the reports of Evliya Çelebi, the place of miniature painters was Hippodrome in Istanbul, which was the biggest public square in the period of the Byzantine Empire and became the center for many public feasts after the conquest of Constantinople (Arseven 1973:226, Konyalı 1942:113, Atasoy 1972:13).

Division of labor was important in the Ahi Unions. The members who changed profession or engaged in more than one profession were not welcomed. The person who wanted to join the organization was free to choose the profession he desired in accordance with his talents. None of the professions was the monopoly of a certain person (Ekinçi 1991:63). This situation explains the fact that painters were full-time professionals. Furthermore it is possible to argue that aptitude and interest were functional in acquiring professional roles, free of attributed factors of status. Nonetheless we are going to assert that this role was often acquired by way of family inheritance.

The training of the artist was carried out in an informal manner between the master and the apprentice, within the general principles of Ahi organization. However if one takes into consideration the fact that promotion of an apprentice to the rank of a master depends on proving aptitude and sufficiency within the rules similarly applied to everyone, it might be possible to talk about a formal process of training. In this context, the painters' union is regarded as the prototype of forthcoming academic training.

The first stage in the Ahi unions was assistantship. Those who carried on assisting without being paid during two years were promoted to the rank of apprentice with a special ceremony. Although a different period of apprenticeship was envisaged for each profession, it generally lasted 1001 days. However, this period was extended to 20 years for craftsmen such as jewelers, whose work demanded a high level of proficiency.

The period of journeymanhood was 3 years for all professions. The journeyman who completed the training participated in a ceremony where he was subject to a sort of examination. The young journeyman was promoted to the rank of master provided that the masters in the lodge appreciated the work of art he had produced (Ekinçi 1991:88). The journeymen were allowed to have their own independent work place only after they became masters (Akkutay 1984:19).

The organization in each workshop of miniature painters was grounded on a rigid three-step hierarchy composed of master (kethüda), journeyman (serböldük) and apprentice (şakird).

The training of the painter followed the traditional course of Ottoman craft customs. The master had complete disciplinary power

over the apprentice. The apprentice became skilled in his art while progressing upwards from the bottom. The workshop was a school (nakışhane) and at the same time a gallery (nigarhane) where they exhibited their works (And 1978:104). In another method of exhibition, the artists presented their paintings on the sides of a litter while parading in procession during public festivals (And 1862:68). This is described by And as a traveling exhibition.

Miniatures were, to a great extent, products of a collective work. Painters worked under the direction of a single master called "sernakkaş" or "nakkaşbaşı" and as a rule they were assigned to different technical processes in different stages of the work. The following artists accomplished tasks beginning with ornamentation and going up to the making of the manuscript book after the author had finished writing the text:

1. the calligrapher, 2. the gilder, 3. the illuminator, 4. the margin drawer, 5. the illuminator of intricate floral ornamentation, 6. the gold-beater, 7. the gold-mixer, 8. the illuminator in charge of sprinkling gold on the borders (the work itself was called zerefsan), 9. the marbled paper maker, 10. the illuminator of floral designs by paper-cutting (ezhar-sükufe-kat'l), 11. the painter (nakkaş or ressam), 12. the master binder (mücellid), 13. the artist who ornamented the bindings with lacquer work (ruqû).

Probably, the master painter (nakkaşbaşı) planned the illustration and assigned certain subjects to his pupils and assistants. In so doing, the master painter imposed his aesthetic preferences on the other artists under his direction. Such a structure left no room for the encouragement of originality.

Notwithstanding the fact that the preparation of a manuscript is usually regarded as a collective work, there existed a number of artists working individually and some exceptions. For instance, Matrakçı Nasuh who was famous with his observatory representations of castles, harbors and towns in the miniature works describing the Ottoman army going to war in the period of Kanuni Sultan Süleyman (the Magnificent) (Çagman, F. and Z. Tanındı 1979:53), was at the same time the author, the draughtsman and the colorist of his works. In the 17th century, Mahmud of Gazne who was a painter, gilded, miniaturesd and bound the manuscript himself and, produced the

whole work on his own (And 1978:103). Evliya Çelebi had reported that the workshops of painters were at Aslanhane and about 100 of the artists worked at their home (And 1982:68). Consequently in this period, there are examples of artists who marked an individual identity by possessing their own materials and products. This is not a fact that stimulated significant originality, nevertheless, it means that individual differences in style were permitted to a certain extent. However, the central tendency was collectivity and this inspired the tradition which allowed the artist to sign his work rarely or sign it with a nickname (Arseven 1973:224). Such a tradition is likely to complicate the association of a particular style with a particular artist (And 1978:101).

According to Arseven (1973:224) the tradition of not signing derived from artists' fear of facing criticism of conservators who evaluated the painter as a sinner, as well as from the belief that in the period under discussion signing was an act of self-praise and was considered as an insult. Whatever the reason is, such a situation helped the artist to concretize his status and role within the system and agree with the system and furthermore, it helped to repress any tendencies for change and difference.

The patronizing and protection of the palace in this period was the pillar which determined the aforesaid status of the painter. It was observed that most of the painters of the epoch worked for Sultan's palaces instead of being self-employed. Within the Ottoman state organization, the society called "Ehl-i Hiref" were composed both of adornment artists and of craftsmen. They were responsible of satisfying all kind of arts and crafts needs of the state and the palace (Meriç 1953). With regard to the function and organization of the palace, they were considered as a part of Birun, stayed outside the Harem and Enderun part of the palace and returned home after they finished their work (Alkutay 1984:3). The artists of the palace (ehl-i hiref hassa) were composed of masters, journeymen and apprentices. They were chosen from among the recruits collected for the palace and were educated. Afterward, boys collected outside the palace were also trained (Uzunçarşılı 1945:462).

The master of arts (Ehl-i sanat) book of the Palace in the 18th century considers the following services and arts listed in the book

no.7224: The miniature painters, the secretaries of the library, the calligraphers, the master bladders, the colorists, the conical hat sewers, the felt makers, the gilders, the silk manufacturers, the jewelers, the watchmakers, sarracin-i rabitha-i enderun, the plume-makers, the engravers, the coin-makers, the carvers, the furriers, the sword-makers, the scabbard-makers, the armor-makers, the cutlers, the bow-makers, the Tirgeran, the cauldron-makers, the locksmiths, the wrap-makers, nalgiçilar, the gum-makers, the musical instrument makers, the carpenters, the glaziers, the spinning-wheel makers, the top-boot makers, the tanners, the velvet-weavers, the silver painters, the woolen stuff manufacturers, the sable-makers, the surgeons, the opticians, the oil-lamp makers, the joiners, the leather manufacturers (s.464).

The miniature painters constituted the majority of the artists in the Ehl-i hiref organization. They included painters, composers, miniaturists, portraitists and wall painters (Çağman, Anadolu Menediyetleri III).

In the periods of Beyazid II (1481-1512) and Selim I (1512-1520), a considerable number of artists were assigned the task of establishing the Ottoman house of painters. These painters kept on working in the period of Kanuni Sultan Süleyman (the Magnificent) as well. The recordings concerning Ehl-i hiref indicate that 29 miniature painters and 12 apprentices worked in the imperial house of painters. It is possible to learn from the same recordings where these painters came from and how much they were paid (see Meriç 1953). Another document from Topkapı palace shows that Selim I brought 14 painters from Tabriz following his victory at Çaldıran in 1514 (Atasoy, N.F. and F. Çağman 1974: m19).

A further document dated 1545 revealed that painters were divided into two groups: the Persian and the Rum. The category under the heading of Persian referred to foreign originals whereas the word Rum expressed Turks themselves. According to this book, 24 painters and 20 apprentices worked for Rums while 11 masters and 4 apprentices did for Persians. Another source from 1557 listed the name of 26 masters and 8 apprentices of Ottoman origin. The book of ehl-i hiref dated 1558 divided the painters once more into two categories, listed 26 Rum painters and named 9 masters and 4 apprentices under the

category of Persian without differentiating between any eastern and western origins (p:21).

However, one point which must be made clear is the fact that the categorization which took place in the book of Ehl-i Hiref under the headings of Rum and Persian did not mean that foreign and indigenous painters worked in different workshops. Members of these two groups were used to work collectively on the same manuscript or even the same painting. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the origins of the artists selected for a given manuscript determined the style of that work. However, regardless of their ethnic origins, painters who worked on the same painting in the same workshop gradually led to the rise of Ottoman imperial style embodied in a constant, different and unique style (p:22). It is worth saying that pleasing the famous foreign artists employed in the Ottoman palaces and also those who came voluntarily by paying them in accordance with their aptitude, contributed to the reconciliation process (For instance, it was observed that in the periods of Sultan Selim I and Sultan Beyazid II, the miniature painters exiled from Tabriz received the highest salaries: Sahkuli-i Bagdadi 25 akçe, Hasan bin Mehmed 22 akçe (Meriç 1953:5). Indeed, a differentiation of style was witnessed due to the influence of foreign artists in the period of Kanuni Sultan Süleyman (the Magnificent) yet, a refined, totally independent and distinguished style could have been developed in painting along with the harmonizing outlook of Ottoman Sultans during periods of Selim II (1566-74) and Murat III (1574-95) (Atasoy, N. and F. Çağman 1974:32).

It is clear that the tradition of representing historical events in miniature paintings persisted in the second half of 16th and first half of 17th centuries and a considerable number of miniaturists worked for the palace during this first half. However, following the abandonment of this tradition in the second half of the century, a significant decrease in the number of artists listed in the books of Ehl-i Hiref is perceptible (p:64).

The artists including miniature painters working for the palace were dependent on chief treasurer who seemed to be the chief of province treasury called as Hil'at treasury within the enderun treasury (Uzunçarşılı 1945:316). The chief paid their salaries, provided the necessary materials, assigned them their duties (Çağman Anadolu

Medeniyetleri III) and also appointed them to vacant positions in the ehl-i hiref society (Meriç 1953:V). In this organization, the miniature painters, the master binders, the gilders worked in separate communities and each had individual workshops. Nevertheless, it was possible to benefit from the art of expert artists who owned workshops for painters, master binders or workshops outside the palace or who worked individually. They were paid with ulufe (Meriç 1953). It was noticed that a considerable number of artists from the organization worked outside the palace and some of them possessed their own shops (Çağman, Anadolu Medeniyetleri III). Ehl-i hiref were considered as palace servants, connected to the organization of the Imperial Army. From time to time, they were appointed to positions in the army where they continued to carry out their artistic tasks (Meriç 1953: VI).

It became a custom that these artists working for the palace presented their art works to sultans as gifts in weddings, great mosque constructions or religious festivals. In return, a significant amount of money was paid to them, their salaries were increased and some of them were given precious robes of honor.

To state it briefly, majority of the painters in this period were in a sense, employed by the palace and they became state artists by virtue of being regularly paid (Puran 1990:248). This kind of patronage on the part of the Ottoman palace provided support for many artists, yet it impelled the palace to assert certain degree of control. The best evidence of this fact was the extension to the entire country of a unified style of those arts protected by the palace. Equally, works produced outside the palace were subject to quality control by the palace and, many works were prepared in accordance with drawings and measurements made by the miniature painters of the palace. As a result of this process an absolute unity was observed in the ornamentation motifs and compositions of Ottoman decorative arts (Çağman 1983:40). In addition to this, as we mentioned earlier, a conservative structure was reinforced by standardizing the rules of the Ahi unions which counteracted creativity and change in the art of painting. Celal Esad Arseven argued that (1973:83) changes in style always took place according to inclinations and taste of the new sultan and his high officials. In this context, Arseven reported that seven different epochs existed in Turkish art:

1. The Bursa style (1325-1501)
2. The classic style (1501-1616)
3. The renewed classic style (1616-1703)
4. The early eighteenth century (İale devri) style (1703-1730)
5. The Baroque style (1703-1808)
6. The Ampir and Renaissance style (1808-1874)
7. The neo-classic style (1875-1923).

As for the functions of the art of painting in the Ottoman period, one may state that miniatures which were considered as palace art and unique examples of Ottoman painting, were classified under four headings according to their subjects:

1. Depictions of high officials of the palace - the portraits of sultans were the most important works among them
2. Depictions of religious, historical and actual events such as; Sultans' successes in wars, reception ceremonies, festivals, circumcision feasts or hunting scenes, history of Islam etc.
3. Landscapes; castles, harbors, towns
4. Miniatures explaining scientific subject matters (Renda 1977:29, Turan 1990:248, Çağman, F. and Z. Tarancı 1979).

The painters of the Ottoman palace attempted to document important events and persons of the period in a realistic manner and by insisting on details as with a camera, within the frame of general aesthetic rules of the miniature art (Renda 1977, And 1982).

In the light of this information, it is possible to argue that the main function of the painters of Ottoman period was to document the life in the palace, symbolize the status of the sultan, demonstrate his power and display it to future generations. This indicates once again to us that the miniaturists worked for the system, within the system.

The examination of the way of acquiring the artistic role would reveal the fact that this role was often inherited from the family. Nevertheless, we have seen that the way of acquiring it through training and proficiency attested by professional authorities, was also not closed. An examination of the documents concerning miniature

painters in the Ottoman archives shows that fathers of some of the registered painters were painters as well. For instance, one of these documents informs us that in the reigns of Sultan Selim I and Yildirim Beyazıt, the eight miniature painters out of 29 who worked in the palace had fathers who were also painters (Meriç 1953:4). However, talented persons could also have acquired this role within the framework of certain rules. That is to say success made possible the acquisition of the role of artist. It was known that talented recruits were trained in various branches of art. For instance, Mimar Sinan was recruited from Ağırnas village of Kayseri, accepted into the Janissary corps and beside his military service, designated as palace architect in 1539 and afterward, appointed to the rank of chief master architect (Turani 1983:305).

The available documents shows that sexual differentiation was exercised concerning acquisition of artistic role. The fact that no female name occurs in the documents about the miniature painters reveals that the use of art for symbolizing the status, demonstrating state's power or simply for religion alienated women from the production of arts.

We have already made the remark that social status of painters in this period was not different from that of a jeweler or a bricklayer. Moreover, it is possible to speculate about a hierarchy within the rankign of arts. For instance, it is known that Ottoman sultans were particularly interested in music and poetry, and personally performed these arts since music and poetry were believed to add to the intellectual level and to the beauty of the soul. However, no information has been found about sultans who painted, except Mustafa Pasha, the son-in-law of Sultan Amnet I. (And 1978:104). Taking this fact into consideration, it is possible to state that music and poetry were considered to be more important than painting.

As a conclusion, it is clearly observed that; in the Ottoman period painters owned their workshops and necessary materials as full-time professionals, they were characterized with a systematic division of labor and organized into Ahi unions making the absolute distinction between the producer and the consumer of art. In addition; painters established among them a socio-artistic organization where hierarchy was inhibited. The art workshops were to a great extent, under the

control of the religion and the state. In this context, the tendencies of artists for creativity, originality and change were repressed and workshops served the function of harmonizing and continuing the structural status quo. Within this framework, a general unity of style embraced and expressed myths of collectivity, although individual expression was permitted to a certain extent.

The training of artist was carried out in an informal manner, based on observation within the master-apprentice relationship. However, it may be thought as a formal process given the fact that it consisted of prolonged training given within the framework of systematic rules. The fact that the professional socialization process functioned within organized and synchronized rules contributed significantly to the institutionalization of the role of the painter and the differentiation of his status. This state of affairs may be thought to have produced de facto autonomy for the art of painting within its allotted scope.

In spite of the fact that artistic roles were often inherited from the family, the merit system contained in Ottoman training fostered acquisition of these roles. However, the differentiation made on the sexual ground with regard to acquisition of roles persisted in this sphere, and alienated women from artistic production by working against them.

It is clearly understood that the main function of painting in this period was to demonstrate the power and status of the political elite. As a matter of fact the main sponsor and purchaser of arts was the state itself. In this context, it is meaningful to talk about of the existence of a symbiotic relationship between the political elite and the artist.

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