

## **The Textile Elements in Ottoman Miniatures**

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### **Abstract**

With the value given to the art and the artist, high quality works of art in many fields were produced in the Ottoman Era. The art of weaving also lived its brightest period in terms of color, design, and weaving techniques in the Ottoman Empire in XVI. Century. The weaving products shaped the lifestyles of the people in those times and received great interest in the Palace as well. Silk woven fabrics had become such a great power in those times that it became the greatest symbol showing the power of the Ottoman Empire to the foreigners, and the determiner of the social standing within the society. The Ottoman Sultans used their clothing, which they made to become flamboyant with embroideries, to distinguish themselves from the public, and make them accept their power. Among the presents that were presented to the Sultans, clothes, kaftans, and similar fabrics as well as other precious presents, were frequent.

The miniature manuscripts that were produced in the Palace are in the quality of unique documents that transfer yesterday's knowledge to the modern age. It is easy to decode the dimensions of the clothing habits, decoration elements and hierarchy concepts of the Ottoman Era, as well as the weaving activities by using the miniature manuscripts. On the other hand, these elements constitute a rich alphabet in transferring the emotional structure of the society in those times, the traditions and habits to our world today. The greatest share in this effort belongs to the artists who depicted the miniatures by staying loyal to the texts in the manuscripts as well as to their active participation in the events of those times and their narrating the events as the very first observers. In addition, the muralists depicting the manuscripts and their undertaking the job of drawing the designs on the original fabric helped them to reflect the richness in the design of those times to the miniatures.

In this study, the weavings and the accessories, decoration elements, tents and furnishing elements used by the civilian people around the Palace, and the weaving of the textile industry which covered the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Ottoman Era mainly, have been examined in relation with the embroidery and embellishment arts of those times.

In the scope of the topic, while the miniatures were being selected, special attention was given to the selection process in selecting the miniatures that included the messages in terms of color-model of the decorative elements and the clothes that emphasized the importance given to the weaving art and were worn on special occasions in the Palace like births, circumcision ceremonies, *cülûs* ceremonies and funerals.

**Keywords:** Textile, Ottoman Miniatures, Weaving arts

## Osmanlı Minyatüründe Tekstil Unsurları

### Özet

Sanata ve sanatçıya verilen değer sayesinde, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu döneminde pek çok alanda yüksek kalitede sanat eserleri üretilmiştir. Dokumacılık sanatı da, XVI. yy'da Osmanlı'da renk, desen ve dokuma tekniği açısından en parlak çağını yaşamıştır. Dokuma ürünleri halkın yaşam tarzını şekillendirirken, sarayda da gerekli ilgiyi görmüştür. İpekli dokuma kumaşlar öyle büyük bir güç olmuştur ki Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun kudretini yabancılara gösteren en büyük simge haline gelmiş, sosyal konum belirleyicisi olarak kullanılmıştır. Osmanlı padişahları, işlemlerle gösterişli hale getirdikleri giysilerini, kendilerini halktan ayırmak ve güçlerini onlara kabul ettirmek için kullanmışlardır. Sultanlara sunulan hediyeler arasında kıymetli eşyalarla beraber kumaş, kaftan gibi dokuma ürünleri sıkça yer almışlardır.

Saraydaki nakkaşhanede üretilen minyatürlü el yazmaları, bu bilgilerin günümüze taşınmasını sağlayan eşsiz belgeler niteliğindedirler. Minyatürlü yazmalar üzerinden dokuma faaliyetlerinin Osmanlı dönemindeki boyutlarının yanı sıra dönemin giyim kuşam alışkanlıkları, dekorasyon unsurları ve hiyerarşi anlayışı rahatlıkla deşifre edilebilmektedir. Bununla birlikte toplumun duygusal yapısının, örf ve adetlerinin tespit edilerek günümüze aktarılmasında da bu unsurlar zengin bir alfabe oluşturmuşlardır. Bunda minyatürleri resmeden sanatçıların, yazmalardaki metinlere sadık kalmalarının yanı sıra olayların pek çoğunda bizzat yer almaları ve ilk elden yaşananları aktarmalarının payı büyüktür. Ayrıca nakkaşların yazmaları resmetmesinin yanı sıra kumaş desenleri çizme görevini de üstlenmiş olmaları, dönemin minyatürlerine orijinal kumaşlardaki desen zenginliğini yansıtabilmelerine yardımcı olmuştur.

Bu çalışmada ağırlıklı olarak 16.-17. yy Osmanlı döneminde hazırlanan minyatürler üzerinde, tekstil alanının kapsadığı dokumalar, dokumacılar, saray çevresi ve sivil halkın giyim kuşam alışkanlıklarıyla beraber kullanılan aksesuarlar, dekorasyon ürünleri, çadırlar ve döşeme unsurlarına ilişkin örnekler, dönemin işleme ve bezeme sanatları ile ilişkili olarak irdelenmeye çalışılmıştır.

Konu kapsamında minyatürler seçilirken, dokuma ve dokumacılık sanatına verilen önemi gösteren, giysi ve mekanlarda kullanılan tekstil malzemelerinin zenginliğini ve değerini vurgulayan, saraydaki doğum, sünnet, culûs ve cenaze gibi törenlerde giysilerin ve dekoratif unsurların renk-model özelliklerinin verdiği mesajları içeren minyatürlerin seçilmesine gayret edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tekstil, Osmanlı Minyatürleri, Dokuma Sanatı

## Introduction

It is observed that in Turkish Art during the Ottoman Era, mainly the architecture, the art of manuscripts, literature, music, and ornaments were developed. As well as the architectural designs that reflect the glory of those times, the calligraphy with high values, ornamentations and miniatures developed as well<sup>1</sup>.

The manuscripts produced in the mural workshops of the Palace are the most important documents that cast a light on the culture in those times. In this study, the weavings in the textile industry, the weavers, the people living in the palace, and the clothing habits of the civilians in those times, the accessories used, the decoration materials, the samples of tents and floorings have been examined in terms of embroidery and decoration techniques and mainly relying on the miniatures of the 16-17<sup>th</sup> Ottoman Era. In selecting the miniatures for the study, special attention was given to select the ones that showed the importance given to the art of weaving reflecting the wealth and value of the textile industry used in clothing and in housing, and the ones that reflected the messages of the color-model properties of the decorative elements used in births, circumcisions, enthronements.

## The Art of Weaving in Ottoman Era and Weaving Activities

The artistic activities were protected by the Palace in the Ottoman Era. The weaving products shaped the lifestyle of the people and were welcomed with great interest in the Palace. Special clothes were used mainly in the dresses of the people living in the Palace and in the Harem, in decoration of the palaces and manors, in beds, quilts, military areas, flags and starboards, in tents, armors, shields; and in the religious field, in clothes that were used to dress the Ka'bah every year.

The Palace hosted the *craftsmen* and the weavers among them in order to cover its own needs and established the workshops that were necessary for the production activities. The products of these workshops and of the ones located in İstanbul and Bursa, which worked as freelance workshops, were made use of<sup>1</sup>. Except these cities, the weaving of silk, velvet, cotton and wool was developed in cities like Bilecik, Bergama, Denizli, Ankara and Amasya.

Silk was such a powerful item in the Ottoman Era that it had become the greatest symbol showing the power of the Ottoman Empire to the foreigners and was used also as a determiner for social position. The Ottoman princes, lords and Sultans made their clothes look more glorious by adding ornaments in order to separate them from the public and make the public accept their power.

The cotton weavings and clothes that were produced by mixing the cotton-silk together had a wide area of usage in the clothing and in the furnishing fabrics of the Ottoman society. The veils and muslins used in turbans and headscarves, the baggy trousers, kaftan, underwear, quilt, handkerchiefs, waist cloths, towels, cushions, the hangers for walls and doors, and the curtains were made of cotton cloth and fabric. This wide demand was covered with a widespread weaving industry all over the country, and in cities and villages.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> İnalçık H, (2008:79)

A wide collection of Ottoman fabrics which started in the early XV. Century is exhibited in the Topkapı Museum today. The XVI. Century was the most glorious century for the Ottoman Empire in terms of weaving industry and the elements in it like the color, design and touch.

The local and foreign fabrics were used in the Ottoman Era in many fields, and the glory of the Era and the clothing of the Ottoman Sultans were reflected in the miniatures. The fact that the muralists illustrated the written texts and drew the cloth designs helped them to reflect the wealth of the original fabrics in the miniatures of the Era.

### The Textile Elements in the Ottoman Miniatures

The Ottoman Miniatures are in the quality of unique documents in many aspects. These works of art reflect the events and culture of the era in a manner close to reality and convey the information of those times to us in the most accurate way. The greatest share in this belongs to the artists that produced the miniatures and to their loyalty to the truth while producing the manuscripts and their being present in many of those events and also to their conveying the events as the first witnesses.

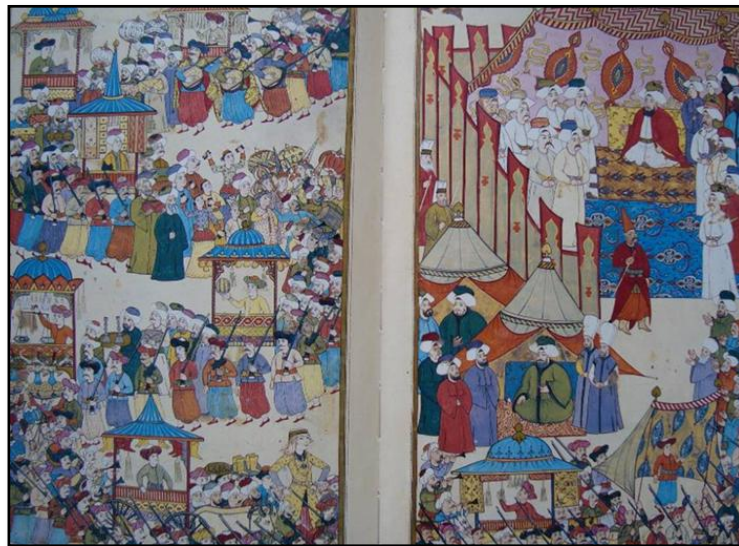
The most beautiful visual expressions of the existence and importance of the Ottoman Weaving Art are observed among the parades in circumcision ceremonies and in the parade of free-traders. The *Sûrnâme* reflects the longest circumcision ceremony of the Prince Mehmet, son of Sultan Murat III, which lasted for 52 days. In this ceremony, which turned to be the ceremony of the glory and power of the Ottoman State, all the free traders of İstanbul participated in the parade by acting their jobs. One of the scenes in the miniature belongs to the waistcloth producers in the parade of the commercial chambers. They carried the bird-shaped waistcloths during the parade in order to show their art. Some of the free traders carried the bathrobes they weaved with care on long sticks during the parades. This vivid and colorful vision turned into an unforgettable ceremony of the waistcloth producers. (Picture 1)



**Picture 1.** *The Parade of the Waistcloth Producers, Regular Show, Sûrnâme-i Hümayûn, around 1587, TSM, H., 1344, y.338b-339a.*

Another document that gives important information on the Ottoman Art and culture is the illustrated manuscript which reflects the festivals organized because of the circumcision ceremony of the princes of Sultan Ahmet III. This work of art also reflects and represents the Era of Tulips. In 1720, Sultan Ahmet III made the preparations start for the circumcision ceremonies of his sons in the Okmeydanı Square, İstanbul, and in the District of Haliç. These ceremonies lasted for 15 days. These ceremonies were best illustrated in the *Surname*, which was written by Vehbi in 1727 in the workshop of Levni, who was the famous painter, who observed and narrated everything with the smallest detail personally.

One of the miniatures shows the parade of hundreds of free-traders with their crafts and skills. The crowd, which starts from the bottom of the right-side page is curved like the letter “S” and ends in the upper part of the miniature. The night-cap producers and the quilted-turban producers are behind the free traders. There are colorful quilts hanging on the cars of the quilt producers coming after them. At the end of the parade, free traders of the covered bazaar appear. An apprentice holds a piece of cloth in his hand in one of the two cars in the parade, and there are silk fringes and skeins hanging around the other boy in the second car.<sup>2</sup> (Picture 2)



**Picture 2.** *The Group of Free Traders: the Tent Producers, the Shoemakers, the Grocers, the Greengrocers that Sell Fruit, the Night-cap Producers, the Quilted-Turban Producers, the Quilt Producers, the Free Traders, Levni, Surname-i Vehbi, TSM, A. 3593 y.108a.*

Among the free traders in the miniature, there are the tailors, the boys carrying presents, armed guards, and instrument players together in the parade. An apprentice is seen as sewing in one of the cars. Silk weavers are also present in the parade with their armed guards, masters and apprentices. The young boy in the car bends silk thread for the ornaments for clothes and belts. (Picture 3)

<sup>2</sup> Atl E (1999: 224)



**Picture 3.** *The Group of Free Traders: the Copper Traders, the Jewelers, the Tailors and the Silk Weavers, Levni, Surname-i Vehbi, TSM, A. 3593 y.121a (detail).*

In this Era, the importance given to the art of weaving and to the clothes made with fabrics is clearly illustrated in the miniatures with the presents given to the Ottoman Sultans. It is observed frequently that the Sultan is offered fabrics and kaftan together among other valuable objects as presents. Together with the cash payment to the artists like architects and muralists by the Palace, they are also given valuable fabrics or kaftans. This is documented in many written texts from the Era. In the heritage records (death registers) there are detailed records of fabrics, and clothes made from these fabrics left to the heirs. In the miniature, Sultan Ahmet III is seen as giving presents to the Grand Vizier in the ceremonies held in 1720. The knives with jewels held by the present-carriers, valuable fabrics wrapped in parcels, clothes with embroideries, belts, an overcoat with fur inside, rare furs and weavings are illustrated among the many other valuable presents.<sup>3</sup> (Picture 4)



**Picture 4.** *Grand Vizier Presenting his Gifts, Levni, Surname-i Vehbi, TSM, A.3593 y.26b-27a*

<sup>3</sup>Atıl E (1999: 224)

The clothing of the princes of Sultan Ahmet III on their way to the Palace from the circumcision ceremonies are the ceremony dresses in dark green color with furs in the front side and in the collar, which is called “*kapaniça*”. According to many resources, this clothing is described as the Dress of the Sultans.<sup>4</sup> Also, the princes wore white dresses with long sleeves, having tiger skin motifs decorated with gilt with a vision of silk.

They have quilted turbans with ospreys in the shape of a hand-fan. Both princes have the same dresses. These dresses are worn when they are sighted by the public. The princes returning with the crowd and going to the circumcision with the viziers’ hands in theirs are depicted in the miniatures. (Picture 5)

After the circumcision, the princes relax in beds, and the curtains that separate them from each other are depicted with all their glory. These are the oldest circumcision beds depicted. (Picture 6)

The birth of the sons of the Sultans is called as “*the imperial birth*”. The dresses and jewels were prepared beforehand for the baby and the mother. The birth scene in the miniature is depicted in detail. It is understood from the documents that have reached today that the birth rooms were renewed and redecorated in each birth. It is also understood that -among the other belongings- the beddings, which were in the room in which the daughter of Sultan Mahmud II, Saliha Sultan was born, were ornamented with silver thread on *seraser cloth* and were enriched with pearls and sequins. One of the most important elements in the birth room is, without doubt, the cradle of the baby. The cloth and quilt of the cradle, and the lines that prevented the baby from falling down were made from ornamented cloth.<sup>5</sup>(Picture7)



**Picture 5.**(Left) *Bringing the Princes to the Circumcision Room, Levni, Surname-i Vehbi, TSMK, A3593, y. 173b*

**Picture 6.** (Right) *Princes in Circumcision, Levni, Surname-i Vehbi, TSMK, A3593, y. 169b-170a*

<sup>4</sup> Koçu R E (1967:144)

<sup>5</sup> Tezcan H ( 2006:69)

It is observed that, in illustrating the miniatures, sometimes the muralists had used the clothes of the people as the tools to convey the emotions and thoughts. The muralist wanted to show that Prince Mustafa resembled his father in the miniature which depicted the visit of Prince Mustafa paid to his father, Suleiman the Magnificent, who was beloved by his father very much.<sup>6</sup> The dress of the prince being all the same in the miniature must be due to the expectation that the subsequent Sultan will be Prince Mustafa after Suleiman the Magnificent.<sup>7</sup> (Picture 8)



**Picture 7.** (Left) *The Birth Scene*, Enderuni Fazıl, *Hubanname- Zenanname*, İÜK, T5502.

**Picture 8.** (Right) *The Visit of Prince Mustafa paid to his Father, Suleiman the Magnificent*, Ârifî, *Süleymannâme*, 477b

The miniature illustrating the funeral of Sultan Bayezid II, which is protected in the collection of Şükrî-i Bitlisi, called as the *Selimnâme*, tells us the mourning culture during the Ottoman Era in the best way. Two of the people who are walking with the coffin carry the deceased, and the other three people are walking while they are praying. The quilted turbans, which are normally white in daily life, are in dark colors in the funeral and are called as “*şemle*”. The “*şemle*” was used in black color in the Ottoman Era as the traditional sign of mourning in the Ottoman Palace. When a Sultan died, all members of the Palace, including the people of the Harem wore black *şemle* and, the state officials attended the funerals with black *şemle* worn over the quilted turbans and veils. After the mourning was over, which lasted for three days, the *şemle* were replaced with regular ones with the order of the new Sultan.<sup>8</sup> The colors in the outer kaftans were dark blue, green and purple. The expression “*wearing the black dresses*”, which is stated in almost all historical sources, means not only wearing black clothes but also wearing clothes with dark colors. The cloth put on the coffin is also in dark green and there

<sup>6</sup>Koçu R E ( 1967:204)

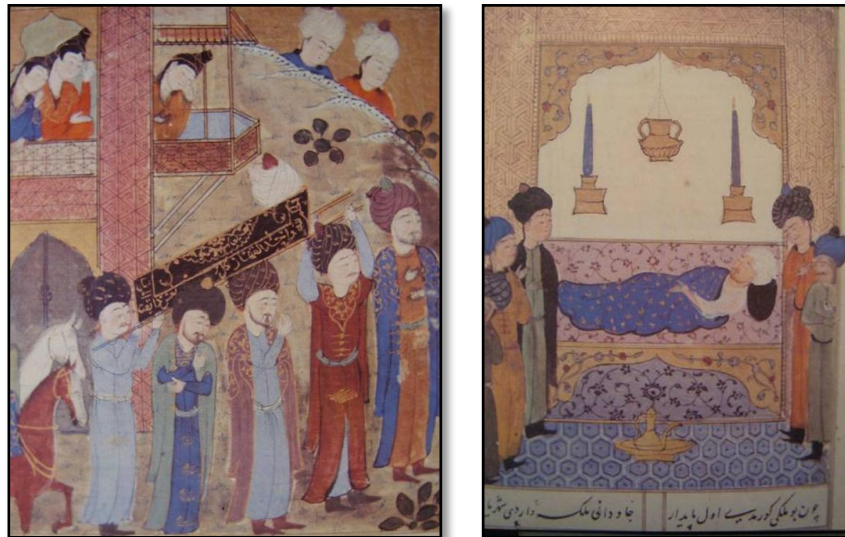
<sup>7</sup>Tarım Ertuğ Z (1999:15-16)

<sup>8</sup> Koçu R.E. (1967:217)



are verses of the Quran on the edges. A white quilted turban with red headgear belonging to Bayezid is placed on the coffin.<sup>9</sup> (Picture 9)

Diseases, just like deaths, are situations which have sorrows in them, and are also reflected in the miniatures. In the miniature that depicts Sultan Selim I in his sickbed, the Sultan has a white turban on his head lying in bed and there is a black cushion below his head. There is a navy blue quilt on him. The facial expressions of the people who are always in close service of the Sultan are sad and their eyebrows are crossed. One of the important points in this miniature is the color of the dresses of these people who wear *semle* because of the sickness of the Sultan. The fact that there are colors that cannot be associated with the mourning on them shows that there are no specific mourning dress in those times; however, with an element in dark color and with the *semle*, the mourning is expressed. In addition, as it is observed in the candles, some decoration elements may also be used as the means of expressing the mourning. In addition, the sign of mourning being used mainly in the turbans constitutes a practical way for the Ottoman society, which mostly lives both the happy and sad events like the enthronement and deaths together.<sup>10</sup> (Picture 10)



**Picture 9.** (left) *The Funeral Cortege of Bayezid II, Şükrî, Selimnâme, 62a.*

**Picture 10.** (Right) *Sultan Selim I in His Sickbed on His Last Days, Şükrî, Selimnâme, 267a*

The miniature that depicts the enthronement of Sultan Selim II in Belgrade is placed in two pages and is protected in the Nüzhetü'l-Esrar miniature collection. Sultan Selim II who is wearing a red shirt and white kaftan and a navy blue outer kaftan is sitting on the throne and looking extremely glorious. Yet, some researchers expect that Sultan Selim II should have looked more glorious as a Sultan; however, they also state that this was due to the fact that the young prince could not foresee the death of his father and therefore was not prepared for the

<sup>9</sup> Tarım Ertuğ Z (1999:92)

<sup>10</sup> Tarım Ertuğ Z (1999:98)

enthronement ceremony. No elements for mourning are visible except a black osprey placed on the white quilted turban. The miniature is depicting a full ceremony with its powerful colors and explicit expression. The State Tent full of red color and the canopies under which the viziers and statesmen stand constitute the rich décor of the scene and show the glory of the ceremony. (Picture 11)



**Picture 11.** *The Enthronement of Sultan Selim II, Nüzhetü'l-esrâr, p. 110b, 111a*

Due to the nomadic traditions, the culture of tent is extremely important for the Ottoman Empire, and this culture gained an imperial status in the hands of the Ottomans. The Ottomans established mobile towns with their tents in the expeditions just like it was the case in the past. Right in the middle of the mobile towns, there was the “*Imperial Tent*” representing the Palace of the Sultan. The tent was surrounded with walls made of fabric. The Imperial Tents were the symbols of the power and glory of the Sultans outside the Palace.<sup>11</sup> This structure contributed greatly to the military achievements. It is understood from the documents that the Imperial Tents were carried with 600-700 camels during the expeditions. Although the tents were used for military purposes, they were also used in open-air enjoyments. The “*surname miniatures*” represent the *Imperial Tent* best, and depict the 1720 festivals. It is clear in these miniatures that the owners of the tents reflect their ranks. The Sultanate Tents are placed in the right-upper part in the miniature, and the tent for the women is placed in front of the Archery Chamber. There is a fence between them made from cloth, and is called as “*zokak*”. There are smaller tents outside the fence allocated for the grand vizier and his guests. The tents for the other officials are located in the bottom right. The ring is surrounded with a fence which is called as “*mahya*” decorated with lanterns. There are more tents on the left side, the biggest of which belongs to the Grand Vizier. On the bottom left, there are the tents for the archers, there is a mobile tower, and 30 guns.<sup>11</sup> (Picture 12)

<sup>11</sup>Atıl E (1999:242)



**Picture 12.** *General View of the Arrow-field, Levni, Surname-i Vehbi, TSM, A. 3593 y. 10b-11a.*

According to the sources, the decorated and ornamented tents belonged to the Sultan and his family. It is even understood that the use of the tents with red colors depended on certain rules by certain people. Just as in the architecture, the decorative elements are placed mainly in the inner areas of the tents. The decorations and ornaments outside the tents are rare. If there are ornaments, they are placed on the roofs of the tents.

In the miniature depicting Sultan Mehmed II as admitting the Magyar Envoy in his Imperial Tent, a good example is provided showing that the glory of the palace life is also reflected outside the palace as well. This work of art is illustrated in accordance with the written texts and is among the miniatures that show the tent culture and the dressing cultural with full aesthetics concerns and wealth.



**Picture 13.** *The Admittance of Sultan Mehmed III in His Imperial Tent, Şehname-i Sultan Mehmed III. 1586, TSM, H, I 609, 26b-27a.*

## Conclusion

The life span of the mankind is in an integrated structure with the art, no matter what branch it is. Therefore, works of art are elements that convey infinite messages that are related with the era they were produced. Not only do the works of art convey the characteristics of the era they were produced in, but also reflect the range of art that continued in those times covering the geographical, climatic, religious, economic, social and cultural interactions. The most important thing here is to reveal the inclinations in the cause and effect interactions during the development and change processes.

When the works of art are evaluated, they become a document reflecting the cultural characteristics of the cultural and social structure in those times, the character and the viewpoint of the artist, and his contributions to the cultural elements in his/her time. Today, the method that documents the depiction of the works of art only in terms of historical process is not applied; on the contrary, the methods that claim that the artistic products cannot be abstracted from the active relationship between the political and economic conditions and the movements of thoughts that emerged due to these conditions are applied. By using this method, the meanings that were put in the forms in the works of art are analyzed and the works of art are interpreted by considering the topic and the formation process of them.

Ottoman miniatures give us information about the contents which stretches beyond the borders of the Empire in a vast geographical area in a vast history. The fact that the works were performed with a realistic viewpoint increases their reliability as historical documents, because written texts and authentic works of art reach to present day with all the information from the past times.

It attracts attention that the formation, models, colors and usage areas of textile products are important in transferring information with miniatures. Over the miniatures, we can obtain information on the textile industry in the Ottoman Era, the clothing traditions, decoration elements and the hierarchy in those times. In addition, the emotional structure of the society, the customs and traditions are also depicted via the miniatures and conveyed to today's world in a rich context.

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