

## Decoration Of Tuğras

Pınar TOKTAŞ<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Traditional Turkish Arts, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, Turkey)

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### Abstract

As being considered as a sort of signature of the Ottoman sultans, tuğras imply the command of the sultan for being documents drawn up in Divân-ı Hümâyûn. Although being affixed to the headers of such documents as ferman, berat, vakfiye etc. in the earlier times, fields of tuğra use expanded in the course of time, and began to be affixed also onto seals, coins, stamps, and epitaphs. Having become fancied so much in the course of time, besmele, ayet, hadis, as well as names began to be written in tuğra form. The texts that tuğra contains were also undergone various additions in the course of time. Tuğras were undergone decoration within the frame of the artistic styles, patterns, and compositional aspects of their times. This study addresses to the phases that decoration of tuğras passed throughout history in terms of techniques, patterns, and compositional aspects thereof. It has consequently been ascertained that, decoration of tuğras was shaped within the frame of the periodic aspects of the art of illumination, which is evidenced with the regression in the art of illumination reflecting itself also in illumination of tuğras.

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**Keywords:** Tuğra, illumination, decoration, arts of decoration

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Date of Submission: 30-09-2020

Date of Acceptance: 13-10-2020

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### I. INTRODUCTION

As being the tokens and written symbols of Turkish rulers from Oğuz khans to Ottoman sultans, tuğra is originally a Turkish word that was passed to Persian and Arabic from Turkish (Kütükoğlu, 1994: 71). Tuğra is called as “Nişan” in Persian, and “Tevkî” in Arabic. While being referred to as “Tuğrağ”, its original term in Oğuz language, Tuğra is indicated to be the ruler’s pressed token (Uzunçarşılı, 1941: 101-102). A tuğra’s term of use commenced with the Sultan’s accession to throne until the end of his Sultanate. While those imprinting tuğra in Great Seljuk and Anatolian Seljuk Empires were called as “tuğraî”, the same persons were called as “nişancı” in the Ottoman Empire. While the terms “tuğraî, tevkiî and muvakkî” were also used in the course of time, finally, tuğrakeş was the term used for such person in the last periods. The persons who imprinted tuğra outside Divan, on the other hand, were called as tuğranüvis (Sertoğlu, 1975: 8; Derman, 2012: 127). There are many terms in the Ottoman language that bear the meaning of tuğra. Tevki-i hümâyûn, tevki-i refî, nişan-ı şerifi alî şan-ı sultani, and tuğray-ı garray-ı sami mekan-ı hakani, tevkiî refii hümâyûn, nişan-i hümâyûn, nişan-i hümâyûn and misali meymun, nişan-i hümâyûn and tuğray-ı garra, nişan-ı şerif-i alişan, as well as alameti şerife expressions at the end of fermans, berats, and hüküms are all meant to be tuğra (Uzunçarşılı, 1941: 106).

Tuğras were both inscribed onto the fermans, which comprised the sultan’s order, berats, by virtue of which the sultan granted rights and privileges, menşurs, which notified the duties and ranks of the top-tier officials, treaties, cadastral record books, vakfiyes and temliknâmes, and printed onto the coins (Sertoğlu, 1975: 10). Tuğra was imprinted onto the correspondences executed in Divan-ı Hümayun in order to symbolize the Ottoman sultans’ approval thereunto. While tuğras of the fermans drawn up in the first years of the Ottoman Empire were imprinted by the sultans themselves, due the Empire’s expansion, and due the increase in the sultans’ workflow it entailed, a member of Divan-ı Hümayun, titled nişancı, began to imprint the tuğras (Odabaş & Odabaş, 2008: 552).

Ottoman era tuğras not only contained beautiful specimens of the arts of both illumination and hat, but also reflected the phases that the art of illumination passed through. While being imprinted in black at the beginning, tuğras were then begun to be imprinted also in golden in the course of time. While some of the tuğras imprinted in golden are without tahrir, some of them are with black, dark blue, or claret red tahrir. Meaning to be gilding, the term illumination is originated from the Arabic term of zehep (gold). It implies all sorts of adornment works made with dye and gold in the manuscripts, being Kur’an-ı Kerim in particular, murakka albums, berats and fermans, and in the hüsn-i hat boards. Illumination with gold as being its essential material of use has been practiced up to the present within the frame of design and compositional aspects in which

stylized/semi-stylized patterns inspired from the nature, flowers in naturalist style, rumis, geometrical patterns, münhanis, and many other patterns are applied.

## II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This is a descriptive research based on screening model. Having screened the literature related with the subject matter, decoration features of the sultans' tuğras were examined, and the pattern and compositional features observed in the tuğras in the course of time, the techniques applied thereto, as well as the stylistic features of the respective periods were evaluated over the specimens available.

## III. RESULT

The first tuğra specimens were imprinted in black without decoration. The first known tuğra belongs to Orhan Gazi. Tuğras imprinted thereafter reveal change and improvement not only in terms of the texts they contain, but also in terms of their forms. Having maintained its simplicity until Fatih Sultan Mehmet era, tuğra attempted to explore its authentic identity as from this era, and gained a more apparent identity as of Kanuni Sultan Süleyman era (Gündüz, 2016, p.66-67). Tuğras affixed in the fermans and berats of the Ottoman sultans are seen to be applied with illumination as from Sultan II. Bayezid era (Özkeçeci & Özkeçeci, 2014: 193). Illumination was applied to beyzes of II. Bayezid's tuğras with hatayi patterns. While the flowers are colored, and the background is dark blue in some tuğras, some of them have flowers colored in golden, applied with tahrir in black, and their backgrounds are left in the colors of their papers (Taşkale, 2016: 54-55).



**Image 1.** Sultan II. Bayezid's Tuğra, detailed appearance

The tuğra affixed in Sultan II. Bayezid's vakfiye and hududname, dated M.C. 911/G.C. 1505, is imprinted in golden with black tahrir applied thereto. Only the outer beyze of the tuğra contains design formed of hatayi group patterns. Patterns filled in with golden, and in parts with blue plastering, are applied with tahrir in black.



**Image 2.** Sultan II. Bayezid's tuğra (dated M.C. 892/G.C. 1486)

Another tuğra in Image 2, belonging to Sultan II. Bayezid, is imprinted in black with golden tahrir applied thereto. Above the letters that form the tuğra, there lies partly (+,-) in golden, and partly plant patterns over single branch either in golden resembling double tahrir technique, or without tahrir. Both tuğras reveal simple decoration in parallel with the aspects of their time.

No tuğra with illumination belonging to Yavuz Sultan Selim is known to exist as of today (Özkeçeci & Özkeçeci, 2014: 193). The growth achieved by the state in 16<sup>th</sup> century reflected itself also in the field of art. We may therefore observe the magnificence of the classical era in terms of illumination falling within the scope of our subject matter. Balanced harmony of dark blue and golden, patterns of Karamemi's garden flowers, Chinese cloud, saz yolu, patterns that are dyed in the negative technique, as well as the spiral bezemes called Haliç work, and rumi compositions have been reflected in the tuğras as being the adornment features of the period (Anonymous, 2003: XI). Form and bezeme of Kanuni Sultan Süleyman's sultanate tuğra was duplicated by his son, II. Selim. While sere sections of the tuğras were in rectangular until II. Selim era, the same of II. Selim's tuğras gradually began to take triangular shape. Such adornment tradition was maintained nearly in kind in III.

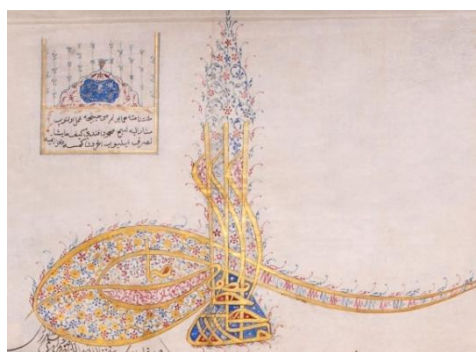
Murad's tuğras. The adornment tradition that exceeds the diameter of the tuğra, which was commenced as from Kanuni era, developed also throughout III. Murad era, and began to take a triangular shape (Ersoy, 1989: 22-23).



**Image 3.** Tuğra of Sultan II. Selim, and detailed appearance

Tuğra belonging to Sultan II. Selim from the copy of Sultan Süleyman's Evkaf-ı Hududname, dated G.C. 1568, is imprinted in golden, and is applied with tahrir in black. The space between seres and zülfes is filled with dark blue plastering. Background of the tuğra's outer and inner beyzes is left in the color of its paper. While there is a composition of three threads of rumi branches in golden at the lower part of the internal beyze, there are three dots in dark blue color placed within the spaces that occurred in between. Upper part of the internal beyze is applied with golden branches and leaves in naturalist style and three cloves in red and dark blue colors. Flowers are engraved in a way that resembles them as springing out of the soil. No tahrir is applied thereto. Outer beyze is applied with golden and dark blue decoration in halıç work style. Dark blue spiral branches are applied in negative technique. The composition formed with golden spiral branches consist of hatai, penç, and goncagül patterns, and is applied with tahrir in black. Crochets over the tuğs resemble the spaces in between zülfes. Reviewing the decoration of the tuğra, it seems to reflect the characteristics of its era.

17. century witnessed a halt in the art of illumination. While dark blue lost its vividness, there occurred a decline in the compositions and patterns. A style that may be described as the cypress form, which emerges from the outer beyze of the tuğra and end points of the hançere, extending upwards in a way forming a triangular shape, and was applied widely. Halıç work maintained its effect also in that century. Despite having undergone certain changes, cypress form kept on being applied until the end of XIX. century. Insides of these forms, which were used to be applied with illumination in halıç work style, were then applied with decoration mostly in halkari and şikaf styles (Taşkale, 2016: 58).



**Image 4.** Sultan IV. Murad's tuğra (dated G.C. 1624)

Sultan IV. Murad's tuğra affixed in the Mülkname, dated G.C. 1624, belonging to Şeyh Mahmud Efendi given in the image, is imprinted in golden, and is applied with tahrir in black. The spaces in between the letters in the tuğra's sere section are filled with red and blue plastering. A large part of the tuğra is surrounded successively by red and blue crochets. There is no background color in outer and inner beyzes. Outer beyze is applied with illumination in halıç work style in golden, indigo blue, and red. There are blue and red flowers over blue spiral branch applied in negative technique. Lower section of the inner beyze reveals rumi composition with red in negative technique. Upper section of the inner beyze is applied with golden branches in naturalist style, and with clove patterns in red and indigo blue, without tahrir. In the space between the tuğ and zülfes there are indigo blue and red penç, leaf, and goncagül patterns over a single branch applied with negative technique. Over the tuğs, there are branches in indigo blue, as well as red and indigo blue flower and leaf patterns applied with negative technique. There is an inscription at the upper left corner of the Mülkname, saying "Mülkname-i Hümayun mucibince amel oluna".

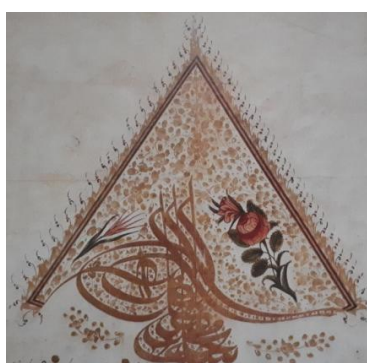
As from the beginning of the 18. century, shady flower painting of the Western art revealed itself also in the Ottoman adornment concept. While Haliç Work maintained its effect in this century, it is seen in parallel thereto that, flowers in naturalist style, as well as the halkari style also became effective in decoration of tuğras. Alongside the revival of the saz yolu style, patterns such as stylized cypress and crescent & star were preferred (Taşkale, 2016: 60; Odabaş & Odabaş, 2008: 557-558). While silver was preferred in decoration, adornments of the period revealed bezemes in the form of colorful tulips, şakayık and rose bouquets, and şükufe used with over-adorning characteristics of the naturalist style (Özkeçeci & Özkeçeci, 2014: 194; Anonymous, 2003: XI).



**Image 5.** Sultan III. Ahmed's tuğra (dated M.C. 1135 / G.C. 1723)

Sultan III. Ahmed's tuğra affixed in the vakfiye, dated M.C. 1135 / G.C. 1723, belonging to Mihrişah Sultan, is imprinted in golden, and is applied with tahrir in black. Classic illumination with dyed background is applied to the outer beyze of the tuğra. Rumi branch composition over red background is applied to the lower section of the inner beyze. Backgrounds of the interior sections of the rumis are filled with blue plastering. Upper section of the inner beyze, on the other hand, is arranged in a similar form. While the background of the space between the tuğ and zülfe is filled partly with dark blue, and partly with red, the design used is formed of single branch of penç and goncagül patterns applied with classic illumination style. The space between the arms is filled in red plastering with goncagül and leaf patterns applied thereto. While the spaces between the letters at the tuğra's sere section are filled in red and dark blue plastering, they were partly applied with penç, goncagül, and leaf patterns. There is tepelik over the tuğs surrounded by dendans. The space falling outside the inscription surrounded by dendans is arranged in classic illumination form with its background painted. The spaces between the letters are applied with beynessür. There are two-colored golden and hatayi group patterns in wet halkari technique, as well as free designs at the space falling outside the tuğra.

Taking the tuğra with a triangular framework from above, and decoration of the inside of this triangular framework with die-plates of various forms is quite common in 19. century tuğra adornments. Outlines and tabulations in the triangle- and dome-formed designs are finished usually with crochets formed of leaf and curled trifoliums. Decoration is designed in a way to comprise both the tuğra, and all empty spaces as well. Haliç work maintained its effect also in this period (Taşkale, 2016: 61). Best examples of Turkish rococo bezeme, which emerged to the end of XVIII. century, and maintained its presence in XIX. century, are seen in decoration of II. Mahmud tuğras. Furthermore, the tuğra form reached to its peak in the same period by the hands of tuğrakeş Mustafa Rakım Efendi (Anonymous, 2003: XI). As being seen in Image 7, as from Sultan Abdülmecid era, it was begun to make rays from gold around the tuğra, just like they are coming from the sun (Özkeçeci & Özkeçeci, 2014: 194).



**Image 6.** Sultan III. Selim's tuğra (dated M.C.1213/ G.C.1799)



Sultan III. Selim's tuğra given in Image 6 is imprinted in golden without tahrir. Tuğra is surrounded by golden tabulation in triangular form and claret red yarn from above. There are leaves made in wet halkari technique over the tabulations. Over the leaves there are claret red and dark blue crochets in trifolium form. Decoration of same style is applied both inside the triangular form and inside the tuğra. The design of the space outside the tuğra consists of hatayi-group patterns made in wet halkari technique. There are İstanbul tulip, rose and its bud are placed to the left and right of the tuğra in naturalist style. Left and right of the tuğra's sere section are applied with the design consisted of hatayi and goncagül pattern over single branch made wet halkari technique.



Image 7. Sultan II. Abdülhamid's tuğra (dated G.C. 1888 )

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It has been attempted in the research to examine the decoration applied to the tuğras according to the characteristics of their respective periods. Features of techniques, colors, patterns, and compositions used in illumination have thereby been evaluated. Research data have been attained from the Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry, Archive of General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre, and from various respective scientific publications. It has become apparent as a result of the research that, the tuğras affixed on ferman, berats, vakfiyes, hududnames, mülknames etc. were shaped by the artistic gusto of their respective periods. Tuğras shed light onto the present time as the visual attestations of the gusto and level of Turkish art. Regression in the art of illumination reflects itself also in the decoration of the tuğras. Haliç work, classic illumination with dyed background, halkari technique, double tahrir technique, şikaf technique were applied to the decoration of the tuğras in the course of history. At times when influence of the west became apparent, flowers were applied in naturalist style, and with different forms of screening technique, in bouquet bound by knot over a single branch, in vase with their buds, etc. While decoration was applied only inside the sections of the tuğra in the earlier examples, decoration in the later examples not only tended to expand beyond the borders of the tuğra, and arranged in a way to constitute triangle, cypress, pear, etc. forms, but also applied in a way to comprise the whole page. Classic illumination with dyed background inside die-plates of different forms, such as mekik, beyzi, medallion, etc., within such forms of triangle, cypress, etc., was applied either in rumi compositions, or in flower arrangements of naturalist style over golden plastering. Regression in the art of illumination observed in 18. century reflected itself also in the decoration of the tuğras. Workmanship, design, and composition thereof were quite different from the applications of the classical period of 16. century. As from 19. century, it was begun to make rays from gold around the tuğra, just like they are coming from the sun. Illumination with inscription of besmeles, ayets, hadises, and personal names in the form of tuğra is an application commonly practiced today. It is critical not only in terms of the history of art, but also for constituting a basis for the future researches to be made in the field of fine arts to examine the müzehhep berats and ferman available in the archives comprehensively, to ascertain, and thereby to document their illumination characteristics, so as to cause tuğras survive in the future times.

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- Image 2. Keten, İ. and Şahin, M. N. (2004). Vakfiye Tuğraları. Ankara: Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Yayını.
- Image 3. Archive of General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre
- Image 4. Archive of General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre
- Image 5. Keten, İ. and Şahin, M. N. (2004). Vakfiye Tuğraları. Ankara: Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü Yayını.
- Image 6. Ottoman Archives of T.R. Prime Ministry State Archives Directorate-General
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