

Original Research Article

A Study of the Developments of Islamic Calligraphy in Contemporary Turkey

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Received; 19/03/2021

accepted; 22/06/2021

available online; 01/07/2021

Abstract

With the formation of the Republic of Turkey and the rise of Western propaganda, the art of calligraphy, which was of great importance during the Ottoman period, was suddenly abandoned. This process which was started by artists such as Sheikh Hamdullah (Şeyh Hamdullah), was stopped for decades. In the 1980s, with the aid of the government of the time, the religious and Sufi communities, this art was revived. This study used a historical-analytical method on contemporary Turkish calligraphy and with reference to the works, lives, and speeches of Turkish calligraphers showed that two distinct approaches to Turkish calligraphy had been formed so far: 1. An approach that remained faithful to traditional calligraphy and spelling methods and made changes only in the materials and tools of the calligraphy. 2- Another approach in which the artist was influenced by modern art, such as abstract painting, with more emphasis on calligraphic forms than on principles of writing. But the important point is that in both approaches, the method of master-student education caused the traditional and religious identity of calligraphy to be preserved. So that even in the modern approach to calligraphy, mystical concepts were still emphasized by artists. In this way, not only did the confrontation of Turkish art with Western art not diminish the traditional values of Turkish calligraphy but also the presence of Turkish artists living in Western countries caused modern art to be influenced in some areas of Islamic calligraphy.

Keywords: *Turkish calligraphy, Ottoman art, neo-traditional art, modern calligraphy.*

Introduction

Islamic calligraphy has a deep connection with God's words and has grown and evolved in the heart of Islamic civilization, so it has found its way into other Islamic arts. Muslim artists have always strived to write the word of God, the Qur'an, in beautiful and worthy handwriting. For this reason, this art was of great importance as a spiritual thing among Muslims.

In the same way, calligraphy has been considered a "Legitimate child of the traditional Islamic visual arts and the most prominent feature of the visual aspect of Islamic civilization" (Nasr, 2010, 29). With the spread of Islam among nations, many people throughout the Islamic world became interested in this art and have always tried to increase its capabilities. The rulers of different dynasties of the Islamic world in their capitals and cultural centers such as Damascus, Baghdad, Cordoba, Cairo, Konya, Samarkand, Herat, Isfahan, Istanbul, etc. paid great attention to the art

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of calligraphy and supported its artists. In Ottoman Turkey, calligraphy reached its peak of power and beauty and found a distinct character. In recent decades, there has been widespread competition among calligraphers in the region to create more innovations in calligraphy. Turkey is one of the countries that has held competitions among calligraphers every year and has attracted the attention of many calligraphers and researchers. Therefore, considering the importance of the art of calligraphy in Islamic societies and Turkey, it is important to study the evolution of calligraphy to become more familiar with the process of its changes in recent years. Since little research has been done on the art of calligraphy in Turkey in a new and modern style after the end of the Ottoman Empire and during the republic, this research seems necessary.

Keywords concepts

Turkish calligraphy: It is a kind of Islamic calligraphy that was formed in Anatolia during the Ottoman dynasty and found its special features. Şeyh Hamdullah was one of the first Ottoman calligraphers to live during the reign of Sultan Mehmed II. Later, his style was continued by other masters. Also, Turkish artists popularized types and forms of calligraphy such as Musalsal, Tughra, etc.

Neo-Traditionalism: “It is a term to describe a trend in contemporary art that presents elements of traditional arts in the form of adaptations of Western art and to emphasize local and national identity” (Pakbaz, 2007, 310). This trend in contemporary art has occurred in many countries such as Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. The emergence of political and social issues and the creation of nationalist movements led artists in many of these countries to take a new approach to their traditional arts.

Research Method

The research method is historical-analytical, and the method of collecting is documentary information. Also, since not much research has been done in the

field of contemporary Turkish calligraphy in Persian, this study seems new. And also, this research is considered as a kind of developmental research that aims to contribute to the field of contemporary art of neighboring countries. To collect data, books, articles, and reputable websites mainly in English and Turkish were used. Artists selected for this research (since many artists have been working in the field of Turkish calligraphy) were the ones in traditional and modern periods who had a new approach to calligraphy, numerous influential works in various fields, and a greater reputation in the field.

A look at the research background

Research on the art of calligraphy in Turkey is not insignificant due to the importance of this art in the Islamic world. However, most of these researches cover the art of calligraphy of the Ottoman period, and in the field of modern Turkish calligraphy, no research has been done in Persian. There has also been little research in English and Turkish. Among the reference books in which information on traditional Turkish calligraphy can be found are works such as *Manaqeb-e-Hunarvaran* by Mustafa Ali Effendi in 995 AH during the reign of Sultan Murad Khan ibn Sultan Salim Khan in Turkish. It is about scribes, calligraphers, cutters, painters, and illuminators and it tells the story of 53 Nasta’liq and several other calligraphers. Another book is *Tuhfat-al-khatatin* by Suleyman Saad al-Din Mustaqim-Zadeh, in which the biographies of 2,079 Turkish calligraphers are written, sorted alphabetically. This work contains information about the place of birth, place of living, and death, as well as the location of the calligraphies. After the revolution and with the change of the alphabet in the Republic of Turkey, this book was reprinted in 1928. The encyclopedia of the Islamic world contains information about many calligraphers with Ottoman style, such as Şeyh Hamdullah (Vol. I) and Hafez Osman (Vol. XIV), But it also contains only information about traditional Turkish calligraphers. An example of articles about the art of calligraphy

in Ottoman Turkey is “The Art of Calligraphy in the Ottoman Empire”, written by Professor Ugur Darman in 2007 which deals with the calligraphy of the Ottoman Empire, the introduction of some Turkish calligrapher and their works, as well as how the calligraphy institutes were established by the Ottoman rulers. The doctoral dissertation entitled “The spiritual in Islamic calligraphy: A phenomenological approach to the contemporary Turkish calligraphy tradition” by Francesco Stermotich Cappellari in 2017, is about the contemporary art of calligraphy in Turkey during the Republic era. In this study, while briefly reviewing the history of Ottoman calligraphy, the reasons for the revival of calligraphy after its stagnation during the republic were mentioned and then continued with the introduction of some contemporary artists in the traditional method. This article, which is also one of the sources of the forthcoming research, contains only traditional calligraphy and does not mention the newer method of calligraphy in modern art.

About the contemporary styles of Turkish calligraphy and the artists who have somehow innovation in this field, one can refer to the article “Fahr El Nissa Zeid” by Pınar YazkÇ in 2001 and also “Sufism and Islam in the paintings of Erol Akyavas” in 2020, written by Mustafa Digler and Rasim Soylu. This article is about Erol Akyavaş and the Sufi and mystical concepts in his works. Information about contemporary artists has also been obtained through exhibitions and catalogs, as well as reputable websites. Among the books that have been translated into Persian and in which contemporary Turkish calligraphy has been dealt with is “Islamic Calligraphy” written by Sheila Blair, translated by Vali-allah Kavousi in 2019. This book is an overview of the history of calligraphy in the Islamic world, and only in a chapter entitled “From traditionalist approaches to graphic design”, the general features of the new calligraphy are mentioned and no analysis of the works of artists in this field has been done. “İstanbul’un 100 Hattatı” is the 57th book in the Istanbul Hundreds of Books by Dr. Süleyman Berk, a

contemporary Turkish calligrapher, and researcher on the art of Turkish calligraphy. He tried to introduce a hundred of Istanbul’s calligraphers in a limited collection. This book was translated from Turkish to Persian by Soraya Moniri and Mehdi Ghorbani and published under the title “Istanbul Calligraphers” in 2016. This book provides comprehensive information about one hundred Ottoman Turkish calligraphers of the Ottoman period but does not address the artists of the new style of calligraphy.

Doctoral dissertation written by Hojat Amani, University of Tehran, entitled “Reflection of Islamic identity (A research in the meaning) in the works of Muslim’s contemporary artists in West Asia; (Egypt, Iran, Turkey)”, 2020, with emphasis on the art of calligraphy, critical discourse analysis method has examined the works based on the calligraphy of Middle Eastern artists, including Turkey. This treatise does not deal with traditional trends in the history of Turkish calligraphy. Among the Persian articles on the art of calligraphy in Turkey is an article entitled “Honar-e khoshnevisi dar dore-ye osmani [The Art of Calligraphy in the Ottoman Period],” by Mehdi Qorbani in 2018 and another article with a similar title, “The Art of Calligraphy in the Ottoman Empire” by Maryam Fadaei, in 2012. These articles, as their title suggests, deal only with the art of Ottoman calligraphy. Therefore, since little research has been done in Persian on new methods of calligraphy in contemporary Turkey, we will continue the above studies by developing research in the field of modern art, while examining the historical context of calligraphy in this country.

Historical backgrounds of calligraphy in Turkey

Before the Ottoman Empire, during the Roman Seljuk period when Konya was the capital of Anatolia, the script of the Qur’an was mostly Kufi or, like Persian calligraphers, a combination of Naskh, muhakkak, and reyhânî, scholarly and for literary books such

as Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* Naskh was used¹. In the thirteenth century, after the death of Yaqut al-Musta'simi in Baghdad, many of his students fled the Mongol invasion of Anatolia. In this way, the method of Yaqut al-Musta'simi in six basic calligraphic styles entered this region and was considered by the Ottomans. The prominent calligrapher of this period was Şeyh Hamdullah from Amasya. Şeyh Hamdullah had an effective role in promoting the items of six scripts. His artistic life is divided into two periods: Yaqut style in calligraphy in Amasya and new-style calligraphy in Istanbul. Hamdullah is considered to be the founder of Turkish Naskh rules of Turkish calligraphy and one of Sülüs masters. He created a new order in proportion to the spacing of letters and their thickness, as well as the way words are placed, and added to the beauty of the Sülüs and the Naskh, and thus he created moderation and balance in the way of Yaqut. He generally used Sülüs and Naskh in one piece. And he uses muhakkak in writing «بِسْمِ اللَّهِ» (In the name of God) and Ruq'ah script, with the name of "permission line", in the "endings" of calligraphies works and also in the licenses (*Islamic Encyclopedia Foundation, n.d., Vol. 1, 6519*). His style was later perfected by another calligrapher named Ahmed Karahisari in making unique inscriptions and manuscripts. He has written the Qur'an, hadiths, and Siyah mashq, and like Şeyh Hamdullah, he has often put Sülüs Jali with Naskh khafa together. He took advantage of the large space in the pages of large manuscripts to place Sülüs Jali next to the Naskh khafa (*ibid., 7117*). At this time, other calligraphy methods such as Diwani, Musalsal, Tughra, and ... were invented by innovative Turkish artists. Another artist who continued the style of the previous two artists and became famous was Hâfiz Osman. Hâfiz Osman, Osman Ibn Ali, (1642-1698 AD) a prominent master of the six basic calligraphic styles, was born in Istanbul. His father was a muezzin of the Sultan's special mosque, and he himself was a memorizer of the Qur'an, and for this reason he became known as Hafiz (*Müstakimzade, 1928, 301*). He has

written the calligraphy of the pioneers, especially Şeyh Hamdullah, in the items of Naskh and Sülüs, for this reason, Hamdullah has been called the first Şeyh and Hâfiz Osman the second Şeyh, and sometimes the third Şeyh. In addition to the six basic calligraphic styles, he also wrote Nasta'liq very well (*Islamic Encyclopedia Foundation, n.d., Vol. 14, 117*). His handwriting also was used in writing the first printed editions (*Fadaei, 2012, 66*). He taught many students, some of whom became famous calligraphers. Among them, we can name Mohammad Râkim, Yusuf Rumi, and Yusuf Majdi and dignitaries such as Ibrahim Pasha Noshahrli (*Islamic Encyclopedia Foundation, n.d., Vol. 14, 117*). In addition to the artists named, other artists and institutions played a key role in passing on the art of Ottoman calligraphy to future generations. Mustafa Râkim (1825-1875 AD) was one of the most important calligraphers in this field. He completed the Sülüs and made corrections to the Tughra whose structure had been somewhat ambiguous before him. Responsible for drawing designs for Ottoman coins with Tughra motifs, he retained the original framework but used more proportions, rotations, and curvatures in the calligraphy. Turkish artists followed his pattern in calligraphy until the republic. Mustafa Râkim's Tughra, which was sometimes written as frames on a large scale, were standard until the end of the Ottoman period in 1301 AH / 1922 A.D., and most of the Ottoman Tughras are divided into two parts before and after his correction (*ibid., Vol. 1, 7117*). Founded in 1915, Medresetü'l- Hattâtîn² was also one of the most influential institutions established by Şeyhülislam Hayrullah Efendi (the emperor's senior religious official) to teach calligraphy and related disciplines such as marbling, bookbinding, and so on. The students who attended there played a key role in passing on the art of calligraphy to future generations. Ahmed Kâmal Akdik (1861–1941 AD) was one of the students of this school, and the last calligrapher who started the tradition of traditional calligraphy in Turkey was named the Reisü'l-hattâtîn³ by the

Ottoman Empire. The title showed that he was one of the most skilled calligraphers of the Ottoman state (Stermotich, 2017, 32).

As mentioned earlier, before the republic, there was a favorable relationship between calligraphers and Ottoman rulers. Calligraphers were always supported to produce manuscripts, teach art to Ottoman kings, and write decrees and laws. They were active not only in the court but also in various fields of calligraphy. On October 29, 1923, Mustafa Kemal, after the abolition of the monarchy and the exile of the last Ottoman sultan, declared Turkey a republic (Shaw, 1991, Vol. II, 615). With the advent of the republic and political and cultural changes, and widespread propaganda for Westernism that began in the late Ottoman period, the Turkish School of Calligraphy, which taught traditional calligraphy free of charge, was closed in 1924 (Amani, 2020, 109). The school was reopened eight months later by Necmeddin Okyay, nicknamed "School Calligrapher". It was then closed again in 1928 due to the government's ban on the use of the Arabic alphabet. It reopened in 1936 as of Güzel Sanatlar Akademisi⁴ after several months. In 1925, all dervishes and Sufi institutes that taught calligraphy were closed by the government. Sufi communities played various roles in Ottoman societies, including the spread of arts such as music, poetry, and calligraphy. As the teaching of calligraphy in an educational system during the Ottoman period was passed down from masters to students, some of them were still able to continue working in some aspects of the art. However, once the institutions were closed, no calligrapher was able to experience calligraphy training at an institution, nor did they receive governmental support. So, many calligraphers were forced to practice the art privately without any governmental support. Thus, during these years, Turkey experienced a period during which Ottoman and Islamic arts were severely neglected. In this way, in various ways, the process of secularization led Turkey to separate itself from its Islamic past, and as a result, public perception of calligraphy declined

dramatically: People were no longer able to read calligraphy pieces, and paying attention to religion and tradition was a form of backwardness. It was in this situation that many calligraphers even struggled to make a living. The life of one of the last calligraphers of the Ottoman period named Hamid Aytaç is proof of this claim. He spent the rest of his life in poverty (Stermotich, 2017, 35). The process of teaching master to student continued privately from the 1920s to the 1970s, but since then, the art of calligraphy in Turkey has been revived and continued by other institutions for various reasons. In the 1980s, the Turkish government and religious foundations began to establish new institutions to preserve and transmit Turkish traditional art heritage. These institutions included: 1- Private institutions under the supervision of government and council institutions that support traditional artists and researchers, and also 2- Academic institutions (Amani, 2020, 110). These schools and institutions included the Caferağa Medresesi, the Klasik Sanatlar Merkezi⁵, Klasik Türk Sanatları Vakıfı⁶, and the IRCICA, or "Research Center for Islamic History, Art, and Culture." IRCICA was supported not only by the Turkish government but also by the International Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). In addition to these institutions, the art of calligraphy was taught at the university level at the Mimar Sinan University in Istanbul and the Seljuk University in Konya. Since 1987, IRCICA has supported international calligraphy competitions (Stermotich, 2017, 39). Artists from all over the world will take part in these competitions and valuable prizes will be considered for them. In addition, they provide the conditions for cultural and artistic exchanges between Islamic art artists around the world. Another example of these competitions is the international calligraphy competition "Albaraka Turk" whose aim is preserving traditional Islamic arts, especially calligraphy, and introducing these arts to the public, and increasing public knowledge and interest in these arts. This competition has been held every three years since 2005 on various topics

such as “Absolute Beauty”, “Solidarity and Charity”, “Justice”, “Gift” and “Supplication” (Albaraka, n.d.). All these activities led to the revival of Turkish calligraphy after half a century, so that today Istanbul, like the Ottoman era, is one of the important centers of Islamic calligraphy.

Different approaches to calligraphy in the contemporary period and its prominent artists

With the flourishing of calligraphy in Turkey, many artists returned to this art. By studying the works of contemporary Turkish art, it is concluded that despite the attention of Turkish artists to the art of calligraphy in the traditional form, artists have been found who have a kind of neo-traditional approach to this art. Therefore, in the forthcoming research, we will study these works in several groups. The first group of artists who has a traditional approach to calligraphy is in full compliance with the principles of calligraphy. This group is in fact the continuation of the generation of artists of the Ottoman era. The second group is artists who took an approach to calligraphy such as abstract painting and used words and letters using different types of media without fully observing the principles of calligraphy. The difference between these two groups has nothing to do with the spiritual or non-spiritual approach to the category of calligraphy and only includes the style and method of writing calligraphy.

Contemporary calligraphers with a traditional orientation

First of all, the remarkable thing about artists who have taken a traditional approach to calligraphy in the contemporary era is the existence of a strong religious meaning behind their works. Research in this area has shown that, as in the Ottoman era, most people who calligraphy in the traditional way are Muslims. Despite the Turkish calligrapher Mohammad Chalabi, emphasized that one does not need to be a Muslim to be a calligrapher, he met only two non-Muslim calligraphers in his life, both of them lived

abroad (Stermotich, 2017, 12). This would be a good confirmation of the fact that Turkish calligraphy in modern times is still directly related to religion and tradition, and most Turkish artists have used calligraphy in writing Quranic verses and religious texts. In general, teaching Islamic calligraphy is a traditional thing that is done through the master to the student. Those who taught calligraphy to students in the last century were in fact, the same master who received their permits from nineteenth-century masters. They continued to teach this art in the same way as before (i.e. they used the same tools and materials as were previously used in writing the texts.) The main text written by Ottoman calligraphers in their time was mostly Quranic texts and verses. This practice continued in contemporary Turkey.

Turkish calligrapher Mehmed Özçay: was born in 1961 in a village in Trabzon. He graduated from Erzurum Atatürk Theological University in 1986. He learned the calligraphy of Sülüs and Naskh from Fuad Başar and received his permission from him in 1993. Özçay went to Istanbul in 1986, where he met his other master, Ugur Derman, and this meeting helped develop his calligraphy talents and expand his visions. He won six awards in various categories in competitions organized by the Institute of Islamic Art and Culture Research. He also published a valuable copy of the Qur’an in 1992 in Naskh script (Ketebe, n.d.). Regarding the art of calligraphy, Özçay believes: “If you abandon the classical view of calligraphy and move only in the direction of modern art, your art will become something that is no longer calligraphy. Some people are like modern painters who use Arabic script in their artwork, but this is not really calligraphy. They only used letters. My view is part of the tradition, and in the context of classical art, I use different colors, clear inks, or new materials. My art is a kind of innovation in tradition. But the letters are the same as they were written in the past and will continue to be so in the future. What can change is only the compositions, colors, and materials” (Stermotich, 2017, 12). In this

way, Özçay emphasizes the correct style of calligraphy and letters in the traditional way and considers non-observance of calligraphy principles to be contrary to the values of calligraphy (Fig. 1).

Hasan Çelebi: was born in 1937 in Izmir, Turkey. He was a student of Hamid Aytaç, one of the last Ottoman calligraphers, and thus the inheritor of Ottoman calligraphy in the modern era. He was allowed in Sülüs, Naskh and Taliq script. He has the title of Imam. His works can be seen in the religious architecture of different countries such as Turkey, Cuba, Medina, South Africa, etc. Çelebi describes his work as a calligrapher as follows: “My journey began with memorizing the Qur’an. At that time, the Arabic script was forbidden, and there were no options for learning calligraphy. I was generally disappointed because I had learned that I needed a university or an art department to learn. I did not find any school to teach, but when I met Hamid Aytaç, the doors of calligraphy opened for me” (ibid., 40). Hasan Çelebi is one of the contemporary artists who found the opportunity to learn calligraphy in the way of a student-master. The importance of religion and tradition is still evident in his works. During his



Fig. 1. Mehmed Özçay, وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَضْحَكَ وَأَبْكِي, Black ink on paper. Source: <http://www.ozcay.com>

life, he trained about five hundred students, including Mohamed Zakariya, Davut Bektaş, Ayten Tiryaki, Ayman Hassan, Gulnaz Mahboob, and Muhammad Hobe. However, only about 90 of his students have succeeded in obtaining permission. About half of his students are from Turkey and the other half from countries such as the United States, Japan, Africa, and many other Middle Eastern countries. He himself has permission in Naskh, Sülüs, rîkâ, and Taliq script (Kolektif, 2017). Çelebi has also reconstructed the inscriptions of many Turkish antiquities, such as the inner dome of the Istanbul Blue Mosque. In 2009, he was elected an honorary member of the Supreme Council of the “Calligraphers Association” of Tehran (Turkish Culture Foundation, n.d.). One of the important features of Çelebi calligraphy is mastery of the correct writing of classical writing styles of many scripts such as Sülüs, Naskh, Diwani, Diwani Jali, researcher, etc. His other significance is his many works in the Islamic architecture of the world. His style is unique in Sülüs Jali. His other skill can be seen in Tughra script. His exceptional skill is also reflected in the rich and varied collection that combines traditional calligraphy with various forms (Fig. 2).

Uğur Derman: He was born in 1935 and has recently become one of the greatest academic officials in the history of Ottoman calligraphy and traditional arts as a historian and researcher. He is an honorary professor at Mimar Sinan University and an advisor to the IRCICA Art Institute. He learned to read and write Ottoman and Arabic from Mahib İz, the older brother of Fahir İz, and the author of the Oxford Turkish Dictionary. He spent many years touring Istanbul and reading inscriptions on historical monuments. He studied calligraphy with Necmeddin Okyay and received his permission in Taliq in 1960 (Stermotich, 2017, 40). He is more important in relation to the many types of research and books he has published on Turkish calligraphy.

Hüseyin Kutlu: is also one of the calligraphers who tried to revive traditional calligraphy. He is

also a calligrapher who has an approach to Sufism. Kutlu was born in Konya in 1949 and graduated in philosophy from Istanbul University in 1947. He has his permission in Sülüs and Naskh from Aytaç and Taliq from Derman. He was also appointed to Imam of the mosques of Sokulu Ahmad Pasha and Hakimoglu Ali Pasha (Kemikli, 2018, 230-233). As a calligrapher, Kutlu organized various exhibitions and trained many calligraphers. Turkish mosques adorned with Kutlu calligraphy include the Şakirin Mosque, Mimar Sinan Mosque, and the Ahmet Hamdi Akseki Mosque in Ankara (Stermotich, 2017, 41).

Kutlu tried to maintain the relationship between calligraphy, the meaning of words, and architecture. Kutlu performs works that combine purpose, meaning, function and aesthetics. According to his idea, the most important feature of Islamic civilization is making everything meaningful and attributing meaning to everything (Kemikli, 2018, 237-238) (Fig. 3).

In addition to the above artists, other prominent artists such as Savaş Çevik, Hüseyin Öksüz, and many others have studied traditional calligraphy in the contemporary era, but not all of them can be addressed in this study, but what is common among these artists is religious beliefs and usage of Quranic verses as the main sources of calligraphy.

Modern calligraphers

• The beginning of modernism in Turkish art

During the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire pursued a consistent effort to reform the traditional system, reforms during which the old Ottoman institutions were replaced by new ones. Thus, the modernization that began in the era of Sultan Ahmad III (1730-1703 AD), coinciding with the “Tulip period”, continued during the reign of Sultan Selim III (1801-1761 AD), the period of Tanzimat (1876-1739 AD) and the first and second constitutional revolution. Until the end of the empire, engaged the Ottoman society (Arabkhani, 2008, 60). During the period of Sultan Mahmud II (1839-1808 AD), measures were



Fig. 2. Calligraphy by Hassan Çelebi, Source: Kolektif, 2017.



Fig. 3. Hossein Kutlu, Letter of Vov, Dimensions 59.5 by 61 cm, 1998, Source: <http://www.artnet.com>

taken to create the press and expand the printing industry (Shaw, 1991, Vol. II, 78). During the period of Sultan Mahmud II (1839-1808 AD), activities were carried out to create the press and expand the printing industry (ibid.). At this time, the sending of

students to Europe began. The idea was formed that to maintain and develop the empire in the face of a technologically advanced Europe, old and traditional methods of governing should be abandoned. In 1860, foreign schools were established under the supervision of the Turkish Ministry of Education (*ibid.* 196). In 1906, Sultan Abdul Hamid Osmani was forced to accept a conditional monarchy (Spencer, 1975, 108). During the restoration of the constitution in 1908, a society with its doors closed to the outside world suddenly opened up. Censorships were removed, and newspapers and magazines were published covering social issues (Feroz, 2003, 35). In 1922, by order of the Constituent Assembly led by Atatürk, the Ottoman Empire collapsed, and the conditions for a republic were created on October 29, 1923 (*ibid.*). The goal of Mustafa Kemal, who served as President of Turkey for 15 years, was to transform Turkey into a modern European government and free it from the old and traditional elements. The founding of the Academy of Fine Arts in 1883 by Osman Hamdi, a student of the French orientalist painter Jean- Leon Gerome, was one of the events that contributed to the development of Westernize painting in Turkey. Now known as Mimar Sinan University, this academy is recognized as one of the most influential institutions in the field of visual arts. Hamdi is considered one of the pioneers of Turkish figurative painting, which combined Eastern and Western aesthetics well. The establishment of an Ottoman school in Paris also increased the influence of French aesthetic culture in the Turkish educational system. Thus, various faculties in the field of painting began to work, and old artists were gradually replaced by new graduates (Aslier & Erol & Turani, 1988, 111). Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, Istanbul had become an international center inhabited by hundreds of nationalities and connected the east world to the west. The result of these reforms in the art world was the formation of the “Association of Ottoman Painters” by 1910 graduates of the Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts. Many prominent members of the group

left Istanbul on scholarships to travel to countries such as France and Germany, countries where the culture of galleries and museums was well established and allowed these painters to grow and learn. These painters returned to Istanbul with the outbreak of World War I, and many of them became the founders of the Impressionist style in Istanbul. Launched in 1933, D Group⁷ had a distinctive aesthetic approach to modern styles, exhibiting them in the form of Turkish themes. The group’s painters wanted to create art that had a distinctive Turkish character, or in other words, art that properly combined Eastern and Western aesthetic elements in innovative ways (Baldwin, 2011, 50-54). With the development of technology, such as the invention of the camera, cinema, and the formation of new artistic movements one after another, artists began to search for traditional arts of Eastern countries. During this period, the Western world witnessed the inspiration of many artists from Islamic and Eastern arts, such as calligraphy. Interest in Islamic calligraphy, on the one hand, and the passage of years and the occurrence of various issues in countries that were somehow involved in the colonization of Western countries, on the other hand, led to the formation of national movements to revive traditional arts. This eventually influenced modern Turkish painting.

• Modern Turkish calligraphers

As Turkish art was influenced by modern and Western art, some calligraphers were also influenced by it. There are different approaches among Turkish calligraphers who took a modern look at calligraphy: 1) works in which calligraphy has been used in painting while maintaining the correct principles and rules; 2) works that have changed the traditional structure of the letters, and finally 3) works where the calligraphy has been implicated in the painting. But what all these works have in common is the use of calligraphy in painting, not for the purpose of writing and as was common in the past.

Erol Akyavaş: is one of the artists who was inspired by Islamic calligraphy in his paintings. In Akyavaş’s

painting language, one can see his Islamic beliefs and aesthetics. Akyavaş's sensitivity to Islamic art emerged in parallel with the development of the formation of religious, political institutions in Turkey. Erol or Khalil Akyavaş was born in 1932 in Ankara. Although he spent most of his life in the United States, he was very successful in combining modernism and tradition. He is a Turkish artist who achieved the depth of mystical thoughts (Digler & Soylu, 2020, 102). He has used religious symbols in his work since the 1960s and has worked in various fields of calligraphy, architecture, miniatures, and religious stories. Akyavaş lived in Izmir, Bursa, and Istanbul and studied architecture at the Istanbul Academy of Fine Arts (Mimar Sinan University) from 1950 to 1952. In 1948, he began painting in Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's workshop. Then, between 1952 and 1953 he attended summer courses at the Florence Academy of Fine Arts, working with André Lhote and Fernand Léger in Paris, and during these years he became familiar with Western art, which resulted in abstract paintings influenced by Cubism. After participating in several exhibitions, he went to America. From 1954 to 1960 in Chicago and Illinois, he studied architecture with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Influenced by this great architect, who was a member of the Bauhaus school and absorbed his views on decoration and functionalism in art, he created abstract reliefs that were his first steps in calligraphy (Amani, 2020, 163). His work entitled "Mavi⁸" consists of blue geometric pieces that are stacked in an abstract way. Gradually, his works became simpler and became paintings with a limited color range. After these paintings, Akyavaş turned to calligraphy, and it was from here that calligraphy became an important element in his art. Interested in theories of American surrealism, he turned to spontaneity, abandoning a rational view of the painting. An issue that increased the importance of patterns and letters in his works and was in fact, rooted in his cultural past (Süreyya, 2013). In 1960, when he was only 28 years old, he became the first Turkish

artist to enter the world art market and was admitted to the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MOMA). The painting "The Glory of Kings", which is included in the collection of the MOMA Museum, refers to the figurative foundations of the traditional Turkish art of Akyavaş and at the same time reveals a style that is in line with the Turkish calligraphy tradition (Bal, 2009, 114) (Fig. 4).

He studied Sufism in the 1980s. His interest in miniature began at this time. It was during this decade that he focused on the values of Islamic art, and these values marked the course of his work. His connection to Sufism came from his family. His grandfather was a Şeyh, and one of his other relatives, Golpinarli, was known for his work on Sufi history and literature (Erzen, 1995, 7). This mystical knowledge that he inherited became his guide during his life in the west. Examining Akyavaş's work, it is concluded that he approached traditional art in two ways: First of all, what is the matter is the traditional forms (see Fig. 4). Gradually, however, in his later works, traditional symbols took on a deeper meaning (Digler & Soylu, 2020, 107). Akyavaş's interest in Sufism led to the gradual appearance of mystical images in his paintings. Some important events and people in the history of Sufism, as well as letters and sentences that have symbolic meanings in this sect, became an integral element of his works. One of the most important of these works is called "Mansour Hallaj", which he created in 1987. This work shows his Islamic orientations and the idea of the unity of existence in the thought of Iranian Sufis. In this painting, the letter "ح" is written by him in a modern way. In Sufi thought, this letter symbolizes the relationship between the Creator and the creature. With this style of large-scale calligraphy, Akyavaş has actually emphasized the value and symbolic meaning of the letter (Sanatci ve Zamani, 2015,120). In this way, he sought to discover the beauty behind the visible. This work, with its intense reds, refers to Hallaj's execution and torture. Hallaj had said: "My life is in my death, my death is

in my life”; The red spot indicates the artist’s arrival at the moment of death, the green spiral indicates his arrival at God, and the continuation of the spiral line indicates a rebirth in eternity (Schimmel, 1975, 420). The colors used by Akyavaş in this painting have symbolic references. For example, red spots on a black background are almost like drops of blood. Black may indicate Hallaj’s burning. The blue color he uses in some of the paintings in this collection symbolizes mourning. This incident shows that Hallaj’s body was burnt, and his ashes were scattered in the Tigris River. Blue refers to the river and gray to the ash (Şenyay 1997, 25-32) (Fig. 5).

His other work, “Ana al-Haqq”, best illustrates Akiyash’s relationship with tradition and Sufism. According to the idea of the unity of existence, there is no being other than God in this world. Everything that appears is his shadow. This work is one of the best examples of Akiyash’s interest in mysticism and tradition. In this work, he shows the relationship between God and the creature in an abstract calligraphic style. The known and unknown worlds are displayed in the image with the contrast of light and darkness. The bright blue sky can be seen through the split world. The high darkness symbolizes the realm of the unseen. The word “Ana al-Haqq” wants to communicate between the earth and the unknown (Bingöl, 2015, 75) (Fig. 6). These two works are examples of works in which the elements of calligraphy are legible and have been used symbolically in painting, but there is no insistence on spelling in the traditional way. In these works, calligraphy is used in an abstract and symbolic style. Such works show that although the west influenced modern Turkish art, it has since been influenced by cultures and traditions. The art of miniature, which is, an Asian artwork, has its roots in the mystical and mysterious world of the East. Arabic, Japanese and Chinese script show that calligraphy is the dominant art in Asia. In Turkey, interest in Anatolian culture and traditional arts, which began in Group D, prompted Turkish artists to explore their culture. Now in Turkish

contemporary art, we can talk about a new generation of artists who have analyzed the dilemma of the West and the East. Painters such as Erol Akyavaş and Ergin İnan are among the artists who have displayed the powers of traditional and Islamic art. Ergin İnan used calligraphy in the compositions of his works. A number of his works include various insects set on a background of traditional calligraphy. In these works, insects seem to be the key to the entrance to magical worlds (The Endless Swarm) (Fig. 7). Akyavaş has used the art of Islamic calligraphy, especially the letter “و”, in works such as “Alchemy of Happiness”, “Mansour Al-Hallaj” and “Merajnameh”, which deal with great historical narratives. He combined Western and Eastern art and concepts with his unique imaginary



Fig. 4. Erol Akyavaş, The Glory of Kings, 1959, oil on canvas, 121.8 by 214 cm (MoMA Collection), Source: postwar.hausderkunst.de



Fig. 5. Erol Akyavaş, Mansour Hallaj, 300 by 350 cm, 1982, Source: wikiart.org/

elements. The concepts in his works are intermittent and periodic and are constantly evolving.

Fahr-el-Nissa Zeid: born in 1903 in Istanbul, is one of the most prominent contemporary artists after the Republic of Turkey. She was the creator of flexible art and diverse works that could not be limited to a particular style. Her importance to art critics and historians is that a woman in traditional and religious societies was able to create abstract works from the capabilities of calligraphy and miniature art. This fusion of Eastern and Western art took place during her stay in Paris. In her works, she exhibited a combination of Byzantine, modern and traditional arts. The geometric lines of calligraphy, balance, and harmony of bright colors are the features of most of her works. Her great abstract compositions, and her courage in using the shapes and colors of the Eastern world and changing them according to Western world art, made her one of the most important leading artists of Istanbul and the Paris School in the 1950s and 1940s. Zayd's art was not in a straight line but had many ups and downs. Internal spiritual developments caused her to follow her own path without entering a specific movement. She lived in the years when the capital of art was moving from Paris to New York, and new artistic styles in the form of abstract art emerged at short intervals. At this time, many of the leading Turkish artists living in France found themselves in a creative environment, and this was the first stage of Turkish painting to develop at the same time as contemporary Western painting. This gave Turkey an important place in abstract painting. The late 1940s were the years when Fahr-el-Nissa Zeid focused on her most famous work, abstract compositions. These works were extremely rich and contained extremely excellent and brilliant colors. The point that critics emphasized at her first exhibition in Paris was her courageous and symbolic attitude in a particular style to the effects of Byzantine art alongside Islamic art. In an interview, she describes how she created his work: "When I paint, I feel united with all the creatures in the world. Then I forget myself and



Fig. 6. Erol Akyavaş, Anna al-Haq, 190 by 350 cm, oil on canvas, 1987, Source: artnet.com



Fig. 7. Ergin İnan, source: endless-swarm.com

become part of the unconscious process of creation. I create the image like a volcano scattering rocks and lava around. I am sometimes surprised by the variety and multiplicity of works I create" (YazkaÇ, 2018, 202). Zeid joined DGroup in 1942. In 1946, after her husband was appointed ambassador to London, she entered the Western world and continued her life in

London and Paris. The content of her solo exhibitions during these years illuminates her imaginative and integrated features and approaches between East and West art, her inner world, and her use of mosaic art. Fahr-el-Nissa also mentions her unknowingly influencing the Turkish tradition: “I have never deliberately prioritized the Turkish tradition. However, I grew up in this tradition. I have participated in their dervish ceremonies since I was a child. These experiences have always played a role in my attitude towards the mystery of artistic creation. This factor has led me to always give priority to the spiritual traditions of my country in the description of my works over Western concepts, but in the end, in terms of my work style, I have always preferred to be a Parisian painter rather than a traditional painter” (Roditi, 1988). However, Western critics have always sought traces of Eastern art in her works, believing that they are composed of geometric and abstract compositions with Islamic aesthetics. Zeid’s first solo exhibition opened at Saint-Georges Gallery in London in 1947, which formed almost a summary of her artistic philosophy that she wanted to achieve throughout her life. This caught the attention of Maurice Collis, who has been mentioned among major art critics: “Zeid’s importance to us is that she is one of the new pioneers of art. The French school Ecole de Paris is moving in a new and global direction. Interactions in this global orientation are taking place not only from the west but also from the East and will reach richness when the artistic, political, and social organizations of our time encompass both sides of the world, the East and the West” (YazkaÇ, 2018, 206). Like many Turkish artists: Nejad Melih Devrim, Selim Turan, Albert Bitran, etc., Zeid was active in Turkish abstract art, but the difference between her works and these painters was her attention to the values of traditional art such as Turkish calligraphy. In 1962, she broke the record for the highest price for a female painter by selling a work at Christie’s auction entitled “Break of The Atom and Vegetal Life” for \$ 2,741,000 and won the title of the

female artist in 2013 (Çelik, 2020).

In this painting, she combined the aesthetics of Islamic calligraphy with the aesthetics of Byzantine and Western art (Fig. 8). The rhythm and textual geometry in her abstract paintings undoubtedly represent a kind of Eastern mysticism based on geometry and calligraphy. Thus, in her abstract art, three issues are decisive: perceptions, improvisation, and composition. Her works have attracted the attention of important global artists and personalities⁹ (YazkaÇ, 2018, 210). It can be said that Zeid was a global citizen with a multinational and multi-identity perspective. For this reason, it is necessary to evaluate the artistic value of his works not only in relation to his Oriental identity but also in terms of its important contribution to the history of art.

Discussion

Calligraphy as Islamic art, as well as the art used to write the Qur’an, has always been of great importance and status. In addition, it has a deep connection with the traditions, teachings of Islam, and mystical wisdom. Hence, Muslim artists have always strived to increase its capabilities and improve it. During the Ottoman period, Istanbul enjoyed a high position as one of the important centers of the Islamic world in calligraphy. During this period, calligraphers such as Şeyh Hamdullah, Ahmed Karahisari, Hafez Osman, and Mustafa Râkim developed the method of Yaqut al-Mustasemi and tried to flourish it. The emergence of the republic and the interest in Western culture, which began in the late Ottoman period, led to the neglect of calligraphy for decades. But after the 1980s, Sufi and religious communities and the Turkish government began to establish new institutions to preserve and transmit Turkey’s traditional art heritage. These activities led to the revival of Turkish calligraphy after half a century. Meanwhile, in the confrontation of contemporary Turkish artists with modern art, two approaches to calligraphy were formed: A group that did calligraphy in the same traditional style but with



Fig. 8. Fakhr al-Nisa Zeid, 1962, Break of The Atom and Vegetal Life, Source: thenationalnews.com

new tools, materials, and compositions. This group includes artists, many of whom are trained by the last generation of Ottoman artists, such as Hasan Çelebi, Mehmed Özçay, Uğur Derman, and their students. The second group used traditional letters and words in a new style of painting, and some of these artists include Erol Akyavaş, Ergin İnan, and Fakhr al-Nisa Zeid. A study of the works of both groups and the interpretation of their works shows that despite the differences in appearance, common views can still be found between the two groups: In the works of the first group, traditional artists, there is adherence to the principles of calligraphy.

In addition, the artists of this group do not seek to express personal feelings in their works, but to express religious concepts by committing to traditional principles and using Quranic and religious texts. The second group includes two categories of works: artists such as Erol Akyavaş and Ergin İnan, who were not very strict in use principles, but the element of calligraphy is still clear and legible in their works, and the proportions have been observed to some extent. And artists like Fakhr al-Nisa Zeid have used calligraphy in an abstract, illegible, and hidden style. In the works of artists such as Erol Akyavaş, although there is no emphasis on the principles and rules of traditional calligraphy, the mystical concepts, which originate from the artist's attention to Sufism, can still be retrieved from the modern appearance. Another artist, Fakhr al-Nisa Zeid, whose Islamic calligraphy is embedded in his abstract works, still pays attention to traditional concepts despite his personal desire to be included in the category of Western abstract arts, and critics also consider it as an artist whose works show oriental tendencies and traditional concepts. The table 1 briefly shows the approach of contemporary artists to calligraphy in Turkey.

Table 1. Some of the leading artists in the field of Turkish calligraphy in the contemporary era. Source: authors.

Number	Artist	Years of life	Calligraphy style	Indicators of artist importance
1	Uğur Derman	Since 1935	Tradition	Efforts to revive traditional calligraphy, much research in traditional calligraphy, reviving many inscriptions in religious places
2	Hasan Çelebi	Since 1937	Tradition	Revival of traditional Ottoman calligraphy, mastery of writing classical writing styles, training many students in the field of traditional calligraphy, restoration and revival of many inscriptions of religious places, skill in Tughra in combination with various forms
3	Hüseyin Kutlu	Since 1949	Tradition	Trying to maintain the relationship between traditional calligraphy, the meaning of words, and the atmosphere of Islamic architecture
4	Mehmed Özçay	Since 1961	Tradition	Use of new materials such as colored and clear inks in traditional calligraphy and Syah Mashq
5	Erol Akyavaş	1932-1999	Tradition and Modern	Using traditional calligraphy in abstract painting with mystical concepts
6	Ergin İnan	Since 1943	Tradition and Modern	Using traditional calligraphy in modern painting with mystical and mysterious concepts
7	Fakhr al-Nisa Zeid	1901-1991	Modern	Traditional calligraphy was implicated in abstract painting

Conclusion

Turkish calligraphy that had a high degree during the Ottoman period and was supported by the Ottoman emperors was neglected with the beginning of the republic and the government's desire to modernize society and language reform. But after a few decades, with the formation of various art movements in Islamic countries, the support of religious and governmental centers, and the atmosphere in the Middle East, this art was revived, and many artists taught it. The works of contemporary Turkish calligraphers have shown that calligraphy in contemporary Turkey has been pursued with two approaches so far:

1. The traditional approach of artists such as Hasan Çelebi and Mehmed Özçay, who remained faithful to the principles of calligraphy and made changes only in the materials and tools of the work. And
2. An approach in which artists, influenced by modern art, used calligraphy as an abstract painting, emphasizing calligraphic form rather than correct writing techniques.

Thus, it can be said that calligraphy in Turkey has pursued the traditional style and its religious purposes. Although calligraphy in Turkey has sometimes appeared in a new way in painting, it has preserved its traditional roots in content.

Endnote

1. After the Battle of Malazgerd, the Seljuk Alpine Arslan increased his dominion over Asia Minor. During the Seljuk period, Iranian culture and art were rooted in this area. But no significant documents are available since then. What is certain about the history of the Ottomans and the Seljuks is that from the time of its establishment, the court of the Ottoman sultans inherited the small and local courts of the Roman Seljuks. Following the Seljuk customs, the Ottoman sultans tried to promote Iranian culture and literature, and the Seljuk court system and administrative organization, which was an imitation of the Iranian court system, was accepted as a political model by the Ottoman sultans (Farrokhfar, 2012, 163)
2. The School of Calligraphers
3. main calligrapher
4. Academy of Fine Arts
5. Center for Classical Arts
6. The Turkish Classical Arts Foundation
7. It was one of the leading artistic groups in Turkey, which started in 1933. The group had a distinct aesthetic approach to modern styles and presented them in the form of Turkish themes. One of the prominent painters of this group was Turgut Zaeem (1906-1974).
8. Blue

9. Queen Elizabeth attended the opening of her exhibition in 1947, and Adolf Hitler paid attention to her work. In addition, his work has been exhibited in the United States, Switzerland and Belgium.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Amani, H & Farahmand Drav, S. (2021). A Study of the Developments of Islamic Calligraphy in Contemporary Turkey. *Journal of Art & Civilization of the Orient*, 9(32), 75-90.

DOI: 10.22034/jaco.2021.277929.1192

RL: http://www.jaco-sj.com/article_132354.html?lang=en

