PAINTED OTTOMAN DECORATION

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In Ottoman architecture, painted decoration was preferred for the inner surface, for upper parts, where it could not be touched. Under this level, it was substituted by tiles or stone. This was because, painted decoration was easily affected by outer factors. Although tiles bore often were used in lower parts of the building, it was also an alternative for painter decoration of the upper parts. Painted decoration, together with upper surfaces, was also employed for the decoration of nabişfi ceilings of many different materials.

The examination of painted decoration is rather difficult. This is due to problems which are connected to its characteristics. Its life is as long as the surface on which it is applied. Generally the painting is on plaster, therefore it is dependent to the condition of the building. As our country is on an earthquake zone, often the plaster cracked or fell down completely. In buildings, that are in public use, for instance mosques, even if the whole decoration was not destructed, a complete renovation was preferred. The old plaster was left, but was chiselled to enable new plastering. The fact that there can be many layers, makes it difficult to find original examples, and brings problems of datation.

Another factor for the destruction of painted decoration is water and dampness. The fresco technique, used in western countries, is applied on wet plaster. Therefore the colour is immerses by the plaster. The decoration lives at least as long as the plaster. Dampness and water affects only the colours of frescoes. As in our technique the painting is on dry plaster, painted decoration of buildings which are not cared well for, even if the plaster does not fall down, the colours could fade. Dampness affects the plaster which consists mainly of lime. The life of decoration applied directly on wood or stone is bound to the characteristics of the material. Even the excess effort of cleaning can damage the decoration. It is a strange paradox that unattended examples can have better surviving chances.

Another factor for loss is fire. As this danger is more likely to affect wooden buildings, it is mostly impossible to find original examples of early residential decoration.

Painted decoration was renewed with different methods. The easiest way was to ignore the existing layer. In this case, the painting would have nothing in common with the old decoration. Most of the existing examples are of this kind. Another way of renovating is to keep the outline of the original but paint the details in the contemporary style. We will have the opportunity to point out some examples, in the following pages.
PAINTED DECORATION OF THE EARLY OTTOMAN PERIOD

The earliest painted decoration remaining from the Ottoman period is around the windows of the Küçük Türbe in Edirne, which is to be dated to the mid 14th century. We found another early example, from the same period in the Orhan Gazi mabed at Bilecik in the year 1985. The decoration, which was not known before, had appeared when some plaster fell down. From the decoration consisting of rumi’s on spirals only black contours and faded colours were to be seen. Although this building, important for its malakari decoration was in ruins since a longer time, some arches and part of a cupola were still existing. When we went again, in the hope to take better photographs, we found the building totally crushed down.

The Muradiye Mosque in Edirne, whose exterior is very simple, has very rich interior decoration. The monument is rather interesting because of datation problems of its inner decoration. The decoration which is undoubtedly of good quality, is also interesting because of the diverse layers of mural decoration, and the problems to be solved. The position of the tiles complicates the interpretation even more. The remaining parts show that nearly the whole upper surface was painted. The fact that the greater part is not re-decorated, helps us for a better understanding of the works of the period. In some parts, layers from different period can be identified by the help of colour and design.

The oldest layer is the original decoration from the first half of the 15th Century. This layer the decoration consist of black contoured white, yellow and blue motifs on red background. The first known mural decoration of the Muradiye Mosque, belongs to this period and is on the soffit of the great arch, between the two big cupolas. Nearly half of the original decoration of the cupola near the entrance is still existing.

Bigger fragments from the same period are to be seen on the left wall of the domed space near the mihrab. Art historians had many considerations on the mural paintings of this section of at least two different periods, and their relation to the tiles.

This original decoration reflects the artistic taste of the period. The design on the great arch consists of white interlaced bands, filled with rumi’s. This decoration is a frame for the symmetrical alif writings.

The main scheme of the decoration of the cupola is based on a radial symmetrical system. The medallions of this radial system are also formed by interlaced white ribbons. Three of the great medallions are intact.

The medallions and the space between them is wholly filled with rumi and batı scrolls. The decoration ends with a band of scriptures. Some of the rumi decoration of the transition elements is also existent.

The most interesting wall decoration is on left hand side wall of the mihrab department. Red white and black is dominant also in this part of the decoration. The upmost part is a written band, which we assume, runs along the whole building. The scripture consists of a smaller black line and a bigger white one. This system is typical for the sarpurla decoration of the period. The background is filled with rumi decoration. A similar band forms the inferior limit.

The main surface looks like garden Eden. The composition is symmetrical only visionary. Motifs placed symmetrical are of similar outline, but different in details. Small vegetal mo-

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1, 2. Bilecik, Imamı Kalesi, Turkey. 3. Edirne, Selimiye Mosque, Turkey. 4. Edirne, Selimiye Mosque, Turkey. 5. Istanbul, Selimiye Mosque, Turkey.
A third layer consists of a fragment of scriptural frieze and some architectural elements. This layer, possibly was painted during repairs of the year 1753. A fourth layer is to been at the upper part of the mihrab wall. A photostatic architecture, similar to those of the 19th century is to be seen here.

A rather great part of the original murals of the Yeşil Mosque in Bursa, completed in 1424 still consists. This is the proof, that the whole covering system was painted with murals. While the murals of the Mursidye in Edirne is the work of the beginning period. The decoration of the Yeşil Mosque shows preparations to the classical period.

Most of the existing murals came out to light in a rather good condition. Only the colours were partly faded. Because the original was left nearly untouched, they are of great importance for the understanding of the decoration of the period. Most of the design is of the rumi group, only few parts are hali decorated. The great part consists white and yellow motives on blue or red background. The scriptural frieze in the lower part of the cupolla and the scriptural decoration in cartouches is typical for the period. White and black scriptures are placed between rumi scrolls on a red background.

The murals of the riwaq cupollas of the _UC Şereffi Mosque in Edirne are known since a long period. Ord.Prof.Dr. A.Süheyl Üneyir considered them as "of this period". But they are repainted during the repairs of 1762, according to the style of this period. They are rough based on the designs of the originals. In this case, classical elements are changed into baroque and rococo designs.

The original murals of the _UC Şereffi Mosque are found after the sixties from underneath the later plaster. In the central cupolla, a scriptural frieze is found. In one of the lateral cupolla rumi decoration is brought to light. For this original decoration, white and yellow designs on blue background was used, according to classical preferences. The decoration of this building shows all the characteristics of the classical period.

The preferred decoration for preclassical period buildings of Ankara, such as Hoca Hanlı or Genezizade is paintings on wood. Even in later periods, this tradition is followed in Ankara mescids.

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

During the classical Ottoman period, which starts with the conquest of Istanbul, the enthusiastic search for new style, left its place to a settled style, following certain rules. The compositions started to be more balanced, colours more calmed down. Dark and light blues were preferred for backgrounds, while white, yellow and brick colours were used for design.

For murals, traditional motifs like the rumi were preferred. Geometrical designs playing such a great role in Islamic art, and liked very much also by the Ottomans are seldom used for murals.

Naturalistic flowers, typical for Ottoman art, starting with the second half of the 16th century, were nearly never used for painted decoration of the classical period.

From the painted decoration of the second half of the fifteenth Century, some small fragments have remained in the Davud Pasha and Rum Mehmed Pasha mosques.

The mural decoration of most classical Ottoman buildings is repaired in the style of the period in which the renovation is undertaken. During restorations, they are wholly renewed, so that nothing of the original decoration remains. Nowadays, buildings are restored respect to modern methods.
It was obvious that the Fatih Mosque, when rebuilt after an earthquake, should be decorated as a new building of that period. Paradoxically this mosque, belonging to the baroque period, was decorated during recent restorations in the style of the Fatih period.

Starting with the mid sixteenth century, nearly all major architecture is the work of Sinan. With few exceptions, the decoration of all is simple and has a dignified look. Murals were painted according to certain criteria concerning its place in the building, the motifs. For this reason we prefer to consider common characteristics. Only some buildings with certain peculiarities will be considered.

In a typical building of Sinan, arches, if not very large, are built of stones in two different colors, or this impression is given by painting. If the arch is larger, a simple border or a script is added. Murals painting is more or less used to enhance the lines of architectural elements. At center of the cupola a roundel with scripture adapted to the form of the medallion is placed. Very light, decorative painting is added. Rumi are the preferred motifs of this decoration.

During the restoration of the Jezahide Mosque in Istanbul, which lasted 6 years, special care has been taken to protect the original mural paintings and the trowel work, using modern methods.

The 1550 dated Alaça Mosque at Foça in Izmir is famous for the most beautiful examples painting on stone. Is far as is known, it is the only example in mural painting of a tree in blossom filling an oval medallion. Classical motifs like clouds and batıje’s were also used in the decoration. As far as I know, this mosque is among the historical buildings lost during the Bosnian war.

The Rüstem Pasha Mosque in Istanbul, which contains some of the most important examples of the classical period, has been radically restored during the nineties. Due to their importance, special care was given to the restoration of the tiles and tiled surfaces. But mural paintings were also brought to light and restored very carefully. In this way, a new contribution was made to the rare examples of mural paintings of the classical period.

The cupola and the walls of a certain height, some painted decoration, even if in a rather bad condition could be seen. Noteworthy is the decoration resembling textile decoration on the big arch. Some murals, remaining under baroque-roccoco decoration were brought to light and were restored during the works in the eighties.

On the mezzine mezza of the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne, is one of the best examples of painted decoration on wood. Before the restoration some traces of the original decoration were to be seen. By careful work, the late decoration was eliminated and the original of the 16th century layer cleaned. On its ceiling, cansets decorated with zax leaves are to be seen. Rumi, batıje and cloud motifs take place on the outer surfaces. This loggia is one of the best protected and most beautiful of its kind.

On the ceiling of the wooden loggia in the Kara Mustafa Pasha Mosque, built by Sinan in the second half of the sixteenth century, a decoration with classical rami and hatari motifs, is in a rather good condition.

The ceiling of the mezzine mezza of the Atik Valide Mosque in Uskudar, shows one of the sel-

dom examples of geometrical painted decorations. With its...

The Selçuklu İbrahim Ağa Mosque in Topkapı differs from the stone buildings of the 16th century with its wooden dome and its wooden construction. Its painted decoration was found only when the paintings on them were cleaned. Interesting to observe is, that while the tile decoration consists mostly naturalistic flower motifs, for the painted decoration rami were preferred.

The reason why the Sultan Ahmed Mosque is famous as the "Blue Mosque" is the painted decoration, where blue is the preferred colour.

EXAMPLES OF THE POST-CLASSICAL PERIOD

The 1708-1710 dated Yeni Valide Mosque in Uskudar, contains murals of the period. It is interesting to note that, classical features are still used in its architecture as well as in its decoration, while in some buildings of the same period, rather strong traces of a new style are to be found.

Elements added after many years to classical buildings, are decorated in the style of this later period. The mezzine mezza of the Sultan Selim Mosque of about 1520, is not decorated in the classical style. This decoration is very similar to that of some dated works. On a signed bookbinding of the famous master Ali Usküdarî (dated works of whom are of the 1720's), the decoration is very similar to the mentioned mezzine mezza.

The Ortaköy Mosque is one of the important buildings of the mid 19th century. The architecture as well as the decoration is similar to a palace. The decoration of the cupola has a rather deep perspective, which gives the illusion of real architecture. Similar decoration is the be seen in the interior hall of the Dolmabahçe Palace.

Starting with the 19th century, murals decorations have been replaced by murals which should rather be defined as "paintings".

The adwan in the courtyard of the Kara Mustafa Pasha Külliye in Merzifon is decorated in a technique resembling mural decoration. Here, a large Istanbul panorama is to be found. The pictures are dated 1875 and signed "Zülcü Emin" to this panorama, the bridges, mosques, houses are to be seen. Scenes of life in Istanbul as well as transporters like tram, train, steamboat, objects like table, chair are depicted.

A less known example of this kind is in the Istanbul Panorama in the cupola of the Sultan Selim of the Amasya II Bâyrezli mosque.

In the buildings of the end of 19th century and of the beginning of 20th century, the beginning of national styles are to be seen. In the buildings of this period, murals are replaced by paintings using misunderstood classical designs. This kind of decoration is to be found in the Valide Mosque in Akaray, in the Hamidiye Mosque in Yıldız. In the following period, like in the Bebek Mosque, the classical style is repeated.