



## The Two Calligraphic Albums (Mesk) Belonging to the Topkapı Palace Museum

### KEYWORDS

Manuscript, calligraphy, library, album.

### Dr.Gül GÜNEY

Asisstant Proffesor, Dokuz Eylül University, Fine Arts Faculty, Traditional Turkish Arts Department, İzmir /Turkiye

**ABSTRACT** *Calligraphy album making, just as in other fields of art, gained importance in the course of the Ottoman Empire. It can be understood from some old album samples that the calligraphy albums containing different art branches such as calligraphy, illumination and miniature were made in the workshops of Timurî palace, and were improved in Turkman and Safevid palaces. In our country, we can see calligraphy album samples of different periods in specific libraries in accordance with written masterpieces. In these samples, written calligraphy albums are of importance with regard to calligraphy art. Among these albums, two samples, which belonged to Topkapı Palace Museum Library, but were in Manisa Museum for a while, and then were put in Manisa Manuscript Libraryare of importance with regard to calligraphy and ornament. We will present two calligraphic albums in this paper.*

In the Art of Turkish books, Calligraphy album making, just as in other fields of art, gained importance in the course of the Ottoman Empire, and many artistic calligraphic album samples have ranked among manuscript libraries, both in domestic and foreign, and among private collections. Calligraphy albums, the oldest samples of which are often seen in late 15<sup>th</sup> century, refer to 'patched' in Arabic "murakka". The word derives from "murakkaa" in Persian, and is used as "murakka'" in Turkish. The plural form is "murakkaât". (Derman,2006:204-205) It can be understood from some old album samples that the calligraphy albums containing different art branches such as calligraphy, illumination and miniature were made in the workshops of Timurî palace, and were improved in Turkman and Safevid palaces. They were adopted in "nakkashane" as soon as taken to Ottoman Palaces by ways of booty and messenger presents, and improved in 16<sup>th</sup> century. (Mahir,2002:401) In this period, the Persian artists, taken to the Palace, played an important role. However, in the Ottoman Empire, until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were single-page calligraphic compositions (kit'a) kept in different styles. These single-page calligraphic composition were agglutinated to each other from the top and bottom, rather than on a backdrop, and were turned into rolls. The calligraphy pieces kept in leather covers attached to the roll used to be called 'tûmar'. (Derman,2002:27) This form gave way to calligraphy albums in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.(Picture 1)

Calligraphy albums are among the richest artistic pieces that have gathered many artistic branches, such as marbling, miniature, calligraphy and illumination. To make these albums, there must be durable cardboards, made up of paper. Therefore, when there were not ready-made cardboards, 'tightening up' used to be done to make durable cardboards in accordance with traditional methods and rules. The obtained cartoons are clearly cut, and then are brought together back to back, and are tied together by a thin leather and cloth strip on its three fringes. These strips also prevents cartoon edges from damaging. By this way, these two prepared -cartoons can be tied to another two on the bottom. After all cartoons are gathered, the calligraphy album is bound in classical style. All these are known as "plain murakkaa", "book murakkaa" or only "murakkaa". It is understood with the samples we can see today that murakka albums are also made in "gusseted"

style. The two back-to-back cartoons are tied together on the "boğaz", and if this process is done for the others, it is possible to see all the cartoons at the same time and then to fold them in zigzag style. The type which is tied to the mould with its first cartoon is called "gusseted album". (picture 2)

After researches, in many libraries, Calligraphy albums belonging to Ottoman period have been seen in private collections. The earliest of Ottoman Calligraphy albums is accepted to be the one that is in Istanbul University Library, documented as F.1423. This album includes a great many calligraphy samples. However, there are also some illumination and pattern works in ink painting style. Some of these samples are attributed to Baba Nakkaş of Fatih period by Süheyl Ünver. (Ünver,2007:45-48) Calligraphy samples belong to Mehmet 2<sup>nd</sup> period, as well as Timur. Some of these calligraphies were written by calligraphists who made the copy of manuscripts for the private library of Mehmet 2<sup>nd</sup> while some others were written in Edirne and Istanbul. (Raby,Tanırdı,1993:53) The existing poems including praise and written two months before the death of Fatih the Conquerer are thought to have been arranged in Beyazıt 2<sup>nd</sup> period just after the death of Fatih, rather than during his reign. The random preparation of this album indicates that in 15<sup>th</sup> century in Ottoman "nakkashane" album making did not start. However, 'Shah Mahmud Nişaburi Album' which belongs to the Suleyman the Magnificent period between 1557 and 1560 and includes Shah Mahmud Nişaburi<sup>2</sup> calligraphy works, is the first sample of elaborate album making.(Mahir,2002:401-411) (Picture 3) Moreover, Timur, Turkmen and Safavid albums, which took place in Ottoman Palace art treasure via various ways such as booty and messenger presents, are among the distinguished samples of Islam world. (Picture 4-5)

In the calligraphy albums, starting from 16<sup>th</sup> century, we can see mostly good calligraphy samples, rather than illumination and miniature samples. The reason why these albums are preferred is that they can exist for long without being damaged and they can put the writings together. In the albums, calligraphy practice sheet (Arabic mashq, Turkish meşk), odes, prays, verses of the Koran and the Prophet Mohammad's sayings are presented in an orderly format. Writing naskh, rayhani, rik'a by a fine pen just

under the line written with one of the forms, such as a thuluth, naskh, muhaqqaq and tawqî writings has been a tradition, especially written in single-page calligraphic composition.(kit'a)

In a single-page calligraphic composition(kit'a) if a verse of the Koran, the Prophet Mohammed's saying or a word can be left unfinished, then they are finished in the following calligraphic panel. These albums are called "müteselsil" (chain) albums. The calligraphists' signature are generally at the end. On the other hand, there are also albums where verses that are not related and written by different calligraphists are put together. These are called "toplama" (collected albums).(Özsayiner,1986:16-18) Furthermore, in calligraphy practice sheet (meşk) murakkaa, while the samples showing single letters and the joining of two letters are called müfredat writing, the ones showing sentence and word composition are called "mürekkebat" writing, such as odes, prayers, verses of the Koran, the prophet Mohammed's sayings.(Derman,2002:27-28)

In our country, we can see calligraphy album samples of different periods in specific libraries in accordance with written masterpieces. In these samples, written calligraphy albums are of importance with regard to calligraphy art. Among these albums, two samples, which belonged to Topkapı Palace Museum Library<sup>3</sup> but were in Manisa Museum for a while, and then were put in Manisa Manuscript Library are of importance with regard to calligraphy and ornament. Because these albums haven't been documented yet, they are called in the article by the inventory numbers 2109 and 2863, which have been given by Topkapı Palace Museum Library. In this article two calligraphy albums will be introduced.

#### • Number 1

Calligraphy practice sheet (Meşk) Album  
Inventory number: 2109  
Dimensions: 340x255 mm – 250x175 mm  
Production Date: Unknown  
Origin: Topkapı Palace Museum  
Current Place: Manisa Manuscripts Library

The folding calligraphy album in the library, having the inventory number of 2109, has a "mülevven şemse"<sup>4</sup> cover which is brown, leather, separated from below.<sup>5</sup> Rosette is sectional and has a free composition with hatayi motives. In the composition, the helezons coming from four different points are separated into different directions by being broken. Hatayi group on the helezons and leaves are in the "saz yolu" style.(Mahir,1986:113-130) The upper part of the rosette slice has been finished by being decorated with points and by short needles. At the bottom and the top of the rosette is "salbek" motive, decorated adjacent to the rosette. The "salbek" motive was designed adjacent to the rosette in the 16<sup>th</sup> century cover binders. This calligraphy album most probably belongs to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The outside casing of the binder has been girthed by a nearly 4 mm golden mating border. The inside of the binder has been covered with (paisley) marbling.(Picture 6)

Calligraphy album is made up of six calligraphic panel "a" and "b" sides of the album is of packed verse, and there "mürekkebat" meşk (calligraphy practice sheet) takes place with carbon black ink and thuluth calligraphy. On the top line of the calligraphy panel, on the "a" side of the album, 'ya ğaliben ğayra mağlub', (never losing ever winning) has been read invertedly. In<sup>6</sup> general, the calligraphy practice sheet(mesk) of a thuluth-naskh begins with prayers,

the meaning of which is "God, let my work be done easily, not difficult but beneficial." Here, there is a pray which is about being successful. At the bottom there are Arabic letters, such as "lam, mim, nun and kaf" L, M, N and K' respectively. As it is known, in Arabic letter teaching, all letters were written in their order beginning from "alif" to "yâ". And then, their combinations with other letters were shown. This process was called "müfredat" mesk.

Calligraphy album is specific in terms of decoration; and the single-page calligraphy composition with "koltuk"<sup>7</sup> on the "a" side has been divided into two with a golden ruler and writings have been girthed beyn-e sutûr.<sup>8</sup> On beyn sutûr, a composition has taken place which is symmetrical to "rumi" and "hatayi" motives, on a golden background. The "koltuk" spaces of the calligraphy composition are made up of free compositions with leaf and hatayi motives on a golden background. On the four edges of the calligraphy are two interior borders, one is thin the other is thick. The thin interior border has been painted blue, and the thick interior border is made from shredded paper.<sup>9</sup> The decoration has been finished with "yekşah" iron<sup>10</sup> on golden rulers. On the light pink exterior border, zereşan has been applied.

In the calligraphic panel on the "b" side of the album, the expressions that are thought to be the prophet's saying by a thuluth calligraphy are written "mesk" form. Here the space hasn't been divided into two, but a thuluth calligraphy has been used throughout the surface. However, a thuluth calligraphy, on the top as a single line, has been separated from the bottom by caesura (golden dots) motives. These caesuras are made up of rumi, panj and leaf motives. The "koltuks" placed on both sides of the writing space vertically are decorated by "çift tahrir" method<sup>11</sup> as symmetrical to the leaf and panj motives. Both interior and exterior borders are decorated just as the "a" side of the album.(Picture 7)

On the "c" side of the album is a saying of the Prophet, expressing the religious importance of prayer in five-line form written in carbon black ink and a thuluth calligraphy. This surface designed as "koltuk" has been decorated with caesura motives, koltuks, interior border and rulers. The caesuras have been made up by hatayi motives and leaves, while vertically placed packed spaces have been made up with double writing method, symmetrically to hatayi motives and leaves. Interior border is made up of two separate borders. The first one is painted light pink, while the second is decorated with sliced papers. The exterior border is covered with light green paper, and its upper part is decorated with zereşan<sup>12</sup>(Picture 8)

On the 'd' side of the album are the sayings of our prophet, beginning with "Our Prophet says that.....". There is a saying at the bottom, related to honest earning, written with golden ink and a thuluth calligraphy. This side of the album has been decorated with laminar interior border and caesura motives. We can see three separate and winding borders on the interior border. On the first border is a free composition covered with gold, "penc"(flower with 5five leaves) and leaf motives. The second one has been covered with light pink paper while the exterior has been decorated colourful cut papers. The exterior border is covered with light green paper, and its upper part is decorated with zereşan.(Picture 8)

On the 'e' side of the album are the Prophet sayings related to the importance of reading the Koran, written in thuluth

luth-naskh calligraphy. In the last lines, there are prayers said by the Prophet. The calligraphic panel seems quite arty craft with laminar interior border, caesuras and rulers and has been girthed by four borders with different sizes. In the first border, from the interior to the exterior, there is a "zencerek"<sup>13</sup>; in the second border, which is thicker in vertical space but thinner in horizontal, a symmetrical composition is placed with the "çift tahrir" method with "hatayi" motives and leaves. The third border is decorated with paper painted green, while the fourth is decorated with sliced paper, and they are separated by rulers. The exterior border has been decorated zerafsan after being covered with broken white paper. (Picture 9)

On the 'f' side of the album, we can see rika' calligraphy (Serin, 2008:72) in the first line and Prophet Ali's saying, which tells how important it is to teach children how to write. In the middle of the fourth line, there is a colophon record belonging to Derviş Mehmed bin Mustafa Dede bin Hamdullah Ma'rûf İbn-i Şeyh.<sup>14</sup> The album has a specific feature because it has a colophon record belonging to Derviş Mehmed who was Şeyh Hamdullah's grandson and died toward the end of 16<sup>th</sup> century. (1592-1593). Nevertheless, the album is thought to have thuluth calligraphic samples, not related to each other and to be gathered from different albums. Moreover, Muhiddin Serin mentions in his book, "Hattat Şeyh Hamdullah" that there is a two-calligraphic panel album in Manisa Public Library. He also says that the cartoon has a record showing that it is Şeyh's calligraphy. (Serin, 1992: 98)(Picture 9)

#### • Number 2

Calligraphy practice sheet (Mesk) Album  
Inventory number: 2863  
Dimensions: 260x155 mm – 210x950 mm  
Production Date: Unknown  
Origin: Topkapı Palace Museum  
Current Place: Manisa Manuscript Library

Folding album has a mülevven<sup>15</sup> rosette separated below. The cover is brown, while the rosette is maroon. The rosette is sectional, in the middle of the rosette. At the bottom and the top is a salbek motive tied with the rosette. The rosette has a free composition which has saz yolu method placed on two handles, hatayi motives and leaves. The inside of the salbek has been decorated with a hatayi motive. Braces have been free-decorated with leaves placed on two handles rising from one point, hatayi motives and cloud. (Özkeçeci, 2007: 58) However, saz yolu method of motives used for the rosette has been replaced by classical method in braces. The cover sides have been girthed with zencerek and gold rulers. (Picture 10)

The album is made up of the sample writings of naskh in calligraphy art. The album contains six calligraphic panels, and each panel has 3 lines. These lines are separated from each other by golden rulers. In the first line of the 'a' side of the album is naskh calligraphy and single letter writing. It is called "müfredat" writing. In the second line "be"s combinations with other letters until "ye", in the third line "cim"s combinations with other letters until "kef". The next step is the "b" side of the album. Here we can see the "cim"s combinations until "ye". The following is the "sin" letter. It finishes at the end of the second line. In the last line, the letter is "sad". (Picture 11) The 'c' side of the album begins with the combination of "sad" and "mim", and ends with "tı" in the middle. In the second line, "tı" goes on until "ye". The last line begins with the combination of "ayn" with "elif", and it ends in the first

line of the 'd' side of the album. The album finishes with the combination of "fe", "kef", "mim" and "he" with the other letters. (Picture 12) In the last side (f side) of the album, the "ebced" line has started in the middle of the first line. Actually, "Ebced" is a regulation which helps to remember the letters in the alphabet easily and is based on the sequence of similar letters. It has no meaning. The words made up by combination of letters are "ebced", "hevvez", "hutti", "kelemen", "sa'fes", "karaşet", "sehaz" and "dağaz". Because the first of these is "ebced", it is called "ebced" line. (Derman, 1994:68) Here, the 'ebced' line is completed with "fe-tebâreke'llâhü ahšenü'l-hâlikin", which is at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> verse of "Mü'min" verse. Finally, the calligraphic panel finishes with "sübhâneke" pray. (Picture 13)

The murakkaa albums are quite important in Ottoman Calligraphy Art as in the mesk murakkaa albums belonging to Topkapı Palace Museum. The albums in which the calligraphy is composed especially together with thuluth-naskh styles are rich art Works done finely. In domestic and foreign libraries, museums and collections, there are very precious albums in terms of calligraphy.



Picture 1: Qur'an "Tumar", measure:575x12,5

(Ağa Han Museum Treasures, Book Art and Calligraphy p.46)



Picture 2 : Körüklü Murakkaa Album "Şikeste" Calligraphy Album (The first half of 19.century, İnan, The period of Kaçar )

(Ağa Han Museum Treasures, Book Art and Calligraphy p.45)





Picture3: Şah Mahmūd Nişabūri Nasta'lik Caligraphy, İstanbul University, inventory number 1426, "murakkaa" Album(Muhiddin Serin: Hat Sanatı ve Meşhur Hat-tatlar, p.273)



Picture5: İnan, end of 18.century,twelve İnan prince potraits (Ağa Han Museum Treasures,Book Art and Calligraphy p.143)



Picture 6:"Murakkaa"Album Cover with Inventory Number 2109



Picture 4: İnan, Safevi "Murakkaa" Album (Ağa Han Museum Treasures,Book Art and Calligraphy p.146)



Picture 7: Murakkaa"Album with Inventory Number 2109, "a and b faces"



Picture 8: Murakkaa"Album with Inventory Number 2109, "c and d faces"

Picture 10:"Murakkaa"Album Cover with Inventory Number 2863



Picture 9: Murakkaa"Album with Inventory Number 2109, "e and f faces"

Picture 11: Murakkaa"Album with Inventory Number 2863, "a and b faces"





Picture 12: Murakkaa"Album with Inventory Number 2863, "c and d faces"

**1.Tightening up** : the name given to cardboard that is obtained by sticking the papers, the "su yolu" should be placed reverse to each other, until the required thickness. See: Yazma Kitap Sanatları Sözlüğü, İstanbul 1985, page 49 by Mine Esiner Özen, Türk sanatında Tezhip, İstanbul 2007, page 182 by İlhan Özkeçeci – Şule Bilge Özkeçeci

**2.Shah Mahmud Nişaburi** is a famous calligraphist in Safavid period. He is called Zerrin Kalem. He was born in Nişabur in 1486-87, in Higer calendar in 892. He learned Nesta writing from Abd-i Nişaburi and Ali Meşhedî. He worked in Shah Tahmasp's palace in Tabriz. Afterwards he went to Meşhed and led a very effective artistic life there, and died in 1564-65. He was a successful calligraphist supported, appreciated, beloved by Persian and Anatolian calligraphists. He wrote Nizami's Hamse. See:Hat sanatı ve Meşhur Hattatlar, İstanbul 2008, page 268 by Muhiddin Serin, Habib Efendi, İstanbul, 1305 page 200

3.The mentioned albums have been named by the registered numbers of Topkapı Palace Museum Library because they have not been registered by Manisa Manuscript Library.

**4. Mülevven şemse**: In bookbinding, the şemse and salbek motives are decorated with different colour leather. See: Mine Esiner Özen: Türk Cilt Sanatı, Ankara 1998, page 14-15

**5.Seperated from below şemse ( rosette )**: In bookbinding, the motives which are in şemse motive are decorated in skin colour while the background in gold. See: Mine Esiner Özen: Türk Cilt Sanatı, Ankara 1998, page 14-15

**6. The evaluation of writings in terms of calligraphy** has been done by İsmail Öztürk, who is a lecturer in Calligraphy Department in Fine Arts Department Traditional Turkish Arts in Çankkale 18 Mart University.

**7.Koltuk**: The rectangle space on the right and left side in the single-page calligraphy composition(kıt'a)

**8. Beyn-e sutür**: The decoration which is made between lines with gold and motives. See: Hat ve Tezhip Sanatı Deyimleri ve Terimleri Sözlüğü, Konya 2003, page 18 by Hasan Özönder



Picture 13: Murakkaa"Album with Inventory Number 2863, "e and f faces"

**9. Shredded (Dilme) paper**: A strong and thin sheet of paper is attached to a wooden piece just from its edges with 'murakka germe' method. Then, thin layered papers having matchy colours are cut into strips. Later on, they are pasted finely on the stretched paper with 45 degrees incline. When dried, some strips are cut accurately interior border. Sometimes, these strips are decorated with motives. See: Hat Koleksiyonundan seçmeler, Sakıp Sabancı Müzesi, İstanbul 2002, page 64 by M. Uğur Derman

**10. Yekşah iron**: A pointed devise made of iron. It is generally decorated with leather covers with gold by damasking on background. See: Yazma Kitap Sanatları Sözlüğü, İstanbul 1985, page 22 by Mine Esiner Özen

11.Çift tahrir is an ornament method at the Illumination arts.

**12. Zerafşan**: Leaf gold is turned into powder and mixed with water. Then it is splattered on jelinoid and aherli paper by a brush. Leaf gold which is sieved out and pasted on aherli background is called Kalbur Zerafşan. See: Yazma Kitap Sanatları Sözlüğü, İstanbul 1985, page 79 by Mine Esiner Özen

13.A design used to decorate the borders of an illuminated manuscript it is

14. He was the grandson of Şeyh Hamdullah by Mustafa Dede. He was from İstanbul. He learned Şeyh model from his father and got diploma. So, he became heirer of Nesih and rosette due to being Şeyh's son. He edited the Koran many times. He died in 1592-93. See: Türk Hattatları, İstanbul by Şevket Rado

**15.Mülevven Şemse**: It is the rosette on classical leather covers, and sometimes it is the covering borders in different colours. See: Türk Cilt Sanatı, Ankara, 19988 page 15 by Mine Esiner Özen

## REFERENCE

- ALPASLAN,A.(1999). Osmanlı Hat Sanatı Tarihi, İstanbul Yapı Kredi editions1286 | BİNARK, İ.(1975). Eski Kitapçılık Sanatlarımız, Ankara,Ayıldız press | ÇİĞ, K.(1971). Türk Kitap Kapları, İstanbul,Doğan Kardeş press | DERMAN, U.(2002). Hat Koleksiyonundan Seçmeler, İstanbul,Aksoy press | DERMAN,U.(2006). "Murakkaa" TDV, İslam Ansiklopedisi, volume 31, p.204-205 | DERMAN, U.(2006). "Hattat" TDV,İslam Ansiklopedisi, volume16, p.493-499 | DERMAN, U.(1998). "Altın Harfler", P journal, number 10, 1998 | DEVELLİOĞLU, F.(1978). Osmalica-Türkçe Ansiklopedik Lügat, Ankara | GRAVES, M. and Junod,B.(2010). Sakıp Sabancı Museum, Ağa Han Museum Treasuries, Book Art and Caligraphy, İstanbul | Editör: Çağatay Anadolu | MAHİR, B.(2004) Osmanlı Minyatür Sanatı, Yaylacık press, İstanbul | MAHİR, B.(2005) "Minyatür" İslam Ansiklopedisi, volume 30, p. 118-123 | MAHİR,B.(1986)"Saray Nakkaşhanesi'nin ünlü Ressamları Şah Kulu ve Eserleri" Topkapı Sarayı Museum, Yıllık 1, Yaşar press, İstanbul, p.113-130 | MAHİR, B.(2002) XVI.yüzyıl Osmanlı Nakkaşhanesi'nde Murakka Yapımcılığı, Uluslar arası Sanat Tarihi Sempozyumu, Prof. Gönül Öney'e Aramağan, Ege Üni.Edebiyat Fak. Sanat Tarihi, p.401-417 | ÖZEN,M, E.(1998) Türk Cilt Sanatı, Ankara T.İ Bank.Culturepress | ÖZEN, M, E.(1985) Yazma Kitap Sanatları Sözlüğü,İstanbul 1985, p.79 | ÖZÖNDER, H.(2003) Hat ve Tezhip Sanatı Değimleri ve Sözlüğü, Konya | ÖZKEÇECİ, İ. & Özkeçeci,B,Ş.(2007).Türk Sanatında Tezhip, Seçil Ofset, İstanbul | ÖZSAYINER, Z.C.(1986) "Hat Sanatında Murakkaa'lar" Antika journal,number 14, p.16-19 | RADO Ş. Türk Hattatları,Tifdruk press , İstanbul | SERİN, M.(1992)Hattat Şeyh Hamdullah, Hayatı, Talebeleri, Eserleri, Kubbe Altı Press, No:29, İstanbul | SERİN, M.(1999) Hat Sanatı ve Meşhur Hattatlar, Mas Matbaacılık, İstanbul | UZUN, M.(1994) "Ebced"İslam Ansiklopedisi, İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi, volume10, p.68-70 | ÜNVER, A.S.(2007) Türk Süsleme Sanatçıları Müzehhpler 1, Bayrak press, İstanbul Edition :Gülbün Mesera, Prof.Dr.Aykut Kazancıgil | YAZIR, M. B.(1981) (Edition: M.Uğur Derman)Kalem Güzeli, Ayıldız press, Ankara, |