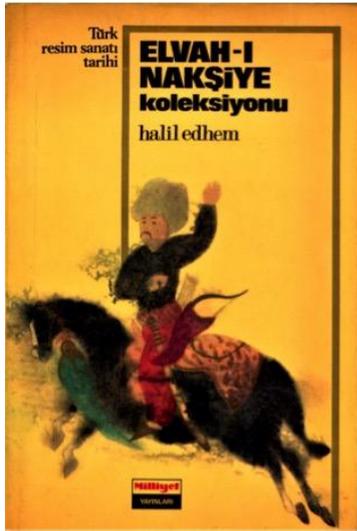


Why Is the Miniature Painting Not History?¹

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Writing in 1924 the museologist and historian Halil Edhem (1861–1938) was introducing the painting collection that he had gathered for the fine arts museum, which was established in Istanbul in 1869, and constructing a historical narrative for Turkish art. Looking for the origins of the arts of the Turks, Edhem was looking back at the artistic practices of the first Islamic societies and linking them with Ottoman miniature painting. Miniature painting had been one of the predominant artistic practices of the Ottomans along with calligraphy. By linking the miniature painting with the art of the Turks in his narrative, Edhem was creating an uninterrupted cultural link between the Ottomans and the Turkish, and suggesting that the Turks have carried on this heritage in the cultural life of Turkey (Fig. 1).²



1 Edhem Eldem, *Elvah-i Nakşiye Koleksiyonu* [History of Turkish Painting, The Elvah-i Nakşiye Collection], cover, 1924 (reprinted 1970)

However, just one year before the publication of Edhem's book in 1923, the newly founded Republic of Turkey had initiated a social, cultural, and political break with the Ottoman Empire. The ideals of the new nation-state provided a new Turkish identity, assigning historians the task of writing new narratives for the history of the Turks. Art histories were also reshaped in this period, suggesting that the cultural origins of the Turks were indeed to be found in the arts of Turkic societies of Central Asia, not in the Ottoman. The fact that, in addition to building his origin story upon the Ottoman heritage, Edhem also discussed the Asian influence in his book, reveals the liminal nature of writing history in Turkey in those days while foregrounding two prominent narrative approaches. While the one establishes a

linear progressive history that links Ottoman art with that of Turkey, the other stretches back to pre-Islamic societies of Central Asia so as to compose a secular art historical narrative.³ Both approaches show the implications of the ways in which Turks have imagined their own identity as against that of Europeans⁴—as well as offering an understanding of how the European art history model has influenced Turkish art-history writing. This model has provided narratives with a new definition of art, which is what Carolyn Dean describes as the “Western idea of art,” and has been one of the prominent tools for restructuring history and recategorizing art (Fig. 2).



Hoca Ali Rıza - Çukürçe'de bir sokak

1914: Sanatımızda yeni bir dönem

Bin dokuzyüz yıllarında, Gôhane parkı içinde, Çinli Köşk yanında Osman Hamdi'nin kurduğu Sanayi-Nefise mektebi, çağdaş Türk resminde rolüleri önemli olacak gençlerin çalışmaları alanı olmuştur. Bu gençler başta ilk gâlib diploma-larını aldıktan sonra, 1910'da açılan Avrupa yarışmasına girdiler, bu yarışmayı kazanarak Paris'e yollandılar. Türkiye devletinin okulun-dan çıkıp Fransız devletinin okuluna girdiler. Kimileri aynı yıllarda İtalya'ya, Almanya'ya git-ti. Ve 1914'de birinci dünya savaşı patlayınca yurda dönmüş olurlar. Türk ressamliğine dönüş çizgisini de bu 1914 yılına uygundur. Bu dönümü kısaca inceleye-lim.

Ahmet Ali paşanın, Osman Hamdi beyin Pa-ris'de resim çalışmaları ile bir Çalı Bektaş'ın, bir Hikmet Onat ya da bir Nazım Ziya'nın çalı-şmaları arasında büyük farklar olacaktır. Önceki-lerle yeni yâdîmler Türk yılı için bir zaman par-çayla ayrılmış Paris'te havasında ve sanat ha-yatında da önemli değişiklikler olmuştur. Genç Paris «Ecole des Beaux-Arts»'nda sanat öp-erimini bakımından büyük bir fark yoktu ama Fransızlar «yaygın» sanata diye adlandırdık-ları egemen eğilimler iyiden iyiyeye yayılmaya başlamıştı. Toulouse Lautrec, Degas, Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh elgün eserlerini çıkaran var-mıştı. İmpresyonizm -ki 1870'lerde doğ-muştu - parlak devresini çoktan kapatmış, yay-gın bir teknik, bir resim yapma formülü olarak

2 Nurullah Berk, *Istanbul Resim ve Heykel*

Muzesi [Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum], 1972

Over the years, in line with the “Western idea of art,” miniature painting has disappeared from the narratives of “Turkish art history,” which came to be associated exclusively with Western art. Instead, landscape murals in palaces and wealthy houses became the starting point of these narratives,⁵ even though they were produced in the Ottoman period. More importantly, miniature painting has been excluded, as it has increasingly been identified with the Ottomans and crafts. The size and function of miniatures, as well as their different understanding of perspective, have been the reasons for leading art histories of “Turkish” art to categorize them according to Western art historical standards and play them down. This adaptation strategy is also very much comparable to recent trends in the field of history, which, as the historian Edhem Eldem argues, appropriate the Ottoman cultural heritage for Turkish historical narratives. Silencing undesirable pasts, identities, and stories, these trends foreground the Turkification of Ottoman history.⁶ Favoring the Western-style Ottoman

painting over miniatures in “Turkish art histories” leads narratives to selectively Turkify the Ottoman cultural past (Fig. 3). Although a few art histories in the second half of the twentieth century put the emphasis on Ottoman miniatures as the source of Turkish painting and move away from the Central Asian origin story, many of the narratives mark the Western-style oil paintings as milestones of Turkish art.⁷



3 Kiymet Giray, *Türk Resim Sanatının*

Bir Asırlık Öyküsü: The Centennial Tale of Turkish Painting II (Istanbul: Rezan Has Museum, 2009), cover

With the transformation of the “idea of art” eventually came the alteration of terminology. Although in 1928 the Arabic script and Ottoman alphabet were officially rejected and the new Turkish alphabet in Latin script was introduced, many terms associated with the arts have been preserved and adapted to the new language. The word *nakış*,⁸ which was extensively used by Edhem in his book and used to refer to miniatures and calligraphic work, has had its meaning extended to include Western-style painting.⁹ Although the official process of purifying Turkish from the influence of languages such as Arabic or Iranian was still in progress in the 1930s, the word *resim*,¹⁰ replaced *nakış* in art historical terminology, and has since been associated with Western-style painting. On the other hand, the influence of French on terminology became prominent in the pre-World War II period, and of English

from the 1970s onward, resulting in the adaptation of terms such as *peinture* into the vocabulary, and also consolidating the “Western idea of art” in the language.

Notes

¹ This title is influenced by Wen C. Fon’s article, “Why Chinese Painting Is History,” *The Art Bulletin*, 85, no. 2 (2003): 258–80. I would like to thank Professor Frederick Asher for his comments on this paper during the Global Conversations III panel at the College Art Association Conference, 2017.

² H. Edhem, *Elvah-ı Nakşiyeye Koleksiyonu* [The collection of paintings] (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayilan, 1924); C. Özpınar, *Türkiye’de Sanat Tarihi Yazımı* [Art historiography in Turkey] (Istanbul: Tarih Vafki Yurt Publications, 2016).

³ M. Becker, “The Institutionalisation of Art Education and Its Implications for the Conceptualisation of ‘Art’ and the Artistic Profession in the Early Turkish Republic,” *Quaderns de la Mediterrània* 15 (2011): 46–47.

⁴ M. Ahiska, *Occidentalism in Turkey: Questions of Modernity and National Identity in Turkish Radio Broadcasting* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

⁵ For example, G. Renda, *Batılılaşma Donemi Türk Resim Sanatı* [Turkish art of painting during Westernization 1700–1850] (Ankara: Hacettepe University Press, 1977).

⁶ E. Eldem, “Osmanlı Tarihini Türklerden Kurtarmak” [Rescuing Ottoman history from the Turks], *Cogito* 73 (2013): 13. Although I must add, apart from the cutting-edge scholarship on Ottoman artistic practices, recent scholarly work such as Begum O. Firat’s *Encounters with the Ottoman Miniature: Contemporary Readings of an Imperial Art* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016) offers a refreshing reading of the Ottoman miniatures.

⁷ Narratives of N. Berk in *The Collection of the Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum* (Istanbul: Akbank, 1972), Kaya Ozsezgin in *The Collection of the Istanbul Painting and Sculpture Museum* (Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Publications, 1996), as well as Kıymet Giray in *The Sabancı Collection* (Istanbul: Akbank, 1995) and in *The Collection of Turkish Is Bank* (Istanbul: Turkish Is Bank Press, 2000) are examples of this approach.

⁸ The word comes from the Arabic root نَقَشَ (nqş), which means “(to) paint.”

⁹ W. M. K. Shaw, *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011): 30–31.

¹⁰ The word comes from the Arabic root رَسَمَ (rsm), which means “(to) paint, draw, painting, drawing, image.”