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The Arts of the Mamluks in Egypt and Syria – Evolution and Impact

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Cover image: Detail of a painted wooden door at the mausoleum of Sultan al-Ghawri in Cairo.

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Two Bibliophile Mamluk Emirs: Qansuh the Master of the Stables and Yashbak the Secretary

Among the fascinating collections of Islamic manuscripts from the Islamic world held in the libraries of Istanbul, the Süleymaniye Library houses a *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha written in Turkish and two illuminated copies of it prepared for Mamluk emirs, namely Yashbak and Qansuh. At the same time Aşık Pasha's *Diwan* was copied and illuminated in the same style at the Ottoman court for an unknown patron. This article demonstrates how the elites in two different parts of the Islamic world shared the same literary taste and interests.

The artistic interaction between the Anatolian Emirates, Ottomans, and Mamluks has been briefly discussed by Julian Raby and myself in an earlier publication that focused on the ways in which this interaction influenced the formation of the Ottoman Court style of bookbinding.¹ In this article, I shall introduce the results of my latest research on Ottoman and Mamluk relations in the fifteenth century, focusing on the binders, the illuminators, the scribes, and Turkish literature in the Mamluk courts.

In the fourteenth century, the cities of Damascus, Alexandria, and Cairo were major centres of Mamluk scholarship. During this period, some Anatolian poets and scholars such as Mustafa Darir (d. after 1400) from Erzurum, visited these Mamluk cities. Mustafa Darir first moved from Erzurum to Karaman, from where he travelled to Cairo, and upon the request of Sultan al-Mansur 'Ala' al-Din 'Ali (r. 1377–1381), he wrote the *Siyer-i Nebi*, a life of Muhammad, in Turkish.² By 1388, when Darir completed his work, Sultan al-Mansur 'Ala' al-Din 'Ali had been succeeded by Barquq (r. 1382–99), to whom the book was eventually presented.³ We know that copies of *Siyer-i Nebi* soon spread to Anatolia and to Bursa; one of this copies consisting of six volumes, was owned by Umur Bey (d. 1461), an early fifteenth-century bureaucrat and bibliophile.⁴ It is also well known that copies of *Siyer-i Nebi* reached the Ottoman Palace and that in 1595, more than two hundred years after its completion, a celebrated illustrated copy was prepared at the Ottoman court and presented to Sultan Mehmed III (r. 1595–1603).⁵

Another Mamluk scholar with Ottoman connections was Ibn al-Jazari of Damascus (d. 1429), who had studied religious sciences in Cairo between 1367 and

1388, before moving in 1395 to Bursa, via Antalya, after a conflict with the Mamluk administration. There, he was warmly welcomed by Sultan Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402), who appointed him as tutor to his children.⁶ At that time the Mamluk aristocracy was also getting interested in the production of illustrated manuscripts with Turkish texts.⁷ The works of Tajaddin Ahmedi (d. 1413), a popular author at the Ottoman court in the fifteenth century, who wrote a Turkish *Iskandarnama*, a history of Alexander, were in vogue among the Mamluk elite, as attested by an illustrated copy of his *Iskandarnama* dedicated to the Mamluk emir Khushqadam ibn ʿAbd Allah in 1467–68. It should also be recalled that the *Shahnama* of Firdawsī was translated into Turkish verse by Sharif between the years 1501 and 1511 for Sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri, who had it illustrated as soon as the translation was completed.⁸

The first Anatolian poet to compose a comprehensive poetical work in Anatolian Turkish was the Sufi Aşık Pasha (d. 1332) of Kirshehir in Central Anatolia.⁹ His grandfather, Baba Ilyas, also a Sufi, had migrated from Khorasan,¹⁰ and his father, Muhlis Pasha, an educated intellectual of the period, had lived in Egypt for five years. After completing his education in Kirshehir, Aşık Pasha travelled to Egypt, and visited Jerusalem on his way. Aşık Pasha, who was buried in Kirshehir, was revered after his death as a saint (*evliya*), and his tomb became the shrine of a major cult that developed around his sanctified memory.¹¹ In 1330, he wrote in Oghuz Turkish the *Garibname* or *Diwan*, which is valued not only for its linguistic quality but also for being the most important *mathnawi*, or Sufi spiritual poem, of the fourteenth century. It is a didactic work on religion and mysticism, which the author himself acknowledged to have compiled with the purpose of educating people. In this work Aşık Pasha defines the main qualities of a ruler such as justice, nobility, bravery, wisdom, and generosity, giving advice to rulers through various stories that provide interesting information about contemporary social and religious life.¹²

The first princely copies of the *Diwan* were produced 130 years after its completion for two Mamluk emirs, Qansuh *amir akhur kabir*, or Master of the Royal Stables, and Yashbak min Mahdi, the *dawadar kabir* or Great Secretary of Sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay (r. 1468–96).¹³ These princely copies are now housed at the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul. Although these works are referred to in the scholarly publications on Turkish literature, they have never been studied in relation to the Islamic art of the book, to their bibliophile Mamluk patrons, or to the Mamluk-Ottoman relationship.

The manuscript copied for Yashbak consists of two volumes (Laleli 1752 M and 1752 M2).¹⁴ They measure 42.5 centimetres by thirty-two centimetres, and the outer covers of the bindings are maroon leather. The centrepiece of the outer cover of the first volume (Laleli 1752 M) is a decorated leather filigree, which is in poor condition. The flap bears a star-shaped medallion, also decorated with filigree



Figure 1: Outer cover. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, dated 1477–78.

leather. This perfectly preserved medallion gives us a hint as to how exquisite the leatherwork of the front and back covers' centrepieces might have been; the doublures' interior of the binding are covered with paper. The second volume's (Laleli 1752 M2) outer cover and flap bear a centrepiece with a pendant, its corner pieces are decorated with arabesque work (fig. 1). The doublures are covered with paper, like those of the first volume. There is evidence that there was a problem with the bindings of the volumes. The filigree of the outer cover must have been exchanged with the doublure of the second volume, or vice versa. If this idea is correct, then one of the volume's original bindings is missing.

Both volumes open with illuminated panels, which state in Arabic that the manuscript was prepared for the library of the emir: *bi-rasm khizanat...Yashbak min Mahdi amir dawadar kabir*. The border of the medallion is inscribed with the



Figure 2: Illuminated frontispiece, dedicated to the emir Yashbak min Mahdi. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria?, dated 1477–78.

Throne verse from the *Sura* of the Cow (Koran: 2/255). Both inscriptions are written in calligraphic *tawki* script (fig. 2). The text was copied in rather large *naskhi* script in 1477–78 (Laleli 1752 M2, fol.241b) and begins with an illuminated heading. The scribe and provenance are not indicated in the colophon (fig. 3). Yashbak was a cultured man, and an avid collector of valuable books, who also wrote poems in Turkish;¹⁵ he purchased originals and commissioned copies to be made for him. He was killed in 1481 during a campaign against the Aq Qoyunlus at Urfa.¹⁶ The later Sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri, who composed Turkish poems, dedicated an elegy in Turkish on Yashbak's tragic death.¹⁷



Figure 3: Colophon page. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria?, dated 1477–78.

A second copy of Aşık Pasha's *Diwan* is in the Süleymaniye Library. The Library has the first volume of the work (Laleli 1752 M1); the second volume seems to be missing. Because the colophon page seems to have been at the end of the second volume all information on the completion of the manuscript, including the completion date, is unknown. The binding of the first volume is dark brown leather. The centre and corner pieces of the outer cover are filled with arabesque motifs (figs. 4–5), and the same pattern is repeated in the sub-triangle form and corner pieces of the flap. The field between the sub-triangle and corner pieces is filled with a floriated scroll. An inscription on the fore-edge section of the flap gives the title of the book.¹⁸ The doublures are in light brown leather and have a filigree centrepiece set against a gold and blue ground (fig. 6); the one of the flap



Figure 4: Outer cover. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria?, dated 1477–78.

bears a large roundel with filigree decoration (fig. 7). This volume opens with an illuminated panel, at the centre of which is a roundel containing the dedication to *birasm khizanat... Qansuh amir akhur kabir*. The dedication is written in gold *tawqi* script on a blue and red arabesque background (fig. 8). The Throne verse (Koran: 2/255) is inscribed in gold *tawqi* script on a blue background in the border framing the roundel. The large *naskhi* script text begins with an illuminated heading (fig. 9).

More than a dozen emirs named Qansuh are recorded in the second half of the fifteenth century, which makes it difficult to determine who among them commissioned this manuscript around 1477. It would be tempting to attribute the manuscript to Qansuh al-Ghawri, later the sultan (r. 1501–16), who is known for his love of literature and illustrated manuscripts¹⁹ and who also composed a *Diwan* in Turkish.²⁰ However, Qansuh al-Ghawri did not have the status of emir before 1482 when he was appointed as provincial governor in Upper Egypt, a minor posi-



Figure 5: Fore-edge and outer cover of the flap. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria?, dated 1477–78.

tion in the court hierarchy,²¹ neither is ever mentioned as *amir akhur kabir* or Master of the Royal Stables. Rather the patron of this manuscript is most likely the emir Qansuh Khamsumi'a min Tarabay, who became *amir akhur kabir* in 1481 and held this position until 1496, when he was appointed as *atabak* or Commander of the Army. He began his career in a secretarial role at the court of Sultan Khushqadam (r. 1461–67) before he was recruited by Qaytbay, who appointed him Second Secretary, then Master of the Royal Stables. In the course of a rebellion against Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad (r. 1496–98), the son of Qaytbay, in February 1496, Qansuh was invested sultan with the title al-Ashraf. However, his rule lasted only three days.²² He was killed in March of the same year. Although so far no information is available about his literary interests, his patronage of books or his interest in the Turkish language, his occupation in secretarial functions, notably as the second *dawadar* of Sultan Qaytbay under the authority of the Great Secretary Yashbak, would have meant that he was associated with cultural activities. Moreover, Qansuh was the brother-in-law of Yashbak, who had married his sister; the two emirs thus shared the same cultural environment and intellectual interests as well as an admiration for Aşık Pasha's work. The fact that Qansuh was *amir akhur kabir* between 1481 and 1496 suggests that the manuscript must have been commissioned during this period



Figure 6: Doubleure of the cover. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria?, dated 1477–78.

The decoration of the bindings, the large *naskhi* script of the text, and the style and design of the illuminations of these three volumes suggest that they were the product of the same artists of a Mamluk workshop in 1477–78. The all-over illumination design is executed in a manner known as ‘delicate’ or ‘naive style’, which originated during the mid-fourteenth century in Tabriz and Shiraz during the Muzaffarid, Jalayirid, and Timurid periods. This distinctive style of illumination reached from Shiraz to Samarkand, Herat and Mamluk lands, and then to Bursa, Edirne and Istanbul in the fifteenth century. The reverberations and influence of this specific style are seen in the manuscripts made in Istanbul in the sixteenth century.²³ Due to the migration of the artists, there are striking similarities between the illumination patterns executed for Mamluk, Jalayirid, Turkmen, Timurid and Ottoman patrons in the fifteenth century.²⁴ The styles were carried from one place to another as a result of a dialogue between Muslim cultures. The

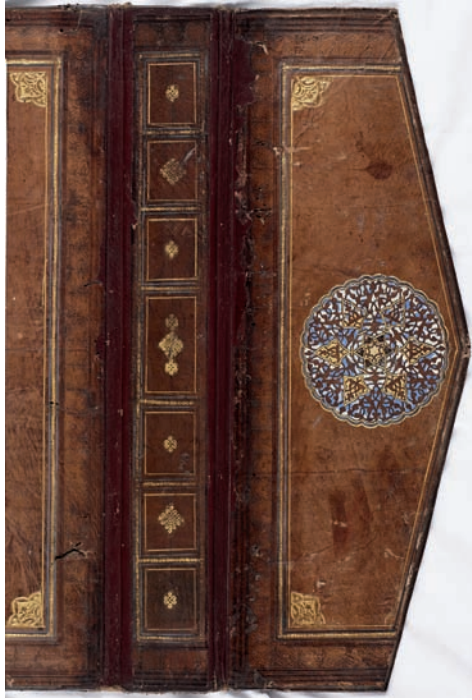


Figure 7: Doublure of the flap. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria? dated 1477–78.

fifteenth-century illuminated frontispieces draw our attention to how the design patterns travelled from one place to another.²⁵

In the last part of this paper, I shall examine some manuscripts and try to explain their relationship to the manuscripts of the two Mamluk patrons, the Great Secretary Yashbak and the Master of the Royal Stables Qansuh. The first manuscript is a *Majmua* in the Süleymaniye Library (Hamidiye 550), which has been studied by literary historians in relation to the texts it includes but has not been examined in terms of its artistic significance.²⁶ It contains the Turkish works of fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Anatolian poets. It measures 35.7 centimetres by twenty-seven centimetres, its text is written in small *naskhi* script and its binding is not original. Each section of the anthology starts with an illuminated heading, every one designed in a different pattern but in naive style. The final pages of each section, except the last, are also illuminated. This illuminated manuscript, containing the works of the most important poets of early Turkish literature, would normally have included a dedicatory inscription. This omission and the fact that the binding is not contemporary with the manuscript suggest that the front pages are missing. One of the sections of the *Majmua* is the *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha written in small



Figure 8: Illuminated frontispiece, dedicated to *amir akhur* Qansuh. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria? dated 1477–78.

naskhi script in four columns (Hamidiye 550, fols. 41b–114a). It starts with an illuminated heading and ends with a splendid illuminated panel. The basic pattern of the illumination is an oval medallion in the centre, accompanied by four-pointed star rosettes. The main field contains a combination of golden floral branches that are symmetrical on the horizontal axis and set against a white background.²⁷ The illumination style of the *Majmua*, which I define as naive, has similarities with the illumination of the Mamluk emirs' copies of Aşık Pasha's *Diwan* discussed earlier. The name of the scribe of the *Majmua* is given at the end of the "Khosraw and Shirin" section (Hamidiye 550, fol. 183b–226b). He signed his name in *tawqi*^c script as Shihab al-Din al-Qudsi without giving a date, and wrote in *muhaqqaq* script in the square area, "the book has been completed by the grace of God the grantor," (fig. 10).²⁸



Figure 9: Illuminated heading. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria? dated 1477–78.

Shihab al-Din al-Qudsi copied two medical manuscripts, both of which are in the Süleymaniye Library. One of them is dated 4th Jumada II 862/April 19th 1458 (Fatih 3645. 31.7 × 21.6 centimetres).²⁹ In the colophon, he states that he was not only the calligrapher, but also the binder and illuminator of the manuscript. The text is written in large *naskhi* script. The leather binding is dark brown and has a very simple, decorated centrepiece. Shihab al-Din al-Qudsi's illumination style is quite plain, and the golden *rumi*s and branches are the dominant decorations.

The second book that Shihab al-Din copied in *naskhi* script in Shawwal 976/March 1472 (Ayasofya 3626. 20.5 × 14 centimetres), was prepared for the treasury of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1444–46; 1451–1481).³⁰ However, in this book he does not introduce himself as the binder and illuminator. In fact, the illuminations and the bindings are much richer than those of the manuscript that he created fourteen years earlier. It is evident from his calligraphy that he was



Figure 10: Colophon page of Khosraw and Shirin, *Majmua*. Ottoman Istanbul, 1460–72.

good at writing in *naskhi*, *tawqif*, *thuluth*, and *muhaqqaq* scripts. Although it is not known for whom it was initially prepared, the *Majmua* copied by Shihab al-Din al-Qudsi can be dated to between 1460 and 1472, when he was actively working for the Ottoman patrons. As we have seen, the calligraphy and the illuminations of the *Majmua* and the medical books copied by Shihab al-Qudsi have similarities with the manuscripts of the emirs Yashbak and Qansuh.

We may then conclude that at some time between 1458 and 1472, the scribe, illuminator, and bookbinder Shihab al-Din al-Qudsi was working in the Ottoman court workshop in 1472 on the *Anthology*, including Aşık Pasha's *Diwan*, and that he copied other manuscripts. A few years later, in 1477–78, two bibliophile Mamluk elites commissioned copies of Aşık Pasha's *Diwan* to be produced with ex-

pertly executed bindings, splendid illuminations and written in fine *naskhi* script. Was this common literary taste a coincidence, or can the impact of the wandering artists be discerned in the development of such common tastes? Is it possible that the scribe Shihab al-Din of Jerusalem, who was skilled in copying Aşık Pasha's *Diwan* in *naskhi* script, was based in Mamluk lands at the end of the 1470s where he penned it for those two emirs? Unfortunately we do not have enough historical data to provide convincing answers to these questions. However, it is worth emphasising that within the same time period, members of the elite in two different parts of the Islamic world shared the same literary taste and an interest in the patronage of the arts of the book.

Illustrations (with image credit)

Figure 1: Outer cover. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, dated 1477–78. (Süleymaniye Library, Laleli 1752 M2, photographer Hadiye Cangökçe)

Figure 2: Illuminated frontispiece, dedicated to the emir Yashbak min Mahdi. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria?, dated 1477–78. (Süleymaniye Library, Laleli 1752 M2, fol. 1a, photographer Hadiye Cangökçe)

Figure 3: Colophon page. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria?, dated 1477–78. (Süleymaniye Library, Laleli 1752 M2, fol. 241b, photographer Hadiye Cangökçe).

Figure 4: Outer cover. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria?, dated 1477–78. (Süleymaniye Library, Laleli 1752 M 1, photographer Hadiye Cangökçe)

Figure 5: Fore-edge and outer cover of the flap. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria?, dated 1477–78. (Süleymaniye Library, Laleli 1752 M 1, photographer Hadiye Cangökçe)

Figure 6: Doublure of the cover. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria?, dated 1477–78. (Süleymaniye Library, Laleli 1752 M 1, photographer Hadiye Cangökçe)

Figure 7: Doublure of the flap. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria? dated 1477–78. (Süleymaniye Library, Laleli 1752 M 1, photographer Hadiye Cangökçe)

Figure 8: Illuminated frontispiece, dedicated to *amir akhur* Qansuh. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria? dated 1477–78. (Süleymaniye Library, Laleli 1752 M1, fol. 3a, photographer Hadiye Cangökçe)

Figure 9: Illuminated heading. *Diwan* of Aşık Pasha, Mamluk Syria? dated 1477–78. (Süleymaniye Library, Laleli 1752 M1, fol. 3b, photographer Hadiye Cangökçe)

Figure 10: Colophon page of Khosraw and Shirin, *Majmua*. Ottoman Istanbul, 1460–72. (Süleymaniye Library, Hamidiye 550, fol. 226b, photographer Hadiye Cangökçe)

Notes

- 1 Julian Raby and Zeren Tanındı, in *Turkish Bookbinding in the 15th Century. The Foundation of an Ottoman Court Style*, (London, 1993), 7–11. Alison Ohta recently published an article on this subject: “The Relationship Between Mamluk, Ottoman and Renaissance Bookbinding,” in eds. G. David and I. Gerelyes *The Thirteenth International Congress of Turkish Art*, (Budapest, 2009), 491–504.
- 2 Zeren Tanındı, *Siyer-i Nebi. An Illustrated Cycle of the Life of Muhammed and its Place in Islamic Art*, (Istanbul, 1984), 10–12.
- 3 Şehabeddin Tekindag, *Berkuk Devrinde Memlûk Sultanlığı*, (Istanbul, 1961).
- 4 Tim Stanley, “The Books of Umur Bey,” in eds. D. Behrens-Abouseif and A. Contadini, *Essays in Honor of J.M. Rogers, Muqarnas* 21 (2004), 323–31.
- 5 Tanındı, *Siyer-i Nebi*, 16–34.
- 6 Idem, “An Illuminated Manuscript of the Wandering Scholar Ibn al-Jazari and the Wandering Illuminators Between Tabriz, Shiraz, Herat, Bursa, Edirne, Istanbul in the 15th Century,” *Turkish Art. 10th International Congress of Turkish Art*, (Geneva, 1999), 647–48.
- 7 For the illustrated Turkish text in the Mamluk court, see: Esin Atıl, “Mamluk Painting in the Late Fifteenth Century,” *Muqarnas* 2 (1984), 160–70.
- 8 Barbara Flemming, “Şerif, Sultan Gavri und die ‘Perser,’” *Der Islam*, 45/1–2 (1969), 81–93. For the literary activities of the Mamluk elite, see: Barbara Flemming, “Literary Activities in Mamluk Halls and Barracks,” in ed. M.R. Ayalon, *Studies in Memories of Gaston Wiet*, (Jerusalem, 1977), 249–60.
- 9 Günay Kut, “Âşhık Pasha,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 4 (1991), 1–3; Âşhık Pasha, *Garib-nâme (tıpkıbasım, karşılaştırmalı metin ve aktarma)*, ed. K. Yavuz, 1–3 (Istanbul, 2000).
- 10 Elvan Çelebi, *Manâkıbu'l-Kudsiyye Fi Menâsibi'l-Ünsiyye. Baba İlyas-ı Horasânî ve Sülâlesinin Menkabevi Tarihi*, eds. E. Erünsal and A. Y. Ocak (Ankara, 1995).
- 11 Semavi Eyice, “Türbesi,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Ansiklopedisi* 4 (1991), 5.
- 12 Âşhık, *Garib-nâme*, 35–52.
- 13 Flemming, “Sultan Gavri,” 88–89; idem, “Literary Activities,” 252; Carl F. Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamluk Sultans and Egypt's Waning as a Great Power*, (New York, 1994), 17, 47–48; Robert Irwin, “Gunpowder and Firearms in the Mamluk Sultanate Reconsidered,” in eds. M. Winter and A. Levanoni, *Mamluks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, (Leiden/Boston, 2004), 129–30.
- 14 Yashbak's volumes were published as facsimiles. See footnote no. 9.
- 15 Flemming, “Sultan Gavri,” 89.
- 16 al-Sakhâwî, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmân, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lâmi’ li ahl al-qarn al-tâsi’*, 12 vols., (Cairo, 1896), 10: 272–74; Ibn Iyâs, *Badâ’i’ al-zuhûr fî waqâ’i’ al-duhûr*, ed. M. Muṣṭafâ (Wiesbaden/Cairo, 1961–75), 3: 177.
- 17 Flemming, “Sultan Gavri,” 88.
- 18 The flap design is similar to the binding of a manuscript copied for Qaytbay and dated 1473, showing that it was executed by the same binder (Topkapı Saray Library, A.649/1). Alison Ohta, “Filigree Bindings of the Mamluk Period,” *Muqarnas* 21 (2004), 271–73.
- 19 Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians?*, 20–26.
- 20 Mehmet Yelsin, *Diwan-i Qansawh al-Ghawri: A Critical Edition of an Anthology of Turkish Poetry Commissioned by Sultan Qansawh al-Ghawri (1501–1516)*, Ph.D. diss. Inner Asian and Altaic Studies, Harvard University, 1993.
- 21 Ibn Iyas, *Badâ’i’* 3: 191.
- 22 Qansuh the *amir akhur* is frequently mentioned throughout volume 3 of Ibn Iyas, *Badâ’i’*, esp. 91, 93, 176, 177, 333, 342ff., 354.
- 23 Tanındı, “An Illuminated Manuscript,” 647–55; idem., “Başlangıcından Osmanlıya Tezhip Sanatı,” in ed. Ali Rıza Özcan, *Hat ve Tezhip Sanatı*, (Ankara, 2009), 253–56.

- 24 Idem, "The Art of the Book. Patrons and Interactions in Erzincan (1365–1410)," *At the Crossroads of Empires: 14th –15th Century Eastern Anatolia. International Conference, Istanbul 4–6 May 2007* (forthcoming).
- 25 Idem, "Başlangıcından Osmanlıya," 261–64.
- 26 Gönül Tekin, "Turkish Literature: Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries," in eds. H. Inalcık and G. Renda, *Ottoman Civilization 2*, (Istanbul, 2003), 507.
- 27 Mine E. Özen, *Türk Tezhip Sanatından Örnekler*, (Istanbul, 2007), 117.
- 28 For the scribe, see Raby and Tanındı, *Turkish Bookbinding*, 61–62, 71.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 61, 66.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 62.