

"Floral Ornaments on the Entrances of Ottoman Buildings"

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Abstract

Islamic art was characterized by several features, such as the artists' aspire to embellish their structures and practical master pieces with all decorative types, such as living beings, geometrical, graphical and floral motifs. However, when Islamic religion prohibited the applying of living beings, the geometrical, graphical and floral ornaments became lavishly applied.

Applying such ornaments in architecture; this research is concerned with the floral ornaments that have been found embellishing the entrances' masses of the Ottoman epoch structures in Cairo.

This research is divided into an introduction, three main items, followed by a conclusion, beside some figures.

- The introduction: encloses an outline of floral motifs and their different shapes that were applied on entrances of the Ottoman epoch structures;
- Item I: encloses the actual style of the applied floral ornaments ;
- Item II: encloses the modified style of the applied floral ornaments ;
- Item III: encloses a brief description of the places where floral motifs were applied to Ottoman structures

Introduction

The floral motifs appeared in various forms in the Ottoman structures in Cairo. These motifs were natural or modified from their original forms. Several floral leaves are applied such as the notched leaves, the spear-shaped leaves, the palmettos and their halves, the *trefoil* and the *quintifoil* leaves, in addition to floral branches, such as the waved, interlaced, intertwined, and the Ottoman foliation or arabesque. Other forms of stems holding the branches, leaves, variously shaped flowers, and trees such as palm trees and fruits.¹

The Turkish Ottomans had perfected the applying of floral drawings. They found their local plants a rich source for their decorative style. They used the floral motifs widely on ceramic tiles. The motifs that appeared were even related to planting flowers and flowers in vases.²

The artists in Ottoman Cairo used various flowers, mainly the notched leaf that was mostly applied in the *nafris* of the entrances, in addition to other floral motifs used in the decoration of ceilings and facades. This notched leaf was used even alone or combined with other floral motifs such as purple viper's bugloss. Also the *trefoil* and *quintifoil* floral leaves are employed in decorating the entrances, prayer niches (*mihhrabs*), ceilings, and crenels.³

Item I: The actual style of the applied floral ornaments

This style of drawing flowers and plants is divided into leaves, flowers, fruits, and trees. In some cases the artist used to draw them in a normal shape and color. In other cases, the artist may draw other floral motifs within the leaves then self especially in flowers drawings. This technique is termed to be formulated floral leaves, a technique that has widely spread in Cairo Turkish tiles, for example the ceramic tiles of the mosque of *Aqa Soumquir* (*Ibrahim Agha Mustahfezan*). and his grave dates back to 1062 H / 1651 A.D.

The *quintifoil* grapes leaf that had been used in Islamic decorations since the eve of the Islamic age has Hellenistic origins, as well as some Byzantine influence after the conquest of *al-Qustantiniyya* in 1453 A.D.⁴

The Turks tended to make use of some flowers as floral motifs; these are the carnation, anemone, pomegranate, purple viper's bugloss, cockscomb, gloxinia, etc.

- The main origin of the carnation is not known exactly, but it may be China or Iran. The Turks greatly adored this flower.⁵ This flower was used in decorating the Turkish tiles in Cairo. two techniques; the first technique declares these flowers as coming out from floral branches that naturally appeared drawn in blue or red colors. In the other technique, however, these flowers were applied as coming out from vase shapes as in the ceramic tiles of the mosque of *Ibrahim Agha Mustahfezan* that is dated back to (1061 A.H - 1662 A.H / 1651 – 1652 A.D). These decorative techniques are among the Hellenistic influences transferred to the Islamic art and continued in use through the different ages with few changes that became in harmony with the public taste in each epoch.⁶

This flower was widespread during the Ottoman epoch so was applied in many structures, such as;

The entrance of the *Sabil-Kuttab* of *Ibrahim bey al-Manesterly* no. 508 (1126 H / 1714 A.D) encloses a foundation text framed with floral motifs of tulip and carnation flower this beside the *nafris* which once was coated with ceramic tiles – all now have fallen down except one – with floral motifs of carnation flower in tomato red and light green colors, the two spandrels of the arch that is cresting the entrance of the mosque of *Yusuf Gorbagy al-Hayatem* no. 259 (1177 H / 1763 A.D) these spandrels are adorned with modified carnation flowers, and the *nafris* in the main entrance of the mosque of *Mohamed bey Abou el-Dhahab* no. 98 (1188 H / 1774 A.D) that is coated with ceramic tiles in the form of lobed *gamat* within which are bundles of carnation and tulip flowers.

- The anemone was of a great popularity among the Turks and was known to them as *Lala* (fig.1).⁷ This flower had been used in most of their practical arts of ceramic arts, carpeting and woven works since the end of the 15th century A.D.⁸ To understand the reason for this important status of the flower beside its beautiful appearance, we should say that it is related to a religious belief among the Turks, according to which the flower was so important,

because the letters of the word *lala* in Arabic are the same as those in the glorious term Allah. Moreover, the word *lala* is composed of the same letters as the word *helal* or crescent, which became the main official symbol of the Turk and their different arts.⁹

This flower participated in decorating the ceramic tiles in Cairo Ottoman structures in various shapes and colors. It was applied as coming out from vases with bent floral branches, or penetrating floral bundles that appeared as plants from the ground. These two forms are applied on the ceramic tiles of the mosque of *Aqasounqur (Ibrahim Agha Mustahfezan)* and his grave that are dated back to 1066 A.H / 1655 A.D. The first use was in the ceramic tiles of the entrance of the mosque of *Zul-Faqar bey* no. 415 that is dated back to 1091 A.H / 1680 A.D, and the mosque of *Mustafa Gorbagy Mirza* no. 343 that is dated back to 1110 A.H / 1698 A.D. Both purple viper's bugloss and gloxinia were widely applied.¹⁰

- The lotus flower was also applied in the decoration of the Ottoman structures in Cairo. Two types of this flower are known: the Egyptian lotus and the Chinese lotus. This flower played a great role in ancient Egyptian decoration.¹¹

It lost some of its original appearance and independency because of being connected with the arabesque technique.¹²

- The lily flower is among the floral motifs used in structures' decoration, but it was not widely spread. Some researchers called it a lotus;¹³ others termed it as a lily.¹⁴

- The sunflower is among the floral motifs that participated in decorating Ottoman structures in Cairo. This flower was imported in Cairo during the Ottoman conquest.¹⁵ The Egyptian artists applied this flower but in a modified shape, making it appears different from the natural sunflower.¹⁶

- Among the floral motifs that were applied on structures were fruits. Fruits were drawn alone or combined with others on plates or trees.¹⁷ Among the fruits that the Egyptian artists drew in the Ottoman age were the pear, fig, apple, dates, and pomegranate, all transferred from the *Sasanians* to the Islamic art.¹⁸ Muslim artists viewed both dates and pomegranate as fruits of the paradise.¹⁹

- In addition, there are floral branches such as the waved, interlaced, intertwined, and the Ottoman foliation or arabesque.²⁰ Some interlaced floral branches in the form of arabesque are found on the arch of the entrance opening of the tenement house (*Wakala*) of *Nafissa al-Beyda* no. 395 (1211 H / 1796 A.D), besides a frame of the same ornaments surrounding the whole entrance mass.²¹

- The Ottoman age vases from which flowers come out are applied on various shapes. Some vases take the shape of a pear with arabesque ornaments, others are of semicircular shape, with geometrical decorations of radiating lines or zigzag decorations. Other vases were small in size with a raised base, adorned with floral motifs.²²

This element is applied on both sides of the entry opening lintel of the mosque of *Suliman pasha al-Khadem* no. 142 (935 H / 1528 A.D) where there is a rectangular panel flanked with vase shape from which floral branches with modified floral leaves come out.

- The trees used by the Turk are the cypress (fig. 2) termed in Turkey as *Selvi*, the Roman tree that is termed in

Turkey as *Houmra agagji*, and the palm trees. The cypress tree was widely applied, until it became one of the main features of the Ottoman art, probably for certain reasons. Mostly because of its fine smell, it was planted in the graves' areas. Another reason was that its green color that never changed throughout the year; this was related to the green color that is preferred to the Muslims because the blessed Prophet's family took this color as their sign.²³

This tree was applied on ceramic tiles in Cairo in two ways, the first - in the form of a frame encircling the two sides of a decorative design that is repeated in a group of adjacent green tiles in a horizontal direction. In the second way, the tree formed the main decorative element.²⁴

This element appeared in many Ottoman structures such as on both sides of the window at the center of the entrance of the *Sabil-Kuttab* of *'Abdel Rahman Katkhuda* no. 21 (1157 H / 1744 A.D).

Item II: The modified style of the applied floral ornaments

In this case the artist may not maintain the natural colors or the original size, but he is free in adding other elements to make it as a decorative motif.²⁵ So, in some cases, it is very hard to know them.²⁶ This technique was called the *Romi* style. These ornaments look like floral branches drawn in a special way not following their shape and direction, or like natural plants, so they appear in a special design. Thus, these ornaments may be termed as the Ottoman foliation ornaments or the Ottoman arabesque (figs. 3, 4).²⁷

In this decorative technique, the Muslim artists were free from imitating the nature. All drawings present us with expressive scenes based on the artist's own imagination.²⁸ Such as:

- A decorative element known as Chinese clouds (*Tchi-Tchi*) (fig. 5), was also applied.²⁹ This element looked like a porous or sponge-shaped ornaments. It was probably a symbol of some natural elements like clouds and lightning in the Far East.³⁰ Again this element appeared in Ottoman structures such as the *nafis* of the entrance of the *Sabil-Kuttab* of *as-Set Salha* no. 313 (1154 H / 1741 A.D) that is coated with ceramic slabs adorned with Chinese clouds.

- Floral ornaments mostly look like interlaced floral stems in the form of arabesque. The arabesque consists of floral motifs of twisted or waved branches with floral leaves of a lobe or two, or palmettos with their halves (fig. 6).³¹

The arabesque technique is widely spread in Ottoman structures such as the two spandrels of the northwest entrance's arch of the mosque of *Suliman pasha al-Khadem* no. 142 (935 H / 1528 A.D), the ceramic slabs on both sides of the *mada'ini* arch that is cresting the main entrance of the mosque of *'Uthman Katkhuda (al-Kekhia)* no. 264 (1147 H / 1734 A.D) are decorated with arabesque enclosing the composite flower shape. The two spandrels of the semicircular arch that is cresting the entrance of the *takiyya* of Sultan *Mahmoud* no. 308 (1164 H / 1750 A.D) are decorated with arabesque. This is beside the pillar abacuses that are adorned with floral motifs on a surface of arabesque.

- Among the modified floral motifs that are widely applied on the Ottoman structures in Cairo are the palmettos that appeared in the form of a leaf divided into

two parts joined together with a floral branch. The half palmettos are used as a surface for other ornaments - even geometrical or graphical. A further use of the palmettos and their halves was a part of the Ottoman foliation or arabesque.³² This element appeared in the first entrance of the mosque of *Murad Pasha* no. 181 (986 H / 1578 A.D) between the two side vaults of the *mada'ini* arch that are filled with stalactites and the space between them is filled with floral branches and half palmettos.

Item III: Various places where floral motifs were applied on Ottoman structures' entrances

- The most widely spread employment was in entrances masses of mosques and public fountains (*sabil-s*).
- The *nafis* on tops of portals and windows were adorned with ceramic tiles. These tiles were filled with various floral motifs and arabesque.
- The entrance's arches crested with a *mada'ini* arch are in the form of trefoil-shaped floral leaves.

- The crenels crowning the buildings' facades and entrances masses are in the form of trefoil or quintifoiled floral leaves.

- The vertical niches decorating the building's facades enclosing windows topped with a *nafis* are ornamented with pomegranate, notched leaves, floral branches, anemone, and carnation flowers.

Conclusion

- The previous description may date the first appearance of some new floral motifs that appeared in Cairo during the Ottoman epoch and explain to what extent it was influenced by the Turkish arts.
- This epoch witnessed the development of many ornamental elements ascribed to the *Mamluk* epoch that preceded the Ottoman conquest in Cairo, and the way these elements combined with the Turkish ones rendering them an Egyptian style. Generally, these ornaments reached their peak during the 12th century H / 18th century A.D

المراجع

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الملخص العربي:

تميز الفن الإسلامي بالعديد من الخصائص ، ومنها تطلع الفنان المسلم الى زخرفة عمارته فضلاً عن تحفه التطبيقية بشتى الطرق الزخرفية، و التي منها رسوم الكائنات الحية ، بالإضافة الى الزخارف الهندسية و النباتية و الكتابية. و عندما حرمت العقيدة الإسلامية تمثيل الكائنات الحية لما في ذلك من مضاهاة لخلق الله، نتج عن ذلك ان اخذت الزخارف النباتية و الهندسية و الكتابية تستخدم على نطاق واسع. و نتيجة لتنوع كل نوع من هذه الزخارف و اشكالها، فقد كان التركيز في هذا البحث الموجز على الزخارف النباتية فحسب، و بالأخص تلك المستخدمة على مداخل العمانر العثمانية بالقاهرة في الفترة ما بين (923هـ - 1265هـ / 1517م - 1848م). و قد تم تقسيم هذا البحث الى المقدمة، ثلاثة عناصر رئيسية، يليها الخاتمة، بالإضافة الى بعض الأشكال التوضيحية مرقمة حسب ذكرها في المتن.

- المقدمة: تضم تعريفاً بالزخارف النباتية و اشكالها المختلفة التي وجدت على مختلف مداخل العمانر العثمانية.

- العنصر الأول: يخص بالذكر و الشرح الزخارف النباتية التي مثلت اشكال نباتات واقعية موجودة في الطبيعة.

- العنصر الثاني: يضم هذا العنصر شرح الأشكال غير الواقعية المتعددة التي ظهرت بها الزخارف النباتية، و المقصود بها تلك الزخارف للفروع المتداخلة و المتموجة و التي لا نجدها في الطبيعة.

- العنصر الثالث: ركز هذا العنصر على الأمثلة التي طوعت بها الزخارف النباتية على مداخل العمانر العثمانية.

- الخاتمة: و في الخاتمة تم ذكر نقطتين أساسيتين هما:-

1- الزخارف النباتية التي ظهرت على عمارت القاهرة العثمانية كانت في اغلبها هي نفسها التي تنتمي للطراز المحلى المصرى، فضلاً عن ظهور اشكال جديدة ذات الطابع التركى و منها زهرة اللالا و زخارف الأرابيسك العثمانى.

2- بعض الزخارف النباتية التي تنتمي للعصر المملوكى السابق للفتح العثمانى لمصر قد ظهرت بشكل متطور او مختلف حيث اندمجت مع تلك الزخارف تركية الأصل، فظهر منهما ما سمي بالطراز المصرى.

Figures:

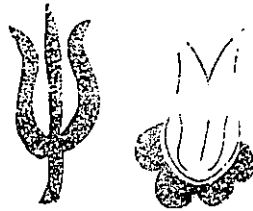


Figure (1)

Several shapes of the tulip flower

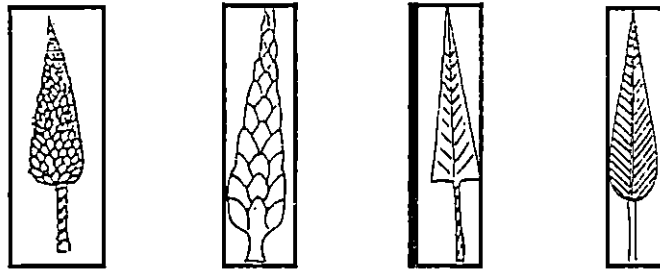


Figure (2)

Several shapes of the cypress tree that is repeatedly applied on the Ottoman epoch



Figure (3)

The detailed *Rumi* decorations (the Ottoman Arabesque)

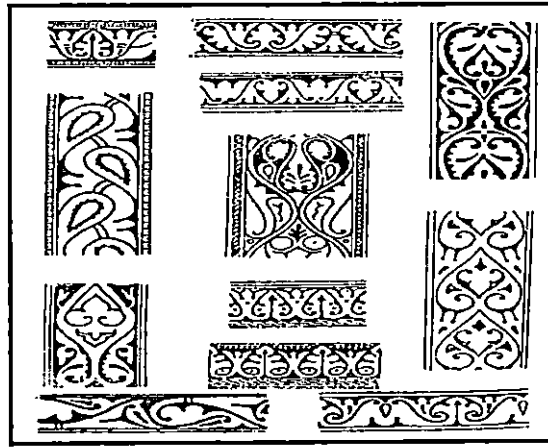


Figure (4)

Several forms of Arabesque ornaments

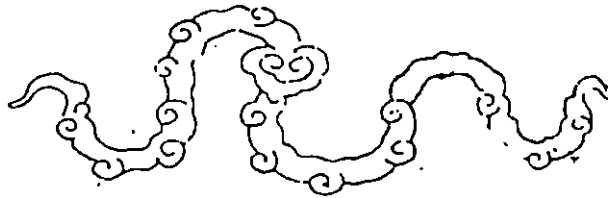


Figure (5)

The Chinese clouds shape



Figure (6)

The palmettos and half palmettos