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Technical and Esthetic Association in Zehra Cobanli's Ceramics

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Abstract: Mankind first shaped the soil according to his needs in the Neolithic Era (6800 BC). In time, to differentiate their works and to add esthetic beauty, potters decorated their forms. First decorations are made through scratching onto the surface of the ceramic. Later colorful soil is used to utilize surface of ceramics. Today this method is called "slip decoration". Slip decoration is the oldest and most widely used docaration method and can be seen everywhere and in every culture in the world. First slip decorated ceramics are found in Anatolia (5000-5500 BC). These residential areas are Hacilar and Catalhoyuk and there is evidence that they are at the epicenter of a greater ceramic industrial area. They pictured ceramic pots with red ochre (Cobanli, 1996, 2). Later slipped ceramics can be seen in a wide area from Anatolia to China. Persian and Egyptian slipped ceramics, Greek and Roman terra sigilata type slips, similar slipped works in Pueblo Mexico, 19th century American slip glazes took place in history. The fundamental and indispensable slip technique can be seen in the works of Zehra Cobanli, who is a contemporary Turkish ceramic artist. Cobanli starts with familiar and traditional pot culture while referring traditional ceramics with modern versions. She uses her specific high temperature slip technique without alienating traditional and with a pictural decoration style. This study shows the diversification of traditional decoration method of slip technique in Zehra Cobanli's works.

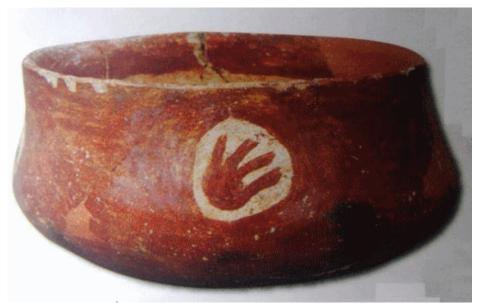
Keywords: Ceramics, Slip Technique

ERAMICS IS AN art form which includes technical and aesthetic elements in it. Due to its functionality, it is the oldest art branch and one of the first creations of humankind. First emerged from the necessity of "pots", this modest art form is now among the contemporary arts and followed an entirely different path from other art branches. By the help of ceramic artists who tried to differentiate their work from others, ceramic forms developed and evolved. First diversifications manifested by the means of shapes and scratching decors, later followed by the "slip decoration" technique.

History of Slip Decoration

Slip decoration is one of the oldest ceramic decoration methods and also the most common. It can be seen in ceramics of different cultures, from Anatolia to China and from Mexico to Africa, all over the world. The first slip painted ceramics can be seen at Anatolian settlements (5000-5500 B.C.). These settlements, which are Hacılar and Çatalhöyük, have strong proofs that they are at the epicenter of an important ceramics industry. Surfaces of pots are especially colored with red ochre paint. (Çobanlı, 1996,2) (Picture 1,2,3).





Picture 1: Turkey, Hacılar MÖ.6500–6000. Astar decorlu kap. (http://kirsehirarkeoloji.blog-spot.com/)



Picture 2. Turkey, Hacılar MÖ.6500–6000. Astar Decorlu Kap (http://kirsehirarkeoloji.blog-spot.com/)



Picture 3: Turkey, Hacılar MÖ.6500–6000. Astar decorlu kap. (http://kirsehirarkeoloji.blog-spot.com/)

In a vast area from Anatolia to China, different slip decorated ceramics can be seen. All these ceramics reflect the characteristics of their region and became unique as regional materials used. For example, Greeks and Romans used the significant terra sigillata type slips to make the ceramics stiff and semi glossy. These slips created a perfectly smoothed surface on Anatolian Hittite pots at 1500 B.C. and are the pioneer of terra sigillata slips. Pots, which are known as red black figured ceramics in Greece are actually blackened terra sigillatas. The best glossiness is achieved at classical era attica pots (Picture 4). Italy's Arezzo region is the first and most important terra sigillata production center (30 B.C.) in Roman Empire. Terra sigilata pots spread to Egypt, England and India from this area (Çizer, 2005, s: 111), (Picture 5).



Picture 4: Greece Atina BC 440-430, Terra Sigilata Kap, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Picture 5: Italy Arezzo BC.25-AD.10. Terra Sigillata Kap (http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/10.210.37)

In the middle ages, slip applications continued to develop at Europe, Anatolia and Mesopotamia. Islamic ceramics are a continuation of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian ceramics tradition. Slip decorated ceramics were made in East Persia, Afghanistan, Semerkant and Nishapur at 9-11th centuries. Generally they are kufic decorated ceramics with black, red and brown colors on white body. (Çobanlı, 1996,9), (Picture 6,7).



Picture 6: Persia, Nişapur, 9–10 yy. Plate with Slip Decoration. (Çobanlı, 1996,11)



Picture 7: Persia, 10–11 yy. Plate with Slip Decoration. (Çobanlı, 1996,15)

In Central America, first ceramics can be seen in 2000 BC and evolved in many forms and styles until the 16th century Spanish invasion. Mayan and Aztec ceramics were slip decorated with natural clay colors throughout history. Although they resemble Egyptian pictures, they contain many different symbols and icons. (Picture 8).



Picture 8: Mexico, Pueblo, 1350–1400 Plate with slip decoration, Brooklyn Museum. http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/15879/Fourmile Polychrome Bowl

As can be seen, one of the oldest decoration techniques in history, slip method is widely used in every part of the world and thus became a part of the artist as a way of expression.

Slip Making

The simplest way of making slip, is to mix water and dry clay body in equal proportions and to granulate. However as the necessities and tastes change, different colors and different methods used both in traditional and artistic applications. Ceramic slips have two different utilizations. First is as an ornament as mentioned before. The other is for functional reasons used especially in Anatolia, Kütahya, to make the body smoother, more uniform and whiter.

Basically, slip compounds must be compatible with ceramic body, have to bind and become one with ceramic body while it shrinks during firing. Whether the body is wet, dry or biscuit fired and firing temperature is decisive in slip structure. Slips can be prepared in accordance with different esthetic characteristics and colored with oxides and ceramic paints. They can be applied by dipping, slip trailers, spraying and with the help of a brush onto the surface of ceramics. These application methods also differ according to the characteristics of the slip to be used and the object which it will be applied. In artistic works, methods like sigrafitto, mishima, paper stencil and wax resist are used alongside with these methods (Çobanlı, 1996, 51).

Since the early days of history, the "slip technique" is an essential and easy to diversify method for ceramic artists. Slip is the best way to capture the pictorial effects on ceramic surfaces. Colors don't blend each with other, as can be seen in some other glazes.

Slip Decoration by Zehra Cobanli

Second generation ceramic artist and ceramic instructor Professor Doctor Zehra Cobanli uses her distinctive slip technique while working with traditional "pot" culture and creating modern versions of traditional ceramics. Cobanli studied the concept and application of high firing ceramic slips at Australian East Sydney Technical College between 1986 and 1989. She made a synthesis of Eastern and Western ceramics and published a book named "Ceramic Slips" in 1996 which became an important reference and handbook for ceramic instructors

Zehra Cobanli used high temperature "zinter" slips on many different forms. She prepares her own slips and applies onto leather hard, and sometimes onto biscuit fired forms using different methods at the same time. Usually she applies air-brush and paper stencil methods together and finishes some details by thin brush. She glazed her multi-textured works with high temperature transparent glazes and sometimes, according to her ceramic themes, emphasized her works with 3rd firing golden gilding.

Earthen Period

During some certain period, the Artist used brownish slips, hence the period is known as "Earthern Period". She acquires earthern colors with the help of iron oxides and colored clays. Her ceramics of this period are usually multi-arrangements which consist of 40 pieces. Thematically they are originated from old Anatolian proverbs and idioms. This way, they differentiate themselves from other works by referring to thousands of years of Anatolian

history. Technically, they are shaped similarly with high temperature molding clay, slipped with zinter and glazed with transparent glaze. When someone looks at these arrangements, at first all the pieces look the same. In fact, every piece has its own language and each one of them is different with its texture, with its lines and with its posture. Apart from her arrangements, giant wall plates, various vases and pots are among her works which are finished with brown slip and various textures.

Blue Period

Ceramics has always been a national art throughout Turkish history. Unique Anatolian materials improved and created unique objects in Seljuk and Ottoman era. Chini art in Anatolia started with Seljuks and improved parallel to architecture. There were very successful specimens in this period. In Ottoman era, especially in 15-16th centuries, blue white ceramics created and decorated with wonderous craftsmanship. They excelled technically, structurally and esthetically, therefore became foremost ceramics in the world. Glossiness and whiteness of the bodies are created by slips in this period.

In time she simplified the color blue, which she also used in her earlier career, and used as absolute blue and its derivatives. This period is known as "Blue Period". She created "Ottoman Tughra" and "The Blue Art" series in this period, which meets traditional with modern again in one object.

So effective in the traditional history, the color of blue finds another life form in Zehra Cobanli's ceramic objects, which are free from over decoration. The important color of traditional ceramics, blue is also the color of freedom, romance and oceans in Cobanli's point of view. When you look at Zehra Cobanli's blue period works, you can see that she regenerated the traditional color of blue and Ottoman Sultans' tughras, "TUGHRAS; unique signatures in the world" as she calls them, with improved designs and refined arrangements. All her blue period works are gathered in her "The Blue Art Zehra Cobanli Ceramics" book.

Even though Ottoman Sultans' tughras, done onto giant plates, are dominant in her blue period, different approaches can be seen which are made by blue slip. These works are generally functional and enriched by precious mines as in Ottoman tradition. Silver is commonly used in these objects. You can see calligraphic impressions on blue ceramic bodies in such works.

Zehra Cobanli continues her ceramic life since 1976, with national and international exhibitions, workshops and other artistic events. Her more than once prized works are in private collections, exhibited in museums and admired in lots of countries like Japan, China, Korea, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand and England. Her specific usage of colors, forms and techniques and her different themed presentations distinguish her one step beyond others.

Conclusion

Ceramics is an important part of human life since first settlements and connected past and future decades long. Ceramics diversified by form and decoration techniques over time. "Slip decors" are one of the first and most important differentiation methods. Slip technique branches out according to firing temperature, body, artistic and industrial utilization. That's where ceramic artist can present his/her diversity from other ceramic artist. Using a technique used throughout history in a unique way and becoming an important link transporting

ceramic art to contemporary dimension is really difficult and requires dedicated study. Zehra Cobanli is a modern Turkish ceramic artist, who relocates historical slip method to modern dimension by detailed experimentation and comprehensive slip research since 1986.

Recipes

Zehra Çobanlı's main Slip Recipe (for 1200°C)

Raw Meterials	Ratio %
Sındırgı China Clay	25
Mihalıççık Clay	5
İnhisar Clay	25
Potassium Feldspar	20
Dolomite	5
Quartz	20

Blue Slip (Added to Main Slip Recipe)

% 5 Cobalt Oxide

% 5 Iron Chromate

% 2 Rutile

Green Slip (Added to Main Slip Recipe)

% 10 Chrome Oxide

% 5 Green Pigment (Ferro 42031)

Brawn Slip (Added to Main Slip Recipe)

% 15 Iron Oxide

% 1 Manganese Oxide

Black Slip (Added to Main Slip Recipe)

% 5 Iron Oxide

% 4 Manganese Oxide

% 2 Black Pigment (Ferro 7201)

% 3 Cobalt Oxide (Cobanli, 1996, 159).

Cobanlı's Art Works with Slip Decorations



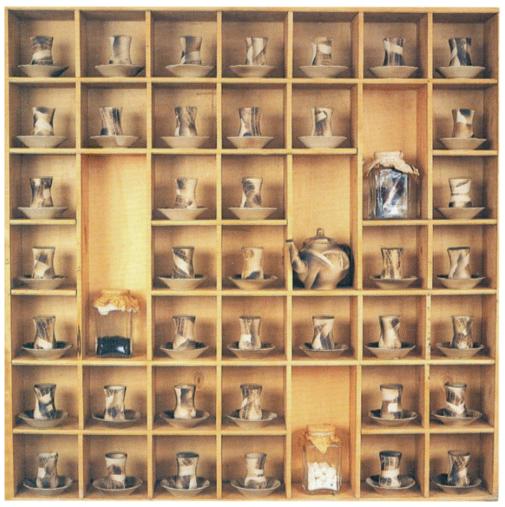
Picture 9: 40 Keys Composition, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 150x110 cm, 1200°C



Picture 10: Power of the Woman, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 135x135cm, 1200°C



Picture 11: Tea Pots, Composition for 40, Colored Undercoating, Stoneware, 130x155cm., $1200^{\circ}\mathrm{C}$



Picture 12: Tea Culture, Composition for 40, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 120x120cm., $1200^{\circ}\mathrm{C}$



Picture 13: Tea Culture, Composition for 40, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 1200°C



Picture 14: Tea Culture, Coloured Undercoating, stoneware, 1200°C



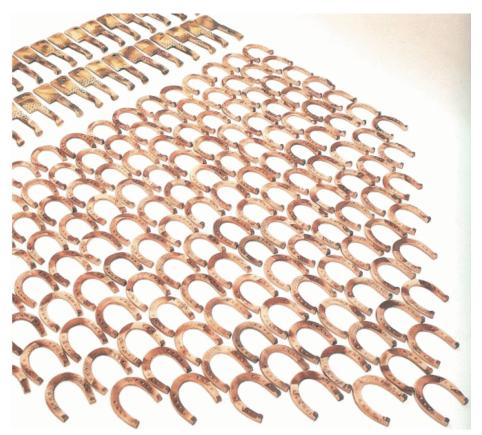
Picture 15: Coffee Culture, Composition for 40, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, Gold and Platinum Coating, 100x60cm., 1200°C



Picture 16: Coffee Culture, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 1200°C



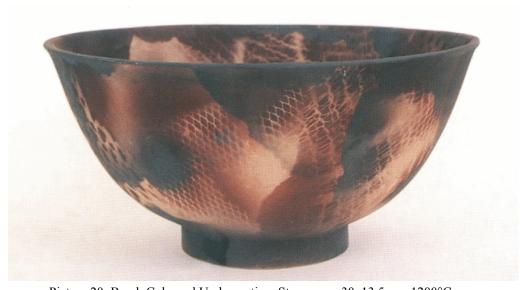
Picture 17: Coffee Culture, Composition for 40, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, Gold and Platinum Coating, 120x120cm., 1200°C



Picture 18: Proverb, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 170x170cm., 1200°C



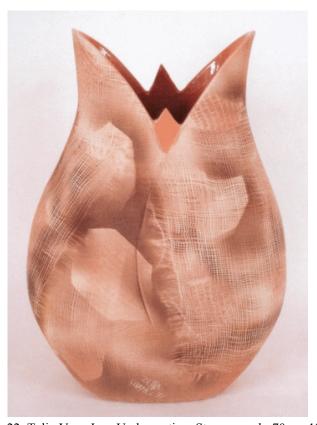
Picture 19: Composition for 40, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 130x120 cm., 1200°C



Picture 20: Bowl, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 30x13.5cm., 1200°C



Picture 21: Turtle box, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 15x3.5cm., 1200°C



Picture 22: Tulip Vase, Iron Undercoating, Stoneware, h: 70cm, 1200°C



Picture 23. Era ages, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 1200°C



Picture 24: Wall Plates, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 180x41cm., 1200°C



Picture 25. Wall Plates, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 185x43 cm., 1200°C



Picture 26: Wall plates, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, 43x43cm., 1200°C



Picture 27: Tulip Vase, Iron Undercoating, Turquoise Glaze, h: 70cm, 1200°C



Picture 28: Signature of "Mehmer II", Undercoating, Stoneware, ø: 41cm, 1200°C., 2003



Picture 29: Signature of "Orhan", Undercoating, Stoneware, ø: 41cm, 1200°C.,2003



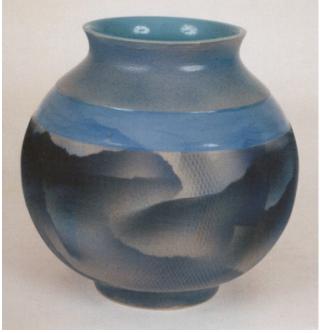
Picture 30: Undercoating, Stoneware, 1200°C



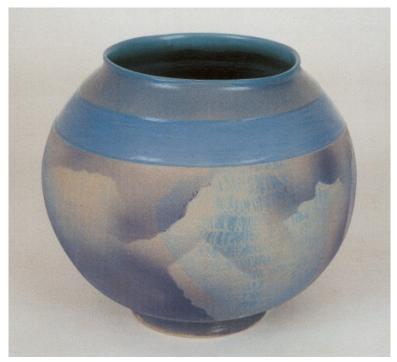
Picture 31: Mystery of Blue, Bowl, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, Blue Glaze, 30x13.5cm 1200°C



Picture 32: Mystery of Blue, Bowl, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, Blue Glaze, $30x13.5cm\ 1200^{\circ}C$



Picture 33:From the Sea to the Sky, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, Turquoise Glaze, h: 23cm., 1200° C



Picture 34: Under the Clouds, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, Blue and Turquoise Glaze, h: 21 cm., 1200°C



Picture 35: Proverb, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, Blue and Turquoise Glaze, 41x82 cm, 1200°C



Picture 36: 40 Doors, 40 Locks, Coloured Undercoating, Stoneware, Blue Glaze, 41x82 cm, $1200^{\circ}\mathrm{C}$



Picture 37: Stoneware, Blue Clay, Blue Slip, Black Glaze, 3,7x43 cm., 1200°C



Picture 38: Plate, Stoneware, Blue Slip, Black Glaze, 1200°C





Picture 39: "Ottoman Signature", Stoneware, Blue Clay, Blue Slip, Black Glaze, 3x36.5x36.5cm., 1200°C



Picture 40: "Rythm of Calligraphy I", Stoneware, Blue Slip, Black Glaze, 4.5x42x42cm., $1200^{\circ}\mathrm{C}$



Picture 41: "Plate I", Stoneware, Brown Slip, Dark Blue Glaze, 40x40x2,8 cm., 1200°C



Picture 42: Plate, Stoneware, Blue Slip, Black Glaze, 25x25 cm., 1200°C



Picture 42: Plate, Stoneware, Blue Slip, Black Glaze, 25x25 cm., 1200°C



Picture 43: Signatures, Undercoating, Stoneware , 1200° C



Picture 44: Stoneware, Blue Clay, Black Glaze, 14x8 cm., 1200°C



Picture 45: "Tulip" Stoneware, Blue Slip, Black Glaze, 14x14,5 cm., 1200°C



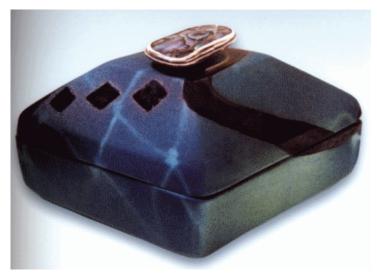
Picture 46: "Antiquity of Water", Stoneware, Blue Clay, Dark Blue Slip, 8x18 cm., 1200°C



Picture 47: "Tulip and Silver Lid" Stoneware, Blue Clay, Blue Slip, 8x18.5 cm., 1200°C



Picture 48: "Çintemani", Stoneware, Blue Clay, Blue Slip, Black Glaze, 17x8 cm., 1200°C



Picture 49: "Box and Silver Lid", Stoneware, Blue Clay, Dark Blue Slip, Black Glaze, 9x9x6.5 cm., 1200°C



Picture 50: "40 Boxes", Stoneware, Blue Slip, 60x6 cm., 1200°C

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