

The Development of Ottoman Ceramics

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Abstract. Many of the world's ceramic objects can trace their aesthetic lineage to one source, Ming Dynasty export porcelain. Turkish or Ottoman ceramics is a tradition that drew inspiration from luxury goods acquired through trade along the Silk Road. Centrally located between Asia and Europe, Istanbul, the former capital of the Ottoman Empire became a trading center for these wares. An entire genre of ceramic work was produced in reference to these vessels. My research shows the influence of Chinese imports as the spring board for the development of Ottoman ceramics, by examining the advances in material experimentation and the interdisciplinary collaboration between artisans and design guilds, that in turn made these Iznik ceramic vessels and tiles so distinguishably Turkish.

1. Introduction

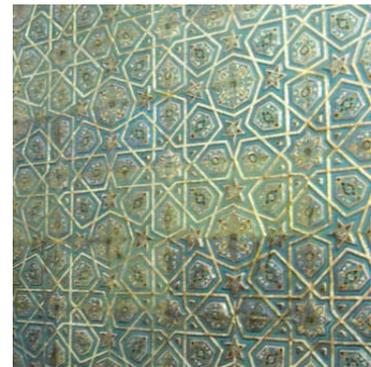
My personal and academic interest in Islamic ceramics developed through looking at different ceramic traditions in search for my own artistic voice and direction. During the summer of 2009 a month long trip to Turkey solidified that interest and admiration. Upon further scholarly investigation, and a return trip to Istanbul this Fall I discovered that I was taught to research and use historical influences in my work, much like the artisans of the Ottoman tradition did. The openness to sharing information between educational and artistic institutions in Ottoman Turkey closely resembles the current attitude in the ceramic community of academia. By examining early Ottoman ceramic wares that are literally replicas of Ming Dynasty porcelain and following the changes over the 15th and 16th century, we see the dramatic advances in new colors, and the complexity of motifs and meanings as the full development of an original Ottoman style

2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance

While traveling in Turkey with students and professors from Western Kentucky University I saw many examples of Ottoman and Islamic ceramic art. Visiting the infamous Topkapi Palace, Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque, to lesser known medieval Ottoman Mosques and the Museum of Islamic Art, I observed and documented much of the historical ceramic art that Istanbul had to offer. Traveling south of Istanbul to Bursa, I observed examples of the beginnings of that ceramic tradition. Safavid style monochrome relief tiles cover the interior walls of the Imperial Mosque of Mehmed 1. In the elevated sultan's prayer quarters the tiles were cut and arranged into complex patterns that represented the eternal and expansive oneness of God. These tiles were turquoise in color with gold inlay; the theological content is a reoccurring theme in nearly all Islamic art. (Figure 1. Below)



After the capture of Constantinople, (Istanbul) in 1521 the bridge between East and West was complete; the Ottoman Empire controlled the center point of the Silk Road. As a result of this strategic economic location, an admiration of Chinese blue and white porcelain. (Figure 2. Left) as a luxury item began to influence the development of an Ottoman Islamic style. Many replicas of these Ming Dynasty wares were being produced by workers in Istanbul to



meet the demand in the Imperial court. Through requests by the Sultan to the Royal Design Workshop, or "Nakkashane", new designs based on Chinese ceramics were drawn by calligraphers to help create revenue from within the Empire. The typical "Hatayi" motifs of Ming Dynasty porcelain were lotus blossoms, palmettes, dragons and flames. These designs were replaced by continuous patterns of local garden vegetation, and plants associated with the Islamic ideology of a heavenly Garden of Paradise. Motifs of this type began to appear on table wares and

wall tiles produced in the established pottery town of Iznik, which would soon become the center of all Ottoman ceramic production during the 15th and 16th centuries. Responsible in part for this change was the Ottomans well established systematic approach to education. Earned experience through the guild, coupled with collaboration between artisans, and advancement by merit and achievement created a standard of technical excellence unsurpassed by other artisans of the day. The development began by encouraging scholarly research on existing Imperial ceramic collections of Ming Dynasty porcelain by the artisans themselves. Do to an interdisciplinary collaboration between artisan's guilds, many examples of ceramic, glass, wood, metal and stone artifacts of Ottoman origin are heavily embellished with Arabic calligraphy. The rise of Islam as the official religion of the Empire made the art prolific. The Holy Qur'an forbids the use of the figure in religious art, in response the decorative arts flourished in the place of sculpture and painting. Inscriptions from the Qur'an are seen in all mediums but especially in ceramic tiles. Thuluth is the style associated with Ottoman ceramics and is characterized by tall and graceful vertical letters. (Figure 3. Below Left) the admiration of Chinese blue and white porcelain had direct influence in the emergence of this style. Nearly all ceramic examples of this script are blue on a white ground or white on a blue ground. From innovations made by court designers in Istanbul and tile makers in Iznik the new style of floral patterns and religious script would gain fame around the world as the decorative element chosen to cover the interiors of the Islamic world's most sacred shrines and Mosques. Lacking the materials and high temperature kiln technology to produce true porcelain, the Iznik potters and tile makers developed white clays that resembled Ming porcelain and was fully



matured at a lower temperature. Because of this lower temperature, and firing method a whole array of color options developed that would eventually define Ottoman ceramics.

The decorative elements that made Iznik Ceramics popular in the blue and white phase could now be produced in vivid new colors including tomato red, emerald green, olive green, pale purple, and amber. This expanded color sensibility pushed the context of the floral patterns to a new level. Most of the interior walls in Mosques and public buildings built in Istanbul during the 15th and 16th centuries are embellished with a variety

of Iznik tiles.

Conclusion.

While traveling with WSU to Istanbul this Fall I gained a greater awareness of University and academic philosophy in its most general terms. I started to see the world of academia as a figurative "Silk Road" or a place that fosters the many varieties of disciplines that all come together to form a community. Just as Istanbul was a center of trade for blue and white porcelain, bringing an awareness of Asian culture to Europe, a research University is an institution where knowledge is shared openly and freely between disciplines. Cultivating ideas to be shared with our students and professors alike not only enriches our perspective fields of study but the University as a whole. I am comparing the Nakkashane (Royal Design Workshop) and artisan guilds to a contemporary research University. Had I not been part of this University I might never have researched Turkish ceramics to this extent. Finding the similarities between cultures and artistic disciplines is for me the next step towards planting seeds for the future. Through my shared experience in Turkish ceramics I hope to contribute to the sense of community at Wichita state University. The relation to our current artistic educational philosophy to that of the Ottomans is one that cannot be denied. Had the Nakkashane (Royal Design Workshop) never formed, the history of Ottoman ceramics would have been much different in comparison. The rich and advanced display of shared knowledge that the Ottomans cultivated so long ago is what a research school such as WichitaStateUniversity does for the academic community.



References: Walter Denny, Iznik the Artistry of Ottoman Ceramics, Thames and Hudson Inc, New York, New York, 2004, Figure # 2 <http://ch08180.kitaguni.tv/d2007-12.html> figures 1, 3, 4, taken by David Hellman.