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**The Use of Animal Figures in Contemporary
Turkish Ceramics Art**

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The Use of Animal Figures in Contemporary Turkish Ceramics Art

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Abstract

There are a lot of sources of inspiration for an artist during the creation process. The major and the most effective source among these sources is the nature. The nature involves a lot of forms, textures and color varieties in it. In this respect, animals in animal kingdom are the most important creatures on which this variety is reflected. The variety of animals has always been a source of data, which enriches the imagination of the artists. The apprehension of art, especially in Anatolian region, reflects the various usages of animal figures. Turkish art of ceramics that has a significant cultural substantiality, maintains traditional sources of inspiration on the land where it has been created with the works of the contemporary artists. In this context; works of contemporary Turkish ceramics art are going to be analyzed and evaluated in terms of shaping methods, formal differences and contents.

Keywords: Anatolia, Animal Figure, Ceramics, Contemporary, Turkey

Introduction

Paleolithic era, among the prehistoric periods, is known as the longest period in terms of the development of civilization. This period had started almost 2 million years ago and it ended 10 thousand years ago¹. People lived in this period maintained their lives with hunting and gathering, they made clothes with peltry and sheltered in caves or stone pockets. Since there was no permanent settlement or they did not start agricultural activities, they used hard and durable stone tools to survive in the nature. As a result of people's deep relationship with animals in this period, animal figures on cave pictures as early artistic expressionist examples were found in caves. Altamira in Spain, Lasque in France, Yarımburgaz (Istanbul), Karain (Antalya), Okuzini (Antalya), Alanya Kadrini, Soğanlıdere (Kayseri), Pirun district (Adıyaman) in Anatolia are the areas where properties of Paleolithic Era can be seen. Any ceramics ruins were found in the areas in Anatolia in this period; however, tools made of stones, knives shaped like a leaf, frescos, ivory sculptures and mother goddess sculptures were found there².

Figure 1. *Centers in Anatolia in Paleolithic Era*



Source: Cengiz, 2015: 14.

In Mesolithic Era between 10.000-8.000 B.C., people also maintained their lives with hunting and gathering. Reindeer was an animal whose meat, antler and bones were benefitted. Additionally, people went fishing and fish had an important role in people's diet. Tools and weapons in Mesolithic Era were quite different from the ones made in previous eras (Ozdemir, 2004: 176). Mesolithic Era which was not quite different from Paleolithic Era, people started to use tools called microlite and it was observed that the settlement started to move towards the areas near water.

The oldest settlement in Anatolia is "Gobeklitepe" that belongs to Neolithic Era. There are more animal figures than human figures in the ruins found in Gobeklitepe that is defined as a prayer hall. The temple dates back to

¹ <http://www.anadolumedeniyetlerimuzesi.gov.tr/TR,77778/paleolitik-cag.html>.

² <http://goo.gl/O5rjuI>.

10.000 B.C. represents a lot of information about the belief systems at that time so that it is possible to say that the basis of the relationship with animal figures in Anatolia was related to the belief system.

Figure 2. *First Settlements and Civilizations in Anatolia*



Source: <http://goo.gl/7XUZlq>.

The Use of Animal Figures in Historical Process in Anatolia

Turkey is a country that is located in Europe and Asia continents. The land in Asia is called Anatolia. Anatolia has been an area where a lot of civilizations were established because of its important geographical position. Therefore; Mesopotamia area has a very significant cultural heritage in terms of ceramics history. “The oldest and the most important ceramics findings were encountered in Askaya region in Turkistan, Jericho region in Palestine, various mounds in Anatolia and in the region called Mesopotamia between the Rivers Dicle and Fırat” (Arcasoy, 1983: 1).”

Clay has been a very essential material throughout the history of humanity. Although most common usage of it is known as tools and kitchenwares, it was first used to shape three dimension human and animal figures. The first use of clay was encountered in Anatolia in Hacilar settlement. Among the settlements in prehistoric times, Hacilar seemed like a city via the muddle and stone constructions built in that area and since they were engaged in agriculture, the use of potteries decorated with geometric figures was quite common. The uses of animal figures in ceramics are seen as surface decorations in Hacilar region whereas in Catalhoyuk they were three dimension depictions. Among the animal figures that can be identified on the ceramics in Catalhoyuk are bulls, cows, goats, donkeys, deer, gazelle, leopards, turtles, frogs, snakes, birds and fish (Yılankaya, 2010: 21). It is thought that the animal figures used in that period represent mythological gods and goddesses in matriarchal system of thought. The use of animal figures in Neolithic and Chalcolithic eras were in the same direction; however, there are formal differences. Among these

differences, especially the bull figure stands out. “Bull depictions on relief vases of Kosk Hoyuk which provide evidences for bull cult in the history in Anatolia are very significant because they reflect the oldest examples of relief ceramics tradition in Anatolia (Sipahi, 2005:668).”

Figure 3. *There is an animal relief like an appliqué on the outer surface of the body of a broken pot. The animal on the relief is probably a deer.*



Source: Yılankaya, 2010: 48.

Figure 4. *Animal figured ceramics examples of Kosk Hoyuk.*

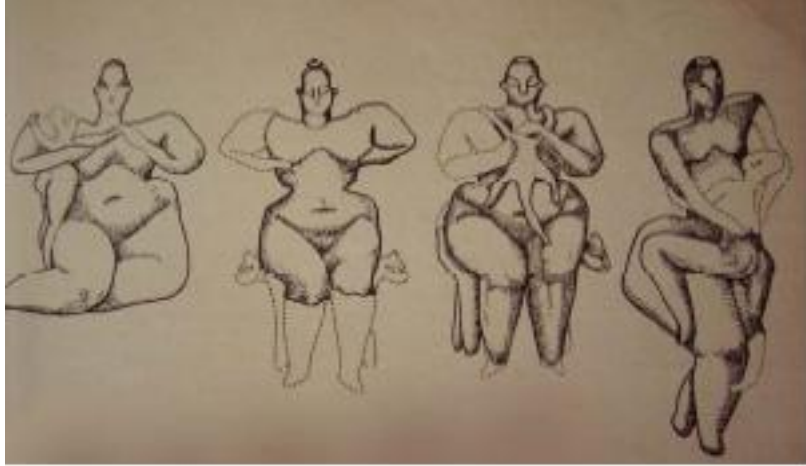


Source: Oztan, 2006.

Another example, which is prominent with its animal figured ceramics among the first settlements in Anatolia, is Hacilar region. It is known that animal figures were commonly used in decorations, stylistic properties of the pots and pottery products made of clay in late Neolithic period in Hacilar. A lot of developments such as taming animals like goat, sheep and pig; improvements in weaving, storage of crops were observed in Hacilar settlement. As a result of these developments, pottery started to change. In Hacilar where all the properties of Neolithic Era can be observed, animal figured vessels that were used for religious purposes stand out. Additionally, in that period when mother goddess belief was common, animal figures were also used in goddess depictions. While Mother Goddess was a symbol of fertility, the animals and animal totems depicted with the goddess turned into the symbols of abundance and fruitfulness. Especially leopard was depicted as the sacred animal of Mother Goddess and it represented her eternal domination on

nature. Although the number of cow head depictions among the animal heads depictions is high, ox and ram heads are among the examples (Efecan, 2011: 113).

Figure 5. *Isometric drawings of Mother Goddess figures found in Hacilar*



Source: Efecan, 2011: 23.

The Hittite Civilization in Anatolia is another civilization where common use of animal figures can be seen following Hacilar settlement. It is seen that bull sculptures were commonly used in the ceramics that belong to Hittite period. There are three or two dimension decoration forms of animal figures on brims or surfaces of pot forms such as jugs, pots and other ceramics forms. Among these examples, there are jugs and pitchers with nozzles like beaks which take their stylistic properties from beaks or teapots with spout depicted as animals.

Figure 6. *The Cup with a Long Stem, Decorated With Three Antelopes and Two Eagles*



Source: Eker, 2009: 53.

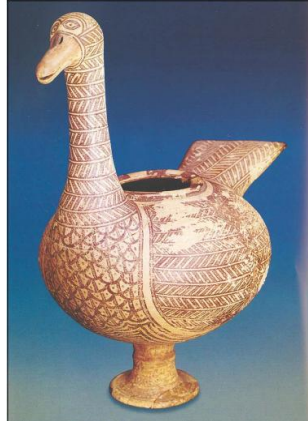
Figure 7. *It has a red primer and it is glazed. The lower parts of horns have cream, upper parts have red glaze.*



Source: Akarsu, 2007: 141.

Characteristics of Anatolian geography affected both the main properties of civilization as well as the art of ceramics. Following the Hittite, Phrygian Civilization is also one of the most important examples of this interaction in terms of both culture and art. Phrygian art of ceramics has very unique understanding of art. Phrygian ceramics, which are separated into two as single-colored and multi-colored ceramics, were usually shaped by using turning wheel. Animal figures were both on stylistic constructions and on surface decorations of ceramics forms in Phrygian as it was in Hittite Civilization. “When we analyze Phrygian ceramics in terms of decoration techniques, we can see that there are three groups, ceramics with geometric decorations, dark matte painted ceramics depicted as animals and ceramics with seal impression decorations. (Pekyaman, 2008: 23)”

Figure 8. *Terra-cotta goose shaped ceremonial rhyton.*



Source: Pekyaman, 2008: 34.

Following Phrygian Civilization, Urartian sovereignty was experienced. The art of ceramics is known with red glazed, elaborate pieces mainly for the use of the people in the palace and in senior management. With the start of the use of minerals commonly, there were some disconnections in Anatolian art of ceramics. The revival of the art of ceramics in Anatolia was with Anatolian

Seljuk Empire. The Seljuk ceramics “The art of tile-making which is a branch of the art of ceramics developed in Middle East was introduced to Anatolia via the Seljuk. People continued traditional production of art of ceramics with pottery and they used bricks in architectural construction in Anatolia in the period of principalities (Acarturk, 2012)”. The Seljuk who converted into Islam as a religion, interpreted the animal symbols Oghuz Tribe, which was their ethnical culture, in their own styles and used them in their own tiles. In Seljuk ceramics “figures of domestic animals such as camel, horse, chicken, pigeon and cat which are beneficial for people were excluded from the theme of the art of decoration. (Despite this, there are some limited examples of these in the art of tile making.) All of these show that, the aim to use the animal figures in Seljuk art was not to depict the cute and the beneficial thing, but to depict the extraordinary one (Kurt, 2012: 18).”

Figure 9. *Horse figure – (Under Glaze Technique, Kubadabad, Karatay Museum)*



Source: Kurt, 2012: 22.

Ottoman Empire which continued its existence after Seljuk Empire has still elements that have affected today’s Turkish art in terms of apprehension of art. Ceramics works of art which were produced during the sovereignty of the empire were consisting of big pieces of tiles with decorative style. Animal figures can be seen in examples produced in cities such as Iznik, Kutahya and Canakkale which became prominent with the production of tiles during Ottoman period. “Different postures and movements of animal figures such as lion, bear, wolf, fox, snake, greyhound, monkey, rabbit and birds we depicted” on tiles in Iznik (Pamuk, 2015: 91).” “When animal figures on Kutahya tiles are analyzed, it is seen that they appeared in the compositions as from the second half of XVIIIth century. In the compositions consisting of these figures, generally animals such as various birds, fish, horse, donkey and rooster are seen (Pamuk, 2015: 96)”, animal figures on ceramics which were mostly produced in Canakkale for the daily use of people are categorized into three groups as ceramics decorated with animal figures, forms with animal figures on them and ceramics shaped as animal figures (Esin, 38). Horse, lion and fish were commonly used on the tiles produced in Canakkale.

Figure 10. *Standing stylized lion-shaped pot*



Source: <http://goo.gl/adZTxm>.

The Use of Animal Figures on Contemporary Turkish Art of Ceramics

Turkish Republic which was established after Ottoman Empire with the proclamation of republic experienced reforms in many fields. Among these reforms, reform in education was also included. Turkish art of ceramics was made an art discipline in 1950s with the efforts of a few artists who had been trained in foreign countries. At the beginning of 1960s, they shared their experiences and techniques with the people who were interested in the art of ceramics. As a result of this sharing, new works of arts and interpretations were created and they developed a unique identity for today's Turkish art of ceramics.

The most important source that contemporary Turkish ceramics artists get the inspiration from is Anatolian land which that has a unique cultural accumulation. Animal figures which have been used for centuries in the art of ceramics are also important sources for contemporary Turkish art of ceramics. The examples of the artists analyzed within the context of this research will be discussed in a chronological order. In this way, the way of usage of animal figure in contemporary art of ceramics and its differences will also be analyzed. There are names of artists, who got inspired and created works with these inspirations they got from the animal figures in Contemporary Turkish art of ceramics, in the manifesto. However, examples of the works of a few artists from each period are given in detail in order to set an example.

1950s are called as the establishment stage of contemporary Turkish art of ceramics. in this period, Hakkı İzzet, Fureyya Koral and Sadi Diren created works inspring from animal figures. Artist Sadi Diren who got the professor title in 1970 is one of the pioneers of contemporary Turkish art of ceramics. Works that he created inspring from Anatolia's long standing traditions have a plain style. It is seen that the artist, who is known in contemporary Turkish art of ceramics as the 1950 generation, especially got inspired from stylistic properties of Anatolian civilizations in his animal figured ceramics works. Figures of bulls and birds are on the foreground in his works.

Figure 11. *Animal figured forms of Sadi Diren*



Source: <http://goo.gl/lgFtKT>.

1960s are known as the development stage of contemporary Turkish art of ceramics. Among the artists who got to the foreground using animal figures are Hamiye Colakoglu, Jale Yilmabasar. Jale Yilmabasar, who completed her high school education in America, received ceramics and ballet education in Turkey. She later had art education in Munich and she has a picturesque expression in her ceramics works. Especially in her works which she designs for architectural constructions, she produces works that reflect form and pattern relationship getting inspired from the patterns and colors of birds and roosters.

Figure 12. *Animal figured form of Jale Yilmabaser*



Source: <https://goo.gl/drMdpP>.

In 1970s Mustafa Tuncalp created works inspiring from animal figures. The artist combines industrial production techniques with traditional expression proficiently. He stands out with his simple form stylization in his works that he created inspired from animal forms. His bird sculptures that are generally depicted with a fat body and small head are among his significant works.

Figure 13. *Animal figured forms of Mustafa Tuncalp*



Source: <http://goo.gl/egHYPH>.

1980s and 1990s are very important in terms of contemporary Turkish art of ceramics. Newly established universities attached more attention to fine arts faculties and contributed to the establishments of ceramics departments. In this way, the number of ceramics artists increased and ceramics became a commonly used material especially in architectural constructions. Among the artists of this generation are Sadettin Aygun, Aysegul Turedi Ozen, Sıdıka Sibel Sevim, Cemalettin Sevim interpreted animal figures skillfully. Artist Aysegul Turedi Ozen also stands out with her academic identity. The artist who retired from Anadolu University with a professor title reflects her colorful personality. She interprets bird figures by using turning wheel and hand forming methods. Ozen's works has a very naïve expression. Artist creates both ceramics sculptures and two dimension designs with her interpretations of clay's physical properties.

Figure 14. *Animal figured forms of Aysegul Turedi Ozen*



Source: Personal archive of Aysegul Turedi Ozen.

“Along with Republican Turkey, the construction that constitutes Traditional Turkish Ceramics started to change and Contemporary Turkish Art of Ceramics approached its own expression language (original object) in an abstract way; however, in the course of time different approaches and pursuits, which were based on abstraction, started. This process has still been continuing today. (Agatekin, 2002:13)”. The finest evidence for this situation is the works of art produced in 2000s of the ceramics artists who produce and have academician identities. When we analyzed today’s works of art, young ceramics artists, who has developed the things they inherited with new styles and approaches, maintain the use of animal figure which has existed in Anatolia for centuries. Aziz Baha Orken, Betul Demir Karakaya, Bugra Ozer, Hasan Baskirkan, Nizam Orcun Onal, T. Serkan Rodoslu are among these artists.

Artist Aziz Baha Orken uses both human and animal figures skillfully. In his master’s thesis called ‘Humor in The Art of Ceramics’, the artist approaches properties and evaluations belonging to Turkish culture in his works with a sense of humor. In Orken’s animal figured works morphological properties of animals were combined with human’s characteristic properties.

Figure 15. *Animal figured forms of Aziz Baha Orken*



Source: Personal archive of Aziz Baha Orken.

In his works, Nizam Orcun Onal, who is among the young ceramics artists, it is seen that conceptual ideas are embodied through animal figures. Systematic properties which exist today and create pressure on people are criticized through compositions created through animal figures.

Figure 16. *Animal figured forms of Nizam Orcun Onal*



Source: Personal archive of Nizam Orcun Onal.

Discussion

Animal figures have been existed in all kinds in Anatolian history for centuries when the clay has started to be shaped. First of all, depiction of animal figures which were blessed in parallel with the lives and belief systems of human were embodied. These sculptures produced in large numbers also enlighten Anatolian civilizations. In ancient civilizations period, the use of animal figures are seen both as three dimension sculptures and as surface decorations. Unique stylization and abstraction ability stand out in both of the applications.

After civilizations period, as a result of Turkish states' conversion into Islam, which were established in Anatolia, there happened some changes in the use of animal figures in the art of ceramics. Animal figures had a more decorative interpretation with the use of colorful dyes and glazes instead of being stylized.

Turkey which was established after the declaration of Republic in Anatolia, contemporary ceramics artist today maintain the tradition of using animal figures which exist in Anatolia's cultural history. However, the figures are now very original and present artist's individual attitude in this tradition. The use of animal figures in contemporary Turkish art of ceramics continues to be depicted with humor, being caricaturized, abstraction and conceptual association.

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