

CULTURAL TRANSMISSION IN CERAMIC ART EDUCATION: A LEARNING METHOD BASED ON MOTIF ANALYSIS AND REPRODUCTION IN IZNIK CERAMICS

TRANSMISSÃO CULTURAL NA EDUCAÇÃO EM CERÂMICA ARTÍSTICA: UM MÉTODO DE APRENDIZAGEM BASEADO NA ANÁLISE E REPRODUÇÃO DE MOTIVOS EM CERÂMICAS DE IZNIK

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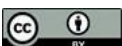
Abstract

This study examines the role of reproducing Iznik ceramic motifs in the transmission of cultural knowledge within the framework of cultural memory and living heritage. The study is based on the premise that traditional craft production is not only a field in which technical skills are acquired, but a process through which historical knowledge, aesthetic understanding, and production practices are transmitted. This study aims to reveal how reproduction practices contribute to the transmission of traditional craft knowledge in ceramic art education. In this context, a practice-based teaching method based on the compositional analysis and reproduction of Iznik ceramic motifs is examined. The study's methodology is based on a practice-based learning approach, in which students analyze the compositional structure of historical ceramic examples, redraw motifs, and participate in production processes. In this process, compositional organization and production logic are clarified through analytical drawing, motif reconstruction, and surface transfer techniques. The findings indicate that reproduction practices contribute not only to students' acquisition of a motif repertoire but also to their understanding of the structural logic underlying traditional decorative systems. In this respect, traditional ceramic education can be considered an effective method for transmitting cultural knowledge through production practice.

Keywords: Cultural Memory. Craft Pedagogy. Embodied Knowledge. Living Heritage. Tacit Knowledge.

Resumo

Este estudo examina o papel da reprodução de motivos cerâmicos de Iznik na transmissão do conhecimento cultural no âmbito da memória cultural e do patrimônio vivo. Parte-se do pressuposto de que a produção artesanal tradicional não constitui apenas um campo de aquisição de competências técnicas, mas um processo através do qual se transmitem conhecimentos históricos, compreensão estética e práticas de produção. O objetivo deste estudo é demonstrar como as práticas de reprodução contribuem para a transmissão do conhecimento artesanal tradicional no ensino da cerâmica artística. Nesse contexto, analisa-se um método de ensino baseado na prática, fundamentado na análise composicional e na reprodução de motivos cerâmicos de Iznik. A metodologia do estudo assenta numa abordagem de aprendizagem baseada na prática, na qual os estudantes analisam a estrutura composicional de exemplares cerâmicos históricos, redesenham os motivos e participam nos processos de produção. Nesse processo, a organização composicional e a lógica de produção são esclarecidas por meio de desenho analítico, reconstrução de motivos e técnicas de transferência para a superfície. Os resultados indicam que as práticas de reprodução contribuem não apenas para a aquisição de um repertório de motivos pelos estudantes, mas também para a compreensão da lógica estrutural subjacente aos sistemas decorativos tradicionais. Nesse sentido, o ensino tradicional da cerâmica pode ser considerado um método eficaz de transmissão do conhecimento cultural através da prática de produção.



Palavras-chave: Memória Cultural. Pedagogia do Artesanato. Conhecimento Incorporado. Patrimônio Vivo. Conhecimento Tácito.

1 INTRODUCTION

The preservation and transmission of cultural heritage are no longer regarded solely as processes limited to the conservation of historical objects. In recent years, approaches in heritage studies have increasingly emphasized heritage as a dynamic process that is continuously reproduced and transmitted through social practices rather than as a static remnant of the past. Within this context, traditional crafts and artistic production practices play a significant role in the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Craft production is understood not only as a field of technical skill but also as a cultural learning domain through which historical knowledge, aesthetic values, and symbolic meanings are conveyed.

Iznik ceramics, one of the most significant ceramic traditions of Ottoman art, constitute an important field of heritage not only in terms of art history but also in relation to cultural memory and craft knowledge, with their rich repertoire of motifs, color palette, and technical features. However, modern production systems and changing educational models have created various disruptions in the transmission of traditional production processes. For this reason, the question of how traditional ceramic techniques and motif knowledge can be sustained and transmitted within contemporary educational environments has gained increasing importance.

This study aims to investigate the role of the reproduction process of Iznik ceramic motifs in the transmission of cultural knowledge. In particular, it focuses on how practice-based production processes function in the transmission of traditional craft knowledge. Within this framework, the study examines the reproduction of Iznik motifs in an educational setting through the lenses of cultural memory, living heritage, and learning through production practice.

The article first discusses the theoretical framework of cultural memory and living heritage, then examines the role of reproduction processes in cultural transmission. Subsequently, craft learning processes are evaluated through the concepts of learning by

doing and embodied knowledge, and the reproduction of Iznik ceramic motifs in an educational context is analyzed within this theoretical framework.

2 CULTURAL MEMORY AND LIVING HERITAGE

The concept of cultural heritage has long been associated with the preservation of historical objects transmitted from the past to the present. However, this approach has significantly expanded in contemporary scholarship. In current heritage studies, heritage is understood not merely as a collection of material remains to be preserved, but as a process that gains continuity through social experiences, knowledge systems, and cultural practices. Within this framework, the sustainability of cultural heritage depends not only on the preservation of inherited objects, but also on the transmission of the knowledge, skills, and systems of meaning associated with these objects across generations. Fields of cultural production and craft practices are considered among the most significant domains in which this transmission takes place.

The concept of cultural memory provides a theoretical framework for understanding how societies remember and reconstruct their past experiences and systems of meaning. Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as a system of remembrance through which social groups institutionalize knowledge and experiences of the past by means of specific cultural forms. This system not only ensures the preservation of knowledge related to the past, but also actively contributes to the formation of social identity. According to Assmann, memory establishes a relationship between time and identity, and this relationship is sustained through cultural narratives, symbols, and forms of representation (Assmann, 2011, p. 37). In this way, fields of cultural production function not only as repositories of past knowledge, but also as practices through which social identity is continuously reproduced.

Discussions on the transmission of social memory indicate that memory is not sustained solely through texts and narratives. Paul Connerton argues that the ways in which societies remember the past are largely shaped through bodily practices and repetitive actions. According to him, social memory is embedded in rituals, habits, and bodily repetitions, and is transmitted across generations through these practices (Connerton, 1989, p. 72). This perspective provides an important theoretical basis for

understanding practice-based knowledge systems such as craft production, where knowledge is often learned and transmitted through the production process itself rather than through written explanations.

Another significant approach in the cultural heritage literature emphasizes that heritage is a socially constructed and continuously reinterpreted process. According to Laurajane Smith, heritage is not a fixed and immutable category of objects, rather, it is a cultural process that gains meaning through social values, interpretations, and practices (Smith, 2006). This perspective frames heritage not as a field limited to the preservation of past remains, but as a complex system encompassing the knowledge, meanings, and production practices associated with these objects. Accordingly, the sustainability of heritage is closely linked not only to the preservation of objects, but also to the continuity of the cultural practices related to them.

Studies on cultural memory particularly emphasize the role of everyday practices and production processes in transmission. Astrid Erll highlights that the transmission of cultural memory is not confined to written texts or monumental structures, but that recurring practices in everyday life also serve as important carriers of this process (Erll, 2011). This perspective allows craft production to be understood as one of the domains in which cultural memory is actively produced. From this point of view, artistic and craft practices are not only fields of aesthetic production, but also carriers of collective cultural knowledge.

At this point, the concept of intangible cultural heritage provides an important framework for understanding the practical dimension of cultural transmission. The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines heritage not merely as the preservation of physical objects, but as living cultural practices transmitted across generations through knowledge, skills, and practices (UNESCO, 2003). Within this framework, the sustainability of heritage depends less on the preservation of objects and more on the active transmission of these knowledge systems and skills.

Craft traditions represent one of the most important domains through which cultural memory is transmitted in practice. In craft-based knowledge systems, learning processes are typically realized through observation, repetition, and practice. This form of knowledge production is explained in the literature through the concept of “embodied

knowledge.” This approach emphasizes that knowledge develops through direct interaction with materials and that the production process itself constitutes the primary domain of learning (Groth, 2016. Ingold, 2013). Embodied knowledge cannot be fully articulated as theoretical knowledge. it is learned and transmitted through physical engagement with materials, tools, and techniques. For this reason, craft knowledge cannot be preserved solely through written documentation. its continuity depends on practice.

Within this framework, ceramic production constitutes a significant example of a craft domain in which cultural memory is sustained through production practices. Iznik ceramics, in particular, historically developed within workshop systems requiring a high level of technical expertise. Production processes such as clay preparation, glaze technology, pigment use, and decorative repertoire were transmitted through the master–apprentice relationship. This model of transmission not only ensured the preservation of technical knowledge across generations, but also enabled the continuity of a specific aesthetic language and motif repertoire. As a result, Iznik ceramics became one of the defining elements of the visual identity of Ottoman art.

However, modern production systems, industrialization, and the weakening of traditional workshop structures have disrupted the continuity of knowledge transmission in ceramic production, as in many craft traditions. For this reason, traditional craft knowledge is increasingly being re-experienced and transmitted through educational institutions, art studios, and cultural programs. In this context, the reproduction of traditional motifs should not be understood merely as the repetition of historical forms, but as a production practice through which cultural memory is reactivated. Therefore, examining how the process of reproduction operates within the context of cultural transmission is essential for understanding how traditional ceramic knowledge can be sustained in contemporary contexts.

3 LEARNING BY DOING AND EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

Craft production is historically one of the knowledge systems that has developed through practice-based learning processes. In these fields, technical knowledge is acquired not through written rules or abstract theories, but through engagement in the act of making. Craft learning is largely an experiential process based on observation,

repetition, and practice. As learners participate in the production process, they directly experience the behavior of materials, the use of tools, and the outcomes of technical procedures. For this reason, a significant portion of craft knowledge is understood as a form of knowledge that emerges within the production process itself and develops through practical experience (Minar & Crown, 2001).

Tim Ingold considers making as one of the domains in which the relationship between knowledge and practice becomes most visible. According to him, craft production is not merely the execution of a predetermined plan. rather, the interaction established with materials continuously reshapes the course of the making process. Ingold describes this as “making as a process of growth” and emphasizes that knowledge develops within action (Ingold, 2013, p. 21). This perspective demonstrates that craft learning largely takes place within production practice and is closely linked to bodily experience.

Contemporary research on craft production indicates that knowledge emerging in the production process develops primarily through bodily experience and interaction with materials. This approach is conceptualized in the literature as “embodied knowledge.” Camilla Groth defines craft production as a dynamic field of interaction between body, material, and tools. In this process, knowledge is shaped not by the application of fully predefined rules, but by experiential feedback that emerges during the act of making (Groth, 2016). Learners develop a practical understanding that guides production by directly engaging with the resistance of materials, surface qualities, and the results of technical operations.

Similarly, Nimkulrat and Groth emphasize that craft and design practices constitute a learning environment in which thinking and making are intertwined. In this perspective, knowledge develops through sensory perception, manual skill, and experiential evaluation that occur during production (Nimkulrat & Groth, 2024). For this reason, craft learning progresses through direct engagement with materials, and the repetition of production processes enables a deeper understanding of technical operations and compositional logic.

A significant portion of knowledge in craft production is not easily articulated and develops within practice. Michael Polanyi conceptualizes this type of knowledge as “tacit knowledge.” According to Polanyi, individuals often know more than they can explicitly

express. therefore, many practical skills cannot be fully conveyed through verbal explanation. He summarizes this with the statement “we can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4). Skills such as sensing material behavior, applying appropriate pressure, or achieving correct proportions develop through long-term practice and repetition.

For this reason, knowledge transfer in craft learning largely occurs through participation in production processes. Learners internalize technical skills by observing experienced practitioners and repeating similar operations. Repeated making processes enable a clearer understanding of compositional relationships, correct application of techniques, and a more conscious interaction with materials. Thus, craft knowledge evolves from a purely theoretical domain into an experiential learning process grounded in practice.

These theoretical approaches provide an important framework for understanding how traditional modes of production can be transmitted in studio-based learning environments. Research on craft education demonstrates that active student participation in production processes plays a decisive role in learning. Koskinen et al. (2015) indicate that learning in craft education progresses through interaction between teacher and student, demonstration, and guided practice. In such environments, technical knowledge is internalized through repeated applications carried out at different stages of production. Similarly, McGing (2025) defines mastery in craft as a long-term process shaped by accumulated experience, repetition, and embodied learning within production practice.

4 CULTURAL TRANSMISSION THROUGH REPRODUCTION AND A PRACTICE-BASED LEARNING APPROACH

Reproduction practices in traditional craft production play a significant role in the transmission of cultural knowledge. Craft production is often based on the repetition of specific techniques and formal arrangements. This repetition does not merely involve the duplication of visual forms. it also enables the transfer of technical knowledge, material understanding, and principles of aesthetic organization embedded within the production process. Reproduction practices constitute an important learning domain for understanding and sustaining historical production traditions. Minar and Crown (2001)

emphasize that copying and reproduction in craft production are among the fundamental mechanisms through which technical knowledge is transmitted across generations.

Repetition and reproduction processes contribute to the development of technical skills and to the comprehension of the aesthetic logic of production traditions. Glenn Adamson notes that craft production is historically grounded in repetition and variation. Although craft objects often emerge through the reproduction of established formal arrangements and techniques, this process should not be understood as mechanical duplication. Each act of repetition enhances the understanding of production practices and contributes to the development of technical proficiency (Adamson, 2007). Through repeated production processes, practitioners gain a more conscious understanding of compositional organization, proportional relationships, and aesthetic balance.

In traditional ceramic production, reproduction practices are closely linked to the learning of patterns and compositional structures. Decorative schemes observed in historical ceramic examples are organized according to specific compositional principles. Elements such as motif placement, orientation, proportional relationships, and the use of space constitute the fundamental components of this organization. For this reason, the process of redrawing traditional ceramic motifs involves not only copying individual elements but also understanding the structural relationships that form the composition. Analytical drawing studies make the compositional logic of production more visible and allow the structural organization of the design to be examined beyond its visual appearance.

The practice-based teaching method examined in this study has been developed over a long period within ceramic art education and is based on the compositional analysis and reproduction of historical ceramic examples. Within this method, students analyze historical Iznik ceramics and learn production knowledge through the process of redrawing motif compositions. Initially, the compositional structure of a selected historical example is analyzed. The placement of motifs on the surface is examined through analytical drawings produced with colored pencils, where motif directions, movement paths, and relationships are marked. Attention is given to compositional axes, proportional relationships, spatial distribution, and overall balance.

Following the analytical stage, students redraw the motifs to reconstruct the composition and correct minor deviations in motif placement. The prepared drawing is

then transferred onto the ceramic surface using the pricking technique, followed by painting and firing processes. This method allows students to experience the compositional structure of a historical Iznik ceramic through analysis and reproduction within a practical framework.

This practice-based learning process enables students to understand not only the visual features of historical ceramic objects but also their underlying production logic and aesthetic organization. Through reproduction, students develop an experiential understanding of motif placement, compositional relationships, and decorative systems. Drawing, transfer, and application stages facilitate learning at different levels of production knowledge. In this way, historical ceramic objects become not merely subjects of observation but sources of knowledge reconstructed through practice.

In this context, reproduction practices can be considered an effective method for transmitting traditional craft knowledge in educational environments. Through compositional analysis and redrawing, students gain insight into the structural logic of traditional decorative systems beyond learning motif repertoires. Reproduction thus functions as a mode of cultural transmission that enables the continuation of cultural heritage within contemporary production practices. In this respect, traditional ceramic art education plays a significant role in sustaining the continuity of traditional knowledge in current production contexts.

4.1 Learning process based on composition analysis

Decorative programs in Iznik ceramics are structured within a systematic visual organization based on specific compositional principles. In order to clarify this structure, a general analysis is conducted through compositional characteristics.

In Iznik plates, compositions are generally organized from the center toward the periphery. The central motif or motif group forms the visual focal point, while vegetal elements extending outward are arranged in relation to this central structure. These compositions are typically organized either symmetrically or asymmetrically as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. In symmetrical compositions, motifs are placed in a balanced manner according to a specific axis, whereas in asymmetrical compositions, balance is achieved through the distribution and orientation of motifs across the surface.

Figure 1

Iznik plate with symmetrical composition: Ceramic (pottery) dish painted in black, cobalt, blue-green, red (bole) under a transparent glaze. decorated with composite lotus medallions, broken stems of roses, cornflowers, tulips, campanulas, cloud clips, wave and rock scroll, 16th century. Source: British Museum. Available at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_G-112 Accessed on: 11 Mar. 2026.



Figure 2

Iznik dish with asymmetrical composition: painted in polychrome with tulips, roses, hyacinths, and cypress trees, with a spiral-patterned border. the reverse decorated with floral motifs, 1600–1650. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum. Available at: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O340301/dish-unknown/> Accessed on: 11 Mar. 2026.



In some cases, compositions that initially appear symmetrical are subtly diversified through minor interventions, such as the direction of a single motif, a small branch extension, or slight shifts in placement. These interventions maintain the overall balance while creating a more dynamic and fluid visual effect. Motifs are connected through directional continuity, and curved branches and leaves establish a sense of movement across the surface, contributing to a coherent visual flow (Figure 3).

Figure 3

*Iznik plate with an apparently symmetrical composition: in a design decorated with floral, leaf, and cypress motifs, minor variations in the arrangement of the branches beneath the dagger leaves disrupt strict symmetry, creating a more dynamic visual flow across the surface, ca. 1565–1570. Source: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon. Image source: Denny, W. B. (2004). *Iznik: The Artistry of Ottoman Ceramics*. London: Thames & Hudson.*



Another key element in compositional organization is the presence of underlying axes. Vertical, horizontal, or diagonal orientations guide motif placement. Although these axes are not always explicitly visible, they can be inferred through motif orientation and arrangement. In analytical drawings produced by students, these axes are marked to reveal the compositional framework, demonstrating that decorative arrangements are structured within a systematic order rather than randomly organized (Figure 4).

Figure 4

*Visual materials for the analysis of an Iznik plate composition. On the left, a polychrome Iznik plate (ca. 1565–1575). in the center, a schematic student sketch prepared to indicate motif orientation and directional flow. on the right, a detailed redraw of the same composition in pencil. These drawings make visible the underlying axes and guiding lines structuring the composition, demonstrating that motif placement is not random but organized within a systematic order. Source: Sotheby's, *An Eye for Opulence: Art of the Ottoman Empire* Available at: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2012/an-eye-for-opulence-art-of-the-ottoman-empire/lot.150.html> Accessed on: 09 Jun. 2026.. Source (student works): author's archive (A. Sultan Karaoğlu archive).*



Proportional relationships between motifs and their spatial distribution also play a crucial role in compositional balance. The relationship between primary and secondary motifs establishes a visual hierarchy. Larger motifs form focal points, while smaller elements support the overall structure. The use of negative space further contributes to balance, preventing visual congestion and enhancing clarity.

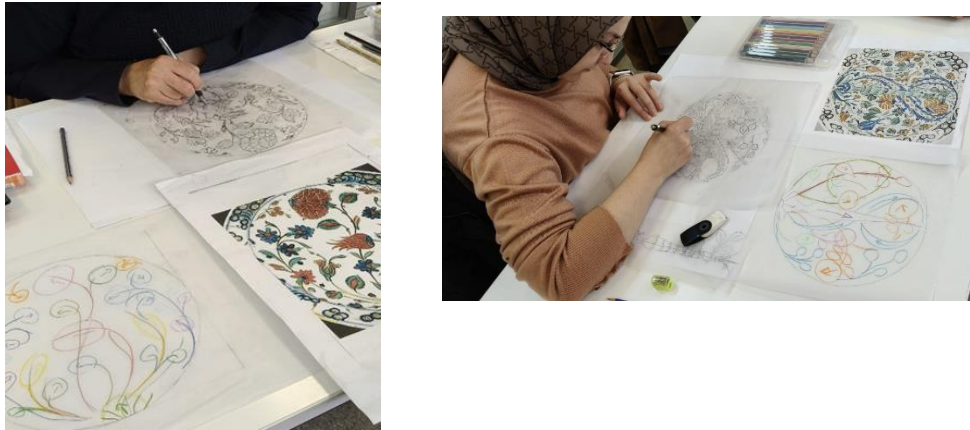
The analysis process also includes identifying motif directions and movement paths. The curvature and orientation of vegetal elements reveal how circulation is established within the composition. Analytical drawings make these relationships visible, enabling a clearer understanding of the compositional structure.

Such analytical studies help students understand not only individual motifs but also how these elements are organized within a structured system on the surface (Figure 5). Representing compositional relationships through drawing contributes to solving placement problems encountered during production. In this way, reproduction practices

move beyond the formal characteristics of historical objects and become a learning process focused on understanding the design logic underlying these works.

Figure 5

Student work: detailed drawing of an Iznik plate composition. The analytical redrawing process functions as a learning tool for understanding the relationships between motifs and the overall organization of the composition. Source: author's archive (A. Sultan Karaoğlu archive).



5 CONCLUSION

This study examined the reproduction of Iznik ceramic motifs within the framework of cultural memory transmission through a practice-based teaching method. The findings demonstrate that craft production constitutes not only a domain of technical skill but also a field in which historical knowledge, aesthetic understanding, and production practices are transmitted. Within this framework, reproduction practices function as fundamental tools ensuring the continuity of cultural knowledge.

Approaches of cultural memory and living heritage reveal that heritage is not a fixed remnant of the past but a process continuously reproduced within social practices. In this context, craft production is associated with the reconstruction of memory rather than its preservation. In practice-based fields such as ceramic production, knowledge is transmitted through direct engagement with production processes. This highlights the significance of embodied knowledge and tacit knowledge in craft education.

The practice-based teaching method discussed in this study is based on the compositional analysis and reproduction of historical Iznik ceramics. Through this process, students gain an experiential understanding of motif placement, compositional relationships, and decorative organization. This approach enables them to grasp not only motif repertoires but also the systematic structure underlying traditional decorative systems.

Reproduction is not treated as a mere imitation of visual characteristics. It constitutes a learning environment in which production knowledge is acquired and reconstructed through experience. As students engage in the production process, they develop a more conscious understanding of compositional order, proportional relationships, and technical applications, contributing to the internalization of craft knowledge.

Based on these findings, reproduction practices can be regarded as an effective method for transmitting traditional craft knowledge in educational settings. By integrating compositional analysis with practical application, this approach supports not only the preservation of cultural heritage but also its continuation within contemporary production practices. In this respect, traditional ceramic art education can be considered a significant domain of cultural transmission that ensures the continuity of traditional knowledge in present-day contexts.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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