

## THE ART OF TERRACOTTA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY: TAVAS CASE (DENİZLİ / TURKEY)

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**Abstract:** The article presents the art of producing terracotta, part of an important cultural heritage in Medet, Tavas region, Denizli province (Turkey). The case study examined the works of Hasan Hüseyin Savcı's family, the only representative of the terracotta art in Denizli. The aim of the undertaken research is to describe, analyze and evaluate the importance of the handicraft for the preservation of the cultural heritage of the region. The research used document analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods, and additionally a partially structured questionnaire as a data collection tool. The field research was conducted in the Medet District. The undertaken research and analysis of the collected material confirm the great importance of the works of successive generations of the Savcı family for the preservation of the cultural heritage of the region dating back to the early Bronze Age. The handicraft of Necip Savcı, reconstructions and reinterpretations of the works are characterized by exceptional artistry. Research on the local raw material, a structured interview allowed for the documentation of terracotta production techniques and the problems related to their sale. The results of the research emphasized the importance of cultural heritage, such as terracotta, for the preservation of local identity, and at the same time being an important tourist attraction.

**Key words:** Terracotta, Turkey, Denizli, Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, Pottery

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### INTRODUCTION

Culture, which is a human concept, is expressed as a set of beliefs and customs arising from living together. Education spreads through generations through imitation and simulation (Getis et al., 2011). The concept of culture includes concepts such as language, religion, architecture, handicrafts, customs, morals and travels (Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2021). The perspective of cultural geography is to enable us to better know the relationship between culture and the natural environment and the place we live in, additional cultural heritage is one of the most important factors of culture tourism development and promotion (Ilieş, et al., 2017; Herman et al., 2019). Handicrafts constitute one of the important cornerstones of cultural geography. Handicrafts, which are evaluated within the framework of concrete cultural heritage, include the cultural codes that a society has brought from the past to the present. The peculiarity of the geography of life, the traditions and customs that society has the way of life comes to life on objects with different shapes with different motives. From the earliest times, handicraft products made of terracotta have been present in all cultures, hence relatively well researched and described by researchers of the antiquity period (Aybek, 2018; Saplakoglu, 2022). They are found on different continents and regions, in Africa (Gosselain, 1999; Frank, 2002; Breunig and Amejé, 2006), in India (Pramanik et al., 2021), in Italy (Duarte Alonso and Bressan, 2014), Sardinia (Doria and D'Orlando, 2018), Romania (Ardeş and Ardeş, 2018; Petcu et al., 2018) or in China (Martín-Torres et al., 2011; Li et al., 2016). Ancient finds from Turkey are also rich in literature (Hakan Verdu Martínez, 2012; Laflı, 2018; Güngör Alper, 2019). Handicrafts also contribute to the tourist attractiveness of destinations selected by travelers and enrich a tourist stay with the knowledge of the value of regional and local cultural heritage (Ilieş and Wendt, 2015; Atasoy and Wendt, 2016; Deac et al., 2019; Solmaz and Oran, 2020; Berdenov et al., 2021). The next two important aspects inclining to take up the presented research topics are related, firstly, to the importance of preserving cultural heritage (Gürçayır Teke, 2018; Marcu et al., 2020) and preserving the traditional brand in tourism marketing (Wendt and Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2018a). And secondly, its economic importance for local communities (Satpathi, 2011; Sahoo et al., 2016), important in the Denizli region (Okca, 2016), also in terms of agritourism development (Wendt et al., 2021) and rural regions (Mikhaylova et al., 2022).

Pottery, which is included in handicrafts, is made in many cities of Anatolia using traditional and modern methods. Its history goes back thousands of years and has a long history, which, according to the pottery masters, goes back to the prophets. In Anatolian culture, the art of pottery, whose history is believed to go back to the prophets, has a sacred place. At the same time, pottery was used in different forms during important events in human life, such as death and marriage (Öney, 2020). Pottery production continues in cities such as Nevşehir, Diyarbakır, Konya, Sivas, and Muğla in Anatolia.

Denizli province, located in the southwestern part of the Anatolian peninsula, between the 28° 30' -29° 30' east meridians and the 37° 12' -38° 12' north parallels, is the city where the terracotta art called “earthenware” is made in Turkey. Clay

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fired at high temperature takes the appearance of hardened ceramic as it loses its water. Products made in eggshell thinness by painting the soil with earth without using glaze and paint have artistic value (Figure 1).

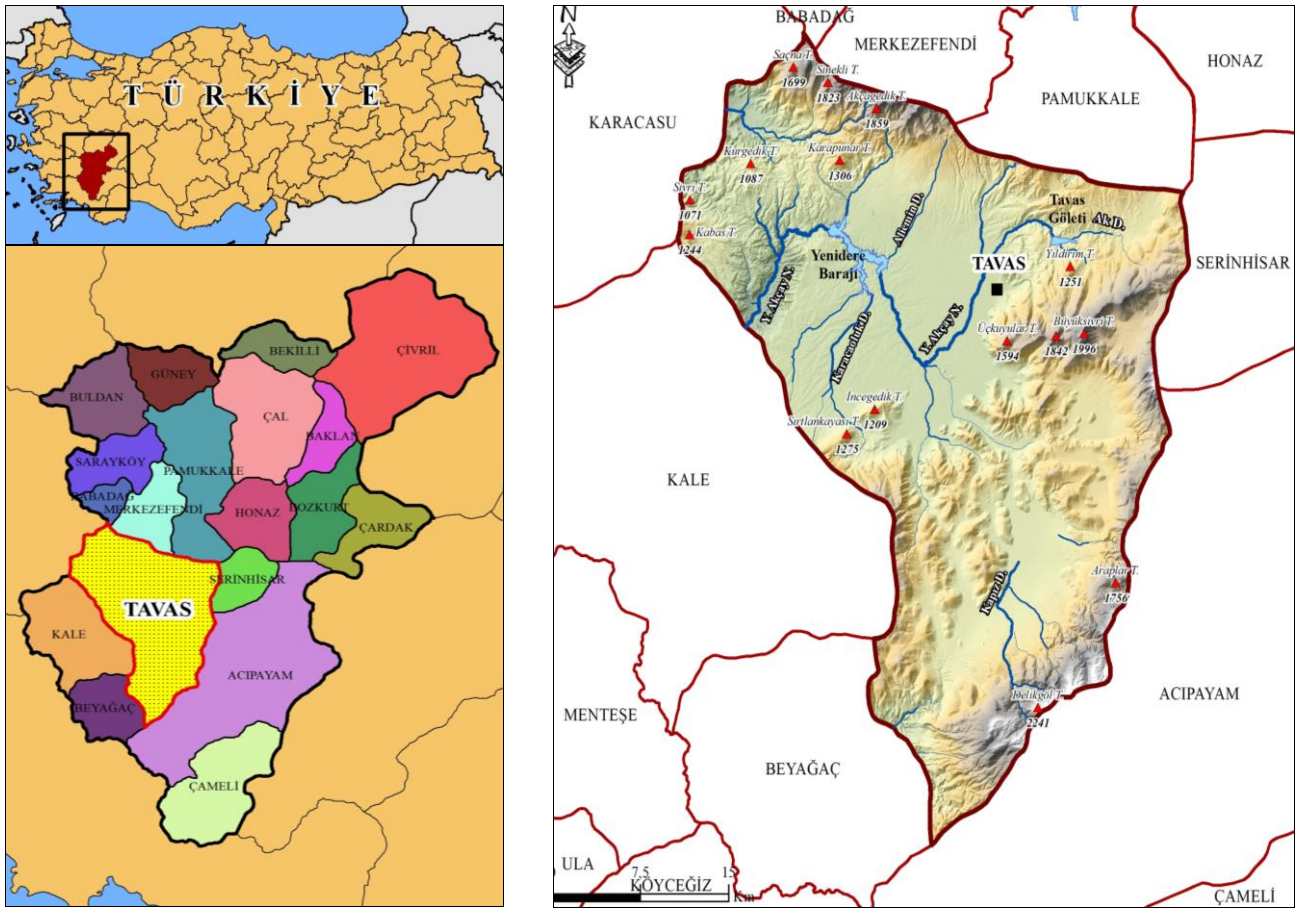


Figure 1. Location Map of Tavas District (authors elaboration)

The history of the terracotta bowls and pottery found in Medet Mound in Tavas district dates back to the Early Bronze Age (Yaylalı and Akdeniz, 2002). The district, which bears traces of Hittite, Phrygian, Persian, Ancient Greek, Roman Empire, Byzantine and finally Turkish periods, is home to a historical ruins. Among these civilizations that settled in the region, especially the Hittites, were an important archaic society that left their mark on the geography they were in with their state administration, law and punishment methods, religion and social life.

It is known that the Hittites dominated the region between 2500-1700 BC (Peker, 2009). The Hittites made the city of Çorum (Hattusa) the capital. Afterwards, the Hittites dominated the Southeastern Anatolia Region of Turkey, the central and northern parts of today's Syria, and the Mediterranean coast in the west and the Euphrates River in the east (Peker, 2009). One of the most characteristic features of this civilization is the pots and pans made by baking clay. Among all these civilizations in the region, the Hittites especially mastered pottery and ceramics.

It is seen that clay is often preferred because it takes shape easily due to its plasticity feature and turns into a durable product after firing. The place of clay has not changed in the process from the day of human history to the present day. The remains of pottery made with clay in the fertile Anatolian lands, which have hosted countless civilizations, are often encountered in excavations. The oldest known examples of these remains are found in Çatalhöyük. The history of the terracotta figurines and vessels found in Çatalhöyük dates back to 10 000 BC (Arslan, 2018).

The unglazed terracotta products made by the Hittites are distinguished from the others by their functionality and the motifs on them. According to sources, the Hittites, who believed in a polytheistic religion and were known to have about 600 gods, goddesses and animal gods, reflected their religious views on the bowls and pottery they made. Animal-headed vessels, beak spouted long-footed jugs are also decorated with religious items (Ünal, 2020).

Citizens living in the rural areas of Tavas district spent their childhood playing games around the ancient Medet Mound and stuck the historical remains to their mind in this region. One of the last family, who create terracotta objects is the Savçı family. Mr. Necip Savçı, who is popularly known as the "Last Hittite". Savçı is an artist who has been the subject of much news in the local and national media with the originality of his works. The artist, who was born in Garip Village of Tavas district in 1949, lived in this region until the end of his life and made a strong impression with the works he produced. The artist, who used the soil that was his own mixture and painted the soil with soil without using a pattern, became the only one in Turkey in this field with objects such as bowls, pots and jugs made as thin as an eggshell. The legacy of the Prosecutor, who passed away in 2010, is being undertaken by his son and family today. In this study, the footprints of the terracotta art, the oldest examples of which we have seen in the Anatolian lands and

spread over a wide area, will be followed under the leadership of the Savçı family, who produced it in accordance with the original and brought it to the present day. The main goal of the research undertaken is to describe, analyze and evaluate the importance of terracotta production for the preservation of the cultural heritage of the region. In addition, the undertaken work aims to show the importance of handicrafts by the Savçı family for the preservation of cultural values, in terms of tourist values, which constitute the tourist potential of the Tavas region.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research used document analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods, and additionally a partially structured questionnaire as a data collection tool. The field research was conducted in the Medet District. This study used as well qualitative research (Philip, 1998; Veal, 2017) and fieldwork methods (Figure 2). The first step of the research is identifying the topic. The second is data collection. Then the analysis of the collected material and its scientific discussion of the obtained results. The literature review on the art of terracotta with the document analysis technique, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was carried out within the scope of this study (Veal, 2017). In this context, theses, articles, magazines and newspapers related to the subject were examined. Necip Savci's family was interviewed by using the interview technique, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Data were collected

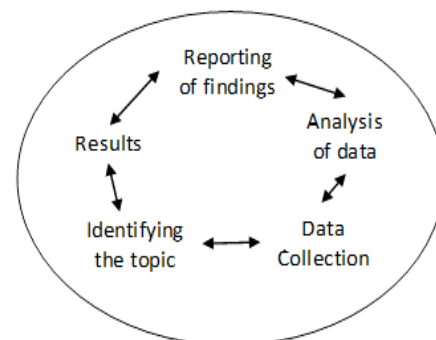


Figure 2. Research Process

with a semi-structured interview form designed by the researchers during the interviews. This form consists of two parts. In the first part of the form, demographic data about the participants were included, and in the second part of the form, 10 questions regarding the purpose of the research were included. The opinion of a geography and language expert was taken to ensure the construct validity and face validity of the form. After the expert opinion, two items were edited in the form.

There are eight questions in total in the final version of the form. These questions are as follows:

1. How did terracotta art begin? How is it made?
2. What is the characteristic of the clay used?
3. How is the soil used for terracotta objects prepared?
4. What objects are usually made?
5. What are the characteristics of the motifs on the objects?
6. Who carries on this art in the family?
7. Are products only displayed locally?
8. Is there a demand for these objects from abroad?

The interviews lasted an average of 30-35 minutes. During the interviews, audio recordings were taken with the permission of the participants, and the recordings were then transferred to a word file. Qualitative data (document analysis and interview data) and data based on field observations obtained in the research were analyzed descriptively (Wendt and Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2018b). In line with the purpose of the research, the findings are presented respectively.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data obtained in the research are given under three headings. These data are the historical development of the terracotta art, the characteristics of the terracotta art made in the rural area of Tavas Medet village and the “Terra Cotta” Story Beginning with Necip Savçı.

### 1. Historical Development of “Terra Cotta” Art

The Latin word terracotta means “earthenware”. Terracotta products, the first examples of which were found in the world between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in 6000 BC, were later seen in China, Egypt, the Mediterranean Basin, India and Africa. Clay soil, which is the main material of terra cotta, has shaped the way of life of man. Products made of baked clay, have become widespread in almost every area since the Neolithic Period with their easy shape, practical use and durability. It is possible to see that clay is used in temples, statues of gods or in decorations in architecture, as it is used in bowls and pottery at home. All products made of terracotta are found in the Neolithic Period. This period has been a very important process in which human beings reorganized their relationship with nature, human beings could physically intervene in nature, and the foundations of today's civilization were laid. Having learned to do agriculture and making objects from the soil, mankind has used his mental faculties more and more, all these developments have occurred with the opening of the doors of the Neolithic Period. The most important criterion that divides the Neolithic Period, which is a time period between approximately 10.000-6000 BC, into aceramic (pre-pottery) and pottery (pottery) periods were the objects made of soil. The bowls and pottery produced by baking clay were first encountered in the Çatalhöyük (Konya-Çumra) region around 10 000 BC (Cessford, 2001; Karataş Yüksel and Çilingiroğlu, 2021). With the invention of the potter's wheel in 7000 BC, there was an increase in the number of products made, and pottery, which was previously a job for women's daily needs, later turned into a profession for men.

It is possible to see clay, which is shaped according to the cultural characteristics of different civilizations, as the female goddess figure reflecting fertility in Anatolia, an army of 700 soldiers protecting the emperor in China (Martinón-Torres et al., 2011; Li et al., 2016), Masks representing different tribes in Africa, and statues and human busts in Ancient Greece and Roman Empire (Saplakoglu, 2022). Every piece of pottery found during the excavations has been

a small ambassador that carries the identity and lifestyle of the civilization they are found in. It is seen that the terracotta bowls and pots made in the Neolithic Period are unglazed and painted in earthy colors using soil, like in others relicts (Schotsmans et al., 2021). For this reason, it is seen that colors specific to the soil such as brown, black, red and yellow are used as the characteristic color palette of Neolithic period items.

The fact that clay is a airing material and that it is easily shaped and allows artists to convey their feelings and thoughts has enabled today's artists to prefer this material. Especially since the 1970s, synthetic materials that have entered our lives have become increasingly inextricable, allowing people to rediscover the soil, which is very important for our lives, and to reinterpret it. A terracotta symposium has been organized in the province of Eskişehir in Turkey since 2006, under the leadership of Tepebaşı Municipality, with the support of Anadolu University and many institutions, creating suitable environments for artists from different parts of the world to come together and exhibit their works on the subject.

## 2. Features of “Terra Cotta” Art Made in Tavas Medet Village Countryside

Located in the southwestern part of the Anatolian peninsula, between the 28° 30'-29° 30' east meridians and the 37° 12' - 38° 12' north parallels, the Tavas district of Denizli is 950 m above sea level and has a surface area of 1691 km<sup>2</sup> (Figure 2). The district is surrounded by Babadağ (2308 m) in the north, Bozdağ (2424 m) in the south and Kızıllhisar Mountain (2241 m) in the east. Tavas Plain, which is not surrounded by very high mountains, consists of tectonic pits. According to Yalçınlar, the plain is a karstic polje formed as a result of the melting of limestones (Yalçınlar, 1963). The Çatak Stream, which joins the plain from the northeast of the region, disappears after it flows weakly in the plain.



Figure 3. Satellite Image of Medet Village (by Google maps)

Medet mound, dating back to the Bronze Age, is located on the Tavas Plain (Figure 1). The mound was built on an ancient settlement called Apollonia, 7 km west of the town of Tavas. The village, which is at the crossing point of the Lycian and Phrygian civilizations, was also an important settlement of its time in ceramic arts. There is the ancient city of Apollonia Salbace, which was founded in the name of God Apollo, in the region, which has been a continuous settlement since the Bronze Age. Located in the province of Denizli, Babadağ, known as Salbace Mountain in ancient times, was a landform of sacred importance for the people of the region in ancient times. In old Turkish mythology, mountains used to represent places with high energy and close to Tengri. The ancient cities of Aphrodisias, Heraclea Salbace, and Apollonia Salbace were established on the Babadağ range, respectively. In the ancient city of Apollonia Salbace, where the Medet Mound is located, coins with divine figures were found, minted between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD on behalf of the Roman Emperor Hadrian. A large number of terracotta bowls and pottery finds belonging to the Prehistoric Period were found in Karacahisar Mound, which was also established close to this region. The intense destruction of this excavation area, which is located approximately 1 km from the Medet Mound, by the settlement areas and its expression as a context residue, caused the finds to not be evaluated sufficiently (Yaylalı and Akdeniz, 2002). The terracotta products found in Karacahisar Mound are generally spouted jugs and double-handled vases and pots. The products found are exhibited in the Aphrodisias museum in Aydın. Quartz found in the soil of the terracotta products found in Karacahisar and Medet Mound was extracted from the slopes of Babadağ. In terracotta products, the color of the paste was mostly brown, red, gray and yellow. As in other regions known for handicrafts (Duarte Alonso and Bressan, 2014; Pramanik et al., 2021), terracotta products play an important role in the budget of individual families. They also play an important role in cultivating disappearing professions (Solmaz and Oran, 2020), displaced by modern industrial products (Satpathi, 2011; Sahoo et al., 2016). Terracotta products are not only of

economic importance on a micro scale, created in accordance with the local tradition, they preserve the cultural heritage by building bridges between the past and the present (Gürçayır Teke, 2018), as is the case with the Savcı family.

### 3. The Story of “Terra Cotta” Beginning with Necip Savcı

Hasan Hüseyin Savcı, son of Necip Savcı, who learned how to make terracotta products from his father, continues this art today as the third generation after his grandfather and father. An interview was conducted with Hasan Hüseyin Savcı using the unstructured interview technique (Figure 3). In the interview, the origin story of terracotta products, the stages of production of the products, the characteristics of the motifs used, and finally the sales of terracotta products were evaluated.



Figure 4. (A) Interview with Hasan Hüseyin Savcı (B) Hasan Hüseyin Savcı (by authors)



Figure 5. View of “Terra Cotta” Workshop (by authors)

Explaining that his father learned about soil and stone from his grandfather from a very young age, Hasan Hüseyin Savcı stated that: *“My grandfather was known as Molla Hasan. He was engaged in mining works during the Atatürk period and had extensive knowledge about stone and soil. Those who wanted to get information about the mines of the region would come to chat with my grandfather. My father had experienced these and learned about mines and soil from an early age.”*

Tavas, which has a plain appearance geomorphologically, has a clayey land in terms of soil structure. The clayey loamy soil that emerged when the rivers around it were drained, especially in the summer months, became a playground for the children in the area. Necip Savcı, who loved clay soil and played with it, learned to shape clay at that age. In Medet Village, which is also a protected area, the jug and pottery fragments found when the villagers plowed their fields and the motifs on these pieces attracted the attention of Necip Savcı over time, so he started to make jugs, pots and pots suitable for these underground pieces in his works (Figure 4).

*“While the villagers were plowing their fields, they took out broken pieces of vases and jugs. My father used to collect these pieces when he was a child and tried to draw the shapes on the old vases and jugs himself. He would examine the pieces that were found and made vases and pots according to the original pieces according to these pieces.”*

*He had formed a mud by trial and error method by mixing the clayey soil found near the mound with different types of soils in the vicinity. My father also had a talent for painting. My grandfather, Molla Hasan, asked him to draw constantly, and he helped him to develop this talent more. "*

Hasan Hüseyin Savçı and his family continue this art, which he inherited from his father, in the same way. The family carries the works to the present day by making the cultural values of the civilizations that lived in Anatolia exactly the same as the way they were made at that time (Figure 5).



A. Pottery Molds



B. Tools Used in the Workshop



C. View from the workshop



D. Earthenware Objects



E. Ready-to-Sale Products



F. View from "Terra Cotta" Bowls

Figure 6. Workshop and handicrafts of the Savçı family (by author)

*"Since the age of seven, I have been continuing this art as my late father taught me. Terracotta means "earthenware". The products are made without glazing. What I do is the art of painting the soil with the soil. After mixing the soil I brought from the mountain in different regions, I add the small rocks I ground in the mill and turn them into mud. After that, I sand the mud in our ceramic lathe, giving it the shape we want. I bake the product in a 150°C oven for 8 hours. After baking, I paint the product completely with earth. The resulting products are as thin as an eggshell. The lifespan of the items I make completely depends on the usage. But the paint on it does not come off at all."*

Hasan Hüseyin Savcı sells the works he produces by sending them to various art centers in Turkey, especially in Paşabahçe. Despite the offers from countries such as Belgium, Sweden, Italy and Greece, they did not want to leave their hometown Tavas, and continued their production in the workshop they opened in the garden of their house. “*We belong to Anadolu and Tavas. We take our inspiration from Aphrodisias, Hierapolis and Laodicea. We get the raw materials of the ceramics we make entirely from the region we are in. We do not use any additives or synthetic materials. We think that we contribute to Turkish Tourism with these ceramics we produce.*”

## CONCLUSION

The history of terracotta art, its application in the Tavas district of Denizli and the terracotta products of Hasan Hüseyin Savcı, the second generation representative of this art, are included within the scope of this research. Terracotta products, the first examples of which were found in the world between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in 6000 BC, were later seen in China, Egypt, the Mediterranean Basin, India and Africa. The pottery, which was first produced by firing from clay in Anatolia, was first encountered in the Çatalhöyük (Konya-Çumra) region around 10 000 BC. However, terracotta bowls and pottery are found in the mounds in the Anatolian geography. A large number of terracotta bowls and pottery belonging to the Early Bronze Period were found during the excavations in Medet Höyük in the Tavas district of Denizli. These artifacts found are exhibited in the Aphrodisias and Denizli museum. The terracotta pieces unearthed from the Medet Mound in Denizli turned into artifacts in the hands of Necip Savcı, who lived in this region, who spent a lifetime researching and reconstructing these pieces in accordance with the original. Necip Savcı painted the works without glazing, without using chemical dyes, only with earth. These works have been reinterpreted in eggshell delicacy.

His son, Hasan Hüseyin Savcı, who is the second generation, continues this art today. In a semi-structured survey conducted with Savcı and his family, it was evaluated how Hasan Hüseyin Savcı performed this art, which he inherited from his father. The characteristics of the soil where terracotta products are made, the stages of their construction and trade have been studied. Crafts that are evaluated within the concept of intangible cultural heritage have become more important today, when cultural values are rapidly disappearing in the face of technology. The fact that these works are bridges that ensure the transfer of the cultural characteristics of past societies to future generations as well as carrying them to our time once again demonstrates the importance of handicrafts. This study emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage. It is also important from the point of view of tourism to support the people and institutions doing this work, such as the Savcı family, which ensures the continuity of the cultural heritage.

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