

THE NARRATIVE COMPOSITIONS OF AKHALTSIKHE FILIGREE¹
ახალციხური ფილიგრანის თხრობითი კომპოზიციები

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Abstract

It has not been long since Georgia was freed from the colonial shackles, but the process is not over yet. Unfortunately, due to the difficult historical-political or socio-economic past, some of the unique collections in the museums of our country have not been thoroughly studied, therefore the pages of many centuries of history are still to be filled. This opinion is supported by the collection of folk and applied art filigree of the Art Palace of Georgia- Museum of Cultural History, providing a diverse research material. A fundamental study of this collection has not yet been published, which adds even more importance to the paper. Two exhibits from the collection attract special attention: a decorative plate with the image of a deer and a jewelry box with motifs of Abkhazian fairy tales. In the article we will try to highlight the ethnographic significance of these works, the artistic-technical characteristics and the historical background in which these artistic masterpieces were created.

Both exhibits are a reflection of an era that was quite loaded with important historical events, so a study of the works will allow us to see what traces the state of the country leaves on its cultural heritage.

Not surprisingly, in addition to local traditions, the works reflect the influences of Eastern and Western cultures. In art, especially in metal work, the main figure is the customer, whose taste, material condition and requirements often determine the level of the work. The customer's taste, in its part, is depended on the historical situation of the country, its relations with neighboring countries. Georgia has always been open to other cultures, for example in the researched period Tbilisi was often compared to Janus, looking one way to the East and the other way to the West. Chokha and frock, chikhtikopi and hat, piano and duduk coexisted here.

Keywords: filigree, Imaginary compositions, Metalwork, Akhaltsikhe, 19th-20th centuries.

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აბსტრაქტი

დიდი ხანი არაა რაც საქართველო კოლონიალური მარწუხებისგან განთავისუფლდა, თუმცა პროცესი ჯერ კიდევ ბოლომდე არ დამთავრებულა. სამწუხაროდ რთული ისტორიულ-პოლიტიკური, თუ სოციალურ-ეკონომიკური წარსულიდან გამომდინარე ჩვენი ქვეყნის მუზეუმებში არსებული უნიკალური კოლექციების ნაწილი არაა ფუნდამენტურად შესწავლილი, შესაბამისად მრავალ საუკუნოვანი ისტორიის ფურცლები ჯერ კიდევ შესავსებია. ამ მოსაზრებას ამყარებს საქართველოს ხელოვნების სასახლე-კულტურის ისტორიის მუზეუმის ხალხური და გამოყენებითი ხელოვნების ფილიგრანის კოლექცია, რომელიც მრავალწახნაგოვან საკვლევ მასალას წარმოადგენს. აღნიშნული კოლექციის შესახებ ფუნდამენტური კვლევა დღემდე არ გამოქვეყნებულა, რაც ნაშრომს კიდევ უფრო მეტ მნიშვნელობას სძენს. კოლექციიდან განსაკუთრებულ ყურადღებას იქცევს ორი ექსპონატი: დეკორატიული თევზი ირმის გამოსახულებით და ზარდახშა აფხაზური ზღაპრის მოტივებით. სტატიაში შევეცდებით გამოვკვეთოთ ამ ნამუშევრების ეთნოგრაფიული მნიშვნელობა, მხატვრულ-ტექნიკური მახასიათებლები და ისტორიული ფონი, რომლის წიაღშიც შეიქმნა ეს მხატვრული შედეგები.

ორივე ექსპონატი იმ ეპოქის ანარეკლია, რომელიც საკმაოდ დატვირთული იყო მნიშვნელოვანი ისტორიული მოვლენებით შესაბამისად ნამუშევრების შესწავლა საშუალებას მოგვცემს დავინახოთ თუ რა კვალს ტოვებს ქვეყნის მდგომარეობა კულტურულ მემკვიდრეობაზე.

გასაკვირი არაა, რომ ნამუშევრებში გარდა ადგილობრივი ტრადიციებისა მჟღავნდება აღმოსავლური, თუ დასავლური კულტურების გავლენები. ხელოვნებაში, განსაკუთრებით ლითონმქანდაკეობაში მთავარი ფიგურა დამკვეთია, რომლის გემოვნება, მატერიალური მდგომარეობა და მოთხოვნები, ხშირად განსაზღვრავს ნამუშევრის დონეს. ეს ყველაფერი თავის მხრივ დამოკიდებულია ქვეყნის ისტორიულ მდგომარეობაზე, მის ურთიერთობაზე მეზობელ ქვეყნებთან. საქართველო მუდამ გახსნილი იყო სხვა კულტურებისადმი, მაგალითად საკვლევ პერიოდში თბილისს ხშირად ადარებდნენ იანუსს, რომელიც ერთი სახით აღმოსავლეთისკენ, ხოლო მეორე სახით დასავლეთისკენ იმზირებოდა. აქ თანაარსებობდა ჩოხა და ფრაკი, ჩიხტიკოპი და შლიაპა, ფორტეპიანო და დუდუკი.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ფილიგრანი, სახოვანი კომპოზიციები, ლითონმქანდაკეობა, ახალციხე, XIX-XX საუკუნეები.

Introduction

Goldsmithing holds particular place in Georgian culture. The tradition of working with precious metals has evolved over millennia and changed the character according to the epochs. As early as the 3rd century BC, in his epic about the Argonauts, Apollonius of Rhodes refers to Colchis as "abundant in gold" (Koshoridze, 2013:261). This was partly determined by prevailing natural factors: there were abundant resources of precious

metals on the territory of Georgia; gold was extracted here from river sediments and mines. In his article "Goldsmith in Georgia" K. Cholokashvili maintains that "according to the legend, the rivers of Svaneti had gold particles mixed with sand. It was therefore not uncommon to find fine gold and, quite frequently, largish gold shards along the banks of rivers" (Cholokashvili, 1976:13).

There were different goldsmithing centers and schools revealing unique features in various regions of Georgia. The samples of metalwork in the fund repositories of the museums of Georgia confirm the millennial continuous history of the field, the knowledge of various techniques practiced by our ancestors and the innovative nature of their work. However, unfortunately, some schools have not yet been properly studied, although their significance may reach beyond the scope of our country.

Two items we are going to discuss belong to Akhaltsikhe filigree school and represent the top of development with its technique and artistic style. They unite important traditions, symbols and forms of our culture and history.

Methodology

The research is based on an interdisciplinary methodology, for the identification process we used technical, artistic and stylistic analysis of items. For filling the information, it became necessary to conduct investigation with interviewing. We also used description, critical and analytical analysis.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Discussion and Results:

Two century domination of Russia in Georgia had finished only at the end of 20th century. On 31 of March 1991, a referendum on restoration of the country's independence was overwhelmingly approved. In our country it took some time to realize belonging regardless of ethnic, cultural or religious identity. After the collapse of Soviet Union Georgia was (and is still) standing in front of new challenges in different fields.

Over the past two decades the museum field was virtually abandoned. The process of revitalization is still ongoing and the role of museums in our society has begun to gradually increase. But in that difficult political and economic period we have lost, reconsidered some pieces of our culture and history. "We forget more than we remember. Remembrance is a selective process. We tell stories of the past that we think important to tell today- for all sorts of political or psychological reasons; and we tend to ignore the stories that we think aren't important or do not fit in the current situation." (Gnedovsky, 2015:121). Museum collections keep an important information, shared or untold stories. Going down to the layers of rich funds of Georgia helps us to match the puzzle pieces of our history.

The Museum of Folk and Applied Arts of Georgia for a number of years was in danger of shutdown, permanent closure, or even dispersal of its collections. Despite The fact that it preserves a really unique collection, and it holds an extensive and virtually unstudied archive, this museum played a relatively passive role in the museum field in Georgia. But after starting revitalization process museum has become important cultural-educational center (Koshoridze, 2015:183).

As we mentioned museum holds unique collections which were formed with help of the Caucasus craftsmen Committee. The Committee was founded in 1899. The main mission of Committee was to study and revive folk and applied art in the region and also investigating the potential for the Caucasus to become an exporter of handmade objects, high quality, competitive and unique items. They started conducting scientific researches in different regions of Georgia, recorded important craft centers, collected important objects made

in unique technique and helped craftsmen to develop. The mission was very close to the mission of 19th century movement Arts and Crafts. The arts and crafts movement emerged from the attempt of reform design and decoration in mid-19th century Britain. It was a reaction against perceived decline in standards that the reformers associated with machinery and factory production.

Two objects we are going to research belong to Akhaltsikhe filigree center, which caught Craftsmen Committee attention with its unique and innovative style. On the first stage Committee sent two researchers in Akhaltsikhe to describe existing traditions and workshops of filigree. From the records we learn that already in 1871 there were 29 workshops in Akhaltsikhe which produced various raw materials, the work was mainly done manually and was distributed to craftsmen. There were workshops for the production of gold and silver, silk, tobacco, copper, weapons, leather, textiles, and stone, although the filigree workshops were distinguished by their high-quality workmanship. (Ванцян, 1943). Armenian and Georgian craftsmen worked together on the filigree, so we should not be surprised if, along with other cultures, we notice the influence of the Armenian school in Akhaltsikhe. Although, according to Rusudan Kenia, this influence has never had the power to completely subordinate the specific national peculiarities developed by Georgian goldsmiths over the centuries.

As has already been mentioned, one of the main goals of the Committee was to identify the potential of the Caucasus as an exporter of handicrafts and to produce items that meet high international standards for export. To develop the Akhaltsikhe Filigree School, the committee began to create sketches in experimental art laboratories (the art laboratories of the Caucasus Craftsmen Committee were supervised by professional artists, such as Julie Straume, head of the art studio in 1918-22). The artists tried to create designs different from the traditional school, which would be acceptable to the local customer and would be able to compete with the leading countries of the world at the international exhibition-fairs. The repertoire consisted mainly of household items and a variety of accessories.

With the help of the Caucasus craftsmen Committee, the Akhaltsikhe filigree was transformed into a highly competitive school in a few years. This is confirmed by the photo material from the Caucasus stand of the Universal Exhibition, which was held in 1900 in the French capital Paris to celebrate the achievements of the last century and the new trend, the beginning of the new century which today is referred to as the "Universal Exhibition". The exhibition was attended by more than 50 million people, which was, in fact, a record number.

The Paris exhibition had a double meaning for the Akhaltsikhe school as well. In addition to presenting an extraordinary opportunity to sell and promote the product on a fairly large scale, observing the achievements made by other countries allowed for the development in many respects. It is, therefore, no coincidence that even for the eye of a non-professional, the works of this school are clearly influenced by the Art Nouveau style. Flowing, free lines, susceptibility to insect imagery, an abundance of plant ornaments, elongated shapes, household items as carefully embroidered and processed as jewelry; Considering the modern requirements of the customer, preparation of catalogue sketches...

Novelties emerged in terms of artistic analysis of the work. Along with plant and geometric ornaments, we find the imagery embedded in the central area of the composition, or the whole item is covered with narrative scenes of a narrative nature. We rarely meet story compositions made in filigree technique not only in Georgian, but also in the works of other important centers of the world, because its creation requires great experience, precision and special mastery.

The plate created by K. Abajian in 1958 is distinguished by the central composition that depicts the image of a deer (Figure 1). It is cross-legged and has its head turned towards the body so that it fits exactly in the round outline of the composition. Its horns are depicted in a stylized form, with only one relatively large circle. The entire body of the animal is drawn by a single contour line, inside this line the decorative coils are arranged in

such a way that they seem to outline voluminous shapes and imitate light-shadows. Around the deer figure are presented the flowers and leaves of the plant, the movement of the lines of the stems of which introduces dynamics into a single picture complements and wraps the composition. The central part is surrounded by a round frame with wavy ornaments. The rest is a rhythmic repetition of circles and plant, stylized ornaments. Spherical grains (granulation) are placed on the leaves of plants, in the centres of circles and on the petals of flowers. The deer eye is also made with the granulation technique.

We should also mention the fact that the depiction of a deer figure has a long tradition in Georgian metal sculpture. We find the image of a deer in the decor of the Colchian axes. It is believed that the cult of this animal has been associated with hunting since ancient times. Images of deer are found on bronze belts and buckles. The main pillars of the Georgian halls were decorated with deer horns. The image of a deer on material monuments is mainly in a religious-cosmogonic context. In this case, if the image of a deer had a deep semantic meaning, it was a medium between the earthly and the celestial world, had special features, in the work under consideration of the Akhaltsikhe filigree it has only a decorative function. However, still, the depiction of a deer is not a mere coincidence, it is an echo of the local worldview of the country.

The works made in filigree with various images are especially noteworthy, the Art Palace of Georgia Folk and Applied Arts collection includes an interesting sketch for the jewel box (size 82; dimensions -31 X 21cm; paper, Indian ink), which is designed for filigree technique. The chest walls feature key pieces from the Abkhazian fairy tale "Hait- the king of the sea". Unfortunately, the work created according to the sketch has not reached us, but it is the highest stage of development of the Akhaltsikhe Filigree School, as we mentioned we rarely meet story compositions made in filigree technique (not only in Georgia but even in the world's advanced goldsmith centres). The sketch is important from a historical-political or social point of view because it combines the unique aspects of Akhaltsikhe craftsmanship and Abkhazian folklore.

This fairy tale is included in the collection of "Old Abkhazian fairy tales" (Хамба, 1935:114) published in 1935. This collection contains fairy tales recorded in Abkhazia, which took a long time to gather together. This was the first experimental attempt to print Abkhazian fairy tales. The illustration of the book and the sketch of the jewel box is made by one artist with the difference that his initials are indicated in different ways, in particular, the illustration of the 1935 collection of fairy tales (most of the illustrations in the book belong to one author) is signed by L. Chachba, while the sketch of the jewel box is signed as A. Shervashidze. Noteworthy are the small descriptions of the story on the back of the sketch by the artists with the signatures of G. Meskhi and Milokhov. The place of the making of the sketch is the Crafts Museum.

Leonide (Leo) Shervashidze (Chachba) (1910 Paris-2003 Sukhumi) - Art historian, Doctor of Arts, Professor of Ethics and Aesthetics, Academician of the Abkhazian Academy of Sciences, honored scientist of Georgian-Abkhazian Art. His field of research was Georgian-Abkhazian art, and perhaps for this reason he was involved in the publication of a collection of Abkhazian fairy tales, he created the illustrations for the collection (he also created illustrations for the Abkhazian alphabet), each illustration has his initials "L.Ch." We do not know who commissioned the sketch of the jewelry box, but the inspiration surely comes from Abkhazian folklore. The item combines the traditions of Akhaltsikhe and Abkhazia, the two most important parts of Georgia, which becomes even more important due to the current historical and political situation.

The sketch of the jewelry box was made in 1948, 13 years after the publication of the collection of Abkhazian fairy tales. The composition of the sketch of the top of the jewelry box (Figure 2) and the book illustration repeat each other, although the sketch created for Akhaltsikhe craftsmen is more decorative and detailed. The artist considers the specifics of the filigree technique in the construction of the composition, which indicates his high professionalism. The depiction of the King of the Sea is similar in both compositions, only the angle is

changed. In both cases, Haiti is portrayed as an angry, long-bearded man. In the sketch of the jewelry box he holds a rod in one hand and the index finger of the other hand is directed towards the old man and speaks to him with a stern, pious look. The illustration, however, shows only the hand pointing to the old man, and the facial expression is not as stern as in the case of the jewelry box. The images of the old man and his son differ only in the compositional placement, in the book illustration they go beyond the framework of the whole composition, their size is larger. On the jewelry box they are smaller. As for the background, the illustration is conveyed in simple lines, while the sketch of the jewelry box is more loaded with decorative elements.

Before we get into all the details of this jewelry box, it would be interesting to describe the content of the tale itself.

The story unfolds as follows: The old man and his wife had only one son. When the boy became of age, the old man took him to the sea side, so that he could learn some craft. After a lot of walking the boy got tired and fell down. The old man called his son- 'Hait!'. Suddenly the sea opened and a stranger came out of the depths. This stranger turned out to be the King of the Sea- Haiti. Haiti asked the old man where he was going and the old man also told him the reason. The King of the Sea suggested taking the boy to teach him everything and returning him to this very same place again a year later. The old man agreed and returned home alone. A year later he came to that place again. Haiti took him to the sea too and invited him to the palace. At the entrance to the palace he noticed 12 boys dressed in silk robes who looked very much like each other. When the old man was getting ready for bed at night, his son, who had become an insect, flew in and warned him that the next day Haiti would show him 12 identical boys, and if the old man could not recognize him then he would have to return home alone. The son told his father that he would be a boy with an insect on his shoulder. The father recognized the son, Haiti realized the boy had tricked him, but how he could not understand. The word could not be broken from his side, so the father and son were sent home. The boy realized that Haiti would not forgive him and would try to destroy him. His expectations were met as Haiti could not forgive the deception and sent different kinds of obstacles. Eventually the boy turned out to be smarter than Haiti and defeated the King of the Sea and married the king's daughter.

The key parts of the story are depicted on the walls of the jewelry box. The top of the box depicts an old man standing by the sea, hugging his son and looking at the sea. As already mentioned, the King of the Sea Hait is depicted with a stern expression, with a rod in his hand. The composition is complemented by images of stylized beach pebbles, waves and clouds. Palm branches can be seen in the left corner. The central composition in the form of a frame is followed by a strip of triangles, followed by a series of dolphins and waves with a shell in the center.

The front wall of the jewelry box depicts how the king's daughter saw the sleeping boy and fell in love with him. Behind the boy and the princess is the sea, with corals, fish, jellyfish. The boy is dressed in Abkhazian clothes. The central area here too is framed by dolphins and waves.

On the back wall are three daughters of Haiti surrounded by seaweed, corals and fish. There is a mirror image of dolphins on both sides. From above, the composition is framed by a series of waves.

On the right wall, the king's daughter is depicted with a magic mirror in her hand, trying to help the boy, while on the left wall, the boy is depicted with a key already found in his hand.

On the front and back walls of the jewelry box, the dolphins are directed to the side of the composition, while the right and left walls are directed in the opposite direction. These dolphins are not only depicted from a decorative point of view, according to the fairy tale, when a boy fleeing from Haiti turned into a fish, Haiti chased him as a dolphin.

The jewelry box stands on legs shaped like a shell. The face of each character is depicted quite skillfully, which would probably be difficult to perform in filigree, especially without the background, in an open-work.

Light-shadows are noteworthy as they depict the character of the story. Unfortunately, we can't say much about the technique, because the box itself has not reached us, but even the sketch shows the diligence of the craftsmen of Akhaltsikhe.

Conclusions:

the objects with imaginary compositions created in Akhaltsikhe filigree technique combine important artistic, historical and ethnographic elements.

They show the development of traditional technique of Georgian metalwork and highlight the professionalism of Akhaltsikhe goldsmith.

Symbols and stories used as main motifs for decorative items prove how cultural identity can be reflected on the pieces of art.

Goldsmith from Akhaltsikhe with the help of Caucasus Craftsmen Committee had created the repertoire which united local traditions and influences of western and Eastern cultures.

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