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TOREUTICS OF AZERBAIJAN

Items of toreutics, being a product of artistic metalworking, reflect the culture of life, ideology and aesthetic views of the society of their time. Products of toreutics of the 9th-15th centuries are a kind of source, reflecting the thoughts and beliefs of medieval people and the artistic tastes of different layers of feudal society.

Rich mineral deposits in Azerbaijan provided the raw material for the metal industry of handicraft production. Albanian historian Moses Kalankatuatsi notes: "... in the

Star globe of the Maraga observatory



mountains of Albania, gold, silver, copper and yellow incense are produced" (1, p.17). 10th century Arab geographer Abu Dulaf reports that in the mountains near the town of Shiz, there were mines that produces "gold, mercury, lead, silver, yellow arsenic and stone known as jamast". He gives the names of the types of the gold produced: "al-gumisi", "al-shahrani" and "al-sajabazi" (2, p. 77). The widespread use of items of toreutics at home by the population of Azerbaijan was reflected in written sources. 10th century author Ibn Haukal notes that metal containers, in particular gold and silver trays, bowls, cups and jugs are widely used (2, p.112).

Archaeological work in the territory of Azerbaijan confirms that the artistic processing of metals had ancient traditions and experience was handed down from generation to generation (3, p.98). Great achievements in artistic metalworking in Azerbaijan were gained in the 11th-12th centuries in the Seljuk era. During this period, one of the most important factors of rapprochement in craftsmanship was creative exchanges between representatives of various cultural centers. Due to the migration of masters and the movement of goods, items belonging to one school of metalworking, as well as traditions spread rapidly over vast areas. In the Seljuk era, one of the leading regional art schools in Central Asia was the Khorasan school of metalworking. Its influence is clearly seen on the products manufactured in Nakhchivan and Shirvan.

A zoomorphic pitcher in the form of a bird with a long beak made in Nakhchivan stands out for its high artistic finish (4, p.49). The surface of the pitcher is decorated with ornamental belts and graceful medallions applied by chasing and engraving. On the body of the pitcher, there are plant and epigraphic ornaments. Medallions and the "signature" of the artist Osman Ibn Salman are placed on the free fields. The head of the pitcher, which has the form of a "buta", is decorated with delicate floral ornament. The "buta" is a very popular decor element in the art of Azerbaijan, Iran and Central Asia and is associated with fire worshipping (5, p.89).

The effect of the Khorasan school of artistic

metalworking can be seen on another item from Nakhchivan. A pitcher with an annular tray, corrugated body and cylindrical neck is made with the highest professionalism. The surface is decorated with floral and epigraphic ornaments. The semi-cylinders of the pitcher’s body are completed with high reliefs, the rhythmic repetition of which gives the vessel expressiveness.

The bronze pitcher “Shirvan Can” kept in the State Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg stands out for its original form. The three-figure composition depicts a zebu cow, a calf and a predator. The zebu cow stands still, while the predator, possibly a lion bites into his hump. A bell is hanging from the neck of the zebu cow. The motive of predators eating herbivores was typical of the art of the Ancient East, and such scenes are occasionally also found in the art of the Muslim East. Despite the fact that Islam does not approve of images of living creatures, the tradition of making utensils in the shape of animals and zoomorphic ornamentation continued in the medieval period. The pattern on the surface of the Shirvan Can was inlaid with silver, but it is poorly preserved. On the body of the central figure, hunting scenes are made gracefully and everyday subjects are realistically depicted. The inscription on the neck and face of the zebu cows reports: the author is

Bronze lamp of the Seljuk period



Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Abu al-Qasim, the can is made at the request of Ruzbeh ibn Afridun ibn Burzin in Muharram 603 (August 1206)”; This cow, calf and lion were all cast at a time with the help of Allah, the fair, and divine providence.” The can made with a casting technique demonstrates the high professionalism of the Shirvan artist.

A fragment of the can from Kharaba-Gilan represents a faceted nose ending with the head of a fantastic animal (Table 1, 7). It is identified as a dragon head or the head of a gray wolf, which is quite a popular zoomorphic image among Turkic peoples. The conic cover of the jug found at the Oren Gala site (Baylakan) is gracefully highlighted.

Shirvan bronze cauldrons stand out for their rich artistic decoration. A cauldron made by Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg) has a hemispherical body resting on three legs. The top half of the cauldron is framed by a ribbed belt to which handles are attached vertically (6 p.90). Two Shirvan bronze cauldrons stored at the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan (hereinafter – the NMHA) have a hemispherical body on three legs and two semi-oval handles. The rims of the cauldrons, bent outwardly and symmetrically carved in the form of four tongues,



Bronze lock of zoomorphic forms

stand out for their elegant decoration. The tongues are richly decorated with geometric, floral and epigraphic ornaments applied by chasing. Two tongues facing each other are particularly interesting. On one of them, the coppersmith's signature Amal al-Ahmad ibn al-Muhammad is written in the Arabic flowering Kufi script, and on the other, there are rosettes with stylized floral ornaments and an S-shaped sign. The S-shaped figure is associated with the image of the dragon and had a Far Eastern origin. In Central Asia, Anatolia and the Caucasus, this motif was widespread in the Seljuk era. The handles of semi-oval product are attached to the rim and are decorated with hornlike projections. The surface is further decorated with geometric and floral patterns. The hornlike projections apparently symbolized the ram. Images of part of a symbol instead of the whole image are typical for arts and crafts in Azerbaijan.

A similar bronze cauldron, made by Muhammad ibn Hussein, is decorated with geometric and floral patterns and stylized images. Here we see the "Seljuk chain" pattern in the form of weaving. A highly stylized image of a peacock in the rim of the cauldron is given in the plant background and is subject to the ornament. In the medieval applied arts of Azerbaijan, the image of this bird, usually against a plant background, was very popular. Worship of the peacock is associated with ancient pagan beliefs. In Islam, as a bird of paradise, it is considered a symbol of immortality.

Unlike Shirvan cauldrons, the bronze vessel from Dabil has a hexagonal body on three legs. The rim of the vessel is bent outwards and rectangular handles with holes are vertically attached thereto. On each side of the hexagon, a geometric pattern is engraved (10, table 42,2). The vase from Baylakan with a high,

conical leg and a hemispherical body is decorated with a geometric ornament made by chasing. From excavations at the Kharaba-Gilan site, a fragment of a bronze vase is known. The lower half of the leg of the vase has a conical shape. The upper part is spherical, accented with a low roller from the top and bottom. The figured leg from the settlement of Oren-Gala (Baylakan) is also part of some vessel.

Archaeological excavations in the medieval settlements of Azerbaijan gave a rich collection of metal lamps. Bronze lamps are known from Baku, Shabran, Baylakan and Sheki. They have a flattened or globular body, a bell mouth, a bent rim and tubular spout for the wick (7, p.74 -75). Lamps are generally provided with legs in the form of three or four projections. A bronze lamp from the Palace of the Shirvanshahs stands out for its high artistic decoration. The surface of the body and spout is decorated with sculptural ornaments with zoomorphic elements - riders, hunting scenes, feline predators, domestic animals and relief images of human faces. The surface of the body and spout of another bronze lamp is decorated with a relief picture of a goat and floral ornament. In the decorative and applied arts of Azerbaijan, the image of a goat has been widespread since ancient times. The bronze lamp in the NMHA is decorated with a sculptured picture of a bird.

Bronze cauldron. Shirvan



Composite bronze lamp

A bronze lamp of the Seljuk era from the NMHA stands out for its high artistic decoration. The lamp has a tripod with three legs in the form of an animal paw, and its lower ledge is oval, smooth and fitting the surface. The upper floor consists of an outer ring inclined outwards, which moves into the flattened-spherical upper part with a roller-shaped ledge. The flattened-spherical part is decorated with openwork decor. The lamp consists of a hexagonal barrel and a reel-shaped part. The barrel is richly decorated with openwork floral ornaments. The upper and lower parts of the barrel are decorated with geometric and epigraphic ornaments. Such composite lamps were widespread in the Muslim world in the 11th-12th centuries.

Judging by the frequency of occurrence in the life of medieval citizens, metal locks were widely used. It must be noted that museums of the Muslim East keep a great collection of the objects described above and among them there are locks of zoomorphic shape. For example, a lock that resembles a rhinoceros with its outlines is kept at the NMHA.

The Mongol conquest halted, but did not interrupt the artistic traditions of metalworking. An important center for craft production in the 14th-15th centuries was Tabriz. The high professionalism of Azerbaijani masters is shown by the gate of the Friday Mosque in Soltaniyeh built at the beginning of the 14th century. Venetian A. Contarini (15th century) emphasizes that "the mosque is particularly remarkable for its three bronze gates that ... are decorated with silver incisions in convex places. These gates are quite beautiful and must certainly be very expensive ..." (9, p.50). It is assumed that these gates were made by masters of the Tabriz school of metalworking (8, p.195).

A masterpiece of the art casting of the medieval era, which still astonishes people with its dramatic size and monumentality, is the bronze cauldron of the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmad Yasavi Mosque made in 801 AH (1399) on the orders of Tamerlane by master Abd al-Aziz ibn Sharaf al-Din al-Tabrizi (height - 158.3 cm, diameter - 243.4 cm, weight - two tons). A huge hemispherical tank provided with 10 large handles stands on a high pallet. The body of the cauldron is decorated with ornamental bands and medallions. The upper area is filled with an inscription made in the Arabic Naskh script. The text contains a decree of Tamerlane and a Koranic verse that recognizes providing water to pilgrims as a charitable thing. In the space between the handles and medallions, there are repeated good



wishes and the "signature" of the master. In the lower zone, the traditional formula "Power belongs to Allah", made in the Arabic Kufi script, is given 22 times (6, p.231-232).

Copper kitchen cauldrons of the 14th-15th centuries have been found in Nakhchivan and Shamakhi. The first find has a hemispherical body, a bent rim and is decorated by chasing and engraving. The lower part of the body of the cauldron is decorated with geometric ornamentation and stylized floral motifs. A horse is also shown here. Another cauldron stands out for its rich decor. The outside surface is decorated with ornamental bands. The first two zones are decorated with geometrical ornaments, the third zone shows a gazelle, snake and plants, the fourth one is filled with bird and plant elements, and the fifth zone is adorned with geometric decor. The last zone contains an inscription.

In the medieval life of all social strata, metal utensils - mugs, bowls, jugs, cups, trays, etc. - were widely used. Contarini, who visited the palace of Uzun Hasan Ag Goyunlu, notes that the entire entourage of the ruler, which consisted of about four hundred people, was served food "in copper bowls" (9, p.56-58).

A 14th century silver bowl from Mingachevir



Bronze pitcher. Nakhchivan

excavations has a hemispherical shape with a round smooth rim. The inner surface of the bowl is richly decorated with floral ornaments and images of birds and fish. There is gilding below the edge of the rim. The bottom of the bowl is decorated with two 16-petal rosettes of different sizes. At the bottom of the bowl there is a pattern painted with small pinholes located in frequent vertical stripes. In the center of the bottom, a pheasant is shown with chasing; his head is turned to the right. Around the pheasant, a medallion of flowers is embossed. Inside the bowl, in the middle of the body, five gold-plated fish swimming counterclockwise are depicted around a circle.

Bronze lamps of the 13th-14th centuries produced in Tabriz stand out for their high artistic value. They have a wide base and a barrel tapering upward. The products are richly decorated with ornamental, pictorial and epigraphic elements. There are lamps with storyline images (4, p.50). The latter include a bronze lamp from South Azerbaijan, sumptuously decorated with a complex braided belt and numerous medallions. A central medallion depicting a rider on a vegetable background stands out. One gets the impression that the image is intertwined with the "islami bandlik" composition and is completely subject to floral ornament.

During archaeological excavations in Shabran, a set

of three dish-shaped metal objects of different sizes was found on the horizon of the 14th-15th centuries. In the center of the smallest item, there is a rod with a serrated roller in the upper part. All products were stored by the principle of Russian dolls.

It is known that in the 13th century, Nasreddin Tusi created a large observatory in Maraga. In 1279 in Maraga, Muvayyid al-Urdi Muhammad made a star globe for the observatory, which is now kept at the Astronomy Museum in Dresden. The globe, which weighs about 1 kg and has a height 14.1 cm, rests on four legs. There is another low support leg (stand) in the center for the rod of the globe. The globe ball, made of 2 hemispheres, is covered by circular arcs. There are constellations and stars depicted on the globe. All lines on the globe are treated with gold and silver (Illustration XIII) (4, p.51).

We should note another device connected to astronomy, which is stored in the collection of Harari. It is an astrolabe made in 1486 by Shukurullah Mukhlis Shirvani – a protractor to determine the position of stars. This tool was not only a perfect scientific instrument of its era, but also a fine example of the art of metalworking in Azerbaijan in the period under review.

In the 14th-15th centuries, metal locks of zoomorphic forms continued to prevail. Finds in the form of a horse are known from archaeological sites and settlements of Shabran and Girkh Chirag (10, s.380).

A bronze mirror of the era of Mongol rule was found at the Girkh Chirag site. The flip side is decorated with an embossed 8-petal rosette.

In general, as shown by archaeological material of the medieval monuments of Azerbaijan, products of toreutics had a characteristic feature of the Islamic artistic culture of this period – tendency towards a synthesis of arts. Metalworking, often with great perfection and harmony, combines ornament, calligraphy, painting and sculpture. Using geometric figures, artists created linear patterns that hit the imagination and demonstrated the calligrapher's high level of professionalism. In ornamentation, various palmettes, buds, shamrocks, stems, etc. were also widely used. Floral ornament with its usual stylized character increasingly began to approach abstraction.

As is known, the method of treating any material depends on its quality. Medieval masters were well aware of the natural qualities of precious and non-ferrous metals. For example, they knew that gold and silver are cast successfully, can be forged, cut and

Bronze cauldron. Shirvan

handled with pressure very well. Copper is not cast very well and is hard to cut, but can be handled by forging, stamping and chasing very well (11, p.92).

Chasing, the main technique in the production of items of toreutics, was one of the simple, widespread and ancient ways in metalworking (11, p.116 -126). Forging - one of the oldest methods in the production of metal art objects - was widely used for shaping metal products. Ethnographic material and written sources indicate that medieval masters invented more than 15 types of anvils and about 10 varieties of hammers. They used different casting techniques, but the most common method in the Middle Ages was lost-wax casting (11, p.277). Since ancient times, the technique of incrustation has been used in artistic metalworking. In medieval archaeological material, silver items inlaid with bronze are found (11, p.155). When decorating items of toreutics, engraving was also applied. Such operations were conducted by masters - "naggash". Linear decor in the form of a picture, ornament or inscription was applied to metal using a special tool - "galam", i.e. graver. For decoration with precious metals, particularly silver or gold, notching was used. According to this technique, patterns are made on the outer surface of an object - the finest ornament, inscription or image - and then filled with precious metal.

It should be noted that metalworking developed in conjunction with other branches of artistic craftsmanship. At the same time, judging by the large number of ceremonial objects and the palace origin of most of the finds, metal products were mainly associated with the life of the feudal class and wealthy citizens. Along with common features, works of Islamic artistic metalworking have details that are peculiar only to the toreutics of Azerbaijan, indicating local features and the establishment and development of their own schools and centers. In the pre-Mongol period, to all appearances, Shirvan and Nakhchivan were among the leading centers. In the 14th-15th centuries, the Tabriz school became famous throughout the Muslim East. In general, the world of artistic toreutics of Azerbaijan is quite wide and varied. Extant metal products are characterized by high craftsmanship and elegant design and are considered masterpieces of medieval arts and crafts. ❀

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Astrolabe