

ARMENIAN ORNAMENTS AND THEIR SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION

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“**S**emiotics is a branch of communication theory that investigates sign systems and the modes of representations that humans use to convey feelings, thoughts, ideas and ideological concepts” (Eco 1976:5). Hence, each thing or object that surrounds us can be used to convey a certain meaning. In the present article ornaments are taken as a subject of a semiotic research. The scope of the observation is confined to two types of ornaments:

1. pistil- harvest;
2. dragonlike ornaments.

“Pistil-harvest” ornaments go back to ancient times. But why are the internal parts of herbs and plants paid attention to? “In Herodotus times male Phoenician date-palm branches were hung from those of female branches. This period of artificial pollination arranged by people was called the month of date-palms. In this month pagans celebrated and glorified the wedding ceremony of gods and goddesses” (Տիմոթիայան 1931:215). This phenomenon is explained by the fact that in ancient times plants served as the main source of food. Hence, human beings needed to study what provided their existence and satisfied their biological needs.

Thus, after finding out why herbs have been the basic motives of the ornamental art we are now to give their ideological explanations. “Pistil- harvest” ornaments, first of all, stand for the concepts of **fertility**. For instance, the symbol of a hand and a twig is interpreted as a sign of fertility. In carpet weaving a hand of a god, of a king with a twig are quite common as a sign of productivity, as a power that **controls the process of growth**. Later, the twig became a magical stick in fairy tales, folk-tales, a ritual stick in real life, a child with a twig during festivals, a virgin with a twig as a sign of the zodiac.

Here it should also be mentioned the meeting of st. Virgin and Gabriel that is regarded as a matrimonial meeting between a male and a female as a result of which Jesus was born. The twig with pistils in the hand of Jesus also has the same meaning of fertility. Later this twig was transformed into a flower. The explanation of this will be given later.

Secondly, pistil- harvest ornaments symbolize **women**. Those were women who cultivated and dealt with herbs and, as a result, the notion of a flower was closely linked to that of females. This is clearly seen in the song “Jan gyulum”:

«Փունջ մանիշակ հարսները,
Խոշ-խոշ եղան աղջիկները»:
(Ա. Մնացականյան «Հայկական զարդարվեստ» էջ 4)

or

«Զին-չին հարսներ,
Փունջ մանուշակ աղջիկներ»:
(Ա. Մնացականյան «Հայկական զարդարվեստ» էջ 28)

“Pistil- harvest” ornaments are depicted as flowers as well. Flowers express the meaning of **powers that protect people from evil. Two flowers** are understood in a sense of a **couple that gives birth**. That is the main reason for the toasts that we hear during wedding ceremonies directed towards a bride and a groom. They are called as “flowers” who are desired “to flourish and thrive, to have a strong family full of naughty children.” The couple is compared to forget-me-nots, snowdrops, pomegranates. But quite surprisingly there are also cases when a flower is associated with a male who gets married.

Աղջկան անհանգստացնում է մի ծաղիկ.
Ծաղիկ մ'է բուսեր
Տեր շինուց վերև,
Տեր շինուց վերև,
Խօց էր զորն զընդեզ,
Ում շաբաթը մեկ թույլ կտա համբուրել,
Մեկ ծոցը մտնել,
Տարին մեկ կտրիճ պարզել»:

(Ա. Մնացականյան «Հայկական զարդարվեստ» էջ 98)

Another widespread use of flowers is discovered through the deep study of king's crowns. On the coin with an image of Tigran II “the flower is found between a bird couple that gives birth”. The crown of Artavazd II is decorated with circles located on triangles that stand for petals of flowers. Women's hats also have a form of a flower:

«Էսօր ինչ օր է, – ուրբաթ ու պաս է,
Աղջի՛, քո գլուխ արծաթ թաս է...
...Աղջի՛, քո գլուխ արծաթե թասի,
Ծո տղա, քո գլուխ արմալի ֆարսի»:

(Մ. Աբեղյան «Ժողովրդական խաղիկներ» էջ 195)

On the belts there are buckles which are also “pistil-harvest” ornaments covered with sprouts. In ancient times married girls and young women wore belts, hats, jewellery with flower-like images in order to be healthy and give birth to healthy children.

The image of buds as a sign of fertility and growth is another inseparable part of “pistil- harvest” ornaments. Buds were compared to single youngsters.

The next type of ornaments to interpret is “dragonlike” ornaments. The existence of this ornament is explained by the fact that ancient tribes lived next to beasts, close to other tribes. In order to survive they should hunt, fish. That process of meeting their requirements was accompanied with fights for survival and, consequently, the fighting process should be generalized through “the good and the evil”. If philology finds its expression of thoughts, ideas through words, then the art of ornaments creates the respective images where the king is portrayed as a totemic animal, an ancestor, “kenats tsar” and the evil got the image of dragons, snakes and other monsters.

The evil powers were depicted in mythological dialogues and folk-tales as dragons, monsters, snakes. The roots of those reasons date back to ancient times where those powers that were harmful to the economic- social life were considered as evil.

The same picture is drawn in a number of stories where we see the incarnation of people with their problems, troubles and anxiety. Through this story we come to the conclusion that people turn to the help of supernatural evil powers when they thought that the place where they lived was considered bad because of the evil sun, soil, water and air. Besides those natural phenomena there are also secondary evil powers – as beasts. Wolves are considered evil by cattle-breeders. They pray to their god to catch them:

«Ալալիոս, Քալալիոս,
Աղա Ստեփան, Ստեփանիոս,
Կալել եմ, կալել եմ,
Սուրբ Սարգսի ձի ու ձորով,
Աստվածածնյա քաղցր կաթով,
Ութ մատով, երկու բթով,
Չուլ, կարիձ, չուլ»:

(Հ. Նազարյան «Նախապաշարմունք» էջ 47-48)

A prayer fights against beasts:

«Ութ մատով, երկու բոյթով,
Քալին, գազանին բերան,
Կալուին, կապ մընան»:

(Գ. Սրվանձտյանց «Համով-հոտով» էջ 341)

It becomes clear that the evil were powers that had their influence on the working class as their crops were damaged because of wars, natural disasters. They hated the image of a water dragon. But why a water dragon? The thing is that the ancient Armenians lived in a territory which was not rich with water and the amount of precipitations was not enough to satisfy the needs of peasants. That is why the water dragon was associated with the evil as the lack of something always makes it unknown and, as a result, a source of trouble.

In the course of time the image of a dragon was substituted by those who abused people as it was done by farmers, clergymen, the rich. They were evil and in “horovel” the names of the evil were mentioned:

«Գութան, գութան, աստվածաբան,
Խերն ու բարին մեր մաճկվորին
Ազապ աղջիկ՝ ուժտնվորին,
Սև պոլոզներ – վարդապետներին,
Սև կողոպուտ – տերտերներին»:

(Ա. Ղանալանյան «Հաշտ վիշապ, կռվող վիշապ» էջ 83)

To sum up, the world of ornaments is rich and broad. Everything in reality finds its place among different types of ornaments. Ornaments are the aesthetic reflection of reality. Of course, in the course of time they have undergone modifications and got stylized. The humanity needs to study them carefully, cherish them with care as they help humans to understand their ancestors, their way of thinking. In many cases ornaments are keys to

many solutions. Their examination helps people to become more aware and understand the world that surrounds them.

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Հայկական զարդանախշերի նշանագիտական մեկնությունը

Զարդանախշերի աշխարհը հարուստ է ու բազմազան, իսկ դրանց նշանագիտական մեկնությունը՝ առավել հետաքրքրական: Սույն հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում են վարսանդա-պտղային և վիշապանման զարդանախշերը և նրանց դրսևորումները հայերի կենցաղում, արվեստում, արքունական կյանքում և բանահյուսության մեջ: Այս ամենն ավելի ընկալելի ու մեկնելի է դարձնում հայկական զարդանախշերի աշխարհը:

Семиотическая интерпретация армянских орнаментов

Мир орнаментов богат и многозначен, а их семиотическая интерпретация довольно интересна. В статье рассматриваются пестико-плодные и драконопохожие орнаменты и их манифестации в бытие, в искусстве, а также в дворцовой жизни и в фольклоре. Все это становится более понятным и объяснимым благодаря семиотическому миру армянских орнаментов.