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Problems of learning of toreutics of the Islamic era of Azerbaijan

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Түйін сөздер: *Әзербайжан, торевтика, ислам кезеңі, металды көркемдеп өңдеу, орта ғасырлар*
Ключевые слова: *Азербайджан, торевтика, исламский период, художественная металлообработка, средние века*

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Azerbaijan has rich craft traditions. Among them, the art of artistic metalwork is of particular importance. Both the ancient period and artistic metalwork of Caucasian Albania have been investigated as a separate research topic. During the Soviet period, the study of the history and cultural heritage of Azerbaijan did not receive proper development. From this point of view, the toreutics of the Islamic period of Azerbaijan were also studied from an artistic and decorative point of view; it was not studied in terms of its affiliation with the Seljuk period and Islamic culture. The article mentions some issues regarding these issues.
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Әзербайжандағы ислам дәуірінің торевтикасын зерттеу мәселелері

Әзербайжанда қолөнер дәстүрі кеңінен таралған. Соның ішінде металды көркемдеп өңдеу өнері аса маңызды. Кавказдық Албанияның металдан көркемдеп жасалған бұйымдар мен ежелгі дәуір жеке тақырып ретінде зерттелді. Әзербайжанның тарихы пен мәдени мұрасын зерттеу кеңестік кезеңде өз дәрежесінде дамымады. Осы тұрғыдан алғанда, Әзербайжанның ислам дәуірі торевтикасы көркемдік-сәндік тұрғыдан ғана зерттелді, олардың селжұқтар кезеңіне және ислам мәдениетіне жататындығы туралы зерттеулер жоқ. Мақалада осыған қатысты кейбір мәселелер айтылады.
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Проблемы изучения торевтики исламской эпохи в Азербайджане

Азербайджан имеет богатые ремесленные традиции. Среди них особое значение имеет искусство изготовления художественного металла. В качестве отдельной темы исследованы античный период и художественные изделия из металла Кавказской Албании. В советский период изучение истории и культурного наследия Азербайджана не получило должного развития. С этой точки зрения торевтика исламского периода Азербайджана также изучалась только с художественно-декоративной точки зрения; не исследовалась в

аспекте её принадлежности к сельджукскому периоду и исламской культуре. В статье упоминаются некоторые вопросы, касающиеся этих аспектов.

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Introduction

Azerbaijan is a country with an ancient history and a rich material and intangible heritage. Since antiquity, various forms of art have been created and developed here, including the art of toreutics (metal engraving and decoration). The use of metal in Azerbaijan dates back to the Eneolithic period (5th–4th millennium BC). The art of metalworking began to take shape during the Early Bronze Age and became more widespread in antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The subject of research and study has often been samples of toreutics from ancient times, antiquity, and the early Middle Ages of Azerbaijan. However, toreutic products from the Islamic period (9th–17th centuries) have not been the focus of specialized research. Each artifact of material culture serves as a repository of information about the lifestyle, ideology, artistic and aesthetic worldview, and cultural and trade relations of its era. Toreutic works from Azerbaijan during the 9th–17th centuries similarly reflect many aspects of early Islam, the Seljuk period, Mongol rule, and the Safavid era. The art of artistic metalworking reached its peak during the Seljuk period (11th–13th centuries), driven by the migration of artisans and expanded trade relations, which fostered cultural influences and connections across regions. During this time, the influence of the Khorasan school of metalworking in Central Asia is evident in examples of toreutics from the Nakhchivan and Shirvan regions of Azerbaijan. The technology and artistic techniques of these artifacts confirm their place within the shared Turkic cultural tradition. The Mongol invasion temporarily disrupted the production of toreutic artifacts, although historical and cultural traditions were preserved. By the 14th–15th centuries, Tabriz had emerged as one of Azerbaijan's primary centers of craftsmanship and trade. Artists of this era produced toreutic works with exceptional artistic quality. With the establishment of the Safavid state in the 16th century, cities such as Ardabil, Tabriz, Qazvin, Urmia, and Isfahan became major craft hubs, making significant contributions to the art of toreutics. Interestingly, the toreutics of Azerbaijan's Islamic period has not been the subject of dedicated research, and its historical affiliation was overlooked during the Soviet period. This gap underscores the importance of studying these artifacts. As part of the Turkic-Islamic cultural heritage, they are crucial for understanding the rich legacy and trade and cultural relations of that era.

The article was prepared using methods of description, comparative analysis, and generalization.

The spread of Islam in Azerbaijan and its cultural influences

Starting from the 7th–8th centuries, Islam began to spread across Azerbaijan. Following its inclusion in the Caliphate, the dissemination of Islam, the adoption of Arabic as a literary and official language, and the establishment of cultural and economic ties with Middle Eastern countries became widespread. These processes led to significant transformations in the material and spiritual culture of the region's population by the late 8th and early 9th centuries, resulting in the emergence of common Muslim characteristics. Artistic metalworking is one of the crafts that flourished in Azerbaijan during the Islamic period. Although the history of metalworking in Azerbaijan dates back to ancient times, some of the most valuable examples of material culture were created during the Islamic era, particularly in the Seljuk period.

Ancient and early medieval ceramics of Azerbaijan have been extensively studied as a separate topic. In contrast, several articles addressing toreutics from the Islamic period exist, but these are primarily examined through the lens of art criticism. Art historians note that while Sassanian influences are evident

in the decorative arts of earlier periods, Islamic-era toreutics increasingly reflect elements of Islamic and Turkish culture.

In our study of Islamic-era toreutics, we focused on a broad chronological framework spanning the 9th–18th centuries. Unfortunately, examples of toreutics from this period are relatively rare. One possible reason is that metal artifacts do not preserve well in soil. Another is the Islamic prohibition against using precious metals for certain purposes. Additionally, unlike ceramics, metal items can be melted down and repurposed if damaged, further reducing the number of surviving examples.

About some examples of toreutics in the Islamic period

The territory of Azerbaijan was rich in minerals necessary for the development of the art of metalworking. We see this clearly from written sources. Thus, Moses Kalankatuklu in the fourth chapter of his work "History of Albania" wrote: "Gold, silver, copper, and ocher are mined in the mountains of Albania" [Kalankatuklu 2006: 19]. Abu Dulaf, an Arab geographer who lived in the 10th century, writes that near Shiz there are mines where gold, mercury, lead, silver, yellow arsenic, and stone are mined. Also, the 10th century author Ibn Hawgal writes that exquisite dishes were made from limestone in Arran and precious metals [Vəlixanlı 1974: 77; 113].

Speaking about toreutics products of the Islamic period, two main regions should be mentioned here – Nakhchivan and Shirvan. The bulk of toreutics products known to us come from these regions. Examples of toreutics from this period can be grouped as follows:

1) Bronze pots;
2) Lighting means;
3) Bronze cups;
4) Fragments of other products.

By production period, toreutic samples can be grouped as follows:

1) Early Islamic era, 9–10th centuries;
2) Seljuk period – early 11–13th centuries;
3) Mongolian period – 13–14th centuries;
4) Post-Mongol period of the 15th century;
5) Safavid era – 16–17th centuries.

Unfortunately, very few examples of toreutics from the 9th–10th centuries have been discovered in archaeological excavations; they consist mainly of fragments. Among the materials dating from this period is an interesting zoomorphic lamp found in Gabala. Particularly noteworthy is the lamp, which has a zoomorphic shape: four legs, five spouts for wicks. There is a hole with a lid in the upper part for refilling the lamp (fig. 1).

The limited number of surviving toreutics objects from the 9th–10th centuries makes it challenging to characterize the level of development and distinctive features of

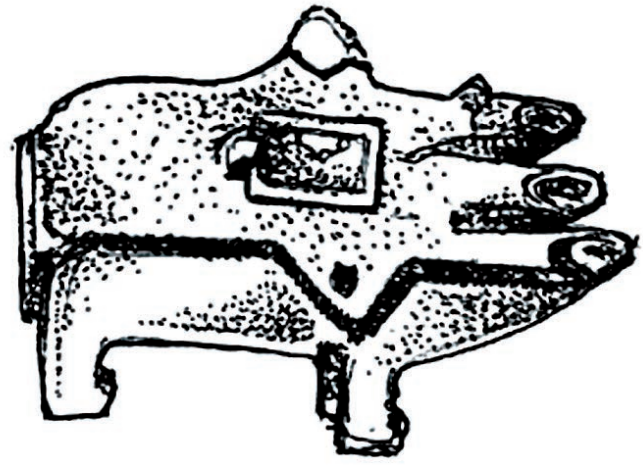


Fig 1. Bronze lamp, 9th–15th – after – Khudozhestvennaya kultura … 2012: 270
1-сур. Қола шам, IX–XV ғғ. ([Художественная культура … 2012: 270] бойынша)
Рис. 1. Бронзовая лампа, IX–XV вв. (по: [Художественная культура … 2012: 270])

artistic metalworking during the early Islamic period. The primary era of artistic metalworking development in Azerbaijan is the Seljuk period, with bronze cauldrons from this time being of particular interest. Shirvan bronze cauldrons are especially notable for their rich artistic decoration. One such cauldron is preserved in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. Crafted by the coppersmith Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, it features a hemispherical body supported by three protruding legs. The upper half of the cauldron is encircled by a ribbed belt, to which vertically positioned handles are attached. Its surface is adorned with flat-relief floral ornaments [Бретаницкий, Веймарн 1976: 90].

Another example, a bronze cauldron from the Shirvan region, is housed in the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan. This cauldron has a semicircular body, three legs, and two handles. Its neck is curved, and the walls are divided into four sections, each decorated with geometric and botanical ornaments as well as epigraphic inscriptions. Two of the front sections depict a leaf-shaped bush. The buta ornament, widely used across various forms of Azerbaijani applied art, is a prominent decorative feature. The semi-oval handles of the cauldron are shaped like horns and attached to the body with stamped geometric and botanical patterns. These handles were designed to facilitate hanging and lifting the pot.

On two horizontal projections located on the right and left sides of the cauldron, a positive “+” sign appears within two parallel medallions shaped like ram’s horns with curved ends. Between the medallions is an “S” motif, designed as a floral ornament with similarly curved ends (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Bronze pot. National History Museum of Azerbaijan. AF 27373.
Photo: Aida Ismailova
2-сур. Қола қазан. Әзербайжанның Ұлттық тарихы музейі. AF 27373.
Фотосурет: Аида Исмаилованікі
Рис. 2. Бронзовый котел. Национальный исторический музей Азербайджана. AF 27373.
Фото: Аида Исмаилова

It should be noted that the "+" sign inside the medallion can be found in Azerbaijan either on the petroglyphs of Gamigai, Gobustan, or on ceramic samples of that period. In these images, the country star is present in the form of goats. A similar image pattern is found in rock paintings in the Saimali-Dash region in Kyrgyzstan. It seems that the "+" sign in a circle has been present in the minds of people since ancient times and is probably a symbol of the sun. The figure in the shape of the letter "S" corresponds to the image of a dragon. It was widely used in Central Asia, Anatolia, and the Caucasus during the Seljuk period. The image of the dragon is dual in nature. So, on the one hand, the dragon is a symbol of success, a protector of water, on the other hand, it is associated with black forces. It is also a symbol of the planet Mercury [Художественная культура … 2012: 274] Jean-Paul Roux notes that the Turks borrowed dragon-shaped images from the Chinese, which he attributes to the ancient name for the dragon, "luu". The author also highlights the use of writhing, serpentine dragon images in Seljuk-era images and ceramics [Roux 2012: 67–68]. The image, reminiscent of a curved ram's horn, is also a widespread motif in the applied arts of Azerbaijan. Thus, the ram was accepted by the people as a symbol of victory and abundance. If you look at the historical development of ram horn-shaped images, then its oldest examples can be found in works of art created in Altai and Central Asia in different periods [Əfəndi 1971: 70; Эфенди 1967: 89–90] Another cut of the pot, the name of the master is written in Kufic script in Arabic with the words "Amal al-Ahmad bin Muhammad" with floral designs. Another pot of the same shape, belonging to the Seljuk period, has the edges divided into four slices, and on the first of the slices, the words "Amal Muhammad bin al-Husayn" are engraved in Arabic in Kufic script [Eliyeva 2010: 48–49]. On another section, a peacock and floral design are given in a stylized form, and "Seljuk chain" is engraved in the space in the middle. On the corners of the other two opposite slices inside the buta, patterns of ram's horns are depicted, and an oval-shaped handle is attached. This pot is smaller than the other one. It should also be emphasized that, speaking about the Kubachi boilers, K.V. Orbeli divided them into two types and called the second type, that is, having a hemispherical body, the "Shirvan boiler" [Орбели 1938: 307]. Larger Kubachi pots have floral designs, as well as images of animals on the edges of the mouth. It should be noted that metal pots were found in areas of distribution of Turkic tribes, in the Saltovo-Mai culture and in the Golden Horde state. The Saltovo-May culture spread to southern Russia and southeastern Ukraine at the end of the 8th – beginning of the 10th century, and these territories were at that time under the rule of the Khazar Khanate [Плетнева 1967: 96, 106]. Bronze cauldrons similar in shape and ornament were found in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan [Художественная культура … 2012: 200, 202]. Clay pots, although not entirely similar in shape, were made in the Early Bronze Age. The body part of these clay pots has a shallow shape. It turns out that he found a place for himself in the body of the people. boilers changed their shape in the process of historical development and were made more elegantly during this period. It can be said that these potties are used more during trips than when traveling. So, since it was made of metal, it was less likely to break and fall apart. It can be assumed that the bronze pots with ornaments on them belonged to people belonging to the highest caste.

Results obtained from the study include the following:

1) Toreutics of the Islamic period in Azerbaijan was studied only from the art perspective;

2) The technological issues of manufacturing these toreutics samples have not been studied;

3) The problems of local production or import of Islamic toreutics and circulation problems have not been completely resolved;

4) Not all examples of toreutics from the Islamic era have been studied.

Conclusion

Above, we provided brief information about some examples of toreutics from the Islamic era of Azerbaijan. The main challenges in studying these artifacts include the lack of information about their production technology. Apart from the work of the archaeologist Tarikh Dostiev, little has been written about the connections between the metalworking schools of the Nakhchivan and Shirvan regions of Azerbaijan and the Khorasan school. Furthermore, there has been no comprehensive research into the origins of these artifacts – whether they were locally produced or imported. While working on this topic, it became evident that toreutics products from Azerbaijan, particularly from the Seljuk period, closely resemble those found in Afghanistan. One of the primary reasons for this similarity is that both Azerbaijan and Afghanistan were part of the Great Seljuk state, which facilitated cultural and artistic exchanges between the two regions. This also raises the possibility of the migration of craftsmen between these areas. We plan to explore these connections further in future studies.

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