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The Influence of Ancient Artifacts on Contemporary Culture (exemplified by the Painting and Sculpture of Kazakhstan)

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***Abstract*—**Petroglyphs, stone sculptures, burial mounds, and other memorial religious structures are ancient artifacts which find reflection in contemporary world culture, including the culture of Kazakhstan. In this article, the problem of the influence of ancient artifacts on contemporary culture is researched, using as an example Kazakhstan's sculpture and painting. The practice of creating petroglyphs, stone sculptures, and memorial religious structures was closely connected to all fields of human existence, which fostered the formation of and became an inseparable part of a traditional worldview. The ancient roots of Saka-Sythian and Turkic nomadic culture have been studied, and integrated into the foundations of the contemporary art of Kazakhstan. The study of the ancient cultural heritage of Kazakhstan by contemporary artists, sculptors and architects, as well as the influence of European art and cultures on the art of Kazakhstan are furthering the development of a new national art.

***Keywords*—**ancient artifacts, Golden Man, nomadic culture, sculpture, painting

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I. Introduction

TODAY, Kazakhstan is striving for integration into the world cultural milieu and is making its own spiritual and scientific contribution to the treasure house of universal human culture. Scientific research into ancient artifacts of Kazakhstan has drawn scholars from Japan, Mongolia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Russia, Ukraine, Finland, France, Bulgaria, Hungary, Great Britain, the U.S. and other countries. Close cooperation with scientific centers of those governments has been established, and joint research on the Turkic heritage is being conducted. Today's heightened interest in scientific circles in the ancient artifacts of Kazakhstan is connected with the enactment in 2003 of the government program "Cultural Heritage". Thanks to this program, researchers of Kazakhstan have researched and collected many historical materials of Kazakhstan abroad. In the study of ancient monuments of Kazakhstan, one must make special note of the important role of UNESCO, with whose support many international programs are being conducted.

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The Kazakh scholar and public figure Arystanbek Mukhamediuly is doing detailed research on the joint cooperation of Kazakhstan with UNESCO. He notes that in the years of cooperation, since 1992, Kazakhstan and UNESCO have achieved the inclusion of the complex of Khoja Akhmet Yassawi, and the petroglyphs of the archeological landscape of Tamgaly on the list of World Heritage Sites. Among the unique monuments of ancient culture, UNESCO's special attention has been focused on Tamgaly, where approximately 5,000 petroglyphs are found [1]. Foreign scholars like H.W. Bailey [2], Pekkanen T. [3], Debaine-Francfort C. [4], Ulansey D. [5], Harmatta Y. [6], Esther Jacobson [7], L'uomo d'oro [8], Joan Aruz, Ann Farkas, Elisabetta Valtz Fino [9], Claudia Chang and Katharine S. Guroff [10], Alimbai Nursan [11] have also studied the culture of ancient Kazakhstan.

Since achieving independence, it has become possible for the art of Kazakhstan to compare itself with and see itself next to other national cultures at an international level. A re-thinking of ancient traditions and a cultural renaissance, which Kazakhstan is undergoing today, are essential and organic in the process of the formation and affirmation of the country as an independent nation. The awakening of a national consciousness has moved artists towards a spiritual re-thinking of the heritage of their ancestors and of the symbols of Kazakhstan's ancient peoples, and towards a discovering of the distinctive national archetypes. In the plastic art forms, one notes a keen interest in Turkic traditions, the archetypes of the nomadic consciousness. Artists turning to ancient archeological discoveries have found convincing answers in monumental sculpture and in historical painting.

II. Monumental Sculpture

In the XIX century and beginning of the XX century, monumental art distinguished itself according to the era, the culture of which developed in the Russian Empire. At the end of the 1950s, this art form developed quickly, in the framework of the ideas of the socialist system (Soviet monumental propaganda of the 1960s – 1980s). But by the end of the XX century, having gone through the crisis of perestroika, it moved to a contemporary, democratic and market-based level of development [12]. One of the most important achievements of the contemporary monumental art of Kazakhstan is the Independence Monument in the city of Almaty, which became the first national symbol of the sovereignty of the country.

The authors of the Monument ably transformed a rich cultural heritage into new plastic forms. It was for a reason that the image of the golden warrior on a winged snow leopard was chosen among dozens of entries for the monument – obelisk to Independence on Republic Square in the city of Almaty (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Monument-obelisk to Independence on Republic Square in the city of Almaty, head of the authors Shota Valikhanov

Financing for the monument came from the government budget. The idea for the creation of the monument belongs to the First President of Kazakhstan, N.A. Nazarbayev. In the composition of the monumental complex, the obelisk is the main element. During a working visit to Egypt in 1993, Nursultan Narzarbayev was enraptured by the obelisks of Luxor. The President assigned local architects the task of creating something analogous in Kazakhstan, which would reflect the national spirit and history of the people. The obelisk in Egypt was considered the symbol of fertility and fatherhood. Egyptian obelisks can be found in London, Rome, Istanbul, New York, and Paris. In Egypt, such obelisks have been preserved in Luxor and Karnak. Shot-Aman Valikhanov (born in 1932), head of the authors of the Monument of Independence, and a Merited Architect of the Republic of Kazakhstan, wrote about the story of the creation of the Independence Monument in an article: "For a long time, we studied the experiences of other countries in constructing this kind of monument, desirous of finding our own path. The Column of Emperor Trajan in Rome, the Vendome Column in Paris, the Alexander Column in St. Petersburg, the Nelson Column on Trafalgar Square in London – all were built by the same method, namely – from the Greco-Roman order system (Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian), a column with a capital was erected and a sculpture placed on it. However, we relied instead on a connection with indigenous art, formed by time-honored traditions [13]".

The Independence Monument is a cohesive work of art, synthesizing architecture, sculpture, and the texts of adages by outstanding figures of science, culture and the state. The exposition of the space of the complex extends horizontally 180 meters. The center of the composition is a graceful vertical obelisk 28 meters high, reminiscent of the traditional Kazakh headstones (kulpytasy). The headstone was decorated with an ornament in bas-relief, by the ancestral coat of arms (tamga), and sometimes by Arabic ligatured script (fig. 3 and 4).

In the opinion of one of the well-known researchers of Kazakhstan, S.E. Azhigali, kulpytasy appeared in Kazakhstan from the time of Islam; they have tremendous significance as monuments to the written word, and also have an ethnographic and historic heritage [14, pages 246-250].



Fig. 2 Epigraphic kulpytasy, western Kazakhstan, Necropolis Ushkan-ata, XIV - the beginning XX centuries

The obelisk is topped with a "golden" man (6 meters high, fig. 3) – a ruler, who, standing, is riding a winged snow leopard and symbolizes firm state power in the land of the Kazakhs.



Fig 3 The obelisk "golden" man, sculptor Adilet Zhumabai, 1996

The likeness of the statue of the Golden Man was recreated on the basis of the reconstruction of the uniform of the golden warrior (reconstructed by Krym Altynbekov) from the well-known Issyk Burial Mound (fig. 4). The base of the monument is arranged by a composition of three geometric figures – a large, external circle, a square inside a circle, and a small circle in the center.

The authors of the monument were, of course, inspired by the integration in antiquity of the mandala and the Islamic cube. The geometric diagram of the mandala was widely known in Asia, especially along the trade routes of the Great Silk Road. The primary form of the diagram was a trinary external circle, a square with a smaller inner circle and a central point. The mandala is interpreted as a symbolic model of the Eternal, a metaphysical map of the universe [15].

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Fig. 4 Golden Man, the head of the archaeological team Akishev Kemal, 1969

An ancient artifact of international significance, found in one of the Issyk burial mounds (50 kilometers from Almaty, Kazakhstan), is the crowning achievement of Saka art of the zoomorphic style. Compared to the looted Pazyryk burial mounds of Gorny Altai (Pazyryk, Bashadar, Tuekty) the "Issyk" Burial Mound (kurgan) turned out to be the only untouched "royal burial site". The excavations of 1969-1970 at the "Issyk" burial mound in Semirech'e showed what garments the leaders of the Saka wore in the V – IV centuries B.C. and permitted the discovery of the features of the cult of the holy prince among the nomads. The Golden Man was dressed in a formal or ritual costume: headdress, tunic, trousers, coat, socks, boots, weapon, and all were decorated with pure gold. There were a total of 4,800 decorations, and out of those, one hundred sixty-five golden articles were done in the "zoomorphic style", found in the first millennium B.C. in the steppes of Eurasia. It is characterized by depictions of animal figures in particular canonical poses and done with distinctive artistic techniques. Also among other items, a silver chalice was found with 26 written characters. To this day, the inscription on the chalice has not been deciphered precisely. Two rings on the fingers of the right hand of the Golden Man are particularly outstanding: one has a mirror-like shield, the other – a depiction of a human profile in a radiating crown (fig. 5).



Fig. 5 Ring with the image of a human profile with a radiating crown, Issyk Burial Mound

The well-known scholar Alisher Akishev notes that most likely, this was the personification of the motif of the sun god, a type of Avestan Mithra. The cult of Mithra comes from Central Asia and developed among the Eastern tribes (among them, the Saka). The possession of holy gold was, as Herodotus tells us (IV, 5-7), the privilege of the Scythian princes [16, pages 31-37]. The Saka tribes worshipped the sun god Mithra, the earthly hypostasis of the higher God, inaccessible to the human senses.

One of the greatest holy places of the cult of the god Mithra in Central Asia is the site of the petroglyphs of Tamgaly, in the district of Semirech'e, 200 kilometers from the Issyk Burial Mound. Created by nature and by many generations of people, by virtue of its size alone (it is 12 -15 square kilometers) it vividly testifies to the fact that this cult played a very important role in the life of the tribes populating the territory of Kazakhstan. Worshipping the Sun, the ancients could not fail to observe it and other heavenly bodies and to seek their ties to Earth and man [17]. The petroglyphs of the shrine of Tamgaly serve as an example of this, with their depiction of the sun god in the guise of a man with the head of the sun, standing alone or standing on the back of a bull (fig. 6).



Fig. 6 Petroglyph on a cliff with a depiction of a man with a head of the sun, Tamgaly Holy Place

The Saka-Tigrakhauda "in tall sharp-pointed hats" who lived in the foothills of Tien-Shan were called by historians of antiquity Massagetae. Their ethnic territory encompassed a huge area, from far across the left bank of the Yaxartes (Syrdarya), all the way to the Oxus (Amurdarya) in the west and including the Altai in the east. According to the prevailing scientific opinion, much in the ancient parts of Avesta was directly related the region of Kazakhstan. For example, as H. Niuberg and B. Vainberg assert, some of the hymns and cults of Avesta were connected to Rankha – the contemporary river Syrdarya (southern Kazakhstan), and were created among nomadic tribes who lived in that area [18]. Sarianidi had interesting things to say about the status of the "Golden Man" in the 1980's: "in the Issyk Burial Mound, the patterns on the crown of the prince signified his power over the universe, so that the Golden Man himself, it would appear, was identified with the sun god-warrior and performed priestly functions" [19, pages 29-32]. As the well-known philosopher O. Spengler said – "In each great culture there is present a secret language of world-perception, completely clear only to those whose soul belongs to that culture" [20]. Like the archeological finds in the Tomb of Tutankhamun, the artifacts of the Issyk Burial Mound are unique. To this day, on the territory of Kazakhstan, there has been no repetition of such a discovery and, despite the numerous attempts of scholars it remains the only complete system reflecting the culture of the Saka tribes [21]. For more than 40 years now, the artistic magnificence of the golden warrior has been the source of inspiration for many artists.

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The Independence Monument in Almaty represents the first monumental complex in Kazakhstan possessing high artistic worth, where the national spirit and history of the Kazakh people are depicted successfully. Copies of the statue decorate many cities of Kazakhstan (fig. 7); in addition, a statue of the Golden Warrior was erected in front of the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Washington, D.C., in 2006 (fig. 8).



Fig. 7 Stone monument "Golden Man", city of Issyk, Almaty region



Fig. 8 Statue of the Golden Warrior was erected in front of the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Washington, D.C., in 2006

The "Golden Man" on the winged snow leopard has become one of the national symbols of Kazakhstan. The figure of the young Saka leader on the winged snow leopard is also depicted on the flag of the President of Kazakhstan. The image of the Golden Man is stirring great interest in the world at the present time. This ancient artifact of Kazakhstan has been exhibited in more than 20 countries of the world. For example, according to Arystanbek Mukhamediuly, organizer of several recent exhibits of the "Golden Man", in 2002, the Saka Golden Warrrior was shown at international exhibits in the major museums of Saint Petersburg and Moscow (Russia). Then, in 2005, the Golden Warrior was introduced to the U.S. in the capital, Washington, D.C., and in the major museums of New York, Houston and San Diego [22].

III. Historical Painting

Up to the beginning of the XX century, fine art in Kazakhstan existed as universal art, developed by national cultural and religious traditions. The fine art of the Kazakh people possessed the same syncretism that was present in the musical and literary arts; for that reason, art education in Kazakhstan was a factor in the birth and formation of new artistic traditions.

In this connection, at the stage of the creation of a national school of painting, it was significant that artists were able to draw from the already considerable experience of Russian art [23]. In the XX century, in the years of Soviet power, in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, young people from all over the Soviet Union got an education in the professional art schools. From the 1930's to the 1950's in Almaty, a cultural center, artists from the other Soviet republics, following their artistic muse, came together with artists of Kazakhstan. Here they joined forces to open schools of painting, where many artists learned the art of painting, later to be polished in Russian institutions of higher learning [24]. Artists of contemporary Kazakhstan were able, successfully, to unite the achievements of the Russian realist school with the national way of life, with ethno-symbols. The theme of history is a most important part of the national culture of an independent Kazakhstan, on a path to democratization and integration into the world community. At one time, the well-known English historian researching world civilizations, the author of the book *A Study of History*, Arnold Toynbee, called the people living on the territory of Kazakhstan from ancient times, "Eurasian nomads" [25, page 151]. As Gulmira Shalabaeva observes, Toynbee's vision is in the fact that today, at the beginning of the XXI century, the theme of Eurasianism remains current. European, in part, the Russian academic school and the rich cultural heritage of Asia: the refinement and sophistication of the lines of Oriental miniatures, the aesthetic perfection of the Saka zoomorphic style, the cosmogony of the symbolism of the Turkic characters, the strict precision of the Kazakh ornament – these are the fundamentals of the fine arts tradition of Kazakhstan [26, pages 34-40].

The artistic traditions and the complicated semantics of the petroglyphs in dialogue with the newest cultural phenomena have given impulse to new creative conceptions. The semantics of the petroglyphs are difficult – there are a multitude of stylized petroglyphs of different periods, beginning in antiquity and ending at the beginning of the XX century in Kazakhstan, a priceless historical and artistic wellspring about the worldview of living peoples. For example, take such vivid galleries of petroglyphs as Kuldzhabasy, Eshki-Olmes, Tamgaly, Baikonur and others. The big surge of interest in petroglyphic symbolism began in the 1980's. In the transitional period, the first one to turn to the ancestral symbolism of the Kazakhs in painting was Abdrasheet Aronovich Sydykhanov (1937-2011), whose creative output opened up a new direction in the fine arts of Kazakhstan. In the works of A. Sydykhanov the ancestral coats of arms (tamgi) got a new lease on life, an unexpected integration, and they go with new symbols thought up by the artists themselves. An experimental bravery, a varying of the textures and materials in his work initiated innovative approaches and noticeably affected the development of a new creative language. Sydykhanov came to this "semiotic" painting intuitively. Immersing himself in the system of characters, the artist discovered a new meaning, which it brings forth [27, pages 51-56]. For example, his work "Bird" (fig. 9) is filled with signs and symbols.

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The center of the painting's composition is a large person, who looks like a certain bird. The image of the bird often figures in the paintings of Sydykhanov. The bird appears in his work in all of its mytho-poetic richness, as a symbol of the sky, freedom, prophesy, a symbol of the heavenly spirit, crowning the world tree.



Fig. 9 Sydykhanov, A., "Bird", oil on canvas, 1989

Sydykhanov considered the most productive years of his life to be the last few, when he worked on the symbols of the tamga, because in his opinion Jesus Christ, Mohammed and Buddha helped him to find his place. The ancestors of the Kazakhs had 92 tamga – 92 symbols of 92 families. Vedic prophets – "aulie-ata" created them. They were diagrams, and Sydykhanov the artist worked out their form, color and portrayal. From his years of work with characters, he believed that, knowing symbols, one can heal pain and illness, and stop bleeding. In terms of painting technique, he was closer to the impressionists; he loved Matisse, Cezanne, but especially, in his words, the unattainable heights – Leonardo da Vinci.

The paintings of the artist Agymsaly Duzel'khanov (born in 1951) are of great value. They express a comparison between the history of the people and contemporaneity, thus doing their part to add something new to realistic painting. The theme of the ancient Saka is one of the main themes presented and rigorously analyzed in the works of Agymsaly Duzel'khanov. In his works on that theme, the artist depicts the Saka prince – the Golden Man, and Princess Tumar, in the triumphant and majestic moments when he was proclaimed Khan. ("The Saka Prince", fig. 10; "Victory. Princess Tomiris", "Gunny" and others). The author of the introduction to an album dedicated to the artist, Baitursyn Omirbekov writes: "In illustrations of books, on posters, in applied and easel graphic works, one can see clearly the distinctive hand of the artist Agymsaly, which infuses his works with a painterly character. Since Kazakhstan gained its independence, it has become imperative for many historians and archeologists to take another look at the historical past, and write about it truthfully, anew. An artist who feels the same way is A. Duzel'khanov – one of the first painters to turn to the theme of history [28, 68]". Many young generations of Kazakhs have grown up studying in school and in other educational institutions the contemporary history of the country, illustrated by the authoritative and beautiful works of this artist.



Fig. 10 Duzel'khanov, A., "The Saka Prince", oil on canvas, 1999

Among young artists who have created interesting images of the Golden Warrior in monumental painting, Nurlan Karymsak is well-known (born in 1974). His singular approach to the Golden Warrior through historical facts led the artist to create a huge battlefield painting "The Golden Warrior, Saka Battle" (size 2 x 5 meters, fig. 11), which has been on exhibit in the Eurasian National University named for L.N. Gumilev in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, since 2001. In this painting, the author emphasizes the military spirit and heroism of the Golden Warrior in this battle of the Saka against the Persians. The story of the battle includes a call for freedom and independence. In the center of the composition is the Saka leader in golden armor on a white horse, leading his force in an attack. The historic fact upon which the artist draws is that the Saka woman – Princess Tumar (Tomiris), during her reign on the territory of Kazakhstan, in an open and fair battle, beat the bloodthirsty Persian King Cyrus, who had conquered half the world and had inflicted horrors on many peoples. This victory was Tomiris's thanks to her wisdom and knowledge of battle tactics, and it went down in history. In the painting, in several places one can see Saka warriors holding high flags with stylized heads of snow leopards. This figure of the snow leopard is seen fairly often on the garments of the Golden Man, by which means the artist metaphorically compares the image of the Saka warrior with the victorious snow leopard. Rays of the just-risen sun suffuse the ranks of the Saka warriors with a special light and impart a certain completeness to the figure of the victorious leader. To achieve historical accuracy, Nurlan Karymsak relied on all kinds of documentation and paid close attention to the depiction of clothing.



Fig. 11 Karymsak, N., "The Golden Warrior, Saka Battle", oil on canvas, 2001

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IV. Conclusion

In the XXI century almost all governments recognize the problem of self-identification in a globalizing world. For the preservation of national self-consciousness, every people needs its own picture of the world. It is well-known that a people's historical past is one of the important sources forming its national picture of the world. For that reason, today, ideas of preserving cultural heritage are becoming popular throughout the world. In 1972 after the adoption of the Convention on the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the activities of UNESCO have concentrated on studying cultures and defending world heritage. Since that time, programs to preserve and conserve material and intangible cultural heritage have begun to be implemented actively in Europe and America. Since 1992, with the support of UNESCO, these international programs have begun to be carried out in Kazakhstan as well. Kazakhstan is one of the oldest places inhabited by prehistoric people on Earth, and possesses a unique spiritual and material heritage. The cultural heritage of Kazakhstan is -- more than 25,000 monuments of history, archeology, architectural and monumental art. Recognizing the importance of preserving national traditions, the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2003 launched a government program unique in all of post-Soviet space: "Cultural Heritage". As a result, the contemporary professional art of Kazakhstan, which arose on the soil of innovation less than a century ago, was able to preserve its own distinctive spiritual character, and to create a suitable, original, figurative language.

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