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Evolution of Ceramic Art of Uzbekistan in the 20th Century: Traditions, Transformation and Institutional Development

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Abstract: Ceramic art of Uzbekistan developed as an independent branch of national decorative and applied arts. This article examines the evolution of the Tashkent ceramic school and craft production in the 20th century. Traditional craftsmanship, development through local schools and the “master-apprentice” system, the impact of industrialization, cooperative movements in the 1920–1930s, the establishment of an experimental workshop at the Artists' Union Art Fund in 1950, and industry modernization in the 1960s are analyzed. Museum artifacts (khumcha, shokosa, lagan) illustrate the preservation of traditional forms and techniques alongside the development of new decorative approaches.

Keywords: Uzbek Ceramics, Pottery, Tashkent School, Folk Traditions, Decorative Arts, Master-Apprentice System, 20th Century, Industrialization

1. Introduction

Uzbek ceramic is an independent field of national decorative and applied arts developed on the base of old traditions, local traditions and craftsmanship. Besides its useful role, pottery served the aesthetic perception as well as the world view and ethos of the people. In the schools of Rishton, Gijduvan, Khiva, and Samarkand a special pitting artistry was formed with its peculiar facing, perfect coloring and high technology performance. These schools preserved their traditions through the ustoz-shogird (teacher-student) system, while also responding to modern artistic searches, and thus shaping and enriching national ceramics. This form of traditional production, however, declined throughout the 20th century, mainly due to the repercussions of industrialization and competition from factory-made products, resulting in a dwindling of local artistic schools and a loss of characteristic shapes and decorative motives. However, craft cooperatives, experimental workshops, and the institutionalization of ceramics as a discipline also safeguarded local traditions and incorporated them into the state system of artistic production. The analysis of the museum pieces of the 1970s – such as “khumcha”, “shokosa” and “lagan” (national dish) – shows the invariability of traditional forms, the conservation of decorative and coloristic canons, as well as the striving of the masters to get a new decorative language. Thus, the development of

20th century Uzbek ceramics represents a historical synthesis of this heritage, craft practice and industrial modernization, providing continuity, traditions, and the paradoxical phenomena of the Tashkent ceramics school as a phenomenon of national artistic culture.

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2. Materials and Methods

The research drew on a wide-ranging approach to historical and art-historical analysis, including the study of textual evidence, archival documentation, museum collections and fieldwork. Special emphasis was placed on contrasting the traditional methods and types of ceramic vessels with the changes that took place in the 20th century.

Through comparative analysis methods, it became possible to reveal the regional features of the Tashkent ceramic school and the individuality of products existing within individual workshops and cooperatives. The examination techniques comprised analyses of a decorative and technological nature as well as visual and artistic-technical methods of examination including ornamentation, color palette, shaping and glaze coatings.

The combination of a historical-analytical approach and a systematic study of museum exhibits provided a holistic understanding of the transformation of Uzbek ceramics, the interaction of traditional craft practices with industrialization, and the preservation of artistic characteristics in the context of mass production.

3. Results and Discussion

By the 20th century, traditional pottery production in Uzbekistan began to decline significantly. The development of mass factory production of economical and practical tableware had intensified the processes of industrialization, as a result industrial goods began to prevail. It devastated craft traditions honed over hundreds of years.

Consequently, pottery itself deteriorated: the specific stylistic peculiarities of glazed pottery, peculiarities of national decoration and colour culture were gradually lost. The dislocation of the master-apprentice system meant centuries of expertise fell apart, and with it the various schools of local art weakened. Classical forms and shapes, which had a high artistic value in the past, were replaced by more repeating and simplified forms.

The decline was evident in the production of household ceramic items - such as the kosa, lagan, jug and khum - once common in everyday life, either rapidly fell or became obsolete. Here, however, the well-known decline in the development of pottery (perhaps the most important branch of national decorative and applied art) that inevitably followed was clearly demonstrable.

In 1930, during the period of collecting data on the state of pottery production in Tashkent, there were approximately twenty artisans in the city, united in an artel. At that time, the artel represented a relatively new form of artisan cooperation, but its management system was not yet well-established. Management did not always effectively cope with organizational and economic tasks, which affected the overall level of the association's work.

Thus, most of the work conducted by the cooperative, was very neutral in nature and did not help the artisans by providing healthy work circumstances. The absence of its own workshops, a fairly weak material and technical base, and the underdeveloped supply system made it possible to expand the production, but very limited. Nor could the cooperative completely control production levels, quality of products, or the timely marketing of products.

Besides, potters never earned a steady salary out of the artel. The economic hardships, competition from machine made pottery and low consumer demand for traditional wares forced artisans to look for additional sources of income. Therefore, even formal unification of craftsmen did not yet turn the artel system into an instrument for strengthening and developing pottery production in Tashkent. Factory-made pottery, both ceramic and metal, dominated the market through state-owned stores, making it harder for artisans to compete. As a result, pottery income did not provide a stable livelihood for most artisans, and almost all were forced to seek additional sources of income, both permanent and temporary. Some potters owned small plots of land and cultivated them themselves, producing pottery only seasonally or occasionally. A telling example is the hereditary master Usto Rasul Muhammad, in whose family both his father and

grandfather were potters [1]. Despite his deep professional traditions, he abandoned his craft several times throughout his life and took jobs in a teahouse. His seventeen-year-old son helped his father in the workshop, combining this with selling sour milk to support the family income.

Another hereditary master, Usto Parmonbergan Igamberdiev, also combined craftsmanship with agriculture. He owned a small plot of land with a vineyard and cotton fields. His workshop was located outside the city, while in the Tukly Jallap quarter, he had only a pottery machine. He fired the finished pieces in a kiln belonging to his neighbor, Usto Rasul Muhammad[2]. His younger brother and teenage son assisted him in his work. In addition to pottery and farming, they all performed other types of day labor: building adobe fences, plastering roofs, hiring themselves out to harvest clover and so on. Some young masters, seeing no prospects in their craft, abandoned pottery altogether and turned to other traditional industries, such as leatherworking. Only a few exceptionally skilled potters, whose work was of high quality and in steady demand, could afford to subsist solely on their craft. Thus, the situation of Tashkent potters in the early 1920s was characterized by economic instability, a weak organizational base and serious competition from factory-made products, significantly complicating the preservation and development of traditional crafts. In 1925, an artel called "Workers' Cooperative" was organized and operated under this name until 1929. That same year, the artel was renamed "Jonon", marking a new stage in its activity. The "Jonon" artel continued its work, uniting masters and artisans, until 1935, contributing to the development of the local cooperative movement and economic initiative of the time. After significant expansion and the establishment of shared workshops, the artel was renamed "Kzyl-Kulol"[3]. Experienced and renowned Tashkent ceramicists, including Gurab Miraliyev, Ursunbay Talibov, Tashpulat Nurmukhammedov, Alim Aripdzhanov, and other masters, were brought in to work in these workshops. Their participation significantly improved the artistic and technical quality of the pieces and facilitated the transfer of experience to the younger generation of artisans.

Before 1925, industrial cooperative artels were typically multidisciplinary. Within a single association, various types of craft activities, not always directly related to one another, could coexist. This structure was explained both by limited production resources and by the desire to ensure employment for artisans through the diversity of their products [4].

In 1950, an experimental ceramics workshop was established in Tashkent under the Art Fund of the Union of Artists of the Uzbek SSR. Its establishment marked an important stage in the institutionalization of traditional ceramic production and the inclusion of folk artistic practices in the system of state artistic commissions. The workshop's primary goal was to regularly engage folk ceramicists from various regions of Uzbekistan in order to preserve local traditions, exchange professional experience and develop new artistic solutions based on a synthesis of folk and professional art. It was hoped that this form of collaboration would contribute to the expansion of the stylistic range of products and strengthen ties between regional ceramic schools.

Yet, the first practical application of this idea faced several organizational challenges. So the workshop together with professional artists consisted mostly of Tashkent folk ceramicists. At the same time, within this framework, the workshop's activities did a lot for the formation of ceramic art of the republic, taking on an experimental nature, fostering renewal of forms and decorative solutions as well as gradual inclusion of traditional crafts in the system of Soviet artistic culture.

In 1960 all ceramic production was transferred to local councils' jurisdiction during a mass reorganization of industrial cooperatives. Indeed, with this, craft cooperatives became more and more ceramic factories or workshops organized within industrial complexes[5] during this period. We cannot ignore its systematic, centralized system, which not only sped up the whole manufacturing system but also made it more effective,

maintaining similar standards of quality and broadening the product variety. Ceramics industry development was strategically important sector of national economy, thus government trusted to pay special attention to this direction. For this purpose, production facilities were modernized, new technologies and modern organizational structures were introduced [6]. A number of the major aspects were systematic tailored skilled personnel recruitment: hundreds of craftsmen took training courses and seminars in the largest ceramic-production centres. These measures allowed ceramics to unify an industrial approach with the artisan hand, preserving national craft traditions within a context of growing industrial output. ADG, Kasera who headed SEZ said craftspeople were also given special training to improve their professional skills and modern techniques. The largest centers of ceramic production had hundreds of trained potters and ceramic artists, learning both traditional techniques as well as new industrial methodologies. This not only helped maintain national artistic traditions, as well as specialists capable of working on large scale industrial production.

The restructuration of the ceramic industry in the 60s was therefore an important moment in the modernisation of the industry, integrating both the industrial mutation and a conservation and development of artisanal savoir-faire. From the 1970s on the process of reception, scientific processing, and museumification of products by ceramic cooperatives was greatly intensified at the museums of Uzbekistan.

This was driven by increased interest in preserving the material heritage of folk arts and crafts, as well as a desire to systematize and scientifically understand works of applied art from the Soviet period. In the context of these processes, the formation of museum collections reflecting the evolution of forms, technologies, and artistic principles in ceramic production in the second half of the 20th century acquired particular significance. This study analyzes objects held in the Museum of the History of Applied Arts and Crafts of Uzbekistan, allowing us to trace the development of the Tashkent ceramic school in the 1970s. One of the highlights of the exhibition is a khumcha (pot) (Inventory No. 2292/499), made by Ch. Sadykov in Tashkent in the 1970s [7]. This khumcha is a typical example of Tashkent artistic ceramics of the period, reflecting the stability of traditional forms combined with the artist's individual interpretation. The work demonstrates the artist's desire to preserve canonical proportions and ornamental principles, while simultaneously adapting them to the aesthetic demands of the time and the conditions of cooperative production.

The container is characterized by an elongated scale, slightly vertically high with a well-contoured body and a smooth transition to the neck. The proportions of its height and maximum diameter (height – 25.5 cm, diameter – 25,5 cm; according to news date – height – 24 cm) bestow a balance and compositional completeness to the piece. The near-equal height and diameter makes for relatively stable and compact volume, close to a spheroid, while the stretched silhouette elevates and extends the vertical line of the form. With two handles that extend from either side of the body, these handles are integrated organically into the rest of the plastic shell which forms the vessel. Not only provide functional purpose but also key compositional parts of the volume, gaining the volume of the volume and emphasizing its closed nature. Yellow green glaze completely covered the external and internal surfaces of the piece. The color is identifiable by the typical streaks which arise from the technology of firing glazed ceramics of this period. They provide subtle streaks that are natural and painterly and they provide depth that gives a patina effect that enriches the artwork. The body is such a piece of stoneware, with an incised line running around it marking the transition point where a cut-out geometric ornament carved in relief on the wet clay was later glazed just before firing. A collar elaborates the spatial segmentation of the form, highlighting the central section of the volume and creating a distinguished rhythm. This cavity fill is similar type of decoration with characteristics of Uzbekistan ceramic with an ornament that has the characteristics of a decorative and typical structure of the tradition. It involves sculpting, carving, and painting, then glazing

and firing. In addition to the plastic development of the form and ornamental system, the color scheme as well, all in all, we can say that all together all these factors allow us to refer this khumcha to the expressive examples of the development traditional Tashkent ceramics of the ninetieth century of 20th century. The state of preservation is characterized by the presence of peeling glaze on one of the handles, small cracks in the glaze layer (craquelure), as well as places of uneven glazing, which is due to the technological features of production and subsequent use of the product.

Among the works acquired by the museum in the 1970s, a shokosa (Inventory No. 2295/502), made by M.K. Rakhimov in Tashkent in 1971, is of particular interest [8][9]. This exhibition very clearly mirrors the specific spirit of artistic ceramics of this time - a kind of return to the basic oriental shapes of vessels, as well as new decorative techniques. The shokosa is an 11-centimeter-deep (about 4 inches), 29-centimeter-diameter (about 11 inches) recessed bowl. That diameter to height ratio creates a stable, broad, blown-open shape with a strong horizontal vector. However, this structure makes the outer roofing of plastic, which decorative values are increased but traditional one remained as the primary platform for ornamentation.

The work is done with the glazed ceramic method, which involves making it, then painting and glazing it. A deep brown glaze fills this background on which glaze stained the surface. The white and black paint ornamentation is applied linearly; the small-scale design creates a rhythmic decorative assembly, reinforcing the constructional concentricity of the bowl. The interplay of light and dark line with a saturated brown background deepens the graphic expressiveness of the composition and underscores the salient hallmarks of the artist's signature style. The state of preservation is characterized by the presence of glaze chips, primarily along the edges, due to wear and tear and wear and tear. Despite these losses, the piece retains its artistic integrity and is of scholarly value as an example of Tashkent ceramics from the early 1970s.

The next piece in the collection under consideration is a lagan (Inv. No. 2301/507), made by M.K. Rakhimov in Tashkent in 1972 [10]. This exhibit reflects the persistence of the traditional flat dish form in the practice of Tashkent masters of the 1970s and demonstrates the characteristic features of the decorative solutions of this period.

The lagan is a flat dish with a diameter of 33 cm (according to revised data - 32.7 cm). Its large format emphasizes its ceremonial and decorative purpose. The wide surface of the mirror creates favorable conditions for an extensive ornamental composition dominated by a central motif.

In this instance, it is a glazed ceramic: creating a mold there, painting it, glazing it. A dark brown glaze coats the surface, forming an almost deep base. The decorative composition is built on a "bodom" ornamental motif – 2 stylized images of almonds, overgrown with green shoots. The bodom motif is one of the traditional and wide-spread ornamentals in the arts and crafts of Uzbekistan and it symbolizes fertility and vitality. In the artist's interpretation, it is laconic, clearly and structured that is highlighted by contrasting palettes. Its composition is based on symmetry and balance; the mid-background elements highlight the center of the dish while the background and rim create a decorative frame which amplifies the ornament suggestiveness [11]. That dark glaze is a chromatic binding factor, giving a form firmness and volume.

The preservation condition includes, chips and scratches to the rim typical of normal use and wear. The lagan, as an object of art and science, still demonstrates the true spirit of Tashkent ceramics of the 1970s, despite these damages.

The next piece in the collection under review is a shokosa (Inventory No. 2297/504), made by A. Aripdzhanov in Tashkent in 1973. This exhibit reflects the persistence of the traditional deep bowl form in the practice of Tashkent artisans in the 1970s and demonstrates the characteristic features of the decorative and coloristic design of this period.

The shokosa is an incised bowl with a diameter of 27.5 cm (corrected data: 26.8 cm) and a height of 11 cm (corrected data: 9.8 cm). This relationship in the dimension between height and diameter is proportional, resulting in a horizontal silhouette that is well balanced with a wide flat rim and gradually curving body. Typical of this form, it serves a pragmatic and aesthetic purpose, enabling the object to be appreciated as a unique artistic object while being an object of daily utility [12]. Included is a glazed ceramic piece, molded and glazed in black and then handpainted in color. The rich black background serves as a bold canvas to the ornament, making it pop and drawing attention that highlights the richness of the color palette. Green, yellow and brown are the colors he used, the color brown has five variations of shades that shows how he wanted a gradual transition of color but in a more intricate decorative sense.

This writing is built on a central concept. In the middle, a circular medallion illustrated with a stylized yellow flower and some green sprouts around it. The aesthetic core organizes the whole decor and acts as a visual accent bringing together the art elements into a single mechanism [13]. In addition to symmetry and rhythmic balance, ornamental design (realized with formal standard), has its own characteristics – plant motifs and its various interpretations are an essential part of artistic language of Central Asian ceramics. The condition is particular by the fact that the paint layer only partially peeled off along the edges, due to natural wear and tear and the specifics of glazed pieces usage. Despite these losses they are still considered artistically expressive and scientifically significant as a characteristic model of Tashkent glazed ceramics of the first half of the 1970s.

So, the 20th century development of Uzbek pottery can be characterized as a multiform multi-complex process of interaction between the traditional foundations of crafts and new social and economic conditions. At the turn of the century, industrialization and the development of factory production caused a dramatic shrinking of the scale of traditional ceramic production and a weakening of matured art movements [14]. The precarious conditions of the economy in the 1920s and 1930s and the disorganized model of crafts, meaning production which had strong parallels with industrially produced articles compounded the problems already facing ceramists in Tashkent and other centers.

In contrast, both cooperative processes and the later institutionalization of crafts – including the 1950 establishment of an experimental workshop on the basis of the Art Fund of the Union of Artists of the Uzbek SSR – contributed to the gradual incorporation of folk ceramics into the state artistic production system [15]. Post-war reforms from the 1960s, conversion of ceramic enterprises to local councils and modernization of the production base guaranteed a balance between the industrialization and old-school traditional artistic craftsmanship. This stabilized the industry and paved the way for the stronger development of the industry.

4. Conclusion

Research has shown that the 20th century formation of the Uzbek ceramic art is a typical example of both the interaction of traditional craft production with the interest of modernity and experimental crafts under socio-economic changes. The advent of industrialization, mass factory production translated into the demise of the traditional ceramic and the weakening of artistic schools. Nevertheless, cooperation, institutionalization of crafts, and experimental workshops were what preserved artistic traditions. Examinations of museum displays dating to the 1970's reveals the preservation of traditional forms, decorative norms, and processes of glazed ceramics, a slow evolution of decorative language, and the emergence of an individual artistic style.

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