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THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE HIERARCHY OF ANGELS ON THE ARMENIAN CHALICE VEILS

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Introduction

The paper aims to present the iconographical peculiarities of the representation of seraphim, cherubim and angels, constituting a part of the celestial hierarchy, on the Armenian chalice veils. The chalice veils, which are a part of the liturgy's holy altar utensils in the Armenian Apostolic Church, are decorated with biblical scenes, religious symbols, angels, evangelists, apostles, vegetal and floral motifs.

The angels typically are arranged symmetrically around the central image, in the corners or on the extreme axes and are embroidered with the portrait details.

Dionysius the Areopagite's corpus concerns the orders of the celestial hierarchy. According to it, there are three hierarchies, each of which is composed of three groups: a. Thrones, Seraphim, Cherubim; b. Dominions, Virtues, Powers; c. Principalities, Archangels and Angels.

According to the Areopagite, the name Seraphim (śērāfīm) in Hebrew means "burning ones", "scorching ones"¹. In its first mention (Isaiah, 6:2–3) it is said that each has six wings. In order not to burn up due to the intensity of the light of God's glory, the seraphim covered their faces with their two wings, with other two

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¹ Դիոնիսիոս Արեոպագադի 2013, 30–60:

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– their feet and with the left two – they were flying². According to the prophet Isaiah, one of the seraphim took from the altar the burning coal and cleaned the prophet's lips (Isaiah, 6:6–7).

The seraphim are similar to the Ancient Near Eastern winged, mystical beings. They stand the closest to God and are considered to be made of fire and are identified with the winged dragons³. Isaiah calls them "serpent's root", "flying serpent" (Isaiah, 14:29), "the viper and fiery serpent" (Isaiah, 30:6).

If we search for the prototype of the seraphim based on their description and references, then we should rely on the texts by the prophets. J. de Savignac has touched upon the question of their origin, comparing the seraphim with the serpents⁴. As the author notes, the serpents are mentioned several times in texts on Egyptian pyramids⁵. For example, they adorned the Pharaoh's head masks, or, according to the legend, fed the pharaohs with the life-giving milk⁶. The serpents' life-giving and deadly features were also known in the Near East. According to J. de Savignac, the group of sculptures, dated to the 4th millennium B.C. (Obeid period), has interesting connections with the prototype of the serpents and seraphim. These statues were found in the cities of Eridu, Al-Ubeid, Tel-el-Weli, Tello, Ur, Uruk, Rejibeh, Haji Mohamed, Nipur and other places⁷. 79 of these figurines are considered to be feminine, 4 – male, and 17 – asexual. They are extremely stylized and have elongated, cone-shaped heads and have become known as "serpent-like". As there is not clear description of the seraphim, we can identify them with the prophet Isaiah's noted serpents (14:29) and flying serpents (30:6)⁸. Their identification with serpents, in some sense, aims to indicate that the seraphim were not only positive characters.

Cherubim (in Hebrew: k^erubīm, in translation: multitude, knowledge, fullness of wisdom) were angel-like beings, guardians⁹. After expelling Adam and Eve from the Paradise, God designated the cherubim as the guardians to guard the Tree of Life (Genesis, 3:24). Moreover, that was God who commanded to

² Պոյաճեան 1881, 532:

³ Токарев 1987–1988, 427.

⁴ Savignac 1972, 320.

⁵ Faulkner 1969, V–VIII; Четверухина 2000, 294–300; Матье 1947, 369–414.

⁶ Savignac 1972, 323:

⁷ Daems 2010, 150.

⁸ Savignac 1972, 321:

⁹ Դինիսիոս Արեուպագաղի 2013, 31:

Noah to install at the two edges of the Ark's, covering the golden statues of cherubim (Exodus, 25:18–22).

If we take into account the guarding nature of cherubim and look for creatures with similar significance in other cultures and beliefs, then it can be pointed out that they are similar to the Egyptian sphinxes, the Hittite and Greek gryphons, but especially to the Assyrian-Babylonian so called karubu beings. Those creatures were winged lions; bulls with human heads which protected treasures, palaces and temples¹⁰.

Seraphim and cherubim were the symbols of God's wisdom, therefore, they were depicted next to Him¹¹. Being close to God, they were imbued with light and became fiery, scorching, with a fiery mind¹². In case of the chalice veils, they surround the Agnus Dei. Agnus Dei is mostly portrayed with the symbol of victory and Resurrection-khorugv¹³.

Consideration of the prototype of the seraphim and cherubim in the Ancient art based on their winged type of representation, takes us to the Ancient Near Eastern art. The sculptures of winged beings were found from the Hittite Sakçe Gözü, Carchemish, Tell Halaf and other cities (archaeological sites). The earliest of them are the orthostates of the entrance of the Sakçe Gözü's palace (18th century B.C.). The first presents two creatures, carved on the stone block, with hands raised up, standing on the lion, one of which is winged (1050–850 B.C.). This orthostate is kept at the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara.

Another orthostate from Sakçe Gözü is an image of a sphinx: a winged creature with a human face and a body of a lion. It is also preserved at the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara.

This kind of winged creatures that can also be found on the orthostates of Tell Halaf, are in a long, embroidered attire with their right hand stretched forward while the other hand holds various objects. In fact, this position of hands is the exact position of a praying figure¹⁴.

In Assyrian art winged creatures (shedu) can be seen on the two sides of the entrance of the Dur-Sharrukin Palace of Sargon II (712–702 B.C.). These are

¹⁰ Мифы народов мира, 589.

¹¹ Гибсон 2011, 195.

¹² Բյուրախ 1995, 199:

¹³ Гибсон 2011, 197.

¹⁴ Grace 1940, 24

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winged bulls with 5.6 m height. Conceptually these are closer to the cherubim as they have a protecting function. One of them is kept at the Louvre and the other at the Oriental Institute in Chicago.

Sir Austen Henry Layard, who had made a great contribution to the studies of Assyrian art, has characterized these winged creatures as Gods, spirits, or priests which participated in the ceremonies of worship. Sometimes they were accompanied by the kings; one can say that they were performing the ceremony for the kings in front of God. Thus, it can be assumed that they were mediators between God and the earthly creatures. The archaeologist has also seen the analogy with Ezekiel's Vision. As he notes, first of all, the temple, described in the Vision, with its size is an Assyrian temple. Moreover, creatures described in Ezekeil's Vision (Ezekeil, 10) had 4 faces: of an ox, a lion, an eagle and of a human, that is to say the faces of all the characters that are found in the Assyrian sculpture¹⁵.

Mesopotamian civilization was the first to have spoken and written about angels. These were guarding beings which can be seen in the sculpture, on stamps, and the biblical angels have originated from their characters¹⁶.

These angels are also known as karubu, cherubu which in translation means "to be close", so to say angels that are close to us. Subsequently, these characters became the cherubim and seraphim in the Christian tradition and the charib in the Islamic literature and beliefs¹⁷.

These winged beings were typically depicted next to the tree of life. Some researchers suggested that these trees resemble honeysuckle, others - pomegranate tree, while according to other scholars, these trees and fruits in the hands of winged creatures were not real, but symbolic¹⁸. The tradition of depicting them near the trees, according to Henry Layard, comes from the Bible. The reason behind that is the description in 1 Kings 6:29: "...Then he carved the walls all around the temple, in both the inner and outer sanctuaries, with carved engravings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers...", as well as the quote from Genesis 3:24, regarding cherubim guarding the way to the Tree of Life.

¹⁵ **Layard** 1849, 464–465.

¹⁶ **Lafayette** 2017, 103.

¹⁷ **Lafayette** 2017, 105:

¹⁸ **Giovino** 2007, 23.

The tradition of presenting winged creatures has transferred into the Urartian art. They can be seen in the mural paintings, on the ceremonial plates, pendants and furniture. The part of the souls, portrayed on the two sides of 11 trees of life of Argishti I's helmet, found at Karmir Blur, are winged¹⁹. On the helmet of Sarduri II, again found at Karmir Blur, the winged creatures are seen likewise²⁰.

One of the earliest depictions of seraphim in Armenian art are the two six-winged angels, making up part of the sculptural decoration of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross on Aghtamar Island. There are multiple eyes on their wings. The hands of the seraph, presented on the left side, are hidden under the wings and the hands on the right side are raised up, as if praying²¹. Certainly, the sculptural decoration of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross has made a huge impact on the Armenian medieval art. The scenes introduced here are replicated in the following centuries.

The earliest monuments of Armenian mural painting with depictions of seraphs are at the Church of Saint Stepanos of Lmbatavank. There is an image of the seraph placed near the image of the enthroned Christ on the apse of the church. The scene narrates Ezekeil's Vision²². The six-winged creatures can be found in the wall paintings of other monuments as well. On the drum of the dome of Kirants monastery (Tavush region, RA, village of Kirants)—between the south-eastern and the eastern windows, the prophet summons the six-winged creature. The wall painting is dated to the 13th century and, as noted by L. Durnovo, it is Isaiah's Vision²³. In another 13th-century monument at Kobayr (Lori region, RA, village of Kobayr) on the semi-dome of the Main church is the scene of Deesis. From the tetramorph only part on the left side of the throne is preserved²⁴. The six-winged image of a being can also be seen in the scene of Deesis of Tigran Honents Church of Ani (Saint Gregory the Illuminator)²⁵.

The images of the seraphim and cherubim on the chalice veils are different: only the head and the wings are embroidered. The reason for such kind of

¹⁹ Пиотровский 1952, 21.

²⁰ Пиотровский 1952, 64–68.

²¹ Ter-Nersesyan 1965, 12; Տեր-Ներսեսյան 1975, 79:

²² Մաթևոսյան 1990, 17:

²³ Дурново 1990, 8.

²⁴ Драмбян 1979, 27.

²⁵ Թորանյան 2011, 140:

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heraldic depiction is on the one hand, the desire to make an embroiderer's job simpler and easier and on the other it is the European tradition of the representation of seraphim. This is testified by the seraphim on the Kuthaya painted and glazed pottery. They were depicted mainly on the egg-shaped painted and glazed ornaments. The ornaments were hung from the church lanterns in order that mice could not expend the oil. In fact, lanterns with the seraphim images are from a later period – the 18th century²⁶. This heraldic type of representation was expanded to the metal falabella, ecclesiastical, ceremonial attires, the sculptures of the Monastery of Saint Thaddeus (Iran), of Katoghike Church (Yerevan), etc.

The embroidering of the images of the cherubim and seraphim on the chalice veils has a special significance and is related to the liturgy. During the liturgy, the priest raises his hands and says aloud: "and in one voice with the seraphim and the cherubim, we should sing holy songs and make melodies and, boldly crying out, shout with them and say"²⁷. Afterwards the Trisagion is chanted during which the priest takes the veil off the chalice²⁸. That part of the liturgy is taken from Chapter 6 of the Book of prophet Isaiah where the prophet sees the Lord and the seraphim who sing the opening part of the Trisagion and then, the messenger of the divine word is talked about. In the missal the given part is added: "Blessed are you who came and are to come in the name of the Lord" which affirms that it is about Christ. Then, the words said by Christ during the Last Supper are quoted: "...take this, all of you, and eat of it: this is my Body, which will be given up for you. Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant; it will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven...", and later "Son of God" is chanted during which, according to the doctrine of the Armenian Church, the bread and wine in the chalice are transformed into the body and blood of Christ. According to that doctrine, God is really present during the liturgy. Pronouncing "and with the seraphim and cherubim" and taking the veil off the chalice symbolizes the removal of the Old Testament's curtain by apostle Paul through which God invisibly appeared to the believers.

²⁶ Macler 2016, 16–19; Soustiel 2009, 65.

²⁷ Պատարագ: Գանձարան աղօթից ի ժամ սրբոյ խորհրդոյ հաղորդութեան: Ի պէրս ջերմեռանդ աղօթասիրաց 2002, 133:

²⁸ Պալճյան 2008, 99:

Angel in Hebrew and Greek means messenger. They are always near God and are the messengers of Him. Angels do not have gender, only the spiritual body. Angels are distinctive from the seraphim and cherubim with only one simple feature – they are closer to the people and have comparably less privileges than the seraphim and cherubim²⁹.

The chalice veils hold a special place in the Armenian medieval art. Initially, they had a certain function: they covered the Holy wine during the liturgy – keeping it off the dust and flies. Gradually they began to be decorated more luxuriously. They were mainly embroidered with golden, silver, metal, cotton and silken threads, some examples were also made on the printed fabric and were decorated with pearls or sequins.

The first depiction of seraphim on the chalice veil can be found in Byzantium. It was a pair of veils dated to the 14th century and kept at the Benaki museum in Greece. The embroidery on the dark blue main fabric with golden and silver threads presents Christ with a chalice³⁰. This is the scene of Communion although the images of the apostles are replaced with the depictions of the seraphim. The words said by Christ during the Communion are written here: "...take this, all of you, and eat of it: this is my Body, which will be given up for you. Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant; it will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven...".

Conclusion

Thus, the imagery of the decoration of the chalice veils of the Armenian Apostolic Church is composed of various orders of the celestial hierarchy, seraphim, cherubim and angels in particular. Firstly, it was related to the symbolism of the veil decoration. The decoration was designed in a way that Christ or His symbols – the cross, the Crucifixion, the Agnus Dei were placed in the centre which were surrounded with angels, seraphim and cherubim and only at the end with the scenes from the Gospel. Such iconography attests to the approach of Theocentrism, and the angels in this case are intermediaries between God and the humanity. Angels, according to the legend, were more in number than people living on Earth, they were creatures praising God's existence, in fact,

²⁹ Պոյաճեան 1881, 318, Jameson 1892, 479.

³⁰ Johnstone 1967, 116; Andronicos Chatzidakis, Karageorghis 1975, 83.

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acting as messengers of His will. Another reason for the depiction of heavenly priesthood were the prototypes, which presented the reproduction of the Byzantine veils and their earliest examples decorated with seraphim, that have reached us. Finally, we believe that the mentioning of the seraphim and cherubim in the prayer made during the liturgy while opening and covering the chalice is a third reason for this kind of decoration.

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1

Seraph, 1774, Limanapat, the Church of Saint Gevorg, now kept at the Treasury Museum of Etchmiadzin.



2

Seraph, 19th century, Constantinople, kept at the Treasury Museum of Etchmiadzin.



3

Cherub, 19th century, Constantinople, kept at the Treasury Museum of Etchmiadzin.



4

Seraph, 1826, the veil was donated to the church of Armash, now kept at the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople.



5

Seraph and angel, 19th century, kept at the Treasury Museum of Etchmiadzin.



6

Seraph, 1754, donated to the monastery of Saint Karapet of Mush, now kept at the Jagiellonian University Museum in Poland.

**ԵՐԿՆԱՅԻՆ ՔԱՀԱՆԱՅԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ
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ԾԱԾԿՈՑՆԵՐԻ ՎՐԱ**

ՕՆԱՆՅԱՆ Ա.

Ամփոփում

Բանալի բառեր՝ սերովբե, քերովբե, հրեշտակ, երկնային քահանայապետություն, պատկերագրություն, սկիհի ծածկոց, պատարագ:

Երկնային քահանայապետության տարբեր դասեր, մասնավորապես սերովբեները, քերովբեները և հրեշտակները, հայ առաքելական եկեղեցու սկիհի ծածկոցների հարդարանքի հիմնական մասն են: Նախ, այդ պայմանավորված է ծածկոցի հարդարանքի խորհրդաբանությամբ: Հարդարանքը մտածված է այնպես, որ կենտրոնում Քրիստոսն է կամ նրա խորհրդանիշերը՝ խաչ, խաչելություն, Գառն Աստծո, որոնք շրջապատված են հրեշտակներով, սերովբեներով և քերովբեներով, միջնամասում՝ ավետարանական տեսարաններով: Նման պատկերագրությունը վկայում է աստվածակենտրոնության մասին, իսկ հրեշտակների դասը տվյալ դեպքում միջնորդ է Աստծո և մարդկանց միջև: Հրեշտակները, ըստ ավանդության, երկրի վրա ապրող մարդկանցից շատ են, նրանք Աստծո գոյությունը փառաբանող էակներ են, նրա կամքի դեսպանները: Երկնային քահանայապետության պատկերման մյուս պատճառը եղած նախատիպերի՝ բյուզանդական ծածկոցների կրկնօրինակումն էր, որոնցից մեզ հասած վաղագույն օրինակները հարդարված են սերովբեներով: Երրորդ պատճառը պատարագի ընթացքում սկիհը բացելու և ծածկելու ժամանակ արտասանված աղոթքի մեջ սերովբեների և քերովբեների հիշատակումն է:

ИКОНОГРАФИЯ ИЕРАРХИИ АНГЕЛОВ НА ПОКРОВАХ ПОТИРОВ

ОНАНИЯН А.

Резюме

Ключевые слова: серафим, херувим, ангел, иерархия ангелов, иконография, покров, литургия.

Важную часть в иконографии покровов Армянской Апостольской церкви составляют изображения иерархии ангелов, в том числе серафимов, херувимов и ангелов. Во-первых, это связано с символикой изображения. В центре композиции изображен Христос или его символы – Крест, Агнец Божий, Распятие Христа в окружении ангелов, серафимов, херувимов и библейских образов и сюжетов. Подобная иконография свидетельствует о теоцентризме (богоцентризм), а иерархия ангелов является посредником между Богом и человеком. Ангелы в численном отношении превосходят людей. Предназначение ангелов – восславление Бога. Ангелы являлись посредниками воли Божьей. Иконография армянских покровов повторяет византийские прототипы покровов, на которых вышиты серафимы. Во время литургии, когда священник задерживает или открывает потир, в молитве упоминаются серафимы и херувимы.