

THE ORNAMENT OF THE TRADITIONAL ARMENIAN COSTUME (THE RITUAL, COLOUR AND SIGN SYSTEMS)

The present work aims to study the ornament of the traditional Armenian costume in historical-ethnographic perspective, while the ornament itself is considered as a specific sign system that may serve as a peculiar historical source.

The research was carried out on the base of various ethnographic and archaeological sources, as well as on language and folklore data. Besides the well-known methods of ornament analysis, some new methods were applied that made it possible to identify the origin and development of both separate motifs and more general ornamental compositions as well.

An ornament, as a rule, is related to those parts of the costume that have some sacral function (e.g., the belt, the apron or the skirt edges with the symbols of fertility). Its semantics becomes clear just due to this function (the protective and magical characters of the ornament, etc.).

The work discusses also the traditional colour symbolism of the costume, the interrelation of the colour and form, on the one hand, and the popular colour perception, on the other hand. A four-parted and a three-parted systems were revealed. The former, being presented by the red, black, white and green/yellow colours, corresponds to the four elements, the four parts of the world, the four seasons, and so on, while the latter, being presented by the black, red and white colours, symbolizes the three vertical Cosmic zones.

The ritually pure (red, white) and impure

(black/blue, green/yellow) colours are also considered, which are grouped into the binary oppositions of the kind of good - evil, light - darkness or man - woman. In the wedding ritual, the green-and-red pair is especially emphasized, as symbolizing the groom and the bride.

The discussion of the main methods of ornamentation including the ample ornamental material (threads, beads, shells, etc.) accentuates the sacral significance of the knitting and needlework - the knitted and embroidered parts of the costume were popularly considered as powerful guards protecting the owner against evil eye, different kinds of evil spirits and any other harm.

The principal part of the work represents an attempt to reveal the main functional and semantic codes of the ornament of the costume: geometric, vegetative, zoomorphic, in particular - ornithomorphic, etc. The following classification has been suggested.

1. The geometrical ornament (circle, square, rhombus, triangle, etc.) being widely spread regarding both area and time period, can hardly be attributed to a single nation. It has polysemantic nature and uses some general semantic structural principles, as, for example, an ornament combining rhombus and triangle might symbolize woman-earth-plant and other general concepts.

2. The ornithomorphic ornament in paired motifs can represent a man - woman opposition (like the symbolic hen - rooster pair in the wedding ritual), while a separate motif of a

rooster may present a symbol of male potency, as well as a symbol of light, goodness, etc.

3. The vegetative ornament reveals related semantic chains like plant-woman-earth, which could be eventually traced back to the fertility concept.

The book raises problems on the origin of one or another ornamental motifs, from the one hand, and the problem on the historical and

cultural links of the Armenian people. from the other hand.

The folk ornament is one of the many-faceted and polysenantic sign systems of a traditional ethnio culture. In particular, It plays the role of a bearer of ethno-differentiating features emphasizing the importance of studying the ornament within the system of traditional culture of an ethnos.