

THE ARMENIAN JEWELLERS FOUNDATION

Few nations have left an impressive worldwide legacy in history. Armenians sometimes blame their ancestors for having migrated to distant corners rather than uniting their intellectual and artistic might in the motherland. Perhaps our contemporaries have the right to express such an opinion. But the time machine hasn't been invented yet and we can only be proud of our unique global heritage, and pass it on to the next generation.

The overall mission of the Armenian Jewellers Foundation is to piece together and advance the heritage of Armenians in jewellery – mainly through archival sources, masterpieces that adorn museums and collections around the world.

In our Armenian Jewellery Heritage column, we proudly present an article by renowned Ukrainian philosopher and Armenian studies expert Dr. Iryna Hayuk, who is the author of the Illustrative Encyclopedia of Armenian Culture in Ukraine.



This two-volume publication contains research done in 44 state museums and depositories in Ukraine. Hayuk reconstructs how Armenians lived and how they contributed to local commerce, diplomacy, armor making, jewellery, carpet weaving, gold embroidery, silk weaving, painting, theatre and literature. Through more than 500 illustrations, she reproduces items such as silver crosses, caskets, bowls, unique carpets, silk belts and famous portraits. Hayuk also provides a full inventory of Armenian monuments and artifacts in the area.



ARMENIAN MASTER JEWELLERS OF UKRAINE

Throughout Ukraine's history, Armenians played a major role in the development of commerce, diplomacy, health care, arts and crafts including jewellery. As evidenced by many historical facts, they were constantly present over many centuries, especially in Western Ukraine.

This distinguished tradition was certainly due to the positive contribution of local Armenian communities and their exemplary social standing. In fact, just like individuals, national groups can also be, or not, very talented or socially engaged.

Armenians are often forced to migrate in large numbers to other countries due to adversities. However, the arrival of the Armenians in Ukraine was not associated exclusively with tragic events. Armenians often migrated to Ukraine before the 10th C., a period marked by religious tension, as well as after that.

Trading posts serving Armenian trade networks existed since the beginning of the 10th C. and stretched from Tanais to northern European countries, as well as from China to Spain. Armenians were essentially welcome for they were very gifted and creative. Wherever they settled, they contributed to local economic development and prosperity. A curious phenomenon is that while preserving their ethno-national identity and culture, and working with each other, Armenians, never created an isolated system in a different society and never opposed themselves to their host society. On the contrary, retaining their own identity, they became an important economic and cultural factor in the development of their new motherland.

In jewellery history, up to the 18th C. Lviv was famous for its gold jewellery, which was significantly influenced by oriental styles, especially, in the production of plane armor, powder flasks, quiver, saber frames, and shields decorations. This fame was preserved particularly thanks to the Armenian master jewellers of Lviv. There was also another contributing factor to this. King Jan III Sobieski was a passionate armament collector and he supported Armenian jewellers in all their activities.

Armenian masters indeed played a dominant role in the history of jewellery art of Lviv. The rise and fall of this sector is closely connected to Armenians. The first mentions of Lviv's jewellery objects date back to the beginning of the XIV century. Among the 18 masters recorded from 1407-1419, there was only one Polish master, six Armenians, and eleven Germans. At the end of the XVII century, about 30 Armenian master jewellers were active in Lviv, representing more than half of all goldsmiths working in the city. Up to the middle of the XVII century, the majority of Armenian jewellers were non-guild masters, and the most respected among them owned a royal or other servitoriat exemption -- a piece of document exempting them from the jurisdiction of city authorities and securing the right to work legally under patronage of the king or a patron. Until 1654, Catholic Armenians were not permitted to be engaged in



Jewellery Box, XVII C., Lviv History Museum (MT-1719, CK-361), Silver 700°, engravings, dimensions 10.3 x 8 x 5, weight 252.7 gr., previously owned by the Armenian Church in Stanislaus (Ivano-Frankivsk).



manufacturing, so the servitariat was mandatory for working in jewellery.

Unfortunately, existing archival sources allow us to only speak about the Armenian jewellers of Western Ukraine, although in my opinion, in the Central, Eastern and Southern Ukraine, they were successful as well. Among the employees of Lviv's mint, there were famous Armenian master jewellers such as: Sefer Armenian, Kshishtof Yaskovich, Kshishtof Armenian and Bogdanovich. In 1678, Krikor Latinovich (Armenian) was elected manufacturing master of the Lviv jewellery. In 1685, Nerses Moysesovich inherited that title.

According to V. Lozinsky, Nerses Moysesovich and Aurivton Davdurovich enjoyed the highest respect in the region, and many were jealous of their work, clients, and wealth. Nerses Moysesovich was probably the last master jeweller in Lviv who adhered to Armenian traditions in armor decorations. King Jan III Sobieski showed much appreciation toward Armenian jewellers. In his residence on Market Square in Lviv, the Korniyaktov Building now housing the History Museum, there was a jewellery workshop where Armenians used to work. Bedros Zakhariashovich was one of the most respected Royal Master Jewellers who crafted the hilts (or handles) of three Florentine swords for the King. In 1690, his workshop was located in the Palace of Jan III and he worked exclusively for His Majesty.

Bedros Mardersovich is another well-known jeweller in Lviv. He was considered the patriarch of Armenian master jewellers and specialized predominantly in expensive plate armors encrusted with gold and decorated with precious stones.

Toros Seferovich was also among the popular Armenian jewellers in Lviv. Owing to patrons' servitariat and significant sponsorship, Seferovich mainly focused his efforts on making plate armors adorned with silver hammers and decorations. Peter Avgustinovich also adorned plate armors and weapons.

Kings wore the armors made by Kirkor Kamenetz, which were inlaid with gold; Kshishtof Mustafovich was instead given Kiev governor Andrzej Potocki's special orders. In 1627, among the Lviv jewellers was Sefer Armenian

(called Valashkiy or Voloshkiy Armenian), a renowned master who made rims of gold, silver and precious stones for swords, quivers and horse harnesses.

The list of 28 Armenian masters who worked from 1682 until 1700 in Lviv includes the following names: Peter Avgustinovich, Shimon Avgustinovich, Nicholas Antonievich, Lazarus Aurivtovich, Stefan Balzamovich, Yang Bedrosovich, Grigor Bogdanovich, Aurivton Davdurovich, Kshishtof Dernersevovich, Bedros Zahariyashovich, Casper Zahariyashovich, Ibrahim, Kirkor Kamenetsky, Cyril Kirkorovich, Nicholas Kirkorovich, Kshishtof Kirkorovich, Kirkor Latinovich, Michael Latinovich, Jozef Madashovich, Nerses Moysesovich, Philip Muratovich, Kshishtof Mustafovich (of Kamienetz-Podolski) Nerses Nersesovich, Andrew Sahakovich, Melko Seferovich, Toros Seferovich, Nicholas Hazarovich, Bogdan Hovhannes Yakubovich.

This is only a partial representation of the Armenian jewellery tradition in Lviv since the guild registers were not properly preserved. The names could only be found in the acts of the City Court, public regulations and legal procedural acts.

Armenian jewellery masters «stormed their place among the goldsmiths of Lviv, with the support of clients.» Often, they ignored old guild rules and lured the market because they were highly skilled and possessed the mysterious charm of the East. They evidently enjoyed the support of influential patrons, among them great Crown commanders Stanislaw Yablonovsky, Belz Castellan, Stanislav Belzsky, Zamoyski magnates, Chernigov Castellan Fredroi and others.

The beginning of the XVII century saw the decline of Lviv's jewellery sector. Although in the middle of that century we observe a short-lived rebound, thereafter it continues to



decline. As noted by V. Lozinsky, Lviv is indebted to the Armenians because the history of jewellery in the city started with them and, as a consequence, also ended with them.

MAINTAINING AND ADVANCING ARMENIAN HERITAGE

When I was in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2012, at a conference on the conservation of Armenian cultural heritage, one of the women in the audience, whose relatives lived in Ukraine, approached me after my intervention saying that she had always been interested in the history of the Armenian culture in Ukraine and used to believe that she knew it well enough, but she could not have guessed that the Armenian heritage in Ukraine was so great (and I might add, so interesting).

One of the main problems of the rich Armenian cultural heritage is that it is in low demand, and as a consequence, it is not well known to both Armenians and Ukrainians, even to people who are directly involved in the preservation of culture. In general, the Illustrated Encyclopedia of Armenian Culture in Ukraine was written taking into account all the problems I faced when dealing with various museums in search of Armenian cultural artifacts. It aims to provide a partial solution to the above-mentioned problem.

I think that the issue of preserving the Armenian cultural heritage in Ukraine (or even other countries) can be divided into two parts:

- 1) Conservation of the immovable Armenian heritage in Ukraine (both secular and religious monuments, as well as Armenian cemeteries or graves, which are numerous);
- 2) Preservation of movable Armenian cultural items found in various collections, such as cultural objects, artifacts and manuscripts.

The process of preserving consists of three essential components:

I] The need to know what to save. This involves the study of the cultural history of Armenians in Ukraine (as well as in the Black Sea region and in relation to Armenia, Romania, Moldova, Poland, Hungary and Russia) accompanied with an effort to search and identify Armenian cultural monuments or items and present them to the academic community;

II] Preservation, conservation and restoration of Armenian cultural monuments or items; and

III] Presentation of the Armenian cultural heritage, which should include not only the study and preservation of cultural achievements, but also raising awareness among the general population -- Armenians and non-Armenians -- and promotion of public opinion that will contribute to increased awareness and interest in the study of Armenian cultural heritage.

The full implementation of such a program remains a dream for me.

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