

A Comparative Study of Niello Art of Armenians of Tabriz and Turkey

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Introduction

Niello, blackwork, Lead Sawat, and black enamel are different names for a metalworking art style known in different countries and among different ethnic groups. This art has a long history and deploys a combination of silver, copper, lead, and sulfur to decorate silver and gold works. This art is popular among the Armenians of Tabriz and Van in Turkey. Previous studies showed that there were deep cultural connections between the Armenians of Tabriz and Van in Turkey. Considering that studies conducted in the field of Niello of the Armenians of Tabriz and Van in Turkey are limited in terms of case studies or comparative studies, so the present study seems essential. This research was conducted in order to understand Niello art and its decorative motifs among the Armenians of Van and Tabriz.







Research Method

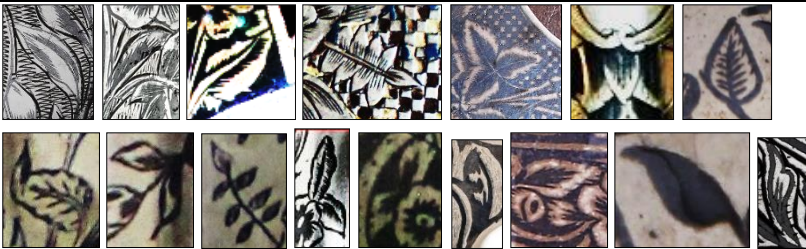

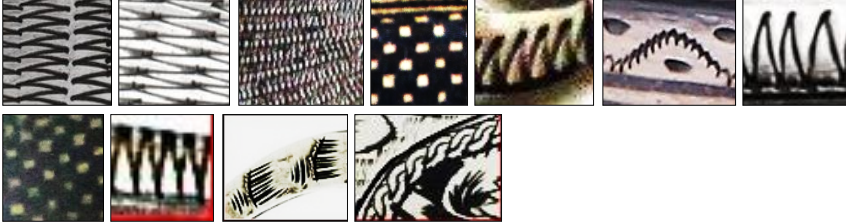

In the present study, the decorative motifs and the execution style of Armenian Niello art in two regions of Tabriz in Iran and Van in Turkey have been compared from a descriptive-analytical approach. The analysis was carried out qualitatively based on library, documentary, and field information. The research samples included five works belonging to the Armenians of Tabriz, five works belonging to the Armenians of Van, and one sample, as a common product of two regions, found in searches. This sample is introduced in a separate section and presented as a document to express the cultural and economic connections of two regions. The sampling method is purposeful and the collection of research samples is based on field data.

Research Findings

The findings of the present study are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Matching of Niello art decorative motifs of Armenians of Tabriz and Van (Authors)

Common example	Examples of Armenians from Turkey	Examples of Armenians from Tabriz
 <p>Image 11</p>	 <p>Images 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10</p>	 <p>Images 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5</p>
<p>Van: 4 grams of silver, 80 grams of copper, 80 grams of lead, and 1000 grams of sulfur</p>	<p>Tabriz: 1 part silver, 2 parts copper, 3 parts lead, and 5 parts sulfur</p>	<p>Composition and execution process</p>
 <p>The pattern of multi-petaled flowers, in order, is part of the details of the images (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 10)</p>	<p>Plant (herbal) motifs</p>	<p>Similarities and Differences</p>
<p>The image of multiple flowers with different feathers but with similar design in most samples is repeated, but the multiple sample flowers (7) are slightly different from other samples. In image (10), the crocus flower is depicted with two types of petals: sharp and curved (broad).</p>		
 <p>Rose pattern, part of the details of the images (3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11) respectively.</p>		
<p>The rose motif is also seen in most of the examples, which are very similar to each other. Only example (9) is different from the others, and its petals are glued together and continuous.</p>		
 <p>Carnation pattern, part of the details of images (4, 11, and 11) respectively.</p>		
<p>The carnation pattern is only seen in samples (4 and 11), in sample (4) the petals are designed in a curved form. However, in one of the flowers in sample (11), the carnation petals are designed with more curvature and sharper lines and a zigzag pattern.</p>		

 <p>Leaf pattern, in order of some of the details of the images (1, 2, 3, 4, 4, 5, 6, 6, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 10, 10 and 11)</p>		
<p>The small-scale leaves of sample (10) and sample (4), which belong to the works of Van and Tabriz respectively, are very similar in terms of design. The leaves of samples (3, 4, and 5) from Tabriz and (6, 9) from Van and sample (11) (common to both regions) are drawn very similarly to each other. In general, in Van samples, the details of the veins are drawn more clearly and have a more natural design than Tabrizi samples. In all samples, the flower leaves have a light shade and are shaded with hatching; only in sample (6), there are two types of leaves: black and light shade. Of course, it should be noted that the type of light shade in samples is different from each other. In sample (10), the light shade of the leaves is very similar to the natural samples, while in the other samples this adherence is less.</p>		
 <p>Animal motifs, details of images (1 and 6)</p> <p>In the examples from both regions, animal motifs were of interest to artists from both regions.</p>	<p>Animal motifs</p>	
 <p>Geometric patterns, part of the details of the images (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 11 and 11)</p> <p>The zigzag pattern is exactly repeated in samples (1, 2, 5, 6, 7 and 11). The zigzag pattern in sample (3) is finer and has a denser texture. The motifs of squares in between silver and black are also seen in works (4 and 9). In sample (11) the braid pattern is also seen.</p>	<p>Geometric patterns</p>	
 <p>Natural landscape, pictures (1 and 6)</p> <p>The presence of natural and native landscapes such as mountainous landscapes, native animals, lakes, and forests shows that artists from two regions were interested in this subject and that it was part of their Niello drawings emphasizing the concept of identity.</p>	<p>Nature and other motifs</p>	

Conclusion

The results of the research show that Van artists use up to one kilogram of sulfur in the Niello composition. As a result, the composition absorbs sulfur to the saturation point and has the quality of a beautiful black color. While in Tabriz, the amount of sulfur accounts for 5 parts of the composition, which results in a less dark result compared to the Van recipe. Regarding the decorative motifs of the two regions, it should be remarked that plant motifs and the motif of roses and their buds and multi-petaled flowers have the highest frequency among the works of the two regions, and there is a major similarity between the works of two regions of Tabriz and Van. This similarity indicates cultural connections and even economic interactions. Even the affinity of the artists of two regions is also so great that some (Niello) works, such as example (11) in Table (1), are a joint product of two regions, and the words Tabriz and Van are engraved on the work. Another important point is that by mentioning the word Van next to Tabriz, the Armenian artist of Tabriz emphasized his ancient origin, Van, and his and his fathers' migration to Tabriz, pointing to his attachment to both of his homelands, emphasizing the concept of unity between the Armenians of the two regions.

Keywords: Niello, Savad's artistic style, Armenians, Tabriz, Van.