Animal representation in the medieval Armenian art

N. Manaseryan & L. Mirzoyan

*Institute of Zoology of Armenian National Academy of Sciences
**Université Marc Bloch, Institut d’Histoire et Archéologie de l’Orient ancien

Medieval Armenian animalistic art belongs to the brightest pages of the world cultural heritage. Animal images are presented in any type of artwork from everyday use objects to the medieval masterpieces. Ceramic objects mostly decorated by bird images were playing substantial role in the medieval art (fig. 1a & 1b). Beautiful animalistic images are present on the significant amount of the applied art objects made of metal (fig. 2). Animals were common motives also in Medieval Armenian embroideries (fig. 3). In the famous Armenian Medieval manuscripts animals are presented both to introduce the meaning of the text and to decorate the manuscript (fig. 4a & 4b). Medieval Armenian art is very rich of animal representations on the inner and outer decorations of the monasteries and churches (fig. 5a; 5b; 5c; 5d; 5e & 5f). Nobel families created their family emblems with animal images as a sign of their power and strength (fig. 6a & 6b). Tombstones of those times were splendidly decorated too with professional scenes including animals depending on the occupation of the deceased (fig. 7a; 7b & 7c).

As we can see in the above presented images, various animals served as an inspiration source for medieval masters. Wild animals like reptiles, birds, big carnivores (lion, leopard), wild artiodactyls (bezoar goat, muflon) etc. are present on the art objects. Domestic animals as bull, sheep, goat, horse, dog, etc. are common motives too. All those animals were represented as a single decoration or the object had a shape of an animal, as well as they were playing certain role on the scene depicted on the object. The scene could be a pictorial illustration of a legend or a story, as well as an everyday life scene like hunting, grazing, farming, etc.

To summarize, animals played great role in the medieval times and were used in all domains of the medieval art by the people of all society levels. Nowadays, as always, medieval art masterpieces serve as a source of inspiration for the development of modern art.

Fig. 1 Ceramic plate, Dvin, XIII c. AD
Fig. 2a Bronze cup, Echmiatsin, XI/XIII c. AD

Fig. 2b Bronze pot, Haghartsin monastery, 1238
Fig. 3 Embroidery, Ani, XIII c. AD

Fig. 4a Gospel, Nakhijevan, 1304
Fig. 4b Letter of Eusebius, Cilicia, 1287

Fig. 5a Exterior ornament, Makaravank church, XII c. AD
Fig. 5b Exterior ornament, Tsakhats Qar monastery, X c. AD

Fig. 5c Exterior ornament, Geghard monastery, 1283
Fig. 5d Façade ornament of the Holy Mother church, Eghvard, 1321-1328

Fig. 5e
Fig. 5e and 5f Holy Mother church decor fragment, Eghvvard, 1321-1328

Fig. 6a Emblem of Proshyan family. Rock cut interior ornament, Geghard monastery, 1283

Fig. 6b Emblem of Orbelyan family. Relief sculpture, Tsakhats Qar monastery, 1041
Fig. 7a Tombstone, Gndevank monastery, X c. AD

Fig. 7b Tombstone, Noraduz cemetery, XVI/XVII cc. AD
Fig. 7c Grave marker, sculptured ram, Julfa on Arax, XVI c. AD

Picture and information sources
1. www.virtualarmenia.am
2. armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/
3. www.armeniapedia.org