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OLD TBILISI IN THE WORKS OF ARMENIAN ARTISTS OF XIX-XX CENTURIES*

Keywords: *Tbilisi, Armenian artists, Hovnathanians, Karapet Grigorians*

At the very beginning of the 19th century, after being declared the administrative center of Transcaucasus, Tbilisi became a creative hub. The long-term coexistence of different ethnic groups created a sort of mosaic of traditions and cultures - Multicultural Tbilisi.

Before the empire's entry, Armenian painting in Georgia had a long history. Already from the 17th century, there were Armenian artists' families in Tbilisi. The oldest famous family of Hovnathanians has lived in Tbilisi since the 17th century. Later, the families of Bajbeuk-Melikyans, Bayakhchevs, Dilbaryans, Manoyans, Elibekyans, Mirzoyans, and other artists were added to the lineages of Armenian artists...

At the beginning of the 20th century, Armenian artists considered themselves an integral part of Tbilisi culture and an organic part of Georgian Culture, participating in the exhibitions of the "Caucasian Fine Art Promotion Society" established in 1887. The emotional background of their creativity was created by Tbilisi's landscape, architecture, and the somewhat theatrical presence of ოც'ბ citizens.

In 1922, right after establishing the Tbilisi Art Academy, famous Armenian artists such as H. Shamshinyan, H. Hakobyan, V. Surenyants, V. Gayfejian, and I. Karalyan were teaching there. Here studied E. Isabekyan, D. Nalbadyan, R. Loris-Melikov, R. Israelyan, R. Simonyan, R. Safarov, H. Gharibjanyan, S. Kirakozov, T. Nalbandyan, Gr. Mirzoev, A. Kojoyan, S. Kashkhyan and others. Together with Georgian artists, they represented a unified school of Tbilisi painting.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a group of Armenian female artists was already active in Tbilisi: Anastasya Dandurov, Nina Tamamsheva, El. Digurova-Kikodze, Hermine Khachoyan, Madeleine Amirkhanova, Nadezhda Aleksanyan-Shakhazizi, talented artist Emma Lalayeva-Ediberidze (Lali).

Professionals who received education in Russia and Europe G. Bashinjalyan, G. Sharbabchyan, E. Tadevosyan, A. Shamshiyanyan, H. Hakobyan, V. Surenyants, V. Gayfechyan, I. Karalyan and recognized masters of the 20-th century - Martiros Sarian, Ervand Kochar,

* The article is prepared in the frame of the project "Ethnoreligious Mosaics of Tbilisi (1801-1921)" Supported by the Shota Rustaveli National Scientific foundation (grant # FR- 21-8081).

Giorgi Akulov, Arshil Gork..., as well as self-taught great masters V. Khojabekov, K. Grigoryants, V. Elibekyan, who brought the life of old Tbilisi to the canvas with exceptional clarity, made an immeasurable contribution to the formation of the Tbilisi Armenian Art School.

K. Grigoriants's work depicting the life of old Tbilisi can be found in artistic, theatrical, and literary circles. He was a primitivist self-taught artist, a contemporary of Firosmiani, and similar to Firosmiani, he created portraits and still lifes with characteristic Georgian painting and made signs. In his paintings, there are types typical for Tbilisi of that time. He worked mainly on plywood using oil-based paints. Autograph "Karapet Grigoryants. "Old Tbilisi" can be found in almost all of the artist's paintings. A total of 40 works of Karapet Grigoriants have survived to this day, from which only one of them is kept in Yerevan, six - in the State Museum of Folk and Applied Arts of Georgia, and thirty-three were brought to the National Museum of Georgia in 1935 by the artist himself.

K. Grigoryants is mentioned by I. Grishashvili not as an artist, but as the author of verses published in 1910 and the translator of "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" into Armenian. According to S. Kldiashvili, K. Grigoryants was the author of 12 books. The texts are almost completely lost. „Rare Stories of Old Tbilisi“, which was submitted to the Museum of Literature in the form of a manuscript by the writer Sergo Kldiashvili in 1944, has survived. The main merit of the book is that the author is an eyewitness and a participant in life in Tbilisi. He describes in detail how the houses were arranged, how oil lamps and electricity came into use, what kind of clothes the people of Tbilisi wore, what the situation was in the factories, how much the salary was, where and how they got together, how criminals were punished, what was sold in the markets, he tells us about the construction of the railway, about corruption, about the fall of thunder, about the visit of the Emir of Bukhari to Tbilisi, about the impressive burial of Grigor Artsrun, about the cases and execution of thug Tato Tsulukidze, about the poisoning of wine by a snake and what we rarely meet - he describes various professions activities of people, including prostitutes, in Tbilisi. It should be said that it is not described in general terms, but every topic has a separate chapter.

In 2011, K. Grigoryants's „Rare Stories of Old Tbilisi“ was published, accompanied by the author's biography. The book is decorated with the author's drawings and includes all the drawings known at the time. K. Grigoryants's previously unknown „Tamar the Great and Shota Rustaveli“ was not among them. The National Parliament Library of Georgia purchased the painting from a private person in 2022. The painting is attached to the article, which I think will be a small contribution to the biography of the artist. Like most of the paintings and texts, the grave of Karapet Grigoryantz is also considered lost.

I. Grishashvili added to his „literary bohemia of old Tbilisi" the illustrations depicting the exotic existence of Tbilisi made by Vano Khojabekov. V. Khojabekov's painting is as original as the existence of old Tbilisi. He mainly painted genre scenes:... The forgotten tradition preserved in Khojabekov's painting „Groom's Dance on the Grave of his parents" is very interesting.

The self-taught artist V. Elibekyan made a great contribution to the creation of the visual encyclopedia of Old Tbilisi. He led the theater for a long time, and that's why his canvases seem to be a stage; the life of Tbilisi seems to be staged. The atmosphere of the old city is expressed in movements, poses, and facial expressions. The everyday life of the townspeople is depicted in a theatrical environment. Elibekyan started painting at the age of 64, and all his works are memories of his native Tbilisi.

The old Tbilisi captured in the pictures of Grigoryants, Khojabegov and Elibekyan revives the self-contained face of Tbilisi of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, urban traditions, clothes of Tbilisi residents, and urban entertainments. The naive works of self-taught Armenian artists from Tbilisi are inspired by the love of Tbilisi and its colorfulness. That is why they are considered to be prominent records of Tbilisi's life.

For Armenian artists, the topic of Tbilisi is so multifaceted and extensive that it is impossible to discuss even one part of it in one article fully. The purpose of the article is to show that the topic is still not fully explored (especially the repressed artists of the 1937s), and the search and collection of works and references continue. I tried to make a small contribution to this search - K. Grigoryants's „Tamar the Great and Shota Rustaveli“ will occupy a worthy place in the list of the artist's works.