

**Artegin Salamzade**  
*correspondent member of ANAS*  
*Institute of Architecture and Art of ANAS*  
*(Azerbaijan)*

*ertegin.salamzade@mail.ru*

---

## IMPERIAL THINKING IN THE ARTISTIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE TURKIC WORLD

**Abstract.** The article deals with the forms of manifestation of imperial thinking in the art of the Turkic world. It shows the main signs of imperial thinking in the artistic culture material of the Hunnish Empire, Timurid Empire, Atabek state, and Ottoman Empire. The article also presents the first-ever transcript of the images on the facing slabs of the Hunnic palace from the 1st century B.C. in Khakassia, stating that these images are not just masters' signs or elements of ornaments but letters of the runic alphabet. Separately considered such a common phenomenon in the Turkic world as miniature painting and identified a specific iconographic type of portrait image. The article lists various identifiers of imperial thinking, such as the creation of artistic works far beyond the area of residence of the titular ethnos groups, the prolonged construction of large ensembles, the establishment of a typology of a new type of buildings, the formation of a large artistic style and, more broadly, a universal artistic language. It concludes that the imperial type is the specific of art thinking, exclusively operating with space and time.

**Key words:** imperial type of thinking, Turkic world, iconographic type, ensemble, universal artistic language.

**Introduction.** Human history knows many empires. All of them have left a trace, profound, unforgettable, or almost forgotten. Many peoples were imperial, establishing and expanding the borders of their great states: Romans, Persians, Germans, Spaniards, Anglo-Saxons, Mongols, Turks, and Russians. Most imperial cultures left behind a rich artistic heritage, embodying their worldview in architecture and art forms.

The main characteristic of an empire is not the size of its territory, the number of its population, and not even the scale of conquest. The main thing is “that an empire, unlike a kingdom or a city, cannot be part of another whole. No one could stand above the emperor: the empire embodies absolute sovereignty” [4, c. 12]. The empire always offers its image of the world.

**The interpretation of the main material.** Interest in the imperial artistic thinking type in art history has increased noticeably in the last decade. Various imperial epochs and styles become the object of research. One such study was performed by A. Yakimovich and is devoted to Velasquez’s portraits, in the iconography of which the art historian revealed the signs of success and defeat of the Spanish Empire of the time of Philip IV. During the period of military defeats, “luxurious ceremonial portraits as declarations of success and triumph were decidedly inappropriate. It was necessary portraits strict and severe – with all the deployment and completeness of power attributes” [10, c. 300]. “The portrait of the king in 1644 is rather a mobilisation portrait than a ceremonial portrait” [10, p. 304].

The series of portraits by Velázquez illustrated the rise and fall of the Spanish crown. There are many similar works in the history of European art. Here, we can recall the portraits of Napoleon by Delacroix, British painting, the imperial architecture of Austria-Hungary and many others.

A range of art historians has sufficiently reflected imperial thinking in the artistic culture of Western Europe. The position of the famous researcher of Italian art, Giulio Argan, introduces a certain dissonance into this semantic field. He writes that “neoclassicism subordinated to the same samples the whole artistic culture of Europe, leaving aside national traditions and “schools”. The ideology on which he relied was the universal ideology of the Revolution and the Empire” [1, c. 213]. In other words, J. Argan considers imperial thinking, on the one hand, as a supranational phenomenon and, on the other hand, as a stadial, historically limited phenomenon. These two principal provisions are fundamental for understanding imperial thinking in Turkic culture.

Turkic civilisation is one of the most significant in human history. The Turks created several great empires. Genghis Khan’s empire covered a colossal geographical space. Its area covered 28 million square kilometres. For comparison, the territory of the Soviet Union was only 22 million square kilometres. The Seljuk Empire of 10 million square kilometres was somewhat inferior in size.

The Turkic empires left a rich artistic heritage. Speaking of the ancient Turks, the outstanding historian and ethnologist Lev Gumilev noted that “the

remains of their material culture – felt, leather, wood and furs – are not as well preserved as stone. This led to a mistaken belief among Western European scientists that the nomads were the “drones of mankind” (Viollet le Duc)” [2, p. 5]. However, even during Gumilev’s lifetime, archaeological excavations were conducted. The pushed results revealed that the heritage of the ancient Turkic civilisation extended beyond felt and leather products. It is especially true for the Hunnu people and the Hunnish Empire. The so-called Hunnish palace of the 1st century B.C. discovered through excavations near Abakan city, the capital of Khakassia, is worth mentioning. It is a rectangular building constructed of clay and wood. “It was erected by experienced architects and builders, undoubtedly, according to a pre-created project or architectural model” [6, p. 176]. The palace had impressive dimensions, with space from north to south 35 metres and from west to east 45 metres. It demonstrates a high level of construction culture of the Huns in the 1st millennium B.C.

The remains of the tile slabs of the palace cladding found during excavations were of great interest. Of course, archaeologists couldn’t help but pay attention, but the depictions put on them they interpreted as “signs of masters” or even as images having “ornamental character” [6, p. 183]. However, on some tiles, the signs of the runic alphabet are very clearly visible. For example, on the tiles No. 13 and No. 15, there is an image of the rune “eh”. Its “vocalisation: phonetic distortion of the logical “i”. Hence the name of Odin – “Igg”, “terrible”, terrible in its greatness” [3, p. 70].

The image on the slab No. 10 also draws attention. Here, we can observe the sign “Y”, a runic hieroglyph. Ideogram “Y” is “the original symbol of the universal Spring, Resurrection” [3, p. 168]. The vocalisation of this symbol is as “ha” or “ka”. In the ancient Greek tradition, the symbol “Y” was called the “tripod of Apollo” [3, p. 84]. In general, we can see this sign in several ancient writing systems. For example, “Egyptian “ka”... Egyptian “ka” denoted the human soul” [3, p. 168]. We should say that the runic alphabet was arranged in a circle, and all the runes corresponded to specific geographical directions and seasons. Dutch researcher Herman Wirth showed that the symbol “Y” precisely corresponded to the east and the beginning of spring. Thus, there is every reason to believe that on the facing slabs of the Hunnic palace of the 1st century B.C., some inscriptions were in the runic alphabet.

The Middle Ages epoch is no longer in doubt from the point of view of the development of imperial forms of architecture in the Turkic world. Genghis Khan Empire, the Seljuk Empire, the Timurid Empire, the Ottoman Empire,

and the Atabek State gave the world culture many architectural masterpieces. One of the signs of the imperial scale of artistic thinking can and should be considered the spread of objects of architecture and art beyond the territory of residence of the titular ethnos or nation that formed the empire. We should note that all the above empires actively carried out construction far beyond the area of residence of their titular ethnic groups – Tatars, Seljuks, Uzbeks, Turks, and Azerbaijani Turkic peoples.

The empire of Amir Timur (1336–1405), with its capital in Samarkand, included the territories of Iran, Caucasus, Mesopotamia, Afghanistan, the overwhelming part of Central Asia, and parts of modern Pakistan, India, and Syria. One of the significant monuments of the Timurid era in Iran is the complex of buildings around the tomb of Imam Reza. At the turn of the XIV–XV centuries, Iran was a periphery of the Timurid Empire. The architecture of this period was oriented on the stylistic samples of the empire’s capital – Samarkand. “The main architectural principles Timur and his descendants developed are portal-dome constructions with minarets on the stylobate” [7, p. 72]. These stylistic signs are visible in the architecture of the Gauhar Shad mosque (1405–1418), which is part of the Mashhad centre complex and erected by Kavamoddin Shirazi.

Another undoubted indicator of the imperial intellection in architecture is the prolonged and purposeful construction of large complexes and ensembles. An empire is in no hurry and always has enough material resources for grandiose projects. Although the Atabek state was not formally an empire, the scope and displayed nature of construction activity in the XII–XIII centuries give reason to see signs of imperial thinking in the work of the outstanding architect Ajami Nakhchivani. The architectural complex he created, consisting of the mausoleum of Momine-Khatun (1186), Juma Mosque, and the entrance portal with two minarets, creates an image of the central ensemble of the imperial capital. It is no coincidence that Ajami’s work significantly influenced the subsequent development of architecture in the Turkic and, in general, the Islamic world.

Any Turkic empire is an embodiment of the archetype of eternal Turan. The Turanian identity took shape much in opposition to the Iranian identity. There is an opinion that the Iranian peoples are the bearers of the legendary hyperborean tradition and that their folklore, myths and calendar consciousness reflect polar realities. Indeed, it is the name Turan that signifies “the country under the sky of Capricorn”, “the country under the northern sky”, while Iran is “the country under the sky of Leo”, “the country under the southern

sky” [11, p. 47]. The outstanding monument of Uzbek architecture, the Ark citadel in Bukhara, preserves the memory of one of the crucial events of the confrontation between these two civilisational poles – the battle between the Turanian leader Afrasiyab and the Iranian ruler Kei Khosrow.

In this sense, the Atabek state, in whose space the great Ajami’s work developed, was a historically fleeting conglomerate of Turanian and Iranian identity. To a certain extent, this also applies to the Seljuk Empire. In this regard, Rustan Rakhmanaliev notes: “It is sometimes a priori argued that the Seljuk art of Rum was only a peripheral part of Iranian art, but this is not so... If the Iranians built with brick, the Seljuks of Rum built with stone. If the first ones created a new type of mosque ... the second ones still followed the so-called Arabian pattern” [8, c. 232]. Symbiosis of these identities did not happen and could not occur. Each of them was a carrier of imperial thinking in itself.

The next sign of imperial thinking should admit the formation of a typology of the new kind of constructions. The tower mausoleum is an obvious example of a new architectural type established based on Turkic imperial thinking. The specific shaping process, traced by researchers in the medieval architecture of Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole, precedes the formation of the classical type of the octagonal mausoleum. The completion of this process is visible in Ajami Nakhchivani’s work, which unfolded in the conditions of the Atabek state, imperial in its essence. And it is not by chance that the octahedron composition is spread widely in the works of the greatest Turkish architect, Hoja Sinan, whose peak activity coincides with the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, who stood at the helm of the Ottoman Empire during the high age of the brilliant Porte. Sinan built five octagonal mausoleums in Istanbul alone. These are the mausoleums of Khosrow Pasha, Zal Mahmud Pasha, Shehzade Mehmed, Hayreddin Barbarossa, and Sultan Suleiman.

Another sign of imperial thinking is the invention of a great artistic style and, more broadly, a universal artistic language. In our case, we are talking, of course, about the visual language. There is no doubt that the visual language of Turkic culture began to form in ancient times. Its examples can be seen in animal-style works, the outlines of balbals, and ornamental designs. H. Mamedov and S. Dadashev identified the main principles of this artistic language. The central concept of their BOPF concept – backgroundless organisation of pictorial forms – characterizes the type of image in which the figure is equal to the background. The tradition of BOPF, according to the authors, dates back several thousand years. The centre of its origin is Siberia,

from where the principle of BOPF spread to the vast region, including the geographical areas of the Far North, Central and Small Asia, Azerbaijan and others. Subsequently, Siyavush Dadashev further developed the provisions of the discussed concept in individual studies.

He proposes a formula defining the typology basically of possible pictorial languages: “1. the more complex are the elements constituting the system, the simpler should be the links between them because complex elements are not capable of multilevel interrelations; 2. the simpler are the elements constituting the system, the more complex should be the links between them because simple elements need multilevel interrelations” [9, p. 34]. Based on this approach, S.Dadashev studies the art of Turkic miniature painting. The difference between the grammar of the Turkic visual language and any other is that the miniature is a system with complex interrelations of simple elements, while the Western classical painting, for example, is, on the contrary, a system with simple interrelations of complex elements. The West’s visual language is based on the picturing external, photographic resemblance to the prototype. The language of Turkic miniature depicts not the object but the idea of its being.

However, S.Dadashev studied the Turkic miniature as a system in the spirit of structuralism. The iconological method involves analysing the work and the visual symbols contained therein. Iconography deals primarily with established iconographic types. On the material of the Tabriz school of miniature painting, such types are well-researched and widely known. In the XVI century, during the highest prosperity of miniature painting, “a special scheme of ceremonial portraiture was developed, depicting in certain, repetitive poses and movements idealised images of young dandies” [5 p. 51]. This type is reflected in the miniatures by Sultan Mohammed, “Young Man with a Book” (1540), “Young Man with a Book by a Tree” (first half of the XVI century), “Portrait of Shah Tahmasib with a Falcon” (XVI century), and Kamal Tabrizi “Prince with a Falcon” (1575) and others. Somewhat later, at the beginning of the XVII century, exactly the same iconographic type is repeated in Uzbek miniature paintings, particularly in the illustrations of “Babur-nameh” from the British Museum in London. This type exactly corresponds to the portrait of Zakhiriddin Muhammad Babur, where he is depicted with a book in his hands.

**Conclusion.** The imperial type is a specific kind of artistic thinking that operates exceptionally with space and time. Works of art created by this type of thinking are, as it were, outside of time or above time because it is not time

that measures empire, but, on the contrary, empire measures time. Likewise, the imperial type deals with space: everything created by it is over here, at the centre of the world. This type of visual language forms the image of the empire, from temples and palaces to the ornaments on the blade and the tips of the rider's spurs.

## REFERENCES

1. Арган Дж.К. История итальянского искусства. В 2 т. – М., 1990.
2. Гумилев Л.Н. Древние тюрки. – М., 1967.
3. Дугин А.Г. Знаки и символы Норда. – М., 2008.
4. Империи Средневековья: от Каролингов до Чингизидов. – М., 2021.
5. Керимов К.Д. Султан Мухаммед и его школа. – М., 1970.
6. Кызласов Л.Р. Городская цивилизация Срединной и Северной Азии: исторические и археологические исследования. – М., 2006.
7. Рахимжан Л. Тимуридская архитектура в Иране. // Проблемы искусства и культуры, 2024, № 1. – с. 61-73.
8. Рахманалиев Р. Империя тюрков. История великой цивилизации. – М., 2019.
9. Сиявуш Дадаш. Теория формального изобразительного языка тюркской миниатюры. – Стамбул, 2006.
10. Якимович А.К. Успех и поражение империи в портретах Веласкеса. // Произведение искусства как документ эпохи. В 2 ч. Часть 1. – М., 2014.
11. Ümid Niayiş-Oqtaу. Avrasiya inanc sistemi bütünlüyündə Türk inanc sistemi. – Bakı, 2007.

**Ərtegin Salamzadə (Azərbaycan)**

## TÜRK DÜNYASININ BƏDİİ MENTALİTETİNDƏ İMPERİYA TƏFƏKKÜRÜ

Məqalədə Türk dünyası sənətində imperiya təfəkkürünün təzahür formaları nəzərdən keçirilir. İmperiya təfəkkürünün əsas əlamətləri Hun imperiyasının, Teymurilər imperiyasının, Atabəylər dövlətinin, Osmanlı imperiyasının bədii mədəniyyəti materialında göstərilir. Xakasiya ərazisində e.ə. I əsrə aid Hun sarayının üzlük plitələri üzərindəki təsvirlərin deşifrə edilməsi ilk dəfədir ki, təklif olunur. Bu təsvirlərin sənətkarların nişanları və ya ornament elementləri deyil, Run əlifbasının hərfləri olması təsdiq edilir. Miniatur

rəngkarlığı kimi Türk dünyası üçün ortaq olan sənət ayrıca nəzərdən keçirilmiş, portret təsvirinin müəyyən ikonoqrafik tipi aşkar edilmişdir. İmperiya təfəkkürünün eyniyyətləri arasında – titul etnoslarının yayılma arealı hüdudlarından xeyli uzaqda yaradılan bədii əsərlər; böyük ansamblların uzun zaman ərzində inşa olunması; yeni tipli tikililərin tipologiyasının təşəkkül tapması; böyük bədii üslubun və daha geniş müstəvidə – universal bədii dilin formalaşması – vurğulanmışdır. Belə bir nəticə hasil olunmuşdur ki, imperiya tipi – bədii təfəkkürün istisnasız olaraq məkan və zaman üzərində bərqərar olan xüsusi tipidir.

**Açar sözlər:** imperiya təfəkkürü tipi, Türk dünyası, ikonoqrafik tip, ansambl, universal bədii dil.

**Эртегин Саламзаде (Азербайджан)**

## **ИМПЕРСКОЕ МЫШЛЕНИЕ В ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОМ СОЗНАНИИ ТЮРКСКОГО МИРА**

В статье рассматриваются формы проявления имперского мышления в искусстве тюркского мира. Основные признаки имперского мышления показаны на материале художественной культуры Гуннской империи, империи Тимуридов, государства Атабеков, Османской империи. Впервые предлагается расшифровка изображений на облицовочных плитах гуннского дворца I в. до н.э. на территории Хакассии. Утверждается, что эти изображения являются не знаками мастеров или элементами орнаментами, а буквами рунического алфавита. Отдельно рассматривается такое общее для тюркского мира явление, как миниатюрная живопись, выявляется определенный иконографический тип портретного изображения. Среди идентификаторов имперского мышления названы: создание художественных произведений далеко за пределами ареала проживания титульных этносов; длительное по времени строительство больших ансамблей; сложение типологии нового типа сооружений; формирование большого художественного стиля и шире – универсального художественного языка. Делается вывод о том, что имперский тип – это особый тип художественного мышления, исключительным образом оперирующий пространством и временем.

**Ключевые слова:** имперский тип мышления, тюркский мир, иконографический тип, ансамбль, универсальный художественный язык.



## FIGURES



Fig. 1. Hunnish Palace. Ist century B.C. Near Abakan city, Khakassia.

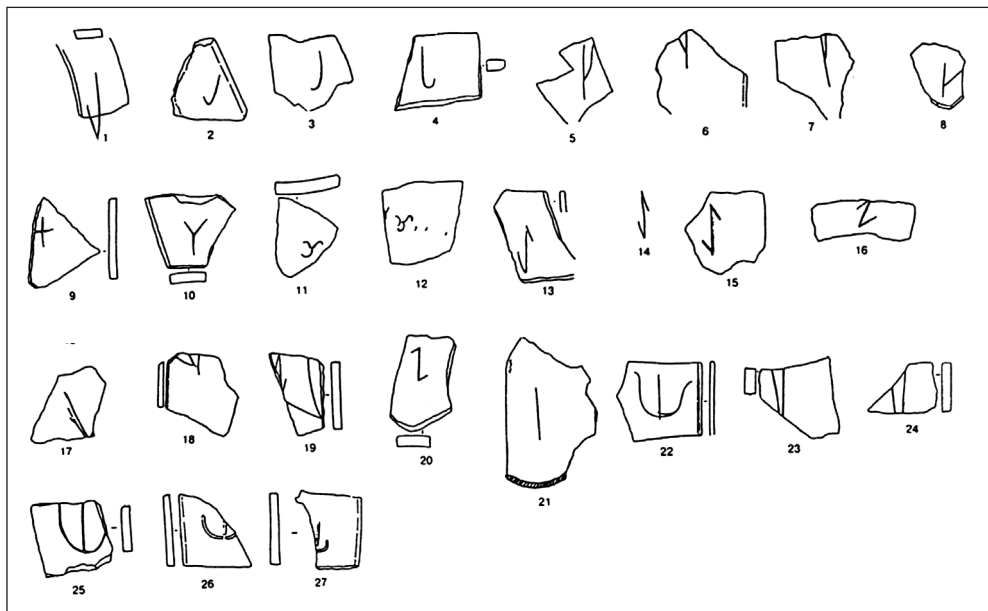


Fig. 2. The tile slabs of the palace cladding found during excavations.

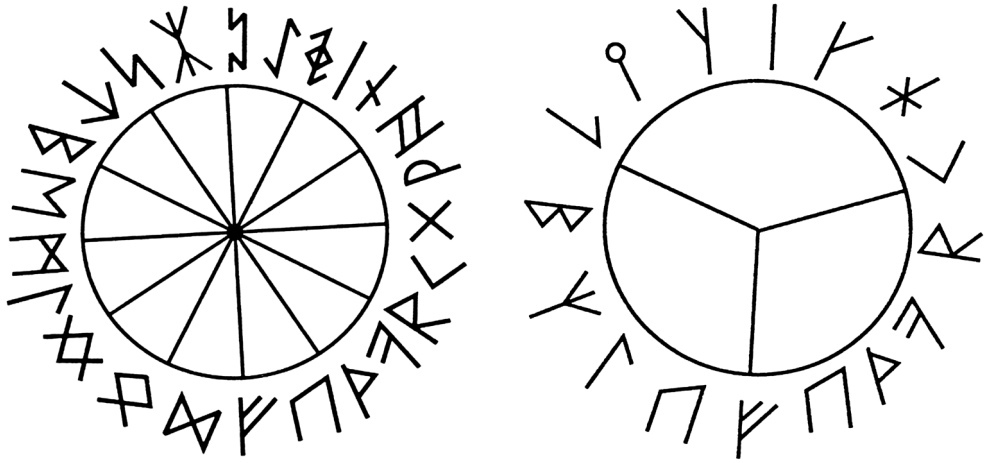
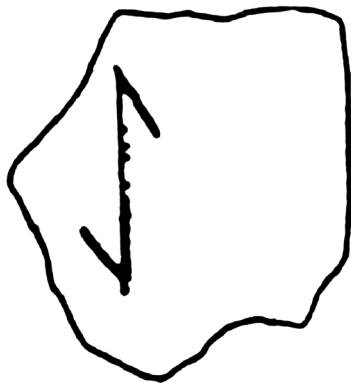
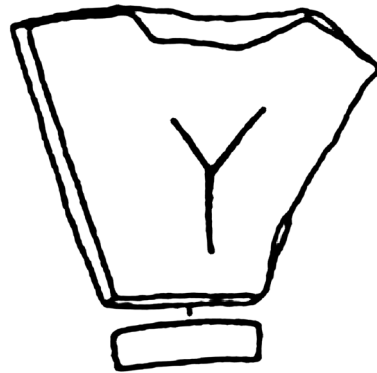


Fig. 3. The runic alphabet.



15

A) "eh"



10

B) "ka"

Fig. 4. The runes "eh" and "ka".