

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

ertegin.salamzade@mail.ru

NATURAL CYCLES AND SYMBOLS OF NATURE IN SHEBEKE ART

Abstract. A shebeke is a decorative plane assembled from many carved wooden elements and pieces of coloured glass reinforced between them. Shebeke patterns are geometric archetypes reflecting major metaphysical principles, including particular natural cycles and images. The report presents an internally consistent concept of the origin of the types of shebeke compositions and the symbolism of the numerical series defining their geometry: 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 16, and 32. It is shown, for example, that 10 and 12-cornered figures symbolise the Tree of Life. To convey the geometry of the Tree of Life in the visual language of shebeke, folk masters of the 18th century, creating compositions of the ground floor of the Palace of the Sheki Khans, presented it in the form of an elongated 12-cornered figure. The geometric code of the number 32 is scarce in shebeke patterns. It is a lunar cycle consisting of 28 days and four main astronomical events of a year: days of winter and summer solstice and spring and autumn equinoxes. Ilgar Rasulzadeh, a young master of shebeke, created a unique composition of shebeke in a Latin cross form (2020) for the Vatican Embassy building crowned by a circle with an inscribed 32-gon within.

Key words: shebeke, natural cycles, symbols, figures of sacral geometry, Tree of Life.

Introduction. The whole world history can be presented as a way of successive separation of human beings from nature. One of the most significant stages of this process is the emergence of urban civilisation. In his time, the priest and prominent thinker Alexander Men wrote, «The city is a

symbol of isolation of mankind from nature and at the same time a symbol of his creative activity» [3, p. 500]. Sheki is one of those historical cities of Azerbaijan where the opposition between nature and humans, nature and culture, is least felt.

But Sheki is yet a city. Right here, the folk art of shebeke was probably born, which has been and continues to be an urban type of handicraft. Sheki itself continues to be the main centre of this kind of folk applied art. Along with it, the shebeke art was spread in Ganja, Ordubad, Shusha, and Baku, as well as in Irevan on the territory of modern Armenia. However, being an urban craft, shebeke remains a folk art. It is not institutionalised in professional artistic culture. The skills and mastery of shebeke art are passed on from father to son, from mentor to pupil.

The interpretation of the main material. A shebeke is a decorative plane assembled from numerous carved wooden elements and pieces of coloured glass fixed between them without using glue or nails. The meaning of the word shebeke is “grid” or “lattice”. The artistic essence of a shebeke lies in the sunlight penetrating through the coloured glass and the grid of contours of geometric figures. An artisan first makes standard parts of various shapes from hardwood – boxwood, walnut, beech, and oak – and then assembles patterns according to the finished drawing. The desired shape of shebeke is achieved by inserting into each other small alats – wooden pieces with a projection and a depression, between which pieces of coloured glass are placed. This kind of applied art requires considerable physical strength, which is why, for centuries, shebeke masters have been exclusively men. A dynasty of shebeke masters originated in Sheki city, founded by Ashraf Rasulov (1928–1997), known as Usta Ashraf. Today, the leading shebeke artists are his son, Tofiq, and his grandson, Ilgar.

An important feature of folk applied art is that it «obeys its laws, rather than patterns of stylistic development». There is nothing «useless, aimless, and lifeless» [5, p. 75, 77]. The master of shebeke strictly observes tradition. He must adhere to several types of compositions. In addition, the shebeke artist must observe the traditional colour palette: he has only red, yellow, blue and green at his disposal. All this completely excludes any improvisation in the art of shebeke. Therefore, phraseological turns such as «successfully combining glass of red, yellow, blue, green colours and their various shades, the master achieved a special psychological mood» [9] are meaningless.

A common perception of the symbolism of shebeke is that the four colours of glass used here represent the four seasons, and the patterns of this art embody the idea of the infinite Universes and the endless flow of life. Yes, in a sense, all this takes place. However, only based on sacred geometry, the real cultural meanings of shebeke art are amenable to the interpretation.

Shebeke patterns are geometric archetypes reflecting the main metaphysical principles. Rhombus, hexagram, eight-pointed star, decagon, 12-corner, etc., are the basis of shebeke ornament is polygons of regular shape. The names of ornaments in Azerbaijani: 'alty', 'sekkiz', 'on', 'on iki', etc., correspond to the numerical series 6, 8, 10, 12, 16, 32. Each number corresponds to specific aspects of sacred geometry, expressing various elements of physical and metaphysical space and time.

The size of the objects and planes that decorate its patterns determine the physical space of a shebeke. The classics of shebeke are windows and doorways. A complex aggregate of mental factors set the metaphysical space of shebeke art. They shimmer in the oppositions of centre and periphery, statics and movement.

«Sacral geometry is a morphogenic structure underlying reality itself» [8, c. 68]. Figures of sacral geometry possess a remarkable property of mutual transformation. «Plato articulates the basic idea of sacred geometry: «Demiurge is a geometer» [4, c. 367]. «The forms of sacred geometry do not represent simple figures: they are processes, pictures and models of things in a frozen form» [4, c. 599]. It is this frozen form that the shebeke patterns convey.

The Flower of Life is the foundational figure in sacred geometry. The various figures within sacred geometry are interconnected through a specific mechanism of mutual transformation. All other figures unfold from the Flower of Life, and they fold into it. To be more precise, the Flower of Life serves as a matrix for all possible manifestations of form. According to the tradition, which is in question, «The Flower of Life is the source of all languages. It is the primary language of the universe, the pure form and proportion» [2, p. 65]. Somewhat simplifying, we can say that the graphic image of the Flower is seen as a hexagon inscribed in a circle. The hexagons inscribed in circles form the internal structure of the Flower. Surprisingly, world art knows absolutely exact images of the Flower of Life. One of them is depicted on the wall of the Temple of Osiris in Abydos, Egypt, and dates back to approximately the 4th millennium BC.

The Tree of Life is the central figure of sacral geometry in shebeke patterns. Purely formally, we can consider it a symbol of nature. However, the Tree of Life figure is actually only one element of a whole system of archetypes concentrated in the universal matrix of the Flower of Life.

The question of the symbolism and structure of the Tree of Life is not a simple and unambiguous one. There are at least two versions of the geometry of this sacred figure. The first of them has been developed most fully in Jewish doctrine. «The ten sephiroths – the branches or fruits of this tree – represent the ten qualities of God as evidence of his presence in matter» [7, p. 143]. According to Jewish doctrine, the Tree of Sephiroth organises the fundamental structure of the four worlds into which the universe is divided. The Sephiroths are depicted in the drawing of the tree in the form of small circles – these are balls of light. The second version is that «there were originally twelve components in the Tree of Life, and this twelve-fold version of the Tree of Life also fits perfectly into the image of the Flower of Life» [2, p. 66].

The point is that the sacral figure of the Tree of Life originally has been depicted as an elongated hexagon, within which an atomic structure of ten elements is inscribed. Four of these do not coincide with the corners of the figure. To convey the geometry of the Tree of Life in the visual language of shebeke, the masters of the 18th century, creating compositions for the ground floor of the Palace of the Sheki Khans, presented it in the form of a vertically elongated 12-cornered hexagon, within which a composition of four rhombuses is packed. Moreover, the fourth, in turn, is packed inside the central, larger rhombus. The palace is an integral artistic and symbolic organism. The heraldic compositions on the facade walls between the window openings, featuring two peacocks standing before the Tree of Life, confirm that the shebeke pattern under discussion symbolises namely the Tree of Life.

The number 32 completes the series we have designated. This value was not easy enough to give any convincing interpretation. Nevertheless, it was found. It is a lunar cycle consisting of 28 days and the year's four major astronomical events: days of winter and summer solstice and spring and autumn equinoxes. So, the number 32 fully describes the most fundamental time cycles with the most direct and profound impact on life on Earth.

The geometric code of 32 as a separate figure in shebeke patterns occurs very rarely. In most cases, the number 32 and the geometric shapes it defines

play a supporting role in shebeke compositions. We do not know of any shebeke compositions based on the geometry of the number 32 in traditional architecture. They are probably lost. It is possible to cite a single example. At that, it is from contemporary artistic practice.

Ilgar Rasulzadeh, a third-generation master of shebeke, created the magnificent work in 2020. The composition of the entrance group for the Vatican Embassy building has a height of three human statures. The geometric basis of the composition is a Latin cross. 16-cornered patterns form the plane of the cross. A circle in which a 32-gon is inscribed crowned the top of the cross. The universal language of shebeke allowed art born in the traditional space of the mosque to visualise Christian symbols. It is substantial that verbatim crowning this composition, the 32-gon also crowns the geometry of shebeke, acting as the supreme digital code of this art form.

Conclusion. Thus, the basis for the principles of the compositional structure of shebeke patterns is the endless reproduction of determined geometric figures. In other words, the decorative plane of shebeke has no centre and periphery and does not know the pictorial dynamics familiar to the eye. It means that the art of shebeke relies on a natural cyclical worldview and draws its cultural meanings from the deepest layers of tradition.

REFERENCES

1. Даими Т. От культа к культуре. – Б., 2023.
2. Друнвало Мельхиседек. Древняя тайна цветка жизни. – М., 2017.
3. Кваша Г.С. Принципы истории. – М., 2006.
4. Неаполитанский С.М., Матвеев С.А. Сакральная геометрия. – М., 2023.
5. Разина Т.М. О профессионализме народного искусства. – М., 1985.
6. Рошаль В.М. Символы и знаки от А до Я: универсальный язык человечества. – М., 2018.
7. Шейнина Е.Я. Энциклопедия символов. – Москва, Харьков, 2006.
8. Фрисселл Б. В этой книге нет ни слова правды, но именно так все и происходит. – М., 2007.
9. Алиев З. Мастер искусства шебеке. <https://www.kaspiy.az/master-iskusstva-sebeke>

Ərtegin Salamzadə (Azərbaycan)

ŞƏBƏKƏ SƏNƏTİNDƏ TƏBİƏT SIKLLƏRİ VƏ RƏMZLƏRİ

Şəbəkə çoxlu sayda kəsmə ağac elementlərindən yığılmış və onların arasına bərkidilmiş rəngli şüşə parçalarından ibarət dekorativ müstəvidir. Şəbəkə naxışları əsas metafizik prinsipləri, o cümlədən müəyyən təbiət sikli və obrazlarını əks etdirən həndəsi arxetiplərdir. Məqalədə şəbəkə kompozisiyaları tiplərinin yaranmasının daxilən ziddiyyət təşkil etməyən konsepsiyası və onların say sırası həndəsəsini – 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 16, 32-ni müəyyən edən rəmlər təqdim olunmuşdur. Məsələn, göstərilmişdir ki, 10 və 12 bucaqlı fiqurlar Həyat ağacını simvolizə edir. Şəbəkənin vizual dili vasitəsilə Həyat ağacının həndəsəsini əks etdirmək üçün XVIII əsrin xalq sənətkarları Şəki Xan sarayının birinci mərtəbəsinin kompozisiyalarını yaradarkən onu dartılmış 12 bucaqlı formasında təqdim etmişlər. 32 sayının həndəsi koduna şəbəkə naxışlarında çox az rast gəlinir. Bu, 28 gündən ibarət ay sikli və ilin 4 əsas astronomik hadisəsi – qış və yay günəşduruşu, yaz və payız gün bərabərliyi. Gənc şəbəkə ustası İlqar Rəsulzadə Vatikan səfirliyinin binası üçün üst hissəsində dairə olan və onun daxilində 32 bucaqlı yerləşdirilən Latin xaçı formasında unikal şəbəkə kompozisiyası yaratmışdır (2020).

Açar sözlər: şəbəkə, təbiət siklləri, rəmlər, sakral həndəsə fiqurları, Həyat ağacı.

Эртегин Саламзаде (Азербайджан)

ПРИРОДНЫЕ ЦИКЛЫ И СИМВОЛЫ ПРИРОДЫ В ИСКУССТВЕ ШЕБЕКЕ

Шебеке – это декоративная плоскость, собранная из множества резных деревянных элементов и укрепленных между ними кусочков цветного стекла. Узоры шебеке – это геометрические архетипы, отражающие главные метафизические принципы, в том числе определенные природные циклы и образы. В докладе представлена внутренне непротиворечивая концепция возникновения типов композиций шебеке и символики определяющего их геометрию числового ряда: 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 16, 32. Показано, например, что 10 и 12-угольные фигуры символизируют Древо жизни. Чтобы передать геометрию Древа жизни визуальным языком шебеке, народные мастера XVIII века, создавая композиции первого этажа Дворца Шекинских ханов,

представили его в виде вытянутого 12-угольника. Геометрический код числа 32 встречается в узорах шебеке крайне редко. Это лунный цикл, состоящий из 28 дней и 4 главных астрономических события года: дни зимнего и летнего солнцестояния, весеннего и осеннего равноденствия. Молодой мастер шебеке Ильгар Расулзаде создал уникальную композицию шебеке в виде латинского креста (2020) для здания посольства Ватикана, которая увенчана кругом со вписанным в него 32-угольником.

Ключевые слова: шебеке, природные циклы, символы, фигуры сакральной геометрии, Древо жизни.