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SEMANTIC POTENTIAL OF SOUNDS IN COSTUME OF NATIONS OF ANCIENT MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract

Sounding elements in the costume of the nationalities of the Ancient Middle East are researched in the paper. The urgency of the topic is conditioned by the pendency of the number of problems in the field of genesis and functioning of sounding elements in the costume, as well as by the absence of an integral, systemic idea about the phenomenon of sounding ornaments, having preserved the semantics of the worldview, idea of an entity as an integrity being a part of the culture. The objective of the paper consists in definition of the semantic potential of sounding ornaments in the costume of the nationalities of the Ancient Middle East. The sound semantics is considered in close connection with formation of value ideas of society about the surrounding world and the role of a human being in it. The attempt to trace the interconnection of the use of a sound code in the costume is undertaken along with the definition of specific peculiarities of particular culture, characteristic features of the mentality, life attitudes of the representatives of this or that socium. In the study of this problem, the leading approaches are systemic and information-semiotic ones.

Keywords

World of sound – Cultural space – Costume – Metalware – Bells – Sound signal – Value meanings

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Introduction

The world of sounds surrounding a human being is extremely rich and diverse. It includes the sounds of surrounding nature created by animals and birds of specific area, water movement, rustle of tree leaves, rustle of grass, wind noise, thunderclaps, and so on. Georgian poet Irakli Abshidze reflected perfectly the emotional impact of sounding images of space on a human being.

I can talk to mountains,
I will understand the traces on virgin snow
And I will catch the night flower's whisper,
I will comprehend why reed sings
And why the ice moans on rocks, –
Nature related its experience to me¹.

Cultural space is filled with specific sounds of human speech. These are child's cry, lullaby, serene conversation, or lamentation, laugh, preach, and so on. Noises made in the process of human activity are also diverse: bangs of an ax, squeak of a saw, rattling of a loom, and other mechanisms. Constant ambient sound was a natural norm of human life; therefore, in a complex semiotic system of culture, along with visual, tactile perception of information, the presence of an acoustic (sound) source of knowledge about the world is obligatory². In this connection, the study of sounding elements in the costume of different nations of the world is conceived as actual.

Popularity of sounding ornaments in the national costume of the distant past points to awareness of their necessity, absolute value of information contained in sounds, its emotional expressiveness, as well as to esthetic ideals and tastes of society. An additional function of the costume, transmitting an information signal in the form of a sound, is emphasized by the fact that a human being used it (wore it at a definite time, granted it), directed his actions (made, decorated, guarded, etc.) at it³. Efforts, turned to creation of noisy elements of the costume, time and material expenditure testify to the perception of sounding ornaments by a nationality as carriers of specific semantics – means of communication of the important meaning⁴.

Materials and methods

The specific character of the solvable problems determines the necessity of realisation of the most important methodological principles and approaches. Scientific objectivity and credibility of the research are provided by a systemic approach to this cultural phenomenon. A traditional costume is the most important element of material, spiritual,

¹ I. Abashidze, *I am Searching for the Cherished Trace* (Moscow: Detskaya Literatura (Children's Literature), 1970).

² T. Shigurova, "The Sound in the Costume of Mordovia", *Vestnik Volgogradskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* (Herald of Volgograd State University) Ser. 7. Philosophy. Sociology and Social Technologies, num 1 (13) (2011): 112–118.

³ T. Shigurova, *Mordovian Wedding Clothes* (Saransk, 2010); T. Shigurova, "The Text of the Mordovian Costume as a "Culture Monument", *Voprosy teorii i praktiki* (Questions of Theory and Practice), num 5 (11) in three parts. Part III (2011): 197 – 201 y T. Shigurova, "The Traditional Female Costume in the Aspect of Ontogenesis of Mordovian Nation", *Vestnik Chuvashskogo Universiteta* (Herald of Chuvash University), num 4 (2009): 107–111.

⁴ T. Shigurova, *Semantics of the Worldview in the Traditional Costume of Mordva* (Saransk: Mordovia University Press, 2012).

artistic culture of an ethnos; therefore, its study in accordance with the principle of motion from the whole to the part enables disclosure and cognition of the whole nationality integrity. According to G. D. Gachev's opinion, even distant details in the culture are correlated with each other and explain each other: "in cognition of integrity, the prohibitions to compare split-level things, as it is accepted in a strictly tectonic structuralism, cannot act... An image, able to connect heterogeneous, is an adequate epistemological form for cognition of national integrity"⁵. The systemic approach to cognition of the nature of the Mordovian costume, stated by us in the doctoral thesis "Semantics of the worldview in the traditional costume of Mordva" and approved in the series of monographic papers, allowed filling some gaps in the study of material, spiritual, artistic culture of the ethnos, representing factual material that is actual for the research in the field of ethnic mentality⁶.

Special attention in the research is paid to such fundamental component of the national integrity as world perception, fixed in the worldview of the ethnos⁷. Existing in natural space, analysing and structuring it, comprehending vitally important realia, qualitative characteristics of the visual, audible, tangible world, the human being creates hisidea about the surrounding reality. In accordance with the perceivable reality, he adjusts to this world, uses actively the materials it supplies, sources of vital activity. The methodologically important concept "worldview" is used as a special research technique by means of which it is possible to view the world from the standpoint of this or that nation, hence – to obtain authentic understanding of the culture⁸. The research of the theory of culture bases on the development of this category within, first of all, such sciences as philosophy, linguistics, psychology.

First, the term "worldview" was introduced into a scientific use by Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in "Logical-philosophical Treatise" («Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung»). One of the theses of the author read: "The world is everything that happens"⁹. In the philosophical conception of the worldview, an axiological aspect is actualized. M. Heidegger thought that the worldview, and specifically "the world comprehended in the sense of such view" became possible only "as long as the standpoint of the human being perceives itself as world outlook", when "a human being ... takes himself out on the stage, becomes a representative of things extant in the sense of objective, when such thing as a human status appears"¹⁰. The problem of the worldview was considered by O. Spengler "Decline of the West"¹¹. C.G. Jung suggested the study of images of the world through the analysis of the collective unconscious, transmitted across generations, and its part – the individual unconscious. Owing to rationalization of the world, the correspondence between the human being and surrounding reality is established; the visible world transforms into a cultural one¹². F. Boas was the first to start researching culture as a system, representing a multitude of interconnected parts; therefore, in his opinion, any borrowing

⁵ G. Gachev, *Cosmo-Psycho-Logos: National World Images* (Moscow: AkademicheskiiProyekt (Academic Project), 2007).

⁶ T. Shigurova, *Mordovian Wedding Clothes* (Saransk, 2010).

⁷ T. Shigurova, *Semantics of the Worldview in the Traditional Costume of Mordva* (Saransk: Mordovia University Press, 2012).

⁸ S. Lurie, *Historic Ethnology* (Moscow: Aspekt Press, 1997).

⁹ L. Wittgenstein, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Izdatelskiy Dom "Territoriyabudushchego" (Publishing House "The Territory of Future"), 2005).

¹⁰ M. Heidegger, *Time and Being* (Moscow: Respublika (Republic), 1993).

¹¹ O. Spengler, *Decline of the West. Image and Reality* (Novosibirsk: VO Nauka (HE Science), 1993).

¹² C. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious* (Moscow: Kanon+, 2003), 320.

occurring as a result of the contacts is certainly filled with a new meaning, being transformed in a considerable way¹³.

R. Benedict considered culture as a “psychological integrity, as an intrinsically harmonious system” with its inherent features, life aspects that are rethought and considered to be insignificant in different culture. It develops a psychological-anthropological theory of the presence in culture of a crucial core –common theme “ethos of culture” that determines realisation of an infinite number of possible variations in the fields of cultural life: religion, family life, economic relations: “any human society should create for itself some scheme of life. It sanctions definite ways of reactions to the situations, definite judgments about it. In such community, people see the foundations of the universe in these decisions”¹⁴. The peculiarity of the view of the world by different nations is a central topic of historic ethnology, where the concept of the worldview was formulated by R. Redfield¹⁵. Along with the development of the semiotic approach, a notion of “universal” worldview appears, reconstructed with the use of semantic oppositions universal for all cultures.

Everything happening in the world that agitates the human being, to which he pays special attention, transmitted through his ideas of right and wrong, standards and values, is certainly reflected in his costume. O. Freydenberg noted that the shape of the man-made thing was his reified, materialized idea of the world¹⁶. The peculiarities of the man-made object of domestic culture contains his “outlook thoughts” that can be seen in the costume to elucidate the “variant of the world existence”¹⁷. Comprehension of the fundamental essence, the “Whole”, is the most important thing that is possible only by means of “joint efforts of rational and image thinking, and, therefore, the work is realised by “mental images”, the image, concentrating the diversity of the world in itself, is an “adequate gnoceological form for cognition of the national integrity.

G. D. Grachev suggests using an “instantaneous transfer ... from frail-spiritual phenomena to coarsely material things, omitting mediating links” as a main methodical technique, an instrument of the work [Ibidem, p.13]. In this case, in his opinion, each element of the “national integrity” can be related to any distant and, despite seeming otherness, remoteness from each other, is able to objectively and unmistakably discover so far the incomprehensible, clandestine, remaining enigmatic for new generation. Each detail of the unique worldview, including the national costume, is a peculiar password, explaining the rules, signs, and their combinations of a unified semiotic system of the given traditional culture. The concept “world” is interpreted by T.V. Tsiv’yan as “the human being and environment in their interrelation, or as a result of processing the information on the environment and the human being”. Processing occurs as though in two phases: primary data, perceived by sensory receptors, are subjected to secondary code conversion using sign systems”¹⁸.

¹³ F. Boas, "The History of Anthropology". *Etnograficheskoyeobozreniye* (Ethnographic Review), num 6 (2002): 86–96.

¹⁴ R. Benedict, *Chrysanthemum and a Sword* (Moscow: Rossiyskayapoliticheskayaentsiklopediya (Russian Political Encyclopedia) (ROSSPEN), 2003).

¹⁵ R. Redfield, *The Little Community: Viewpoints for the Study of a Human Whole* (Uppsala and Stockholm, 1955).

¹⁶ O. Freydenberg, “Semantics of the First Thing”, *Decorative Art in the USSR*, num 12 (1976): 16–22.

¹⁷ G. Gachev, *Cosmo-Psycho-Logos: National World Images* (Moscow: AkademicheskiiProyekt (Academic Project), 2007).

¹⁸ T. Ziv’yan, *Linguistic Bases of the Balkan World Model* (Moscow: Nauka (Science), 1990).

Human perception of the surrounding world is unique and individual; it is “never photographically exact”¹⁹ since it is in subjection to a more sensitive organ. Vision plays the most important role in appearance of invariable images of the worldview, however, for some people, the ear is a dominating sensory receptor, and then “their information reserve is based on the acoustic impressions”. The structurally-activity concept of culture also served as a methodological basis for the research of sounds present in the costume.²⁰

Discussion

First metallurgists arrived to the Mordovian territory from the upper reaches of the Dnieper at the end of the III millennium B.C. These were Imerktribes using the coppery sands of Transurals for producing of yet scanty copper ware. First metal ornaments appeared in the Bronze Age. This was the period of settlement of Indo-European – Phat’yanov (Balanov) and Iranian-speaking - Abashev tribes. P.P. Yefimenko characterises stock-raising Indo-European Iranian-speaking Abashev tribes as cultures which “possessed the sources of copper ores, engaged in metal processing”²¹. Their origin remains a complex problem in the ancient history. The extermination of the North-Iranian cultural community of “Astrabad bronze” in the XVIII – XVII centuries BC is known in connection with the mass migration of Indo-Europeans-Aryans (Indo-Iranians), which explains subsequent events of disintegration of the common Indo-Iranian unity into communities of Indo-Aryans and Iranian-speaking tribes.

The Ancient Middle East – a combination of cultures, located to the east from the Greece-Roman world, is considered as a homeland of art bronze. Besides, there appeared the first states, the first systems of writing, private property; a new system of values, different from a primitive one, was formed. Admiration of modern civilizations for achievements of the Ancient Middle East was perfectly expressed by Georgian classic I. Abashidze, having organized a scientific expedition to Palestine (Jerusalem) in 1960, emphasized the value of “greatness of the history, the history of the home nation, fraternal nations, the whole humankind” for modernity²².

We are flying over Tigris and Euphrates,
Over the world which is united and disintegrated...
... The world is screaming with all its myths, and roots of Elam languages
Have grown out willfully from under millennial gravestones.
And my ancient roots having been turned into ashes someday,
Tremble in the innermost of the earth in the Tigris and Euphrates’s valley...²³.

Researchers believe that the Ubaid population, living in the lower reaches of Tigris and Euphrates (predecessors of Sumerians) in the V– beginning of the IV millennium BC, possessed the skills of copper melting, and in Assyria and Palestine, ancient Persia, experiencing the influence of Urartu, the human being had mastered the technology of copper casting already in the IV century BC. The first ware represented rather primitive

¹⁹ A. Adler, To Understand the Human Being Nature (SPb.: AkademicheskiiProyekt (Academic Project), 2000).

²⁰ M. Kagan, Philosophical theory of values (SPb., 1997).

²¹ P. Yefimenko, P. Tretyakov, “Abashevsk culture in the Middle Volga Region”. AS USSR Press, num 97 (1961) 43–110.

²² Yu. Surovtsev, Poet’s Soul is Revealed in Front of you, I. Abashidze, am Searching for the Cherished Trace (Moscow: DetskayaLiterature (Children’s Literature), 1970), 5–10.

²³ I. Abashidze, I am Searching for the Cherished Trace (Moscow: DetskayaLiteratura (Children’s Literature), 1970).

armour in the form of “leather bands with copper metal plates, sewn on them, and strange peaked helmets and masks covering the whole face and imitating the faces of reptiles”²⁴. On this territory, metal and the ware, made of it, become a measure of value, simultaneously performing a utilitarian, protective function; their real usefulness consisted in protection of the life of the chief or priest of Ubaid people.

Formation of the value system of society about metallic things took place under unstable socio-cultural conditions of the “war with everybody”; therefore, the variety of metalware was reduced to a defensive costume of the warrior, a horse harness, weapons, which is illustrated by monuments of art. Thus, for arming and equipment of the huge Assyrian army, iron was used. The Assyrian warrior’s costume included “armour made of small metal plates covering the chest”, which was put on over the tunic»²⁵.

The extant embossed images silently inform the audience of the possibility of perception of audible signals created by metallic things: rumble of a heavy-armed infantry, clangs of axes and daggers in a fight, sounds of blows of weapons against the armour, which were supplemented by musical score of army campaigns. The assumed sound palette organised rhythmically a unique phenomenon of the Assyrian culture – concentration of the military force, embodying semantics of powerful dynamics, collective life power generation, consistency of emotional tension, readiness for campaigns, manliness of acts, rigour of daily routine, military valor in the fight.

Interactions with surrounding nations were determined by aggressive interests: “Seizure of lands, slaves, cattle, plunder of neighbouring countries constituted the main goals of the war. All international disputes were solved by means of wars”. In the states of the ancient Mesopotamia, pacification and suppression of mutinies, coups with overthrowing of tsars, revolts, distempers, dynastic conflicts, violent punitive campaigns, mass tortures and executions, incursions of neighbours, wars with elusive nomadic tribes were alternating. Therefore, namely at that period, a state ideology of “sacred war” originates.

The worldview of Mesopotamian population was characterised by practicality, which covered the main measure of culture value on this territory – metal: “I have destroyed, deserted an infinite number of cities, and my loot, namely, silver, gold, golden bowls, the golden sacrificial dish, golden cups, golden buckets, lead, was innumerable,” [Ibidem, p. 88]. In Assyrian chronicles, it is reported on seizure of copper, lead, and tin. Warriors-winners strived to utilize metal ware as soon as possible: “... attendees, arranging purchase and sale of lands, houses, gardens, borrowing and lending money, mortgaging and taking the property in pledge, were constantly jostling at judges’ and dealers’ (“notaries”). Some warriors, on the contrary, were striving to deposit silver and gold in a safe place and to gain interest”.

Realism is characteristic for the art of Mesopotamia as well. In Assyrian embossed images, the realistic authenticity of events representation horrifies the modern audience with the royal cruelty, scenes of agonizing executions, images of premortal suffering of animals during hunting.

In the cultures of the East, there appear first sounding bronze ware, representing a significant artistic value. Thus, in the I millennium BC, in Luristan (the territory of the western

²⁴ Ancient Middle East: textbook for universities (Moscow: Astrel; AST, 2008).

²⁵ D. Sadaev, Ch. The History of Ancient Assyria (Moscow: Nauka (Science), 1979).

part of Iraq), bronze miniature bells were manufactured. Their prolonged and fine sounding served as realisation of rhythm magic, movement emotionality, transmission of signals acting on the human sensory organs and transmitting important knowledge about the world at the level of space and time categories. The duration or brevity of the sound source is in direct relation to its motor activity, which generates a signal being spread in space and time (here and now), creating the semantics of concepts – movement – sound – life. An Assyrian bell, dated from the IX century BC, is known as the earliest one, which is now repositied in the British Museum.

Exquisite tsar's ornaments, made from precious metals (earrings, bracelets, pendants), supplemented the glass pendants, which, when touching each other, made low sounds that correspond to the status of their wearer in the society. Thus, the full dress of the Assyrian tsar was incarcerated in the waist by a wide belt, which was "edged by fringe along the bottom edge, each tassel of which ended with four strings of glass beads"²⁶.

The earliest information on the use of bells in the costume concerns the festive ritual attire of Jewish clergymen. Initially the costume of clergy was modest, but after the ruling of David, it acquired sound, symbolizing the main value of the Hebrew culture – the cult of god Jahve. The value comprehension of sound in the Jewish culture was certainly associated with the understanding of its deity, sanctity, with perception as a means of communication with God, of cognition of God in the absence of the visual image. Commandments, carved later on the tablet of testament, were initially pronounced by God and heard by the nation: "Listen, Israel!"²⁷. In the words, communicated to the nation through Moses, an important term of sanctity is expressed, i.e. successfulness, prosperity of Jewish culture that consists in the necessity to execute the sound code: "If you obey the voice of Mine...". The understanding of sanctity in culture is connected with realisation of the meanings of separation, dedication, isolation. The concepts "consecration" and "dedication" of the nation are brought closer. The main sense (result) of sanctity consists in separation of Israel from other nations, dedication of it to God, "similar to the way that clergymen are separated from other people and placed in the service of God".

Sounding ornaments isolated the priest from Hebrew common people. The pontiff "put on shorter blue overclothes without sleeves over traditional vestments (a white shirt with long sleeves, trousers girt by a sash); its lower edge was decorated with white balls and small metallic bells"²⁸.

Besides, it was permitted to use sounding ornaments in the ritual costume of levites who initially were not vested with land and lived on church donations. Their clannish duties were directly related to servicing the Temple: they kept order during divine service, guided correct execution of sacrifice, sang psalms, were charged with music score, conducted the chronicle of events.

Owing to the existing tradition of clan solidarity and social stratification in the culture, a concept of unification of tsar's and superior priestly authorities is formed. Leviticus acquired an exclusive right to study and teach Torah. In the costume, their superior status was accentuated by a white cloak without sleeves, "the lower edge of which was sewn around by small bells; it was girt twice by a long wide multicoloured band".

²⁶ D. Sadaev, Ch. The History of Ancient Assyria (Moscow: Nauka (Science), 1979).

²⁷ N. Lange, Judaism: The Most Ancient World Religion (Moscow: Eksmo, 2012).

²⁸ The History of Costume compiled by Nataliya Budur (Moscow: OLMA-PRESS, 2002).

Thus, the acoustic (sounding) code of the clergymen's ritual costumes reflected the values of the culture, meanings embedded by representatives of priestly aristocracy.

In the subsequent history of the Jewish culture, the examples, consolidating value meanings of the sounding code, were fixed: "sanctity", "power", "effectiveness" of the sound made by clergymen. In the Bible, there is a legend about the capture of Jericho town, and in the Russian language, there is an expression "the trumpet of Jericho". Despite the existence of various modern interpretations of the history of a specific event, characterising the conquest of the Promised Land, realisation of the holy sound into a practical result is traced: destruction of unassailable stone walls and conquest of the town. In the holy religious texts of Judaism, there is often a call for spiritual transformation of the human being, for performing righteous acts, including the mentioning of obligation to use the sound code: "Appeal loudly, do not restrain yourself; raise your voice like a trumpet" ²⁹.

Conclusion

From the mentioned-above it follows that the way and the kinds of use of sounding accessories by the human being determine specific peculiarities of this or that culture, typical ideas and life attitudes of people, forming the semantic field that comprises all spheres of cultural space. By the mid of the I millennium BC, a semantic line, determined by value meanings of the existing cultures of the past, is traced in the application of glass and metal ware, and then of bells in the costume of the considered nations of the Ancient Middle East: war, victory in battle, authority (wealth), religious value (sanctity), beauty (solemnity), life. The main meaning of the acoustic code of the costume attracted attention to the most important cultural topic of the ethnos. The completeness of perception, the accuracy of the understanding of the meaning content of sound are determined by the depth of immersion of the researcher into the culture history, objectivity in studying the artifacts of antiquity, comprehension of the processes of their development, which is of tentative (introductory) nature in this paper³⁰. The further research of the problem is also actual in the context of understanding modern culture, including artistic culture, since nowadays the processes of intercultural interaction and formation of the unified cultural space, connecting people, have significantly invoked. The interest to the materials about inter-ethnic interrelations, peculiarities of national cultures, opportunities of understanding each other is rekindled. In an effort to prevent world tragedy, humanity should obey the ancient precept: to listen. The result of the splendid and, at the same time, tragic history of civilizations of the Ancient Middle East is universal moral standards, rules, laws, voiced and later formulated and recorded in texts. Today's many-voiced buzzing, moaning, crying space should hear the first "... echo of music sounding in the Jerusalem Temple, because according to many evidences, the Jerusalem Temple was the source of those ideas, world outlook and attitude that were later canonized in cultures of other nations"³¹.

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²⁹ N. Lange, Judaism: The Most Ancient World Religion (Moscow: Eksmo, 2012).

³⁰ T. Shigurova, "The Text of the Mordovian Costume as a "Culture Monument". Voprosyteoriiipraktiki (Questions of Theory and Practice), num 5 (11) in three parts. Part III (2011): 197 – 201.

³¹ A. Eisenstadt, Music and Temple... (2016), (last accessed date: 7.07.2016) from: http://toldot.ru/tora/articles/articles_679.html

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