

Silver of Kazakh zergers (jewelers)

Jewelry traditions of the Kazakh nation, the origins of which date back to the techniques of metal of art processing used by early nomads, further developed during the Middle Ages, were affected by many Eurasian cultures and obtained their complete image at the same time with the formation of Kazakh ethnos. According to the legendary Kazakh tradition, Daud Paygambar (the Prophet David) was the first smith, jeweler and patron of the first forty masters. The origin of metal processing and appearance of all handicrafts were related to his name. It was told that the hands of Daud could not be burned by the fire; he was able to knead metal like a dough without using any instruments. The obsession with a spirit of the great Prophet defined the vocation of master-zerger.

The Kazakhs believed that people who worked with heated metal had miraculous power; the place of their work was honoured with great esteem. It was prohibited to discuss bad things, use foul language, shout and step over anvil, bellows and other instruments in workshop. Kazakh people not only respected the attributes of metal procession but also believed in their healing properties. People still remember numerous of stories about the recovery of infertile women and insane persons who spent the night near bellows or anvil: in the evening before this master lighted a candle, in this case his patron spirit could come and help sick person.

Silver dominated in the subject sphere of nomadic culture. It was considered that it had the power to clear and protect people. Kazakh zergers traditionally knew such techniques as engraving, niello, enamel, filigree, granulation, stamping, coining, notching, silvering and gilding, cutting of gemstones and ornamental stones, and so on. Articles of Kazakh jewelers were marked by their diversity. Household items, horse harness, weapon and clothes were decorated with plates made of silver, gold, bronze, and to name but a few. Making jewelry was the main work of masters-zergers.

The special place in traditional repertoire of Kazakh jewelers-zergers was occupied by women jewelry which defined the social and age-related status of their proprietress as well as provided people with magic protection. The courtliness of jewelry was considered as an integral part of female beauty.

Women had their own jewelry beginning from childhood. According to Kazakh tradition, their absence was a symbol of mourning. In general, the traditional women complex of Kazakh jewelry was very complicated and decorated with the symbols of fertility.

S.K. Suraganov