



TURKMEN JEWELLERY IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN COLLECTION OF THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM IN PRAGUE

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is a detailed description of a little lot of Turkmen jewels which makes part of the Central Asian collection of the Náprstek Museum in Prague (two pectoral ornaments and two bracelets) and can be also considered to be a tentative basiliary introduction to the study of jewellery in the region of present-day Turkmenistan. All pieces of jewellery presented in the article can be dated approximately to late 19th – first half of the 20th century. With these four jewels we get a nice insight into the cultural heritage and the still living tradition of the central Asiatic jewellery.

KEY WORDS: Turkmenistan, Central Asia, Turkmen jewellery, jewellery art, collections of the Náprstek Museum

Introduction

The aim of this article is a detailed description of a little lot of Turkmen jewels which makes part of the Central Asian collection of the Náprstek Museum in Prague.² At the same time, therefore, this article can be considered to be a tentative basiliary introduction to the study of jewellery in this region, so rich in this respect. Rich parure is a notable ethnographical feature of this area (as is the case in most of Asia) and remained in everyday use down to the mid-20th century. The silver jewels of the second half of the 19th century - mid-20th century which constitute the majority of known instances develop naturally from earlier models. As is already attested by archaeological finds, jewels play an important role in the Central Asiatic culture. They are also firmly interconnected and at the same time complementary with the traditional rich textile production.

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² I would like to express my gratitude to Ph Dr. Dagmar Pospíšilová, PhD, the head of the Asian Department of the Náprstek Museum who enabled me to study the objects and to Mgr. K. Poppová-Urbanová thanks to who the materials could be analyzed.

Turkmen jewellery

Among the different classes of the Central Asiatic jewellery, the Turkmen one is characterised by a particular massiveness, which is, however, equilibrated by its clear and neat outlines and predilection for simple, mainly geometrical shapes. The Turkmen jewel, developing the nomadic traditions makes a very vivid impression and stands in a neat contrast to the pompous “urban” jewellery of the Tajiks and Uzbeks.³ Its distribution covers, naturally, the territory of present day Turkmenistan and some areas of Iran and Afghanistan. It can be found, however, also in the bazaars of Uzbek Bukhara⁴ which for a long time constituted an important centre of jewel production. The majority of the known instances of a high artistic value belong to the period comprised between the 2nd half of the 19th and the 1st half of the 20th century. The chief material employed in Turkmen jewels is silver which attains the highest percentages of purity in the period of the greatest floruit. The basiliary shape of the jewel was cut-out from a silver sheet and subsequently often complemented with contrasting golden elements smelted onto the silver base. The most often employed non-metallic elements are oval or round carnelians later substituted with hard red glass and sometimes complemented with stones or glass inlays of other colours. The other materials typical for the Central Asiatic jewellery – coral, shell, rich turquoise inlays – are not common. The single tribal schools can be distinguished, the most notable (according to the documentation at our disposal) being that of Tekke, Yomud and Ersari.⁵ It is right in the Tekke jewellery that we encounter most often the golden elements (symmetrical floral or geometric ornaments) contrasting with the silver base. These are created by means of smelting gold with mercury on the silver base. Filigree and openwork are often used. It is also in this class, more than in any other, that carnelian is employed. The Tekke jewellery seems to be the best represented in the museums’ collections and it is again these jewels (or later jewels made in a Tekke tradition) that can often be found in Central Asiatic bazaars. The Yomud jewellery is characterised by gilded metal sheets of simple geometric shapes, most often discs or lozenges, smelted onto the silver base and complemented with carnelians. The latter came to be substituted since ca. 1925 with tinted glass. A typical feature of the Ersari jewellery is plain silver surfaces and simple outlines. Gold is never employed for decorative purposes in this class. Carnelians are used commonly but parsimoniously not to overshadow the main element: silver. As in other cultures, besides its decorative and protective/magical functions there were also other points to the jewellery for the Turkmen: it served to estimate the wealth and social standing of the person carrying them and (not only for the nomads) it was a granted investment into an object which does not lose its value and which is easily transportable anywhere directly on the body. Jewellery is almost exclusive to the women, while men presented themselves by means of weapons and horse and its rich harness.⁶ Probably the only ornamental part of the male costume might have been a decorative belt made up from silver plaques sewn onto leather or cloth stripe (*tegbent*). Children wore mainly protective amulets. The conspicuous female jewellery was worn by young women who

³ For Uzbek and Tajik jewellery in general cf. e.g. Фахретдинова (1988), ЧВЫРЬ (1977) or (in english) Kalter – Pavaloi (1997), pp. 283-312.

⁴ Фахретдинова (1988), p. 72.

⁵ The following overview of Turkmen jewellery is based on Van der Star – Stokmans (2008), pp. 73-110.

⁶ Akiniyazov (2003), pp. 174-189.

attained the age of marriage⁷ and mainly by „brides“, i.e. young women at the occasion of their marriage and in the period which followed afterwards, usually until the birth of their first child. In the Turkmen parures stress is put mainly on decoration of the upper part of the body. Headwear was an important part of the parure, as a secure means of recognition of the woman's social standing. The headwear of brides was cylindrical and often several tens of centimetres high. Other jewels were then sewn-on or fastened onto this (e.g. *ildirgitch* – a stripe made up of numerous ornaments and with pendants around the face – or *egme* – metal plaques bent up so as to recall a tiara⁸). The choice of these added pieces depended on the respective regional, ethnical and fashion circumstances. Ear-rings and temple pendants are called *tenetchir* while *adamlik* is a particular kind of massive female temple pendant whose upper part resembles a human figure and which was sewn onto the headwear.⁹ The greatest part of the jewels, often collectively called *bukau*, was worn on the breast. From among them we may point out the firm collar ring made up from a metal sheet, which eventually served as a basis for fastening other elements (e.g. pectoral plaques of various shapes and dimensions – such as hexagonal *göndschük/gursatscha*¹⁰). *Gülyaka*¹¹ was originally a collar brooch which however lost its original function in the course of time and “grew up“ into a flat disc worn on the transition between neck and breast. *Dagdan*¹² is another pectoral jewel, this time in the form of bicephalous bird (eagle) and employed, depending on its size, either as a necklace element or individually (Fig. 2). Mantle lapels were richly adorned with a complex of sewn-on plaques (*chapraz*), particularly common are convex discs complemented with a mantle clasp consisting of two often rhomboid parts – *çanga*¹³ (Fig. 1). Amulets providing magical protection were carried in one or several lockets. The most simple among them are round or roughly rectangular *atcharbak* though more complex forms occur too. The most common variety is *tumar*¹⁴ consisting of a triangular and a cylindrical part, into which amulets or pieces of paper with quotations from The Koran could be placed. In a particular quantity of other jewels these could have been placed below the person's abdominal zone. The Turkmen women wore jewels even on their backs (fastened to their braids). As this part of the body was usually covered, the purpose of these ornaments consisted mainly in protection against bewitchment coming from behind. The braids were inter-wound with a series of minute chains with various pendants (*satchlik*, *satchmondchuk*¹⁵). The main role in this complex is definitely played by *asik*¹⁶, hung often in the lowermost part of the chain network. Its apparently heart-shaped form is in reality an abstracted rendition of a pointed spearhead. Typical of the Turkmen jewellery are massive bracelets (*bilezik*¹⁷) composed from several broader bands decorated with carnelians and separated from each other by

⁷ for Turkmen wedding cf. e.g. Kokaisl – Pargač (2007), pp. 163-177.

⁸ Akiniyazov (2003), pp. 88-90, 105-111.

⁹ According to Akiniyazov, R. (2003) *adamlik* is the term for pendants worn by married women (pp. 132-135) while the *tenechir* pendants make part of girl's parure (pp.142-145).

¹⁰ Cf.e.g. Van der Star – Stokmans (2008), figures on pp. 82 and 97.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, figures on the p. 103, (2003), Akiniyazov, R. (2003), pp. 66-75.

¹² Cf. No 1 of the following catalogue.

¹³ Cf. No 2 of the following catalogue.

¹⁴ For various comparisons cf. <http://www.turkmens.com/Jewelry.html> (17th December 2008), very similar lockets are known from the Karapalak jewellery, cf. Толстов (1952), p. 554, ill. 26.

¹⁵ Akiniyazov (2003), pp. 164-169.

¹⁶ Van der Star – Stokmans (2008), pp. 88-91.

¹⁷ Cf. No s. 3 and 4 of the following catalogue.

the means of narrower plain silver stripes in the number of two to eight (most commonly three to five). The bracelets are open, narrower on one side and broaden gradually. When slipped on the wrist they adapt to its shape. The most instances are known from the Tekke class in which the broader bands with carnelians are gilded. Also finger-rings (*yüzük*) of various shapes enjoyed popularity.

The jewels in the Náprstek museum¹⁸

A small group of four Turkmen objects – two pectoral ornaments and two bracelets – can be distinguished within the collection of Central Asiatic jewellery of the Náprstek museum. Their detailed description will be given in the following catalogue. The first object – a pectoral plaque with pendants – is identified as a *dadgan* (Fig. 3 and 4). The shape of this “bird-headed amulet” was reputedly inspired by the Russian imperial coat-of-arms, i.e. bicephalous eagle. This type is only known in the Tekke jewellery. Its date – as is the case with all the objects – is rather problematic. Given the employment of coloured glass, however, the present author opts for dating the first object sometime to the early to mid 20th century. Also the style of the second ornament seems to point to the Tekke jewels. The square plaque with pendants (Fig. 5) probably made part of a female mantle ornament, called *çanga*. A *çanga* is a clasp consisting of two identical square or rhomboid parts, one for each lapel of a coat. Though originally serving for fastening a coat (with a hook in one of them and an eyelet in the other), gradually they came to lose their original function and became simple decorative elements placed roughly in the height of the coat’s waist. The object can be dated, similarly to the first one, to the early to mid 20th century. The first bracelet (Fig. 6) belongs, one more time, to the Tekke jewellery and confirms the impression of an exceptional representation of this class even in a collection of such a small scale. The workmanship and delicacy of execution are of a very high standard. Unlike all the other jewels it is enlaid with carnelians. The quality of workmanship can point to an earlier date, probably to late 19th – first half of the 20th century. The second bracelet (Fig. 7) stands as a sole representant of the Yomud tribe in our little lot. Instead of ornaments reserved in the gilding characteristic of the previous class, here we observe decoration by means of golden sheets, typical of the Yomud jewels. It is inlaid with orange glass. Also this bracelet might have been made by the end of the 19th or in the early 20th century. With these four jewels we get a nice insight into the cultural heritage and the still living tradition of the Central Asiatic jewellery.

Catalogue

No. 1. *Dagdan*¹⁹ – pectoral with pendants; a Tekke jewel (Fig. 3 and 4 a, b).

Gilded silver, red glass, turquoise. Turkmenistan. 1st half of the 20th century.

Purchased by the Museum in 2000 from a private individual, no closer information. Dimensions: length (including the pendants) 25.5 cm; width max. 11.5 cm; weight – 210.6 g. Inv. No.: A 21.181.

¹⁸ The metal composition was analysed by the Institute of nuclear research of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Řež (executed by Dr. Frána and Ing. Fikrle); for the results see appendix 1. The objects N5 A 21181 and A 15 318, 57 357 were analyzed on the 9.2.2009, the object 46 521 was analyzed already in 2005. For more information see Appendix.

¹⁹ The material of the inlays was ascertained in 1994 by PhDr. J. Kouřimský, CSc.

The object makes part of a female pectoral parure. Its shape is roughly heart-shaped, or – as often recalled – that of a stylized of a bicephalous eagle. This shape is proper basically only to the Tekke jewellery from the mid 19th century on. It is made of a high quality silver plaque inlaid with a series of drops of hard red glass and two greenish turquoises. The object (its total thickness is ca.5 mm) is composed of two identical pieces terminating in the upper part in lateral volutes and from a central piece projecting into a complex symmetrical protuberance. All of these pieces are cut out of silver sheet and firmly joined by means of smelted silver pegs. Its surface is made up by a silver plaque cut rather clumsily with symmetrical pairs of spirals, arches and rectangles in open-work (corresponding to identical shapes on the backside). The surface is decorated with a net of styled gilded floral ornaments on the silver surface. The single decorative motives – arches, wavy lines and concave triangles are incised into the surface with a pointed tool and gilded by smelting golden powder on them while their interiors are reserved in the natural colour of the base. There are thirteen projecting cases (each some 5 mm in diameter) symmetrically distributed on the jewel's surface and inlaid with two kinds of coloured materials: the majority of them with extraordinarily hard orange to orange-red partly transparent glass. Its local production is very probable. The colour of the glass was further tuned by the means of coloured metal sheets or pieces of paper. The other material is green turquoise used for two eye-catching inlays set into the high part of the volutes. Just below the volutes there are two fluted cylindrical eyelets serving for suspension of the pectoral on chainlets. Fifteen other eyelets are distributed in roughly uniform distances from each other along the lower margin of the pectoral from which long pendants are suspended (ca. 11 cm each). The pendants are composed of two parts: a superior longish gilded suspension sheet with rounded sides and an orange glass inlay in the central part; and an inferior rhomboid hollow longitudinally and transversely striated pendant. The central pendant does not terminate in the rhomboid shape but in a tear-shaped sheet with an orange inlay. The object's backside is basically plain with the exception of the conspicuous seams by means of which the pendants are fastened to the lower margin. Compare: Akiniyazov (2003), pp. 76 – 81, Prokot (1980), p. 17, Kozlova (1980), p. 11.

No 2. Çanga - a part of coat decoration; a Tekke jewel (Fig. 5 a, b).

Gilded silver, red glass. 1st half of the 20th century. Purchased by the museum in 1978 from *Klenoty* (an antique shop), no closer information. Dimensions: length (including the pendants) 21 cm; the width of the plaque – 13,7 cm, weight - 112,6 g. Inv. No: 46. 521.

The ground plaque is cut out of a thick rhomboid sheet of an alloy of silver and copper and entirely gilded. The upper corner is provided with a suspension/sewn-on ring. Thirteen eyelets are distributed along the inferior sides with a moveable pendant hung in each of them. These pendants are composed of a superior lozenge shaped element and an inferior hollow element in the shape of a rose-hip. Both elements are plastically decorated. The most complex decoration is naturally concentrated on the square part: its outline is underlined by a double relief chainlet. Another smaller square with the same orientation and lined by a similar chainlet occupies the central part of the plaque. The broad band between the two chainlets is decorated with alternating triangular and spiraliform patterns in open-work. There is an oval case with a dark red hard glass inlay in each of the four band's angles. A fifth – this time circular – inlay with an incised Arab inscription „Ali“ is set in the centre of the smaller square encircled from four sides with

a reserved pattern of two concentric arches – the only visible silver parts in the jewel. Compare with: Akiniyazov (2003), p. 74, pp. 91 – 93.

No 3. Bilezik - bracelet; a Tekke jewel (Fig. 6).

Gilded silver, carnelian.

2nd half of the 19th – 1st half of the 20th century. Purchased by the museum in 1984 from *Klenoty* (an antique shop), no closer information. Dimensions: max. diameter – 6,5 cm; max. height – 8,5 cm; weight – 229, 52 g. Inv. No: A 15.318.

Among the treated jewels, this is the best quality piece in terms of both the applied material (carnelians with silver) and of the workmanship standard. The bracelet is made, according to the traditional technology, of two joined parts. Thanks to the accurate smoothing of the seams, however, it gives the impression of being cast in one piece in a mould. The bracelet's body is open in one point and it is through this opening (only 2.3 – 3.5 cm) that it is slipped onto the wrist. Its body tapers towards one of the ends and so accustoms more easily to the wrist's shape and fits more closely. The opening's edges are serrated (7 massive teeth for each edge). The body of the bracelet itself is transversely divided in three equally broad bands separated from each other by narrow mouldings decorated with a simple embossed pattern (a line of punched circles on the two inner mouldings, a derivation of a guilloche on an outer one). Oval carnelians are cast at regular distances into the broad bands (three per band), shaped and polished so as not to rise over the margins of the case. The spaces between the stones are covered with an almost compact and rather thick layer of smelt-gilding, interrupted with geometrical patterns reserved in the gilding. As is clear from the description, we are faced here with a product of the Tekke tribe jewellery school.

Published in: Procházková (1997), p. 7.

Compare: Van der Star – Stokmans (2008), p. 102, Prokot (1980), pp. 20 – 21.

No 4. Bilezik – bracelet; a Yomud jewel (Fig. 7).

Gilded silver, carnelian. 2nd half of the 19th century – 1st half of the 20th century. Acquired from the State Notary's Office, Prague 5 (inheritance from Dr H. Turková²⁰). Dimensions: height – 7,8 – 8,2 cm; max. width – 7,8 cm; max. thickness of the body – 1,3 cm; weight – 223, 11 g. Inv. No: 57.357.

The other bracelet, similar to the previous one but of a lesser quality is composed of two main parts cut out of silver sheet. The seams are relatively well visible. The interior of the bracelet is filled-in probably with an organic matter. The bracelet's body is open on one side (the opening's width 3,2-3,8 cm) and, due to its massivity, almost horse-shoe shaped in section. The opening's edges are serrated (twelve sharp teeth per edge). The bracelet's surface is richly decorated with four silver filigree fillets separating three broader bands decorated with embossed golden sheets and regularly spaced cases for inlays in orange glass (5 inlays per band). The golden sheets are decorated with simple lines, points and circles making up simple geometrical patterns. The described jewels' features and the disposable comparisons indicate that our bracelet is a product of the tribe of Yomud.

Compare with: Van der Star – Stokmans (2008), p. 102, Prokot (1980), p. 20.

²⁰ Dr Helena Turková (1900 – 1982), Czech Turcologist, specialized in modern Turkey literature and Turkey rugs.

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Photographs by Jiří Vaněk

Appendix

X-Ray Fluorescence Analysis (XRFA) of jewellery items from the Collection of the Náprstek Museum

by Jaroslav Frana and Marek Fikrle

Nuclear Physics Institute, Academy of Sciences, Řež u Prahy

Fig. 1. Dagdan

		Ni	Cu	Zn	Au	Hg	Pb	Ag	Sn	Sb
A21181	basis		8,49%	0,25%				90,37%	0,89%	
	gilding		7,46%	0,32%	22,12%	5,09%	0,25%	64,32%	0,44%	

Fig. 2. Tekke Bracelet

		Ni	Cu	Zn	Au	Hg	Pb	Ag	Sn	Sb
A15318	basis		8,96%		0,40%		0,53%	90,11%		
	gilding		6,85%	0,19%	14,85%	3,11%		75%		

Fig. 3. Yomud Bracelet

		Ni	Cu	Zn	Au	Hg	Pb	Ag	Sn	Sb
A57357	basis		9,25%		0,18%	0,04%	0,55%	89,97%		
	decorative ribbon		13,91%	3,83%	0,43%		0,72%	81,11%		
	gilded leaf		2,14%	0,11%	63,81%	0,37%		33,58%		

Fig. 4. Çanga (2005)

		Cu	Au	Ag	Sn
A46521	basis	6,97%		90,17%	2,06%
	gilding	1,51%	50,30%	46,99%	1,01%



Fig. 1. Turkmen women with traditional dress and jewellery, after Akiniyazov (2003), p. 74.



Fig. 2. Turkmen woman with *dagdan*, after Akiniyazov (2003), p. 76.



Fig. 3. *Dagdan*, Inv. No: N5 A21181.



Fig. 4a. *Dagdán*, Inv. No: N5 A21181, detail.



Fig. 4b. *Dagdán*, Inv. No: N5 A21181, detail.



Fig. 5a. Çanga, Inv. No: 46.521.



Fig. 5b. Çanga, Inv. No: 46.521, detail.



Fig. 6. Tekke bracelet, Inv. No: A15.318.



Fig. 7. Yomud bracelet, Inv. No: 57.357.