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MIRROR INTERIORS OF GEORGIA:

THE CASE OF THE TARKHAN-MOURAVI MANOR OF THE EARLY AND MIDDLE 19TH CENTURY

ДЗЕРКАЛЬНІ ІНТЕР'ЄРИ ГРУЗІЇ:

НА ПРИКЛАДІ САДИБИ ТАРХАН-МУРАВІ ПОЧАТКУ ТА СЕРЕДИНИ ХІХ СТОЛІТТЯ

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Abstract. The article is dedicated to the palace of Marshal Tarkhan-Mouravi or “Marshliant Sasahle” in the village of Garikula, which belonged to the direct descendants of the last Georgian kings Heraclius II and George XII. The building was erected in the late 18th — early 19th centuries and was decorated with mirrored mihrabs, muqarnas and mosaics, as well as oriental paintings that were created by Persian artists in Persian and Chinese traditions. The decoration of this building was completed around the 1830–1840s. History has not preserved the names of the artists since, in the Soviet times, one of the members of the Tarkhan-Mouravi family Catherine had to burn the entire family archive to protect the life of her descendants. She also applied to rector of Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi State Academy of Arts with a request to obtain the right to manage the nationalized estate, which was mercilessly damaged during the Soviet regime, and even the mirror decoration was cut with axes.

Keywords: mirrored interiors of Georgia, the village of Garikula, Kaspi Municipality of Shida Kartli Region, the 19th — early 20th century.

Анотація. Стаття присвячена палацу маршала Тархан-Мураві або «Маршліанта Сасахле» в селі Гарикула, який належав прямим нащадкам останніх грузинських царів Іраклія II і Георгія XII. Будівля була зведена наприкінці XVIII — початку XIX століття і прикрашена дзеркальними міхрабами, мукарнами і мозаїками, а також східними розписами, які створили перські художники в перській і китайській традиціях. Оздоблення цієї будівлі було завершено приблизно у 1830–1840-х роках. Історія не зберегла імена художників, оскільки в радянські часи одна з членів родини Тархан-Мураві Катерина була змушена спалити весь сімейний архів, щоб унеможливити життя нащадків. Вона також зверталася до ректора Тбіліської державної академії мистецтв імені Аполлона Кутателадзе з проханням отримати право на управління націоналізованим маєтком, який був нещадно пошкоджений за часів радянської влади, і навіть дзеркальне оздоблення було порубано сокирами.

Ключові слова: дзеркальні інтер'єри, Грузія, село Гарикула, муніципалітет Каспі регіону Шіда Картлі, XIX — початок XX століття.

Introduction. The family estate of the representatives of the Tarkhan-Mouravi family of princes is located in the village of Garikula near Akhalkalaki town of the Kaspi Municipality in the Shida Kartli Region in Iveria. Nowadays, this settlement is also known for another renovated old estate — Art-villa located at about 80 km from the country's capital.

The village of Garikula consists of two parts: the rural section itself and the centre of the cultural restoration of the ancient estates of the princes, where 5 of the former 26 palaces survived. These buildings belonged

to the direct descendants of the last royal families of Georgia, Heraclius II and George XII. One of the most beautiful among these buildings is the Tarkhan-Mouravi family estate. All those buildings were located on the hills; next to them, there was the Church of St. David, and now there are only two ancient cupolas left.

The history of the mirror arrangements of the 19th-century apartments of the Tarkhan-Mouravi family house in Garikula (fig. 6, 7) is almost not covered in published sources. To a greater extent, information about them is kept in the family archives of representatives

of several branches of descendants of the family (Irakli Machabeli, Manana Lezhava). A significant contribution to this article in terms of providing materials for research was made by researcher and local historian Lyudmila Narikayeva and the spouses of artists Iia Gogishvili and Otar Vepkhvadze.

Gogishvili and Vepkhvadze, teachers of the Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi National Academy of Arts, initially recorded the colors of the specified palace in Garikula during vacations with students as part of the artistic residence at the educational institution after its nationalization. And later they came to this part of Georgia to their own house, located nearby. Thanks to this, they were able to photograph the condition of the mirror decorations of the interiors of the Tarkhan-Mouravi Princes' building over the last four decades.

The research of several Georgian authors helped in writing this article. It is worth mentioning M. Alexidze's "Persians in Georgia (1801–1921)", published in the *Journal of Persianate Studies* in 2008, and D. Khoshtaria's "Persian Master Builders in the Cities of the Nineteenth Century Georgia," published in *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences* in 2019.

Results and Discussion. The history of the Tarkhan-Mouravi building is as follows: at the end of the 18th century, its ground floor with 12 rooms was built, and at the beginning of the 19th century — the first floor, also for 12 rooms. It is known that the decoration was created in the period of life of the ancestor of the current owners, Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi (fig. 1.), who was often named in a Russian manner Tarkhanov (Tarchanoff) in the Russian sources of the 19th century.

He was a close friend of the then commander-in-chief of the Caucasian army and governor of the Caucasus (1856–1862), Prince Aleksandr Ivanovich Baryatinsky (1815–1879). The latter periodically visited the estate in Kartli, the heart of Georgia, Baryatinsky repeatedly came and stayed there for several days. Therefore, a personal room was provided for him.

According to the great-granddaughter of Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi, princess Manana Lezhava (Machabeli), it is known that in 1845 in the mirrored office on the first floor, the Prince, General Baryatinsky, made plans to capture Shamil, the leader of the Caucasian resistance against enslavement [5]. And Shamil was taken captive in 1859, for which Baryatinsky was raised to the rank of Field-Marshal. It means that the mirrored interiors were completed here by the middle of the nineteenth century.

There is another fact concerning the date of mirrored interiors of four rooms on the ground floor of the estate. According to Irakli Machabeli, a great-grandson of Prince Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi (Tarkhanov), in the words of his grandmother Catherine, Aleksandr's granddaughter, the interior finishing works had been performed by the crew of ten Persian decorators in ten years. Because Persians integrated, influenced and were influenced by many cultures, including Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, Indians, and Chinese, through centuries, they left numerous marks on the civilizations and cultures [7, p. 1]. It should be noted that interior decoration was important area of activity of Persian craftsmen in Georgia [2, p. 255]. They stopped working on the commission after the head of the crew fell ill and soon died, as he was the person who designed decorations with mirror mosaics, carved plaster and al fresco murals for apprentices [8].

It is noteworthy that for ten years, the Persian crew of decorators of the Kadjar (Qajar) days decorated only the Big Living Room with an arch and a stage, the Office of the descendant of Giorgi Saakadze (1570–1629), the legendary commander, the Grand Mouravi (Great Ruler) of Kartli — Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi; the Great Gallery and Baryatinsky's Room. These premises are in the northern part of the estate. Though primarily, it was planned to decorate the entire first floor in this style.

According to Prince Irakli Machabeli, his great-grandfather Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi personally brought from Persia that group of masters who knew about mirror mosaics, plaster stucco moulding, and al fresco murals. But the most interesting fact is the information, that the prince's idea of the stylistics of the design of these interiors, was inspired by the painting of the Chinese tea-caddy [6], which was presented to him by his friend Aleksandr Baryatinsky after his trip to China and Mongolia in 1820 and 1821 [8].

In the view of Prince A. Baryatinsky, Russia's consolidation in the Caucasus, setting up friendly relations with Persia and France, had allowed Russia to establish good relationships with China in the east and India, where the British colonialists entrenched to continue the Great Game for world hegemony [4, p. 52]. Therefore, diplomatic re-interpretation of relations with Asian countries was part of politics in Western Asia and the Far East. That is, conceptually, in these interiors, we can see the idea of connecting Western Asia with the Far East. And in the first half of the 19th century, it was the significant strategic task of Russia in the Caucasus, and since the middle of the century, it became a key political task in the Central and East Asia [1, p. 74].

Having reviewed the dates preserved in the Machabeli family memory, it was found out that the prince, Marshal Aleksandr Davidovich Tarkhan-Mouravi (1812–1874), had been inspired by a Chinese tea box around 1821. If the Persian masters worked in the estate for the next ten years, they had to complete the finishing of the halls indicated above in 1831–1832. And, according to other evidence of Irakli Machabeli, after finishing decoration with mirrors in the family estate in Garikula, a painting was ordered for one of those rooms, on which there is an inscription of 1832 [8] (fig. 8, 9).

This fact confirms the arithmetic of all the dates listed and even assigns the indicated interiors not to the middle of the century but to the period 20 years earlier (fig. 10, 11). It means that today this significant site remains one of the oldest mirror decorations in Georgia among the surviving ones. Its historical and cultural significance is confirmed by its contribution to the country's cultural heritage. The estate requires a delicate capital restoration since the part of the structure had been destroyed. The historical monument has been waiting for restoration for a very long time.

In this building, in the large room on the first floor, combined with a small-scale arch, decorated with mirrored ornamental elements of the ceiling (the base of the chandelier), the premieres of the performances of the famous Georgian playwright Giorgi Eristavi (1813–1864), the founder of the Georgian drama theatre, took place. He was the son-in-law of David Tarkhan-Mouravi, married for the second time to Martha Davidovna Tarkhan-Mouravi (1820–1908). The estate was often visited by Akaki Tsereteli (1840–1915), the ideological inspirer of the national liberation movement of Georgia. From the 19th to the early 20th century, the estate was frequented by the best representatives of the Georgian and Russian intelligentsia, the military, high-level public officials, aristocrats, writers and poets, directly related to the families of the last Georgian kings.

In the Soviet period, looking for ways to preserve the family nest, one of the representatives of the Tarkhan-Mouravi family, Kateryna, had to burn the entire family archive, which may have contained the names of those people who were involved in the construction and decoration of the family estate (fig. 12). The goal was not only to protect the lives of their descendants, but also to make it possible to carry out conservation measures for the preservation of the building itself and its equipment at the expense of state funds (fig. 14, 15).

For this, the heiress turned directly to the rector of the current Apollon Kutateladze Tbilisi State Academy

of Arts. She expressed a request that the management of the nationalized estate, which during the Soviet regime was ruthlessly destroyed and looted, while the mirror decoration of the interiors was plundered, should be transferred to an artistic organization that could breathe life into the old ancient walls. This step saved the Tarkhan-Mouravi estate from destruction.

In the twentieth century, the cinema figures of the level of Sergei Parajanov and Veriko Anjaparidze met in the mirrored room of the estate (fig. 13). Considering that, the restoration of this pearl of Georgian architecture in a highly atmospheric place should be a priority for conservation and restoration activity.

Since the acts of vandalism against this building during the period of the Soviet Union were carried out purposefully, a concept should be developed for the restoration of the unique interiors. On the walls of the building, next to the roughly covered with thick layers of plaster parts of murals, there are surviving pieces of historical paintings of extraordinary artistic value. Even though it is now private property, the state should be engaged in such delicate restoration work. Perhaps during the restoration of the building, it will be possible to clarify the attribution regarding the authorship of the architect and decorators.

Nowadays, the greatest admiration of this ensemble is the office of Aleksandr Davidovich Tarkhan-Mouravi, entirely decorated with mirror mosaics. The room has a vaulted crowning. The intricate patterns of ornaments and their complex geometry are nearly perfect. Despite the fact that artisans invited from Persia played a leading role in decorating “Persian style” interiors in Georgia in those works of Persian masters you can see the influence of the Georgian culture [6, p. 158]. After all, all the elements of the interior are inscribed in the environment; it was made by an unknown Georgian architect and leaves its mark on the overall style of the building. The architect made lancet elements of stained-glass windows and a mihrab, bypass galleries typical for a traditional Georgian house.

Thus, the “Marshliant Sasahle” (fig. 2, 3, 4, 5), as this building is called, which continues to be the place of gathering of the aristocracy and bohemians in Garikula — a noble nest, over time has every chance to regain the well-deserved glory of the unique heritage of previous generations, who had invested in this estate their understanding of the beautiful, according to the tastes of the representatives of royal blood.

Indeed, from 1960 to 1991, the building formally became the location for the summer practice for arts students of the Tbilisi Academy of Arts. They came

with their professors, worked and lived in the estate. After independence, the building was returned to its rightful owners, restored to their rights. Since Princess Catherine had three children, seven grandchildren (five of them are now alive), several great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, the total number of descendants claiming this inheritance reached 50 people (fig. 16, 17). Therefore, this landmark is one of the oldest and most archaic ones.

In general, it should be noted that the compositional and building structure of the Tarkhan-Mouravi Palace in the architectural solution appeals to the palace of Sardar (ruler) in Erevan of the seventeenth century, and its figurative and stylistic design — to the Palace of Shaki Khans in Azerbaijan in the city of Shaki [9, p. 10], built in the Persian style in the eighteenth century.

Conclusions. The oldest building in Georgia, decorated with mirror mosaics, is the Tarkhan-Mouravi palace in the Garikula village of the Kaspi Municipality in the Shida Kartli region on the lands of the historical Iberia. According to the narratives of the representatives of the family, Princes Manana Lezhava and Irakli Machabeli, the decoration of this building continued for ten years by the Persian masters brought from their country personally by the owner of the estate, Prince Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi, a descendant of the last Georgian kings. Among other monuments in Georgia, decorated with ornaments made of glass with amalgam, this one is the most ancient.

The interior decoration of “Marshliant Sasahle” (the Marshliant Palace) lasted until 1830–1831, when the head of the crew of decorators fell ill and later died, without him the apprentices were not able to complete the decoration work. Of the planned rooms of the entire first floor, these plasterers, moulders, artists, glass cutters, gilders managed to decorate only four rooms. At the same time, the stylistics of the decor was analogous to Chinoiserie, since the owner of the estate, being inspired by the gift of his friend, General, and later Field-Marshal Aleksandr Baryatinsky, wanted those masters to focus on the painting of the tea box, which he truly liked. History has not preserved the names of these artists.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1. Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi. Photos from the family archive of Irakli Machabeli.

Fig. 2, 3. The photo of Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi “Marshliant Sasahle.” Its architecture resembles the architecture of the Palace of Shaki Khans in Azerbaijan. The village of Garikula, Kaspi Municipality. The mihrab with the remains of the decorative plaster stucco moulding in the form of stalactite ornaments (muqarnas) and murals in the fireplace niche in A. Baryatynskyi’s room made by the crew of Persian masters. Between 1821 and 1831.

Fig. 4, 5. The historical photo of the Tarkhan-Mouravi “Marshliant Sasahle” estate, before its partial destruction.

The photo of Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi with his wife (right) at the fountain with red and white wine in the Grand Gallery. The village of Garikula, Kaspi Municipality. Photos from the family archive of Irakli Machabeli.

Fig. 6, 7. The estate of Tarkhan-Mouravi. The large living room, where the stage used to be. The village of Garikula, Kaspi Municipality.

Decorating with mirror mosaics (the base of the chandelier and at the corners of the room), decorative plaster stucco moulding in the form of stalactite ornaments of the transition from the walls to the ceiling. The works performed by the crew of Persian masters based on Chinese motives. The great hall was decorated with French

wallpaper. The period between 1821 and 1831. Photos from the archive of Ludmila Narikaeva.

Fig. 8, 9. The richly decorated office of Tarkhan-Mouravi with the half-dome space. The village of Garikula, Kaspi Municipality. Decorating with mirror mosaics, plaster stucco moulding in the form of stalactite ornaments and alfresco paintings in the “birds and flowers” style, performed by the crew of Persian masters according to the Chinese motives. Between 1821 and 1831. Photos from the archive of Ludmila Narikaeva.

Fig. 10, 11. The richly decorated office of Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi with the half-dome space. The village of Garikula, Kaspi Municipality. Between 1821 and 1831. Photos from the archive of Ludmila Narikaeva.

Fig. 12. The granddaughter of Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi with her aunts in Tarkhan-Mouravi's office. Photos from the family archive of Irakli Machabeli.

Fig. 13. Sergei Parajanov and Veriko Anjaparidze during filming of “The Legend of Suram Fortress” in the office of Aleksandr Tarkhan-Mouravi. Photos from the family archive of Irakli Machabeli.

Fig. 14. Murals on the corner of the Great Gallery at Marshliant Sasahle. Photos from the family archive of Irakli Machabeli.

Fig. 15. Murals and plaster stucco moulding in the Small Living Room (stage) and the Large Living Room. Photos from the family archive of Irakli Machabeli.

Fig. 16, 17. Wall murals of the Tarkhan-Mouravi estate. The village of Garikula, Kaspi Municipality. Various styles of alfresco patterns made by Persian masters based on Chinese motives. Between 1821 and 1831.

Artists Iya Gogishvili and Otar Vepkhvadze indoors (photo from Gogishvili's archive, 2014).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

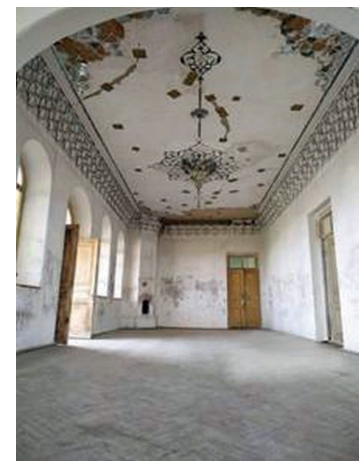


Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

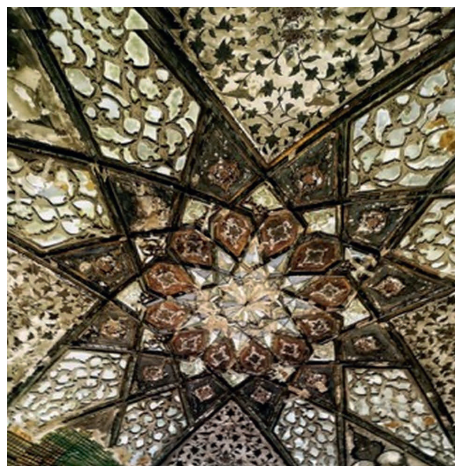


Fig. 9

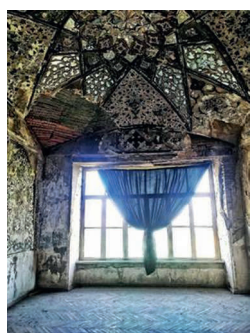


Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

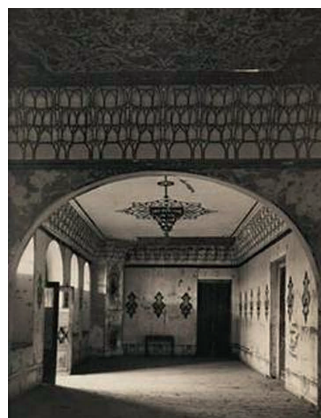


Fig. 15



Fig. 16

