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FIGURATIVITY OF VEGETABLE OBJECTS *

SUMMARY. This article touches upon the topic of figurativity as a form of social experience expression. The author examines the issue of potential concentration of social experience in the natural world figures. The study is performed on the basis of the following materials: mythology, religious and philosophical doctrines of the Orient, historical research papers, works of art. Concurrently a comparative and historical method is used. The targets of the research are the figures of water-lily and lotus. The uniqueness of these plants gives rich possibilities to concentrate cosmogonical ideas, views on the world's spatio-temporal design, on religious and moral values, on the netherworld and the meaning of human life. The figure of lotus does not only shape, but partially forms social experience in Oriental societies, that is, it becomes functional. A conclusion is made that figurativity with the employment of these vegetable objects is used in communities with a poorly marked individual beginning, undeveloped emotionality, values of meditateness and inactivity. The water-lily and lotus attain figurativity characteristics, namely, the ability to concentrate, to shape up information and to function.

KEY WORDS. Figurativity, social experience, vegetable objects, water-lily and lotus figures.

Figurativity is often used for transmission of dense information on something in order to add functional character to it. Images of art, historical characters, mythological objects are used for transmission of the typical and the ideal. Objects of the natural world are also quite widely used: the figures of plants and animals, which serve for "organisation ... of social forms of space, time and movement" [1; 12]. Created figures are not only a way of social experience concentration; they "live" in the social medium and permanently participate in social actions. This demonstrates their functional character. The figures of plants were of specific meaning in the ancient times when the sphere of emotions was poorly developed. They were used for transmission of understanding about the world's organisation and origin or about moral values.

Judging by the number of subjects devoted to portrayal of different varieties of lilies, including water-lilies, and lotus through the figure of flowers, one can speak of formalisation of a considerable amount of social experience. Painters, writers and poets turned their attention to water-lily motifs:

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The nenuphars on the mourning black waves
Are as silent as my thoughts... [2].

The water-lilies and lotuses are favourite objects in myths, religious and philosophical meditations, and mystical visions. The figure of a water plant unites the rational and the irrational, making its meaning inexhaustible.

What is so attractive in the figure of a water-lily? What contemplations of the mankind are concentrated in and shaped as lotus?

The figure of a water-lily was first used in the mythology of the Egyptians, the Hittites and the Phoenicians. According to mythological traditions, the figure of a water-lily depicts the link between this world and the world of the dead, which is always close to us. Thinking of death, I. Levitan turned to portrayal of a water-lily. In 1895 he painted the picture "Nenuphars" (the French name of water-lilies — O. Zakharova). The surface of water is a kind of border between the world hidden under the water, being very close to us, and the world above the water, being sunny, familiar, but transient. Water-lilies link those worlds together like a human soul which is about to travel from the living world to the world of the dead. That is why the figure of a water-lily is used in the Egyptian mythology for transmission of temporariness, evanescence and hope at the same time. Water-lilies are used in funeral traditions. This way the theme of link between the worlds is reflected in the unique existence of the flower.

A special attitude of the Egyptians to water was expressed in the fact that the water-lily became the central vegetal figure of the powerful state. In order to recognize the social significance of water-lily's figure it was depicted close to gods. At the same time the figure of water-lily is present in portrayals of Amon-Ra and the earth-goddess Iris. The water-lily grows out from the silt, passes through the water, escapes from the dark and opens out to the Sun. This corresponds to cosmogonic notions of the Egyptians: "the chaos of water, enshrouded in eternal darkness, preceded the creation of the world. The start of escaping from chaos was linked with the birth of light, impersonated in the sun" [3]. The social practices of the Egyptians were similar: the welfare of the people of Egypt depended on the overflowing of the Nile, on the silt remaining on the shores and on the Sun.

At the same time a water-lily meant freedom to the Egyptians. Social understanding of freedom was still quite limited. Freedom was connected with integrity and self-containment of this plant. The flower is unique in this sense. Integrity of the world is based on the unity of four elements: Earth, Water, Air and Fire. The water-lily comprises all elements. Besides, it is the symbol of the Sun and the Moon: a species of water-lilies known to the Egyptians opened in the morning to welcome the Sun, another one — at night, to welcome the Moon. The idea of integrity and self-containment was expressed in the androgyny of a water-lily: it contains flower buds, flowers and seeds proving a possibility of self-creation.

Thus, a social meaning of a water-lily is based on its properties to implement the cosmogonic notions of the Egyptians, to participate in religious performances and, at the same time, to demonstrate the practices of household activities.

In the West the figure of a water-lily loses its functionality. It is replaced by more earth-bound flowers representing the notions of Christian values and the monarchical power. By the Middle Ages the water-lily accumulating the ideas on mutual transition between the worlds had finally moved to the mystical teachings to become the neighbour of mermaids, elves, nymphs, etc.

Still greater emphasis in terms of concentration of information on the origin of the world is laid on the eastern figure of a water-lily — a lotus. In accordance with Hinduism, Brahma (the god of creation) is born from the flower of lotus growing from the omphalus of Vishnu (the preserver of the universe) sitting in the water. The meaning of water as of the source of life is also expressed in the figure of lotus. Lotus is a womb, a place of the birth of life. The universe originates from lotus. The universe like a lotus floats on the surface of the ocean.

In China the origin of the world is depicted through the parts of lotus's figure: the source of existence — the root — is hidden deeply under the water; the fertile force of creation, the life in its physical form — is a box with seeds; the spiritual perfection is the flower of lotus in blossom. "In accordance with Chinese philosophy the qualities of a human being are identified with the properties of nature because a man is inseparably connected with it" [4; 119].

Generally, in the eastern traditions the figure of lotus concentrates perceptions on the world more distinctly than in the West. The figure of lotus is used to group space and time. "Symbols of any kind are products of abstraction, and abstraction comprises the processes of analysis and synthesis, connection and separation at the same time" [5]. Everything is used for putting the space together: the form of a flower, the number of petals and the stalk piercing all elements.

Thus, the structure of a lotus flower is depicted as a geometrized rosette with seven, eight or ten ray-type petals symbolizing unity of Yang and Yin. It depicts a wheel of deaths and births with simultaneous representation of the past, present and future. A button, a flower and seeds of a lotus symbolized the past, the present and the future correspondingly; and "a lotus pearl" meant the escape from the wheel of regenerations and deaths and arrival to nirvana. "Time and eternity are two aspects of the same perception of the whole, two aspects of sole non-dualist non-expressibility; therefore, the treasure of eternity is resting in the lotus of birth and death" [6].

The number of petals transmitted information on the chakras of a man — the centres of his energy. In general, due to its long stalk, lotus symbolised the spinal column — the connecting chakra of the human body.

The stalk of a lotus was considered as the world axis or "the world tree". All that made part of perception of the world in the Ancient East was connected to this world axis.

Lotus position, considered as the best for peace and concentration, is of significant importance in the spiritual practices of the East, in particular in yoga. Lotus position still determines social practices, guiding towards physical and spiritual perfection, acquisition of inner harmony and balance. Lotus position becomes a business card of yoga and philosophical and religious teaching of the East. It reflects passivity of the eastern culture, its meditative character, its focus on the inner. A man depicted in

lotus position often keeps his eyes closed to avoid being distracted for the temporary and transitory. Overcoming temporariness and connection with the eternal makes social sense of this figure.

The meaning of the lotus as a symbol of enlightenment becomes focal for the white lotus learning. The white lotus learning comprises schools considering the Pure Land idea of Buddha Amitabha as an underlying concept. The souls of the righteous ones resurrect in the lake with white lotuses in the Pure Land [7].

In the medieval East the figure of lotus concentrates more and more information on a human being; the cosmogonic topic loses its central position. A man lives in an intellectual, material and spiritual dimensions, but his goal is in spiritual enlightenment, in nirvana. Lotus grows on the ground, in the water and in the air, but its aim is to open towards the Sun. Everywhere lotus is used for description of the enlargement of the mind: the flower grown from the dirt remains pure. This is why it often becomes the symbol of Buddha: Gautama lived in a dirty environment, but remained pure in his soul and in his thoughts.

Lotus in Buddhism is also considered as a symbol of enlightenment. The pedestals of statues of Buddha are often in the form of a lotus. The figures of Buddha appearing from the flames are called “lotus pearls” and “lotus hearts”.

According to the legend, after enlightenment Buddha saw his pupils as stalks and buds of lotus. Some of them were submerged into the silt corresponding to the state of ignorance and spiritual darkness characteristic of most people. Others try to stay on the water surface; they make efforts for understanding the truth. The third ones are in blossom and turn to the Sun: they have achieved enlightenment and acquired spiritual knowledge. The lotus’s way through the thickness and darkness of water toward the Sun reflected the way of spiritual overcoming of delusiveness of the world, the victory over Mara, the king of death. Buddha taught: “When one looks upon this world as a bubble, as a mirage, one is not seen by the king of death” [8; 298].

Within the period of Buddhism expansion in the East, the figure of a lotus continued performing the function of an information centre. For example, the Chan School originates from the legendary episode when people circled Buddha and asked to explain the essence of his learning. Buddha smiled and directed his eyes at the lotus flower in his hands. Just one person understood what the teacher meant and he acquired enlightenment. This was the act of transference of experience without words and instructions. It was the origin of Chan principles: transference of truth not based on sacred texts; independence from words and signs; direct indication on human intellect; attainment of Buddha condition through the insight of proper nature [9; 20].

The French painter Claude Monet was acquainted with Eastern philosophy and aesthetics, and he had the greatest respect for both. He also recognized their influence on his creative works. He planted a garden in oriental style in his estate with a pond and a bridge in Japanese style and the water-lilies he used to paint. C. Monet wrote that he planted water-lilies just for his delectation, not thinking about depicting them in his paintings. “Suddenly the revelation of the beauty of my fabulous, wonderful garden struck me. I took my palette and from that very moment I have never had a

different sitter” [10]. In the end of his long life C. Monet built a studio in the garden named “Water-lilies Studio”. In this studio the painter implemented his last large-scale project— he painted water-lilies on panels making a panoramic circle of about 70 metres in diameter. For C. Monet this panorama was a kind of worldview. He expressed all his knowledge and feelings experienced throughout his long life.

From the earliest times people tried to understand the secret of life and death, the secret of the origin of the world. Sophisticated ideas about a soul, the netherworld, the structure and origin of the Universe, the way and the mission of a man concentrated on certain figures. Search for figurativity leads to using forms copied from nature. The present article dealt with the figures of water-lilies and lotuses performing the function of transmission of certain social knowledge and ideas about the world.

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