

About the Work of Italian Artist Ludwig Longo in Tbilisi (1831-1914)

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ABSTRACT: The main purpose of this paper is to present a well-known Italian artist Ludwig Longo, who was once really active in Tbilisi, to the public life. Unfortunately, he has gradually been forgotten but he left precious heritage. According to this purpose the author of this article, considered to reconstruct Tbilisi passages of Longo's biography in order to make a famous this painter for modern Georgian and Italian arts historians. Main materials were found by the Fund of New Georgian Art Department of Art Museum, newspaper materials, etc. As a result of this research revealed that L. Longo was deep involved in and have obtained his place in Tbilisi. He mainly was painting portraits, as well he had covered with drawings Tbilisi Saint Trinity Church and Al. Nevelly Military Temple or "Soboro" as it was called.

KEYWORDS: Ludwig Longo, Italian Painter; Georgia; Georgian Art

The 19th century was one of the most important eras in the history of Georgia. Tbilisi became the centre of the Caucasus. A lot of foreign artists came to Tbilisi at that time, some of them were passing through, some were for a while, and some were staying forever. One of them was the Italian artist Ludwig Longo, other artists: R. Franken, L.O. Prematsi, F. Khodorovich etc. can be mentioned as well.

The main purpose of my article is to present a well-known Italian artist Ludwig Longo, who was once really active in Tbilisi, to the public. Unfortunately, he has gradually been forgotten but he left us precious heritage. It is considered as our duty to appreciate his works and contribution in art. I would like to reconstruct Tbilisi passages of his biography, if it can be said so.

When I looked through the art-related lifestyle of Tbilisi at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, my greatest interest was drawn to L. Longo. He was fully involved in the events of art societies of that time, in addition, he was teaching painting at art schools. By this time his works are preserved in Tbilisi Sh. Amiranashvili Art Museum, in a private collection and in Tbilisi Art Academy as well. He painted the Holy Trinity Church in Tbilisi and also Tbilisi Al. Nevelly Military Temple or "Soboro" as it was called, which is no longer exists. It was demolished according to order by Beria in 1930 and the current parliament building was built in its place.

I made a decision to restore the biographical data of L. Longo which unluckily turned out to be quite complicated. I was provided with main materials only by the Fund of New Georgian Art Department of Art Museum, newspaper materials, etc.

Ludwig Longo, the son of Gaetani, was born in 1831, probably in Italy, but in which city, still remains unknown. It is also unknown where he received his education in art or when he arrived in Georgia. Based on the materials which I have gained, he had actively been involved in the cultural and artistic life of Tbilisi city since 1890 so he must have been here until 1913. He was so deeply immersed in the life of Tbilisi that he was even mentioned as a local artist of Tbilisi. He died in 1914, that is, Longo spent the last years of his life in Tbilisi, and possibly he even died here, maybe his grave is in Tbilisi, obviously this is an assumption because it is hard to prove.

We should follow the years: a fascinating story is told in one of the local newspapers of 1890, that year Tbilisi was visited by the Prince of Naples, Victor the son of Italian Emmanuel. In order to celebrate this remarkable event the artist from Tbilisi L.Longo gifted him an album which consisted of thirty artistically performed works, the local typical Caucasian characters were painted with water colour paints. The paintings were clad in Tarsicon cover (a piece of skin dyed with red, the cover was made in the Illotsi's workshop. On the top of the album the cover was three coloured which reminded of a combination of three colours: red, green and white so the colours of the Italian Flag having the following inscription: "A. S. A. R. il principe di Napol; Ricordo del Caucaso. Tiflis, 1, anno, 1890" (Tifliski Listok 1890, 95).

The aforementioned album contained mostly the sketches of characters of Tbilisi street: merchants, hairdressers, coalmen, water sellers, bread sellers, Kinto and others. This gift was really valuable. Perhaps it would be great to have an access to this album, we really would come across a lot of interesting and amazing material for us.

The same newspaper # 100 informs us that "An artist Longo from Tbilisi was given 500 rubles as a reward by the Majesty for the album which he had presented to the Prince of Italy and contained mainly the sketches of Caucasian characters" (Tifliski Listok 1890, 100).

The newspaper # 11 "Tarazi" of 1892 lets us know that "an exhibition of paintings by local artists was opened at the Tbilisi Military Museum, there were displayed 200 small and medium-sized works, including Longo's art. # 17 Typical characters of wine buyers and sellers, which is portrayed with highly considerable success" (Tarazi 1892, 11).

In 1908 The Society of Caucasus Artists organized an exhibition of artists where Longo's three paintings were presented: A guy with charcoal; An Arab and a worker who has a rest. Ludwig Longo is also an outstanding and respectable person due to the fact that he was a teacher of two Georgian artists, Lado Gudiashvili and Alexander Tsimakuridze.

I would like to mention one extract from L. Gudiashvili's memories: "There was an art school in Tbilisi at that time, where in 1910 I was taken to pass entrance exams. By the way, Mikheil Chiaureli, Keto Magalashvili and Giorgi Khmaladze participated in the process of exams with me and four of us passed the exam successfully. None of the Georgian teachers worked at the school at that time. We were taught by the German Oscar Schmerling (my supervisor), the Italian Longo, the Russian Patenkowski and the Polish Greenwich" (Gudiashvili 1979, 7).

Longo's pedagogical contribution and activities are proved by the following events: Longo opened a private art school in which students painted plaster heads with charcoal and also painted tombstones with oil paints. Al. Tsimakuridze was studying at this private art studio with Longo where he learnt his original professional artistic skills (Tabukashvili 1983, 3-4).

In the newspaper "Sakhalkho Gazeti" #984 of 1913 a response named "Do not forget" is published under the pseudonym Rish-Basha which reads as follow: "Some letters have appeared in the newspapers: A temple should be built in the name of St. Tamar ..." and the whole article contains a kind of ironic glimpse of the article, however, the considerable information for us is, for instance, following: "To whom should we paint the temple: Grynevsky or Longo" (Rich Baba, 1913).

Thus, it seems that in 1913 Longo was alive and was still working in Tbilisi. The deceased person would not be mentioned such as Rish-Baba told conveys. As for the church painting, we already have the knowledge of it, that Longo painted two churches according to the above mentioned newspaper letter about the invitation of Longo, in order to paint the churches, probably, referring to Longo as a painter of other churches as well.

We are definitely talking about two churches: St. About Trinity and "Soboro." The exact dates are unknown therefore we must to come to a reasonable dating by a logical discourse.

First of all, I will try to bring the facts first and then analyse them: The newspaper “Iveria” of 22nd May, 1897 writes the following: “Yesterday, on May 21st. A new military temple named after Alexander Nevsky was consecrated, the church is large enough and holds almost 200 four-sided Sajen (1 Sajen= 2m and 13/14 cm) space. It is build based on the Byzantine and beautifully decorated both inside as well as outside. The altar is decorated with precious icons specially ordered from Moscow, there are pictures of saints painted on the walls, In the middle there is a Chandelier hung with a 218 light-like electronic lamp, and candle holders are entirely made of bronze.

The church was consecrated by Exarch Vladimir with the presence of local clergy men. The blessing ceremony was attended by the great chief Nikoloz the son of Mickhael, the head clergy man Golitsyn with his wife, his assistant A. A Freze, Corps Commander T.,,C. Amilakhvari, Commandant Reiter, Governor T. Shervashidze, Chief of Staff, Police Chief and many others. After the blessing ceremony, everyone was invited for breakfast to the governor.”

Hence, this extract from the newspaper “Iveria” contains really interesting information for us. The new temple was consecrated in 1897 and it was perfectly decorated. Moreover, if we look at the biographical moments about Longo, which we have found, from 1892 to 1908 it is a kind of gap and his activities and contribution are less visible and difficult to find. Together with Longo A. Colchin had participated in the painting of “Soboro.” The fact is that by this time Longo must have been a well-crafted and skillful artist, otherwise he would not have been allowed to paint this temple.

In my opinion, “Soboro” must have been painted by Longo together with Kolchin from 1892 to 1897, because in these years he no longer participated in exhibitions. As for the painting of the Holy Trinity Church in Tbilisi, to my mind, the lower edge is 1898, and the upper is 1905, and why? If he finished painting Soboro in 1897, the following year he was probably commissioned to paint the Trinity. The founder was Archpriest Nikoloz Ardaziani the son of Petre, who was serving in the Trinity Church from 1859 to 1905.

As K. Tsintsadze writes that Nikoloz resigned in 1905 due to blindness. He was a highly respected clergy man, hard-working, peaceful talker, eager and tireless prayer (when he was not a mourner, he still prayed in the morning and in the evening every day), at one time a chief elder, a member of the seminary board, and chairman of audit committees, etc. Died in 1907, buried in Trinity Cathedral, which he had first domed, then he had this church painted (Tsintsadze 1994, 86). In addition to I must mention that Archpriest Nikoloz Ardaziani held the wedding ceremony of Ilia Chavchavadze and Olga Guramishvili and Ekvtime Takaishvili and Nino Poltaretskaya.

Thus, Longo must have painted the Trinity Cathedral between 1898 and 1905, in my view, the participation of several people can be seen in the process of painting. I think the painting which is preserved in the conch of the altar belongs to Gregory Gagarin, the south and north parts (arms) are made by Longo and perhaps he was assisted by Kolchin, while the the artist of the gate is unknown. In relation to the neck and sphere of the dome, it might be painted relatively later.

The existence of several layers in the church painting is best highlighted by the ornamental patterns that divide the painting into registers. However, portraits of kings and queens are mostly divided into registers, and the scenes are presented without any framing.

Consequently, based on the all facts above, it is clear that Ludwig Longo worked in Tbilisi from 1890 to 1913 or, possibly, until 1914 or until his death, which means that he spent the last decades of his life here and was his contribution was really worthwhile.

Through his work he really left an incredible and significant mark in Georgian art. However, his name was unfortunately forgotten. I have set an aim to explore Longo’s works and contribution in depth, even may restore moments from his biography, at least by reaching out my colleagues in Italy.

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