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## **Concerning the Closeness of the Form of Sufi Kashkul and the Slavic Boats**

**Olga V. Shkolna**

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine

**Olha D. Sosik**

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine

**Oleksandra V. Barbalat**

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine

**Alla B. Buihasheva**

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine

**Veronika I. Zaitseva**

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Kyiv, Ukraine

**Abstract**--The article deals with investigating the resemblance between the kashkul shape from the collection of the Istanbul Museum of Islamic and Turkish Art and the Slavic type of longship. The specified item is now being kept in the exposition of the specified collection as an item of the Sefevidian era period of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century under the inventory number 2960. The typological analysis of its shape, peculiarities of the use of similar items in the Orthodox tradition of the Old Rus, Byzantium, separate countries of the Christian world and Scandinavia prove the closeness of this item to the shapes that were common in the Orthodox society. Analysis of the item decoration, the method of its manufacture allows us to assume the contribution of Islamic craftsmen, possibly Persian, to casting of this artefact. The study results are reduced to the basic hypothesis that the object designated in the exposition of the Istanbul Museum of Islamic and Turkish Art called kashkul (a bowl for the poor or a container for alms) has a shape of a golden longship that was in common use between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Kyivan Rus-Byzantine tradition.

**Keywords**--bowl, Byzantium, Kashkul, Kyivan Rus, Sufism.

## Introduction

Nowadays, the Istanbul Museum of Islamic and Turkish Art holds a boat-shaped item. According to the data of the mentioned collection exposure labelling, this item, under the inventory No. 2960, there is a kashkul (a beggar's bowl) (Nematzade, 2020). Whereas, it is attributed as an artefact from the Sefevidian era of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (obviously, based on the fact that it was covered with gold of the certain ornamental decoration type). But, taking into account the item production from precious metals and its evident resemblance to the boat shape (Figure 1), widely spread in the Old Russian, Byzantine jewellery, and in the Scandinavian shipbuilding tradition, sources of inspiration of the item stated should be verified. It is decorated with friso with inscriptions along the upper edge; along the bowl bottom side, rondal arabesque-ornamented compositions are distributed (Persia, the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; collection of the Istanbul Museum of Islamic and Turkish Art, Turkey) (Arslan, 2020).



Figure 1. Kashkul in the shape of a golden longship with two handles with dragon heads with the holes drilled

The research methodology includes a collection of historical and genetic and art critic and cultural approaches (Launay et al., 1997; Wansink et al., 2014). It also includes numerous ontological, historical-chronological, typological and art review methods. The scientific novelty is in substantiating the distribution of the shapes of a longship, a bucket, a small dipper in Kyivan Rus and Byzantium in the 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the specified countries, this form was perceived, on the one part as a grace cup, a ritual bowl that was served during feasts of the princely and military elite and was passed around in a circle to all the feast participants (Kamal & Mohammed, 2018). On the other part, the item intended use was understood as part of the Christian Eucharistic communion culture with the reference to the Covenant Ark. Moreover, it should be noted that the tradition of using longship shape naval vessels from which the shapes of gold goods were taken and the craftsmen produced their goods as warships in miniature. This tradition prevailed primarily in Slavic-Varangian countries (Ribut et al., 2019; Dasih et al., 2019). Besides, during the next several centuries, the typology of various shapes of the longship and small dipper in Kyivan Rus and Byzantium in

Ukraine and Russia of the 17<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries continued developing (Xoplaki et al., 2016).

### **The origin of the tradition of using longship shape in the manufacture of boat-like dippers**

The description of the longship, which has been present in the Kyivan Rus naval arsenal since the 9<sup>th</sup> century (then the fleet of these ships consisted of at least 200 units of such warships) and served as a symbol of the courage for the Ruthenians, can be found in numerous Slavic texts describing military campaigns and shipbuilding from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. An example is the article in the first volume of Naval Dictionary by [Samoilov \(1939\)](#), published in the USSR. Separately, boat-like dippers and their varieties, including those manufactured from precious metals, in the Old Russian and Russian Art are described in the “Dippers” section on the Web page of Moscow Kremlin Museums (2020). In particular, it can be concluded from this publication that by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the appearance of such items has transformed. It happened due to the introduction of beautiful decor with complex ornaments and incrustation with precious stones ([Ahmed & Ziddan, 2011](#); [Arafat et al., 2013](#)). At the same time, a tray or a leg in the form of several balls appear on dippers and endolles (low, sometimes boat-shaped bowls with a draining nose on one side and a handle on the other) ([Özpinar & Batur, 2018](#)).

Similar cast objects in the form of a silver gold-coated boat on legs, decorated with embossing and carving, referred to as small dippers, are shown on the aforementioned Web page in the section with the same name (Moscow Kremlin Museums..., 2020). They were of small size, as represented by a small dipper from the Patriarchal Palace of the Museums of the Moscow Kremlin, which belonged to Patriarch Nikon (Figure 2). The stated exhibit was cast from silver and decorated with carving, embossing, and gold-coated ([Swan et al., 2017](#)). Its size depended on the function, for such objects were intended for containing strong drinks. On account of the use of precious metals and various complicated techniques for the art processing of metal, mostly wealthy people can afford buying these goods ([Hattap, 2019](#)).



Figure 2. Small dipper that belonged to patriarch Nikon (Moscow, 1657; silver, casting, carving, chasing, gold-plating; collection of the museums of Moscow Kremlin)

The bases of some silver water dipper, depending on their size, were made by casting, others by raising. The last technique for vessels making was widespread in the times of Kyivan Rus and came from the depths of the centuries. Raising is an ancient method of cold processing of metal, it is carried out by direct blows of a hammer, under which metal stretches, bends, sits and as a result, acquires the necessary shape (Figure 3). It differs from hammering by the fact that it is performed in a cold state, and when forging, the metal is heated to red. Besides, the raising product is moulded from the sheet metal with a thickness of more than 2 mm, while forging works are usually done from a massive metal block. Raising also differs from calking, as “it is performed with a hammer, and calking tools (especially, made of wood) are rarely used” (Soysaldi & Çatalkaya Gök, 2020).

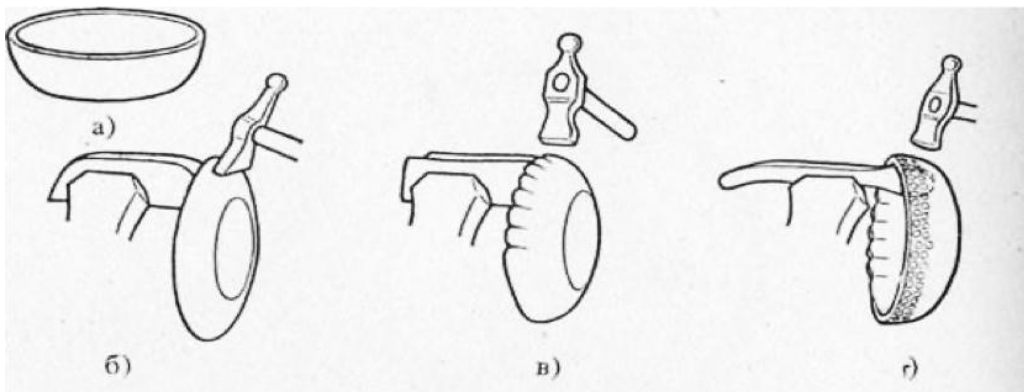


Figure 3. Stages of raising of vessels from a single sheet of metal

Source: Flerov (1981)

Throughout its long history, depending on the metal being processed (gold, silver, copper, iron) and the purpose of the products, raising acquired various types and properties. This technique reached virtuoso art in the hands of the great ancient sculptors Phidias and Polykleitos, who dressed their statues of Athena and Hera in gold robes, raising them from thin gold sheets. The so-called Kyivan Rus' goldsmiths knocked out cups, bowls and dippers of sheets gold and silver, decorated them with calking, engraving and precious stones, and these houseware objects became samples of the best jewellery. Even at that time, doing these works, the craftsmen strove to decorate them with the plant, animal and geometric ornaments. As a rule, these figures had the corresponding cult symbolism. Such products organically combined a cult and practical purpose.

The dippers in the configuration of a longship or a rook are typical for the Kyiv Russ forms of houseware, the origin of which goes back to the ancient times. Those boats firstly appeared in the North, where there were many rivers and lakes with a sufficient quantity of wild ducks and geese. Then skeuomorphic houseware of the boat-like shape, such as dippers, appeared as well. The area where they built wooden rowboats resembling birds floating on water, was limited to the Scandinavian countries, from where similar models spread to neighbouring territories. Since the second millennium BC, the wood houseware in the form of oval dippers was already made in the North. “Later, on the form of a wood dipper,

the craftsmen began to make gold and silver analogue things". But at the same time, they imitated the form of a kashkul shown in the exposition of the Istanbul Museum of Islamic and Turkish Art.

At the same time, "the noblemen in the 17<sup>th</sup> century used to drink fresh mead from golden boat-shaped dippers in the form of a boat (a vessel resembling a web-footed bird in shape), so the functions of these items differed" (Golden tableware as luxury..., 2019). At this time, dippers and small dippers-boats forged from a single piece of gold, which were preserved, for example, in the Armory Chamber of Moscow (Russia), could be decorated with pearls and gems. People believed that precious stones can make the drink change colour if it is poisoned, and thus, the owner will be warned about the danger.

One of the world's most famous exhibits, which is today stored in the Imperial Treasury at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, made in the fourth century by masters at the court of Emperor Constantine the Great in Constantinople. With particular illumination of this bowl made of a single piece of agate, a miraculous inscription appears – the name of Christ (XRISTO). "It is now generally believed that the inscription inspired the legend that the bowl was the Holy Grail". The Agate Bowl is the largest carved stone bowl in the world. Bowls made of agate and decorated with gold, silver and precious stones were distributed throughout the Byzantine Empire as religious and secular objects, one of the purposes of which was to determine the presence of toxic substances in the liquid that filled it. Agate is a crystal that belongs to the group of semiprecious minerals. It can change the shade depending on the current state of the host's health, mood and life circumstances. Agate is also known for its outstanding ability to determine deadly poisons: if something poisonous approaches the mineral, the stone changes its colour sharply. There is a story of agate decoration, which belonged to the famous theosophist Helena Blavatsky. She gained an international following as the leading theoretician of Theosophy, the esoteric religion that the society promoted. For a long time, the philosopher wore a ring with an agate as a decoration, and before leaving for the East gave it to her sister. After a while, the stone turned completely black. Later it became known that it "happened at the time of the death of the mistress thousands of kilometres from home" (Stones-chameleons..., 2020).

Some bowls, mainly of religious purpose, the basis of which was also made of agate, decorated with precious metals and minerals, were so heavy that in the following post-Byzantine period they were used only as decoration of interiors. The item was very heavy, up to 5 kg, so drinking from it became uncomfortable, and it turned into the interior decoration item. Here, we see several items that are really similar or almost identical to the exhibit from the exposition of the Istanbul Museum of Islamic and Turkish Art. The foremost attention should be paid to the bowl for alms of the 15<sup>th</sup> century of the Timurid period, made in Northeast Iran, the shape of which also resembles a boat (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Kashkul of the Timuridian era of typical shape, without a support  
(Northeast Iran, 15<sup>th</sup> century)  
Source: A Timurid Tinned... (2011)

Tinned copper, engraving is decorated along the bowl upper edge with frieze with an inscription a-la naskh, with an ornamental vine-shaped frieze below it, with lotus flower motives along the lower part. Handles ended like dragon's heads, turned with their mouths inside the bowl, 31, 2 cm in diameter.

### **The role of the Kashkul in the Sufi Mystical tradition**

In general, the etymology of the word “kashkul” is related to the phrase “kashkul and the dervish crook”. Moreover, the first term refers to an ovoid bowl, often made from the world's largest “double” or “sea” coconut, which mendicant dervishes (Sufi ascetics) used to have to collect food and water alms. Most often, it was attached on both sides of the elongated part with a chain for threading over the shoulder or head to be carried on the chest. The second subject in this phrase means a crook, which the dervish (a mendicant monk) could lean on while walking. Often, this pair is perceived as its owner's certain experience, since kashkul is considered to contain energy of lands visited by the item owner. At the same time, the dervish touched the energy of the earth of holy places with his crook, therefore, people believed that things have magical healing powers. A certain sacral meaning to this pair is provided by drawing of images on the top of the initial image, or calligraphic drawings in the form of zikra (remembrance, Islamic spiritual practice of repeating the prayer formula many times) or another personal motto or life formula of wisdom.

An example of the image of dervishes with kashkuls is the painting of V. Vereshchagin, written in Tashkent in 1870 (now it belongs to the collection of the Tretyakov State Gallery in Moscow). This canvas clearly shows which shapes were typically used for collecting water (pumpkin-like – the so-called calabazas) and food (kashkuls) by followers of the Sufi teachings (mainly made from pumpkin). We would also like to mention here that there is a certain sacral meaning of the whirling dervishes perform a Sufi dance in modern Turkish society – the dance that appeared more than seven centuries ago, and now gained the status of a tourist trend in the country.

Generally speaking, it should be noted that Sufism is a mystical Islamic belief, the principal postulates of which were developed based on the protest against excessive wealth, lust, greed and pride. “True Sufis used sensual images to convey the mystical experience in their writings, considering God the embodiment of eternal beauty” (Mratkhezina, 2019). The doctrine preached religious tolerance and accepted every religion, provided that it did not claim the exclusive right to own the truth. Thus, the philosophy of Sufism has managed to go “beyond confessional restrictions and become non-denominational spiritual teaching”. “Since God is the source of all things, His being is the most obvious and all pervasive”.

It should be noted that the ideological origins of Sufism originate in Indian teachings. William Walker Atkinson (a pseudonym for Yogi Ramacharaka), an American writer and popularizer of Indian philosophy, notes that some scholars have pointed to similarities between Neoplatonists and Sufis, claiming that the latter borrowed their teachings from the former. If we recall that the Neoplatonists themselves borrowed the foundations of their worldview from the Indians, then the similarity between their Greek and Persian followers becomes clear (Voultsiadou, 2010; Werbner, 2010). “There is no doubt that later Sufism was influenced by other different theories, but its direct origin connected with Indian teachings is undeniable” (Ramacharaka & Atkinson, 1909).

Due to its cosmopolitanism, Sufism in different countries simultaneously acquired its characteristic features. So, in the territories of modern Iraq and Syria, he was revealed mainly through literature, in India - through meditative practices, in Turkey - through ritual rotations during the sema ceremony. Even though many Sufi orders practised this ceremony, the part with the dance of the whirling dervishes was characteristic of only two – Mevlevi and Alevi-Bektaşî. It is the founder of the first, the Sufi poet Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, who is credited with the origin of this ritual. Its essence is in the spiritual access to God, during which the dervish renounces his ego. It is assumed that the sema represents the solar system and the circulation of everything in nature. The garments of the participants performed a significant role in the Mevlevi sema ceremony. The whirling dervish’s cloak resembles the grave, his conic hat the gravestone of his ego, and a wide white skirt stood for a shroud.

While moving around its axis, the dervish skirt revealed itself as a flower and the dancing dervish (semazen) seemed to be freed from its ego. Starting the rotation with arms crossed, semazen embodied the number one, which testified to the unity of God. Then his right hand rose palm up to heaven, receiving God’s blessing, and, through his left hand, facing the earth, he distributed these blessings to all people. Unlike the sema of the Mevlevi order, both women and men participated in the Alevi-Bektaşî ritual. During the ceremony, the participants were dressed in traditional clothing for their region, not bearing the symbols that are inherent in the robes of the followers of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi. The dance form of the Alevi-Bektaşî fraternity varied depending on the region, but the most common was the turnalat semach (crane dance), which imitated the shamanistic rite of turning into a bird. Today, the rituals of these two orders are listed by UNESCO as the intangible cultural heritage of mankind (Beregovska et al., 2021; Ruangan et al., 2021).

Although the religious practices of Mevlevi and Alevi-Bektaşî varied greatly, they were united by a common desire for unity with God for all Sufis and love for the whole world. According to the doctor of Turkology, [Kaim \(2017\)](#), adherence to Sufi ideas that contributed to the development of the “intellectual life of Islam and strengthened people's faith was for many centuries the dominant feature of Ottoman religiosity” (2017). Bowls for alms in India and Pakistan, for example, often become magical objects of power, because they were used for certain movements in the centre of the dervish group circle (for example, a kashkul from Deccan, made around 1600, and a kashkul from Kashan from 1913-1914) (Figure 5). It was a common practice to manufacture some beggar’s bowls with special notches for fingers, “especially for the rituals where the item was handed from one dervish to another, as a sign of fine energies of changing owners with the feature to be accumulated and multiplied” (Kashkul and the dervish’s..., 2015).



Figure 5. Beggar’s bowl (kashkul) from Deccan, Bijapur Province, India, made around 1600; tinned bronze, casting, engraving  
Source: *The Sultans of Deccan* (2015)

It is believed that the tradition of carrying a kashkul as a bag was borrowed by Iranian Sufis from the Indians during the close contacts of the dervishes over the period from 1510 to 1737. Then the monks of the Kaksar brotherhood, actively supported by the Indian Sufis, started protecting the new Sefevîd dynasty. Therefore, their symbolism of ritual items often resembled the Indian Sufi traditions, which is evident, since the bowl for alms started acting as a talisman, step by step. Moreover, people started using it in mourning or funeral ceremonies over time. However, “copper, tin, wood, and clay most often served as the material for manufacturing kashkuls as traveling utensils”.

### **The relationship of the Kashkul with the Byzantine boat-shaped bowl**

The shape of the bowl for alms in the Persian tradition, which was close to the Turkish one through the Islamic doctrinal statement, and shape of the Kiev-Byzantine type of boat are similar. However, a nut-like shape is often more inherent to Iranian items. Although Iranian boat-shaped items with plastically modelled ends with stylized dragon heads are known, the friso of the inscription



a-la naskh is finely engraved on the vessel top. These items are made of silver, copper, bronze, brass and are dated to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and later, when many craftsmen who used to work for the Second Rome were forced to leave their homes in search of orders in the neighbouring countries.

Traditionally, the kashkul has holes in two skate handles, which distinguishes it from items of the same boat-like shape, but with different functions. After the decline of Byzantium in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the establishment of the institution of Sufi dervishes within two centuries after the year of 1510, this sacred item became a symbol of the symbol. So, designed to be worn by people choosing a path to spiritual enlightenment, it could absorb those grains of philosophy about virtue that formed the basis of the doctrinal statement of a large country that had vanished in oblivion, partly formed by the peoples of the East. Indeed, during the period of the Byzantine Empire reign, there was the possibility to make orders to Persian craftsmen and moving them with diplomatic gifts (Suwija et al., 2019). Moreover, the rotunda-shape decor on the vessel eternal walls indicates a fashion for braids, inherent to medieval Europe, although genetically related to the art of peoples that came from East.

However, in general, it should be noted that the majority of the Iranian kashkul samples have the shape of half a walnut with a notch in the core. A typical example is an exhibit from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Shirvanshah's Palace in Baku (Azerbaijan) (Figure 6). These items differ a lot from the longships of Byzantium and Kyiv Rus boat, dipper, small dipper, flagon, grace cup, mostly related to the custom of tasting wine during rituals, holy services and church holidays.



Figure 6. Kashkul of the Sevefid period from the collection of the Shirvanshah's Palace in Baku (Azerbaijan)

Source: Palace of the Shirvanshahs (2016)

So, after the appearance of longships in the Kyivan Rus and Varangian tradition (on the route “From the Varangians to the Greeks”, that is, to Byzantium), shapes similar to skeuomorphic (with references to the shapes of famous items and natural shapes) dishes appeared in Kyivan Rus, and afterwards, spread throughout the Old Russia (the territory of modern Ukraine and Russia). It is

believed that during the 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, no other countries in the world had such shapes of boat-like dishes. Genetically, they were related to the grace cup, the form from which the brothers in military actions, the princely elite or the monastic brothers were drinking in turns.

These items, in addition to seahorses, the most figures on stern of ships from Russia, Byzantium, Scandinavia, also often had handles shaped like a duck, a goose, or a rooster. Sometimes the entire vessel was styled as a swan. Most often, such products were made of copper or hollowed wood. The wood selected was mainly chosen lime, oak, birch, maple. The same shaped items, but with a deep domed lid, were used on the territory of the old Russian apanage principalities as the central vessel for decorating the table, which was later replaced by tableware for soups and main dishes (terrins). This kind of a two-part item was called "stein".

In the form of a dipper in ethnic Russia, they started making spoons with ornithomorphic handle. These items were ornamented with a braid with reference both to the Eastern and Greco-Byzantine culture, and the culture of the Scandinavian and the Baltic nations. Ornaments and symbols of metal dippers were principally incised on the flat surface, using the engraving technique. For the highest expressiveness of the image, they used methods of tinting, mainly blackening with niello.

In general, niello application is considered one of the oldest ways of decorating art products made of precious metals (silver and gold). This technique reached an extraordinary peak in the Byzantine-Kyivan Rus period of the tenth-twelfth centuries. For example, one of the dippers stored in the Armoury, made using the technique of raising from a single sheet of silver up to 2 mm thick. It is decorated with engraved inscriptions and ornaments using the blackening and gilding techniques (Figure 7). This method of precious materials tinting is so stable that it does not lose its beauty for centuries. For the first time, the detailed technology of this alloy was described in a Benvenuto Cellini's (1500-1571) treatise on jewellery art, which indicates the composition and methods of preparing niello.



Figure 7. The dipper granted to sacristan Bogdan Silin 1650, the Armoury of the Moscow Kremlin

In the Art Nouveau era, when the neo-Byzantine and neo-Russian styles were fashionable in Ukrainian and Russian art, many jewellers addressed the motives of the small dippers, longship, steins, flagons, grace cups, that gained popularity anew. Once again, this phenomenon proved the existence of a tradition that has not lost its genetic connection with the original sources. Such shapes became especially popular in the Ukrainian art before celebration of the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kyivan Rus culture, around 1980. Then many longships, flagons, dippers were made from the variety of materials, including fine ceramics. A typical example is a longship made at that time at the Korosten porcelain factory with blue cobalt underglaze painting. These motifs are also popular in the modern arts and crafts of Ukraine and Russia, especially in jewellery.

In the church life of the Orthodox Slavic countries, which is based on the Greek Christian tradition, the longship is still associated with the path to the Lord (Freund & Band-Winterstein, 2013; Rosenbloom et al., 2004). This found its reflection in the constant appeal to this form of church clergy, and is also proven by the existence of many sayings of priests and people following spiritual path as vocation. The most famous example is the sentence of St. John the Forerunner “Tie a burdened boat to the ship of your fathers, and they will bring you to Jesus”.

From a practical perspective, understanding the sources of inspiration for the longship shape in Slavic and Eastern art will provide a deeper understanding of the essence of the Kyivan Rus, and especially Byzantine tradition. Indeed, the artifacts of the last-named civilization are saved in small amounts today on their native territory which belongs to Turkey now, in the cradle of the Second Roman Empire, where the alma mater of the entire Christian world has been located once. And today, such items have been preserved mainly in separate former provinces of the once great state that appeared in 395 and fell in 1453. And the Byzantine legacy is still honoured nowadays in the countries that adopted Orthodoxy and is still connected with their spiritual homeland: in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Cyprus, ethnic Greece, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the above, we can make a conclusion that the shape of the boats of the separate nations predetermined the appearance of tableware dishes of similar shapes, resembling a longship. The first in this connection should be named the old Ruthenians, who already had boats in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when they went to military campaigns in Byzantium. Later, through Princess Olga, who was baptized by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus in 957 in Constantinople, the dynastic relations between the two states were strengthened. Gradually, the shapes of tableware sold by merchants or as gifts went to the East, where they found their circle of appraisers, became part of the Greek Orthodox and Muslim ecumenical community. Numerous items enchanted the new consumer with their perfect shapes, the holiness of the ark inner space, which was related to a container of gifts.

When Byzantium lost its leading position at the global political arena after 1453, some of the “spiritualized” shapes, already familiar to the eastern consumer, found a new application. Thus, boat-shaped bowl became a source of inspiration

for the Indian-Persian group of products of the ascetics who adopted the Sufi dogma, and started following the way of mendicant dervishes. Therefore, the bowl called kashkul (beggar's bowl), with the reference to the Slavic-Byzantine boat, was an eternal source of force and an attribute of the sinless nature of the spiritually enlightened people of India, Pakistan, Iran. When the cult of dancing dervishes spread, it gained popularity in modern Turkey. The best example among such shapes was the perfectly preserved, unique kashkul shape of the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century from the collection of the Istanbul Museum of Islamic and Turkish Art (inventory No. 2960).

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