

Art History

The Illustrated *Knight in the Panther's Skin*: Georgian Manuscripts from the Collection of the Bodleian Library of Oxford University

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Abstract. This paper examines two illustrated 17th century manuscripts of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* preserved in the Oliver and Marjory Wardrop Collection at the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Wardrop d.17 and Wardrop d.27), situating them within the development of Georgian secular book art and its close interaction with Safavid Persian miniature painting. Created during the period of intense political and cultural transformation, when Georgia was positioned between the Oriental spheres of influence, these manuscripts reflect a distinctive process of artistic exchange and adaptation. The study focuses primarily on the pictorial cycle of Wardrop d.27, which contains twenty-one miniatures illustrating key narrative episodes of Rustaveli's epic. Through stylistic and compositional analysis, the article demonstrates the artist's engagement with late Safavid, particularly Isfahanian, visual conventions, such as vertical formats, flattened spatial organization, ornamental landscapes and courtly costume, while also identifying elements that diverge from Iranian models. These include color palettes, undifferentiated forms and color fields, and architectural motifs that may derive from contemporary views of Tbilisi, suggesting a local Georgian artistic milieu and familiarity with monumental painting. The miniatures are marked by the absence of a gold ground and gold pigment, which distances them from the classical tradition of Iranian miniature painting. In contrast, Wardrop d.17, with fifty-one illustrations, represents a more provincial and folk-oriented strand of Georgian miniature production. By comparing the Bodleian manuscripts with contemporaneous illustrated copies preserved in Georgian collections and with Persian visual traditions, the study argues that these works exemplify a creative synthesis that contributed to the formation of a distinct Oriental-Georgian literary language within 17th century Georgian art. © 2026 *Bull. Natl. Acad. Sci. Georg.*

Keywords: Bodleian *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* manuscripts, miniature, Persian art, Georgian secular art

Introduction

The Oliver and Marjory Wardrop Collection at the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford, along with a wide range of archival materials and items

related to Georgian cultural heritage, also preserves two illustrated manuscripts of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* dated to the 17th century – Wardrop d.17 and Wardrop d. 27. These works exemplify a

stage in the formation of Georgian miniature painting and book art marked by the pronounced influence of Persian artistic traditions. The political and cultural context of the period, characterized by the growing impact of Persian secular literature and visual aesthetics, introduced through translations, stimulated the flourishing of local secular artistic production. Within this milieu, the numerous versions and illustrated copies of Shota Rustaveli's 12th century epic poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* reflect a significant synthesis of Georgian and Persian artistic elements, revealing the dynamic interplay between indigenous tradition and foreign stylistic influences in late medieval Georgian art.

The paper focuses on the examination of the illustrations of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* preserved in the Bodleian Library and highlights their artistic and stylistic characteristics. Particular attention is given to the formal and compositional features of the miniature paintings, considered both in relation to contemporary Persian book art schools and within the context of the local Georgian artistic environment of the period. The study traces the history and production of these manuscripts, analyses the nature and significance of their miniatures, explores the creative work of Georgian artists trained in Iranian artistic tradition. It further seeks to compare these illustrations with other known pictorial cycles of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, thereby situating the Bodleian manuscripts within the broader corpus of Georgian illuminated secular literature. In the development and evolution of late medieval Georgian secular book art, these illustrations of Shota Rustaveli's poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* made a significant contribution.

The study of extant illustrated manuscripts suggests that the earliest illustrated copies of the poem have been lost. The majority of artistically decorated codices that have reached us are dated to the 16th and 17th centuries, while the most complete surviving manuscript containing the text of the poem is from the 17th century. Special attention

deserves the fact that just fourteen are illustrated out of 164 known copies. Among the illustrated codices of the poem, two manuscripts (Wardrop d.17 and Wardrop d.27) preserved in Oxford stand out. Their illustrations, although informed by the Oriental traditions of book art, present distinct artistic approaches, each reflecting a unique visual conception.

Thus, the diversity of the material and the need for its analysis from new perspectives have made a comprehensive study essential.

It is well established that Persian miniature painting of the Safavid period was characterized by exceptional artistic quality and highly refined aesthetic (Grabar, 2000, 65-66). Georgian artists of the time engaged closely with the artistic traditions of Persian manuscript production, drawing inspiration from their compositional balance, chromatic subtlety and decorative sophistication.

It is important to note that painters of Georgian origin were active and highly successful at the royal court of Iran, where they secured a distinguished place in the history of Safavid art.

Emphasis should be given to the miniaturist of Siyavush Beg Gorji (1536–1616), one of the outstanding masters of the late sixteenth century and Ali Quli Jabbadar, a seventeenth-century painter of Georgian origin.

Against this background, it is not surprising that the illustrations of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, like those found in the Georgian translations of Persian epics and literary works, follow the tradition of Persian miniature painting.

However, as is generally acknowledged, a full understanding of this phenomenon requires consideration of two key factors: First, Iranian miniature painting at that time was still at the zenith of its development and its sphere of influence extended throughout the East; Second, Georgian painting during the same period was undergoing a relative decline, which naturally prompted Georgian artists to turn toward Persian artistic models for inspiration and renewal (Khuskivadze, 1976, 9;

Khuskivadze, 2018, 67). Safavid-period Iranian art brought together the artistic traditions and achievements of several major miniature schools – Herat, Qasvin, Tabriz, Shiraz and Isfahan – raising this branch of Iranian painting to the level of true artistic masterpieces.

Thus, the Bodleian illustrations of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* and more broadly the development of Georgian secular miniature painting, should be viewed not as a direct or blind imitation of the Iranian tradition, but as the result of a process of fusion and transformation. This process laid the foundation for a new, synthetic artistic movement within Georgian art, in which Oriental aesthetics and national artistic vision are organically intertwined.

Discussion

During their stay in Georgia, Marjory and Sir J. Oliver Wardrop actively collected examples of Georgian manuscript heritage. Among the copies of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* preserved in the Bodleian Library, one – Wardrop d.17 – originally belonged to Mzekhatun, the daughter of King David II of Imereti and the spouse of Simon Tsereteli. In 1911 manuscript was donated to the Bodleian Library by the Tsereteli family as a gesture of respect and appreciation towards the Wardrops (The extensive Wardrop Archive housed in the Bodleian Library also includes epistolary material confirming this).

The second book, Wardrop d.27 (the so-called Tarkhan-Mouravi MS), after a prolonged period of travels and changing ownership, in 1949 was acquired by the Bodleian Library. For approximately two decades, the manuscript remained in the possession of Ekvtime Taqaishvili, under the condition that it would ultimately be transferred to the ownership of the Historical and Ethnographic Society of Georgia. He is the author of the earliest publication on the manuscript, providing an overview of its history, a codicological analysis,

and an initial dating of the codex to the 17th century (Taqaishvili, 1991, 62-63).

In both manuscripts, written in Mkhedruli script, the authentic text is set within characteristic of 17th century Georgian manuscripts four-color frames, and the beginnings of each stanza is highlighted in cinnabar.

The manuscripts contain no colophons or inscriptions indicating the place or date of copying, the scribe, the commissioner, or the artist. Instead, they are adorned with numerous later marginal notes (among them inscriptions by Catholicos Anton), extensive textual additions or unskilled poetic works inspired by Rustaveli, variety of marginal notes of unclear origin (in Georgian, Armenian, Persian, Turkish, Lesgian languages). On the basis of their palaeographic and artistic characteristics both manuscripts are dated to the 17th century.

The texts of the Oxford manuscripts of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* are well established: Wardrop d. 17 is referred to by the siglum T, and the Wardrop d. 27 by the siglum Z (Tsaishvili, 1984: 414-416). The Wardrop d. 17 manuscript comprises 1,867 stanzas. The prologue is missing and was subsequently restored on the basis of the printed edition by Vakhtang VI. The text begins with stanza 146 and belongs to the extended version of the poem's redaction (the so-called Mzekhatun). The Wardrop d. 27 manuscript contains 1,536 stanzas, with several folios missing. Its text belongs to the extended redaction and entirely follows the first version of the poem as defined in S. Tsaishvili's classification of *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*. (Tsaishvili, 1984, 415).

Both manuscripts are nourished by Persian artistic traditions, yet the difference between them is striking. The artist of Wardrop d.27, while engaged in diverse artistic explorations, strives to match the technical mastery of Iranian miniaturists; whereas the artist of Wardrop d.17 appears as a representative of a provincial, folk-oriented stream, who nevertheless remains perceptibly under the impact of Persian art.

The manuscript **Wardrop d.27** contains twenty-one miniatures, illustrating exclusively the major key episodes of the poem: 1. The meeting of Avtandil with Khatavian brothers and acquaintance with the story of Tariel; (f. 8r); 2. Avtandil climbing a tree and seeing Tariel and Asmat (f.10v); 3. The meeting of Avtandil and Asmat in the cave (f.14r); 4. The meeting of Avtandil and Tariel (f.15v); 5. Tariel recounting of his own story to Avtandil. (f.21r); 6. The meeting of Tariel and Nestan-Darejan and his fainting (f.26v); 7. Asmat handing the letter of Nestan-Darejan to Tariel (f.29v); 8. Tariel returns as a conqueror hero from Khataeti and capture of King Ramaz (39r); 9. Tariel helps Pridon in the Battle (55v); 10. Avtandil tells King Rostevan the story of Tariel (f. 62r); 11. Avtandil's testament; Shermadin appointed as a vice-regent (f.78v); 12. Tariel's slaying of the lion and the panther and his fainting (f.88r); 13. The meeting of Avtandil and Pridon, their hunting and slaying of griffon (f.97r); 14. Avtandil's naval battle and his victory (f.104v); 15. Patman's slave beholds Nestan-Darejan in the fortress of Kajeti and delivers the letter to her (f. 129r); 16. Avtandil brings Tariel the news of Nestan-Darejan and Tariel's fainting (f.137v); 17. Battle at the fortress of Kajeti (f.145r); 18. The wedding of Tariel and Nestan-Darejan (f.151r); 19. The wedding of Avtandil and Tinatin (f.161r); 20. Tariel kills King Ramadan (f.168r); 21. The Wedding of Tariel and Nestan-Darejan in India (f.172r). Only three of these illustrations are incorporated into the text (f.14r, 21r, 29v), while eighteen are placed as full-page images. Their versos are left blank and filled with later-period marginal notes. In his description of the manuscript, Basil Gray emphasizes that the miniatures – with their small figures, costumes and delicate line – resemble 16th century Iranian painting more than that of the 17th century (Gray, 1951, 196) In dating the manuscript, all scholars accept the 17th century chronology proposed by Ekvtime Taqaishvili, while at the same time not disregarding Gray's suggestion of a 16th century date.

Several miniatures and the opening folios of the poem are missing, as reflected in the disrupted narrative sequence at the beginning of the text. The manuscript was rebound at the Bodleian Library in 1949.

In this paper, we discuss only a few artistic aspects of the manuscript's miniatures, specifically those features that distinguish the Bodleian manuscript from the illustrations of the poem preserved at the National Centre of Manuscripts (NCM H-2074, S-5006, H-599) and dating to the same period.

The miniatures of **Wardrop d. 27** were executed by two artists and are of a notably high artistic standard. They can be dated, with some probability, to the second half of the seventeenth century and reflect an effort to renew the visual language. Within this series of miniatures oriented toward Iranian artistic traditions, the principles of late Isfahanian art become discernible; The compositions move away from a purely decorative, carpet-like character and instead highlight the poem's key narrative moments.

Characterized by unified forms, relatively uncluttered backgrounds and a restrained palette, pink, silver, purple, grey and light brown, the miniatures achieve visual clarity and compositional balance. According to Sh. Amiranashvili, the miniatures belong to the 17th, although some appear to be based on prototypes originating from the 13th-14th centuries paintings (Amiranashvili, 1966, 29).

The miniatures included in the Bodleian manuscript may be divided into several groups: a) Scenes unfolding against a landscape background; b) hunting and battle compositions, including naval battle; 4. architectural constructions; 5. Compositions set in interior spaces.

One of the defining features of this manuscript's illustrations is the preference for large-scale figures, presented as if brought close to the viewer, almost in a cropped or close-up view. The figures stand out sharply against thick, dimmed backgrounds, their silhouettes clearly defined by the

coloring of their garments. Color is applied in broad, opaque layers with minimal modeling.

Across these miniatures, a consistent pictorial language emerges, one shaped by the conventions of Safavid painting yet filtered through Georgian interpretation. Each composition is built on the characteristic vertical format of Persianate manuscript art, where figures, horses and landscape elements appear stacked upon one another rather than receding in depth, creating a flattened, ornamental surface. The landscapes are dominated by steep, undulating mountains rendered in warm ochres, reds and yellows, often outlined in dark ink and juxtaposed with a dense vegetal ground that features stylized flowers and sprigs. The mountain motif, an essential element of the Iranian miniature landscape, is depicted through heavy, multicolored rock formations typical of the Isfahan school of miniature painting.

The sky is almost invariably painted in a saturated ultramarine tone, now partially abraded, further emphasizing the decorative, rather than naturalistic, treatment of space.

Figures appear in elegantly simplified poses, with elongated torsos, almond-shaped eyes and schematic facial features (the faces are mostly damaged or have been retouched at a later date by an unskilled hand), their expressions subdued. The clothing consistently follows Safavid models: long, fitted tunics belted at the waist, layered robes in contrasting colors and tall, rounded caps sometimes crowned with feathers. These sartorial elements underscore the courtly ethos of the scenes, whether the figures are engaged in dialogue, riding on horseback or shown in solitude. In several compositions, two or three figures sit on low ground planes, their bodies turned toward one another in gestures of speech or consolation. The rock formations behind them rise like theatrical drapery; Dark, voluminous cloaks and bent postures evoke mourning or lamentation, especially in the scenes where a solitary black-robed figure dominates the composition, its form silhouetted against the rocky

landscape with a striking sense of visual drama (ff. 14r, 15v, 21r). In these scenes, the artist's reliance on color-field contrasts, deep blacks against bright minerals-creates a heightened symbolic charge that compensates for the otherwise limited expressive range. The cycle also includes scenes often set against sloping hills dotted with stylized trees. These trees, depicted with round, cloud-like crowns (f. 137v) or dense, tangled foliage, reflect the painter's engagement with both Persianate garden imagery and local decorative traditions.

A group of miniatures clearly reflects the influence of Iranian compositional traditions, manifested in a carpet-like spatial organization and a hierarchical structuring of the pictorial field. The upper register is occupied by the principal figures, followed below by viziers and nobles, while the lower zone is reserved for secondary figures such as servants, musicians, or dancers. This carpet-like quality is partially softened by the use of undivided forms and color fields, which function as an important expressive feature.

Some miniatures (ff.29v, 161r) display a schematic manner of execution, while maintaining a sense of symmetry. At first glance, the thickly applied paint produces a muted, dusk-like palette, enlivened by sharp, bright color accents. Color is applied in broad, opaque layers, with minimal modeling. The line varies in character, appearing fluid and plastic in some cases and more rigid or angular in others.

The Battle (ff.39r, 55r) miniatures depict densely composed military scenes characterized by pronounced visual compression and a strong sense of movement. The pictorial space is shallow and almost entirely filled by interlocking figures, horses and weapons, creating a carpet-like density in which action unfolds across overlapping planes rather than through spatial depth. Diagonal axes formed by lances, raised arms and rearing horses structure the compositions and heighten their dynamic tension.

Stylistically, the figures are rendered schematically, with simplified anatomy and standardized facial features; individuality is subordinated to collective action. Expressive intensity is conveyed primarily through posture, gesture and directional movement. The color palette is dominated by warm ochre tones, yellows, reds and browns, occasionally punctuated by darker accents, which unify the scenes and reinforce their dramatic impact. In both miniatures, narrative urgency takes precedence over decorative refinement, reflecting Persianate conventions of mass battle imagery adapted within a local manuscript tradition.

One miniature (f.104v) presents a rare and conceptually focused maritime scene in which narrative action unfolds entirely within an aquatic environment. Two small boats occupy the pictorial field, set against a densely patterned sea rendered through rhythmic, repetitive wave motifs. The surface of the water dominates the composition, effectively suppressing spatial depth and transforming the sea into an all-encompassing, abstract field of action. The scene emphasizes struggle and confrontation at sea, articulated through the gestures and postures of the figures wielding spears and poles. The absence of a shoreline or architectural reference intensifies the sense of isolation and danger, while the repetition of fish beneath the boats reinforces the aquatic setting as both physical environment and symbolic space. Stylistically, the miniature is marked by a pronounced flatness and a deliberate avoidance of spatial recession. The sea is rendered as a continuous ornamental surface, composed of repetitive curvilinear patterns that recall Iranian pictorial conventions. The restrained palette, dominated by muted blues, greys and ochre tones, serves to unify the composition and heighten the contrast between the animated figures and the abstracted environment.

In comparison with contemporary illustrated copies of the poem preserved at the National Centre of Manuscripts, this miniature stands out for its

singular thematic focus (NCMS-5006, ff.122r, 124r, 188r; NCM H-599, f.160r).

Completely different, one might even say new, artistic approaches become evident in the depiction of architecture (ff. 129r, 145r). The miniatures form a closely related pair centered on architectural space and siege imagery, with fortified structures occupying a dominant visual role. The compositions are vertically structured and organized around massive stone walls, towers and gates, rendered with pronounced geometric clarity. A fortress tower encircled by a crenellated wall, surmounted by a conical roof and flanked by a dense cluster of buildings cascading down the slope, entirely dominates the pictorial field and represents a striking departure from architectural types prevalent in both Persian and Georgian miniature painting of the period. Architectural elements are depicted schematically yet emphatically, functioning as both setting and narrative agent, while figures are distributed across different spatial levels, within towers, on battlements and at ground level, creating a clear hierarchical articulation of action. The miniatures employ a restrained palette dominated by greens, reds and ochre tones, with brickwork and stone surfaces articulated through repetitive linear patterns rather than illusionistic depth. It should be noted that the miniatures show an attempt to use perspective, even if imperfectly applied. This partially breaks the flatness of the image and clearly distinguishes these works from Iranian miniature painting. In the search for comparable architectural backgrounds in Oriental art, parallels may be found in Ottoman miniatures; however, the architectural settings are also often derived from European urban views.

More importantly, similar architectural forms appear in 18th engravings of Tbilisi produced by foreign travelers and artists (In this respect, the accounts of J. Chardin deserve particular attention). This suggests that the painter was directly inspired by views of Tbilisi itself. This highlights the artist's Georgian origin and the place where the manuscript

was illuminated, as seen also in the depictions of domed churches in contemporary manuscript of “The Knight in Panther’s Skin” (NCM H-599, f. 7r, 124v).

A fragment preserved at the Korneli Kekelidze National Centre of Manuscripts (NCM Fr.147) - a folio detached from *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin* - bears the same distinctive features. In terms of artistic and stylistic characteristics, it is undoubtedly part of the cycle of illustrations belonging to manuscript Wardrop d.27. Miniature depicts a courtly gathering with nobles, musicians and attendants in an outdoor setting, rendered in a manner strongly reminiscent of Safavid-period painting, the same artistic milieu that shaped many Georgian secular miniatures of the 16th -17th centuries. The first scholar to study this fragment, E. Machavariani, explicitly notes its close resemblance to the Bodleian manuscript. She argues that the miniature was originally placed at the beginning of the codex and represented the scene with King Rostevan and Tinatin (Machavariani, 2012, 88). Relying solely on photographic evidence, she concludes that the three illustrations incorporated into the text and this fragment are contemporaneous, whereas the remaining eighteen full-page miniatures were added to the manuscript at a later date (Machavariani, 2012, 86–87). P. Margvelashvili, however, believes that the scene represents “the meeting of King Rostevan and Avtandil” (Margvelashvili, 2013, 50-51). This view is convincing, since in all known depictions of “Tinatin’s enthronement”, the king and his daughter are invariably shown on an equal level; one point remains clear: the miniature originally formed the part of the beginning section of the manuscript.

The palette of deep greens, reds, blues and blacks further enhances the sumptuousness of their attire, while the variety of headwear, ranging from softly wrapped turbans to tall rounded caps, felt hats and tightly fitted skullcaps partially covered by veils, reinforces the hierarchical nuances and

aesthetic codes of Safavid court culture. Collectively, these sartorial elements emphasize the figures’ elegance, refinement and elevated social status within the depicted setting. The furniture in the miniature reinforces the hierarchical structure of the scene, with the central figure seated on an elevated platform covered in a green textile that resembles the rich velvets or embroidered fabrics typical of Safavid ceremonial seating, its geometric, box-like construction evoking the small throne; The musical instrument held by the kneeling figure is a long-necked lute closely resembling the tanbur or setar of the Persianate world, and the musician’s manner of holding corresponds precisely to traditional performance postures; its presence, together with the attentive stance of the surrounding attendants, situates the gathering firmly within the iconography of the majlis, where poetry, music and courtly leisure intermingle and contributes to the overall impression of a refined cultural milieu shaped by Safavid aesthetic norms.

It is particularly important to note that, in accordance with the content of the poem, the artist does not avoid ethnic differentiation when depicting the wedding scene of Tariel and Nestan-Darejan in India (f.172r). This is reflected in the types of dancers and musicians, their attire (such as the saree), facial features and other cultural characteristics associated with India.

The second manuscript **Ward. d. 17**, dated paleographically and stylistically to the late 17th century (It may also be dated to the turn of the 17th -18th centuries). Although all fifty-one miniatures were executed on Italian paper of consistent quality and accompanied by annotations written by the same calligraphic hand, the pictorial execution itself remains relatively uniform and restrained. Painted by two artists, the miniatures show limited stylistic variation and a generally low level of artistic vision. The flatness of the compositions results from a different conception of space. The artist’s provincial hand is visible in the frequent inconsistencies of proportion, the naïve drawing of

horses' heads and limbs, and the mechanical repetitions of floral motifs, yet these very traits provide the cycle with its distinctive aesthetic identity. The viewer observes the scene from an elevated viewpoint; consequently, figures, groups of figures and objects are arranged one above another, without overlapping or obscuring one another; Despite the evident influence of Iranian miniature painting, decorative solutions are repetitive and largely lack visual richness, relying primarily on sharp orange accents to enliven otherwise subdued compositions. Stylistically, the figures are schematized, with simplified facial features and limited individualization. The palette is restrained, dominated by soft earth tones and muted purples, with brighter accents used sparingly to articulate garments. Particularly striking are the vivid orange and green tones. The colors appear almost watercolor-like, while the yellowish texture of the paper, visible between areas of paint, contributes to an overall chromatic unity. The miniatures no longer retain the carpet-like decorativeness characteristic of earlier examples.

Conclusion

After studying the miniatures contained in the Bodleian Library manuscripts of *The Knight in the Panther Skin* and comparing them with contemporary Persian and Georgian painting, we can draw the following conclusions:

The miniatures of **Ward. d. 27** are distinguished by a high artistic quality and may be dated, with some probability, to the second half of the seventeenth century. Despite the presence of Iranian influence, they reveal an attempt to develop a new artistic vision. The influence of the 16th

century Iranian art observable in certain miniatures should be attributed to the use of earlier Persian models or, possibly, to the artist's reliance on Iranian *muraqqa'* albums.

The painter of manuscript d.27, and it is likely that two painters can be distinguished, was clearly well acquainted with examples of Georgian monumental painting and it is likely that undifferentiated forms and colors entered his work precisely under the influence of wall paintings. The absence of gold grounds and gold pigment, characteristic of Iranian miniature, not only points to the modest means of the patron but also reflects the influence of contemporary Georgian painting and the artist's inclination toward monumental art. It is also plausible that the manuscript was produced in Tbilisi, as suggested by certain architectural constructions that correspond to those seen in engravings of Tbilisi from that period.

The illustrations of second manuscript **Ward.d.17**, despite its low level of execution, is distinguished by its narrative character and represents an important example of Georgian secular miniature painting.

It is evident that Georgian artists worked within a cultural milieu deeply imbued with Iranian artistic taste, shaped and refined in accordance with the aesthetic expectations of the aristocratic society of the period.

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ნ. ქავთარია

კორნელი კეკელიძის სახ. საქართველოს ხელნაწერთა ეროვნული ცენტრი, თბილისი, საქართველო

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ა. არაბულის მიერ)

ნაშრომში განხილულია ოქსფორდის უნივერსიტეტის, ბოდლეს ბიბლიოთეკის ოლივერ და მარჯორი უორდროპების კოლექციაში დაცული შოთა რუსთაველის „ვეფხისტყაოსნის“ XVII საუკუნის ორი დასურათებული ხელნაწერის (Wardrop d.17 და Wardrop d.27) ილუსტრაციები ქართული საერო წიგნის მხატვრობისა და სეფიანთა პერიოდის ირანული მინიატიურული მხატვრობის კონტექსტში. ინტენსიური პოლიტიკური და კულტურული გარდაქმნების ეპოქაში შექმნილი ეს ხელნაწერები საქართველოში აღმოსავლური მხატვრული გავლენების განსაკუთრებულ პროცესს ასახავს. სტილისტური და კომპოზიციური ანალიზის საფუძველზე, ნაშრომში ნაჩვენებია, რომ, მიუხედავად მხატვრის განსწავლულობისა, გვიანდელ სეფიანურ, განსაკუთრებით კი ისფაჰანურ მხატვრულ ტრადიციებში, Wardrop d. 27 ხელნაწერში გამოვლენილია ის ელემენტები, რომლებიც ირანულ მოდელებს ემიჯნება: ფერთა პალიტრა, დაუნაწევრებელი ფორმები და ფერები, აგრეთვე, ციხე-კოშკისა და ქალაქის არქიტექტურა, რომელიც შესაძლოა თბილისის ხედებიდან მომდინარეობდეს და ადგილობრივი ქართული მხატვრული გარემოსა და მონუმენტური მხატვრობის ცოდნაზე მიანიშნებდეს. მინიატიურებში უგულებელყოფილია ოქროს ფონები და ოქროს პიგმენტის გამოყენება, რაც მათ აშორებს ირანული მინიატიურული მხატვრობის კლასიკურ ტრადიციას. ამის საპირისპიროდ, Wardrop d.17 მინიატიურები უფრო პროვინციულ, ე.წ. ხალხურ მიმართულებას წარმოაჩენს. ბოდლეს ხელნაწერების შედარება თანადროულ ქართულ დასურათებულ ნუსხებსა და სპარსულ მხატვრულ ტრადიციებთან გვაფიქრებინებს, რომ ეს ნამუშევრები წარმოდგენს შემოქმედებით სინთეზს, რომელმაც XVII საუკუნის ქართულ ხელოვნებაში განსაკუთრებული ისლამურ-ქართული მხატვრული ენის ჩამოყალიბებას შეუწყო ხელი.

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