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Georgian illuminated charters: art historical and cultural study

My thesis on Georgian Illuminated charters from the Early Modern Era aims to represent poorly studied part of Georgian art. The exploration of illuminated charters will add a lot to our understanding of the Early Modern Georgian culture, and the identity of Georgian art in general.

About forty deeds preserved until today are dating back from the period of the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, and are issued by the Georgian kings, noblemen and clerics.

Illumination of legal documents presents variety of artistic trends. Coexistence of the Byzantine, post-Byzantine and Georgian artistic features in the fifteenth century, increase of the Islamic tastes from the sixteenth century that lasted for more than a century, the strong interest for the Western art and culture clearly shown in the eighteenth century – all these reflect general cultural and political developments in the country. These developments were stipulated with the role of Georgia, as of the geographical and cultural crossroad between the East and the West, and peculiarities of the Early Modern Era for the country situated between two Islamic empires, when links with the Christian world, including the Catholic West, were crucial for its further development.

My research is based on comparative analysis and interdisciplinary research of the material. Religious art presented with manuscript illumination, wall painting, embroidery, metalwork and easel painting, as well as historical chronicles and literary texts are widely used to understand the essential characteristics of the illuminated charters and their cultural context.

The main issue of the study is exploration of the process of transition from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era expressed in Georgian culture, the secular art being of special interest. The narrative, iconographic elements and style of charter illuminations are explored. Texts of legal documents and their illuminations are studied in correlation with the political views and artistic taste of their issuers. Cases with the historical events reflected in charters decoration are also found.

One of the major issues comprises the interrelation between the means of expressions of the secular and religious art in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era, and understanding of the role and importance of secular art in the cultural trends of the time.