

International Memory of the World Register

Manuscript Collection of Shota Rustaveli's Poem "Knight in the Panther's Skin"

(Georgia)

2012-45

1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

The Medieval epic poem "Knight in the Panther's Skin" is a national epos of Georgian people written in the XII-XIII cc. by Shota Rustaveli during the reign of Queen Tamar — the time period that is most frequently called the "Golden Era" of Georgia.

The significance and importance of this poem which qualify it for nomination can be characterized by different distinguishing features. First of all, it is a wonderful mixture of Georgian, Oriental and European cultural traditions that was created during major political, socio-economic and cultural changes throughout the whole Caucasian and Middle East regions. That is why the importance of the poem extends beyond just one nation or country, but belongs to the World Cultural Heritage. Secondly, it provides unique information about the lifestyle, traditions, and characterizations of different social groups in the Middle Ages — from the Royal family ending with merchants and peasants. In addition to this, "Knight in the Panther's Skin" can also be characterized as the peak of development of neo-Platonic thinking and a hymn of human nature, friendship and love, equality and struggle for freedom and liberty, etc. Finally, this poem contains a huge aesthetic value distinguished by calligraphy, decorations, miniatures, etc.

Rustaveli's Poem "Knight in the Panther's Skin" has an enormously great importance for both the scholars of Georgian and Caucasian studies and for scholars of the Middle East. It is widely acknowledged that the Poem supplies incomparable information regarding the different political, economic, social and cultural aspects of all the geographic areas.

This nominated collection is the largest collection, including 96 manuscript books (94 from the National Centre of Manuscripts and 2 from the Bodleian Libraries) from the depositories of National Centre of Manuscripts, Tbilisi, Georgia and the Bodleian Libraries, United Kingdom from XVI-XVIII cc.

It's also worth mentioning that Shota Rustaveli's epic poem "Knight in the Panther's Skin" is the first Georgian secular book printed in Georgian typography in 1712. The fact that

UNESCO announced 2012 as a celebration of the 300th anniversary of the poem's first printed edition further underlines the significance and importance of the poem not only to Georgia, but to the rest of the World.

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

National Centre of Manuscripts, Tbilisi, Georgia;

Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland;

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

Owning Institutions of the Nominated Documentary Heritage.

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Dr. Buba Kudava — Director, National Centre of Manuscripts; Amiran Makaradze — Head of International Relations Service;

Dr. Gillian Evison - Head of the Bodleian Libraries' Oriental Section & Indian Institute Librarian;

Contact details

Name

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3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

The Nominated Collection consists of Manuscript books of Shota Rustaveli's Poem "Knight in the Panther's Skin" (XII c.) from the depositories of the National Centre of Manuscripts, Tbilisi, Georgia and the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford;

Collection from the National Centre of Manuscripts>	42) 3061	XVII c;	
A - Fonds:	43) 3249	XVII c;	
363 - XVII c.			
530 -1834;	Q - Fund:		
855 -1790;			
859 -1816;	44) 239.	XIX c;	
933 - 1712;	45) 246.	1867 ;	
1123 -1833;	46) 261.	XVII c,;	
	47) 279.	1826 ;	
H - Fund:	48) 280.	XIX c;	
	49) 375.	XIX c;	
7)54	1680;	50) 376.	XIX c,;
8)167	XIX c;	51) 431.	XIX c;
9) 248.	XIX c;	52) 433.	XIX c;
10) 288.	1829;	53) 483.	XIX c;
11)	302. 1803;	54) 566.	XIX c;
12) 403.	1818;	55)622.	XIX c;
13) 412.	XIX c;	56) 714.	XVIII c;
14) 455.	XIX c;	57)733.	XX c;
15) 599.	1646;	58)737.	XIX-XX c;
16) 740.	XVIII c;	59)768.	XIX c;

17) 741.	XIX c;.	60) 779.	XVIII c;
18) 742.	1869;	61) 796.	XIX c;
19) 743.	XIX c;	62) 797.	XIX c;
20) 757.	1671;	63) 798.	1842 c;.
21) 783.	1857;	64) 799.	XIX c;
22) 925.	XVIII c;	65) 931.	XVII c;
23) 933.	1834;	66) 1076.	XVIII c;
24) 937.	XIXc;.	67) 1083.	XVII c ;
25) 964 a, b.- XVIIIc, XIX c.;		68) 1211.	1831 c;
26) 1079.	1823;	69) 1265.	XVIII c;
		70) 1322.	XVIII c;
		71) 1336.	XVIII c;
27) 1090.	XIXc;	72) 1370.	1823;
28) 1128.	XIX c;	73) 1444.	1838;
29) 1205.	1833 ;.	74) 1542.	1712;
30) 1279.	XIX c;.	75) 1566.	XIX c;
31) 1280.	XIX c;		
32) 1759	XIX c;	S- Fund:	
33) 1839	XIX c;	76) 305.	XIX c;
34) 2052	XIX c;	77) 1418.	XVII-XVIII c;
35) 2055	XIX c;	78) 1515.	XIXc;
36) 2074	XVI-XVII c;	79) 1675.	XVII-XVIII c;
37) 2323	1806;	80) 1727.	1825 ;
38) 2610	XVIII c;	81) 2315.	XIXc;
39) 2689	XIX c;	82) 2686.	XIXc;
40) 2850	XIXc;	83) 2781.	1836 ;
41) 2930	XIX c;	84) 2829.	1688 ;
85) 3077.	XVIII c ;		
86) 3430.	XIX c ;		
87) 3441.	1841;		

Collection from the Bodleian Library:

88) 3442.	1849 ;		
89) 4499.	XVII c. ;	95).	1) MS.Wardr.d.17
90) 4527.	1805 ;	96).	2) MS.Ward.d.27
91) 4699.	1837 ;		
92) 4731.	1827;		
93) 5006.	XVIII c.;		
94) 5207.	XIX c. ;		

3.2 Catalogue or registration details

For this information, please see 3.1.

3.4 History/provenance

There are 94 manuscript books of Shota Rustaveli's Poem "Knight in the Panther's Skin" at

the National Centre of Manuscripts and two at the Bodleian Libraries. Some of the manuscripts are entire, while in some cases only some fragments of them reached us. The majority of existing manuscript books are from 16th-18th centuries as earlier pieces had been either obliterated by different means (invasions, wars, fire) or lost.

The majority of these manuscript books was the belongings of Georgian princes and princess and had been either purchased by or gifted to the National Centre of Manuscripts and its predecessor institutions.

The oldest fragment of the Poem from the XVI century was discovered at Akhaltsikhe Museum by the expedition of The Institute of the Manuscripts (National Centre of Manuscripts) in 1963.

MSS H-599 (National Centre of Manuscripts) was scribed by the outstanding calligraphist Mamuka Tavakarashvili who scribed the poem in 1646 according to the order of Prince Dadiani of Samegrelo. MSS H-54 (National Centre of Manuscripts) had been made for King George the XI in 1680 by his Royal calligraphist and writer.

MSS Q-261 (National Centre of Manuscripts) had been scribed in the XVII century in the Western Georgian Kingdom of Imereti.

Wardr.d.17 (The Bodleian Libraries) belonged at one time to Princess Mzhatuni, daughter of King Davit of Imereti and was presented to the library by Prince Girogi Cereteli in 1911, through Princess Venera Cereteli. With the intermediacy of Miss Marjory Wardrop, it reached the Bodleian Library on July 6th, 1914.

Wardr.d.27 (The Bodleian Libraries) was purchased from the executors of Sir Bernard Edkstein on 21st February, 1949, the Marjory Wardrop Fund contributing half the cost.

E. Takaishvili (in La Georgie Independante, no. 118, Oct. 1935) attributes it to the second half of the 17th century but Basil Gray notes that the style of costumes in the miniatures is more reminiscent of the 16th century.

3.5 Bibliography See attached article by Basil Gray, Bodleian Library Record, vol. 3, no. 32, Aug. 1951.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name

Address

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+44 1865 270708

4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

external evidences made by various scholars, like: Ekvtime Takaishvili, J.O.Wardrop, S.Tsaishvili, B.Gray and etc.

5.2 World significance

Rustaveli's epic poem was composed in the so-called "Golden Era" of Georgia's history during the reign of King Tamar (1184 - 1213) and is estimated to be the most important national epic by the Georgian people. The nominated collection is unique due to various aspects: first of all it contains the most important and the oldest manuscript books of the "Knight in the Panther's Skin" that are distinguished by the unique calligraphy and scribe, style and form. Many of them are rich in splendid miniatures and illuminations, alongside irreplaceable information regarding the political, social, economic and cultural situation in XII-XIII cc (MSS H-599, MSS H-54, MSS Q-261, Wardr.d.17, Wardr.d.27 and etc.). Georgia and throughout the entire region of the Caucasus and Middle East.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

1 Time

The Poem was composed in XII-XIII c during the so called Georgian Renaissance that is also called as "Golden Era" of Georgia. This time period is also characterised by the mixture of Georgian, Oriental and European cultures in Georgia that have been reflected in the Poem in a very professional way.

Thus, this is a poem that has been composed during time of major social, political, economic and cultural changes in the above mentioned time period. This factor has had an enormous influence not only on Georgia itself but on the entire region of the Caucasus and beyond.

2 Place

The documentary heritage itself gives very important information about the geography of XII-XIII centuries, it describes different states and cities based on an actual places.

However, the nominated documentary heritage is scribed in different regions of Georgia that also provides us with very significant information on social and economic realities in these different regions in XVI-XVIII cc.

3 People

As the Poem itself contains several hundreds of stanzas it definitely provides very meaningful information about the life style of the people in the Middle Ages throughout in those geographical areas that are covered by the poem. It reflects significant aspects of human behaviour and structure of different social groups and persons: kings, queens, princes, merchants, warriors, peasantry, knights and etc.

Apart from this the colophons of the nominated documents contain invaluable information regarding to the social, economic and political structure of Georgia in XVI-XVIII cc, about outstanding writers and calligraphists, rich noblemen, royal families and etc.

4 Subject and theme

Themes, which are presented in the poem, give a clear idea about the ancient Georgian political and social circumstances, because there is represented trustworthy information about the real situation in the country. In particular, the idea of the men and women's equality (gender balance), that makes it possible for the woman to become a king; the feudatory institution which is

analogously reflected in the poem; Also, characteristics of the Georgians — suffering torture and stubborn, fighting against the enemy, which helped them to survive. In the poem, Shota Rustaveli, represents idealized personages, who in spite of the physical excellence are also wise, brave, cheerful, devoted to the friends, and perfect servants of the king. For the Georgians these features were not only the focus of action, but also worthy example. The fact, that poem was translated into the language of the almost every civilized country, proves that the ideas presented in the poem were [worthy for the every nation] universal. To uphold of these ideas morally and mentally enhances and develops people.

5 Form and style

The aesthetical value of this collection is formed not only by the external side of the manuscripts — high quality paper, brilliant calligraphy, decoration with well-crated ornaments, highly artistic illustrations, but also by the pithy subject of the poem. The thinking and lifestyle of physically and morally talented personages, which is reflected not only in their actions, but also in passing thoughts and opinions in their relationship, also helps in the formation of aesthetical values. Wisdom and national experience, which is presented in the poem, is essentially important for every people of any epoch. The Author's hortative are frequent in the poem. They are given in the forms of aphorism-saying and are as urgent now, in the literature and daily life, as it they were in the period of creation.

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

"Knight in the Panther's Skin" had great influence on the poets of following centuries. Writing in a similar way to Rustaveli was an indicator of the giftedness of a poet. Until now, because of its highly artistic [poetical] and poetic qualities work, the poem has no equal.

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

6.2 Integrity

6.1. This nominated documentary heritage belongs to the oldest, very unique and rare manuscript books of Shota Rustaveli's Poem "Knight in the Panther's Skin" from XII c.

Their rarity and importance is also determined by the fact that the handwritten manuscript books are distinguishable one from another by a variety of features.

6.2. The nominated documentary heritage is a completed collection of the Shota Rustaveli's poem "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" that is preserved at the depositories of National Centre of Manuscripts and includes 94 of the manuscript books of the poem from the XII c. in addition to two manuscript books from the Bodleian Libraries.