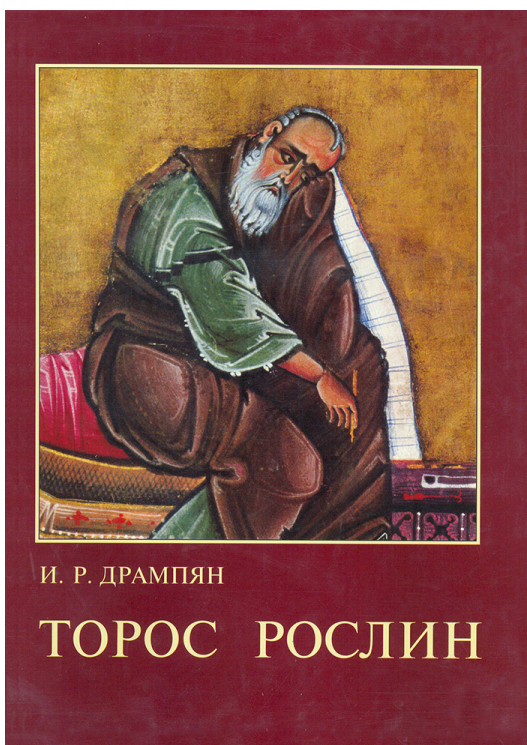


TOROS ROSLIN

Drampian I. R.

Doctor of Sciences (Arts)

S U M M A R Y



Toros Roslin is rightfully considered one of the most accomplished Armenian painters of the Middle Ages. His miniatures which are imbued with deep spiritual, poetical and noble feelings revealed through a harmonious colour pattern and composition; his impeccable taste, power of observation and distinctive mastery; the progressive tendencies which are so clearly manifested in his work and which put him well ahead of most of his colleagues (not only Armenian ones) - all these qualities make Toros Roslin's work unique among other developments of the 13th-century art.

Toros Roslin lived and worked in Cilician Armenia.

The Armenian state of Cilicia emerged in the second half of the 11th century on the north-eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Since the times of the King of Kings Tigran the Great (95-55 BC) a considerable Armenian population lived, particularly Cilicia Pedia within the Armenian Empire. Their number drastically increased from the middle of the 11th c. as a result of the expansionist policy of the Byzantine Empire towards the Armenian Bagratuni Kingdom and after its fall (1045) because of the invasions of the Seljuk Turks. Many Armenians moved from Great Armenia and resettled in Cilicia and the neighbouring lands. For nearly 300 years of its existence, first as the Armenian Principality (1080-1197) then the Armenian Kingdom (1198-1375), Cilician Armenia, being the seat of Armenian culture, spiritual (in 1066 the Holy See of the Armenian Apostolic Church was transferred to Cilicia and in 1441 was transferred back and restored in Ejmiatsin) and political life played an important political role in the Near East and the East-West economic and political relations.

The political situation in which the country developed was complex. Interests of different forces clashed in the region, including the Byzantine Empire, the Crusader states, the Catholic Church, Genoa and Venice, the Iconia (Rum) sultanate, Mamluk

and other Islamic states. In this intricate setting, not only did Cilician Armenia manage to retain independence, but it also continued to be a key participant in the Near East political life. Several factors were instrumental in the country's attaining political and economic prosperity: protection from the outside by mountain ridges, abundant natural resources and a convenient geographical position at an intersection of major trade paths between the East and West.

In a relatively short period of time Cilicia established itself as a habitable place. Ancient towns were brought back to life, and new ones were founded. Fortresses and castles, monasteries and churches, caravansaries and baths, schools and hospitals, aqueducts and canals sprang up all over the small country.

Stability and welfare walked hand in hand with cultural flourishing.

From the emergence of the Cilician state till its fall in the last quarter of the 14th century, Armenian culture developed along two parallel, closely related lines. Like their counterparts in Great Armenia, Cilician writers, philosophers, poets, historiographers, artists, musicians, physicians, etc. revived and maintained the Armenian cultural tradition temporarily interrupted in the mid-11th century. Thanks to the favourable historical conditions they often appeared in the vanguard of new trends and developments in Armenian culture. The animation of culture in Europe in the 12th-13th centuries was also manifest in Cilicia. The well-developed urban life proved to be a benign soil for the growth of a more secular philosophy, but the general secularization also penetrated the monastery walls, as it is evident from sermons, parables and fables by Vardan of Aigek, as well as from the work of such religious poets as Nerses the Shnorhali (the Gracious), Grigor Tgha, and Nerses of Lambron.

The broad outlook of the ideologists of the Armenian Church, their tolerance for both other Churches and loyalty to various phenomena of national culture had a profound effect on Cilician culture in general.

Cilician culture is continuous with the earlier culture of Great Armenia, as is evident in all spheres of life, including art.

The great number of surviving miniatures of the highest quality provides extensive material for studying Cilician painting, in particular, its origins, trends and phases, the establishment of principles of the codex decoration, production of different painting centres, Cilician aesthetics, and creative work of individual painters.

General Characteristics of Cilician Manuscript Painting

When the Armenians who had moved to Cilicia began to settle down in the new place, one of their main concerns was reviving of spiritual life. Monasteries were built, with scriptoriums and libraries. Among the emigrants there were professional scribes and miniaturists who had sound schooling back at home, repositories of the centuries-old national tradition to which they introduced new generations of painters. Another important link between Cilician painters and the earlier Armenian tradition was the

manuscripts that had been brought from Great Armenia. They served as guides for the painters, channeling their creative work and facilitating the revival and development of the national tradition that seemed to have been interrupted at the end of that century. However, having inherited the earlier Armenian pattern, in particular that of the 11th century, Cilician miniaturists introduced a number of considerable changes to suit new tastes and demands. In the second half of the 12th century a new distinctive style evolved that became established in the mid-13th century.

This was a rich, elegant and refined style. The effect of exquisiteness and richness was achieved not only by using high-quality materials, such as fine white parchment, expensive paints and plenty of gold, but also by the overall design where a manuscript was lavishly embellished with miniatures and decorative elements, as well as by the painting itself, with its bright, exuberant colours, ornamental variety, and masterly execution.

As the Cilician style evolved, a number of innovations were introduced: images become less abstract; poses and movements more lively and natural; draperies reveal, rather clearly, body forms; spatial representation of figures and their relative positions become more pronounced; and the colour scale is diversified by introducing semitones. Artists begin to take interest in dramatic features, often enlivening scenes with almost genre details. These progressive developments (which are most vividly expressed in the work of Toros Roslin), together with the generally high artistic quality make Cilician painting of the 13th century one of the most important phenomena in contemporary art.

The outward appearance of manuscripts gradually changed: the format became smaller, and, accordingly, the style of the miniatures lost much of the monumentality of the earlier period. The colour scheme also changed, pastel tints giving way to rich, thickly laid colours. The layout became more like that of a book. Following the tradition that had originated as early as in the 11th century, the text and the illustrations were now completely integrated. In the mid-13th century the tradition of detailed narrative illumination evolved, where the miniatures would be incorporated into the text or placed on the margins.

A comparative analysis of the Cilician miniatures and earlier Armenian illustrations reveals that everywhere, e.g. in illumination sets, iconography of individual scenes, types of the Evangelists' portraits, structure and decorative elements of canon tables, and style in general, there existed, on the one hand, close relationship between Cilician art and the national tradition, particularly the 11th-century manuscripts, and, on the other, new features brought about by the evolution of style and decoration system.

However, the innovations introduced into the Armenian tradition by Cilician painters were connected not only with the illumination development and the establishment of codex decoration principles, but also with the new age that gave rise to a new outlook, artistic trends, and life conditions. The famous Greek, Armenian and Syrian monasteries located on the slopes of the Black (Holy) Mountain in Cilicia were instrumental in introducing Cilician painters to foreign artistic achievements, in

particular, to Greek miniatures, which, incidentally, could be found in other monasteries of Cilicia. By associating with Crusader circles Cilicians became familiar with their artistic produce, such as manuscripts and icons. Various works of applied arts, as they were passing through Cilicia, settled there: Arabian ceramics and embossed metals, Persian carpets and cloths, Chinese porcelain, brassware, silk, etc. Besides, Cilicia preserved quite a good deal of antique monuments.

In this artistic treasury, Armenian miniaturists were especially attracted by certain features that appealed to their national spirit - above all, by the ornament to which Armenians as a partly Oriental nation had always been attached. However, as Armenian masters replenished their abundant stock of national ornaments with foreign motifs they invariably assimilated them by giving them a markedly Armenian touch.

Inspired by arts of other countries, particularly by Byzantine art, Cilician painters considerably enriched Gospel iconography; some motifs in their work indicate that they were also familiar with Western sources. On the whole, however, their interest in arts of other nations did not extend beyond adopting minor iconographic details which produced virtually no effect on the principles of manuscript decoration or Cilician style in general.

The similarities that can be observed between Cilician and European art are hardly of stylistic nature, rather they derive from parallel developments that occurred at that time in different parts of the Christian world; these developments, caused by shifts in contemporary thought, ultimately led to general secularization of the society. In art, this was reflected by painters' interest in the surrounding life, which revealed itself in a more realistic representation of figures, proportions, movements and gestures, as well as in a more humanist interpretation of the events of the Gospel. In their endeavor to render the events of the Gospel in a realistic and convincing way, Cilician painters, Toros Roslin in particular, worked out new methods that would allow them to create more natural compositions. They began to treat space more actively by using various perspectives to attain natural arrangements of figures and objects, and a more complex system of modelling with tints. Cilician painting is firmly rooted in the centuries-old Armenian tradition, it was created by exponents of this tradition, who introduced stylistic innovations and modifications in strict accordance with the national character.

The main source of biographical data about Toros Roslin is the colophons of seven manuscripts signed by the artist. Otherwise the information is practically non-existent: his name is not mentioned in the contemporary Armenian chronicles, while the documents that might have proved helpful were lost following the destruction of the Patriarch's residence in Hromkla in 1295 and the capture of the Cilician capital by the Mamluks in 1375 when all the state archives perished.

The seven manuscripts were done by Roslin in Hromkla between 1256 and 1268. In the colophons, the artist gives his name as Toros called Roslin after his ancestors; he asks to remember his parents, brothers, sisters, sons and teachers; of these, he mentions only two names that of his brother Anthony and his teacher Kirakos.

Scarce as this information may seem, it gives an opportunity to ascertain some facts of Toros Roslin's life. It is not clear whether Roslin was born in Hromkla; perhaps, he came to stay in the Patriarch's residence as a gospel illuminator. However, his art is so closely connected with the local tradition that there is no doubt that he had lived in Hromkla since his early days and was educated there.

It can be argued that Toros Roslin was born not later than in the mid-1230's; indeed, his earliest surviving manuscript (1256) shows him as a mature artist, who, it would be reasonable to assume, could hardly be younger than 20 or 25. This assumption is corroborated by the fact that the artist's children are first mentioned in the colophon of the manuscript dating back to 1260. On the other hand, it is unlikely that in 1256 Toros Roslin was much older than 25: his miniatures in the manuscript dating from this year display the freshness of feeling, passion and vigour that are not seen in his later work of a far more composed style. His young age is also suggested by the colophon text where the artist calls himself inexperienced and unskillful, as opposed to his venerable teachers - a description that never appears in his later colophons.

The donors of Roslin's manuscripts were Armenian Catholicos Konstantin I (1221-1267), King Hetum I (1226-1270) and his son Levon [who was a donor as a royal prince and later as King Levon III (1270-1289)], and other members of the Cilician elite, both secular and ecclesiastical. The colophon texts indicate that the artist was acquainted with some of them rather well; they also enable one to conceive, to some extent, what the relations were like between the rulers and the artists in Cilician Armenia, which, at least in Roslin's case, seem to have been based on mutual respect.

Another interesting feature can be derived from the text where the artist mentions the devastation of Antioch by the Mamluks. It is not a dispassionate account of a chronicler, but rather an emotional message of an artist grieving over destroyed art relics with which he seems to be familiar.

It is generally considered that Toros Roslin was head of the Hromkla scriptorium. Meanwhile the fact that nowhere in the colophons are mentioned his holy orders, it is hard to believe that a layman could have been put in charge of the Patriarch's scriptorium. Since Toros Roslin had children he could not possibly belong to a monastic order; probably, he was a priest or a deacon, but would not indicate this explicitly, using his nickname, Roslin, instead.

In the last decade, this nickname of obscure origin fell victim to etymological investigations by some authors, who, although not being professional linguists, attempted to establish its connections with certain European words and proper names. Leaving this issue to linguists (and just drawing their attention to the purely Armenian, abbreviated form of the artist's first name - Toros, not Theodoros), we would like to state that an analysis of Toros Roslin's work leaves no room for doubt as to his nationality. Toros Roslin's art is firmly rooted not only in the local school of Hromkla, but, more broadly, in the entire Armenian tradition.

It is difficult to establish the year of the artist's death. That his name does not show up in any of the manuscripts dated after 1268 does not mean that he died soon after that date, although this possibility cannot, of course, be totally rejected. The artist was only about 40 at the time. Just a small portion of Toros Roslin's work has survived. We know that in 1292 Hromkla was captured by the Mamluks, its people were partly killed, partly taken prisoner, and the sacred objects of the See were looted. Indeed, there is little doubt that the bulk of Roslin's work perished in the havoc, and it does seem plausible that the artist himself, then over 60, died at that time.

At present, 7 manuscripts illuminated and signed by Toros Roslin survive; 3 more have been attributed to him. Such an unusually great number of surviving manuscripts for the 13th-century painter provides an opportunity to trace the artist's evolution and determine its principal tendencies. This will seem especially interesting if we consider that Roslin treated each of the manuscripts in a different way, never repeating himself in the selection of sets, iconography, or, particularly, imagery.

This book presents a consecutive discussion of all miniature types occurring in Toros Roslin's work.

Khorans In the Armenian literature, the term *khoran* is used to denote a set of decorated pages comprising the Eusebius's letter and the canon tables. Armenian khorans, with their diversity of forms and motifs, represent a unique section of national art. Their style, iconography, selection of decorative elements, architectonic patterns, and number of pages varied in time according to the different principles of manuscript illumination at different stages.

In this centuries-long development, Roslin's khorans stand out as works of art displaying classically harmonious architectonics and diversity of forms and motifs. Structurally, Roslin's khorans follow the standard practice of the school of Hromkla: the twelve-page set with two pages for the Eusebius's letter, eight for the canon tables, and two for the donor's colophon. Architectonic patterns of the headpieces are also in line with the Hromkla tradition (there are seven recurring patterns, and each of them is used in one pair of *khorans*) and their decorative elements: ornamental motifs, plants, birds and other animals (their selection, too, is associated with pairs of *khorans*). Normally, the headpieces are surmounted by a cross, an altar, a fountain, a basin, or a bowl with flowers, with approaching birds.

The artist is never repetitive either within a single manuscript or through the manuscripts. At the same time, Roslin uses a well-defined system of *khoran* decoration, which suggests a certain tradition. This brings up an association with Armenian Commentaries of khorans (recently studied and published by V. Kazarian) which form an important part of Armenian ecclesiastical literature. They were by no means a kind of instructions for artists; rather, they were illustrations that provided material for theological generalizations and Christian symbolism.

In conformity with Cilician practice, Roslin places lunettes with half-length portraits of the correspondents on the pages with Eusebius's letter to Carpianus. But he also

introduces a new feature - lunettes of prophets on the pages with the canon tables. The selected prophets vary, but all of them are ones who had foretold the coming of the Messiah; passages from the prophecies are written on the scrolls that they hold in their hands. In some manuscripts Roslin also places lunettes with fragments of the Deesis on the pages with the donors' colophons.

Incipit pages Here, too, Roslin follows the tradition that by then had become firmly established in Cilician miniature painting, in particular, in the school of Hromkla. However, this tradition had not been as old as the khoran tradition, since decorated incipit pages appeared in Armenian manuscripts relatively later, namely, in the 11-th century, when it became customary to mark the beginning of each of the Four Gospels. Cilician artists produced headpiece and initial patterns based on the frontispiece design of the 11th century and also introduced a new element - a large marginal ornament all along the outer field.

Roslin normally uses two headpiece types: an "I" shaped and a rectangular one with trefoiled arches; the two types alternate with each other in the Four Gospels. The field is usually filled with a floral ornament. The ornament occasionally includes the Deesis, and the headpieces are surmounted by various scenes involving animals similar to those crowning khoran headpieces.

The initials on the incipit pages are usually formed of the Evangelists' symbols, while the lines include multicoloured ornamented letters composed of stylized flowers, semipalmettes, braids and knots. The large marginal ornaments on the incipit pages are diverse and, like other Roslin's compositions, strikingly imaginative.

The Evangelists' portraits In general, the iconography of the Evangelists in Toros Roslin's manuscripts follows compositions commonly used by school of Hromkla, in particular, by Ovannes and Kirakos, Roslin's immediate predecessors. Roslin prefers the type of the writing or meditating Evangelist. (John also falls in that category; only in one manuscript he has been made to stand on the Island of Patmos, dictating to Prochorus.) However, in contrast to his predecessors, Roslin focuses neither on architectural or interior details (which seem rather unimportant to him) nor on the Evangelists' symbols (which he prefers to use on the incipit pages rather than in the portraits). Roslin's target is always the Evangelist himself, which accounts for the compositional compactness of his portraits where the Evangelists' figures dominate. Movements and poses are natural and real, almost concrete, and seem to have been taken from the life by the artist's keen eye.

The program of Gospel illustration and miniature types

While in the decorated pages (khorans and frontispieces) and, to some extent, in the Evangelists' portraits Roslin perfected the tradition that became established in Cilician painting, in particular, in the school of Hromkla, his treatment of subjects reveals, apart from the artist's supreme skill, his power of innovation. This is manifest not only in

Roslin's interpretation of events and images, but also in the great variety of illumination sets used by the artist. These sets can be broken down into the following categories:

1. The festival set with the most important events of the Gospel, which was very popular in the Armenian tradition. Here, each miniature occupies a full page opposite the passage illustrated; confined within a more or less broad ornamented frame, it can be regarded as an independent picture. Occasionally, such illustrations are integrated with the text, covering a half or a third of the page, or else they are incorporated into the text columns;

2. The detailed narrative set illustrating the text of the Gospel verse by verse, where the miniatures are integrated with the text, covering some part of the page, or placed in the margins. This set type should not be regarded as an alternative to the first one: in several Roslin's manuscripts it serves to compliment the festival set by furnishing the so-called "secondary" events of the Gospel. The smaller miniatures are incorporated into the text columns or placed in the margins; being in conformity with the overall page composition, the miniatures, the text and the initials constitute a harmonious whole. It seems Roslin was especially fond of this set type as its less traditionalized subjects allowed of more freedom in iconography and interpretation;

3. The set of small marginal miniatures which do not, properly speaking, illustrate an event, but rather hint at it with one precise detail. This type, which is considered to be intrinsically Armenian, has been inherent in the national tradition of manuscript painting since the 12th century.

The Gospel Iconography Roslin's iconography of the Gospel is based on the Armenian tradition, particularly on the Cilician Armenian tradition of manuscript painting. At the same time, the artist's remarkably great store of new subjects made him keenly aware of other arts as well, especially, of Byzantine painting which provided him with extensive iconographic material. However, Roslin did not merely copy Greek types and patterns; whenever he felt that they were extraneous to his art he turned to familiar solutions that could be found in the Cilician Armenian tradition.

Another interesting feature of Roslin's iconography is that he never duplicated his miniatures - even when a subject did not readily allow of variations he found an ingenious way to diversify it. Without transcending the established iconographic norm he boldly varied details and introduced new elements to enliven the subjects and make them appear more familiar to his contemporaries. Roslin felt especially free in illuminating "secondary" events of the Gospel, the iconography of which was much less conventionalized. Roslin showed even less restraint in handling colours: he unhesitatingly varied the conventional colour scheme for clothes and other elements, creating an iconographic interpretation that would be in accordance with his own colour perception.

The chapter ends with a discussion of the iconography of some Gospel events as represented by Roslin in both his festival and narrative set.

A Stylistic Analysis of Toros Roslin's Painting

Toros Roslin's painting was a progressive development in Christian art of the 13th century. Roslin was one of the first artists to embody the tendencies of the new world outlook that was just beginning to emerge at that time. Roslin's work clearly reveals his interest in human values and his humanist interpretation of Christian history. To represent this essentially new content Roslin developed an appropriate expressive style, pronouncedly more spontaneous than that of his immediate predecessors. Still, in many respects, it was a style of medieval art. It has been established that Roslin's work is primarily based on the centuries-old national tradition; at the same time, he was also drawn towards other cultures, particularly towards Byzantine art with its inheritance of classical traditions. Roslin's interest was purposeful, since it was associated with his quest for humanist representation and with his fondness for anthropomorphic images which he liked to include even in purely decorative compositions.

That Roslin was inspired by the new tendencies is also manifest in his active treatment of complex spatial arrangements. He has perfect command of various kinds of perspective; however, he does not show strong interest in the spatial aspect and seems rather restrained in introducing into his compositions architectural structures which could afford opportunities for rendering extents. Also, he tends to ignore spatial properties of such geometrical objects as tables, cabinets, footstools and cushions, where the spatial aspect could have been most clearly revealed.

What Roslin endeavours to attain by making use of different perspective types, which he sometimes boldly combines in one and the same element, is compositional harmony and clarity.

The solutions found by Roslin in his treatment of space had a significant impact on composition of his miniatures. Of all the means of expression it is composition where the domination of the iconographic convention was most strongly felt, and Roslin, as an artist of the Middle Ages, hardly ever transcended the bounds of the traditional schemata. In his work, however, those bounds tended to expand, which was partly due to the new spirit of the time, but more importantly, to the artist's creative thinking that enabled him to go beyond the conventional iconographic imperatives. This is most conspicuous in his interpretation of the "secondary" events of the Gospel, which were relatively independent of the iconographic conventionalism. Represented in a very lively manner, they seem to have been taken from the life. Normally, such miniatures have no frame, and their spontaneous outlines are formed by freely combining their compositional elements. A very interesting feature of some of Roslin's miniatures (which rarely shows up in the rest of medieval painting) is the so-called "curtailment" - when, for example, we can only see the hind legs of a donkey entering the city gates. In representing the main events of the Gospel, Roslin gives variety to composition by adding or withdrawing certain elements, changing size of the constituents, boldly deforming proportions of the figures, and freely arranging colour spots.

The artist's masterly handling of composition is revealed in the peculiar compactness of pattern achieved through rhythmical precision of harmoniously arranged constituents and appropriate distribution of colour elements. To Roslin, as to many other masters of the Middle Ages, colour was one of the most important means of expression. His colour patterns were essentially based on the medieval methods. Having absorbed the experience of the centuries-old national tradition, Roslin enriched it with refined techniques of modelling with colour and its wide range of tints. The artist's noble palette includes, besides his favourite combination of blue and gold with added white highlight and delicate dashes of red, an impressive array of blended hues, such as soft pinks, azure, purples of different grades, and various shades of green. Roslin's colour representation of figures, particularly the faces is of special interest. Roslin achieves convincing modelling by applying series of bold strokes, which are free of any conventionalism - a feature that reflects Roslin's typical striving for naturalness and reality of expression. In Roslin's miniatures, the colour pattern is often closely connected with the drawing: not only does the latter reveal volume, but also emphasizes the harmonious relationships between colour elements. Gold, which seems so important to Roslin in the decorated pages, is sparingly used in the miniatures representing events of the Gospel. Even when it fills a considerable portion of background Roslin applies transparent colours to subdue the excessive glitter that might distract one from the focus of the miniatures - characters of the Gospel. Finally, colour is also instrumental in achieving the expressive and emotional effect that is so typical of Roslin's miniatures.

Image of a man in Toros Roslin's miniatures

Although human concept is one of the least known aspects of the art of Toros Roslin, yet it seems very important for comprehending the significance of Roslin's work; for it is his human imagery that most clearly reflects the trends of contemporary thought and art, and most fully expresses the new content introduced by the artist. In some works of Roslin's immediate predecessors one can already see a certain degree of animation in human figures: poses and movements become more natural, facial expressions, less abstract and ascetic. This tendency was further reinforced by Roslin, due to his keen interest in human personality, which manifested itself in the considerably expanded illumination sets and in the anthropomorphic images used even in purely decorative compositions. In Roslin's interpretation, the life of Christ, His deeds and His death on the Cross assume a quality of vividness, even intimacy, while some events of the Gospel are represented as scenes of contemporary everyday life. Actors of scenes often seem to have been taken from real life; striving to render their natural reactions and mental states, the artist often distorts proportion, for example, he enlarges heads so as to lay more emphasis on faces.

Generally, however, figures in Roslin's miniatures are exquisitely proportional and reveal the classical tradition (but occasional distortions do occur to focus attention on a particular image). Poses and movements are easy and natural, devoid of abruptness or affectation; usually it is torsos turned sideways and smooth movements of arms and, especially, hands. Gestures, so real and expressive, are no longer symbols of motion. Faces, while reflecting a variety of psychological states, are solemn and calm.

However, Roslin's keen interest in characters' psychology never results in a pictorial description of the individual (in the sense of Renaissance portrait painting). Indeed, one cannot expect to find such a description in the work of a 13-th century artist: even in Giotto's paintings people are human types rather than real personalities. People in Roslin's miniatures, too, in spite of all the differences in facial features and expressions, age and haircut, are somehow akin to each other - in fact, they look very much alike, as if they were relatives of a family. Although their ethnic features are not emphasized, the Armenian type stands out and is recognizable even today.

Roslin's aesthetic ideal is ethical; it is a man of harmonious character. This ideal is attained in Roslin's rendering of Christ as an embodiment of morality in human form. Roslin's Christ is not a terrible God or a dread Judge; He is devoid of abstract grandeur, sternness or transcendentality typical of earlier representations. Rather, He is noble, kind and gentle, but at the same time inwardly strong, steadfast and sober, whose greatness and power lie in his spiritual and moral perfection.

<http://www.fundamentalarmenology.am/datas/pdfs/188.pdf>