

ИЗОБРАЗИТЕЛЬНОЕ ИСКУССТВО

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**The Image of Gregory the Illuminator
in Romanian-Armenian Icon Painting***S. S. Manukyan*^{1,2}, *Sh. V. Devrikyan*^{2,3}¹ Yerevan State University,

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Icon painting has been one of the most important aspects of the cultural heritage of Romanian Armenians, contrasting with historical Armenia, where icon paintings were not widespread. Among more than ten iconographic forms of St. Gregory popular in Armenian art of the 18th century, only three are found in the icons created in Romania. The most common of these three forms created in Romanian-Armenian art, similar to Armenia itself and the Armenian colonies of the Diaspora, depicts the baptism scene of the Armenian royal family. Comparable icon paintings in the Romanian environment depict King Tiridates III of Armenia, Queen Ashkhen, and Princess Khosrovidukht kneeling before the Illuminator. In contrast to Armenia, the tortures of Gregory the Illuminator were often depicted in European art. In the 18th–19th centuries, a group of icons was also created in the Romanian-Armenian church environment, illustrating St. Gregory’s tortures and the martyrdom of St. Hripsime. Romanian-Armenian art portrays several biblical and pan-Christian worshipful saints as intercessors before the Mother of God, including St. Gregory. Alongside other saints of the General Church, St. Gregory served as the intercessor of the Armenian people. The Romanian-Armenian icons of Moldova exhibit a diverse range of styles, reflecting the various influences from Eastern European Orthodox and Catholic art during the 17th to 19th centuries. This article delves into the distinctive features of each iconographic type, comparing their versions within the same theme to unveil commonalities and differences. Details

of the icons dedicated to St. Gregory's life are described and analyzed based on biographical narratives.

Keywords: Romanian-Armenian art, iconography, Gregory the Illuminator, icon painting, engraving, King Tiridates III of Armenia, Oxendio Virziresco, Armenian Diaspora.

Among the saints of the Armenian Church, Gregory the Illuminator has the most diverse range of iconographic forms. This fact is due to several important circumstances. First and foremost, the Illuminator is the premier Armenian patriarch, playing a pivotal role in the adoption of Christianity in Armenia. Secondly, Saint Gregory is the only pan-Christian saint of the Armenian Church, commemorated universally by both Catholic and Orthodox churches.

Such a spread of the worship of the Illuminator among sister churches and among Armenians who departed from the apostolic creed has a unique national-psychological explanation. The Armenians of the Greek confession, having distanced themselves from their relatives in ecclesiastical aspect, at the same time, through Gregory the Illuminator, drew on their national origins, claiming that they, having converted to the Orthodox confession, were at the same time the successors of such a great Armenian. Catholic Armenians, similarly opposing their compatriots in ecclesiastical aspect, expressed awareness of their national belonging to St. Gregory, referring to him as their "father of faith" [1, p.242–3].

The Romanian-Armenian colony, with its long-established roots and centuries-old history, emerged in the aftermath of significant historical events, such as the weakening of the Bagratuni kingdom and the fall of the Ani capital in 1045, as well as invasions by the Turkish-Seljuks and Mongol-Tatars in the 11th–13th centuries. These upheavals compelled numerous Armenians to migrate from Armenia and Asia Minor, leading them to settle in various regions, including the Crimean Peninsula. Leaving the peninsula, many Armenians continued their migration to Romania (Moldova), Bulgaria, Poland, and other countries in Southern and Eastern Europe [2, p. 182].

The first reference to Armenians in Moldova dates back to Botosani, where the Armenian Church of the Virgin Mary was constructed in 1350 [3, p. 114]. Afterward, as the distinguished Romanian-Armenian historian Hakob Sirouni records that Suceava served as one of the primary destinations for those migrating from Ani along the Romanian-Moldavian borders [4, p.97]. During the 14th to 16th centuries, Suceava served as the capital of Moldova, hosting the prominent Armenian monastery of Saint Auxentius or also known as "Zamca", renowned since the late 14th century [4, p. 74–5]. Records show that the Armenian community's bishop, appointed in 1401 [4, p. 9], resided in Suceava, with the Zamca monastery becoming their official seat from 1415 onwards [4, p. 73; 5].

Subsequently, Armenians established communities in Yash, Roman, Trgu-Okna, Focsani, as well as in Galati, Tulcea, Constanta, and Braila [6]. Among these, Botosani, Suceava, Yash, and Focsani emerged as major Armenian centers, witnessing the flourishing of Armenian-Romanian art, with Armenian buildings, churches, and cemeteries still standing as testament to this historical legacy [7, p. 165–6].

The Armenian settlers in these cities actively engaged in significant cultural endeavors, leaving a notable impact on Moldavian (Romanian) architecture and sculpture. Armenians' contribution to church icon painting is also substantial, a topic we delve into in this article.

Icon painting stands out as a crucial facet of the cultural heritage of Romanian Armenians, as opposed to historical Armenia where such artistic expressions were less widespread. This art form developed in the Romanian, especially Moldavian, cultural milieu, assimilating influences from the artistic traditions of Armenian communities in Crimea and Lviv [8, p.98].

Within the churches, an iconostasis adorned with icons, almost enclosing the altar, was a common feature. These icons, varying in size from small round, oval, square, to rectangular, mirrored the structure, arrangement, and iconography found in the iconostasis of Romanian churches influenced by the post-Byzantine tradition. In addition to all this, there were also individual, larger icons arranged in one or more rows on the walls of the church, with a frequently positioned large icon in the center [8, p.98].

Turning to the question of who commissioned and executed the icons, it's important to note that in most cases, the icons were commissioned by the Armenian Apostolic Church. However, based on inscriptions found on icon paintings, there are numerous instances where affluent Armenians from the community donated these icons to the church to commemorate significant events. In such cases, the patron, date, and often the artist are documented in the inscription.

As mentioned earlier, the image of Gregory the Illuminator was utilized by preachers of various denominations. Therefore, it's worth noting that customers commissioning these icons could also be Armenians of other confessions.

Upon examining the extensive collection of Armenian icons in the Armenian churches of Romania and the Museum of the Armenian Church in Bucharest, it becomes evident that the iconographers were Armenians, Romanians, and Greeks [9, p.98], yet the iconographic themes were consistent across all cases. Generally, the iconography across various Eastern European Armenian settlements, as well as in the icon paintings of Armenian churches in Jerusalem and Constantinople, shared similar themes, differing primarily in stylistic nuances [9, p.100].

The themes depicted in the icon paintings of Eastern European colonies were largely consistent, with variations primarily seen in artistic styles. In the realm of Romanian-Armenian iconography the most commonly encountered saints and themes were:

1. St. Mary and Child Enthroned as a Queen of Heaven, depicted in several iconographic versions, often with two saints.
2. Gregory the Illuminator, featuring various episodes of his Acts.
3. Saint Minas, one of the prominent saints of the Armenian Church, portrayed on a horseback or as a Saint soldier, sometimes in scenes from the saint's Acts.
4. Saint Jacob of Nisibis, depicted in the mountains, receiving a relic of Noah's Ark or in different scenes from his Acts.
5. Saint Virgins Hripsime, Catherine, Barbara, Irene and scenes from their Acts.

It is noteworthy that the iconography of Gregory the Illuminator underwent significant development and dissemination, particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries. Prior to this timeframe, depictions of St. Gregory were predominantly found in miniatures of Armenian ritual books, especially Synaxaria.

Among the more than ten pictorial forms of St. Gregory, which were particularly common in Armenian art during the 18th century, we find only three types in the icons created in Romania, namely:

1. The Illuminator baptizing the Armenian royal family.

2. The baptism of the Armenian royal family, accompanied by the scenes of Illuminator's tortures.

3. St. Gregory portrayed as an intercessor in "Madonna and Child" icons.

In this study, we aim to delineate the distinctive characteristics inherent to each iconographic form and undertake a comparative analysis of icons sharing a common theme. This approach enables us to elucidate both shared elements and divergences, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the visual representations under investigation.

The Baptism of the Armenian Royal Family

The primary source detailing the spread of Christianity in Armenia, the tortures of St. Gregory, and the adoption of Christianity as the state religion by King Tiridates (Trdat) III in 301 is the work "History of the Armenians" by the 5th-century historian Agathangelos [10].

The earliest surviving icon of St. Gregory, created in Romania, pertains to the conversion of Armenia to Christianity (Fig. 1). Crafted at the end of the 17th century on wood, this icon exemplifies the use of well-known "classical" technique prevalent in Byzantine, Russian, and Romanian icons: wood (sometimes linen-covered), coat of gesso, tempera or oil [8, p. 98]. These works testify to the post-Byzantine tradition [9, p. 36]. Hence, it can be asserted that Romanian art developed in the post-Byzantine period, but, in fact, it is a continuation of the Byzantine tradition as it carries on the traditions of Byzantine iconography.

In this portrayal, Gregory the Illuminator is depicted alongside King Tiridates, who kneels before him, and two soldiers representing the Armenian army. Agathangelos notes in his writings that 15,000 royal soldiers were baptized in the Aratsani River in one day [10, p. 369]. The soldiers depicted in various icons symbolize the multitude of baptized individuals.

Traditionally, kings and soldiers are depicted disproportionately small, following a medieval tradition where characters are hierarchically represented in terms of grandeur and splendor [11]. In Armenian medieval art, Tiridates III is often depicted humbly compared to the Illuminator. However, from the second half of the 18th century onward, with the resurgence of the idea of statehood, Tiridates gains significance as an Armenian king and symbol of independent statehood. From this point on, he begins to be portrayed in regal magnificence and splendor, marking a discernible shift in the iconographic representation [12, p. 140].

In the icon, the Patriarch of Armenia is shown blessing with his right hand and holding a book in his other hand. The latter is not a typical attribute of the Illuminator's iconography for the 18th to the 19th centuries. Generally, he is represented with a crosier, a symbol of his patriarchal authority. However, according to Byzantine iconography, a book was depicted in the hand of the saint. St. Gregory was portrayed with a book in the earliest depiction of him (late 9th century) [13; 14]. This mosaic used to be in the St. Sophia Church in Constantinople, where the Armenian illuminator was represented alongside other Patriarchs of the Universal Church [15, p. 64].

Amidst overall dark colors, the king's bright green and red robes are conspicuous. The connection between Tiridates' cloak and the Holy Book in the hands of the Illuminator is highlighted, symbolizing the king as the bearer of the true teachings of the Holy Book.



Fig. 1. St. Gregory the Illuminator Baptizes King Tiridates III. Late 17th century, Romania. Now kept in Bucharest, Dudian Museum, size 159.5 × 85 cm



Fig. 2. St. Gregory the Illuminator Baptizes the Armenian Royal Family. Artist: Pieterhn Svisrechi, son of Alexan. 1794, Yash, Moldova. Now kept in Bucharest, Dudian Museum, size 162.5 × 90.5 cm

Another icon, created in the city of Yash, shares a similar palette but boasts a richer iconographic and artistic decoration, illustrating the baptism of the royal family and elite (Fig. 2). Queen Ashkhen stands beside Tiridates III, both adorned in European-style luxurious fur coats, with king's crown put on the ground as a sign of humility.

In the upper part of the painting, the Holy Trinity is depicted. God the Father, with a triangular halo, gazes from the open sky at the converting people below. The Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, and the Lamb of God, symbolizing Christ, are portrayed on the crucifix held by a high-ranking military officer. The latter is transferred to Romanian-Armenian art from Western European culture.

Following the 1779 icon, two similar icons were created at the beginning of the 19th century (Figs 3–5). In the 1779 work, the tortures of the Illuminator are depicted below the arch, symbolizing the pillars on which the faith of the first Christian nation rested.

In the 19th-century icons, the tortures are omitted. The Illuminator stands in the center, with the king and queen kneeling before him. On either side the Princess Khosrovidukht and a soldier are portrayed. The queen, adorned in regal attire with a golden crown and elaborate hairstyle, contrasts with Khosrovidukht, who appears in simple clothes befitting a virtuous Christian.



Fig. 3. St. Gregory the Illuminator Baptizes the Armenian Royal Family. 1779, Armenian Church of the St. Resurrection (1891) of Focsani, size 132×112.5 cm



Fig. 4. St. Gregory the Illuminator Baptizes the Armenian Royal Family. 1806, Suceava, St. Simeon Church. Now kept in St. Cross Church, Suceava



Fig. 5. St. Gregory the Illuminator Baptizes the Armenian Royal Family. 19th century, Romania, size 124×71 cm

It is noteworthy to observe the precise resemblance of minute details in the two icons, underscoring a remarkable similarity in the finer elements of their depiction. We can see the image of Christ holding a globe crowned with a cross on St. Gregory's collar, symbolizing power. The Patriarchal ornament is specially emphasized as a symbol of Patriarchal authority, signifying that just as a shepherd guides his flock with a mitre and a shepherd's staff, St. Gregory similarly shepherds the Armenian people with a scepter and a patriarchal staff [16, p.333]. As in the previous painting, in these two as well, the soldier's crucifix is the Lamb of God, and the Illuminator's collar features images of two apostles.

The altar of the Armenian Church in Bucharest is adorned with three icons created in the 19th century. All three paintings are crafted with refined European aesthetic taste and style. According to Armenian church tradition, the "Madonna and Child" icon is placed in the center, with the other two depicting the Illuminator.



Fig. 6. St. Gregory the Illuminator. Artist: Vasile Serafim. 1854, altar painting of the Church of the Holy Archangels in Bucharest, size 165×92 cm



Fig. 7. St. Gregory the Illuminator Baptizes the Armenian Royal Family. Artist: Vasile Serafim. 1854, altar painting of the Church of the Holy Archangels in Bucharest, size 165×92 cm

The right side of the icon depicts St. Gregory standing alone with patriarchal majesty (Fig. 6). Holy Lady and Christ are portrayed in the sky, appearing as if soaring through the air with billowing capes and relaxed postures.

The third icon, once again, represents the Armenian conversion. In contrast to previous icons of the baptism where the absence of perspective may have led the viewer to perceive the baptisms occurring on the banks of the Aratsani, in this instance, the artist chose to portray the scene within the confines of the temple, positioned in front of the altar (Fig. 7). Two icons are displayed in the altar, the first representing the crucified Christ, and the second, the Holy Trinity. The overall mysterious darkness is illuminated only by the bright light radiating from the Holy Spirit, the brightest of whose rays descends in the direction of the kneeling Tiridates and Ashken. In contrast to previous depictions, where the king's crown was placed on the ground, here the Armenian crown is ceremoniously held by a young servant.

The culmination of this iconographic form, however, is the icon painting created in Suceava in the 18th century and kept today in the collection of Etchmiadzin (Fig. 8) [17, p. 48]. The combination of different shades of blue, gold, and red, symbolizing heavenly and earthly power, emphasizes the presence of divine power, and the graces distributed by the Holy Spirit are equally shared among all. The waters of Aratsani River, seen from the backs of the Illuminator and king Tiridates, seem to continue in the scintillant trumpet-blue robes of the two. The faces of the characters are gentle and filled with humility. The frame of the picture adds additional elegance and solemnity.



Fig. 8. St. Gregory the Illuminator Baptizes the Armenian Royal Family. 18th century, Suceava. Now kept in Collection of St. Etchmiadzin

The Baptism of the Armenian Royal Family and the Tortures of the Illuminator

In accordance with traditions dating back to the Middle Ages, various episodes of the saint's Vita were often depicted in one image. Typically, the most significant event in the life of the saint was depicted at the center, surrounded by a circular arrangement of other scenes. That kind of iconography originated in Byzantium in the early 13th century, and earliest example is found in Mount Sinai's St. Ekaterina Monastery, portraying Saint Ekaterina along with different episodes from her life [18, p. 69–70].

Icons featuring this motif also evolved in post-Byzantine art during the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly in Orthodox countries like Russia [19], Romania [20], Bulgaria [21] and Ukraine [22], each with distinct stylistic variations. These icons are also present in the artistic traditions of Armenian communities in those regions.

A series of icon paintings, adhering to a consistent iconography, was also created in Romania, depicting Gregory the Illuminator. The central focus of these depictions, highlighting the most sacred event, is the baptism of the Armenian royal family.



Fig. 9. The baptism of the Armenian Royal Family and the Scenes of Illuminator's Tortures. 1714, Budapesht, Armenian Catholic Parish, size 58.5 × 48 cm

This way of depicting saints was common in both Eastern and Western Europe. It is noteworthy that the icons on this theme, created by Romanian-Armenian masters, closely mirror the one-page engravings representing the life of Gregory the Illuminator, created in Europe in the 17th–18th centuries, both in terms of iconography and structural composition [23; 24]. Certainly, modifications have been introduced to the icons. The inscriptions originally present on the engravings, narrating the life of the Illuminator, have been omitted, and in certain instances, replaced by dedicatory inscriptions. It is especially likely that the one-page engraving created by the order of Bishop Oxendio Virziresco (Vrzaryan) [25; 26, p. 19–25] in Transylvania in 1714 was used as a model for some of Romanian-Armenian icons (Fig. 9).

In Romanian-Armenian icons, at the core, as previously mentioned, is the Armenian conversion with a consistent iconography. In some depictions, two men stand behind the Il-



Fig. 10. The baptism of the Armenian Royal Family and the Scenes of Illuminator's Tortures. 1815, Romania. Now kept in Bucharest, Dudian Museum.

luminator, possibly representing his sons Aristakes and Vrthanes or two attendants (Figs 10, 11). This consistent iconography is evident across all similar icons created in Romania.

According to Agathangelos, the description of the first torture is as follows: “He had his hands bound behind him, and a muzzle put in his mouth; and he had a block of salt hung on his back and a noose placed round his chest, and cords put round and tightened on him” [10, p. 79]. In all Romanian icons, similar to the one-page engravings of the previous years, the first torture is presented in two episodes. In the initial episode, two servants are seen squeezing the Illuminator’s mouth, who is tied to a tree. In the second scene, in contrast to Bishop Virziresco’s engraving, the load of salt is not clearly depicted and it seems that the saint is simply bound by his arms to a high pole.

Other tortures were portrayed in accordance with the details conveyed by Agathangelos:



Fig. 11. The baptism of the Armenian Royal Family and the Scenes of Illuminator's Tortures. 1818, Hachkatar, Church of Transfiguration, size 102×71 cm

2. He was hung up-side down from one foot and beaten while dung was burnt beneath him.
3. Blocks of wood were tightened around his legs.
4. Nails were driven through his feet and he was made to run.
5. He was buffeted on the head.
6. Salt, borax and vinegar were poured down his nose.
7. A bag of cinders was fixed over his head.
8. He was held upside down while water was poured into his bottom.
9. He was torn with iron scrapers.
10. He was rolled on iron thistles.
11. He was suspended with iron leggings on his knees and was struck with hammers.
12. Molten lead was poured over his body.

The artists aimed to create the impression that the torturers are diligently and energetically carrying out the king's orders, inflicting inhuman torture. They are depicted with more dynamism, appearing in motion as they raise their hands to strike with sticks or drag the saint over iron nails or pour molten lead onto the Illuminator's body in flames. In contrast, St. Gregory is presented as calm and indifferent to the tortures, each of which would be enough to kill an ordinary mortal. Thus, a parallel is drawn between the savior of humanity and the illuminator of the Armenian nation, enduring sufferings with divine strength.

All Romanian-Armenian icons known to us feature the episode of Hripsime's martyrdom. Although, according to Agathangelos, the virgin was killed after enduring excruciating torture in the fields of Vagharshapat, here her martyrdom is depicted as if inside the palace. A sword is drawn over the kneeling saint, and the king enthroned watches the unfolding event. The depiction of this episode in Hachkatar Monastery's 1818 icon is noteworthy. The artist, not being familiar with history, probably did not understand that in that medallion St. Hripsime is depicted, and, like the other fragments, it also portrays a bearded man, the Illuminator, but with a halo, dress and a headscarf resembling Hripsime.

Gregory the Illuminator as an Intercessor in the Icons of "Madonna and Child"

A favored theme among artists during the 17th–18th centuries is the iconography of the Queen of Heaven, and Armenian artists exhibit a notably liberal approach by incorporating attributes from other icon types and diverse symbolic details into their depictions. For instance, the depiction of saints embodying the idea of intercession alongside the Virgin. Similar pictures are mainly characterized by the image of Our Lady Hodegetria [27; 28, p. 178].

In Romanian-Armenian art, a variety of venerable biblical and pan-Christian saints of the Armenian Church, such as John the Baptist, Thaddeus and Bartholomew, Patriarch Jacob of Nissibis (Hakob Mtsbnetsi), Saint Karapet, and other saints, are portrayed as intercessors before the Mother of God. Among the saints of the Armenian nation, however, we only encounter Gregory the Illuminator in a few icons.

The earliest of the icons (beginning of the 18th century) represents the coronation of the Holy Virgin (Fig. 12). Two cherubic angels delicately position a silver crown upon the head of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Their naked bodies are partially obscured behind the clouds and adorned with fluttering red ribbons. The representation of angels adorned with ribbons made its entry into Armenian iconography through European fine art, a distinctive feature exclusively identified in late medieval Armenian artistic expressions [28, p. 188]. Angels also offer bouquets of roses to the St. Mary. The devotion to roses is closely tied to Madonna. In the Middle Ages, during holidays dedicated to the Holy Virgin, the clergy used to distribute blessed roses to the faithful [29].

The poetic works and treasures of the great medieval Armenian poet Grigor Narekatsi (Gregory of Narek) often compare the Mother of God to a rose, reflecting this mystical perception. Narekatsi's writings use allegorical descriptions of the rose to make scriptural realities more visible. Many symbolic scenes are associated with the rose, serving as an allegory for virtue, the perception of Mary as a rose [30, p. 72], and the



Fig. 12. Gregory the Illuminator as an Intercessor in Front of Holy Lady and Child. Early 18th century, Romania, size 110×76 cm



Fig. 13. Gregory the Illuminator as an Intercessor in Front of Holy Lady and Child. 1782, Bucharest Church of the Holy Archangels

cosmic symbolism of the rose [31, p. 141; 32, p. 197]. This intertwining of divine revelation in Narekatsi's works breathes life into nature, uniting the essence of life with the natural world.

The depiction of the lily flower held in Mary's hand symbolically represents her enduring purity [33, p. 39]. In depictions of the Annunciation, Archangel Gabriel often presents the lily to the Virgin, to which she responds. "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). It is believed that the salvation of humanity begins with Mary's consent [34, p. 33].

Patriarch Jacob of Nisibis is positioned to the right of the Mother of God, with The Illuminator to the left. According to ethnographic sources, Jacob was of Parthian lineage and was the son of Gregory's aunt [35, p. 521]. This connection likely explains the joint representation of these two patriarchs. They are portrayed in luxurious attire, in a prayerful posture, with their eyes directed towards the Savior seated on the Mother's lap.

All the characters are portrayed with refined features, and the painting exudes a dynamic, luminous, and ethereal style reminiscent of the Baroque era. Despite acquiring a general dark patina over time from candle smoke and dust, the predominant red, blue, and yellow hues have remarkably preserved their vibrancy.

In another painting, John the Baptist, the intercessor of the Universal Church, replaces Jacob (Fig. 13). He holds his own head in his hands as a symbol of his sacrifice. The lifeless head appears drab and white, in contrast to the vibrant face of the Baptist, which

is flushed-cheeked, wide-eyed, and slightly smiling. St. Gregory is depicted in patriarchal robes, holding a board with nails, symbolizing his tortures.

Beyond the Virgin and the saints, the background is painted blue, representing the heavenly kingdom. God the Father is surrounded by golden light and rays, signifying his presence above the heavens. Four angels next to the Lord, two pointing to the enthroned Our Lady with the Child and the other two looking on with adoring smiles and wide-open eyes.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the icon paintings depicting the Illuminator originated from the Romanian-Armenian church milieu during the 17th–19th centuries possess substantial significance and originality. Several of the icons featured in this article are presented to the scholarly community for the first time, contributing to the broader academic discourse.

In many Romanian-Armenian icon paintings originating from Moldova, we observe figures with distinct Armenian features, suggesting their creation by an Armenian master or for use in Armenian churches.

Regarding the stylistic characteristics of Romanian-Armenian icons from Moldova, it's important to note their diversity, reflecting various stylistic influences from different eras. These icons are part of the broader Eastern European art scene of the 17th to 19th centuries, influenced by both Orthodox and Catholic traditions. Baroque elements are evident in the crowns, opulent throne designs, and intricately detailed clothing, reflecting regional artistic trends. Greek-inspired shading techniques are used in facial features, contributing to a nuanced portrayal of figures. By the 19th century, icons display a shift towards realism and three-dimensionality.

The Romanian-Armenian iconography established in Moldova continued to evolve among Armenian Catholics in Transylvania, adapting to new stylistic influences driven by evolving religious orientations. In towns, once Armenian cultural centers, icons depicting Gregory the Illuminator maintain traditional iconography but adopt Western European baroque and classicism styles.

In summary, Romanian Armenians upheld the rich traditions of church art originating from Armenian communities. Their artistic expressions were influenced by local Romanian customs and culture, resulting in icons spanning the 17th to 19th centuries. These icons exhibit unique iconography rooted in Armenian identity, resonating with broader trends seen in Armenian art centers such as Etchmiadzin, Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Lviv, reflecting a distinct Armenian artistic expression.

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