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Altar Radiances among Ritual Objects of Armenian Church (On the Example of the Collections of Armenian Diocese of Romania)¹

Introduction

A radiance is one of the elements of decoration of the Holy Table in the Armenian Church.

The name of the object comes from its form: it usually represents round or oval metal sheets made mostly in the technique of chasing or having transparent compositions framed by rays. Radiances could be decorated from one side or from both sides. The center usually depicts either the Crucifixion of Christ or Madonna with the Child, which are the most common scenes. At the same time, there are other, not very common scenes used in the decoration of these objects, which is the subject of the article.

Sometimes the object is presented as a “Cross” in the donative inscriptions written on the radiances. It is obvious that donors confuse the radiances with radiant crosses, and more often with the equilateral, wheel-shaped crosses. Due to the inscriptions, the same confusions took place in various catalogs and albums.

In order to study the artistic peculiarities of the radiances, first of all, it is necessary to try to clarify the issues of the possible period of their inclusion among the ritual objects used in the Armenian Church. Was this object presented among the ritual objects of the Armenian Church from the beginning of its foundation, or is it a later addition?

To clarify this question and to offer you our hypothesis, we have made comparisons between the ritual objects that decorate the Holy Tables of the Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic Churches.

Among the items that decorate the Holy Table of Orthodox Churches and are used in Liturgy, there are no items resembling the radiances in their appearance. Perhaps only fla-

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bella are similar because of their round shape. Although flabella are used in the Armenian Church, they have a completely different function. Therefore, there are no grounds for comparison.

The picture is different in the Western Church. On the Holy table of the Catholic Church, in its center at the highest place, there is a solar monstrance or ostensorium.

The monstrances, which refer to the Sacrament, have been known since the 13th century [11, S. 280; 27, p. 2]. Initially, the object was presented in the architectural form of a late Gothic tower, which was intended for the ritual display, worship of the Eucharistic host or a relic [27, p. 1] and was associated with the idea of the Holy Sepulcher [28, p. 10]. From the 16th century onwards, the appearance of the monstrances began to change, and after the emergence of the Baroque style, they received their finished composition framed by rays [12, p. 177]. In its form, the Baroque monstrance unites the ideas of the “Real Sun”, that is, Christ, and the idea of sacrifice [11, p. 281], testifying to the invisible presence of Christ on the Holy Altar [12, p. 177]. In the New Testament, Christ is often compared to the sun (Matthew 17:2; Matthew 13:43; Luke 1:78; Revelation 1:16 etc.). The symbol of the sun, known since the ancient times, was adopted in Christianity: “. . . The sun is the image and example of Christ, the sun of justice”... [9, p. 682]. In Christian iconography, the sun, which always rises above the earth, symbolizes the resurrection and immortality [3, p. 330]

After the great cultural and iconographic changes of the 17th century, as a result of which the Baroque and later Rococo styles spread in the East, their elements appeared in various forms [19, pp. 92–93; 2, pp. 507, 508, 512]: flowers, garlands, clouds, images of angels, and especially rays. The rays of the sun appeared everywhere: in the interior and exterior design of churches, as well as on the pieces of fine and applied arts. The Armenian art of the period did not stay away from these changes: until this period, such an abundance of rays has never been observed in the Armenian art. So, judging by the above, it becomes obvious that the artistic decoration of the radiances bears the characteristic features of the artistic principles prevailing in the new era.

The fact that the radiances entered the Armenian Church much later, proves that they have no function in the rituals of the Church.

Archbishop Małakia Ormanian² mentions in his “Ritual Dictionary” that radiances sometimes had an empty space covered with glass in the center, intended for placing a relic [22, p. 98]. It is obvious that in this case Archbishop Ormanian identifies the radiance with the monstrance or ostensorium described above, which is intended for the display of a Eucharistic host or a relic, and for this purpose it always has an empty space covered with a crystal in the center.

In the description of the items preserved in the Catholicosate of Cilicia, Dr. D. Kouyoumjian mentions one example that was used both as a reliquary and as a radiance [13, pp. 167–168]. This is another argument in favor of the fact that the function of the object has not been clarified yet. However, we can only liken in appearance, but not identify the two objects, as the functions of the reliquary and the radiance are completely different and, in ecclesiastical practice, the function of those objects do not mix.

Although the radiances are designed to decorate the Holy Table, as we note, they are not mandatory items [20, pp. 70–75]. It is proved by the fact that at present not all the churches use radiances. Of course, the opposite happens too, when there are two or more radiances placed on the Holy Table.

² Armenian Theologian, Armenologist, historian, philologist, Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople in 1896–1908.

The fact that the subject is not mandatory, is also confirmed by the fact that Giwt Ala-neanc³ in his *Order of Piety of Armenian Holy Church*, which lists and describes Armenian church ritual items, does not mention radiances [1, pp. 40–51].

The topic of radiances was not touched upon by Stepanos Priest Mandinian⁴ in his *Piety of the Armenian Orthodox Church*, referring to the objects decorating the Holy Table [15, pp. 176–184].

Altar Radiances in the collections of the Armenian Diocese of Romania

In the Armenian churches of Romania, the radiances are also not placed on the Holy Table in all cases. The tables are mainly decorated with crosses and candlesticks.

Although there are only a few examples⁵, they are diverse in their artistic form and, in many cases, differ from the examples preserved in Armenian or other museums and collections.

Due to the absence of hallmarks, maker's marks, or donative inscriptions, we conclude from the stylistic and iconographic features that the radiances were mainly made in Romania in the 19th century.

We classify the radiances of the collection according to the following principle:

One-sided

Two-sided

Transparent

There are four one-sided examples, two round, and two oval in shape. The sample, according to the donative inscription placed on the round frame, was donated to the Armenian Church of Targu Ocna in 1827⁶ (Ill. 1). The one-sided radiant plate has an image of the crowned Madonna and the Child with an urban landscape in the background. The depiction of Madonna as the Queen of Heaven was widespread in Romanian-Armenian icon painting of the 18th–19th centuries, which, in turn, was influenced by the local Romanian tradition [16, pp. 39, ill. 1c., 2a., 2b., 2c., 2d]. In addition to the large number of individual icons, the Holy Tables of all Armenian churches in Romania were crowned with the image of the Madonna and the Child [17, p. 170, ill. 4, 7, 8, 9, 16, 18, 19].

Although the low quality of silversmith's work is clearly noticeable in the presentation of proportions, facial features, body plasticity, and drapery, the image and the entire composition are full of luxurious tendencies, emphasizing the influence of the Baroque on the local style. This phenomenon was typical of the period and was reflected in all manifestations of art. For example, the luxuriously decorated throne with a high back, the shape of the crowns of the Madonna and the Child become typical for local icon painting under the influence of the Baroque after the 17th century [7, ill. 96, 114, 263]. The Romanian-Armenian icon painting was not spared from this tendency either, the effect and influence of which we see in our silver example. Therefore, the connection with the local icon painting is obvious.

In its structure, the radiance is similar to the samples preserved in the museums of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, in this respect, it is the only one in the collections of the di-

³ Armenian cultural, church and public figure, pedagogue, writer, translator, philologist, ethnographer, historian, publisher, editor (1856–1919).

⁴ Armenian cultural, church figure, publisher, editor (1816–1886).

⁵ The samples presented in the article are published for the first time. Only two of them have been published recently [32, pp. 281, 283].

⁶ Not all the objects preserved under the auspices of the Armenian Diocese in Romania have numbers. These works are in progress.

ocese [24, pp. 97–98]. However, in the case of Targu Ocna, the rays are longer and the pedestal design is closer to the Romanian examples.

The one-sided radiance of the Church of St. Mary in the town of Botosani is also made with the help of a round slab (Ill. 51). Despite the absence of indication of the date and place of preparation, the general style of the sample is typical for the 18th–19th centuries. The radiance, bearing the scene of the Crucifixion, in contrast to the previous one, stands out in the elaboration of details with much higher quality work of the silversmith. An inscription “INRI” in Armenian («ՅԼԹՅ») hints at a master with Armenian origins. The pedestal is again funnel-shaped, close to the previous example. It is possible that it is a work of an Armenian master who worked in Botosani, a circumstance to which we will return in the case of one of the radiances described below.

The other two one-sided examples are oval and are also illustrated with a brief depiction of the scene of the Crucifixion. The No. 105 radiance of the Dudian Museum of Armenian Diocese in Bucharest is made of one complete tincture (Ill. 52). According to the donative inscription on the pedestal, it was dedicated to the Church of St. Mary in Akkerman (currently Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy, Ukraine), although it does not indicate the date. Until the early 20th century, Akkerman was included in the Romanian-Armenian Diocese [26, p. 95]⁷. As mentioned above, often in the donative inscriptions, the item is presented as a “Cross”. Such presentation we see right in this example.

The radiances are often similar to the individual parts used in the design of book bindings, and sometimes, as we notice, the same exact detail is used. For example, the oval radiance from the St. Mary Church of Constanta, as we are sure, was made by adding rays to a book binding detail.

The earliest dated double-sided radiance preserved in the Dudian museum in Bucharest is No. 104 (Ill. 53). This example is interesting for several reasons: first of all, this is the earliest Radiance in the collections of the Romanian-Armenian Diocese with the exact dating; secondly, the donative inscription, which is placed on the front-side, along the bulging part, we can read the words “miter with the collar...”, which makes it clear that the detail was originally part of the priest’s miter (the upper part of a miter) and turned into a radiance only later in 1819, when, according to the inscription on the pedestal, it was donated to St. Mary Church of Botosani. Most importantly, in the donative inscription of the miter’s detail, the name of the silversmith, that is the name of the Armenian master who worked in Romania, is mentioned. The inscription tells, that the object was donated to the Holy Trinity church of Botosani “by the ordinary people and was created by “ՔԹԻՄԻՆՅԱՆՑՈՒՄՆԵՐՆԵՐԻՆ ԵՄ ԿՐԻՍՏՈՍԻՆԻ ՍԱՆՏՈՍՈՒՄՆԵՐԻՆ ԵՄ ԵՐՈՐԹՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻՆ ՍԱՃԱՐԻՆ ՈՐ ՇԻՆՎԵՑԱԿ ԶԵՆՈՒՄԲ ԴԸՅԻՆԼԸԵԱՆՑ ԱՍՏՎԱԾԱՏՈՒՐԻՆ 1803»).

⁷ As in the cases of other examples, we offer again the same opinion expressed in our other articles about the appearing of such objects in Bucharest. We suppose they could be brought to Bucharest during the preparations of the great Armenian exhibition in 1930. The organizer and coordinator of the exhibition Hakob Siruni with the aim of collecting artefacts went around all the localities associated with the Armenian Diocese of Romania, where Armenians lived and had churches. So, the sample could stay here after the exhibition, to be displayed in the newly formed Armenian museum [31, p. 199]. It could be also moved here after joining Akkerman to the Soviet Union as a part of Ukraine, like in the case of Izmail, when after joining to Soviet Ukraine some items were brought to Romania, as before this territory was also included in the Armenian Diocese of Romania [30, p. 147].

The detail of the priest's miter forms the front side of the radiance giving convexity to the object. The scene of the Crucifixion in the Western style is depicted on the reverse side, combined with the Instruments of Passion typical again of Western iconography.

Especially from the comparison of the artistic features of the miter detail with other examples, it becomes clear that it was made according to the principles typical of the Romanian post-Brancovan style⁸: lavish floral motifs, luxurious decoration [25, pp. 34–35; 29, pp. 7, 33, 140]. The style and iconography of the images of Evangelists depicted here was quite common for Eastern Orthodoxy toretics in the 18th–19th centuries, and especially for Russian art [23, p. 40; 32, p. 322], the source of which were the samples of Western printed books. It is noteworthy, the Romanian researchers emphasize the Russian influence, which became significant in the local art of the 18th century [6, p. 166], and as we see, it was continued also in the beginning of the 19th century. All this, in turn, confirms that the detail was made in Romania, in this case, by the Armenian silversmith from Botosani Pəhəxəleanç' Astvacatur. This information is of a special value both for the study of the history and culture of Romanian-Armenian community and Armenian silversmithing in general. Botosani was one of the centers where the Armenian community was occupying an important place [8]. This gives a reason to think, that in other Romanian cities, where there was also a large Armenian community, Armenian silversmiths could worked, although historical sources are silent about this (perhaps there is an information only about Iasi, but it is poor [4, p. 346]).

Nothing has changed on the miter's detail, only in the centre, where the cross crowning the miter is placed usually, the image of Madonna and the Child is attached on a separate chased plate.

We see for the second time, as in the case of the radiance from Constanta, that a part of a ritual object was given a new life, completely new design, and used as a completely different object with different function.

The Holy Table of the Armenian Church of the Holy Archangels in Bucharest is now decorated with oval-shaped radiances in the center. According to the design principles of central tinplate, these examples are similar to the most common form of altar crosses or hand crosses of the period: on one side, there is the scene of the Crucifixion in brief iconography, and on the other side, we can see the Madonna and the Child (Ill. 54). Although the examples almost completely repeat each other, they were donated by different people in 1849 and 1855, as written on the donative inscription. Stylistically, the images are clearly westernized, generalized, whereas the design of a foot and pedestal are more in the local style. There are no writings in the artistic decoration of the objects in Armenian or any other language. There is only the donative inscription, which could have been made later and not necessarily by the same master.

The other pair of radiances donated in 1871 are again from the decorations of the Holy Table of the Church of the Holy Archangels. On one side, there is the Agnus Dei (Ill. 55), on the other side, there is the scene of the Dormition of the Mother of God⁹ (Ill. 55). Silver radiances with the image of the Dormition of the Mother of God do not come to us from the Armenian

⁸ Post-Brancovan style followed the Brancovan style. This is the era of heyday of the post-Byzantine tradition, when the art of the Danubian principalities, preserving the typically local elements of religious and secular art and culture gradually turn to the Western models. This manifestation entered the history of Romanian art called as "Brancovan style", named after the Wallachian Prince Constantin Brancovianu of the same period (17th–18th centuries), and the subsequent a bit simplified phase – "post-Brancovan" [14; 29].

⁹ The mark of the silversmith is unknown. The deciphering of the latter would clarify the problems of the right attribution.

silversmithing centers. This scene is widely known in Romania, and it can be seen on different ritual objects: incense burners [5, ill. 42], arks [21, ill. 142], trays [21, ill. 93], Bible bindings [5, ill. 3, 5, 14, 21] etc. Since the samples were made in Romania, the presence of the scene is not surprising. In the case of these objects, there are also no writings there, only donation inscriptions in Armenian. Therefore, all three previous examples could have been made by a non-Armenian master.

Agnus Dei is depicted also on the radiance from the Armenian St. Mary Church in Iasi. However, unlike the example of Bucharest, this one is one-sided and transparent.

In general, all the radiances presented in the Armenian Church in Iasi are transparent, and only these samples are included in the group we have selected. According to the master's marks, all the radiances were made by the same silversmith. However, only one has a donative inscription from 1840. The great altar cross of this church with the "INRI" (ՅՆԹՅ) inscription in Armenian was made by the same master [31, p. 200]. It is possible that an Armenian master worked in Iasi, and believers often ordered ritual objects from him to donate to the church. In any case, we can speak clearly about this fact only after the deciphering of the maker's mark.

In addition to the transparent composition, the images that form the radiances were made in accentuated Western style. It is reflected in the construction of the scene, the modeling of the figures, the body plastics, and drapery. This tendency is also noticeable in the case of other metal ritual objects from the Armenian Church in Iasi, a specific provision which can be helpful in the attribution of other items.

The most special examples are the twin transparent radiances with the all-seeing eye of God (Ill. 56), an image that can not be found very often in the art of Greater Armenia.

The image of the all-seeing eye of God, enclosed in a triangle became widely distributed since the 18th–19th centuries [10, p. 224] in Eastern Orthodox countries, including Romania.

Therefore, the Armenian Church in Romania did not escape from presenting this picture either. The image of the all-seeing eye of God has appeared in the interior and exterior decoration of Armenian churches (the Holy Archangels Church in Bucharest, Church of St. John the Baptist in Pitesti, St. Mary Church in Iasi, St. Mary Church in Roman, St. Mary Church of Targu Ocna (Ill. 57)), as well as on icons [18, p. 107] and on the frames of icons painted by local Armenian artists.

Conclusion

Summarizing, we can conclude that even though the samples were made in the same environment and almost in the same time period, they bear different subscripts, different styles of creating, testifying to the authorship of different masters and different settlements. Although it is largely unclear whether the item was created by an Armenian or Romanian master, it is undeniable, that all the examples were ordered by the Armenian patrons, as the Romanian Church never used such objects.

The above shows that although the original appearance of the object was preserved, it was greatly influenced by the local culture. The influence is expressed in the appropriation of the local style, in the scenes decorating the object, and in their iconography, which is the reason for the differences between the examples in the collections of the Armenian Diocese of Romania and the others.

The comparison of the ritual objects used in different Christian churches, brought us to the conclusion, that the altar radiances were formed and used in the Armenian Church under the

influence of the Western Church tradition, perhaps after the 17th century. The model for the creation of the object and its artistic decoration was a western monstrance or ostensorium, which in its shape and rays was in harmony with the requirements of the period. The fact that the object was adopted by the Armenian church much later testifies to its non-ritual function.

The radiances are typical exclusively for the Armenian Apostolic Church. This is another phenomenon which distinguishes the Armenian Church from the other Christian churches. It is also one of the manifestations of cultural interaction, when even with other influences it is possible to create a new and unique type of a ritual object.

In this regard, the current study can serve as a basis for the accurate attribution of radiances preserved in different collections, without Armenian inscriptions not attributed yet, as well as for the unknown documental photographic materials depicting church altars and church vessels.

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Title. Altar Radiances among the Ritual Objects of Armenian Church (On the Example of the Collections of Armenian Diocese of Romania)

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Abstract. A radiance is one of the elements of decoration of the Holy Table, typical exclusively for the Armenian Apostolic Church. It was formed under the influence of the Western Church tradition perhaps after the 17th century, served from western monstrance or ostensorium as an example. The fact that Armenian Church adopted the object much later testifies to its non-ritual function. The radiance usually represents round or oval metal compositions framed by rays, decorated from one side or from both sides. The center usually depicts either the Crucifixion of Christ or the Madonna with the Child. The Radiances preserved in Romania are mostly of local origin and were created during the 19th century. The design of these objects, obviously, was influenced by local culture, signs of which particularly are the scenes decorating the object, as well as their iconography.

To a large extent, the masters remain unknown, but it is undeniable, that all the examples were made for the Armenian patrons of the Church, since the Romanian Church did not use objects of this type.

The collection of altar radiances from the Armenian Diocese of Romania is of great importance, since it is distinguished by the diversity of the object. It is also worth mentioning the discovery of an engraved inscription on one of the items containing the name of one of the Armenian silversmiths who worked in Romania in the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century.

Keywords: Armenian colonies, Armenian Diocese of Romania, ritual objects, altar radiances, Monstrance, Ostensorium, Crucifixion, Madonna and the Child, Dormition of the Mother of God, all-seeing eye of God

Название статьи. Алтарные лучезарные диски в ряде ритуальных предметов Армянской церкви (на примере коллекций Армянской епархии Румынии)¹⁰

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Аннотация. Лучезарный диск — один из элементов украшения Святого Престола, характерный исключительно для Армянской Апостольской Церкви. Он сформировался под влиянием западной церковной традиции, вероятно, после XVII в. Образцом для создания предмета и его художественного оформления послужили западные монстранцы (остенсориумы). О том, что предмет вошел в практику Армянской Церкви позже основного оформления Святого Престола, свидетельствует, в частности, его внеритуальный статус.

Предмет представляет собой обрамленную лучами круглую или овальную металлическую композицию, в центре которой обычно изображается Распятие или Мадонна с младенцем. Сохранившиеся в Румынии экземпляры дисков в основном имеют местное происхождение и были созданы на протяжении XIX в. На оформление указанных предметов, очевидно, большое влияние оказала местная культура. Признаками этого влияния, в частности, являются сцены, украшающих предмет, а также их иконография.

В значительной степени мастера-изготовители остаются неизвестными, однако бесспорно, что все предметы были изготовлены для жертвователей Армянской Церкви, поскольку Румынская Церковь не использовала предметы такого типа.

Коллекция алтарных лучезарных дисков из собрания Армянской епархии Румынии имеет важное значение, поскольку отличается видовым разнообразием предметов. Кроме того, следует отметить находку на одном из предметов гравированной надписи, содержащей имя армянского серебряных дел мастера, работавшего в Румынии в период с конца XVIII по начало XIX в.

Ключевые слова: армянские колонии, армянская епархия Румынии, ритуальные предметы, алтарные лучезарные диски, монстранц, остенсориум, Распятие, Мадонна с младенцем, Успение Богородицы, всевидящее око Божие

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Ill. 50. Altar radiance. 1827. Romania?. Silver, gilded. 53.2×22 cm. Armenian Church of St. Mary, Targu Ocna, Romania. Photo: M. Vardanyan, 2013



Ill. 51. Altar radiance. 18th–19th centuries. Romania?. Silver, gilded. 36×29 cm. Armenian Church of St. Mary, Botosani, Romania. Source: Vardanyan M. The Silverware Collections of the Armenian Diocese of Romania. Armenian Treasures in Romania. Bucharest, Zamca Publ., 2020, p. 281



Ill. 53. Altar radiance. 1803–1819. Botosani?. 37×31 cm. No. 104, Dudian Museum of Armenian Diocese of Romania, Bucharest. Photo: M. Vardanyan, 2013

Ill. 52. Altar radiance. 19th century. Akkerman?. Silver, gilded. 36×16 cm. No. 105, Dudian Museum of Armenian Diocese of Romania, Bucharest. Photo: M. Vardanyan, 2013



III. 54. Detail of altar radiance. 1849, Romania? Silver, gilded. Armenian Church of Saints Archangels', Bucharest. Photo: M. Vardanyan, 2014



III. 55. Detail of altar radiance. 1871. Romania? Silver. Armenian Church of Saints Archangels', Bucharest, Romania. Photo: M. Vardanyan, 2014



Ill. 56. Altar radiances. 19th century. Romania?. Silver. 42×20 cm. Armenian St. Mary Church of Iasi, Romania. Photo: M. Vardanyan, 2013



Ill. 57. All-seeing Eye of God on the exterior of Armenian St. Mary Church of Targu Ocna (beginning of 19th century), Romania. Photo: M. Vardanyan, 2013

