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## HISTORY AND ICONOGRAPHY OF GRIGOR NAREKATSI'S VISION

**Аннотация.** Великий армянский средневековый поэт Григор Нарекаци (951–1003; святой Армянской Апостольской и Католической церквей, объявлен Учителем Вселенской Церкви папой Франциском в 2015 г.) был канонизирован и причислен к лику святых Армянской Апостольской церкви благодаря своей поэме «Книга скорбных песнопений». В рамках армянской средневековой литературы было создано его житие, богатое историями о творимых Нарекаци чудесах. Одно из ярких эпизодов жития — история о явлении ему Богородицы с Младенцем на фоне озера Ван. Как подтверждение исторической достоверности видения в житии приводились строки из его сочинений. Этот эпизод жития нашел большое распространение путем устного пересказа и фигурировал как отдельная история. Вместе с тем видение Нарекаци иллюстрировалось в ряде миниатюр: как в армянских манускриптах, так и в гравюрах старопечатных книг. В статье показано постепенное развитие иконографии иллюстраций видения Нарекаци, начиная с миниатюр на полях и страницах армянских рукописей до гравюр в печатных толкованиях поэмы «Книга скорбных песнопений», изданных в 1745 и 1801 гг.

**Ключевые слова:** Григор Нарекаци, «Книга скорбных песнопений», Младенец Христос, Пресвятая Богородица, видение, иконография, армянские рукописи, гравюры старопечатных книг

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## HISTORY AND ICONOGRAPHY OF GRIGOR NAREKATSI'S VISION

**Abstract.** The great Armenian poet Grigor Narekatsi (Gregory of Narek; venerated as a saint of the Armenian Apostolic and Catholic Churches and declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Francis in 2015) was canonized and numbered among the saints of the Armenian Church thanks to his poem “Book of Lamentations”. His *Vita*, rich with tales about his miracles, arose within the framework of medieval Armenian literature. One of the most striking episodes of his *Life* is the legend which tells that one day during self-forgetful prayer, in a vision Narekatsi saw the Mother of God holding the Christ Child in her arms. As confirmation of the historical veracity of Narekatsi's vision lines from his works are cited in the *Vita*. This episode from the *Life* was widely disseminated by means of oral retelling and was also presented as a separate wonder narrative. At the same time, among the images related to Narekatsi, his vision has also been illustrated more than any other, both in Armenian manuscripts and in the engravings in early printed books. The article traces the gradual development of this iconographic form, from the marginal and page miniatures of the manuscripts to the engravings of the two printed commentaries (1745, 1801) dedicated to the “Book of Lamentations”.

**Keywords:** Grigor Narekatsi, “Book of Lamentations”, Christ Child, the Holy Mother of God, vision, iconography, Armenian manuscripts, engravings of early printed books

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## Introduction

Grigor Narekatsi was born near Lake Van, in the then Armenian Kingdom of Vaspurakan, c. 945, and spent his whole life in the monastery of Narek in the District of Rshtunik — where he died in 1003<sup>1</sup>. His *Vita* is of folk origin. It is a typical example of monastic folklore. The legends and miracles told about Narekatsi and his work in the monastic environment were passed on to pilgrims coming to Narekavank and became even more miraculous in the folk environment. Various epic episodes were collected, which were then passed on by pilgrims to the clergymen of Narekavank and surrounding monasteries, and recorded by the latter.

The extensive medieval record of the popular version of Narekatsi's hagiography, composed of stories concerning the saint's life, his miracles and his grave, has been preserved in manuscript no. 9861, written in 1837 in Astrakhan and now kept in Mashtots Matenadaran<sup>2</sup> in Yerevan.

The oral version of Grigor Narekatsi's hagiography was more popular in Vaspurakan, the location of Narekavank monastery, where he was a clergyman. Accordingly, his name derives from the place with which he was associated.

Grigor Narekatsi was famous not only for his monumental poem, the "Book of Lamentations", and his poems and spiritual songs (in Armenian *Gandz* and *Tagh*), but also for his ascetic life.

During the Armenian Middle Ages, the "Book of Lamentations" was not only celebrated for its literary merits, but was also proclaimed as sacred, as possessing miraculous powers<sup>3</sup>. A number of copied manuscripts and 18<sup>th</sup>-century printed editions of "Narek"<sup>4</sup> were reputed to have such powers that people turned to them for healing and with various requests.

A number of miracles were associated with the tomb of Narekatsi, located in Narekavank; people, hoping for the saint's intercession, brought to it their requests. This symbolically shows that the saint's life after his death was continued not only by his literary works, but also through miracles associated with his name.

The vision of Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus in her arms is one of the exquisite episodes of Grigor Narekatsi's hagiography. This vision was also recounted outside of the *Vita* as a separate story.

### 1. The history of Grigor Narekatsi's vision

Among the various episodes of Narekatsi's hagiography, the vision has been depicted most frequently, both in Armenian miniatures and in engravings in early printed books.

It is said that Narekatsi's ascetic cell was located on the shore of Lake Van, in a rock cave, where he prayed day and night, asking to see the Christ Child.

<sup>1</sup> About Narekatsi's life in more detail see [Terian 2015: 278].

<sup>2</sup> Matenadaran — The Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, located in Yerevan, Armenia, holds an incredibly rare and exclusive collection of manuscripts. (Hereafter will be written as MM.)

<sup>3</sup> More details on the beliefs, miracles, healing features and spiritual remedy of "Narek" see [Davtyan 2015: 61–64].

<sup>4</sup> By the people, the "Book of Lamentations" is also called "Narek" after Grigor Narekatsi.

In characteristic popular exaggerations, it is said that he prayed so much on his knees over the years that the stones of the place where he was kneeling fell into a pit. Along with the prayers, he also wept, pouring out tears.

One night, he saw light from the sky over Lake Van, a thin breeze blew, and the Virgin Mary appeared above the opposite island with the Infant Jesus in her arms. When Narekatsi saw this, he said: "Lord, take my soul, for I have attained my desire". The vision disappeared and the name of the island remains "Arter" [Solaqian 1910: 99] (literally from the words "Ar Ter". In Armenian the word "Ar" means take and "Ter" means God. So, the literal meaning of the folk etymology of the place name is "Arter" — Take Lord).

According to another version of the vision, Narekatsi descended from the hermit's cave and, walking on the sea as on dry land, knelt on the water in front of the Holy Virgin, who handed him the Child Jesus and said: "Take the Lord, whom you yearned for" [Mko 1882: 313].

Therefore, the name of the island Arter has two etymologies. First, Narekatsi, seeing Mary and Jesus in her arms, asks God to take his soul, as his wish has been fulfilled. Second, the name Arter comes from the words of the Virgin Mary, when she tells Narekatsi to take the Lord (Infant Jesus).

In the written version of the legend, however, the name of the island, Arter, is not mentioned. According to the medieval *Life* of Narekatsi, which was strongly influenced by folk legends, Grigor Narekatsi went to Rshtunik and lived alone for seven years in a cave in front of the monastery of which Anania Narekatsi was the abbot. One day, the Virgin appeared in a vision and ordered him to go to Jerusalem to receive the covenant. Seeing her, Narekatsi asked who she was. The Virgin said that she was the mother of Jesus. Narekatsi replied that he would not believe this until he saw her as the three magi did in Bethlehem with the Child in her arms. The folk legend states: "The next morning the Holy Virgin descends in indescribable glory with the Infant Jesus in her arms. And he knelt down and mournfully sang the melody "Eyes like sea..." in honor of Our Lady. And as a strong light illumined the sea and the Narekatsi cave, the Virgin spoke to Saint Gregory and said: "I will give you grace and power to perform many miracles and cast out demons and heal people and animals from all diseases. Those who rely on your intercession may be freed from their debts. May the barren women give birth to a son by your requests and find mercy from God and find peace from many other troubles"" [Ghanalanyan 1969: 319; MM manuscript № 9861: 10a–11a]. According to the *Life*, Narekatsi's miracles begin with this vision.

In another version of this legend, set down by Grigor Karnetsi in the Muturki monastery of Karin in 1829, the writer noted that "The legend says that Saint Gregory saw the Infant Christ in the arms of the Holy Virgin at sunrise in the morning in Narekavank and Christ's rays were so bright that they covered the sunlight" [Khachatryan 1996: 196; MM manuscript № 8068: 58b]. It can be seen from the words "The legend says" that Karnetsi wrote down this legend after listening to it in a folk environment, and did not imitate a manuscript from any source.

To be more certain, it should be noted that, in general, visions are considered to be manifestations of divine revelation. Through immaterial images, realities are conveyed or hinted at to a person: they may refer to the past, the present and the

future, but are mainly directed to the future, and therefore have a prophetic character [Qyoseyan 2002: 1004].

Visions are primarily intended to establish a connection between God and man. Very often this connection is mediated, and mostly angels or saints play the role of a mediator [Tamamyan 2005: 95].

Usually, the seer fears the angel or saint sent to him and the appearance of the afterlife. For Narekatsi, however, it is not a sudden appearance but a long wait fulfilled, so instead of fear, a sense of joy and gratitude is expressed, especially since the one who appears is the Mother of Christ.

Visions are of great importance in understanding the further development of historical figures and events, as well as in their more accurate coverage and interpretation [Tamamyan 2005].

Medieval hagiography emphasized the idea that visions were given to those who had previously spent a certain amount of time in prayer, fasting and asceticism. The saint's visions considered in this article were also given during prayer and asceticism.

Grigor Narekatsi's "Book of Lamentations" was subjected to various interpretations in the Middle Ages, in which the meaning of each chapter, the spiritual mystery it contained, as well as the passages with the most comprehensible and allegorical meaning were explained. In those explanations, two lines of the "Book" are connected and explained by his vision. The first is the 27<sup>th</sup> line of the chapter "As I saw it with my own eyes" [Narekatsi 2011: 193]. As P. Khachatryan writes: "The commentators of the "Book" paid special attention to this line in order to emphasize that Narekatsi, being a saint, had "living communication with God"". The researcher refers to MM manuscript no. 5650, in which one of "Narek's" medieval commentators writes: "It is said that this Saint have seen Christ in front of him" (363b) [Narekatsi 1986: 180].

With such an interpretation, it is said that, according to the cited line of the "Book", Narekatsi testifies that he saw the Holy Virgin with his own eyes.

The second is a line of a spiritual song, "The Birth Melody":

Her eyes, sea beside sea, widen cheerfully in the morning,  
Bright shining like two suns<sup>5</sup>.

This line is interpreted as follows: in the morning, the young man, staring at the waves of Lake Van, sees this vision and recites the cited verses [Nalian 1745: 4].

## **2. Iconographic versions of Grigor Narekatsi's vision**

In miniatures in Armenian manuscripts and in engravings in early printed books there are images that at first glance may be confused with Narekatsi's vision, because the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child are also depicted with him. There is, however, another interpretation of these images. Based on an iconographic study, we can divide the paintings depicting Grigor Narekatsi and the Holy Mother into three groups.

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<sup>5</sup> Translation from Armenian [Terian 2016: 163].

The first group is, of course, the images representing the vision itself. In them, the masters sought to depict two important episodes described in the poem: the Virgin Mary with the Child in the firmament in Divine light and Narekatsi within the panorama of Lake Van.

In early printed books, we find the first mention of this vision and a high-quality engraving in the Commentary on Narekatsi's "Book" by Patriarch Hakob Nalian [1745]. Before Nalian's work, there are engravings depicting Narekatsi in some other early printed books. They mainly represent the saint in his cell at the moment of prayer. Also, in some images, God's light descends on Narekatsi, empowering him. However, the first engraving representing the vision is found in Nalian's book (fig. 1)<sup>6</sup>.



**Fig. 1.** *The vision of Grigor Narekatsi [Nalian 1745: 18]*

<sup>6</sup> All the engravings are taken from open access books on the website of the National Library of Armenia (URL: <https://nla.am>).

Nalian writes in the preface that “Two bright orbéd suns appeared in the lake of Vaspurakan, in honor of which Narekatsi sang sweetly “Her eyes gaze, over the sparkling morning sea”” [Nalian 1745: 10]. He considers this vision to be the most wonderful of the miracles associated with Narekatsi: “The wonder of the wonders associated with him was to see Christ together with his Mother” [Ibid.: 14].

Nalian describes Narekatsi’s vision in the following way, which is also expressed in the engraving in his book, as a result of which his writing and images form a unity. It is said “that once, when Narekatsi was in his cell in Narekavank, as he wished, the Blessed Virgin appeared to the saint with the Christ Child in her arms and consoled him for his unbearable asceticism. Seeing this vision, the young man said: “Her eyes gaze, over the sparkling morning sea” and so on. Thus, at dawn in the morning, before the sun rose and the sea was being blown by the gentlest wind, the rays of the sun were blocked from the rays of light of the Holy Virgin and Infant Jesus, Narekatsi saw the Blessed Mother holding Christ in her arms. At that hour the sweetest melody sounded, as the lark sings on the rose at sunrise” [Nalian 1745: 790].

The engraving has a picturesque style and presents five episodes from the life of Grigor Narekatsi. The scene of the vision occupies the main part of the engraving. With the Child in her arms, the Virgin Mary appears to be sitting in a rocking chair made of clouds. Christ is depicted with hand raised in a blessing. The Holy Mother and the Child look towards Narekatsi and smile. At the edge of the lake, Narekatsi kneels with his arms outstretched in admiration. The engraver tried to give him individual features. Narekatsi sings his ode: “Bright shining like two suns”. The pictorial language suggests that Narekatsi, fascinated by what he saw, describes the Mother and Child as two bright suns.

The Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove from the visible light of heaven. Only one part of its body is depicted, the other part is still in the sky. This kind of image shows an ongoing event. The calm waters of the lake and the peaceful nature are witness to the miracle. The scene is enclosed in an oval frame surrounded by four angels.

The engraving can be said to be divided into three parts: the sky, the watery expanse of Lake Van, onto which the Virgin descends with the Child, and the “earthly reality”. On the earthly ground the kneeling Narekatsi sees the vision.

The first of the four scenes depicted below is entitled “the reawakening of the hen”. According to this legend Narekavank belonged to a Kurdish man who gave one of the village women a hen to keep. The hen had chicks, and one day, frightened by the rain, it went with its chicks under a millstone leaning against the wall. Under the influence of evil, the stone fell on the hen and its offspring. The village woman put the dead chickens in a sieve and, relying on the power of God, took them to the grave of Grigor Narekatsi, continuing to pray to God and turning to St. Grigor. An hour later, she “saw the hen coming down with its alive chicks. And the woman, delighted, gave praise to God and to Saint Narekatsi” [Synaxarion 1706: 520; Ghanalanyan 1969: 306].

Two episodes are shown simultaneously on the same engraving. We see a woman in rural clothes who takes the dead hen from under the stone and puts it in a sieve to take it to the grave of Narekatsi. At the same time, behind her the reanimated hen and its chicks are depicted.

The second episode presents “The reawakening of doves”. The legend states that several evildoers were slandering Narekatsi, and princes and bishops sent men to arrest him and bring him to the court. Narekatsi hosted the visitors and before



setting off invited them to dine, offering them two roasted pigeons. It was Friday, and the guests, seeing the pigeons, said: “Reverend, isn’t today Friday?” Narekatsi answered: “Forgive me, brothers, for I did not know that today is Lent.” Then, turning to the roasted doves, he said: “Fly and join your flock, for today is a fast.” And before everyone’s eyes, the doves were resurrected and flew away. Those who came were amazed. They asked for forgiveness and, upon returning, recounted what had happened and silenced the ill-wishers, calling the saint the second Illuminator and Wonderworker [MM manuscript № 9861: 18a-18b; Ghanalanyan 1969: 308–309].

On the engraving, we see two guests sitting at the table, with their mouths open in astonishment and their hands outstretched in horror. In contrast to them, Narekatsi is depicted as quiet and calm. Two reanimated doves soar above the heads of the sitters and seem to be about to fly out of the open window.

The third episode is entitled “Teaching students.” Here Narekatsi is represented as a teacher with his disciples.



**Fig. 2.** *The vision of Grigor Narekatsi*  
*“Prayer Book”, Constantinople, 1755. P. 2*

The fourth part bears the caption “Healing the demon-possessed.” As we already mentioned, after seeing the Mother of God Narekatsi receives the grace to perform miracles and healings.

An engraving with simpler artistic solutions, but with a similar iconographic structure, was inserted in the “Prayer Book” published in Constantinople in 1755 (fig. 2). We find this same engraving in other Constantinople editions of the “Prayer Book” (1763 and 1782).

Here we see Narekatsi standing under a flower-decorated arch, probably holding the “Book of Lamentations” in his hand. Beside him is a Bible. Above the arch, in the right corner of the engraving, a small section depicts the vision. It is so small and so clumsily depicted that it seems to have been added after the engraving was ready and was not originally intended to be there. As a confirmation of this, there is also the fact that Narekatsi’s eyes are not directed towards Mary and the Child, but rather he is reading the book in his hand.



**Fig. 3.** *The vision of Grigor Narekatsi [Avetikian 180: 2]*



In the lower part of the picture, the above mentioned episodes of Nalian's engraving are depicted with the same iconography, except for "the reawakening of the hen".

In Venice in 1801 Gabriel Avetikian published "The prayers of Grigor Narekatsi", which is the second complete and most comprehensive commentary on "Narek" after Nalian's work. After the prologue, on the first page, we see a small engraving depicting the vision (fig. 3).

Avetikian, who goes through "Narek" line by line, writes an explanation of Narekatsi's previously cited words: "With this line, he clearly shows seeing Christ with his fleshly eyes, thereby confirming the tradition related to him that exists in our nation" [Avetikian 1801: 164].

In both Nalian's and Avetikian's commentaries, Narekatsi was depicted in comparison to the line cited above and to the interpretative tradition, whereby the Virgin and the Child become the two suns that the saint saw with his own eyes.

The Virgin is sitting in the clouds with the Child in her arms. Unlike previous images, here Narekatsi is represented on a high hill. His feet are off the ground. He seems to be floating in the air, glorified by what he saw. The faces of the characters are softly and delicately drawn. The engraving has a European aesthetic style. Narekatsi's *Life* stated that the vision was seen near a cave-hermitage, but here Narekatsi is standing near a wooden hut, and his staff rests in front of it. Behind Narekatsi, in perspective, one can see village houses and a church on the hill. The engraver, probably not from Armenia and unfamiliar with the islands of Van, used his own environment to depict Arter Island and Lake Van. We can consider that he depicted them like St. Lazarus Island and the Adriatic Sea. A closer look at the painting shows an elongated boat (perhaps a typical Venetian gondola) on the seashore.

The caption of the engraving reads:

The Holy Virgin orders, Awake Grigor,  
To approach her Son on Arter Island<sup>7</sup>

Miniatures and amulets depicting Grigor Narekatsi are collected together in the book *Grigor Narekatsi in Armenian Medieval Miniatures* by Seyranush Manukyan and Davit Ghazaryan [2016]. The study of the images presented in their work shows that the miniatures depicting the vision of Narekatsi were created chronologically after Nalian's book.

We find the first miniature of the vision in a manuscript kept in the collection of the Mekhitarist Congregation in Venice (manuscript no. 603, Constantinople, 1762, P. 328) (fig. 4)<sup>8</sup>. Narekatsi is depicted inside the church and the vision is seen over Lake Van. The artist resorted to an interesting trick, depicting Lake Van instead of a wall of the church, as a result of which spatiality and perspective were created. All three characters in the picture have Armenian features. According to tradition, the red curtain indicates the importance of the event taking place.

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<sup>7</sup> Here Narekatsi is called awake, because the Greek equivalent of name Grigor comes from Grigoreo (awake angel). Gregory the First Illuminator (Armenian Catholicos 303–325) was characterized in the same way.

<sup>8</sup> All miniatures in the article are taken from [Manukyan, Ghazaryan 2016].



**Fig. 4.** *The vision of Grigor Narekatsi*

*Mekhitarist Congregation Library manuscript no. 603. Constantinople, 1762. P. 328*

Amulets and margins of manuscripts present the vision in its simplest forms: the kneeling Narekatsi and Virgin Mary with the Child enshrined in the clouds (figs. 5, 6, 7).

The literary source of the miniature depicted in the above-mentioned manuscripts is a version of Narekatsi's hagiography in the church of the Holy Virgin across Lake Van. In the village Narek the legend was heard and presented by N. Sargisian, one of the Mekhitarist fathers of Venice. He wrote: "Here Narekatsi saw St. Mary with the Son of God, for whom he was constantly suffering with insatiable love. On the island of Arter, having seen a vision of bright scenes and spreading rays on the sea, Narekatsi quickly got off his cave cell and walking over the sea as if over land, reached what he was seeking, the Holy Virgin giving the Child to him and saying "Take the Lord" [Sargisian 1864: 253].

H. Narlyan considers this legend of the vision as the literary source of the images depicted in different editions of the "Book of Lamentations". He wrote: "The saint once saw Holy Mary on the heights of Arter Island, sitting in the mist, holding the Child Savior in her arms. An image showing this scene is found in almost every "Narek". In the image, the Saint is seen worshipping in front of this miraculous phenomenon with his hands spread out in amazement" [Narlyan 1893: 197; Kha-chatryan 1996: 197].

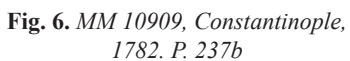
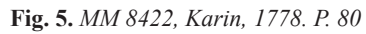






Fig. 7. MM amulet 502, 1778

In the miniatures of the second iconographic group (there are no engravings with this iconography in early printed books), the Virgin is depicted enthroned and the Child in her arms. Narekatsi is kneeling in front of them, handing the book in his hand to the Holy Virgin. As an example, we can mention the miniature on page 1b of MM no. 5650 manuscript (15<sup>th</sup> c.) (fig. 8). The art critic Seyranush Manukyan wrote about this iconography: “The miniature presents Grigor Narekatsi in a new way, as a poet kneeling in front the St. Mary, donating the book. The iconography of the painting comes from medieval “donor portraits” common in both the East and West. In such images, emperors, empresses, princes or patrons were presented offering the result of their pious activities to Christ or the Holy Virgin. And in this miniature, Narekatsi is presenting his “Book” to St. Mary” [Manukyan, Ghazaryan 2016: 10-11].

This iconographic form, not found in printed books, can be explained not only by the fact that its understanding and structure of the image is etymologically within the framework of the medieval worldview, but also by the following technical reason. The book from this period did not have a patron in the medieval sense and was not given to him, but was printed in many copies. The benefactor of the new period was essentially different from the medieval patron.

In the miniature, Mary with the Child occupies the main space of the image, and Narekatsi is represented in the corner in his own frame-temple. Manukyan notes that in this way the poet’s idea of being a lowly earthling is emphasized. To some extent, the image of Narekatsi has acquired an independent character, its location — the temple — has been determined. The difference in the level of presence of the two characters was also emphasized — the sky for the Mother of God, the temple for Narekatsi [Manukyan, Ghazaryan: 11].

We find a similar image in a miniature on page 6b of the Matenadaran manuscript no. 5087 (1694, Ktuts monastery) (fig. 9). Here, however, all three figures are within the temple. Compared to the Virgin, Narekatsi is depicted as very small in order to appear mortal.



**Fig. 8.** Grigor Narekatsi donating his book to the Holy Virgin  
MM 5650, 15<sup>th</sup> c.

Finally, the third iconographic group, which represents Narekatsi and the Mother of God in one scene with the Christ Child, has the following structure. Narekatsi is depicted kneeling in front of the altar of the church, and in the altar there is an icon of the Virgin and the Christ Child. It is known that, according to tradition, an icon representing the Mother of God with the Child is placed in the senior altar of Armenian churches.

It is difficult to say what inspired the artists to create this scene. If we assume that they were simply trying to represent Saint Gregory praying in church, then the question arises why we do not find similar images of other saints. That is why it can be suggested that the artists did not just depict a prayer, but in this way presented Narekatsi's pleas to God to see the Christ Child. Relying on this version, we can say that this scene is an event that precedes the vision itself.

Thus, it may be stated that iconography, especially in miniatures, is very significant. The above-mentioned manuscript preserved in Venice speaks in favor of this version. At the beginning of that manuscript, on the second page, Narekatsi is depicted praying in front of the icon of the Virgin in the altar (fig. 10). Also, as mentioned above, there is a miniature of the vision on page 328 of that manuscript.



**Fig. 9.** *Grigor Narekatsi donating his book to the Holy Virgin. MM 5087, 1694, monastery Ktuts*

We also find an engraving with this scene in the “Book of Lamentations” published in Venice in 1763 (p. 122) (fig. 11).

The painting is notable for its unusual number of angels and lions. However, we can see lions in many European paintings of this period — they act as guardians. In an oval frame above the stairs, the Virgin Mary and the Child are depicted in a disturbing iconography. We see the warmth and care characteristic of Tenderness iconography (*Mater Amabilis*). Narekatsi is kneeling in front of the icon with his hands in a prayer position.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, we can say that the image of Narekatsi’s vision, in which he sees the Christ Child in the arms of His Mother, is a typical example of a syncretic analysis, based on various biographical episodes of the writer’s works and their pictorial expressions.

The comparison of this image with the vision that served as its textual source helps to reveal a number of creative similarities which are not the result of the creative imagination of the artists, but represent plot details described in the vision.





**Fig. 10.** *Grigor Narekatsi praying in front of the Holy Virgin's icon*  
*Mekhitarist Congregation Library manuscript no. 603. Constantinople, 1762. P. 2*

This refers especially to the creative solution that in both engravings nature was also struck by the miraculous appearance of the Virgin and the Child Jesus and seemed to stand still, as the account of the vision tells us that at that moment the wind ceased and the waves of the lake calmed down.

While the engraving from Nalian's book is a typical expression of the local environment of Lake Van, the image of the lake and the island in Avetikian's interpretation projects the Venetian environment including the Adriatic.

Since the iconography of above-mentioned images is based on folk tradition, it is the pictorial expression of a primary source.

Each version of any image has its original equivalent or original version. This applies to the vision of Narekatsi, which, along with the formation of its history, is first expressed in images depicting Narekatsi in his ascetic cell in front of the Virgin Mary's icon and then in the "Take the Lord" version, as a vision seen on Lake Van.





**Fig. 11.** Grigor Narekatsi praying in front of the Holy Virgin's icon  
"Book of Lamentations". Venice, 1763. P. 122

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