



3026. Monumental Icon showing St Nicholas and St John the Baptist
Romanian Villages tradition, ca. 1800
Egg tempera and gesso on wood
Panel: 75.5 x 43 cm
Condition: some visible losses concomitant with age
Provenance: Private collection, Switzerland



The large size suggests our icon may originally been the patronal icon from the iconostasis of a church dedicated to Saint Nicholas and Saint John the Baptist. Placed either side of the Royal Doors the ‘despotic’ (Christ Pantocrator and the Mother of God) and ‘patronal’ icons were life-size and would be venerated by the Orthodox faithful. This can be very well seen in the iconostasis of the Cotroceni Monastery held in the Romanian Medieval Art Gallery in Bucharest (Fig. 1.)¹

A stylistic comparison may be made with an icon of the Archangel Michael from Maramures in the region of the Carpathian mountains, Northern Romania.² (Fig. 2)

To the eye trained only in western aesthetics, such a painting can appear unsophisticated or primitive. However, the painter follows an entirely different set of ideas around the function of sacred images. His tradition aims to represent the saints as present in eternity. They are transfigured, their physical form dematerialised. Their appearance corresponds to the spiritual world and not the natural world of three dimensional space. The icon’s value therefore is in its abstract qualities where colour, form, symbol and presence are the primary language and where the literal and narrative elements are secondary.

¹ <https://mnar.ro/en/discover/permanent-galleries/115-the-romanian-medieval-art-gallery/discover-the-works-in-the-gallery-of-romanian-medieval-art/281-the-iconostasis-of-the-cotroceni-monastery>

² Corina Nicolescu, *Îcônes Roumaines*, Éditions Meridiane, Bucarest, 1971. P. 71 (cat. 51)



Fig. 1. The Iconostasis of the Cotroceni Monastery Wallachia, 1682. Romanian Medieval Art Gallery. Note the patronal and despotic icons by the Royal



Fig. 2. Archangel Michael, 18th c. Maramures, Northern Romania. Romanian Medieval Art. Gallery



Reverse of the panel