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# Armenia – Georgia – Islam : A Need to Break Taboos in the Study of Medieval Architecture

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# Armenia – Georgia – Islam

## A Need to Break Taboos in the Study of Medieval Architecture

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**Abstract** Two important spheres of the history of medieval architecture in the Anatolia-Armenia-South-Caucasian region remain insufficiently explored due to some kind of taboos that still hinder their study. This concerns the relationship between Armenia and Georgia on the one hand, and between Armenia and the Islamic art developed in today's Turkey and South Caucasus during the Seljuk and Mongol periods, on the other. Although its impartial study is essential for a good understanding of art history, the question of the relationship between these entities remains hampered by several prejudices, due mainly to nationalism and a lack of communication, particularly within the countries concerned. The Author believes in the path that some bold authors are beginning to clear, that of an unbiased approach, free of any national passion. He calls for a systematic and dispassionate development of comparative studies in all appropriate aspects of these three arts. The time has come to break taboos.

**Keywords** History of art. Medieval architecture. Armenian-Georgian architectural relationship. Seljuk and Ilkhanid architecture. Armenian-Islamic 'syncretism'.

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## 1 Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present some general observations on two important issues concerning the study of medieval art and architecture in the Anatolian-Armenian-South-Caucasian region: the relationship between Armenia and Georgia, and between Armenia and the Islamic world, two areas of study whose normal development is hindered by some kind of taboos. Even if an increasing number of conscientious and bold scholars (working mainly outside the region) have already overcome them, these prejudices remain widespread in the societies and in their elites, as well as in a part of the national academic circles, and continue to obstruct research.

By raising these issues, this article aims to contribute to an unbiased approach, free of any national passion and prejudices. It calls for systematic, rigorous and dispassionate comparative surveys in all areas where parallels can be drawn. The Author believes that such an approach will allow a fruitful study of a rich heritage that must be considered, without ignoring the specificity of each of its components, as the shared property of the entire region.

## 2 Armenia – Georgia

A first group of taboos concerns the relationship between Armenia and Georgia,<sup>1</sup> and is based, from both sides, on nationalistic prejudices, a false national pride, according to which all that is ours is better, older, more authentic, and is the origin of the creations of the other.<sup>2</sup>

On the contrary, as neighbours Armenia and Georgia have an old, deep relationship, based on a largely common heritage and historical fate, a shared tradition of stone construction, and sculpted decoration, which translates into a mainly common aesthetic language, particularly visible in the architectural silhouette, proper in general

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**1** Caucasian Albania, also concerned by this problem, is left aside in this article because of the specificity of its position, near the two neighbouring Christian cultures, because of the complexity of the questions it poses, and because of the limited number of preserved monuments. A recent synthesis on the early Christian churches in this part of the South-Caucasian ensemble can be consulted in Plontke-Lüning 2016, based on the same author's book of 2007.

**2** The 20th century in Transcaucasia was punctuated by intense historical-cultural controversies, among which art historians remember notably the publication of the Georgian academician Giorgi Čubinašvili's polemical book on Armenian architecture (1967), followed by the Armenian Academy's response (Arakeljan, Arutjunjan, Mnacakanjan 1969). Many similar controversies (on the church of Ateni, on the Chalcedonian Armenians...) continue nowadays. One of the last of such disputes concerned the work of Giorgi Gagošidze and Natia Čantladze (2009), to which Samvel Karapetyan (2013) responded with a detailed review.

to 'South-Caucasian' (or Sub-Caucasian) churches and monasteries. Having already published an attempt of overall comparison between the two architectures, the Author will limit himself to brief remarks.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.1 The Early Christian Period (4th-6th Century). Longitudinal Structures

In the early Christian period, both architectures had roughly a common development, with the same architectural compositions and the same decorative solutions.<sup>4</sup> The longitudinal single-nave and three-nave compositions were similar, but some features were specific. For example, Iberia (central and eastern Georgia in the late Antique period) created an original type of three-hall basilica, or triple basilica, and began to show a trait that should remain constant: a stronger interest towards sculpted decoration. Iberia was paying more attention to openings in the south façade than Armenia. But overall, it was the same architectural language.

## 2.2 The Birth of Domed Structures, Both Centred and Longitudinal (Late 6th-7th Century)

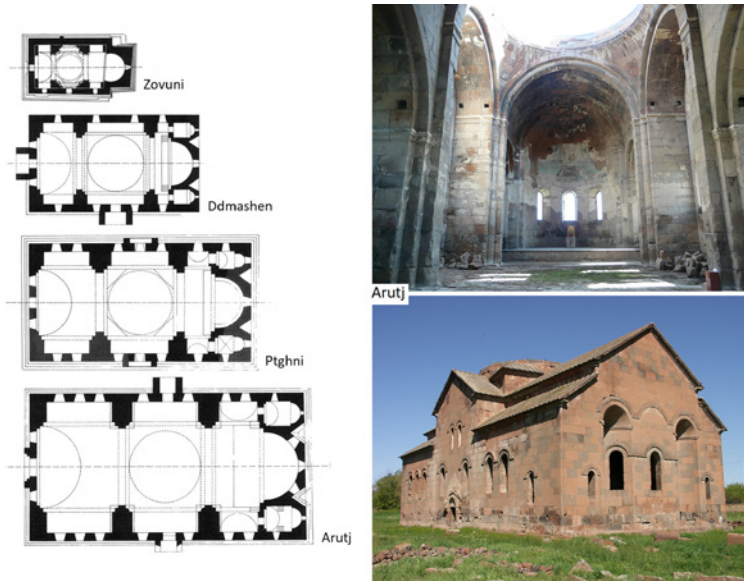
In Armenia, the basis of sacred architecture with centred compositions crowned with a dome was laid perhaps at the very beginning of Christianity, the 4th century, but more probably at the end of the 5th century in St. Echmiadzin and Tekor. Iberia too probably has very old evidences of cupola on centred compositions, for example at St. Nino chapel of Samtavro, founded perhaps in the 4th century. However, it is only from the end of the 6th century, in both countries, that began the absolute reign of cupola (Donabédian 2012a, 223-9). A great diversity of compositions developed in both countries. A series of important types is attested in Armenia, like the Echmiadzin-Bagaran one and its development in the Mastara group, or the composition called 'domed hall' (*Kuppel Halle/Salle à coupole*) [fig. 1], which are unknown in Iberia at the time.

On the contrary, the Avan-Jvari group is common to both countries and was created simultaneously at the end of the 6th century.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Several considerations set out in the first part of this article (§ 2) have been presented, with a detailed bibliography and an abundant collection of illustrations, in a two-part essay: Donabédian 2012a; 2016.

<sup>4</sup> A synthetic comparison of Armenian and Iberian architectures in the late antique period is proposed in Donabédian 2012a, 215-22.

<sup>5</sup> Many studies have been devoted to this group. For a synthesis with a detailed bibliography, see Donabédian 2008, 79-87, 163-84. More recent publications include:



**Figure 1** Armenian domed halls (*Kuppel halle* / *Salle à coupole*) of 7th c. Plans after Cuneo 1988, 726. Arutj church. © Author

Within this group, along with an obvious kinship, the differences are rich in lessons. In Armenia, the internal radiant composition is strictly inscribed in a parallelepiped. Dihedral (triangular) niches cut into the perimeter suggest the inner articulation. On the contrary, in Iberia the outline is much more cut out, and the external mass is more ‘transparent’. Jvari (late 6th-first decades of 7th century) gives the best example of this Iberian version. The conchs that mark the cruciform volume are clearly expressed. Besides, by its position on a high hill dominating the whole region, the Church of Jvari is characteristic of a frequent choice in Iberia, almost absent in Armenia.<sup>6</sup> In Iberia the sanctuary completes and crowns the nature, while in Armenia, it integrates with the nature. Moreover, in Jvari a figurative sculpture of exceptional quality and marked presence animates the façades. Although it bears the signature of the Armenian architect Thodosak, the church of Ateni reproduces faithfully, but a little more clumsily (partly due to later restorations), the major monument of Iberia at the time, Jvari.

Plontke-Lüning 2007, 313-29; Kazarjan 2012; in the latter, several passages from the first three volumes concern these monuments.

<sup>6</sup> On the position, often on heights, of the sanctuaries in Georgia, see: Alpagò Novello 1980, 251.

### 2.3 The Golden Age of the 7th Century

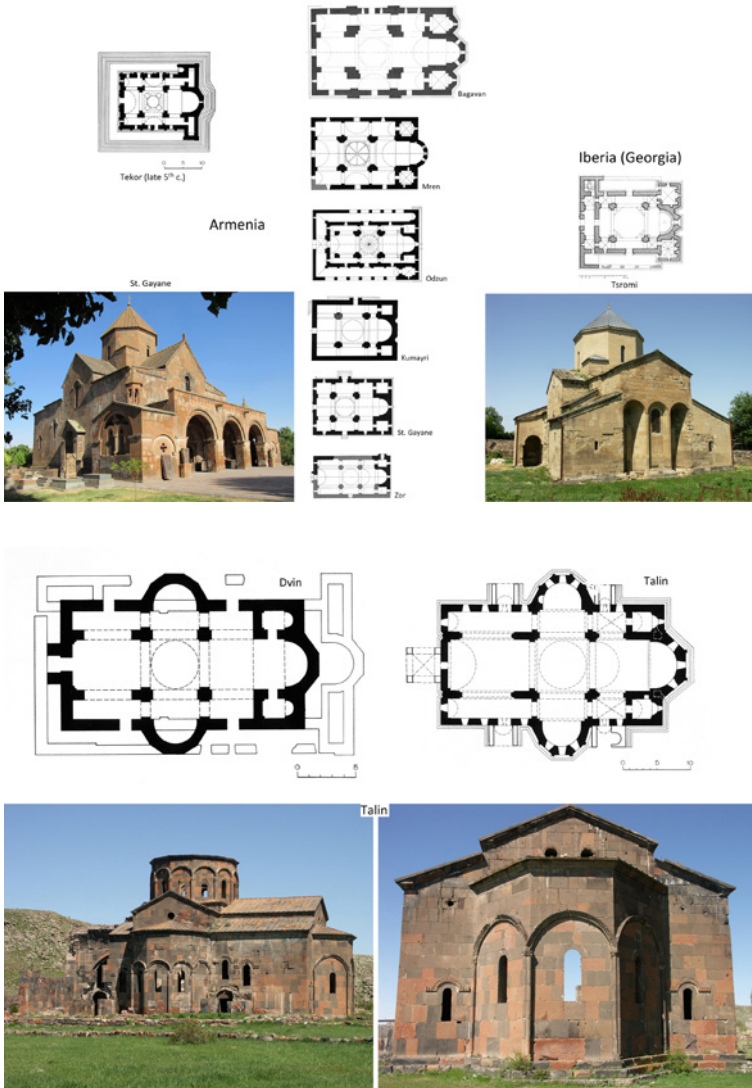
Standing next to a large group of hexaconch and octoconch buildings in both countries, one of the summits of Armenian 7th century Golden Age (Donabédian 2008), the cathedral of Zvartnots, presents a daring composition, in which a tetraconch is inscribed in an annular ambulatory.<sup>7</sup> This model will be repeated in several important churches of the South-Caucasian region from the second half of the 7th to the 11th century (Mnacakanjan 1971). Zvartnots distinguished itself also by an abundant and refined, very innovative carved decoration. Among its characteristic features are the ‘Ionic-Armenian’ basket capitals, the cornice adorned with interlace, and especially the blind arcade on blind colonnade. Starting from Zvartnots, this arcade covers the conchs and drums of many Armenian churches of the second half of the 7th century. In Iberia, it remains unknown, except for an original echo in Tsromi. It will spread widely in this country a little later.

In addition to the central and radiating compositions, the Golden Age produced a series of inscribed cross churches with a dome on four free supports, a plan inherited from Tekor [fig. 2]. In Iberia, the sole representative is Tsromi, a monument of great interest for its combination of archaisms and innovations, as well as for its great kinship with the contemporary churches of Armenia (Donabédian 2012a, 236-7).

Another innovation of the Golden Age in Armenia is the ‘domed hall’, a church of an elongated type in which the supports of the cupola are attached to the main, lateral walls. It will have a feeble echo in Medieval Georgia (Gengiuri 2005), and a very wide development in Armenia, through the so-called *croix inscrite cloisonnée* (partitioned inscribed crosses) (Cuneo 1988, 2: 726-9). On the contrary, the composition called by convention ‘three-conch (triconch) basilica’, with a dome on four free standing supports, and with three protruding conchs, represented in 7th century Armenia by the cathedrals of Dvin and Thalin [fig. 3], will serve later as a model for many major buildings of Tayk/Tao and of Medieval Georgia (perhaps also for several Byzantine churches – Alpaço Novello, Beríze, Lafontaine 1980, 248, 259).

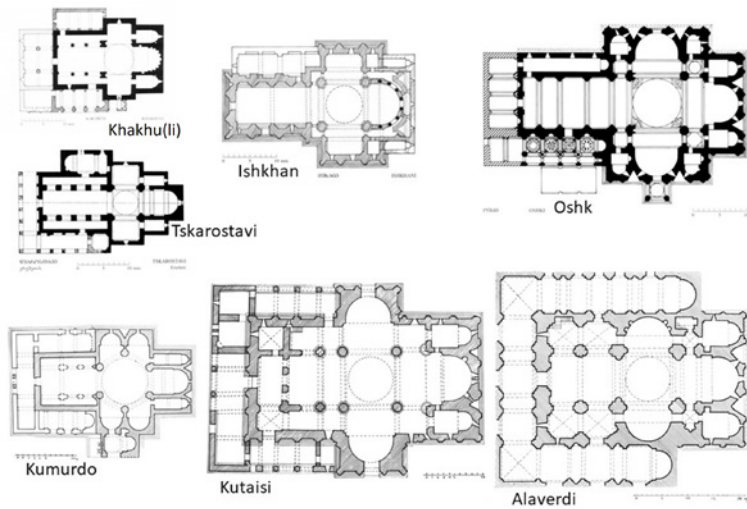
The schism that occurred between the two Churches around 608 sanctioned an already long-standing divergence but did not yet lead, at least in the course of the 7th century, to a significant rupture in the cultural field. Although poorly preserved, the fragments and traces of murals visible in many monuments attest that in the 7th century, this

<sup>7</sup> Among the numerous publications on this monument, a recent detailed study can be mentioned: Maranci 2015, 113-99. The same author dedicated a synthetic article to it, with a selective bibliography: Maranci 2016.



**Figure 2** Inscribed cross with a dome on four free standing supports (sometimes called 'domed basilica'). Tekor (Armenia, late 5th c.), Armenian churches of 7th c., and the Georgian church of Tsromi (7th c.). Plans after Cuneo 1988, 730, and, for Tsromi, after Mepisachvili, Tsintsadze 1978, 90. © Author

**Figure 3** 'Triconch basilicas' of Dvin and Talin (Armenia, 7th c.), with a dome on four free standing supports, and three protruding conchs. Plans after Hasratian 2000, 159-60. © Author



**Figure 4** Churches and cathedrals of Tayk/Tao and of Georgia (10th-11th c.). Combination of monoconch or triconch free cross, and of 'domed basilica'. Plans after Mepisachvili, Tsintsadze 1978, 129, 142, 146, 148, and Giviashvili, Koplatadze 2004, 30, 34, 35

field of art was widely represented in Armenia,<sup>8</sup> as well as in Iberia.

Thanks to its high conceptual, technical and decorative fecundity, the 7th century Golden Age, in which Armenian creation predominated, endowed the two Christian cultures of the South Caucasus with a well-established architectural language, and with a strong identity, in the main common to both, which they will retain until the modern period.

## 2.4 The Post-Arab Period (9th-11th Century)

From the end of the Arab domination, in both countries started a new, impetuous development of architecture. This process began earlier in Georgia, perhaps as early as the 8th century, and later in Armenia, not before the second half of the 9th century. It revealed a bifurcation of the tracks. Two national schools were then emerging. In both countries, the role of the provinces (Syunik, Vaspurakan, Shirak; Karthli, Kakheti) was increasing, with very original composi-

<sup>8</sup> For a recent comprehensive publication on Armenian mural painting of the 5th-7th centuries see: Kotandžyan 2017; see also Zarian, Lamoureux 2019. The collection edited by Matevosyan 2019 is more about medieval and late painting.

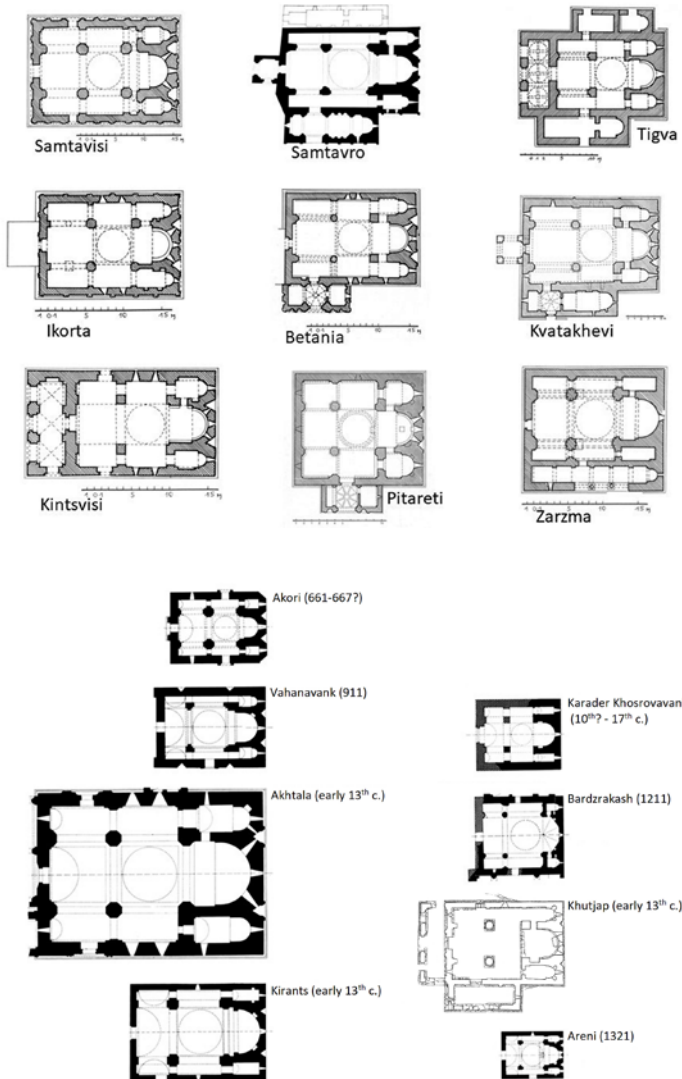


tions (for example the innovative structures of Gurjaani and Vachnadziani – Donabédian 2012a, 247-8). Among them, the province of Tayk/Tao, straddling the western end of both countries and the eastern end of Byzantium, is particularly important: this very fertile area of architectural creation provided models for both schools, especially for that of Georgia (Donabédian 2012a, 248-56). Tao ‘exported’ to Georgia, for example, the Dvin-Thalin principle of domed cathedral on a three-conch cross with an elongated western arm [fig. 4], a type of small cupola on porches, with radiant ribs, a type of blind arcade which follows in its vertical development the slopes of gable façades, or the effect created by the gap between the projecting surface of the façade above the blind arcade, and that recessed under the arcade, as well as the motive of hanging palmette with concentric veins. It is revealing that a device created in Tayk/Tao is present exclusively on the three main cathedrals of the region: the blind arcade on a colonnade made of one single half-column, first in Oshk, then in Ani and Kutaisi. Curiously, the umbrella-shaped dome, created almost simultaneously in Klarjeti and in Armenia (probably early 10th century), gained a huge favour in Armenia (and keeps it until our days), but remained very rare in Georgia (Donabédian 2018-19, 215-31).

During the post-Arab period (9th-11th centuries), in Armenia, plans tended to a normalization around the model of the partitioned inscribed cross with angular chapels (Donabédian 2012a, 242-3). This new version of the ‘domed hall’, more compact, proved to be more resistant to earthquakes. In Georgia, on the other hand, the byzantine type of the inscribed cross with a dome on two western free-standing supports began to spread [fig. 5], along with several other compositions.

The period is marked by the first development of monastic architecture in both countries. In Georgia the place given to sculpted decoration increased, leading at the end of the 10th – the beginning of the 11th century, to a kind of “Baroque style” (Donabédian 2012a, 259-63).<sup>9</sup> The slender, picturesque and festive image of the Georgian churches is very distinct from that of the Armenian churches, squatter, more ascetic (Alpago Novello et al. 1980, 249) and more soberly animated by the vertical lines of the blind arcade and the angular vivacity of the umbrella dome. The rich palatine church of Aghtamar is an exception, outside the general trend of Armenian architecture. At the time, murals were ubiquitous in Georgia. In Armenia, on the contrary, they were the subject of a contrasting attitude according to the regions and their dogmatic-political position vis-à-vis Chalcedonism and Constantinopolitan power: in the central and northeastern

<sup>9</sup> A thorough study on Georgian medieval figurative sculpture can be found in Aladašvili 1977.



**Figure 5** Inscribed cross with a dome on two free standing western supports. Georgia (11th-14th c.). Plans after Mepisachvili and Tsintsadze 1978, 158, 162, 174-5, 178, 193-4, 198, 206

**Figure 6** Inscribed cross with a dome on two free standing western supports. Armenia (7th[?]-14th c.). Plans after Cuneo 1988, 731 and, for Khutjap, after Shakhkryan 1986, 135

provinces, without being banned, mural painting was often avoided, while it was maintained in the south, southeast and outlying areas (Thierry, Donabédian 1987, 125-6).

At this period was created in Georgia, on the east façade of Samtavisi (1030), an original sculpted composition [fig. 7]: a body of moldings comprising a pair of rhombs, the rectangular frame of the central window, and a large cross on a tall shaft, on top of the façade (Donabédian 2012a, 266-7). This impressive composition spread throughout Georgian churches of the 12th-13th centuries, and found a certain echo in 13th-century Armenia (see below).

## 2.5 The Period of Queen Tamar and of the Mongol Yoke (Late 12th-First Half of 14th Century)

During the period of Queen Tamar and of the Mongol yoke, the two schools continued their own path, with many features in common. Monasteries amplified their development. In Armenia, a characteristic type of monastic building, the *gavit/zhamatun*, a kind of narthex, imposed its constant presence before the western façade of the main church, while in Georgia more reduced forms were used, like porches or galleries on the west and south façades of the church (Donabédian 2016, 38-48, 105-14).

This time, Georgian solutions served as models, both in architecture and in sculpted decoration, and were taken up and reinterpreted by the Armenian builders. While the main Armenian architectural type remained the compact version of the *kuppelhalle*, on the contrary, in the northeastern provinces of the country, several Chalcedonian communities adopted for their churches formulas borrowed from Georgia.

Among these new features, the architectural type of a large and high single nave, with a barrel vault reinforced by two or three transverse arches resting on engaged pillars, which was common in Georgia since the previous period, appeared in northern Armenia. The apse, very wide, usually without side sacristies, is in direct, or almost direct continuation of the side walls. Since the end of the 12th century, in Armenia, this kind of enlarged and high nave was used for some churches which are Chalcedonian or linked with Georgia (Donabédian 2016, 60-70). In each of them, traits of the two traditions are present, but variously combined, in different proportions.

The so-called 'Georgian church' of Ani bore a Georgian inscription, engraved in 1218; it served an Orthodox parish, but it was the least characteristic of the group, the narrowest. On the internal face of the well-cut stone walls, there are no traces of paintings, except short captions painted in Georgian near two reliefs. The single apsidal window conformed to the Armenian tradition.



**Figure 7** The Samtavisi composition of the eastern façade (1030), reproduced in Georgia (12th-13th c.), and in Armenia (early 13th c.). © Author, except for Gudarekhi: J.-C. and Ch. Hotellier

The Thezharuyk church, near Meghradzor village, is typologically more representative of this group. It had a large Georgian inscription probably of the late 12th century. It is a large and high three bays nave. Against the Armenian norms, there is no apse elevation (*bem*), but according to them, there is only one window in the apse. Inside, the covering stones, well cut, do not bear any trace of painting. The carved decoration combines elements of both traditions. In front of the south door, the porch recalls a Georgian one.

The single-nave church of Sedvi presents three windows in the apse, and does not have, inside, the elevation of apse, two traits which are more reminiscent of Georgian practices. But the carved decoration, very modest, resorts to Armenian formulas. The church was probably the centre of a monastery and yet, against Armenian modes, it is deprived of *gavit*; its southern door is preceded by a small tetrapod porch, of a Georgian type.

The most 'Georgian' single-nave of this group is at Kobayr monastery. As Kirakos Gandzaketsi reports, in 1261 Shahəshah, son of prince Zakare, died and 'was buried in Kobayr, which his wife had taken from the Armenians'. Kobayr single-nave church was broad and high. Three windows, a Chalcedonian mark, are opened in the apse. Two high niches are cut out inside the apse, as in several Georgian single naves. The carved inscriptions are in Georgian, the paintings in the apse are accompanied by texts in Georgian, and sculpted deco-



**Figure 8** Cross on top of the façade. A Georgian formula adopted on Armenian churches of 13th c.  
© Author, except for Gandzasar: © H.H. Khatcherian

**Figure 9** Cross on top of the façade (other than eastern). Georgia (and Khutjap in Armenia) (late 12th-13th c.).  
© Author, except for Khutjap: © Z. Sargsyan

ration draws from the Georgian repertoire, with however a restraint adapted to the Armenian environment.

The second type of the 13th century, probably linked to Georgia, is the inscribed cross with a dome on two free standing western supports [fig. 6]. Well known in Georgia, this type was very rare in Armenia before this time. From the beginning of the 13th century, it was used in the North of the country, in a small group of monuments, many of which had a relationship with Georgia (Donabédian 2016, 70-86).

The most famous is the church of Pəghəndzahank or Akhtala monastery. Kirakos Gandzaketsi tells us that when ‘Zakare’s brother Ivane died, he was buried in Pəghəndzahank, in the church he had built himself, having taken it from the Armenians, and where he had established a Georgian monastery’. In the same time, the monk Simeon attests that Pəghəndzahank, home of Orthodox thought and culture, was simultaneously an Armenian and Armenophone centre.

By its typology, its architectural features, the octagonal shape of the two west columns, the three windows in the apse, and by its decoration, the large church of Akhtala is in keeping with Georgian standards. The eastern façade repeats the sculpted formula of Samtavisi-Ikorta. The other three façades adopt, on their upper half, the most widespread formula in Georgia: the high cross standing between two windows. However, the portals combine both traditions. The south one reproduces the usual Georgian type, whereas the west and north portals follow the Armenian models. A certain restraint in the carved decoration fits with the Armenian milieu.

The church of Khutjap, in the north of Armenia, in all regards conforms to the Georgian standards: typology, proportions, twelve windows in the drum, three windows in the apse, no altar elevation, the octagonal form of western supports, traces of plaster on interior walls, forms and motifs of the exterior decoration, porch to the west and gallery to the south.

The monastic church of Kirants is, along with Berdavank and Sərvegh, one of the rare brick monuments of northeastern Armenia. It is related to Qintsvisi and Timotesubani in Georgia by its material and plan composition, its slender proportions, the paintings that adorned its internal walls, and its Iranian-Turkish affinities. The general image of the ‘agglomeration’ of elements adjoined to Kirants church is close to that of Qintsvisi. On the other hand, the portals of Kirants are of the Armenian type. This group of five brick-built monastic churches - three of them in Armenia, two in Georgia - deserves a special attention: it seems to constitute an enigmatic transnational phenomenon, including an Islamizing component.

Several decorative compositions of 13th-century Armenia are inspired by Georgian models (Donabédian 2016, 87-94). Most emblematic is the large composition of the eastern façade of Samtavisi (1030), reproduced in 1172 in Ikorta, and on several Georgian churches of

the 13th century, which adorns in Armenia two monuments of the early 13th century: Akhtala and Hovhannavank; in the latter, which did not belong to a Chalcedonian community, it is treated much more soberly [fig. 7].

Beside Orthodox monasteries, borrowings from the Georgian decorative repertoire took place in the non-Chalcedonian Armenian space too. For example, the metamorphoses of the blind arcade, combined with a large cross on the centre and on top of the façade, very frequent on 13th-century Armenian churches [fig. 8], are probably an echo of the compositions spread on Georgian façades since the 12th century [fig. 9]. The scallops (festoons) sculpted on top of the Armenian external, dihedral niches of the 13th century also have probably a Georgian origin.

These borrowings reveal an attitude of openness, of permeability to foreign forms, characteristic of the Armenian art of this period, including ‘Islamizing’ forms. All these questions, very important for a right understanding of the history of Armenian and Georgian arts, must be studied dispassionately, without any nationalistic pressure.

### 3 Armenia – Islam

The second taboo in the history of medieval architecture in the ‘Asia minor – Armenia – South Caucasus’ region concerns one of its important chapters, which remains little studied, notably inside the countries: the relationship between Armenia and its Muslim neighbours. During the period of Seljuk (12th-13th centuries) and Mongol (*Ilkhanid*) (13th-14th centuries) rules, this relationship was made of numerous exchanges and interactions which resulted in a close kinship. But few researchers are willing to recognise it and make it a subject of study.

Here too nationalism is at work. Its impact is aggravated by the very heavy legacy of genocide, and its official denial, including obliteration of the Armenian past of ‘Eastern Anatolia’. The political, ideological and practical factors rightly highlighted by Patricia Blessing and Rachel Goshgarian – the strengthening of an exclusive national identity, the closure of the Turkish-Armenian border, the estrangement of the countries from one another, the ‘ghettoisation’ of the fields, the linguistic barrier of publications – also have a negative influence (Blessing 2016, 54-5, 58; Blessing, Goshgarian 2017, 3). As Islamic monuments located in Nakhichevan, Arran and Shirvan (nowadays Azerbaijan) that bear witness to artistic interactions are also concerned, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict must obviously be added to these negative factors. Fortunately, recent works by scholars like Oya Pancaroglu, Birgül Acıkyıldız, Gülru Necipoğlu, Rachel Goshgarian, Armen Kazaryan/Ghazaryan..., have initiated a radically dif-

ferent, objective and open trend.<sup>10</sup>

The question also reveals interesting aspects when comparing Armenian and Georgian architectures. Here we observe a clear difference between them regarding their attitude towards the formulas used by the Islamic environment. Georgia bases its architectural development mainly on its own heritage, remaining almost impervious to external contributions, whereas Armenia opens widely to exchanges with the Muslims, creating a new phenomenon: a kind of Armenian-Islamic ‘syncretism’ (Donabédian 2016, 94-104). It is important to note that this openness is not only about relations between Armenians and their Muslim neighbourhood. Indeed, the Armenian art of the time, including miniature in Cilicia, also incorporates Byzantine, Western European and even Far Eastern contributions.

### 3.1 After the Caliphate (9th-11th Centuries)

Armenia was occupied by the Arabs from the 7th to 9th century. Still quite light in the second half of the 7th century, Arab domination became very heavy in the 8th and 9th centuries and interrupted the development of Armenian early Christian architecture. Destructions, repressions against the local nobility, and settlement of Arab tribes and emirates on Armenian soil marked this period, during which almost no Armenian construction was made. Nevertheless, the Arab domination also meant development of the economy thanks to the international network of the caliphate, and stimulation of the local productions, in particular textiles. At the end of this period, important changes took place, which result, in part, from integration into the caliphate.<sup>11</sup>

a) The definitive break with the Byzantine Church and the reaffirmed rejection by the Armenian Church of the dogma of Chalcedon on the two natures of Christ, which occurred in the 8th century, are reflected, in architecture, in the spread of compact structures where space is perfectly united under the dome, and in a certain reluctance, at least in the central-northeastern regions of the country, towards painted decoration in the Armenian churches.

<sup>10</sup> Among relatively recent studies by these authors, some are particularly relevant for our subject: Ghazarian, Ousterhout 2001; Kazarjan 2004; Pancaroğlu 2009, 2013; Açıkıldız 2009; Necipoğlu 2012; Goshgarian 2013 (in particular her chapter “Erzincan and Muslim-Christian Cultural Exchange”, 239-46); Blessing, Goshgarian 2017. Earlier already some authors in Armenia had led the way, not only by emphasising – without much merit – the Armenian contribution to the works created for Muslim sponsors, but also by acknowledging “the interaction of the types and methods of construction between local Christian and Muslim architectures” (Muradjan 1984, 152-3, citing studies from the twenties).

<sup>11</sup> On the situation of Armenia during the Arab occupation, relatively succinct presentations, accompanied by detailed bibliographies, can be found in Dédéyan 2007, 214-41; Dadoyan 2011-14, 1: 43-112; Mahé, Mahé 2012, 105-25.





**Figures 10a-b** 10a: Monastery of Tsakhats-Kar, funerary chapel. Two khachkars (1041).  
 10b: Monastery of Haghbat. King Smbat Bagratuni (977-989); Ani. King Gagik Bagratuni (990-1020).  
 © Author, except for Gagik's statue: Archives of the Museum of History of Armenia

b) This dogmatic choice was also reflected, after the Arab occupation, by the creation of a new type of stela, the *khachkar*, or cross-stone, an emblem of Armenian spirituality and Christology.<sup>12</sup> From the 9th century onward, Armenia was covered with thousands of *khachkars* on which the cross is always sculpted as a tree of life, and never as the instrument of the human sufferings of Christ. Over time, the edges of these stelae were covered with a wide band adorned with interlaces where, while expressing the hope of eternal life, a kinship bond was established with the world of Islam. These interlaces became denser and tended to cover the entire available surface. At the beginning of the 11th century, a new motif appeared under the foot of the cross: two flared palmettes, placed horizontally [fig. 10a], to which an Arab origin can be attributed.<sup>13</sup>

c) From the 9th century onward, an innovation in Armenian onomastics was the use of Arabic names among Armenian princes. In the 10th-11th centuries, while Armenia was in principle no longer dependent on the caliphate, the Armenian kings, perhaps to better assert their authority, continued to proudly wear the caftan and turban that the caliph traditionally used to offer them for their investiture, as shown in the sculptures of Smbat and Gagik Bagratuni in Haghbat and Ani [fig. 10b]. In the Gospel of King Gagik of Kars, on the portrait

<sup>12</sup> For a thorough study on *khachkars* see Petrosyan 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Michel Thierry writes about the motif that he calls the 'abbasid palmette': "de gros bouquets végétaux dont l'origine abbasside ne semble pas faire de doute" (Thierry, Donabédian 1987, 168).

of the royal family, the king, his wife and daughter, seating cross-legged, wear coats with rich animal motifs and *tiraz* decorated with Cufic letters on the sleeves (Der Nersessian 1977, 103, 109-10; Maranci 2018, 88-9). Thus names, attitudes and fabrics illustrate the depth of marks left by two centuries of Arab domination.

d) The presence and role of Armenian viziers at the court of the Egyptian Fatimid rulers (from 1074 to 1163), accompanied by tens of thousands of their compatriots, must be also mentioned as an important moment in these close contacts between Armenians and the world of Islam, after the Arab occupation of Armenia (Dadoyan 2011-14, 2: 65-143). The construction of the first stone ramparts of Cairo, and in particular of the main gates of the city, is attributed to Armenian architects from Edessa, invited to Egypt by the first of these viziers, Badr al-Jamali (1074-1094) (Creswell 1952, 1: 165; Irwin 1997, 218; Dadoyan 2013, 124-6). It should be noted that these towers seem to give the first example (c. 1087) of adapting *muqarnas* to stone (see below), a very early dating, as this form is not attested in Armenia before the end of 12th century, which did not prevent Creswell from attributing them to Armenian builders.

### 3.2 Under Seljuk Rule, Georgian Suzerainty and Mongol Domination (12th-14th Centuries)

Annexed by Byzantium between the end of the 10th and the first half of the 11th century, Armenia was not able to resist the Turkish invasion: the capital Ani was taken in 1064. Armenia passed almost entirely under the Seljuk domination. After the shock of the invasion, the Seljuk Turks settled down and created their new culture by integrating the contributions of the cultures to which they imposed their power: naturally, those of the Muslim Persians and Arabs, but also, especially in Asia Minor, those of the Christian natives, Greeks, Armenians, Georgians... In Armenian cities, life was resuming, especially in Ani. In the Turkish states, a brilliant culture was developing, in particular, a great architecture.

To the north of Armenia, Georgia reached its zenith during Queen Tamar's reign (1184-1213). Under her leadership, the Zakare and Ivane brothers, of the Armenian Zakarian dynasty (Mkhargrdzeli in Georgian), at the head of Armenian-Georgian troops, liberated the former Armenian kingdom. In 1199 Ani was retaken. Formally a vassal of Georgia, 'Zakarid' Armenia experienced a brilliant cultural and artistic bloom in the early 13th century. But this prosperous period was interrupted in the 1230s, when the Mongols invaded the region. Once the first shock passed, northeastern Armenia, although subject to a very heavy Mongol tax and military pressure, managed to maintain a certain autonomy until the mid-14th century. Under the Mon-

gols, major international trade routes, part of the ‘Silk Road’, crossed Armenia and benefited the Armenian cities, including Ani. But the Mongol anarchy of the second half of the 14th century and the invasion of Tamerlane at the end of the 14th century put an end to this last bloom in the Armenian Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.2.1 Adoption/Adaptation of Local Know-How

It is natural that the Turkish newcomers, few in the beginning,<sup>15</sup> once settled and having assimilated the Arab-Persian legacy of Islam, should turn, especially in Anatolia, to the native craftsmen because the latter had valuable experience of the region’s mainly volcanic lapidary materials, an in-depth knowledge of earthquake-resistant devices (Donabédian 2012b), and a precious architectural and decorative know-how (McClary 2017, 31-4).

Indeed, “despite a dearth of names and masons’ marks pertaining to Armenian craftsmen” (McClary 2017, 31), the inscriptions engraved on a few Seljuk and *Ilkhanid* buildings of Anatolia seem to indicate an Armenian origin, hypothetical for some architects, and certain for two of them. Particularly important is a group of builders from Khlat (in Armenian), Khilāt (in Arabic), Ahlat (in Turkish), an Armenian city and a port on the northwestern shore of lake Van, whose population was in part Islamized.<sup>16</sup> These architects had Muslim names, but could very well have a Christian origin. They played a major role in the creation of certain key devices at the end of the 12th century.

<sup>14</sup> Here again, synthetic essays on Armenia’s fate during these troubled periods, with comprehensive bibliography, may be found in Dédéyan 2007, 327-36; Mahé, Mahé 2012, 209-47.

<sup>15</sup> According to Rustam Shukurov, “in the 12th-13th centuries, the number of Muslim newcomers (Turkmens, Persians, Arabs) was hardly more than ten percent of the Anatolian population” (Shukurov 2004, 757-8; see also Eastmond 2015, 185, referring to William of Rubruck, mid-13th century). In eastern Asia Minor, the overwhelming majority of the population remaining Armenian, this reality was reflected in the name of Turkish state formations: if the Danishmendid and Seljuk princes, further west, proclaimed themselves kings or sultans of Rum (= of Romania), those of Erzurum and Amid called themselves kings of Rum and Armenia (Shukurov 2004, 720-1). As for the rulers of Khlat/Ahlat, they bore outright the title of king of Armenians (next note).

<sup>16</sup> On Khlat, its mixed population and trilingual culture (Arabic, Armenian and Persian), see Pancaroğlu 2009, 185; 2013, 54. A detailed article is devoted to Khlat in Hakobyan, Melik-Baxşyan, Barselyan 1988, 737-8. Note that the local Turkmen rulers, in the 12th-early 13th century, called themselves ‘Shah-i Armen’ (King of Armenians). See further about Khlat’s medieval Muslim cemetery and the very close links between its *stelae* and *khachkars*.

- Tutbeg bin Bahram,<sup>17</sup> builder of the Alay Han caravanserai near Aksaray<sup>18</sup> (c. 1192) and of the Sitte Melik *türbe* of Divriği (1196), a pioneer in the creation of stone portals adorned with *muqarnas* in Seljuk architecture;<sup>19</sup>
- Ebu'n-Nema bin Mufaddal, builder of the Mama Hatun *türbe*<sup>20</sup> at Tercan, c. 1200;
- Khurramshah ibn Mughith, author of the Great Mosque-Hospital of Divriği (1229).<sup>21</sup>

Two names have been considered Armenian by many authors:

- Kalus<sup>22</sup> or Keluk,<sup>23</sup> son of Abdallah, builder of Konya's Ince Minareli *medrese* (1258), and of two mosques of the same city, could correspond to the Armenian name Kalust/Galust;
- Kaloyan/Kaluyan al-Kunawi (from Konya), a name which might be both Greek<sup>24</sup> and Armenian,<sup>25</sup> is mentioned on the Sivas Gök *medrese* (1271) and on two monuments at Ilgin.

Two other names are clearly Armenian:

- Ashot, mentioned as the builder of the caravanserai at Zor/Kervansaray (13th century);<sup>26</sup>

**17** Bahram-Persian name widespread among the Armenians since the 7th century under the form Vahram, see Ačaryan 1962, 5: 20-9.

**18** Description and bibliography in <http://www.turkishhan.org/alay.htm>.

**19** On the inscription citing the name of Tutbeg B. Bahram, see Pancaroğlu 2013, 39-41; on his 'background', Pancaroğlu 2013, 53-7 ("The World of Tutbeg B. Bahram al-Kh-ilati"). See also McClary 2017, 42.

**20** Description and bibliography in: <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/mama-hatun-kulliyesi>.

**21** On this monument, Pancaroğlu 2009. The wooden *minbar* of the mosque dated to 1241 is signed by a craftsman named Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Tiflīsī (from Tiflis) (Grenard 1901, 553; Marr 1934, 37; Pancaroğlu 2009, 184-6). On the importance of Khurramshah' origin: van Berchem 1917, cited by Thierry 1985, 299 fn. 50.

**22** Marr 1934, 36; Jakobson 1983, 126; Yevadian 2010, 34 [referring to Clément Huart's articles of 1894 and 1895].

**23** Sarkisian (1940, 61) and Yetkin (1962, 31) read 'Keluk', a form adopted by Hoag (1987, 117).

**24** Vryonis 1981, 282: "Perhaps the best known of these architects was the Greek from Konya, Kaloyan, who worked on the Ilgin Han in 1267-8 and three years later built the Gök Medrese of Sivas". See also Vryonis 1971, 235-8.

**25** For Marr (1934, 36), who bases himself on Grenard (1900, 457), Kaloyan is Greek; for their part, Sarkisian (1940, 62) (referring to Max van Berchem and Halil Edhem 1917), Jakobson (1983, 126) and Yevadian (2010, 32, 34) consider him as an Armenian architect. Hoag (1987, 117) evokes a "possible Armenian origin and even an identification with Keluk b. Abdullah".

**26** Barxudaryan 1963, 97; Kalantar 1994, 74 (first published in *Christianski Vostok*, 1914. Petrograd, 3(1), 101-2, in Russian).

- Takvor, son of Stepan, at one of the *medreses* of Malatya (13th century).<sup>27</sup>

Several factors facilitated the intercultural exchanges and interactions. Among them, mixed marriages between the elites of the two communities played of course a great role,<sup>28</sup> as well as, particularly under Mongol domination, international trade and the circulation of people (princes, princesses, merchants, real and false clergymen) and goods, including textiles (Blessing 2019). In large cities with mixed population, like Erzänka/Erzincan,<sup>29</sup> a certain linguistic plurality, including a common knowledge and appreciation of Iranian poetry (Goshgarian 2013, 239-46; Cowe 2015, 90) can also be considered in this context, as well as translations and the use of multilingual inscriptions (Eastmond 2019). An interesting trilingual inscription, in Arabic, Syriac and Armenian, engraved on the entrance to the Hekim Han caravanserai, near Malatya, mentions the name of the Syriac deacon and doctor from Melitene/Malatya who had it built in 1218 (Erdmann 1961, 1: 65 fn. 18; Hillenbrand 1994, 349; Eastmond 2014, 80; Cowe 2015, 86; Blessing 2016, 59 fn. 22). The Armenian text requests the prayers of local Armenians in favour of the patron, reflecting the image of a multicultural society. High-ranking officers of Armenian origin serving in local and neighbouring Muslim states may also have contributed to artistic exchanges, such as the Armenian convert to Islam, Badr al-Din Lu'lu' (d. 1259), governor and emir of Mosul for nearly fifty years, who was a patron of the applied arts (Ettinghausen, Grabar 1987, 254).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Grenard 1901, 551; Marr 1934, 36; Jakobson 1983, 126; Yevadian 2010, 32.

<sup>28</sup> See a table of Armenian-Muslim marriages in the 11th-13th c. in Mutafian 2012, 2, "Tableaux. 4. Les unions d'Arméniens avec les Mongols et les musulmans". Two of the most emblematic figures in this regard are the Armenian-Georgian princess Tamta, who successively married two emirs and one sultan (Eastmond 2017), and the daughter of the Chalcedonian Armenian prince Kir Vard, Mahperi Khatun, wife and mother of two sultans, and patron of an impressive number of constructions, notably in Kayseri (Mutafian 2012, 1: 118, 134-5; Blessing 2014; Yalman 2017). See also, on the Georgian-Turkish marital alliances as an element of diplomacy, Peacock 2006.

<sup>29</sup> About the interactions between Armenian and Muslim communities of Erzänka in the 13th-14th c. see Dadoyan 2011-14, 3: 21-3, 29-33, 69-71.

<sup>30</sup> Mattia Guidetti (2017, 167-8) highlighted the role that the Mosul region may have played, through its productions in the last decades of the 12th century, as a source for certain Armenian ornaments, in particular capitals with angles cut into *muqarnas*, and arabesques.

### 3.2.2 Adoption/Adaptation and Exchanges of Architectural Structures

It is therefore natural that the architectures built for Turkish Muslim and Armenian Christian sponsors show a great kinship. Thus, the techniques of stone construction in the first Seljuk buildings, with perfectly matched cladding blocks carefully cut and bound by a concrete core, with vaults and dome of stone, obviously appeal to the Armenian and Georgian traditions.<sup>31</sup> From the second half of the 12th century, the plans of the Seljuk mosques and *medreses* combine Arab and Persian compositional models; and the mausoleums in the form of a cylinder (or a polygon) topped by a conical (or pyramidal) dome carry on probably Iranian and perhaps Central Asian traditions.<sup>32</sup> But at the same time, these structures have an obvious kinship with Armenian architectural forms. The architecture of Armenian churches with their system of arches and vaults (barrel, broken or groin vaults), with their pyramidal or conical dome preceded by an octagonal or cylindrical drum, first on squinches, then on pendentives, or the structure of the *gavits/zhamatuns* (narthex) with their central truncated cupola and lateral ceilings, on mighty supports-cylindrical or octagonal columns, are very close to what we see in the external volumes and in the large internal spaces of the Seljuk mosques, *medreses* and *hans* (caravanserais). The comparison between the cupolas of the Armenian *gavits* and some Seljuk *medreses*, with a central skylight and, under/around it, similar stalactites is striking (Blessing 2016, 56-7): it suggests that the same craftsmen took part in the various work-sites, or in any case, that models were faithfully reproduced [fig. 11].

A very characteristic form of medieval Turkish architecture, the mausoleum called *türbe* (*kümbet*, *gumbat* or *gonbad*),<sup>33</sup> while perpetuating probably, as we noted above, the memory of Iranian or Cen-

**31** For comparisons on technical aspects (measure units, project conception, building technique...) see Kazarjan 2004; a thesis by Sharon Laor-Sirak on *The Role of Armenians in Eastern Anatolian Muslim Architecture* (in Hebrew), defended in 2008 in Jerusalem, mentioned in Blessing 2016, 61 fn. 37; McClary 2017, 34.

**32** The earliest 'tower tombs' are located in northern Iran. One of the earliest and most impressive examples is the high tower of Gumbat-i-Qabus (1006), covered with a conical dome (Ettinghausen, Grabar 1987, 221-2). For Yetkin (1962, 33), the Anatolian *türbes* recall "the ancient Turkish tents", an idea close to David Talbot Rice's hypothesis (1975, 60-3), according to which Mongolian tents with a conical roof on a cylindrical volume could reveal the Central Asian origin of these forms. Otto-Dorn (1967, 165), while listing all the elements borrowed by the *türbes* from the Armenian architecture, nevertheless underlines the heritage of the funeral rites of Central Asia. After reviewing the various hypotheses, Robert Hillenbrand concludes: "it seems better to admit ignorance" (1994, 282).

**33** On the Anatolian *türbes*, see Arık 1969; Önköl 1996; in English, Hillenbrand 1994, 306-11; in French, Yetkin 1962, 31-44; Talbot Rice 1975, 170-1; beautiful photographic documentation, among others, on the *türbes*, in Curatola 2010, 23-94.



**Figure 11** Gavits of Haritj and Gueghard monasteries (first decades of 13th c.). Yakutiye medrese, Erzurum (1310). Photo of Haritj © Author; of Gueghard © Z. Sargsyan; of Erzurum © bing.com, blogspot.com

**Figure 12** Monastery of Gueghard. Main church (1215). Erzurum, two türbes (13th c.). Photo of Gueghard © Z. Sargsyan; of Erzurum © Author

tral Asian traditions, seems to be a transposition of the drum and dome (*gəmbet* in Armenian) of the Armenian or Georgian churches.<sup>34</sup> In both cases, the form – a cylindrical drum surmounted by a conical dome (or a polygon covered with a pyramidal dome), the decoration of the drum – often a blind arcade, and the ribs on the roof – a reminiscence of Roman tiles, are almost identical [fig. 12]. This similari-

<sup>34</sup> This issue is briefly addressed in Marr 1934, 36 [referring to Choisy 1899, 2: 22, 101, 137]; Orbeli 1939, 152; Sarkisian 1940, 61-2; Otto-Dorn 1967, 165, 168; Baboudjian 1979, 233; Jakobson 1983, 127; Hillenbrand 1994, 307-9 (“The Armenian Connection”); Irwin 1997, 218; Curatola 2007, 271; Yevadian 2010, 26-37; Yalman 2017, 227; Maranci 2018, 135-6.

Tercan, Mama Hatun *türbe* (c. 1200)Ani, Virgins hermitage (early 13<sup>th</sup> c.)

**Figure 13** Tercan, Mama Hatun's *türbe* (c. 1200). Ani, Virgins hermitage (early 13<sup>th</sup> c.).  
Photo of Tercan © H.H. Khatcherian; of Ani © Author

ty is reinforced by the community of stone material. In the structure too, one can see the old principle of the two- or three-storey funerary chapel, which dates back to the early Christian period.<sup>35</sup>

According to Hillenbrand (1994, 307-8), most of the *türbes*, particularly those of Kayseri and Erzurum, “are virtually indistinguishable from the top half of the standard contemporary Armenian church”. The same author considers as Armenian borrowings “the use of twin windows [...], of deeply grooved V-shaped niches with scalloped heads,<sup>36</sup> and of the continuous patterned rectangular borders enclosing them”. Hillenbrand’s final remark in this passage could

**35** On the tradition of the tower-shaped, two or three-storey mausoleum in early Christian Armenia, see: Mnac’akanyan 1982, 57, 88-92, 177; Donabédian 2008, 25-27, 204-205, 207-208; in medieval Armenia, see: Mnatsakanyan 1984, 422-4. On the structure of the *türbes*, with a funerary ‘crypt’ surmounted by an ‘oratory’, see: Gabriel 1931, 75-6; Yetkin 1962, 31-3; Ettinghausen, Grabar 1987, 271, 323; Hoag 1987, 124; Hillenbrand 1994, 282-7 (“The Tomb Tower”).

**36** We saw above that the scallops on top of the niches can be regarded, in the Armenian repertoire, as a borrowing from the Georgian one. On *türbes* of Erzurum, the row of hanging palmettes with concentric veins, and the motif of cable that adorn the cornice are more reminiscent of Tayk-Tao and Georgia (as well as of the Armenian-Georgian church of Çengelli near Sarıkamış, early 11th century) than of Armenia proper.



serve as a conclusion for our essay: “Clearly, an extended scholarly assessment of the interplay of the two cultures in this field is long overdue” (1994, 308).

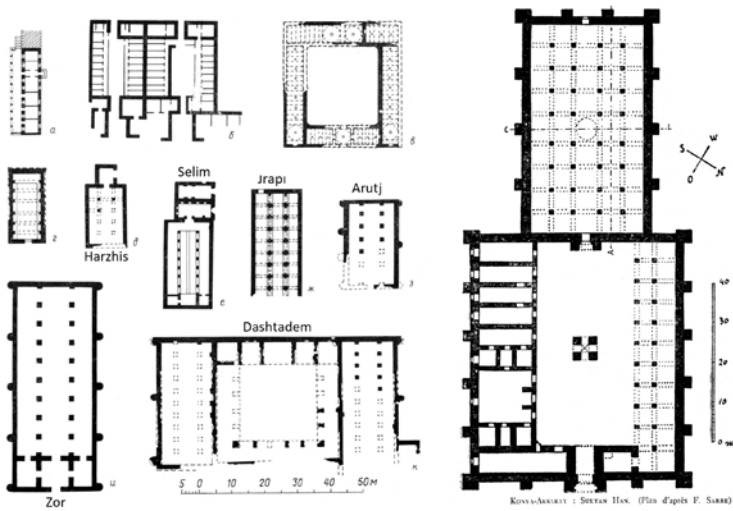
One of the Seljuk mausoleums, the Mama Hatun *türbe* of Tercan, built, as we saw above, c. 1200, by an architect from Khlat/Ahlat, has an octoconch configuration, unusual in this context [fig. 13]. Some of the *türbes* have an umbrella-shaped dome, rather rare in the Turkish-Muslim world (but present on Yezidi mausoleums). An umbrella roof of an original shape<sup>37</sup> also covers the central dome of one of the largest and richest ensembles of the time, the Divriği Mosque-Hospital (1229), built by Khurramshah from Ahlat [fig. 14]. These forms are in all likelihood borrowed from Armenian architecture where they have been widespread for long centuries: the hexaconch and octoconch compositions have been employed since the 6th-7th centuries (in Armenia as well as in Georgia – Donabédian 2008, 78-9, 185-9), and the umbrella dome since, at least, the 10th century (Donabédian 2018-19, 215-34). The free hexaconch of the Virgins monastery in Ani (early 13th century) is very close (and almost contemporary) to the Tercan mausoleum (Baboudjian 1979). One of Khlat/Ahlat’s *türbes*, the Emir Bayındır *türbesi*, dated 1481, is crowned by a rotunda, similar to the lantern frequently used in Armenia on top of the *gavits*, bell-towers and chapel-mausoleums of the 13th-14th centuries (Jakobson 1983, 127).

Two remarks can be added to these observations on the exchange of architectural structures. The first one concerns an important and impressive structure in the Armenian monastic architecture, which, curiously, was not transferred, nor adapted for Muslim architecture. It is the large system of pairs of cross arches that support the vaults of many *gavits* and other monastic constructions. The buildings sponsored by the Seljuks and then by the Ilkhanids did not resort to this remarkable solution, which remained unique to Armenian architecture. Only a relatively late mosque, located in Sis/Kozan, former capital of the Armenian kingdom in Cilicia, a Mameluk work dated 1448, recently restored, presents such a structure under its large vault.<sup>38</sup> The second remark concerns a curiosity: one of the manifestations of the strong Armenian interest in cross arches was the creation of six-pointed stars made of cross ribs in the cupolas of two 13th century *gavits* (Neghuts and Khoranashat) and one church (Khorakert, 1251).<sup>39</sup> This

**37** The dome has eight rhomboid panels faintly pleated in their centre, a solution close to that adopted on Haghbat’s bell tower (Armenia, 1245) (Donabédian 2018-19, 233).

**38** A very brief note with photos can be found concerning this monument in [https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoşkadem\\_Camii](https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoşkadem_Camii).

**39** A powerful carcass of six large arches creating a six-pointed star, reconstructed in the dome of St. James cathedral of Jerusalem during its restoration of 1835, might be a reminiscence of the original structure, similar to Khorakert’s one, contemporary (?) of the foundation of the cathedral, in the mid-12th century.



**Figure 14** Umbrella domes on Armenian churches of 11th c. (photos: © Author), and on Turkish monuments of 13th-14th c. © J.-C. and Ch. Hotellier (Divriği), and Z. Sargsyan (Amasya and Tokat)

**Figure 15** Plans of caravanserais built by Armenian sponsors (13th-14th c.), after Khalpakhchyan 1971, 189. Plan of Sultan Han near Aksaray (1229), after Yetkin 1962, 53

form in turn has an enigmatic affinity with the eight-pointed stars of 10th-11th centuries Andalusian domes...

### 3.2.3 Kinship of Compositions Based on a Community of Function

A close relationship is observed in the architectural composition of the caravanserais, called *han* in Turkish, large buildings placed along the roads, at a distance allowing the caravans to go through stages of one day (around 40 km) [fig. 15]. Approximately the same structures are present on a wide territory including nowadays eastern Turkey and the republic of Armenia.<sup>40</sup> Several caravanserais are partly preserved in 'eastern' Armenia: Zor (now Kervanseray, province of Iğdır, Turkey), Arutj, Harjis (1319), Selim (1332)... Most of them, like the early Christian basilicas, have three naves, with vaults and roof in stone, and correspond to the category of 'mountain caravanserais'. Often, at the top of the vault, skylights are open, sometimes decorated with stalactites. In Zor, it is precisely here that, according to a practice attested elsewhere in Armenia (Barxudaryan 1963, 97), the architect had his name engraved.

At Selim, a preliminary room before the entrance was perhaps intended for thermal protection of the interior. In some other representatives of the "mountain caravanserais", notably at Zor, the same "airlock chamber" was integrated within the building's perimeter (Thierry 1985, 293-323). There was also, for example at Dashtadem (Nerkin Talin), a type of plain caravanserai: a larger, quadrangular composition with a central courtyard and open galleries (summer inn), flanked by two three-nave wings (perhaps dormitories).

The numerous *hans* preserved in nowadays Turkey have, in the main, the same composition but are generally much larger, and better preserved (restored). The larger ones combine both principles: a covered space, with several naves and a dome (an eight-sided pyramid on a short octagonal drum) on the central nave, for the winter, and buildings stowed on the sides of an open courtyard, for the summer. In four of them, in the centre of the courtyard, stands a small square-plan oratory, an original two-level structure called a kiosk-mosque, with a first floor open like a canopy.<sup>41</sup> On the main façade of this type of 'chapel', two corbelled staircases lead to the door of the upper floor. We will come back to them below.

<sup>40</sup> On the medieval caravanserais of Armenia see: Harut'yunyan 1960; Chalpachčjan 1971, 185-209. On those of Turkey, Erdmann 1961-76; Yetkin 1962, 46-59; Hillenbrand 1994, 346-50.

<sup>41</sup> The study of this original structure and its links to similar constructions in the region is outside the scope of this article. It could bring out affinities, especially with the bell towers and funerary chapels mentioned below.



**Figure 16** Pairs of corbelled staircases on Armenian monuments (13th-14th c.) and on the 'kiosk-mosque' of Kayseri Sultan Han (c. 1230-36). Photos of Haritj and Kayseri © H.H. Khatcherian; of Gandzasar © Z. Sargsyan; of Noravank © Author

Referring to the 'flourishing school of caravanserais centred in Armenia', Hillenbrand emphasises the Armenian contributions to the architecture of the Seljuk caravanserais, which include, according to him: "the tradition of fine stereotomy and carved stone decoration, [...] the form of an open courtyard with an adjoining basilica stable". And from there, enlarging the perspective, he adds: "conical roofs on tall drums, exterior sculpture, stonework in chequerboard patterns and numerous geometrical and floral motifs, all come to mind. Even the preponderant use of stone in Anatolian Saljuq architecture [...] is a notable characteristic of Armenian architecture" (1994, 346).

### 3.2.4 Transfer of Forms with Round Trips from One Area to the Other

The pairs of corbelled staircases give a good example of round-trip transfer of architectural forms between Christians and Muslims in Anatolia-Armenia region [fig. 16]. Corbelled staircases are used in Armenian architecture from the very beginning of the 13th century, inside the churches. Starting from the ground, they allow access to the second floor of the twin angular chapels that flank the west arm of the nave. One of the first dated examples can be seen in Haritj in 1201. Several others were built during the first decades of the century. On each sacristy, a single flight of stairs protrudes, but as the two walls of the west arm of the nave face each other, we perceive these two staircases as a pair.<sup>42</sup> The effect is even sharper when the twin staircases are placed in the apse, as is the case in Gandzasar (1216-1238). Sometimes the underside of each step is cut into a three- or pentalobe leaf pattern, which is the matrix of stalactites/*muqarnas* (McClary 2017, 32). The pair of cantilevered staircases is soon taken up inside the hospital of the Great Mosque of Divriği, built, as we saw, by an architect from Khlat/Ahlat c. 1229.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, the device is transposed to the exterior of buildings where its twinned position is highlighted: it is adapted to the façade of the small kiosk-mosques mentioned above. Four examples are preserved in the following caravanserais: Sultan Han and Aǧzikara Han near Aksaray (respectively 1229 and 1231, 1240), Sultan Han near Kayseri (c. 1230-36), and Işaklı (Sahipata) Han (c. 1250) in Afyonkarahisar district. The same form is used, with the same function of threshold staircase, at the foot of several *türbes*, especially in Ilkhanid period (13th-14th centuries) mausoleums, for example in Kayseri.<sup>44</sup>

Several decades later, in its new version applied to the façades of Turkish shrines, the form ‘returns’ to the Armenian Christian environment. In the monastery of Noravank, it vigorously animates the western façade of Prince Burtel Orbelian’s mausoleum-church (1331-39): its two flights of steps, starting from the ground, gradually rise on both sides of the façade, leading to the door of the upper chapel.<sup>45</sup> ‘Shortened’ formulas can also be found on Armenian buildings of the

<sup>42</sup> In Yeghipatrush (Mravyan) monastery, such staircases are used inside the *gavit* (early 13th century) to access the second floor of eastern angular sacristies.

<sup>43</sup> Gabriel 1934, pl. LXXVI, figs. 1-2; pl. LXXVII, fig. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Gabriel 1931, numerous illustrations. The same type of staircase appears on the Gök *medrese* of Amasya (1266).

<sup>45</sup> This “convergence of construction techniques” was noted by Blessing 2016, 61. See also McClary 2017, 34; Maranci 2018, 143.

late 13th and early 14th century which have the shape of a tower, such as the library-bell tower of Goshavank (1291) and the chapels-mausoleums-campaniles of Yeghvard (between 1301 and 1328) and Kaputan (1349) (Donabédian, Porter 2017, 844-5).

### 3.2.5 Shared Decorative Repertoire Between Armenian and Seljuk-ilkhanid Architectures Since the Late 12th Century

As regards the decorative repertoire of architecture, an important phenomenon can be observed. At a time when a rich decorative and ornamental Seljuk vocabulary was just being created and disseminated, in all likelihood with the participation of Armenian, Georgian and other indigenous artists, Armenian architecture opened its doors widely to many of these new compositions and motifs, hitherto unknown to it. In this process the rich urban civil architecture that was developing in multicultural Ani, with the active participation of merchants like Tigran Honents, probably played a notable role (Marr 1934, 35-6; Guidetti 2017, 177; Donabédian 2019a, 122-4). An astonishing ‘syncretism’ was thus created, in which many devices, shapes and ornaments fluidly passed from Christians to Muslims and vice versa (Otto-Dorn 1967, 165; Blessing 2016, 55, 58).<sup>46</sup> This ‘porosity’ was such that the boundaries between the two religious spheres sometimes seem blurred (Blessing 2016, 55, 63-4). The catalogue of common traits is very extensive, ranging from the structure of the portals to surfaces dug with stalactites, from zoomorphic scenes to a large number of ornamental motifs.

#### 3.2.5.1 Decorative Structures

**Portals.** During the post-Arab renaissance (the ‘kingdoms period’) in the 10th-11th centuries, Armenian portals were of two types: with a curved contour until the end of the 10th century, then with a rectangular frame and a high ‘lintel’ ornated with ‘antiquisant’ motifs, in the first decades of the 11th century. After the Seljuk domination, from the end of the 12th century, a new type of portal appeared, akin to the *pishtaq* created in the Islamic architecture of Iran around

<sup>46</sup> Richard McClary (2017, 32) invokes, among examples of transfer of forms from the Islamic tradition to the Armenian architecture, some elements of ornamentation of Gandzasar church (1216-1238). In fact: a) the scallops/festoons on top of the dihedral niches, as we saw, are a borrowing from Georgian architecture, where this feature is present since the 11th century; b) the pair of corbelled staircases, as was noted above, is widespread in Armenian churches since the early 13th century.

the late 10th-11th century.<sup>47</sup> It is characterised by two frames: the first one, immediately at the edge of the bay, curved, and the second one, a little wider and higher, rectangular. The same principle of double frame portal is omnipresent on Muslim monuments during the Seljuk rule, then under the Mongols, but, according to the *pishtaq* norm, it is often 'out of scale', independent, to a certain extent, from the architectural structure of the façade and it shows a much greater ornamental richness, including frequently a deep triangular niche filled with *muqarnas*.

On the contrary, Armenian portals are more tightly integrated into architecture and differ from the Seljuk style by their sense of measure, and the simplicity and clarity of their decoration. Some of them present bands of stalactites along the frame(s), but the niche carved with *muqarnas* is relatively rare (*gavits* of Holy Apostles in Ani, Neghuts, and Yeghipatrush/Mravian, upper level of Yeghvard chapel, palace of Sahmadin at Mren, caravanserai of Selim).<sup>48</sup> Armenian portals are also often decorated with stone marquetry or its imitation. The portals of Ani's palaces and hotels however differ from this norm, because, although they present the same composition and decoration, they are double, consisting of two portals placed on top of each other (nevertheless in correspondence with the architectural structure of the building).

Another portal of Ani attracts attention, that of the *gavit/zhamatun* (a building with an ambiguous function) added in the early 13th century, contrary to usual practice, not to the west, but to the south of the Holy Apostles church (early 11th century). Enriched with a high niche adorned with stalactites, it is part of an unusual, large composition with vertical sculpted stripes and pairs of small dihedral niches, which decorates the eastern façade (a strange position) of this building. As Antony Eastmond recently pointed out, a great similarity binds this enigmatic portal of Ani to that, created in the same years in Tercan, at the entrance to the courtyard of Mama Hatun's *türbe*, by an architect already mentioned above, from Khlat [fig. 17].<sup>49</sup>

**Dihedral niches.** As noted by several scholars (Otto-Dorn 1967, 165; Baboudjian 1979, 237; Hillenbrand 1994, 308; Pancaroğlu 2009, 181), pairs of dihedral (triangular) external niches on the façades, very popular in Armenia (and Georgia) since the 7th century, where they had a multifunctional use, were in all likelihood transferred to Mus-

<sup>47</sup> [http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t276/e736?\\_hi=0&\\_pos=6389](http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t276/e736?_hi=0&_pos=6389).

<sup>48</sup> Useful synoptic plates can be found in Cuneo 1988, vol. 2. For the portals of late 12th-14th centuries, Cuneo 1988, 779-82, 811. Architectural surveys of sixty-four portals from this period are published in Azatjan 1987.

<sup>49</sup> Eastmond 2019, 14-15; pertinent observations also by Maranci 2018, 135.



Tercan, Mama Hatun's mausoleum



Ani, church of Holy Apostles, 'gavit'

**Figure 17** Portals of the courtyard of Mama Hatun's mausoleum, Tercan, and of the *gavit* of St. Apostles church, Ani, both c. 1200. Photo of Tercan © H.H. Khatcherian; of Ani © Author



lim architecture, first of all to *türbes*, where they received a purely decorative function. Continuing a tradition that dates back, in Armenia, partly to the 7th, and partly to the 10th-11th centuries, the squinch that covers these niches often receives a sculpted decorative treatment in both schools, sometimes including animal figures (St. Gregory of Tigran Honents, Ani, and Emir Saltuk *türbe*, Erzurum).

**Radiating/arched ribs** on the external surface of the domes and blind arcades-colonnades on the drums, which are an old Armenian tradition, as we have seen before, have frequently been applied on Seljuk and Ilkhanid constructions, especially on *türbes*.

**Brace-shaped arches** and, less often, trefoil/trilobed or polyfoil/pollobed arches are shared between both architectures.

**Triangular caissons** under certain cupolas. We mentioned above the similarity of the transitional systems of cupolas through squinches and pendentives. Under the cupolas of some 13th-century *gavits*, as well as in the chapel of Yeghvard (c. 1321), one finds the same type of triangular *caissons* adjusted into a transition belt as in certain Muslim monuments of Anatolia (Karatay *medrese*, and İnce Minareli *Medrese*, Konya, 1251 and 1279).

**Elaborate ceilings and groined vaults** with radiating patterns and stone marquetry are present in both architectures, always with the same difference: soberer in Armenian monuments, mainly *gavits*, and extremely sophisticated in some Muslim ones – one of the most impressive examples is offered in the mosque-hospital of Divriği. The city of Ani has partly preserved two remarkable sets of flat and vaulted ceilings, one in the prayer room of the Manucehr Mosque, the other in the *gavit* of the Holy Apostles [fig. 18]. In the first, the flat portions alternate with groined vaults, in the second, the central rhombus is occupied by a stalactite-dug cupola open in the centre. These two ensembles distinguish themselves, in particular, by the richness of their marquetry where dark brown and orange stones alternate to draw various star and checkerboard motifs. In the centre of the *gavit*, the stalactites of the vault are dug into blocks of bright orange tuff, while the rhomboid moulded border is dark brown. Given the kinship of these two halls, including the resemblance of their wide cylindrical columns topped by capitals with *muqarnas*-carved angles, and given the earliest inscription, of 1212, engraved on the *gavit* (Karapetyan 2011, 112) which constitutes a *terminus ante quem*, it seems reasonable to envisage, for both, as Mattia Guidetti (2017, 169-73) proposes, a dating from the late 12th-early 13th century. The participation, in both buildings, of the same team of craftsmen can also be considered.



**Figure 18** Ceilings, vaults and capitals of columns in Manuehr mosque and the Holy Apostles 'gavit', Ani, both c. 1200. © H.H. Khatcherian

### 3.2.5.2 Ornamental Compositions and Motifs

**Sculpted architectural ornamentation** is traditionally, since the early Christian period, executed in Armenia in bas-relief, generally (but not always) flat and slant-carved, inseparable from the stone surface on which it stands out. This slightly protruding sculpture lends itself well to the play of shadow and light. It was very permeable to contact with Islamic ornamentation, both animal, floral and geometric. In his chapter “Bevelled style cum arabesque”, Guidetti (2017, 163-8) rightly points out the Armeno-Islamic kinship in this regard during the ‘Seljuk-Ilkhanid’ period. It could be useful, however, to recall the old roots, in Armenia, as well as in Georgia, of the technique of more or less slanted/bevelled, sometimes vertical, carving, shared since the late Antique period with the other eastern Christians (Syrians and Copts), as well as with Sasanian stucco tradition (Donabédian 2008, 58-9, 247-8). Compositions, perhaps of popular origin, such as rosettes or daisies with almond furrows, seem to reveal the influence of the traditional wood carving and its type of incisive cutting with very regular geometry. At the same time, especially for figurative images, there was a more plastic treatment, with rounded transitions and more marked relief. This common heritage served as the basis for the subsequent interactions, including those which developed during the Arab and post-Arab periods. From the second half of the 9th century, the *khachkars* provide countless examples of more or less bevelled carving technique, including, since the 11th century, elaborate geometric interlaces. All this prepared the ground for the exchanges of the 12th-14th centuries, where intricate plant motifs, arabesques and floral interlaces multiplied.

**Zoomorphic compositions** where real or fantastic animals are placed symmetrically, in pairs, face to face, or in combat scenes, show great affinities between the two schools. It should be remembered that images of animals, already widely practiced in the architectural sculpture of Armenia and Georgia since the early Christian period, adopted new patterns during the post-Arab period (10th-11th centuries), giving a wide place to fantastic themes and scenes of attack of an animal by a lion or an eagle. On this fertile soil grew the rich bestiary of the 12th-14th centuries, whose pictures appear on both Christian and Muslim monuments. Among imaginary animals of the new period, pairs of harpies, sphinxes, griffons and dragons, or isolated figures of such monsters, illustrate narrow links.<sup>50</sup> On a monument mentioned above, the Alay Han caravanserai near Ak-saray, built c. 1192 by an architect from Khlat/Ahlat, a small bas-re-

<sup>50</sup> For an accurate visual presentation of the Armenian medieval bestiary, see Kyurkchyan, Khatcherian 2010, 40-88.

relief depicts a double-bodied but single-headed lion (or sphinx);<sup>51</sup> a similar creature is carved on the Artukid rampart of Diyarbakır (early 13th c.), and on the portal of Nor Varagavank monastery (1224-37), in Armenia [fig. 19].<sup>52</sup>

Let us note in passing that, in the Armenian context, some of these scenes, which seem to have a ‘heraldic’ character – for example those showing an eagle holding a small quadruped in its talons, or a lion attacking another animal – have often been interpreted as coats of arms,<sup>53</sup> while virtually the same figures are observed on monuments sponsored by different dynasties, which excludes that they may have a function of dynastic symbols. For their part, Antony Eastmond (2015, 185) and Patricia Blessing (2016, 56) have rightly suggested an apotropaic function for several animal figures. This interpretation seems particularly justified for such representations as the pair of long dragon-snakes that converge, with their mouths wide open, towards a central figure, and seem indeed to protect, from the ramparts on which they are carved, the cities of Ani, Amid and Baghdad (Eastmond 2015, 186-90, 194).

**Stone marquetry** (or its imitation) combines stars and rhombuses, eight-pointed stars and crosses, polygons and triangles... In Armenia, stone marquetry on ceilings, portals (notably the tympanum) and fronts of altar, is often two-toned or polychrome. We briefly presented above two remarkable examples of such stone mosaic in Ani: in Manucehr’s mosque, and in the *gavit* of Holy Apostles (both probably late 12th-early 13th century).

**Stalactites – *muqarnas*** in Arabic are one of the most characteristic motifs of late 12th and 13th-14th centuries sculpted decoration, common to both arts and still popular on their monuments for many centuries, until the modern period. It is a transposition into stone of a form widespread in Persia, Mesopotamia and Central Asia since the 11th century on brick supports. On Armenian and Seljuk-Ilkhanid monuments, stalactites, almost identical in their design, are mainly applied to domes, portal niches and internal niches.<sup>54</sup> They are also often carved on the lower angles of parallelepipedic capitals which are very similar in both architectures (Guidetti 2017, 163, 167-8, 174; Eastmond 2019, 16-17). We mentioned above the striking resemblance between the cupolas of the two architectures which are

<sup>51</sup> According to McClary 2017, 42, the same image, interpreted as a ‘symbol of royal authority’, is carved on two other Muslim monuments of Anatolia, in Kayseri and Sivas.

<sup>52</sup> It is also present on *khachkars* of the late Middle Ages; cf. Petrosyan 2008, 214, 227.

<sup>53</sup> This broadly accepted viewpoint is presented, for example, in Mat’evosyan 2002.

<sup>54</sup> In his study of *gavits*, Stepan Mnatsakanyan summarises the history of this form, and analyses the structure of the stalactite vaults of Armenia and the design of their main elements: Mnacakanjan 1952, 118-30. See also Ghazarian, Ousterhout 2001. An in-depth analysis of the geometry of *muqarnas* is given in the work of Necipoğlu 1995.



Aksaray, Alay Han



Diyarbakır, rampart



Nor Varagavank

**Figure 19** Double bodied and single headed sphinx or lion: A) Aksaray Alay Han (c. 1192). Photo: Aksaray İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü. B) Diyarbakır, rampart (early 13th c.). Photo: H.H. Khatcherian. C) Nor Varagavank monastery (1224-37). © Z. Sargsyan

carved with *muqarnas* surrounding the central skylight, and thus benefiting from the permanent contrast of shadow and light [fig. 11]. At the Horomos Monastery, near Ani, the reliquary hall and library built in 1229 by Prince Vache Vachutyan, had one of the largest stalactite vaults in the whole region, which covered a square of 76 m<sup>2</sup> (Kazaryan 2015, 184, 196).

Two observations can be added concerning the *muqarnas* in Armenia and Anatolia.

First, this ornament seems to have been introduced into the stone architecture of the Armenians and of the Seljuk Turks simultaneously, at the end of the 12th century. According to Oya Pancaroğlu, the bearers of the innovation seem to have been architects from Khat/Ahlat (Pancaroğlu 2013, 55-7; McClary 2017, 39).<sup>55</sup>

Second, in Armenian architecture, this ornament is less present in the purely religious/liturgical space: it certainly appears around the tympanum and on the edges of the portal of some churches and sometimes on some elements of their decoration, but it is very rare in the interior of the churches (Mnacakanjan 1952, 128). On the contrary, the *muqarnas* is widespread on and in other monastic buildings, including *gavits*, which are adjoined to the western façade of the monastic churches, and in which funerary function is predominant, probably combined with an utilitarian function (e.g. as a meeting place), but where the purely religious function is much less important, almost deprived of liturgical component. One wonders if this reveals, at least in part, a religiously prohibitive origin.

The **ornaments**<sup>56</sup> shared between the two architectures include:

- a. complex **floral compositions**, such as sophisticated **arabesques** of long, coiled flowering stems, interlaced scrolls, several kinds of palmettes... that cover entire fields, e.g. on the tympanums of the doors, the borders of the portals, the front of the apses, as well as on the medallion under the cross of the *khachkars*. Mattia Guidetti (2017, 167-8) recently put forward the hypothesis that the Mosul region could have served, through its productions of the last decades of the 12th century, as the source of certain Armenian ornaments, such as capitals with angles cut into *muqarnas* and intricate arabesques with coiled stems. As for the latter, it is true that they do not appear, in the field of Armenian architectural sculpture, be-

<sup>55</sup> Mattia Guidetti (2017, 167) evokes the appearance of *muqarnas* carved on the corners of stone imposts as early as 1172-73 in Mosul, suggesting that this would be a possible source for the introduction of this form one or two decades later on Armenian (and Anatolian Seljuk) monuments.

<sup>56</sup> A representative selection of Armenian ornamental motifs is given in Kyurkchyan, Khatcherian 2010.

- fore the 1190s.<sup>57</sup> However, it should be noted that very similar floral coils are already present in Armenian illumination since the 11th century.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, in the Georgian sacred silverwork, the brilliant scrolls with very sophisticated tendrils, of the late 12th century, are the result of a long evolution that links them to an already ancient local tradition (Donabédian 2016, 96 fn. 94). In other words, without excluding the ‘appeal’ exerted by some of Mosul’s works of late 12th century, it is probably necessary to go back in time to find the first exchanges that could give birth to these forms.
- b. Various **geometric interlaces**, especially bands with complex angular tracery, popular on portals and on drums of Armenian churches and on Turkish *türbes*,
  - c. Angular interlace of two large, rounded stems, often called ‘**Seljuk chain**’. These two stems cross diagonally and draw relatively long horizontal sections between two intersections. Strangely enough, the appellation ‘Seljuk chain’ is mainly used by historians of Armenian art, even though the motif is at least as much, if not more frequent on Armenian Christian architecture than on medieval Turkish buildings.
  - d. **Eight-pointed stars** (and more rarely, five- and six-pointed stars) are a popular motif, both in Armenian art (in some cases, perhaps, because of the crosses that alternate with the stars) and in the Islamic world. Iranian decorations with eight-pointed tiles of earthenware are one of its famous manifestations. It is frequent, in Armenian architecture, in stone mosaics (marquetry), on the strips that adorn for example the portals, on the elevation of the altar (*bem*) and on the ceilings, as well as on the *khachkars* (see below).
  - e. Some Armenian **inscriptions**, both in metropolitan Armenia (Noravank) and in Cilicia (Anavarza), as well as in Crimea (Holy Cross of Surkhat/Surb Khach), are inspired by the floriated Cufic script, as shown by the flowery form of the letters and the plant background on which they are carved (Maranci 2018, 144).

<sup>57</sup> For early examples on portal frames see Azatjan 1987, 16 (chapel, Makaravank, 1198), 18 (church, Goshavank, 1191-96).

<sup>58</sup> The earliest occurrences of such floral coiled scrolls can be seen in the following manuscripts of the Matenadaran (Yerevan): Durnovo, Sargsyan 1978, 9-10 (Mat. no. 2877, 10th-11th centuries), 22 (Mat. no. 8209, End pages, 11th century), 23-6 (Mat. no. 7737, 11th century), 27 (Mat. no. 985, 11th century), 28 (Mat. no. 379, 12th century).

### 3.2.6 Yeghvard – An Emblem of the Armenian-Islamic ‘Syncretism’

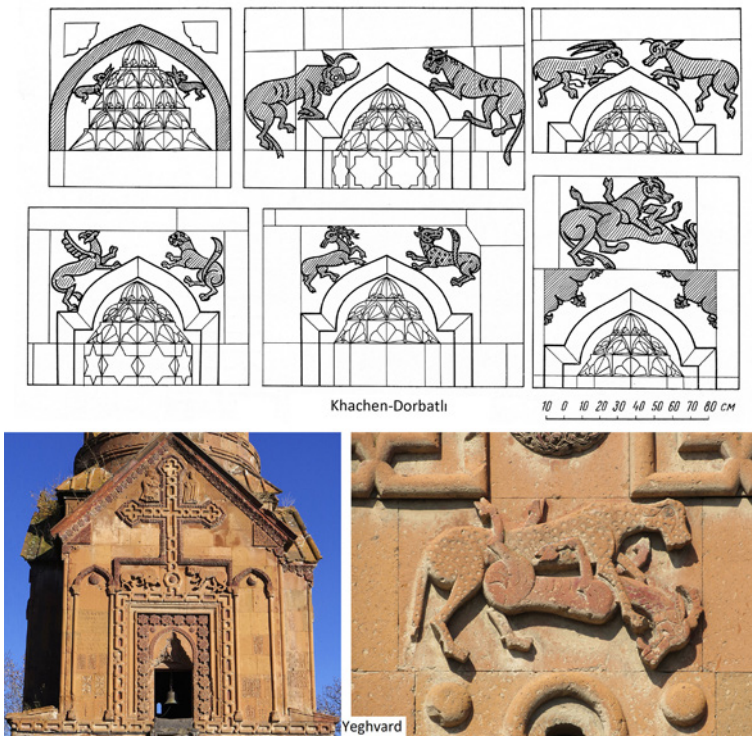
The chapel-mausoleum of Yeghvard, built between 1301 and 1328, probably around 1321 (Donabédian, Porter 2017), is a true emblem of Armenian-Muslim artistic interaction, for two reasons. First, a very large place is given in its carved decoration to features, shapes and ornaments which are common to Armenians and Muslims. These elements include:

- a. Decorative structures and compositions: the structure of the lower portal, with its two frames, the composition of the second level door (with its niche, frame and animals), the niche of this door and that of the apse of the same oratory, both similar, with their stalactites, to a *mihrab*, the row of triangular *caissons* under the ‘portion of drum’ that supports the rotunda.
- b. Decors and ornaments: the numerous animal sculptures, the ‘Seljuk chain’ which has a considerable presence, especially on the western façade of the monument where it forms a large cross, the elaborate arabesques, the complex networks of geometric interlaces with star motifs, the row of eight-pointed stars, omnipresent, and the combination of eight-pointed stars with cruciform figures sculpted on the altar front of the lower floor.

The second reason why Yeghvard can be seen as a symbol of Armenian-Muslim ‘syncretism’ is the very close relationship that binds this funerary chapel to the Khachen-Dorbatlı mausoleum, erected in 1314 for a Muslim lord, about two hundred kilometres further east as the crow flies, in Artsakh/Karabakh (Usejnov, Bretanickij, Salamzade 1963, 149-56; Bretanickij 1966, 188-95; Karapetyan 2010, 4-11). Indeed, the two buildings are the work of the same architect who signed them by his name, Shahik. In Khachen, the architect harmoniously combined the cruciform composition of the interior with the dodecagonal outline of the exterior. He freely reinterpreted the principle of Armenian dihedral niches, in particular those carved into the faces of the type of polygons surrounding a hexaconch or an octoconch of Armenian religious architecture. He could be inspired by the 7th-century church of Zoravar, very close to Yeghvard, which is an octoconch inscribed in an eighteen-sided polygon (Donabédian 2008, 185-7).

Moreover, related by function and composition, and practically contemporary, these two monuments have, as we saw, many traits in common [fig. 20]. A great resemblance binds in particular the images of animals, real and fantastic, even if in Khachen they are engraved, and not sculpted: the representations of the spotted panther, the doe, the ibex, the deer and the attack of a goat by a feline are al-





**Figure 20** Khachen-Dorbatlı türbe (1314) and Yeghvard mausoleum-chapel (c. 1321). Drawings after Bretanitskii 1966, 191. Photos of Yeghvard © H.H. Khatcherian and Author

most identical in terms of design. The location of the two animals engraved (and painted in Khachen), under the arch that rises above the door with *muqarnas*, is exactly the same in both cases.

An underground mausoleum recently discovered in Yerevan, in the basement of a building on Abovyan Street,<sup>59</sup> may well be the third work of the same architect. Indeed, its cruciform structure is close to that of Khachen's interior, and the *muqarnas* carved on the four rectangular niches of the cross are similar to those of Yeghvard and Khachen.

<sup>59</sup> To our knowledge, only one or two photographs have been printed in non-specialised publications.

### 3.2.7 *Khachkars*

The limitations of this article do not allow us to evoke the various areas of medieval Armenian art in which Islamizing motifs have a certain presence, for example, the fields of miniature and of wooden doors.<sup>60</sup> We will limit ourselves to brief observations on the domain of *khachkar* because of its strong representativeness and its close connection to sculpted decoration of architectural monuments.

Revealing the depth of the phenomenon considered here, many features and motifs already observed on architectural monuments can also be seen on the *khachkars*, symbols of Armenian Christianity. As indicated above, mainly aniconic, the *khachkars* have greatly benefited from contacts with the cultures of Islam. Here too these interactions were probably facilitated by the fact that Armenian traditions, know-how and artists had contributed to the gestation of the art commissioned by Seljuk princes, and to its development.

While until the 10th century the *khachkars* had often their upper end rounded, from the 11th century the stelas with rectangular outline multiplied, bordered by wide bands abundantly ornamented. Elaborate and subtle interlaces, both geometric and floral, developed, complementing and reinforcing, with their endless movement, the symbolism of eternal life expressed by several other elements, including plant ornaments.

After the Seljuk and Mongol invasions, the ornamental repertoire of the *khachkars* was enriched with rows of six- and mainly eight-pointed stars, complex arabesques of the type described above, wide angular interlaces, 'Seljuk chain' (less frequent), brace-shaped arches, rows of *muqarnas* (less frequent): the patterns shared between Armenian and Islamic architectures are almost equally present on *khachkars*. The tendency to cover the entire field is also strong from the late 12th century onwards.

The two-directional character of these exchanges and the depth of their roots are confirmed by some important evidences. In some of the oldest (preserved) medieval cemeteries of Turkey, the carved stelas erected by the Muslim neighbours of the Armenians (and/or by Islamized Armenians) are obviously inspired by the model of the *khachkar*. This is patent in the Muslim cemeteries of Khlát/Ahlát (Sarkisian 1940, 61; Pancaroğlu 2009, 186; Curatola 2010, 23) and Vostan/Gevaş in the basin of Lake Van. Vostan, on the south shore, was the capital of the Armenian kingdom of Vaspurakan (908-1021); as for Khlát/Ahlát, as mentioned above, this port on the north-west-

<sup>60</sup> The large door of Bethlehem, dated 1227, for example, deserves a particular attention, not only because of its decoration, but also because of its bilingual, Armenian and Arabic inscription. See Donabédian 2019b.

ern shore of Lake Van became one of the first Muslim settlements on Armenian soil, where as early as the 8th-9th centuries, the caliphs had established an Arab colony. During the Seljuk and Mongol periods it was known as a multicultural and polyglot centre. Dated approximately to the 12th-14th centuries (the earliest from the 1180s-90s – Pancaroğlu 2009, 185), covered on both faces with elaborate floral and geometric patterns, as well as long Arabic inscriptions, the high rectangular Islamic slabs of Khlat are richer than the ordinary Armenian *khachkars*, and their ornamentation is different. But by their proportions and general silhouette, their general decorative composition (a main field delimited by fairly wide edges often forming the frame of a kind of niche), the presence of a slightly protruding cornice, as well as by their position at the extremity of a tomb, they are very close to their Christian models. It should be noted that an Armenian cemetery with *khachkars* existed in Khlat until the beginning of the 20th century in the vicinity of the Muslim one (Bachmann 1913, taf. 45; Pancaroğlu 2009, 198, fig. 14).

### 3.3 The 17th-Century “Renaissance”

During the dark period from the mid-14th century until the mid-17th century, Armenia was several times ravaged, submitted to Turkmen tribes, then became the arena of numerous conflicts between Ottoman Turkey and Safavid Persia. Few Armenian constructions are then reported. Cultural life took refuge in monasteries and especially abroad, in Diaspora centres. At the beginning of the 17th century, a large part of the Armenian population of southeastern Armenia was deported to Persia, notably to Isfahan, where they built the large Armenian quarter of New Julfa, and from where they developed an immense international trade network.

When peace returned in 1639 between Turkey and Persia, Armenia came back to life. Restorations and new constructions marked this period of rebirth. Among the diversity of sources from which Armenian architectural decor was enriched, the Islamizing current remained very important, as always integrated into the main core of the national tradition. This current manifested itself as before, mainly in the sculpted decoration, especially in the carved strips, on the door or window frames, on the impostes or capitals. These motifs were highly regularized interlaces, lush plant motifs and stalactites of a new, Ottoman type.

The great novelty was coming from the opulent merchant community of New Julfa. An unprecedented synthesis of Armenian and Persian traditions was taking place there. For the first time, architectural forms borrowed from Islam were entering the Holy of Holies of Armenian religious architecture. On the centre of the churches, a bulbous dome was built in light masonry, substantially above the ac-

tual cupola, and under the latter, the transition was carried out by reticulated pendentives.<sup>61</sup>

Inside their buildings, the New-Julfan Armenians adopted an abundantly painted decoration that opened up, on the one hand, to the iconographic and stylistic influence of Western engravings used in printed Bibles, and on the other hand, to ornamental compositions borrowed from Persian Safavid art. The impressive churches of New Julfa could not fail to exert a strong influence on the Armenian world of the time. Admittedly, the bulbous domes, probably considered too foreign to the national tradition, were not transplanted out of Persia. On the contrary, the other principles used in New Julfa, the reticulated pendentives and the new fashion of painted decoration, had a wide resonance in Armenia itself, especially in St. Echmiadzin cathedral.

#### 4 Conclusion: Let the Vast Lands Left Fallow Be Cultivated

Islamic-Christian ‘syncretism’ and the deep relationship between the two ‘South Caucasian’ Christian communities are areas of considerable importance for the history of medieval art in the region. This is true not only for their most visible expression, architecture, but also for their sculpted decoration and, if we consider the question from the Armenian point of view, for the emblematic domain of *khachkar*, as well as for the field, still insufficiently explored, of mural painting.

The depth and breadth of Armenian-Muslim ‘syncretism’, for example, strongly distinguishes Armenian art within Christian cultures. In this respect, Armenia can be compared to Andalusian Spain and Norman Sicily. In this fruitful dialogue, Armenia has undoubtedly given a great deal for its part, but it has also received much. It is probably the breadth of the contribution that explains and facilitated the wide use by Armenians of ‘Islamizing’ forms.

These considerable questions have not yet been the subject of any specific and in-depth study because of the serious obstacles evoked above. Although the objective and dispassionate study of the artistic relationship between the three communities is indispensable for a right understanding of the history of art of the region, these questions remain hindered by several prejudices.

These observations lead the author to unite his voice with that of his colleagues Ivan Foletti, Stefano Riccioni and Erik Thunø:

Viewing the artistic heritage of the South Caucasus from a regional perspective [...], while at the same time acknowledging its diver-

<sup>61</sup> For an overview of New Julfa religious architecture, see Hakhnazarian, Mehra-  
bian 1992.

sity, interconnection and association with other medieval societies, is long overdue. [...] Barriers of many kinds – linguistic, geographical, political, nationalistic, racial, religious and ethnic – have not only made it difficult, sometimes impossible, for outside scholars to access the South Caucasus, but have also torn the interrelated cultures apart and isolated them from each other and from the rest of the world. (Foletti, Thunø 2016, 13)

To think of the entire region as a place where extraordinary cultures came together in constant dialogue, could be a partial solution. In order for this viewpoint to lead to a solution, though, we should remember that, in addition to common traits, there are in the region unique cultural identities that must not be denied or diminished. One model could be important for the region's future: the concept of 'shared heritage' [...]. The basic idea [...] is to transform the perception of a specific artistic monument into an object whose value is shared as human heritage. (Foletti, Riccioni 2018, 8, 10)

The fairly numerous recent studies published in international collections, which have largely fed this essay, and their general orientation show a widely shared view: the breadth and depth of exchanges and interactions are clearly seen as one of the essential features of medieval artistic life in the Anatolia-Armenia-South Caucasus region, and as the source of the extraordinary richness of its creations in particular during the late 12th-14th centuries. The profound wish of the Author of these lines is that this common wealth be made more perceptible, understandable, and accepted by the societies concerned and their elites. This is why he proposes to unite efforts with researchers working inside the countries of the region to help break taboos, and, by creating common scientific structures, to encourage systematic and unbiased comparative studies, in all the fields of the three arts where similarities exist and parallels can be established. Specificities and differences should also be carefully considered from a comparative viewpoint, in the same spirit of openness and the same effort of objectivity, in order to better identify their sources and teachings, and thus better apprehend the common heritage of the region.

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