



# **”Culmination of a late antique legacy? The Golden age of Armenian architecture in the seventh century”**

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article

**“Culmination of a late antique legacy?  
The Golden age of Armenian architecture  
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**Abstract*****Culmination of a Late Antique Legacy?******The Golden Age of Armenian Architecture in the Seventh Century.***

Three powerful factors combined to spur the burgeoning – indeed, a golden age – of Armenian architecture in the seventh-century. First, the demand at work at the end of Late Antiquity to meet Armenian Christianity's need for a new church architecture. Second, church planners and artists ability to integrate certain models borrowed from Byzantium. And third, the “revolution of the dome” which occurred at the end of the sixth century. From then on, the uninterrupted dominance of the cupola, a centralizing structure, with its symbolic meaning, appeared on a wide diversity of church plans – cruciform, central, radiating, and longitudinal. Thanks to the huge repertoire of compositions, forms, and motifs created during the Golden Age of the seventh century, the religious architecture of Armenia (and Iberia as well) acquired the main features of its strong identity.

**Keywords**

Armenian architecture, Byzantine architecture, Golden age of seventh century, Late Antiquity, Early Christian, Transmission of architectural forms

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**Culmination of a Late Antique Legacy?****The Golden Age of Armenian Architecture in the Seventh Century****“Late Antiquity” and the history of Armenian architecture**

In the 1970s, when I began my studies in the history of art and architecture, the expression “Late Antiquity”, although introduced at the very beginning of the twentieth century, was still little used<sup>1</sup>. Admittedly, seminal works like Peter Brown's *World of Late Antiquity* and Beat Brenk's *Spätantike und frühes Christentum* in the 1970s had promoted its use, but the phenomenon still had limited spread in art history<sup>2</sup>. We had to wait, in France at least, until the end of the 1980s to see this new vision take root. I remember, in the USSR, where I had come to prepare my doctorate, one spoke only of “high Middle Ages”, and of “period of early

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the historiography, see, e.g., Mario Mazza, “‘Spätantike’. Da Burckhardt a Usener e Reitzenstein e oltre”, *Rivista di diritto romano*, XIX (2019), pp. 149–165.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Brown, *The world of Late Antiquity from Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad*, London 1971; Beat Brenk, *Spätantike und frühes Christentum*, Frankfurt a. M. 1977.

feudalism”; there was no question of an “Early Christian period”, and the concept of Late Antiquity was ignored<sup>3</sup>. The decisive step was, in France, the creation of the Association for Late Antiquity (*Association pour l'Antiquité tardive*) in 1986 (which became “internationale” in 1989) and the beginning of the publication of the journal *Antiquité Tardive*, the first issue of which came out

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in 1993<sup>4</sup>. In their preface, the editors declared: “This new annual journal [...] aims [...] at a multidisciplinary approach [...] which] will attempt to abolish the traditional boundaries between Antiquity and the Middle Ages, between [...] classical, secular and pagan art, and what is called Early Christian art”<sup>5</sup>.

It was of course a crucial and innovative orientation, but not easy to apply to Armenia. Indeed, despite recent progress in Armenian archaeology, for example on sites such as Artashat, the properly Armenian pre-Christian architecture does not yet appear very clearly to us. It is easier to speak of its external sources than of its own, internal roots. For example, we can clearly see what the Greco-Roman Classicism transmitted to Christian Armenia. The considerable contribution of the late Roman heritage is particularly obvious. Incidentally, this late Roman legacy in Armenian architecture, which is not yet fully appreciated, is certainly the foundation of the numerous kinships that link Armenia to the other great cultures of the Christian world, particularly the Western one, quite simply because of common Roman roots. Many clues also show that Armenia, at the beginning of Christianity, continued to owe much to the Iranian world, especially to Sasanian art.

This is the very peculiar picture that emerges in Armenia if we start the period of Late Antiquity before the adoption of Christianity at the beginning of the fourth century, for example in the second century. This would moreover be perfectly in keeping with the intention of the “Fathers” of Late Antiquity such as Peter Brown. Some young researchers are trying to do so. For example, my ex-doctoral student Arevik Parsamyan tries to deconstruct the traditional approach of a total destruction of the pagan temples of Armenia before the construction of the Christian churches and to show the survival of pagan legacy<sup>6</sup>. But it must be admitted that it is difficult, because the architectural evidence is uncertain and scarce.

If we now consider the period of approximately four centuries which separates the adoption of Christianity as the official religion at the beginning of the fourth century from the effective establishment of Arab domination at the beginning of the eighth century, two major stages can be defined: an “Early Christian period” and then, the “Golden age of the Seventh century”<sup>7</sup>.

The first stage extends from the fourth to the sixth century and can be conventionally called “Early Christian period”. It is marked by the predominance of longitudinal structures without a dome: single-nave chapels and three-nave basilicas. The memorial and funerary sphere has a strong presence. As for the dome, it is still rare, but already very important.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Vaagn Grigorjan, *Rannesrednevekove central'no-kupol'nye malye pamjatniki Armenii* [Small Central-domed Monuments of Early Medieval Armenia], Yerevan 1982, or Suren S. Mnacakanjan, *Memorial'nye pamjatniki rannesrednevekovo Armenii* [The Memorial Monuments of Early Medieval Armenia], Yerevan 1982. Both books in fact concern late antique (Early Christian) monuments.

<sup>4</sup> *Antiquité tardive*, I (1993) : *Les sarcophages d'Aquitaine*.

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Charles Picard, Charles Bonnet, Noël Duval, Jean Guyon, *Antiquité tardive* (n. 4), pp. 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> See Arevik Parsamyan, “Destruction/sécularisation des temples et premières implantations d'églises en Arménie d'après les données archéologiques”, in *Saint Grégoire l'Illuminateur. Aux commencements de l'Église d'Arménie*, Pascal-Grégoire Delage ed., Royan 2016, pp. 23-60 ; Arevik Parsamyan, “Les sanctuaires antiques en Arménie : panorama géographique”, in *Vishap between fairy tale and reality*, Arsen Bobokhyan, Alessandra Gilibert, Pavol Hnila eds, Yerevan 2019, pp. 460–473.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Donabédian, *L'âge d'or de l'architecture arménienne. VII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Marseille 2008.

## Early Christian Period (fourth-sixth centuries). Historical background

After the adoption of Christianity in the early fourth century CE, again very early, by ca 370, the Armenian ecclesiastical structure became autocephalous<sup>8</sup>. Then, between 385 and 428, Armenia was divided between Rome and Persia, and lost its sovereignty<sup>9</sup>. However, it retained its traditional social structures and safeguarded its identity, notably thanks to the creation of the alphabet at the beginning of the fifth century, then thanks to – or rather because of – the struggle against Persian Mazdeism and against Roman hegemony through Chalcedonian “orthodoxy”<sup>10</sup>. Finally, in 485, under the rule of Prince Vahan Mamikonian, Armenia reconquered a certain autonomy and enjoyed a relative peace until about 571<sup>11</sup>. Large construction campaigns were launched. As we said, it is difficult to determine what the new churches could inherit from the architecture of pre-Christian Armenia, which has almost entirely disappeared. Historical sources of the fifth century assert that the baptism of Armenia was followed by a campaign of destruction of the pagan temples before the construction of the churches. The temple of Garni, which is a pure Roman monument, is the only one preserved, albeit heavily restored<sup>12</sup>. It has a North-South orientation, quite different from that of the churches. But the break between paganism and Christianity was certainly not as complete as the sources suggest. As we said already, it is certain that many elements were transmitted especially from Roman heritage to Christian Armenia.

From the beginning, Christian buildings in Armenia are oriented and the construction technique is similar to that of the Roman *opus*

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*caementicium*: a core of concrete between two stone facings very carefully cut on their outer face<sup>13</sup>. Armenian architecture, especially in the central districts of Ayrarat province, mainly uses tuff, the volcanic stone widespread in the area<sup>14</sup>. A system of precise rules (“golden ratio”) governs the relationship between the parts and the whole. In the Early Christian period, religious architecture meets mainly two needs: a) to provide places of worship for believers, that is churches, b) to house relics of the saints and remains of martyrs, that is “memorial” and funerary architecture.

## Memorial and funerary architecture

This category includes a) martyria and mausolea and b) funerary chapels. Martyria and mausolea are small rectangular vaulted rooms, partially or entirely hypogea (underground).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Nina Garsoïan, “The Aršakuni Dynasty (A.D. 12 [180?]-428)”, in *The Armenian People From Ancient to Modern Times, The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*, Richard G. Hovannisian ed., vol. I, New York 1997, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 84–94. See also Annie Mahé, Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Histoire de l'Arménie : des origines à nos jours*, Paris 2012, pp. 86–91.

<sup>10</sup> Mahé/Mahé, *Histoire de l'Arménie* (n. 9), pp. 87–89 ; Jean-Pierre Mahé, *L'alphabet arménien dans l'histoire et la mémoire : Vie de Machtots par Korioun, Panégyrique des saints traducteurs par Vardan Areveltsi*, Paris 2018 ; *Idem*, “Confession religieuse et identité nationale dans l'Église arménienne du VII<sup>e</sup> au XI<sup>e</sup> siècles”, in *Des Parthes au Califat. Quatre leçons sur la formation de l'identité arménienne*, Nina Garsoïan, Jean-Pierre Mahé eds, Paris 1997, pp. 59–76.

<sup>11</sup> *Histoire du peuple arménien*, Gérard Dédéyan ed., Toulouse 2007, pp. 187–195.

<sup>12</sup> R. D. Wilkinson, “A Fresh Look at the Ionic Building at Garni”, *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, XVI (1982), pp. 221–244; Taline Ter Minassian, “La restauration soviétique du temple antique de Garni (Arménie) : un paradigme patrimonial?”, in *Patrimoine & Architecture dans les États post-soviétiques*, Taline Ter Minassian ed., Rennes 2013, pp. 25–43.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Donabédian, “Les architectes de l'Arménie médiévale usaient-ils de dispositifs parasismiques ?”, *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, XXXIV (2012), pp. 169–242.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 184.

They are oriented and, for many of them, have an apse located to the East. Excavations conducted in recent years by Hamlet Petrosyan in the province of Artsakh have shown that three mausoleums from the end of the fifth century, at Amaras, Tigranakert and Vatar, had a unique feature: an entrance from the east<sup>15</sup>. According to Petrosyan's convincing hypothesis, this layout was inspired by that of the tomb of Christ in the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

### **Ecclesiastic architecture**

As said above, according to the sources, the baptism of Armenia was followed by a campaign of destruction of the pagan temples<sup>16</sup>. But could the rupture be complete? The churches bear an important novelty, compared to the pagan temples: they are oriented, intended to allow believers to participate in the liturgy inside the sanctuary, and, in some of them, to provide preliminary spaces for catechumens and penitents. The main groups are two.

### **The longitudinal churches without dome**

#### *Single-nave chapels*

There are around fifty of them<sup>17</sup>. None is dated with certainty. It is the simplest composition, relatively easy to build. The composition presents an oblong hall, with an apse to the east, generally inscribed in the quadrangular outline of the building. The chapel was covered by a vault in stone, often supported by transverse arches. On one or both sides of the apse, an angular room may exist. These rooms are called pastophoria and served for the needs of liturgy: they housed the vestments and the vases and liturgical objects; they

[p. 28, with fig. 1a]

could also shelter relics<sup>18</sup>. Galleries (porticoes) are present along the façades of some chapels. These spaces were probably intended for catechumens and for penitents, who were not allowed to enter the church (Council of Nicaea, 325).

#### *Three-nave basilicas*

As in Rome, where large public halls served as a model for Christian basilicas, in Armenia too, the principle of basilicas with three naves is probably borrowed from pre-Christian palatine halls<sup>19</sup>. Around nine examples of three-nave basilicas are preserved from Early Christian Armenia. Here also the dates are uncertain. The compositions show a certain diversity.

Dvin and Ereruyk' (fig. 1a-b) are large oblong buildings surrounded by galleries (or porticoes), again, probably for catechumens and penitents<sup>20</sup>. Dvin is the biggest church of Armenia, with dimensions of 52.5m x 22.5m<sup>21</sup>. The others are much smaller. All had stone

<sup>15</sup> Hamlet Petrosyan, "Politics, Ideology and Landscape: Early Christian Tigranakert in Artsakh", *Electrum*, XXVIII (2021), pp. 163–187.

<sup>16</sup> Such events are recalled in the life of St Gregory the Illuminator by the fifth-century chronicler Agathangelos; Agathangelos, *The Teachings of Saint Gregory*, translated by Robert W. Thomson, Ann Arbor 2010, §777-779, §790, §809, §812-813. See also Mahé/Mahé, *Histoire de l'Arménie* (n. 9), pp. 79; Wilkinson, "A Fresh Look" (n. 12).

<sup>17</sup> Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 33–39. See the synoptic plates of Paolo Cuneo, *Architettura armena* (2 vol.), Rome 1988, vol. II, pp. 710-711.

<sup>18</sup> A similar hypothesis was proposed by Josef Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa*, Wien 1918, vol. I, p. 231.

<sup>19</sup> Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 40–49; Cuneo, *Architettura armena* (n. 17), vol. II, p. 716.

<sup>20</sup> Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

vault which have often collapsed, but some may have been initially covered in wood. The importance of these stone vaulted structures on solid stone supports delimiting a square span must be underlined: this is the base on which the domed churches on inscribed cross with four free supports (of the Tekor type) will be build<sup>22</sup>. Two types of roofing coexisted: the oriental type with only one saddle roof, and the Hellenistic or western type, where the saddleback roof of the central nave is higher than the lateral pent roofs. Ereruyk<sup>23</sup> illustrates the close ties between Armenia and Syria during the Early Christian period<sup>23</sup>.

### The first domed churches

Local traditions may have contributed to the genesis of the Christian cupola and to the design of

[p. 29, with fig. 1b]

central dome structures. These are, notably, the *glkhatun* farmhouses with a *hazarashēn* roof, and an *erdik* skylight<sup>24</sup>. Other possible sources might include the well with cupola known as Khor Virap (deep dungeon), which existed before the adoption of Christianity<sup>25</sup>. The brilliant structures with cupola on a central space elaborated in Rome may also have played a role, as well as the legacy of Iran, especially the Sasanian Mazdean or Zoroastrian fire temples (*pyrae*), in the shape of a domed cube or a canopy (baldachin or ciborium), which have existed in Armenia but are not preserved<sup>26</sup>. It should be noted that the Armenian word for dome, *gmbet*, is borrowed from Pahlavi<sup>27</sup>.

The most important examples of early domed churches in Armenia are St Sergius of Tekor and the Cathedral of Saint Ējmiatsin (Etchmiadzin). For St Sergius of Tekor (fig. 2a-b), we have only partial

[p. 30, with fig. 2a, 2b]

knowledge of a monument destroyed by earthquakes in 1911 and 1935. The edifice can be dated on the basis of an inscription on the western door lintel, from the 480s to the latest 490 CE<sup>28</sup>. Its plan is that of a rectangular room where the dome rests on four pillars which delimit a square. Tekor gives the first example of the inscribed cross type in Armenia, with the first transept. It has a massive, archaic, cubic drum – both drum and cupola were probably the oldest in Armenian architecture. Possibly, the structure had been reworked already in an early period. The space perhaps had galleries (or porticoes); the pilasters and columns against the facades recall decorative element perhaps inspired by Roman orders or by their Anatolian and Syrian imitations. They could possibly testify to an unrealized gallery idea.

<sup>22</sup> At Tekor, the dome rested on four pillars at the junction of the four cradles formed by the nave and the transept, in the centre of a cross inscribed in a parallelepiped. On the church of Tekor see Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 54-58. Regarding the Tekor type domed churches, see *Ibidem*, pp. 103-118; Christina Maranci, *Medieval Armenian Architecture. Constructions of Race and Nation*. Leuven/Sterling 2001, pp. 100-106.

<sup>23</sup> Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), p. 43-49 ; *Idem*, *Ererouyk, un site archéologique majeur, haut lieu de l'Arménie chrétienne*, Erevan 2020, pp. 68-74.

<sup>24</sup> Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), p. 50.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>26</sup> On Zoroastrianism and its architecture, see Michael Shenkar, "Temple Architecture in the Iranian World in the Hellenistic Period", in *From Pella to Gandhara: Hybridisation and Identity in the Art and Architecture of the Hellenistic East*, Anna Kouremenos, Roberto Rossi, Sujatha Chandrasekaran eds, Oxford 2016, pp. 117-140; Mary Boyce, "On the Zoroastrian Temple Cult of Fire", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, XCV/3 (1975), pp. 454-465. On Zoroastrianism and Armenia, see James R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*, Harvard 1987.

<sup>27</sup> Hrač'ya Ačařyan, *Hayeren armatakan bařaran, A hator* (Armenian Etymological Dictionary, volume I), Yerevan 1971, p. 567.

<sup>28</sup> The inscription is known from an archive photo and an original stamping, and reads from bottom to top, see Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), p. 54; Mahé, *L'alphabet arménien* (n. 10), p. 54.

The other important domed building, the Cathedral of Ējmiatsin (fig. 3a-b), is certainly one of the oldest buildings of Christian Armenia, although its present superstructures have been rebuilt in the seventeenth century<sup>29</sup>. The great antiquity of the building is attested by the historian of the fifth century, Agathangelos, who describes the famous Vision of Saint Gregory the Illuminator, related to the place where the cathedral should be erected: “And from four columns, above the crosses, marvelous vaults fitted into each other. Above this I saw a canopy of clouds, wonderfully and divinely constructed in the form of a dome”<sup>30</sup>.

While we have little information on the old state of the cathedral, it is safe to assume that the current structure with a tetrapod tetraconch square structure dates to the reconstruction by Vahan Mamikonian in 485. This late fifth-century structure seems to have been designed for a dome, perhaps similar to that of Tekor.

In summary, during the first three Christian centuries, several imposed factors endowed the religious architecture of Armenia with a certain identity, despite a great diversity of forms and a heterogeneity of structures. These imposed factors of identity are the lapidary material, the technique, the natural contingencies (the need to erect buildings capable of resisting earthquakes), and the dogmatic and liturgical requirements. Among them, the increasing role of the dome had a decisive impact. It is on

[p. 31, with fig. 3a, 3b]

these bases, through a combination of transmission and rupture, and thanks to particularly favorable conditions, that the Golden Age flourished.

### **Transition period (end of the sixth to the first decades of the seventh century)**

This period represents a troubled but decisive transition between the Early Christian period and the “Golden Age”<sup>31</sup>. It must be replaced against the backdrop of the long Byzantine-Persian wars which marked the late sixth and early seventh century. The first of these wars ended in 590 with the victory of Emperor Maurice (582–602): it also marked, in 591, a new division of Armenia, with the creation by Constantinople, at Awan, of a Chalcedonian anti-Catholicosate<sup>32</sup>. The second war is the last great confrontation between the two states, which lasted about 25 years, from 603 to 628–629<sup>33</sup>. In both these moments of the transitional period, the situation of Armenia was very agitated, at times dramatic.

It is also the period which sees, between the end of the sixth century and the 620s, a decisive turning point taking place: the triumph of domed types. The longitudinal structures without a dome were abandoned in favor of domed types on longitudinal, centered, cruciform, and radiating compositions. Also in the architectural decor, we notice a conjunction of archaism and innovations. This pivotal transition period laid the foundation for the bloom of architectural innovation in the seventh century. But, because of the political struggles, the architectural activity was reduced, in striking contrast with the flourishing of the following period.

<sup>29</sup> It is supposed that the original dome was placed on four pillars in the centre of a square (a cube) each side of which was indented with a protruding conch. On Ējmiatsin, see Annegret Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien*, Wien 2007, pp. 168-173, 310-312, cat. pp. 341-345; Armen Kazarjan, *Kafedral'nyj sobor Surb Echmiadzin* (The Cathedral of Holy Ejmiacin), Moscow 2007; *Idem*, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura stran Zakavkaz'ja VII veka: Formirovanie i razvitie tradicii* (Church Architecture of 7<sup>th</sup> century in Transcaucasian Countries: Formation and Development of Tradition), 4 vols., Moscow 2012, vol. I, pp. 325-356; Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 51-54.

<sup>30</sup> Agathangelos, *The Teachings of Saint Gregory* (n. 16), §737.

<sup>31</sup> Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 63–90.

<sup>32</sup> Mahé/Mahé, *Histoire de l'Arménie* (n. 9), p. 101.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 101-103.



[p. 32]

Five notable constructions were carried out during the “transition period”: the Cathedral of Awan (590s) (fig. 10a-b), the Dvin Cathedral, reconstructed between 607 and 628, the church of St. Hrip’simē of Vagharchapat (between ca 617 and ca 628) (fig. 11a-b), as well as the renovation of the Cathedral of Ējmiatsin undertaken under Catholicos Komitas in 616/617, who “raised the wooden roof of the holy cathedral, and renewed the unstable walls. He built the stone roof”<sup>34</sup>. The fifth church of the “transition period” was St John of Bagaran (624–631), which already had a “foot” in the new period<sup>35</sup> (fig. 8a-b). We must recall here Josef Strzygowski’s hypothesis concerning the influence of the Ējmiatsin-Bagaran typology on the development of Christian architecture, both in Byzantium and in the West, starting with the Carolingian period<sup>36</sup>.

### The Golden Age of the seventh century

The reconquest of Armenia by Emperor Heraclius (610–641) and his victory over the Persians in 628–629, resulted in a prosperous period for this country<sup>37</sup>. We observe a flowering of architecture from 630 to about 690. This development was not interrupted by the Arab attacks of the 640s, because at first the Caliphate granted a favorable regime to the Armenians, with a very low taxation. It is important to note that during this period, the other major Christian regions in the East, Byzantium, and Syria, were experiencing a deep depression. On the contrary, Armenia, together with Iberia (Georgia), enjoyed a lull and a large autonomy which resulted in an abundant architectural production.

Between about 630 and 690, around sixty monuments of high technical and aesthetic quality were built, among them fifteen precisely dated. All have a dome. The dome compositions had an unprecedented development. We can mention the important monuments that have a reliable dating: in the years 630–640, Alaman<sup>38</sup> (destroyed), Mren<sup>39</sup>, St. Gayanē<sup>40</sup>,

<sup>34</sup> On Awan and the church of the anti-Catholicosate see Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), pp. 317-318, cat. pp. 68-71; Donabédian, *L’âge d’or* (n. 7), pp. 79-82; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. I, pp. 256-277; on the reconstruction of Dvin Cathedral see Donabédian, *L’âge d’or* (n. 7), pp. 213-214; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. I, pp. 278-289; vol. II, pp. 479-491; on St. Hrip’simē see Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), p. 318, cat. pp. 345-352; Donabédian, *L’âge d’or* (n. 7), pp. 83-87; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. I, pp. 290-324; on the renovation of Ējmiatsin see *The Armenian History attributed to Sebeos*, translated by Robert W. Thomson, Liverpool 1999, vol. I, p. 77.

<sup>35</sup> Murad Asratjan, *Armjanskaja arkhitektura rannego xristianstva* (Early Christian Architecture of Armenia), Moscow 2000, pp. 26, 67, 140.

<sup>36</sup> Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst* (n. 18), pp. 22, 33–36, 95–98, 436.

<sup>37</sup> Mahé/Mahé, *Histoire de l’Arménie* (n. 9), p. 101. Note that the dedicatory inscription on the building of Mren refers to Heraclius and describes him as the victorious king, see Timothy Greenwood, “A Corpus of Early Medieval Armenian Inscriptions”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, LVIII (2004), p. 83.

<sup>38</sup> On Alaman see Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), cat. pp. 11-12; Donabédian, *L’âge d’or* (n. 7), p. 141; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. II, pp. 128-137.

<sup>39</sup> On Mren see Donabédian, *L’âge d’or* (n. 8), pp. 108-110; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. II, pp. 164-183; Christina Maranci, *Vigilant Powers: Three Churches of Early Medieval Armenia*, Turnhout 2015, pp. 23-111; Christina Maranci, “The Great Outdoors: Liturgical Encounters with the Early Medieval Armenian Church”, in *Aural Architecture in Byzantium. Music, Acoustics, and Rituals*, Bissera Pentcheva ed., London/New-York 2018, pp. 32-51, sp. 44-51.

<sup>40</sup> On St Gayanē see Donabédian, *L’âge d’or* (n. 7), pp. 105-107; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. II, pp. 138-163.

Mastara<sup>41</sup>; in the 650s, Zvart'nots' Cathedral<sup>42</sup>; in the 660–680s, Aruch<sup>43</sup>, Sisian<sup>44</sup>, and Zoravar<sup>45</sup>.

The monuments of the Golden Age, especially those of the second half of the period, from the middle of the seventh century, are characterized by a new attention paid to carved decoration, the wide use of blind arcade-colonnade, and the place granted to figurative decoration. In carved ornamentation, vegetable ornaments, hitherto rare, multiply. The cornice with interlace on its slanted plane spreads. Large Theophanic scenes, common to the whole East-Christian world, are painted in the apses<sup>46</sup>.

Another curious feature, frequent on the major monuments of the seventh century, attracts the attention: the presence of three windows in the apse. It contradicts the constant tradition in Armenia before and after the “Golden Age”: in agreement with the Christology of the Armenian Church, only one window is present in the apse<sup>47</sup>. The presence of three windows in the seventh century cannot be due to chance. In my opinion it is a clear sign of the openness of the Armenian elites of the time to a formula which is widespread in the Byzantine orthodox world. It can be seen, therefore, as a mark of their obedience, perhaps purely formal, to Chalcedonism, that is to say, to orthodoxy<sup>48</sup>. It must be remembered that three times during the seventh century, the Armenian Church was forced, under military threat, to adopt the dogma of Chalcedon<sup>49</sup>.

### Churches with dome on longitudinal plan

The churches with dome on longitudinal plan in this period display three different typologies. The first typology, the inscribed cross with cupola on four free supports, was elaborated at the

<sup>41</sup> On Mastara see Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), p. 295, cat. pp. 193-195; Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 154-157; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. II, pp. 199-225; see also Christina Maranci, “The Great Outdoors” (n. 39), sp. 33-39.

<sup>42</sup> Regarding Zvart'nots' Cathedral see Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), p. 304-309, cat. pp. 379-382; Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 190-198; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. II, pp. 492-549; Christina Maranci, “The Archaeology and Reconstruction of Zvart'nots'”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, LXVIII (2014), pp. 69-115; *Eadem*, “The Monument and the World: Zvart'nots' and the Problem of Origin”, *Convivium Supplementum* (2016), p. 70-87; *Eadem*, *Vigilant Powers* (n. 39), pp. 113-200; *Eadem*, “The Great Outdoors” (n. 39), sp. pp. 39-41.

<sup>43</sup> On Aruch see Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 126-128; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. III, pp. 72-105.

<sup>44</sup> On Sisian (Sisavank') see Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), cat. pp. 287-289; Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 172-175; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. III, pp. 124-145.

<sup>45</sup> On Zoravar (Eghvard) see Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), pp. 330-332, cat. pp. 127-128; Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 185-187; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. III, pp. 106-121.

<sup>46</sup> Ivan Foletti, Irene Quadri, “Roma, l'Oriente e il mito della Traditio Legis”, *Opuscula historiae artium*, LXII (2013): *Byzantium, Russia and Europe. Meeting and Construction of World*, pp.16-37; Nikolai G. Kotandžjan, *Monumental'naia živopis' rannesrednevekovoj Armenii (IV-VII veka)* [Monumental Painting in Early Medieval Armenia (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries)], Yerevan 2017.

<sup>47</sup> While the Armenian Church refutes the concept of the dual nature of Christ as stated in the Council of Chalcedon (451), it is not, however, Monophysite. Glorification of Christ's flesh is only possible by ensuring the commixture of the divine and human natures of Christ, the two natures therefore being indissociable. See Peter S. Cowe, “Armenian Christology in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries with Particular Reference to the Contributions of Catholicos Yovhan Öjnec'i and Xosrovik T'argmanich'”, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, LV/1 (2004), pp. 30-54. At the same time, as Armenian theologians themselves point out, “by upholding the dogma of 'one nature', the Armenian Church, in general, emphasizes more, in Christ, the divine side; however, by saying 'one nature', it does not understand only the divine side and does not ignore the human one”, from *Christian Armenia Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Eutychnianism”, Yerevan 2002, p. 321 [in Armenian].

<sup>48</sup> Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 93-94, 123; Maranci, *Vigilant Powers* (n. 39), p. 91-92.

<sup>49</sup> In ca 632 under catholicos Ezr, in 653 under cath. Nerses III, and ca 690 under cath. Sahak III. See Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 93, 95, 100.

end of the fifth century in Tekor (fig. 2a-b). It was inherited from the structure of early Christian basilicas stretching from west to east. But the great change consists in the introduction of the transept which creates the shape of a cross. The largest churches of the seventh century were built on this plan, mainly in the 630s: Bagavan (631–639)<sup>50</sup>, St. Gayanē of Vagharshapat (630–641), Mren (630–640)<sup>51</sup> (fig. 4a-b)

[p. 33, with notes 35-51, and fig. 4a-b]

[p. 34]

and perhaps Ōdzun (630s with restoration in the eighth century)<sup>52</sup>. This composition presents both an advantage and a disadvantage for religious architecture. The advantage is that the dimensions of the wall perimeter do not depend on the central square covered by the dome: the space can be quite large. The disadvantage is that the dome leans on isolated supports, which may weaken the stability of the building. Hence the importance of a good balance of charges and forces, with the base of the cupola reinforced by the four cradles that buttress it. The importance also of the technical quality of the bond and the blocking (or concrete).

The second typology, the “three-conch basilica” with dome on four free supports might be the result of the “grafting” of a tetraconch square – like in Ējmiatsin – or of a three-conch cross type, on a plan of the Tekor typology. The specificity here is that the cross created by the intersection of the nave and the transept is not inscribed in the rectangular perimeter but protrudes by its conchs. This is the typology we find at the Cathedral of St. Gregory of Dvin (40.3 x 18.3 m), of which only few elements remain. The cathedral, built in the fifth century, was destroyed by the Persians in 572 and remained for approximately 35 years in ruins. It was then rebuilt on a new plan between 607 and 628<sup>53</sup>. A similar typology can be found at the Cathedral of T‘alin (35 x 18 m) (fig. 5a-b), probably erected in the late seventh century under the auspices of prince Nerseh Kamsarakan (689–693)<sup>54</sup>. At T‘alin, we note trapezoidal and pentagonal apses, elegantly articulated pillars and pendentives. Its base being round, the drum is no longer octagonal, as in the middle of the seventh century, but dodecagonal, approaching the cylinder shape. T‘alin also displays an abundance of windows, with about 40 windows enlightening the space, including oculi. Under the influence of Zvart‘nots‘, blind arcades adorn

<sup>50</sup> Bagavan, today destroyed, was 46 m long and 27 m wide, making it the biggest church of Armenia in the seventh century: see Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), cat. pp. 21-22; Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 104-105; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. II, pp. 89-107. For a synoptic plate of this typology see Cuneo, *Architettura armena* (n° 17), vol. II, p. 730.

<sup>51</sup> Mren features important carved decoration, with, on the northern door lintel, what has been identified as the Restitution of the Cross in Jerusalem in 630 by Heraclius: see note 39 for further bibliography.

<sup>52</sup> Ōdzun is more difficult to date: while various historians from the thirteenth century have attributed the monument to the catholicos John of Ōdzun (717-728), it appeared to several researchers that the realisation of such a monument during the Arab yoke would be unlikely. John of Ōdzun probably renovated a pre-existing structure dated to the first half of the seventh century. See Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 110-114; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. II, pp. 282-310.

<sup>53</sup> In the seventh-century cathedral of Dvin, the two sacristies-chapels, on both sides of the central apse, are one of the first dated evidences of this form, with a small apse (an apsidiole). They replace the pastophoria sacristies, flat-bottomed, of the first Christian centuries. This second cathedral was destroyed by the earthquake of 894. See Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), p. 43, 66; Armen Kazarjan, “Trikonxovye krestovo-kupol'nye cerkvi v zodčestve Zakavkaz'ja i Vizantii” (Cross-domed triconch churches in Transcaucasian and Byzantine architecture), in *Vizantijskij mir: iskusstvo Konstantinopolja i nacional'nye tradicii* [Byzantine World: Art of Constantinople and National Traditions], Marina A. Orlova ed., Moscow 2005, pp. 13–30.

<sup>54</sup> At T‘alin, two monuments are attested: the main church following the plan of the second cathedral of Dvin, and a chapel a few dozen meters south of the church. Thanks to an inscription on this second sanctuary, we can attribute and date the foundation of the monuments. For the discussion of the inscription, see Greenwood, “A Corpus” (n. 37); regarding the architecture, see Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 118-122, 146-147; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. III, pp. 146-183, 556-565.

conches and the drum<sup>55</sup>. The arcade is “carried” by pairs of half-columns with double cubic capitals (and simple ones at the ends of conches). The ornamental repertoire is rich and diverse, with plentiful plant motives, characteristic of the second half of the seventh century. The mural painting in the apse was part of the “Byzantinizing” current of the time<sup>56</sup>.

The third typology is the “partitioned inscribed cross”, also known as *Kuppelhalle*, or domed hall<sup>57</sup>. This original form of implementation of the dome on a longitudinal plan is another testimony of the great creativity of the Armenian architecture of the seventh century. Here the supports of the dome are not isolated but engaged in the side walls. Notable examples of this type include Zovuni, Ptghni and Aruch. Saints Peter and Paul of Zovuni, the oldest, dated to the late sixth or early seventh century, was first an Early Christian single-nave chapel which was then refashioned into a domed hall<sup>58</sup>. Ptghni, in the middle of the seventh century, is the first known example of a building which was originally conceived as a domed hall<sup>59</sup>. Most eloquent is the structure of St. Gregory of Aruch (fig. 6a-b), built in the 660s, probably in 662–666<sup>60</sup>. It displays the first dated example of pendentives under the drum.

This third composition was particularly fertile: shortened and reinforced, especially from the earthquake-resistant point of view, it became the most widespread formula for the monastic churches of medieval Armenia.

### Domed churches on a centered plan

Another great category is represented by domed churches on a centered plan, with four different possibilities also here. The first is the principle of a free cross covered with a dome, which existed already in ancient Rome. It is very frequent in Early Christian and pre-Arab Armenia: we find around fifty small chapels, with a cupola on an octahedral drum, preceded by squinches.

[p. 35, with notes 54-60 and fig. 5a, 5b, 6a, 6b]

[p. 36, with fig. 7, 8a, 8b]

Most of them belong to the seventh century, and display numerous planimetric variants: monoconch, triconch (fig. 7), tetraconch, with various apse contours.

The tetraconch tetrapod square is the plan of the Cathedral of Ējmiatsin (probably late fifth century) and represents the ideal composition of a Christian sanctuary, linked to one of the

<sup>55</sup> In the seventh century, the use of blind arcades as decorative elements is limited to polygonal or round structures (conches and drum); by the tenth century it is also applied to straight (rectilinear) façades such as at Ani Cathedral, see *Ani : capitale de l'Arménie en l'an mil*. Pavillon des Arts [Paris], 7 février-13 mai 2001, Raymond H. Kévorkian ed., Paris 2001; *Ani: world architectural heritage of a medieval Armenian capital. International Symposium on the History, Culture, and Architectural Significance of Ani*, Peter S. Cowe ed., Leuven 2001.

<sup>56</sup> In the apse was probably represented a throne on which rested an open book (the *Hetoimasia* Throne). In Armenia, this iconography is only attested in T'alin and has been interpreted as a visual link to Greek theology and practices. Ivan Foletti, “The Book on the Throne as Image of Orthodoxy in the Late Antique Mediterranean (and Beyond)”, in *Le livre enluminé médiéval - instrument politique*, Vinni Lucherini, Cécile Voyer eds, Rome 2021, pp. 8–13. For the architecture see bibliography n. 54.

<sup>57</sup> The term *Kuppelhalle* was first used by Strzygowski and is still mostly used by scholars, see Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst* (n. 18), pp. 137-158; 373-419. Synoptic plate: Cuneo, *Architettura armena* (n° 17), p. 726.

<sup>58</sup> Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 67-68; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. III, pp. 461-472.

<sup>59</sup> Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 123-125; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. III, pp. 184-205; Maranci, *Vigilant Powers* (n. 39), pp. 201-254.

<sup>60</sup> The date of construction is indicated by a dedicatory inscription located on the eastern façade; for a discussion of the inscription see Greenwood, “A Corpus” (n. 37), 39, 49-50 and *passim*, text p. 86.

most sacred spaces of Armenia. It is reproduced, until the nineteenth century, only once, in St. John of Bagaran (fig. 8a-b), erected in 624–631, today destroyed<sup>61</sup>.

Another option, adopted in St. John of Mastara (640s) (fig. 9a-b) and in three other churches during the seventh century, is the tetraconch square<sup>62</sup>. The very appreciable advantage of this composition is that the dome is placed almost directly on eight points of support which belong to the mural perimeter: the dome rests on a cube expanded by four conches, with eight arches which constitute the base of the drum. It is a remarkable solution from both symbolic and technical point of view: a space totally united under the cupola, and earthquake resistant.

The last major option is the tetraniche tetraconch square. Proper to Armenia and Iberia, this sophisticated structure was created in the late sixth century and developed in the seventh century. The core principle is close to that of Mastara type, but it is enlarged and complexified by diagonal niches and angular sacristies, so that the ensemble is inscribed in a parallelepiped. The principle of such organization of the space can be seen in sixth-century Byzantine architecture (Sts Sergius and Bacchus, and Hagia Sophia in Constantinople). In Armenia, the first dated example of this typology is Awan Cathedral (fig. 10a-b), built in the 590s to serve as the seat of a Chalcedonian (pro-byzantine, orthodox) patriarch<sup>63</sup>. It displays unusual, round sacristies. The drum of the cupola rested on a sort of band of pendentives, a form previously unknown in Armenia, and which evokes Byzantium. It is on this model that the Church of St. Hrip'simē, founded in ca 617 on the shrine of one of the important saint martyrs of the fourth century, was built<sup>64</sup> (fig. 11a-b). Heavily restored in modern times, this

[p. 37, with fig. 9-11]

[p. 38]

church still retains many of its ancient features. Here, we see quadrangular sacristies not only on the eastern side, but also on the western one. The large but still low drum rests on a combination of squinches and a band of pendentives. The façades give the first dated example of dihedral niches, characteristic for Armenia (here, for their first appearance, these niches are trapezoidal and not completely dihedral). The sculpted decoration is very sober, far from the relative abundance that will be practiced a few decades later.

The other representatives of this type show several variations around the same structure: Aramus, Arcuaber, Aygeshat, Gaṛnahovit, Sisian, as well as a non-inscribed subgroup with Sarakap and Soradir<sup>65</sup>. The Georgian variants (Jvari, Ateni, etc.), although similar, have

<sup>61</sup> The monument is only known today thanks to archive photographs taken before WWI. For discussion see Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), pp. 310-311, cat. pp. 76-78; Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 69-71; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. I, pp. 357-372.

<sup>62</sup> With its 11.2 meters in diameter, the drum of Mastara is the widest preserved in Armenia. For bibliography, see note 41. Synoptic plate of this typology: Cuneo, *Architettura armena* (n° 17), p. 722.

<sup>63</sup> See above, note 34 for bibliography.

<sup>64</sup> Hrip'simē was one of the Christian virgins who were tortured by King Trdat IV. The martyrdom and the construction of the martyria for Hrip'simē and her companions are recorded by Agathangelos, *The Teachings of Saint Gregory* (n. 16), §197-198 and §757-759. As for the seventh-century church built above her martyrion, see Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), pp. 318, cat. pp. 345-352; Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 83-87 and 93; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. I, pp. 290-324.

<sup>65</sup> Regarding these monuments, see as follows: for Aramus, Donabédian, *L'âge d'or* (n. 7), pp. 164-165; for Arcuaber, *ibidem*, pp. 166-167; for Aygeshat *ibidem*, pp. 165-166; for Gaṛnahovit *ibidem*, pp. 168-171; for Sisian *ibidem*, pp. 172-175; for Sarakap *ibidem*, p. 178; for Soradir *ibidem*, pp. 175-178.

two revealing differences: they are more “extroverted” and more generously decorated<sup>66</sup> (fig. 12). This is true also for Ateni, even though it was built by a team of Armenian builders<sup>67</sup>.

### Churches with dome on a radiating plan

Finally, we must note the principle of the cupola on a radiating organism, only partly present in the Awan-Hrip’simē typology, which finds its full expression here. A corolla of six or eight conches radiates around the space crowned by the dome. Aragats, one of the first examples, displays the hexaconch type<sup>68</sup>, while St. Theodore/Zoravar (662–685) displays the octaconch type<sup>69</sup>. Irind, in the last decades of the seventh century, shows a quasi-octaconch plan<sup>70</sup> (fig. 13).

### Zvart’nots’ Cathedral

The iconic monument of the Golden Age, Zvart’nots’ was erected from about 643 to 660 by the Hellenophile Catholicos Nerses III (inscription in Greek)<sup>71</sup> (fig. 14a-b). It collapsed towards the end of the tenth century because of an earthquake, after more than 300 years of imposing presence in front of Mount Ararat. Devoted to St. Gregory and the angels “zvart’unk’” from his Vision, it was an exceptional creation, a rare representative of the category of memorial or martyrial cathedrals. This feature is magnified by the presence, under the whole building, of a high crepidoma: a platform with six steps. As in several memorial (funerary) sanctuaries of the Christian world with a rotunda shape, the composition of Zvart’nots’ was probably inspired by the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem.

[p. 39, with fig. 12, 13, 14a-b]

<sup>66</sup> Jvari is one of the first attested examples of this composition. The church is located on the top of the hill overlooking the ancient city of Mtskheta. Dated to the early seventh century on the basis of written sources, inscriptions and a stylistic analysis of the carved reliefs on the façades, it is believed to mark the place where St. Nino, patron and enlightener of Georgia, erected a cross. For the monument, see Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), pp. 314-316, cat. pp. 203-212; Donabédian, *L’âge d’or* (n. 7), pp. 178-181; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. II, pp. 311-355; Georgij Čubinašvili, *Pamjatniki tipa Djvari* (The monuments of Jvari type), Moscow 1948.

<sup>67</sup> Ateni has been dated to the mid-seventh century thanks to both architectural analysis and sculptural parallels with Mren and Jvari. See Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), pp. 316-317, cat. pp. 52-66; Donabédian, *L’âge d’or* (n. 7), pp. 182-184; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. III, pp. 397-417; Čubinašvili, *Pamjatniki tipa Djvari* (n. 66), pp. 121-123, 156-178.

<sup>68</sup> Aragats is probably one of the first Armenian edifices to use the hexaconch plan. The sober sculptural decoration of the first cornice (there are two superimposed cornices) is similar to that of Bagaran, which allows the church of Aragats to be dated to the first decades of the seventh century. In the region, the Georgian church of Ninotsminda, generally dated to the end of the sixth century, perhaps pre-dates the Armenian monument. See Donabédian, *L’âge d’or* (n. 8), pp. 78-79; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. II, pp. 184-198. Synoptic plate of radiating plans: Cuneo, *Architettura armena* (n° 17), vol. II, p. 724.

<sup>69</sup> Zoravar is an octaconch inscribed in a polygon on a cylindrical base. The internal sculptural decoration is very discreet, perhaps because the monument was originally covered with frescoes, of which only traces remain. See Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), pp. 330-332, cat. pp. 127-128; Donabédian, *L’âge d’or* (n. 7), pp. 185-187; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. III, pp. 106-121.

<sup>70</sup> Irind is attributed to the 680s. Its composition follows that of Zoravar except for the western arm which is rectangular (which is why this plan could be called a heptaconch), and for the two rectangular rooms flanking the apse, which break the octagonal contour of the monument. See Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur* (n. 29), pp. 330-332, cat. pp. 153-154; Donabédian, *L’âge d’or* (n. 7), pp. 188-189; Kazarjan, *Cerkovnaja arxitektura* (n. 29), vol. III, pp. 443-462.

<sup>71</sup> While it is common practice in Armenia to place a dedicatory inscription on the monument, these are normally written in Armenian. The Zvart’nots’ inscription is an exception and has often been read as a materialization of the Greek political and religious affiliation of its sponsor. On the Cathedral see above note 42.

[p. 40]

It presented a tetraconch with an annular ambulatory, inscribed in a 36-meter-wide polygon (the same dimension as in the Holy Sepulcher).

Not only was the design surprisingly daring, but also the carved decoration of the cathedral. Abundance, quality and novelty were its main features. Sphero-cubic capitals, Ionic-Armenian capitals with balusters on a basket, large eagle capitals, blind arcade-colonnade, cornices with interlacing on inclined plane, rich compositions with vine scrolls and pomegranates as eucharistic symbols: all these original forms were remarkable creations of the seventh-century Armenian architects and sculptors. These forms strongly marked the second half of the seventh century, and all the subsequent development of Armenian architecture.

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Zvart'nots' serves as an ideal conclusion to affirm that the "Golden Age" of the seventh century was of course a culmination, a zenith which results from the long maturation of the still heterogeneous principles laid down during Late Antiquity. But it is also the fruit of a revolution, the revolution of the dome, which imposed its unchallenged reign from the end of the sixth century. Extending this "late antique" framework, we must note the resilience of the transmission of the classical heritage to Christian Armenia. If we consider the first-century Mausoleum of the Julii in Glanum (France) and compare it with a series of Armenian funerary buildings of the fourteenth century, and especially, among them, the Mausoleum of Prince Azizbek (ca 1310–1320) in Eghvard, and that of Prince Burt'el Ōrbelian (1330–1339) in Noravank', it is striking to see how the principle of the mausoleum in the form of a tower with two levels topped by a small rotunda, which resulted in Armenia from a long evolution since the Early Christian period, culminated at the end of the "Classical Middle Ages" in a form surprisingly evoking an antique Roman model<sup>72</sup>.

The importance of the "Golden Age" of the seventh century lies in the fact that the many compositional and ornamental innovations it created constitute an arsenal of forms unique to this period, but also founders of the Armenian and Georgian architectural language for all following centuries. After the Early Christian period marked by a certain heterogeneity, during the seventh century, and especially during the sixty years between 630 and 690, under the constant reign of the dome, Armenian architecture, together with Georgian architecture, created a language of its own which will remain so until our days.

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<sup>72</sup> Patrick Donabédian, Yves Porter, "Éghvard (Arménie, début du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle). La chapelle de l'alliance", *Hortus Artium Medievalium* XXIII/2, 2017, pp. 839-855, sp. pp. 843-844.

[p. 41, summary in the Czech language]

*summary***Vrchol pozdně  
antického odkazu****Zlatý věk arménské  
architektury v sedmém století**

Autor v článku poukazuje na to, jak souběh tří faktorů umožnil pozoruhodný rozvoj – vskutku „zlatý věk“ – arménské architektury v sedmém století. V první řadě se jednalo o mocnou dynamiku, která na konci pozdní antiky působila v reakci na potřebu nové architektury ve službách křesťanské víry, dále o schopnost integrovat modely převzaté z Byzance a konečně o „revoluci kupole“, k níž došlo na konci šestého století. Od té doby se kupole prochnutá symbolickým významem rozprostírala nad stavbami s rozmanitými dispozicemi – s půdorysem centrálním, křížovým, radiálním i longitudinálním. Autor zde představuje stavby z časového rozpětí přibližně čtyř století, které dělí přijetí křesťanství jako oficiálního náboženství na počátku čtvrtého století od faktického nastolení arabské nadvlády na počátku osmého století. V rámci toho lze rozlišit dvě hlavní etapy: „raně křesťanské období“ a poté „zlatý věk sedmého století“. Význam „zlatého věku“ sedmého století spočívá v tom, že mnohé kompoziční a ornamentální inovace, které v této době vznikají, představují arzenál zcela specifických forem, ale tvoří také základy arménského a gruzínského architektonického jazyka pro následující staletí. Po raně křesťanském období, vyznačujícím se jistou heterogenitou, si arménská architektura v průběhu sedmého století, zejména potom mezi lety 630 a 690, vytvořila spolu s gruzínskou architekturou za stálé dominance kupole vlastní jazyk, který zůstává součástí její silné identity až dodnes.

Added by the author: French summary  
Ajout de l'auteur : résumé en français

Après les trois siècles paléochrétiens (IV<sup>e</sup>-VI<sup>e</sup> siècles) marqués par l'élaboration progressive d'un langage architectural propre devant assimiler de nombreux apports divers, l'Arménie (et avec elle l'Ibérie – centre et est de la future Géorgie) connut, au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle, en particulier de 630 à 690, une période de grand épanouissement architectural.

La conjonction de plusieurs facteurs permit ce développement, qualifié d'« Âge d'or » de l'architecture arménienne : a) la nécessité, à la fin de l'Antiquité tardive, d'élaborer une architecture nouvelle au service de la foi chrétienne ; b) la capacité d'intégrer certains modèles empruntés à Byzance ; c) la « révolution de la coupole » survenue à la fin du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle, liée à la christologie propre à l'Église arménienne. Le tout fut favorisé par la relative « légèreté » de la tutelle alternée, byzantine et arabe, avant l'alourdissement de la domination califale à la fin du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Durant ces six décennies, une soixantaine de constructions de grande qualité conceptuelle, technique et esthétique fut réalisée, dont quinze sont assurément datées. Le règne sans partage de la coupole, cette structure centralisatrice chargée de sens symbolique, s'imposa sur une grande diversité de plans – cruciformes, centrés, rayonnants et longitudinaux. Grâce au vaste répertoire de compositions, formes et motifs alors créés, l'architecture culturelle de l'Arménie (ainsi que celle de l'Ibérie) acquit les principaux traits de sa forte identité.



## Illustrations

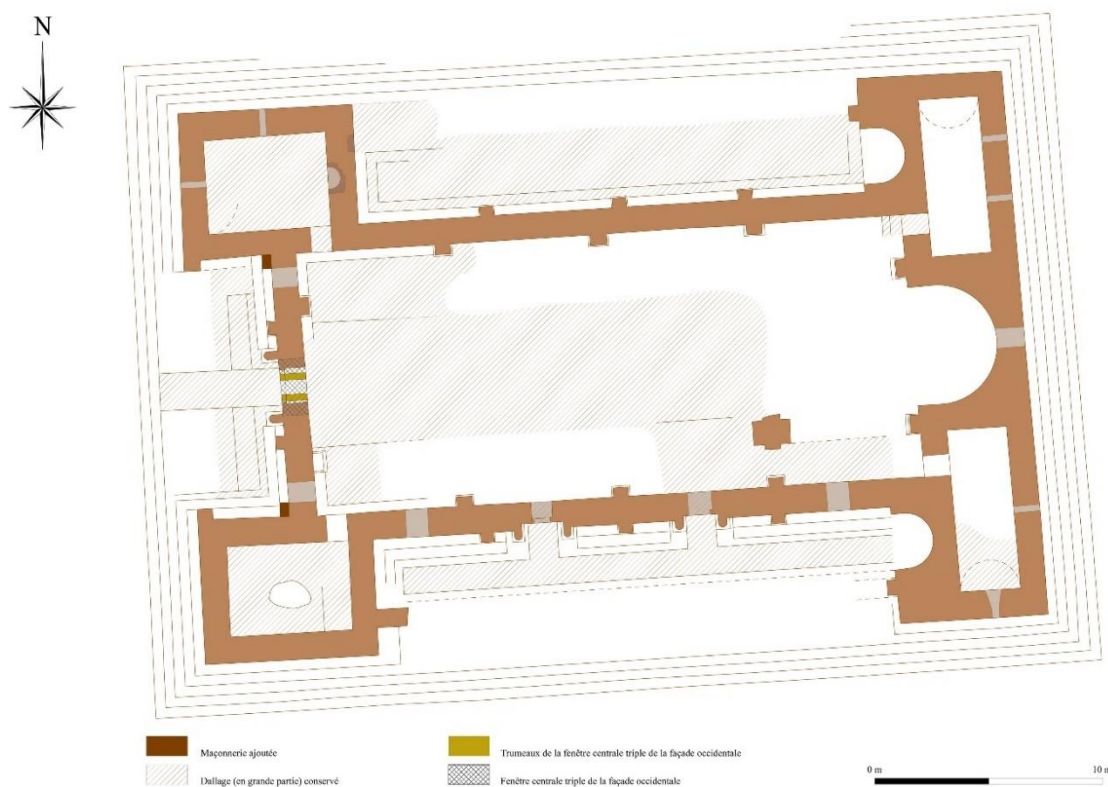


Fig. 1a. Ereruyk' Basilica, plan, ca 6<sup>th</sup> century © Armenian-French archaeological mission of the LA3M laboratory (Aix-Marseille University) in Ereruyk' (2009-2016)



Fig. 1b. Ereruyk' Basilica, ca 6<sup>th</sup> century, general view from southwest © Author

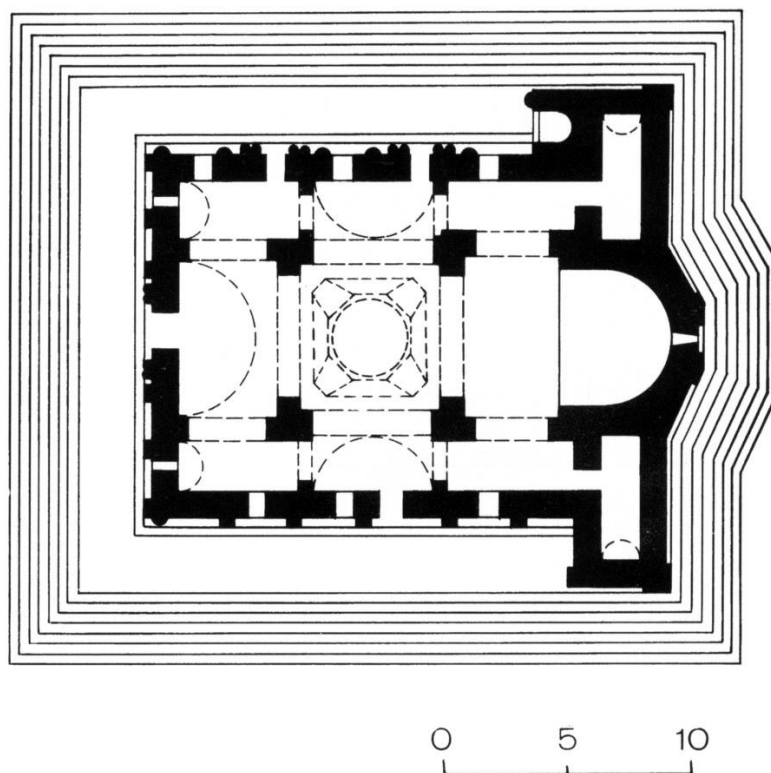


Fig. 2a. Tekor, St Sergius church, 480s, plan © Murad Asratjan, *Armjanskaja arxitektura rannego xristianstva* [Early Christian Armenian architecture], Moscow 2000, p. 153



Fig. 2b. Tekor, St Sergius church, 480s, general view from southwest © N. Marr (1908), after Nikolaj Marr, *Ererujskaja bazilika, armjanskij xram V-VI vv.* [The Basilica of Ereruyk', an Armenian church of the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> cc.], Yerevan 1968, pl. X

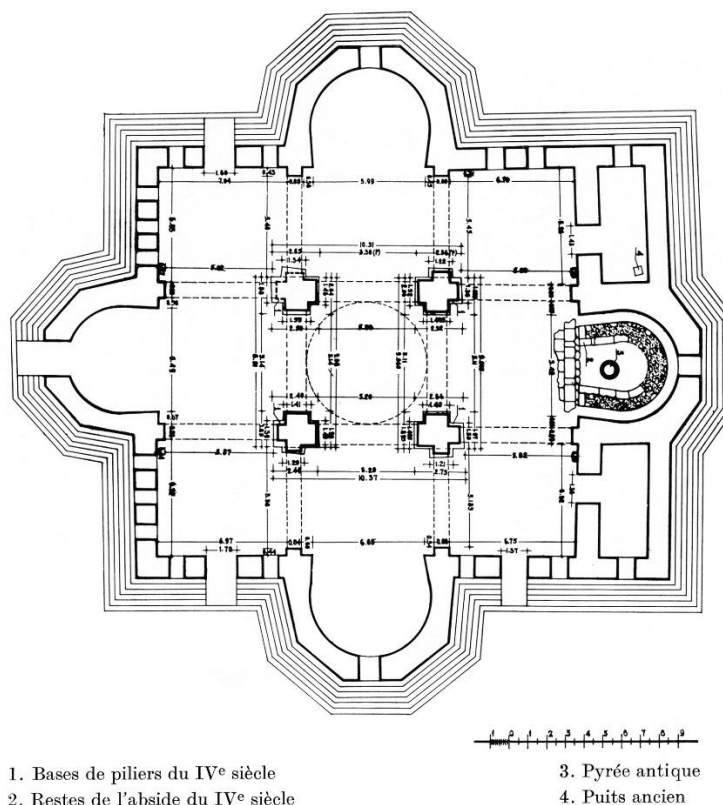


Fig. 3a. Ējmiatsin Cathedral, hypothetical plan of the monument at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century © Alexandre Sahinyan, "Recherches scientifiques sous les voûtes de la cathédrale d'Etchmiadzine", *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, III, 1966, pl. XXIX

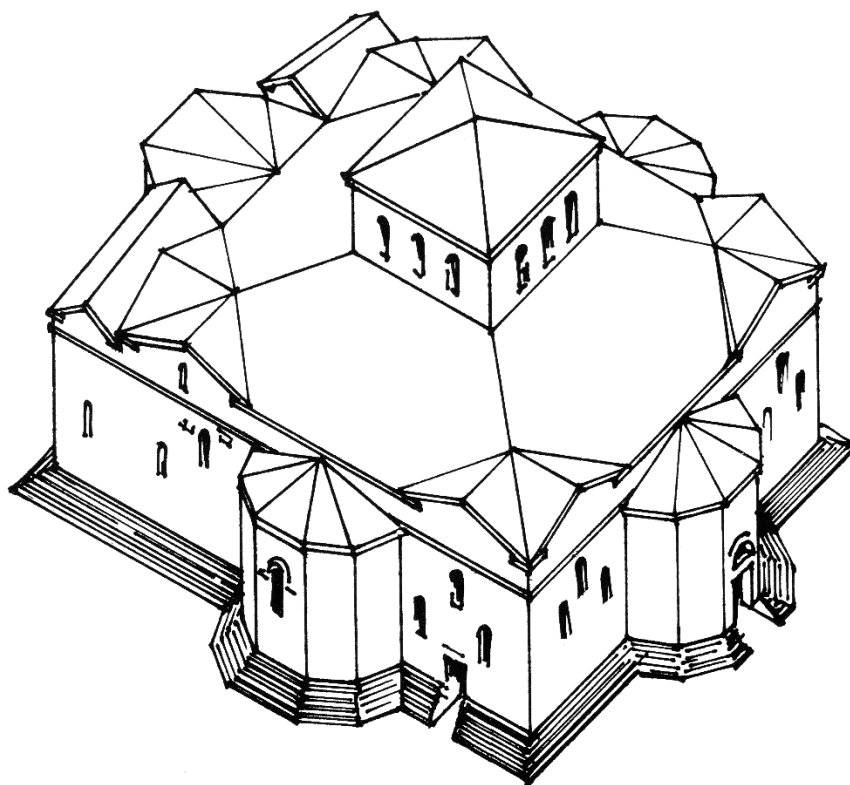


Fig. 3b. Ējmiatsin Cathedral, hypothetical reconstruction of the monument at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, view from northwest © Armen Kazarjan, *Kafedral'nyj sobor Surb Echmiadzin* [The Holy Echmiadzin Cathedral], Moscow 2007, p. 39, fig. 23



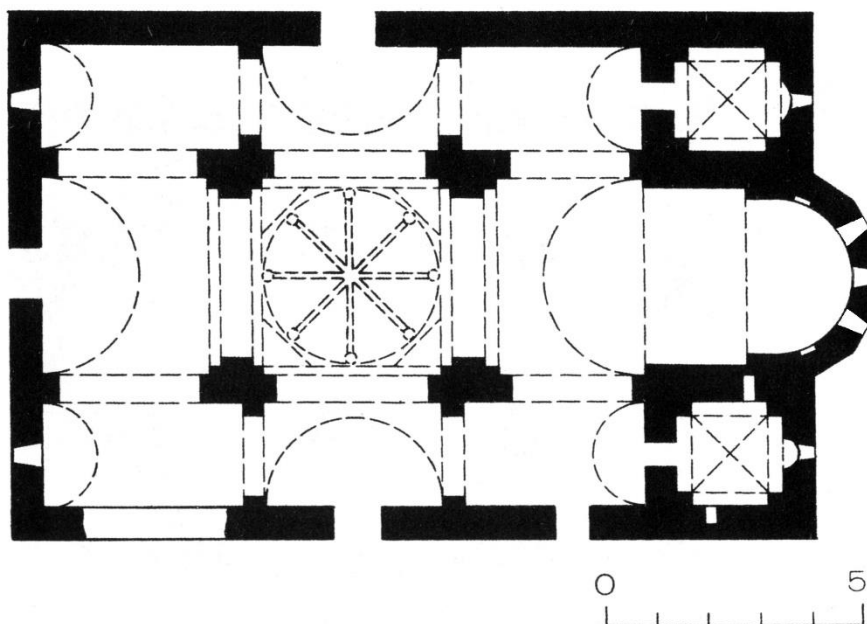


Fig. 4a. Mren, church, 630s, plan © M. Asratjan 2000, p. 350



Fig. 4b. Mren, church, 630s, general view from southeast © Author

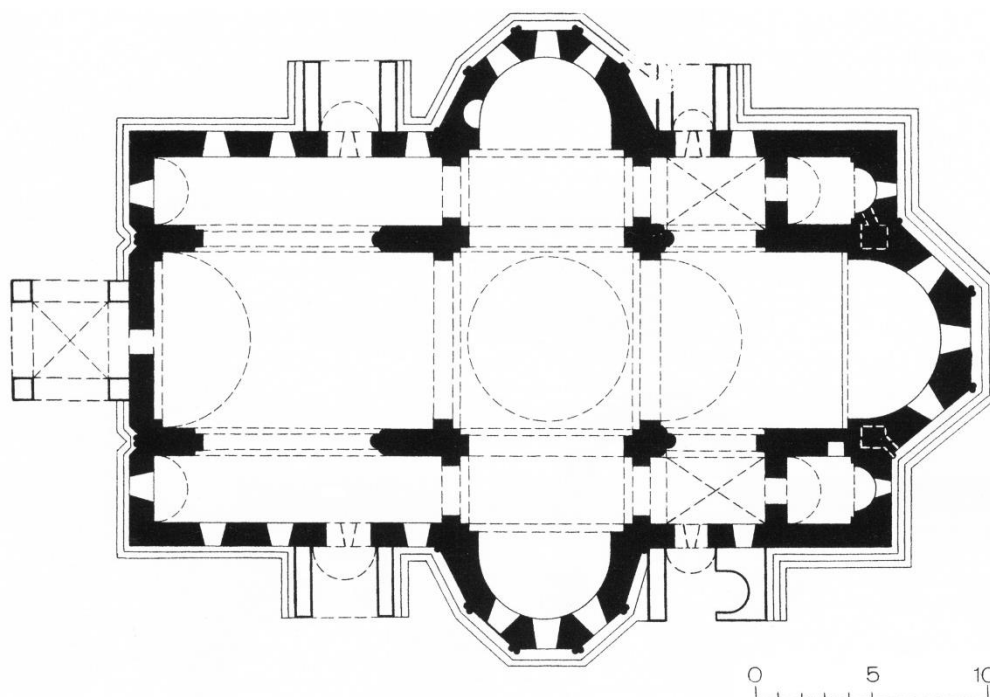


Fig. 5a. T'alin Cathedral, ca 689-693, plan © M. Asratjan 2000, p. 160



Fig. 5b. T'alin Cathedral, ca 689-693, general view from southeast © Author



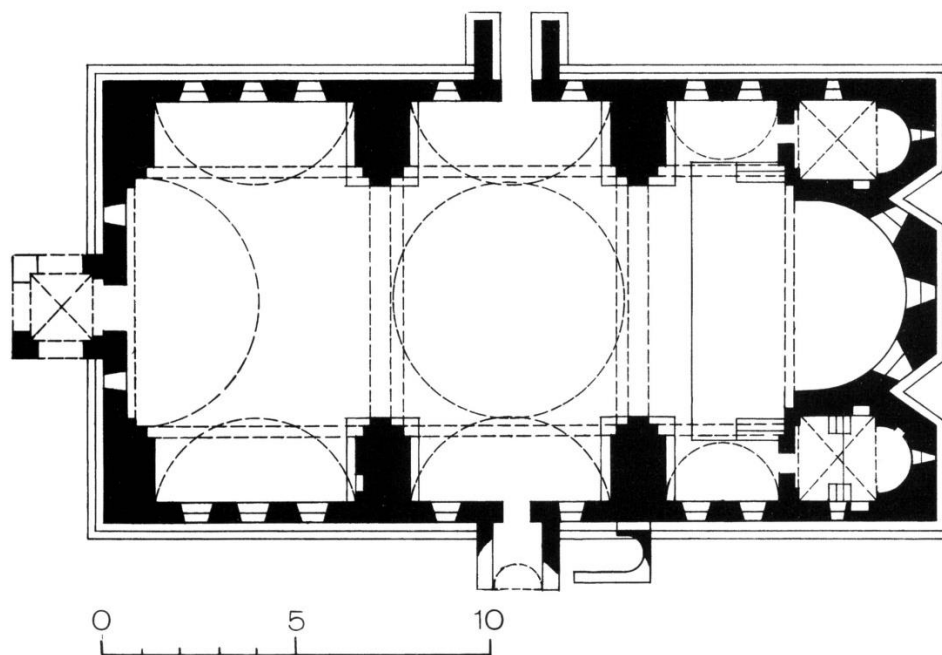


Fig. 6a. Aruch Cathedral, ca 662-666, plan © M. Asratjan 2000, p. 164



Fig. 6b. Aruch Cathedral, ca 662-666, general view from southeast © Author

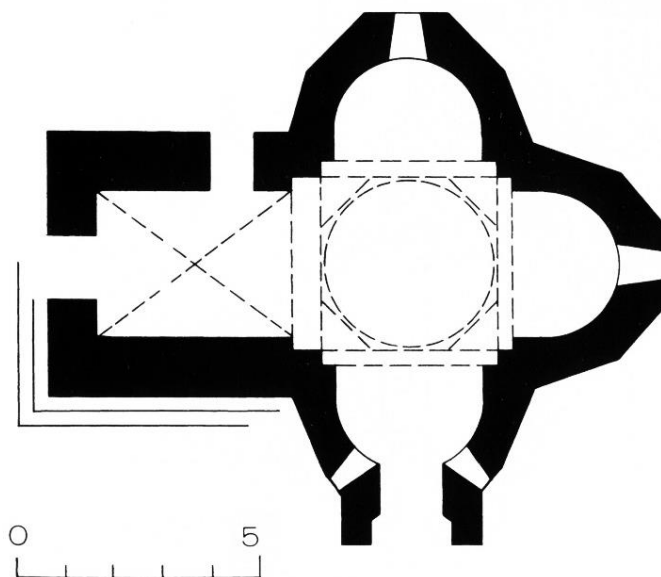


Fig. 7. Alaman, St Ananias chapel, 637, plan © M. Asratjan 2000, p. 130

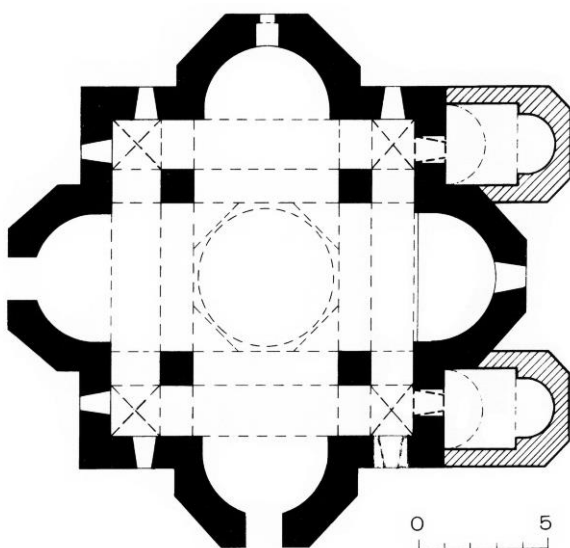


Fig. 8a. Bagaran, St John church, 624-631, plan © M. Asratjan 2000, p. 140



Fig. 8b. Bagaran, St John church, 624-631, hypothetical reconstruction © Sergej Mailov

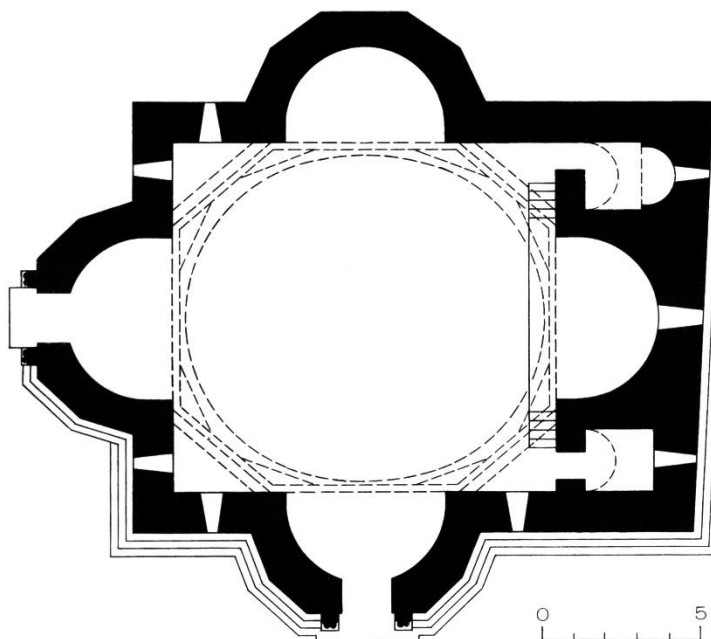


Fig. 9a. Mastara, St John church, 640s, plan © M. Asratjan 2000, p. 288



Fig. 9b. Mastara, St John church, 640s, general view from southwest © Author



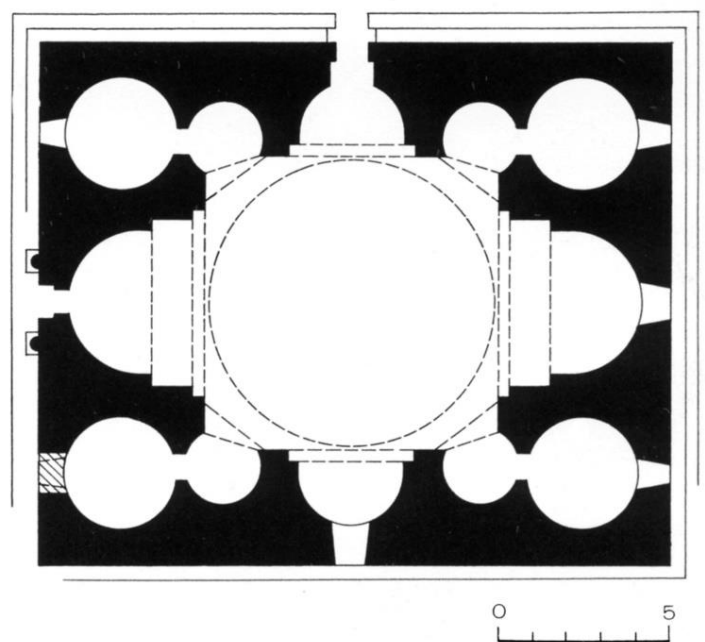


Fig. 10a. Awan Cathedral, 590s, plan © M. Asratjan 2000, p. 301



Fig. 10b. Awan Cathedral, 590s, general view from southwest © Author

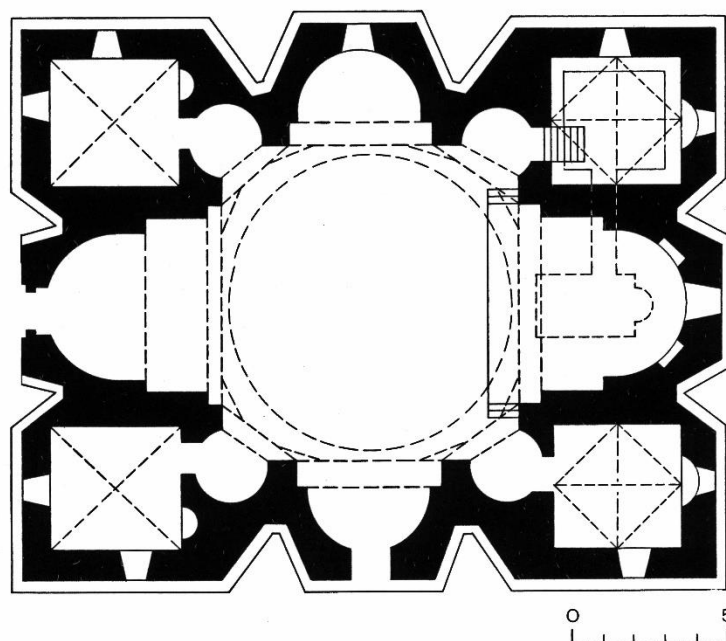


Fig. 11a. Vagharchapat, St Hrip'simē church, ca 617-before 628, plan © M. Asratjan 2000, p. 307



Fig. 11b. Vagharchapat, St Hrip'simē church, ca 617-before 628, general view from southeast © Author

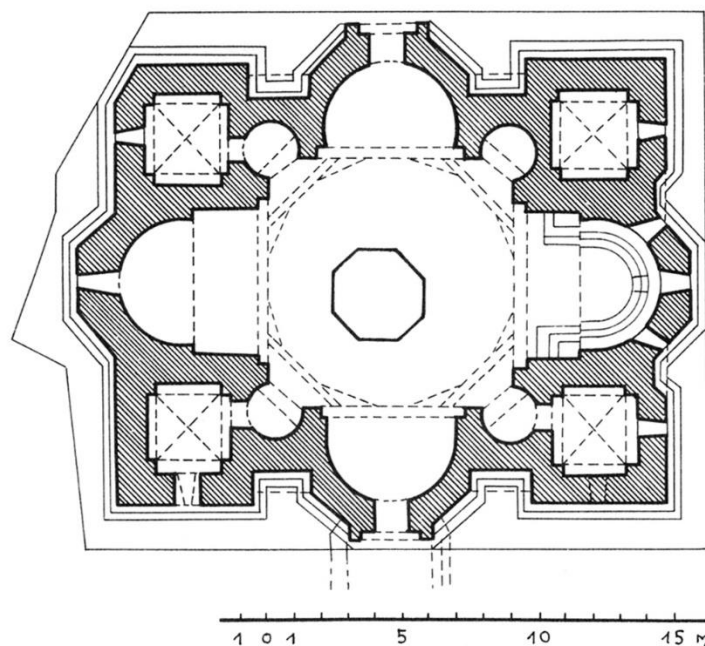


Fig. 12. Mtskheta (Georgia), Jvari (Holy Cross) church, late 6<sup>th</sup> – first decades of 7<sup>th</sup> century, plan © Rousoudane Mépisachvili & Vakhtang Tsintsadzé, *L'art de la Géorgie ancienne*, Leipzig 1978, p. 64

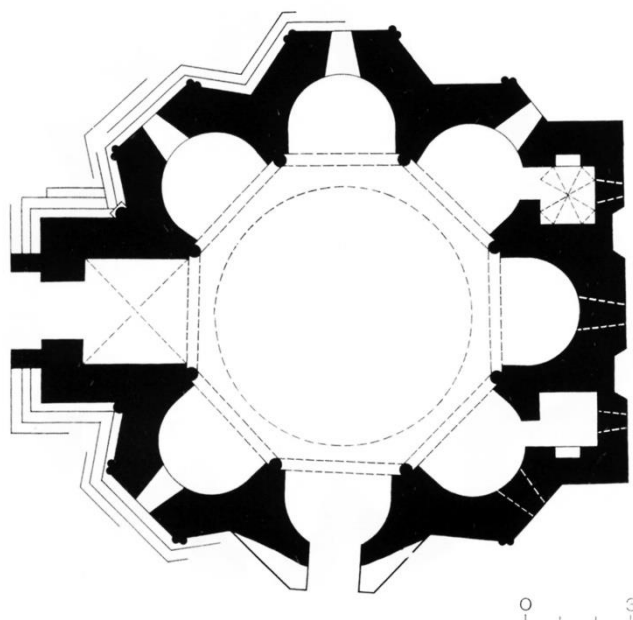


Fig. 13. Irind, church, ca 680s, plan © M. Asratjan 2000, p. 332



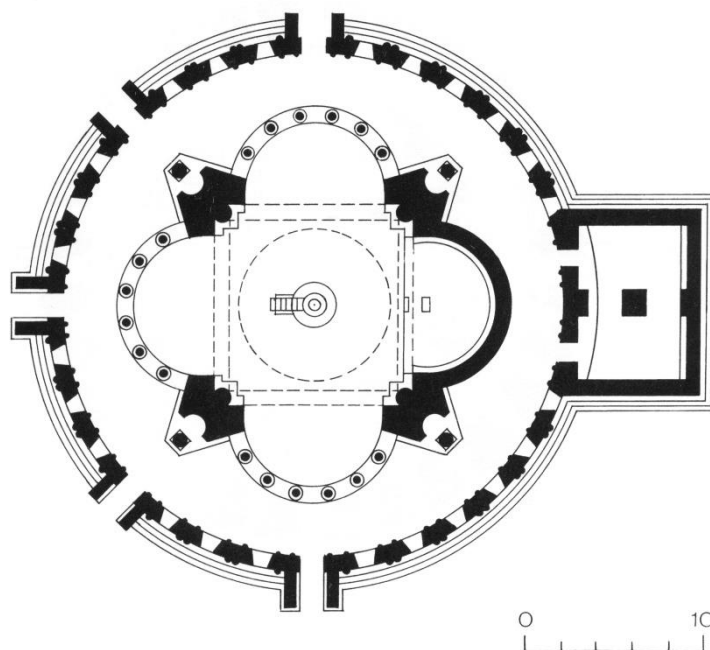


Fig. 14a. Zvart'nots' Cathedral, ca. 643-ca. 660,  
plan © M. Asratjan 2000, p. 338

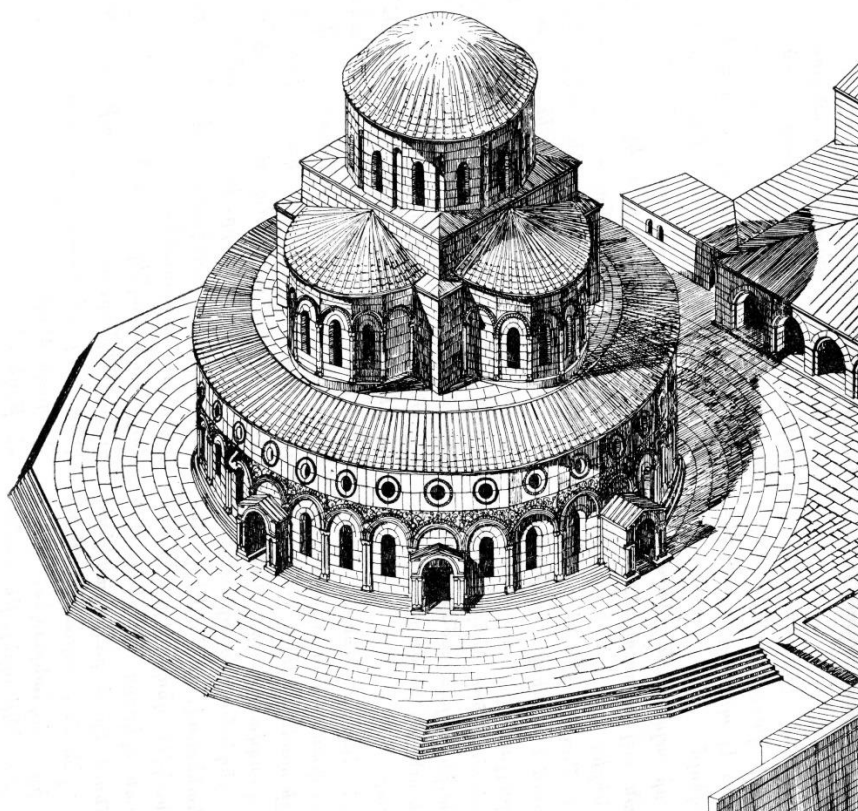


Fig. 14b. Zvart'nots' Cathedral, ca. 643-ca. 660, hypothetical reconstruction  
© Step'an Mnats'akanyan, *Zvart'noc'ə ev nuynatip hušarjannərə*  
[Zvart'nots' and the monuments of the same type], Yerevan 1971, p. 100, fig. 28