

## TRADITIONS AND DEVELOPMENT IN ARMENIAN SACRAL ARCHITECTURE<sup>1</sup>

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In the history of Christian liturgies, the Armenian ritual is a rather peripheral problem: because of its geographical, ethnical, linguistic isolation, it had but a restricted effect impedig it to come to the foreground of interest. This relative isolation has its advantages for liturgy and architecture historical analyses. Inner development of rituals may be observed about 'in vitro' under nearly 'laboratory' conditions, also from the aspect of church architecture development typology. On the other hand, deeper knowledge of Armenian sacral architecture spotlights some early Western Christian churches. Maybe in certain mediaeval periods Armenian liturgy was not as isolated as assumed? Let us have a glance at it.

Historically, first preaching propagation of Christian doctrines is attributed to apostle St. Taddeus in Hajastan. His personality is particularly respected in the Armenian Church, his arm has been kept as a reliquie in Surp-Echmiadzin and also involved in liturgy (e. g. oil benediction of Maundy Thursday). Another tradition in the eastern region of the Antiochian (Syrian) Patriarchate, about Edessa, concerns missionary activities of Addai and Mar (among the first seventy pupils of Jesus; but nothing else is known about them). The Eastern Syrian (Khaldean) liturgical group still keeps textual traditions of Addai and Mar. Initially, the Armenian Church had strict relations with Edessa, an East-Syrian origin recognizable in pristine strata of liturgy. Beyond traditions, it is a historical fact that in the 3rd century, in Hajastan there had been already an established ecclesiastic hierarchy. Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History (VI. 46,2) of that time refers to the correspondence between the Armenian bishop Merusanes and Dyonisius of Alexandria. The Alexandrian relation — at times against Byzantium — remained determinant also later. After the big persecution of Chris-

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tians by Diocletian (287), organization of the Armenian Church took an upswing. During the rule of King Tirdat III (287–330), most of Armenians converted to Christianity, and since 305, Christianity has become state religion — first in the world. Leading personality of church organization was Krikoris Lusavorich, bishop St. Gregory the Enlightener. At the first Universal Nicene Council (Neiaea, 325) the Armenian Church was represented by Aristakes, son of the bishop, while in 355, an independent Armenian national council is known to have taken place. Already in the 4th century, the monk Nerses ordered and set down the first form of liturgy. Its old Syrian language was replaced by old-Armenian, i. e. Krapar. Sakhak the Great finished translation of the Bible in 433. In the establishment of liturgy of national language and character, activities of Mesrob Mastoc (361–441) are determinant by creating to 396 the Armenian alphabet of 36 letters, still in use to-day. Main workshops of liturgic arrangement were monasteries where life and activities were initially controlled by rules of Syrian monasticism. But no such extremist, ascetic monastic movements (stylites, non-sleepers, etc) arose as in Byzantium or Syria. At 5th century councils deciding over important religious polemics (Ephesus 431, Chalcedon 451) the Armenian Church could not be represented. This isolation has led to a lag in obtaining the council decisions, often in poor translation. The Chalcedon Council in 451 proscribed the so-called Jacobite Syrians professing monophysite doctrines who emigrated from the Antiochian region. Also this Syrian immigration motivated independence of the Armenian Church by the end of the 5th century. Most of the ecclesian historians consider this situation ‘verbal’ monophysitism, ‘verbal’ schism. This definition is more correct if the term ‘verbal’ is replaced by ‘factitious’. Namely, it was more of an incomprehension, a misunderstanding than of a conscious theological opposition (there having been no possibility to expound it). After these antecedents, in 506, the national council in Dvin enounced independence of the Armenian Church.

Maybe more space than thought necessary was spent on the problem of ecclesiastic independence. But this period was determinant for the liturgy: The earliest apostolian rite maybe after St. Taddeus was replaced in the 5th century by a Jacobite-Syrian rite. To now, no examples are known of the ‘necessity’ church architecture from the first three centuries, probably house-temples like those in Syria (Dura-Europos, Qirqbiza) functioned also here. The earliest churches were built early in the 3rd century, at present either ruined or reconstructed (Avan I, Djards’haris, Garni I, Echmiadsin I). These were single-nave hall churches with a single semicircular or horseshoe apse, covered by carpentry ceiling or architraved vault, the apse by a concha. Entrances were on the south and west sides, and often all the building stood on a three-stepped crepidoma (like Antique

temples). After liturgic dispositions by Nerses (374), in the last decades of the 4th century, a somewhat complexer church space has developed: the single-nave hall church was added a narthex porch on the south side, and a prothesis by-rooms (sacristy) joining the apse. (Tanahat, Giulagarak, Karnut). This 'side-porch' type was generalized in the 4th century in Central Syria (Nurijeh, Rbé'ah, Kfer, Srir). At a difference, for Syrian churches, there is frequently a triple apse head (madbah) to become later generalized: the apse is joined bilaterally by a by-space (prothesis, diaconicon). Thus, in the earliest Armenian churches, the rite required no additional room, supposed to be architectural frame of the Addai-Mar liturgy. The first Armenian rite by Nerses already required a preparatory room. Even for the first three-nave churches, this prothesis by-room anorganically joined the east part of the church, but always the nave (Casakh, about 400). By the 5th century, the three-nave church type, maybe in its 'side-porch' variety, has become general (Jeghvard, Astarak, Ereruk, Tekor). These invariably comprised the triple apse head, the madbah. To cope with requirements of Syrian liturgy, side by-rooms were always open to the aisles, with no direct access from to the apse. (Syrian analogues: Bancusa, Babisca, Djeradekh, Dar-Kita). By and by, however, the apse space got elevated, placed on a podium, named the choran. Originally, its stairs were axial to the nave (after Syrian examples), later bilateral stairs have become Armenian 'speciality'. By the way, among Eastern rites, such an other than axial access to the altar is known for the Armenian alone, while here and there it occurs in early Gallican western rites — attributed to Armenian influence.

Thus, in the 6th century, Armenian rite got finalized after Syrian pattern, having as determinants the triple apse head (madbah) with protheses open toward the aisles, as well as the choran — the apse podium — with bilateral stairs. The face of the choran 100 to 120 cm high might bear imagery, this is, however, other than general, and cannot be demonstrated to have been applied already in the 6th century. This is rather a Byzantine effect to be quoted later. Another Syrian-Armenian feature is to have the altar space hidden by an antependium (varacoyr) during certain parts of the rite. According to actual knowledge, the choran in its actual form was first applied in St. John's church in Mastara early in the 6th century; by the 7th century it has generalized (Voskepar, Arthik, Kcharich). Beyond the strictly meant liturgy space, the integer Mastara building may be at the origin of the typical Armenian church type, called in special literature 'Hripsime-type, after the memory hall built 614–618 in Vagharsapat. The octagonal, mid-dome hall is joined at corners by protheses, and laterally by apses (tetraconch system). There are several examples for this layout from the 7th century (Avan, Targmanchasvank, Garnakhovit, Sissavan). This space form may be correlated to similar spaces in Syria (Esra, Bosra,

Rusafah, Gerasa), Egypt (Dongola, Tamit) and Georgia (Mcheta-Djvari). It would be too far-reaching to look after a linear relationship between the Monophysite church in Constantinople (Hagioi Sergius and Bacchus, 527–536) and the 'Hripsime type': probably there is none. But the octagon completed by corner spaces points — beyond Syria — also in this direction. Since 591, prefects of the Armenian Church have made an increasingly pro-Byzantine policy, so early in the 7th century, this influence has to be reckoned with. The so-called novopartite space proclaimed as typically Byzantine appeared also in some Armenian monuments: Bagaran (624–631), Garni (7th century), Echmiadsin reconstructed (641–652). For this latter, Byzantine relations of catholicos Nerses III (641–661) and master builder Hovhan are known from records. While in other cases, direct Byzantine origins are debatable. This tetraconch variety of the novopartite space is missing from Byzantine architecture of that time, even it appeared much later in areas under Byzantine rule (Athos, 963, Athens, Hagioi Apostoioi, 11th century; in Georgia: Oski 10th century, Kutaisi 1003, etc.), but it did not generalize. Neither occurrences in West and Central Europe (St. Germigny — des-Pres, Linz, Feldebró) may be unambiguously derived from Byzantium. The mid-dome type extended with apses in the transept has, however, become general in Hajastan to a degree that it was also applied in essentially nave and aisle churches in the 7th century, such as in the third reconstruction of the Dvin cathedral (607). There are great many such monuments: ... etc. Subsequently, also monasteries from the 10th to 13th centuries adopted essentially this space form. In the 'golden age' (7th century), then in the 'silver age' (10th–11th centuries) some significant aristocratic-pontifical private churches arose (Svartnoc 641–652), Yeghward-Zoravor 662–685, Gaghic church in Ani 1001–1013, Abugam-rents church in Ani, second half of 10th century, etc.). From other aspects, these are outstanding creations of Armenian architecture, worth to be presented, but secondary for liturgy historical investigations. They being private churches, there was an intermingling of the traditional function of congregational rites, the cultic role, and the special requirements of individual display.

Third, last phase of the history of sacral architecture and liturgical history comprises the monastic ritual under Byzantine influence. It has multiple causes. In all the Eastern churches in general, priests were married, had families. At the same time, it has become the rule that higher ecclesiastic dignitaries could only be celibate priests. Practically this meant preference to monks. Throughout in the East, but also often in the West, the clergy subordinated to the bishop consisted of monks, one of them being successor to the bishop. At the same time, this resulted in a concentration of mental forces committed to religious service so that monasteries

could develop into strongholds of sciences, culture, arts and traditionalism. Armenian monasticism prevailed in ecclesiastic organization, liturgy development, scientific life. Already from the 4th century, a layer of celibate teacher priests (vartabed) has developed, as spiritual depositaries of the Armenian ecclesiastic 'elite'. In local monastic rules, habits, Byzantine and Syrian (Antonite) traditions intermingled. Monasteries are known to have existed already in the 4th century, and generalized about the 9th–10th centuries. Already by about the Islamic rush in the 7th century, inmates of Armenian-founded monasteries in Asia Minor and in Syria returned to their homelands. Then, after 928, Syrian and Armenian Monophysite monks were driven away from the Byzantine Empire, to continue their function also in Hayastan. Based on Byzantine 'experience', the earlier — essentially Syrian-type — Armenian liturgy got significantly altered. This period is characterized by three space form changes in architecture: development of jamatoon, cavite and apse head.

The concepts of jamatoon and cavite (gavite) are often applied by special literature as synonyms. Both mean 'porch', 'propylaeum' 'courtyard'. But the functions themselves are not the same. Jamatoon means an altar space, a chapel in the western part of the church. Its function is related to entombment, to funeral, in part, to the Easter rite. This is also doubtless a Byzantine motif, although as an independent room it is a peculiarity of Syrian and Coptic architectures (Turmanin ... or in Nubia, Tamit ... etc.). For these latter, funeral cult takes often place in the church axis, at the west end — of course, with the entrance on the south side (Sahaba, Abdallah-Nirqi). In the influence area of the Coptic rite, in Ethiopia almost everywhere such western 'mortuary' chapels have been established (Axum, Laliberal). In Byzantine liturgy this occurs by setting up an independent 'Holy Sepulchre' altar in the west part of the church before Easter and most of the liturgy takes place here rather than on the east side, on the apse altar. Presence of the 'jamatoon' as a mortuary chapel is manifest already in 7th century Armenian memorial churches of the so-called 'Hripsime type', to become generalized in 9th–10th century monastic architecture (Tatev ... ). Since it was at this time that the north prothesis adjacent to the apse (see below) lost its function, often it was transformed into mortuary chapel, still in use today. It would lead too far to be concerned — in connection with this space type — with Westwerks of western, Gallicane liturgies.

Cavite (gavite), the enormous three-aisles hall joining the west side of a monastic church unambiguously derives from Byzantine monastic liturgy called there *lité*. In monastic congregations in Athos from 850 to 963, some parts of the intonation took place in this western hall. The first representative architectural formulation is known to have been in Megisthé Laura,

Athos (963) but with precedent functional origins. This practice of intonation is likely to have been introduced in Hajastan by Armenian monks displaced from Byzantium after 928. In the 10th and 11th centuries, every monastic church had a western hall (lité=cavite): Gnadevank (1196), Horomos (1035), Hachpat (1161), Sanahin (1185 and 1211), Geghard (1225). Monastic communities at sees but seldom constructed cavits (e. g. Aghtamar: the church was built 915 to 921, it has been an independent see since 1113, the cavite originates from the 12th century).

The third, Byzantine period of Armenian history of liturgy is perhaps the most convincingly distinguished by the change of the apse formation. In the earlier, Syrian period, three elements of madbah: prothesis, apse and diaconicon functioned independently: either of them was accessible only from the nave, without communication between them. Namely, according to the Syrian rite, every 'proceeding' passed along the nave. In Byzantine liturgy these protheses had a priori a more differentiated function. Since during most of the liturgy the priest was behind the iconostasis, inner access was needed between spaces joining the apse. From the 10th century, this change can be traced in Armenian monastic churches. Continuously, but not exclusively, apse heads arose, with mutual access inner communication between the three units. Among the monasteries referred to, there was no Byzantine-type apse head in Tatev, Gosavank, and the first church of Sanahin, but it did occur in the second church of Sanahin (966), Hachpat (972-991) and Geghard (12th century). Non-monastic churches seem not to have adopted this solution but simplified the rite 'in this spirit'. The southern by-room prothesis, the diaconicon has become an independent sacristy, while the northern prothesis was replaced by a recess or a preparatory table in the north wall of the apse. Recent and actual Armenian churches have been built accordingly.

This short recapitulation has scrutinized a little studied problem of the histories of liturgy and architecture. Historical, ecclesiastical history data helped to trace the process of essentially three phases — those of initial pathfinding and development, of marked Syrian effect, then of Byzantine influence — for the Armenian liturgy to get to its actual form. According to the fragmentarily known monuments, church buildings adequately helped their sacral functions at any time, accordingly they changed from time to time. 'Achronism', constancy may be nothing but a superficial statement also in this area of Christian East. Also here, traditionalism could only be possible under the prevailing conditions, giving rise to a 'traditionalist' inner development.