

Result

- General attitudes and policies governing the Caucasus region have made use of religion, the church and its decorations as cultural-economic tools to advance their goals to dominate their cultural affairs and function in the economic processes within the new global system.
- The aesthetics system of decoration in historical and modern eras of the Caucasus is heavily influenced by the policies governing any given country and, thus, has changed thereof. Furthermore, these factors play important parts in achieving the mentioned macro objectives. Meantime, visual and objective aspects of beautification have been emphasized on the part of Georgian churches. In return, decorations of churches in Armenia have been historically driven that have addressed the subjective aspects of beauty.
- Techniques and tactics used to create and rearrange decoration in historical and modern churches have born different properties for decoration and, subsequently, the atmosphere of churches. Accordingly, these properties can be characterized in terms of attributes such as "diverse", "temporary", "displaying", "accessible" and "changeable".
- Today, the decoration is not a sole interior phenomenon, nor it is limited to the atmosphere of churches. Actually, decorations go beyond this border and play an important role in shaping the surrounding environment and, in particular, urban visage. Hence, strategies and techniques adopted to decorate the churches are determined with regard to the urban visage management policies. Similarly, Georgian churches have paid special attention to make use of light as a critical decorative means to represent the sublime status of churches in the overnight part of the Georgian cities.

Conclusion

Decorative arts and, in particular, decorations prevalent in churches in the Caucasus that once represented and reflected the beliefs and ideals of a religion, have been heavily affected by the contemporary world, where humanity is considered as an instrument in the development of financial and investment-oriented goals, and these elements have undergone fundamental changes in form and content. Meantime, the decoration has also converted into a commodity that should be delivered as attractive as possible. Naturally, this attractiveness is not going to appeal to customers who do not have a deep and lasting relationship with the offered product. Therefore, the aesthetic representations represented in the form of decorations of churches should not necessarily include sensible and comprehensible content. The trend of changes in the decoration of the churches, which is affected by the wave of globalization, has overwhelmed all the areas of developing region of the Caucasus. The only difference is the strategies adopted by countries in the region.

The strategy in Armenia is directed towards developing and attracting tourists via maintaining the historical visage of this country and churches as the most important representation of this visage. The latter circumstance is due to this fact that this country benefits from some comparative advantages including numerous global registered historical sites. However, the dominant thinking trend in Georgia is attempting to introduce itself as a country with diverse tourist attractions as well as a place to be explored by different people. In this way, paying enough attention to the apparent prosperity of churches and even constructing new and big churches should occupy their priority.

Finally, it should be noted that the inherent feature of the decoration leads to change in the mentioned approach in the context of its development and application. Decorations, as the most accessible and outermost layer of any given phenomenon including a church, are highly flexible in expressing and presenting the subjective intentions of their policy makers. So, if the ideological resistance is initiated, decorations will be the last stronghold to be defeated. Consequently and in the event of change in attitudes and practices based on it, the first and easiest aspects of this change should be researched in the field of decorations.

Endnote

1. There is just one case of the violation of this trend which is related to St. Echmiadzin Church in Armenia. The architecture and decoration of this church are similar to those of Vanek Church in Isfahan which is inspired by the architecture of Safavid era in Iran. Since the image of Shah Abbas, the Great is placed on the Tower Bell of the Church as well as other evidence, it seems that the Church has been built on the order of Shah Abbas himself or, at least, Iranian craftsmen have repaired the Church. Hence, the Church cannot be considered as an artwork entirely related to Armenian civilization.

as an advertising representation will be very serious.

Thus, decorations of churches in the Caucasus, as the first land to recognize the Christianity, have been heavily influenced by Christianity and its narrative style as fundamental trend in this faith. In this regard, it can be said that although Islam, as a dominant religion, has governed the people of Georgia and Armenia over several centuries, the mentioned people did not convert to this new religion and Muslim Georgian migrated thereof. Therefore, Islam has played a state religion in practice among these people and that they have resisted against adoption of the civilization-related impacts of this religion, at least in its advertising layer (decorations of the church).¹

The results based on the new approach

The Caucasus Art and Civilization Research Group decided that the above-mentioned questions related to the hypotheses and previous design were not sufficient, summed up the field results and proposed some new research topics. This time, the Group addressed the role of decorations in new attitudes towards the role and functions of the church within the contemporary society and urban visage. This new approach was based on this field fact that the observed decorations in the historical churches, additional decorations as well as their style in new churches did not serve the goals of these churches. Accordingly, this hypothesis was generally proposed that decoration and the issues related to aesthetics as well as its function in the contemporary era were heavily affected by modern social and political events and that the forms of their manifestations in the churches were in accordance with the direction of the macro policies. Accordingly, three new articles have investigated this general subject on the basis of different aspects.

The first article, entitled “the aesthetics of decorations of churches in the Caucasus,” focuses on the aesthetic approaches in the use of decorations. This article explained the objective and subjective criteria in the domain of perception of beauty and assessed the contemporary situation as well as prevalent attitudes towards the aesthetic aspects of decorations of church from the perspective of expert audience. The results of this study clearly emphasized the fact that although the tradition of church building in both countries has been clearly dominated by the symbolic role of the decoration and establishment of an subjective atmosphere rather than those objective aspects, two different approaches to beauty perception of decorations in Georgia and Armenia have been arisen in the wake of the contemporary events. Decorations of churches in Georgia have been influenced by some modern perspectives that have attempted to reinforce visual and objective aspects of spatial beauty. In return, decorations of churches in Armenia have been historically driven that have addressed the subjective aspects of beauty.

The second article has adopted a more detailed viewpoint in order to address the use of light and lighting as some decorative means in the traditional and contemporary eras in the course of churches in the Caucasus. Although the exterior lighting of buildings is considered a new decorative art, the use of light as an beautification element in inner space setting, at least in Iranian architecture and the churches established after the Middle Ages in Europe, has had a long background. However, this study found that light has not played a symbolic presence in the atmosphere of Armenian historical churches. There is a similar trend, except for a few small cases, in Georgia. These circumstances have been resulted from the teachings of the early Christian as well as centrality of monasticism in this faith. However, due to the change in aesthetic approach mentioned in the previous article, the lighting has become a modern decoration that plays an important role in representation of these architectures in Georgia. In this way, historical churches and, even, the newly built churches have been looked upon in terms of distinctive physical and positional features in this direction. In particular, it can be argued that decorative and symbolic uses of light have not occupied any important place in the church building tradition in the Caucasus and this trend is continued in Armenia as well. However and regarding the contemporary period, visual (objective) decoration of churches, as a tourist attraction on the overnight part of the Georgian cities, has given great importance to use light as a decorative element.

The third article has shed a more general look at contemporary approaches to decorations of churches. Having cited the role of macro factors such as policy making and management of religion in terms of political factors, the impact of these factors and, ultimately, the results of this change in the attitudes, this article has attempted to address the mentioned factors in the form of the role of decoration in new systems of both countries. Based on the results of this study and in line with the development policy, the Georgian government has made use of churches and religion as tools to control the country’s culture as well as attract mainly non-cultural tourists. Meantime, the decoration has also converted into a commodity that should be delivered as attractive as possible. Features such as evanescence, diversity and, looking at decoration as an object are the result of these policies.

Approaches to Architectural Decorations in the Churches of Caucasus

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Abstract

The Caucasus Art Research Group consists of four researchers who attempt to make use of discovery method in order to identify and introduce some aspects of Caucasian civilization via an 18-day trip to this region. This paper is an analytical statement extracted from art research group in this trip. The overall strategy of the Group is postulated in a way that prevents from addressing the many artworks and architectures available in this region. Accordingly, the most notable representations of this field have been carefully and precisely considered.

The specific cornerstone activity of the Group is focused on the genealogy of decorations of churches in Georgia and Armenia. Decorations are the outermost layer of the relationship between artwork and the audience and the representation (showcase) of the artwork. Accordingly, decorations are considered as the most striking visual and physical features of any artwork. Consequently, decorations can transfer subjective concepts, beliefs and designers' norms to the observers. As demonstrated in previous studies, the major representations of traditional Caucasian civilization are maintained throughout the architecture of churches. Having reviewed the decoration properties of these monuments, one can grasp different aspects of the transformations in the beliefs and values of this nation.

The basic research framework and analysis of current situation

Based on pre-trip studies, the research program was designed in such a way that the "geographical and cultural impacts of the Caucasus region on decoration of churches" constituted the main line of research topics. In the meantime, "the impact of ancient rituals of Iranian cultural sphere", "the impact of climatic and natural features of the Caucasus" and "impact of Islam" on the decorations of churches was among the most important topics. Later on, however, the Group's approach was changed and some new topics came out of the field researches to replace the previous choices. It should be noted that the reason for this change of approach are delineated in the following sections. Firstly, rejection of ancient beliefs in accordance with the remaining decorations on the body of churches required historical studies and frequent reference to the written documents. However and regarding the prevalent constraints as well as duration of the trip, it was not possible.

Secondly, the field studies conducted in the first visits indicated that the decorations of the churches were mainly influenced by Christian beliefs and the impact of local and ethnic characteristics was low. The severe influence of Christian beliefs on decorations of churches can be analyzed and determined on the basis of special function of decorating elements. Actually, since the decorations are the outermost layer of any given artwork, these elements can play important advertising roles in offering the opinions of their owners and creators. Therefore, if the influence of other civilizations and contextual factors is justifiable and, even, unavoidable over the structural layers of an architecture, the resistance of a civilization and believers in a belief against an architectural decoration layer