



Fig.6. the ancient carvings, that are much like a signature or a diary writing, are seen as the same past style in the monastery of Haghpat. Armenia. Photo: Zohre Shirazi, Archive of NAZAR Research Center, 2013.



Fig.7. the interface element between decorates which are left from the past is not seen in Gegard monastery and it is preserved just like its past style. Armenia: Photo: Zohre Shirazi, Archive of NAZAR Research Center, 2013.

## Conclusion

By the pass of time and getting far away from the early Christianity era, the style of the remaining, repaired or added decorations, all belong to the early Christianity and few belong to the Byzantium period. Religious building aesthetics can take form in different society centered, history centered, and governance centered dimensions. With the aesthetics of today's churches of Caucasus we discover that they're only like the past in their appearance and unlike ancient churches, they're not meaningful and no sign of complex and impressive gothic church or mysterious and ceremonial Baroque and Rococo periods are seen in them. Most of aesthetics are merely visual which are based on municipal managers and their treatment method with historical and religious buildings.

In the Caucasus region, the aesthetics of the present decorations in the religious Christian buildings such as churches and cathedral can be evaluated with two different approaches. First, Georgian churches that

have preserved the past style architecture, decorative past additions, and new frames have been added to them, and paintings were put on the walls to show and preach Christianity and the power of church in the landscape of city. On the other hand, no new church is built and the decorations are preserved as their original style and their view towards churches are more related to viewing a historical work which must be saved as its original form.

In both countries, treatment towards decorations has a demonstrative role, and the attraction of tourism, is more important than the holiness of the building. In other words, in both concepts, the holiness of the church and the expectation from the decoration in religious building is ignored, and are based upon momentary and visual and tourism oriented aesthetics; In Armenia, it's done by preserving its historical originality and in Georgia, it's done with the aim of demonstrating in the city landscape.

## Endnote

1. German philosopher of Nineteenth-century

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in churches, follow the past period and the early Christianity and Byzantium art and little additions exist in them. In the Haghpat) church collection and cathedral of Armenia, like most churches seen in the Caucasus region, decorations are mostly inside the building and the exterior is rather simple with little to no decoration. For example, the base or the top of the columns are only decorated on one side and the other side is incomplete.

In the contemporary period, no effort has been put to completing it and it's been left as it was before.

In this Cathedral, different types of cross patterns carvings are seen on church walls which are like a historic work signature, recording of presence and memorabilia writing. This is style is more or less repeated in other places as well.

Any array is elaborate and aesthetic principles are considered in it but it made no connection with other patters and does not have the evaluation potential in the collection as a whole.

## • Armenia

In Armenia, on the one hand no new church is built and on the other hand, old buildings are left untouched. The few frames of the interior, usually have a higher historical value, and are really close to the hor-

rifying dark atmosphere of the early Christianity and Byzantium church. The other decorations are being destroyed and or are saved by saving their original and amending them. In many places, the dim dark horrifying atmospheres of the old churches are preserved. Here, the approach is to save the decoration and the historical landscape with the least manipulation in the old building and remaining loyal to the historic work. In the Gegard Cathedral, some signs of old temples and Mithraism were seen and simple decorations and the original purity whose carving was saved were also seen and no new added decorations were seen in them. Delicate patterns of cross, animals and holy plans were seen on the stone buildings. In the Cathedral, a type of mental aesthetic sample and historical aesthetic of Armenian churches are seen. In general, the beauties of these churches aren't visual and don't match with physical beauty criteria, rather, the viewer faces a horrifying atmosphere that is the reminder of early and ancient Christian features. Therefore, the existing beauty in these places is created by relating the mind of the viewer with historical concepts and beliefs and the past values. They're preserved as they were to attract tourism, and instantly induce the feeling of ancient church atmosphere which are in contrast with their today's religious views.



Fig.5. In contemporary period, in Annanury Church, display frames has been added to the new and more popular building, whereas the small older building has no addition. Georgia: Photo: Zohre Shirazi, Archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.



Fig.3. Decorative and advertising frames in chapel Zhuri's Mama in Tbilisi rarely seen. Georgia. Photo: Zohre Shirazi, Archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.



Fig.4. During the contemporary period, the dramatic Frames had been added, in the height of human vision, to the old monastery building in Bagrati's Cathedral in Kutaisi. Georgia. Photo: Zohre Shirazi, Archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.

and its combination with the body and the other decorations, are all there with the purpose of being seen, and in many cases are rather elementary and amateur. Holiness, dim, and the spirituality of the early church, are replaced with new paintings with religious subjects. Instead of overall decorations on the wall and in accordance with the church building, different paintings are placed on some columns and walls without considering the other parts of the church, and each demonstrate a different story. Overall, the decorations are separate from the interior wall of the church and it's clear that they are added, in a way that any change or displacement of them doesn't not affect the church in any way. In the, the prolific entrance with stone writings are seen and inside the building, paintings of holy individuals and historic narrations are seen. In the newer building, the walls are painted white and the paintings are added, while in the older part, the walls are rather simple and have no decorations. In general,

although Georgian churches are more or less decorated by past period styled decorations, but by the changes that took place in the new period, such as using various colors, special night lighting, application of different and sometimes uncoordinated arts like painting, metalworking, tessellation, added to the visual dimensions and aesthetic criteria of the walls and the building. In older churches, new decorations were as prepared frames and in new churches, decorations were performed by narrative painting on the wall and installment of frame. These decorations are only like the past in their appearance and unlike ancient churches, they don't make a holy and meaningful atmosphere, also, gothic churches of Baroque and Rococo periods with all their complex decorations have not become impressive. Their aesthetics are merely physical. In Armenian churches, added decorations are very little and much effort has been made to preserve the works. The principle for the aesthetics of the decorations and paintings





Fig.2. Two sidewalls of the sanctuary are asymmetric in decorations. One of them is completed and the other one is about to start. “Mother of God” church, Guri town, Georgia. Photo: Zohre Shirazi, Archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.

shows the addition to the building in different times by different people. In other words, each pattern is drawn skillfully but isn't combined with other patterns. Classic art principles such as mirroring and balancing is seen in the overall building but no sign of classic aesthetics is seen in decorations.

### • Georgia

The first thing that's appealing in the interior of Georgian churches is the high number of paintings installed to the wall up to human view level. The basic aesthetic principles including the suitability in the size, same being in the form of framing, the installment method and paintings combinations are not considered, the form of painting a performance technique, show the short life time of paintings. It seems that the literature of any painting has a more important role than the overall understanding of their entire combination. Apparently, the installments of these painting are done to fill the gaps and are rather demonstrative.

In the church of “God's mother” in the city of Guri in Georgia, the decorations were complete in one part and being formed in the other, the fact that they seem complete in one part means that they're not seen as a whole and are not anything but an addition, and more importantly they're more important for the church's view and advertisement than its gradual evolution.

On the other hand, the decorations in the “Zhuri's Mama” church in Tbilisi remain intact. Zhuri's Mama is a local small scale church with little brick façade and teal tile in dome. Inside the church, there are fewer paintings and the main building is seen more. Since the worshippers were local people and it had lesser governance and demonstrative dimension, then lesser need to advertisement is seen and the main building remains the same with more originality. In big and highly visited Georgian churches such as Bagrati's Cathedral in the city of Kutaisi, frames and murals were added to the main building in the contemporary period and are rather demonstrative and advertising. The installment height, the performance method, coloring

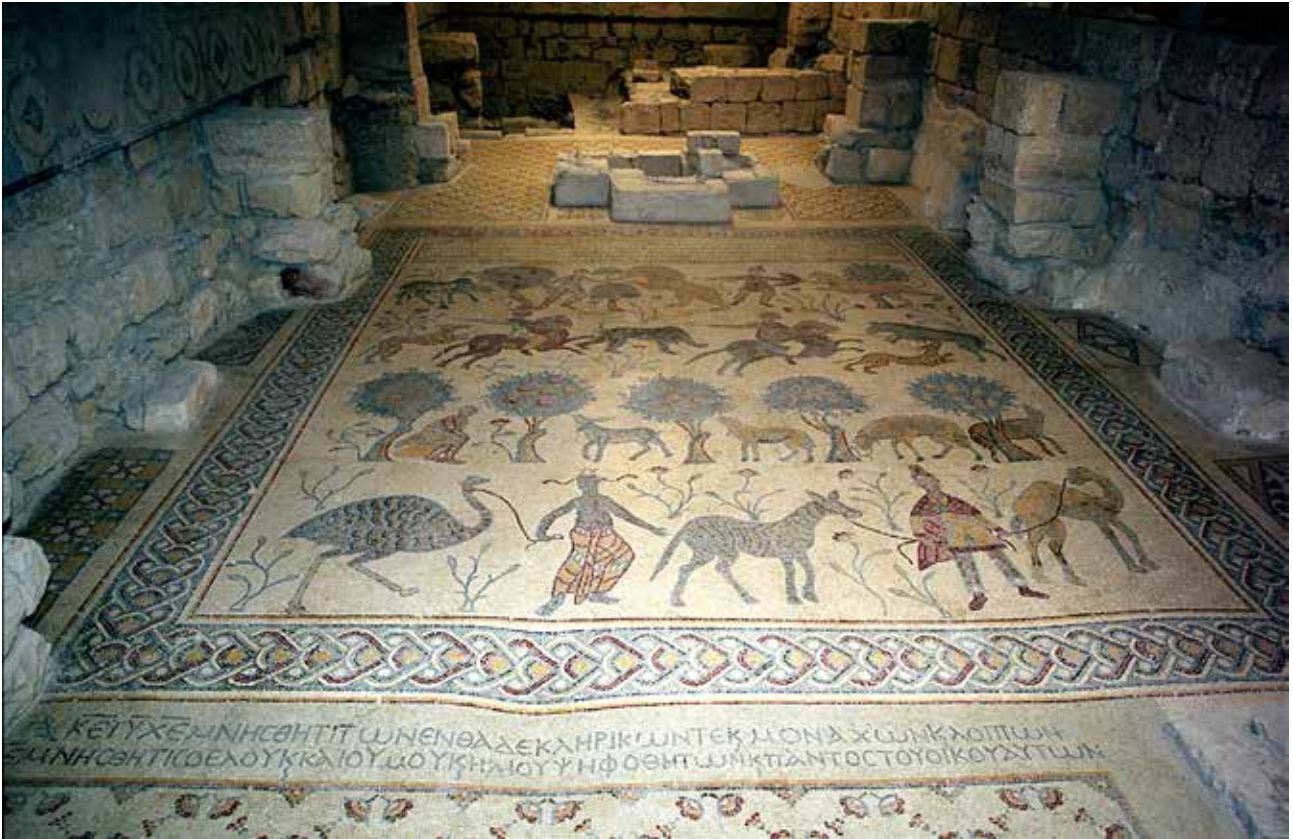


Fig.1. the mosaic floor of the sacred building of summit “NeboMount” in Israeli that portrays a narrative of the life of Prophet Musa (AS).  
Source: [www.marbleexports.com](http://www.marbleexports.com)

view, we discover the reason as to why it was formed and changed based upon the background conditions, and ultimately we discover that we are dealing with additional decorations.

The method of showing through stone and stone carving belongs to people who learned how to deal with native stones during different periods via living in mountains. Native stone architecture remains from ancient Urartu, Parthian and Sassanid periods. Despite the fact that in this region, Christianity was recognized before other countries, but these regions did not have new artistic experiences such as the ones belonging to gothic and renaissance art and still the originality of the early Christianity can be seen in their churches. In different fields, the desire to preserve tradition is more than the desire to change and write. In the contemporary period, except for a few large cities, simple rural life that depends on livestock and agriculture continues, few people know non-native languages and no sign of interest to learn other languages is seen in them. Their bias to preserve culture under the shad-

ow of cultural symbols such as language, religiously biased and bigoted rituals, family and collective life style is seen. The lack of stable central power and the prejudice of the orthodox faith to preserve basic religious principles can be the causes of it.

The churches of this region are built in the style of early Christianity and Byzantium architecture style and their decorations are little and belong to this same period. Church decorations, especially in Georgia are additional and separate from the building. This means that the preservation of decorations reduces the holiness of the building in the mind of their viewer. Neither they completely removed all the decorations like the modern era and nor did they see the holiness in the purity of the construction and meaning and interior of the church; in a sense, the holy pattern shows the holiness of the building. Their decorations are not unified in visual terms and the unifying element is not seen amongst the components. Early aesthetic classic principles exist in any decoration as the single work and are not observed in combination with the whole, which



religious art, is one of the identity effects of ancient civilization. According to “Burkhardt”, holy art for traditional human is a means to reach the supernatural world. For relatives residing in the same place, holy art is the building of a shrine or a holy place where the godly spirit or his earth representative, invisibly resides there (Burckhardt, 2011: 17). All religions have symbols which if are not recognized, will make them seem trivial and fetishistic. Desire to decoration existed in humans from the beginning. The symbols and signs used to decorate a place are the way to preserve and state the beliefs of a nation and are the tools for the recognition of that civilization. Decoration as the last layer that is added to the construction has the same role as a showcase to convey the most original thoughts to the viewer. In fact, the signs that we know as the building decorations mean more than just decoration for their creators and are not merely there for physical beauty.

Statement style and the type of order governing an artwork are of the factors that distinguish the art of a group from another. The order governing any artwork is dependent on the field of the work. It seems rather complex in a place and simple in another. Holy signs are somewhat the effort of the builders in stating the beauty and are a sign of the supernatural that are formed in different ways depending on the formation and the creator of that work. According to “Schwann’s” belief, in the holy art, a human will find order and discipline in everywhere. In this art, it’s possible that the mystery or order, find a higher importance to something, depending on the subject; but what’s clear is that, both of these elements always exist and are evolving (Schwann, 2003: 16).

The holiness of an artwork depends on many things; illustration of a tradition or a religious belief, being located in a holy place and most importantly it’s the subject of the work and the figure of illustration that validates a holy event by illustrating it (Mahmoudi & Elyasi, 2009: 150-151). The motifs that are repeated are holy and they mainly owe their holiness to the people, stories, and the events that happen to religious individuals. The decorations existing in a church differ in each period and take different forms throughout history. Christianity is a religion whose art has only manifested in churches and has not entered the other dimensions of people’s life. In fact, church is the main place for the Christian religion and it’s there mere art source.

According to field observations, the decorations

in ancient churches can be divided into interior and exterior. Exterior mostly is the carving of plant and symbolic patterns, and interior decoration, is mostly painting of events related to Jesus, apostles and holy martyrs and rarely painting. The method for presenting patterns, differ in accordance with historical, geographical and social background of church. In early Christianity churches, the type of presentation is really simple. Most carvings are inspired from ancient Roman and Greek art. Less face illustration is seen in them and if there is any, it is from the consequent period. The works belonging to the early Christianity can only be identified by their subject from the Roman art and not their style. “Christians of that time were as much believers of the Roman religion as the Romans themselves” (Gardner, 2013: 221). With the recognition of Christianity and its integration with governance and politics, early Christianity gradually gave its place to elaborate and highly decorated churches of the next period, and the goal mostly is to show the power of Jesus and Christian governance than the religion of Christianity.

### **Aesthetics of decorating Arrays in religious building in the Caucasus**

Armenia was the first country to recognize Christianity and openly practice the art and culture and tradition of Christian art in the caucuses region. Christian and Byzantium art forms of early Christianity are seen more than the other arts in the religious buildings of the Caucasus region, and this art is exclusively religious due to the conditions governing the society and the type of religious teachings.

Since Christianity developed in countries where the Roman and Greek art, as outstanding ancient civilizations existed, therefore, the Christian art becomes a derivation of an art that was prevalent in that territory. Therefore, sculpture and carvings as the art of ancient Romans and Greeks became the means to state the artistic concepts of early Christianity. Painting and mosaic art that exist in the cellar walls of tombs and monasteries of the Christian area illustrate holy stories. Face illustration was blameworthy until Christianity was openly introduced and no signs of it can be seen in untouched early holy buildings. But in the churches of the Caucasus region remaining from the past, some changes are seen that do not follow the previous trend. By observing the exterior of the work and studying and analyzing it from the aesthetic point of

## Introduction

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Art remaining from any civilization is the result of human life interaction with the environment during history. Each region, with a different geographical, intellectual and religious variety, has a different art too. Decorations, as symbols of any civilization's culture and art, appear in different forms and show an aspect of the universe according to the form of viewer's understanding and the effective field influencing his thinking. On the other hand, throughout the history, cultural exchanges take place amongst different nations and an art consisting of worldviews and different tastes is formed. Religion plays the most traditional role in human life, whose reflections are observed in the remaining of the past. Religion as the most obvious form of mindset and identify of any ancient civilization, has extensively affected traditional nations' art.

Evaluation of a work from an aesthetic point of view

is something that's done to discover the relation between the appearance and inner part of a work and is also aimed at finding the type of thinking governing the creation of the work. With the investigation and analysis of the religious buildings of any nation, we discover the evolution of the thought, worldview and the factors influencing them, and of course, with the beginning of the modern era and the empowerment of logical thinking style, religious believes are blurring out in people's life and new actors are entering the show. Virgin and original religious constructions exist in ancient civilizations such as Caucasus, but the transformation of the point of view and beliefs, has caused the attitude to decorations in religious buildings to change. Study of the new method of treating decorations, as a showcase to state the beliefs of any nation, helps us to get to know peoples' life with a new perspective.

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**Hypothesis:** Under the influence of modern approaches, decorations in today's Georgian churches, seek to empower the visual and physical aspects of atmosphere aesthetics, as to preserve the holistic of the city, city landscape and to attract tourism. In contrast, modern decorations in Armenia are a part of their territory's historical landscape that considers mental aspects of beauty and content.

## Definition of Aesthetics

Beauty, as a relative matter, is different every individual's perspective. Beauty is an easy and neutral concept that everyone understands, but cannot be clearly stated or explained. In Aesthetics, the appearance of an object is not the principle, and aesthetics, is the study of different factors that influence the phenomenon or the viewer. "An artwork is simultaneously an object and a historical event" (Gardner, 2013: 15). The understanding of beauty requires the establishment of a relationship between the mind of the viewer and the outer object. Since beauty is a relative issue, it depends on the mind of the viewer, his aesthetics background and also the number of the repetitions of the subject. "Newton" considers the type of the understanding of beauty, to be related to the formation of the object: the amount of beauty, is the feeling of joy in the person who understands it, which results from the desire to

the repetition of individual experience in the internal observational world, and this desire is developed in humans based upon experience in any field (Newton, 1997:257). Therefore, the mentality of any individual, has a major role in his understanding of beauty. The criteria for measuring aesthetics are summarized into the two mental and objective sets including the properties of the object and historical, political factors, and the beliefs.

Some people have assumed a major role for politics and its related factors in the aesthetics of the art of a nation. Quoting from "Brace Gutt"<sup>1</sup>, "Qezelsofla" considers aesthetics to show the ideology and ideal of social classes and believes that since the 19th century, artists state their political and social thoughts by art (Qezelsofla, 2009:175). For the aesthetic evaluation of a work, it's necessary to consider the political conditions governing the society too. Therefore, there are many criteria for the measurement of this qualitative matter that differs in every period and field. Generally, the coordination between components and the understanding of the whole, being regulated and suitable, are things that bring about the beauty of the face.

## Decorating the church: Christian religious art

Throughout history, art has played an important role in developing and saving religions. Religion is the most important part in a traditional person's life, and

# Decoration Aesthetics of Churches in the Caucasus

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## Abstract

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By aesthetically looking at an artwork, we discover the appearance and the development background of that artwork. Aesthetics studies the material and identity of a phenomenon and discovers the reasons as to why and how it exists. In religious constructions and particularly churches in the two countries of Armenia and Georgia, two different approaches were observed in regards to contemporary decorations. Comparison of the church decorations in these two areas reveals some differences in their contemporary approaches due to their relatively similar historical background. In Georgia, lots of indiscriminately extra decorations are added to the primary church constructions which are used as the means to preach Christianity, demonstrate churches and the power of governance in the city landscape. Whereas in Armenia, freestanding decorations are preserved as they were in early Christianity and no effort has been put to add or change them; their approach is to preserve the historical landscape with the least decorations and to demonstrate the original architecture of church.

## Keywords

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Decorating arrays, Churches of Caucasus, Aesthetics, historicism, Performing Arts.