

## Conclusion

---

Religion is the most important connection link of human societies in passing of time and change of cultures. Human beings have made symbolization in form of religion for formation of society and unity among them and have allocated a place for it during history. Unity, as an existential philosophy of religion has remained stable in different periods and only its symbols have benefited from new definitions and they have got a form in proportion to their time considering the governing cultural and social conditions and have been structured.

Armenian Churches have been religious symbols and continuation of old religious beliefs since beginning of Christianity. Main architectural skeleton structure of churches have been fixed and taken from meanings and concepts of the past symbols and the other spaces added to it is in service of the central space and has a

supporting role for stability of structure of the building and on the other side is an emphasis on religious and functional meanings.

In skeleton space of churches there is a main axis which connects the entrance to the altar. This is the same fixed religious-social axis and has humanely values from the past up to today and represents religious hierarchy in the church building.

In spite of stability that is seen in the core of formation of the churches, religious beliefs and faith of peoples, cultural, social and historical conditions of a territory determine changes of appearances of religious places and symbolization of ritual designs during the history which represents a place specifically for a territory. Old religious and existential history of Armenian Land and monuments left from its ancient time is a true confirmation of this claim.

## Endnote

---

- Schematic plan of evolution of churches in the text of this essay is the result of observations and field understanding of the author during a research trip to Caucasus in 2013 which was carried out in NAZAR research center.

1. "POP" is the title of the leader of the Catholic world and the highest and most sacred religious authority in the Roman Catholic Church. Pop or Papa in European language and Daddy in the Persian Language means father. This word is a derivative of "foot", meaning "guard and protect".

Many titles are bestowed up Pope: the Jesus Christ successor, server of God servers, Pontiff so that Pope spiritual headquarters (Pope Headquarters) is totally different from worldly domain (city and people); (Hosseini, 2011).

2. "The reverend Bishop", an appointed member of the Christian clergy, high priest of the Christian Church, and the highest -ranking cleric in the Orthodox Church who is generally assigned to administer the government and observatory affairs.

The Greek word of "episkopos" meaning an observer consists of two parts:

A. Epi: on the hand over

B. Derived from (skeptomai): Looking precisely, monitor, under observation, looking around

## Reference list

---

- Baghdarasain, E. (2001). *Tarikh-e kelisa-ye Armani* [the history of the Armenian Church], Tehran: Moalef.
- Falamaki, M. (2011). *Noavari-ha-ye meamarane safaviye* [Safavid architectural innovations], Proceedings of the First Conference on Bam Ark.
- Hassandoust, M. (1996). *Chand loghat-e yonani dakhil dar zaban-e farsi* [Some Greek words involved in Persian Language], Journal of Academic Center, (8): 102-83.
- Hossaini, S. (2011). *Elal-e jodaei do kelisa-ye catolic va ortodox* [Reasons for separation of Catholic and Orthodox Churches], Payman Cultural Quarterly, 2 (2).
- Janson, H.V. (1980). *Janson's history of art: the western tradition*. Translated from English by P. Marzban, Tehran: Sazman-e entesharat va enghelab-e eslami.
- Mac Grawth, E. (2003). *Reformation thought: an introduction*. Translated from English by B. Haddadi, Qom: Religions Studies and Researches Center.
- Tavakoli, F. (2010). *Naghsh-e kelisaye Armani dar tadavom va estemrar-e hoviat-e armanyan* [Role of Armenian Church in continuity of Armenian Identity], Payman Cultural Quarterly, 14 (52).



Fig. 7: Cross, a symbol of Christianity and principle of Church plan. Haghpat, Armenian. Photo: Farnoosh Mokhles, Archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.



Fig.8. Garni Sun-Worshippers Temple of the pre- Christian era has a single-Dave, Altar plan on the eastern front and entrance on western front. Garni, Armenian. Photo: Ehsan Dizani, Archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.

“Mehr Religion”. (Fig. 7) . Armenian churches were built on a hierarchy of spaces and functions. Entrance is located in the western front which after crossing it the main nave is located with eastern-western protraction and at its beginning there is places for lighting the candle and performance of religious ritual and some narrations about the life of the Christ and the Apostle-shave been imprinted on all around the walls of nave. Altar, as the last stage of the pilgrimage, is specifically designed for bishops and priests as men of God and nobody is allowed to enter it.

### Armenian Orthodox Church Based on Altar

What plays a specific and symbolic role in construction of the spaces of Armenian Church architecture is that the building belongs to its religious-social environment. In creation of the Armenian Church architecture spaces, giving the symbolic role to the church construction, were inspired from the past beliefs of Armenian Territory. Religious symbols and direction of people’s praying from the entrance to the altar have been one of the important religious structures in ancient times.

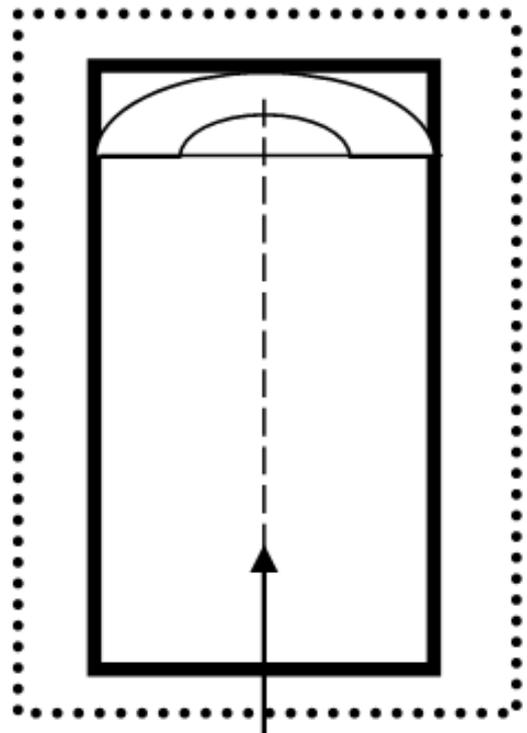


Fig.9. Schematic plan of Mehr Temples before Christianity and a model for the churches of Christianity Era, taken from Garmy Temple. Source: author.



Fig.5. Achmiadzin Church Complex, originally pertained to the 4th Century A.D. has been restored according to the church needs in 17th Century A.D., corresponding to Safavid Dynasty era in Iran, by transferring the seat of the bishop to this sacred site. Etchmiadzin, Armenian. Photo: Ehsan Dizani, Archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.



Fig. 6. Symbolic and narrative paintings in the nave and the dome housing of the altar. Mother of God church, Tebilisi, Georgia. Photo: Padide adelvand, Archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.



Fig.3. The interior space of Aphlistsikhe church belongs to the 4th century AD. Axial and single chapel room Church in the Eastern Front. Aphlistsikhe church, Georgia. Photo: Ehsan Dizani, Archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.



Fig.4. Haghpate Monastery from the monasteries reviving. A square plan with a dome in the center, service facilities, around nave and stone materials. Haghpate, Armenian. Photo Ehsan Dizani, Archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.



Fig.2. The Church in the historic cemetery Khachkar of the 4th century AD. A single chapel room church and based on the early church pattern. cemetery Khachkar,sevan,Armenian. Photo: Farnoosh Mikhles, Archive of NAZAR research center, 2013.

## 19th to 21st Centuries A.D

Armenian religious architecture entered the third phase of stagnation by domination of Russian Tzarism over the territory of Armenia and communist sovereignty that were considered opponents of the religion in the 20th century. In this period no new church was built and people carried out their religious rites and ceremonies in the churches built in the previous periods. The period of church sovereignty and empowerment started following Armenian independence. The most spacious Basilikaian pillared churches were built as a mark of the empowerment of the church which was a symbol of revival and authority period in building the Armenian Churches (Fig.6).

## Orthodox's Beliefs in Building Structure

In a general look, most of the churches in different sects of Christianity have a unique structure and specified skeleton components. Their religious rituals are carried out inside the church in line with a longitudinal axis the origin of which is the entrance and the final destination is the altar. Belief of each of the sects in

decorating the internal space and behaviour of people in that place has had a direct effect. What specifies their difference is the manners of carrying out the religious rituals, internal and external decoration of the building. Ingenuousness is considered the most important basis in Orthodox Churches. Decorations are used on the walls in the least and added form, seeing of which is part of religious steps of the one who prays. Considering the observations made from the buildings of the ancient time and churches of Caucasus, the churches have many symbolic meanings the root of which is in the past religions. In Orthodox Religion, symbolization has been made for any parts of the church from the entrance to the altar considering the religious beliefs. In the old churches of Caucasus a single axis may be specified which connects the entrance to the altar and all pilgrimage ceremonies are carried out in this direction. Based on ideological beliefs of people, ritual axis of the church can be divided into three main parts: Entrance, Nave and Altar.

Church buildings have many symbolic meanings which has its roots in the past religions. "Entrance" of a church has a spiritual status, expressing the concept of motion around the religious axis which is accompanied by specific rituals. "Nave" is the second step of the way towards mysticism with terrestrial dignity where and Christian pilgrims worship would be performed at this stage. "Altar" is the last stage of reaching perfection and since achieves the high status it is one step further above the nave, representing human status against the heavenly world. Altar which is the pilgrimage place of the bishop and presence of Christ and the Virgin Mary is totally enclosed, and having a door to reach the last status. (Mac. Grawth, 2003)

## Symbolism in Armenian Orthodox Churches

Designs, paintings and skeleton structure in the Orthodox Church have a purpose and a clear meaning of God's revelation to man. In Armenian stone architecture churches along with its small size dimensions and limited openings there could be seen engravings and carvings on the exterior facade that most of which are interpretation of apostles and life of Mary and Jesus (Fig. 6). Symbolic forms in designing and Cross are of the utmost importance in development and expansion of Christian Architecture and particularly the Armenian architecture to such an extent that most churches plan are a combination of cross shapes. The symmetrical axis of churches with cruciform plan makes a cross. The cross shape has been taken from the symbolic designs in the altars of the ancient period and related to

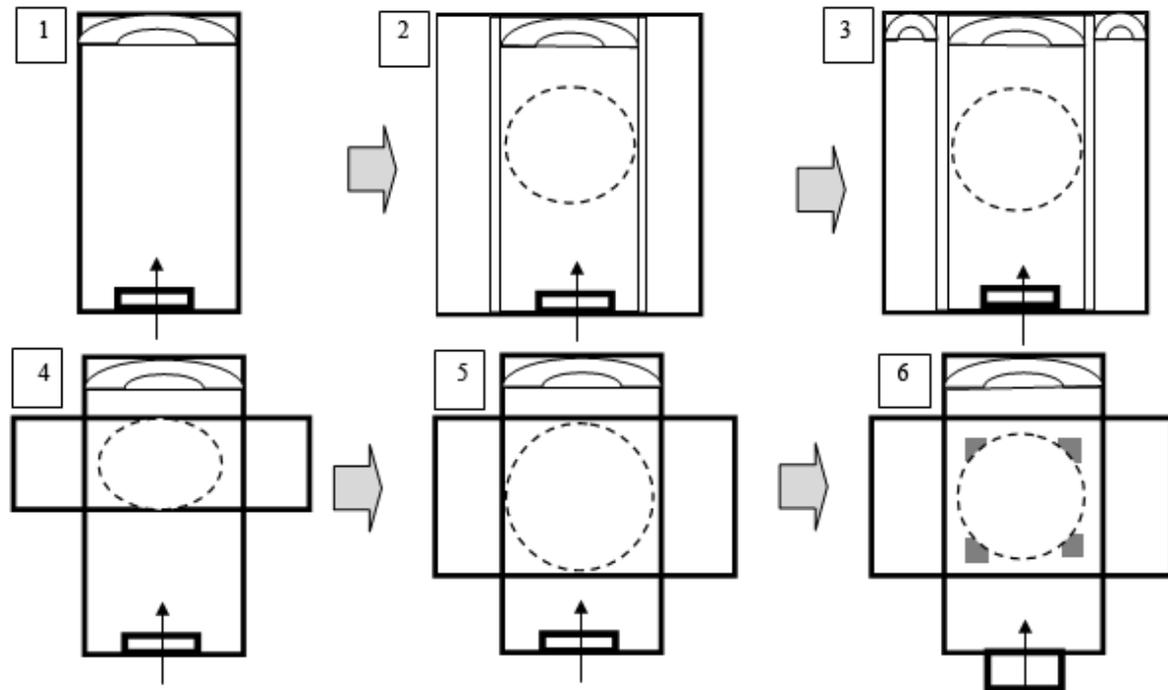


Fig 1. Evolutionary process of Armenian Churches Plan from the 4th to the 17th Centuries. Source: author.

built on the remains of altars as a single chapel room nave conforming to genuine pattern of altar. Near the end of this period with expansion of churches, their constructions have been widespread with three aisles, three altars on the eastern front and domed Basilica type churches. The church architecture of this formative cycle which was simultaneous with the invention of the Armenian alphabet (Baghdarasain, 2001: 60).

became customary as a national architectural church style in other parts of the Christian regions and Armenian architecture was renowned as a religious architecture. (Figs. 2 & 3)

### Monastery Booming Period: 9th to 14th Centuries

The first period of church stagnation was formed from 7th to 9th centuries owing to the Arab invasion to Armenia and internal disputes within the church. After elapsing this period and revitalizing the Armenian political independence, churches entered a new phase of their evolutions. (Ibid: 5). The empowerment of the church and soaring might of Christianity in Armenian territory, the monasteries have been prevailed in various natural and environmental regions as educational atmosphere and churches as worship, pilgrimage, public and humanity environment, were built at vast level. This period was called the monastery flour-

ishing time which was a recommencement in church building style and evolution of its previous architecture with cruciform plan and a dome in the center of the cross and definition of its index and protruded from the framework (Fig. 4).

### The 17th to the mid-18th Centuries

The 14th to the 17th century A.D. have been recognized as the second period of religious architecture stagnation owing to the political problems and external wars of Armenia, especially Tamerlane attack and disputes between government and church on taking power. With the fall of Byzantium and transfer the seat of church leadership to a sacred place - Etchmiadzin – the church came to power once again which played a major role in reviving religious life of Armenia (Ibid).

After three centuries stagnation in church architecture, construction of religious spaces started with the pattern of previous churches. Also wider churches were built on a far beyond regional scale a developmental modifications, considering new social structures and people's needs. Perhaps churches of this period could be classified into two groups of governmental churches with a wide and a functional politico-pilgrimage environment and humanitarian-based churches on a district scale (Fig. 5).

tion between Catholicism and Orthodoxy are as follows:

- A political issue of Rome separation and dividing it into two parts of Eastern and Western.
- Different creed and religious viewpoints as well as Pope and Bishop's Authoritarianism.
- Social-political factors in Roman Empires since the freedom of Christianity, during the time of Constantine (I), until the power of Christianity during the time of Constantine (IX).

## Some Religious Beliefs of Orthodox Christianity

Orthodox religious and ritual beliefs have affected on skeleton structure, decorations and art of church and its behavioral-religions patters. In this religion, Mary is worshiped as the Mother of the God on High and is a super human being and the Christ has a divine nature. For this reason all the Disciples have equally gained spiritual powers from Jesus Christ. The followers of this religion believed in effectiveness of the "Jesus Christ Resurrection" in rescuing the human society, and from this point of view the Sacred Images have God's Holy Spirit. In order to communicate with God, one should abandon the worldly nature and be separated from its mortal body. The church has been as a shrine which is the God's grace and palpable sense on the earth. The church is in square form and has two levels. The upper part is the place of religious guardians and is considered as the sky and the lower part is the place for gathering the whole Christian community and represents the earth. Sources of Orthodox belief principles were based on "Book- Bible" and "Tradition" and the followers carried out their rites and ceremonies on this basis (Mac. Grawth, 2003).

## The Architecture of the Orthodox Church in Armenia

Armenia had the most advanced architecture before Christianity and the Christian architecture, during the civilizations of URARTOEE, Parthian and Sassanid. Appearance of Christianity had effective role in formation of today's architecture of Armenia, in such a way that the Armenian architecture is called religious architecture (Fig. 1). Christian Church architecture has inspired part of its structure from the past of the Armenian Land which in addition to benefiting from symbols of Christian Religion it has benefited from creed and skeletal structures of ancient architecture such as "Mehr Religion". Churches skeleton structure

had different impressions after prevalence of Christianity and under the effect of environmental, functional, political factors and the people's daily needs in different periods of time ranging from the 4th to the 17th centuries AD. Structure of buildings while maintaining the original structure of uniform pattern has found new conceptual shape and feature in responding to new concepts and policies of the church. Interpretation of these symbols can lead us to rereading the history and culture of changes in the Society of Armenia. In shaping the architecture, the phenomena, insights, values and certain proportions given to the structure are fused together in such a way that the result of which is a space where one can find out passage of time and its symbolic meanings, feeling the belonging to historical time and place (Falamaki, 2011). In the culture of Christianity, church architecture is a symbol of celestial order. In Armenia, thinking before it had a special emphasis on symbolization. Therefore, there are no fixed rules and regulations in the architecture, based on which the building achieves perfection. What creates architecture is a nobility of ideas, beliefs, customs and rituals throughout history which are changed into physical structure, and finds an exact impression. On this basis, reviewing features of the Armenian Churches Architecture deserves consideration from two viewpoints:

- Religious beliefs of orthodox and their impact on architecture.
- Past ritual symbols of Armenian Land having influence on the buildings of Christianity Era.

Religious architectural patterns vary in appearance, but the oldest dominant and genuine form in churches and perhaps their oldest and most prominent forms are rectangular and BASILICA forms which have been imitated from altars. Chapels and older ones, has a rectangular nave towards the east-west direction, where the altar is situated at its east side. There were an addition of two hallways in the lateral space of the main nave and three altars on eastern front and service spaces around the sanctuary with expansion of Christianity and churches becoming bigger, but in general, the symbolic layout of the church has remained the same(-janson,1980:168). Christian Orthodox Churches could be divided into four periods in terms of physical structure:

## Formative Period: 4th to 7th Centuries

The early architecture of churches is renowned as an Armenian Architecture Style with a mixture of Urartu, Parthian and Roman styles. This era has the most contribution in changes of plan and architecture of church history. In the early 4th century A.D. churches were

## Introduction

---

Christianity widespread as an official religion in Armenia in 301A.D. In the realm of Armenian art, architecture and specifically religious architecture is considered as the first and the most important art of Armenia where the traditional arts such as painting and sculpture have been employed in its service. It is obvious that architecture is the first art-cultural manifestation in the urban communities. Since the power of Christianity in Armenia goes back to 4th until 17th centuries AD it can be said that the greatest architectural achievements of this period are churches, too, so that the Armenian architecture is considered equal to the religious architecture.

There can be seen the development of a unique type

of religion and ritual- centered architecture in the history of Armenian architecture. Although the land of Armenia is a place of ancient culture and rituals and likely most of its old churches were built on basis of altars, but the dominant element of its today's architecture are churches.

The manifestation of Mithr beliefs along with architecture of Urartuee style plays an important part in shaping the early churches. Based on studies and observations made it seems that churches of this land are not separated from their past rituals and in all likelihood the central skeleton of churches are the same holy structure of altar that have been shaped according to a unique ritual thinking.

---

**Hypothesis:** Architecture of Orthodox Churches in Armenia, as a religious aspect in this land, indicates old ritual beliefs since beginning of Christianity.

### Term of Orthodox

The term "Orthodox" is an adjective composed of the prefix "orthos" means right, and the Greek word "doxo" means belief. When this word is accepted as an adjective of beliefs and behavior as official meaning it is correct and if it is used to describe a person, means it would be the exact meaning of rites and traditions. If the term "Orthodox" is written in lower-case letter, it will be the name of a group of Christians who have conceived certain current teaching among Christians irrelevant to the ritual over a period of history, adhering to, the substitution of teachings for them are considered conditional /essential to sound faith. (Hossaini, 2011:87).

The term "Orthodox" has considered the symbolic meanings of Christianity which means ingenuousness and genuineness and contrary to luxury-oriented Christian catholic, unadorned spiritual atmosphere prevailing at the church. In general, the term of Orthodox signifies ingenuousness and being aloof from luxuries in which the substantive meaning and keep avoiding from the mundane temporal aspects are dominant.

### History of the Orthodox Church

The official title of the Orthodox Church is "Orthodox Eastern Church" and includes the churches all of

which appeared in a period of history of Church of the Byzantine Monarchy in the ancient time. The oldest and most sacred Orthodox Churches include: Four Dioceses of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. The advent of Orthodox sect before having a religious origin is of geographic, indicating the division of Rome into two separate parts of East and West. Catholic Christianity was formed in the west part of Rome and Eastern Christianity and or Orthodox Christianity in Byzantium-Eastern Rome.

In the year 284 AD, during the "Diocletian Empire", Rome was split into two parts: East and west and in 313 AD the Christianity was released by Emperor Constantine I under the "Edict of Milan". In 476 AD the Western Roman Empire was overthrown by the Goth leader "Odoacer", which marked the beginning of medieval era and from then on it was the beginning for separation between both Eastern Church and Western Church owing to the new religious and political prominence in the Roman Empire. There has been much difference of religious-political views and ecclesiastical powers between Eastern Christianity and Western Christianity since the separation of the two churches by the year 1054 AD. Intensive efforts were made by "Constantine IX" in 1054 AD for reconciliation between the two churches, but proved ineffective so these two churches were officially separated from each other. Thus Catholic Christianity was centered on Rom, under "Pope" leadership and Orthodox Christianity was in popular acceptance by centering on Constantinople and "Bishop" leadership. (Hossaini, 2011: 89-93).

In general, the most important factors in the separa-

# The Structure of Armenian Orthodox Churches

Farnoosh Mokhles

M.A. Landscape Architecture, farnooshmokhles@ymail.com

## Abstract

---

The church as a symbol of religious concept contains cultural, social and religious ritual values that are the result of interaction of human being with monastic manifestations throughout history.

These aspects cover, protect, and demonstrate the identity and historical rites of a region and its inhabitants and therefore pondering on the religious manifestation and their values would be a matter of great importance. In its cultural monuments, the ritualistic effects have been interwoven with historical events and humanistic activities. The church is shaped along with a humanitarian group of people sharing a common religious faith and as a token of a nation's unity whose manifestations are seen in the city-bed or nature bed and far from human society. The Armenian Orthodox Churches in linking with the meanings and historical symbols are considered to be one of the ritual sites across this terrain.

This essay describes reviewing the meanings

of Orthodox Churches Religions Rituals and Architecture and continuation of ritual beliefs since early Christianity with descriptive-analytical method and the help of field observations and gathering information in library form and method.

In line with this, with reviewing the philosophy of existence of churches and continuation of old ritual beliefs, it seems that religion and ritual ceremonies satisfy the spiritual and social needs of visitors.

This matter has caused survival and continuation of churches over time and being distinguished as a single complex. In spite of the firmness that is seen in the central core of formation of the church, religious beliefs of people determine the changes in the appearance of religious places and symbolization ritual designs during the history.

Main structures of churches are fixed and have been taken from meanings, concepts and past symbols of Armenia.

## Keywords

---

Orthodox, Church of Caucasus, Religious Architecture.