

THE ARMENIAN TRADITIONAL CHURCH AND ITS SYMBOLISM

The Church in Armenian is called YE-GE-GHE-TZEE, or DAJAR. After the church is built the Bishop blesses the church and anoints it with Holy Meuron (Chrism). In the church we perform all the sacraments and ceremonies. The church is the body of Christ. The members as a whole integrated group have one faith, and work under the command of one Hayrabed (Catholics).

THE FORM OF THE CHURCH

The Armenian Church is built in the form of the Cross. It means that the foundation of the church is the Cross. The Cross is the symbol of victory, sacrifice, and service. Also, it is the symbol of love, light, will and beauty. Only upon these virtues can you build a temple.

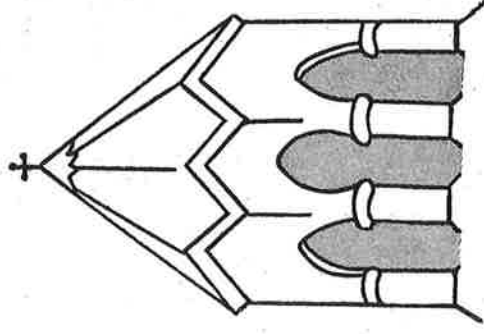
1. The Khoran. The Khoran, or Alter is placed in the East side of the church because, as the sun dawns from the East, so will be the second coming of Christ. Christ is called the "Star of the East" or the "Sun of Righteousness." The sun is the symbol of God, the symbol of the source of life, of light, and of power, toward which is directed the whole congregation.
2. The main door is situated on the Western side of the Church because man comes out from the darkness of the soul towards the light of Christ. He goes from West to East. It means he goes from darkness to light, from weakness to power, from hatred to love. The door symbolizes Jesus, who said, "I am the Door." (Please note that there are five doors, collectively symbolizing the five wounds of Christ upon the Cross.)
3. There are four pillars which support the GATO-GHIGE (Basilica). (Please note numbers 17, 18, 19 and 20 of the diagram of the plan. These four pillars symbolize the Four Gospels). Tradition says that it represents Mt. Ararat, where the Ark rested. The new humanity started from there. Sometimes we have many Gatoghige upon our churches, for example, upon Echmiadzin there are four. If there are many, they symbolize:

- a. Mt. Ararat
- b. Sinai
- c. The mountain where Christ was transfigured (Mt. Tabor)
- d. Mt. Golgota (Calvary)
- e. Mt. Zion

We have few churches where the Gatoghige dominates all over the building - giving the impression of a mountain. The Gatoghige means universal. It is the main form atop the Armenian Churches, and it is originally Armenian. The form or architecture of our Armenian original church is mostly the result of the vision of Krikor Lousavorich. He supervised the building of our former churches, and they were built on what he saw in his vision. The same happened when he was building the temple.

The ancient people used to believe that the mountains were holy places where God or angels dwelt. Salvation came from the mountain. (Refer to and read: Judg - 5.4, Psalms - 68.16, Math - 14.23, Mark - 6.46, Luke 6.12, 9.28, John - 6.15)

We know also that His ascension took place on a mountain (Luke - 24:50).



THE GATOGHIGE

The Gatoghige opens in the ceiling by a circular form upon the four pillars (No. 17, 18, 19, 20 - the four Gospels).

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE GATOGHIGE

Sometimes the number of the pillars are seven. In this case, it symbolizes the seven pillars of wisdom. "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars come eat of my bread, and drink of my wine which I have mingled . . ." - Proverbs, 9-1-5.

It also symbolizes the seven colors of light which comes from God, from the sun, and descends upon the praying, or meditating congregation. It opens in the ceiling in a circular form which symbolizes infinity of divine love, light and power which descends from the seven pillars of wisdom.

Sometimes it is built with twelve pillars. In this case, it symbolizes the 12 disciples who distributed the light, the love, and the power of God upon the earth. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the Temple of my God" Rev. 3-12.

Pillars in the Armenian Church have various significances:

- a. They are the ways leading to heaven
- b. They are the outstanding light bearers to the world - I Tim 3:15
- c. Leaders, as the pillars of light and cloud - EX 13:21 Josh 4:19-24, GAL 2:9
- d. As the witness of God's presence - GEN 31: 13-52

In olden times the pillars of the Armenian Churches were ornamented with pomegranates, bunches of grapes, or with the heads of animals, as the lion, eagle, ram, etc., symbolizing the different characters of the leaders.

The Cross atop the Gatoghige symbolizes the risen Christ, the victory of Christ, and the way through which man will enter into the kingdom of God. It is the sign of the son of man (Math 24:30). It is the sign through which we will follow the footsteps of Christ. As He said, "He that taketh not his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me." Math. 10-38.

It is the sign of the power of God, "The preaching of the Cross is a foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." (1 Cor. 1-18) If you will note there are triangles on the Gatoghige, which symbolize the Trinity - The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Why is it called universal or gatoghige? It symbolizes the infinity, the universality of our faith. It symbolizes the unlimited mystery of Holy Trinity, and the universal service of 12 disciples, or the universal blessings of sun, - God.

In some churches there is room for the choir within the Gatoghige. The choir sings from above, and the congregation does not see them, so that the attention of the whole congregation is concentrated on the altar and priest. In other churches when the Gatoghige has no opening in the ceiling, the huge bells are hung there. The bells symbolize the "good news" of the disciples with which they call everybody to walk in the way of Christ.

At the time the Bishop anoints the church, he gives the name of a saint and dedicates the church to him.

THE PARTS OF THE CHURCH

The Church has three parts:

1. KAVIT - "The Porch" (No. 32, 33 of Diagram - The space between the Outer Door and the Inner Door). In older days, it was the place where the repentants prayed. They could not enter into the Adyan (the Court) if not worthy.

2. ADYAN or Court. It is the main hall, or Nave, where the congregation gathers together and prays (No. 29 - Diagram). In early Christian days, only those people could enter here who were in good standing and morally high. In the middle of the Badarak (Divine Liturgy) the Deacon warns us, saying, "Let none of the

catechumens, none of little faith and none of the penitents nor of the unclean draw near unto this divine mystery.” “Greet ye one another with an holy kiss. And ye that are not able to partake of this divine mystery, and have gone without the doors, pray.” While the Deacon was singing these words, some of the congregation would leave the hall (Court, Adyan) and go to the Kavāt (porch) to repeat and pray there.

3. TAS—Chancel. This is where the Choir stands, and is placed in front of the altar. It is a few inches higher than the Adyan. This means that the members singing there are on a higher level of spiritual life, because, according to the church, those who are serving the church must have a very high moral and spiritual life. The Tas is encircled by a railing, or wooden half-wall, meaning that people standing in the Court cannot enter there if they are not ordained properly. It has two sides, right and left. During the morning worship the Choir divides itself into two parts, one part going to the right and the other to the left, and they sing in antiphon (a chant). On both sides there is a bookstand (kur-a-gal) for each group.

THE PEM (Khoran or the stage) or the Pulpit is placed on the East side of the Church. It is three feet higher than the TAS, and has seven steps on both sides. On the PEM is performed the ceremony of Holy Badarak (Divine Liturgy), the ordinations, the reading from the New Testament, and the Sermon. Only those who have been ordained can rise to the Khoran. The seven steps symbolize the seven virtues by which one can approach the Khoran. These seven virtues are as follows:

1. Humility
2. Charity or fraternal love
3. Kindness - gentleness
4. Diligence
5. Mercifulness
6. Temperance, or moderation
7. Chastity or sagacity - good sense

Those who wish to serve on the Khoran must have or develop these seven virtues, because these seven virtues are the seven steps which bring us closer to God.

On the Khoran we have another structure which is the Holy Altar, or the Soorp Seghan. It is placed approximately in center of the Khoran or sanctuary. Behind the Altar there is a semi-circular space so there is an ambulatory around the Altar.

THE FORM OF THE ALTAR

Imagine a big square table upon which there are seven stages or steps rising towards the East. Upon the last step a picture is placed, the picture of the Holy Virgin with the Child Jesus in her arms or on her knees. Immediately in front of the picture on the seventh step there is a large cross, without Crucifix. On the sixth step are two radians. On the fifth step are vases of flowers. On the fourth step, the Arc with the sacrament in it. On the third step, vases of flowers on both sides and the dove of the meuron. On the second step the Gospel, and on the first step there are the following:

1. The Liturgy Book on the South side.
2. The Gospel Book with its linen holder on the North side of the Altar, laid flat.
3. In the middle of this step there is placed the Corporal, which is a square linen or other material, on which the Chalice is placed during the Divine Liturgy. The Corporal represents the shroud in which the Lord's body was wrapped at his burial.

On the 7th, 6th, 5th, 4th, 3rd, and second steps are located the 12 candles, symbolizing the 12 gates of the new Jerusalem, “each separate gate being built of one solid pearl.” The Soorp Seghan itself is the symbol of the new Jerusalem where Christ is the Light. (Read Revelation XXI. 21-23). The PEM symbolizes the upper room where Christ performed the mystery of Holy Communion, and the Holy Altar symbolizes the Mt. Golgata where Christ was crucified. When the priest walks from the TAS to the Pem and Altar, he says, “Send out, O Lord, Thy light and Thy truth that they may lead me; and bring me unto Thine Holy Mountain, and unto thy dwelling.”

There are four pillars or corner stones on the four corners of the Soorp Seghan. Under these pillars or corner stones are placed four anointed stones in the name of the four Apostles, (1) Matthew, (2) Mark, (3) Luke, and (4) John, representing the four pillars who hold the sayings or the words of Christ. In earlier times, we used

The Soorp Seghan is blessed and anointed according to the old traditions. For example, "Noah built an Altar unto the Lord and . . . offered burnt offerings on the Altar," and before that, "Abraham built an Altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord." "Moses built an altar and called the name of it "Je-ho-vah." We read also that, "Jacob . . . lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven and . . . angels of God ascending and descending on it . . . And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stones that he had put for his pillows and set them up for a pillar and poured oil upon the top of it." Gen. 28: 11, 12, 18.

"O, Lord God, who hast established in the heavens the orders and the legions of Angels and of Archangels for the ministry of thy glory, grant that now the Holy Angels also enter with our entrance, that they minister with us, and with us also glorify thy Goodness."

See Holy Liturgy - p. 15

Then,

"O, God, Thou hast filled thy Holy Church with the angelic order. Thousands of Archangels stand before Thee, and myriads of angels serve Thee."

Holy Liturgy - p. 67
published in London - 1887.

And then the Deacon sings -

"You, who, with faith stand before the Royal Holy Table, behold Christ, the King, sitting, surrounded with the celestial hosts"

Holy Liturgy - p. 79

All these prayers and hymns bring to mind the vision of Jacob when he was at the holy place. If you notice, you will see that, beginning from the Pem or Khoran, there are nine steps. The first is the platform of the Pem, the second is the Badvantan where the officiating Priest stands, and the seven steps on the Holy Altar, curiously enough the classes of the Angels are divided into nine groups:

1. Atonk (throne)
2. Kerophpek (cherubim)
3. Serophpek (serophim)
4. Deroutiunk (dominions)
5. Zorutiunks (powers)
6. Ishkhanutiunk (principalities)
7. Bedootiunk (might)
8. Hreshdagabedk (archangels)
9. Hreshdagk (angels)

Above the Pem on the Altar, there is the Khachgal, the structure upon which the Cross is fixed. On the Khachgal, there is an Armenian letter Ե (eh) which means is- AM - referring to God. In many churches there is an Eye also upon the symbol Ե (eh), the all-seeing eye. "And God said to Moses - I am that I am. Exod. 3.14,

The curtain is hung on the pulpit or pen, and in front of each Altar in the church. It is closed at the following occasions:

1. When the Prothesis is going to be prepared by the Priest and Deacon
2. At the time of Der Voghormia
3. At the time of the feast of the three oecumenical councils . . . when the choir sings "Ov Hrashaly"
4. At the time of the door-opening ceremony (Toorun Patzek)
5. During the forty days of Lent.
6. Candlelight Service nights.
7. Holy Thursday, when a special ceremony is held for those who repent.

Traditionally, it must be one piece, as was the robe of Jesus. Every church may have many curtains, with the following colors: (1) blue, (2) purple and (3) scarlet. On this curtain, or we should call it veil, many symbols are placed, by painting or hand work. For example, a big Cross with radiations, or a large Chalice with the Nushkhar standing upon it, or five-pointed star with three wise men, or a Chalice around which branches and fruit of pomegranate, and vine with grapes, or St. George with the spear in the mouth of the monster, etc. You may

refer to the following verses to have more information about the curtain or veil: EX 26: 31-37, EX 30: 6, 40:3, Matt. 27:51, and Heb. 6:19.

On the right and left sides of the Khoran there are two small Khorans, facing the West. The minor Altar at the right is dedicated to St. John the Baptist. The left side minor Khoran is dedicated to the Holy Virgin, Soor Asd-va-dsa-dseen. In front of the Main Altar there should be a small dias (Bad-van-tan), covered with an oriental rug (no. 30 - diagram). This Badvantan is about 5-8 inches high and about 3-4 ft. wide and 3-4 ft. long. The Priest stands on the Badvantan during the Divine Liturgy. This symbolizes that he is of a higher rank and must have higher spiritual power and understanding than those who serve on the Altar. On the right minor Altar, there is the Chalice and the cover. After the Divine Liturgy the Deacon places them there.

The Undzayaran or the Khoraur-tanotz, is the place where the Nushkhar (holy bread) and the wine is kept, reminding us the shewbread table of the Old Testament (EX 25 - 23:30). It also symbolized the cave or place where Christ-was born as the bread of life.

The Arms of the Cross (No. 25-27, Diagram) form special rooms. The Vestry (no. 25) is where the Baptismal Font (Avazan) is found. It is in the north Chancel, in or before the north wall. The procession of entry at the time of "Khorhurt Khorin starts from here."

There are some churches which have a special chapel, closed off by a door, which is the most preferred form for the Baptismal Font. The form of the Font must be oval, and deep enough to hold a baby to his shoulders. At the time of the church consecration the Baptismal Font is anointed with Holy Meuron in five places, in the center and in the four corners. This is a cruciform anointment. Also, it refers to the star, traditionally the five pointed star, which appeared above the place where Christ was born. We must remember that the baptism is the sacrament of the new birth. "*Verily, I say unto Thee, except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*" - *John III. 5. (Also read 24:17, and Matthew 2:1-2.)*

As shown on page 3, the twelve pillars are each dedicated to an Apostle, four of which are found on the Altar. We have a total of 16 pillars, No. 8 being Krikor Lusavorich, and No. 16 being St. Paul. Then Luke and Mark bring the over-all total of pillars to sixteen upon which our church is built. Symbolically upon these spiritual pillars is built the Armenian Church.

The windows symbolize the writings of the Holy Fathers through which the divine light enters in. Sometimes the windows have three parts, symbolizing the doctrine of Trinity. Sometimes they have five parts, symbolizing the five wounds of Jesus. If they have seven parts they symbolize the seven sacraments, or the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The upper Arm of the Cross is the Altar if you will notice. The two side Arms are left and right vestries. where the Priest and the choir members prepare themselves for the service. The Body of Christ is the Court or Hall, and the feet of Christ is the Door and the Kavut. So the church symbolically is the body of Christ. The outer court symbolizes the physical body, the Hall symbolizes the Heart, - - devotion. The Chancel (TAS) symbolizes the throat, the voice, creativity, and the Altar symbolizes the mind and soul.

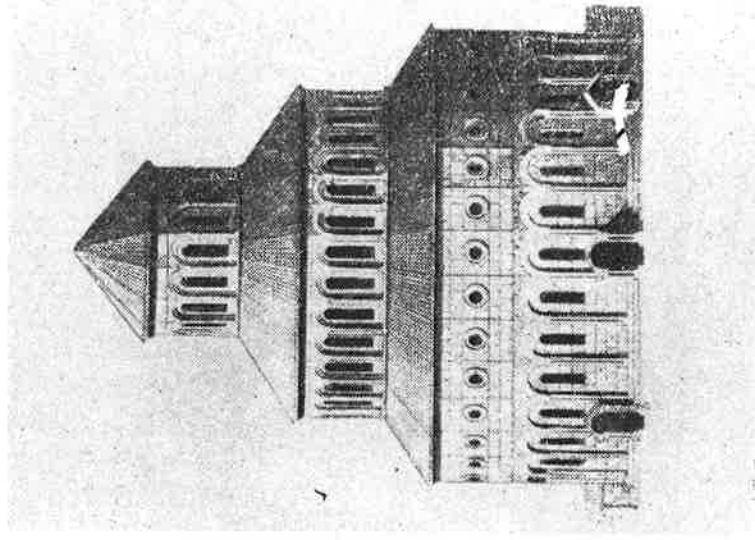
We may also say that the outer court symbolizes the state of mind of those people who are not initiated into the mysteries of God. The Court, or Aryan, symbolizes the Church-under-Arms (Zinvooyal Yege-ghetsee). To understand the meaning of Arms, we read "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand . . . having your loins gird about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness. . . above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Ephes 6-13-16.

The TAS (Chancel) represents the victorious church, the redeemed ones, and the Khoran (Altar) represents the Christ and His Disciples. All these symbols, vestments and vessels are there for one reason, to create such a mental emotional and physical atmosphere in which the faithful can easily raise his soul to divine planes, to divine ideas, and help him to come in contact with spiritual realities. The atmosphere of our church immediately absorbs you, and releases in you a spirit of worship, dedication and meditation. Also, the atmosphere of our church, with the hymns, incense and decorations puts us in contact with the faith and God of our fathers. There the link continues unbroken. That is why the Armenian church is our Mother Church. Our Church is built upon the ideas; for centuries it symbolized the holiest concepts of Christianity, in itself it is a book. If we can read its every form, every object, its meaning is deep and is itself an explanation of some part of the Bible or Chris-

tianity. It is unique in its outer and inner form. We can contribute something to our coming generation if we build a bridge between our ancestors and future generations, and that golden bridge is our traditional church. Centuries after centuries, all our culture is synthesized in our churches. The form of our church, in our mind, is a channel through which pours into our heart all the history and achievements of our nation. Every form is a transmitter of a different kind of thought, or of inspiration.

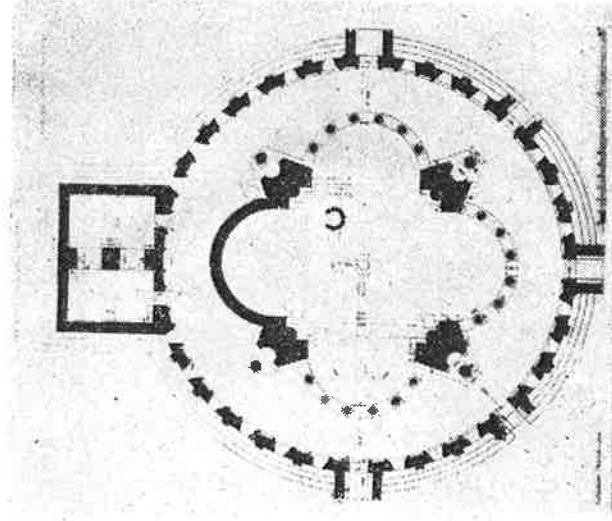
The Armenian architecture is for us a real source of inspiration. There are forms which are created by the hands of our emotional, physical or even mental needs. But there are forms, also, which are creations of our soul, through Divine Intervention (intuition), beyond time and space, and consecrated throughout centuries by the prayers, dedication and worship of the people.

I believe that our Church has been conceived in such an elevated state of consciousness, and that is why through twenty centuries it is unchanged. The secret of this is that it is not a form, but a materialized, divine IDEA.



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(Վերականգնությունը թ. Քրիստոմանկյանի)

ZUVARTNOTZ



ԶՎԱՐՏՈՒՆԻՆ ԵԿԵՂԵՑԻՆԻ ՀԱՏԱԿԻՑՈՒՄԸ
(Գաղափարաբան թ. Քրիստոմանկյանի)

FOUNDATION OF ZUVARTNOTZ
built by Nerses the Builder in 7th Century