



DOCUMENTS  
OF ARMENIAN  
ARCHITECTURE

I

SOURB  
NSHAN  
SOURB  
NIKOGHAYOSI  
CHURCH,  
TBILISI

UDC 726.5

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## SOURB NSHAN SOURB NIKOGHAYOSI (HOLY SIGN OF ST. NICHOLAS) CHURCH

**Location.** The monument which forms an integral part of the panorama of Tbilisi (called *Tpghis* in ancient times) stands in the heart of the city, in the centre of one of its oldest quarters called Kalo (*Kaloubani* in Georgian) or simply Sourb Nshan, in the area between former Serebryannaya (Goldsmiths') and Sourb Nshan (later renamed after H. Hakobian, at present Sultnishany) Streets, at an altitude of 415 metres above sea level. Geographical coordinates: N 41°41'39.62," E 44°48'17.37."

According to the administrative-territorial division of the city as of 1831, the church of the Holy Sign of St. Nicholas the Miracle-Worker was situated in the first quarter of its first part.<sup>1</sup>

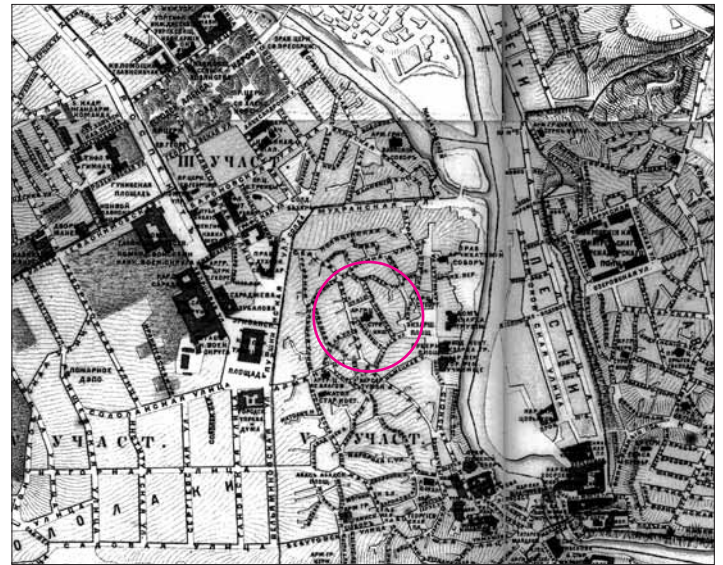
**A Historical Introduction.** The exact time of the foundation of the monument remains unknown.<sup>2</sup> According to a viewpoint largely circulated by the scholars engaged in the study of this issue, it was erected between 1703 and 1720<sup>3</sup> (this hypothesis is based on the well-known construction inscription carved on the tympanum of its northern entrance), with its dome being added to it in 1780.

<sup>1</sup> Վրաստանի საგარეო საქმეთა სამინისტრო (henceforward: ՎԱԳ), ֆ. 209, გ. 1, კ. 394, პ. 2: There also exist other records on the location of the church. Thus, in the 1840s, M. Brosset wrote: "Going along Serebryannaya Street, you find yourself in front of a Georgian seminary: on the left, towards the centre, the beautiful Armenian church of Sourb Nshan is seen standing in a yard surrounded with houses" (**Brosset M.**, *Rapports (V) sur un voyage archéologique dans la Géorgie et dans l'Arménie exécuté (en 1847-1848), livre 2, St-Pb., 1850, p. 18*). Michael Sulian, who was from Tpghis by birth, states the following in his Armenian-language memoirs entitled *Tiflis City during My Childhood*: "When you pass from the Armenian Street to Saldatski Bazar, the Goldsmiths' Street begins, with the church of Sourb Nshan built there" (ՀԱԳ, ֆ. 428, გ. 2, კ. 104, პ. 19). T. Kvirkevelia, who is one of the best experts on the history of the city, says: "Sourb Nshan—a church in H. Hakobian Street which overlooks the castle" (**Кვირкеველია თ.**, *თბილისის აღმშენებლობის ურბანისტული სახელწოდებებში*, "საბჭოთა ქელონება", 1984, № 4, გვ. 123).

<sup>2</sup> In fact, so far this issue has not been studied properly.

<sup>3</sup> There also exists a hypothesis according to which, the church was founded in 1701: it is based on M. Brosset's decipherment of the inscription, which contains a lot of errors.

<sup>4</sup> **Иоселиани П.**, *Описание древностей города Тифлиса*, 1866, с. 258 (the original reads: "Сурб-Нишан, бывшая в руках православных, во имя Св. Николая Чудотворца"). In another record P. Ioseliani states the following: "The time of the foundation of Sourb Khach (Sourb Nshan) Church remains obscure. Since time bygone, part of Andrew the Apostle's skull has been kept here" (the original reads: "Церковь С. Креста (Сурб-Нишан). Время основания ее неизвестно. Здесь сохраняется издревле часть черепа Апостола Андрея", *idem*, *Древние памятники Тифлиса*, "Журнал Министерства внутренних дел. 1844. Часть пятая", СПб, с. 120.



The site of Sourb Nshan (Holy Sign) Church on the plan of the old city (St. Petersburg, 1887)

However, in 1837 Georgian researcher P. Ioseliani advanced another thesis according to which, in 1703 the Armenians founded the church in the site of a Georgian Orthodox one.<sup>4</sup> Later a great number of scholars blindly repeated this absolutely groundless and unsubstantiated allegation, concocted by Ioseliani; moreover, some of them simply re-formulated it considering it a piece of information handed down "traditionally." Thus, G. Aghaniants states: "As is traditionally said, the site of Sourb Nshan Church used to be occupied by a Georgian sanctuary dedicated to St. Nicholas the Miracle-Worker. Later the Armenians took possession of it and erected a church of the same name there."<sup>5</sup>

This viewpoint, which is highly pleasing and advantageous for the Georgian Orthodox Church, has been even reflected in official publications: "Like so many other Armenian churches situated in Georgia, this one, which is dedicated to St. Nicholas the Miracle-Worker, was once in the possession of the Orthodox Church."<sup>6</sup>

Another researcher to allege—again on the basis of this "traditionally"—repeated hypothesis—that the present-day Armenian church stands in the site of an originally Georgian one is T.

<sup>5</sup> Հայաստանի ազգային դիվան (henceforward: ՀԱԳ), ֆ. 332, გ. 1, კ. 102, პ. 8:

<sup>6</sup> **Проценко Ю.**, *Археологический путеводитель по Тифлису*, Тифлис, 1881, с. 59-60 (the original reads: "Сурб-Нишанская на Сурп-нишанской улице, именованная в руках православных во имя св. Николая Чудотворца"). Also see "Кавказский календарь на 1886 г.", Тифлис, 1885, с. 152 (the original reads: "Церк. эта, как и многия арм., в Грузии была некогда в руках православного, посвященная Николаю Чудотворцу").



Kaloubani Quarter (Quarter of Kalo), with Sourb Nshan (Holy Sign) Church in its centre, as seen from space (Google Earth, 2010)

Kvirkvelia: “It was built in 1701. This site is said to have been occupied by an Orthodox church which was later destroyed and subsequently restored by Armenian Gregorians. Its name means Holy Cross.”<sup>7</sup>

Clinging to the same concoction, another scholar of the recent period “substantiates” the Georgian origin of the initial building of the church with the name of St. Nicholas (Nikoghayos): “An ancient Georgian legend comes to suggest—and not without grounds—that St. Nicholas’ name has been preserved in a church that was primarily Georgian but later changed into an Armenian one under the name of Sourb Nshan.”<sup>8</sup>

As is apparent from the aforementioned, none of the available sources contains at least the slightest hint that the church which stood in the present-day site of Sourb Nshan before 1703 belonged to Georgians. In fact, the specialists engaged in the study of this issue simply did not have at their disposal any written records attesting to the existence of the primary building of the church. The only exception is the colophon of a prayer-book of 1624 mentioned by Dr. P. Muradian (Professor): although it contains information of the utmost importance, he did not disseminate it in the scientific circles, perhaps, due to the fact that it is the only source proving the existence of an older church in the site of the present-day one (it is noteworthy that it also clearly states that the sanctuary belonged to Armenians), and he had doubts about its trustworthiness.<sup>9</sup>

7 კვირკველია თ., *ibid.* Also see **Квирквелия Т.**, Старотбилисские названия, “Вечерний Тбилиси”, 6.11.1991 (the original reads: “По преданию, на этом месте в старину стояла православная церковь. После того, как она была разорена и разрушена, новая возведена армянской общиной”).

8 **Арвеладзе Б.**, “Армянские” или грузинские церкви в Грузии?!, Тбилиси, 1996, с. 14-15 (the original reads: “Нужно думать, и безосновательно, что, по древней грузинской традиции, имя святого Николоза сохранилось в названии исконно грузинской, но обращенной в армянскую церкви – Сурб-Нишан...”). Probably, the author of these lines was guided by the groundless viewpoint that “...the worship of that saint was not accepted in Armenia” (**Ուրարարյան Բ., Հասարակական Մ.**, Դադիվանք, «Հայկազյան Հայագիտական Հանդես», հ. Ը, Պէյրուք, 1980, էջ 37-38). In fact, however, the cult of St. Nikoghayos, as his name sounds in Armenian, was quite wide-spread in Armenia as well and there are many churches in different districts of the country dedicated to him (the churches of Kamarakap and Narver Villages in Akn District; the monastery located close to Btarjij Village in Yerznka District, and another church in Zimara Village, Tivrik District. St. Nicholas’ representation is also found in one of the frescoes decorating Dadivank situated in Tzar District, Republic of Artsakh (NKR).

9 **Мурадян П.**, Армянская эпиграфика Грузии. Тбилиси, Ереван, 1988, с. 73.

We find it expedient to point out that P. Ioseliani’s statement about an older church in the site of the present-day one is quite correct, but it should be stressed that the older monument was not a Georgian, but an Armenian one, and this is attested by the available sources. It is especially noteworthy that during the construction of today’s church, the name of the older one, Sourb Nshan Sourb Nikoghayosi (Holy Sign of St. Nicholas), was not changed, but simply passed to the newly-erected one.

Below follow the existing written records and lapidary inscriptions (most of these last ones are put into scientific circulation for the first time) dating back to a period preceding the year 1703 and indisputably proving that at least from the beginning of the 17th century onwards, an Armenian church of the same name existed in the place of the present-day church of St. Nicholas.

The earliest of these records is the aforementioned colophon, which says: “Written in the year 1073 (1624). I, Andri of Cesarea, priest of the church of St. Nicholas in the city of Tpkhis, gave this manuscript...”<sup>10</sup>

As is clear from the colophon, in 1624 Priest Andri, who was from Cesarea by birth, passed the manuscript to St. Nicholas Church of Tpghis (it may be interpreted as an act of donation), which shows that at that time one of the Armenian churches of the city was dedicated to this saint.<sup>11</sup>

The next record is a Thesaurus completed in St. Gevorg Church of Mughni, Tpghis, in 1656 by scribe Aghamal Jughayetsy and donated to Sourb Nshan in the same year: in its colophon we find the earliest reference to the church under this name: “And I, heavy sinner Zurab, received this holy book and gave it to Priest Ohan, as a gift to Sourb Nshan. May you remember...”<sup>12</sup>

Equally important are the fragments of the construction inscription (1662) of the old church and those of an inscribed

cross-stone created in the same year, which were removed to the southern sacristy of the newly-built one (probably, for their further preservation). These newly-found inscriptions, which are put into scientific circulation for the first time,<sup>13</sup> reveal that the monument underwent renovation in 1662, also mentioning the name



<sup>10</sup> Հայերեն ձեռագրերի ԺԷ դարի հիշատակարաններ, հ. Բ, Երևան, 1978, էջ 155 (the original reads: «Գրեցաւ ի թուին Ռ-ՀԳ (1624), ետու գիրս զայս ես՝ Անորի Կեսարացի քահանայ եկեղեցոյն Ս. Նիկողայոսի, ի քաղաքն Տփլիս...»):

<sup>11</sup> We think that the colophon clearly shows the location of the church, but we find it expedient to add that there was no church dedicated to St. Nicholas in Cesarea (the churches of the city were St. Grigor, St. Sargis, Sourb Astvatzatzin (Holy Virgin) and St. Hakob of the Lower Quarter. In its neighbourhood, the monastery of Sourb Karapet (Holy Forerunner) was located). See **Էսկիզապ, Կեսարիոյ հայրօթիւնը**, «Արեւ», 1923, Թ տարի, № 231, 13 սեպտեմբեր, էջ 1, **Արզեռոյի մեղու**, Թղթակցութիւններ, «Կոհակ», 1913, № 5, էջ 56).

<sup>12</sup> Հայերեն ձեռագրերի ԺԷ դարի հիշատակարաններ, հ. Գ (henceforward: ԺԷԳ), Երևան, 1984, էջ 721 (the original reads: «Արդ՝ ես բազմամեղ Ջուրաբս ստացայ զք. տառս և ետու յիշատակ ի դուռն Ս. Նշանին, ի ձեռն տէր Ռհան քահանային, յիշեցէք...»):

<sup>13</sup> For the first time, we saw these inscriptions in the photographs handed to us by N. Akopov in 2011. In April 2012, we studied them on the spot.

of the architect who carried out the work, Navasard: most presumably, he is the person who built the church of Sourb Kiraki (*Holy Sunday*) in Bolnis-Khachen Village, Bolnis District, Georgia, in 1655, and the main church of Bni Dzori Metz Vank (*Great Monastery of Bnidzor*) located near Sheghver (Metz Shulaver), Marneul District, Georgia, in 1663.<sup>14</sup>

The four-line construction inscription, which is engraved on two blocks of stone (dimensions: 38.3 x 12.3 & 69.3 x 37 cm), reads:

Ի քվ(ին) ՌՃԺԱ (1662) || ...հ(ար)սրն, Գասսար. իրան  
 ւ(ներ)հ(այր) Բերոնն, քարայիատ Նասայսարքն, որ է Յա-  
 նիճ(ցի)<sup>15</sup>, շին(եցաւ) ձեռասըր ս(ն)ց(ա):

Transl.: *In the year 1111 (1662), ...daughter-in-law, Gaspar, his father-in-law Bero, stonemason [architect] Navaysart, who is from Harij. [This church] was built by them.*

Published for the first time.

The cross-stone is broken into at least four parts which are engraved with the following inscription:

[Մորք խաչս խօջա Բարխիստարին եւ իր ամուսին  
 Գարայջանին: Մ(ուր)ք խ(ա)չս ք(ա)ր(ե)խ(ա)ս, քվ(ին) ՌՃԺԱ  
 (1662):

Transl.: *May this Holy Cross protect khoja Barkhutar and his spouse Darayjan. May the Holy Cross protect, in the year 1111 (1662).*



Published for the first time.



In 1673 prominent French traveller Jean Chardin mentioned Sourb Nshan amidst the 8 Armenian churches of Tiflis.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ասրանյան Ս., Կարապետյան Ս., Շուրվեր, Երևան, 2002, էջ 63:

<sup>15</sup> It is hard to find out whether stonemason and architect Navasard was from Harij Village of Shirak District, Ayrarat Province, Armenia Maior (there is a village of the same name in Shirak Region of the present-day Republic of Armenia), or from another village of the same name about the existence of which nothing is known to us.

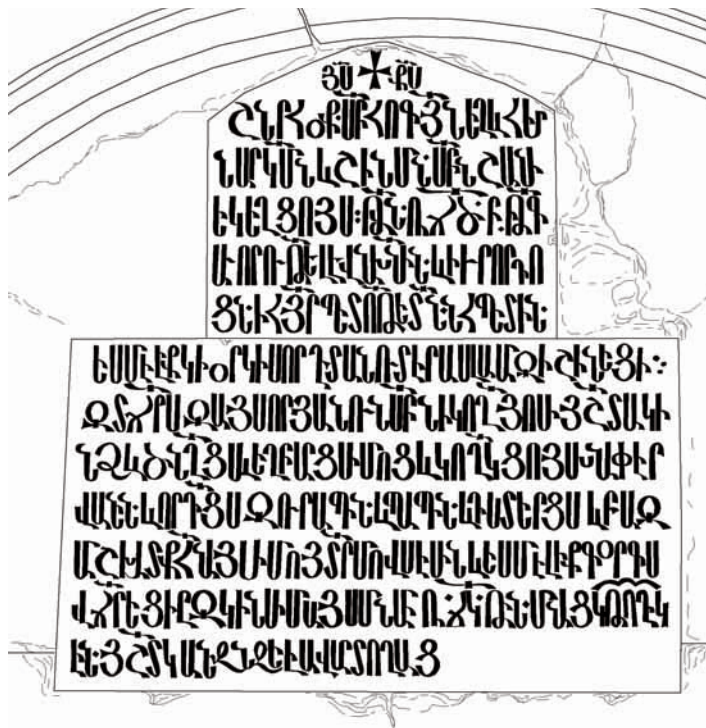
<sup>16</sup> Chardin Jean, Journal du chevalier Chardin en Perse et aux Indes orientales par la mer Noire et par la Colchide, Londres, 1686, 1<sup>ère</sup> p., pp. 221-222.

All these sources of the 17th century come to prove that before the construction of the present-day standing church, at least over a century ago, there already existed an Armenian church of the same name in its site: for the last time, it was thoroughly rebuilt in 1662 by outstanding stonemason and architect Navasard.

As for the multi-stage reconstruction of the church, and the additions made to it in the 18th century, there are a vast number of records providing ample information regarding it.

With this respect, indeed, first and foremost mention should be made of the construction inscription of 13 lines carved on two adjoining stones which are still preserved on the northern entrance tympanum of the church (it commemorates the foundation of the monument in 1703 and its construction within 17 years):

Յ(իսու)ս Զ(րիստո)ս | շն(ն)րհօք ս(ուր)ք հոգ(ն)յն եղև հիմ-  
 նարկ(ու)մն և շին(ու)մն ս(ուր)ք Նշանի | եկեղ(ե)ցոյս քվ(ին)ն  
 ՌՃԺԲ (1703), ի ք(ա)զ/ատրութե(ան) Լէվան խ(ա)նին և իւր  
 որդր/ցն, ի հ(ա)յր(ա)պետո(ւ)թե(ան) տ(եա)ռն Ն(ա)հ(ա)պե-  
 տին. | ես մէլիք Կիօրկիս որդի տանուտէր Ասլամազի շինեցի |  
 գտ(ա)ճ(ա)րս գալս, որ յանուն ս(ուր)ք Նիկող(ա)յոսի յ(ի)-  
 շ(ա)տակ ի/նձ և ծն(ն)դ(ա)ցս և եղբարցս իմոց և կող(ա)կցոյս  
 Խանվեր/վանին և որդ(ո)ցս Ջուրապին և Պապին և դստերցս  
 և բազմաշխատ ք(ա)հ(ա)նայս իմոյ տ(է)ր Մովսէսին և ես մէ-  
 լիք Գիօրգիս | վճ(ա)րեցի ըզկին սմայ ամ(եմայ)ն ամէ ՌՃԿԹ





The northern entrance tympanum of the church which bears its construction inscriptions dated 1720, 1780 & 1781

(1720)-ին. մնաց կ(ա)թողիկէն յ(ի)շ(ա)տ(ա)կ անջնջելի ա-  
վարտողաց:

Published in: **Brosset M.**, Rapports (V) sur un voyage archéologique dans la Géorgie et dans l'Arménie exécuté (en 1847-1848) par M. Brosset, livre 2, St-Pb., 1850, p. 19. **Ջալալեանց Ս.**, Ճանապարհորդութիւն ի Մեծն Հայաստան, մասն Բ, Տիփսիս, 1858, էջ 71: **Мурадян П.**, idem, стр. 69.

Transl.: *Jesus Christ. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, the foundations of Sourb Nshan Church were laid in the year 1703. In the times of Levan Khan and his sons, in the days of Supreme Pontiff Nahapet, I, City Elder Aslamaz's son Melik Kiorki, built this church, which is dedicated to St. Nikoghayos, in memory of my parents, my brothers, my wife Khanpervan, my daughters, my sons Zurap and Pap, as well as in perpetuation of meritorious priest Movses and my soul. And I, Melik Giorgi, paid all its expenses in the year 1720, with only its dome remaining for those*

*who will complete it [later] in everlasting memory [of their souls].*

Note: The first scholar to attempt the decipherment of the inscription was M. Brosset, who, however, did it with numerous mistakes and certain omissions. A more complete decipherment is offered by S. Jalalians, but the scholar who carried it out with absolutely no errors is Prof. P. Muradian.

A 5-line inscription engraved on a stone slab (50 x 48 cm) has been recently found in the southern vestry of the church. It opens a new page in the history of the reconstruction activity unfolded there between 1703 and 1720, commemorating the overhaul of the belfry in 1719 on the initiative of Barkhudar's daughter Tsagan:

Կաման ա(ստուծո)յ ես Բարխուդարի դուստր Յազա/նիս  
վերստին նորոգելի հօրս շինած զանգակա/տունս, թվ(ի)ն  
Ռ-ՃԿԸ (1719)-ին:



✠ ԿԼԵՍԱՅԵՍԲԸԻՈՒ  
 ԴԱԼԻԴՈՒՍՏՐՅԱԿԱ  
 ՆՍՎԵՆՏԻՆՍՈՒՆԵՅ  
 ԻՅՈՆԵՇԻՍԸ ԶՍԺԿ  
 ՏՈՒՆ ԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻՆ

Transl.: *By God's will, in the year 1168 (1719), I, Barkhudar's daughter Tsagan, again renovated the belfry built by my father.*

Published for the first time.

The church was completed only in the 1780s: its dome and northern entrance were built in 1780 and 1781 respectively. These events are commemorated in the inscriptions carved on the northern entrance tympanum: the first of them contains 7 lines on a marble slab, a single line carved on its right and left sides comprising the second one:



ՀՆՈՒՍԻՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆ  
 ԵԿԵՆՅՈՒՆՍՈՒՍՏՐՅԱԿԱ  
 ԹԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆ  
 ԹԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆ  
 ԿՈՒՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆ  
 ՅԻՇԱՍԱԿՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆ  
 ՆՆՈՒՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆՆԵՆ

Շնորհի տ(եառ)ն ա(ստուծոյ) շինեցաւ կաթողիկէն |  
 Եկեղեցոյս ի ժամանակս Թագաւորութե(ա)ն վրաց Հերակլեա  
 Եւ հայրապետութե(ա)ն տ(եառ)ն Սիմէօնի ամ(ենայն) հայոց  
 կաթողիկոսին, արդեամբ Ղազարի, որդենօրն, | յիշատակ  
 համայն կենդանեաց եւ | ննջելոցն իւր, ի թուին ՌՄԻԹ (1780).

Published in: **Brosset M.**, *ibid*; **Զապախանց Ս.**, *ibid*; **Мурадян П.**, *idem*, стр. 70.

Transl.: *Thanks to the Lord's mercy, the dome of the church was built in the times of Georgian King Heracle and His Holiness Simeon, Catholicos of All Armenians, with the means of Ghazar and his sons, in memory of all his alive and dead relatives, in the year 1229 (1780).*

Յիշատակէ դուռնս մ(ա)հս(եա)ի տ(ե)ր Նիկողայոսին, ՌՄԼ (1781):

Published in: **Brosset M.**, *ibid*; **Զապախանց Ս.**, *ibid*; **Мурадян П.**, *idem*, стр. 70.

Transl.: *This door perpetuates the memory of Mahtesy Father Nikoghayos, 1230 (1781).*

Note: P. Muradian erroneously read the name as 'Nikoghayun.'

'Mahtesy' is a title used with reference to Christians who are known to have been to Jerusalem on pilgrimage.

A relief of St. Nicholas embellishing the upper part of the west-facing side of the tambour (above the window) dates back to the period when the dome was erected. It has a single-line Georgian inscription reading: *Մծեղճ Նոյողոբո* (transl.: "St. Nicholas").



The southern sacristy of the church also retains a deteriorated tympanum broken in two parts (probably, it belonged to the old



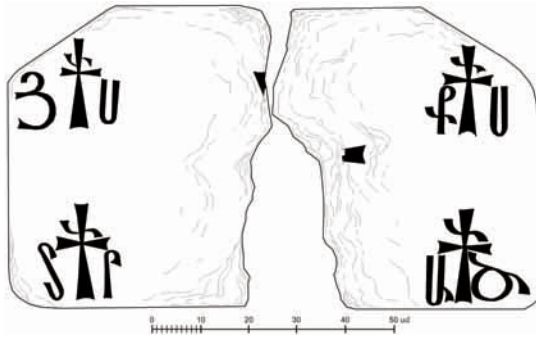


church, which was totally destroyed in the early 18th century) with a two-line inscription:

Յ(hum)u Զ(p̄huunn)u | u(t)ր u(uunn)uծ:

Transl.: *Lord Jesus Christ.*

Published for the first time.

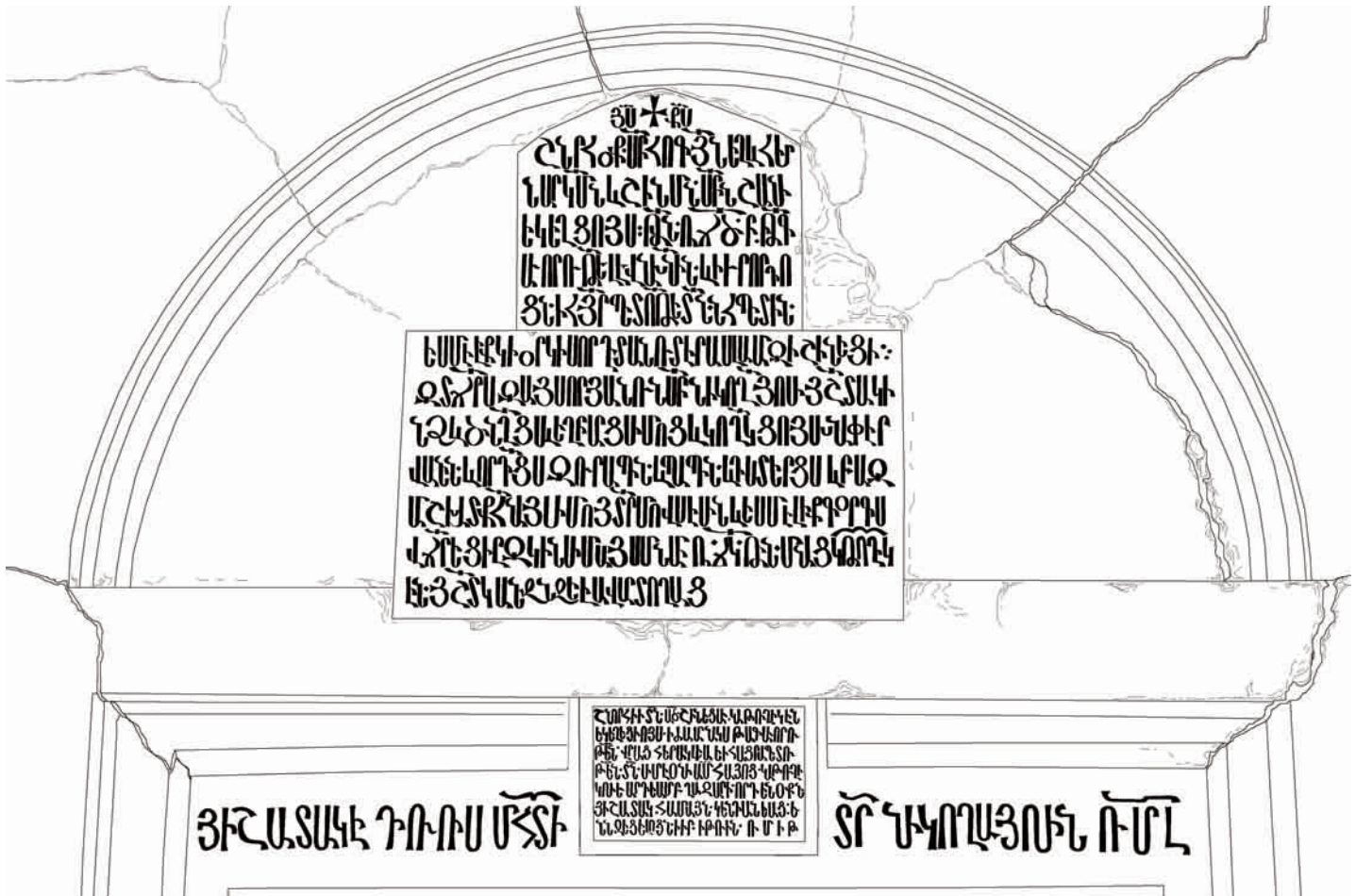


The process of the construction activity unfolded in Sourb Nshan in the 18th century is described in the *Notebook of Echmiatzin*, from which the following was copied: “Built by City Elder Amir and his son, City Elder Aslamaz, and repaired by Melik Giorgi after 1703, with its dome constructed later, in 1784, by Agha Mehrap Sharipekian.

“City Elder Amir and his son, City Elder Aslamaz, built Sourb Nshan Sourb Nikoghayosi Church together with its *zhamatun*<sup>17</sup> and surrounding walls. Khoja Parkhutar and his spouse Darejan constructed the belfry of Sourb Nshan with a cell.

“Parkhutar’s daughter Yagund repaired the bell tower erected by her father together with its cross.

“City Elder Giorgi had the church ramparts moved back [namely, he enlarged the church grounds].



Tracings of the construction inscriptions (dated 1720, 1780 & 1781) of the northern entrance tympanum of the church

“City Elder Aslamaz and his spouse Shahruban again carried out overhaul in the sanctuary.

“Perikhan built a baldachino (*khachkal*).

“Melik Giorgi again reconstructed the church from its very foundations and enlarged it, [making it a] beautiful arched edifice, in 1152 (1703). In 1190 (1741) it was consecrated and a divine service was performed there (in the same year, Melik Giorgi died).

“Melik Giorgi and his wife Khampervan built an *ashurkhana*<sup>18</sup> for the sanctuary.

“Master Hakob put his apprentice Sargis under the possession of the church so that he would serve it for a litre of oil and a quarter of candles annually.

“Khozoyants Arakel and his spouse purchased a graveyard and a plot of cell for the church.

“Alahghulunts Murat’s son Martiros and Panos built a large door for the *zhamatun*.

“Andoyan Darejan Gheziliants donated a shop to the sanctuary with her sons Giorgi and Harutiun.

“Gaspar’s sons Movses, Yohan and Hovsep paid for their pawned house and gave it to the church in memory of their late nephew Mkrtum so that later they would be buried there, too.

“Seeing the written records left by his predecessors, King Temuraz... and made up a document permitting citizens to do whatever they wished with [viz. the property of] those who would die childless. Neither he nor his princes would be entitled to control anything.

“Divan Otar and his wife Khamperjan bought a stall from Melik Eynal’s son Rostom and decided that its income should be equally allocated to Vank, Sourb Nshan, Jigrashen, Norashen, Mughni, Bethlehem and Kamoyants Church[es] so that the *Aysmavurk*<sup>19</sup> would always be read there [in perpetuation of their memory].

“Mahtesy Nikoghayos... renovated the church door with newly-hewn stones.

“Mehrap Agha’s son, Yenovk Agha, built a splendid lofty dome for the church... which had been standing without it for [more than] 50 years. It was surmounted by a gilded cross, with a circular gallery beneath it. Without sparing his means, he adorned it with representations of the 12 Apostles and 4 Evangelists, also placing 7 images... along the bema.”<sup>20</sup>

17 A large vestibule in Armenian churches (often standing separately) also used for burials.

18 We failed to find an explanation for this word.

19 A large volume containing the martyrologies and lives of saints which are read before the start of the vesper service.

20 ՀԱԳ, ֆ. 332, ց. 1, գ. 102, ք. 8:

As is evident, some of the acts and events commemorated in the *Notebook of Echmiatzin* are directly reflected in the aforementioned well-known and newly-found inscriptions; therefore, it is logical that the person who put down these notes was familiar with, and made use from, the inscriptions which had been neglected for a long time due to their being kept in the southern sacristy of the church.<sup>21</sup>

So the 19th century saw Sourb Nshan as completed from an architectural point of view, but its parishioners who kept it under their constant care periodically unfolded some construction activity or partial overhaul there: thus, in 1830 the interior of the monument was enriched with frescoes on church deputy Avetik Piroyan’s initiative<sup>22</sup>; in 1837 it underwent general renovation; in 1861 a chapel was built close to it; in 1868 partial overhaul was carried out there, etc.

In 1833 the southern entrance of the church was re-laid with finely-dressed stones, this event being commemorated in a bilin-



gual (Armenian and Georgian) inscription which was carved on the tympanum of the same entrance:

*Շինեցաւ դուռս ս(ուր)ք եկեղեցոյ արդեամբ բազմաշխատ սաազ ք(ա)հ(ա)ն(ա)յ տ(է)ր Յովհաննէս Չախապետանին ի յիշատ(ա)կ իւր եւ կենակցոյն, դստերն՝ մէլիք Ջուրաբի եւ որդոցն, 1833:*

*უფალო, მოიხსენებ დეკანოზი მეძკვიდრე ტერ-ოჰანეზ ზარაფოვი და მისი მშობელები წელსა ჩველგ-სა მარტის 0.*

Published in: **Мурадян П.**, idem, с. 70.

Transl.: *This holy door of the church was made through the means of meritorious Archpriest Father Hovhannes Zarapian in perpetuation of his, his spouse’s, [as well as] Melik Zurab’s and his sons’ memory, 1833.*

21 It should be noted that both Ignat Ioseliani and M. Brosset, who was the first to study the lapidary heritage of Sourb Nshan, were unaware of the existence of these newly-found inscriptions and the *Notebook of Echmiatzin*. The former only writes the following: “This church was built with the means of citizen (Mokalak) Amir Mamasakhliis, from whose family Zurab Melikov is alive at present” (**Մելիքութեան Լ.**, *Վրաց արքայութեանը Հայաստանի և հայերի մասին*, հ. 3, Երևան, 1955, էջ 267). Some passing reference to the construction of the church is also found in an article by A. Yeritsian: “The citizens Muntoyan, Bastamian and Bashinjaghian built Moghni, and the Aslamazians Sourb Nshan...” («Արձագանք», 1882, № 11, 2 մայիսի, էջ 169).

22 ՎԱԳ, ֆ. 500, ց. 8, գ. 74, ք. 5:

Note: The author deciphered this inscription with certain inaccuracy in meaning which was reflected in its Russian translation as well.

On the occasion of the Russian Emperor's planned visit to T'pghis, on 28 May 1837, the Primate of the Armenian diocese of Georgia, Archbishop Tadevos, addressed a letter to Agha Avetis Piroyants, deputy of Sourb Nshan Church, calling on him to carry out some overhaul there: "...all the church buildings should be improved and renovated before the expected arrival of the Emperor together with its booths, houses and ram-

parts: they should be plastered and painted some appropriate colour, for the purpose of which...  
...therefore, I would like to tell Your Excellency to embark upon the repairs and decoration of the entire church on the 29th of the current month in the following manner: its interior is to be plastered and painted either marble or another suitable colour.



Outwardly, it should be plastered and painted yellow or white. The newly-erected chapel standing in front of its main door should be plastered and painted... and its ramparts ought to be plastered both inwardly and outwardly and painted yellow or white. Furthermore, all the parts of the church should be embellished for the beauty of the city. For this purpose, we have appointed Archpriest Hovhannes Zarapian and Father Andreas Ter-Stepanian to collaborate with You and support You: they have been told to handle all the work excellently for the benefit of the church.”<sup>23</sup>

In 1861 citizen of T'pghis Varvare Rotinians built a burial chapel (probably, the author of this information means the southern porch of Sourb Nshan, which has turned into a funerary structure like the northern one) in memory of her husband Gabriel Amiraghians, who was buried close to the church. In commemo-

ration of this event, the following inscription was carved on a stone set in the lateral part of the southern entrance:

Կանգնեաց զայս մատուռ / թիֆլիզոյ քաղաքաց/ուիի Վառ-  
վառէ յազգէ / Բօտիանեանց՝ ի յիշատակ / ամուսնոյ իւրոյ  
Գարրի/էլի Գէորգեան Ամիրաղեանց աստ հանգուցելոյ,  
թուին 1861, նոյեմբ. 1:

Transl.: *This chapel was erected by citizen of Tiflis Varvare from the Rotinianses' family in memory of her husband Gabriel Gevorgian Amiraghians, who is interred here, on 1 November 1861.*

Published in: **Мурадян П.**, idem, с. 70-71.

Sourb Nshan also went through overhaul in 1868: the work which required 1,020 roubles included the repairs of the baldachino (300 roubles), the whitewashing of its interior (500 roubles), etc.<sup>24</sup>

In 1886 it is mentioned among the 24 Armenian churches of the city, with a parish of 1,925 members.<sup>25</sup>

In 1891 the Charity Society of Armenian Women allocated 543 roubles 10 kopecks for the renovation of the church.<sup>26</sup>

In 1894 the monument faced the necessity of further overhaul: “One of the churches situated in the heart of the city, Sourb Nshan, which is already very old, is in bad need of urgent repairs: otherwise, it will be [greatly] endangered.”<sup>27</sup>

In 1928 the church closed, with its door sealed, but in March 1930, it was returned to its parishioners.<sup>28</sup>

On 3 May 1931, the Primate of the Armenian eparchy of Georgia, Bishop Artak, addressed a letter of protest to the Central Executive Committee of the Republic of Georgia, particularly stating the following: “For several times, the Diocese Council has applied to the proper bodies trying to intercede for the return of Khojivank Church and the opening of Sourb Nshan



<sup>24</sup> ՀԱԳ, ֆ. 56, ց. 1, գ. 5061, ք. 1:

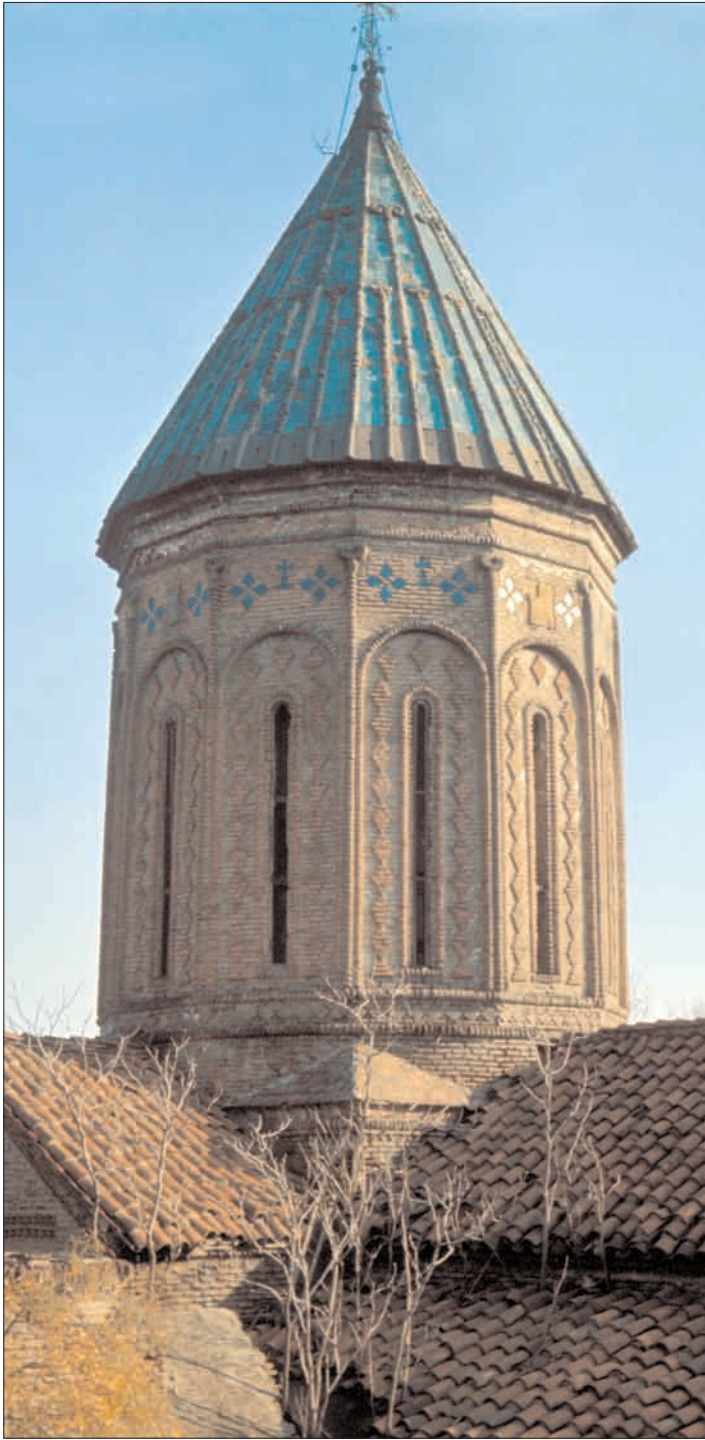
<sup>25</sup> “Министерство внутренних дел. Департамент духовных дел иностранных исповеданий. Алфавитные списки армяно-григорианских церквей и магометанских мечетей в империи”, С.Петербург, 1886, с. 60-61.

<sup>26</sup> «Արձագանք», 1891, № 7, 28 ապրիլի, էջ 102:

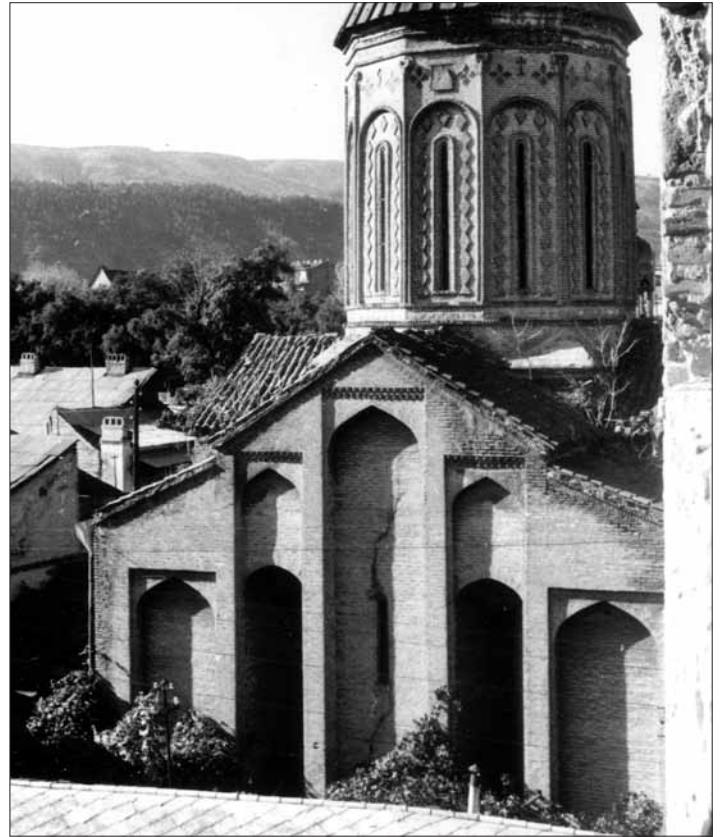
<sup>27</sup> «Արձագանք», 1894, № 65, էջ 1:

<sup>28</sup> Վավերագրեր հայ եկեղեցու պատմության, գիրք Գ, Երևան, 1997, էջ 526:

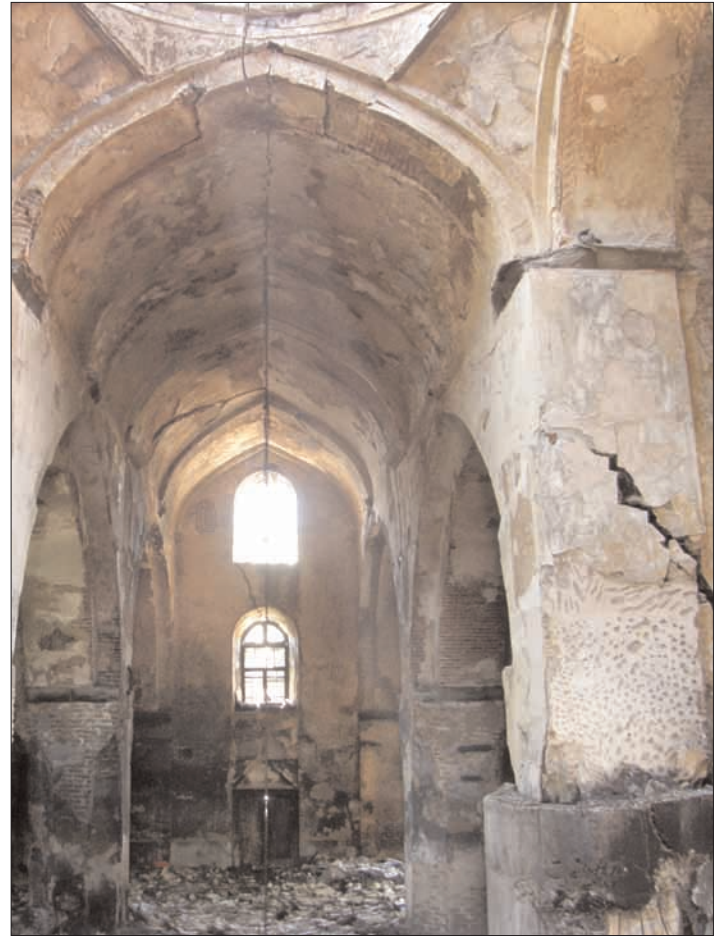
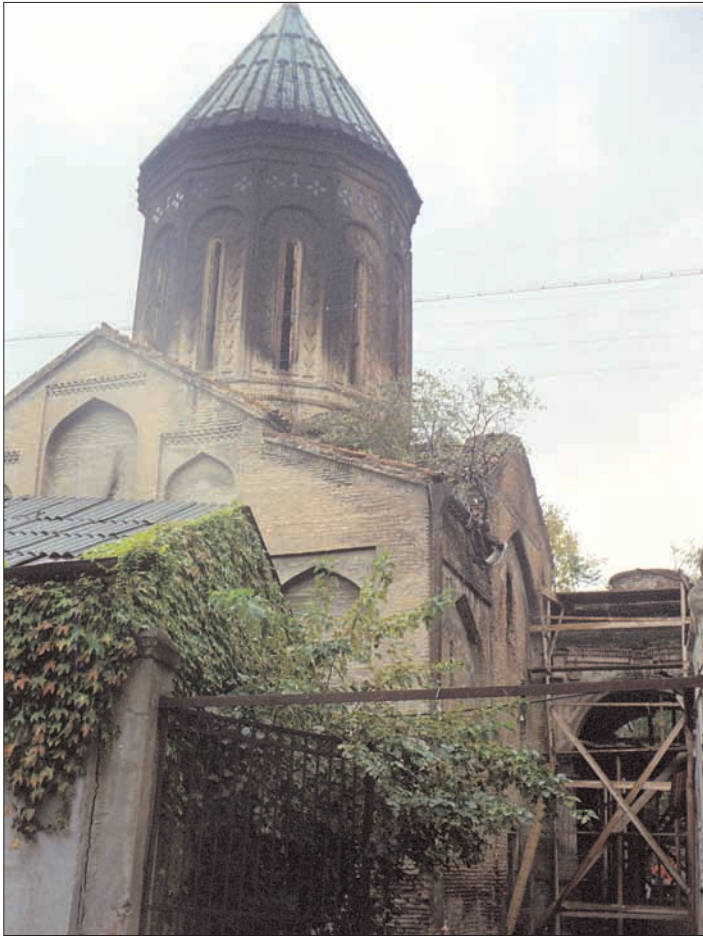
<sup>23</sup> Մատենադարան, ֆ. 49, թղթ. 148, վավ. 179:



The dome of Sourb Nshan (Holy Sign) Church from the north-west (photo by S. Darchinian, 1990) and the cross added to it in 1780 (photo by A. Hakobian, 2012)



The structures erected illegally close to Sourb Nshan (Holy Sign) Church in the mid-1990s (photos by S. Darchinian, 1994 & 1996); the monument from the north-west and east (photos by S. Darchinian, 1970s)



**Sourb Nshan (Holy Sign) Church a day after the major fire of 20 October 2002 (photo by S. Darchinian) and its interior in 2007 (photo by S. Karapetian)**

Church, but up to this day, no instructions have been issued with regard to these repeated requests.”<sup>29</sup>

In the Soviet years, the church building was used for various purposes: “During the World War, the church was reduced to a storehouse of macaroni and vermicelli. Later it housed the stacks of the National Library, mostly including its collection of Armenian periodical press.”<sup>30</sup>

The building of Sourb Nshan, which never ceased serving for different purposes, was exposed to continual deterioration and needed repairs, but such work was never carried out there, although the board attached to its northern wall said: “The monument is protected by the State. Those causing any damage to it are

to be punished by law” (it is still preserved with the same words written on it).

After Georgia became an independent state, the condition of the monument kept worsening; moreover, it was no longer regarded as a historical monument, for gradually more and more residential buildings—evidently, erected illegally, but with the connivance of the authorities—sprang up directly close to its walls.

In September 1998, several employees of Georgia’s Department for the Preservation of Monuments who pretended to be concerned about the fate of the church declared to the Armenians of its neighbourhood that it would shift into the possession of the Georgian Patriarchate if they did not embark on its renovation within a month.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Idem, էջ 516.

<sup>30</sup> Չեֆոն, Անէանում է Թիֆլիսի պատմությունը..., «Լրագիր օր», 1996, 18 հունվարի, էջ 6:

<sup>31</sup> “Голос Армении”, 1998, 26.09, № 108, с. 1.



The tiled roof of the church, which was seriously damaged by the conflagration of 2002, easily fell prey to vegetation in the subsequent years (photos by N. Akopov, 2011 & S. Karapetian, 2007)

This fact directly proves that the proper bodies of Georgia did not view Sourb Nshan as a historical monument subject to preservation.

Four years later, on the night of 20 October 2002, a fire broke out inside the sanctuary: the person who was to blame for it remained “unidentified,”<sup>32</sup> as claimed by a press publication,

<sup>32</sup> **BS-PRESS**, “Пожар тушили девять машин”, “Вечерний Тбилиси”, 2002, 22-23 октября, № 121. The author of the article did not forget to declare: “The sanctuary was built 300 years ago and belonged to the Georgian Orthodox Church until the mid-19th century. Later it passed into the possession of the Armenian Church” (the original reads: “Здание церкви построено 300 лет назад, до середины XIX века оно принадлежало

while according to another, the monument had been set on fire “due to a Russian vagabond’s negligence.”<sup>33</sup> The raging conflagration was extinguished only through the united efforts of 9 fire-brigades...<sup>34</sup>

In the aftermath of this fire, the layers of plaster, covering the interior of the church almost entirely, were damaged and started falling off: this is especially regretful given the fact that they were mostly embellished with frescoes tracing back to the 18th to 19th

грузинской православной церкви, потом перешло к армянской церкви”). After these lines, we can only add: “No comment...”

<sup>33</sup> “ახვედ-დახველი”, 28.10-3.11, 2002, № 44:

<sup>34</sup> “Вечерний Тбилиси”, 2002, 22-23 октября, № 121.



Partial views of the mural paintings of Sourb Nshan (Holy Sign) Church (photos by S. Darchinian, 1976)





Remnants of frescoes preserved after the conflagration of 2002 only to fall prey to the fires of January 2012 (photos by S. Karapetian, 2007)



The sediments accumulated in the central part of the prayer hall and in the porch standing in front of the northern entrance: they were deposited from the water with which the fires of January 2012 were extinguished (photos by N. Akopov, 2012)

centuries (the last of them date from 1830). What is even more painful, before this fire, the church was constantly closed before visitors—in this way, the Georgians wanted to conceal the fact that it was being used for various purposes—so that researchers were unable to at least photograph the rare specimens of Tqghis’ Armenian school of mural painting, which are now irreparably lost. A certain idea can be formed about these treasures only by means of several amateur photographs taken in the 1970s.

After the fire, the emergency condition of Sourb Nshan grew incomparably graver, for it had been extinguished with water—something impermissible as far as historical monuments are concerned—the sediments deposited from which accumulated in the central part of the prayer hall and in the northern porch where it comprised graves.

Eventually, in 2007 the church, which was filled with rubbish and had been reduced to a place of refuge for dogs and vagabonds, *did* receive the status of a historical monument, which shows that after the proclamation of Georgia’s independence, it was truly removed from the lists of the historical monuments of Tbilisi.<sup>35</sup>

However, Sourb Nshan was to go through further calamities: on 3 and 7 January 2012, two more fires broke out there under unspecified circumstances. They were again put out with water, as a result of which, the sediments became even more striking (the depression of the prayer hall now reached a metre). Besides, the

<sup>35</sup> ცხელიძე ნ., ისტორიულ ძეგლად ცნობილი სპსხური ეკლესიის ძაღლებს თავუესაფრედ იქცა, “რეზონანსი”, 5.02.2010, ვვ. 5: Also see Из церкви убрали псарню, “Головинский проспект”, 2010, № 7.



The successive fires of 3 & 7 January 2012 destroyed the north-eastern pillar of the church (they were extinguished in a manner impermissible for historical monuments—with water (photos by N. Akopov, January 2012)

extreme heat became the reason for the collapse of one of the 4 dome-bearing pillars, namely, the north-eastern one, while the cracks that had appeared in the western and eastern facades of the monument grew more dangerous. Those of the porch (it was built in front of the northern entrance of the church and also served as a belfry and a burial chapel), which had been visible since 2002, grew highly perilous.

In March 2012, the National Agency for Cultural Heritage of Georgia started the removal of the rubbish-like mass which had accumulated inside Sourb Nshan after the burning of the stacks and the falling of plaster (this work was still underway in April). In order to prevent the possible collapse of certain parts of the monument, supporting metallic and wooden constructions were

placed inside it and in its northern porch. However, the heavy shower of 14 May totally destroyed the four-pillar porch, which evidently had not been conserved properly.

At present (June 2012), the church is still preserved standing, but it is in a grave state of emergency.

**Architectural Description.** One of the earliest available descriptions of the monument is provided by I. Ioseliani, who says the following about it (the material is entitled *A Description of the Antiquities of Tpghis and Somkhit*, 1837): “The church that is named Sourb Nshan and is ...it is a magnificent domed edifice dedicated to St. Nicholas and resting on four pillars. Its dome is covered with green bricks, while the church itself and its wings are tiled. It has three sanctuaries: the middle one is the largest,



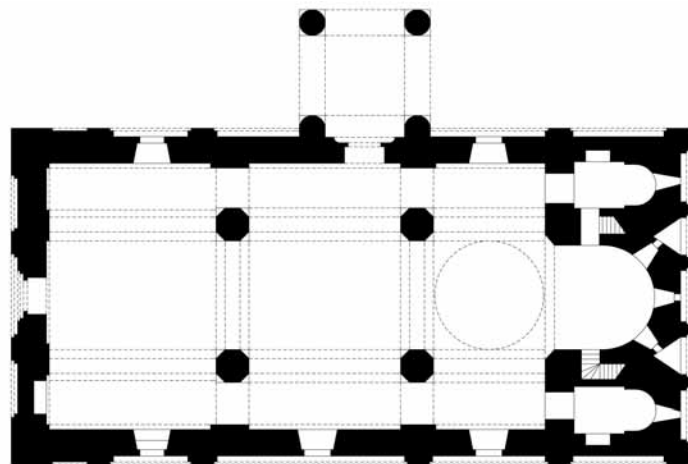
The cleaning of the church in January and February 2012 (photos by N. Akopov)



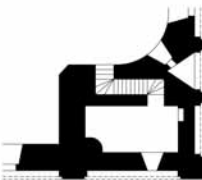
The metallic and wooden constructions placed inside the church between March and April 2012 to prevent the possible collapse of the monument (photos by A. Hakobian)

bearing St. Nicholas' name; the northern one is dedicated to Andrew the Apostle, and the southern one to St. Gevorg..."<sup>36</sup>

Michael Sulian writes the following in his memoirs: "...it is a large wide church making the impression of an old one. It is said to resemble Sourb Nshan Church of Haghpat and bear its name."<sup>37</sup>



0 1 2 3 4 5 10 m



The plan of the second-floor vestry

The plan of Sourb Nshan (Holy Sign) Church (measurement by A. Hakobian, 2007)

Another architectural description of the monument is offered by Dr. of Architecture Murad Hasratian.<sup>38</sup>

A record of the early 1980s states: "At present the church has turned into stacks. Its lofty dome and striking dimensions make it greatly different from the other buildings of Tiflis. It was also

<sup>36</sup> Միլիպուր-Քելի Լ., idem, էջ 266:

<sup>37</sup> Մուլիան Մ., Թիֆլիսի քաղաքը իմ մանկությունից ժամանակ, ՀԱԳ, ֆ. 428, ց. 2, գ. 104, ք. 19:

<sup>38</sup> Ասրատյան Մ., Памятники средневековой архитектуры в Тбилиси, II международный симпозиум по армянскому искусству, том 2, Ереван, 1978, с. 399.



Partial views of the interior of Sourb Nshan (Holy Sign) Church (photos by S. Karapetian, 2007 & 2012)



The dome of Sourb Nshan (Holy Sign) Church inwardly (photo by S. Karapetian, 2007)

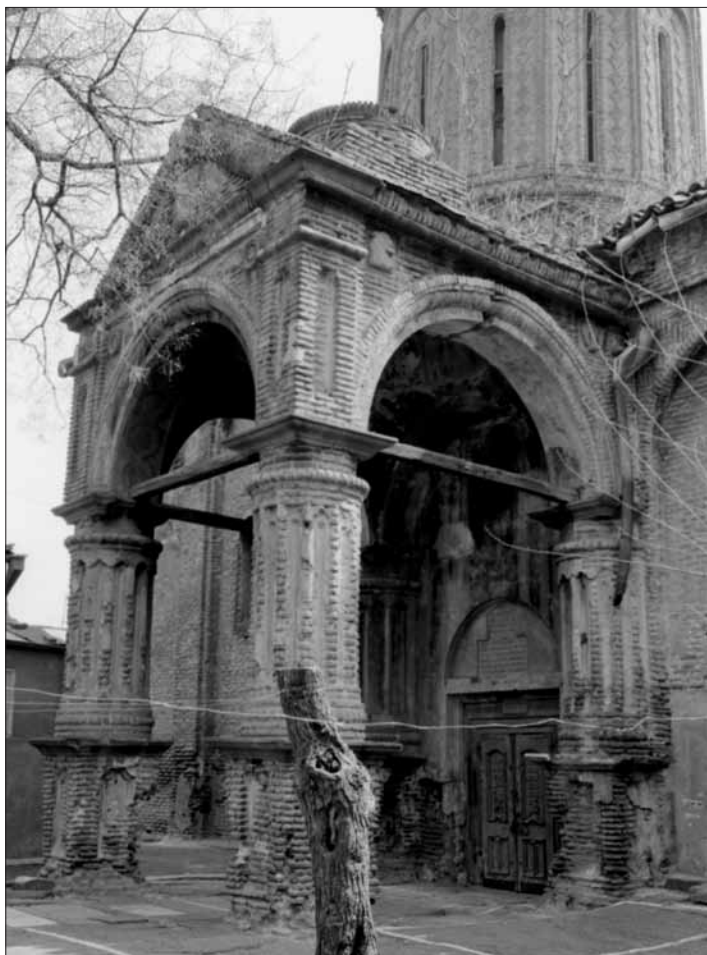
mentioned by Jean Chardin. Its architectural features reveal the traces of renovation carried out in late periods.<sup>39</sup>

Sourb Nshan represents a tri-nave domed basilica—a composition that was quite wide-spread in Armenian church-building between the 17th and 18th centuries. Its vaults and outwardly dodecahedral drum, which ends in a pointed spire, are inwardly supported by two pairs of thick columns. Three windows, widening inwardly, open from the eastern semi-circular sanctuary (it is

the one dedicated to St. Nicholas). In the north and south, the church has two double-floor sacristies (each of them has a sanctuary dedicated to St. Andrew the Apostle and St. Gevorg respectively) the entrances of which open from the west into the prayer hall. On the second storey, their entrances open into the chancel with which each of them communicates by means of 17 stairs.

The entire monument is mainly built of brick, although stones are used, too (especially in its main masonry, cornices and entrance corners). Its roof is covered with tiles. The interior of the church used to be embellished with murals, a considerable part of which is ascribed to the Hovnatianians' school of wall painting. It

<sup>39</sup> კვიციანი თ., *ibid.*



The northern porch of the church from the north-west and west; reliefs (photos by S. Karapetian, 1989)





The northern porch of the church from the north-west and west; reliefs (photos by S. Karapetian, 2012)



The porch built in front of the northern entrance of Sourb Nshan (Holy Sign) Church as totally destroyed on 14 May as a result of the heavy showers of the preceding days (photo by N. Akopov, 14 May 2012)

has three entrances opening from its northern, southern and western facades. Its western pediment is surmounted by a rotunda resting on eight pillars. The porch of four columns, which stood in front of its northern entrance before the disastrous shower of 14 May 2012, used to have a belfry, too: it probably collapsed (or was destroyed) in the first decades of the Soviet rule. The walls of the church are rich in Armenian inscriptions. Exterior dimensions (without the northern porch): 29.45 x 14.60 metres.

**Estates.** Sourb Nshan Church owned profitable real estate the income of which was used for the clergymen serving there and for the parochial school attached to it.

Chronologically, the donations made to the church represent the following picture:

In 1824 in accordance with the will of Gaspar Barseghian, who was from Van in origin, Sourb Nshan became one of the 17 Armenian churches of the city each of which received 10 roubles in silver coins for their needs and a rouble for their sextons.<sup>40</sup>

A record of 1838 states the following: “The church of Sourb Nshan, which has lofty ramparts, has a vacant area of 1,116 gazes...<sup>41</sup> in its vicinity. There are two rooms close to its belfry: one of them is unoccupied, being intended for priests, and the other is inhabited by the sexton free of charge. The [dwellers of

<sup>40</sup> Մատենադարան, ֆ. 155, գ. 68:

<sup>41</sup> A unit of length equal to 112 cm.

the] house of [church] serf Giko Hunanov are his widow Lalu, her son and two daughters, who pay nothing to the church. The house of [another] serf, Pap's son Karapet, [comprises] Mayin and Ketevan, who pay nothing either."<sup>42</sup>

In 1843 the income received from the serfs of the church amounted to 210 roubles.<sup>43</sup>

In 1898 State Councillor Grigor Solomonian Abisalomians donated his own income-yielding booth, located in the 5th part of the city and assessed at 5,000 roubles, to the church.<sup>44</sup>

**Church Deputies.** Below follows a chronological list of deputies elected to represent Sourb Nshan Church in different diocesan affairs and events: 1868 (year of election) - Alexandre Tayirians (he was an official), Grigor Shanshians and Solomon Vardzelians;<sup>45</sup> 1872 - State Councillor Alexandre Ghazarian Tayirians, Collegiate Secretary Hakob Gevorgian Avtandilians and Grigor Harutiunian Ghandubalians, who bore the title of *Citizen of Tpghis* (they were to elect new trustees for Nersissian School of Tiflis);<sup>46</sup> 29 January 1884 - Hakob Ter-Hovhannissian, Barsegh Ghandubalians, Gabriel Mirzoyan and Nikoghayos Ter-Harutiunian ;<sup>47</sup> 10 January 1885 - Hovhannes Ter-Karapetian, Gevorg Enakolopians and Hakob Ter-Hakobians;<sup>48</sup> 7 April 1891 - Hakob Ter-Hovhannissians, Sokrat Melik Adamians and Grigor Enikolopians;<sup>49</sup> 26 January 1892 - Hovhannes Ter-Karapetian, Barsegh Ghandubalians and Gabriel Mirzoyan;<sup>50</sup> 1914 - H. Hambardzumian and S. Khanghalamian, with B. Amiraghian and S. Khachikian elected as their substitutes.<sup>51</sup>

**Priests.** In 1646<sup>52</sup> and 1656<sup>53</sup> mention is made of Priest Ohan.

A note of gratitude issued by the Catholicos of All Armenians in October 1789 makes reference to "...Father Grigor, one of the members of the monastic community of Sourb Nshan..."<sup>54</sup>

In 1837 Hovhannes Zarapians (Zarapov) is mentioned.<sup>55</sup>

From 24 October 1881 until at least 1914, Grigor Hovhannissian Shermazaniants (born in 1851, ordained in 1881) served in Sourb Nshan, and from 27 July 1887 until at least 1914, Garegin Markossian Arakelians (born in 1857, ordained in 1887) performed the same duties there.<sup>56</sup>

In 1888 Arakel Hakobian Azizians<sup>57</sup> was the spiritual shepherd of the parish of Sourb Nshan.

**Male School of Sourb Nshan Church.** It opened under Catholicos Nerses Ashtaraketsy's bull of 2 June 1848.<sup>58</sup>

Early in 1861, it was one of the 6 schools attached to the Armenian churches of the city (the other sanctuaries with similar establishments were St. Gevorg of Mughni, that of the castle of Narighala, St. Sargis, St. Minas and Shamkoretsots Sourb Astvatzatzin).<sup>59</sup>

The school also worked in 1873 and 1875 having only 18 pupils.<sup>60</sup>

A record of 1875 states that the establishment was in an insoluble state: "...it so happened that we visited Sourb Nshan Church and found its school in a miserable condition. It is a long time since classes terminated there: the building is reduced to ruins, with the school property being scattered here and there, deteriorated and broken."<sup>61</sup>

In April 1875, mention is made of the trustees of the school, Father Ghevond Kharazians and G. Akimians.<sup>62</sup>

Early in 1876, it was headed by teacher Harutiun Shahnazarian: "It is a great shame for us to have a school like that in Tiflis. ...a small dirty room without a furnace, the broken glass of its windows replaced by paper, and that for only half of them... we shall have a clear idea about the condition of the poor children especially ...in the severe cold of winter..."<sup>63</sup>

**Sextons' School of Sourb Nshan.** Ignoring the extremely miserable state of the children's school, in 1876 the spiritual authorities opened a new one in the church for sextons: "...on the order of the Most Reverend Archbishop Gabriel, a school has

42 ՀԱԳ, ֆ. 56, ց. 6, գ. 39, ք. 61:

43 ՀԱԳ, ֆ. 56, ց. 4, գ. 787, ք. 75, 145:

44 ՀԱԳ, ֆ. 56, ց. 18, գ. 363, ք. 1:

45 «Մեղու Հայաստանի», 1868, № 12, 23 մարտի, էջ 84-85:

46 «Մեղու Հայաստանի», 1872, № 30, 23 սեպտեմբերի, էջ 120:

47 «Արձագանք», 1884, № 5, 5 փետրուարի, էջ 68:

48 «Մեղու Հայաստանի», 1885, № 18, 7 մարտի, էջ 3-4:

49 «Արձագանք», 1891, № 6, 19 ապրիլի, էջ 82:

50 «Արձագանք», 1892, № 12, 29 յունուարի (10 փետրուարի), էջ 2:

51 «Հորիզոն», 1914, № 113, 28 մայիսի, էջ 2:

52 ՀԱԳ, ֆ. 56, ց. 6, գ. 39, ք. 57:

53 ԺԷԳ, էջ 721:

54 Դիվան հայոց պատմության, գիրք առաջին, հատոր Բ, Երևան, 2003, էջ 497:

55 Մելիքսեթ-Քել Լ., idem, էջ 266:

56 ՀԱԳ, ֆ. 56, ց. 18, գ. 1020, ք. 221-222: Also see ֆ. 53, ց. 1, գ. 795, ք. 53; գ. 331, ք. 74:

57 «Արձագանք», 1888, № 31, 14 օգոստոսի, էջ 421:

58 **Խոտդյան Մ.**, Արևելահայ դպրոցները 1830-1920 թվականներին, Երևան, 1987, էջ 593:

59 «Մեղու Հայաստանի», 1861, № 14, 1 ապրիլի, էջ 108:

60 **Խոտդյան Մ.**, idem, էջ 593:

61 «Մեղու Հայաստանի», 1875, № 14, 12 ապրիլի, էջ 2:

62 Ibid.

63 «Մեղու Հայաստանի», 1876, № 5, 7 փետրվարի, էջ 3:

opened in the yard of Sourb Nshan Church for sextons. The number of those studying there is about forty.”<sup>64</sup>

**Female School of Sourb Nshan Church.** A record of 1873 states that in the same year, “The highly-respected Mrs. Ter-Grigoriants opened a school for girls in Sourb Nshan on the authorities’ permission,”<sup>65</sup> but it is generally held that this establishment opened in 1883 by the Charity Society of Armenian Women. In 1884 it had 200 pupils.<sup>66</sup>

In 1884 the General Meeting of the Charity Society granted its Administration with permission to use 2,000 roubles from its budget “...for the construction of a school house in the narthex of Sourb Nshan Church. For that purpose, the Primate had ordered to allocate 2,000 roubles from the budget of Sourb Nshan together with another 160 roubles collected through private donations. The work, however, was not initiated at once: it was only in February of the current year that they began laying the foundations of the building. The Administration is planning to carry out that goal in the future, and at present they intend to only build its substructure and erect a wall in that site.”<sup>67</sup>

In 1885 the Charity Society of Armenian Women addressed a note of gratitude to Doctor David Orbely, who visited the school of Sourb Nshan once a week, free of charge and gave its pupils useful information on health care.<sup>68</sup>

In the same year, Nikoghayos Meghvinian and Markos Dolukhanian presented the school (it had 30 pupils) with a complete volume of the “Aghbyur” magazine.<sup>69</sup>

In 1887 Miss Nune Pridonian (Russian) and Makar Vardikian (Singing) taught at the female school, which had only a single department.<sup>70</sup>

A record of 1888 says: “...the school which is situated in the narthex of Sourb Nshan Church. It is housed in a very comfortable building: the classrooms and narthex are so clean that they can meet the highest standards of health care... Apparently, the staff of female teachers pays great attention to the needlework of the pupils so that those from poor families may be able to earn their living and support their parents through their own work. In the fulfillment of this goal, the Charity Society is greatly assisted by Miss B. Zohrabian...”<sup>71</sup>

64 **Նրզնկեանց Գ.**, Նորարաց ուսումնարան տիրացուաց համար Թիֆլիսում, «Մեղու Հայաստանի», 1876, № 40, 16 հոկտեմբերի, էջ 3:

65 «Մեղու Հայաստանի», 1873, № 9, 10 մարտի, էջ 3:

66 «Արձագանք», 1884, № 10, 11 մարտի, էջ 143:

67 «Մեղու Հայաստանի», 1885, № 29, հինգշաբթի, 18 ապրիլի, էջ 3:

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 ՀԱԳ, ֆ. 35, ց. 1, գ. 8, ք. 22:

71 «Արձագանք», 1888, № 10, 20 մարտի, էջ 125:

On 29 May 1888, “The school of the Charity Society of Armenian Women, located in the narthex of Sourb Nshan Church, held a prize-awarding ceremony. ...The teacher of the school, Miss Zohrabian, read its annual report and the names of the graduating pupils, giving each of them a Certificate and a Gospel...”<sup>72</sup>

On 21 September 1888, “...the opening of the second department (it was dedicated to the Armenian Charity Society) of the female school of Sourb Nshan took place in the presence of its women-trustees, the members of this Charity, the pupils and their parents. The newly-opened school [department] holds classes in Shahparunian’s house in Sergiyevsk Street. It offers education for those pupils who have completed their course in the first department of the institution. At present the school, which consists of three departments, has 41 female pupils, 27 of whom have come from other establishments, and the remaining 14 have completed their education in the school of the Armenian Charity this year...”<sup>73</sup>

On 10 October 1888, the school received Catholicos Makar I of Teghut: “His Holiness condescended to visit the school of Sourb Nshan Church, which works under the auspices of the Charity Society of Armenian Women and is governed with its means. The members of the Administration of the Society, their substitutes and the teachers of the school were all in the school balcony. The Primate of the diocese, the Right Reverend Bishop Aristakes, who is also Honorary President of the Charity, introduced the Head of its Administration, Princess Katerine Behboutian, to His Holiness, and she in her turn introduced the members, deputy members, as well as the chief teacher and other teachers of the school to the Catholicos. His Holiness went to the school hall, where the pupils were lined up: they sang a song titled *Babe*, after which the chief teacher, Miss Varvare Zohrabian, was honoured to introduce the graduates to the Catholicos: these pupils now continue their education in a school of sewing founded by the Charity...”<sup>74</sup>

In 1891 the Charity Society of Armenian Women allocated 2,506 roubles to the school.<sup>75</sup>

A record of the same year states that “The Charity supports the parochial school of Sourb Nshan Church and that of sewing at its own expense.”<sup>76</sup>

72 «Արձագանք», 1888, № 21, 5 յունիսի, էջ 293:

73 «Արձագանք», 1888, № 37, 27 սեպտեմբերի, էջ 506:

74 «Արձագանք», 1888, № 40, 16 հոկտեմբերի, էջ 544:

75 «Արձագանք», 1891, № 7, 28 ապրիլի, էջ 102:

76 «Արձագանք», 1891, № 5, էջ 69:

Hovhannes Khudadian, the husband of Varvare Khudadian, who had died in April 1892, donated 100 roubles to the female school of Sourb Nshan in memory of his spouse.<sup>77</sup>

In the academic year of 1891/1892, the girls' school of Sourb Nshan, which had a single class, had 6 teachers: Deacon Hovhannes Nazariants, head teacher Nune Pridoniants, Galust Abuliants, Alexandre Simeoniants, Mariam Malumiants and Srbuhi Susaniants.<sup>78</sup>

On the eve of the closing of the Armenian schools throughout the Russian Empire, namely in 1896, the female school of Sourb Nshan had two classes with 5 departments.<sup>79</sup>

In 1907/1908 it merged into that of Kamoyants Church.<sup>80</sup>

In 1911 it was a two-class institution with a 5-year instruction course.<sup>81</sup>

**Hospital.** This establishment worked in Yagor Gharajian's house between 1873 and 1874.<sup>82</sup>

**Cemetery.** It chiefly extended in the north of Sourb Nshan, with some graves located in the west of the church. In the 1970s, most of the tombstones situated in the main cemetery were covered with asphalt: the few others escaped this fate only thanks to their being a little higher.

Apart from tombstones, the graveyard of Sourb Nshan also retained funerary memorials, only two of which have come down to us: one of them (1858) is dedicated to Avetik Piroyan and the other (1894) to Barsegh Meghviniants.

Some of the graves of the cemetery belonged to the Abisoghomiantses, the Begtabekiantses, the Meghviniantses and the Piroyantses, with epitaphs engraved on them.

1. In 1743 one of the clergymen of Sourb Nshan who had contributed to its decoration “through strenuous efforts” found repose in the four-pillar porch located in front of its northern entrance. The right part of his tombstones is entirely weathered from top to bottom, and for this reason, only the following is read from the inscription which originally comprised 11 lines:

*Այս է տապան... / ավաք էրէց տ(է)ր... / իսա, որ եկեղեց... / ց  
բազում աշ[խատ]անօր ջանաց ... / ...ք ձեռ... / աց ի տապան  
նիս... / ց թէ աշխարհին ... / աց, օվ կարդա [ասի ողոր]մի հան-  
գեալի տ(է)ր ... / ՌՃՂԸ (1743):*

Published in: **Мурадян П.**, idem, с. 71.

77 «Արձագանք», 1892, № 44, 15 (27) ապրիլի, էջ 1:

78 ՀԱԳ, ֆ. 56, ց. 15, գ. 26, ք. 24:

79 **Խորդյան Ս.**, idem, էջ 594:

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 «Մշակ», 1873, № 21, էջ 4: Also see «Մեղու Հայաստանի», 1874, № 21, 1 յունիսի, էջ 4.

Transl.: *In this grave reposes... Archpriest, Father... ...did every-thing through strenuous efforts... ...May those who read this pray for his soul. He yielded up his spirit to God... in 1192 (1743).*

Note: We have presented the decipherment offered by P. Muradian with certain additions.

2. The gravestone of Sulkhan Bektabekiants (he was buried in front of the western entrance of the church in 1788), which was preserved *in situ* until the early 1980s, had only a Georgian epitaph:



A partial view of the graves located in the four-pillar belfry-porch built in front of the northern entrance of the church (photo by S. Karapetian, 1989)



A tombstone, 1743



საქართველოს მეფის ირაკლის ვიცე-კანცლერ <მღ>ივანი თავადი სულხან ბეგთაბეგოვი აღ(ვე)სრულე აგვისტოს ქა უოვ, წე(ლს)ა ჩღვც.

Transl.: Vice-Chancellor of Georgian King Heracle, Mdivan and Tavada Sulkhan Begtabegov departed this life in August 476 according to the Chronicon.

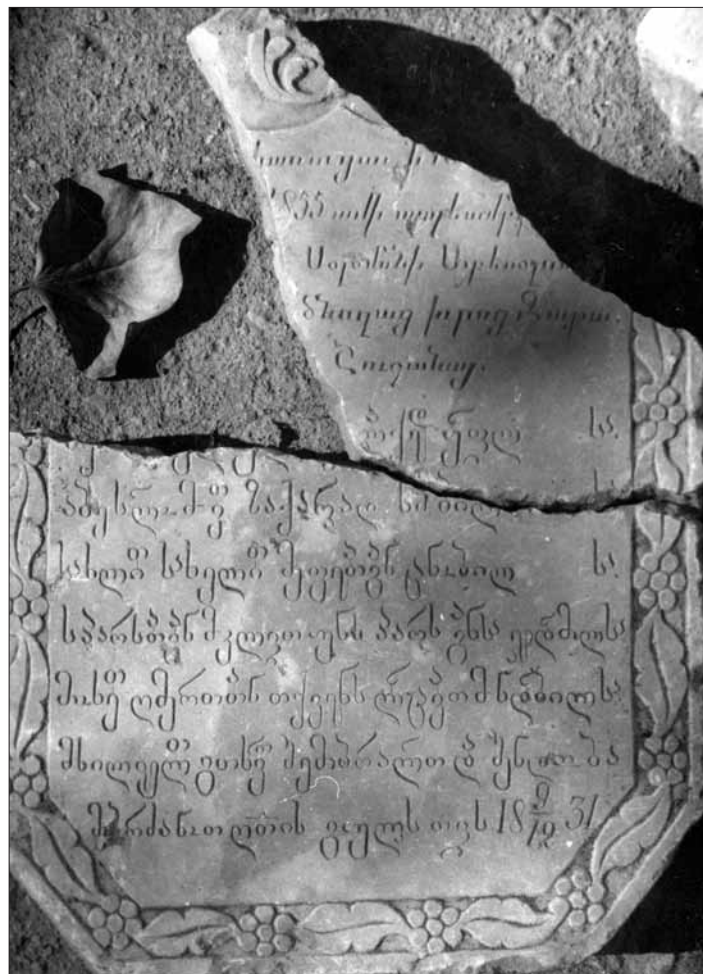
Published in: Меликсет-Беков Л., Усыпальница кн. Бегтабеговых, Тифлис, 1914, с. 4. Мурадян П., idem, с. 71.

3. The graveyard retains a marble slab with a bilingual (Armenian in 5 lines and Georgian in 7) inscription which was probably placed there in 1855 in memory of Zakaria Abesalomians by his son Soghomon:

...կառուցաւ ի 18... | ...1855 ամի արդեսամբք ... | ...Սօլօմոնի Արեսօղոմ... | ... (յիշատակ) ծնողաց իրոց Չաքա/(րիսայի եւ) Շուշանայ:

Transl.: ...built in 18... ...in 1855 with the means of... ...Solomon Abesoghom... ...in memory of his parents Zakaria and Shushan.

այ... (მოქ)ლაქედ ყოვილსა | აბესალომოვთ ზაქარი-  
ად [სმობილ]სა | სახლით სახელით მეფეთავან ცნობილ  
სა | სპარსთავან მკლვით უნსპარს განსაჯდომილსა |  
მოხეთ ღმერთან თქვენს ლოცვათ მინდობილსა |  
მხილველთ გთხოვთ შემობრალთ და შენდობა |  
მიბრძანოთ ღ(მრ)თის გულისათვის, | 1831. 9. 12.



A tombstone, 1855

Transl.: ...was a Mokalak named Zakar Abesolomov [coming] from a family whose name is well-known to kings [and] sentenced to death by Persians (?). May you remember me [for] I hope you will pray for me before God.

Published in: Мурадян П., idem, с. 113-114.

Note: The remnants of the tombstone, which comprised two fragments, were removed from the cemetery to the Historical and Ethnographical Museum of Tbilisi, where Dr. P. Muradian saw them in the early 1980s. The photograph reached us thanks to S. Darchinian.

4. The funerary memorial dedicated to Avetik Movsisian Piroyants, which was erected in 1858 close to the northern wall of the church with an extensive epitaph, is still preserved *in situ*. This person “...bequeathed a magnificent edifice to Nersissian School, for the benefit of which its income is used.”<sup>83</sup> Avetik Piroyants,

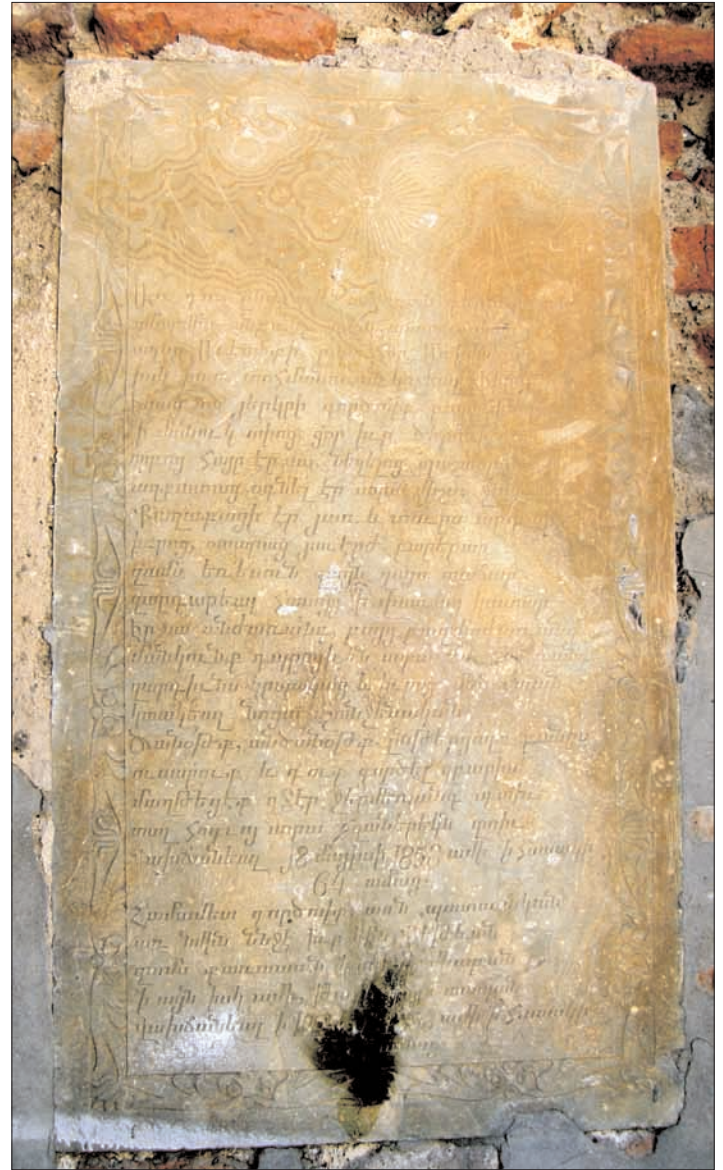
83 «Մերոյ Հայաստանի», 1875, № 13, 5 ապրիլի, էջ 3:



who was a furrier by trade, was elected as a deputy for Sourb Nshan in 1820: “When he assumed this post, the church had absolutely no financial means, but he increased its budget by serving it faithfully. He had the women’s gallery re-built from its very foundations, and held office for 28 years, serving the church with great fairness and loyalty and leaving a capital of five thousand roubles for it, in addition to a sum of about 600 roubles for its embellishment in perpetuation of his memory.”<sup>84</sup>

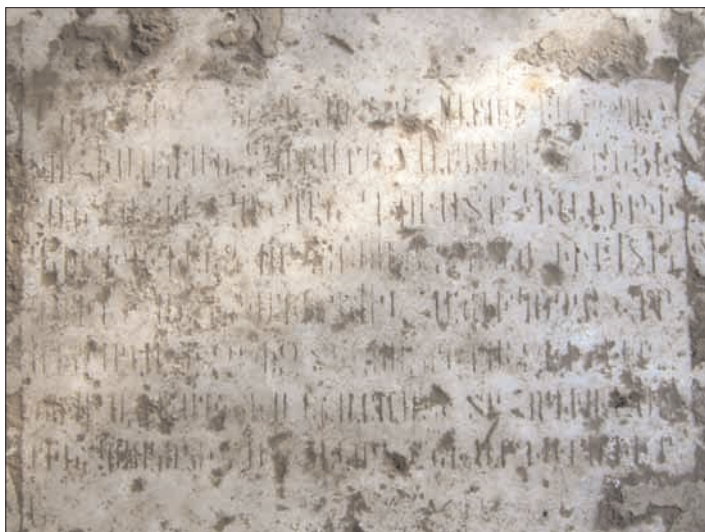
A. Piroyan died on 8 May 1858 and was buried “...close to the ramparts of Sourb Nshan Church.”<sup>85</sup> On 10 September of the same year, his wife Ketevan consigned her soul to God and was interred beside her husband. Their memory is kept living by an epitaph of 28 lines engraved on a marble slab set in the northern wall of the church, close to the memorial to A. Piroyan:

*Առ դու ընդ քև տապան գերութեան  
 Չմարմին անշունչ առն պատուական  
 Աղայ Աւետիքի ըստ հօր Մովսիսեան  
 Իսկ ըստ տոհմանուան կոչեալ Փիրոյեան  
 Եկաց սա յերկրի գործովք բարութեան  
 Ի մանկուց տիոց ցօր իւր ծերութեան  
 Որբոց հայր էր սա, նեղելոց պաշտպան,  
 Աղքատաց օգնել էր տրա միշտ ջան,  
 Քաղաքացի էր՝ յառ և տուրս արդար,  
 Իւրոց, օտարաց յաւերժ բարերար.  
 Չամս եռեսուն գոյն գայս տաճար  
 Չարդարեալ հասոյց ի փառաց կատար,  
 Էր սա անժառանգ, բայց բազմաժառանգ.  
 Մանկունք դպրոցի են տրա ժառանգ.  
 Չարդիւնս կրպակաց և իւրոց մեծ տան*



*Կտակեալ նոցա մշտնջենական,  
 Ծանօթք, անծանօթք ընթերցող բանիս,  
 Ուսարուք և դուք գործել զբարիս.  
 Մաղթեցէք գտեր ջերմեռանդ սրտիս  
 Տալ հոգոյ տրա զաներեկն գտիս,  
 Վախճանեալ յ8 մայիսի 1858 ամի, ի հասակի  
 64 ամաց,  
 Համեստ գործովք առն պատուական՝  
 Առ նմին ննջէ իւր կին Քեթևան.  
 Չամս քառասուն կացեալ միարան՝*

84 «Մեղու Հայաստանի», 1859, № 24, 13 յունիսի, էջ 192:  
 85 Ibid.



Ի սոյն իսկ ամի թաղի յայս  
տապան,

Վախճանեալ ի 10 սեպ.  
1858 ամի, ի հասակի  
55 ամաց:

Published in: **Мурадян П.**, idem, с.  
72.

Transl.: *Grave of captivity, take the lifeless remains of my husband, honourable Agha Avetik, whose patronymic is Movsissian and family name Piroyan. From childhood to his old age, he lived doing good: he was a father for orphans, and a protector for the destitute, always helping the poor heartily. He was a citizen fair in commerce, ever a benefactor for his own people and aliens. He embellished this church and completed [its renovation] gloriously within thirty years. He was childless, but he had many heirs, his sons being the children of the school to which he bequeathed the income of his booths and large house for eternal use. May those who read these lines, both acquaintances and strangers, learn to do good. May you pray God heartily to shroud his soul in eternal light. He died at the age of 64 on 8 May 1858. By her pious husband's side reposes Ketevan, who was modest in her deeds. She lived with him in solidarity for forty years and was buried in this grave this year: she died at the age of 55 on 10 September 1858.*

Note: P. Muradian erroneously read the family name of 'Piroyan' as 'Pitoyan.'

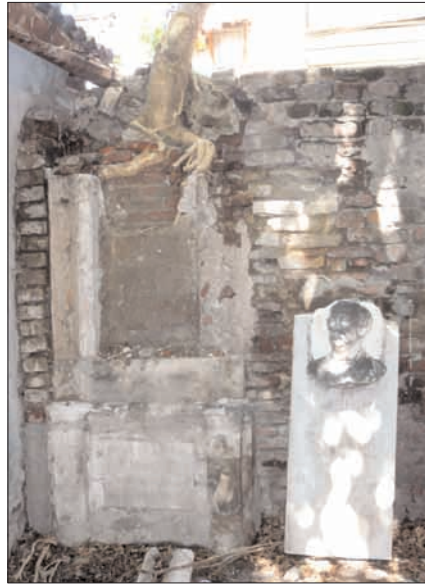
5. In 1874 Shushan Ketkhudians-Abesalomians, Mayor Soghomon Abesalomians' mother, found repose in the cemetery of Sourb Nshan.<sup>86</sup> Her tombstone bears a white marble slab with a 10-line inscription which is in a semi-distorted state:

Ընդ շիրմասս հանգչի ...արուե թարեպաշտուի ամուսին  
Չարարայ Արեսալօմե(ա)նցի | հանգուցե(ա)լ Շուշան,  
դուստր՝ Դաւիթի | Քէթխուդեանց, որ կնքեաց զկեանս իւր ... |  
ամի ..., ով հանդիպօղբ շիրմին աղաչեմ զձեզ տալ սմա ողորմի ... |  
... արասցէ տ(է)ր հոգւո ...սոյրին պսակակից ... եթող ընդ  
արդարս իւր | ... | ...:

Transl.: *In this grave reposes ...pious spouse of Zakar Abesalomians, the deceased Shushan, the daughter of David Ketkhudian,*

<sup>86</sup> Shushan Ketkhudians-Abesalomians is also mentioned in the epitaph written in memory of her husband Zakaria Abesalomians in 1855 (see epitaph № 3).





who departed this life... at the age of... Pray, may those who see this grave beg for her soul's peaceful rest... ..Lord...

Published for the first time.

6. In 1868 Soghomon Zakarian Abesalomiants (Abisoghomiants), who held the mayoralty of Tiflis for two terms (1860 to 1861, 1865 to 1866), was interred in the graveyard of Sourb Nshan Church.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> “Кавказ”, 1868, 21.07. For details concerning his biography, see «Թիֆլիսի քաղաքագլուխները», Երևան, 2003, էջ 52-53. His tombstone is not found among those which can be seen in the cemetery.

7. In 1880 Lieutenant Colonel Avriam Michaelian Yenikolopiants was buried in the cemetery.<sup>88</sup>

8. In 1892 Hakob Abesolomiants found eternal repose in the four-pillar belfry-porch built in front of the northern entrance of the church. His tombstone bears an epitaph in Armenian and Russian:

*Հակոբ Աղղոմոնեան / Արեւորոմեանց, | Яковъ Соломоновичъ | Абессаломовъ | 1823-1892 г.*

Transl. from Armenian: *Hakob Soghomonian Abesolomiants.*

Published for the first time.

Note: The Russian epitaph merely contains the same name with the birth and death years of the deceased.



9. In 1894 mineralogist Barsegh Hovhannissian Meghvinians, the Vice-Consul of Belgium in Tiflis, was buried in the cemetery.<sup>89</sup> The memorial perpetuating his memory stands at the northern extremity of the main graveyard of the church, close to its ramparts (in recent years, it has been deliberately damaged).

*Василий Ивановичъ | Мегвиновъ | род. 5 ноября 1843 г. | сконч. 31 декабря 1894 г.*

*Բարսեղ Յովհաննիսեան | Աղղոմեանց, | ծնեալ ի 5-ն նոյեմբերի 1843 ամի, | վախճանեալ յ31 դեկտեմբերի 1894 ամի:*

Transl. from Armenian: *Barsegh Hovhannissian Meghvinians: born on 5 November 1843, he died on 31 December 1894.*

Published for the first time.

Note: The photographs show the memorial as standing (1989, by S. Karape-tian) and as already subjected to premeditated destruction (2008, by S. Darchi-nian).

The Russian epitaph has the same contents.

10. In 1915 Royal Councillor, Prince Grigor Bektabekiants was buried close to the western facade of the church. His tombstone, which disappeared between 2010 and 2011, had an epitaph in Armenian, Russian and Georgian:

<sup>88</sup> ՎԱԳ, ֆ. 5, ց. 1, գ. 6469, ք. 62: His tombstone was not found *in situ*.

<sup>89</sup> “Тифлиссский листок”, 1895, № 1, 02.01.



A cross-stone (17th to 18th centuries) inside the southern sacristy of Sourb Nshan (Holy Sign) Church (photo by N. Akopov, 2011)

Աստ հանգչի մարմինն նաղթօրնի սովեղնիկ | կն. իշխան  
Գրիգորի Ռոստոմեան | Բեգթաբեգեանց | նախկին հոգաբար-  
ձու Թիֆլիսի հայոց | Ջկրաշեն եկեղեցու ուսումնարանի | Ժմ.  
29 յունիսի 1838 թ. վախճ. 5 փետրուարի 1915 թ.:

Надворный советникъ | попечитель Джиграшенской школы  
| князь Григорий Ростомовичъ | Бегтабегевъ | род. 29 июня  
1838 г., сконч. 5 февраля 1915 г.

Եւջորճի Տօւրքեճիոյ | Կնոճի ցրօցօրի Րօսեճօ-  
մօցօ... | Երեւթօճօցօ | Երօքիթեճօ Վ... Զօցրօճեճօս ...  
| 1838-1915.

Transl. from Armenian: *In this grave repose the remains of Court Councillor, Prince Grigori Rostomian Begtabegiants, the former trustee of the school of Tiflis' Armenian church of Jkrashen. Born on 29 June 1838, he died on 5 February 1915.*

Published for the first time.

Note: The photograph was taken by S. Darchinian in 1988.

The Russian and Georgian epitaphs have almost the same contents.

The southern sacristy of Sourb Nshan Church also retains an ornate cross-stone which was probably removed there from this cemetery. It is bare of any inscription, but its stylistic and artistic features trace it back to the period between the 17th and 18th centuries.

**Church Vessels and Vestments.** One of the earliest records about the relics kept either in the church or with the clergymen serving there dates back to 1837: “It has a pyx with the representation of St. Nicholas the Miracle-Worker which retains Andrew the Apostle’s forehead. Besides, Archpriest of this sanctuary Ohannes Zarapov preserves in his house a tiny piece of the cross upon which Christ was crucified together with other relics handed down to him by inheritance. These sacred pieces, which have healing power, are held in veneration by both the Armenians and the Georgians. In times bygone, they were treated with the utmost awe by the members of the royal family as well. The priest sometimes takes them to church for Christians to worship and kiss them, and again takes them back home.”<sup>90</sup>

According to a document made up on 8 March 1838, Sourb Nshan had a large collection of gold and silver utensils, 168 in total number.<sup>91</sup> We have selected only those of them which have donation inscriptions.

“A gilded cross of silver with five artificial stones on one of its faces, and the following words on the other”:

Ի թուին հայոց ՌՂԵ (1646) շինեցաւ սուրբ Նշանս  
բարեխոս Յոհան վարդապետին և ծնողաց նորին՝ Մէլքօյին և  
Մինունդին:

Transl.: *In the year 1095 (1646) of the Armenian calendar, Sourb Nshan was built in protection of Archimandrite Ohan as well as his parents Melko and Minund.*

“The cross weighs thirty-one meskhals.”

“Two identical crosses... one of which bears words of commemoration in Armenian”:

Յանուն Բաղդասարին, Բեժանի դուստր Դեդեբօյին,  
որդոյ Կակալօյին..., ՌՆԺԱ (1662) թուին:

Transl.: *In memory of Baghdasar, Bezhan’s daughter Dedebo, his son Kakalo... in the year 1111 (1662).*

<sup>90</sup> Մելքսեթ-Բեկ Լ., idem, էջ 267: Ohanes Zarapov’s name is also found in the following record: “...a small domed church dedicated to St. Gevorg, with a wooden roof built in 1775 with the means of the family of Father Ohanes Zarapov, Archpriest of Sourb Nshan, opposite the large gate of the castle of Metekh...” (idem, էջ 268).

<sup>91</sup> ՀԱԴ, ֆ. 56, ց. 6, գ. 39, ք. 56-61:

“...the other has the following inscription written in Armenian, but in the Georgian script”:

*Յանուն Փերիխանին, Մարիամին...:*

Transl.: *In memory of Perikhan, Mariam...*

“Two similar crosses one of which is gilded and the other not (both of them are broken). One of them has only the following written on it in Georgian [in the original]: *Father Grigor*. The other is engraved with these words”:

*Յանուն քահանայից Բաղդասարին և պարոն Դավթին և մոր Խորեշանին, եղբորն Յարութիւնին:*

Transl.: *In memory of Priest Baghdasar and Mr. David and his mother Khoreshan [and] his brother Harutiun.*

“A gilded cross with a dove-shaped part of silver...”:

*Յիշատակ յանուն Բաղդենի դուստր Թուրազին..., ՌՃԿԳ (1715):*

Transl.: *In memory of Baghden’s daughter Turaz... 1164 (1715).*

“An icon of St. Minas, its lower part adorned with silver... It perpetuates the memory of Rostom Hokiniants’s son Hokin... in the year 1164 (1715).”

“Two similar gilded crosses, one of them having a scene of the Crucifixion on its face and representing the Holy Virgin on its four wings... the other face of the cross shows the Holy Mother of God holding crowned Jesus in Her arms...”

*Յիշատակն յանուն մորսի Մարտիրին և կողակցոյն և որդոյն Խաչատուրին..., ՌՃԿԶ (1717) թուին:*

Transl.: *In memory of Mahtesy Mesrob and his spouse and his son Khachatur... in the year 1166 (1717).*

“...the other is engraved with the following”:

*Յանուն Շատինեանց Բաղդասարին, իր կողակցոյն...*

Transl.: *In memory of Baghdasar Shatinian [and] his spouse...*

“...it dates from the same year. Both the crosses weigh two hundred and forty-five meshkals together.”

“A silver chalice with a gilded paten... written on its lower part”:

*Յիշատակ յանուն Մանգոյին և իր կողակցոյն և իր որդի Գիորգին հոգոյ համայ... ՌՃԿԷ (1718):*

Transl.: *In memory of Mango and his spouse and for his son Giorgi’s soul... 1167 (1718).*

“A gilded icon with a scene of the Annunciation, showing the Holy Virgin and angels with flowers in front of Her. Above Her are seen God the Father and the Holy Spirit shaped like a dove. Each of the two edges of the icon is embellished with representations of the Apostles who have double-winged angels above them. Written on the lower part of the icon”:

*Յիշատակ յանուն Օրոյենց Ռոստոմի որդի Հոթինին, Ասլամազին, Բէժանին... ՌՃՀԵ (1726):*

Transl.: *In memory of Rostom Okoyants’s son Hokin, Aslamaz, Bezhnan... 1175 (1726).*

“A gilded chalice of silver without a paten... partly adorned with ornaments. Written at the edge of its base”:

*Յանուն Էզենց Բէժանին և իր որդի Ստեփանին, Մարտիրոսին և իր ծնողացն... ՌՃՀԹ (1730) թուին:*

Transl.: *In memory of Ezents Bezhnan and his son Stepan, Martiros and his parents... in the year 1179 (1730).*

“A dresser adorned with silver and covered with gilding in certain parts...”:

*Յանուն Աւետիքի որդի Ախտարխանին և ծնողացն և եղբարցն... ՌՃՂԲ (1743) թուին:*

Transl.: *In memory of Avetik’s son Akhtarkhan and his parents and brothers... in the year 1192 (1743).*

“A small gilded icon of St. Mary embellished with six tiny pieces of emerald”:

*Յանուն Մէհրաբի հայր Ենօքին... ՌՄԻԲ (1773) թուին:*

Transl.: *In memory of Mehrab’s father Yenok... in the year 1222 (1773).*

“A dresser with silver-adorned representations of John the Baptist and Stepanos Nakhavka [St. Stephen the Protomartyr], whose relics are kept inside it... The lower parts of its doors show [Sts.] Peter and Paul. The words commemorate Ketevan for the enjoyment of Father Mkrtich, 1232 (1783).”

“A Book of Hours printed in Holy Echmiatzin in 1234 (1785).”

“Two identical icons adorned with silver. Donated in memory of Yesayi Mamloyants’s son Rostom and his spouse Lalitars... 1236 (1787).”

“A large gilded chalice with its paten made in Russia. The latter bears a cross.”

*Միրզայ Գուրգէնին և Միսայէլին ... ՌՄԼԸ (1789) թուին:*

Transl.: *To Mirza Gurgen and Misael... in the year 1238 (1789).*

“An icon adorned with silver”:

*Յիշատակն Մանգոյեանց Յոհան և իր կողակից Թամարին, ՌՄԽԵ (1796):*

Transl.: *In memory of Ohan Mangoyants and his spouse Tamar, 1245 (1796).*

“A gilded icon of the Holy Virgin... The inscription is as follows”:

*Յանուն Դաւիթ Մանանովին, ՌՄԾԵ (1806) ամի:*

Transl.: *In memory of David Mananov, 1255 (1806).*

“A stole of red atlas sewn with golden threads and decorated with a tree whose branches show the twelve Apostles, with the Holy Virgin, hugging Jesus, at its top... the chest has representations of two saints below which is written”:

*Յիշատակ յանուն հանգուցեալ Գրգորիդ, Փարսադանի որդի Ջուրաբին և իր կողակից՝ Քեթեվանին... 1809 ամի, ի 26 սեպտեմբերի:*

Transl.: *In memory of the late Grigor, Parsadan’s son Zurab and his spouse Ketevan... 26 September 1809.*

“A silver cross of large dimensions... one of its faces representing the Crucifixion, with the Evangelists on its four wings... The other face of the cross shows the Holy Virgin with a crown on Her head and six-winged angels on its four wings... written in Armenian and Georgian”:

*Յիշատակ յանուն Դաւիթ Շանշինովին և իւր ծնողացն 1810 թուին:*

Transl.: *In memory of David Shanshinov and his parents in the year 1810.*

“The base is joined with the cross through three apples two of which are of the same size. On one of the apples is written: *in memory of the late spouse Barbare and Kalol, who is alive, [as well as their] daughter Sopi...*”

“A small dresser... which is adorned with silver in its lower section... and contains part of St. Gevorg’s wafer. ...Written as follows: *This wafer of St. Gevorg perpetuates the memory of Minas Simanovich, ...Margaret, Anan, Anna and their sons in the year 1259 (1810).* ...The doors of the dresser are embellished with silver on both their faces. Inwardly, one of them bears a representation of St. Gevorg, and the other an angel. Outwardly, they show the images of Sts. Peter and Paul. The dresser weighs fifty-five meshkals.”

“A stole... sewn with golden threads and decorated with crosses and flowers...”

*1823, յիշատակ է Ալադատովի դուստր Ովսանին:*

Transl.: *1823, in memory of Aladatov’s daughter Ovsan.*

“A newly-made beautiful Russian chasuble... with the following written on its silver clasps”:

*Յիշատակ յանուն Պետրոս Սարգսեանին և ծնողացն նորին... յամի 1825, ի սեպտեմբեր 5:*

Transl.: *In memory of Petros Sargissian and his parents... 5 September 1825.*

“A pair of fans shaped like six-winged seraphs... donated by the two deceased brothers Kharaziants, Harutiun and Avetis, 1828.”

“A newly-made and richly-adorned Lectionary printed in St. Petersburg in 1786 A.D. ...donated by noble Ghaytmaz Ghaytmaziants on 15 August 1831.”

“A gilded gonfalon of silver with its cross donated by Galust Bezhoiyants in the year 1831.”

“A chasuble... decorated with flowers and having silver fasteners...”

*Յիշատակ յանուն Յոհաննէս Սուրբանովին և ծնողացն նորին, 1834:*

Transl.: *In memory of Hovhannes Sultanov and his parents, 1834.*

“A dresser with a glassed face containing St. Andrew the Apostle’s skull. The donation inscription is written on its doors”:

*Յանուն Խաչատուրի որդի Պապին և իւր կողակից Թամարին... ՌՄՂԲ (1843):*

Transl.: *In memory of Khachatur’s son Pap and his spouse Tamar... 1292 (1843).*

“A silver chalice with its paten... [the original] written in Georgian along the edge of its base”:

*Յանուն Սոլաղեանց Բայենդուրի որդի Եսային...:*

Transl.: *In memory of Bayendur Solaghians’s son Yesayi...*

“Three almost identical crosses which are only slightly different from each other. One of them was donated in memory of Gabriel Poladians, his parents and his spouse Mariam; the other in memory of Dodo Ghorghanians and his son Gabriel, and the third one in memory of Mahtesy Khatin Avetikians. They weigh eighty-eight meshkals.”

“A silver vial of chrism shaped like a dome and having a cross... [the original of] the inscription is written in Georgian in memory of Shamir Begliarians.”

“A gilded manuscript Gospel embellished with silver bearing a scene of the Crucifixion on one of its faces with a representation of the Holy Saviour on the other. Its four corners show the Evangelists and double-winged angels.”

*Յանուն Օբոյեանց Բէժոյին և եղբայր Նասղիտին և իւր ընկեր գորցի Նասղիտին:*

Transl.: *In memory of Bezho Okoyants and his brother Nasghit and his friend Nasghit from Gori.*

“The silver part of the Gospel weighs one hundred and eighty-two meshkals.”

“A pair of icons representing the Holy Mother of God and enriched with silver... the words perpetuate the memory of goldsmith Machlo’s son Yesayi, his spouse Baghin [as well as] their sons Tetebo [and] Nikoghos.”

“An icon of the Holy Virgin adorned with silver and having a gilded halo. The following is written on its lower part of silver in the Armenian language, but in Georgian letters: *in memory of the late Hakob...*”

“An icon representing Holy Pontiff Nicholas...”:

*Յիշատակ Դաւիթ Մանանեանցի:*

Transl.: *In memory of David Mananians.*

“A large icon of St. Mary with Jesus in Her arms... in commemoration of Atom’s daughter Tamar...”

“Another icon of the Holy Virgin adorned with silver...”:

*Յիշատակ Գոգինեանց Թինաթինին:*

Transl.: *In memory of Tinatin Goginians.*

“An icon... donated by Galust Bezhoiyants and his widow Babarer. It weighs two hundred twenty-six and a half meshkals.”

“A pair of silver candelabra...”:

*Յիշատակ Եսայի Իզմիրեանցի:*

Transl.: *In memory of Yesayi Izmirians.*

“A pair of finely-made chandeliers of silver donated by Avetis Babanassiants.”

“Another pair of silver candelabra with their bases having serpentine edges. Donated by Harutiun Kharaziants.”

“A priestly helmet decorated with silver... written on the lower part of its base...”:

*Յիշատակ է խաչս Աղամջանեանց հանգուցեալ Գօգինի կին Մաթոյին:*

Transl.: *This cross perpetuates the memory of the late Gogin Aghamjaniant's wife Mato.*

“A *vakas* [a priestly vestment]... embellished with seven images of silver representing the Holy Saviour, the Holy Mother of God, John the Baptist and other Evangelists... [the original] written in Georgian: *in memory of Sam Shanshiniants.*”

“A Russian chasuble... donated by Avtandil Yokoyants in memory of his brother's soul. Its silver clasps were given by another person, for they bear these words: *in memory of Khanghalem's son David...*”

“A yellow chasuble... donated by Mirza Abraham Enakolopiants.”

“A pair of cuffs, one of them sewn with golden threads [and donated] in memory of Tamar, the daughter of Aghamjan's son, i.e. the late Giorgi, and her spouse, the deceased Hovhannes...”

“A pair of silver candelabra donated in memory of Mehrap's father Yenovk.”

“Three Gospels one of which is a manuscript; the other was printed in Constantinople in 1796, and the third one represents a Lectionary printed in St. Petersburg in 1786.”

“Two books called Aysmavurk: one of them was printed in Constantinople in 1651 [and donated to the church] in memory of Bezhan Okoyants and his dear ones. The other is dedicated to Ghutiasavar Amiraghians...”

## Epilogue

It is already several years since the Armenian diocese of Georgia raised the question of the restitution of several Armenian churches, situated there and appropriated by the Georgian authorities since the 1920s to 1930s, to their only legal owner, the Armenian Apostolic Church.

So far the Armenian side has presented such a demand for only 6 of the numerous Armenian churches located in Georgia, and Sourb Nshan Sourb Nikoghayosi is one of them.

This demand has not been satisfied yet, and this is due not to the stance of the state authorities on this issue, but rather to the approach of the Georgian Orthodox Church to it. The point is that they express doubts about the belonging of the church to the Armenians and its foundation by them; moreover, they have put forward the hypothesis that the Armenians built it over the foundations of a Georgian Orthodox one, thus appropriating the old Georgian monument.

Indeed, the demand advanced by the Georgian diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church is quite clear and unambiguous: it refers to the church named Sourb Nshan Sourb Nikoghayosi, which was erected between 1703 and 1720 and functioned as an Armenian Apostolic church until 1930 (at present it is still pre-

served standing). The Georgian Orthodox Church, however, keeps rejecting it, unfortunately, without substantiating its refusal with trustworthy historical sources; instead, the Georgian side has been busy making groundless statements and repeating the aforementioned viewpoint regarding the belonging of the church.

Confusing as it is, a number of Georgian historians and philologists have manifested the same attitude to the issue without having ever gone deeper into the historical documents regarding it or without even having the slightest knowledge about them.

This comes to prove that both the representatives of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the researchers defending its interests in their statements are guided not by objective scientific logic, but merely by political considerations.

Under these circumstances, the detailed analysis of the historical past of Sourb Nshan Church for both scientific circles and the public at large is a task of urgent necessity.

We hope that this research, which presents an overall and unbiased history of the church of Sourb Nshan Sourb Nikoghayosi, analysing both the well-known and newly-found sources regarding it, will shed new light on this long-disputed question and finally give an exhaustive answer to it.



DOCUMENTS  
OF ARMENIAN  
ARCHITECTURE  
**2**

ST. GEVORG  
CHURCH  
OF MUGHNI,  
TBILISI



DOCUMENTS  
OF ARMENIAN  
ARCHITECTURE  
**5**

YEREVANTSOTS  
ST. MINAS  
CHURCH,  
TBILISI



DOCUMENTS  
OF ARMENIAN  
ARCHITECTURE  
**3**

SOURB  
ASTVATZATZIN  
CHURCH  
MGRASHEN,  
TBILISI



DOCUMENTS  
OF ARMENIAN  
ARCHITECTURE  
**6**

SHAMKORETSOTS  
SOURB  
ASTVATZATZIN  
CHURCH,  
TBILISI



DOCUMENTS  
OF ARMENIAN  
ARCHITECTURE  
**4**

YEREVMAN  
SOURB KHACH  
CHURCH,  
AKHALKHEHA



DOCUMENTS  
OF ARMENIAN  
ARCHITECTURE  
**7**

SOURB  
ASTVATZATZIN  
CHURCH  
OF BETHLEHEM,  
TBILISI

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