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Samvel Ayvazian & Gagik Sargissian
THE 2008 EXCAVATIONS IN DADIVANK



p. 1

Samvel Karapetian
**NEWLY-REVEALED DATA REGARDING THE
FOUNDATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF KHATRAVANK**



p. 13

Raffi Kortoshian
**A NEWLY-FOUND CROSS-STONE (910)
FRAGMENT IN KHOTAKERATS MONASTERY**



p. 21

Samvel Karapetian
THE SECOND GENOCIDE OF AGULIS



p. 22

Raffi Kortoshian
FORGOTTEN KHENE



p. 28

Samvel Karapetian
MREN AND ITS MONUMENTS



p. 31



N 7

2012

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THE 2008 EXCAVATIONS IN DADIVANK

by Samvel Ayvazian & Gagik Sargissian

Dadivank Monastery is situated on the left bank of the river Trtu, in Upper Khachen District of historical Artsakh Province (nowadays: Shahumian District, Republic of Nagorno Karabakh). The first historiographical record mentioning it dates back to the 9th century: "...in a deep valley called Dadoyi Vank."¹ It is also called monastery of Dadu, Dad, Dade, Date, Tade, Khuta, Khota, Dotal, Arakelots and Charekdar.

political and spiritual life, Research on Armenian Architecture (RAA) NGO (at present: Foundation; Founding Director: Dr. of Architecture Armen Hakhnazarian) embarked on its restoration in 1997.

The restoration project of the monastery also envisaged excavations which were conducted between 27 May and 5 June 2008 inside one of its buildings, the church of Dad (photo 2) as a continuation of the exca-



Photo 1: Dadivank Monastic Complex from the south (photo by S. Ayvazian, 2010)

The foundation of Dadivank is traditionally traced back to the martyrdom of Dad, one of the disciples of Thaddeus the Apostle who was tortured to death in the 1st century A.D. because of his being a preacher of Christianity. Later a monastery was erected over his grave:

Thaddeus, one of the seventy disciples who went to the north, to Armenia Maior. Hearing about Abgar's death, he went back and entered Small Siunik [namely Artsakh]. He was killed due to his secret preaching, a monastery being erected in the site [of his martyrdom] and called after him.²

Highly appreciating the cultural and historical significance of Dadivank, and particularly its role in Armenian

excavations that had started in the section of its bema in 2007 (head of the expedition: archaeologist Hamlet Petrossian; architect: Samvel Ayvazian) being later provisionally stopped.

The excavations of 2008 were headed by archaeologist Gagik Sargissian (architect: Samvel Ayvazian).

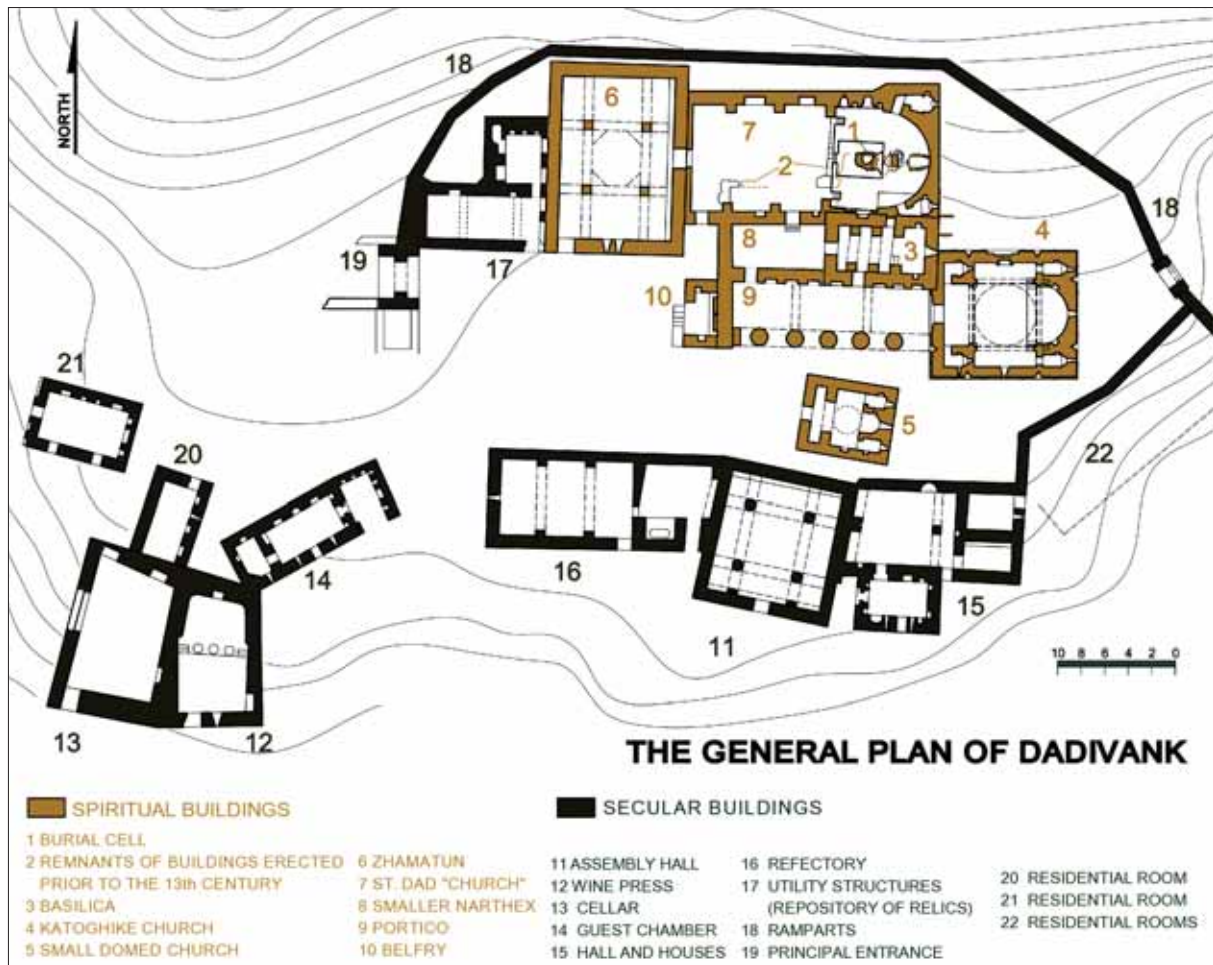
The continuation of the excavations was found necessary out of the following considerations:

a. The excavations of 2007 had revealed that the burial unclosed behind the stele situated in the centre of the sanctuary of St. Dad Church had nothing to do with St. Dad³ (photo 3); therefore, it was important to finally clarify whether his grave existed or not.

1 Movsēs Daxsurançi, *The History of the Caucasian Albanians* (London, 1961), 226.

2 Ժամանակագրություն տեսան Միխայելի Ասորաց պատրիարքի [Chronology by Assyrian Patriarch Michael] (Jerusalem, 1871), 33.

3 Պետրոսյան Հ., 2007 թ. ՀճՈՒԻ հ/կ-ին հանձնված պեղումների հաշվետվություն [H. Petrossian, A Report on the 2007 Excavations Submitted to RAA NGO]. This report also contains a decipherment of the inscription on the stele: «Թ:ՊԺ:» (1361) or «ՊԺԹ» (1370).



b. The aforementioned stele was erected over a large mass of wall with mortar backfill (photo 4), the remnant of a building constructed earlier than St. Dad Church (mid-13th century).⁴ Probably, this mass represents the vestiges of the south-western corner of that building on which the upper interior angle of the entrance is preserved with part of its tympanum. It was necessary to find out the significance of this earlier structure as well as the construction date of the angular wall unearthed south of the bema.

c. The restoration project of St. Dad Church also envisaged the paving of its hall and bema, but once this was done, the main sections of certain walls (photo 5), revealed by the formerly-opened exploring pits, would have remained under the pavement: therefore, before that work, it was necessary to find out how these walls were related to the surviving buildings of the monastery.

d. After finishing the excavations of 2007, the workers suddenly unclosed a pit resembling an empty well under the mass of mortar unearthed in front of the bema stele: the pit contained pieces of wood which they supposed might be the remains of a wooden cross (unfortunately, they took out the wood pieces without our knowledge). The archaeological finds, 27 big and 11 small pieces of wood together with 13 metallic nails, were taken to Yerevan, where we reconstructed the original object by measuring the pieces and putting them together (photo 8). It turned out to be a wooden armchair resembling a throne, the only preserved part of which is the section above the seat (photo 6): its entire back and arms, as well as the head of the right one, are missing. All the pieces were broken⁵ (as was apparent, metallic nails had been used in the junctures). The upper parts of the back and left arm have cylindrical finishing. The seat is thoroughly carved with an ornamental pattern of four furrow-shaped parallel bands which stretch longitudinally and have a row of

⁴ Հասրաթյան Մ., Հայկական ճարտարապետության Արցախի դպրոցը [M. Hasratian, Artsakh School of Armenian Architecture] (Yerevan, 1992), 50. Also see Այվազյան Ս., Գաղի վանքի հողեր շինությունների կառուցման ժամանակագրական հաջորդականությունը [S. Ayzajian, "A Chronology of the Construction of the Religious Buildings of the Monastery of Dad"], «ՊԹՀ» [Historico-Philological Journal], no. 3 (2006), 201.

⁵ The fragments of the wooden throne were cleaned, consolidated and prepared for exhibition by Lena Atoyants.



Photo 2: Dadivank Monastic Complex before its restoration (photo by S. Karapetian, 1993); photos 3-4: the burial behind the stele after the end of the excavations of 2007 (photos by S. Ayvazian, 2007); photo 5: the exploring pit close to the south-western wall pylon of the church (photo by S. Ayvazian, 2007)

circular patterns above and beneath them. The furrow-shaped decorative band is engraved on both the inner and outer sides of the throne, while the circular bands are seen only inwardly, being outwardly preserved only on the upper part of the surviving arm. These furrow-shaped and circular carvings remind of the symbols of water (as one of the elements of nature) and the sun respectively.

Similar circular patterns can also be seen in early Christian monuments, particularly on the endings and intersection points of the wings of winged crosses of the 5th to 6th centuries (such winged crosses can be seen on the entrance tympanum of the 6th-century basilica of Yereruyk; on the pilaster of the royal church of Ani (9th to 10th-centuries), on various cross-stones, etc.). An identical ornamental pattern is engraved on a cross-stone of 1158 preserved in Okhte Yeghtsy Monastery (photo 7). The part of the cross-stone (it was erected in memory of a child who died a premature death) beneath the cross is adorned with a relief of three human beings, the child between his parents. Left of the boy, his father is depicted as sitting on the

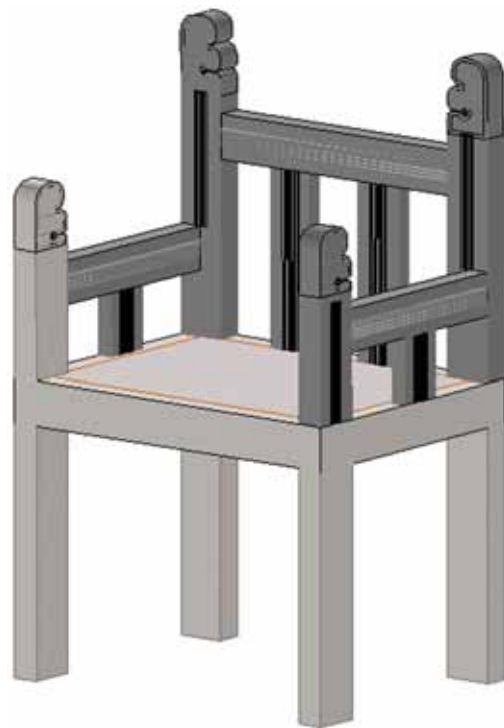
throne, and right of him, his mother is standing on a carpet. The aforementioned circular patterns are carved on this throne and carpet. The fact that the cross-stone is engraved with a chair with such ornamental patterns (they date as far back as the times of petroglyphs) allows us to trace the unclosed wooden throne back to the 12th century. However, the same decorative forms are more frequently found on older monuments, which comes to suggest that this throne might have been made even earlier than the time specified.

This archaeological find led us to the supposition that the workers might have come across some grave pit: surprising as it was, the dead person had been buried as sitting on the chair. Anyway, they had unearthed some closed cell the significance of which still remained obscure.

In order to clarify these four issues, we resumed the excavations on 27 May 2008. We found the opening leading to the aforementioned cell, outlined it and cleaned its roof, namely the aforementioned mass of mortar, on which the large mass of wall with mortar filling (beneath the stele) partly rested. What is now



Photo 6: fragments of the throne unclosed in the burial cell; photo 7: the lower part of a cross-stone of 1158 located in Okhte Yeghtsy Monastery (photo by R. Kortoshian, 2011); photo 8: the throne unclosed in the burial cell (reconstruction by S. Ayvazian, 2007)



clearly known as the cell roof had been unearthed during the excavations of 2007, but we were unable to find out its significance as the excavations temporarily stopped.

The cell turned out to have no entrance at all as it was sealed, and the opening unclosed by the workers was on the upper part of its southern wall, right beneath its roof (photo 9). In order to avoid causing much damage to the monument, we decided to enter there through its opening and widened it to such an extent as to be able to slip in.

The cell represented the following picture at the moment we entered there: it was empty with 5 to 6 rows of the undressed stonework of its walls clearly visible together with two level slabs forming its roof. The floor was covered with a smooth layer of fine sand (brought by water), with small stones and tiny pieces of wood visible in it. Near the eastern corner of the cell, the two

ends of a human lower jaw could be seen protruding. The backfill of the floor, which was as thick as 20 to 30 cm, mainly comprised water-brought fine sand, and for this reason, the preparation was carried out with a brush and partly a knife blade. The lower jaw was placed on a pile of human leg and hand bones, carefully arranged along the southern wall, in the eastern corner of the cell (photos 10, 11), together with two tiny pieces of a skull and some fragments of the wooden throne. After documenting and removing these remains, we found out that the floor level slightly descended in the eastern corner of the cell, beneath its northern edge. In this part, we unclosed whole foot bones arranged in anatomical precision (photo 12), this confirming the



Photo 9: the roof of the burial cell (photo by G. Sargissian, 2008)

supposition that the human body had been originally buried right in this tomb and not re-buried.

In the central part of the floor of the tomb, we unclosed vertebra, rib and shoulder-blade bones mixed with tiny pieces of the wooden throne. The western extremity of the cell did not retain any finds, but the back parts of the wooden chair used to lean right against its western wall: this supposition is based on the evidence provided by the workers: when one of them looked through the opening, something (namely, the wooden cross) hit his head.

Near the southern wall of the cell, we found the head of a staff (it had sloping ends) of white onyx (photos 13, 14) which had a hollow place with two holes made by metallic nails (the upper part of the staff used to be set there). Another staff with a similar head is carved in a bas relief on Archimandrite David's tombstone in Shativank (photo 15).

The archaeological finds of the burial cell also comprised two small fragments of tiling: one of them had been used for fastening a stone to the second upper row of the masonry of the southern wall.

The study of the skeleton showed that it missed some parts (photo16), namely a pelvic bone, the upper jaw as well as certain parts of the vertebral column, some rib bones and parts of the hands. Its completely preserved parts were its lower jaw, shins and feet. As



Photo 10: the bones unclosed in the east of the burial cell; photo 11: the same part after the removal of the first layer of bones; photo 12: feet bones (photos by G. Sargissian, 2008)



Photo 13: the onyx head of a staff unearthed in the burial cell; **photo 14:** the onyx head after its cleaning (photos by G. Sargissian, 2008); **photo 15:** a staff relief in Shativank (photo by R. Kortoshian, 2010)

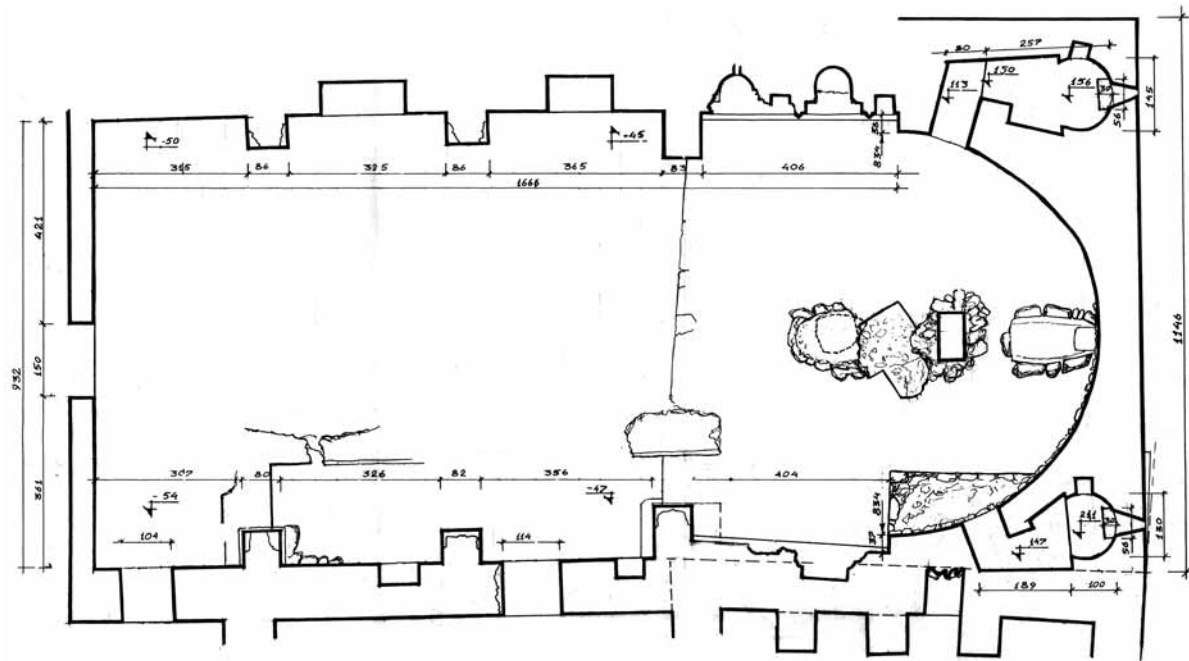
for the skull, only some 3 to 4 small pieces could be found. After taking samples of the bones, we re-buried the rest of them in the same cell and covered them with sand and polyethylene. Ruzan Mkrтчian, who holds a Ph.D. in History, carried out a preliminary anthropological examination which showed that the person buried in the cell is a man aged between 50 and 55,



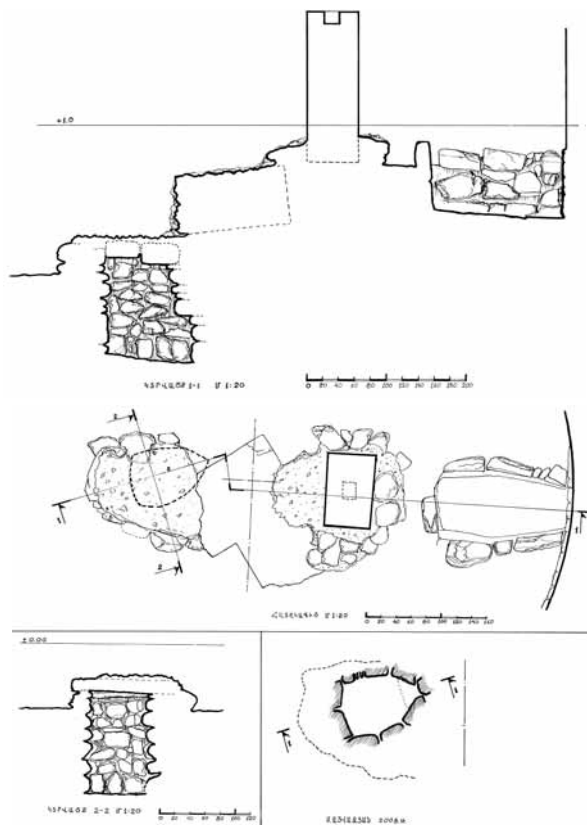
Photo 16: the bones unearthed in the burial cell (photo by G. Sargissian, 2008); **photos 17-18:** the excavation site and burial cell after the excavations (photos by S. Ayvazian, 2008)

with a height of 175 to 180 cm (he suffered from toothache).

After the measurement of the burial cell, the aforementioned opening was re-laid with the stones that had been covering it, being temporarily blanketed with oil cloth and a thin layer of soil. It was decided to include the issue of the preservation of, and tourist visits to, the mon-



The plan of St. Dad Church after the excavations (measurement by S. Ayvazian, 2008)



A northward section of the central part of the sanctuary and its plan; a cross section of the burial cell and its plan (measurement by S. Ayvazian, 2008)

ument in the restoration project of St. Dad Church (photos 17, 18).

This tomb has a remarkable structure with an oval plan in which the pointed end is directed eastward,



Photo 19: the eastern corner of the burial cell (photo by S. Ayvazian, 2008)

although its axis, which extends from the west eastward, deviates from the axis of the church to the north by 11 degrees. The cell floor is 260 cm lower than the base of the stele in the centre of the bema (the base of the stele

corresponds to the level of the bema of St. Dad Church); moreover, it is even lower than that of the small basilica (by 36 cm). The interior plan dimensions of the cell are: 107 cm on the longitudinal axis (from the east westward); 72 cm on the transversal axis; height: 132 cm. Indeed, it goes without saying that a traditional burial, with the deceased person lying on his back with his head to the west, could not have been held in a cell of these dimensions. The dead man was buried as sitting on the aforementioned wooden throne, with a staff on his right side or in his right hand (it should be remembered that the head of the staff was found close to the southern wall of the cell, namely on the right of the sitting corpse).

The tomb is built of the local undressed solid stone and sandstone without mortar. It is thoroughly dug down in soft sandstone which forms the soil proper in that part of the monastery. In its eastern part, which is narrower than the rest of the structure, the stones are placed on one another with their ends coming a little forward (photo 19). Above half of the cell height, its longitudinal dimensions diminish to 81 cm, as a result of which, it looks like an armchair in its longitudinal section, repeating the outline of the person sitting on the throne (see the drawing). This is an additional substantiation of the supposition that the cell was specially built for that burial. The tomb is covered with two slabs (thickness: 20 to 22 cm) which stretch transversally, the western of them being placed 7 cm higher than the other. Outwardly, these covering slabs have a layer of mortar over them: it has a thickness of 3 to 5 cm, comprises small stones and retains a fragment of the extreme part of a tile. Probably, the present-day roof of the cell is not its original one and was made later. As a rule, similar structures have a false vault or a dome-like ending of a stonework going with their walls. Outwardly, the upper contour of the northern wall of the burial cell is equal to the soil, while that of the southern wall is 40 cm higher than the soil: this difference may be explained by the former north-southward slant of the terrain.

The burial cell is entirely located in the centre of the vaulted space in front of the sanctuary of St. Dad Church, west of the stele. Its eastern extremity is beneath the remnants (the aforementioned wall mass with mortar filling) of a destroyed structure that was unclosed in 2007. The well-known stele of the central part of the bema of St. Dad Church was erected over these remnants (photo 9), which suggests that the burial cell was built earlier than the ruined structure and stele. As for St. Dad Church, the excavations of 2007 showed that it stood over the ruins of this destroyed build-

ing, that is to say, the church was erected later than the burial cell. The latter could not have been built later than the church as in that case, it would have been necessary to dig a pit of a depth of 260 cm in the part of its bema for the burial, something not very probable as a depth of 80 to 120 cm would have been quite sufficient to inter a dead body (as is the case with the burial behind the stele). Even if we accept that the cell was built after the church, it will be difficult to explain how the large fragment of a structure destroyed before the construction of Dad's church could have appeared over a burial cell erected after the church.

The aforementioned leads us to the conclusion that the burial cell existed before the stele, church and structure that went to ruins even earlier than the construction of these monuments, at least in the second half of the 12th century (during the ruin and devastation spread by war-lord Choli). Its volumetric composition, building technique, construction chronology and burial ritual suggest that the legend of St. Dad might have a close connection with this cell. Even if we accept that this burial cell is not St. Dad's grave or that the legend is merely a concoction, we might consider that those writing the inscription of 1224⁶ on the western facade of the cathedral meant this very tomb when mentioning Dad's grave.

According to historian A. Hakobian, the inscription «Տր Ըբաւնսս» (*Father Atanas*), carved in the vestry of St. Dad Church, can be considered as a memorial plaque over⁷ the probable grave of Prior Atanas, who was the spiritual leader of the monastery from 1260 until 1290.⁸

The remnants of the destroyed structure as well as the part of the angular wall unclosed south of the bema

⁶ For the inscription, see Գիվան հայ վիմարություն [A Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions], vol. 5 (Yerevan, 1982), 201; S. Karapetian, *Armenian Cultural Monuments in the Region of Karabakh* (Yerevan, 2001), 106.

⁷ Յակոբյան Ա., Խաչեն-Խոխանաբերդ ամրոցը եւ նրա իշխանատոհմի Թ-ԺԳ դարերում [A. Hakobian, "The Castle of Khachen-Khokhanaberd and Its Princely Family between the 9th and 13th Centuries"], «Հանդես ամսօրեայ» [*Handes Amsorea*], nos. 1-12 (Vienna-Yerevan, 2010), note 147, 136.

⁸ During our discussion with A. Hakobian, he expressed a viewpoint that the unclosed tomb retains the remains of Atanas or one of the priors of the monastery who served in the second half of the 13th century. This supposition is also shared by Gagik Sargissian, who is guided by the results of the radiocarbonic examination (SPb-63) of the deceased man's bone carried out in St. Petersburg Pedagogical University after Herzen: 1260 A.D.±55 years. Nevertheless, we do not share this thesis as the funerary cell was built prior to the construction of Dad's "church" and the ruined structure, namely before the lifetime of these people (Atanas served from 1261 until 1291).

are closely connected with the small basilica, being either part of it or having been erected with little time difference. The corner wall, which is preserved in situ, continues along the southern wall of the sanctuary of St. Dad Church (supposedly, it could reach the small basilica), proving that the church was built over this wall. Unfortunately, the exploring pit dug in this part in 2007 could not be made deeper for technical reasons to clarify the inter-relation between this wall and the small basilica, the northern entrance of which is in this very part. Had we been able to clarify this issue, it would have been easier to find out the chronological sequence of the construction of the burial cell and small basilica.

Close to the southern wall of the vaulted space in front of the sanctuary of St. Dad Church, 1.5 to 2 metres south of the burial cell, we unearthed part of a flagging of medium-size flat stones and boulders which continues to the small basilica.

The excavations conducted inside St. Dad Church unclosed the remnants of two walls of rough masonry. One of them extends transversally (photos 17, 18) beginning from the eastern wall pylon of the northern wall of the church and continuing to the eastern wall pylon of the southern wall, remaining within a metre of the latter. This wall, which is preserved to the height of

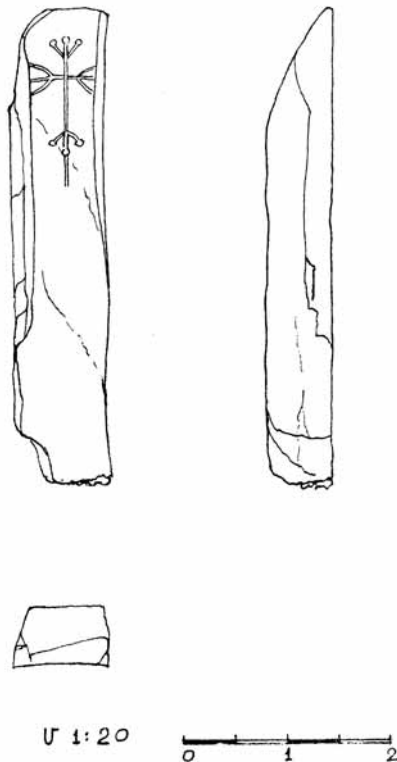
only a single row, has a layer of split stone. The other wall, which stretches longitudinally (photos 5, 20), begins from the ending of the first one with a large block of unbroken stone, and continues to the western wall pylon of the southern wall, then bends for 90 degrees and gets under it. It is impossible to find out how it continues further and it is only clear that it existed before the foundation of St. Dad Church.

East of the south-western wall pylon of the church, within 10 to 20 cm of the longitudinal wall and at a depth of 112 cm of the base of the wall pylon, we found a cross-stone (25 x 33 x 191 cm) of a smooth face (see photo 21 and the drawing) which lay right on the ground, a fact showing that it was not in its original place. In the upper part of the khachkar, its thickness gradually diminishes to 2 cm, giving it the shape of a knife. The upper part of its smooth surface is engraved with a plain cross having the form of a line, the wings of which end in three branches and have ball-shaped hollows at their ends. The lateral parts of the cross-stone are broken all along its length and there is a small broken section in its lower part. The stylistic and artistic peculiarities of the cross-stone trace it back to the period between the 11th and 12th centuries.

In order to find out the continuation of the angular wall, unearthed south of the bema of St. Dad Church in



Photos 20-21: the unclosed longitudinal wall and cross-stone (photos by S. Ayvazian, 2008)



A graphical drawing of the unearthed cross-stone (by S. Ayvazian)

2007, we opened an exploring pit of 3 sq. metres close to the eastern facade of the same monument. At a depth of about a metre, we unclosed two Christian burials in cists without tombstones (photo 22) which adjoin the main wall unclosed beneath the eastern facade of St. Dad Church (we shall enlarge on this below): it is evident that these burials were held later. These graves substantiate the viewpoint we expressed earlier,⁹ according to which, this part of the monastic complex used to retain a number of graves and probably a cemetery. The exploring pit did not show any continuation of the wall in question to the east; instead, we unclosed a retaining wall (photo 23) in the foundations of the eastern facade of St. Dad Church: it jutted out of the surface of that facade by 15 cm and was a little deviated from it, its level approximately coinciding with that of the eastern facade of the small basilica. Taking into account the differences in building technique and masonry, we can state with conviction that St. Dad Church was built after this main wall, being erected over it. This retaining wall is closely connected with the aforementioned angular wall and the small basilica: perhaps, it formed part of them. In order to further clarify this connection, we need to conduct excavations in

⁹ Ayvazian, "A Chronology," 205.



Photos 22-23: the eastern burials and the unclosed main section of the eastern wall of St. Dad Church (photos by S. Ayvazian, 2008)

this part of the monastic complex, which we decided to carry out in the next stage of the excavations. As for the exploring pit, we filled it back with soil.

During the field work, we took samples of the mortar pieces preserved in different parts of these buildings. Their comparative examination, conducted by Knarik Navasardian, a Ph.D. in History, yielded the following results: the mortar of the large wall mass under the stele of Dad and that of the wall remnants of the ruined church (they are now in the bema backfill) are identical to the mortar of the wall unclosed in 2007 in the southern corner of the sanctuary. The mortar consolidating the stele, the masonry of the wall of St. Dad

Church and that covering the roof of the burial cell differ in their structure and composition, possibly also in their chronology.

The archaeological finds yielded by the excavations, namely the wooden throne and the staff head, were handed to the History and Geology Museum of Artsakh.

To summarise, we would like to submit the results of the 2008 archaeological excavations of Dadivank Monastery with the following conclusions:

1. A cross-stone has been unclosed.
2. A cemetery has been unearthed in the area north of the cathedral and east of St. Dad Church.
3. The wall remnants unearthed inside St. Dad Church attest that before its construction in the second half of the 13th century, its site was occupied by another building the forms, volumes and functional significance of which are still to be found out.
4. The unclosed cell is a sepulchre, the oldest of the structures preserved in Dadivank Monastery (perhaps, only the small basilica can be an exception). It was specially built for the interment of the given person, and probably, the legend about St. Dad and the supposition that he had a grave within the monastery (as stated in the donation inscription of 1224 engraved on the western facade of the cathedral) are based on its existence.
5. The dead person was buried as sitting on the wooden throne, with his face eastward. Judging from the ornate throne and the head of his staff (it has sloping ends typical of the staffs of Biblical fathers), he was an eminent Christian figure, but his identity still remains moot.
6. Possibly, the cell twice opened formerly for plunder or for the purpose of taking the saint's relics.

For the first time, the tomb was broken into quite a time after the burial, when the soft tissues of the deceased person had putrefied, the skeleton had shrunk and the rodents had eaten away the legs and seat of the wooden armchair. The robbers or those taking away the holy relics mixed the bones scattered on the floor and partly broke them. The feet remaining in the depression of the eastern corner of the floor and the onyx head of the staff, which lay on the floor, exactly close to the southern wall, probably did not attract their attention, being covered with water-brought sand.

Presumably, those who entered the cell for the last time wanted to do away with the disorder reigning there after the robbers and those who had taken away the relics without bothering themselves to keep every-

thing in order. Besides, they also wanted to consolidate the cell: they carefully arranged the big bones near the eastern wall and put the lower jaw over that pile of human remains. The tile pieces found in the masonry of the cell and in the mortar backfill of its roof, which date back to the 13th century and are identical to the tiles of the small domed church, attest that for the last time, the cell opened during the construction of St. Dad Church, when the tomb was placed beneath its sanctuary (later it was sealed).

7. North of the uni-nave basilica (it is evidently an earlier structure with numerous traces of reconstruction¹⁰) adjoining St. Dad Church in the south, there used to exist a building of considerable volumes (let us remember the angular wall south of the bema of the church; the fragment beneath the stele of Dad, numerous other similar, although small, pieces as well as the main wall unclosed in the east) which either shared the building period of the basilica or formed part of it (this may be ascertained through excavations and by means of exploring pits). It was removed during the construction of St. Dad Church, its debris being used for increasing the height of its bema. It should be noted that the builders of the church were well-aware of the existence of the burial cell as the future church had been designed in such a way as to have the cell in the centre of its bema, on the axis. The remnants of the wall with mortar backfill, which belonged to the removed structure, were carefully arranged around the cell so as not to damage it.

8. At this point, we find it expedient to repeat the viewpoint expressed in different reports, namely that the church of Dad does not meet the criteria of a building known to have functioned as a church: first of all, the vaulted space in front of its sanctuary is rather long (406 cm) and so high (110 cm) that it reaches the sanctuary, something that cannot be seen in any medieval church. Even the basilicas of earlier periods and domed ones (Yeghvard, Dvin, Mren, Tekor, Bagavan, etc.) have low sanctuaries (in some cases, they consist of two parts, their first rectilinear sections being comparatively extended).

Secondly, the longitudinal (northern and southern) walls of the hall and vaulted space in front of the sanctuary retain large and small recesses (4 in the former and 6 in the latter) which are not typical of churches. The left niche in the northern wall of the vaulted space

¹⁰ Ayvazian, "A Chronology," 201-203.



Photo 24: St. Dad Church (photo by S. Ayvazian, 2009)

in front of the sanctuary is remarkable for its splendid ornamentation and a circular opening in its centre which might have borne a clay water pipe: this again puts into question the fact that the building used to serve as a church.

Thirdly, the sanctuary of the building retains a grave (unclosed in 2007), something impossible for a church.

Fourthly, the building was not completed¹¹: it either remained without a roof or was just designed to have none, whereas a church should have one by all means.

Besides, in all times churches were built in such a way as to have at least a window in the sanctuary opening from the east, which is associated with the sun and light, that is to say, the saving light coming from Christ: for this reason, churches extend from the east westward with the sanctuary in the east. In this case, the church has no windows although technically their existence was quite possible.

Finally, the building lacks an altar which is necessary for the conduct of spiritual rites. What we have in the centre of the bema is a large-size stele with cross



Architect Samvel Ayvazian and archaeologist Gagik Sargissian at the burial cell (2009)

reliefs and an inscription. Its upper part retains a hollow, the place of a cross relief once placed there. This stele could not have served as a holy altar as it has a height of 190 cm, which surpasses average human height (in fact, it should reach the chest or be slightly lower).

9. Our previous conclusion, the unearthed burial cell, the grave unclosed east of the stele in 2007 and the entrances¹² to the zhamatun, small narthex and basilica, which open to St. Dad Church, as if marking a way leading to a sacred place, give us grounds to say that this church retains the holified place around which the monastic complex was established throughout centuries, the present-day church of St. Dad serving as a sacred sepulchre.

According to the changes made to the restoration project of St. Dad Church, the unclosed burial cell is included in the section of its bema as a separate part. It communicates with the hall through steps, via the entrance opening from the bema facade. As of the present moment, most of the construction activity has been carried out in accordance with the project (photo 24).

¹¹ This is M. Hasratian's viewpoint (see **Hasratian**, 50). Also see **Ayvazian**, "A Chronology," 201.

¹² See **Ayvazian**, *ibid.*, for information about these entrances.

NEWLY-REVEALED DATA REGARDING THE FOUNDATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF KHATRAVANK

by Samvel Karapetian

Khatravank is one of those well-known monastic complexes in Artsakh the constituent buildings of which were erected and reconstructed in different periods.

It comprises several chapel-churches, a narthex, a refectory, a burial chamber, a double-floor funerary memorial and some other annexes. Perhaps, of no special architectural value as taken separately, they are of great interest as parts of the monastic complex, their history showing the stages of its construction.

In Khatravank, as well as in other monuments, the chronology of the construction of its buildings is partly revealed through the study of their junctures, which abut on each other with their walls. Fortunately, it also abounds in construction inscriptions which cast light on the history of its foundation.¹

It should be noted that the earliest dated monuments of the monastic complex are not its architectural buildings, but cross-stones of 1104,² 1167 and 1179, the surviving remnants of its destroyed cemetery.

A cross-stone of 1167 is outwardly preserved beneath an east-looking window opening from the main apse of the church, which was rebuilt in the 17th century:

«ԹՎ(ԻՆ) ՈՎԺԶ (1167), զՄխիթար | մեղաւոր յի-
շեց(է)ք»:

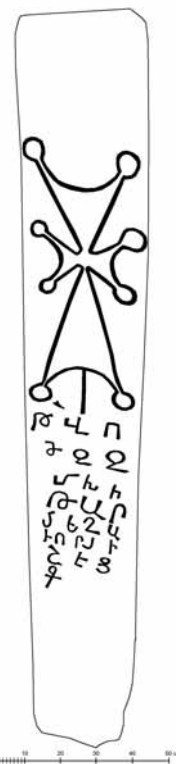
Transl.: *In the year 616 (1167). May you remember sinner Mekhitar.*

The second cross-stone is about 100 metres south of the main structures of Khatravank, in its ruined cemetery:

«ՈՒԸ (1179) քվակ/անին ... | ... | ԻՄ... | ...կանգնե-
ցաք զխաչս Ի տապանիս, յիք երկրպագէք | յիշե-
ցէք»:

Transl.: *In the year 628 (1179)... my... erected this cross[-stone] over this grave. May you remember [us] in your prayers.*

These two cross-stones attest that before the construction of the oldest preserved building of Khatravank, its small uni-nave church (below we shall substantiate that it was erected not in 1204, as is generally stated in specialised literature, but 22 years earlier, in 1182), a cemetery of cross-stones used to extend



Khatravank. A cross-stone of 1167 (photo 2011)



Khatravank. A cross-stone of 1179 (photo 2011)

1 Khatravank underwent blanket research between 1978 and 2011 thanks to the visits of a number of researchers.

2 This cross-stone was set in the tympanum of the church erected in 1204 (for further information, see the part of the article devoted to this church).



Khatravank as seen from the north-west and south-east (2011)

in this site. Part of its khachkars and tombstones were used as simply building material in the periods of cultural decadence that generally followed the establishment of foreign domination.

Thus, the oldest building of the monastic complex of Khatravank is its uni-nave church standing in the north, as revealed by its construction inscription outwardly set on its southern wall. Strange as it is, all the former

researchers failed to notice this 14-line inscription, which is preserved intact, revealing that the oldest known church of Khatravank was founded in 1182³ by Desum's daughter Seda. She also made some contribution to it, a fact showing that the newly-erected monument was not the first of the monastic structures: on the contrary, presumably, the place was already well-known as a spiritual centre although it did not have a prior yet.

The construction inscription of Seda's church reads:

Ես Սեդա դուստր Դեսումսա շինեցի զեկեղեցիս եւ ետու զՅորդաձորո սուրբ նշանս մեծ ծախիւք ի սմա, վիսսն իմ հոգոյս, արդի առաջնորդ ով լինի սմա զԱռաքելոցն տաւներն :Դ: (4) ալի ժամ իմ



հոգոյս արևաց յամեն ամի, որ խափանէ իմ մեղացն | պարտական է, ք(վի)ն :ՈԼ/Ա: (1182):

Transl.: *I, Desum's daughter Seda, built this church and gave Sourb Nshan of Hordadzor to it, spending large amounts of money in perpetuation of my soul. May he who becomes Father Superior of this [monastery] annually conduct a four-hour divine service for my soul on the Apostles' feasts. May those who hinder this atone for my sins. In the year 631 (1182).*

Published for the first time.

Another inscription casting light on the construction of the monastic complex dates from 1204. Although it has been known to the scholarly circles since 1858⁴ and was later republished twice,⁵ it still

needs some clarification. The point is that in the 1960s the members of the special expedition which was engaged in collection of inscriptions moved the fragments of the broken inscription to Yerevan without reporting any information regarding the place whence they had collected them. Nor did its first publisher say a word about the place of its location, while the second one wrote that it used to be outwardly engraved on the eastern facade of the church.⁶

Probably, S. Barkhudarian, the head of the scientific expedition which worked on the spot in the 1960s, meant the broken and already scattered pieces of the inscription when later stating that the removed inscription had been found as outwardly carved high on the central part of the eastern wall⁷ of the church.

The eastern facades of the northern⁸ and central churches of the monastery are preserved thoroughly intact, whereas that of the southern one (especially its part above the window) misses certain revetment stones so that we can conclude that the inscription in question used to belong to this very church.

The 10-line inscription, the contents of which divide it in two parts, is engraved on a stone slab of a slightly rough surface (it has been broken into five pieces). It commemorates the construction of the second church of Khatravank by Father Hovhannes, at the same time emphasizing that it was a spiritual centre, namely a monastery:

Ի ՌԾԳ (1204) բուխս ես տ(է)ր Յոհանէս շինեցի զեկեղեցիս եւ ժողովեցի զխաչ եւ զգիրք որ ի սմա եւ արկ | զՏոբացն այգին եւ զՄատաղիսն բազում աշխատութ(եամ)ք | եւ ետու զվանքս իւր ամեն սահմանաւ իմ աագ աղբարս Հասխնա եւ իւր որդեացն Հաբերքո տեսանն միջնորդութ(եամ)ք, ով խափանէ խափանեցի ի կենացն ա(ստուծոյ): Յանուն ա(ստուծոյ) այս իմ գիր է Հասխնա, որ երբ աղբերս գեկեղեցիս շինեաց ու զվանքս ինձ երես, ես | զԽնձորոբակս իւր սահմանովն ի յեկեղեցիս տուի, ով հակառակս կա ա(ստուծոյ) է հակառակ, ով զայս գիրս խափանէ, չունի թողութի(ւ)ն յա(ստուծոյ):

Transl.: *In the year 653 (1204), I, Father Hovhannes, built this church and collected crosses and books here, planting the garden of Jot through hard efforts. And I gave the monastery, together with its grounds, to my elder brother Hasan and his sons, the masters of Haterk, by the grace of God. May those who hinder this have their lives destroyed by God. In the name of God, this was written by Hasan: when my brother built this church and gave the monastery to me, I donated Khendzorobak and its grounds to it. Those opposed to this*

3 It is on the basis of this very inscription that so far specialised literature has ascribed the foundation of Khatravank to 1204 (see Մկրտչյան Շ., Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի պատմամաշխարհագրական հուշարձանները [Sh. Mkrtchian, The Historical and Architectural Monuments of Nagorno Karabakh] (Yerevan, 1985), 48; Ուլուբաբեան Բ., Հասրաբեան Մ., Խաղաղական-Խաթրավանք [B. Ulubabian, M. Hasratian, "Khadavank-Khatravank"], «Հայկազեան հայագիտական հանդես» [Haykazian Armenological Journal] 10 (Beirut, 1984), 23-24; Thierry J.-M., Eglises et couvents du Karabagh [The Churches and Convents of Karabakh] (Antelias-Lebanon, 1991), 89-90).

4 The first publisher of the inscription is S. Jalalians, whose decipherment contains certain distortions (see Ջալալեանց Մ., Դանապարհորդութիւն ի Մեծն Հայաստան [S. Jalalians, A Journey to Greater Armenia], vol. 2 (Tpphis, 1858) 230-231).

5 Բարխուտարեանց Մ., Արցախ [M. Barkhutariants, Artsakh] (Baku, 1895), 194. Also see Դիվան հայ վիմագրութեան [A Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions], vol. 5 (Yerevan, 1982), 121-122.

6 Barkhutariants, *ibid.*

7 Corpus, vol. 5, 121.

8 Besides, this inscription cannot refer to the northern church for the simple reason that it has its own construction inscription (1182) on its southern facade. As for the eastern facade of the central church, it was thoroughly rebuilt in the 17th century.

second one used to retain two adjoining cross-stones from which only the pedestals are preserved with the remnants of the crumbled cross-stones).

It was in 1225 that particularly large-scale construction activity was carried out in Khatravank: in the same year, it was decided to build a narthex in the unoccupied space between the churches of 1182 and 1204 (they are so small in dimensions that they can be named chapels). It was constructed by Dop, the sister of the well-known Armenian princes Zakare and Ivane who also built a chapel in the same year. Her building activities are commemorated in a ten-line inscription engraved on the northern facade (near the western corner) of the newly-erected monument:

Թռ(ւիմ) ՈՆԳ (1225). Ես Դոփս դուստր Ս(ա)րգ- սի, քոյր Չաքարեի եւ Իւանէի շինեցի զգաւիթս եկե- ղեցոյս եւ զմատուռս եւ սվի զաւետարանս եւ / յԱնկարակոց երկիրն եւ զիմ Հակուռենայ մատա- ղիսն յեկեղեցիս իմ հոգոյ յԱ(ստուա)ծածնիմ. / ժամն :Գ: (3) ար ինձ արարեթ, ով խափանէ չունի քոյրութիւն Ա(ստուծոյ):

Transl.: In the year 674 (1225), I, Dop, the daughter of Sargis and sister of Zakare and Ivane, built the narthex of this church together with a chapel. I gave a Gospel as well as the land of Hankabak and my newly-planted orchard in Hakuren to the church for the salvation of my soul. May you remember me for three hours during divine services on the feast of the Holy Virgin... May those who hinder it never receive atone- ment from the Lord.

Published in: **Շահխատունյանց Յ.**, Ստորագրութիւն Կաթու- ղիկէ Էջմիածնի և իննգ զաւաստն Արարատայ [**Bishop Hovhann Shakhhatunians**, A Description of Echmiatzin Cathedral and Five Districts of Ararat], vol. 2 (Echmiatzin, 1842), 363-364; **Jalalians**, A Journey, vol. 1 (Tpkhis, 1842), 207; Corpus, vol. 5, 127.

Note: Jalalians' publication of the inscription contains the same errors which are found in Shakhhatunians' (for instance, the omission



of the word «եկեղեցոյ» (this church), «Հակուռինայ զիմ մատա- ղիս» (...my newly-planted orchard in Hakuren...), etc.), which suggests that he merely confined him- self to republishing it. The compilers of the *Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions* did not decipher the toponym correctly (*Hakuden*) and their tracing does not correspond to the inscription. As for the site of Hakuren, at present its form of Hekorán is well-known to the inhabitants of Vaghuhas and Khunkutala, Martakert District, Republic of Artsakh. Stone dimensions: 35 x 47 cm.

The narthex mentioned in the inscription is the one which is still preserved standing. As for the phrase *the narthex of this church*, perhaps, it implies the sanctuary built east of the narthex and reconstructed in 1691, its construction, in fact, marking that of the central church of the monastic complex between its two churches. The chapel mentioned in the inscription is probably the annexe stand- ing in the north-western corner of the monastery.

The chapel roof retains two ornate cross-stones of 1219 and 1220 which form its ornamentation: they were probably placed there either in 1225 or a short time later.

The cross-stone of 1219 (148 x 72 cm) bears the following 8-line inscription:

Թ(վիմ) ՈՆԿ(Լ) (1219) | Ես Հասան որդի Գրիգորոյ կանգնեցի զխաչս եղբարս ինոյ Շասնասիմիմ, սվի տիրիցորոյ տունն, զԹողակերտն ի Խաղարի վանս ծառգարիար(ի) արն եկեղեցի...:

Transl.: In the year 668 (1219), I, Grigor's son Hasan, erected this cross in memory of my brother Shamsadin. I also gave a house to the priest's son and



Khatravank. Cross-stones of 1219 and 1220 (photos 1999)

Toghakert to the monastery of Khadar on Palm Sunday...church...

Published in: Corpus, vol. 5, 126.

Note: The *Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions* does not have the passage «ծառգարիլար(ի) արևն եկեղեցի...» (...on Palm Sunday...church...).

The cross-stone of 1220 (132 x 68 cm) is engraved with the following 10-line inscription:

ԹՎ(ԻՆ) | Ո՛ԿԹ (1220) | ԵՍ ԳՐԻԳՈՐ ՈՐՈՂԻ ՎԱՐ-
 ԽԱՍՄԱՅ | ՍՎԻ զԱՐԵՎՇԱՏԱՆԳ ԵՐԿԻՐՆ, ԳՈՐԱՏԱ-
 ՓԻՆ ԱՅԳԻՆ ՍՎԻ ԽԱՊԱՐԻ ՎԱՆՍ, ՍԱՐՈՒՄՆ :Ե: (5)
 ԱՐ ԺԱՄ ԻՄ ԽՈՂՈՅՍ ԱՐԱՐԱՅՔ Ա(ՈՐ)Ք ԳՈՐԳԻՆ:

Transl.: *In the year 669 (1220), I, Varham's son Grigor, gave the land of Arevshatants and the garden of Goratap to the monastery of Khadar. May a divine service be held for my soul for five hours on the feast of St. Gorgi.*

Published in: Corpus, vol. 5, 126.

Note: The *Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions* erroneously presents the toponym in the form of *Arevhatants* («զարեհատանց»). The toponym *Arevshatants* is also mentioned in another inscription found in *Khatravank* as well as in one of the lapidary inscriptions of *Sorpen*, a smooth site situated east of *Chapar Village*, *Martakert District*, *Artsakh*.

A 6-line inscription, carved between the cross wings and on the lower part of a small cross-stone (65 x 32 cm) inwardly set in the western facade of the narthex commemorates the construction of the sanctuary of the narthex-church (1225):

ՈՉԸ (1239) | ԵՍ ՎԱՐԽԱՄ ՉԻՆԵՑԻ | զԴՍՈՐԱՆՍ ԵՍ
 ԱՄԻ | ՀԱԿՐՈՒՆԵՆ :Ա: (1) | ԽԱՄԱՊԿԻ ԽՈՂ:



Transl.: 688 (1239). I, Varham, built this sanctuary and gave it a hamadik of land in Hakuren.
 Published for the first time.

This sanctuary underwent major reconstruction about four and a half centuries later, in 1691, when a great number of cross-stones and tombstones (including inscribed ones) were set in its walls both inwardly and outwardly. The fact that these funerary memorials were used as simply building material speaks of the

general cultural decadence marking the Late Middle Ages. Not only were they casually set in the walls of the rebuilt sanctuary (mostly horizontally), but they were also used as “raw material” for getting new architectural pieces: thus for instance, a tombstone of the 12th to 13th centuries, perpetuating Prince Hasan’s memory, changed to fit the part above the window opening from the sanctuary.

The initial part of its epitaph, which can be easily read at present, says:

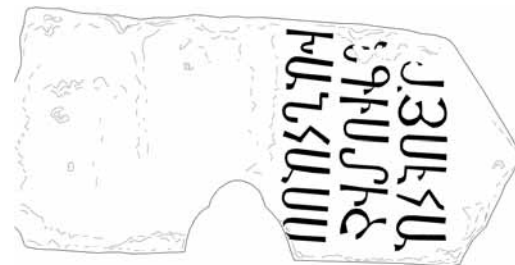
Այս է ԽԱՆԳԻՍՏ ԻՉԻՍԱՆ ՀԱՍԱՎ(ՆԱ)...

Transl.: *In this grave reposes Prince Hasan...*

Published for the first time.

Another inscription of 7 lines, engraved on the bema facade, commemorates the reconstruction of 1691:

ԹՎ(ԻՆ) ՌՃԽ (1691), | շՆՈՐԻԽԻ ԱՄԵՆԱՊՈՐ(Ի)Ն
 Ա(ՍՈՒՈՆ)Յ, մԵՔ Ն(Ն)ԱՍՏ(Ա)Գ(ԵԱ)Լ Ժ(Ա)Ն(Ա)ՅՔ
 Ք(ՐԻՍՏՈՍ)Ի | ՈՒ(Ա)Ն(Ե)Ս, Բ(Ա)ՅՍ(Ե)Պ, ԱՔ(Ա)Ն(Ա)Ս,
 Ղ(Ա)Գ(Ա)Ր Վ(Ա)ՐՊ(Ա)ՍԿ(ԵՍ)ՔՍ, ՈՐՈՅ ՍԵՆ | ՔՈՂ(Ն)Վ
 մԵԾԱՓ(Ա)Ն ԻՉԻՍ(Ա)ՆԻՆ Հ(Ա)ՍԱՆԱ Չ(Ի)Ն(Ե)Գ(Ա)ՅՔ



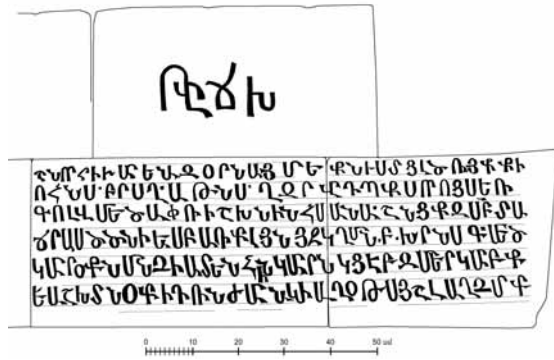
qu(n)pr tsa/d(w)ru A(s)stoa)d(w)dni t t u(n)pr
 An(w)pr(t)l(n)gn, j(w)g(w)k(n)q(d)ta(n) :Բ: (2) ju(n)-
 r(w)nu, :Գ: (3) mtd | ksm(w)ropn mhnz h wntn(h)
 hhn ksm(w)rn kg(ta)l p(w)q(n)u երկամբք | եւ աշ-
 խ(ա)տ(ա)նօք ի դ(ա)նն ժամ(ա)նակի աղօթս յ(ի)-
 շ(ե)լ աղ(ա)չ(ե)մք:

Transl.: *In the year 1140 (1691), thanks to the Almighty Lord, we, the humble servants of Christ, Archimandrites Vohanes, Barsegh, Atanas and Ghazar, descending from great prince Hasan, built this holy church of the Mother of God and Holy Apostles together with two sanctuaries on the right and three large arches up to the older arch of the middle part of the space between the sanctuary and prayer hall... with hard efforts in bitter times. We pray to remember us in your prayers.*

Published in: **Jalalians**, *A Journey*, vol. 2, 231; *Corpus*, vol. 5, 126.



Note: Apart from certain minor misreadings, the *Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions* erroneously decipheres the word «աղ(ա)չ(ե)մք» (*We pray*) as «Գազար ք(ա)հանայն» (*Priest Ghazar*), which led to further distortion of facts: according to it, Ghazar was the person who engraved the inscription.



Published in: *Corpus*, vol. 5, 125.

Note: The inscription, which traces back to the 13th century, is remarkable for its splendid large-size letters (18 cm). As compared to its publication in the *Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions*, our decipherment is more complete.

This lapidary record is first of all noteworthy as it reveals the names of two of the churches of the monastic complex, Sourb Astvatzatzin (Holy Virgin) and Sourb Arakelots (Holy Apostles). It also reports important details regarding the renovation of the two sanctuaries and three new arches reaching the older arch of the middle part of the space between the sanctuary and prayer hall.

There is another four-line inscription carved (probably, in commemoration of some building activity) on two rows of finely-finished or hewn stone on the considerably weathered outer revetment of the southern wall of the narthex-church:

...նորոգ ի :ՂԵ: (95) ...որոգ շր... | ստեղծման բարեացս ի տ(եառն)է ամէն | ...ազատ չորեքտասան...
...եւ ձեռնտութ(եամ)ք... | [որուտոր Հասս]նա Դոսիեան:

Transl.: ...repairs... with the support of Hasan's daughter Dop.

An inscription left by Princess Aspa celebrates the placing of the altar stone (in the 1960s it disappeared without any trace):

Շնորհին Բրիստոսի եւ Ասփե դուստր արքայաշուք իշխանին Տարսայիճին, քազազարմ մօրն իմոյ Մինախաթունին նպաստ եղեալ քրիստոսապսակ զլխոյ իմոյ մեծափառ իշխանին Գրիգորի ի շինութիւն լուսանուէր սուրբ եկեղեցոյս՝ կամեցաւ ի ձեռն քահանայապետին մեծի տ(եառ)ն Յօհաննիսի, զիմ յարդար ընչից կանգնեցի բնի սեղան ի զեմմանն Բրիստոսի, զի ամենայն կիրակէ և շաբաթ տօն ծննդեան և տեստնընդառաջին, գատկին, վարդավառին և ա(ստուա)ծածնին և ս(ուր)ք խաչին ինձ կատարի պատարագ զամէն եկեղեցիքս, որ և տվի զմեր խասս հողն, բլրի հանդի կապն Ա (1) բահի ջուր, թէ որ ի մերոց կամ յօտարաց զայս՝ այս եկեղեցոյս հանէ, կամ զպատարագն խափանէ՝ ի փառաց որդւոյն ա(ստուծո)յ որոշեալ եղիցի:



Transl.: *By Christ's will, I, Aspe, the daughter of majestic Prince Tarsayij and Minakhatun of royal descent, supported ...great prince Grigor in the construction of this holy church of light. Supreme Father Hovhannes had an altar stone placed in the bema with my honestly-earned means..., for which every Saturday and Sunday, on Christmas and the Presentation of the Lord, on Easter, Vardavar and on the feasts of the Holy Virgin and Holy Cross, divine service should be held in all churches. I also donated our fertile plot of land... May those from our or aliens' midst who take them away from this church or hinder the conduct of divine service be stripped of the grace of the Son of God.*

Published in: **Shakhhatuniants**, *A Description*, vol. 2, 362; **Jalaliants**, *A Journey*, vol. 1, 205-206; **Barkhutariants**, 194; *Corpus*, vol. 5, 129.

Note: The publishers of the *Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions* righteously state that this inscription cannot be found on the bema facade of the church so that its actual place is still to be clarified.

Another construction inscription which cannot be found at present used to be engraved on the small left vestry, reporting that the left of the monastic churches, which was consecrated after St. Procopius, was built by Father Superior Hovhannes:

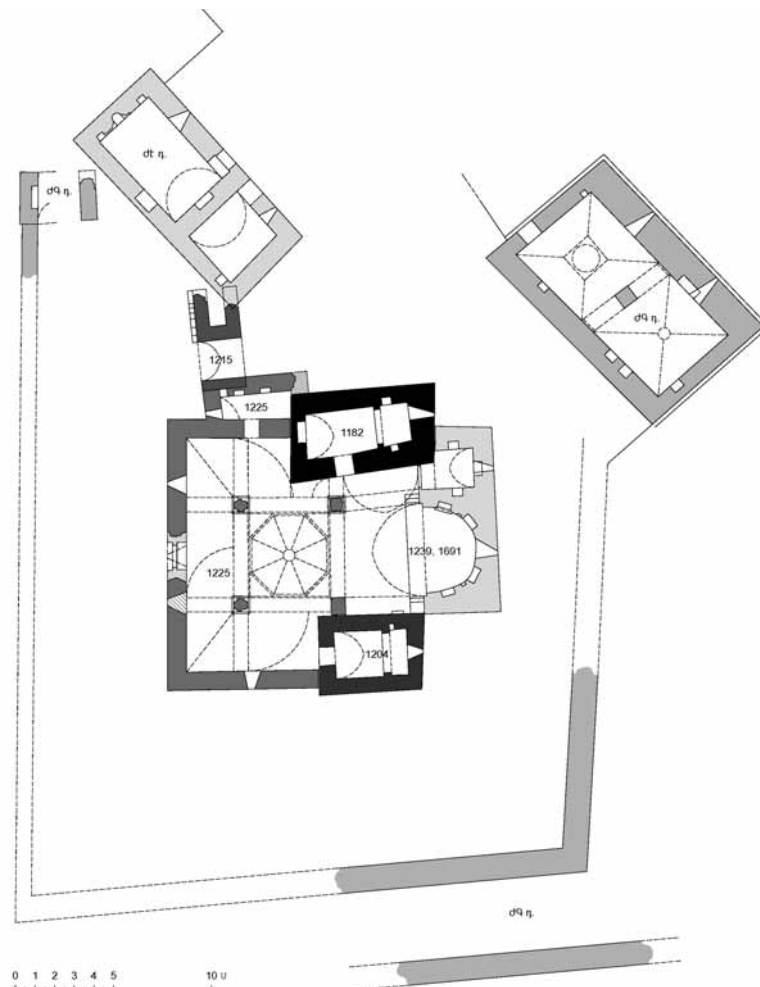
Այս ճախակողմ խորանի սուրբ Պրոպիպիոս է, զմեծ տէր Յովհաննէս շինող եկեղեցոյս որդի Դաւիթին, եղբայր մեծ իշխանին Հասանայ, աղաթս յիշեցէք:

Transl.: *This left sanctuary, named after St. Procopius, was built by Father Hovhannes, the son of Dop, the brother of great prince Hasan. May you remember him in your prayers.*

Published in: **Shakhhatuniants**, *A Description*, vol. 2, 362-363; **Jalaliants**, *A Journey*, vol. 1, 206; **Barkhutariants**, 195; *Corpus*, vol. 5, 128.

To summarise the stages of the construction activities unfolded in Khada Monastery or Khatravank, we want to underline that its oldest church was founded not in 1204, but in 1182. The monastic complex was finally completed in the course of building initiatives that lasted for almost six decades (1182 to 1239). It was partially reconstructed after an interval of four centuries and a half.

In order to provide a clearer picture of these building stages, below we are presenting the plans of the monastery as reflecting all the changes it has undergone.



The general plan of Khatravank (measurement by E. Abrahamian and S. Karapetian, 2005; prepared for publication by architect A. Hakobian, 2012)

A NEWLY-FOUND CROSS-STONE (910) FRAGMENT IN KHOTAKERATS MONASTERY

by Raffi Kortoshian

In 2010 the monastery of Khotakerats or Karkop, situated near Khachik Village, Vayots Dzor Region, Republic of Armenia, was in process of restoration, having completely changed into a building yard. Regretfully, different architectural fragments and pieces of funerary monuments were scattered there, consigned to total neglect. Among them especially noteworthy was the lower fragment of a dated cross-stone (910) engraved with a two-line clearly intelligible inscription:

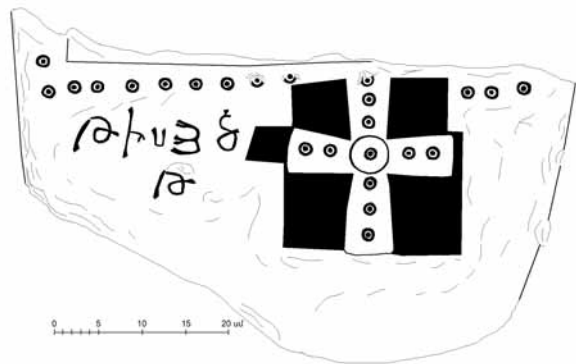
ԹԻ(Ն)Ս 3ԾԹ:

Transl.: *In the year 359 (910).*



In fact, this is one of the oldest clearly-dated khachkars preserved throughout the Republic of Armenia: prior to its discovery, the earliest cross-stone¹ known to scientific circles was the one (876) in Hortun Village Site (Ararat Region), which is only 34 years its senior.

It is noteworthy that the cross-stone fragment of Khotakerats Monastery and its oldest monument, Sourb Astvatzatzin Church, date back to the same year.²



- ¹ **Կարապետյան Ս.**, Ամենահին թվագրությամբ նորահայտ խաչքարը [S. Karapetian, “The Earliest-Dated Newly-Revealed Cross-Stone”], «Արարատ» [Ararat] (a district newspaper), no. 151, 20 December 1986, 3; *ibid.*, «Էջմիածին» [Echmiatzin], nos. 5-6 (1987), 80-81.
- ² Sourb Astvatzatzin Church of Khotakerats Monastery was erected in 910 by princess of Siunik Shushan in the site of a church that had been built by her husband, Prince Ashot of Siunik (it was destroyed by a severe earthquake in the late 800s). **Ստեփանոս Օրբելյան**, Սյունիքի պատմություն [Stepanos Orbelian, History of Siunik] (Yerevan, 1986), 214-216.

THE SECOND “GENOCIDE” OF AGULIS

by Samvel Karapetian

Since the 1988 deportation of the native Armenian population of the Autonomous Republic of Nakhijevan, the Armenians have been denied access to the region. For this reason, for about ten years, until 1998, it was almost impossible to procure any trustworthy information concerning the Armenian historical monuments situated there.

Indeed, during all this period, we could have only a gloomy foreboding regarding the state of Nakhijevan’s Armenian cultural heritage given the anti-Armenian propaganda unfolded by the Azerbaijani authorities and the numerous cases of encroachment against the local Armenian monuments, especially those of the Christian period.

In 1998 some photographs taken from the Iranian bank of the Arax exposed the destruction of the medieval Armenian cemetery of Old Jugha with bulldozers, and the public at large learnt about the acts of vandalism ongoing in Nakhijevan.

The storm of protest reached even the UNESCO, but the vandals did not stop their work: the photos of 2003 revealed that all the standing cross-stones of the site, amounting to several thousand, had been levelled to the ground.

In the summer of 2005, after having been denied access to Nakhijevan for several times in the preceding years, Scottish researcher Stephen Sim was finally permitted to enter the region. However, his work in its territory hardly lasted for three days (on the third day, the local authorities arrested and deported him), but even that short period was enough for him to reveal that the Azeris’ vandalistic acts had not been confined to only the cemetery of Jugha. Stephen Sim did not find any Armenian monument in the sites he managed to visit:

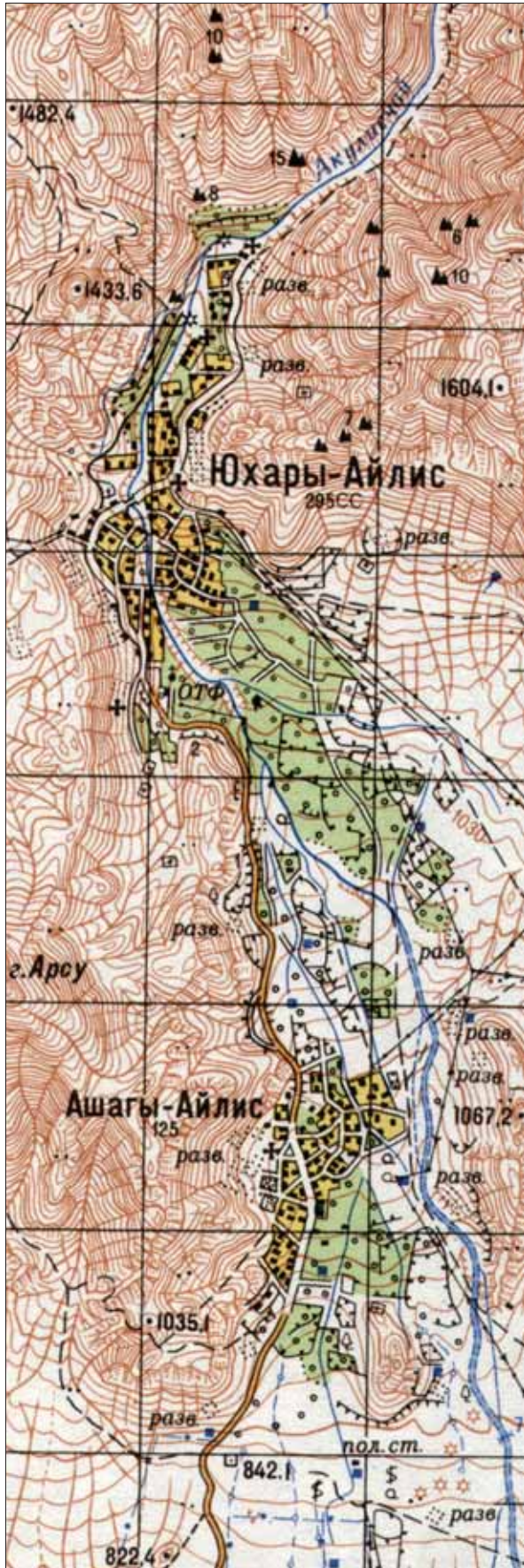
thus, for instance, he exposed the total annihilation of Abrakunis’ renowned monastery of Sourb Karapet (Holy Forerunner) and the church of Shorot Village.

Only some months later, in December 2005, the photographs taken from the Iranian side of the river Arax exposed the unprecedented barbarities committed by the Azerbaijani soldiers: armed with heavy hammers, they had crushed the overthrown cross-stones and tombstones of the cemetery of Jugha, numbering several thousand, thus levelling the world-famous cemetery to the ground.

This tragedy confirmed that the atrocities committed against the Armenian heritage throughout the region of Nakhijevan had been premeditated at state level. Despite all the efforts of the Azerbaijani side to deny their crimes and disseminate gerrymandered information in their own support, we have indisputable evidence proving their guiltiness: a photograph taken from space on 17 July 2011 shows that besides the cemetery of Jugha, the churches of Nakhijevan City and the adjacent village of Aliapat, Abrakunis Monastery,¹ eight medieval monuments (a monastery and 7 churches) in Upper and Lower Agulis and several cemeteries of thousands of tombstones have been annihilated without a single vestige left.

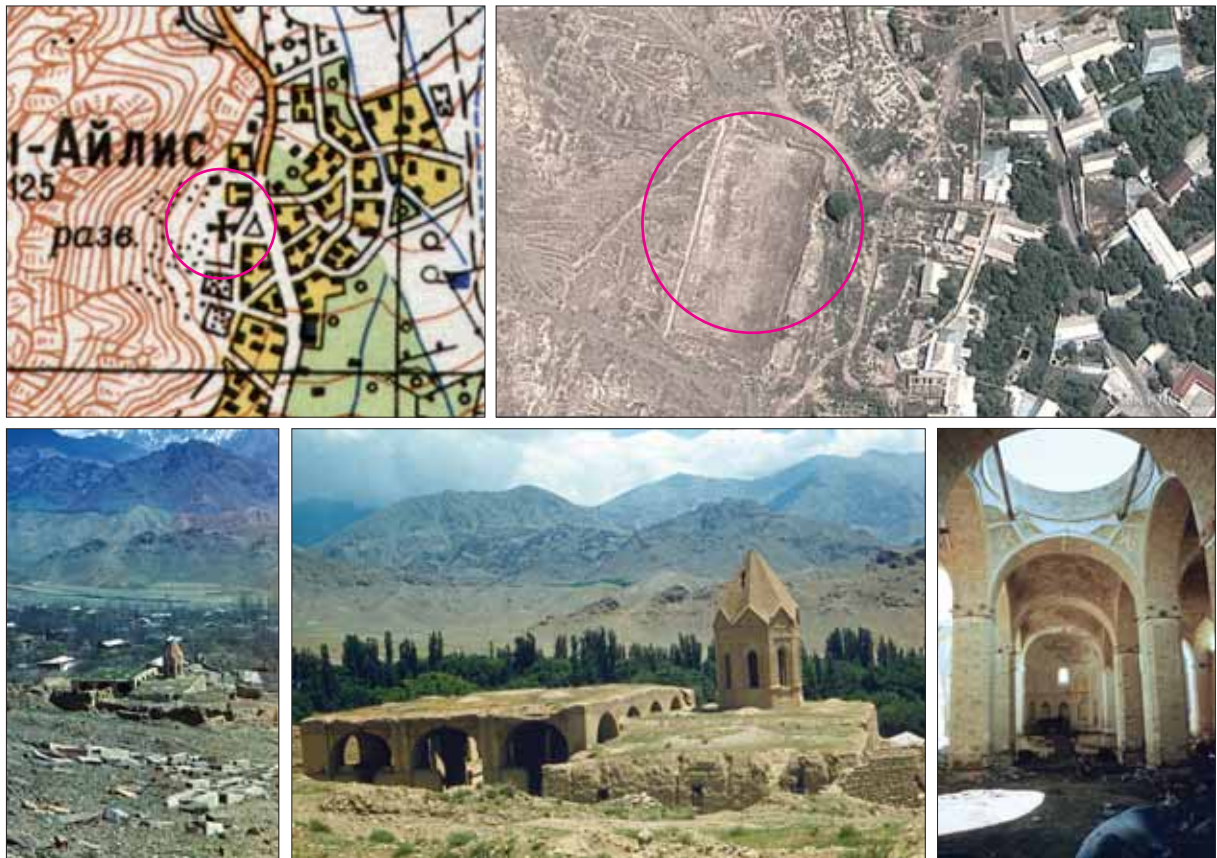
Below follow the photographs of the eight monuments in Upper and Lower Agulis which no longer exist today. At this point, we involuntarily remember Victor Hugo’s well-known phrase: “The Turks have been. Destruction everywhere.” At the same time, we want to emphasize that unlike Europe, the Armenian Homeland has not got rid of the Turks yet: they *do* still continue their existence here, ever busy with what they have been perpetrating for already many centuries...

¹ For details regarding the destruction of these monuments, see *Vardzk*, no. 3 (2011).



A detailed physical map of Upper and Lower Agulis and their neighbourhood according to the map (1:50,000) of the USSR General Military Headquarters (1977); a photo taken from space on 17 July 2011 (Google Earth)

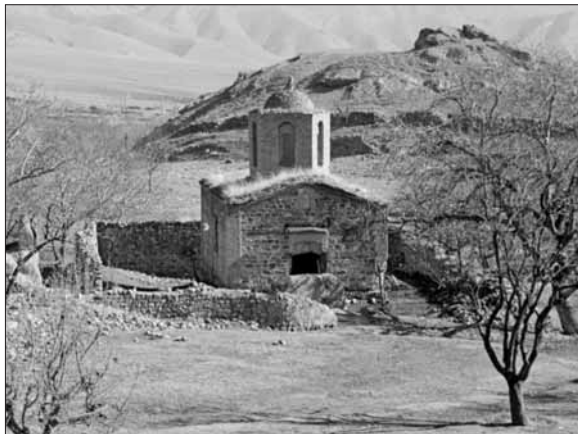
Amarayin (Sourb Nshan) and St. Stepanos (Sourb Yerrordutiun) Churches of Lower Agulis



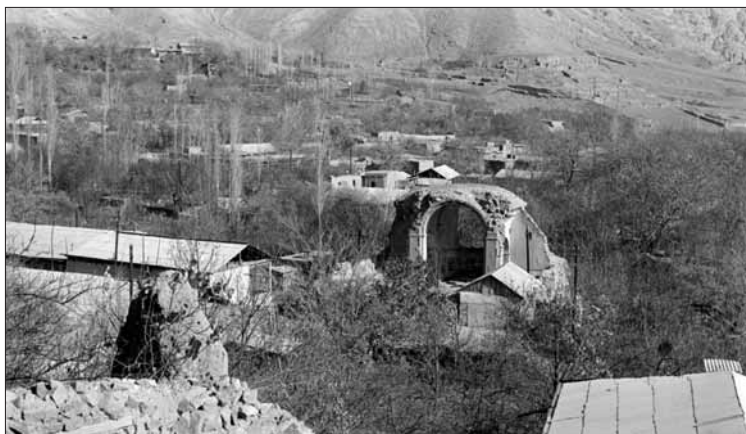
St. Hovhannes Mkrtych (John the Baptist) Church of Upper Agulis



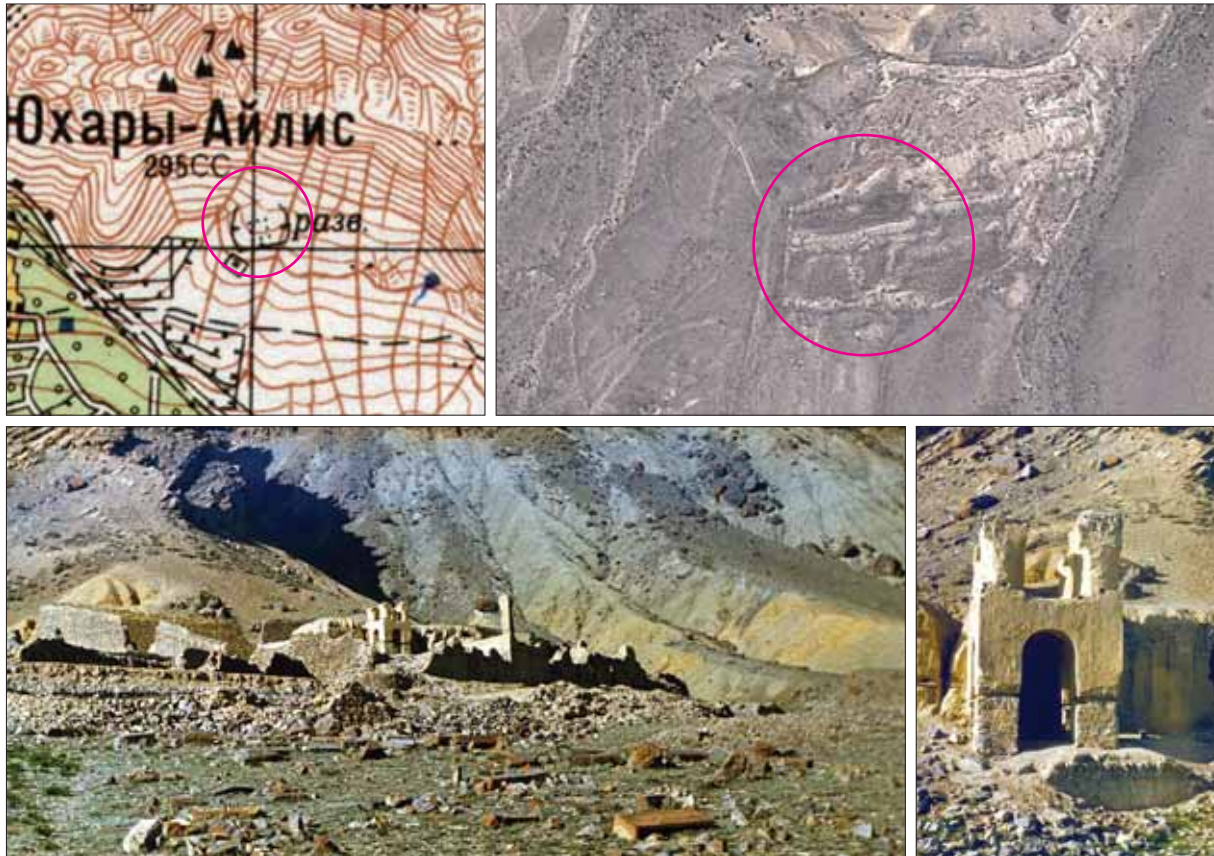
St. Hakob Hayrapet Church of Upper Agulis



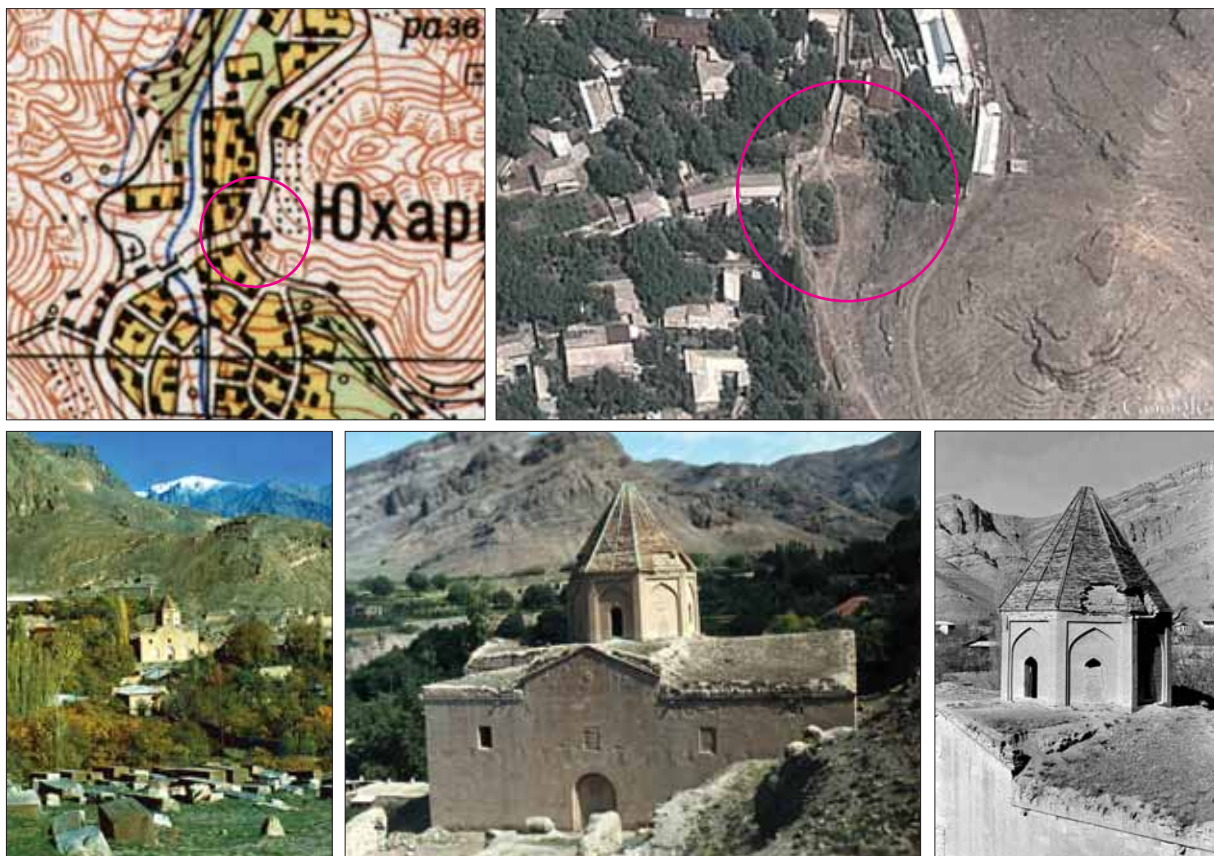
St. Shmavon Church of Upper Agulis



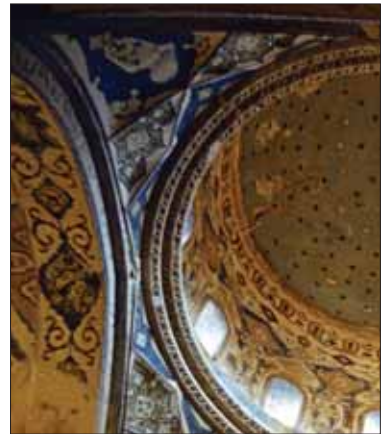
Upper Agulis. Metz Anapat Sourb Astvatzatzni (Great Cloister of the Holy Virgin)



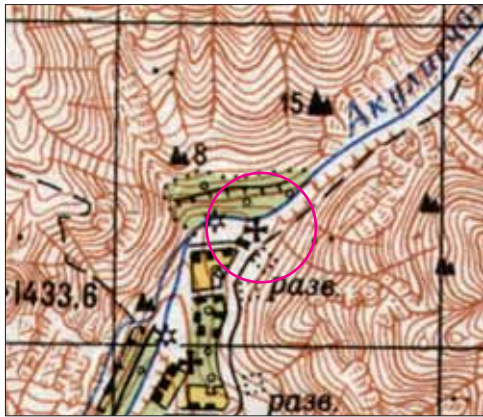
St. Christopher Church of Upper Agulis



St. Tovma Monastery of Upper Agulis



St. Stepanos Church of Upper Agulis



FORGOTTEN KHENE

by Raffi Kortoshian

The village of Khene¹ extends on a small hill near the mineral water of Sheikh Isa, east of Yagupie Village, in the north of Jeser-Sheghur District, Syria.

It has a great number of fountains and is surrounded with gardens and orchards of olive and fig trees.²

The first known reference to the name of the village is found in a two-line embossed Armenian inscription of 1804 preserved on an ecclesiastical headgear (crown) which is kept in the treasure house of Aleppo:

Նոր(ո)գ(ե)ցի սաղ(ա)վ(ա)րդս ձեռամբ տ(է)ր
Յոհանէս զահանային և տրամբ իւր կողակցուն / և
տրամբ Իտլիպու եղեալ ժողովրդոցն ի դրան
Ս(ուր)բ Կիպրիանոսի Խնէ գողիկն եկեղեց(ու)ն,
ՌՄԾԳ (1804):

Transl.: *This crown was repaired by Priest Hovhannes, with the help of his spouse and the people of Itlip in St. Kyprianos Church of Khene Village, 1253 (1804).*

Published for the first time.



Khene Village from space (Google Earth, 2010). The red circle marks the site of St. Kyprianos Church, which has been destroyed.

Father Sahak Keshishian is known to have copied two inscriptions of 1818 and 1856 in the vicinity of this village.³

In 1852 one of the inhabitants of Khene, Petros Movsessian, was ordained priest in Sis to serve his village.⁴

1 Its present-day official name is Gheneyye (غنية) and it is known as a village of Armenian converts to the Latin faith.

2 **Տէր-Ղազարեան Յ.**, Հայկական Կիլիկիա. տեղագրութիւն [H. Ter-Ghazarian, Armenian Cilicia: A Topography] (Antelias, 1966), 216-217.

3 Ibid., 217.

4 **Միսրմեան Ա.**, Պատմութիւն Հալէպի Հայոց [A. Syurmeyan, History of Aleppo Armenians], vol. 3 (Paris, 1950), 811-812.

In the 1870s, when the priest of Khene was Mesrop Nazelian,⁵ the propaganda of the Latin faith penetrated there due to the conflict between two large families, those of Joub and Hanne.

In 1871 Priest Markos Ter-Gasparian was sent to Khene to attend to the issue of an olive orchard belonging to the Holy See of Sis and examine the consequences of the activity of local pro-Latin priest Mesrop. He succeeded in keeping part of the peasants from adopting the Latin faith,⁶ but despite that, in 1876 most of them converted to it.⁷

In 1878 a Latin monastic centre was established in Khene with a church, schools for males and females, a crafts school and a public health care centre. In 1884 another Latin church was founded in the village.⁸

Priest Mesrop's pro-Latin activity was again put under consideration at one of the district meetings in Aleppo in 1878 as between 30 and 40 Armenian families had followed his example and converted to that



A view of the olive gardens of Khene once belonging to the Holy See of Sis

5 Priest Mesrop was born in Karin in 1829. Up until his death (1916), he conducted religious service in the Latin church of the village in the Armenian language (**Չոլաքեան Յ.**, Անտիոքի մերձակայ Ռուճի հովիտի հայերը [H. Cholakian, The Armenians of the Rouj Valley Close to Antioch] (Antelias, 2006), 126, 136).

6 Syurmeyan, 833.

7 «Արեւելեան մամուլ» [Arevelian Mamul], no. 49 (1906), 1199-1202.

8 **Ազեզեան Հ.**, Հայերու տեղաբաշխումը Սուրիոյ մէջ [H. Azezian, "The Distribution of Armenians in Syria"], «Լրաբեր հասարակական գիտությունների» [Messenger of Social Sciences], no. 3 (2008), 79.



A crown of 1804 kept in the treasure-house of Aleppo (photos by R. Kortoshian, 2008)

faith. Besides, Father Mesrop had appropriated the garden of olive trees belonging to the Holy See of Sis⁹ and refused to submit a report regarding it.¹⁰

A record of 1888 reveals that certain high-ranking clergymen themselves led their Apostolic flock to despair and conversion to the Latin faith due to their greediness:

Priest Grigor of Yaghupie Village has to pay 25 pieces of gold: he, however, neither has that money nor can borrow it, but who cares about it? Why did he become a priest if he is unable to pay it? He may go to Father Mesrop, who is an adherent of the Latin faith. Priest Matevos of Aramo Village is obliged to provide either gold or a promissory note; otherwise, he will be stripped of the right of wearing a chasuble under the plea that protests have been submitted against him.¹¹

In 1899 O. Mazlumian wrote the following:

Thanks to the strenuous efforts of that Franciscan who calls himself Father Emin, tempted by the large amount of gold he has spent, the three fourths of the inhabitants of Ghenia [Khene] have converted to the Latin faith together with their two priests, Fathers Mesrop and Karapet. In order to hunt for several Armenian houses, he has given up his high post in Aleppo and lives in Ghenia, where he has built a magnificent expensive monastery with an adjoining church and school. He provides education for the peasants' children, both Latin and non Latin, free of charge, preparing the offsprings of those who still cling to their former faith, for the Latin one. As for the Gregorian Armenians (if we are permitted to use this name), they have a church named St. Kyprianos. Do not look for a

school as they do not have one. Nor do they have a priest: every Sunday a priest comes from Yaghubie and conducts a religious service in Armenian, a language he himself does not understand. The Vicar of the city, Father Nerkararian, who was on a tour in the villages of these parts together with us, held a ceremony of worship in the church of this village on 8 August...¹²

In 1906 Khene had a population of 131 houses, including 5 Armenian Apostolic (their priest was Father Karapet Papazian) and 126 Armenian Latin ones (their spiritual shepherd was 80-year-old Priest Mesrop).¹³

St. Kyprianos¹⁴ Church is situated east of the Latin monastery of Khene, in the centre of the village.

Between 1902 and 1905, the Latin Armenians of Khene seized its keys for several times, but they were obliged to return them to Priest Karapet thanks to the mediation of the local authorities. Seeing that all their efforts of appropriating the church were fruitless, they destroyed its roof in the shroud of night in 1905.¹⁵

In August 1906, the issue of the renovation of the church roof was put under consideration during one of the meetings of the diocese of Beria (Aleppo). It was decided to obtain permission for its overhaul by bribing the kaymakam of Jeser-Sheghur (this task was entrusted to two inhabitants of Khene, Ibrahim Asis and Ibrahim Musa).¹⁶ Receiving permission for the beginning of the work, on 6 September of the same

⁹ The descendants of Priest Mesrop still live in the village.

¹⁰ **Syurmeyan**, 856.

¹¹ «Արձագանկ» [*Ardzagank*], no. 6 (Tiflis, 1888), 73.

¹² **Մազլումեան Օ.**, Սոնացուած անկիւններ Դընիա և Եազու-սիլիէ [**O. Mazlumian**, "Ghenia and Yagupie: Forgotten Places"], «Բիւրակն» [*Byurakn*] (1899), 635.

¹³ *Arevelian Mamul*, no. 49 (1906), 1201-1202.

¹⁴ In 2007 the villagers covered the church foundations with earth (we got this information from Avetis Ohanian in 2011).

¹⁵ *Arevelian Mamul*, no. 49 (1906), 1200, 1202.

¹⁶ National Archives of Armenia, fund 1421, list 5, file 4, p. 3.



The Latin church of Khene Village

year, Father Arsen Harutiunian arrived at Khene and made up an estimate of 5,600 kuruses. The village head, however, opposed to this initiative saying:

...the majority of the village has converted to the Latin faith... and the church belongs to the majority... the remaining 5 Armenian families do not have the right to take possession of the church...¹⁷

On 6 October 1906, the Apostolic Armenians launched legal proceedings to restore their rights, but the Latins again won as the court was under the pressure of the fathers of Tierra Santa Mission and the consul of Italy in Aleppo.¹⁸

After this fiasco, the Apostolic Armenians of Khene and Yagupie were imbued with fear:

...The Armenian people of Genia [Khene] were overcome with unspeakable terror which had affected even the people of Yagupie. The latter declared that they did not want to see Father Karapet in their village as they were very afraid: they wanted him to either reside in Jisir or move to Aleppo...¹⁹

As of 1907, Khene had 5 houses of Apostolic Armenians²⁰ whose spiritual shepherd, Priest Karapet

Papazian, lived in Aleppo.²¹ He returned only in December 1909,²² when the entire village had already converted to the Latin faith, and the teaching of Armenian had stopped at the Latin school built by the Franciscans.²³

In the 1960s Khene had 100 houses of Arabic-speaking inhabitants of Armenian origin who were adherents of the Latin faith.²⁴ In 2011²⁵ they comprised 70 houses. These people were well-aware of their Armenian roots, but they had absolutely no sense of national identity which had been replaced by that of religious identity.

One involuntarily thinks: who is to blame for the apostasy of the Apostolic population of Khene: Catholicos Mkrtych or Father Mesrop with their greediness? The peasants who were too weak to do anything? Was it the love of gold that brought the Apostolic parish of the village to destruction? We think that the Armenians' indifference was the reason, indifference that led to the disappearance of the Armenian language in a village where it had been not only spoken but also written until the mid-19th century. The language is the bulwark of the preservation of national identity and it is impossible for a nation to continue existence unprotected by it.

Nevertheless, it is not too late. We should stir up national and not religious feelings amidst the people of Khene who still remember their Armenian roots. An Armenian remains an Armenian no matter whether he is Latin or Apostolic: this should be our approach to this issue. And finally, the Armenian language, the teaching of which has stopped in Khene since 1908, should again be taught there. We are calling upon the Armenian Ministry of the Diaspora to attend to this problem and return the Armenians who have been led astray (the existence of the Armenian statehood will indeed be a guiding pharos in this initiative).

We are also addressing our appeal to the Armenian Apostolic and Armenian Catholic prelaties of the diocese of Beria: the latter had such a precedent in 1946, when the Armenian-speaking Latin community of Kesab merged into the Armenian Catholic one.

Finally, we are calling upon the Latin Armenians of Khene to return to their ancestors' and their own national identity.

21 National Archives of Armenia, fund 1421, list 5, file 6, p. 5.

22 Ibid., file 24, pp. 3-4.

23 Syurmeyan, 895-896.

24 Ter-Ghazarian, 216-217.

25 For our 2011 visit to Khene, we are grateful to the Primate of Aleppo Diocese, Bishop Shahan Sargissian, as well as our guides, Japra Pitari, the Head of the Board of the Armenian Apostolic church of Yagupie Village, and one of its members, Avetis Ohanian.

17 *Arevelian Mamul*, no. 49 (1906), 1199-1200.

18 Cholakian, 141-142.

19 Ibid., 142.

20 «Արարատ» [*Ararat*] (1907), 142.

MREN AND ITS MONUMENTS

by Samvel Karapetian

The ghost city of Mren extends on a cape of level surface stretching between the rivers Akhurian and Tekor, at an altitude of 1,260 to 1,300 metres above sea level.

A record states the following about it:

The large city site of Mren is situated in quite a spacious field-like area in the west, on the other side of the river, with a number of cross-stones, chapels and its great cathedral preserved standing there. As reported by historiographers, this church was built by David Saharuny. The Muslims of this place call it Gharabagh, but the Armenians, and particularly, the inhabitants of Bagaran, which is in the south, within about an hour, simply name it Mren.¹

Below follow some other records describing Mren:

The famous and picturesque Mren, the gardens of which abound in inscriptions: it is in the middle of an extensive plain within an hour of Bagaran.²

The city of Mren is situated east of Nakhijevan Village, within a distance of 3 hours: it is built in a level plain in the south of which the river Akhurian flows.³

Throughout the area of the lower course of the river Arpachay, the ruins of cities, churches, houses, ramparts and towers are scattered covering a whole verst. Among them the church of Mren particularly stands out for its beauty and elegant simplicity.⁴

Equally 20 versts south of each of Ani and Arpachai, there was another graveyard in an Armenian village: the ruins seem to be remarkable with some walls and a well-preserved church. It is called Merin.⁵



Mren. The location of the city site according to the map (1:25,000) of the USSR General Military Headquarters (1977); a photo taken from space (Google Earth, 2002)

The museum of Karabakh (the church of Mren) is located close to Karabakh Village, Digor.⁶

Construction Activities. The central part of the ghost city, which occupies an area of more than 2 sq. km, consists of three sections. It retains the remnants of

1 Ստորագրութիւն Կարողիկէ Էջմիածնի և իննգ զաւասացն Արարատայ, աշխատասիրութեամբ Յովհաննու Եպիսկոպոսի **Շահխաթունեանց** Շահրիարցոյ միարանի սրբոյ Էջմիածնի [A Description of Echmiatzin Cathedral and Five Districts of Ararat by **Bishop Hovhan Shakhhatunians Shahriartsy**], vol. 2 (Holy Echmiatzin, 1842), 42.

2 **Սարգսիան Ն.**, Տեղագրութիւնք ի Փոքր և ի Մեծ Հայս [N. **Sargissian**, Topography of Armenia Minor and Armenia Maior] (Venice, 1864), 194.

3 Museum of Art and Literature: G. Srvandzian Fund, section 1, file 17, p. 9. Also see **Սրապեան Կ.**, Ստորագրութիւն Կարսի շրջակայ գիւորէից և վանորէից [K. **Srapian**, "A Description of the Villages and Monasteries Near Kars"], «ԲՀԱ» [*Herald of the Armenian Archives*], no. 2 (1970), 105.

4 **Надеждин П.**, Опыт географии Кавказскаго края [P. **Nadezhdin**, A Geographical Experiment in the Region of Caucasia] (Tula, 1891), 256 (the original reads: "Все нижнее течение р. Арпачая на целья версты усеяно развалинами городовъ, храмовъ, дворцовъ, домовъ, оградъ и башень. Среди этихъ развалинь особенно выдается своей красотой и изяшной простотой Мренскій соборъ").

5 **Martel E.-A.**, La Côte d'azur russe: Riviera du Caucase [The Russian Azure Coast: The Caucasian Riviera] (Paris, 1909), 282

(the original reads: "A 20 verstes au sud d'Ani et sur l'Arpa-Tchar également, une autre ville arménienne itale, paraot-il, des ruines bien curieuses aussi, des murailles et une église bien conservée. On la nomme Merin").

6 Kars Valiliği il Turizm Müdürlüğü, Kars [Tourism Department of Kars Provincial Administration, Kars] (Ankara), 19.



Mren. The central part of the city site and its cathedral from space (Google Earth, 2002)

about 300 densely-constructed buildings (mostly dwellings) the majority of which have irregular, complicated plans. The cathedral rises almost in the centre of this area, the quarters being adjoined by plots of land which have irregular plans, too, being separated from each other by stone ramparts of no considerable height. In the bygone times of Mren's prosperity, these parcels of land were covered with orchards:

Mren consisted of two parts, one comprising the houses and other buildings, and the other the gardens...⁷

These orchards, which were probably destroyed in the 15th to 16th centuries, had been reduced to grazing lands by the mid-19th century:

...the gardens have become completely barren, now being used as pastures for cattle breeders as they are spacious and large in number, being enclosed within stone ramparts.⁸

In 1878 Primate of Kars Kyuregh Srapian wrote the following about the peculiarities of the general construction system of the city site:

Most of the local buildings stand east and north of the church, with a narrow vault rising in the west. The whole place is surrounded with gardens which are especially numerous in the south.⁹

The buildings which abound throughout the ghost city absolutely lack finely-dressed stones, which can be explained by the fact that for many centuries, the inhabitants of the nearby villages had free access there and thoroughly appropriated them:

...the houses are all levelled to the ground and only their foundations are visible. It is not surprising that no large blocks of hewn stone can be found in these heaps of stones: the city site being situated in a plain, it is easily accessed by the people of the neighbouring villages who have taken them away.¹⁰

Even at present many of the streets of the former city can be clearly spotted, which suggests that in 1878 their traces were indeed far more visible:

The streets of the city can still be distinguished amidst the semi-ruined walls of the same buildings.¹¹

A Historical Introduction. The earliest pages of the history of Mren still remain obscure. As an important inhabited place, it is first mentioned in Armenian historiography in the mid-5th century, when "...Xoren from Mren..." participated in the assembly of senior clergymen and "...honorable priests..."¹²: they had gathered to discuss the decree of Persian King of Kings Hazkert II (439 to 457).

The population of Mren suffered considerable losses during the Arab rule (754 to 775):

"The cities K'aghian, Mren, and T'alan were destroyed, 700 people were killed and 1200 were taken captive."¹³

Despite all these calamities, life continued in Mren. In 992 its church received a garden as a gift (see inscription 2) and in 1041 a royal decree exempted it from certain tributes (see inscription 5).

In 1163 the Seljuk Turks devastated Mren and slaughtered 4,000 of its inhabitants:

...as a fierce beast, he came to Mren and set its castle on fire, four thousand people being burnt alive there for Christ's sake...¹⁴

Anyway, Mren was able to recover from this disaster, too and lived a particularly active life in the second half of the 13th century.

From the mid-14th century onwards, the city start-

7 Sargissian, 195.

8 Ibid., 196.

9 Museum of Art and Literature: G. Sravandzian Fund, section 1, file 17, p. 9. Also see Srapian, "A Description," 105.

10 Sargissian, 195-196.

11 Srapian, "A Description," 106.

12 Ghazar P'arpec'i, History of the Armenians, 74. Available at: <http://rbedrosian.com/gpintro.htm>.

13 Kirakos Ganjakets'i, History of the Armenians, 64. Available at: <http://rbedrosian.com/kgtoc.html>.

14 Հատարումն պատմութեան Վարդանայ վարդապետի [History by Archimandrite Vardan] (Venice, 1862), 127.



Mren. The cathedral from the south-east (early 20th century)

ed losing its significance and was gradually deserted in the course of time. Apparently, it was never re-populated as the large ghost city does not retain any monuments erected after the 14th century.

In the following centuries, the gardens of the city site, which had been lying destroyed for already a long time, served as hayfields, while its church was reduced to a cattle-pen.

General Popko, who visited Mren after it had shifted into Russian rule as part of Kars Region in 1878, described its church as follows:

This church is the cattle-shed of Bishar-Pertobel oghli from the Kurdish community of Kaskal.¹⁵

The Armenian clergymen thought that they could return to Mren under the auspices of Christian Russia and applied to the Russian powers for permission to take possession of the derelict church of the ghost city. However, this initiative ran counter to the interests of the Russian authorities who planned to re-inhabit it with Greeks. In 1891 the following was said with this

regard:

The diocese of Kars has a lot of ruined monasteries, but that of Mren, which is especially magnificent, is preserved standing: it rises in a forsaken, uninhabited place within an hour of Bagaran's pilgrimage site of St. Gevorg and is surrounded with a large number of unoccupied plots of land. The spiritual authorities applied to the Government with a request to allocate part of them to the monastery, but they were rejected as the authorities plan to allocate these lands to the Greeks. They want to establish a Greek village here, after which our monastery may turn into a Greek one, like Sourb Arakelots Mother Church of Kars built by Abas. I attempted to clean the monastery with the help of some ploughmen from the midst of the Armenians of the neighbourhood who agreed to work free of charge. However, if the church is not properly renovated, it cannot be consecrated and divine service cannot be held there, whereas that overhaul will require several thousand roubles, which we cannot procure all by ourselves.¹⁶

On 31 November 1892, the spiritual powers of Kars declared to the Synod of Echmiatzin:

...the monastery of Mren does not have any estates and will be unable to sustain a prior if anybody is

15 Արամյան Ավետիք, Վավերագրեր Անի քաղաքի և Կարսի մարզի ներձակա վայրերի հուշարձանների պահպանության մասին [Avetik Adamian, "Documents on the Preservation of Monuments in Ani City and the Neighbourhood of Kars Region"], «ԲՀԱ» [Herald of the Armenian Archives], no. 3 (1971), 48 (the original reads: "В этом храме загоняет скот куртин Каскалинского общества Бишар-Пртобек оглы").

16 Yerevan Research Institute of Manuscripts, folder 63, document 29, p. 2.



Mren. The cathedral from the north-west (late 19th century and 2000)



Mren. The cathedral as seen from the south-west (early 20th century and 2000)



Mren. The cathedral from the south-east (photo by Bishop Sepuh Chuljian, 2011)

appointed to that post.

The spiritual powers dare inform the Holy Synod that there is some royal unoccupied parcel of land of 1,073 dessiatinas in the neighbourhood of Mren, and if Mr. Military Governor agrees to intercede before the political powers for its allocation to the monastery as its property, the father superior may easily live on its income. The Vicar of Yerevan Diocese, the Right Reverend Sukias has already applied to the Governor of Kars with his note of 30 April 1888 (no. 354) for a land of 300 dessiatinas, but he was met with rejection under the plea that the monastery of Mren is in utter deterioration and its renovation will require heavy expenses. In fact, however, it is preserved thoroughly standing and needs almost no repairs and large amounts of money. May the Holy Synod receive and keep the copies of all the letters connected with this issue for your information.¹⁷

Further correspondence shows that the church of Mren *did* finally acquire a spiritual shepherd as between 1896 and 1899, Priest Sargis Ter-Karapetian is mentioned as its prior (he wished to rent a royal land of 280 dessiatin-

nas to ameliorate his grave financial predicament).¹⁸

Some photographs taken between the 1900s and 1910s show that the responsible bodies *did* take some care of the monuments of Mren: thus, the lower parts of the walls of the cathedral, which had been hanging in the air in consequence of the removal of the finely-dressed revetment stones of the lower masonry were consolidated with new stones. The area around the portal of Sahmadin's palace, one of the monuments of the ghost city, was cleaned.

Material Heritage. The available sources show that Mren had two main stages of development throughout its history: the 7th and 13th centuries, although the period between the 10th and 11th centuries was comparatively prolific, too.

Mren's heritage of material culture is grouped according to these three periods and can be classified in the following way (based on their present-day state of preservation or trustworthy sources):

1. A cemetery of quadrilateral steles (5th to 7th centuries) and the cathedral (639 to 640);
2. Cross-stones (10th to 11th centuries) and numerous inscriptions (992, 1041, 1063 and several undated ones) on the walls of the cathedral;
3. Sahmadin's palace (1261), a uni-nave chapel (1277) and a lot of inscriptions (1251, 1273, 1284,

¹⁷ National Archives of Armenia, fund 56, list 18, file 158, p. 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, file 346, p. 78.

1288, 1295) on the walls of the cathedral.

Below we shall enlarge on these monuments starting with the older ones.

Quadrilateral Steles. Chronologically, we should first of all speak about the fragments of two quadrilateral steles (they might also be the pieces of the same one) of the 5th to 7th centuries, which substantiate the existence of a cemetery during the period specified. These funerary memorials have reached our days as broken to pieces which were set in the western and southern facades of the cathedral during the partial repairs of the 11th to 13th centuries.

The cathedral of Mren stands within 1.1 km of the right bank of the river Akhurian, at an altitude of 1,284 metres above sea level (geographical coordinates: N 40°14'31.80", E 43°39'46.54").

The first Armenian historiographer to speak about this unique masterpiece of Armenian architecture is Hovhannes Draskhanakerttsy, who lived around 300 years after its construction:

“In the same period of time, the Emperor Heraclius made Dawit' Saharuni curopalate and set him up as prince of Armenia. ...The magnificent church in the komopolis of Mren was built at his order.”¹⁹

The next record is provided by Kirakos Gandzaketsy, who unfolded his activity about 600 years after the foundation of the church:

“...Dawit' Saharuni was the marzpan for thirty years. In his day, in the year 62 A.E. [613], the cathedral of Mren was constructed.”²⁰

Samvel Anetsy almost shares these viewpoints regarding the construction time of the church:

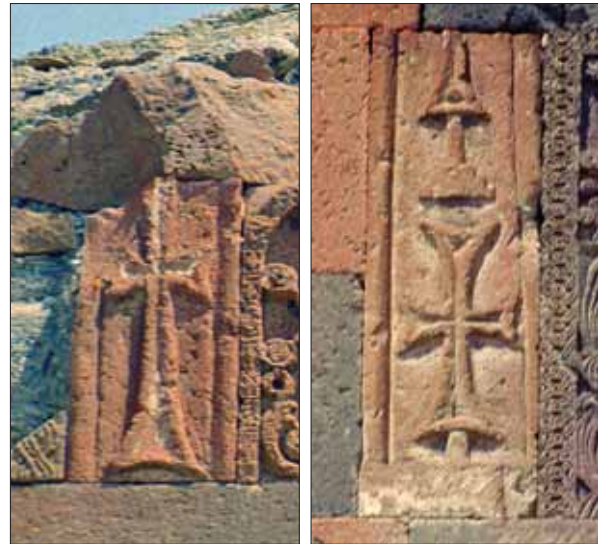
The cathedral of Mren was built [in 615].²¹

Guided by these sources, Father Nerses Sargissian wrote the following:

According to historiographers, the gorgeous cathedral of Mren was erected by David Saharuny in the 7th century, prior to the bloom of the capital of Ani.²²

This thesis, which was quite predominant in scientific circles, was rejected only after the decipherment of the construction inscription of the church engraved on its western facade:

Historiographers report that David Saharuny erected a splendid church in Mren. Present-day historians ascribe this information to the large cathedral standing in Mren, without questioning its trustworthiness. Recently, however, since the partial decipherment of its



Mren. The fragments of a quadrilateral stele outwardly set in the western and southern facades of the cathedral (photos by S. Karapetian, 2000)

inscription, this conviction has been disputed: so far it has not been read due to its height and decrepitude of the stones. Lately several names have been read in it thanks to a good-quality photograph, which revealed that this church was constructed not by David Saharuny, but by one of the descendants of the Kamsarakans' family known for their building activities. The life period of Emperor Heracle and Nerseh, the lord of Shirak and Arsharunik, does not correspond to that of David Saharuny.²³

Eventually, T. Toramanian came to the strong conviction that the church founded by Saharuny in the early 610s, as reported by historiographers, is a building unknown to scientific circles:

According to some historical records, in Mren David Saharuny erected a magnificent church the location of which remains obscure.²⁴

According to another viewpoint, the years specified by the aforementioned historiographers and those in the construction inscription simply mark the foundation and accomplishment of the same church:

The Mren Cathedral built by Prince David Saharuni (according to historians' evidence, its construction was started between 613 and 615 and completed, judging by the masons' inscription, in 639 or 640...²⁵

However, when a historiographer mentions a year connected with a monument without any details, it generally marks its completion and not foundation.

Indeed, these issues, which are of great interest,

19 Yovhannes Draxanakertc'i, *History of Armenia* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987), 31. Available at: <http://rbedrosian.com/YD/yd.html>

20 Kirakos Ganjakets'i, *History of the Armenians*, 47. Available at: <http://rbedrosian.com/kgtoc.html>

21 Սամուէլի քահանայի Անեցոյ Հատարմունքի ի գրոց պատմագրաց [A Collection of Historiographical Works Compiled by Priest Samuel Anetsy] (Vagharshapat, 1893), 78-79.

22 Sargissian, 196.

23 Թորամանյան Թ., Նյութեր հայկական ճարտարապետության պատմության [T. Toramanian, *Materials on the History of Armenian Architecture*] (Yerevan, 1942), 295.

24 Ibid., 246.

25 M. Hasratian, *Early Christian Architecture of Armenia* (Moscow, 2000), 74.



Mren. The cathedral from the north-east and east (photos by Bishop Sepuh Chuljian, 2011)

might be elucidated with greater ease if only researchers were able to properly study the standing, semi-ruined or totally destroyed monuments of the city site on the spot. Regretful as it is, none of the scholars who visited Mren were able to spend more than a day there. The studies carried out there so far have not yielded sufficient results as the lion's share of every researcher's work was given to the cathedral (it goes without saying that only this single monument requires quite long-lasting research) which leaves behind all the other monuments preserved in the ghost city. With this regard, special mention should be made of meritorious T. Toramanian's observation:

It is too insufficient to see Mren just once: one needs long days and weeks for blanket research, but unfortunately, I was not able to do so. I could have only a single day to visit Mren and study the standing cathedral.²⁶

We want to add that a photo taken from space in 2002 clearly shows that apart from the cathedral, Mren truly used to have and still has at least one (perhaps even two) large-scale church (or churches), the chapels excluded. Future research may probably confirm Toramanian's viewpoint.

One of the churches (geographical coordinates: N 40°14' 29.54", E 43°40' 00.00") of Mren is situated in a formerly-inhabited quarter 350 metres east (slightly south-eastward) of the cathedral, in the south-east of the city site. Its remnants look white because of its having been erected with mortar, this clearly differentiating them from the ruins of many other buildings in the city site. The church has a central-domed composition (approximate exterior dimensions: 20 x 23 metres).

The vestiges of the second building, which resembles a church (geographical coordinates: N 40°14' 42.12", E 43°39' 44.87"), are located in the north of Mren, being thus slightly isolated from the residential quarters. It is a circular building with a diameter of about 24 to 25 metres, and if future research reveals that it is truly a church, we might have another church



Mren. The remnants of the central-domed church from space (Google Earth, 2002)



Mren. Remnants reminding of a church of a circular plan (Google Earth, 2002)

sharing the composition of Zvartnots (we doubt its being a church as its walls are of a darker colour whereas those built with mortar look whitish).

An Architectural Description of the Cathedral. Father N. Sargissian was the first to provide an architectural description of Mren's cathedral and touch on the issue of the decipherment of its inscriptions:

The gorgeous largeness of the church, ...the thickness of its walls and great dimensions of its stones as well as its four pillars and arches make it different from other magnificent churches in Shirak which are on this side of the river Akhurian. As compared to that in Shirakavan, this one has larger dimensions... It comes second only to the cathedral of Ani: I should even say they were designed by the same architect but for the

²⁶ **Toramanian**, 295. On 19 July 2000, we were fortunate enough to visit Mren and enjoy "working" there, although our studies hardly lasted for 15 minutes: the Turkish frontier guards immediately appeared and made us leave the site (it is interesting to note that they do not fail to ban tourists from entering the site while treating the gold searchers of the neighbourhood, who keep repeatedly ransacking the ghost city, with the utmost connivance). Anyway, during that quarter of an hour, we succeeded in taking some photographs (they are put into scientific circulation for the first time) which made it possible for us to supplement this article with the tracings of all the lapidary inscriptions of the cathedral. Given the fact that its southern facade collapsed between 2005 and 2006, our collection becomes especially exclusive as it contains photographs of the cross-stones inwardly and outwardly set in this facade as well as its quadrilateral stele and outer inscriptions, all of which appeared amidst ruins after this fall (our visit to Mren became possible thanks to our guide, Vardan Samsonian, a participant of the Liberation Struggle of Artsakh).

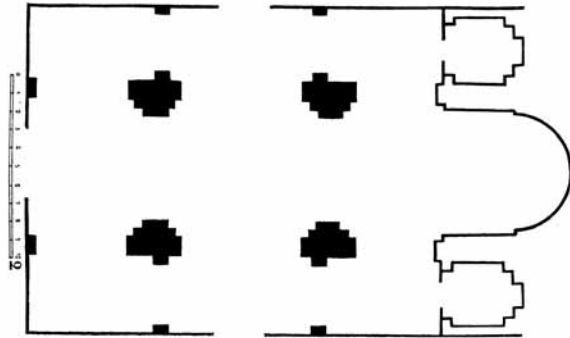
²⁷ **Sargissian**, 196.

time span separating them.²⁷

The meritorious clergyman even made an attempt to work out a plan of the cathedral.²⁸

Next comes a record by the Primate of Kars, K. Srapian, who makes only a passing reference to the cathedral but reports some information regarding its architectural features. Thus, his report of 1878 reads:

The church is built of red and dark stone... The gorgeous and majestic domed church rises in the heart of the city leaning on four columns. It has three doors in



Mren. The first measurement of the cathedral (by Father Nerses Sargissian)

the west, south and north...²⁹

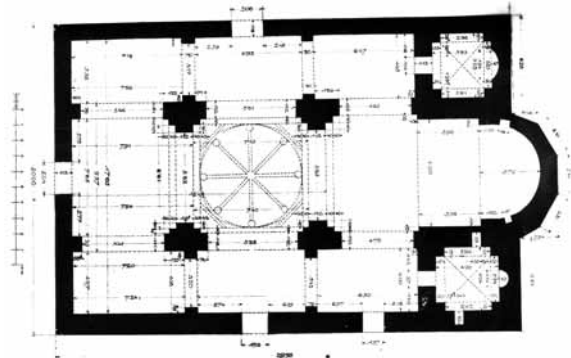
Special mention should be made of Karapet Ohanjaniants, who published an extensive article on Mren in 1881.³⁰

As compared with the other existing research works, a more detailed architectural study of the cathedral is provided by architect T. Toramanian (although it should be noted that he studied it for only a single day). His first observation is that the church was originally not a domed structure but a tri-nave basilica:

...as clearly revealed by the plan of Tekor Cathedral, that of Mren used to exactly resemble its primary building, namely it extended from the east westward with broad naves in its middle part and narrow ones laterally. It used to represent an arched building of freestanding cruciform pylons without a dome and received its present-day appearance only a long time after its initial construction.³¹ Toramanian, who is fully convinced that the cathedral was founded in the site of a pre-Christian temple, writes the following with this regard:

What about the huge monotonous structures of the

3rd or 4th centuries which have neither a regular construction inscription nor any reference in historiographical sources? Armenian historiographers mention churches that are of less importance than these buildings and even lavish words of high praise on them; moreover, they even write odes in glorification of the sanctity and piety of their founders! They did not forget to mention the church that David Saharuny erected in Mren in the 7th century although it has vanished without any vestiges left, whereas the huge church



Mren. The plan of the cathedral by Toros Toramanian

erected (better to say, it replaced another, earlier structure) right close to it by a member of the Kamsarakans' family is not referred to at all! Why? Did our historiographers want to consign the origin of these monuments to oblivion or were they truly not erected in their times? This last supposition seems more probable: the historiographers of both the 7th and 5th to 6th centuries keep total silence about a number of cathedrals of huge dimensions: they only mention the names and locations of the churches built in their own times, never making at least a passing reference to one or two of the others. It is as clear as day that they existed before the days of our historiographers of the 5th to 6th centuries, so why should they feel obliged to write anything about them?

Can we not see the clear imprint of heathen Armenian temples on this kind of ancient churches which are very similar to the places of worship of Greeks and Romans once sharing the faith of pagan Armenians?³²

Toramanian also adds:

...if Yereruyk, Mren and others like them bear the evident imprint of having formerly been heathen temples, it will not be strange to suppose that they underwent changes later than their predecessors, being modified to meet the demands of Christianity.³³

Truly, the cathedral of Mren is one of those monuments which greatly add to the glory of old Armenian architecture.³⁴ Indeed, it can be compared with other

28 The first schematic plan of the cathedral, attempted by N. Sargissian (see Sargissian, 195), was later republished by Gh. Alishan (see Ալիշան Վ., Շիրակ [Gh. Alishan, Shirak] (Venice, 1881), 137).

29 Museum of Art and Literature: G. Srvandzian Fund, section 1, file 17, p. 9-10. Also see Srapian, "A Description," 105.

30 Յովհաննջանյանց Կ., Սրբն [K. Hovhanjaniants, "Mren"], «Մերոյ Հայաստանի» [Meghu Hayastani], no. 143, 25 July 1881, 1-2; no. 146, 29 July 1881, 1-2.

31 Toramanian, 201.

32 Ibid., 210.

33 Ibid., 211.

34 Ibid., 295.

valuable monuments of the same period:

Some gorgeous specimens of the style of basilica are the cathedrals erected by Grigor Mamikonian in Aruj; by Kamsarakan in Mren, and by Catholicos Yezr near Echmiatzin (St. Gayane Monastery). A novelty typical of all these churches is the absence of rooms in the west, while those in the east ...extend from the east westward instead of representing equilateral squares, as was typical of the previous century.³⁵

The following record reveals some of the peculiarities of the cathedral of Mren:

What is stranger and contrary to the traditional rules of Armenian churches is that the semi-circular sanctuary of the cathedral of Mren has three large windows: perhaps, this is the first and last specimen of such a sanctuary among Armenian churches: it is directly influenced by the sanctuary of St. Sofia Church in Constantinople.³⁶

Indeed, Toramanian's evaluation of the three windows opening from the sanctuary is a little surprising as the famous scholar was of course well familiar with St. Grigor of Aruj, the cathedral of Talin, St. Gevorg of Artik, St. Hovhannes of Bagavan, and finally, St. Hripsime of Vagharshapat, all of which have three windows opening from the sanctuary. This feature is quite typical of churches of Chalcedonian faith, which was officially professed in Armenia during the period between the days of Catholicoses Yezr and Hovhan Odznetsy (although it had already spread to the country even before the former's days). In this context, there is nothing strange about the fact that the cathedral of Mren, which dates back to the 7th century, contains elements coming from the ideology and architecture of a faith that was contrary to the traditional rules of Armenian churches.³⁷

Toramanian further makes the following observation:

A peculiar feature of Mren's cathedral is that its semi-circular apse juts out in the east. As is apparent from all cruciform churches of the 7th century, the outward accentuation of semi-circular apses was a novelty which also influenced the cathedral of Mren. However, it remains obscure how long that innovation lasted...³⁸

It should be noted, however, that this so-called novelty was not typical of only the 7th century and is also

³⁵ Ibid., 125.

³⁶ Ibid., 297.

³⁷ Referring to A. Yeremian, Dr. M. Hasratian writes the following relating to the three windows opening from the sanctuary of the cathedral: *The polyhedral apse alone protrudes outward and is illuminated through three windows, a typical sign of Catholicos Eyr, its builder, being guided by Chalcedonian principles* (A. Yeremian). See **Hasratian**, 75.

³⁸ **Toramanian**, 214.

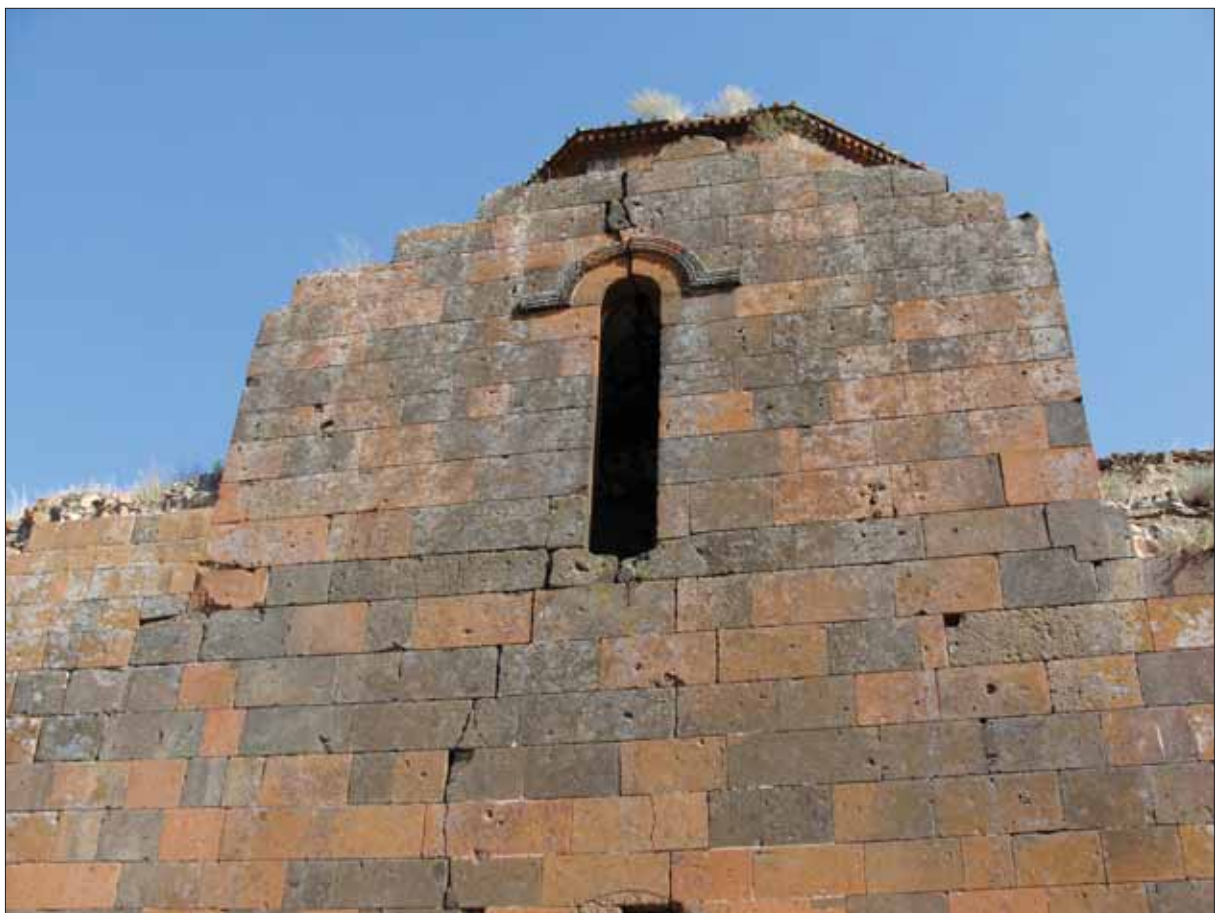


Mren. Crowns of windows opening from the southern (2000) and northern (photo by Bishop Sepuh Chuljian, 2011) facades of the cathedral; a frame

manifest in a great number of religious structures dating as far back as the 4th to 5th centuries.³⁹ Therefore, the following statement by the meritorious scholar does not sound convincing at all:

As for the jutting semi-circular apse of Mren Cathedral, I should note that it is one of the rare specimens of the accentuation of the apse in the eastern wall

³⁹ See their specimens in: **Hasratian**, 195-196, 198-204, 224-227, 256-259.



Mren. Partial views of the western and northern facades of the cathedral (photos by Bishop Sepuh Chuljian, 2011)

in 7th-century churches of a long square plan. Most presumably, the apse was outwardly accentuated in the 9th or 10th century, this being followed by the establishment of the practice of three jutting apses. In order to get convinced of this, one needs just cast an examining look onto the outer depth of the apse which exceeds that of ordinary apses by 1.5 times. One day they just pulled down the eastern wall and accentuated it probably for want of greater depth or simply for making the apse visible from the exterior. The roofs of the rooms located on either side of the apse bear the imprint of modern art: they have vaults of the voute darete style and hardly date back to 12th-century Armenian art...⁴⁰

Like many other churches, the cathedral of Mren had a vaulted room beneath its sanctuary:

Several churches have some underground space underneath their sanctuaries, and this is true of the church of Mren...⁴¹

At present this chamber lies in ruins as a result of the actions of gold searchers.

Judging from the available photographs, the arches of the church truly look semi-circular. T. Toramanian wrote the following about their composition:

...it is only the arches of the church of Mren that look exactly semi-circular at first sight, although they have some pointedness at the top (it is so inconsiderable that can hardly be discerned).⁴²

As far as the roof of the cathedral is concerned, it should be noted that its octahedral spire still bears considerable parts of its original (7th-century) high-quality tiling:

That in times bygone people had perfect command of the ways of getting brick and burning it is substantiated by the tiles of a number of ancient buildings which are still preserved standing: Mren, Ashtarak, Bagaran, Tekor, Zvartnots and others: not only are they perfectly baked but they are also wonderfully finished and do not allow any leakage.⁴³

Ashkharbek Kalantar, who visited Mren in 1920, reports some interesting information regarding the tiling of the cathedral:

Fortunately, the primary tiling of the dome of Mren is still preserved. Besides, the tiles of the dome are not flat but semi-round, like a circle divided in two. A spate of tile fragments were scattered around St. Teodoros of Bagaran, also including flat ones: it is clear that the roof of its dome resembled that of Mren.⁴⁴

The church underwent considerable repairs in the



The vaulted room beneath the sanctuary of the cathedral, which has been destroyed by treasure searchers (photos by Bishop Sepuh Chuljian, 2011)

13th century, their traces being especially evident on its southern (both inwardly and outwardly) and western (only externally) facades. These acts of overhaul are commemorated in a number of records:

More than half of the southern wall of Mren's cathedral has been thoroughly renovated... Now the same wall is endangered.⁴⁵

For some reason or another, it turned out necessary to repair the outer masonry of the western facade in the 13th century. Some stones of this facade were removed for the purpose of setting a number of cross-stones of varying dimensions in the wall, which was carried out very skillfully. The khachkars of the 10th to 11th centuries still remain completely intact, as an integral part of the wall.⁴⁶ Near the western corner of the southern facade, from the crown to the door arch (in the western facade as well), the wall was broken open at a width of four to five metres, the removed stones being replaced by new ones. This destruction or modification does not at all look like the renovation of some old or damaged part: the impression is that this removal and re-laying of stones were deliberately carried out to get rid of

40 Toramanian, 216.

41 Ibid., 149.

42 Ibid., 180.

43 Ibid., 142.

44 Քալանթար Ա., Հայաստանի քարե դարից միջնադար, ԵՃ [A. Kalantar, Armenia: From the Stone Age to the Middle Ages, in: Works], vol. 4 (Yerevan, 2007), 192.

45 Toramanian, 133.

46 Ibid., 296.



Mren. The interior of the cathedral to the west (photo 2000)

some record or another unpleasant stuff. You can get convinced of the truthfulness of these words if you examine the wall: you will see that large blocks of stone which are still preserved intact have been hewn for new stones to be set on them. Probably, this change was carried out in the 13th century as that part retains some inscriptions the oldest of which does not date back to a period earlier than the year 700.⁴⁷

The cross-stones set in the eastern and southern walls of Mren's cathedral used to stand over some graves of the 10th century: they were just removed and brought here. Probably, they perpetuated the memory of the family of the person who implemented the overhaul of the cathedral; therefore, it must have been renovated after the mid-10th century, if not much later. Possibly, the pillars of its corners date back to the period following the middle of the 10th century.⁴⁸

A. Kalantar writes the following regarding the repairs of the monument:

The church of Mren repeatedly underwent renovation. Its walls, particularly the western (outwardly) and southern (both externally and internally) ones, bear a spate of cross-stones of a wide variety all of which are superb specimens. Apparently, the surprising relief of the tympanum of the western wall used to be surmounted by a large relief which probably had a circular shape (at present only its meagre remnants are preserved with a frame piece). Much has changed in many parts of the church. The initial and concluding parts of its construction inscription, each of them carved on a block of stone, have been replaced by khachkars.⁴⁹

On the whole, the replacement of the finely-dressed revetment stones with khachkars during the overhauls broke the monotony of the wall and it is difficult to assess this fact from an artistic point of view. According to an opinion, the 10th-century cross-stones, set at a height of four metres in the southern wall of the church, as elements of ornamentation, add something disagreeable to the inner harmony of the monument.⁵⁰

Inwardly, the church was entirely plastered, some murals being still spotted here and there. The medalion-like icons following one another on the southern side of the concha of the apse are in a more or less good state, three of them being thoroughly preserved and one only partially:

The semi-circular apse of the sanctuary is plastered, with the outlined reliefs of the apostles carved in clear

lines (this work remains unfinished).⁵¹

The inner ornamentation of the church is especially remarkable for its murals, the outer one standing out for the window crowns (those of the windows opening from the vestries eastward represent dragons in embrace), cornice bands, and particularly, the tympanums of the northern and western entrances. Indeed, mention should also be made of the numerous cross-stones set in the southern and western walls of the church in the 13th century.

The southern entrance tympanum of the church has simpler ornamentation comprising an equal-winged cross below a circular frame in the centre of the smooth surface of the stone. The tympanums of the northern and western entrances abound in splendid high reliefs which were first described by Father N. Sargissian:

Its high reliefs are on the northern and western doors: the former is enriched with a saddled steed adjoined by a man kneeling before a cross rising on a post. There is also a child and a bearded old man in a long tunic holding a long pouch, both of them in a kneeling position. Then comes a tree. The western door is adorned with angels, followed by six male figures beneath them, some of them holding books.⁵²

In 1878 the Primate of Kars showed some interest in these high reliefs:

...the western door is engraved with six figures above whom two angels can be seen, with their wings outstretched. The southern door is embellished with a horse, a person holding a flag with a cross, a huddled up human figure, another with a censer as well as a tree of seven branches.⁵³

Another record states:

...another group of reliefs can be seen in the cathedral of Mren, where they depict secular people, one of them, a prince, wearing a headgear like a diadem.⁵⁴

In 1881 K. Ohanjaniants gave the following description of the ornamental reliefs of the western entrance of the cathedral:

...it is decorated with 5 salient figures of a height of almost an arshin, three of them, which are in middle, depicting the three Evangelists holding God's words. Those on the right and left seem angels who point to the Saviour's disciples, as if urging obedience to the Lord's word. Below their high, semi-ruined arch, two bigger and higher figures are engraved with wings like birds, their right hands resting on their chests in token of submission: perhaps, they are praying for the clergymen and protecting them. As already said, above these two angels, the semi-circular door frame runs with narrow and pointed bands, with broad grape

47 «Ախուրյան» [Akhurian], 9 August 1909. Also see **Toramanian**, 191, 193.

48 **Toramanian**, 193.

49 **Kalantar**, 192-193.

50 **Մարզպանեան Յ.**, Բաղդաստական ակնարկ մը կրօնական ճարտարապետութեան վրայ և հայ ճարտարապետութեան տեղը անոր մէջ [H. **Marzpanian**, A Comparative Study of Religious Architecture and the Role of Armenian Architecture in It] (Istanbul, 1970), 123.

51 *Ibid.*, 121.

52 **Sargissian**, 196.

53 Museum of Art and Literature: G. Srvandzian Fund, section 1, file 17, p. 9. Also see **Srapian**, "A Description," 105.

54 «Հովիտ» [Hoviv], no. 33 (1907), 525.

55 **Hovhanjaniants**, "Mren," *Meghu Hayastani*, no. 143, 25 July 1881, 1.



Mren. Partial views of the interior of the dome and sanctuary concha of the cathedral (photos by Bishop Sepuh Chuljian, 2011)



leaves and prominent bunches carved on it.⁵⁵

T. Toramanian holds that these reliefs are of historical rather than artistic significance: they show the costume of the 7th-century Armenian prince and nobleman in detail (it is preserved unchanged amongst Kurdish beys).⁵⁶ He also adds that the high reliefs adorning the two entrances of the church are of quite large size, with mixed figures of clergymen and secular people. These reliefs are of great importance from an ethnographical standpoint: even if the religious figures repeat the style and type of Byzantine ones, those of lay people represent them purely in the local costume.⁵⁷

According to another viewpoint, the reliefs of the entrances represent the benefactors of the church as praying before an entire row of saints: Christ, apostles Peter and Paul together with another saint who is probably Gregory the Enlightener.⁵⁸

As already mentioned above, during the different acts of renovation carried out in the 13th century, some cross-stones were set in the church walls: their total number is 51, 16 of which used to be outwardly placed in the western facade (8 of them are still preserved in situ), and 35 in the southern one (23 in the outer and 12 in the inner revetment of the wall). Prior to the 1950s, 5 of them disappeared in the aftermath of the collapse



Cross-stones inwardly set in the southern wall of the cathedral during its 13th-century overhaul (photos 2000): they have been amidst ruins since 2005 to 2006, when that part of the wall collapsed.

⁵⁶ Toramanian, 175.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 296.

⁵⁸ Մնացականյան Ս., Հայկական աշխարհիկ պատկերաբան-դակը [S. Mnatsakanian, Armenian Secular Reliefs] (Yerevan, 1976), 9.



The western entrance tympanum of the cathedral (photo by Bishop Sepuh Chuljian, 2011)

of the section adjoining the south-western corner of the church, whereas the remaining 30 (12 in the inner and 18 in the outer facing) have been in ruins since 2005 to 2006, when most of the southern facade tumbled down.

It should also be noted that the lower juts of the cross-stones were removed to set them in the walls: besides, some of them were damaged in the upper, lower or lateral parts. In a word, it is evident that no importance was attached to their artistic value and they were simply used as suitable ready building material.

As far as dimensions are concerned, throughout Western Shirak, the cathedral of Mren comes second only to that of Ani. With this regard, architect H. Marzpanian wrote:

Its plan has the following dimensions: 20.00 x 29.30

metres, which shows that a rectangular site of about 586 square metres retains what comes second only to the cathedral of Ani rising on the right bank of the river Akhurian. As for its height, I think it is unsurpassed.⁵⁹

History has not retained the name of the architect of the church, but A. Kalantar's scrutinising eye caught sight of a letter which also used to be found in the church of Agarak. Perhaps, it is a symbol left by the master or the initial letter of his name:

I saw the letter Յ on a stone: it is the same Յ that can be seen in the cruciform church of Agarak. I mean that a single master worked in these two monuments and the

⁵⁹ Marzpanian, 120.

⁶⁰ Kalantar, 192.



author of these rare chef-d'oeuvres is the same person.⁶⁰

All the researchers who carried out studies in the cathedral of Mren emphasize its great simplicity. Thus, architect H. Marzpanian writes:

The unknown architect of the church was able to carry out a most complicated task via simplicity.⁶¹

As far as the technical state of the church is concerned, in the late 1900s, it was in a safe condition:

...it has reached our days almost intact, with only some slight damage. If archaeologists seriously take care of it, it can be easily repaired and will further continue its existence for several centuries.⁶²

According to A. Kalantar, who visited Mren in



The northern (photo by Bishop Sepuh Chuljian, 2011) and southern (photo by S. Karapetian, 2000) entrance tympanums of the cathedral

⁶¹ Marzpanian, 123.

⁶² Toramanian, 295.



Cross-stones outwardly set in the southern wall of the cathedral during its 13th-century overhaul (photo 2000): they have been amidst ruins since 2005 to 2006, when that part of the wall collapsed.



Cross-stones outwardly set in the southern wall of the cathedral during its 13th-century overhaul (photos 2000): they have been amidst ruins since 2005 to 2006, when that part of the wall collapsed.



1920, the state of its church was concerning:

The cathedral as well as its dome is entirely preserved standing, but it has some highly perilous cracks, for instance, in the northern corner of its western wall (from the top to bottom) and in the southern wing of the same side, from the middle nave and window (in a curved line) to the floor where that inner corner is destroyed altogether. There are some other partial splits, too. A hole in the dome marks the vacant place of the cross, and there are hollowed sections in the walls: they have been repaired with ordinary stone, without mortar (in the western and northern walls). The roof is damaged. It is of the utmost importance to renovate all this; otherwise, the leakage of water into the walls may accelerate their destruction, soon bringing about the fall of this unique monument.⁶³

As for the state of the cathedral since 1920, it is clear that in recent 90 years human malice has caused more decrepitude to the ancient monument than the past 1,300 years.

The cathedral of Mren is the fruit of an architectural genius, and as long as it is preserved standing in that devastated site, it will keep looking for lovers of art to appreciate itself.⁶⁴

Lapidary Inscriptions. Father Nerses Sargissian made an immense contribution to the collection, decipherment and publication of the inscriptions of Mren Cathedral.⁶⁵ Fortunately, his decipherments are almost



⁶³ Kalantar, 191.

⁶⁴ Marzpanian, 130.

⁶⁵ Sargissian, 196-200.



Cross-stones outwardly set in the western wall of the cathedral during its overhaul in the 13th century (photos 2000): they are still preserved in situ

complete, having only very few omissions. Later they proved useful for numerous researchers who merely republished them in some cases.

Below we are presenting the lapidary heritage of the cathedral in accordance with the contemporary scientific criteria, thanks to the photos taken in 2000.

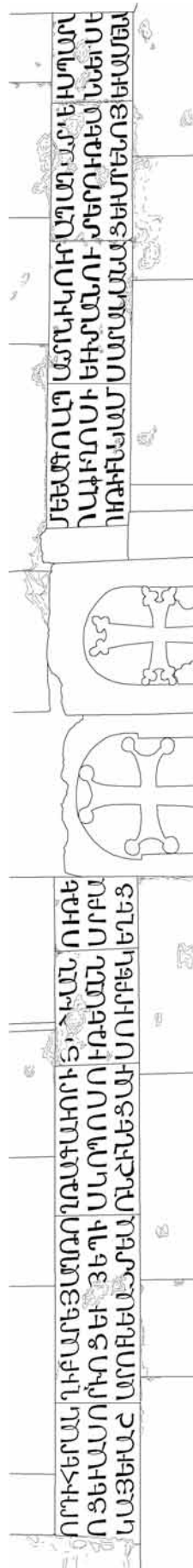
The Inscriptions of the Western Facade

1. 3 lines on the upper part:

[Անոյն քսան եւ իններ]որդի (կամ) [երեսներ]որդի) Հերակղի բարեյաղթող թագաւորի յիշխանութեան Դարթի ամենագոյ պատրկի կուրապաղատի եւ սպարա/պետի Հայ]ոց եւ ասորոց եւ յեպիսկոպոսութեանն սրբա[սիրի տեսան Թե]ովփիղոսի



The cathedral from the south-west (photo by Yermakov, 1890s) and south (photo by Bishop Sepuh Chuljian, 2011)



և ի տանուտերութեան Ներսէսի Շիրակայ եւ Արշարունեաց տեսան շինեցաւ սուրբ եկեղեցիս ի բարեխաւսութիւն Կամսարականաց եւ Սրենոյ եւ աննայն երկրի:

Transl.: *In the 29th or 30th year of the reign of victorious king Heracle and in the days of David, a praiseworthy ...curopalate and commander-in-chief of the Armenians and Assyrians, in the times of pious bishop Teovpighos and Nerseh, the lord of Shirak and Arsharunik, this holy church was built for the glory of the Kamsarakans and Mren and the entire country.*

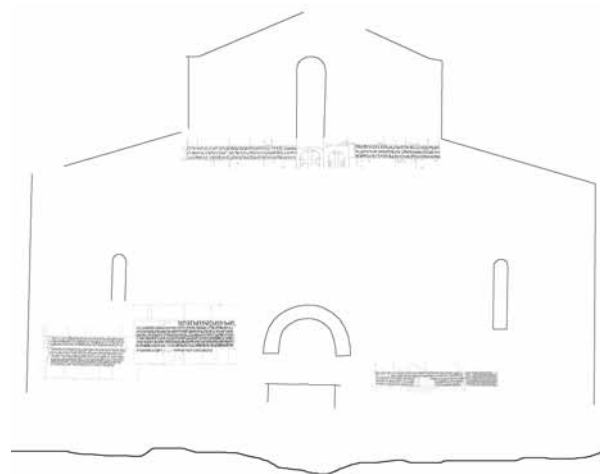
Published in: Ալիշան Ղ., Այրարատ [Gh. Alishan, Ayarat] (Venice, 1890), 114; Орбели И., Багаванская надпись 639 года и другие армянские ктиторские надписи VII века [H. Orbely, Bagavan Inscription of 639 and Other Armenian Inscriptions Left by Donators], in: “Христианский Восток” [The Christian Orient], vol. 2, edition 1 (St. Petersburg, 1913), 138; Орбели И., Избранные труды [H. Orbely, Select Works] (Yerevan, 1963), 401; Մանուչարյան Ա., Սրենի և Թալին տաճարների շինարարական արձանագրությունները [A. Manucharian, “The Construction Inscriptions of the Cathedrals of Mren and Talin”], «ՊԲՀ» [Historico-Philological Journal], no. 1 (1966), 247; Մնացականյան Ս., Ե՞րբ է կառուցվել Սրենի տաճարը [S. Mnatsakanian, “When was Mren Cathedral Built?”], «ՊԲՀ» [Historico-Philological Journal], no. 3 (1969), 161.

Note: Father N. Sargissian was the first to notice this construction inscription of 639 to 640, but he failed to copy it due to its height: *Apart from the aforementioned inscriptions, the same western side also had another of large-size letters: unfortunately, it remained undeciphered due to its elevated position. Probably, it contains some reference to the founder of the cathedral, David Saharumy (Sargissian, 158).* Gh. Alishan was the first to publish the inscription, being later followed by H. Orbely, who deciphered it from the available photographs, also making use of N. Marr’s field records of 1892. Guided by K. Gandzaketsy’s record (“In his day, in the year 62 A.E. [613], the cathedral of Mren was constructed.”), A. Manucharian suggests reading the lost initial part of the inscription as follows: «[Յամի երր]որդի Հերակղի...» (...*In the third year of Heracle’s...*), and S. Mnatsakanian offers: «[Ամի երեսներ]որդի Հերակղի...» (*In the thirtieth year of Heracle’s...*).

We have presented H. Orbely’s decipherment.

2. 5 lines:

Յանուն ա(ստուծոյ) ի ՆԽԱ (992) քիվականիս



A schematic drawing showing the lapidary inscriptions on the western facade of the cathedral



A photo and tracing of the inscription of 992 (no. 2) carved on the western facade of the cathedral

ես Գաւիթ Վարդա որդի ետու զիմ յայզին զայն | որ ... ի զեւեզերն իմ ձեռաց արկել ի սուրբ Կաթողիկէ ի ձեռն աստուածապատիվ | եւ հոգետր տեսան Սահակայ եւ պարտիս եմ [ընգեցեալ մինչ ի] միս {ան}անգամ զարուստն զբար/եկեանդանին ուրբաք արն պատարագ[ն յամենայն եկեղե]ցիս յիմ անուն մատուցանե եւ որ որ ստե կամ յապիշտակել իմ մեղ[ացս եւ իմ ազգի մեղաց] պարտական եղիցի առաջի աստուծոյ եւ | [աստուծոյ յաստուծոյ դատապարտ եղիցի եւ մասն եւ բաժին ընդ իսաշահանս կրեցէ | իսկ կատարիչ գրոյս արհնեալ եղիցին յաստուծոյ եւ յամենայն սրբոց]:

Transl.: *In the name of God, in the year 441 (992), I, Vard's son David, gave my garden that ...I myself had planted on the river bank to the holy cathedral, to God-honoured father Sahak. And all churches should hold divine service in my memory every Friday until next Pancake week. May those who fail to do so or seize the garden atone for my family's and my own sins before God. May they be condemned by the Lord and may they suffer the sufferings of the One who was crucified. And may those who obey this writing be blessed by God and all saints.*

Published in: Ջալալեանց Ս., Դանապարհորդութիւն ի Մեծն Հայաստան [S. Jalalians, A Journey to Greater Armenia], vol. 2 (Tpkhis, 1858), 47 (with considerable mistakes); Sargissian, 196-197; Alishan, Shirak, 138; Յովհաննջանեանց Կ., Սրէն [K. Hovhanjanians, "Mren"], «Մեղու Հայաստանի» [Meghu Hayastani], no. 146, 29 July 1881, 1; Эмин Н., Армянские надписи в Карсе, Ани и в окрестностях последнего [N. Emin, Armenian Inscriptions in Kars, Ani and in the Neighbourhood of the Latter] (Moscow, 1881), 72-73; Srapian, "A Description," 105.

Note: We have presented N. Sargissian's decipherment.

3. 7 lines engraved south of the entrance:

Եւ եւ Սոփի դուստր մեծին Աշոտոյ Շ[ահան- շ]լ[ահի] Հ[ալոյ]ց եւ Վրաց թագուհի տվեալ եմ ե[ւ] |



A photo and tracing of the inscription of the 10th to 11th centuries (no. 3) carved on the western facade of the cathedral

[ի]յաստատեալ զԳաւթի զայզին ի սուրբ կաթ[ո]ղիկէ եւ ի տ(ե)ր Սահակ եւ ի նորին աթոռակալս | [զ]որ ինքն ինձ անդարձ եր արարեալ վասն Գաւթի | [հո]ղոյն եւ վասն իմ եւ վասն Գազկայ Շահան[շա]լի արեւշատութեան եւ որ որ յապըշտակել ջա[նայ] յա[ստուծոյ] բանեն ...եալ եղիցին իսկ հրամանակատարքն արհնեալ եղիցին յաստուծոյ]:

Transl.: *And I, Sopi, the daughter of Ashot the Great, Shahنشah of the Armenians, and the Georgian queen, gave David's garden to the holy cathedral and Father Sahak, the prior, for him to conduct a divine service for*

David's soul as well as for Shahnshah Gagik's and my longevity. And may those who seize [the garden], ... and may those who comply with this order be blessed by the Lord.

Published in: Sargissian, 197; Alishan, Shirak, 138; Hovhanjanians, "Mren," 1; Emin, 73; Srapian, "A Description," 105.

Note: The inscription is dated on the basis of the reference to Sopi, the daughter of Ashot III the Merciful, who lived between the 10th and 11th centuries. We completed those parts of the inscription which were no longer preserved as of 2000 according to N. Sargissian's decipherment.

4. 9 lines north of the entrance:

Յանուն աստուծոյ այս իմ ի հրամանք են Գազկա շահիագնշահի | ազատեալ են զՄրենոյ զկռռն, որ ի Նախճասանի էր զմարդո | եւ զեզին ի ձեռն խնդրոյ աստուծապատիւ տ(եառ)ն Սահակ Աշարունեաց եպիսկոպոսի որ անմառաց խնդրէ ի Զ(րիստոս)է քողոքիւն լինել մեղաց իմոց արդ արդ որ ընդիմանա իմա հրաման[ց]նացս կամ | յիմ յորդեաց կամ այլոք եւ իցե պարտական լիցի մեղաց իմոց եւ | իմ ամենայն ազգի եւ սպանման արեանն Զ(րիստոս)ի, իսկ կատարիչ գրոյս արին(եալ) եղիցի Զ(րիստոս)է սուրբ կաթաղիկէ եւ սուրբ Նշանս լիցի կնիք գրոյս | եղաւ առաջնորդ քարոյս հարպ հայոց տանաւտէր:

Transl.: In the name of God, I, Shahnshah Gagik, order to exempt Mren from corvee, human workforce and oxen, that have been passed to Nakhijevan [so far], at the request of God-honoured bishop Sahak Arsharuny, who should selflessly ask Christ for atonement of my sins. May those who disobey my orders or those of my sons or others atone for my whole family's and my own sins as well as for the blood of murdered Christ. And may those who obey this writing be blessed by Christ...

Published in: Sargissian, 197; Alishan, Shirak, 138-139; Hovhanjanians, "Mren," 1; Srapian, "A Description," 105 (incomplete); Emin, 73.

Note: The inscription is traced back to the period of King Gagik's reign (989 to 1020).

5. 8 lines south of the entrance:

Վահան քահանա զծող: | Ի ՆՂ (1041) քուականութեանս Հա(յ)ոց, ի հայրապետութեան տ(եառ)ն Պետրոսի եւ Խաչ/կա Հա(յ)ոց կաթողիկոսաց, այս իմ հրամանք են Գազկա Շահանշահի որդոյ Աշոտն՝ ազատել իմ զՄրենոյ զհարկն զծուծ եւ մրուր, զկապիճքն :ԻԵ: (25) | իջուցի եւ բազինի հացն եւ զդրամն, եթե որ ընդիմանա հրամանաց իմոց | յիմոց կամ այլ ոք ով իցե պարտական եղիցի սպանման արեանն ի Զ(րիստոս)ի ի ժամ ամենայն | ազգի մեղաց տէր է ի ՅԺԸ ն (318) հայրապետացն նզովեալ եղիցի ի կենութ եւ մահու | եղել առաջնորդ ... Գրիգոր Հա(յ)ոց տանաւտէր:

Transl.: Priest Vahan the engraver. In the year 490 (1041) of the Armenian calendar, in the times of Armenian Catholicoses Petros and Khachik, I, Shahn-

shah Gagik's son Ashot, order to exempt my Mren from the tribute of... May those who disobey this order atone for the blood of murdered Christ and the sins of the whole nation and may they be cursed by the 318 supreme fathers... Armenian prince Grigor:

Published in: Jalalians, A Journey, vol. 2, 47; Sargissian, 197; Alishan, Shirak, 139; Hovhanjanians, "Mren," 1; Emin, 74; Srapian, "A Description," 105 (incomplete).

Note: The letters of the first line are larger in size than those of the others. Jalalians offers an incomplete decipherment with the year erroneously read as ՆՁ (957). N. Sargissian's version contains some minor errors. As for Priest Vahan the engraver, his name is also found in one of the inscriptions (1034) of Bagaran (Sargissian, 202-203).

6. An inscription engraved in large-size letters (its decipherment is incomplete):

Ի յարեղական տոմարիս տոմարիս եւ ք(վի)ն Հայոց ի ՇԺԲ (1063) ամաց շր...:

Transl.: In the year 512 (1063) of Habeth's family's and Armenian calendars...

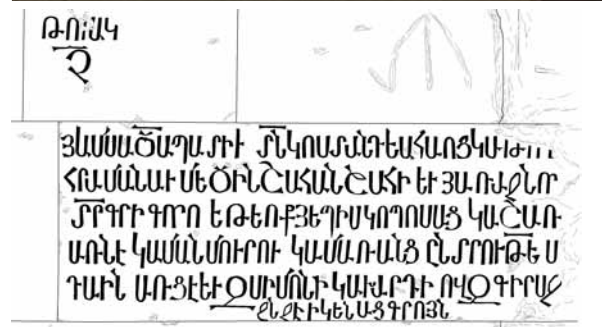
Published in: Sargissian, 198; Alishan, Shirak, 139; Hovhanjanians, "Mren," 1; Srapian, "A Description," 105.

Note: In 2000 we did not find this inscription in situ. The inscriptions of the southern facade:

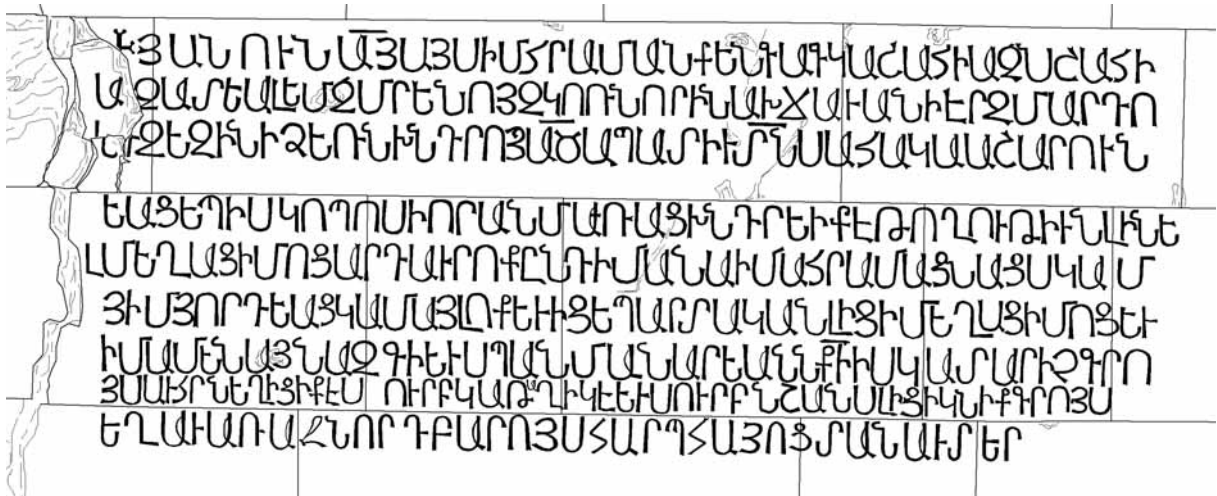
7. 6 lines on a whole block of stone:

Թուակ | Չ (1251) | յամս աստուծապատիւ տ(եառ)ն Կոստանդեա Հա(յ)ոց կաթողիկոսի.../ հրամանաւ մեծին Շահանշահի եւ յառաջնորդութ.../ տ(է)ր Գրիգորո, եթե որ յեպիսկոպոսաց կաշառար ե.../ առնէ կամ անմորու կամ առանց ընտրութե(ան) մասն զ(Ու)րախին առցէ եւ զՄիմնի կախարիի, ով զգիրս ջնջէ ... | ջնջի ի կենաց գրոյն:

Transl.: In the year 700 (1251), during the reign of God-honoured Catholicos Kostandea of Armenians... on



A photo and tracing of the inscription of 1251 (no. 7) carved on the southern facade of the cathedral



A photo and tracing of the inscription of the 10th to 11th centuries (no. 4) carved on the western facade of the cathedral



A photo and tracing of the inscription of the 10th to 11th centuries (no. 5) carved on the western facade of the cathedral

the Great Shahnshah's order and under the leadership of... Father Grigor. May any of the bishops taking bribes remain beardless or unelected. May they share the fate of Judas or be bewitched by Simon. May those who erase this writing... have their own life book deleted.

Published in: Sargissian, 198; Alishan, Shirak, 139; Hovhanjaniants, "Mren," 1; Emin, 74.

8. 4 lines on a whole block of stone:

Թուսկ | ՉԻԲ (1273) | ողորմութե(ամ)քն ա(ստուծոյ) եւ պարոն Սահմադինս ազատեցի զս(տու)ք



A schematic drawing of the inscriptions engraved on the southern facade of the cathedral

ուխտին [Արջվ]ա ...|ո այգիքն Մրենն եւ Աւշական ի Խալ :Ա: (1) ի եւ յոյ հարկէ որ բնական ազատ էր ոչ Ամիրի :Ա: (1) | ոչ ում ձեռն չկա ի վերա վ(ա)ս(ն) արեւշատութե(ան) որդեց ինոց քատութե(ան) մեղաց

մե(րոց) ...| [ազատ մինչ ի ծագումն Ք(րիստոս)ի, արդ թէ ոք ի մերոց կամ յաւտարաց] ...:

Transl.: In the year 722 (1273), by the grace of God, I, Mr. Sahmadin, exempted the holy monastery... the gardens of Mren and Oshakan... that were unpossessed either by the emir or anybody else, for my sons' longevity and the atonement of our sins... May those from our midst or from among aliens...

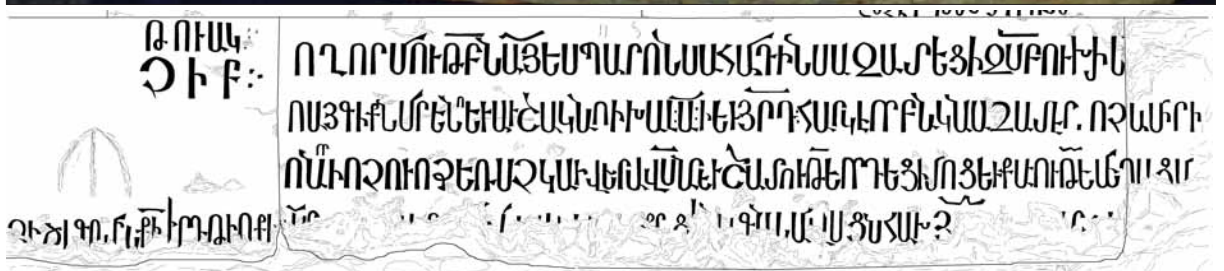
Published in: Sargissian, 198; Alishan, Shirak, 139; Hovhanjaniants, "Mren," 1; Emin, 74.

Note: Certain parts of the inscription which we found as already missing during our visit in 2000 have been completed according to N. Sargissian's decipherment.

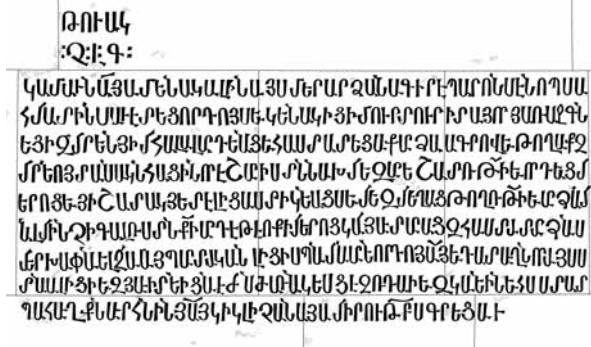
9. 11 lines engraved on three rows of stone:

Թուսկ(անութեան) | ՉԼԳ (1284) կաման ա(ստուծոյ) ամենակալին այս մեր արձանագիր է պարոն Սէնոպ Սա/հմատինս Աւետեց որդոյս եւ կենակից իմ Ուրտորիտայ որ յառաջ գն/եցի զՄրեն յիմ հալալ արդեանց եւ հաստատեցաք արձանա- չն}գրով եւ թողաք զ/Մրենոյ տասնակն հացին, որ է շարիստն նախ մեզ արեւշատութի(ւն) եւ որդեաց մերոց եւ յիշատակ յետ ելից աստի կենացս եւ մեզ մեղաց թողութի(ւն) եւ արձան մնալ մինչ ի գալուստն Քրիստոսի արդ էթէ ոք ի մերոց կամ յաւտարաց զհաստատ արձանս | մեր իսպիանել ջանայ, պարտական լիցի սպանման արեան որդոյ ա(ստուծոյ) եւ դատաւող նորայ սախտան լիցի եւ գյախտե- նից անեծս{ս}ն ժառանկեցէ զՈւդաի եւ զԿաննին եւ հաստատ | պահապան արհնին յա(ստուծոյ): Կիկիչանայ Ամիրութե(ամ)քս գրեցաւ:

Transl.: In the year 733 (1284), by the grace of Almighty God, this is our inscription: my spouse Urturita and I, Mr. Senop Sahmatin, Avet's son, bought Mren with my honestly-earned means and ratified the



A photo and tracing of the inscription of 1273 (no. 8) carved on the southern facade of the cathedral



A photo and tracing of the inscription of 1284 (no. 9) carved on the southern facade of the cathedral

purchase with an inscription. And we exempted Mren from the tithe of bread... for our sons' and our own longevity, in perpetuation of our memory after our death and for the atonement of our sins. And may this inscription be preserved until the Advent of Christ. And if anybody from our midst or from among aliens tries to break this solid inscription, may they atone for the blood of God's murdered son. May they be judged by the satan and ever cursed like Judas and Cain and may those who preserve it be blessed by God. Written in the days of Emir Kiklichan.

Published in: Sargissian, 198-199; Alishan, Shirak, 139-140; Hovhanjanians, "Mren," 1; Emin, 75.

Note: The year of the inscription is erroneously deciphered as ՉԻԳ (1274).

10. 8 lines on three rows of stone:

Թ(վին) ՉԼԷ (1288) յանուն {ն} ա(ստուծոյ) եւ միջնորդութեամբ ամենայն երկնայ(յ)ին եւ երկրայ(յ)ին զաւրորդեան. Ես պարոն Մէնույ Սահմանինս եւ ամուսին իմն Տուրտա վ(աս)ն փրկութեան / մեղաց մեր եւ վ(աս)ն յերկար կենդանութեան զաւակաց մերոց եւ վ(աս)ն շին(ւ)թեան համար Մրէնո հացին շարինատն թողել էաք եւ հայմայլ թողաք զեզեցն | զինն եւ խաղողի խալէն, որ այլ ոչ ի մերոց եւ ոչ յաւարաց ոչ ով չխառնէ | ով հակառակի եւ զմեր յիշատակս խափանէ, նզովի յաստուծոյ եւ :ՅԺԸ: (318) հա(յ)րապետացն եւ մասն եւ բաժին նորա ընդ Ուղայի եւ ընդ Կաէին եւ ընդ սատանայի ԵԸ (?):

Transl.: In the year 737 (1288), in the name of God and by the power of all divine and earthly forces, my spouse Turta and I, Mr. Senop Sahmadin, exempted

Mren from the tithe of bread for the atonement of our sins, for the longevity of our children and for the sake of this monument... May this be unhindered by anybody from our midst or from among aliens. May those who impede this and mar our memory be cursed by the Lord and 318 supreme fathers and may they share the fate of Judas, Cain and the satan...

Published in: Sargissian, 199; Alishan, Shirak, 140; Hovhanjanians, "Mren," 1; Emin, 75.

11. 4 lines on two rows of stone:

Թ(վին) ՉԻԳ (1295) | կաման ա(ստուծոյ) եւ Դավիդ միարանեցա ս(ուր)ք կաթողիկէիս եւ արար արդիւնք տ(է)ր Յով եւ այլ սպաս/ատորք եկեղեցոյս փոխարէն հաստուցին մեզ ի տարին :Բ: (2) ժամ ի տանի Դարթի եւ Յիսկորայ :Ա: (1) ինձ առնեն Դարթի եւ :Ա: (1) ամուսնոյ իմոյ Էլիսաբունին, կատարողք արհնինս աստուծոյ:

Transl.: In the year 744 (1295), by the grace of God, I, David, joined the brethren of the holy cathedral and made a contribution to Father Hovhannes and the other clergymen serving in the church, in return for which, a divine service should be conducted in our memory 2 hours a year on the feasts of David and Hakob: an hour for me, David, and another for my spouse Elkhatun. May those who obey this be blessed by God.

Published in: Sargissian, 199; Alishan, Shirak, 140; Emin, 76.

Note: N. Sargissian's decipherment contains some minor mistakes which are also found in the subsequent republications of the inscription.

12. 5 lines near the western corner of the southern wall and on its lower part:

Կաման ա(ստուծոյ) ի պարոնութեամբն Սարգսի և Էվան խաթունին | եւան Ակորայ և [ի] հայրապետութեան) ի տ(է)ր Վ(արդ)անին) եւ Իւանիկս իմ ամիրութեան)ս և Աւտաշին ձ(եռն)ատրութեան) զայս արձան հաստատեցաք ու զձրի-հասն եկեղեցոյս ընձայ տվ|ար մեր հոգոյս համար...:

Transl.: By the grace of God, in the days of Prince Sargis and Evan Khatun, ...Akob and during the reign of Supreme Father Vardan, I, Emir Ivanik, had this inscription written on the initiative of Otash and donated an oil press to the church for our souls...

Published in: Марр Н., Новые материалы по армянской эпиграфике [N. Marr, Newly-Revealed Materials on Armenian Epigraphy] (St. Petersburg, 1893), 88-89.

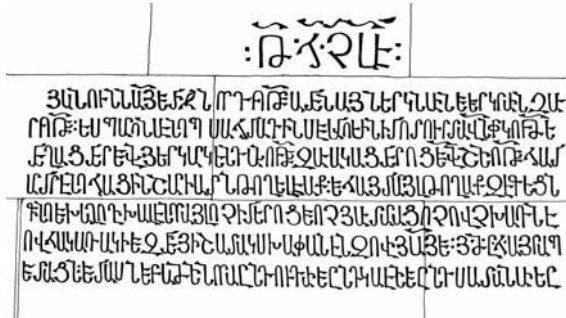
13. Engraved near the western corner of the southern wall and on its lower part:

...(ա) և այլ աթռ(ակալ) այն մին | (ն) եւ հոգոյս յիշատակի | ... ալ են մինչ ի Ք(րիստոս)ս եւ որ որ ... (մ)եղաց և իմ ազգի մեղաց...:

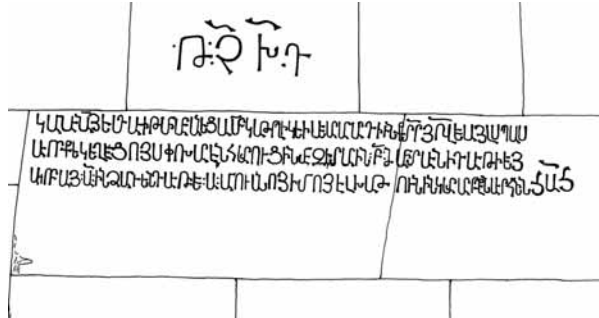
Transl.: ...in memory of the soul... to Christ and may those who... sins and those of my family...

Published in: Marr, 1893, 88.

14. 3 lines on the northern wall:



A photo and tracing of the inscription of 1288 (no. 10) carved on the southern facade of the cathedral



A photo and tracing of the inscription of 1295 (no. 11) carved on the southern facade of the cathedral

Չառուրդ յիշեցեր Սրբունյ ... զերկց:

Transl.: *May you remember... the priest of Mren.*

Published in: **Srapian**, "A Description," 105.

15. Carved on the lower part of one of the cross-stones that were outwardly set in the southern wall of the church during its renovation of the 13th century:

S(t)ր աւղորմեսյ:

Transl.: *God, be merciful.*

Published for the first time.

Note: The inscription is traced back to the 10th to 11th centuries.

Cemetery. As early as 1878, the following was written about this graveyard no vestiges of which are preserved at present:

The Turks have appropriated the tombstones of the city as well as the stones of some famous edifices and built a post-office with them. We saw only a single funerary memorial which was engraved with the figure of a clergyman wearing bishop's vestments.⁶⁶

Apparently, the main cemetery of Mren used to extend in the neighbourhood of the cathedral:

Near the church, numerous ancient graves can be seen: some of them are elevated and shaped like boxes. Others are just ordinary tombstones, several of them with simple reliefs.⁶⁷

Once mortuary monuments could be seen not only in the cemetery of Mren but also in different parts of the city:

Mren is very rich in cross-stones which are not gathered in a single place but scattered here and there: some of them are superb works with high solid

pedestals of stone, others rising to a man's height...⁶⁸

Funerary memorials, predominantly tombstones, could also be seen in the gardens of the city:

In many of the orchards, I came across 2 to 6 small and large tombstones. I also saw wine presses in several places.⁶⁹

One of the cross-stones of Mren was engraved with the following inscription:

Ով ս(ուր)ք խաչ փրկական եւ ներկեալ արեամբ որդոյն ա(ստուծո)յ ի քեզ ապաւինեցաք ծառայքս խաչերոյն Զ(րիստոս)ի. ես Սարաիրոս եւ ամուսին իմ Վարդուսս եւ հարազատ որդիք մեր Փարսամն Հմաէ...Ս(ար)գ(ի)ս ք(ա)հ(անա) եւ քոյր մեր Նճիս կանկնեցաք զխաչս բարեխաւս մեզ եւ ծնողաց մերոց, զաւակաց մերոց, արդ աղաչեմք:

Transl.: *Oh, Holy Cross of the Saviour covered with the blood of God's Son! We, the servants of crucified Christ, are turning to you. My spouse Vardut and I, Martiros, as well as our sons Parsam... Priest Sargis and our sister Nejis erected this cross-stone for the salvation of our parents, children and our own souls. Pray, [remember us].*

Published in: **Sargissian**, 199; **Alishan**, Shirak, 141; **Hovhanjaniants**, "Mren," 1; **Emin**, 76.

Note: N. Sargissian writes: *The encoded name seems to be Hmaek. There is also another distorted name.*

Chapels. Two chapels were documented in Mren:

Apart from the cross-stones, there are also two small chapels...⁷⁰

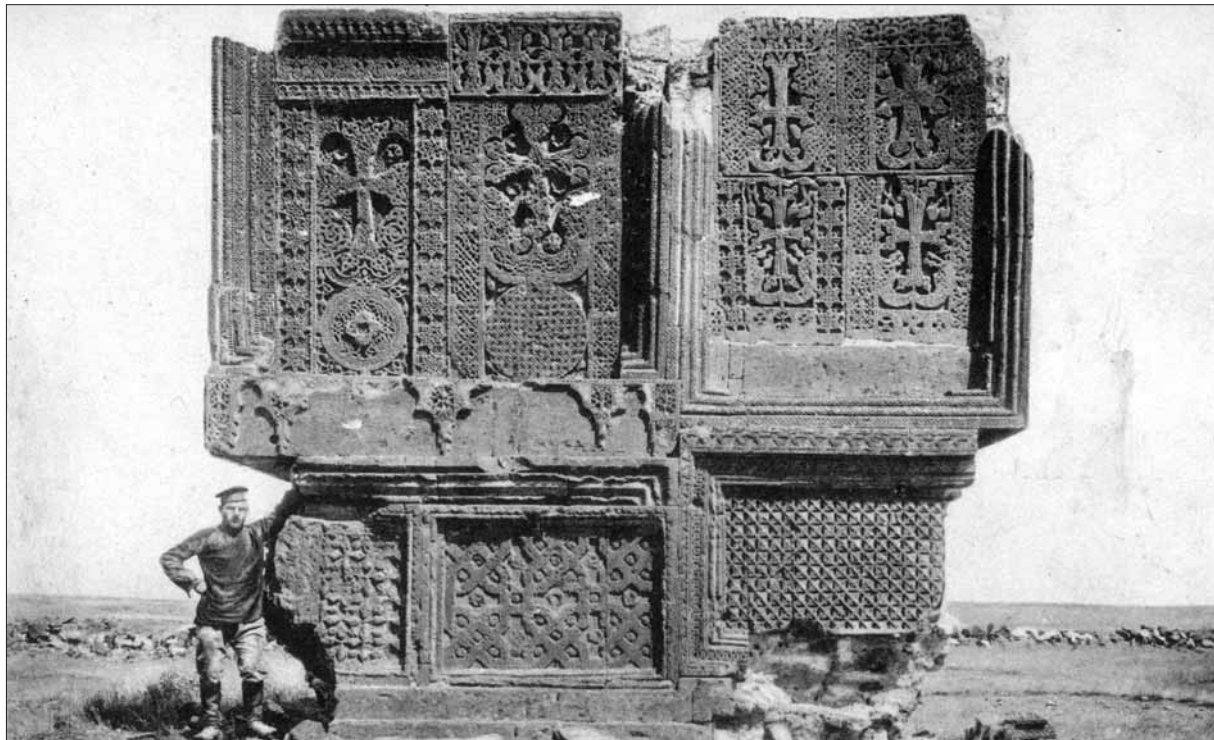
66 **Srapian**, "A Description," 106. Also see Museum of Art and Literature: G. Srvandzian Fund, section 1, file 17, pp. 9-10.

67 **Sargissian**, 200.

68 *Ibid.*, 199.

69 **Hovhanjaniants**, "Mren," *Meghu Hayastani*, no. 146, 29 July 1881, 2.

70 **Sargissian**, 199.



Mren. Set-in-wall cross-stones in the city site (photo 1900s): deliberately removed since the 1920s

The following records describe these monuments:

South of the church, there is a small semi-ruined chapel built of finely-dressed red stone and engraved with crosses, with a funerary memorial rising on a pedestal in front of its door...⁷¹

East of the church, there was another small chapel of three doors built of red stone. It was still preserved standing, the arch of its door bearing an encoded inscription...⁷²

The inscription of the eastern chapel reads:

Թ(վին) ՉԻՉ (1277) ի հայրապետութեան եւ քա-
 գաորութեան Հայոց տեառն Յակորբա եւ Լեւոնի եւ
 ի պարոնութեան Մահմատինի նվերակառուցելս
 զայս խորան յանունադրութիւն Յ(իսուս)ի փրկչին
 մերո, որ է պատճառ աղաւթելոյ ի սմա զիս Մխ(ի-
 քար) վարդապետս եւ որք աւգնեցին, յիշեցէք:

Transl.: *In the year 726 (1277), in the days of Catholicos Hakob and during the reign of Armenian King Levon, when Sahmatin was the prince, this sanctuary was built in the name of Our Saviour Jesus. May you pray for those who helped in the work and for me, Archimandrite Mekhitar. May you remember us.*

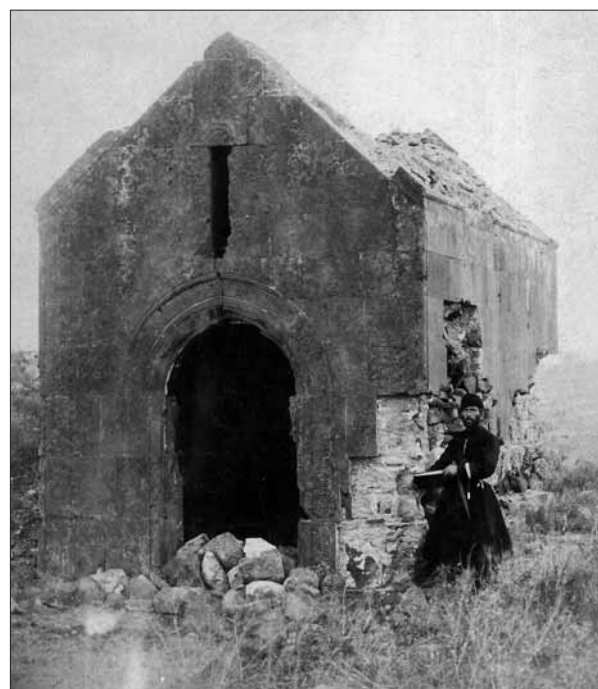
Published in: Sargissian, 200; Alishan, Shirak, 140; Emin, 76; Srapiian, "A Description," 106.

Note: S. Kyureghian's decipherment of the inscription contains numerous mistakes.

Sahmadin's Palace or Village Head Vardan's

71 Museum of Art and Literature: G. Srvandztian Fund, section 1, file 17, p. 10. Also see Srapiian, "A Description," 106.

72 Ibid.



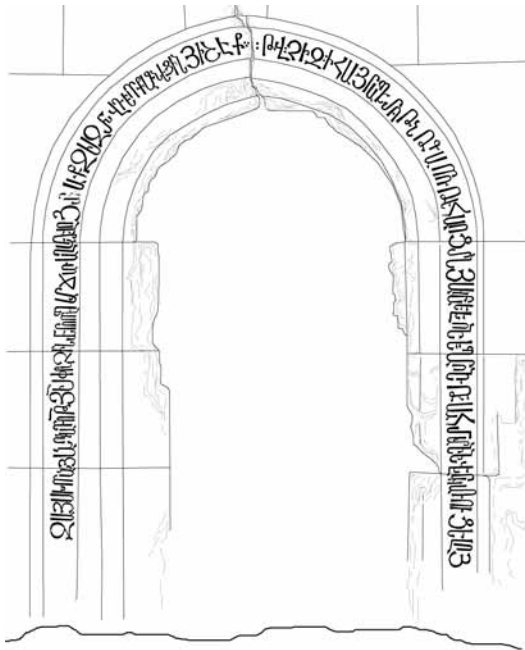
Mren. The chapel (1277) situated east of the cathedral from the south-west (photo by Yermakov, 1890s)

Gate. Those who visited Mren in the 19th century also write about the remnants of other remarkable architectural buildings such as Prince Sahmadin's palace:

...the door which is still preserved standing is magnificent, with a frame adorned with beautiful reliefs. Inwardly, its walls have totally decayed on both sides... The wall on the opposite side is semi-ruined and it is

73 Sargissian, 200.

difficult to guess what it is. It does not occupy large space. The door was engraved with an inscription but we could not decipher it due to its height.⁷³



Mren. A tracing of the inscription of the western entrance of the chapel (1277) situated east of the cathedral

K. Srapian writes:

*Likewise, the ruins of an extensive palace lay in the south. Its eastern door was a superb work of red stone having a high position and boasting surprising beauty. It was embellished with large-size pieces of faience and bore a four-line inscription on its facade: we failed to read it because of its height and our shortage of time.*⁷⁴

Special mention should be made of K. Ohanjaniants' record in which he reports the name with which the palace was known among common people:

...amidst the heaps of stone and earth in the centre of the southern dwellings, two fragments of other buildings can be seen: they are of red stone, partly adorned with fascinating images and reliefs. One of them resembles a door and is named Gate of Village Head Vardan. The second might have been the remnant of a watch tower or a pyramid.⁷⁵

The ornamental reliefs of the palace also attracted H. Orbely's attention.⁷⁶

At present this monument is destroyed without a single vestige left. Fortunately, its construction inscrip-

tion, which N. Sargissian and K. Srapian had failed to read, was thoroughly deciphered by another meritorious scholar, N. Marr:

Four lines on the upper part of the entrance to Sahmadin's palace:

ԹՎ ՉԺ (1261) ի տիեզերակալութիւն Հուլաւու դանի եւ Սահմադին որդի [Աւետեաց գ]նեցի զքաւաորանիս[տ] տեղի[ս] զՍրեն ի յԱրտաշրէ որդո Շահնշահի հալալ ընչ[ից իմ]ոց ի վայելումն ինձ և որդիոց իմոց, ա(ստուա)ծ շնահաւոր ար[ա]յսցէ յախտեանս ժամանակաց: [Ի թվ] ՉԻԵ (1276) յաշխարհակալութե(ան) Ապադանին եւ Սամտին, որ պարոնին ամարանոց ու դարապաս չկայր, զաս այգիս և գորախոս, որ կոչի Արքայութիւն, գնեցի՝ զամէն մէկ յիւր տիրոչէն. և յիմ մտաց դուս՝ առանց (°) վարդպետի ձևեցի ու հիմն ձգեցի դարապասիս ու դրախ[տ]իս. ի Ժ (10) տարին կատարեցի. ա(ստուա)ծ շնահաւոր արասցէ պարոն սահմատինին որդից ի յորդիք. ու խարճ, որ եղաւ դարապասիս :Խ:Ռ: (4000) դուկատ դահեկան:

Transl.: *In the year 710 (1261), under the supreme reign of Hulavu Ghan, I, Avet's son Sahmadin, purchased the magnificent site of Mren from Shahnshah's son Artashir with my honestly-earned means for my sons' and my own enjoyment. May we enjoy it by God's will for ever. In the year 725, during the supreme reign of Apaghan, when the prince had neither a summer residence nor an enclosure, I, Samtin, bought this garden and paradise that is called Heaven from their owners and on my own initiative, without consulting an architect, I designed this gate and paradise and laid their foundations. I carried it out throughout 10 years. May Mr. Sahmatin and his descendants enjoy it by God's will from generation to generation. And this gate cost me 4,000 dukat dahekans.*

Published in: Marr, 1893, 82-83; Mapp H., Ани [N. Marr, Ani] (Yerevan, 1939), 79; Kalantar, 192 (only the initial part); Ժամկոչյան Հ. Գ., Անի քաղաքի 13-րդ դարի երկու արձանագրության մասին [H. G. Zhamkochian, "About Two 13th-Century Inscriptions from Ani City"], «Տեղեկագիր» [Bulletin], no. 47 (1955), 102.

Note: A. Kalantar writes: *The only surviving remnant of Sahmatin's palace is its door with its facade. All across its upper part, a 4-line inscription of large-size letters is engraved with numerous distortions, in many parts some letters overlapping one another.*

Royal Palace. This residence, which is conventionally named Royal, has not come down to us:

Another remarkable monument of the heritage of Mren is a ruined regal court... it is mentioned by this very name so that I cannot give any other. It was not a royal residence but a boulevard although this cannot be substantiated by any trustworthy record: its name just comes from the fact that the site used to be occupied by orchards and magnificent edifices beseeching kings...⁷⁷

74 Museum of Art and Literature: G. Srvandztian Fund, section 1, file 17, p. 10. Also see Srapian, "A Description," 106.

75 Hovhanjaniants, "Mren," *Meghu Hayastani*, no. 146, 29 July 1881, 2.

76 Орбели И., Колокол с анийскими орнаментованными мотивами XII-XIII века, Избранные труды [H. Orbely, A Bell with Ornamental Motifs of the 12th to 13th Centuries Typical of Ani, in: Select Works] (Yerevan, 1963), 184.

77 Sargissian, 200.



The palace of Sahmadin also called Gate of Village Head Vardan (1900s)

Gharakyokhvi Palace. K. Ohanjanians is the only researcher to provide a description of this grand residence:

Within several hundred steps of the church, the vestiges of a large building are preserved standing, its fascinating murals and various reliefs of small and big dimensions attracting visitors' attention... That semi-ruined wall, which is built of red stone, is the western wall of a building rising on several steps. Its outer face is entirely embellished with densely-carved reliefs. Two rows of ornate cornices run over three square recesses, the cornices bearing six cross-stones. The one on the right has a height of almost 2 1/2 arshins, being enclosed within an ornate frame. The cross pedestal represents another four-winged cross. Above this lyre-shaped cross-stone, another 5 crosses can be seen neatly arranged on the facade of the same stone. Near them the second khachkar is located: it has the same height, but its cross is not shaped like a lyre and its circular pedestal is made up of a number of very small cross-stones. It is adjoined by the other 4 crosses, which are exactly alike, sharing each other's dimensions and reliefs. Two of the khachkars are placed on each of the lower and upper parts, without a circular pedestal: they are set within ornate frames in a square position, being adorned with semi-circular and square floral reliefs of petty dimensions. Inwardly, the wall is laid with red hewn stones

which are arranged smoothly and evenly. Judging from the plan, this used to be quite a large dwelling or a famous religious building of a single floor. The new inscription of this remnant, which is preserved intact, suggests that it was not destroyed by nature at all: it was the devastating human hands that levelled it to the ground. Both the Armenian and Muslim inhabitants of the neighbourhood call this ruin Gharakyokhva's palace on the basis of a legend that once it was inhabited by a local village head (kyokhva), Ghara.⁷⁸

Monastic Estates in Mren. The available donation inscriptions attest that different monasteries of Ararat Region had their own share in the large gardens of Mren, which totaled 1,200.⁷⁹ Among them were: Marmashen, to which some of the orchards of Mren⁸⁰ were donated in 1029; Tigran Honents Monastery of Ani (in 1215 it received a number of glebes including garden no. 1 in Mren⁸¹); Khetzkonk Monastery, which received one of the city's gardens named Aghtot in 1240,⁸² etc. In 1034 one of the mills of Mren was donated to the mother church of Bagaran:

...a mill in Mren was given to the holy cathedral...⁸³

Summary. This brief research into the monuments, and particularly, cathedral of Mren is first and foremost an SOS to the proper international bodies, primarily UNESCO, to urgently draw their attention to the issue of the preservation or, better to say, salvation of this pearl of architecture consigned to total annihilation. For already many decades, the watch base of Turkish border-guarding forces, stationed in the neighbourhood of the ghost city, has been giving entry permit to only the inhabitants of the adjacent villages who visit it simply for searching for gold there. Unlike them, architects, culturologists and tourists are absolutely denied access to the ghost city.

We are calling upon everybody to do everything within and beyond their power to prevent the continual destruction of the almost 1,400-year-old monument, destruction which is going on with the unhidden connivance of the Turkish authorities.

p.s. We extend our cordial gratitude to valorous clergyman, Bishop Sepuh Chuljian for providing us with his photos of Mren taken in 2011.

⁷⁸ **Hovhanjanians**, "Mren," *Meghu Hayastani*, no. 146, 29 July 1881, 2.

⁷⁹ Thus, a record states: *The orchards which number more than 1,200 extend west and north of the cathedral. All of them have low but solid enclosures of stone, still containing some fruit trees which have grown wild, with delicious grapes growing in the nearby stony gorge («Մեղու Հայաստանի» [Meghu Hayastani], ibid).*

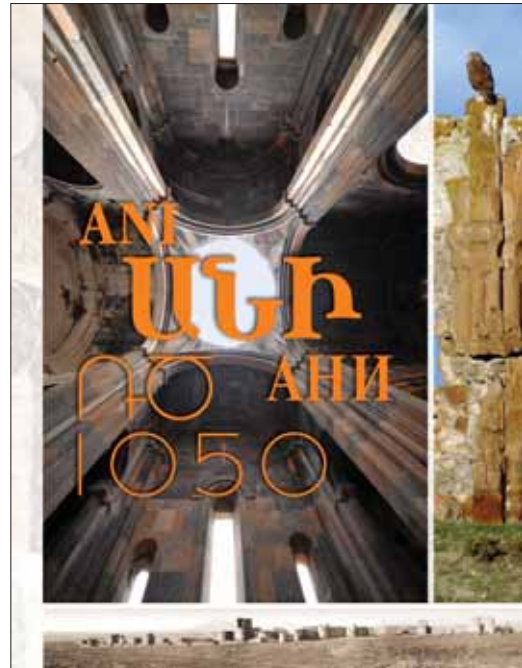
⁸⁰ **Shakhhatunians**, 272.

⁸¹ *Գիվան Հայ վիմագրության [A Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions]*, vol. 1 (Yerevan, 1966), 63.

⁸² **Sargissian**, 211.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 202-203.

In February 2012 RAA Foundation published **Ani 1050**, a large-scale trilingual album, under the patronage of the Ministries of the Diaspora and Culture of the Republic of Armenia.



In February 2012, under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia, RAA Foundation published a map (100 x 70 cm) entitled **Printing-Houses throughout the Armenian Homeland** in commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the first Armenian printed book.



In March 2012 the Foundation published the 15th volume of the RAA Scientific Research Series, **Three Monasteries of Artaz**, by Dr. Armen Hakhnazarian.



NEW RAA PROJECTS

In commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Great Armenian Genocide of 1915 and in token of deepest respect of the memory of its innocent victims, RAA intends to complete its decades-long research in Western Armenia in 2015 and present the history of its over 70 districts in 36 volumes.



The members of RAA are also preparing a series of publications on the history and material culture of the towns and villages of Artsakh.



NOTIFICATION

The year 2013 marks the 800th anniversary of the foundation of the renowned monastery of Teger (1213 to 2013), Aragatzotn Region, Republic of Armenia. In commemoration of this, RAA Foundation is planning to dedicate one of the forthcoming "Vardzk" issues of 2013 to this monastic complex, which, regretful as it is, has not been properly studied so far.



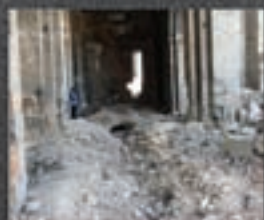
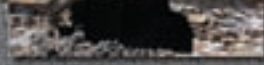
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

RAA Foundation extends its deepest gratitude to **Mr. Arthur Seredian** (Harutiun Sarhadian, the younger son of Sirak Sarhadian, an outstanding political, public, cultural and educational figure from Van, Western Armenia) for his donation of an IPAD2 4G.

OBITUARY

We regret to inform our readers about the death of our senior friend, master **SEPUH SAGHATELIAN**, a man of great patriotic feelings, who died at the age of 92 on 27 February 2012 in his birthplace Akhalkspha.





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