ARCHITECTURE OF CHURCHES OF ARMENIANS IN TEHRAN

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ABSTRACT

Armenian churches had been built in Tehran since 18th and 19th centuries, but the most important part is from 20th century. These churches can be studied in three groups: the earliest churches group, the Church of St. Astvatsatsin (Holy Mother of God) built by Nikolai Markov and finally the church of Saint Sargis (Armenian Prelacy of Tehran) along with the churches built afterwards. By studying the architecture of exact buildings in terms of plan and volume separately and in the political and cultural context of that period, especially when in compare with historical Armenian churches, contemporary Armenian churches, Armenian churches built in other areas of Iran and modern and contemporary churches of the world; comprehensive results are obtained about the architecture of them. So, in this study, the earliest churches along with a number of churches in other cities in Iran belong to a transition period between the architecture of Armenian churches in Isfahan and Tehran. The churches of Isfahan, in their turn, follow the Traditional Armenian architecture, in plan and interior spaces, and influenced by the architecture of Safavid period of Iran, in the total volume and façades. Second group can be seen as a type of classicism, which means the direct integration of Armenian traditional architecture. And the third group buildings, contemporary ones with deep roots in traditional architecture, have the obvious impact of modern and contemporary architecture of the world. These churches represent the same sense and concepts embodied in traditional Armenian architecture with an abstract language and remarkable artistic innovation. In addition, the direct use of concrete traditional churches or some types from Armenian architecture history or a new reading of them, provide a tight connection between these and their predecessors. According to the characteristics of all three groups and paying attention to this fact that, Armenian churches of Tehran have always had the common Armenian architectural design in their plan and interior space and also in their external volume, we should mention that this is a kind of return to roots, after the separation point in its historical aspect occurred in Isfahan. This return was identically at first and in addition with use of technology and innovation afterwards. So we should conclude that the architecture of Armenian churches established in Tehran have a single identity and must be called Armenian contemporary Church Tehran, by the way of cultural belonging in architecture .

Keywords: *Armenian church, Armenian architecture, Iranian Armenians, architecture of church, the churches of Tehran*

INTRODUCTION

Different areas of Tehran City embrace several examples of Armenian churches due to the long-term presence of Armenians in this City. Some of these churches which have special characteristics or are urban and cultural symbols, have a greater chance to be known by the specialist or citizens. But most of them and especially, their architectural identity are unfamiliar to the community of experts and researchers in the field of architecture, Iranian architecture, contemporary architecture, religious architecture and so.

It should be noted that the architecture of Armenian churches in Tehran is important as the architecture of Armenian churches and also, in other fields of contemporary times, as a significant part of contemporary architecture in Tehran. This architecture has also had an important impact on the shaping of city landscape.

Armenian churches, built in Tehran over time, have impressive architecture as a single building and also, along each other, portray an evolutionary path. Studying the changes in plan, interior space, external volume and architectural features of this process in the cultural-historical circumstances of the formation of buildings on one hand and looking at the architecture of the churches in Armenia, architecture of modern and contemporary churches in the world, the architecture of Armenian churches in other regions of Iran, at the same or earlier time, on the other hand, will provide valuable information.

The number of the studies on the architecture of Armenian churches in Tehran City are less than the studies in other regions and cities of Iran, such as Azerbaijan and Isfahan. Also, existing studies, which have considerable value, are mainly general, descriptive and have historical information. Deeper and more accurate studies have been done only on individual buildings. There are no comprehensive and analytical studies, including comparative studies of architecture, in the historical - cultural circumstances and by the use of modeling and comparison.

METHODOLOGY

This study is mainly qualitative research and provides the dominant types based on the quantity of the samples. Data was collected by the use of archive documents and field study and investigated by modelling, comparing and analyzing logically. According to the holistic nature of research, the resources used for studying each of the buildings and also, the resources used for accurate and extensive study will be provided. Given the qualitative and multi-categories analysis, this study is also deep-thinking in addition to be comprehensive. Despite of its extensive review levels, it is generally considered fundamental.

What this study seeks is to answer a main question:

- What are the nature and characteristics of the architecture of Armenian churches in Tehran?

That can be reviewed by a few questions:

- What are the common and differences between the Armenian churches in Tehran and the architecture of the church in the world and Armenia?
- Can the specified process be considered for the changes of architectural characteristics of Armenian churches in Tehran?
- Do the Armenian churches in Tehran have the same and identified identity in terms of the architecture?

There are many churches in Iran that religiously follow the “Armenian apostolic holy church”. So we select the buildings based on this criterion and call them “churches of Armenians”, and study them to find out what identity do they have according to architecture and cultural belonging. Therefore the architecture of other churches as Catholic or Protestant of Armenians in Iran all other nations’ churches are out of the delimitation of this research.

DIFFUSENESS OF CHURCHES IN TIME AND PLACE

The considerations of Armenians’ presence in Tehran is different from Azerbaijan where they are local and from Isfahan where they had been moved by forced displacement by Safavid Shah Abbas. Except the primary forced movement, increase of Armenian population in Tehran had occurred at the end of 19th and early of 20th century and must be considered as the part of the general flow which tended to capital. Of course, the migration of Armenians of Iran to Armenia, in the years following World War II, had significant impact on the displacement of the population from the different towns and villages to Tehran City.¹

¹ For further reading, see [1], [2], [3], [4]

“The first group of Armenians were moved to Tehran at the time of Karim Khan Zand (1762-1779). This group included 10 families of the masons from New Julfa, Isfahan and were resided in the neighborhood of Sarasiab Dolab.

.... At the time of Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar, after Tehran was chosen as capital, a group of Armenians along with the captives of war in the Caucasus in 1795 were moved to Tehran and resided in the neighborhood of Qazvin Gate. The first Armenian chapel (Matur) was built in this neighborhood and in the alley next to Haj Kazem bagh (Moayer bazaar) in 1797. In 1884, St. George church was built at the place of this matur.” [5]

In following years, the Armenians settled in Tehran and the neighborhood of Shah Abdul Azim, Vanak village, Jomhori St., Karim Khan St., neighborhoods of Vahidieh, Majidieh and Heshmatieh and churches of St. Bardughimeos, St. Minas, The Holy Mother of God, St. Sargis, St. Targmanchats, St. Gregory the Illuminator and St. Vartan were built in mentioned neighborhoods, respectively. In total, there are 11 churches in Tehran, all of them are active [6].

Also, three maturs² were established in the old Armenian cemetery of Dolab neighborhood, the current Armenian cemetery (Khavaran Road) and Ararat sport complex (Vanak). So, the churches in Tehran include the main group of urban churches and some maturs (figure 1). Unlike the historical

Figure1: Diffuseness of churches in Tehran

maturs of Azerbaijan region, which were established in certain places or to remember any saint, the maturs in Tehran were established in the area of cemeteries and in order to perform funeral and remember the dead. A monastery, which originally means having monastic life within the set, don't exist in Tehran. But, it should be noted that Armenians in Tehran needed some space for national and social organizations. So although, the existing churches in Tehran are not a monastic set but they are the sets with the core of worship building and other buildings with administrative, cultural (school, museum, association) and service functions (exceptional children care center, the elderly care center³).

There are no rural churches in Tehran, although the Armenians, who moved to Tehran in earlier years, settled in the villages around the city and St. Minas church of Vanak was established at that time.

ARCHITECTURE OF CHURCHES IN TEHRAN

Urban churches of Tehran must be categorized into groups in terms of time and architectural image. The earliest churches, that some of them such as St. Gevorg church (Figure 2), were replaced over time by new buildings, shape the first group. These churches were built at the beginning of the settlement of Armenians in Tehran and at the same time of Armenian active life and architecture in Isfahan (Figure 3). Churches of this group resemble the former Isfahan churches and should be considered along Isfahan architecture [8] .

² Small churches built in the place of martyrdoms and in the memory of saints are generally small places of worship and prayer [7].

³ Refer to [5]

Figure2: St Gevorg church Tehran (replacement). Figure3:Betkhehem church Isfahan.
Figure4: St Thadeos and Bardughimeos church of Tehran (the earliest type)

Figure 5: St Hripsime Church of Ghazvin 1870

St. Bardughimeos church in Molavi cross- roads, built in 1808 is one of those (Figure 5). Plan of pillared hall, a small dome or bell tower, brick material and simplicity in generalities and details are the characteristics of this group of buildings. There are also some other churches in different cities of Iran which belong to this very type, for example the Armenian church Shiraz, built with the same architecture of the churches in Isfahan churches, or the churches of Ghazvin (Figure 5) and Araq, built in late 19th and the early of 20th centuries. These churches have some characteristics of Isfahan ones, just like the Tehran earliest churches. Brick material and the associated manufacturing methods (such as Safavid dome) and some of the most significant and vary according to the time and place.

Figure6 &7: The church of Holy Mother of God. Figure8:Oushk church, Tayk region, 7th century[9] . Figure9: St Karapet church in Abadan (1940)

The next church which is important in general trend is the church of the Holy Mother of God (Figures 6 and 7) built in 1938 by Nikolai Markov, a famous architect from Georgia [9]. This building, unlike its Tehran predecessors, was designed according to historical architecture of Armenian churches in terms of plan and volume, although, it resembles the churches of the northern areas of Armenia⁴ (Figure 8), which are on the border of Georgia, and it is more similar to Georgian church than the Armenian one in terms of the proportion of dome. The more interesting and ironic issue is that Tehran

⁴ For further information, especially about ambiguity in the design of this church designed by Markov, although it had been certainly built by Markov, see [9]

Russian Orthodox Church built in 1944 by this architect⁵, was designed with the same plan, while the conventional architecture of Russian Church is quite different from the Armenian. In this building, the plan, interior space and also, the total volume and the details of façade were directly derived from traditional Armenian architecture (with the aforementioned considerations). St. Karapet church built in Abadan City in 1940⁶ (Figure 9), is similar to Markov's church, in the rehabilitation and adhering to the traditional architectural features.

Other churches in Tehran which were built after these periods and by educated and sometimes famous Armenian architects form the final image of the Tehran Armenian churches and to be familiar with their exact features, the following outstanding samples were chosen among them.

ST. SARGIS CHURCH

St. Sargis church is also the center of Armenian Prelacy in Tehran. This building, located in intersection of Karim Khan and Nejat Ollahi (Vila) streets, is designed by Armenian architect Ojen Aftandillians, [5].

"The building of Prelacy center and adjacent church named as St. Sargis, began in 1964 and completed in 1971." [2]

Figure10: St Sargis church plan [2]. Figure11: St Gayane church plan, Ejmiatsin, 7th century, domed basilica [9] . Figure12: Dvin Cathedral plan, 7th century, cruciform domed basilica (1940)

The plan of this church is an elongated rectangle with four center pillars and with a little protrusions in the wings, it is similar to the cruciform type in Armenian architecture (figure 10). Rectangle with four central pillar (domed Basilica) can be found in St. Gayane church in Ejmiatsin City (Figure 11) and cruciform plan or three-apse basilica can be found in the Cathedral of Dvin city (Figure 12), Only the semicircle protrusion of wings has become orthogonal. The former is seen in the Isfahan churches, and the latter in St. Stepanos Monastery in Azerbaijan. The major differences between this church and the traditional types are reducing the wall thickness and adding to the interior spaces, increasing the number and size of openings and some other changes in the proportions.

Figure13: St Sargis church volume. Figure14: The original design of the church . Figure15: St Sargis church, Yerevan, Armenia, external renovated by contemporary architect Rafael Israyelian (designed in 1972)

⁵ [9]

⁶ [8]

In the external volume, it also follows the Armenian architectural traditions (Figure13), rectangular volume combination with triangular centaur of western façade and protrusion of side wings, the polyhedral protrusion of the apse, the dominant dome, the bell tower above the entrance, the triangular recesses in facades (khorsh⁷) and many other features have been derived from Armenian architecture culture.

In contrast, simplifying the volumes, narrow vertical openings, extensive use of metal and glass (even in the dome), separating the level of main entrance from the secondary level of bell tower and generally, the abstract translation of the volume of Armenian church are the impact of modern architecture on St. Sargis church design. It is interesting to know that the original design, had an entire transparent (glass and metal) west façade. The façade was covered later and some windows were placed there. Also, the dome, except the white lines (structure), was completely made with glass in the original design. Now, in the upper part (pyramid coating), it is covered by another material which is similar to glass from exterior view and in a way that the light enters the church just through the drum, like in a traditional Armenian church. Both of these changes were done with functional reasons, but also in order to return to the traditions interior of Armenian Church (Figure 14). In modern times, some churches in Armenia also are being built with Armenian traditional characteristics and innovation in methods of implementation, use of modern materials and technologies, simplifying the decorations and other so called “conservative” changes (Figure 15).

ST. GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR CHURCH

This church was placed in Majidieh neighborhood, its construction began in 1975 and completed in 1983. The church was designed by Jirair Simonian and it known to be a derivation of the historic St. Hripsime church (Figure 16) in Armenia (7th century) [2].

Figure16: The St. Hripsime church, 7th century, cross inside rectangle. Figure17:St. Grigory the Illuminator church [2]. Figure18: St Astvatsatsin church Bujakan, 7th century, cruciform

In terms of plan, this church (Figure17) is more similar to another group of Armenian churches, called single- apse cruciform plan, and mainly seen in small churches (Figure 18). In terms of exterior volume, especially the proportions of dome, the church (Figure 19) indeed resembles St. Hripsime (Figure 20). In interior space also, the church is similar to St Hripsimeo. The significant corners of St. Hripsime church have been replaced by narrow vertical skylights in this church, which creates the same, only brighter spatial sense (Figure21, 22). Simplifying the transition from the plan square to the drum circle in interior and the drum volume in the exterior, designing the bell tower at the entrance by the use of cross motive and emphasizing on the entrance by using lines and surfaces, in contrast of the volume-oriented nature of the Armenian architecture, are innovations influenced by modern architecture. But we should also mention, that the building, just like St. Sargis church, is largely faithful to the traditional Armenian church architecture in both inside (completely) and outside (significantly), while the modern technology (expose metal beams) and abstraction, are also entered.

⁷ Khorsh: these depression have been created to reduce the volume and weight of materials, particularly to deal with the earthquake

Figure19: St Grigory the Illuminator church volume. Figure20:St. Hripsime church volume.
Figure21&22: the interior corners in two churches

THE HOLY CROSS MATUR (ARARAT SPORT-CULTURAL COMPLEX)

This matur was built in the southern part of Ararat sport-cultural complex, because of the remnants of the Armenian cemetery in Vanak and in order to remember them.

“Little chapel of the Holy Cross was built in 1987 in the area of Ararat club. This church was designed by Rostom Voskanian with a cruciform plan” [2].

Figure23: The Holy Cross matur. Figure24: An Armenian classic four- apse or cruciform plan, St Stepanos church in Artik, 6th century

The Matur (Figure23) can be classified as a small three-apsed cruciform church which is a type of cruciform centre domed church (Figure24), one of the main types in the architectural development of maturs or small churches in Armenian architecture. In exterior volume (Figures 25, 26) and interior space (Figure 27, 28), the total central volume of Armenian churches and also division plan are quite tangible. The use of abstraction is as high that it seems the architect has tried to make totally abstract sculpture to provide a new reading based on the combination of lines and surfaces and by the simplification of the some basic features of this type. The Armenian architecture basic features used in the classical sample of this type and abstracted here are the conical dome, protrusions of the wings of cross, inner and outer corner details, volume proportions of the whole or a part of it and even decoration. Using the Cross (Figure 29) which is usually a decorative motif in similar buildings as a part of the main volume, is completely perceived via modern thinking and abstraction. Looking at

Figure25: St Stepanos church in Artik. Figure26&27: exterior volume and interior space in Holy Cross church, Figure28: interior space in Artik church

Holy Cross chapel (Figure30) designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, a famous architect of Modern style, can be reminiscent of a similar process in world architecture. The use of exposed concrete material, the most similar one to stone (the main material of the Armenian church architecture), the small and narrow windows, perceiving the church as a sculptural volumetric nature, faithful to the Armenian stone-decoration traditions and finally, the volume proportions are some subtle nuances that the designer has used to provide a quite familiar artwork to an Armenian church user in addition to creativity and innovation.

Figure29: the decorative use of cross motif in Armenian stone decoration, Figure30: The HolyCross chapel, Frank Lloyd Write, 1956

RESULTS⁸

According to the above, some results can be extracted as characteristics of Armenian churches in Tehran. The conclusion of comparative modeling (plan and external volume) (Figure 31) and the table

Figure31: models of Tehran Armenian church samples

of results, including dates of construction and architectural characteristics of studied churches (Figure 32) are provided. Studied churches selected as the examples of the architecture of Armenian churches in Tehran are the outstanding ones in the 3rd group of the Tehran Armenian churches mentioned above.

⁸ The table of results was created by author based on [2] and [8] and the models were built by author based on the status quo of the churches and the information of the same sources has been used directly in indirectly.

Figure32: Table of Tehran Armenian church types and characteristics

Region/ Type	City church				Chapel			
	Time	Sample	Freq. plan	Characteristics	Time	Sample	Freq. Plan	Characteristics
Tehran	18th to 20th c	St Sargis 1970	cruciform	Similarity to classic Armenian Church appropriate composition, importance of roof and the dome, simplicity and abstraction, materials of brick, stone and concrete	20th c	The Holy cross- Ararat 1973	cruciform	Centered composition, a new look to Armenian classic church proportions, volumes, items and methods by the light of modern and contemporary thinking
		St Grigory the Illuminator 1982				St Stepanos 1974		

DISCUSSION

The first group of Armenian churches in Tehran built in 18th and 19th centuries is considered along the architecture of Armenian churches in Isfahan. So this group forms a transition period between Isfahan and Tehran Armenian church architecture, along with some other churches in different cities of Iran. The material, climate and construction methods are some main differences between the churches in New Julfa and Armenia in its turn. Being moved to other points of Iran, Armenians had continued the architecture of Isfahan's churches identically at the beginning. Later some changes have been done by the influence of local climate and material. These changes include the return to conical Armenian dome, use of the Armenian façade tradition in volume (Figure33) and the tendency to use non-rectangular forms, especially the Cross form, in plan (Figure34).

The churches built after this transition period, mainly by educated and famous architects, were designed paying attention to Armenia classic church architecture, especially in outside. This was

Figure33: The exterior image development from Isfahan to Tehran Architecture, Isfahan, Shiraz, St. Tadeos- Bardughimeos Tehran, St. Gevorg Tehran, Ghazvin, Arak respectively (by author)

Figure34: The exterior image development from plan forms, Isfahan, Ghazvin, Abadan, St Astvatsatsin Tehran, St. Sargis Tehran, St. Grigory the Illuminator Tehran respectively (by author)

emphasizing the types lacking attention during 17th and 18th centuries. The church designed by Markov is the first significant step towards traditional Armenian architecture (limited to architect's awareness) and the church built in Abadan is also of the same type. This kind of identical repetition without any targeted change in the composition or the elements can be known as classicism. Aftandillians in St.Sargis church and Simonian in the St. Grigory the Illuminator church had used two non-rectangular almost cruciform plans, called three-apse center domed and three apse domed basilica. Also, noticeable efforts can be seen in return to the classic traditions of roof and dome shapes in Tehran churches which had been faded out in the changes from the vernacular architecture of Armenian churches in Azerbaijan to the region with different climate, materials and architectural

traditions such as Isfahan. It seems that the common flat roofs of Tehran and considering the fifth level out of sight still prevails and no excellent representation, of combined volumes, except the chapels, is seen in these churches. Achieving to volume proportions is slightly easier in chapels due to the limitation of dimensions. Still a tangible process of this field is visible in comparison with the recent examples in Azerbaijan and early examples in Isfahan (Figure 35). However the most significant difference between the recent churches of Tehran and previous examples is the importance of innovation or the strong effect of Modern architecture. Trying to name the process which has created the volume and space by the use of abstract language and obvious features of modernism such as technology and materials and avoiding decorations, still very faithful to traditional Armenian architecture in sensorial and conceptual layers, seems futile. Classicism, post-modernism, traditionalism and names like these sound useless. "Radical historicism"⁹ may seem more appropriate, but, we will call in Modern influence on Armenian architecture, as we call Seihon's works, despite the widespread use of the concepts and elements of Iran's historical architecture.

Figure35: The development of external volume and the composition of at roof and dome, from the beginning to contemporary churches in Iran. St Stepanos (Azerbaijan), "Vanq" (Isfahan), St Astvatsatsin (Tabriz), St Gevorg (Tehran), Armenian church of Hamedan, St Atvatsatsin (Tehran), St Karapet (Abadan), St Sargis, St Grigory the Illuminator, St Targamanchats churches and the chapel of Holy Cross (Tehran) the(Tehran), respectively (by author)

Finally, it can be said that the churches of Azerbaijan, which are vernacular and loyal to the architectural culture of Armenian churches in history¹⁰, and the churches in Julfa in Isfahan that have been along the first group and changed with combining with Safavid Iranian architecture¹¹, are the source of the architecture of churches in all other Iranian cities, including Tehran. This architecture reaches a contemporary image in Tehran after passing the transitional period and scattering in different climate and geography. In this process, the string of rosary is certainly the interior space of Armenian churches which represents the need of users' for a place with a familiar sense. In addition to the linear connection by the axis of interior space, rebuilding the outstanding and familiar historical buildings of the Armenian architect which can be seen in abundance at all times¹², is the evidence of mentioned need for mental security. In external appearance, there are two aspects affecting more than others, the political and economic ones. Thos, when political conditions

Figure36: the comparative graph of Armenian church in Tehran, Armenia and the world architecture by plan (by author)

permit and it is economically possible for the community, a stronger expression of Armenian architectural concepts and themes in external appearance is clearly visible. This applies to the Armenian churches in Iran, except indigenous monuments of Azerbaijan and most of all characterizes churches of Tehran. And, when addressing the modern architecture and new methods is possible and required, these language and possibility are again used in order represent the previous cultural concepts (Figure 36, 37).

Figure37: the comparative graph of Armenian church in Tehran, Armenia and the world architecture by volume (by author)

CONCLUSION

Armenian churches are being built in Tehran from the 18th and 19th centuries but most of them are a 20th century building. These buildings are to be studies in three groups, the earliest churches for the first group, St Mary church by Nikolay Markof for the second group and St Sargis church (the Armenian prelaty of Tehran) and the churches afterwards for the third group. The first period had been started with these features: brick materials, plan of pillared hall, rectangular volume, small conical dome or bell tower and the simplicity of other characteristics. This period has no similar examples and given its transient nature, the buildings had gradually changed towards the features of second group in terms of plan and volume. The features of second group are repeating the division plans of buildings and important periods of the architecture of churches in Armenia and direct derivation of total volume and other architectural features. The features of third period are the innovative repetition of classic Armenian plans and usage of Armenian Church traditional volume and dome by the techniques of simplifying and abstraction of the volumes and decorations, which is the obvious effect of modern architecture with daring steps in using modern materials and technologies. Innovations and the effect of modern and contemporary architecture in these churches is in line with greater emphasis on total structure of volume and details and the expression of the Armenian church architecture and not far from it. Also, in terms of interior space, these techniques are completely used to create spatial sense of traditional Armenian churches. Keeping pace with the architecture of modern church in Armenia is another feature of this architecture.

Therefore, despite the separated periods and differences, all churches of Tehran are along with the architecture of Armenian Church (meaning the architectural culture of the church in 17 centuries in the geographic area of Armenian culture) in terms of plan and interior space, and this is a common feature of the churches of Tehran with all other churches in Iran. In terms of exterior volume and other architectural features, the churches of Tehran express the sensory and conceptual themes of the architecture of Armenian churches at the modern and contemporary abstract language by the use of technology and artistic creativity. They must be perceived with a unit nature and identity and be called Architecture Church architecture in Tehran, addressing the cultural belonging of these buildings.

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