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The main church of Dadivank and the metropolitan architectural ideas¹

Abstract

The scholarly interest in the architecture, reliefs, and murals of the monastery of Dadivank in the Artsakh province of the medieval Armenia manifested itself in recent years in the course of the conservation and restoration works carried out on it and in the following research. The main church, St. Astvatsatsin or Cathoghike, that is the Cathedral, according to the inscription, was built in 1214 by Arzu Khatun, the wife of Vakhtang, Prince and sovereign of Haterk and all of Verin Khachen. Despite Dadivank's distant location from the medieval Armenian capital Ani, the study assumes that its external image was created in accordance with the image of the Ani cathedral. Moreover, we do not know of any other buildings embodying the same idea before Dadivank's Cathoghike was built. This main conclusion has been demonstrated by the results of an analysis of two peculiarities of the Dadivank church, which seem very important for the understanding of its image: 1) the blind arcade on the main body, with only one colonnette and with specific profile of the archivolt; 2) rosettes in the fields of the archivolt of the arcade of the drum. Also, the study has an important meaning for clearly understanding the original view of the Ani cathedral and its role in the development of the 13th-century Armenian architecture.

1. Introduction

Among numerous medieval monastic ensembles of Artsakh, Dadivank (or Khutavank) is one of the most interesting with regard to its complicated structure as well as to its beautiful arrangement in a mountain landscape. Several impressive constructions of the monastery were built mostly during the 13th century with different purposes and various volumetric and spatial solutions (Fig. 1). Of these, there are unique structures, such as 4-column constructions: the so-called ›temple‹ and the gavit, as well as an unusually shaped belltower,

¹ The study has been realized by the grant of the Russian Science Foundation, project no. 22-18-00354, in the National Research Moscow State University of Civil Engineering (NRU MGSU). Topic: »The Architecture and monumental art of Ani as a phenomenon of world artistic culture. Making of the metropolitan school of Armenian architecture of the 10th-14th centuries.«

into which two high khachkars — unsurpassed in beauty and designed in the monastery in 1283 — were inserted.² According to the legend the grave of St. Dadi, a disciple of Apostle Thaddeus, one of the seventy disciples of Christ is located here in Dadivank.

The main church, St. Astvatsatsin or Cathoghike, that is the cathedral, was built at the time when the monastery united a small number of buildings. An inscription carved on its southern façade states that, in 1214,

»Arzu Khatun, a daughter of the Prince of Princes of Kurd, and the wife of Vakhtang, Prince and sovereign of Haterk and all of Verin Khachen, built this cathedral with the great hope on the resting place of herself and her sons [...] (one of whom died in the war against the Turks)«. ³

The building is of the common type of domed monastic churches, cruciform inside and rectangular from the outside. In the corner zones, there are additional cameras in two tiers, most of which served as chapels (Fig. 2).

The size of the church is small, 12.3 by 10.6 m on the ground plan, but the forms are monumental and, at the same time, there are elegant details, following the great examples of decoration of the façades and the drum with a blind arcade. The ornamentation and all the shapes of the building are made with ease, the authors went baldly from the typical proportions of the samples of central regions of Armenia; the construction impresses with its picturesque masonry, polychrome in places — the chess in scheme or with inserts of arches and columns made with stone of a colour that differs from its background (Fig. 3). We do not need to give a detailed description of the features of the Dadivank Cathoghike here, as such presentations are existing in previous publications dedicated to the architecture and conservation works on the church.⁴ The main goal of this study is the uncovering of the origin of its architecture in the part of the architectural idea.

2 Paolo Cuneo, *Architettura Armena dal quarto al diciannovesimo secolo / Con testi e contribute di T. Breccia Fratadocchi, M. Hasrat'yan, M. A. Lala Commeno, A. Zarian*, vol. 1–2. Roma: De Luca Editore, 1988, 450–455, no. 245; Shahen Mkrtchyan *Историко-архитектурные памятники Нагорного Карабаха (Istoriko-arkhitekturnye pamiatniki Nagornogo Karabakha) (Historical-Cultural Monuments of Nagorno-Karabakh)*. Second ed. Yerevan: Parberakan 1989, 34–39; Murad Hasratian. *Հայկական ճարտարապետության Արցախի դպրոցը (Artsakh School of Armenian Architecture)*. Yerevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1992, 43–61; Samvel Karapetyan *Памятники армянской культуры в зоне Нагорного Карабаха (Pamiatniki armianskoi kultury v zone Nagornogo Karabakha) (Monuments of Armenian Culture in the Zone of Nagorno-Karabakh)*. Yerevan: RAA, 2000, 79–122; Samvel Ayyvazyan *Դադի վանքի վերականգնումը 1997–2011 թթ. (Dadi vanki verakangnume 1997–2011 tt.) (The Restoration of the Monastery of Dad (1997 to 2011))*. Yerevan: RAA, 2015; Ara Zarian, Christine Lamoureux *La conservation-restauration des peintures murales dates 1297 dans l'église Kathoghike-Sainte-Mere-de-Dieu construite en 1214*. Yerevan: Tigran Mets, 2021 (in Armenian and French), 51–91.

3 Original Armenian inscription has been published several times (Դիվան հայ վիմագրության (Divan hai vimagrutian) (Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions), vol. 5: Artsakh, ed. by Sedrak G. Barkhudarian, Yerevan: Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR, 1982, 198–199, no. 708; Samvel Karapetyan (cf. fn. 2), 108–110, no. 1; Ara Zarian/ Christine Lamoureux (cf. fn. 2) 94–95). Its translations have been published also in Russian (Karapetyan 2000, 106–107) and in French (Zarian, Lamoureux 2021, 94–95).

4 Murad Hasratian (cf. fn. 2), 45–49; Babken Ulubabyan. *Հայոց Արևելից կողմանց եկեղեցին և մշակույթը (Haiots Arevelits koghstants ekeghetsin ev mshakuite) (The Church and Culture of the Armenian Eastern Sides)*. Yerevan: Tigran Mets, 1998, 368–374; Samvel Ayyvazyan (cf. fn. 2), 28–37; Ara Zarian/ Christine Lamoureux (cf. fn. 2), 93–111.



Fig. 1: Dadivank. Main view of the monastery from north-west. Photo by A. Kazaryan (2012). All rights reserved.

The interest in the architecture of this church and in studying the origin of its architecture gets bigger. Moreover, in the last couple of years, the Udins' community of Azerbaijan, with the support of the authorities of that country, was trying to claim its rights, as supposedly the heirs of all parts of Aghvank (Caucasian Albania), to the Christian shrines of Artsakh. Earlier, Azerbaijani scholars systematically engaged in the ›Albanianization‹ of the Armenian heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh, from time to time receiving a rebuff from their colleagues from other countries. The solution of the problem presented in my article should clearly reveal the complete inconsistency of such pseudo-scientific political claims. I am to do this solely by means of an architectural analysis of this monument in the context of Armenian architecture.

Moreover, the scholarly interest in the architecture, reliefs, and murals of the Dadivank Church manifested itself in recent years in the course of the conservation and restoration works carried out there and in the following research. In 2001–2005, the church was restored; the results of those works were covered in the articles and a book by the architect

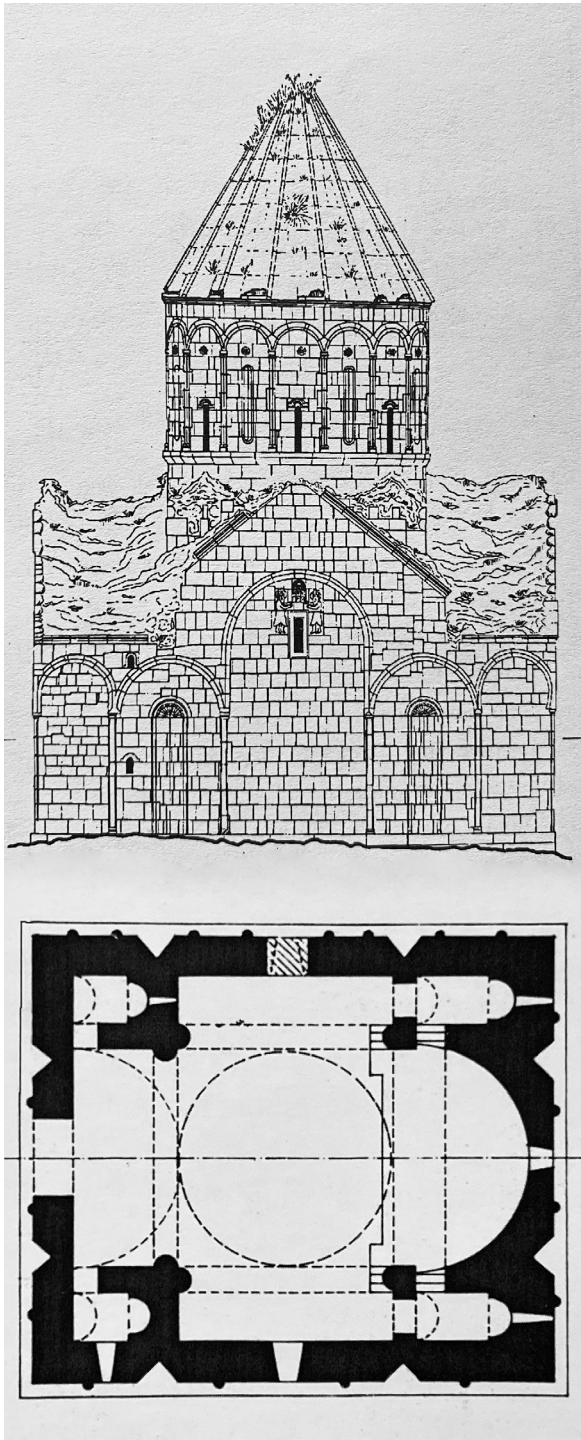


Fig. 2: Dadivank. Groundplan and southern façade, measurements. Drawing used materials from: Ayvazyan 2015, 95; Zarian, Lamoureux 2021, fig. 87.



Fig. 3: Dadivank. Cathoghike Church. View from north-east. Photo by A. Kazaryan (2012). All rights reserved.

Samvel Ayvazyan.⁵ In 2014–2017, the murals that were concentrated on the northern and southern walls of the inner space were fully discovered and cleared by Ara Zarian and Christine Lamoureux.⁶ Both of these books, the main purpose of which was to present the archaeological and conservation work on the site, contain sections describing and analyzing the architectural features of the Dadivank Church.

⁵ Samvel Ayvazyan (cf. fn. 2).

⁶ Ara Zarian/Christine Lamoureux (cf. fn. 2).

2. The image of Dadivank Cathoghike in the context of the Armenian monastic churches of the Zakarid Period

In the context of the Khachen Kingdom, the architecture and decoration of the Dadivank church can only compete with the cathedral of St. John the Baptist of the Gandzasar Monastery of 1216–1238, magnificent in forms and reliefs. These two churches were built by the same kind of architectural type, and in some decorative shapes they are convenient. The facades of both are decorated by a blind arcade, in which triangular niches are inscribed. Reliefs representing the donors with the models of churches (kritor reliefs) are inserted in their walls. But proportions of the ground plans and several architectural forms, as well as the stylistic features are different. The last observation brings me to the opinion that both churches cannot be built by the same architect or same builders.⁷

Moreover, the Dadivank church was built earlier than the one in Gandzasar; and it increases the possibility that the moment of its creation was the starting point of architecture and monumental arts synthesis on the territory of Artsakh, where this principle was implemented in a full scale. After all, it is in that church that the majestic architectural forms were enriched with reliefs and ornaments, lapidary inscriptions, polychrome masonry, façade colouring, and interior paintings. Many of these peculiarities are characteristic of both Armenian architecture in general and especially its Artsakh school. It can be assumed that the Dadivank church lay at the roots of that school or of its radical transformation in the beginning of the 13th century.

There is a logical question: has scientific research determined the place of this church in the development of the architecture of Artsakh and, in general, of whole Armenia? It seems that it has not. I need to mention only one attempt of searching for the sources of Dadivank's Cathoghike architecture. Basing their theory on the role of bishop Hovhannes, the abbot of Haghbat Monastery and a relative of Arzu Khatun, the scholars Mesrop Magistros and Bagrat Ulubabayan suggested the Surb Nshan church of Haghbat (972) as a prototype for the church of Dadivank. This version has been analyzed and mainly denied in the latest book about the church's architecture and mural painting.⁸

My own research is devoted to the disclosure of this issue, which connects the architectural image of the Dadivank church with the ideas that were born in Ani, the capital of Armenia in the Bagratid time at the end of the 10th century, which turned out to be popular again from the end of the 12th century.

Before presenting the version of the origin of the architecture of this church, I will pay attention to the reason for all the difficulties in finding the origins and 'family ties' of medieval architectural structures, which especially applies to the historiography of Armenian

7 Murad Hasratian (cf. fn. 2), 44–45.

8 Ara Zarian/Christine Lamoureux (cf. fn. 2), 94–96.

architecture, where the method of typological analysis is dominant.⁹ The method was developed in the 20th century, in the atmosphere of longing for functionalism and formalist-rationalist trends in architecture. Certainly, medieval customers and architects had similar considerations, but not on the foreground. For the most part, they could think in images, especially when they planned extraordinary buildings, and the utility was not the only reason for their creation. The main monastic churches, cathedrals as a rule, were erected on the initiative of prominent representatives of secular and spiritual authorities; in the architectural design, the ideas determining the imagery of the work prevailed. Therefore, if we want to unravel the idea given to the architect or developed as a result of his joint creativity with the customer, it is necessary to comprehend precisely the imagery characteristics of the completed building.

What do we have in the case of the cathedral built by Princess Arzu Khatun? This is a centric church, almost square on its base, with a high dome and a blind arcade encircling both the main volume and the drum. Two models, depicted in the donor reliefs above the southern and eastern windows, correspond to such image (Fig. 4).

One of the next two models of churches, embodied in a sculptural form on the drum of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Gandzasar, built shortly after the Dadivank church, in 1216–1232, looks similar (Fig. 5). In the Gandzasar Cathedral, the five arcade fields on each façade are presented just like in Dadivank. And both cathedrals belong to one and the same architectural type, with cameras in the corners. There is, however, a difference: their domed heads are of completely different types. In Dadivank, the polyhedron of the drum is emphasized with bundles of pilasters, as if bearing a wide zigzag cornice serving as a basis for a pliciform umbrella-shape roof of the dome. The line of development of such monastic cathedrals is well known, from Haritchavank (1201) to Gandzasar, through three or four decades of the 13th century. At their roots, apart from the Haritchavank cathedral, there were two churches of Ani, built during the revival of the Armenian capital under Zakare and Ivane Mkhargrdzeli or the Zakaryans. Both of them are known to us from reconstructions: the Bakhtagek church in the reconstruction by Toros Toramanian, and the church in Akhchhaberd in Ani.¹⁰ The latter combines a blind arcade with a folded roof. It can be seen as a sample of all such churches of Cathoghike of Marmashen monastery, 1029. But it is a completely different theme in Armenian architecture, which was mainly developed in parallel.

Nevertheless, a church with a blind arcade on the main volume and on the drum forms a very recognizable image in Armenian architecture, more precisely, a cathedral type. Its sim-

9 Armen Yu. Kazaryan, Церковная архитектура стран Закавказья VII века: формирование и развитие традиции (Tserkovnaia arkhitektura stran Zakavkaz'ia VII veka: formirovanie i razvitie traditsii) (Church Architecture of the 7th Century in Transcaucasian Countries: Formation and Development of the Tradition), in 4 vols., vol. 1. Moscow: Locust Standi Publ., 2012 (in Russian), 52, 76–78.

10 Armen Yu. Kazaryan, Новые данные о куполах храмов Ани. Часть вторая. Церковь во Внутренней крепости (Novye dannye o kupolakh khramov Ani. Chast' vtoraiia. Tserkov' vo Vnutrennei kreposti) (New data on the domes of the Ani's churches. Part two. The church of the Inner fortress), in: Voprosy vseobshchei istorii arkhitektury (Questions of the History of World Architecture), no. 13, 2019, 127–144.



Fig. 4: Dadivank. Ktitors relief on the southern façade. Photo by A. Kazaryan (2012). All rights reserved.



Fig. 5: Church of the Gandzasar Monastery, view from south-east. Photo by A. Kazaryan (2005). All rights reserved.

plified version is a composition with a blind arcade on a high drum only and, accordingly, with smooth walls of the main volume. Such are the churches of Geghard (1215), Makaravank (1198), the recently restored church of Astvatsnkal (1244).

However, literally a year after the construction of the Dadivank church in Ani, on the initiative of the merchant Tigran Honents, the monastic church of St. Grigor Lusavorich (1215) was built, which later passed into the use of the Chalcedonian community of the city (Fig. 6, 7). This church resembles the Ani Cathedral, built by the great architect Trdat, on the order of Shahinshah Smbat Bagratuni and Queen Katramide in the last third of the 10th century (Fig. 8, 9). It is the close proximity of these two churches that leaves no doubt that the plan of Tigran Honents was to reproduce the main idea of the external composition of the Ani cathedral, including its non-preserved, but theoretical reconstructed high dome (Kazaryan 2018). At the same time, the internal structure and dimensions turned out to be completely different, corresponding to the capabilities of the customer and the functions of the monastic church.



Fig. 6: Ani, St. Gregory Illuminator Church of Tigran Honents, view from south-east. Photo by A. Kazaryan (2019). All rights reserved.



Fig. 7: Ani, St. Gregory Illuminator Church of Tigran Honents, the drum from north-west. Photo by A. Kazaryan (2022). All rights reserved.



Fig. 8: Ani Cathedral. View from south-east. Photo by A. Kazaryan (2013). All rights reserved.



Fig. 9: Ani Cathedral. Reconstruction of the western façade from: Texier 1842, pl. 20.

3. Dadivank Cathoghike and the Ani Cathedral

If the church of Tigran Honents can be considered a kind of copy of the Ani cathedral, built in close distance from the pattern, then any other church with similar criteria – i.e. with a blind arcade both on the main volume and on the drum – can claim to be built in the image of the same cathedral. Outside of Ani, only the Dadivank church can serve as such a monument. The unusual number of blind arcade sectors – five on each of its façades – follows from the almost square shape of the ground-plan and distinguishes this monument from other churches of the era. It is obvious that the five-part arcade is a logical form for the façade, enriched with a pair of niches, which reflects the cruciform inner composition. This form is found not only on the western and eastern façades of the Ani cathedral, but also on all its reflections, from two churches of the Marmashen monastery of the Bagratid era (Fig. 10) to the Ani churches of Zakare in Aghchkaberd (western façade) (ca. 1200), of Bakhtagek (early 13th century) and of Tigran Honents (1215). The number of arcade fields on the longitudinal walls is related to their length: there are seven fields on the church of Bakhtagek (two on each side sections), and nine fields on the longer church of Honents (three on each side sections). Similarly, the shorter one, in Dadivank, contains only five fields on its southern and northern facades (one on each side sections).

Considering the forms of arcature themselves, we must take into account their originality in connection with the provincial nature of the Artsakh branch of the development of Armenian architecture, within the framework of which the Church of St. Astvatsatsin was created in Dadivank. The simplification of some forms of ›classical‹ Armenian architecture, close to the circle of the capital Ani, as well as the change in their proportions, is the result of precisely the provincial character of architecture. However, I am convinced, and this can be verified by analysis, that basically all these forms are also present in non-provincial monuments, many preserved in the main city of the country and in the most important monasteries of Armenia, such as Horomos, Haritchavank, Haghbat, Sanahin, Hovhannavank, Makaravank. In this article, I consider the origins of only those architectural forms that were used in the design of the facades of the Dadivank church: elements of the blind arcade of the main volume and the drum, rosettes on the drum (Fig. 11).

In the arcade on the walls of the main volume of the Dadivank church there are single narrow semi-columns with bases and capitals made up of a cuboid element and an abacus. The profile of the arches above the columns consists of a bevel and a shelf (plinth) above it (Fig. 12). All of the listed forms are not characteristic of most examples of arcature on the walls of Armenian churches. At the same time, a complex of marked forms – single half-columns in the main tier, described bases and capitals, similar archivolts (Fig. 13), as well as paired columns on the drum are found on the same cathedral in Ani, where, of course, they are carried out with the skill belonging to the great architect Trdat.

The appearance of the rosettes under the archivolts of the drum in Dadivank seems to be connected with the reproduction of the decor of the Ani cathedral as well. First of all,



Fig. 10: Marmashen Monastery. View from north-east. Photo by A. Kazaryan(2022). All rights reserved.



Fig. 11: Davivank. The drum from north-east. Photo by A. Kazaryan (2012). All rights reserved.



Fig. 12: Dadivank. Fragment of the blind arcade of the eastern façade. Photo by A. Kazaryan (2012). All rights reserved.

because we do not find rosettes arranged with such regularity and exactly along the axes of the archivolts in other monuments of Armenian architecture. Secondly, in order to give substance to this version, it is possible to look at the almost forgotten reconstruction of the Ani cathedral, which has this kind of rosettes.

This reconstruction was published by Charles Felix Marie Texier in 1842.¹¹ In all subsequent reconstructions, created by Toros Toramanian, Nikolay Tokarskiy, Hrachia Gasparyan, Artak Gulyan, Armen Abroyan, the decoration of the drum is simplified in comparison with Texier's first attempt. Some scholars unreasonably ignored the existence of an ornamented frieze,¹² downfallen fragments of which are preserved on the roofs of the cathedral,¹³ but all

11 Félix Marie Charles Texier, *Description de l'Arménie et de la Perse, de la Mesopotamie*, Paris, 1842, pl. 19–20.

12 Toros Toramanian, *The Cathedral Church of Ani*. Yerevan: Agency of historical-cultural museums and the preservation of historical environment Publ., 2008 (in Armenian, English and Russian), 117, tabl. 25.

13 Armen Yu. Kazaryan, Новые данные о куполах храмов Ани. Часть первая. Кафедральный собор зодчего Трдата (*Novye dannye o kupolakh khramov Ani. Chast' pervaya. Kafedral'nyi sobor zodchego Trdata*) (New data on the cupolas of Ani's churches. Part first. The cathedral by an architect Trdat), in: *Voprosy vseobshchei istorii arkhitektury* (Questions of the History of World Architecture), no. 10, 2018, 145–169 (in Russian), 153–161.



Fig. 13: Ani Cathedral. Fragment of the blind arcade of the southern façade. Photo by A. Kazaryan (2017). All rights reserved.

of them unanimously refuse depicted rosettes, apparently considering them to be the result of the French researcher's fantasy. Now we can safely suspect that in the first half of the 19th century there were many more details of the collapsed dome, and among them were fragments of a drum, including rosettes. In addition, there are some rosettes on the arcade's fields on the drum of the church ordered by Honents in Ani, oriented to the cathedral. By contrast with Dadivank, the drum of this church has a frieze above the blind arcade. So, in a certain sense, it is more fully a copy of the Ani cathedral's image. We may conclude that the architects of both of these churches collected a number of details into a common pattern, and developed them to a specific style on its own.

By the time of construction of the church ordered by Honents in Ani, the Dadivank church had been already founded. Despite its far distance from Ani, we have every right to assume that its external image was created in accordance with the image of the Ani cathedral. Moreover, we do not know of any other buildings embodying the same idea — especially those which could be dated back to the time before 1214. The only exception could

be the stone model, discovered in Ani during the excavations by the expedition of Nicholas Marr in the early 20th century. But it does not have an exact date. Noteworthy, except the examples on the façades of the churches of Dadivank and Gandzasar, the images of all other models — on the churches of Haghbat, Sanahin, Haghartzin — do not contain blind arcades and they are much simpler in general.

Simplification of the original model, citing some of its features and ignoring others is a characteristic approach of medieval architecture. There have never been literal borrowings, especially in cases of creating a work of a much smaller scale. Therefore, such details as the shape of the arcade's elements, their proportions, the absence of a frieze on the drum at the Dadivank church look natural. Especially, if we take into account the provincial nature of the work of the architect and master masons of Cathoghike.

Nevertheless, this monument contains two peculiarities, which seem very important for this research: 1) the blind arcade on the main body, with only one colonnette and with specific profile of the archivolts; 2) rosettes in the fields of the archivolts of the arcade of the drum, which, being an exceptionally rare feature, remind the earliest reconstruction of the Ani cathedral proposed by Texier. It can be assumed that, in the middle of the 19th century, those blocks still existed and served as the basis for such an unusual reconstruction. It seemed incredible to everyone, but it was the drum of the Dadivank Cathoghike, that made the proposal of the French researcher quite reasonable. The same allusion to the shaping of the Ani Cathedral is contained in the rosettes on the drum of the Honents church, but with an arbitrary arrangement of the rosettes.

4. Conclusion

Thus, for the first time, putting forward a version about the embodiment of the architectural idea of the Ani cathedral in the Dadivank church, I ought to comment on the possible reasons for such reference to the Ani cathedral by Arzu Khatun or Bishop Hovhannes Khachentsi, who helped her with the construction. This main conclusion has been demonstrated by the results of an analysis of two peculiarities of the Dadivank church, which seem very important for the understanding of its image: 1) the blind arcade on the main body, with only one colonnette and with a specific profile of the archivolts; 2) rosettes in the fields of the archivolts of the arcade of the drum.


Most likely, the main task of their decision was a rhetorical reference to the greatest work of the Armenian capital in order to transfer its symbolic and meaningful significance to the land of Khachen, declaring its inalienability from the main national center. The study discovered the importance of Ani for the development of Armenian architecture during the first decades of the 13th century, when that famous cultural and political center of Armenia also played a major role in the religious life of the provinces of the country.

It remains to ask the opponents from Azerbaijan: how can one talk about certain Albanian features of the Armenian churches of Artsakh, if their creators openly declared their belonging to the single Armenian Church in the very forms of buildings. They declared it much more openly than it happened in other historically Armenian provinces.

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