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MONOGRAPHIES 50

HOŖOMOS MONASTERY:
ART AND HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

by Edda VARDANYAN

This volume explores Hořomos Monastery, the pre-eminent architectural monument of the Bagratid Kingdom and a major Armenian cultural center for many centuries after the Kingdom's demise. This monument is of inestimable value both in historical and archaeological terms.

This foundation is situated about 4–5 km north-east of the Bagratid capital of Ani, on the right bank of the River Axurean, in the řirak district of the Ayrarat Region of the historical Greater Armenia. Presently, the River Axurean marks the border between Armenia and Turkey, leaving Hořomos in Turkish territory.

Hořomos Monastery was founded in the 930–40s under the rule of King Abas Bagratuni (929–953), marked by the flourishing and diffusion of Armenian monasticism. Other celebrated monasteries were founded in the same period, such as Halbat and Sanahin. Small at the time of its foundation, Hořomos became a major center after Ani was declared the Bagratid capital in 961 and the seat of the Patriarchate in 992. The subsequent history of the Hořomos Monastery is closely linked to that of Ani. Described in a dedication from 1036 as a “world-wide renowned monastery,”¹ it acquired a central role in the Bagratid Kingdom thanks to its architectural wealth, and the significance of its monastic and scholarly institutions.

The importance of Hořomos was primarily due to being the burial place of the Bagratid dynasty. The first king who ruled from Ani, Ařot III the Merciful (953–977), was buried there, as were kings Gagik I (990–1020) and Yovhannēs-Smbat (1020–1041). It was also the final resting place of Catholicos Sargis I of Sewan (992–1019, died 1021). As a royal pantheon, Hořomos Monastery is often referred to as the “Armenian Saint-Denis.”²

1. № 4.

2. TEXIER 1842, pp. 101–102.

Hořomos was one of earliest monastic architectural ensembles of medieval Armenia. Constructed at the zenith of Ani's architectural school, it marks a major phase in the development of Armenian architecture. In the first period, the constructions occupied the gorge of the Axurean in the peninsula created by the river's meander. New buildings were added in the upper plain around the gorge in the second half of the 11th century, making the monastery an ensemble of two groups of buildings termed Upper and Lower Hořomos.

The fervent construction activity that marked the first half of the 11th century brought innovative architectural ideas. New architectural and decorative solutions bestowed a novel significance and a system of symbols on the monastery, while defining the semantic development of Armenian monastic architecture. The *řamatun* (Armenian type of fore-church structure) built in 1038 next to the Church of St. John established the tradition of centrally planned four-column halls which spread widely in Armenian monastic ensembles. The process of urbanization gave rise to new types of architectural units too, such as a triumphal arch that was erected on the road from Ani to the monastery and which was part of the monastic complex. It was a unique "door" on a ceremonial and processional road, connecting the political center, Ani, to the spiritual center, Hořomos. Finally, a new type of *xac'kars*, emerging in the first half of the 11th century, determined the later development of the art of *xac'kars*. These extraordinary architectural and decorative elements show an intriguing connection to the contemporary environment ripe with eschatological speculations.

Lavish support for the monastery as a major spiritual center continued after the end of Bagratid independence. In the 12th–14th centuries, a period of renewal for the foundation under the patronage first of the Vaćutean nobility and then of the Zak'arids, it continued to function as part of a poly-centric Armenian socio-economic, administrative and cultural whole. Hořomos was restored numerous times, new buildings were added to the complex, including new mausoleums. During the 12th–14th centuries it received numerous donations in the form of villages, orchards, watermills, as well as real estate and shops in Ani. Some of the donors, such as Tigran Honenc', are known from other dedications from Ani. This is also the period that marks the development of the Hořomos scriptorium.

The monastery was active until 1918 and was abandoned after the Russian-Turkish Treaty of 1921, which ceded the Province of Kars to Turkey. In the subsequent decades the buildings of Hořomos complex were slowly destroyed and ruined. Today only ruins are left and all surviving buildings are in a disastrous state of conservation.

The historiography on Hořomos covers more than one and a half centuries. Yovhannēs řahxat'uncan (1842) initiated the study of Hořomos' inscriptions,

later studied and published by Karapet *vardapet*, abbot of Hořomos (1849), Archbishop Abēl Mxit'arean (1855 and 1870), Archbishop Sargis Ĵalaleanc' (1858), Nersēs Sargisean (1864), Ēwond Ališan (1881), Melik'sedek Gēorgeanc' (1903), Yusik Episkopos (1904), Mkrtič' (Nikita) Ēmin, Karapet Kostanean (1913), Alek'sandr Manuč'aryan (1977), Jean-Michel Thierry (1980) and Jean-Pierre Mahé (2002). As a monastic complex, Hořomos is mentioned by British travellers Robert Ker Porter (1821) and Henry Lynch (1901), as well as by the French archaeologist and architect Charles Texier (1842). Later, the description of the site was provided by Ēwond Ališan in his book *Širak* (1881) and other publications, as well as in the *Illustrated Dictionary* of Suk'ias Ēp'rikean (1907). The only monograph dedicated to its history is still the study of Abēl Mxit'arean (*History of the Monastery of Hořomos*, 1870). At the beginning of the 20th century T'oros T'oramanean started a systematic, scholarly study of the architecture of Hořomos. The results of his work were published in his *Materials on the History of the Armenian Architecture* (1942, 1948), while his measurements and drawings appeared only in 2002 thanks to the efforts of Ani T. Baladian and Jean-Michel Thierry in *Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot* (81). Jean-Michel Thierry produced the only monograph on the architecture of Hořomos: *Le couvent arménien d'Hořomos* (1980). Students of Armenian architecture often refer to Hořomos. Its importance is emphasized in the works of Josef Strzygowski, Jurgis Baltrušaitis, Nikolaj Tokarskij, Varazdat Harut'yunyan, Step'an Mnac'akanyan, Armen Zarian, Paolo Cuneo and others, as well as in general surveys of Armenian architecture.

Situated on the Turkish side of the Turkish-Armenian border, Hořomos was inaccessible for decades. But a series of visits by scholars during 2008–2014, including by some authors of this volume, confirmed the need for a new study of the foundation. If previously the monument was known only through the photographs taken mainly by T'oros T'oramanean at the beginning of the 20th century, now we possess new photographs by Samvel Karapetyan, Armen Kazaryan, Karen Matevosyan and the photographer Hrair Hawk Khatcherian which have revealed many hitherto unknown architectural and sculptural details, opening new avenues of research. It is now possible to conduct a more detailed analysis of the monument and shed light on hitherto untouched issues. This book presents the results of such research.

The seven sections in this volume are devoted to Hořomos, including the role of this monastic establishment as a spiritual and cultural center of medieval Armenia, as well as architectural and art historical analysis which places Hořomos Monastery in the context of medieval Armenian art and architecture.

The first contribution traces the history of the monastery from its foundation under King Abas Bagratid (929–953) to the early 20th century. The author, Karen Matevosyan, focuses first on the oldest church constructed within the Hořomos complex and argues that the church and the monastery, were originally dedicated to St. John. He further considers the flourishing of Hořomos in the Bagratid period (953–1045), as well as the history of the monastery in the 12th–13th centuries and in the 14th–20th centuries, using the evidence from inscriptions and colophons. The author also reconstructs a list of 27 abbots of Hořomos.

In the second part of the book Armen Kazaryan studies the architecture of Hořomos Monastery, providing the first thorough investigation of the monastic complex as a whole, of its separate groups and its individual buildings. The author traces the development of the ensemble in the different periods of its existence, exploring the connection between the plan of Hořomos' buildings and the landscape of the Axurean river gorge, as well as the implications of its proximity to the capital Ani. Hořomos emerges as the main creative center of medieval Armenian architecture, a laboratory of architectural innovations, especially in the last decades of Bagratid rule. A completely new architectural plan of poly-column hall, the *žamatun*, as well as a peculiar medieval interpretation of the ancient theme of the triumphal arch, give the monastic ensemble unusual features. The analysis of 12th–13th century architectural monuments demonstrates the continuity of creative traditions at Hořomos, where clients and leading Ani architects kept implementing new ideas. The chapter concludes with reflections on the current condition of the monument and the problem of its preservation despite unfavorable political circumstances.

Hořomos was given its official title of the “royal place of rest” (*hangstaran t'agawořac'*)³ by King Yovhannēs-Smbat, who founded, in 1038, a hitherto unattested type of structure – the *žamatun*. The third part of the book, by Edda Vardanyan, is dedicated to that structure and to *žamatun/gawit'* structures in Armenian architecture. This four-column hall, entirely different from the existing narthex types, was conceived as a royal mausoleum and became the model for dynastic funerary buildings within monastic complexes from the 11th to the 14th century. They were called either *žamatun* or *gawit'*, depending on the purpose of the construction. This chapter attempts to clarify the use of the terms *žamatun* and *gawit'*, explore their functional significance and the situation of both elements in monastic complexes, as well as analyze the sources of their architectural features based on extant historical data. The author examines the *žamatun* of Hořomos as a memorial building, impregnated by the strong eschatological mood at the time of its construction.

3. № 4.

The next contribution by the same author explores the sculpted dome of the *žamatun* (1038): eight carved slabs containing a figurative composition of the Last Judgment, a Tree of Life, four decorative panels in relief and two *xac'k'ars*. A series of new digital images permits a reconsideration of the iconography of the dome's decoration. This sculpted dome commissioned by King Yovhannēs Smbat is one of a kind. It is a unique both among sculptural figurative decorations from the School of Ani, and in the history of decorations of *žamatun/gawit's*. The study of this monument raises several issues, such as a new identification of the sculpted figures, their meaning in the scene of the Last Judgment and the symbolic nature of the overall decoration due to its situation in the *žamatun*. It confirms the hypothesis that the *žamatun* was conceived as a funerary and memorial building. The overall decorative program is interpreted as an iconographic version of the Apocalypse well placed within the historical and political context of its time, marked by the end of the Millennium and connected with the decline of the Bagratid kingdom during the reign of Yovhannēs-Smbat.

In the next contribution by Jean-Pierre Mahé a critical survey of the crosses and *xac'k'ars*s of Hořomos (11th – 13th centuries) is provided within the frame of an interpretative theory of their symbolic meaning. All *xac'k'ars*s of the site belong to the same type, which appeared in the surroundings of Ani during the early 11th century. The cross does not represent the crucifixion, but is rather the glorious Sign of the Son of Man, along with the Tree of Life and Salvation. The important point is that the *xac'k'ars*s of Hořomos are closely connected to the funeral monuments of the monastic buildings. Therefore they are devoid of the pictorial extensions (*Deisis* or the person of the deceased) characteristic of the 13th century. They show the cross as a salvation path ascending from the grave to Paradise, such as the luminous Sign which Christ in the *Acts of Philip*, in order to rescue the impious, draws from hell to heaven. Thus the *xac'k'ars*s globally are ideograms endowed with a cosmological meaning.

A major center of learning, Hořomos was famous for its scriptorium, where manuscripts were copied and illustrated. Karen Matevosyan and Sona Baloyan conduct the first comprehensive survey of this production, which includes the greatest number of extant manuscripts from the region of Ani. Numerous skilled scribes worked at Hořomos. Among these Ignatios is considered to be one of the most outstanding scribe-illuminators of medieval Armenia. Ignatios worked in the 13th century, mainly in the Monastery of Hořomos, had several disciples and witnessed the Mongol invasions. The manuscripts he copied, illuminated or completed, represent the majority of codices preserved from the scriptorium of Hořomos and from the region of Ani in general. They are kept in the Matenadaran of Yerevan, in the Libraries of the Mechitarist Congregation of Venice-St. Lazzaro, of the All Savior's Monastery of New Julfa (Isfahan). The only extant manuscript cover produced at Hořomos (and generally in the region of Ani) dates to 1347.

The last part of the book is dedicated to Hořomos' inscriptions. The inscriptions were studied *in situ* for the first time since the efforts of Nersēs Sargisean in the 19th century. Samvel Karapetyan established the text of numerous inscriptions covering the churches and other buildings of the monastic complex during his visit to Hořomos in 2008. Among more than 100 inscriptions comprising the present *corpus*, many have never been edited; texts previously published have been revised after collation with the original inscriptions when available. Moreover, for the first time in this edition the inscriptions are accompanied by drawings and photographs. In 2002, Jean-Pierre Mahé published a French translation of the texts copied by N. Sargisean in volume 81 of the *Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot*, which was dedicated to T'oros T'oramanean's study of the architecture of Hořomos. For this book, J.-P. Mahé has prepared a new translation of the inscriptions from Hořomos, which takes into account the new readings provided by S. Karapetyan. The detailed Introduction to the chapter includes a historiographical survey by S. Karapetyan, as well as a linguistic, historical and cultural appreciation of the texts by J.-P. Mahé.

This book is the result of a long collaborative effort started in 2008. Its publication is due to the support of many institutions and individuals. It is, thus, my pleasure to thank all those who gave advice on and supported the project directly or indirectly.

I am grateful to the History Museum of Armenia and its director Anelka Griğoryan who allowed me access to archival photographs of Hořomos made at the beginning of the 20th century. Reproduction of manuscripts produced at Hořomos were kindly provided by the Mařtoc' Institute of Ancient Manuscripts – Matenadaran (Yerevan), and the Diocese of New Julfa of the Armenian Church, Monastery of the Savior of All (Isfahan). I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the director of the Matenadaran Hrachia T'amrazyan and the representatives of the public relations office of the Diocese of New Julfa/Isfahan, especially Sonik Baghumean. I would like to thank the contributing authors of this book — Samvel Karapetyan, Armen Kazaryan, Karen Matevosyan — as well as the photographer Hrair Hawk Khatcherian (Bazé), who put a wealth of photographic material on Hořomos at our disposal. I am thankful also to Zaven Sargsyan for his support and collegial solidarity in enriching the illustrations of this book. My gratitude is due to Karen Matevosyan, whose comments and suggestions helped improve the edition of inscriptions, as well as Matenadaran researchers Hayk Hakobyan and Ariadna Harutyunyan for their scholarly advice. Similarly, help has been regularly forthcoming from Emmanuelle Capet, Research engineer at CNRS (Paris). Special appreciation is due to translators Zara Pogossian, Janice Abbott, Olga Chumicheva and Gayane Movsissyan for translating the articles into English, as well as to Clive Sweeting for having read the English translation. I thank the

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A visit to this Monastery gives one a feeling of the early days of Christianity, and gives one a sense of being relatively close to the Holy Land. More. Show less. Date of experience: June 2017. Ask AI_Q2007 about Monastery of St. John. 1 Thank AI_Q2007. This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC. See all 607 reviews. Reviews (607).
The views from the monastery are absolutely fantastic, the artwork in the museum is amazing and well worth the visit. Date of experience: June 2017. Ask 388manolom about Monastery of St. John. The monastery of Horomos is situated about 15 km north-east of Ani, beside the Akhurian river, and is reached by a rough track that runs close to the edge of the river's ravine. It was one of the most important religious and cultural centres within the Kingdom of Ani, and was founded during the reign of King Abas the first (943-953) - a period of monastic revival in Armenia. The immediate history of the monastery after Ani's capture by the Turks in 1064 is unknown. Horomos became an important burial place for the feudal families who governed Ani on behalf of the Mkhargrdzeli dynasty, the rulers of the Ani region during the 13th century. The monastery had a large library and an active scriptorium, and it is believed that the archbishops of Ani and northern Armenia sat here.