



A Comprehensive Evaluation Based on Fieldwork on the Medieval Armenian Church in Oğuzlu Village, Kars: History, Architecture, and Decoration

Güner SAĞIR

Assoc. Prof. Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Museology
Beyazıt Merkez Yerleşkesi MUZEYUM Ofisi, 34134 Fatih/Istanbul, Türkiye
E-mail: guner.sagir@istanbul.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-3103-6965

Abstract

The medieval Armenian church in Oğuzlu Village near Kars, which was commissioned by Hasan Gnt'uni before 895 according to one of its two inscriptions, is one of the important examples of Medieval Armenian architecture with its partially surviving structure and inscriptions. It was used for military purposes during the Ottoman-Russian wars of 1853–1856 and 1877–1878. The church has a triconch plan within a rectangular plan. The central square space of the naos was originally covered with a dome, which has since collapsed. While there are similar examples in Armenian architecture in terms of plan type, the Oğuzlu church is unique in some respects. This article provides a comprehensive evaluation of the surface surveys of Medieval Armenian Churches in Kars and its surroundings (excluding Ani) conducted in 2010, 2012, 2018 and 2021, presenting new findings from these years, which are amply supported by original drawings and images.

Keywords: Armenian, church, Medieval period, Kars, Oğuzlu village.

Kars, Oğuzlu Köyündeki Orta Çağ Ermeni Kilisesi Üzerine Saha Çalışmasına Dayalı Kapsamlı Bir Değerlendirme: Tarih, Mimari ve Süsleme

Öz

Kars'ın Oğuzlu Köyü'nde bulunan Orta Çağ'a ait Ermeni kilisesi, kitabesine göre 895 öncesinde Hasan Gnt'uni tarafından inşa ettirilmiştir. Kitabeleri ve mimarisi ile günümüze kadar ulaşmış Orta Çağ Ermeni dini mimarisinin önemli örneklerinden biri olan yapı, 1853-1856, 1877-1878, Osmanlı-Rus savaşları sırasında askeri amaçla kullanılmıştır. Kilise dikdörtgen içinde tetrakonch planlıdır. Naosun merkezi kare mekânının, bugün yıkılmış olmasına rağmen, kubbe ile örtülü olduğu bilinmektedir. Plan tipi olarak benzer örnekleri Ermeni mimarisinde görülse de bazı özellikleri bakımından üniktür. Bu makalede, Kars ve Çevresi Orta Çağ Ermeni Kiliseleri (Ani hariç) yüzey araştırması çerçevesinde 2010, 2012, 2018, and 2021 yıllarında Oğuzlu kilisede yapılan

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arařtırmalar kapsamlı řekilde deęerlendirilmiřtir. Bu deęerlendirmeler yapılırken yeni tespitler, çizimler ve görsellerle desteklenmiřtir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ermeni, kilise, Orta Çaę, Kars, Oęuzlu köyü

Introduction

The medieval Armenian church in Oęuzlu Village, which is located in the central district of Kars, built in the 9th century is worthy of special attention due to its architectural design, inscriptions and decorations (Figure 1-8).

Although the church was included in the field survey titled Medieval Armenian Churches in Kars and its Surroundings (excluding Ani), in 2010, 2012, 2018, and 2021, it has not been the subject of a monographic inquiry.¹ Within this general survey, the name, location and history of Oęuzlu village were examined, as were the location, name, current condition, architectural features, decorations, inscriptions and history of the church. These were supported with images and drawings. Additionally, a general assessment was made based on our fieldwork and publications about the church.²



Figure 1: General view from the southwest (early 1900s)
Photo T. Toramanian (Strzygowski 1918, I, p. 216, Abb. 253)



Figure 2: General view from the southwest (2018)

¹ I visited the church during my doctoral research in 2004. I then directed a surface survey of medieval Armenian churches in Kars and its surroundings (excluding Ani) with the permission of the General Directorate of Cultural Assets and Museums of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, as well as the General Staff Headquarters, which began in 2010 and lasted until 2021. My preliminary study on the structure entitled 'Medieval Armenian Church in Oęuzlu Village, Kars' was presented at the 22nd International Symposium on Medieval and Turkish Period Excavations and Art History Research, which was held at Istanbul Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University between 24 and 26 October 2018. As work on the structure is ongoing, the paper has not yet been published as an article; however, a 200-word Turkish abstract was included in the symposium abstract book. See Güner Saęır, "Kars'ın Oęuzlu Köyü'ndeki Orta Çaę Ermeni Kilisesi" (Medieval Armenian Church in the Oęuzlu Village in Kars). *22th International Symposium on Medieval and Turkish Period Excavations and Art History Research, Abstracts*, prepared for publication by G. Köroęlu, E. İęus, J. Ö. Oktay Çerezci ve S. Soylu Yılmaz, (İstanbul: Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Üniversitesi Yayınları, October 2018), 121.

² I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues with whom I conducted fieldwork: The following individuals were involved in the project: Architect Aykut Fenerci; Assistant Professor Rıza Gürlü Akgün of the Vocational School of Architecture Restoration Program at Maltepe University; and Assistant Professors Dr. Can Avcı and Armaęan Tan of the Department of History, Ancient History Division at Istanbul University. I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. High Priest Hovagim Seropyan and Senior Priest Dr. Krikor Damadyan of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul for their contributions in translating the Armenian sources, publications, and inscriptions used in the text. I would like to thank Dr. Lâle Uluç for translating my text, and her helpful comments.



Figure 3: General view from the southeast (1877-1878)
(Photo D. A. Nikitin, <https://russiainphoto.ru/photos/272975>)



Figure 4: General view from the southeast (2018)



Figure 5: General view from the northwest (early 1900s)
(Photo A. Vrouyr)
(<https://www.vanker.org/fiche/oghuzlu/oghuzlu/#anciennes-photos>)



Figure 6: General view from the northwest (2018)



Figure 7: General view of east façade (early 1900s)
(Photo A. Vrouyr)
(<https://www.vanker.org/fiche/oghuzlu/oghuzlu/#anciennes-photos>)



Figure 8: General view of east facade (2010)

1. Oğuzlu Village

Oğuzlu Village is a settlement located 43 km east of Kars and affiliated with the central district (Figure 9). It can be reached from Subatan on the Kars-Ani road by turning northeast onto the road leading to Başgedikler. Along this route, Oğuzlu Village is reached after the villages of Karakaş, Külveren and Başgedikler in succession.

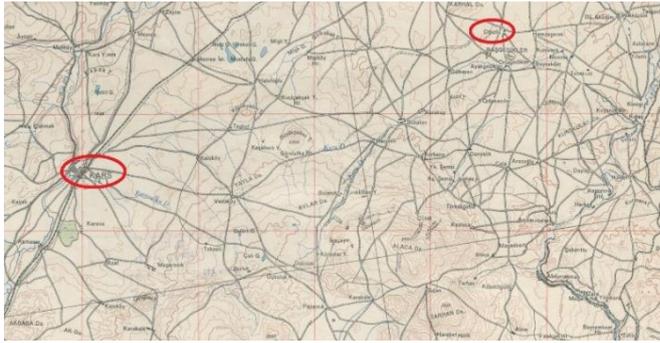


Figure 9: Kars Map, 1955.
(<https://acikerisim.tbmm.gov.tr/items/cfbbd202-450d-451b-b676-2875f7e0b89b>)



Figure 10: General view from the northeast
(drone photo, 2021)³

The distance between Subatan and Oğuzlu is approximately 12 km. There is no definitive information about when Oğuzlu was founded or what its former name was. It is recorded that the village was inhabited by Armenians until the early 20th century and was called Yeznasar (Öküzdağı). Later, Karapapak and Terekeme people were settled here.⁴

The name of the village appears in Turkish and Western language publications as *Oguzli*, *Oguzlu*, *Oghuzlu*, *Oghuzli*, *Oguzly*, *Ozoughlou*, *Ouzoghli*, *Ohuzlu*, *Ougouzlu*, *Oghüslü*, *Ougousli*, *Ogouslof*, *Ughuzlü*, *Ugliuzlü*, *Ughuzly*, *Ughuzli*, *Oghuzli*, *Ughuslü*, *Ughujli*, *Uğuzlu*, *Oğuzlu*. In Armenian publications it appears as *Օգուզլու* (Oguzlu), *Օղուզլու* (Oghuzlu), *Օղուզլուի* (Oghuzlui), *Սղուզլու* (Ughuzlu), *Սղուզլի* (Ughuzli), *Սլձլու* (Udzlu). It appears in Russian publications as *Огузлы/Огузлы* (Oguzly/Oguzli), *Огузлу* (Oguzlu), *Окюзлю* (Okyuzlyu), *Огузлами* (Oguzlami), *Огузлов* (Oguzlov), *Угузлы* (Uguzly).

During the Ottoman period, the name of the village appears in connection with the Battle of Başgedikler on 1 December 1853, which was one of the fiercest engagements between Russian and Ottoman forces during the Crimean War (1853–1856).⁵ The battle began on 18 November 1853 with fighting between Ottoman and Russian forces, and intensified the following day when Russian troops attacked Ottoman forces stationed in the village of Oğuzlu. This battle occupies an important place in Russian history.⁶

According to Russian records from 1886, the Armenian village of Oğuzlu comprised 87 households and a total population of 666, consisting of 333 men and 333 women.⁷ The village's population reached 851 in 1896 and 924 in 1906.⁸ In 1928, it was recorded as the village of Ougouzli (اوغوزلی) in the Başgedikler district of Kars.⁹ In the 1940 census, it was listed as the village of Uğuzlu, which was part of the

³ All drone photos of the church was taken by Asst. Prof. Rıza Gürler Akgün who is also a member of the team, are published here for the first time.

⁴ For details, see Sevan Nişanyan, “Oğuzlu”, *Index Anatolicus. Nişanyan Yeradları Türkiye Yerleşim Birimleri Envanteri*, (Inventory of Settlement Units in Turkey), no date. The information that the village's name was Yeznasar is provided with reference to several sources from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, there are no contemporary sources to corroborate this name.

⁵ For more information, see Vasily Aleksandrovich Potto, “Воспоминания о закавказском походе 1854-1855 годов”. *Военный Сборник* (Voennyy Sbornik), No 1-4, 1863; Modest Ivanovich Bogdanovich, *Восточная война 1853—1856*. (The Oriental War of 1854-1856), Tom. I, (St. Peterburg: F. Sushchinsky Press, 1876), 239-255; Vasily Fedorovich Novitsky (Ed.), “БАШКАДЫКЛАРЪ (Башь-Кадыкларъ)”. (BASHKADIKLAR (Bash-Kadyklar), *Военная энциклопедия* (Military Encyclopedia), Tom. I, (St. Petersburg: I. D. Sytin, 1911), 427-428; *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri Tarihi Osmanlı Devri Osmanlı-Rus Kum Harbi Kafkas Cephesi Harekâtı (1853-1856)*, T.C. Genelkurmay Başkanlığı, Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etüt Başkanlığı Yayınları, (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1986), 81-82, kroki-3; William Edward David Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border 1828-1921*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 62-65, 75-80, 168, 178; Candan Badem, *The Ottoman Crimean War (1853–1856)*. (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010).

⁶ Russian general and military historian V.A. Potto is reported to have given a lecture at the Tiflis garrison on November 19, 1903, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Başkadıklar, where he had announced that donations were being collected for the construction of a monument in memory of the soldiers who had died in the war. The monument was later unveiled in the village of Oğuzlu, Kars, in 1906. For details, see *КАВКАЗЪ*, “Башь-Кадык-Лар война”, (Bash-Kadyk-Lar war), 18 November 1903, No: 307, 2; *Кавказъ (Kavkaz)*, “Приказъ по войскамъ кавна округа”, (Order for the troops of the district), Thursday, 1 January 1909, No. 1, 1; Yuriy Semenovich Sulaberidze, “The Role of the Military History Department of the Headquarters of the Caucasian Military District in Preserving the Historical Memory of the late 19th and early 20th centuries”. *Russkaya Starina*, 13 (2), 2022, 83.

⁷ See Candan Badem, *Çarlık Rusyası Yönetiminde Kars Vilayeti*. (İstanbul: Bircamanlar Yayıncılık, 2010a), 320.

⁸ See Candan Badem, *Çarlık Rusyası yönetiminde Kars, Ardahan, Artvin 1878-1918*. (İstanbul: Aras Yayıncılık, 2018), 110.

⁹ See *Son Teşkilât-ı Mülkiyyede Köylerimiz Adları*. T.C. Dâhiliye Vekâleti Nüfus Müdüriyet-i Umûmiyesi, (Osmanlıca, Fransızca), (İstanbul: Hilâl Matbaası, 1928), 758.

Başgedikler subdistrict of the Arpaçay district of Kars.¹⁰ According to the 1962–63 village inventory study, Oğuzlu was a village in the Başgedikler subdistrict of the Arpaçay district.¹¹ The same was true in 1968.¹² However, in accordance with the Border Determination Decisions of the Ministry of the Interior, on 13 March 1990, the village was separated from the Başgedikler subdistrict of the Arpaçay district and transferred to the central district of Kars.¹³

2. Church

The church was built on flat ground in the centre of Oğuzlu village (Figure 10). Today, there are dirt roads the west and north of the structure.¹⁴

The original name of this Armenian church is unknown, but it is understood from its inscriptions to have been built in the late 9th century during the Middle Ages. For this reason, it has been referred to in publications as Oğuzlu Church, after the village in which it is located.

The church has survived to the present day, albeit with the southern section of the western wall, the western section of the southern wall starting from the diaconicon and the entire roof destroyed.

2.1. Architectural Design

The church is rectangular in shape, with dimensions of 22.30 x 16.40 m from east to west. It features a three-leaf clover (trikonch) plan and two-story pastophorion rooms (Figure 11-12). The structural design comprises a two-tiered platform, as observed from the east facade. The naos was originally accessed via a door in the west wall, as well as doors in the north and south exedras. Presently, the sole remaining entrance is the northern portal.

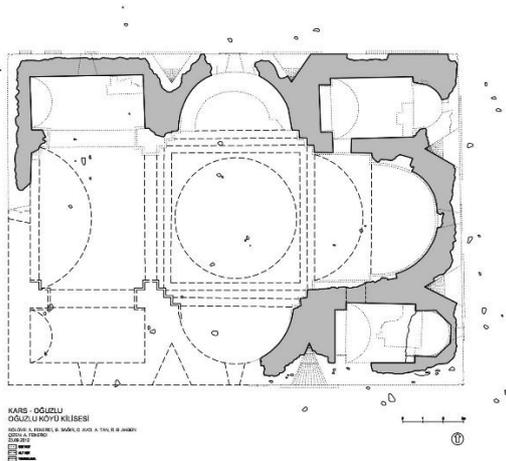


Figure 11: Church plan (2012)¹⁵



Figure 12: Church plan (drone photo 2021)

¹⁰ *Genel Nüfus Sayımı 20 İltişerin 1940: Vilayetler, Kazalar ve Köyler İtibarile Nüfus ve Yüzey Ölçü/Recensement général de la population au 20 Octobre 1940: Population et superficie par provinces, districts, communes et villages.* (Ankara: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Başbakanlık İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü, Ankara Yeni Cezaevi, 1944), 350.

¹¹ *Köy Envanter Etüdülerine Göre Kars.* (Türkiye’de Köy Gerçekleri ve İhtiyaç Grupları Serisi: II, Ankara: Köy İşleri Bakanlığı Yayınları: 41, 1966), 126.

¹² *Köylerimiz: 1 Mart 1968 gününe kadar.* T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı İller İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü, (Ankara: Başbakanlık Basımevi D.S.İ., 1968), 424.

¹³ Published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey states: “The villages of Küçükpirveli, Külveren, Ortagedikler, Oğuzlu, Tazekent, Yağikesen, Yalçınlar, and Yılanlı in the Arpaçay District of Kars Province, and the villages of Ayakgedikler, Bayraktar, Bekler, Büyükkazım, Hamzagerek, Küçükpirveli, Külveren, Ortagedikler, Oğuzlu, Tazekent, Yağikesen, Yalçınlar, and Yılanlı villages are attached to the Central District of the same Province, and the villages of Duraklı, İncedere, and Kürekdere are attached to the Central Subdistrict of Akyaka District; has been decided in accordance with Article 2(B) and Article 7267(D) of the Provincial Administration Law No. 5442.”. See *Resmi Gazete*, “Sınır Tespit Kararları” (the Border Determination Decisions), 13 Mart 1990 Salı, Sayı: 20460, Karar No: 90/36599, 18.

¹⁴ Coordinates taken from the west entrance of the church using GPS: Latitude 40° 39' 26"N Longitude: 43° 33' 07"E

¹⁵ All the measurements taken by the research team and the drawings made by architect Aykut Fenerci, who is also a member of the team, are published here for the first time.

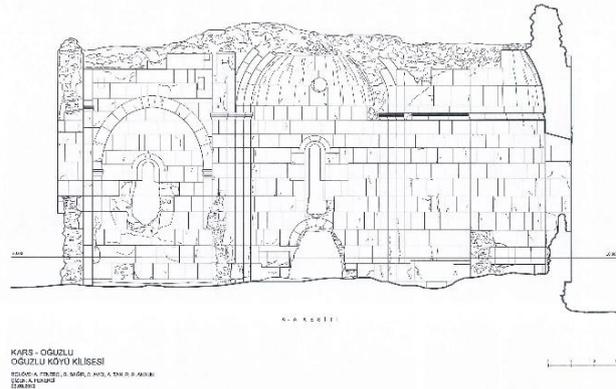


Figure 13: A-A Section (2012)



Figure 14: Northern part of naos (2012)

As demonstrated by its historical photographs, the central section of the naos was once covered by a pendentive-transitioned dome, characterized by high, rounded drums both internally and externally (Figure 1, 3, 5, 7). As is evident from the extant remains, the central square space opens to the exedras in the north and south, the bema and apse in the east, and the north-south rectangular space in the west with stepped round arches resting on stepped pilasters and cushions (Figure 13-14). The exedras are semicircular on the inside, with straight walls on the outside, and are covered with a semi-dome.¹⁶ Along the axis of the north and south exedras, a rectangular door was situated in each exedra, accentuated by a round arch above it.¹⁷ A long rectangular window is positioned above the door, its upper section, also adorned with a stepped round arch.¹⁸ A circular window is also present in the semi-domes that are situated above these elements.¹⁹ The eastern part of the stepped round arch of the door on the south façade, in conjunction with the window above it, is the only one that has been preserved (Figure 15).



Figure 15: Southern exedra (2012)



Figure 16: Western section northern location barrel vault (2012)

The western space is divided into three sections by round arches running east-west, which are supported by wall piers (Figure 11, 13).²⁰ The northern and southern sections are narrower than the central section and rectangular in shape, running east-west, with barrel vaults providing cover for each (Figure 16).²¹ The western section most probably had a rectangular door along its axis with a rectangular window

¹⁶ The width of the northern exedra that has survived to the present day is 5,60 m, its depth is 2,90 m, and its height above the current ground level is 9,70 m.

¹⁷ The door of the standing north exedra from the current floor has a height of 2,24 m and a width of 1,83 m.

¹⁸ The window above the door is 0,90 m wide on the inside, 0,50 m wide on the outside, and 3,00 m long on the inside.

¹⁹ The diameter of the round window is 0,64 m on the inside.

²⁰ According to measurements taken from the sections that have survived to the present day, the middle section measures 7,07 x 5,15 m. Its height above the existing floor is 8,70 m.

²¹ The northern section that has survived to the present day measures 2,64 x 5,57 m. The height of the space above the current floor is 7,70 m.

topped by a round arch, the north side of which has survived to the present day. A rectangular window, topped by a round arch, is also situated along the north wall of the north section.²²

The bema, located east of the naos, is rectangular in shape and covered with a barrel vault running north-south.²³ The apse, located east of the bema, has a semicircular interior and a flat exterior wall, and is covered with a semi-dome (Figure 17-18).²⁴ In the apse, there is a rectangular window with a rounded arch that narrows from the inside to the outside and a rectangular niche on the north wall.²⁵ There is a stepped cornice at the transition to the semi-dome of the apse.

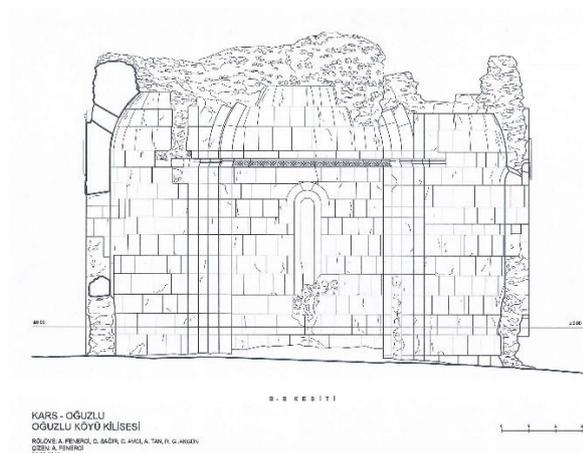


Figure 17: B-B Section (2012)



Figure 18: Apse with South and North exedras (2018)

The two-story pastophorion rooms on the north and south of the apse open into the bema. Presently, the access point to the diaconicon is obscured by the accumulation of earth, rendering it inaccessible both within the bema and inner space. The lower floors of both rooms are rectangular in plan, oriented east-west, and are covered with a barrel vault (Figure 11).²⁶ The apse of the prothesis is circular internally, while the apse of the diaconicon is a five-sided polygon (Figure 19-20). In addition, small squinches are present at the point of transition to the semi-dome of the diaconikon apse (Figure 21). Each apse is characterized by the presence of a window, which is located along the primary axis of the structure. The second floor of the pastophorion rooms are not accessible by staircase. Access to these spaces, which were likely utilized for shelter or defense purposes, was probably provided by the use of rope or wooden ladders.



²² The measurable inner width of the window is 0,95 m, the outer width is 0,52 m, and the height is approximately 2,38 m.

²³ The bema measures 6,25 x 2,84 m.

²⁴ The width of the apse is 5,60 m, the depth is 3,24 m, and the height from the existing floor is 10,25 m.

²⁵ The apse window is 0,95 m wide on the inside, 0,50 m wide on the outside, and 3,24 m long on the inside.

²⁶ The pastophorion rooms including the apse are approximately 5,95 m long and 2,98 m wide.

Figure 19: Prothesis apse (2012) Figure 20: Diakonikon apse (2018) Figure 21: Diakonikon apse small squinches (2004)

The north and south façades of the structure have the same layout with minor differences even though the south west of the south façade has not survived to the present day (Figure 6, 22-24). These façades are divided vertically by two deep triangular niches topped by shell-shaped squinches (dihedral “^”) extending along the height of the façade on either side of the exedras, while the east façade is similarly divided by two deep triangular niches topped by shell-shaped squinches on either side of the apse (Figure 7-8, 25).²⁷ The squinches of these niches are divided into three sections in the eastern niche of the north façade, two sections in the western niche of the north façade, and two sections in the surviving eastern niche of the south façade. The shell-shaped squinches of the deep triangular niches on the east façade are divided into three sections. The squinches of the deep triangular niches as well as the windows on all façades feature semicircular crown arches.

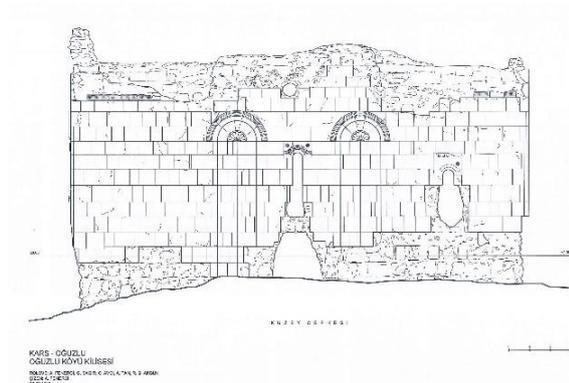


Figure 22: Northern façade (2012)

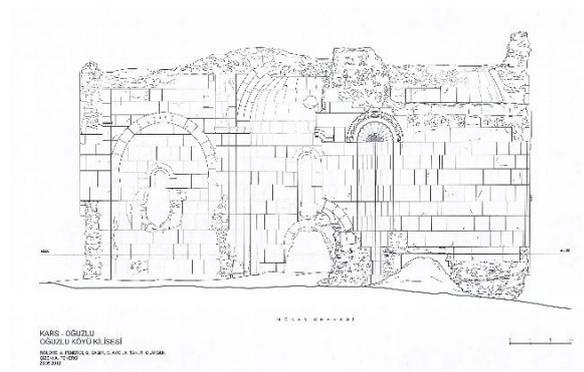


Figure 23: Southern façade (2012)



Figure 24: Southern façade (2012)

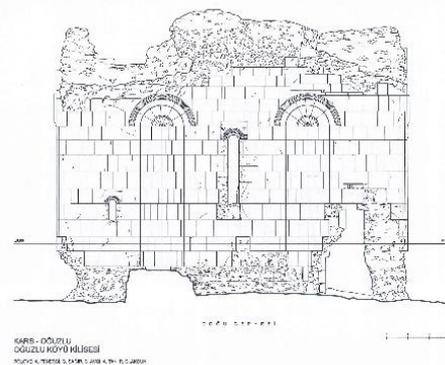


Figure 25: Eastern façade (2012)

A photograph taken in the early 1900s reveals that the southern section of the church's west wall and the western section of the south wall have undergone restoration, utilizing stones of a different color (Figure 1, 3, 5). The west façade is characterized by its minimalist design even though it is mostly destroyed, with only a section of the northern window surviving to the present day. It can be seen that the window was closed during the restoration, the date of which is unknown. It is also evident that a door, was installed in the location of the original door.

The church's roof has suffered extensive damage over time, with only a small portion of the original structure remaining intact. However, historical photographs indicate that the domed central section of the naos was once covered with a conical cap resting on a high cylindrical drum with a square base. In

²⁷ The approximate widths of the deep triangular niches are between 1,85 and 1,90 m, while their heights are 6,05-6.10 m in the north and south, and 6,90 m in the east.

contrast, the north and south exedras, as well as the west section featured double-pitched, while the remaining sections had single-pitched roofs. The drum of the dome has a series of twelve round blind arches, resting on double columns. The drum has six rectangular windows each topped with a round arch.

The facades of the church have centrally placed high triangular pediments. The configuration of the roof structures exhibits a distinction between the sections, with the triangular pediments have double-pitched roofs while the lower sections flanking them have single-pitched roofs. The central space of the building is covered by a cylindrical high drum dome, both inside and outside.

The church was constructed by cut stone in hues of red, yellow, and black, utilizing the infill wall technique. The walls are of substantial thickness, with the interstices between the stones filled with rubble and mortar. It can be understood from the extant sections of the roof as well as the historical photographs that the roof was constructed using a technique where stone slabs, rounded on one side, were laid in an overlapping pattern.

2.2. Decorations

The church is decorated with figural ornaments on the moldings of the apse in the interior, and the south door lintel in the exterior, but with geometric and floral motifs on the semicircular crown arches of the squinches of the deep triangular niches, and the windows, as well as on the eaves. The cornice at the transition to the apse's half dome has a four-banded basket weave motif. The stepped cushions on which the arches rest are unadorned. No other decorative elements within the structure have survived to the present day.

Extant documentation, in the form of both old photographs and publications, attests to the existence of a stone relief scene featuring figures on the south door lintel, which has not survived (Figure 26). Strzygowski's analysis of the church indicates that the three-tiered semicircular arch of the door featured a three striped braided bands and animals.²⁸ The lintel has a longitudinal relief representing Virgin Mary seated on a wooden throne in the center, holding the infant Jesus in her arms, with two horsemen on either side and flying angels in the upper corners. The edge of the arch is decorated by a two-striped meander band. Strzygowski observes that the relief had sustained significant damage, with the heads of the figures having been destroyed. The surviving portion of the lintel arch incorporates a lion/leopard relief, with its head discernible within a rectangular strip with two grooves, and a composite weave motif intertwined with two strips forming the rectangle.



Figure 26: A stone relief scene featuring figures on the south door lintel (early 1900s) Photo: T. Toramanian (Strzygowski 1918, I, p. 428, Abb. 465)



Figure 27: The crown arch of the window above lintel the south door (2004)

²⁸ Josef Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst der Armenien und Europa*. Band I, Einleitung. Erstes Buch: Denkmäler, Zweites Buch: Wesen, I. Stoff und Werk (Gussmauerwerk mit Plattenverkleidung), II. Gegenstand (Altchristlicher Kirchenbau), III. Gestalt (Kuppel), Ergebnisse Einer vom Kunsthistorischen Institute der Universität Wien 1913 Durchgeführten Forschungsreise, unter Benützung von Aufnahmen des Architekten Thoros Thoramanian, Mitarbeiter: Assistent Dr. Heinrich Glück und Leon Lissitziax, mit 828 Abbildungen samt Einer Karte, (Wien: Anton Schroll & Co., 1918), 428.

The two-tiered crown arch of the surviving window above the door on the eastern side, is decorated with floral and geometric motifs (Figure 27). The lower arch incorporates palmette motifs, with five leaves in the shape of a drop, united at the base of the cup. The short, curved stems and cup leaves curve to form a circle, set against curved branches that completely cover the surface, extending in the same direction and intersecting to form a circle. The upper arch is adorned with a geometric motif consisting of three intertwined strips forming a basket weave covering the whole surface. A damaged cross motif is observable above the straight section that continues to the right of the arch the arch. The lower arm of the cross, which is situated on a triangular base, is longer than the lateral arms and has leaf-like motifs that extend from either side. The lateral arms of the cross curve outward to form a curved triangle, which also have curved branch/leaf motifs on its outer corners.

The ends of the three-part squinch of the deep triangular niche on the eastern side of the south facade are rounded in the shape of an oyster motif (Figure 28). The stone below, carved in high relief, is divided into six triangles, expanding upward from a centre, with a zigzag pattern traversing the entire surface. The six triangles at the end of this section protrude outward, with the middle two featuring a five-leaf palmette with a heart-shaped central leaf. The triangles adjacent to them feature half palmettes arranged back-to-back, and the outermost triangles have cosmos-shaped flower motifs. The area above these is formed of fourteen concave, grooved oyster shell motifs, culminating in a semicircular formation. The semicircles are embellished with small triangles that are joined together. Two decorated bands above these extend up to the crown arch. The lower has two alternating rows of half-acanthus motifs, open on both sides, joined at the upper and lower ends. The upper has equilateral square motifs that are formed by two intertwined strips. The lower portion of the semicircular crown arch is subdivided into twelve adjoining semicircles, while the upper part terminates in a fishbone-shaped carved border. The area between the adjoining semicircles and the upper border is filled with motifs that evoke the image of cosmos flowers with eight or ten petals.



Figure 28: The squinch and crown arch of the deep triangular niche on the eastern side of the south façade (2018)



Figure 29: The north exedra window crown arch (2012)

The lower two sections of the three-part squinch of the eastern deep triangular niche on the north façade and the lower section of the two-part trompe of the western deep triangular niche on the same façade are decorated with oyster motifs. The semicircular crown arches of both of the deep triangular niches have a wide concave molding between two convex molding bands. The entirety of the surface of the semicircular arch extending along the edges of the north exedra window is decorated with vertically arranged acanthus leaves (Figure 29). Two raised floral rosettes, which consist of eight-petals with small embossed circles with central perforations at their wide ends, are placed above the arch towards each side. The western window on the north façade must also have had a semicircular crown arch the traces of which can be clearly seen to indicate its location and form. The presence of a small embossed cross at the summit of the arch with multi petalled flower rosettes on either side can also be detected. The rosettes are slightly distorted in form but are similar to those above the crown arch of the north exedra window. Slightly above the crown arch, there is a straight sawtooth cornice, half of which has been

destroyed. Furthermore, simple cross marks, various animal figures, and stonemasons' marks can be noted on the wall surfaces of the deep triangular niches of northwest.



Figure 30: The crown arch of the southern deep triangular niche on the east façade (2012)



Figure 31: The squinch and crown arch of the northern deep triangular niche on the east façade (2012)

The lower two sections of the three-part squinches of the deep triangular niches on the east facade also feature oyster motifs. The semicircular crown arches of these niches are comparable to those on the north facade, while the section between the squinch and the crown arch in these niches feature geometric and floral decorations, similar to those on the south facade. The entire surface of the section between the squinch and the crown arch of the southern niche on the east facade is decorated with a straight-lined, yet complex geometric pattern (Figure 30). It consists of interwoven octagonal shapes with internal divisions forming squares in their centres. The corresponding section between the squinch and the crown arch of the northern niche on the east facade is fully decorated (Figure 31). The lowest band features a string of pearl motifs, followed by a band of hollow, square crosses and a third band of continuously arranged S-shaped upright and inverted acanthus motifs.



Figure 32: The crown arch of the apse window (2012)



Figure 33: The crown arch of the diaconicon window (2012)

The semicircular crown arch of the apse window is also decorated with acanthus leaf motifs, as is the north exedra window. The distinguishing feature of the apse window's crown arch is its composition of two distinct levels. The floral rosettes located at the corners are six-petaled, though it should be noted that some of these are damaged. The semicircular crown arch of the diaconicon window, is decorated with acanthus leaves arranged horizontally (Figure 32). Below the arch, two pomegranate motifs with short stems extend from the corners where the decorated band extends to the side in a straight line. The northern pomegranate is in a better state of preservation while the southern one is heavily damaged. The crown arch of the prothesis window has been lost, but a straight sawtooth cornice, similar to that of the west window on the north facade, remains extant (Figure 33). On the surviving eaves of the structure, a basket weave motif is observed, situated between two fluted moldings, similar to that on the apse inside.

2.3. Inscriptions²⁹

²⁹ The inscriptions were done the current state, separated into words with completed abbreviations and spaces state, transcription and Turkish translation by Priest Hovagim Seropyan of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul. These inscriptions are being published in this form for the first time.

There are two inscriptions on the south and east façades of the church (Figure 34-35). The earlier inscription is a single line. It begins on the south façade at the diaconicon and ends on the east façade north of the apse window. The second, later inscription, which is in four lines, is on the diaconicon wall of the south façade.



Figure 34: Inscriptions 1 and 2 on the south façade (2010)



Figure 35: Inscription 1 on the eastern façade (2021)

An old photograph shows a third inscription on one of the stones of the south façade below the four-line inscription, which is no longer there, since it had fallen (Figure 36). Subsequently, this stone was found on the wall of a village house built near the church later. Although the letters are legible, no meaningful words have yet been identified (Figure 37).

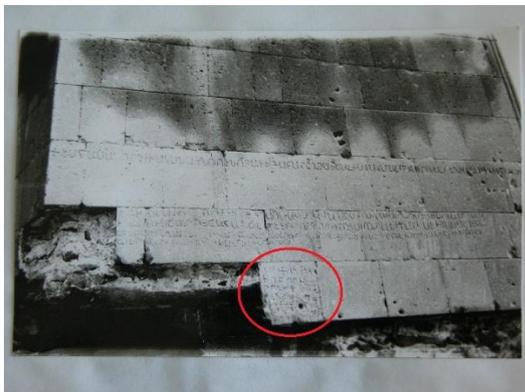


Figure 36: Inscriptions on the south façade (1980s) (Erzurum Cultural Heritage Preservation Board Archive)



Figure 37: The stone that bore the 3rd inscription in its present site (2012)

Apart from the two inscriptions that exist today, an inscription stone that used to be located at the north corner of the west wall that Toramanian had said was brought from elsewhere is no longer present.³⁰

2.3.1. Inscription 1

The single line runs continuously along the south and east facades of the diaconicon and the apse façade.³¹

³⁰ Toros Toramanian, *Երուզեր Հայկական Ճարտարապետություն և Պատմություն*. (Materials on the History of Armenian Architecture), Vol. II, (Erevan: Armfan Publishing, 1948), 201.

³¹ For earlier publications of the inscription, see Nerses Sargisean, *Տեղագրությունը: Ի Փոքր և Ի Մեծ Հայք* (Teghagrut'iwink' i P'vok'r yev i Mets Hays. (Küçük ve Büyük Ermenistan'daki Yerleşimler), (Venice: I. Tparani Srboyn Ghazaru, 1864), 174; Ghevont Alishan, *Շիրակ տեղագրություն պատկերացող*. (Shirak, Topographical illustration), (Venedik: St. Lazar, 1881), 15; K. Kostaneants, *Վիմական Տարեգիր, Յուցակ ժողովածոյ Արմանագրութեանց Հայոց*. (Vimakan Taregir: List of the Collection of Armenian Inscriptions), (St. Petersburg, 1913), 4; Hovhannes Marzbanian, *Բարդատական Ակնարկ Մը Կրօնակա և Ճարտարապետութեան վրայ Եւ Հայ Ճարտարապետութեան Տեղը Անոր Մէջ*. (A Comparative Overview of Medieval Architecture and the Place of Armenian Architecture within It), (Istanbul: Marmara

Current state:

+ԵՍՀԱՍԱՆՈՐԴԻԽԱԿԱՆԱԳՆԹՈՒՆՅԱԲԵԺԱԲԱՐԸՂՁԱՑԵԱԼՓԱՓԱԶՄԱՐՅԱԲԻԽԵԼՏԷՂԻ ԱՊԱԼԻԽԵԻԿԵՐՁ³²ԵԱԼՍՆՎԱՍՆՅԱԲԳՆԱՀԱՍԲԱՐԵԲ³³ՄԱՍԵՂԱՆՁԻՆ³⁴ԻՄՈՅՈՒԺԱՐՈՒ ԹԵԱՍՍՐ³⁵ՏԻԻՄՈՆՈՐՀԵՑԱՇԻՆԵԼՁԵԿԵՂԵՑԻՍՉԱՅՍՆ³⁶...ԵՐԻՆԵՄԻՈՂՐՄՈՒԹԵ

Separated into words with completed abbreviations and spaces:

+ԵՍՀԱՍԱՆ ՈՐԴԻ ԽԱԿԱՆԱԳ[Յ] ԳՆԹՈՒՆՅՈՒ ՅԱԲԵԺԱԲԱՐ ԸՂՁԱՑԵԱԼ ՓԱՓԱԶՄԱՐ ՅԱԲԻԽԵԼ ՏԷՂԻ ԱՊԱԼԻԽԵԻ Ի ՀԱՆԴԵՐՁ(East facade:)ԵԱԼՍՆ ՎԱՍՆ ՅԱԲԳՆԱՀԱՍԲԱՐ ԵԲ ԲԱ[Չ]ՄԱՍԵՂ ԱՆՁԻՆ ԻՄՈ ՅՈՒԺԱՐՈՒԹԵԱՍԲ[Բ] ՍՐՏԻ ԻՄՈ ԽՈՐՀԵՑԱ ՇԻՆԵԼ ՁԵԿԵՂԵՑԻՍ ՉԱՅՍ Ն[ԱԽԱԲ]ԻԽԵԼ[ԱԿ] Ե[ՐՈՒԲՍԱԳԷ]ՄԻ ՈՂ[Ո]ՐՄՈՒԹԵ[ԱՆ:]

Transcription:

YES HASAN VORTI KHAGANA KINTUNO HAVEJAPAR IGHTSATSYAL PAPA KMAMP HAVRINEL DEGHĪ ABAVINĪ Ī HANTERTS(East facade:)YALS N VASN HAVKNAHAMPAR YEV PA[Z]MAMEGH ANTSĪN ĪMO HUIJARUTYAM[P] SRDĪ ĪMO KHORHETSA ŞĪNEL ZEGEGHETSĪS ZAYS N[AKHAV]RĪN[AG] YE[RUSAGHE]MĪ VOGH[O]RMUTY[AN].

English translation:

“I, Hasan, son of the Khagan of the Gnt'uni family, wishing for my weary and sinful soul to find refuge in eternity, conceived the idea of building this church in the likeness of Heavenly Jerusalem.”

2.3.2. Inscription 2:

The four-line inscription on the south façade of the diaconicon.³⁷

Current state:

ԻՇԽԱՆԱՑԻՇԱՆՈՐԴԻԳԷՈՐԳ...ԱՌՆՔԱՉԻԵՊԱՏԵՐԱՉՍՈՂԻՀԱԲԱՏԱՐԻՍԵՂԵԼՏԱՆՍՀԱՅՈՑ ԻՊԱՏԻԻԱՇՈՆՅՈՆՅՈՆՀԱՆՇԱՀԵԻԻՅՈՐԴՈՑԻԲՈՑՍՄԱՏԱԵԲԳԱԿԱԵԻՅԱՍԵՆԱՅՆ ՍԻՉՄԱՅՐՔԱՂԱԶԻՍԵԲՏՍԻԱՐԻԱՅՉԱՊԱԿԱՆՈՒՄՆՈՐՈԳԵՑԻՆՇԱՍԻՊԱՐԹԵԻԻՍԻԳԱԼՍՈ ԲՍԱՍԻ ԱԲԵՐԲԱԵՐԻՆԱՐՔՈՒՆԻԿՍՍԵՂՍԻՆՁԽԱՉ

Separated into words, with abbreviations and spaces completed:

- 1- [ԵՍ ԱՇՈՏ] ԻՇԽԱՆԱՑ ԻՇԽԱՆ ՈՐԴԻ ԳԷՈՐԳ[ԱՅ] ... ԱՌՆ ՔԱՉԻ ԵՊԱՏԵՐԱՉՍՈՂԻ ՀԱԲԱՏԱՐԻՍ ԵՂԵ[Ա]Լ ՏԱՆՍ ՀԱՅՈՑ
- 2- [ԱՌԻ ԲԱՐՁ Ե]Ի ԳԱՏԻԻ Ի ԱՇՈՏՈՅ ՇԱՀԱՆՇԱՀԵ ԵՊԱՏԱՍՄԱՏԱ ԵԲ ԳԱԿԱ ԵԻ ՅԱՍԵՆԱՅՆ
- 3- [ԹԱԳԱԲՈՐԱՅ ՏԵ]ՄԻ ՉՄԱՅՐ ՔԱՂԱԶԻՍ ԵՊ ... ԱՐԻ Ա[ՍՏՈՒՇՈ]Յ ՉԱՊԱԿԱՆՈՒՄՆ ՆՈՐՈԳԵՑԻ ՆՇ (450+551=1001) ԱՍԻ ՊԱՐԹԵԻԻՍ Ի ԳԱԼ ՍՈՒՍ ԱՍԻ
- 4- [ԵՀԱՍ ԻՆՁ ՀՐ]ԱԲԵՐ Ի ՎԵՐԻՆ ԱՐԿՈՒՆԻ ԿԱ ՄԵՂՍ ԻՆՁ ԽԱՉ:

Transcription:

- 1- [YES AŞOD] İŞKHANATS İŞKHAN VORTI KEVORK[A] ... ARN KAÇI YEV BADERAZMOGHĪ HAVADARĪM YEGHY[A]L DANS HAYOTS
- 2- [ARĪ PARTS YE]V BADĪV Ī AŞODO ŞAHANŞAHE YEV Ī HORTOTS YUROTS SM[P]ADA YEV KAKGA YEV HAMENAYN
- 3- [TAKAVORATS DE]SĪ ZMAYR KAGHAKĪS YEV ... ARĪ A[SDUDZO] ZABAGANUMN NOROKETSĪ NDZ (450+551=1001) AMĪ BARTEVĪS Ī KAL MUS AMĪ
- 4- [YEHAS İNTZ HR]AVER Ī VERĪN ARKUNĪ GA MEGHS İNDZ KHAÇ

Matbaasi, 1970), 97-98; Jean-Michel Thierry, “A propos de quelques monuments chrétiens du vilayet de Kars (III)”. *Revue Des Etudes Armeniennes (ReArm)*, 1983, 330.

³² From this point, the inscription continues on the eastern facade.

³³ The inscription is interrupted here because of a window, and it continues after the window.

³⁴ From this point, the inscription continues on the south face (diakonikon) of the deep triangular niche to the south.

³⁵ From this point, the inscription continues on the north face (apse) of the deep triangular niche.

³⁶ There are a few letters that are missing because the wall was damaged.

³⁷ For earlier publications of the inscription, see Sargisean, *Տեղագրություններ* 174; Alishan, *Շիրակի տեղագրություն*, 15; Kostaneants, *Վիճակահան Տարեգրք*, 12; Thierry, “A propos de quelques”, 330-331.

English translation:

“I, Ašot, prince of princes, son of Kevork, a brave warrior loyal to the Armenian nation. I honour Šahanšah Ašot, his sons Smbad and Gagik, and all the kings who witnessed the destruction of this capital and God's temple. I repaired it in the year 450 (=1001) of the Pertev era. The following year, an invitation came from the Great Kingdom. This cross is for my sins.”

3. Brief History

The exact construction date of the church is unknown. The earlier single line inscription states that Hasan Gnt'uni commissioned the building, but bears no date. Very little information is available about Hasan Gnt'uni. Our only reference is from a history book written by Catholicos Hovhannes during the reign of the Armenian King Smbat I (890–914). Hovhannes, who was Catholicos from 899 to 931, mentions in his book that Hasan Gnt'uni was the 'Governor and Royal Administrator of Kars'. Based on this information, the construction of the church can be dated to the end of the 9th or the beginning of the 10th century. But the general trend in dating the structure is that it was built before 895.

The four-line inscription on the south façade indicates that the church was restored by Prince Ašot in 1001. However, there is no information about the extent of the restoration work.

The church was used for military purposes during the Crimean War of 1853-1855 and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. During this period, the damaged sections of the church were restored and the walls were raised in some areas.

4. Findings Near the Church

During the surface survey of the surrounding area of the Oğuzlu church and the village, one of the first findings was a cemetery (Figure 38). Situated on a gentle slope around 180 meters southeast of the church, this Armenian cemetery is notable for its tombstones, most of which are used in their natural state or at most partially flattened to be close to a rectangular shape with a few bearing simple crosses (Figure 39). It is not possible to determine how long the cemetery has been in use. However, the date 1915 on one of the tombstones suggests that it was already in use during the period when Kars was under Russian administration (Figure 40).



Figure 38: Location of the church and cemetery (2012)



Figure 39: A tombstone bearing a cross (2012)



Figure 40: A tombstone bearing the date 1915 and a cross (2012)



Figure 41: A tombstone from 1911 with Armenian writing and a cross (2021).

Our survey also yielded two 19th-century tombstones and another stone with Armenian writing, in the courtyard of a house to the south of the church. It was not possible to understand if the latter was a tombstone or just a stone bearing an inscription. We also observed that stones from the church had been used in the construction of nearby houses. Additionally, a wall located 6 meters west of the church had a rectangular niche made of roughly hewn stones, suggesting that it was once connected to the church.

One of the rectangular tombstones measuring 1,70 x 0,58 x 0,40 meters bears an inscription in Armenian with an Orthodox cross above it (Figure 41). A simple cross is also carved into the lower part of the stone, which stands upright. The inscription on the stone³⁸:

ԱՅՍ Է ՏԱՊ[Ա]Ն ՀԱՆ
 ԳՍԻ ՄԱՐՄԻՆ ՄՇ
 Ո՞՞՞ ԲՈՒԼԱՆՈՒԽ ԳԱ
 ԻԱՌԻ ՓԻՕՆԶ³⁹ ԳԻԻ
 ՂԱՅԻ ՞՞՞՞ ԲԱՇ
 ՞՞՞՞ ՅԱԿՈԲ
 ԵԱՆԻ
 1876
 1911 5 Յ[ՈՒ]Ն[ՈՒԲԱՐ կամ ԻՍ]

The other tombstone is a sarcophagus-shaped piece of stone measuring 1,10 x 0,60 x 0,30 meters, with two rectangular frames carved into its prism-shaped lid (Figure 42) and architectural reliefs in the form of churches, complete with crosses on top of their domes, on its sides.

Conclusion

A monographic publication on the medieval Armenian church in Oğuzlu village does not exist. The structure has been mentioned in the majority of 19th-21st century publications, either in terms of its

³⁸ The Armenian inscription on the tombstone has been reviewed, divided into words, and translated into Turkish by Priest Hovagim Seropyan of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul. Despite the fact that the letters on the tombstone inscription can be deciphered, the text itself has not yet been fully deciphered.

³⁹ The *PIONK* mentioned here is the old name of Yemişlik village, which is now located in the Bulanık district of Bitlis province. The owner of the tombstone was probably born in this village in 1876 and died in 1911 in Oğuzlu village, which is part of Kars.

history or its architecture.⁴⁰ Some of the observation-based studies discussed below provide information on sections of the structure that no longer exist, as well as photographs.

The earliest publication on the church is Sargisean's 1864 book. He refers to the church, as Ուղուզլի (Uğuzli), and describes it in two sentences as having a rectangular plan, double-storeyed pastophorion rooms, and two inscriptions on the south façade providing the full text of both inscriptions.⁴¹ Alishan's 1881 book also discusses the structure, briefly mentioning it and publishing the two inscriptions on the south façade.⁴² Alishan additionally supplies the information that the inscriptions do not include the name of the church and its construction date, but suggests that construction of the church may be dating back to the 9th century because of the mention of Hasan Gnt'uni in the inscription. He notes, furthermore, that the dome of the edifice church was encircled by arches.



Figure 42: Sarcophagus-shaped tombstone (2021)

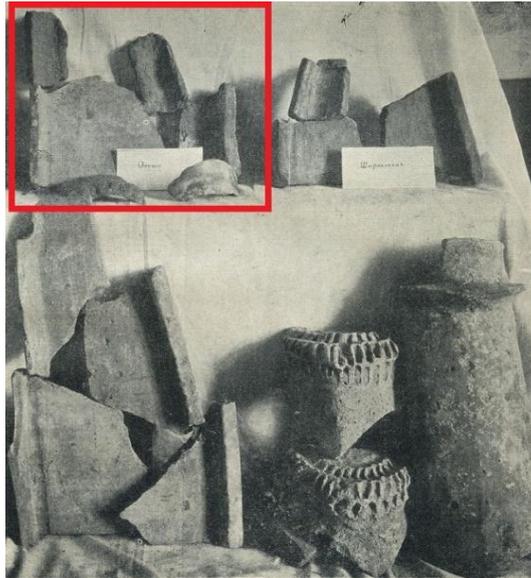


Figure 43: Roof tiles from the Oğuzlu Church (Marr 1916, p. 23, Fig. 9)

⁴⁰ For publications providing information about the church, see Marie-Félicité Brosset, "Examen critique de quelques passages de la Description de la Grande-Arménie, du P. L. Alichan, relatifs à la topographie d'Ani". *Mélanges Asiatiques* IV (1860-1863), 1863, 411; Sargisean, *Տեղագրություն*, 174; Alishan, *Երևանի տեղագրություն*, 15; Gabriel Millet, *L'école Grecque dans L'architecture Byzantine*, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1916, 190; Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst I*, 215-216 (Abb. 253), 289, 428 (Abb. 465)-429; Jozep Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa*. Band II, Zweites Buch: Wesen. IV. Form; V. Inhalt, Drittes Buch: Geschichte, Viertes Buch: Ausbreitung, Ergebnisse Einer vom Kunsthistorischen Institute der Universität Wien 1913 Durchgeführten Forschungsreise, unter Benützung von Aufnahmen des Architekten Thoros Toramanian, Mitarbeiter: Assistent Dr. Heinrich Glück und Leon Lissitziax, mit 828 Abbildungen samt Einer Karte, (Wien: Anton Schroll & Co., 1918), 513, 693-695; Nikolay Yakovlevich Marr, "Древности Ширака", (*Antiquities of Shirak*), *Краткие сообщения* (Kratkiye soobshcheniya) (Института истории материальной культуры), Issue XIV, (Moscow-Leningrad, 1947), 6; Toros Toramanian, *Երկրորդ Հայկական Ճարտարապետության Պատմություն*. (*Materials on the History of Armenian Architecture*), Vol. I, (Erevan, 1942), 428; Toromanian, *Երկրորդ Հայկական*, II, 202; Marzbanian, *Բարձրաստիակա Այլնապի*, 96-103; Paolo Cuneo, *L'architettura della scuola regionale di Ani nell'Armenia medievale*. (Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1977), 47-48d, 59, 68, 78, Tav. XLIV/a-b; Thierry, "A propos de quelques", 329-336, 363-369, Pl. XXI-XXVII (fig. 2-10); Thomas Alan Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey*, Vol. I, (London: The Pindar Press, 1987), 424; Paolo Cuneo, *Architettura Armena dal quarto al diciannovesimo secolo*. Tomo I, Testi introduttivi e schede degli edifici, con testi e contributi di Tommaso Breccia Fradocchi et al., (Rome: De Luca Editore, 1988), 35, 680-681 (No: 436); Paolo Cuneo, *Architettura Armena dal quarto al diciannovesimo secolo*, Tomo II, Tavole sinottiche e apparati di consultazione, (Rome: De Luca Editore, 1988), 721, 763, 769, 799; Jean-Michel Thierry, *Armenian Art*, Principal Sites by Patrick Donabedian with the assistance of Jean-Michel and Nicole Thierry, Translated from French by Celestine Dars, Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America Catholicosate of Cilicia, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 124, 165, 562, 575, fig. 801, 802 (plan), 803; Adèle Kamsarakan, "Les Principaux sites d'Ani et de sa Périphérie", *Ani: Capitale de l'Arménie en l'an mil*, Ed. R. H. Kevorkian, (Paris, 2001), 299-300; Güner Sağır, "Kars İli ve Çevresinde Yer Alan Ani Ören Yeri Hariç Ortaçağ Ermeni Kiliseleri Yüzeysel Araştırması", (*Survey of Medieval Armenian Churches in and around Kars Except Ani*), *Anadolu ve Çevresinde ORTAÇAĞ* 4, 2010, 215, 218 (fig. 5); G. Sağır, "Kars İli ve Çevresinde Yer Alan Ortaçağ Ermeni Kiliseleri (Ani örenyeri hariç) Yüzeysel Araştırması", (*Survey of Medieval Armenian Churches in and around Kars Except Ani*), *33th International Symposium of Excavations, Surveys and Archaeometry (23-27 May 2011-Malta)*, 29th Meeting on The Result of Surveys, Vol. 2, prepared for publication Adil Özme, T. C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Kültür Varlıkları ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü Yayını, (Ankara: Kalkınma Matbaacılık, 2012), 12, 17, 30 (fig. 6); Güner Sağır, "10. Yüzyılda Kars ve Ermeni Dini Mimarisi" (10th Century Kars and Armenian Religious Architecture), *Yeni Türkiye, Ermeni Meselesi Özel Sayısı I*, Year 20, Issue 60, (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Stratejik Araştırma Merkezi, Eylül-Aralık 2014), 875, 886 (fig. 26, plan 8); Güner Sağır, "Kars ve Çevresi Ortaçağ Ermeni Kiliseleri (Ani hariç) Yüzeysel Araştırması 2012 Yılı Çalışmaları", [*Survey of The Medieval Armenian Churches in Kars Area (except Ani), 2012 Season*], *35th International Symposium of Excavations, Surveys and Archaeometry (27-31 May 2013-Miğla)*, 31th Meeting on The Result of Surveys, Vol. 1, prepared for publication Dr. Adil Özme, T. C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Kültür Varlıkları ve Müzeler Genel Müdürlüğü Yayını, Ankara, 2014a), 263; Güner Sağır, "Kars'ın Oğuzlu Köyü'ndeki", 121; Vendi Jukić Buča et al., "Armenian Ecclesiastical Sites in the Kars Province (Turkey): Current State, Preservation and Revalorization", *Heritage & Society*, 13 (4), 2021, 15.

⁴¹ Sargisean, *Տեղագրություն*, 174.

⁴² Alishan, *Երևանի տեղագրություն*, 15.

Architect T. Toramanian, who participated as a team member in N. Marr's excavations at Ani between 1904 and 1917, conducted research at the church in the early 1900s. In the aftermath of Toramanian's demise in 1934, his academic oeuvre was published in two volumes, the first in 1942 and the second in 1948. He mentions the church that he refers to as Օղուզլուի կաթողիկէ (Oghuzlui Kat'ughike) in the first volume, and as Ուղուզլու (Ughuzlu) in the second volume.⁴³ In Volume I he lists the name of the church among the structures of the third revival period of Armenian architecture in the 10th century.⁴⁴ He observes that, despite its architectural perfection, it is among the structurally experimental edifices that amalgamate eastern and western architectural forms. In the second volume, he briefly discusses the structure⁴⁵, observing that on the western facade of the church, there are two inscriptions carved in yellow stone, one near the northern corner and the other south of the pediment, in the renovated section. Additionally, he makes a cursory reference to the significance of the decorative elements on the south door and the two deep triangular niches, though he does not delve into the intricacies of these features.

In his 1918 publication, Strzowski evaluates the church as a domed hall type kuppelhalle referring to it in five different variations of its name Ughuzlü, Ugliuzlü, Ughuzly, Ughuzli, and Oghuzli through his book.⁴⁶ He also includes T. Toramanian's research, discussing and evaluating the structure's plan type, current condition, restoration, and decorations as needed.⁴⁷ His information about the stone relief decoration on the south door lintel, which has not survived to the present day, and the old photographs of the church are particularly valuable.⁴⁸

Two relatively more comprehensive studies on the church are based on investigations conducted in the 1960s. One such study was conducted by Marzbanian who provided an architectural plan of the edifice, which he designated as Օղուջլուի Եկեղեցին (Oghujlu Church), relating the history of the church as well as its architectural, and decorative elements⁴⁹. The second study was conducted by Thierry.⁵⁰ In his article about the Armenian churches in the vicinity of Kars, he provides a detailed description of the location and current state of the building, explaining its inscriptions, plan, and decorations by referencing similar examples. Thierry also notes that the church's original plan was drawn by Cuneo in recent times⁵¹ but my research indicates that the original plan for the church was in fact drawn by Marzbanian.⁵² Additionally, Thierry was able to definitively date the church to a period prior to 895, a conclusion that he reached by researching the name Hasan Gnt'uni, which is mentioned in the inscription.

In his 1977 article, Paolo Cuneo has listed the structure, which he refers to as Oğuzlu/Oğuzlu and dates to the 10th century, among edifices with a three-leaf clover plan. In addition to the architectural plan of the church, which was drawn by the author himself, he has also published an antique photograph taken from the south façade in the early 20th century, as well as photographs of the building's current state in 1969⁵³. In Cuneo's 1988 publication, the church is briefly discussed by M.A. Lala Comneno, who contributed a section to the book.⁵⁴ Here, she posits that the church, which she designates as Oğuzlu, Oğuzlu, was constructed in 895, underwent alterations in 1001 during the reign of Ašot, both conclusions indicated by the inscriptions on the southern and eastern walls of the edifice, and was subsequently converted into a castle.⁵⁵ While describing the architectural design of the building she mentions for the first time that the structure with its wide triconch plan within a longitudinal rectangle exhibits a resemblance to a three-nave domed basilica in its external appearance. She also noted that the high

⁴³ Toramanian, *Երուզեր Հայկական*, I, 54; II, 201. About Toros Toramanian's valuable work, see Ani Totoyan-Baladian, "Toros Toramanian", in *Le Couvent de Horomos d'après les Archives de Toros Toramanian*, (Monuments et Mémoires de la Fondation Eugène PIOT, Paris, 2002), 17-19.

⁴⁴ Toramanian, *Երուզեր Հայկական*, I, 1942, 54.

⁴⁵ Toramanian, *Երուզեր Հայկական*, II, 1948, 201.

⁴⁶ Strzowski, *Die Baukunst*, I, 215.

⁴⁷ Strzowski, *Die Baukunst*, I, 215-216 (Abb. 253), 289, 428 (Abb. 465)-429; II, pp. 513, 693-695.

⁴⁸ Strzowski, *Die Baukunst*, I, 428.

⁴⁹ Marzbanian, *Բաղդաստանի Արևարկ*, 96-103.

⁵⁰ Thierry, "A propos de quelques", 329-336, 363-369, Pl. XXI-XXVII.

⁵¹ Thierry, "A propos de quelques", 332.

⁵² Marzbanian, *Բաղդաստանի Արևարկ*, 97.

⁵³ Cuneo, *L'architettura della scuola*, 47-48d, 59, 68, 78, Tav. XLIV/a-b.

⁵⁴ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 35, 680-681 (No: 436); II, 721, 763, 769, 799.

⁵⁵ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 680.

cylindrical drum, shaped by arches connected by double columns, no longer exists, and that the arches of the deep triangular niches feature high relief decorations. In addition, she provides three historical photographs of the church, a plan that she had drawn, and current photographs of the general aspects of the church as well as its decorations.

Kamsarakan briefly discusses the history, architecture, and reliefs of the church, offering a general overview. Using the inscription of the church, he places its construction prior to 895.⁵⁶ He also notes that the dome is supported by pendentives, with a total of six windows adorning the drum of the dome. The drum is further animated by a series of twelve blind arches, connected by double columns.

The most recent comprehensive study of the church was conducted by the present researchers during surface surveys in 2010, 2012, 2018, and 2021. The results of our detailed fieldwork to date have not been widely published; only a brief introduction to the church, a few photographs, a plan drawn by us, and the inscriptions have not been included in research reports⁵⁷ As part of the research project, the church was subjected to a detailed architectural examination. Sketches of the building's plan, section, façade, and decorations were drawn in 2010, and the work was completed in 2012 with the creation of scaled drawings. In 2018, a preliminary visit was conducted to assess the church's current condition, and in 2021, permission was obtained for the acquisition of drone footage.

Although the church in Oğuzlu village has two inscriptions in Armenian, it remains impossible to determine its exact construction date or original dedication. The edifice is commonly designated as Oğuzlu Church in scholarly publications.

The construction of the church is generally placed prior to 895, because of the name Hasan Gnt'uni, mentioned in the single-line inscription (Inscription 1) which begins on the south facade and continues on the east façade. Hasan Gnt'uni is identified as the individual who commissioned the construction of the church. The name of Hasan Gnt'uni is mentioned in the history book of, Armenian Catholicos and historian Yovhannes Draskanakertsi, during the attack by the Abbasid Ostigan Afshin⁵⁸ on the Armenian King Smbat (r. 890-914).⁵⁹ According to the historian, Afshin, who sought to capitalize on the disputes among the Armenian nakharars in the region to capture King Smbat, ultimately failed in his objective when Smbat sought refuge in his inaccessible castle in the Tayk region. However, Afshin laid siege to the Kars castle, where King Smbat kept his treasury. Furthermore, Smbat's wife, who led a reclusive existence, along with his daughter-in-law, who was the daughter of the king of Egrisi and the wives of other noblemen, had sought refuge in the Kars castle. The person in charge of the defense of the castle was Hasan, a member of the Armenian Gnt'uni family, which came from the Kenan region. According to the historian's account, Hasan was in charge of the king's entire household and a very trustworthy man. When Hasan realized the fall of the castle was inevitable, he sought a guarantee from Afshin that no blood would be spilt and that no harm would come to anyone in exchange for the surrender of the castle. When Afshin gave this assurance, he opened the gates and surrendered the castle. Afshin subsequently released the castle's inhabitants, yet on his return to the city of Dvin, he kept the queen, her daughter-in-law, the steward of the royal household, Hasan, a small number of the noblewomen as prisoners and transported the king's treasury. The prisoners were treated with respect, and Hasan was released shortly afterwards to return to King Smbat.

⁵⁶ Kamsarakan, "Les Principaux", 299-300.

⁵⁷ Sağır, "Kars İli ve Çevresinde", 2010, 215, 218 (fig. 5); Sağır, "Kars İli ve Çevresinde" 2012, 12, 17, 30 (fig. 6); Sağır, "10. Yüzyılda Kars", 875, 886 (fig. 26, plan 8); Sağır, "Kars ve Çevresi Ortaçağ", 263; Sağır, "Kars'ın Oğuzlu Köyündeki", 121.

⁵⁸ Afshin, is a princely title, see Clifford Edmund Bosworth, "AFŞİN", *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 1/6, 1984, 589-591 for details. The Afshin mentioned in the text is Muhammad ibn Abu al-Saj, is a member of the Sajid dynasty, who ruled as the Abbasid governor of Azerbaijan between 889 and 901. He is also referred to as Afshin ibn Diwdad and Ibn Abu al-Saj in the sources. For details, see Ali İpek, "Azerbaycan'da Hüküm Sürmüş Bir Türk Hanedanı Sacogulları-Ermeni Münasebetleri. Muhammed el-Afşin Dönemi (889-901)", *Ekev Akademi Dergisi*, year 8, issue 21, Autumn 2004, 203-214; Faruk Sümer, "Muhammed b. Ebü's-Sâc. محمد بن أبي الساج. Ebü'l-Müsâfir (Ebü Ubeydillâh) el-Afşin Muhammed b. Ebi's-Sâc Ya'küb Dîvdâd b. Yûsuf Dîvdest (ö. 288/901). Sâcoğulları Hânedanının Kurucusu ve İlk Hükümdarı (889-901)", *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 30, 2020, 521-523.

⁵⁹ Draskanakertsi. *Yovhannes Draxanakertsi, History of Armenia*, Translated and Commented by Krikor H. Maksoudian, (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987), 147-148, chapter XXXV. For details and sources on the Armenian Gnt'uni family, see Nina G. Garsoïan, "Appendix I: Prosopography", in *P'awstos Buzand. The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut'wnk')*, Translation and Commentary by Nina G. Garsoïan, Cambridge, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 374.

Despite extensive research, no further information has been found in contemporary sources regarding Hasan Gnt'uni, the steward of the royal household, and this event in 895/896. The following questions remain unanswered: firstly, whether the individual in question returned to King Smbat following his release by Afshin; secondly, the method by which this return was achieved, if indeed it was; thirdly, the manner in which he was received at the palace; and fourthly, any subsequent events that may have occurred. The absence of any additional information pertaining to an individual of such a prominent position is a matter that demands attention. In Draskanakertsi's book, evidence pertaining to these questions can be found in the translator's commentary on the section mentioning another Hasan among those who opposed King Smbat's taxes and planned to kill him.⁶⁰ This Hasan is described as one of the elite nakharars, the commander-in-chief responsible for all the king's lands, a powerful figure whom no one dared to oppose and even the king always listened to his advice.⁶¹ In the translator's commentary, it is stated that the Hasan mentioned in the text is most likely the same person as Hasan Gnt'uni. This view is based on the fact that both Hasans bear the title of hramanatar (commander) and are associated with the castles where the royal treasuries are located. The commentary draws parallels between the origins of the two Hasans, highlighting that the first Hasan was associated with the Gnt'uni family, while the second Hasan was linked to the Havnuni family through marital unions and also possessed kinship connections with the populace of Vanand. It is also posited that Hasan Gnt'uni was the commander of Kars Castle in Vanand, thus indicating the possibility that these two Hasans may in fact be the same person.⁶² The translator's interpretation appears to be a rational one when considered in the context of the events and individuals referenced in the history book. The available sources do not provide any information regarding the origins of the second Hasan. It is only stated that he was connected to the Havuni family through marriage. When viewed in general terms, both characters are perceived to be held in high esteem, occupying positions of significant influence and authority. Should the hypothesis that the person in question is Hasan Gnt'uni be accepted, it may be deduced that he soon fell out with King Smbat. This finding serves to reinforce the hypothesis that the church in the village of Oğuzlu was constructed prior to 895/896, during the period in which Hasan Gnt'uni held the position of steward of the king's household. Draskanakertsi's account of the events of the period also substantiates this conclusion.

The Gnt'uni family mentioned in the inscription, to which Hasan belonged, occupied a prominent position among Armenian families. The 5th-century Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi asserts that the Gnt'uni dynasty was of Kenan origin.⁶³ He writes, "King Vagharšak appointed Dzer'e, who was of Canaanite descent, as a dresser, and gave his clan the name Gnt'uni, but I do not know the reason for this".⁶⁴ As this statement indicates, the Gnt'unis were responsible for the royal robes.⁶⁵ Nina Garsoïan in her study on the origins of personal names in the Middle Ages, mentions that some names are of Arabic origin, giving the name Hasan Gnt'uni as an example.⁶⁶

The four-line inscription on the south facade of the church (Inscription 2) mentions three Armenian kings: Ašot III (952/53-977), Smbat II (977-989), and Gagik I (989-1020). The name of Prince Ašot, son of Kevork, is also recorded as the person who restored the church in 1001. M. Thierry writes that this Ašot came from a junior branch of the Pahlavuni family and was Marzban (border commander)

⁶⁰ Draskanakert, *Yovhannes Draxanakertci*, 288, #14.

⁶¹ Draskanakert, *Yovhannes Draxanakertci*, 160-162, chapter XLII.

⁶² Draskanakert, *Yovhannes Draxanakertci*, 288, #14.

⁶³ Hacıyan et al. (Eds.), *The Heritage of Armenian Literature: from the Oral Tradition to the Golden Age*, Vol. I: From the Oral Tradition to the Golden Age, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 317.

⁶⁴ Another important historical source describing the events of the 4th century is the history book of the 5th-century Armenian historian P'awstos Buzand also describes the events of the 4th century in his book, which is translated and commented on by Garsoïan, who states that the Armenian Arsacid King Vagharšak was enthroned, together with his elder brother Arshak III between 378-386. In the appendices of the book, he also gives references containing information about the origins, properties, and history of the Gnt'uni family. For details, see Garsoïan, "Appendix I", 374, 420.

⁶⁵ In Tim Greenwood's translation of Stephen of Tarōn, again with reference to Movses Khorenatsi, the Gnt'unites are described as: "...And [he appointed as] the dressers of the gloves from the line of Canaanites and K'anidas, who in the times of Joshua fled from Canaan and came to Armenia. And he called the name of the house Gnt'unik'". See Stephen of Tarōn, *The Universal History of Step'anos Tarōnec'i*, Introduction, Translation, and Commentary by Tim Greenwood, Oxford Studies in Byzantium, Oxford: University Press, 2017, 120.

⁶⁶ Nina G. Garsoïan, "Notes Préliminaires sur L'anthroponymie Arménienne du Moyen Âge", in *L'anthroponymie Document de L'histoire Sociale des Mondes Méditerranéens Médiévaux*, Eds. M. Bourin et al. (Rome: l'Ecole Française de Rome, 1996), 234; Nina G. Garsoïan, "Reality and Myth in Armenian History", in *Church and Culture in Early Medieval Armenia*, (Aldershot: Variorum collected studies series by Ashgate Publishing, 1999), 120.

during the reign of Gagik I, and that he was also the father-in-law of Seda, who is mentioned in the Bagnayr Monastery and who was also from the Pahlavuni family.⁶⁷ However, there is no definitive information that Ashot was a member of the Pahlavuni family. Nevertheless, given that he bore the title of prince of princes and restored such a church, he was most probably connected to one of the important families of the period.

Although the inscription refers to the restoration of the church in 1001, it does not provide any information about the scope of the restoration other than the person who commissioned it. The phrase “I saw the destruction of the temple...” in the inscription is a very general statement. It does not answer questions such as how much of the church was destroyed, which parts were renovated, or whether only a part of it was renovated, etc. However, based on old photographs of the church and its current state of preservation, it can be deduced that the eastern part of the south facade and the east facade have retained their original form. The rationale behind this is that the construction inscription commences on the south wall of the diaconium and continues uninterrupted on the east facade. Furthermore, the deep triangular niches on the north, south, and east facades as well as their crown arches are very similar to those of the Surp Prkich church, which was built in 893. Given that the Oğuzlu church is thought to have been built before 895, it would not be wrong to assume that these sections have maintained their original structural integrity.

It is regrettable that the two inscriptions on the western facade that were identified by Toramanian during his research in 1914 have not survived to the present day⁶⁸. Furthermore, since no record of them have been found in the course of our research, no information is available concerning their content.

A preliminary analysis of the architectural design of the Oğuzlu church reveals a plan type that is represented by a limited number of extant examples within the Armenian architectural tradition. It has a three-leaf clover plan (trikonch) situated within a rectangular framework. The free applications of this plan type emerged in Armenian architecture in the 7th century, and buildings with a three-leaf plan within a rectangle began to be rebuilt after a protracted period, towards the end of the 9th century. The earliest examples of this period are to be found in the Sevan Monastery in the Syunik Region, as well as in the Surp Arak'elots Church and the Surp Asdvadzadzin Church, both of which were constructed for Princess Mariam in 874.⁶⁹ The following examples represent structures with the same plan type, with the exception of some details: the church in the village of Oğuzlu and the Kotavank Surp Asdvadzadzin Church in the Martuni region (9th-11th century)⁷⁰, Şolagavank (9th-10th century)⁷¹ and Masrats/Masruts/Masrac Anapat (9th-10th century)⁷², the Varagvank Surp Hovhannes Church in Van (9th-10th century)⁷³, Narekavank (10th century)⁷⁴ and Iluvank (10th century)⁷⁵, Oratnavank in the Sisian region (9th-10th century)⁷⁶, Makenotsats/Makenyats/Makenoc'ac'vank in the Vardenis region (9th-10th century)⁷⁷ and the Aparank Surp Garabet Church in Siirt.⁷⁸ However, the church in Oğuzlu is unique

⁶⁷ Thierry, “A propos de quelques”, 331. For the details mentioned in the Bagnayr Monastery, see Ani T. Baladian et al. “Le monastère arménien de Bagnayr (Xe-XIVe siècles). Archives de T'oros T'oramanean et inscriptions lapidaires”, in *Journal des Savants*, no 2, 2021, 316, 388. There are different interpretations and approaches regarding the origin of the Armenian Pahlavuni family and its members. For details, see Sargis Baldaryan, “Պաշտօնավանդանի իշխանական տան ծագման հարցը”, (Issue of the origin of Pahlavouni princely family), *Էջմիածին: Պաշտօնավանդանի անաստիքի Անկնայն Հայոց Կաթողիկոսության Մայր Աթոռու Սրբոյ Էջմիածնի* (Etchmiadzin: Official Journal of the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Catholicosate of All Armenians), 2015, 58-77.

⁶⁸ Toramanian, *Երուզեր Հայկական*, II, 201.

⁶⁹ For more information on Sevan Monastery, see Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst*, II, p. 692; Stepan Mnatsakanian, *Sevan: Hayravank, Noradz, Batikian, Hatsarat, Masruts Anapat, Shoghavank', Vanevan, Kot'avank', Makenotsats*, Documenti di Architettura Armena (18), (Milano: OEMME, 1987), 12-15, 17-30; Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 360-362, no:175; Thierry, *Armenian Art*, 164, 573-574; Zara Pogossian, “The Foundation of The Monastery of Sevan: A Case Study on Monasteries, Economy And Political Power in IX-X Century Armenia”, *Le Valli Dei Monaci Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio Roma-Subiaco*, 17-19 maggio 2010, 2012, 181-215; 2012; Güner Sağır, “Orta Çağ Ermeni Dini Mimarisinde Bir Kadın Bani: Prenses Maryam/Mariam-A Female Patron in Medieval Armenian Religious Architecture: Princess Maryam/Mariam”, in *Zaman, Mekân ve Kadın*, eds. D. Maktal Cankö et al., (İzmir: Ege Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2021), 47-65.

⁷⁰ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 371, No: 186.

⁷¹ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 372-373, No: 187.

⁷² Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 376, No: 189.

⁷³ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 538-542, No: 322.

⁷⁴ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 554-555, No: 330.

⁷⁵ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 570, No: 339.

⁷⁶ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 410-411, No: 213.

⁷⁷ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 378-379, No: 191.

⁷⁸ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 586, No: 366.

and distinctive from the others in terms of its size, its interior layout created with stepped arches, the deep triangular niches on its three facades and its decorations. A comparative analysis of the architectural solutions and decorative elements reveals notable parallels with the Surp Pirkiç Church in Shirakavan which was also constructed during the Smbat period.⁷⁹

Within the geographical confines of Kars province, there are no other examples with the three-leaf clover plan type within a rectangle, similar to Oğuzlu Church. However, two other churches that are dated to the 7th century have the free three-leaf clover plan, even though one has not survived to the present day. These are the Alaman Surp Anania Church⁸⁰ in Alem village, Digor district, that is thought to be dating from before 637, and the church that is dated to the 7th century near Bulanık village⁸¹ within the central district of Kars.

The two-storey plan of the pastophorion rooms of the Oğuzlu church has existed since the early structures in the region. The 630s Mren Cathedral and the 10th-century Horomos Monastery Surp Hovhannes Church can be cited as exemplars. It is important to note that there are no stairs providing direct access to the second floors of these rooms. A similar practice is evident in all pastophorion rooms of the same type in the region. This is likely to be related to security concerns.

The deep triangular niches that divide the eastern facade of the church, the round-arched, narrow and elongated rectangular windows, the crown arches above the windows, and the wall technique are all characteristic of Armenian architecture in the region from early times. However, the manner in which the decorative embellishments are applied distinguishes the Oğuzlu church from the others.

The division of the facades of Armenian churches into vertical sections by deep triangular niches serves an important structural and aesthetic function. These niches serve to reduce the visual mass of the thick walls that support the high-ribbed domes, as well as ensuring an even distribution of weight and an enhancement of the structure's static strength. This practice is related to the fact that this region is an earthquake zone. The division of the north, south, and east facades of churches with deep triangular niches had been a widespread practice in the region since the 7th century. One of its earliest examples is visible in the Surp Hripsime Church (dating from before 618). In addition, the deep triangular niches have also assumed significance within the decorative program.

The church has three portals, with one situated on the western facade and others on each of the northern and southern exedras. However, only the door on the north conch has survived to the present day. Using three portals is a frequently observed practice in Armenian architecture, with its implementation contingent upon the dimensions of the edifice and the congregation it serves.

The central section of the church's naos, although not surviving to the present day, was covered by a dome resting on a cylindrical high drum. The north and south exedras and the apse are covered with a semi-dome each, while the three western sections are each covered with a barrel vault. Externally, the dome was surmounted by a conical cap, the north and south exedras, as well as the west section featured double-pitched, while the remaining sections had single-pitched roofs.

The edifice is composed of neatly cut tuff stone, a material utilized in the construction of all the Armenian structures in the region. The construction of the church incorporated the infill wall technique, a conventional method in Armenian architectural design. This technique had been used in all of the Armenian churches in the region since the early times. The implementation of this wall technique in the region, which is susceptible to seismic activity, was driven by the objective of enhancing the structural integrity of the walls and providing support for substantial roof systems, including high-ribbed domes.

⁷⁹ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 682-683, No: 437.

⁸⁰ Cuneo, *Architettura Armena*, I, 649, No: 415.

⁸¹ Güner Sağır, "Kars İli ve Çevresinde Yer Alan Ortaçağ Ermeni Kiliseleri (Ani Hariç) Yüzey Araştırması 2017 Yılı Çalışmalar", [Survey of The Medieval Armenian Churches in Kars Area (except Ani), 2017 Season], *40th International Symposium of Excavations, Surveys and Archaeometry (07-11 May 2018 Çanakkale/Turkey)*, 36th Meeting on The Result of Surveys, Vol. 2, 2019, 126-127, 131-133, Photo 1-3, Drawing 1-2.

Although the roof of the church does not survive, its old photographs as well as small surviving details show that it was also composed of stone. However, Yakobson, who conducted research on the utilization of roof tiles in medieval Armenian edifices, evaluates the Oğuzlu church among the structures that employed roof tiles.⁸² He supports this assessment with a photograph of the roof tiles of the Oğuzlu Church included in N. Marr's publication on the Ani Palace Church.⁸³ As Marr asserts, the roofs of structures such as the 10th-century Shirakavan Cathedral, which was constructed under the rule of King Smbat, and the analogous Oğuzlu church, were both covered with tiles (Figure 43). He states that architect N.G. Buniatov, who was involved in the construction of the church in Oğuzlu, observed the tiles of the old roof in situ, beneath the subsequent stone roofing slabs on the western part of the church.⁸⁴

The church features architectural decorations such as basket-weave cornice moldings, stylized leaf motifs, interlocking circle motifs, four- and six-petaled rosettes, eight-pointed stars, and oyster motifs. These decorative elements can also be observed in Armenian churches in the region that have survived to the present day. However, the aesthetic approach employed in Oğuzlu, particularly in the deep triangular niches, squinch arches, and crown arches, differs from other structures in the region. The closest examples of these elements are found in the Surp Prkich Church in Šhirakavan (893).

It is unfortunate that the relief on the south door lintel, which Toramanian mentions as noteworthy, has not survived to the present day.⁸⁵ However, we have a photograph taken by Toramanian during his research and Strzygowski's narrative, which is mentioned above. In the section where Strzygowski examines the equestrian figures, he also discusses the relief in the Oğuzlu church, making use of Toramanian's photograph.⁸⁶ Strzygowski's analyses of the reliefs of Saint George and Saint Demetrius in the Ani Mijnaberd Chapel (the Citadel Church) and the relief in the Oğuzlu Church reveal a striking similarity in their design, with the notable exception of the presence of the Tree of Life motif in the center, replacing the conventional depiction of Mary and Jesus. Despite the evident disparities in the depicted scenes, the author draws parallels between the equestrian figure sculpted in stone on the lintel of the north door of Mren Cathedral, dating back to the period prior to 641. Consequently, he poses the question of whether the equestrian figures could have belonged to the donors. In support of this proposition, he cites the scene with the inscription above the door at Gndevank Monastery as an example. The researcher's other view is that these horsemen figures are Persian/Sasanian-influenced, and that the horsemen soldiers are protectors of the church/Christianity. In his publication on stone reliefs in Armenian structures, Mnatsakanian also examined the relief on the south facade of the Oğuzlu Church and published an old photograph of both the southwestern facade of the church and the relief.⁸⁷ He then proceeded to describe the shape and composition of the relief, and evaluated examples that may have similar characteristics in terms of the rendering of the figures. In a brief discussion on the subject, Thierry made references to Mnatsakanian and Strzygowski, and published an old photograph of it.⁸⁸ Consequently, researchers who have observed the relief or interpreted it from photographs have stated that a detailed evaluation in terms of stylistic features cannot be conducted. However, it is noteworthy that although reliefs of figures on horseback, Mary, and the infant Jesus are observed in Armenian architecture, there is no other extant example of a composition like the one in the Oğuzlu Church.

The analysis of historical photographs indicates that the non-extant southwestern wall of the church had been destroyed and rebuilt. Strzygowski, who saw this restored wall in 1913, cited it as a prime exemplar of renovation when discussing wall applications in Armenian architecture and published the above-mentioned photograph taken by Toramanian.⁸⁹ It is not known when this renovated wall was collapsed,

⁸² Anatolyy L. Yacobson, "К Изучению Раннесредневековой Строительной Керамики Армении" (On the Study of Early Medieval Construction Ceramic in Armenia), *Պատմա-Բնակավայրագիտական Հանդես* (Patma-Banasirakan Handes), Volume 1, 1979, 217.

⁸³ Nikolay Y. Marr, *Описание дворцовой церкви в Ани*, (Description of the Palace Church in Ani), Петроград (Petrograd): Изд. Анийского музея древностей (Published by the Ani Museum of Antiquities), 1916, 23, Fig. 9.

⁸⁴ Marr, *Описание дворцовой*, 20, Fig. 9.

⁸⁵ Toramanian, *Երթմուկը Հայկական*, II, 201.

⁸⁶ Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst*, I, 428, Abb. 465.

⁸⁷ Mnatsakanian, *Sevan*, 23-28, figs. 9-10.

⁸⁸ Thierry, "A propos de quelques", 334, fig. 7.

⁸⁹ Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst*, I, 215-216, fig. 253.

but it is highly likely that it was reconstructed during the extended Ottoman-Russian wars of the second half of the 19th century. This assertion is substantiated by historical sources that document the utilization of the church during these wars. The closure of all the doors in this wall as well as the extension of the wall above the southern exedra indicates that the structure was used for defense. The collapse of the wall can most probably be attributed to the seismic activity in the region. Kars is within an earthquake-prone region and has experienced destructive earthquakes throughout history. As is demonstrated by extant records, the region was subject to severe seismic activity in 1926, 1935 and 1936, which resulted in considerable loss of life and the destruction of nearly all of the 50 villages located between Digor and Kars.⁹⁰ Despite the absence of empirical evidence pertaining to this edifice, it is reasonable to hypothesize that, given the extensive damage sustained by numerous ecclesiastical structures in the region, particularly during the 1936 seismic event, it is probable that this particular structure was also destroyed within the same historical period.

The second significant era in Armenian architecture, subsequent to the 7th century, commenced in the 9th century and attained its zenith in the 10th century. During this period, novel plan types emerged alongside those employed in the 7th century. The most significant factor contributing to the resurgence of architectural activity was the redirection of trade routes to this region. It is evident that the Armenians experienced a period of significant economic and cultural flourishing during the latter half of the 9th century, largely attributable to their integration within the realm of King Ašot I (r. 885-90). This era was characterized by the absence of major conflicts between the Byzantine Empire and the Abbasids, fostering a harmonious relationship between the two powers. The commissioning of churches was undertaken by a variety of individuals and institutions, including royalty, members of the nobility, religious leaders such as bishops and catholicoses, as well as prominent landowners and high-ranking religious figures.

Consequently, despite the absence of definitive evidence, the Oğuzlu Church can be tentatively dated to the late 9th century. When its architectural features, inscriptions, and decorative program are considered together, the structure incorporates both elements specific to its period and the idiosyncratic work of local craftsmen. These characteristics make it significant as one of the precursors of the second revival period in Armenian architecture and as a witness to that era.

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⁹⁰ Süleyman Tekir, “Kars ve Çevresinde Depremler (1924-1941)”, (Earthquakes in Kars and its Surrounding (1924-1941), *History Studies*, Prof. Dr. Enver Konukçu Armağanı, 2012, 423-436.

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