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Anastasis „Copies” in the Early Mediaeval Church Architecture of the Caucasus?

In the overall picture of the Early Christian churches the cross-shape was evidently one of the most important symbolical forms of compositional inspiration for the cultic building activity. St. Ambrose of Milan stated on its sign: „Forma crucis templum est, templum victoriae Christi. Sacra, triumphalis, signat imago locum.”¹

The appearance of that meaningful motive is hardly surprising in the Caucasus-region: a well known example of it was Nino's monumental cross on the top of the Djwari mountain nearby Mcheta in Georgia. By the fourth century the Christian religion was becoming dominant in the given historical circumstances; the new faith that was taught made local people conscious of authority during the struggle against Sassanid invaders who were generally the worshippers of the fire-cult.

As early as in the fourth century a simple scheme of „cross in square” church form was going to be realized in Mcheta. By its researchers seemed to be proved that the small chapel (named Samtawro) originally had a rectangular core covered by a domed cross structure.²

In the fifth-seventh centuries a new impetus was given to the development to this symbolic form of church architecture in the Caucasus-region. Outstandingly tetraconchs and triconchs were built at Dswali Gawasi in Georgia³ and St. Astvatzatin of Moro-Dsoro monastery, St. Khaatch of Taik, Ogevank, Agarak, Drzviz, Arzni, Mankanots, Papi in Armenia.⁴ A group of „croix libre” type of church was also created on the soil of the above mentioned countries. Georgian variations are known in Segani, Idleti, Eralant-Sakdari,

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1. St Ambrose, in 396. *Inscr. cristiane in Milan*, 229. – Abel, A.: *Le symbole de la croix*, Byzantion, II (1925), 337–348. – Jerphanion, G.: *La representation de la croix*, *La voix de monuments*, I. Paris, 1930. 138–164. – Cecchelli, C.: *Il segno della salvazione*, *Accad. Rom. Archeolog.* 25. (1949–1951), 9. – Dölger, F.J.: *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Kreuz-zeichens*, *Jb. f. Antike und Christentum*, 1958/1967. – Dinkler, E.: *Signum crucis*, Tübingen, 1967.
 2. *Newer researches of the small church*, see Mepisashwili, R.–Zinzadse, W.: *Georgien*, Leipzig, 1987. 90.
 3. Tshubinashwili, G. N.: *Arhitektura Kahetii* (in Russian), Tbilissi, 1959. 216–231.
 4. Grigorian, V.: *Malüe centralnüe pamiatniki Armenii rannego srednevekovia* (in Russian), *The Second International Symposium on Armenian Art*, Erevan, 1978. II. 66–75. – *idem*: *op. cit. in detail*, Erevan, 1982. – Hasratian, M.: *Essai sur l'architecture arménienne*, Moscou, 1985. 27–63. – *in general*: Tokarsky, N. M.: *L'architecture arménienne du IV e au XIV siècle*, Erevan, 1961. – *Fundation C. Gulbenkian: Eglises arméniennes*, Lisbon-Etchmiadzin, 1970. – *Monuments of Armenia*, Beyrouth, 1975. 41, 57, 60, 61, 251. – Brentjes, B.– Mnazakian, S.–Stepanian, N.: *Kunst des Mittelalters*, Berlin, 1981.

Samzewrissi, Shiomghwime⁵ and there are also similar Armenian ones in Lmbat, Karmavor, Alaman, Thalin (Kamsrakan).⁶ Some of the „croix libre” churches got a triconch or tetraconch shaped interior.⁷ Apart from these in Armenia a particular tetraconch compositional structure named „Mastara type” also became established by the seventh century.⁸ An extended, more complex representation of that composition was built either in Etshmiadsin or in Bagaran.⁹

However the study of the further enrichment of the design of cross shaped remains by the sixth-seventh century also deserves further attention: some of their interiors became set in an octagonal wall-frame of the mass. No doubt the figure of the number eight had significant resemblance to the sign of Redemption.¹⁰ According to our knowledge by the Gregorian Sacramentary „six is said to stand for the present age, seven for the age of Test and eight is marked by the Resurrection.” That spiritual meaning was correspondently demonstrated by the inscription of St. Teclas’ baptistry in Milan. The text of which is correlated again with the spiritual view of St. Ambroise.¹¹ Later Johannes Scotus Eriguena also expostulated the symbolic content of the number eight:¹² „Haec sunt quae tacite nostris in cordibus intus Octoni numeri modulator nabra sonorum Spiritus interior clamat nac deinit unquam Semper concrepitans, quiquid semel intonat annus Haec scriptura docet cui rerum concinit ordo.”

In fact there is a good reason to believe that this kind of religious concept inspired those architectural compositions where the cross shaped interior of the church had been compoundly combined with an octagonal wall-frame of mass. This formula was followed by a

5. Tshubinashwili, G.N.: Die Schiomghwime Lawra, Tbilissi, 1925 – Idem: op. cit. 1959. 261–264, 266–269. – Mepisashwili-Zinzadse, op. cit. 1987. 115–128. – Beridse, W.–Neubauer, E.: Die Baukunst des Mittelalters in Georgien, Berlin, 1980. 24,31,73–77.
6. See note 4.
7. See notes 4–5.
8. Sahinian, A.: L’architecture de la cathedrale d’Etchmiadzin (in Armenian) Etchmiadzin, 1961. – Hasratian, op. cit. 1985. – Haroutiounian, V.M.: Etchmiadzin, Erevan, 1985. – Idem: Kamennaia letopis Armianskogo naroda (in Russian), Erevan, 1985. 29–39. – See analyses of early Armenian church structures, Gandolfo, F.: Chiesa e capelle armena a navata semplice dal IV. al VII. secolo, Roma, 1973.
9. See note 8.
10. Dölger, F. J.: Das Oktagon und die Symbolik der Acht, Antike und Christentum, 4. (1934). – Hopper, V. F.: Medieval Number Symbolism, New York, 1938.
11. Kostof, S. K.: The Orthodox Baptistery of Ravenna, New Haven–London, 1965. 51. see Augustinus, De Civitate Dei, XXII. 304–306 (Migne). – Perler, O.: L’inscription du baptistere de Sanete Thécle a Milan et le ‘D Sacramentis’ de Saint Ambroise, Riv. Ac. 1951. 145–166.
12. Versus Iohannis Scotti ad Karolum Regem, see Krautheimer, R.: Introduction to an Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture, Medieval Architecture, New York–London, 1976. 166–168.

pair of Georgian buildings built in Wasisubani and Manglissi¹³ or the Armenian one of Arani.¹⁴

The spiritual idea of the above outlined formula might have been a kind of inspiration for the design of the monumental Bishopric church built in Ninozmina (Georgia) in the sixth century.¹⁵ Its tall domed octagon core has received an additional tetraconch, diagonally interspersed by four corner compartments (chapels).

By the beginning of the seventh century another similar important start was made in a parallel way on the formation of the Georgian „Djwari type” church: e.g. nearby Mcheta, in Ateni, Martwili, Dsveli Shuamta, etc.¹⁶ and of the Armenian „Hripsime form” (e.g. in Vagharshapat, Avan, Sunivan, etc.).¹⁷ Their arrangement became a tetraconch covered over curved corners by octagonal drum and a dome, the dominating structure of which was flanked underneath by four corner compartments (eastward a prothesis and a diaconicon, westward a pair of rooms for the use of female believers in Georgia). In the case of the interior of Djwari Nino’s cross – which had been erected a few centuries earlier – was comprised in the centre under the dome.

The vaulted surface of the dome was often glorified by the same sign of redemption applied in bas relief to the interior of the artificial skybolt representing the Heavenly sphere.

The spiritual meaning of these space structures seems to be illuminated by a sixth century Syriac text written of the Edessal cathedral:¹⁸ „Indeed, it is an admirable thing that in its smallness it should resemble to the great world...” – we may read – „Its ceiling is stretched like the heavens – without columns, vaulted and closed – Its high dome is comparable to then heaven of heavens; Its great splendid arches represent the four sides of the world; Exalted are the mysteries of this Temple concerning the heavens and the earth: in it is represented schematically the sublime Trinity and the Saviour’s Dispensation.” From the content of this one may deduce that this type of church design (e.g. the similar Georgian and Armenian ones) simultaneously had a comparative compound Cosmic meaning.

Early Christian-Mediaeval people obviously responded to this sort of architectural symbolism with particular favour. To their way of thinking it was possible to find an analogy between the above mentioned compositional patterns and those ones where the tetraconch

13. Tshubinashwili, G. N.: *Zamiatki o mangliskom hrame* (in Russian), Tbilissi, 1921. – *Idem*; op. cit. 1959. 264–265., 223., 254., 437. – Dwali, M. M.: *Arhitekturnij pamiatnik v Manglissi*, Tbilissi, 1962. – Beridse-Neubauer; op. cit. 1980. 122. – Mepisashwili-Zinzadse, op. cit. 1987., 124,128.

14. Grigorian, op. cit. 1982. see Pl.I/3.,III.

15. Tshubinashwili, op. cit. 1959. 232–246. – Beridse-Neubauer, op. cit. 1980., 24–26. – Mepisashwili-Zinzadse, op. cit. 1987., 129–133.

16. Zinzadse, W.: *Mchetski hram Dshwari* (in Georgian), Dseglis megobari, 40. Tbilissi, 1976. – Mepisashwili-Zinzadse, op. cit. 1987. 131–143. – Beridse-Neubauer, op. cit. 1980. 24–28.

17. Yeremian, A. B.: *L’Englise de Hripsime*, Erevan, 1955. – Ghalpakhdjian, H.K.: *Matériaux nouveaux au sujet de projets du couvent d’Etchmiadzin et de Vagharchabat*, Etchmiadzin, 1959. – Sahinian, A.: *Surp Hripsime*, Etchmiadzin, 1978. – Hasratian, op. cit. 1985. 49–63.

18. Mango, C.: *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, Sources and Documents*, Prentice-Hall, 1972. 57–60.

became enclosed in a circular ambulatory. The significance of roundness appeared already in an attractive way in the letter written by St. Gregory of Nissa to Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium.¹⁹ „I have called the octagonal shape a circle because it is rounded in such a way that the four sides of the octagon that are opposite one another on the main axis (ek diametron) connect by means of arches the central circle to the four adjoining bays.”

One can hardly overestimate the spiritual importance of the circle in the space structures of Mediaeval Christian churches.²⁰ It is a well known fact that according to St. Augustine it was „a symbol of virtue, an interpretation which he based on Horace ‘Fortis et in se ipse totus teres atque rotundus’. It is preeminent among all other geometrical figures and comparable to virtue because of the conformity and concordance of its essentials, its ‘congruentia rationum atque concordia’...”. On the other hand by Egil „the circle is a symbol of the Church, never ending and containing the sacraments; also it signifies ... the reign of eternal majesty, the hope of future life and the ‘praemia mensura quibus iusti merito coronatur in aevum’ ...”.

It is not surprising that in the Early Christian and Mediaeval centuries the unity of roundness – „mira rotunditas” – became a characteristic feature of the Holy Sepulchre church „copies” although the original model of the Church of Jerusalem was never imitated „in toto”. It was reproduced „figuraliter and typice” as a memento of a venerated site or of a saint simultaneously as a symbol of the promised Salvation. The same intention might be observed in the arrangement of S. Stefano Rotondo in Rome as well as in those of several Syrian cathedrals e.g. of St. Sergius and Bacchus in Bosra. A similar influence of the Anas-tasis idea may be observed in the cross in circle church compositions which were evolved in the Caucasus regions.

An exquisite example of that type was erected by the catholicos Nerses III. – „the Builder”, next to the patriarchal palace in Zvartnots between 644–652.²¹

As a result of new research it was established that its cross shaped nucleus emerged originally elevated from the round ambulatory: by that way the symbolic interior could also be visualized plastically from outside.

Having known the liturgical function of this cathedral one may wonder at the significance or the presumed large baptismal fountain in the architectural arrangement.²²

19. Mango, op. cit. 1972. 27–29.

20. Loeffler – Delachaux, M.: *Le Cercle*, Genève, 1947. – Krautheimer, op. cit. 1972. 166.

21. Thiramanian, T.: *Zvartnots, „Ani”* Beyreuth, 1949. – Haroutiounian, V.: *Zvartnots, Erevan, 1947, 1954*. Mnatsakanian, S.: *Zvartnots (in Russian)*, Moscou, 1971. In the district of Dvin the vanished church of St. Sarkis (St. Sergius) should have by several researchers a similar design as in Zvartnots has been formulated, see D’Onofrio, M.: *Le chiese di Dvin*, Roma, 1973. 118–120. „In conclusion, ... we may certainly suggest that particular structural features ... indicate that the vanished church of St. Sergius served as a preliminary experiment leading to the grandiose project realised in the church of Zvartnotz.”

22. Khatchatrian, A.: *L’architecture arménienne du IVe au VIe siècle*, Paris, 1971. – Castelfranhi, M. F.: „Baptisteres” et liturgie baptismale en Arménie du IVe au VIIIe siècle, *The Second Interna-*

We have to remember that according to Christian teachings there existed a mystical connection between memorial ideas and baptism, that is death and resurrection. The text of St. Basil's book highlighted these relations: „How then do we achieve the descent into hell? By imitating through baptism the burial of Christ. For the bodies of the baptised are, as it were, buried in water... For there the death on behalf of the world is one, and one the resurrection of the dead, where of baptism is a type.” To St. Augustine „baptism is nothing but ‘similitudo’ of death of the Lord...”. No doubt baptism and resurrection were closely linked by the Early Christian belief and therefore the baptismal rite was performed for the catechumens at Easter time.²³ In the early Armenian churches – as well as in Palestine – the baptismal fountain was usually inside in the interior of the church itself, – however in Syria they eventually had a separate baptismal chapel. By the „Rituale Armenorum” the baptismal liturgy had three phases: first the abjuration in front of the church entrance, second the immersion, and third the communion on the bema.²⁴ The spiritual meaning and the process of the rite seems to be quite sufficient for us to accept the particular significance of the layout of the baptismal fountain in Zvartnots. However it has to be pointed out that according to some researchers no baptismal fountain existed but instead a memoria of St. Gregory.

We know for certain that the dedication of the cathedral is one of the most important event revealing to us the characteristic meaning of the cultic building. In accordance with this question the esoteric idea appears again to be very dominant: the cathedral was devoted to those „vigilant angelic powers” which had participated in one of St. Gregory's mystical vision. In this way it appears to be proved, that in the mind of the local people the church was regarded as a model of the „Heavenly Jerusalem” or a „copy” of the Anastasis.²⁵

The same architectural formula became realized in Lekiti (recently in Aserbaidshan) in about the eight-ninth century.²⁶ A later version of this composition is the Palace church of Gagik (1001–1013) devoted to St. Gregory in Ani.²⁷

It is a tempting suggestion to compare the pictorial representations of St. Gregory's visions with the further derivations of the „Zvartnots type” space structures. In Kasak there is

tional Symposium on Armenian Art (1978), II. Erevan, 82–89. – Gandolfo, op. cit. 1973. 232–237.

23. Krautheimer, op. cit. 186–190.

24. Gandolfo, op. cit. 1973. 236. see Conybeare, F.C.: *Rituale Armenorum*, Oxford, 1905.

25. „Copies” of the Holy Sepulchre e.g. S. Stefano Rotondo in Rome, see Krautheimer, R.: *Santo Stefano Rotondo a Roma e la Chiesa del Santo Sepolcro a Gerusalemme*, *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* (1935), XII. – Idem, op. cit. 1976. – Ritz, S.: *A templom* (in Hungarian), Róma, 1985. – Guzsik, T.: *Szimbólumok a középkori örmény építészetben* (in Hungarian), *Építés- és Építészettudomány*, XXI. (Budapest, 1990), 1–4. 129–163. – Tompos, E.: *Characterist Features of the Early Byzantine and Caucasian Architecture Periodica Polytechnica, Architecture*, 35/3–4. 91–122. – Idem; *A későrómai császárság és Bizánc keresztény építésze* (in Hungarian), Budapest, 1994.

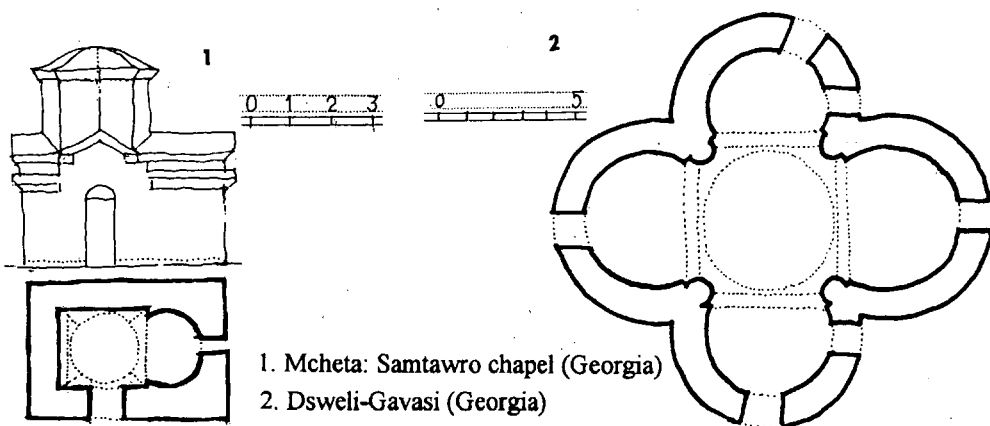
26. Mepisashwili-Zinzadse, op. cit. 1987. 148. – Hasratian, op. cit. 1985.

27. Cuneo, P.: *L'architettura della scuola regionale di Ani nell'Armenia Medievale*, Roma, 1977. 54–55. fig. 20.

a faithful illustration of the mystic event: on the surface of a six century stele there is a column and above it appears the cross inscribed in a circle.²⁸

In this pattern the arms of the cross are filled with four ornamental elements evidently symbolising the glorious splendour emanation of st. Gregory's vision.²⁹ In a similar way the derivation of the Zwartnots type became combined in the pattern of the space structure with four compartments as the „Djwari type” in Georgia and „the Hripsime form” in Armenia. An eminent example of that arrangement remained in Bana (now in Turkey).³⁰

Hardly surprising that this type of space structure appeared in a reduced form in Garni and much later in Marmashen, Xckonck, where the ambulatory is missing.³¹ By that way the cosmic meaning of the Heavenly Jerusalem remained as well accentuated as preciously meanwhile the altered composition was not going to loose its previous spiritual importance, it being a „copy” of the Holy Sepulchre. After the seventh century examples this phenomenon was actualized by the historical circumstances in the tenth-eleventh centuries. By the beginning of the eleventh century in Jerusalem the real Anastasis building became demolished and on the other hand by that time the Caucasian people were being relieved of islamic invaders. These events might have inspired the Armenians to produce afresh exalted Holy Sepulchre „copies” in their church architecture around the milleneum.

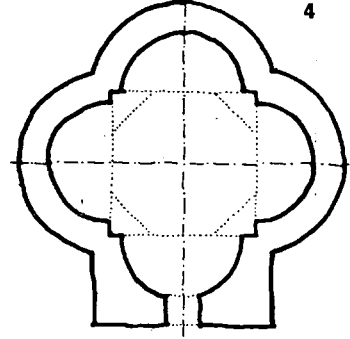
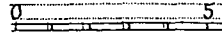
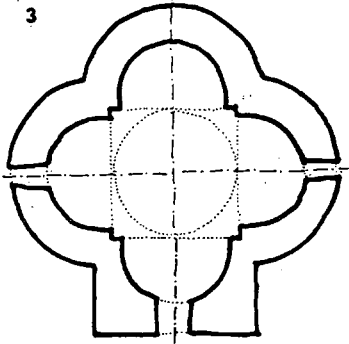


1. Mcheta: Samtawro chapel (Georgia)
2. Dsweli-Gavasi (Georgia)

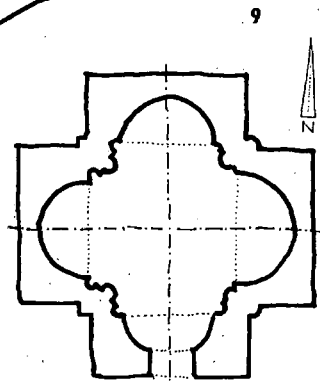
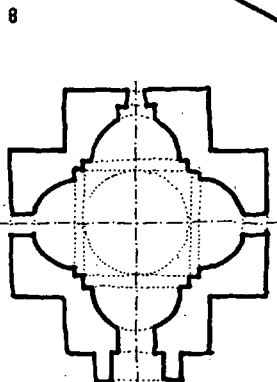
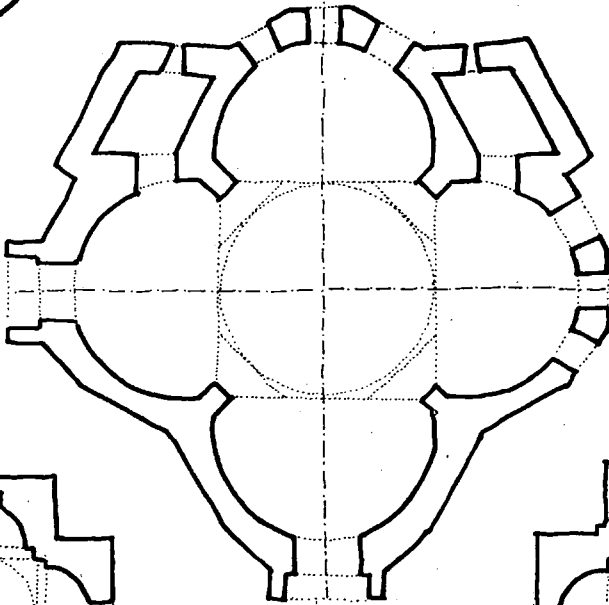
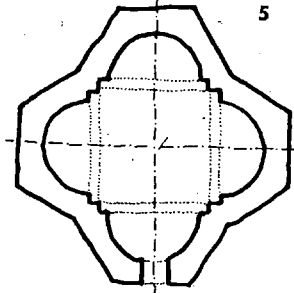
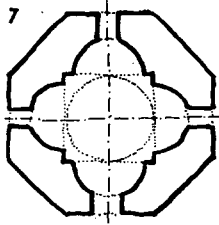
28. Gandolfo, op. cit. 1973. 187.

29. Version of St. Gregory's visions, op. cit. Gandolfo, 1973. 186, note 6. see Storia di Agatangelo, illustrated by the Armenian Mechitarist monks style revised by N. Tomaso, Veniee, 1843.

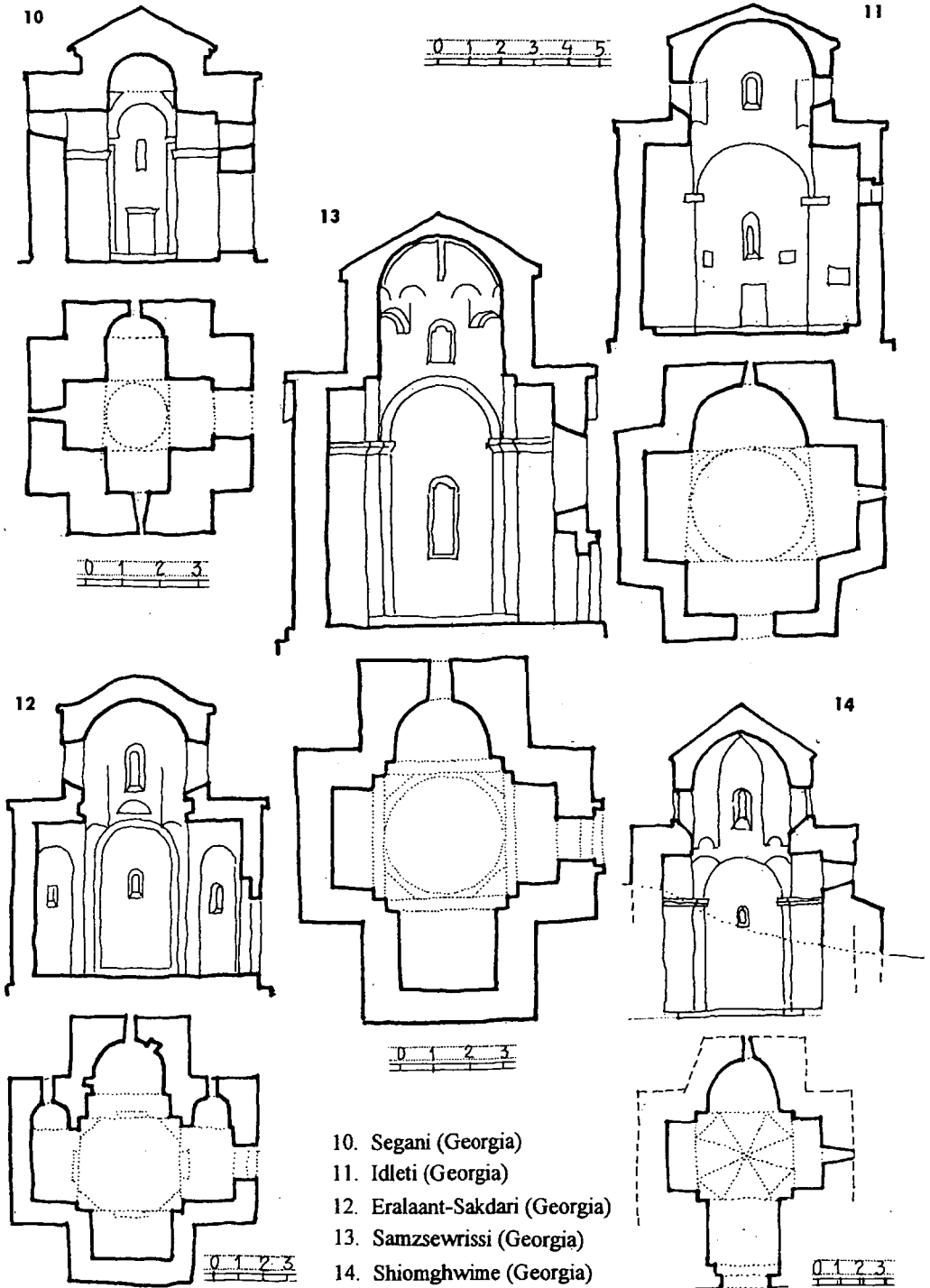
30-31. Mepisashwili-Zinzadse, op. cit. 1987. 147. – Hasratian, op. cit. 1985, 81. – Cuneo op. cit. 1977. 49. – Thierry, J. et M. Ani, ville morte du Moyen Age arménien, Jardin des Arts, 5. Paris, 1960. et (in Armenian), Etchmiadzin, 1961. – Haroutiounian, V. M.: Ani (in Armenian) Erevan, 1964. – Kleinbauer, E.: Zwartnots and the Origins of Christian Architecture in Armenia, The Art Bulletin, LIV. (1972).

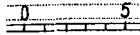
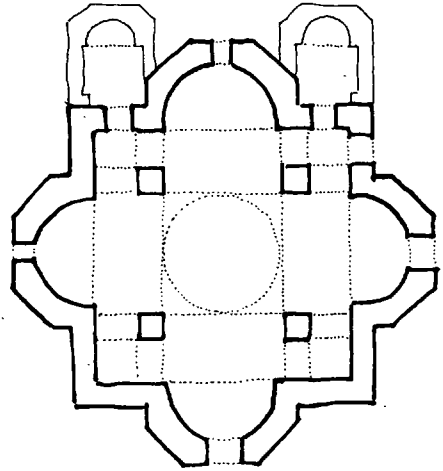
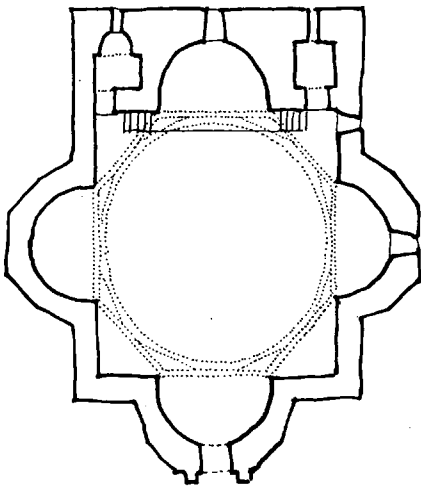
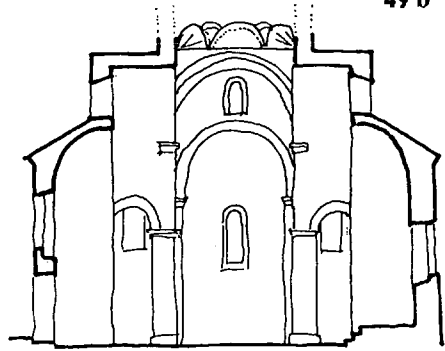
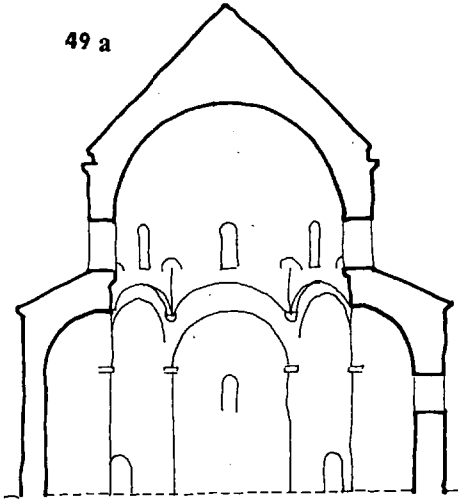


- 3. Moro-Dsoro monastery
- 4. Taik: St. Khatch (Armenia)
- 5. Ogevand (Armenia)
- 6. Agarak (Armenia)
- 7. Arzni (Armenia)



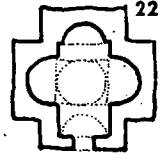
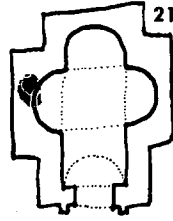
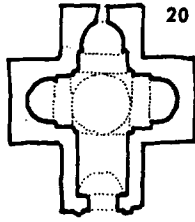
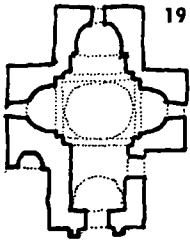
- 8. Mankanot: St. Sion (Armenia)
- 9. Parpi (Armenia)



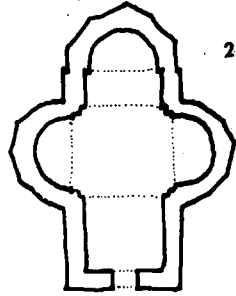
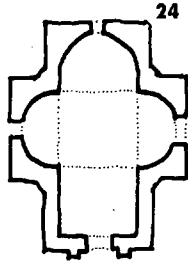
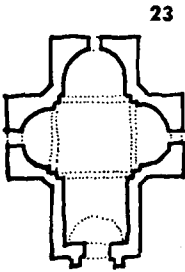


49/a. Mastara: St. Ovanes (Armenia)

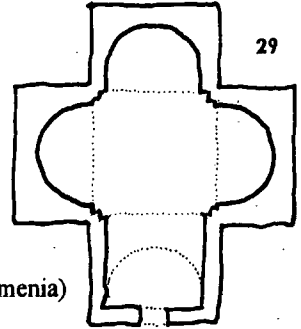
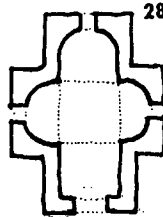
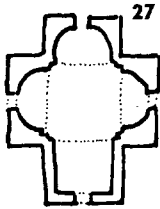
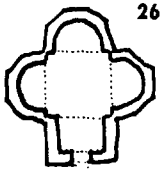
49/b. Bagaran (recently in Turkey)



19. Thalín: St. Astvatzatzin \ 20. Thalín, in Nerkin 21. Djrvej 22. Lusaginh (Armenia)

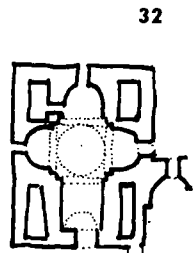
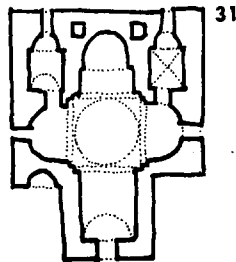
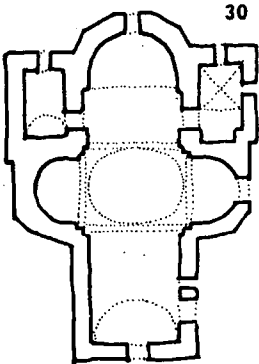


23. Karashamb (Armenia) 24. Ailaber: St. Ovanes (Armenia) 25. Djararat (Armenia)

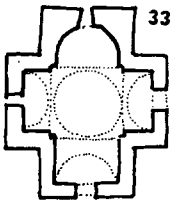


26. Dsagavank (Armenia) 27. Vankar (Armenia) 28. Arzin (Armenia)

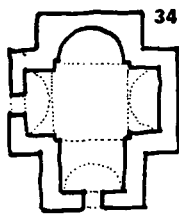
29. Nerkin (Armenia)



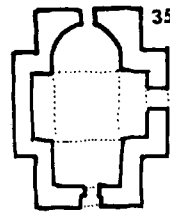
30. Dobrantavank: St. Astvatzatzin 31. Chnevank (Armenia) 32. Pemsashen (Armenia)



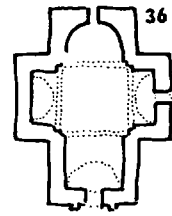
33. Artsovit (Armenia)



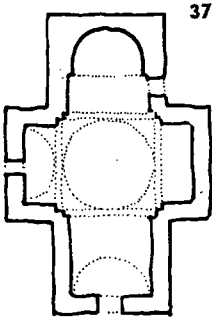
34. Nor Kiank: St Grigor (Armenia)



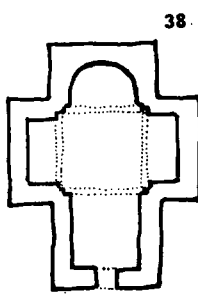
35. Nalband (Armenia)



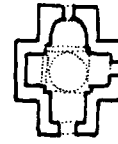
36. Shenik (Armenia)



37. Bujakan (Armenia)



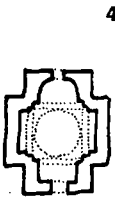
38. Tsakmakhe (Armenia)



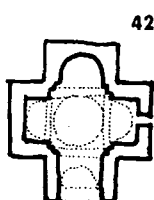
39. Ashtarak: Karmravor (Armenia)



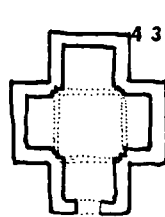
40. Bdjni: St. Sargis (Armenia)



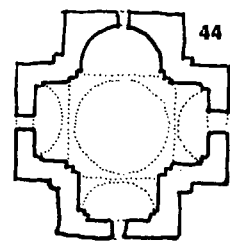
41. Artshavan: St. Amenaprkits (Armenia)



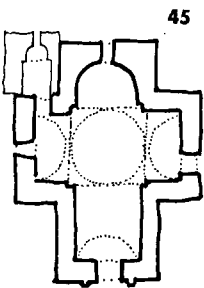
42. Lmbat (Armenia)



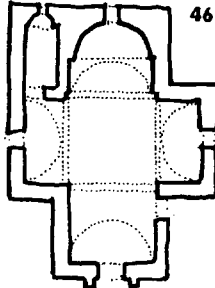
43. Sarnakhiur (Armenia)



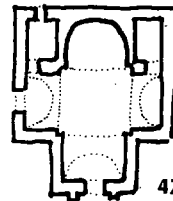
44. Tspni (Armenia)



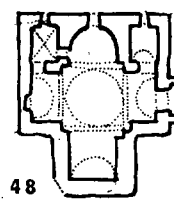
45. Biurakan: Artavasik (Armenia)



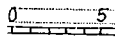
46. Mansian: Tiranavor (Armenia)

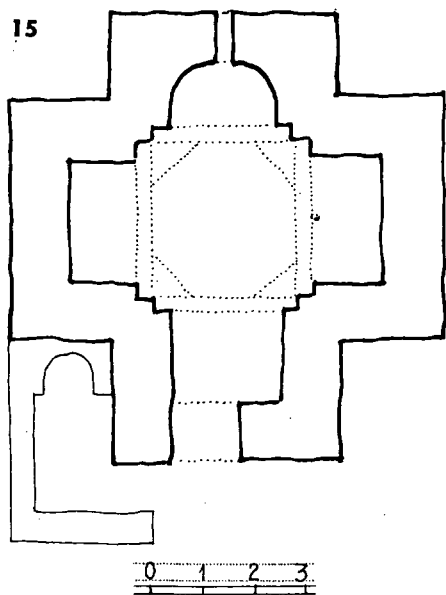


47. Sasunik: St. Grigor (Armenia)

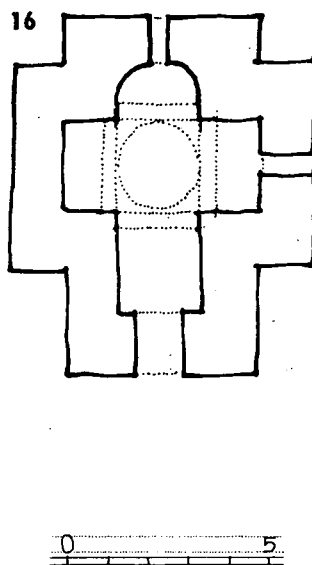


48. Kosh: St. Stepanos (Armenia)

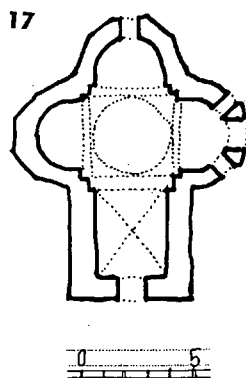




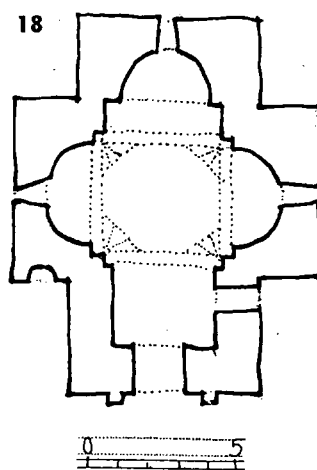
15. Lmbat (Armenia)



16. Karmravor (Armenia)

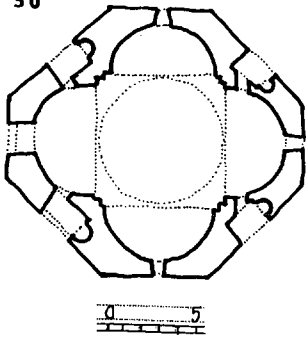


17. Alaman (Armenia)

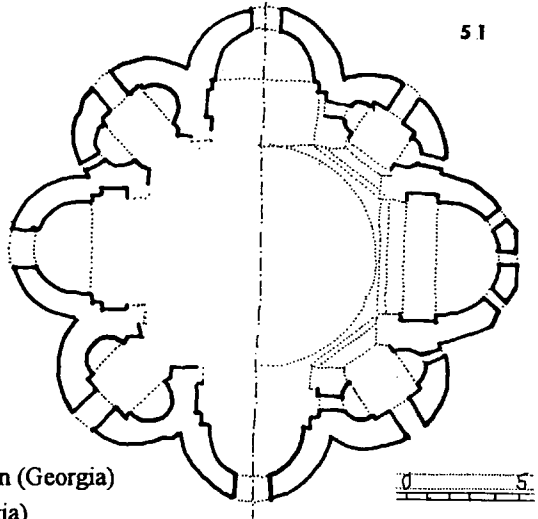


18. Thalín: Maria church (Armenia)

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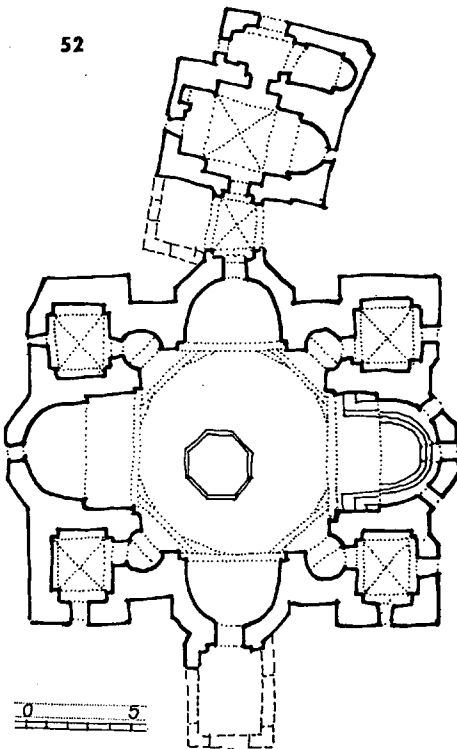
51



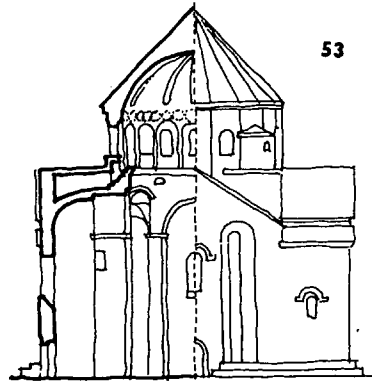
50. Manglissi: Tetraconch, 5th century plan (Georgia)

51. Ninotsminda: Bishopric church (Georgia)

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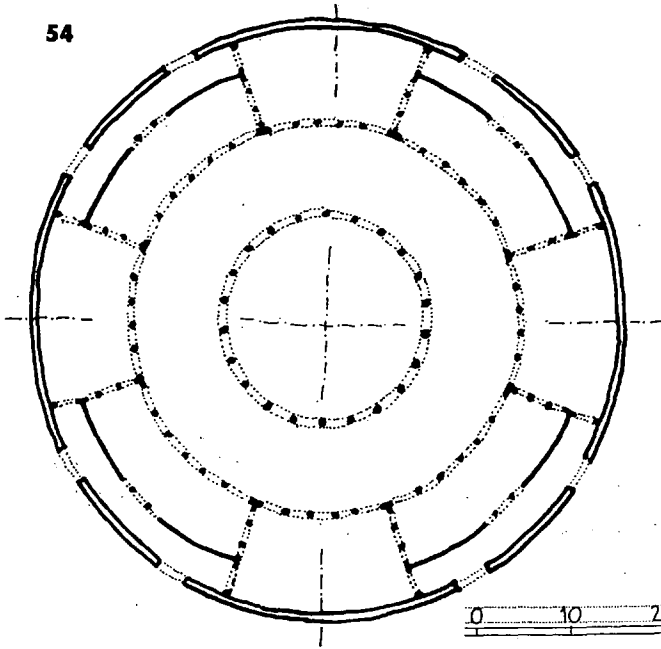
53



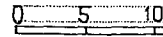
52. Mcheta, nearby: Djwari (Georgia)

53. Vagharshapat: Hripsime (Armenia)

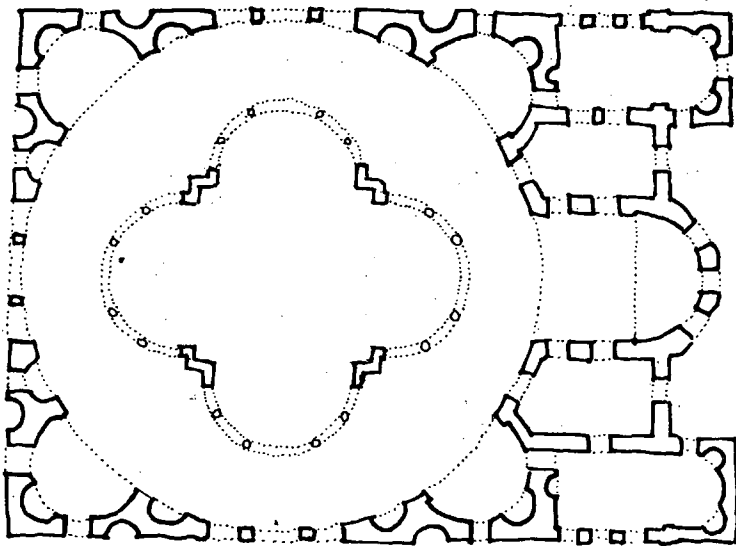
54



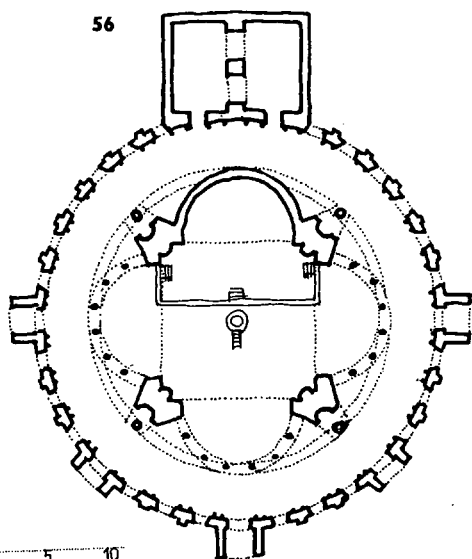
54. Rome: S. Stefano Rotondo (Italy)



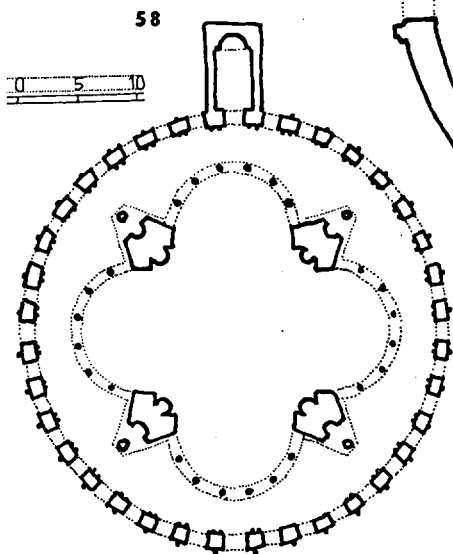
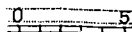
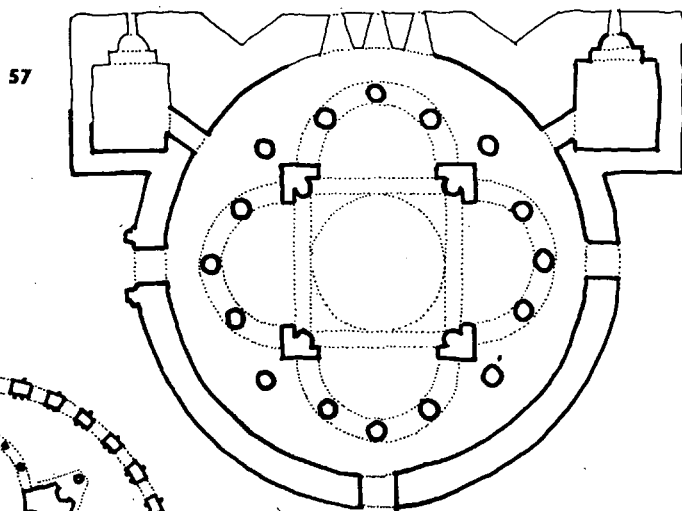
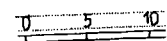
55



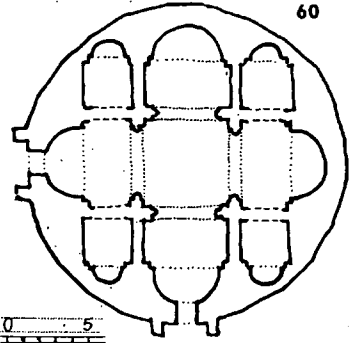
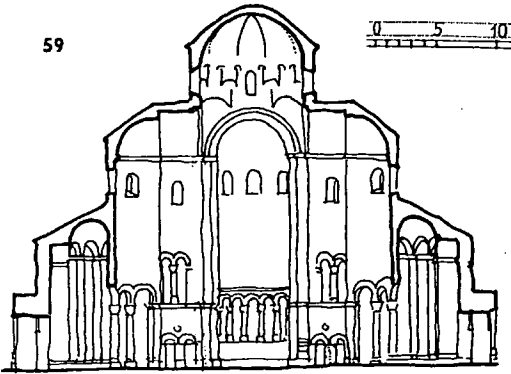
55. Bosra: St. Sergios and Bacchos (Syria)



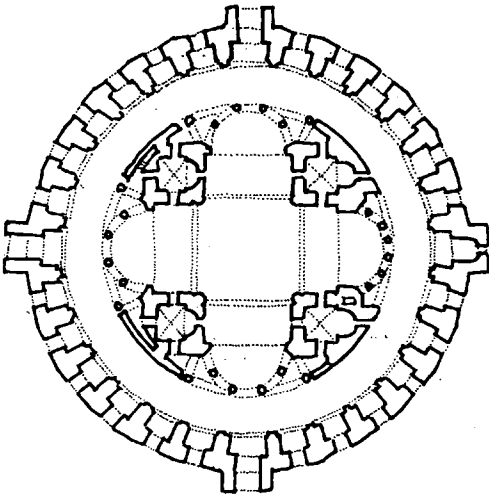
56. Zwartnots (Armenia)



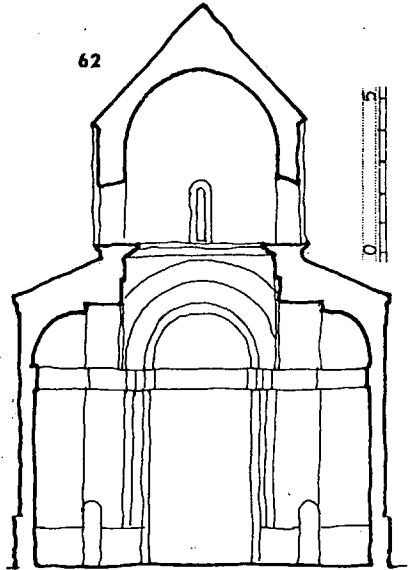
57. Lekiti (recently in Aserbaidshan)
58. Ani: St. Grigor (recently in Turkey)



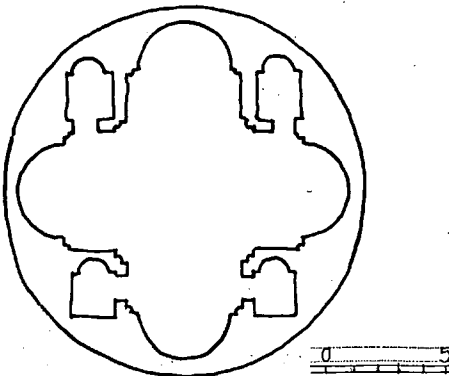
60. Garni (Armenia)



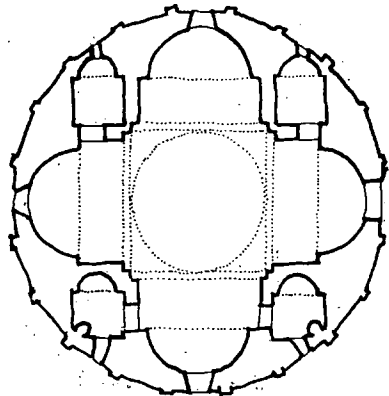
59. Bana (recently in Turkey)



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61. Marmashen (Armenia)



62. Xckonck, nearby Ani (recently in Turkey)