

Feature Articles

Heresy, Hybrid Buildings, and a Geography of Architectural Traditions

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This examination of historical churches in Armenia, Cappadocia and Greece advocates a new geography of architectural traditions that can capture nuanced relationships among different material cultures, especially where they have coexisted in tension. While the history of heretical religions can help identify such places, the buildings analyzed here reveal suppressed or unconscious processes of cultural negotiation. Despite attempts by political and religious leaders to control the ideological programs of art and architecture, heretical worldviews have persisted as tacit but materially consistent practices that have contributed to a greater complexity of forms and experiences than recognized by conventional architectural history.

In our present globalized world, it is no longer possible to uncritically assume the traditionally Eurocentric periodization of art history or accept cultural divisions that implicitly reproduce a legacy of political domination.¹ To critically explore an alternative view of the past, an increasing number of art historians have studied early modern and proto-modern phenomena, often by questioning the epistemic assumptions behind such historiographical categories as Byzantium, the medieval era, or the Renaissance.² Such investigations may help dispel the perception that the dynamic complexity of the contemporary world is unprecedented. After all, the so-called spatial turn in historical knowledge has already revealed that social, political or cultural changes have always occurred in multiple places and in seemingly unrelated ways.

In the twentieth century, interest in the complexity of these dispersed processes coincided with epistemic shifts away from the teleology of the Hegelian vision of history — emphasizing linear and purposeful evolutionary progressions — to the study of spatial fragmentation and the tacit logic within cultural practices. For example, Michel Foucault (whom Gilles Deleuze once described as “a new cartographer”³) mapped how social and epistemological concepts emerged from the interaction between explicit verbal discourses and the implicit functioning of space.⁴ In his seminal work, Foucault identified how spatial patterns in social actions are symptoms of common but unspoken assumptions.⁵

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Simultaneously, the new field of human geography motivated major shifts and revisions in many other disciplines, including a number of innovative studies of urban phenomena in the global economy.⁶

Yet the history of architecture seems resistant to these influences. Even Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann's *Toward a Geography of Art*, which offers the most comprehensive case to date for developing an understanding of spatial diversity in art and architecture, reveals above all how determinism and cultural essentialism have been inseparable from these fields.⁷ It has been politically beneficial to justify dominant powers as guarantors of high culture, and it has been useful to impose a sense of a particular history on diverse people in order to subjugate them. But, more broadly, thinking about symbolic production in terms of consistency in its ideological goals, or of dominant programs, has also produced a comfortably simplistic view of the past. When things are known only to the extent they affirm a well-established system of narratives, such knowledge creates a deceptively attractive impression of cohesion. Instead of registering the actual complexity of cultural phenomena, historical or contemporary, such knowledge masks diverse and dynamic aspects of the world by erasing local or idiosyncratic manifestations of the tensions, conflicts, and ambiguous intentions inherent in the processes of change and cultural negotiation.

This is the key issue addressed in this article. If the mainstream history of architecture tends to reduce built environments to those characteristics that support dominant worldviews, what does it leave out? And, as a corollary, is it possible to view architecture as a material record of cultural and political processes in places where traditions were multiple and diverse?

To answer these questions, this analysis begins with certain methodological premises. First, I posit that complex design decisions have always involved far more than the pure pragmatics of problem solving or the conscious expression of symbolic intentions. That, I argue, is why architecture provides a unique opportunity to analyze the mode of thinking that framed it. Second, I hold that to study those idiosyncratic ways of thinking, it is necessary to examine features of built environments that traditional research methods tend to overlook. Fortunately, many of these are now accessible with the help of new digital tools. Finally, I argue that the history of heretical beliefs can be instrumental in identifying places in which cultural and religious conflicts took place.

In the case examined here, the dominant branches of Christianity exemplify the processes that helped establish the power of the West. However, the heretical worldviews that persisted reveal dispersed, fragmented and unorthodox cultural practices that preserved other ways of thinking. By definition, heresy threatens a politically secured dogma and right to impose a worldview. The concept of heresy is therefore symptomatic of operations of pure power, and thus provides a rich opportunity to explore the coexistence of political domination and cultural resilience.

EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND HERETICAL BELIEFS

To demonstrate these processes, this study examines several buildings in Armenia, eastern Turkey, Cappadocia, and Greece, which date to the fourth through the twelfth centuries, a period when Christian religious ideology was becoming emblematic of the West. This period was also when institutionalized Christianity was established in opposition to (and, I will argue, tacitly negotiated with) beliefs it defined as heretical.

Before 301 CE, when Christianity became the first state religion in Armenia, and for many centuries after that, Christian beliefs were multiple and diverse, contributing to a tapestry of dynamically interacting and evolving religious traditions. But when Constantine, the founder of the Byzantine Empire, convoked the first Council in Nicaea in 325 CE to establish a religious canon for his theocratic state, the invited bishops were charged with eliminating all narratives that might clutter a pure notion of Christian dogma.

The first Council in Nicaea marked the first phase in a long process of turning the biblical canon into a controllable and enforceable system. Its members arbitrarily deemed many biblical sources to be apocryphal — of dubious origin and theologically irrelevant — and attempted to establish unequivocal interpretations of accepted texts. To do this (like many contemporary historians) they focused on the rational integrity of the verbal system they were producing, and they dismissed the complexity of religious practices in the lands under their jurisdiction. Nonetheless, many nominally Christian communities continued to accept conflicting narratives and a variety of material practices, resulting in the interaction and merging of many ancient and newly invented beliefs.⁸ Some of the most influential of these systems, and thus the most threatening to Christian orthodoxy, were syncretic religions that included elements of biblical narratives.

Early Christianity's most adversarial relationship was with what have come to be called dualistic concepts of divinity. Unlike older and more common polytheistic systems that assumed the existence of many gods, dualistic religions threatened the beliefs of followers of Jesus Christ by answering certain fundamental questions that strictly monotheistic traditions could not. Most simply, these revolved around the origin and function of evil: if the world had been created by an all-perfect and infallible god, how was it possible that the world included decay, misery, suffering and crime? The dualists' answer was that the world had been created not by one but by two gods. One deity created and was in charge of all that was perfect and safely beyond the reach of human beings, while the other created and controlled the imperfect material world in which we live — a simple division that placed all people squarely in the domain of the malevolent god.

This dualistic concept of the cosmos took a spectrum of forms. Some religions, especially those based on ancient Platonic-Pythagorean traditions, emphasized the tension between

perfection and imperfection. Simultaneously, people following what is commonly referred to as Gnosticism made a profound distinction between corporal and cerebral perceptions of the world, absorbing many ancient narratives that assigned symbolic meaning to different kinds of thought and experience and viewing thought rather than empirical experience as the most reliable source of religious insight. Such traditions aspired to acquire *gnosis* — a secret understanding of the material and immaterial world.⁹ Following the philosophical assumption called negative theology — the notion that the true divinity is not knowable — the Gnostic tradition found its counterpart and continuation in Neoplatonism; and between the third and sixteenth centuries this attracted not only Christian but also many medieval Islamic and Jewish thinkers.¹⁰

The Persian religious legacy, which competed with Greek traditions for centuries, also emphasized the conflict between two cosmic forces. In the Zoroastrian mythical universe, Ahura Mazda, the good god associated with the sun, was in endless competition with Ahriman (Angra Mainyu), who represented forces of destruction and darkness. In the material world made of symbolically charged natural elements, Zoroastrians viewed fire, especially in combination with water as its opposite, as the source of life and wisdom. This emphasis on fire as both material and immaterial served to connect earthly elements and immaterial principles. Later, this focus on the symbolic function of fire/light inspired the sun-worshipping cult of Mitra in Persia, which subsequently evolved into the mystery cult of Mithras in the Roman Empire.¹¹

Perhaps the most refined and consequential version of these dualistic views, however, was Manichaeism. Conceived by the prophet Mani in the third century in Persia, this was an intentionally and explicitly syncretic compilation of Gnostic, Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian beliefs.¹² Although its followers were prosecuted by Persian priests during Mani's life and by Christian and Muslim authorities for centuries after his death, forms of Manichaeism eventually spread across the Middle East, Europe, North Africa, Indo-Persia, and deep into Central Asia and China.¹³ The cross-cultural appeal of Manichaeism was rooted in its theological construction, as, unlike its competitors, it was broadly inclusive and struck a unique balance between a high degree of visual evocation and the strictest rules of verbal logic.

The Manichean conception of dualism revolved around the issue of light, which it presented as the most intellectually refined connector between the material world and the universe of abstract concepts. Mani's surviving writings clearly demonstrate his mastery at creating evocative visions of a world pulled apart by the forces of darkness and light, explaining how the sacred light had been stolen and infused into the material world. Like Gnostic narratives, this religion of light, as it was often called, was also obsessively complex in its use of numbers and the names of secondary deities, their relationships, and actions. In this way, Mani managed both to paint an imagination-firing view of the mythical origins

of the world and to construct a highly elaborate and logical system of cause-and-effect narratives.¹⁴ Furthermore, his religious system was designed in such a way that imaginative leaders could exploit the coexistence of multiple religious traditions and satisfy the need for enough consistency to organize Manichean communities and control their verbal and material practices.

More effectively than other dualistic traditions, Manichaeism defined the world as divided between two opposing deities, and presented a system of rituals and practices for bridging the divide. Yet, as is the case for all religions, the further Mani's followers spread, the more hybrid their symbolic traditions became. Although elects (priests) aspired to lead and control believers by representing their knowledge as comprehensive and as penetrating both symbolic domains, the people who followed them, especially in remote and secluded locations, exercised these worldviews in more intuitive ways, and their daily material practices included local traditions.

I submit that to understand these complex processes and their cultural consequences, however, requires moving beyond the study of textual sources to explore the material production of the people who were immersed in these nuanced exchanges. Architecture can be particularly instrumental in this endeavor because some of the most symbolically contested religious issues revolved around the constitution of places of worship. Indeed, key features of Christian church buildings in these areas evolved from little-known and culturally unconscious dialogues between nascent versions of Christianity and the symbolic sensitivities created by the dualist legacy.

As I will discuss, the construction of churches raised three issues of religious symbolism. The first was how to construct a place of worship. In the material universe, where everything has been created by the malevolent god, any physical act of construction necessarily enhanced the domain of evil. How, then, could any church made of stone, bricks or wood be truly appropriate for worshipping the benevolent god? The second issue involved where to site places of worship. Since any landscape explicitly represented the symbolically tainted materiality of the world, what kind of place could be suitable for praising the god of immaterial reality? The third issue involved what role light and daylight should play in a Christian church — a particularly acute concern because light was so directly associated with dualistic beliefs. How could a Christian church make use of light without evoking heretical associations?

In the rest of this article, I will examine how these issues were resolved in church buildings during the time and in some of the regions where this exploration took place.



FIGURE 1. *The Armenian Holy Cross Cathedral on the island of Aghtamar (now in Turkey).*

ARMENIA

Although the official history of the Armenian Church does not openly acknowledge that its views may have evolved in dialogue with dualist beliefs — and, in fact, cites many instances when church officials and political rulers prosecuted advocates of dualist views for religious dissent — many of its old churches seem to respond directly to the three symbolic issues mentioned above.¹⁵ Telling instances can be seen in the accompanying photographs.

The Holy Cross Cathedral on the island of Aghtamar in Lake Van provides a striking example of Armenian churches built before the fifteenth century (FIG. 1). In general, these structures are easily recognizable by their siting, composition and craft. In this case the pure geometric form of the church stands in figurative contrast to the vastness of the open space surrounding it. Indeed, the only fragment that seems rooted in the ground, a low entry hall visible in the foreground, is a later addition. The structure is geometrically pure because it is composed of the most elemental solid shapes. Made of reddish sandstone, its walls and roof intersect at perfectly cut corners. Furthermore, the overall purity of shape and material is uncompromised by its decorations, which appear as if delicately drawn on its stone elevations. Meanwhile, the central part of the building dominates the landscape because it is strongly vertical. Its central space (the equivalent of the *naos* in Byzantine architecture) is almost three times higher than it is wide.

These types of refined figures are usually found either sitting on the edge of large open spaces, as at Lake Van; marking natural hills, as in Haghpat Monastery (FIG. 2); or dramatically surrounded by a vast valley, as in Noravank or Tatev.¹⁶ In such churches, the site has been selected to heighten the contrast between the figurative clarity of geometrical forms and the natural background of the landscape. The issue of form was inherently significant in Gnostic and Manichean beliefs, as the notion that a form could be fair or



FIGURE 2. *The Haghpat Monastery in Armenia.*

hideous supported the duality of form and matter — a way of creating a polar opposition between an abstracted shape and a material thing.¹⁷ The refined forms of Armenian churches seem to have grown out of this way of thinking.

However revealing of the dualist dilemma these buildings may be, the oldest remaining examples of churches in Armenia avoided altogether the challenges posed by the first two dualistic issues discussed above. They did this by hiding places of worship in natural or enlarged caves. As if trying not to expand the domain of the malevolent god, it seems these early Christian worshippers preferred found places with no external form at all.

The Geghard Monastery in the Kotaik region, historically one of the most important sacral sites in Armenia, is a good example.¹⁸ Established in the fourth century by Gregory the Illuminator, the founder of the Armenian Church, and partly destroyed in the tenth and twelfth centuries by Muslim invaders, it was reconstructed in the thirteenth century. It later became a center of learning and ecumenical power and played a key role in preserving the religious and cultural identity of Armenia.¹⁹ The monastery is also called Aïrivank, “the Monastery of the Cave,” because its oldest portions were natural caves or were carved out of solid rock.

The accompanying figure shows a fragment of such an interior, the *zhamatun* or *gavit* — the equivalent of the *nartex* in Byzantine churches, but also a mausoleum for its founders (FIG. 3). This *zhamatun* leads to Astvatsatsin, the second-oldest cave church in the main complex of the Geghard Monastery. The oldest church in the complex, Avazan (Basin), is similar to the space shown here. Although these interiors include some pre-Christian references, it is difficult to find architecture that makes one more aware of the basic elements of the natural world.²⁰ Natural elements such as water, solid matter, air, and fire/light symbolically play only a marginal role in the Christian tradition. But they were essential components of dualist systems, which saw in their relationships the structure behind the malevolent god’s design.



FIGURE 3. *The Geghard Monastery, interior.*

Water is a particularly important part of the Geghard experience. As the right side of Figure 3 shows, water seeps from natural cracks in the wall, making the *zhamatun*'s rocky surfaces wet and sensually evocative. Meanwhile, at the top of the interior, a carved dome admits daylight that softly illuminates all of the interior's natural and artificial forms. Interiors carved out of massive rocks are always colder than their surroundings, when these are heated by the sun; thus caves support greater humidity and water condensation. In this case, this results in an increased density of the air, which is vividly apparent when direct sunlight enters the space through the oculus (opening at the top) and materializes as a luminous beam (REFER TO FIG. 3). In Geghard, all of the natural elements that were symbolically charged in Zoroastrian, Gnostic and Manichean narratives are heightened as perceptual phenomena: matter in the rough surfaces of the rock, water on walls and creating small watercourses in the floor, air thickened by the humidity, and light and fire represented by sunlight and candles.

This experience is quite different, however, than what one would observe in a natural cave. While the space shown

in Figure 3 is defined by four approximately orthogonal walls, and thus seems to have been shaped according to principles of geometry, a closer examination suggests that its design was actually driven to a large degree by considerations of light. Although Christian sacral architecture has always used symmetry to indicate the symbolic importance of certain places, the layout of the *zhamatun* in Geghard violates such rules, and instead gives priority to the directionality of sunlight.

The accompanying figure shows three slightly rotated views of a computer-generated model of that interior (FIG. 4). The view in the center approximates an orthographic view of this volume. Although this roughly carved interior is too complex for traditional measuring techniques, the photogrammetric model is accurate and reveals that the main volume of the *zhamatun* is not entirely symmetrical.²¹ Not only is the space carved much deeper on the north side (left in all the pictures), but, more importantly, the dome is shifted to the right, resulting in it being out of alignment with both the volume's center and the small altar apse in the east wall. All the symbolic signs in the space are also carved in the north



FIGURE 4. Geghard Monastery photometric model.

half of the space, where they dynamically interact with the light coming from the moving sun. By contrast, the south wall (right in all pictures) is without decoration, its primordial character emphasized instead by the cracks and water. This approach to space and decoration suggests that the builders must have carved the solid rock while observing the effects created by sunlight, and adjusted the size and shape of the interior and the position of the sculpted figures to the way daylight reaches them.

In Geghard's *zhamatun*, all of the key questions posed by the dualist traditions have been answered in a strangely non-Christian way. Daylight becomes more important than the overall symmetry of the temple layout. The oldest volumes have no exterior presence, and their interiors preserve and reveal the natural state of physical matter. Meanwhile, the newer structures added to the old cave-like interiors are designed, like the Holy Cross Cathedral on the island of Aghtamar and the Haghpat Monastery, to create a strong geometric contrast to the natural complexity of the surrounding valley.

CAPPADOCIA

Other examples of this hybrid way of thinking about places of worship can be found in Armenia, perhaps because this part of the Christian world has always been most exposed to the religious traditions of the East, especially those of Persia and the Middle East.²² Just as the seclusion created by the Caucasus Mountains has helped preserve some of the oldest dialects and cultural traditions in the region, so has it helped maintain diversity in religious attitudes.

In contrast, Armenia's neighbor, the powerful Byzantine Empire, evinced a more radical attitude toward such diversity. As Byzantium waged war against heretics in an attempt to totally eradicate unwanted influences, the three issues of

religious symbolism discussed above reached their height, fueling a century of destructive struggle. Around the time of iconoclasm, between 730 and 842 (and including the second council of Nicaea), the empire turned the worship of figurative depictions of God into a political issue. Depending on shifts in control, the Eastern Church engaged in the persecution either of those who agreed or who disagreed with such a dogmatic belief. More broadly, however, this schism can be seen as a war over the constitution of places and objects of worship.

Although largely glossed over by Western history, this was a time of intense conflict between Byzantine orthodox authorities and the Paulicians, a fiercely iconoclastic sect of militarized Armenian Christians who followed noncanonical writings of the apostle Paul and a mixture of other beliefs.²³ The Paulicians' version of Christianity was so different from those established by the councils in Nicaea or the Armenian Apostolic Church, and so close to dualistic traditions, that many historical sources refer to them as Manichaean Christians.

The largest, best organized, and militarily strongest group of religious dissenters during the period, the Paulicians originated in western regions of Greater Armenia and spread across Asia Minor, especially in the central region between Pontus and Cilicia. They even created their own state near Tephrike (modern Divriği). When the Byzantine Empire was not fighting the Paulicians, it used them as a buffer against Arabs and Bulgars on its borders. Finally defeated in 871, many of the Paulicians were slaughtered or forcibly relocated, while others were absorbed into the Byzantine system of military and administrative *themes* (provinces). The Paulicians did not leave any buildings that can be directly attributed to them or their religious principles. But an example from Cappadocia, the region where descendants of those rebellious heretics were likely to have lived, may reflect some of their beliefs.

Although the history of Cappadocia is inseparable from that of theocratic Byzantium, it also includes Zoroastrian traditions and even late cases in which orthodox bishops were prosecuted for heretical practices.²⁴ In that region, even today one can find villages in which every homestead includes an ancient Christian chapel carved into solid rock (now all converted by Muslim farmers into stables or storage spaces). The largest surviving group of elaborately decorated rock-carved churches near Göreme (Korma) has been converted into a national museum. The construction, or rather carving out, of these places of worship coincided with the iconoclastic controversy in the eighth century and continued until the eleventh century. Almost all of these spaces adopted the spatial pattern characteristic of structures built of stone in the centers of Byzantium, and their painted decorations resembled the iconographic programs of better-known orthodox models. In some of them, however, the range of influences cannot be understood within conventional taxonomies.

A good example is the Chapel of Saint Barbara (Azize Barbara Kilisesi), constructed at the beginning of the eleventh century (FIG. 5).²⁵ Its simple interior is marked by a strange system of signs painted in reddish ochre directly on the surface of light-colored volcanic rock. According to Dorothy Wood, the few figurative paintings that can be found

in the space were added to the abstract patterns later.²⁶ Although she described the reddish signs as “folk decorations,” she also suggested that they represented Byzantine military standards and scepters — which would increase the likelihood that Armenian soldiers and their descendants in the Cappadocian/Anatolic Theme may have participated in their creation.²⁷ The chapel’s similarities to Armenian designs also include certain non-Christian signs. A circular symbol painted prominently at the top of the north vaulted ceiling in Saint Barbara, for instance, resembles the sun-like rosettes on the vaulted ceilings of some Armenian churches.²⁸ This, too, suggests that nominally converted soldiers with Paulician sympathies may have contributed to the design of the chapel.

Even more importantly for this analysis, the spatial and experiential characteristics of the chapel’s interior reveal a dualistic way of thinking. The space, which is seemingly laid out and oriented according to Middle Byzantine orthodox principles, has only one opening, the deep entry door on its south side.²⁹ In the past, this door connected the chapel with the no-longer-existing *nartex*, meaning that the light accessing the interior today is stronger than it would have been originally. Yet the position and the size of the door remain the same; and even if the original interior would have been darker, the distribution of daylight inside the chapel must have been very similar.



FIGURE 5. The Chapel of Saint Barbara in Göreme, interior.

As Figure 5 shows, the natural illumination creates a dramatic visual differentiation in the eastern portion of the chapel, in its ritual center. The further one moves from everyday reality, the more the interior appears as if made entirely of light, shade, and red signs. Thus, this chapel offers a case for thinking about places of worship as made of visual phenomena and abstract symbols. By diminishing one's ability to consider the chapel's material construction, this experience strongly resonates with the first of the aforementioned dualistic issues.

These elusive visual attributes stand in contrast to the landscape of the region. Austere in its material appearance, its postvolcanic topography includes natural pyramids and cones that look almost as if they had been intentionally sculpted for arbitrary reasons (FIG. 6). The chapel is hidden in one of the smaller of these rocky hills, which is not much bigger than the interior itself (FIG. 7). Its old *nartex* must have been small and contained by another rocky mound, which would have appeared to the left of the picture. As a result, this place of worship must have been designed to exist only as an interior.

The implied distinction between the inside and the outside is even stronger in the Chapel of Saint Barbara than in other rock-carved interiors in Cappadocia in which figurative pictures cover all the surfaces. To a dualistic way of thinking, religious iconography consisting of human figures, buildings, and views of the natural world — the malevolent god's domain — might have weakened the sacral character of the interior.

This chapel's engagement with daylight, the third dualistic issue, is also particularly striking. The tension between light and darkness visible on the back wall of the main apse in Figure 5, for instance, seems structured in a deliberate way. The accompanying image shows a digital model of the interior as if it were visible from the outside (FIG. 8). The photogrammetric technique used to produce this model maps the light on the surfaces in a way directly corresponding to phenomena recorded by a camera in the actual space. As it shows, the central and the northwestern apses (visible at the left and bottom of the picture) are strongly divided into bright and dark areas. Upon closer analysis this space reveals that its form, like that of Geghard, was also shaped to interact in certain ways with daylight.

Meanwhile, a top view of a wire-frame model of the chapel shows that geometrically ideal forms have been distorted in its construction (FIG. 9). Specifically, its northeastern portion (top right) is not aligned with the approximately orthogonal grid of the chapel's main body.³⁰ The white beams in Figure 9 reveal a possible reason for that seeming imperfection. The thicker beam shows that the central and northeastern apses were shifted so that the light coming from the door aperture would divide the back walls of the main apse into two relatively equal parts, bright and dark.

Moreover, the shifting of the plan's grid made it possible for a hole carved in the wall separating the main and



FIGURE 6. Landscape in Göreme's vicinity.



FIGURE 7. The Chapel of Saint Barbara in Göreme, exterior.



FIGURE 8. The Chapel of Saint Barbara in Göreme, photometric model of its interior.

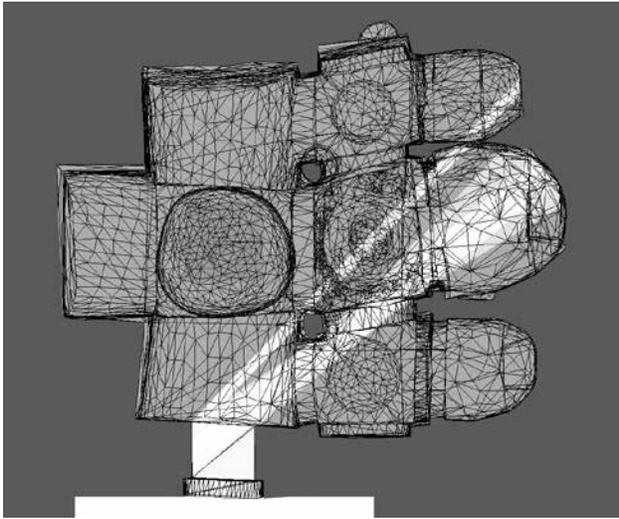


FIGURE 9. *The Chapel of Saint Barbara in Göreme, form and light diagram.*



FIGURE 10. *The northeast apse in the Chapel of Saint Barbara in Göreme. The picture shows a delicate spot of light in its symbolic center.*

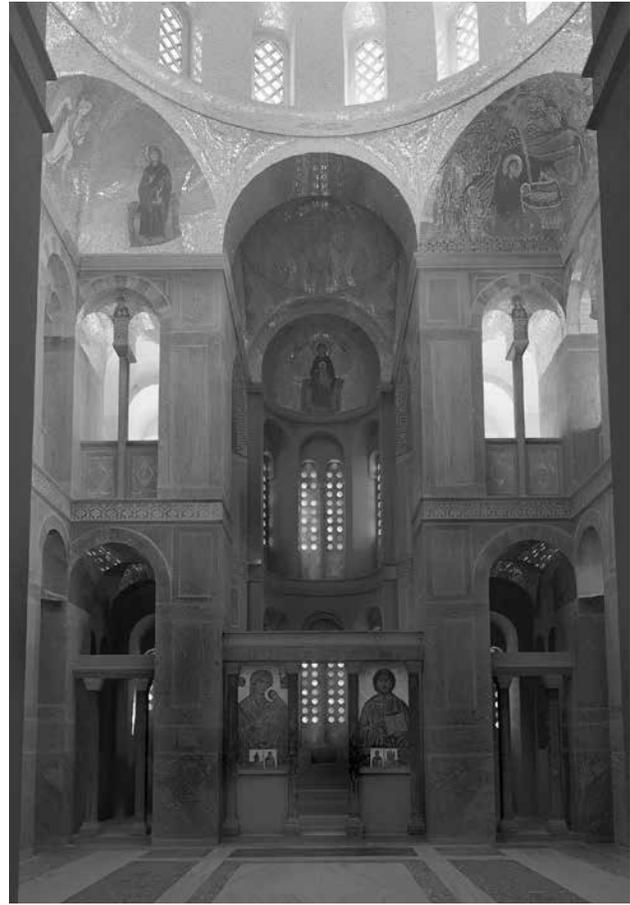
northeastern apses to admit light into the darkest corner of the chapel (FIG. 10). This is the back wall of the northeastern apse, where it strikes right above the central ceremonial platform. The second and thinner white line in Figure 9 shows how this is possible.

All these visual phenomena can today be observed from morning to evening, their contrast increasing only at midday. But they would have been more constant in the past when the old *nartex* was still in existence. This is because light entering via the *nartex* would have been less dependent on the position of the sun. Whereas the general shape of this interior was based on conventional Middle Byzantine patterns, it appears that when the builders started to carve out its eastern end, they watched the effects of the daylight and adjusted the shape accordingly. This suggests that in Cappadocia, as in Armenia, light phenomena were considered more important than faithfulness to the geometric design conventions of orthodox places of worship. Although the community that commissioned chapels such as Saint Barbara may have had little specific knowledge of Paulician and other dualistic heresies, the evidence suggests that they at least subconsciously paid attention to symbolically charged issues of materiality and light, and that their architecture transmitted and preserved those earlier and officially suppressed religious concerns.

GREECE AND MIDDLE BYZANTINE ARCHITECTURE

The Middle Byzantine period in art and architecture began in 843 CE, right after the end of iconoclasm. The burst of creativity in this period, characterized by historians as a renaissance of artistic production, was a direct reaction to the preceding century of destruction. New churches and icons manifested the triumph of those who had invested their political capital in the strictly orthodox version of Christianity and rejected Eastern or ancient ways of thinking about God. New monuments were meant to communicate the rejection of the idea that the true divinity was inaccessible to the human mind and that all material production of religious icons was sacrilegious. Figurative representations became orthodox again as political powers restored their control over their symbolic programs. This shift from individual contemplation of the uncircumscribable nature of divinity to institutionalized religion as a political ideology can be observed in churches constructed during this period.

One of the best-known and well-preserved among these is the Katholikon in the Monastery of Hosios Loukas, built in Greece around the first quarter of the eleventh century, soon after a second wave of forcibly relocated Paulicians reached nearby regions of Thrace.³¹ Its design is based on the “cross-in-square” model characteristic of Middle Byzantine architecture. As if reinforcing the dominant narrative of the time, most studies of the space have elaborated on its relatively well-preserved and masterly executed collection of mosaics



FIGURES 11 AND 12. *Katholikon in the Monastery of Hosios Loukas, as it appears now on the left, and as it would have appeared in the past on the right.*

and their symbolic meanings. As I have argued elsewhere, however, the Katholikon's most distinctive feature was the way it controlled daylight.³² This sophisticated visual apparatus has remained insufficiently explored because old methods of analysis were not only too limited to study its symbolic complexity but in fact contributed to significant alterations of the original church interior.

As the accompanying images show, the interior originally looked differently than it does today. The photograph of the currently existing conditions in the church shows a different distribution of light than the digitally simulated view of its earlier appearance (FIGS. 11, 12).³³ This difference is primarily the result of the contemporary use of totally transparent glass in exterior apertures, changes in certain windows, and the loss of gilded mosaics in the dome. In the past, the publicly accessible part of the interior would have been generally darker, with daylight precisely concentrated in certain portions of its volume.

An analytical record of the earlier daylight distribution within the empty space of the interior shows that light was most intense inside the dome cavity and on the second-floor galleries, which were accessible only to the monks (FIG. 13).

As if following principles of the negative theology, the Katholikon created a paradoxical place of worship. The volume of brightness at the top of the *naos* was only implied, perceivable in the glittering of the gilded mosaics. The threshold between this nonfigurative representation of the divine realm and the darker space designated for lay believers below would have been indeterminate and inscrutable.

All the finish materials used in the church, including mosaics, colored glazing, and polished stones, were optically similar in that they all reflected or transmitted light, creating gleaming or shimmering effects. Optically unifying and dematerializing the interior, these phenomena recalled the notion of light trapped in matter. And in some cases stones literally emitted light where thin translucent slabs of marble were placed between areas of radically different light intensity. Although the current differences in light intensity are too small to produce most of the original effects, slabs of thin white marble installed in the southern wall of the church do still create a delicate gleaming effect (FIG. 14).

In contrast to these paradoxical impressions, the outside view of the building seems crudely material, as if the texture of its large, irregular stone blocks was meant to resemble the

landscape (FIG. 15).³⁴ Thus, the Katholikon reflects all three aspects of the dualist legacy: the interior turns the physical construction and materials into an environment made of light phenomena; the exterior blends with the materiality of the landscape surrounding it; and daylight is instrumental in making the paradoxes of this place of worship possible.

EPISTEMOLOGY OF HYBRID ARCHITECTURE

Although the Katholikon in the Monastery of Hosios Loukas was an imperial commission and one of the most important among those constructed by iconodule leaders after their victory over the Paulicians and other iconoclasts, this crowning example of political and military triumph is not only symbolically hybrid but seems to almost glorify the heretical imagination. Thus, the church provides key evidence of the impact of dualist religions on Middle Byzantine architecture and of how deeply their ways of thinking had been internalized by orthodox design principles.³⁵

Such evidence, I submit, has epistemological implications for the understanding of architecture. Complex buildings like those I have discussed here are trivialized when they are described merely as physical objects known only to the extent they conform to conventional taxonomies of architectural styles and their periodization, or when they are analyzed as direct expressions of conscious symbolic intentions presumably aligned with a particular ideology.

Designers of the Katholikon explored the tension between the traditionally inclusive and the dogmatically exclusive ways of thinking about divinity that was characteristic of the period. As a religious and political conflict, there was no way the iconoclastic controversy could have been reconciled or resulted in an ideologically inclusive narrative. A design task inspired by it could, however, produce new perceptual phenomena that transformed the Katholikon into a paradoxical site of worship. While politicians and church authorities strived to purify dogma and impose it on believers as the religious canon, builders in the Monastery of Hosios Loukas reached beyond these reductive assumptions. If that building is still understood in the conventional way, that is primarily because the history of architecture still tends to replicate the point of view of those political and religious authorities.

Evidence of complex cultural phenomena similar to those discussed here can be found in the architecture of many other areas that were formerly part of the Byzantine Empire, and in many other parts of the world. Frequently, however, such examples of cultural negotiation are dismissed as provincial aberrations or treated as an idiosyncratic form of artistic expression. Even Alexei Lidov, a scholar who has acknowledged the limitations of conventional architectural knowledge and promoted the study of the hierotopy of light (the light-centered constitution of Christian Orthodox places of worship) has reduced that new focus to one of a unique creativity.³⁶

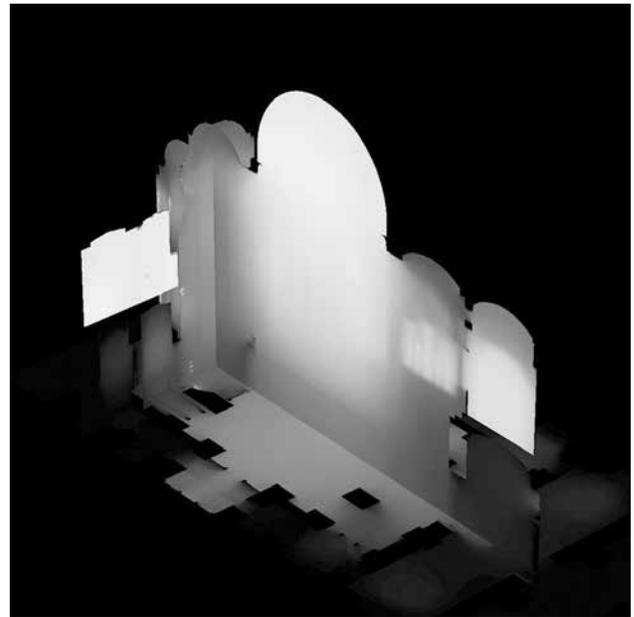


FIGURE 13. *Katholikon in the Monastery of Hosios Loukas, analytical representation of the original distribution of light.*



FIGURE 14. *Light transmitting slab of marble in the southern wall of the Katholikon.*



FIGURE 15. *Exterior of the Katholikon.*

In contrast, this article posits that the shifts in and transfers of modalities of thought exposed in the cases discussed here are not expressions of individual creativity or of conscious conspiracies to smuggle heretical ideas into orthodox places of worship. What they do reflect is that builders have always used architecture to give form to common and frequently conflicted concerns that are too complex or too nascent for explicit narratives. Beyond buildings' practical purposes and ability to communicate conclusive symbolic messages, they have always explored and manifested ways of perceiving and making sense of the world.

After centuries of associating architectural history with well-defined and consistent ideological programs or artistic

intensions, it is difficult to consider that important cultural processes may have resulted in symbolically inconsistent production on the periphery of political domains. Yet the conventional knowledge of architecture based on dominant programs and styles is not sufficient to understand architecture's functions in a multicultural world. Old methodologies and epistemic assumptions must be challenged and transformed to deal with the nuances of cultural difference, especially their dynamic transformations and nonverbal complexities. By focusing on built environments, a new geography of hybrid traditions may help expand, if not radically alter, the history we think we know.

REFERENCE NOTES

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1. For a discussion of epistemological challenges facing world art history, see D. Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon, 2003).
2. Consider, for example, works in such series as Palgrave's *The New Middle Ages* or Ashgate's *Early Modern Studies*.
3. G. Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
4. Foucault discussed the emergence of what he termed "discursive formations" in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp.106–13.
5. See M. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics*, Vol.16 No.1 (1986 [1967]), pp.22–27; or "The Eye of Power," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, C. Gordon, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).
6. This refocusing of geography has resulted in a shift from knowledge grounded in environmental and social determinism and the mapping of relatively fixed characteristics of the world to the use of such new theories as realist structuration, postmodernism, and feminism to identify and analyze the most dynamic aspects of cultural, social and political reality. See, for example, R. Peet, *Modern Geographic Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). Such new scholarly emphases have proven productive in the work of such students of urban phenomena as Edward W. Soja, Saskia Sassen, Nezar AlSayyad, and Keller Easterling. Their architectural impact has been more superficial, however, as has been discussed by D. Gissen in "Architecture's Geographic Turns," *Log 12* (Spring /Summer 2008), pp.59–67.
7. T. DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Note also that Robert S. Nelson, a renowned Byzantine art scholar, called for geographical studies in the history of art in his "The Map of Art History," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol.79 No.1 (March 1997), pp.28–40.
8. Perhaps the most consequential of these ideas for the formation of Western Christianity emerged in the Sasanian period (224–637 CE) in Persia, when various versions of dualism became more open to other religions. See S. Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1994).
9. See K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, R. McLachlan Wilson, trans. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983). For a discussion of the epistemological complexity of Gnosticism, see M.A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).
10. See, for example, R.T. Wallis and J. Bregman, eds., *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
11. In the first three centuries CE, the cult of Mithras became especially popular among Roman soldiers, who disseminated it in the lands under their control. See M. Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras: The God and His Mysteries* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).
12. See S. Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947).
13. Most existing Manichean texts and religious decorations have been discovered in remote places in Egypt and China (Turfan). See, for example, S.N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); and M. Heuser and H.-J. Klimkeit, eds., *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).
14. Mani was also a painter, and illustrated his original texts.
15. Many authors have discussed how Armenian cultural traditions include ancient and Asian elements, yet they have rarely admitted that dualist religions played a significant role in shaping Armenian Christianity. See L. Abrahamian and N. Sweezy, *Armenian Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). This religious tension has generally been acknowledged only when discussing ancient religions. See, for example, J.R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1987).
16. Many descriptions of such churches were published in M. Hasratian and Z. Sargsyan, *Armenia: 1700 Years of Christian Architecture* (Erevan: Mughni, 2001).
17. See H.-J. Klimkeit, "The Fair Form, the Hideous Form and the Transformed Form: On the Form Principle in Manichaeism," in Heuser and Klimkeit, eds., *Studies in Manichaean Literature and Art*, pp.142–72. The third-century philosopher Plotinus made a similar distinction when he defined the possibility of a universal evil. See *The Enneads: Plotinus*, S. Mackenna and B.S. Page, trans. (Lawrence, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2012), pp.146–47.
18. See A.A. Sahinyan, *Gheghard* (Milano: Ed. Ares, 1978).
19. It is telling that, like Mani, Gregory the Illuminator was also a painter.
20. The oldest cave church in Geghard, Avazan, was the site of ancient pagan rituals centered on the natural spring that still exists in the cave. The Geghard Monastery is located close to the even older sacred

site of Garni, which includes an unusual Mithraic temple, now a center of the neopagan movement.

21. These pictures were created with the help of the Photomodeler Scanner software, which with photogrammetric precision converted hundreds of photographs into a point cloud model of that complex interior.

22. Armenia was one of the main centers in which Gnostic and Zoroastrian traditions interacted. See Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*.

23. The officially accepted end of iconoclasm coincided with the 843 or 844 flight of Karbeas, a Byzantine general (protomandator of Theodote Melissenos, strategos of the Anatolikon Theme) and a group of 5,000 persecuted heretics who found refuge in the Paulician state. Karbeas later became the Paulician leader. See N.G. Garsoian, *The Paulician Heresy: A Study of the Origin and Development of Paulicianism in Armenia and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), pp.126–27.

24. J. Hamilton, B. Hamilton, and Y. Stoyanov, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c.650–c.1450: Selected Sources* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p.40.

25. See S. Kostof, *Caves of God: Cappadocia and Its Churches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.210.

26. The depiction of Christ in Figure 5, for example, is one of those later additions. The original abstract sign is still visible in the center of Christ's body. Dorothy Wood has stated that such abstract decorations mark the oldest phase of these places of worship in Cappadocia, but has also treated the reddish patterns and signs as temporary embellishments. D. Wood, "Byzantine Military Standards in a Cappadocian Church," *Archeology*, Vol.12 (1959), p.40.

27. Ibid.

28. This sign's position is also similar to that of a sun sign prominently carved in another old church in Geghard, Žamatoun

(built in 1288). Natalia Teteriatnikov has suggested that connections between the design of Cappadocian and Armenian churches can be traced also in the sizing and position of other interior elements. See N. Teteriatnikov, *The Liturgical Planning of Byzantine churches in Cappadocia* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1996), p.36.

29. Orthodox Byzantine churches were entered from the west, but some of the oldest Christian churches — for example, those in Syria — had their main doors located on the south.

30. It is difficult to measure this interior without the help of range scanning or photogrammetry. The few published plans show the layout without the distortion. See, for example, Figure 19 in S. Güven and M. Ari, *The Inscribed-Cross Churches in Göreme* (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 2004), also available at <http://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12605118/index.pdf>.

31. Many historians believe that the Katholikon was built in 1025. Carolyn Connor, however, has suggested that it was built closer to the third quarter of the tenth century. See C. Loessel Connor, *Art and Miracles in Medieval Byzantium: The Crypt at Hosios Loukas and Its Frescos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.82. Note also that the monastery of Hosios Loukas, located near the town of Distomo in Boeotia, was connected by land to Constantinople via Byzantine Thrace, which at that time was populated by Paulicians who were resettled there in 747 and around 970–75. Moreover, this exposure to heretical beliefs may have included direct remnants of Manichaeism. Indeed, Nikos Chausidis has argued that Manichean communities may have survived in Macedonia and contributed to the emergence of Bogomils there. See N. Chausidis, "The Funeral Stelae of the 'Kavadarci Group,'" in N. Cambi and G. Koch, eds., *Funerary Sculpture of the Western Illyricum and Neighbouring Regions of the Roman Empire* (Split: Književni Krug, 2013), pp.641–78.

32. A. Piotrowski, *Architecture of Thought* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp.8–22.

33. To study light in the Katholikon, I used a no-longer-available physically based software, Lightscape 3.2.

34. This is unusual because many churches of the Middle Byzantine period were made of bricks, which articulate a building's form more clearly.

35. In her critical review of Josef Strzygowski's writings and the historiography of Armenian architecture, Christina Maranci noted that, based only on the study of its formal characteristics and without considering the non-Christian influences, Strzygowski identified the Katholikon in the Monastery of Hosios Loukas as the "most skilled rendition of the Armenian type in the Byzantine sense" [C. Maranci, trans. from Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa* (Vienna: Kunstverlag Anton Schroll, 1918)]. See C. Maranci *Medieval Armenian Architecture: Constructions of Race and Nation* (Louvain: Peeters, 2001), p.127.

36. A. Lidov, "The Dramaturgy of Light and Fire as a Form of Hierotopical Creativity," in A. Lidov, ed., *Hierotopy of Light and Fire in the Culture of the Byzantine World* (Moscow: Theoria, 2013), p.17. Many of the other chapters in this book include examples clearly implying connections to dualistic traditions, although many of these cases are glossed over without considering their heretical import. See, for instance, F. Barry's reference in "The House of the Rising Sun: Luminosity and Sacrality from Domus Ecclesia" (p.92) to Paulinus of Nola's description of the church of St. Peter at Tarentaise as "a prison of light," a term frequently used by Manicheans to emphasize the entrapment of the sacred light on earth.

All images are by the author.