

THE MONASTERY CHURCH OF BUDGHOONS (BUDGHAVANK) AND THE DOMING OF ANCIENT ARMENIAN CHURCHES

I

History cannot be understood without chronology. That is true with regard to monuments of art as well as to other historical phenomena. We have relatively few dated ancient churches and these are not earlier than the seventh century. To this small group should be added those churches which do not bear dated inscriptions but those general dates are known from historical and literary sources. The most ancient of these is that of Avan, built by the anti-catholikos John, the opponent of Catholikos Moses of Yeghvard, in the end of the sixth century;¹ another of these churches is that of St. Hripsimé built in the year 618, according to contemporary sources and inscriptions. During the fourth decade of the same century were built the churches of Gaianè, Bagaran, Masdara, Alaman, Mren, Bagavan or St. John of Bagrevant, and the little church of Talin; in the fifth decade was built the church of Zvartnots; in the seventh decade were built St. Gregory of Arouj and St. Theodore of Yeghvard.

These data are of course of great significance; it may be said that these monuments, because of the wide variety of forms and ornamentation which they display, give us a definite and clear idea of Armenian architecture, of ornamental and figure sculpture. These buildings help us to determine the approximate time of those which are not dated, or rather, to establish the extreme limits between which they must be placed, that is the *postquem* and *antequem* dates;

since they reveal a flourishing period, one can even say a golden age which lasted for a short time during the first half of the seventh century. But this is not sufficient for an understanding of the history of Armenian architecture, the origin and development of which up to the seventh century remain obscure. Those buildings, in their entirety, have not sprung up like mushrooms after a spring rainfall; their splendid artistic perfection presupposes a long period of development up to the time of their actual construction. We only know the flourishing period of Armenian architecture, not its origin and development up to the seventh century. We are intentionally omitting any mention of the churches of the basilican type, because none of them has any date.

But are there actual remains of earlier churches? According to ecclesiastical tradition, the church of Etchmiadzin, the origin of which goes back to the beginning of the fourth century, when Christianity was proclaimed the state religion in Armenia would be such a monument. But even a novice can see that the present structure has undergone so much change that it is impossible to obtain from it an idea of its original condition or form; only a minute and intensive study of it by a specialist, such as has been attempted by Toramanian, can give us an approximate and hypothetic restoration of its original form. Therefore every new discovery, verified of course by historical data, which carries our knowledge of Armenian architecture back to the earlier centuries will be of great value for the understanding of the early history of Armenian art. In our opinion we have such ruins at Budghavank, at present known as Budghuni, which is situated between Kanakerr and the Elarr station, in a valley, north of the gravel road.

1. This work was written many years ago. Now upon finally reviewing it before sending it to press, we see in the paper "Lraper", July 26, 1941, the news item from Soviet Armenia concerning the discovery of part of a Greek inscription by the founder of the church, the anti-catholikos John. The discovery occurred probably during excavations made around the ruins.