

## **Manifestation of Armenian-Iranian Architectural and Artistic Interactions in the Exterior and Interior Formation of the Churches of New Julfa**

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### **Abstract**

This article attempts to reveal the manifestations of Armenian-Iranian architectural and artistic interactions in the churches of New Julfa, focusing on their unique characteristics and various influences.

New Julfa was created by the Armenians who were forcibly relocated to the territory of Iran by Shah Abbas I (1588-1629). This relocation not only served as a response to political and economic needs but also became a focal moment for the formation of the cultural and architectural identity of the created Armenian community in the Safavid Empire (1501-1722). Actually, the Armenian district of New Julfa, established in Isfahan in the early XVII century, represents a fascinating confluence of Armenian and Iranian cultures, particularly visible in the architectural and artistic styling of its churches. The interactions between Armenian and Iranian styles and principles not only highlight the unique identity of the churches of New Julfa but also reflect broader international artistic exchanges of the period. It was conditioned by the trade ties of Armenian merchants with Europe, as well as with the Near East and Far East. Indeed, the churches of New Julfa are notable for their unique architectural form and spatial organization, external and interior design. The used local materials in the Armenian churches, such as brick and tile, demonstrate the collaboration between Armenian and Iranian interactions. In terms of internal formation, the Armenian churches in New Julfa demonstrate the influences of both Armenian and Iranian features, as well as the European style, which is obvious in their interior decoration, such as frescoes and murals, tiles, and pictures. In other words, these churches combine Armenian Christian symbolism and Iranian elegance, resulting in the creation of a unique manifestation of both styles. Thus, the residential houses, churches, and other structures built in New Julfa during the XVII-XVIII centuries reflect a distinctive blend of Armenian architectural traditions and local Iranian influences, resulting in a unique architectural creation. At present, New Julfa is still a densely populated Armenian district in Isfahan with Armenian schools and more than a dozen remarkable churches.

**Keywords:** New Julfa, the Armenian churches, architectural and artistic interactions, Iranian and other influences.

### **Introduction**

The XVII and XVIII centuries marked a significant period for the Armenians, particularly in the context of the Armenian community that established itself in New Julfa [in Arm. Nor Jugha], a suburb of Isfahan, the capital city of Safavid Iran. Actually, created in 1604-1605 and centered in New Julfa, this community played an important role in the historical, religious, administrative, and cultural life of the Armenians and the Armenian church. Actually, it was one of the largest and most flourishing Armenian communities of the XVII century, which was the biggest minority in Iran. (Ghougassian, 1998)

As the history states, during the XVII-XVIII centuries, Armenia became a battlefield between its Muslim neighbors—Ottoman Turkey and Safavid Iran—resulting in the destruction of the majority of the country and eventual conquest by the Ottomans. However, at the beginning of the XVII century, Shah Abbas the Great began a counter-offensive, ushering in a long period of deadly conflicts. After the Turkish-Persian war in 1603, on his way back to Iran, Shah Abbas I destroyed a few provinces of Armenia, including Goghtn (present-day Nakhichevan), and others, and totally annihilated the famous town of Julfa (i.e., Old Julfa), thus deporting the Armenian people and relocating them in Iran. Being well aware of the talents of Armenians in trade, handicraft, engineering, and building abilities, Shah Abbas intended to turn his capital city, Isfahan, into a great cultural and commercial center with the help of the deported Armenians. (Aslanian, 2011) Shah Abbas announced: “I have brought them by force to our land. I have spent much money, effort, and tricks, not for their benefit, but for ours. They shall benefit our land and shall increase our population.” (Davrijeci, p. 55)

Suffering hardship and losses on the way of deportation, the surviving Armenian population was able to reach the capital of Iran, Isfahan, and was settled in the districts of Char Mahal and Peria. So, Shah gave the Armenians the vast territories on the southern bank of the Zayandeh-Rud River of Isfahan, where a separate town, divided into districts, was designed and constructed there in a short period of time. In fact, New Julfa was established on a plan that reflected its communal organization. The main avenue crossed the town from east to west, and was named after Khoja Nazar (Der-Hovhaneants, 1980, I, pp. 40-42; Karapetian, 1974, p. 48). Nine parallel streets crossed Nazar Avenue from north to south, forming twenty wards (district) for twenty noble families, and each of them had a main gate, which was closed at night. Thus, in those conditions established New Julfa. Additionally, a part of the inhabitants of Old Julfa was also forcibly resettled in New Julfa, whereas the peasants uprooted from Armenia began a new life in the above-mentioned districts. In those conditions, New Julfa was formed, becoming the Armenian quarter of Isfahan (Iran) that flourished between the XVII and XVIII centuries, until the Afghan occupation of Isfahan between 1722 and 1729. (Der-Hovhaneants, 1980; Ghougassian, 1998, pp. 157-65)

According to various scholars, while constructing the city of New Julfa, the Armenians also built trade houses on the routes to Russia, China, Indonesia, India, England, the Netherlands, and Mediterranean countries, running large trade relations along those routes for nearly two centuries, operating concurrently with other commercial establishments. (Aslanian, 2011; Price, 2005) Just these trade relations also played their role in the development of the cultural life of New Julfa's residents. Furthermore, being a major merchant and cultural center founded by the Armenian settlers, New Julfa's residents were granted freedom of religion (ring bells and organize religious processions), some privileges, and freedom of trade. In fact, those circumstances created an opportunity for the Armenian settlers to build a fascinating district with remarkable buildings, including residential houses and many churches. Established since 1605-1606, already in 1640 New Julfa became a notable and important cultural center of the Armenians (Figure 1). Here are edifices presenting rich and unique architecture, public buildings, including workshops, trade houses, schools, bathhouses, chapels, churches, etc. It should be mentioned that the churches of New Julfa standing up to now are the obvious samples of the architecture and culture of that time.

Historians of the time, as well as foreign visitors and traders who traveled to Iran, have written on New Julfa's architectural environment and the presence of its wonderful culture. For instance, famous French traveler and trader Jean Chardin once wrote of New Julfa, "The town of Julfa is perhaps the biggest town in the world." (Chardin, [1735], 1988, p. 106-107). The importance of New Julfa was also well known to be in some recent works on cross-cultural trade and enough integrated

general economy (Ferrier, 1973, pp.41-45). The documents published at the end of the XX century, provide fundamental and valuable information about the economic role and the political status of the Armenians of New Julfa. (Baghdiantz McCabe, 1999). Those documents and up-to-date realized studies also state that all the stone masons and craftsmen were chosen to be sent to Isfahan, where they were especially useful to the local Iranians for constructing new buildings. In his turn, evaluating the input of the Armenians in Iran, the Shah allowed them to build churches and other buildings in Isfahan and New Julfa. So, Armenians live there to this day in the quarter of Isfahan, which is called New Julfa. They are treated with respect and kindness in Iran as representatives of the century-old Christian minority, as well as also due to their contribution in trade, crafts, science, etc. Indeed, the culture created in New Julfa became an integral part of the centuries-old Armenian culture. Currently, modern Julfa is the center of the largest and oldest Armenian diaspora in Iran, perfectly preserving their identity, language and culture. It is known, where there are Armenians and even very small Armenian communities, there are also Armenian churches. Actually, the churches that still survive in New Julfa were built between 1606 and 1728 and architecturally are considered a mixture of Armenian and Iranian styles (Khabazian, 2016).



**Figure 1. New Julfa: The Armenian district in Isfahan**

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted based on the study and analysis of historical and literary sources and field research (site visits, photography, and taking notes on the architectural features and decorative elements). An analysis and comparative study were also conducted regarding the comparison and contrast of the architectural and decorative elements of the Armenian and Iranian styles in the region. The exterior and interior elements of the buildings (churches, edifices, etc.) were analyzed to identify architectural, cultural, and artistic influences. The comparative study allowed for the identification of patterns of architectural and artistic interactions in the context of the overall region and foreign influences (both western and eastern). In fact, historical and literary primary and secondary sources on the history of New Julfa allowed for the disclosure of the Armenian-Iranian relations during the discussed period, and field notes and photographs allowed for the observation of created architectural materials and styles, decorative elements, and ornamentations. All these led to

understanding firstly the interactions between Armenian and Iranian cultures in the context of architectural and artistic expressions, including the reveal of western and other influences.

Thus, the Armenian churches of New Julfa, situated in the heart of Isfahan, are considered unique cultural and architectural phenomena. And it is important firstly to study the historical conditions, cultural context, climate conditions and technical facts in order to reveal the factors shaping each architectural creation particularly and to be able to see the reasons, influences, and the ways in which the changes are being made generally and finally to be able to understand the development process of the external and internal images of Armenian churches in New Julfa. Indeed, these churches that were built between the XVII and XVIII centuries, exhibit a distinctive blend of Armenian and Iranian architectural styles in the exterior and in the interior, where the international influences are also seen. (Shahdaryan, 2018)

It is known that the Armenian architecture is unique and rich. But in different stages indeed, it had often been influenced by the traditions and styles of countries beyond Armenia in the process of its development and innovation. This is also evidenced by the architecture formed in New Julfa; i.e., the Armenian people who were forcibly uprooted from their homeland created a new culture of architecture in New Julfa due to the initiative of merchants and the activity of craftsmen and the donation of the benefactors. This culture bears Eastern and Western influences in both external and internal images. In general, the churches of New Julfa belong to two types in plan: hall church and the outer rectangle with four inner columns or domed basilica. (Simoni, Hojjat, 2016, p.2-12)

The first church, which was founded in New Julfa in 1606-1607, was *Saint James of Nisibis* [in Arm. Surb Hakob Mtbna]. Due to its small size, it was named a chapel. In the 1890s it was reconstructed.

Another fantastic monastery, *the Holy Savior church* [in Arm. Amenaprkich] was built in 1655 in New Julfa during the reign of Shah Abbas II and operates up to date. Previously, a small church was in the yard of this monastery, which was destroyed, and a huge building built instead. It is decorated with floral ornaments and paintings from the New and Old Testaments. The construction of the church came to life due to Armenian benefactor Khoja Avetik. The interior of the church was flourished by talented painters, such as Minas, Hovhannes Mrkouz, Father Kirakos, and Bar-segh. (Der-Hovhaneants, 1980) Indeed, the Holy Savior is one of the most notable churches in New Julfa, also known as *the Vank Cathedral*. It really serves as a typical example of the architectural synthesis during this era. This cathedral is distinctive not only for its size and grandeur but also for its intricate ornamentation that embodies a fusion of Armenian and Iranian artistic traditions. The dome of the church is reminiscent of Islamic architecture, presenting a style characterized by harmonious proportions and decorative tilework. The rich frescoes that adorn the interior walls depict biblical scenes and Armenian saints, merging local artistic sensibilities with the church heritage of Armenia. The monastery has a few adjacent structures, such as the publication house, museum, library, house of the cathedral superior, and the rooms of clergy and monks. (Ghougassian, 1998, p.93)

One of the biggest and most famous churches in New Julfa is *Saint Gevorg* [in Arm. Surb Gevorg], which was built in 1611 with financial support from Khoja Nazar and is located in the Lesser Meydan district. (Figure 2) This church is prominent, as it keeps a few stones that were brought from Echmiadzin with the decree of Shah Abbas, aimed to form a pilgrimage center for the Armenians in New Julfa, in this way to keep them in Iran. (Davrijeci, 1978; Ghougassian, 1998, pp. 84-85)



**Figure 2. The interior of Saint Gevorg Church in New Julfa**

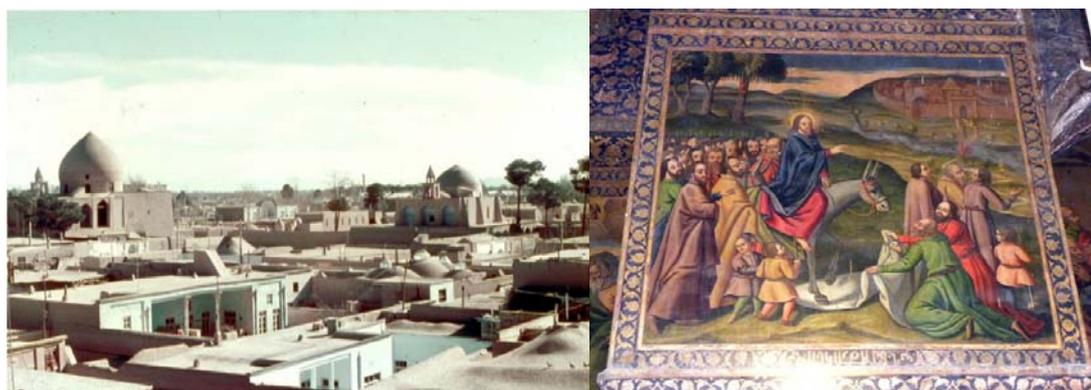
Another fantastic church in New Julfa is considered *the Saint Stephen* [in Arm. Surb Stepanos], built in the Hakobjan district with the donation of the local people. The building date of the church is most likely 1614 based on a writing in one of the Mass books. Among the preserved churches in New Julfa is *Saint John the Baptist* [in Arm. Surb Hovhannes Mkrtych], built in 1621 and situated in the Charsou quarter, which is famous for the relic of St. John the Baptist, that is, the right hand of him, that is preserved in the church. Another significant structure in New Julfa is the vaulted building of *Holy Virgin Church* [in Arm. Surb Astvatzatzin], built in 1613 and illustrated in 1666. It is notable for its elegant simplicity and Armenian craftsmanship. The church's facade features typical Armenian elements such as intricately carved crosses and geometric patterns. The interior, including the traditional altar, of the church is painted with floral and geometric ornaments. (Figures 3, 4)



**Figures 3, 4. Holy Virgin Church of New Julfa (exterior shape and interior fragment)**

*Saint Bethlehem Church* [in Arm. Surb Bethlehem] is another famous building located in the Major Meydan district of New Julfa and built between 1627-1628 with the financial support of Khoja Petros Velijanjan. The church is square in plan with a central dome style, two-storied with eight

windows. The dome is really magnificent, and the biggest dome among New Julfa churches with a radius of 12.5 m rests on it. (Figures 5, 6) The interior of church is completely and richly decorated with paintings and floral ornaments; the walls are covered with colorful and painted tiles. (Ghougasian, 1998, pp. 89-91) The frescoes here represent the scenes from the entire Old and New Testaments. History states that in the 1850s the church was on the brink of destruction, but in the 1870s it was repaired and saved thanks to Agha Yelizian's efforts. (See Arm. Diocese of Isfahan)



**Figures 5, 6. St. Bethlehem Church on the left and the Holy Virgin Church on the right (the photo was made in 1972); fragment of an interior painting of St. Bethlehem Church**

*Saint Sargis Church* [in Arm. Surb Sargis] was built in 1659 with the donations of local people. There is evidence that previously the church was decorated with pictures and frescoes. Unfortunately, they were removed. The walls are now painted white. *Saint Minas Church* [in Arm. Surb Minas] was likewise built in 1659 with the donations of the local people. The niches, pillars, as well as the holy altar of this church, were decorated. *Saint Catharine* [in Arm. Surb Katarine] monastery or nunnery was built in the Charsou quarter in 1623 with the financial support of Khoja Eghiazar (Figure 7). It should be stated that one of the first female schools was opened in Saint Catharine in 1858. In 1967, a part of the building was turned into an orphanage and a nursing home for old people.



**Figure 7. Saint Catherine monastery in New Julfa**

In addition to the churches listed above, there have been and are other churches in New Julfa as well, in which Armenian, Iranian, and other cultural influences also existed. Indeed, the architectural composition of the preserved churches in New Julfa first exemplifies the commitment of the Armenian community to maintaining their religious identity while adapting to their new sociocultural context. (Moreen, 1981) The study of Armenian Church architecture in New Julfa expresses the elements of Armenian Church architecture and Iranian Safavid architecture (namely, the onion-shaped dome), which are seen in plan and external appearance. In other words, the churches mostly belong to the Armenian church type in plan and are influenced by Iranian architecture, as a new-shaped manifestation, in external image. The dominant role of the dome in both the interior sense of place and the exterior image is obvious. Therefore, we may conclude that the unique architectural identity of New Julfa churches, which represents Armenian Church architecture in a new manner, at the same time combines the influences of the Iranian, i.e., eastern, environment. It is undeniable that New Julfa churches have rare architectural characteristics, such as domed halls and basilica compositions with four pillars that are characteristic of the created churches of that period. As a peculiarity, it should be mentioned that all the churches in New Julfa have complexes bearing a resemblance to monasteries, including cells, stores, kitchens, halls, and sometimes schools. These churches are often surrounded by high walls. It should be noted that a few entrances of these spiritual centers adjoined various streets, and the people living in the districts had somewhere to hide in case of disaster or emergency. (Carswell, 1968) Moreover, New Julfa constructive art combines the Armenian architectural styles and types, the perception of beauty, national traditions and way of lifestyle and the different factors in the newly formed environment such as the local climate, building material, criteria and standards of that time Safavid Iran. As for instance the stone walls of the Armenian churches were replaced by brick in New Julfa. (Khabazian, 2016, p. 39) Thus, forcibly deported and relocated Armenians brought their national and religious customs and inherited cultural and architectural traditions with them, which contributed to forming a cozy environment in the Iranian atmosphere.

Regarding the interior formation of those churches, first we have to mention the beneficial role of the trade, as the Armenians have had commerce ties with different countries such as Italy (Venice), the Netherlands (Amsterdam), India, North Africa, China, Russia, America, etc. (Der-Hovhaneants, 1980, I, pp. 159-60) It was as a result of trade relations and travel that major Armenian merchants invited skilled painters from European countries to Iran to decorate and flourish the churches and buildings. Moreover, those European painters worked in the royal palaces and castles of Isfahan. Invited European painters, who most likely worked in Armenian painters' workshops, might have left influences on them. They worked and created wonderful works in Isfahan in that period when the Iranian art also flourished due to the talent of some prominent Iranian painters (Reza Abbas and others). Thus, the painting art of Safavid Iran, with its distinctive miniatures and the perception of beauty, has been spread in New Julfa as well. Though, it needs to be stated that the relocated Armenians haven't rejected the miniature traditions already existing in New Julfa. On the other hand, the Armenian merchants often bought paintings from Holland and Italy and brought them to Iran, which served as models and patterns for local artists to create unique works. (Ghougassian, 2008) Actually, the relations of Armenian traders of New Julfa with the countries of the Near East and Far East were fruitful in those years. It is obvious that economic ties between different cities also have led to mutual cultural influence. This is evidenced by the numerous works of applied art that have reached New Julfa, including church accessories and embroidered curtains, which were made and donated by Armenians from India and China. Thus, via trade ties, the Armenian merchants were

able to purchase tiles, different accessories, and equipment for the churches, as well as fantastic curtains for the holy altars, from India and China. (Aslanian, 2011)

According to our observations, it is impossible to study the architecture of the preserved churches of New Julfa apart without examining the luxurious ornaments of the buildings. Undeniably, the ornamentation of New Julfa churches applied in the church architecture of the time is unique and luxurious. Since the Armenians, due to the dictates of the local environment and the circumstances of the time, were forced to have more modest-looking, strict, and simple church buildings, in contrast to the existing magnificent mosques of Isfahan, therefore they changed their own tradition and built an austere exterior, flourishing the interior with ornaments and wall paintings. On the other hand, trips of Armenian traders in Western and Eastern countries had their consequences. (Ghougasian, 2008, p.68-69) Traveling in Europe and other countries as well, they could reveal the art of other churches, which made them think about the modernization of the architectural style of the Armenian buildings in New Julfa. As a result, churches and residential and other types of buildings suffered changes by distincting from the Armenian tradition. Indeed, trade relationships facilitated the establishment of relationships with artisans and masters from near and far countries, thereby promoting the development of an independent and distinctive culture in an environment of mutual cultural influence. According to studies, Armenian paintings from this period, which were saturated with medieval traditions, incorporated European concepts into their style while preserving their originality. That is where the role of traders and New Julfa became obvious, resulting in a combination of Iranian and European art with that of Armenians. (Karapetian, 1974) Indeed, such manifestations are visible among the thematic paintings; there are some floral and geometric ones that show the combination of Armenian and Iranian ornamental art while also being influenced by European one. On the other hand, the cultural life of the Armenian communities of Russia, India, China, Poland, the Netherlands, and other countries also had a profound impact on New Julfa under these circumstances, which contributed to the enrichment of Armenian art. (Ferrier, 1973; Aslanian, 2011)

Based on the studies, it should be noted that first, wall painting was applied in churches and then in residential buildings. They, unfortunately, have suffered in the last several decades because the majority of the homeowners of these edifices changed, and the buildings of *khojas* (that is, wealthy merchants) were destroyed. Actually, one can gain certain information about their exterior and interior images mostly in the works of a number of researchers who refer the presentation and history of those treasures of New Julfa. (Lucas, 2016; Karapetian, 1974, p.24) Regarding the still-standing churches in New Julfa, they remain intact and saved. These churches' interiors and arched coverings, as well as a portion of the altar and dome, are all painted. Aside from the murals, the churches are filled with pictures and works of applied art from various times. In this regard, the Vank Cathedral, Holy Virgin, and Bethlehem churches stand out since their walls are completely covered with oil and tempera paintings.

It is noteworthy that in the XVII and XVIII centuries, it was common to cover walls and domed columns with tiles, a custom that was typical to Iranian art (with the use of seven colors). In fact, the tiles were also used in the churches and other buildings of New Julfa. Those tiles were covered with floral and geometric ornaments, as well as with the images of animals, angels etc. Although they bear a great resemblance to Iranian art manifestations, in essence, they represent the style of the Armenian craftsmen and are distinguished for their dynamism, with Christian themes, and Armenian inscriptions. Alongside the influence of Iranian art, it is worthwhile mentioning Indian art; the manifestations of Indian-style paintings (for example, on the slabs of St. Sargis Church) are also noteworthy, which demonstrate the connection between East and New Julfa.

Thus, the interesting and unique Iranian-European atmosphere contributed to the development of the New Julfa school, which the historian of the time, Arakel Davrijeci, speaks about in his work. He mentions about the important role of the visual arts in the religious life of the New Julfa community in the XVII century. He marks about the Armenian traders, who returned from their trips in Europe with an interest in painting and became highly motivated to redecorate both their churches and their edifices. And that Armenians liked Minas (trained and mastered by European artists living in Aleppo), the most important painter from New Julfa. The historian praised the painter Minas, who worked in Iran and painted with oils, watercolors, and charcoal. His paintings reveal his unique style, which was based on a combination of Armenian, Iranian, and European art. According to Davrijeci, Minas was credited with the paintings of the edifices of Khoja Safraz and Petros Velijanyan, some of the frescoes in the palaces of Shah Abbas and Shah Safi, as well as several paintings in the Holy Savior Monastery. (Davrijeci, 1978, p.305)

### **Results and Discussion**

So, studies make visible that the relocated Armenians in Isfahan brought with them their rich cultural heritage, including their architectural and artistic (particularly, the miniature) traditions. From the perspective of architectural composition, the churches presented above are characterized by a distinctive architectural style that indeed blends elements of Armenian and Iranian traditions. With the results of the research and with the analysis of the general image of New Julfa church architecture, we can state that among the most notable features of these churches are: brick made domes and vaulted roofs that are inspired by Iranian architecture; the use of arches within arches, a technique that allowed for the creation of complex and visually striking interior spaces. The use of columns and pillars adds to the grandeur and beauty of the buildings as well as application of decorative elements, such as luxurious frescoes and ornate tile works serves the same purpose. The use of light and space, as the internal design emphasizes natural light, which is a significant element in both Armenian and Iranian architecture. On the other hand, the use of windows, which allow light to illuminate interiors, enhances the spiritual experience and conveys mystery perception to adorned interiors within churches. Both architectural and artistic elements in both the exterior and interior reflect the artistic skills of the Armenian craftsmen who built the churches and the residential edifices of that time wealthy Armenians. Thus, the architectural compositions in New Julfa are characterized by traditional Armenian elements while simultaneously incorporating elements from Iranian Safavid architecture. Such incorporation also creates a unique dialogue between two rich cultural heritages. The unique tilework and ornamentation in some churches reflects an adaptation of Iranian motifs into an Armenian context. This demonstrates the cultural and artistic exchange within a thriving artisan culture between the techniques and styles which have been applied both by Armenian and Iranian artists and craftsmen. (Ghougassian, 1998) It should be taken into account the beneficial role of international artistic interactions, which was of high importance as well due to trade and diplomatic ties that formed during the discussed historical period. Actually, due to considerable ties of trade and diplomacy in the era of Shah Abbas and his successors, interactions and exchanges between various cultures took place, which influenced the architectural and artistic styles that manifested in New Julfa's churches and other types of buildings. Hence, the blends and influences of Iranian, European and other influences contributed to an eclectic artistic language that merged with Armenian century-old traditions both in the external and internal design of the churches in New Julfa.

It should be stated, that the architectural compositions of the Armenian churches in New Julfa also reflect the socio-political dynamics of the time. (Carswell, 1968, p.19) These churches served

not only as places of worship but also as community centers, where Armenians could gather, sustain their cultural and national identity, and continue their old-centuries traditions. The construction of churches is often a communal effort, emphasizing the solidarity and resilience of the Armenian diaspora in a foreign land. This also happened in the case of Iran, namely, in Isfahan, where the sense of community was further enhanced by the establishment of schools, libraries and museums within church complexes, which played a key role in preserving and transmitting Armenian literature, art, and religious practices across generations.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, New Julfa with its built environment (churches, residential houses, edifices, other structures) is considered a testament to the architectural and artistic innovations of the period. It really served as a hub for Armenian and foreign merchants and artisans, artists and craftsmen providing an area to act. The detailed analysis show that the Armenian churches of New Julfa are considered a testament to the cultural exchange and architectural and artistic innovation that took place between the Armenian and Iranian environment that shaped during the XVII and XVIII centuries. The unique blend of Armenian and Iranian architectural styles along with various artistic expressions has resulted in a distinctive and captivating style that reflects the cultural heritage of both communities by demonstrating the richness and diversity of these two cultures.

These churches continue to inspire admiration and wonder in those who visit them. These church buildings completely belong to Armenian church architecture culture in their interior, having the same plans as the famous examples of Armenian historical and classical churches, including the interior space traditions, such as a dome resting on four columns or wall columns. The dominant feature of Armenian church architecture is the dome, which was manifested in the architecture of New Julfa once more. For the churches of New Julfa, the Iranian architecture in facades and domes is typical, but in fact they are a new phenomenon caused by new physical circumstances, including hot climate, brick material, local techniques, and brick-related decorations, as well as the political and cultural circumstances, which determine certain limits for churches' exteriors (i.e., in their shape, they were adapted to the local context so as not to cause the anger of Muslim locals). Though the brick-building techniques were applied for the dome construction, while the interior was covered with plaster coating, the surfaces of which provided ample space to emphasize the building's Christian character with didactic and decorative paintings. However, these churches still represent the former meanings and contents of classical Armenian architecture, using the existing types of this culture and gradually forming a new language, unique in volume, proportions, and decorations. Therefore, the architectural compositional features of these churches, including their domes, vaulted roofs, arches, columns, pilasters, decorative elements, and remarkable frescoes, contribute to their grandeur and beauty. These features not only reflect the artistic skills of the artists and craftsmen who built and flourished the churches but also demonstrate the cultural exchange and innovation that took place between the Armenian and Iranian communities during this period.

Regarding interior decoration, it is remarkable to mention that although wall painting is a known art in Armenian church architecture, it is not as widespread as it is in New Julfa. Moreover, the wall paintings (frescoes) in the churches of New Julfa contain influences from Iranian and European art. These manifestations are due to the wide relations of New Julfa Armenians, namely, merchants, who have traded with European countries, Italy in particular. Meanwhile, the European or Western influence is limited to two-dimensional painting and never enters the three-dimensional reality of architectural volumes. Finally, we should conclude that the architecture of New Julfa Armenian churches belongs to Armenian architectural culture and, in the context of new circumstances, is

presented in a new eclectic language. Actually, these churches have a crucial role in the evolution of Armenian church architecture in Iran.

At present the churches of New Julfa stand as a testament to the rich intercultural dialogue between the Armenians and Iranians. Actually, these interactions have also marked a significant moment in the broader narrative of cultural exchange in the region. Furthermore, the Armenian churches in New Julfa stand as testimonies to the resilience and creativity of the Armenian community, embodying both the preservation of tradition and adaptation to new influences. Through the lens of these churches, one can appreciate the ongoing narrative of Armenian heritage in diaspora, where architecture becomes a powerful expression of faith, community, and identity.

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