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From Medieval Church Ornament to Soviet Architectural Composition: Reinterpretation of Armenian National Heritage

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Abstract

The present article develops a more focused analysis of medieval Armenian church ornament that was reinterpreted in the architectural composition of Soviet-era buildings in Armenia. It is based on the author's previous study "Manifestations of Ancient and Medieval Armenian Ornamentation in the Architecture of Armenia of the Soviet Period," which surveyed a broader range of ancient and medieval ornamental motifs and their presence in Soviet Armenian architecture. The present study narrows the analytical field to ornament derived from medieval churches and examines not only its occurrence but also the ways in which floral and vegetal, geometric, and zoomorphic forms were transformed through stylization, abstraction, changes in scale and material, and compositional integration. Particular attention is given to the transition of ornament from sacred architectural contexts into secular public, institutional, monumental, and urban environments. Through comparative visual analysis, field observation, architectural documentation, and the study of historical sources, the research identifies recurring mechanisms of reinterpretation: the monumentalization of vegetal motifs, the conversion of geometric patterns into compositional and structural systems, and the abstraction of zoomorphic imagery into symbolic sculptural elements. The analysis demonstrates that the revival of medieval ornament in Soviet Armenia involved more than the preservation of recognizable motifs; it entailed their adaptation to new architectural functions, materials, scales, and aesthetic conditions. The paper therefore contributes a more detailed specification of ornament as an active component of architectural composition and as a mediator between medieval visual heritage, modern architectural language, and the cultural memory of Soviet Armenia. Finally, the article reveals that the combination and incorporation of medieval Armenian ornaments into Soviet architecture served not only as a means of preserving cultural and national identity but also as a response to the sociopolitical narratives of Armenia at the time. This synthesis resulted in a unique architectural dialogue and, through its remarkable architectural creations, marked a new epoch in the centuries-old history of Armenian architecture.

Keywords: Medieval Armenia, church ornament, sculpture, decorative elements, Soviet era, architecture

Introduction

According to scholarly studies, Armenian ornamental art originated and acquired meaning as early as the prehistoric period, in conjunction with the life experience, accumulated knowledge, and worldview of early agricultural and pastoral communities. It subsequently passed through stages of development influenced by proto-social structures and productive–familial concepts, as well as by evolving perceptions of natural forces and phenomena. In the course of social development, diverse ornamental motifs and ideas emerged, while earlier forms were at times transformed or lost their

original meanings. Parallel to this process, natural and technological advances contributed to the evolution of ornamental art, giving rise to new ornamental forms and symbols. At the same time, historical circumstances within society fostered the creation, formalization, semantic depth, and widespread acceptance of ornamental forms. In essence, ornamental motifs originated in the depths of primitive society, grounded in inherent originality. They are largely the products of early knowledge of nature, influential social forces and phenomena, and the perceptions and beliefs of Armenian people. Consequently, they embody religious-mystical interpretations, ethnographic subtexts, and expressions conditioned by historical circumstances (Mnatsakanyan, 1955). Thus, studies reveal a wide range of ornamental forms and motifs that constitute the principal components of Armenian ornamental art and appear in numerous complex combinations as integral elements (floral, vegetative, animal, bird, geometric, etc.). Essentially, underlying every image, form, or conceptual representation is a specific premise—some aspect of reality connected to nature, clearly defined semantic notions, and related symbolic associations.

The aim of the present article is to examine, in greater depth than the author's earlier survey study, how medieval Armenian church ornamentation was transformed into a compositional and symbolic language within Soviet-era architecture in Armenia (1920s–1990s). The study focuses on the mechanisms of reinterpretation—stylization, abstraction, monumentalization, changes in scale and material, and integration with architectural structures—and considers how these mechanisms altered the function and visual meaning of ornament as it moved from medieval sacred contexts into modern secular and monumental buildings. The methodology combines qualitative visual and comparative analysis, field observation, on-site examination, architectural documentation, and historical research. In contrast to the previous article's broader inventory of ancient and medieval motifs across Soviet Armenian architecture, the present study uses selected cases to conduct a closer reading of ornamental forms and architectural composition. Medieval church examples are treated as reference points and compared with Soviet-era applications in order to identify specific processes of continuity, transformation, abstraction, and contextual change.

Regarding relationship to the previous article, the present article is a focused continuation of the author's 2025 study, "Manifestations of Ancient and Medieval Armenian Ornamentation in the Architecture of Armenia of the Soviet Period." That article surveyed a broad range of ancient and medieval motifs—including vegetal, animal, geometric, object-based, and Christian-symbolic forms—and documented their manifestations across Soviet Armenian architecture. Instead, the present paper concentrates on medieval church-derived ornament and examines in greater detail how selected motifs were transformed through stylization, abstraction, monumentalization, changes in scale and material, and integration into architectural composition. Some architectural examples discussed previously are therefore revisited here, but with a different analytical purpose: the earlier study established their occurrence within the broader field of Soviet Armenian ornamentation, whereas the present study analyzes their compositional function and reinterpretation.

Materials and Methods

This study is based on selected examples of medieval Armenian ecclesiastical architecture, published scholarship, source studies, design documentation, photographic records, and field surveys of Soviet-era buildings and monuments. The examples were selected because they allow for a close comparison between identifiable medieval ornamental principles and their later architectural reinterpretations. Historical-architectural and comparative visual analysis is used to examine form, composition, scale, material, placement, and symbolic context. The analysis therefore does not treat the Soviet examples simply as instances of inherited motifs; rather, it examines how medieval orna-

mental vocabulary was modified to function within twentieth-century architectural compositions. Where examples overlap with those discussed in the author's previous article, they are reconsidered here at a deeper analytical level, with emphasis on their compositional integration and transformation rather than on their mere presence.

Roots of Armenian ornamental patterns

It is well known that the medieval period of Armenia is remarkable, marked by the flourishing of monasteries and churches, illuminated Gospels and manuscript codices, clerical vestments and liturgical objects, as well as Christian symbols and imagery, which consequently came to occupy a central place in artistic production. By emulating earlier forms, medieval painters, sculptors, and masters of ornamental art reproduced these forms and, with exceptional craftsmanship, further developed them, elevating them to a high artistic level and creating sumptuous compositions and designs. These achieved wide dissemination, continuously evolving throughout the medieval period and being transmitted as a heritage to the present day. In essence, Armenian ornamental patterns emerged as a historically necessary and inevitable outcome of the life, struggles, resistance, and intellectual world of the Armenian people. Thus, formed in the depths of history, they were progressively enriched while simultaneously undergoing transformations conditioned, on the one hand, by socio-political developments and, on the other, by natural and technological factors, thereby embodying evolving systems of knowledge, worldviews, and ways of life. It should be noted that the processes of formation and development of ornamental art are not uniform or identical in terms of chronological depth, since it is precisely time that has endowed ornamental forms with differing meanings and functions, thereby directing the purposes of their application. Consequently, the study of ornamental art encompasses an examination of the internal structural principles and essential nature of its forms, including issues of stylization, abstraction, and generalization; symmetrical ornamental compositions; the relationship between form and content; as well as those aspects that have acquired new interpretations in the period under consideration.

Research indicates that Soviet architecture underwent significant evolution throughout the 20th century, with ornamentation playing a decisive role, shaped both by traditional Armenian motifs and by Western stylistic influences (Foletti & Rakitin, 2020). Within Soviet architecture, ornamentation also served to convey ideological messages, express national identity, and enhance public spaces. Despite the widespread repression characteristic of the period, Armenian cultural forms found ways to survive and evolve, resulting in a distinctive architectural heritage that is remarkable not only for its artistic expression but also for its enduring legacy (Hasratyan, 2011).

Thus, the origins and development of the principal motifs of Armenian ornamental art are rooted in the earliest periods, encompassing animal (or zoomorphic), bird, geometric, vegetal, floral, and other auxiliary motifs, as well as a variety of ornamental elements. These form the foundation of Armenian decorative art and are reflected in the architectural constructions of the Soviet period.

Floral and Vegetal Motifs: Vegetal motifs include floral, tendril–fruit, seed–grain (pomegranate, apple), and Tree of Life motifs, among others. The most significant expression of vegetal ornamentation in Armenian decorative art is the Tree of Life, which appears in diverse forms (Figs. 1-3). Characteristic of these representations are highly stylized and generalized motifs, frequently encountered in miniature painting and early manuscripts (Mnatsakanyan, 1955). These sources generally incorporate a wide variety of vegetal and floral ornaments enclosed within circular frames, isolated, paired, or arranged in clustered compositions. Overall, the symbolism of the Tree of Life is expressed in multiple ways, encompassing vegetal, geometric, and zoomorphic motifs, whose diverse manifestations are products of humanity's accumulated knowledge about life. Owing to their conceptual richness and synthesizing power, these are considered among the most complex orna-

mental motifs, appearing in numerous combinations. Essentially, they are the result of human life experience, knowledge, and interpretations of the forces of nature and their laws.

Of particular interest is the paired floral motif, which is widely encountered in architecture (for example, the sculptural decoration of the twin pilaster capitals of Zvartnots cathedral). In antiquity, floral ornaments incorporating Trees of Life, tendril–fruit symbols, seed motifs, and other ideational forms were commonly carved on domes, upper sections, and façades of temples and sacred structures (Harutyunyan, 1992). Manifestations of floral ornamentation have survived to the present day in secular architecture. Studies show that from ancient times to the present, the depiction of flowers and floral reliefs has remained one of the most favored ornamental motifs in architecture - applied to columns, walls, fortifications, doors, ceilings, windows, and other architectural elements not only in Armenian culture but also across other civilizations. These motifs universally express the idea of fertility (Mnatsakanyan, 1955). It should also be noted that churches were initially adorned with tendril ornaments, while later, in 20th-century architecture, these motifs reappeared in balcony compositions as elements of Armenian decorative architecture. Tendril ornaments were also used to embellish the ornamental bands of apses and semi-apses.



Figure 1. Akhtamar monastery, 915-921



Figure 2. Hovhannavank, 1251



Figure 3. Tade monastery, 12th century

In the buildings of the period under study, the examination of various ornamental motifs makes it possible to discern the meaning of decorative sequences formed by symmetrical repetition such as flower–fruit or flower–seed combinations, which emphasize the concept of the eternity of life. These motifs are among the most favored ornamental schemes and are widespread not only in Armenian culture but also in many others. Frequently, these sequences are arranged not in straight lines but in semicircular formations.

A characteristic example of a stable ornamental form capable of generating endless variations, and one that constitutes a widely disseminated artistic motif with specific applications in architecture, is the vegetal trefoil, which, through its generalized linear forms, likely represents the grapevine. The use of the trefoil ornament is particularly typical of medieval Armenian architecture (Mnatsakanyan, 1955). In parallel, floral garlands, vegetal scrolls, and leaf-ornamented reliefs de-

veloped, finding distinctive expression in acanthus and bear's-breech leaf motifs, as well as in representations of pomegranates and their fruit-bearing branches, grape clusters, apricots, apples, wheat ears, leaves and foliated branches, laurel leaves, and cluster-like symbolic forms. It should be noted that seed and grain motifs in ornamental art, such as those of the apple and pomegranate, possess deep historical roots. Their inner seeds symbolize vegetation and are associated with fertility, immortality, and related symbolic concepts. Essentially, Armenia, as an ancient land of agriculture and horticulture, provides inexhaustible material for ornamental motifs. Moreover, due to its geographical position along the Silk Road, Armenia both absorbed influences from diverse cultures and served as a source of inspiration for many others, including in the field of ornamental art. The detailed study of the history of the field best demonstrates this. Thus, motifs inspired by nature were frequently represented within decorative patterns from the early medieval period to the present. Notably, nature-inspired elements were extensively applied to façades, friezes, columns, and other components of architectural decorative systems in Soviet-era architecture as well.

Thus, these ornamental reliefs, which were already applied in antiquity and continued throughout the early Christian and medieval periods, bore both every day and ritual significance, thereby acquiring distinct symbolic value. This symbolism is rooted in the concept of the Tree of Life. Similarly, motifs of the pomegranate and grape retained significant cultural and symbolic importance in Armenia's modern heritage, particularly manifesting within the architectural landscape of Soviet Armenia. Over the centuries, the widespread presence of grapes and pomegranates in Armenia, combined with their artistic conceptualization, fostered their transformation into enduring symbols. This is especially evident in decorative forms that continue to be employed across various artistic fields, including painting, sculpture, and architecture, undergoing morphological transformations over time (figural series: Ptghni Church, Zvartnots, Akhtamar Monasteries) (Mkhitarian, 2008). As some of the most common fruits of the Armenian Highlands, and the source of wine, grapes and pomegranates carry shared symbolic meanings. Consequently, through their stylistic diversity, they appear across multiple domains of Armenian culture, particularly in architecture both in pre-Christian and Christian structures within ornamental programs as well as in the rituals of the Armenian Church.

In Soviet Armenian architecture, floral, vegetal, and fruit ornamentation underwent a process of conscious stylization and contextual transformation. While preserving their symbolic core - fertility, life, continuity, and national identity - these motifs were reinterpreted through new materials, scales, and architectural functions. Unlike medieval church decoration, where such motifs were embedded within sacred symbolic systems, Soviet-period applications placed them primarily in secular environments, such as public institutions, memorial complexes, and residential architecture. In these contexts, these types of ornamentation assumed the role of cultural signifiers, visually embedding historical memory within the modern urban space. This found expression in the works of several Soviet-era architects.

In works such as the wine cellars of the "Ararat" Trust building by R. Israelyan (Fig. 4), vegetal reliefs are monumentalized and integrated into the tectonic structure of the façade, transforming traditional motifs into rhythmic architectural elements. The stylized grapevines, leaves, and fruit-bearing compositions no longer function merely as surface embellishment but become part of the compositional logic of the building, mediating between mass, texture, and light. This approach reflects a Soviet Armenian tendency to merge ornament with structure, modernizing medieval forms while maintaining their symbolic associations.

A similar reinterpretation is evident in the Cascade Complex in Yerevan (Figs. 5-7), where floral and vegetal forms are abstracted and scaled to an urban dimension. Here, ornament is not con-

fined to detail but operates across terraces, relief panels, and sculptural surfaces. The vegetal vocabulary, though modernized, continues to evoke growth, ascent, and continuity, aligning the medieval symbolism of the Tree of Life with Soviet-era concepts of progress, collective space, and monumental urban composition. In this way, floral and vegetal ornament functions as a bridge between historical memory and modern architectural ideology.



Figure 4. "Ararat" trust, 1937, Yerevan



Figure 5. Cascade, 1971, Yerevan



Figure 6. Cascade, 1971, Yerevan

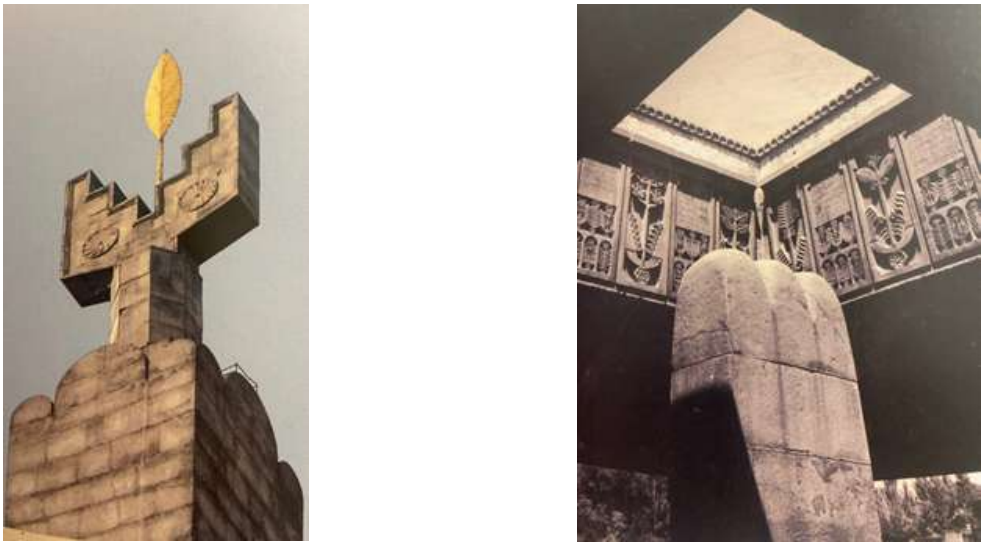


Figure 7. Yerevan's Cascade Memorial to Victims of Repression, S. Gurzadyan, Yerevan

Geometric Motifs. The next significant type of ornamentation is geometric, occupying an important place in Armenian medieval culture. Architecture, stone and wood carving, and textile decoration including carpets and other woven works are all rich in diverse, often rhythmic geometric patterns, sometimes combined with stylized representations of indigenous Armenian flora, which were incorporated into architecture as decorative elements. These manifestations are likewise notable in Soviet-era architecture.

Studies show that geometric patterns including symmetrical triangular motifs and related forms are deeply rooted in traditional Armenian art and are characterized by proportionality and precision, conveying a sense of harmony and order (Erbudak & Kyurkchyan, 2022). From the fram-

ing of openings to the articulation of wall surfaces, geometric forms impart visual interest and cultural depth to architectural structures. Particularly noteworthy are manifestations of the rhombus, square, circle, triangle, rings, four-lobed and quadrilateral elements, as well as octagonal, oval, pointed-oval, and trilobed motifs, found in manuscript miniatures, textiles and embroidered fabrics, altar decorations, and elsewhere. The geometric forms of Armenian ornamental art are imbued with rich conceptual content and were developed over centuries. Based on scholarly research, it may be asserted that in ornamental art, there is essentially no geometric motif devoid of meaning: the repetition and interlacing of triangles, quadrilaterals, circles, and rhombi all possess distinct origins and material foundations, rooted in the accumulated knowledge of ancient Armenians and in observations of nature, including the animal and vegetal worlds.

In this context, it should be noted that in Soviet Armenian architecture, geometric ornament proved particularly compatible with the modern architectural language. Its inherent qualities order, rhythm, modularity, and abstraction - allowed medieval geometric systems to be reinterpreted in ways that aligned with Soviet architectural principles while preserving national specificity. Architects frequently employed geometric motifs not only as decoration but also as organizational frameworks structuring façades, screens, ceilings, and relief surfaces. In this sense, the buildings of the Institute of Communications (Fig. 8) and the Polytechnic Institute (Fig. 9) provide clear examples of how interlaced geometric patterns and modular compositions were adapted to large-scale public architecture. Here, medieval-derived motifs are transformed into repetitive systems that articulate surface depth, regulate light and shadow, and establish visual rhythm. It is evident that these geometric networks echo the logic of medieval stone carving while simultaneously resonating with Soviet ideals of rationality, standardization, and technological progress.

In this regard, the Mother Armenia monument in Gyumri (1975; by R. Yeghoyan) is remarkable, as geometric structuring plays a decisive compositional and symbolic role (Figs.10, 11). The monument is based on a clear and monumental geometric order: the generalized massing, axial symmetry, and strict proportional relationships emphasize stability, strength, and timelessness. The treatment of the figure avoids excessive naturalism, favoring instead simplified, almost tectonic forms that recall the constructive logic of medieval Armenian stone sculpture and khachkar compositions. The geometric clarity of the volumes and the restrained plastic language transform the female figure into an archetypal and monumental image, in which national symbolism is articulated through the disciplined language of form. Here, geometry is not merely decorative but becomes a means of ideological and artistic expression, aligning medieval compositional principles with Soviet monumental aesthetics (Mnatsakanyan, 1955). In conclusion, geometry in Soviet Armenian architecture functions as a mediator between ornament and construction. By embedding patterns into concrete, stone, or prefabricated elements, architects blurred the boundary between applied decoration and structural form. This approach exemplifies a broader tendency to reinterpret national ornament as an integral architectural language rather than as isolated embellishment, allowing historical motifs to operate dynamically with modernist spatial and material frameworks. Accordingly, through this synthesis, medieval and traditional forms are both preserved and transformed, linking cultural heritage with contemporary architectural expression.

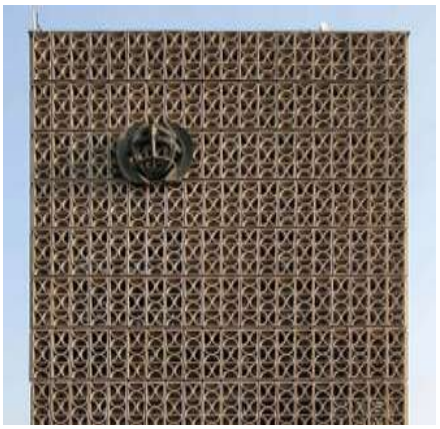


Figure 8. Institute of communication, Armen Aghalyan, 1978



Figure 9. Politechnical Institute, Armen Aghalyan, 1975



A



B

Figure 10. Mother Armenia, Gyumri, 1975, Rafik Yeghoyan
a. Façade of Mother Armenia, Gyumri, 1975, Rafik Yeghoyan
b. Details of Mother Armenia, Gyumri, 1975, Rafik Yeghoyan



A



B

Figure 11. Mother Armenia, Gyumri, 1975, by Rafik Yeghoyan
a. Frontal view of Mother Armenia, Gyumri, 1975, Rafik Yeghoyan
b. Details of Mother Armenia, Gyumri, 1975, Rafik Yeghoyan

Zoomorphic (Animal, bird) Motifs. Animal and bird motifs hold an important place in the decorative culture of medieval Armenian churches, where zoomorphic imagery expresses symbolic meanings related to protection, power, glory, eternity, vigilance, resurrection, divine order, and others. These motifs appear in relief sculpture on façades, capitals, friezes, sculptural bands, and other architectural details of medieval buildings. In the Soviet period, animal and bird imagery was reintroduced in a secularized and stylized form, finding expression in architectural works of the time (such as the Matenadaran building, the "Ararat" trust winery, the Cascade Complex, and various public buildings), where bird and animal forms were abstracted and integrated into modern compositions. While both preserving and transforming their original contextual essence (religious, historical, and others), these motifs, getting a new life, continued to function as carriers of symbolic meaning, expressing ideas of strength, continuity, and national identity within Soviet Armenian architecture. Thus, the manifestations of animal and bird motifs—including naturalistic, fantastical, and imaginary creatures, as well as expressions of totemism—are not merely decorative but carry diverse conceptual meanings and symbolic content (Khorenatsi, 1997). For example, the depiction of paired birds and fledglings is widespread and symbolizes birth and fertility. Birds, while expressing the idea of fertility within the animal world, simultaneously reflect corresponding concepts associated with the floral and vegetal world (Fig. 12)



Figure 12. Akhtamar church, 10th century

Armenian ornamental art also incorporates representations of various other animals, including bull heads, lions (from Urartian decorative traditions onward), oxen (also originating in Urartian ornamentation, though later less frequent and considered a symbol of the Evangelist Luke), eagles, falcons, peacocks, deer, goats, rams, leopards, foxes (the fox being one of the ancient totems, symbolizing victory over the destructive forces of nature; however, from the Christian period onward it acquired opposite connotations) (Mnatsakanyan, 1955; Khorenatsi, 1997), and others. These images appear both as independent naturalistic figures and in combination with floral and vegetal attributes. In addition, representations of fantastical creatures are also encountered (for example, in the high reliefs of the Akhtamar monastery) (Fig.12).

Thus, it may be stated that the origins (structural principles and conceptual foundations) and the formation (processes of stylization, abstraction, and symmetrical composition) of ornamental forms are linked to both pre-Christian and Christian worldviews and sources (including vegetal–animal and zoomorphic–botanical syntheses and their close conceptual interrelations). Over time, Christianity reinterpreted the meanings of a number of ornamental forms in accordance with subsequent stages of historical development (Fig. 13.). This is precisely what accounts for the enduring character of ornamental motifs, since they are grounded in historical reality and in distinctive reflec-

tions of a people's life, struggles, religious-mystical conceptions, worldview, and modes of thought, as well as their perceptions of various forces and phenomena. Through transformation and reworking, these motifs have reached the present day as expressions of beauty and as ornamentation endowed with specific meanings, continuously generating new compositions.

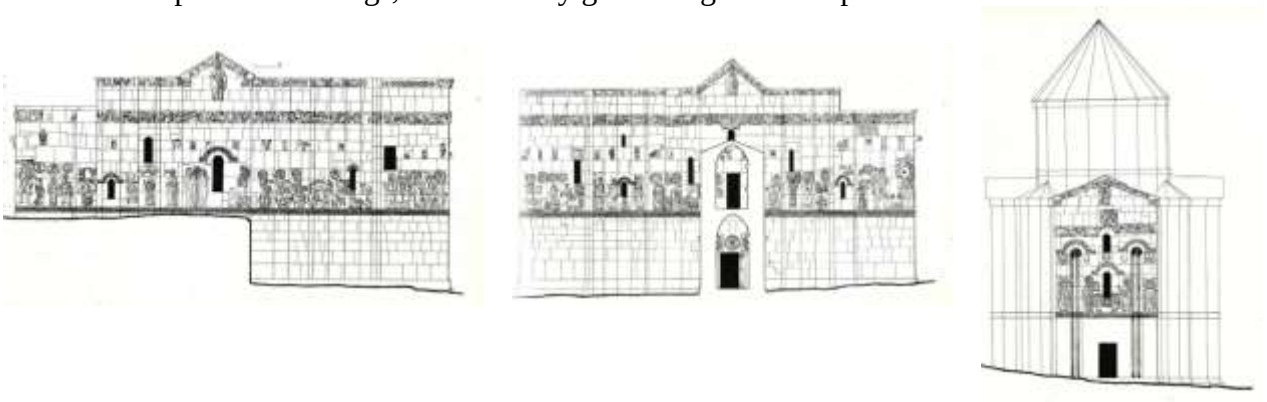


Figure 13. Akhtamar monastery drawings, 10th century

It is notable that, compared to floral and geometric systems, zoomorphic ornamentation appears more selectively in Soviet Armenian architecture; however, when employed, it carries intensified symbolic and narrative functions. Animal imagery is primarily manifested in relief sculpture and monumental compositions, where it operates as a bearer of collective memory, cultural archetypes, and expressive symbolism rather than as a purely ornamental detail.

Field studies clearly show that in different buildings, among them the Ararat Trust building by R. Israelyan (Fig. 14), zoomorphic and bird-like forms are incorporated into sculptural reliefs that synthesize medieval iconographic traditions with Soviet monumental aesthetics. These images are not literal reproductions of medieval prototypes; rather, they are generalized, stylized, and often monumentalized, transforming historical animal symbolism into visual metaphors of vitality, resilience, and cultural continuity. Their placement within public and institutional architecture shifts their meaning from sacred symbolism to cultural representation.

It is also remarkable to note the decorative appearance of the Institute of Geodesy (Fig. 15), which demonstrates how zoomorphic motifs were adapted to modern architectural surfaces through abstraction and compositional integration. Here, animal forms interact with vegetal and geometric elements, forming hybrid ornamental systems that recall medieval syntheses while responding to modern compositional demands. In Soviet Armenian architecture, zoomorphic ornament thus functions less as isolated imagery and more as part of an integrated artistic language that reconnects modern architecture with archaic and medieval layers of Armenian visual culture.

A comparable approach can be observed in the bas-relief adorning the façade of the Ani Plaza Hotel in Yerevan. Executed in tuff and integrated into the architectural surface, the composition features a stylized anthropomorphic figure combined with symbolic and zoomorphic elements, most notably a lion-like creature rendered in a flattened, heraldic manner. Rather than a naturalistic depiction, the animal operates as an emblematic sign, recalling medieval Armenian relief traditions while reinterpreted through the formal language of late Soviet modernism. Constructed in the late 1960s–early 1970s, the building reflects the synthesis of modernist architecture with national decorative idioms, where the bas-relief serves as a mediating layer between structure and cultural memory, and the zoomorphic motif becomes part of an integrated ornamental system rather than an isolated image (Fig. 16).

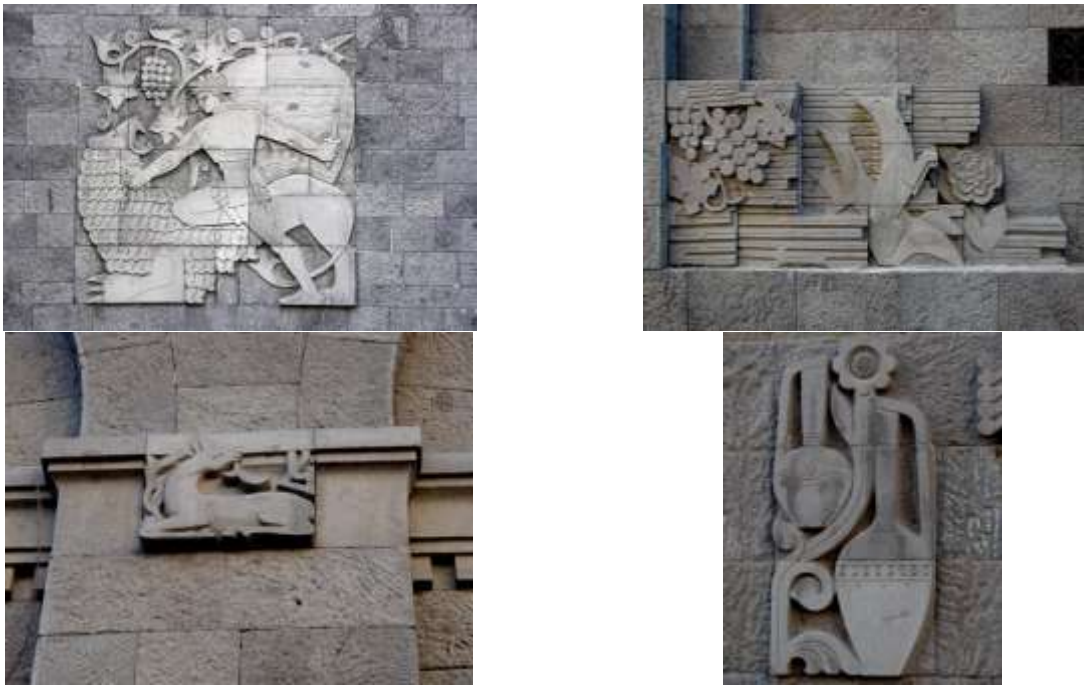


Figure 14. The wine cellars of the "Ararat" Trust, 1937, by R. Israyelyan

Results and Discussion

Thus, this article examined, at a more focused level, how medieval Armenian church ornament was transformed when incorporated into the architectural composition of Soviet Armenia. Building on the author's previous, broader survey of ancient and medieval ornamental manifestations, the present analysis concentrated on three groups—floral and vegetal, geometric, and zoomorphic motifs—and examined the mechanisms through which they were adapted to twentieth-century architecture. The evidence indicates three related processes: vegetal motifs were monumentalized and integrated into façades and urban compositions; geometric systems were converted into rhythmic and sometimes quasi-structural organizational devices; and zoomorphic imagery was selectively abstracted and incorporated into sculptural and relief compositions. The principal contribution of the present analysis is therefore to distinguish the presence of inherited ornament from the architectural process of its reinterpretation. The Soviet examples show that continuity did not depend on literal reproduction. Medieval forms could retain symbolic associations while simultaneously changing in scale, material, spatial position, degree of abstraction, and compositional function. This transformation allowed medieval visual heritage to operate within modern secular architecture and to connect historical memory with the architectural language of the twentieth century. In this sense, the relationship between the two studies is sequential rather than duplicative. The earlier article established the broad field of ancient and medieval ornamental manifestations in Soviet-era architecture; the present article takes a narrower group of medieval church-derived forms and investigates more closely how those forms were compositionally transformed. The new analysis consequently shifts the emphasis from documenting their occurrence to interpreting their architectural operation—how ornament functions within façades, reliefs, scale, rhythm, material, and monumental composition.

The findings suggest that the revival of medieval ornament should therefore be understood as a process of adaptation rather than simple preservation. Ornament participated in the artistic articulation of buildings while also providing a visible connection with Armenian historical heritage. Its

new architectural settings, however, required changes in scale, technique, composition, and context, producing forms that were recognizably related to medieval sources but functionally adapted to Soviet architectural conditions. Therefore, the integration of medieval Armenian ornamentation into Soviet architecture can be understood as a form of compositional reinterpretation in which historical motifs acquired new architectural functions. The present study contributes to this understanding by examining the formal mechanisms of that transformation and by showing how sacred medieval visual vocabulary could be translated into secular, monumental, and modern architectural environments.



Figure 15. Institute of Geodesy, 1978, by A. Aghalyan



Figure 16. Ani Plaza hotel, 1960-70's, by Ed. Safaryan

Conclusion

The article explored the revival and reinterpretation of medieval Armenian church ornamentation within the architectural production of Soviet Armenia, focusing on floral, geometric, and zoomorphic motifs as principal vehicles of cultural continuity. The analysis demonstrates that Soviet-era Armenian architecture did not employ ornament merely as decoration, but as a conscious means of reconnecting modern architectural practice with the historical, symbolic, and compositional traditions of medieval art. Vegetal and floral motifs preserved their associations with fertility, continuity, and the Tree of Life, while geometric patterns rooted in medieval proportional and structural systems were transformed into monumental and rhythmic compositional devices within Soviet public buildings and sculpture. Regarding zoomorphic imagery, which drew on pre-Christian and Christian symbolic sources, it further contributed to the semantic richness of Soviet Armenian ornament through selective revival and stylization. As a result, the synthesis of medieval ornamental heritage with Soviet architectural language produced a distinctive cultural phenomenon, in which historical memory, national identity, and modern architectural expression were interwoven. Within the ideological and formal framework of Soviet architecture, Armenian architects and artists succeeded in embedding enduring national symbols into new structures, ensuring the application, continuity, and transformation of medieval ornamental principles in the 20th-century architectural landscape of Armenia. By applying ornamental forms, the masters of that time attempted to enhance the artistic expression of the buildings, enliven architectural spaces, and contribute to the visual and symbolic revival of national heritage. Therefore, the integration of medieval Armenian ornamentation into Soviet architecture functioned not only as a means of preserving cultural identity but also to a new manifestation of the architectural and artistic legacy of contemporary Armenia.

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