

work devoted to the church of Digor Toranian expresses the opinion that the small number of Armenian churches of this type, such as of Digor, Yererouyk, Mren, Kassakh, Otsoun, were originally pagan temples and were later converted into Christian churches, at which time the dome was added. We do not object to the first part of this thesis, concerning the basilicas, but we should like to add that square domed buildings or temples could have existed in Armenia before the establishment of Christianity. The earliest examples of the extant buildings of this category, presuppose a period of development of hundreds of years, and, moreover, the doming did not result from any immediate needs of the Christian cult. There were magnificent churches, without domes, in Syria, and this was no hindrance for the cult. The doming was the result, as we saw in the case of Budghavank, of mutual influences upon one another and the fusion of two styles of art, which culminated in the three-aisled domed basilicas and in the triumph of the local-Iranian style. This process takes place along two lines: the one in the three-aisled basilicas—Otsoun, Gaianè, St. John of Bagrevant, Mren; the other in one-aisled basilicas—Dzarrayishen, B u d g h a v a n k, Arouj, Yerazcavors. The last church mentioned is a work of the renaissance period of the Bagradounik.

The church of Otsoun with its dome resting on free-standing pillars and in its general plan is similar to St. Gaianè and Mren. There is however an important difference. St. Gaianè has retained only the pillars and the rectangular shape of the basilican style: its ornamentation reminds us of Sassanian art. The same can be said in general of the church of Mren.²⁸ The local-Iranian art has again dominated here, as we saw in the case of the church of Arouj in comparison with Budghavank. On the contrary in the church of Otsoun the basilican style has been maintained to a very large extent—in the selection of material, in its preservation of rooms, in its figure ornamental

sculpture, which unfortunately have been badly damaged.

At Otsoun there are three edifices, which mutually contribute towards the determination of their antiquity. The oldest is the church of the fort; although renovated it retains nevertheless archaic features which indicate great antiquity. Those features are its exactly horseshoe-shaped arches and the figure sculptures in the crowns of its windows; (of those sculptures only a few have remained). In our opinion this church is older than the large church and the monument called "the belfry", which in reality is a magnificent sepulchral stele and is called "the belfry" by the present village dwellers because the church bells have been hung there (fig. 25). However the stone of the three edifices, their structure and sculpture show that they are not far removed in date from one another. Horseshoe vaults and arches are also found elsewhere, for instance in the basilica of Ashdarag, in that of Avan at Mt. Aracadz, or in the apse of the one-aisled basilica of Kirashlou in the valley of the Teghenik; also at Baibourd not distant from Karni, on the left stream of the river Azad. But nowhere are they as clearly defined as in the church of Kassakh, the southern nave of which as well as the eastern room adjoining the north wall have remained intact. The same may be said of the one-aisled basilica (fig. 15) of Dzopk or Adzop (to the north-east of the villages of Burtatsor and Khozhornni in the middle valley of the river Sataklou at the northern border of Lorri) and of its narthex at the west. All the arches are horse-shoe-shaped, resembling in this respect the fort church of Otsoun. That the church of Dzopk is one of the most ancient basilicas is evidenced not only by the grape vine carving on the south wall (which may not be in its proper place, but transferred from another part of the building to its present position (fig. 22), but also and especially by the rare vegetable and animal carvings on its pilaster capitals, representing a palm tree with a little hind on either side and

28. Strzygowski, *Die Baukunst*, Fig. 182, 507.