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CONVIVIUM

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of the Premodern World

Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova

CONVIVIUM

supplementum 2025/2

Exchanges and Interactions
in the Arts of the Premodern World
Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova

*Journal of the Department of Art History of the University of Lausanne,
of the Department of Art History of Masaryk University, and of the Institute
of Art History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic*

This volume was published within the project **Armenia Entangled:
Connectivity and Cultural Encounters in Medieval Eurasia 9th–14th
Centuries (ArmEn)**, Grant number 865067.

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Publisher / Brepols publishers, Begijnhof 67,

2300 Turnhout & Masarykova univerzita,

Žerotínovo nám. 9, 601 77 Brno, IČO 00216224

Editorial Office / Seminář dějin umění, Filozofická fakulta

Masarykovy univerzity, Arna Nováka 1, 602 00 Brno

Print / Tiskárna Didot, spol s r.o., Trnkova 119, 628 00 Brno

Typeface / Blacker Pro, Blacker Sans Pro (Zetafonts type foundry)

E-mail / convivium@earlymedievalstudies.com

www.center-recent.com/convivium.html

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Published / December 2025

Reg. No. MK ČR E 21592

ISSN 2336-3452 (print)

ISSN 2336-808X (online)

ISBN

ISBN

Convivium is listed in the databases SCOPUS, ERIH,
“Riviste di classe A” indexed by ANVUR, and in the Emerging
Sources Citation Index (ESCI) of the Web of Science.



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MEDIEVAL YEGHEGIS, ARMENIA

History, Archeology, Society.

Local Multiplicities and Global Connections
of a Rural Centre on the Silk Road(s)

Edited by
Zaroui Pogossian
& **Michele Nucciotti**
with the collaboration of
Francesca Cheli, Leonardo Squilloni,
& **Veronika Džugan-Hermanová**

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VII. THE “OLD CHURCH”

An Archaeological Stratigraphic Analysis

Abstract / Located on the southwestern edge of Yeghegis in Vayots' Dzor, the so-called Old Church is a little-known ninth-century religious structure largely absent from historical sources. Through detailed archaeological analysis, this study reconstructs the church's architectural evolution, identifying three phases: the original ninth-century construction, an eleventh-century reconstruction of the western entrance, and a later collapse likely caused by seismic activity. Architectural parallels with the nearby St Sion Church of Arates support the dating provided by an inscription from 851. The study also hypothesizes that the church's eleventh-century modifications may have been influenced by the artistic trends of the Bagratid period. By applying methodologies of Building Archaeology, this research provides new insights into the construction history of the Old Church and the broader historical context of early medieval Armenian ecclesiastical architecture.

Keywords / archaeological analysis, Bagratid domain, Light Archaeology, masonry types, medieval Armenia, Old Church, St Sion Church, Syuni princes, Yeghegis

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DESCRIPTION OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMPLEX

On the south-western edge of Yeghegis in Vayots' Dzor, there is a small church building mostly unknown from historical sources. Located today in a private garden, the church is presently in a ruined condition – the maximum height of the internal walls is about 3.80 meters – and the external walls are almost completely underground. However, it is possible to understand its architectural structure [fig. 1]. It is a single-nave church with an apsed hall, with a w-e orientation. The inner space (6.40 × 3.40 meters) is divided into two bays that end with an elongated semi-circular apse on a *bema* with one step. The bays are separated by semi-pillars that must have supported the arches of the roof (maybe a barrel vault), now completely lost. According to the architectural structure, it seems to be very similar to the St Sion Church, about eight kilometers north-east, in the Arates monastic complex, even if the dimensions and the manufacturing of stones are different [fig. 2].¹

There are two doorways: the main entrance with a lintel, rebuilt and now mostly collapsed, is located on the western side; the second one – surmounted by a round arch on the inside and a lintel decorated with crosses on the outside – is located on the southern wall. Another door is found on the northern side, along the first span. This allows access to a structure that must have been a side chapel (on the northern side), now completely collapsed and inaccessible.

Even if the church is unknown from historical sources, the archaeological survey conducted by the joint Italian-Armenian mission “The Making of the Silk Road in Armenia: Light Archaeology of Eurasian Connectivity in the Middle Ages (cc. 7–14)” has made it possible to acquire important elements for its understanding. Inside the eastern frame of the southern entrance, an inscription is preserved that documents that in 851, cut stones were donated for the construction of the church.² The inscription has a great value both because it is the first epigraphic evidence from Yeghegis and because it sheds light on the construction of the building. Since it is, actually, the oldest structure in the village (dating back to the ninth century), it is named the “Old Church” in this

volume. At our present state of knowledge, there is no information regarding the dedication of the church.

F.C.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSES

In this article, the Old Church is analyzed according to methodologies of building archaeology for the first time. This approach allows us to establish a hierarchical data recording system.

The structure is part of an *Architectural Complex* (AC4) that includes the *Building* of the single-nave church (B1). At the current state of conservation, it is not possible to identify other annexes with certainty.

Since the external elevations are mostly not visible, all the internal *Elevations* (E1-4) [fig. 3] of B1 have been archaeologically analyzed in detail in order to understand the stratigraphic sequence of the construction process.

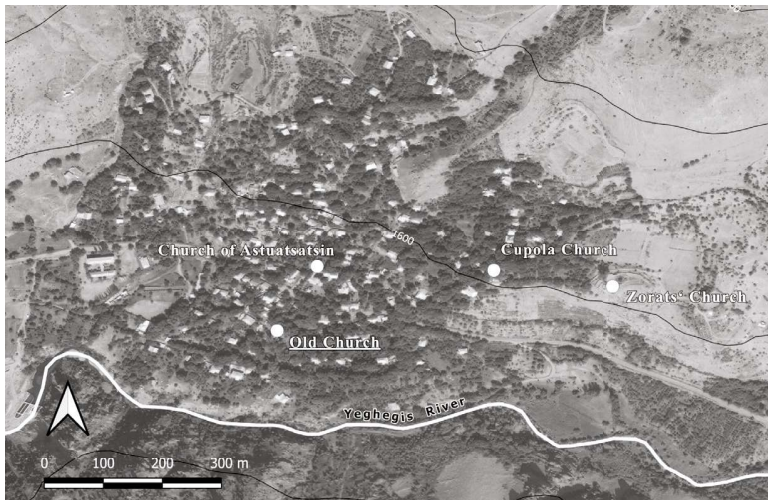
Each elevation was so numbered:

E1, northern side

E2, eastern side (apse)

* Field research for this project was carried out with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) for the project “The Making of the Silk Roads in Vayots' Dzor,” as well as a European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant *Jews and Christians in the East: Strategies of Interaction between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean*, (grant agreement no 647467). The article was written and published with the support of the ERC Consolidator Grant *Armenia Entangled: Connectivity and Cultural Encounters in Medieval Eurasia 9th–14th Centuries* (ArmEn) (Grant number 865067). Both ERC projects were funded under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program.

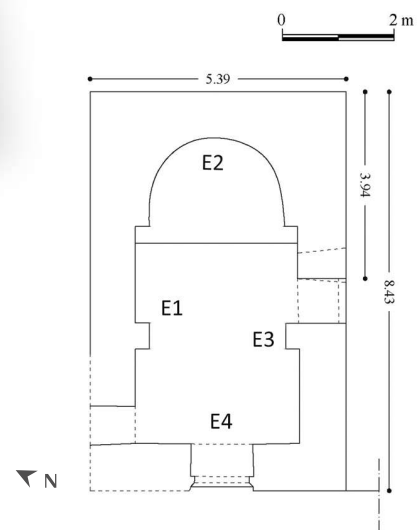
- 1 Paolo Cuneo, *Architettura armena dal quarto al diciannovesimo secolo*, Rome 1988, vol. 1, sheet no 195, pp. 382–383. For the archaeological analysis of the St Sion Church in Arates, see Michele Nucciotti *et al.*, “The Making of the Silk Road in Armenia (cc. 7th–14th): Vayots Dzor and Arates Monastery”, in *vii Congresso Nazionale di Archeologia Medievale*, Paul Arthur, Marco L. Imperiale eds, Florence 2015, pp. 493–498. Resemblances to the structure of the Old Church of Yeghegis and the church of St Sion in Arates seem to be recognizable in one of the churches of the monastic complex of St Mamas. However, the archaeological mission conducted by the University of Florence has not yet carried out targeted investigations on this site. The monastic complex is located just north of the present-day village of Salli, in the Vayots' Dzor province, along the road to Selim.
- 2 See Hamlet Petrosyan, Zaroui Pogossian, “Armenian inscriptions in and around Yeghegis”, inscription vi.1 in this volume for a transcription and translation of the inscription, published here for the first time.



[fig. 1] On the left, the localization of the Old Church in the village Yeghegis; on the right, an overall view of the complex (photo by 3D modelling, 2019)



[fig. 2] A comparison between the Old Church in Yeghegis (left side) and St Sion Church of Arates (right side): above - the northern side; below - the southern side of the two churches



[fig. 3] Plan of the Old Church (Building 1) with all the elevations analyzed

E3, southern side

E4, western side (counter-façade)

One *Masonry Type* (MT7a)³ has been sampled.

The detailed archaeological analysis of Building 1 allowed us to identify three main phases: the building of the church as a whole, dating back to the ninth century according to the inscription; the reconstruction of the main doorway and perhaps some minor interventions (Phase 2), and the collapse of the roof and the upper portions of the walls (Phase 3), not precisely datable, that led to the building's current appearance.

PHASE 1 (MID-9th CENTURY)

The first phase involved the construction of the church in the ninth century. Generally, it is possible to notice that the builders proceeded with the construction by “horizontal bands.” The masonry is made of roughly squared basalt blocks of medium size arranged in sub-horizontal and parallel courses with sporadic small polygonal lithic wedges in the bed; lithic wedges are placed vertically with the same height as the row; the surface dressing is regularized with a quarry tool or a chisel (MT7a).⁴ Squared and smoothed basalt ashlar were used only for architectural elements like semi-pillars and openings.

According to the archaeological analysis, Phase 1 can be divided into five sub-phases (phases 1a–1e), basically coeval, that provide details on the design and construction procedures:

SUB-PHASE 1A

The construction of the church started from the eastern side (E2), building the lower part of the apse.

After placing the one-step bema (MSU 56), the workers proceeded in “horizontal bands,” first building the corners and then the portion of masonry leaning against or linked with them.⁵

In the second “horizontal band,” near the corner, they built a single-light window (MSUs 19 and 20) [fig. 4], on the northern side of the apse, and a small niche with a lintel on the southern side (MSU 23) [fig. 4].⁶

SUB-PHASE 1B

During this sub-phase, the workers proceeded to build the lower part of the central bay, leaning against the structure of the apse and completing the hemicycle of the apse.

First, the workers built the semi-pillar between the first and second bay, and then proceeded with the same construction method by “horizontal bands,” already seen in the apse.⁷

On the southern side (E3), near the semi-pillar, they built the arched southern entrance that we have already mentioned for its important inscription, preserved inside the eastern door jamb.⁸ The construction of the door proceeded together with the portion of masonries.⁹

Reaching the level of the rounded arch, they built the portion of masonry on it (MSU 34) linking it with the portion of the corner of the apse (MSU 30) and the third “horizontal band” of the apse (MSUs 27 and 28). On the southern side of the apse, a second small niche with a lintel was built in the third “horizontal band.”¹⁰

This construction solution, linking the central span to the apse, could have been adopted for seismic and static reasons.

SUB-PHASE 1C

During this sub-phase, the construction of the central bay was completed.

3 See Michele Nuccioti, Lapo Somigli, Elisa Pruno, “Yeghegis Atlas of Masonry Types” in this volume, pp. XY.

4 *Ibidem*.

5 The first band is formed by the corners msus 15 and 25 and the lower portion of masonry msu 17; the second one is formed by the corners msus 16 and 26 and the portions of the masonry msus 18 and 24. It must be noticed that msu 18 makes a sort of connection between bands two and three, maybe for seismic and static reasons.

6 Comparing the Old Church with St Sion Church in Arates, we can see that the latter has a niche on the northern side. Moreover, thanks to the bigger dimensions of the St Sion Church, on the northern side of the apse, there is a doorway to a chapel.

7 It is visible especially on the northern side (E1) where – after placing the semi-pillar (msus 1 and 8) – they built the portions of the masonry corresponding to msus 10, 11 and 12.

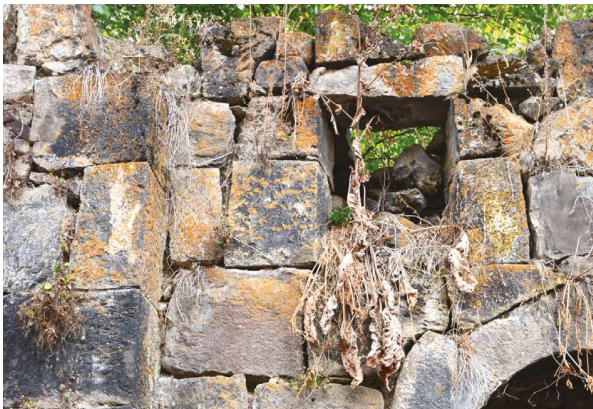
8 For the construction of the door, the semi-pillar was used as the right jamb of the structure.

9 After placing the left jamb of the door (msu 35), they built the portion of masonry leaning against it (msu 33), then placed the rounded arch (msu 37).

10 The niche msu 29, is linked to the portion of masonry msu 28 and the ashlar of the corner msu 30.



[fig. 4] On the left side, the single-light window on the northern side of the apse; on the right side, the small niche on the southern side of the apse



[fig. 5] The small window MSU 38 in E3 (southern elevation)

On the northern side, the portion of the masonry MSU 13 was built, which leans on the apse and is linked with the upper part of the semi-pillar (MSU 9), between the first and the second bay.

On the southern side, the workers completed the construction of the upper portion of the elevation (MSU 40) with a small window featuring a lintel (MSU 38) [fig. 5]. Then the small portions MSUs 55 and 54 were built to connect the central span to the apse. The window is now partially closed (MSU 39), maybe due to a collapse of the roof (MSU 52).

SUB-PHASE 1D

During this sub-phase, the apse was completed with the construction of its spherical cap (MSU 22). However, it was extensively damaged due to the collapse of the building, and only up to three rows are currently preserved.

SUB-PHASE 1E

At the end of the construction procedures, during this sub-phase, the workers completed the construction of the church, building the first bay, leaning against the central one and linked to the western side (counter-façade).

On the southern side (E3), they built the portion of the wall (MSU 42) leaning against the semi-pillar and linked to the counter-façade. No openings were created here.

On the northern side (E1), leaning on the base of a semi-pillar (MSUs 1 and 2), the builders created an entrance to a side chapel, which is now impossible to enter due to the collapse of the structure. The construction procedure of the door is similar to that of the southern entrance: they built just the right jamb (MSU 3), using the wall of the counter-façade as the left jamb of the door. The original crowning element of the door is lost, and the current lintel can be attributed to a later reconstruction (Phase 2). After its construction, the workers proceeded to build the portion of the wall (MSU 5) leaning against the semi-pillar between the first and the second spans. Linked to the southern side (E3, MSU 42), the western side, with one of the entrances to the church, now mostly ruined, was built. Leaning against the portion of the wall of the side chapel (MSU 57), and on a sort of foundation identified during the archaeological



[fig. 6] On the left side a detail of the external profile of the western entrance; on the right side a detail of the main entrance to the church of St Astuatsatsin (church of the Mother of God) in Arates



[fig. 7] On the left side, the new lintel replaced in the phase 2; on the right side, the small squared cut on the southern side

analysis as MSU 43, the workers built the portion of masonries near the access (MSUs 44 and 48).¹¹

PHASE 2 (CIRCA 11th CENTURY)

The second construction phase involved mainly the creation of a new doorway on the western side (cuts MSUs 49 and 50 and door MSUs 45–47). The entrance is made of perfectly squared and smoothed basalt ash-lars.¹² According to the external profile of the jamb of the door, molded with an almost “torus” shape, it could be comparable with the decorations of the church of St Astuatsatsin (church of the Mother of God) in Arates, dated to the eleventh century, even if in the Old Church it is not so emphasized [fig. 6].¹³ At our current state of knowledge, lacking other elements or historical documents, it is possible to affirm that the reconstruction of the access door could be attributed to the eleventh century, when Vayots’ Dzor was annexed to the Bagratid domains.

Even if there are no specific elements, lacking other data, we can include in this phase also other small restorations or such activities as the replacement of the lintel of the left chapel door (MSUs 4, 6, and 7) and a small squared cut on the southern side of the apse (MSU 31), maybe for the purpose of opening another niche [fig. 7].

PHASE 3

Phase 3 refers to a great collapse, which involved the building of the Old Church. At our state of knowledge, it is not precisely datable. One may hypothesize that the collapse was due to one of the earthquakes that occurred in Armenia between the twelfth and twentieth centuries.¹⁴

- 11 Due to the poor state of conservation and the construction of a new access, it is not possible to advance hypotheses on the original access to the building and its creation according to the construction procedures.
- 12 Due to the working of the ash-lars and the surface dressing, the architectural elements could be referred to the mri identified in Yeghegis (mri). In this regard, see Nucciotti/Somigli/Pruno, “Atlas of Masonry” (n. 3).
- 13 Regarding a first archaeological analysis of the church of St Astuatsatsin in Arates, see Nucciotti *et al.*, “The Making of the Silk Road” (n. 1), pp. 495–497.

- 14 The area may have been affected by several earthquakes recorded in Armenia. Strong historical earthquake along the Pambak–Sevan–Syunik’ faultline occurred in 1139 (M ~ 7.5–7.7), in 1187 and 1853 (M ~ 6.0) and in 1931 (M ~ 6.5) according to Arkady Karakhanian *et al.*, “Active Faulting and Natural Hazards in Armenia, Eastern Turkey and North-Western Iran”, *Tectonophysics*, 380/3–4 (2004), pp. 189–219. See also Arkady Karakhanian, Yelena Abgaryan, “Evidence of Historical Seismicity and Volcanism in the Armenian Highland (from Armenian and Other Sources)”, *Annals of Geophysics*, 47/2–3 (2004), pp. 793–810; Mourad Hasrat’yan, “The Medieval Earthquakes of the Armenian Plateau and the Historic Towns of Ayrarat and Shirak (Dvin, Ani, Erevan)”, *Annali di Geofisica*, 38/5–6 (1995), pp. 719–722.

During this phase, the roof and the entire upper portion of the church were destroyed.

Moreover, in recent times, the building may have been used as an open-air quarry to obtain ash-lars for the houses in the village.

This phase led to the current shape and appearance of the building.

M.N.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the Old Church located on the south-western edge of Yeghegis, almost unknown from historical sources, seems to be, according to the inscription visible on the eastern frame of the southern entrance, the oldest church in the village, dating back to the ninth century.¹⁵ The dedication of the church is unknown.

In this article, the building has been archaeologically analyzed in detail for the first time. The archaeological interpretation allows us to trace that the church was built in a single construction phase proceeding by “horizontal bands.” The workers built the single-nave basilica structure starting from the eastern side, building up the apsidal hemicycle (sub-phase 1a). Then they continued westward, building the two bays (sub-phases 1b and 1c), until the façade (sub-phase 1d). Squared and smoothed basalt ash-lars were used only for such architectural elements as semi-pillars and openings, while the masonry is made of roughly squared basalt blocks of medium size arranged sub-horizontally (MT7a).

The plan and the inner spatial partition seem to be comparable, albeit smaller in size and manufacturing of stones, to that of the church of St Sion in Arates, about eight kilometers to the north-east, dated to the ninth or tenth centuries.¹⁶ These elements of parallelism and the dating provided by the inscription allow us to hypothesize the foundation of the church in the ninth century, when the Syuni princely family’s senior branch made Yeghegis in Vayots’ Dzor its central residence.¹⁷

According to the archaeological analysis, a second construction phase included the reconstruction of the western entrance of the church. At this stage, masonry was made by perfectly squared and smoothed basalt ash-lars. This is a *unicum* among the working type and surface dressing recorded in

the church. Without any historical documents and considering that the door is almost in ruins, one may speculate only about its remaining decorations. Indeed, one of the jambs is molded with an almost “torus” shape, which seems to be similar to the decorations of the church of St Astuatsatsin (church of the Mother of God) in Arates, dated to the eleventh century, even if in the Old Church it is not so emphasized. At our current state of knowledge, it is possible to assess that the reconstruction of the façade of the Old Church in Yeghegis could be dated to the eleventh century. At the beginning of that century, Vayots’ Dzor was annexed to the Bagratid domains, and it is possible that under their rule, the construction of new religious buildings and the restoration of existing ones began, incorporating artistic decorations and design elements characteristic of the architectural school of Ani.¹⁸

M.N.

¹⁵ See Pogossian/Petrosyan, “Armenian Inscriptions” (n. 2), inscription vi.i in this volume.

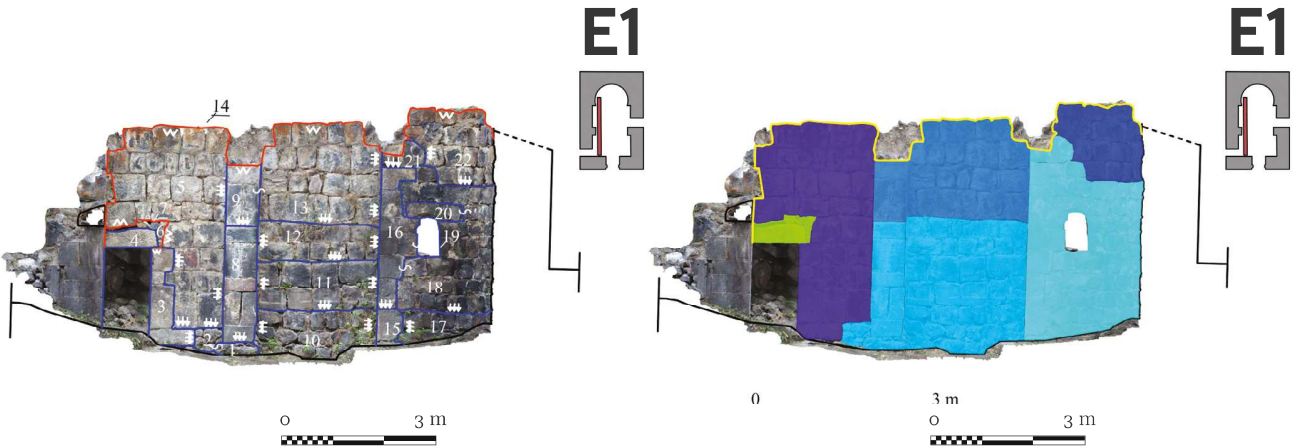
¹⁶ Regarding the archaeological analysis of the St Sion Church in Arates, see Nucciotti *et al.*, “The Making of the Silk Road” (n. 1), pp. 493–498.

¹⁷ The ninth and tenth centuries, under the domain of Syuni princes, was a period of flourishing economy in Syunik’ (and Armenia), and numerous monastic foundations were also recorded in this area. Regarding the Vayots’ Dzor’s political landscape during the ninth and tenth centuries, see Zaroui Pogossian, “Vayots’ Dzor, Syunik’ and the World: Global Transformations and Local Dynamics between the 9th and 14th Centuries”, in this volume, pp. XY.

¹⁸ This seems to be the case for the church of St Astuatsatsin in Arates, as well as exhibiting close parallels with the church of Surb Karapet in the Ts’akhats’ K’ar Monastery (1040s), the cathedral of Marmashen (end of the tenth century), and the cathedral church of the Teghenyats’ Monastery (mid-eleventh century). See Nucciotti *et al.*, “The Making of the Silk Road” (n. 1), p. 495.

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CATALOGUE OF THE OLD CHURCH

E1: ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS



Stratigraphic analysis legend

AC	Architectural Complex	111	Negative MSUs Id. Number	—	MSUs limits
B	Building	+++	abuts against (later than)	---	negative MSUs limits
E	Elevation	W	cut by (early than)	---	cracks
102	Positive MSUs Id. Number	~	linked to (contemporary with)	---	damaged surface

Constructive phases legend

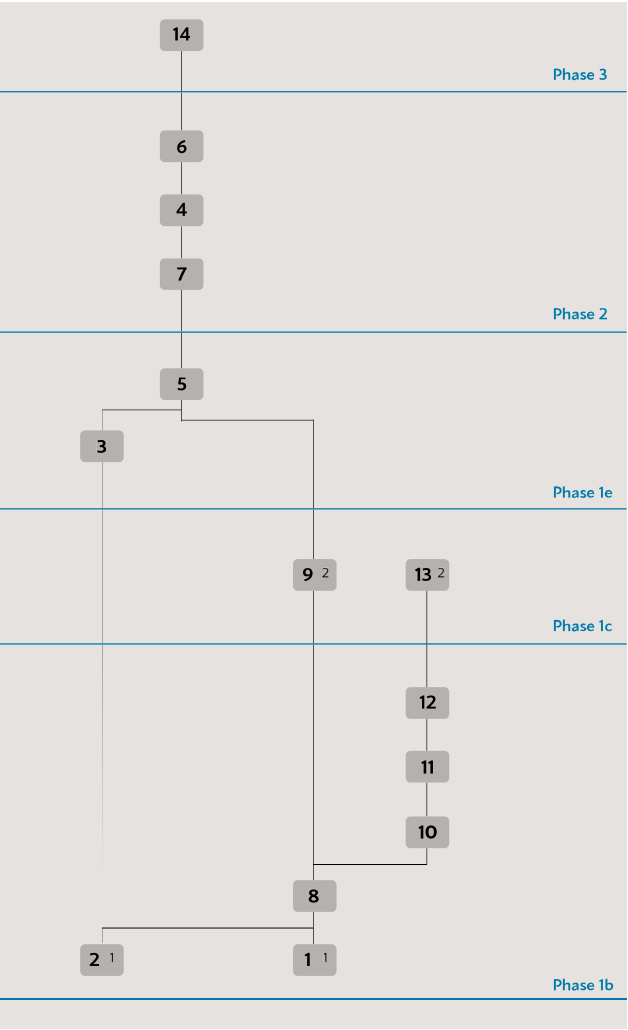
sub-phase 1a	phase 2
sub-phase 1b	phase 3
sub-phase 1c	
sub-phase 1d	
sub-phase 1e	

E1: LIST OF MSU

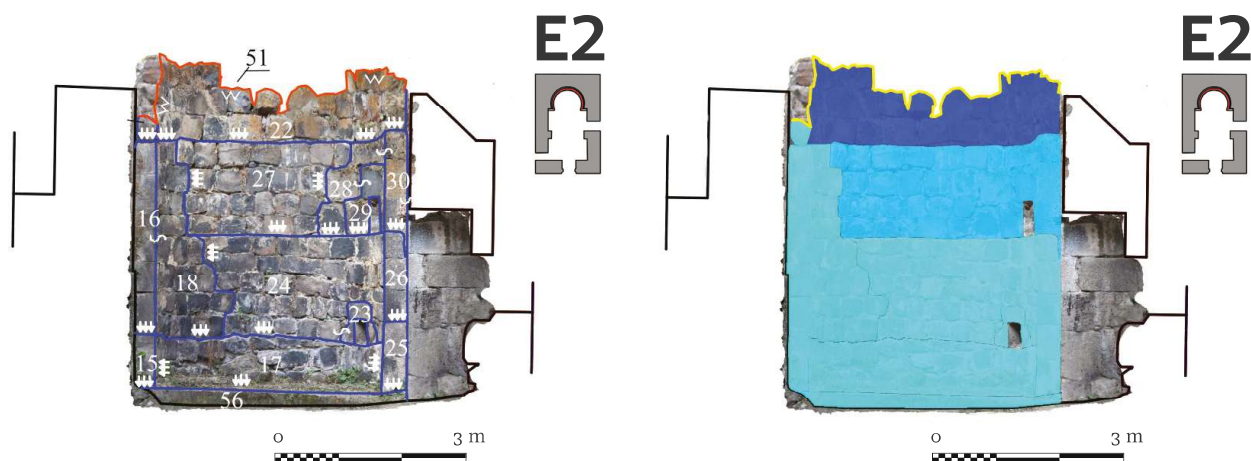
ID MSU	Definition	Later than	Earlier than	Contemporary with	Equal to
1	Base of the pillar in E1		8	2	
2	Small portion of masonry between MMSSUU 3 and 1		3, 8	1	
3	Right jamb of the entrance of the chapel in E1	2	5		
4	Replaced lintel of the entrance of the chapel in E1	7	6		
5	Masonry of the first span in E1	3, 9	7		
6	Reconstruction of a portion of the masonry on the lintel MSU 4	4	14		
7	Cut to remove the previous lintel in E1	5	4		
8	Central part of the pillar between the first and second span in E1	1, 2	5, 10		
9	Upper part of the pillar between the first and second span in E1	8	5	13	
10	Portion of the masonry (lower part) of the second span	8, 15	11		
11	Portion of masonry (central part, on MSU 10) of the second span	10, 16	12		

12	Portion of masonry (central part, on MSU 11) of the second span	11	13		
13	Upper part of the masonry of the second span	12, 21	14	9	
14	Collapse of the roof in E1	6			51, 53

E1: MATRIX



E2: ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS



Stratigraphic analysis legend

AC	Architectural Complex	III	Negative MSUs Id. Number	—	MSUs limits
B	Building	+++	abuts against (later than)	---	negative MSUs limits
E	Elevation	~	cut by (early than)	---	cracks
102	Positive MSUs Id. Number	~	linked to (contemporary with)	---	damaged surface

Constructive phases legend

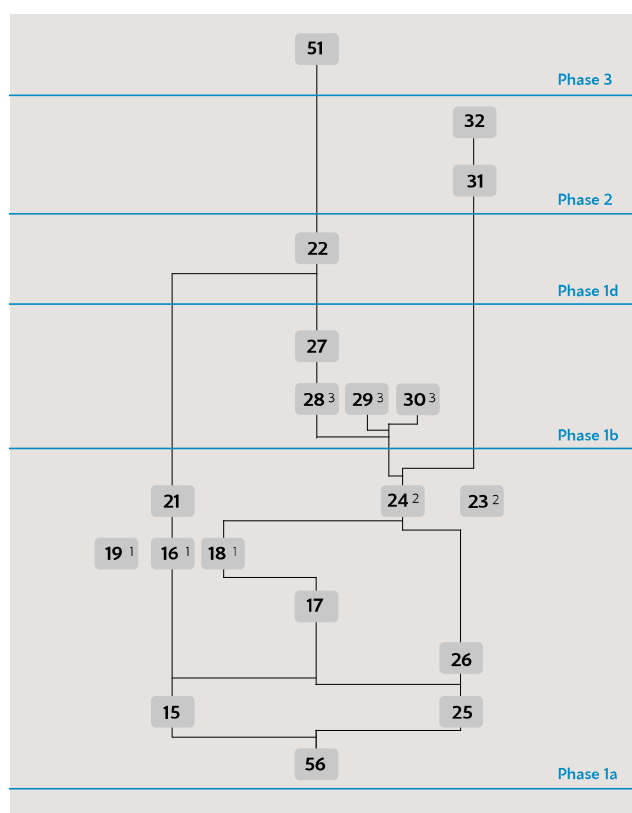
sub-phase 1a	phase 2
sub-phase 1b	phase 3
sub-phase 1c	
sub-phase 1d	
sub-phase 1e	

E2: LIST OF MSUS

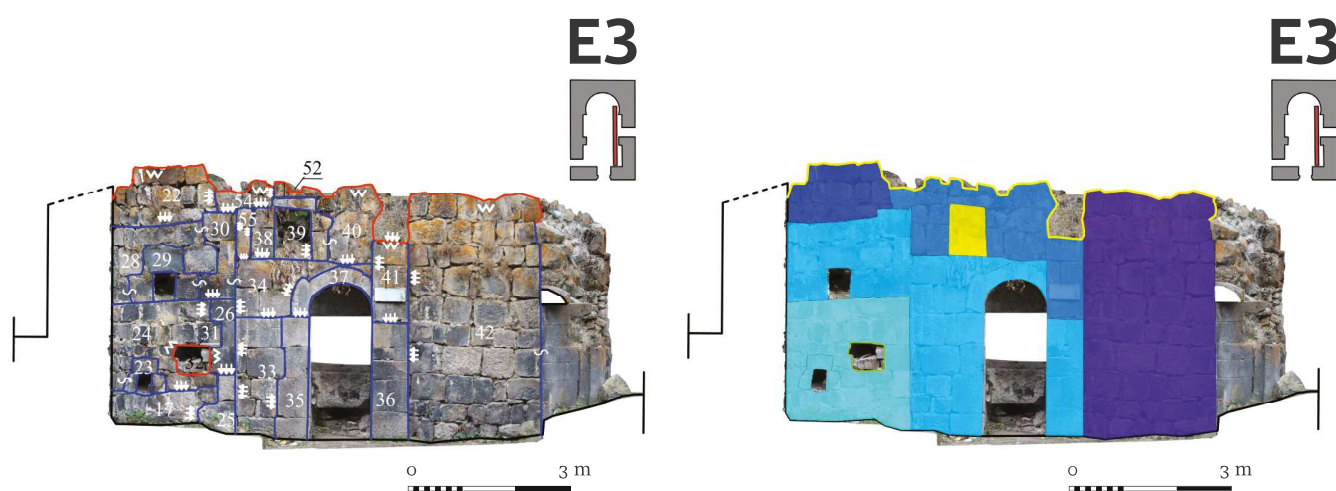
ID MSU	Definition	Later than	Earlier than	Contemporary with	Equal to
15	Lower left part of the triumphal arch of the apse in E2	56	17, 10 (E1)		
16	Left jamb of the triumphal arch of the apse	15	11, 21	18, 19	
17	Lower portion of the masonry of the apse	15, 25	18		
18	Left portion of the masonry of the apse	17	21, 24	16, 19, 20	
19	Small window on the left side of the apse			16, 18, 20	
20	Lintel of the window MSU 19			16, 18, 19	
21	Remains of the upper part of the left side of the triumphal arc of the apse	16	22		
22	Upper portion of the masonry of the apse (apse spherical cap)	21, 27, 54	51		
23	Small niche on the right side of the apse			24	
24	Central portion of the masonry of the apse	18, 26	28, 29, 30, 31	23	
25	Lower part of the right jamb of the triumphal arch of the apse	56	17, 26		
26	Central part of the right jamb of the triumphal arch of the apse	25	24, 33		
27	Upper portion of the masonry of the apse	28	22		

28	Upper right small portion of the masonry of the apse	24	27	29, 30	
29	Small niche on the upper right side of the apse	24		28	
30	Upper part of the right jamb of the triumphal arch of the apse	24	55 (E3)	28, 34 (E3)	
31	Square cut on the right side of the apse	24	32		
32	Filling of the cut MSU 31	31			
51	Collapse of the upper part of the apse in E2	22			14, 52
56	Step of the presbytery in E2		15, 25		

E2: MATRIX



E3: ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS



Stratigraphic analysis legend

AC	Architectural Complex	III	Negative MSUs Id. Number	—	MSUs limits
B	Building	+++	abuts against (later than)	---	negative MSUs limits
E	Elevation	~	cut by (early than)	—	cracks
102	Positive MSUs Id. Number	~	linked to (contemporary with)	▨	damaged surface

Constructive phases legend

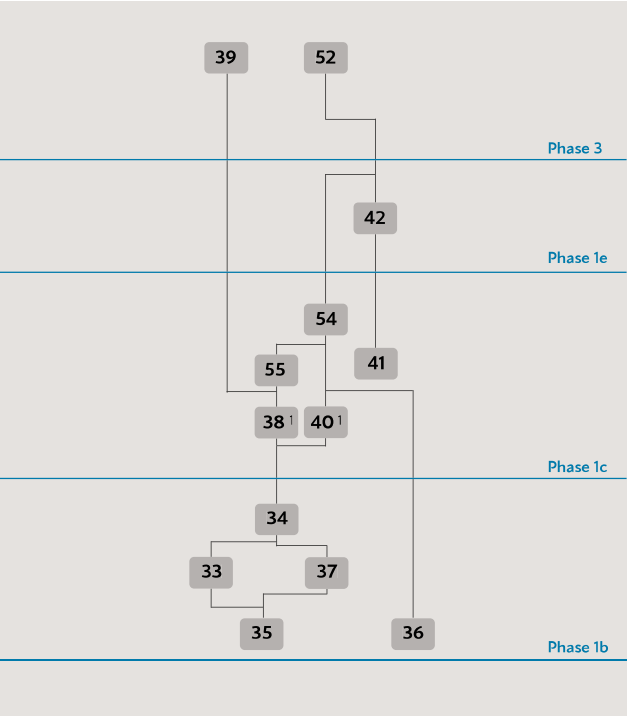
sub-phase 1a	phase 2
sub-phase 1b	phase 3
sub-phase 1c	
sub-phase 1d	
sub-phase 1e	

E3: LIST OF MSUS

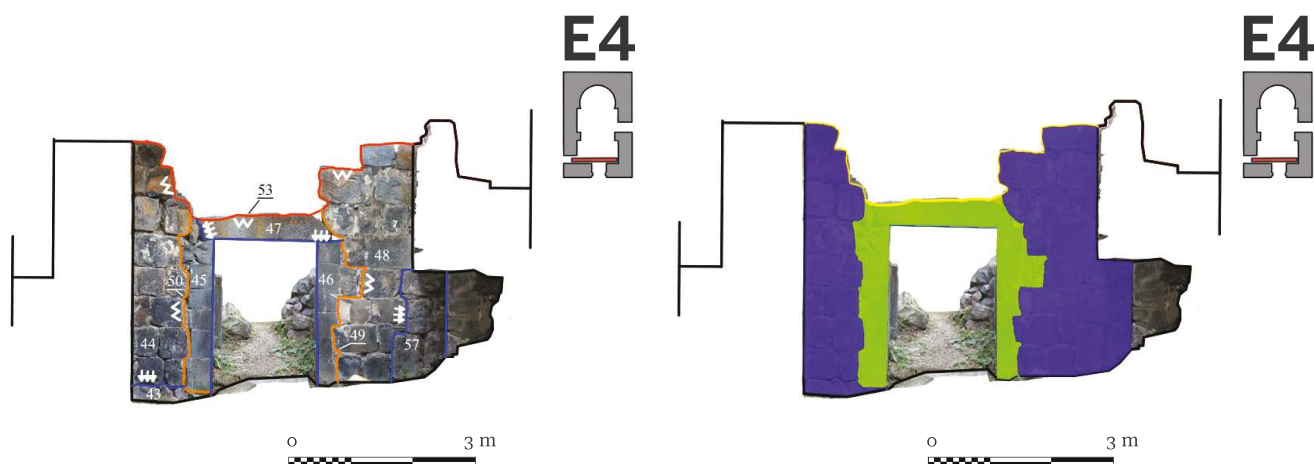
ID MSU	Definition	Later than	Earlier than	Contemporary with	Equal to
33	Small portion of masonry on the left side of E3, near the entrance	25 (E2), 35	34		
34	Small portion of masonry on the left side of the arch of the entrance	33, 37	38, 40	30	
35	Left jamb of the entrance in E3		33, 37		
36	Lower part of the pillar between the first and the second span in E3		41		
37	Arch of the southern entrance, in E3	35	34		
38	Small window on the upper left side in E3	34	39, 55	40	
39	Filling of the window MSU 38	38			
40	Small portion of the masonry on the upper part between the window MSU 38 and the pillar	34	41, 54	38	
41	Upper part of the pillar between the first and the second span in E3	36, 40	42		
42	Masonry of the first span in E3	41	52	44	
52	Collapse of the roof in E3	42, 52			51, 53

54	Small portion of masonry between E2 and E3	55	22		
55	Small portion of masonry in the upper part of E3, on the left side of the window MSU 38	38	54		

E3: MATRIX



E4: ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS



Stratigraphic analysis legend

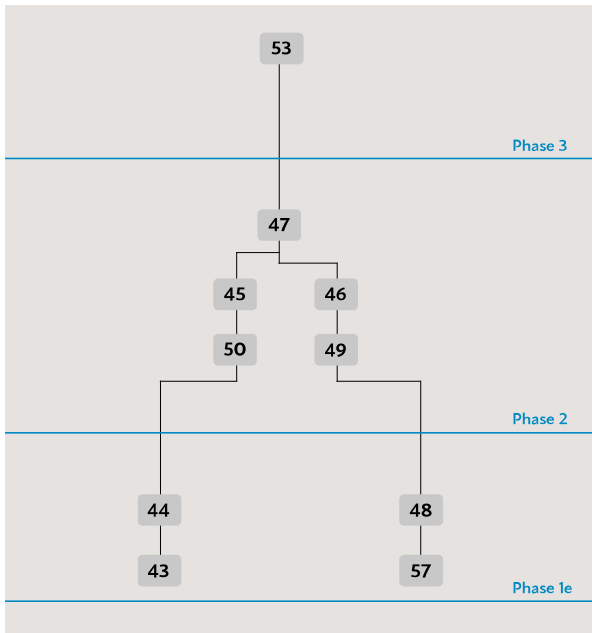
AC	Architectural Complex	III	Negative MSUs Id. Number	—	MSUs limits
B	Building	+++	abuts against (later than)	—	negative MSUs limits
E	Elevation	~	cut by (early than)	—	cracks
102	Positive MSUs Id. Number	~	linked to (contemporary with)	—	damaged surface

Constructive phases legend

sub-phase 1a	phase 2
sub-phase 1b	phase 3
sub-phase 1c	
sub-phase 1d	
sub-phase 1e	

E4: LIST OF MSUS

ID MSU	Definition	Later than	Earlier than	Contemporary with	Equal to
43	Lower part (foundation) of the left side of the masonry of the counter façade		44		
44	Left portion of the masonry of the counter façade	43	50	42	
45	Left jamb of the western entrance (reconstruction) in E4	50	47		
46	Right jamb of the western entrance (reconstruction) in the counter façade E4	49	47		
47	Lintel of the western entrance (reconstruction) in the counter façade E4	45, 46	53		
48	Right portion of the masonry of the counter façade E4	57	49		
49	Cut for the reconstruction of the western entrance (right side)	48	46		
50	Cut for the reconstruction of the western entrance (left side)	44	45		
53	Collapse visible in E4	47			
57	Small portion of masonry to connect the side chapel and the counter façade E4	/	48		



F.C.

APPENDIX

THE OLD CHURCH (9th c.): AN ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION ¹⁹

Cecilia Luschi, Laura Aiello

This small building is located on the south-eastern edge of Yeghegis, not far from the town's main road, about 100 meters from the church of St Astuatsatsin (Mother of God) and less than 600 meters from the famous Zorats' Church. It is within a garden, on private property. However, the area is subject to restrictions according to cultural heritage protection laws, even if this building has not been included in a historical-descriptive catalogue. Nothing is known about the dedication of the church since it is not mentioned in the historical sources. During the 2018 archaeological survey, Prof. Hamlet Petrosyan identified an inscription inside the doorway, on the southern side. The inscription is published in this volume for the first time. The denomination Old Church refers to its early date, which is now confirmed by its ninth-century inscription.

The architectural structure has a single apsidal hall and belongs to a type of ecclesiastical buildings widely diffused in the various historical periods, according to Paolo Cuneo.²⁰ The church is built with double-layer walls with an internal nucleus, into which doors and windows open in square ashlar. Generally, it has architraves with monolithic blocks modelled *ad hoc*. It is difficult to form a clear idea of the details of the building's ground plan because it is partially buried and embedded within an artificial

¹⁹ Architectural surveys and their representations included in this analysis – plans, façades, sections, photomaps and 3D models – have been produced by the dida Research Group of the University of Florence, including: dida Mission Director Cecilia Luschi, and collaborators Laura Aiello, Beatrice Stefanini, Francesco Trovatielli, Alessandra Vezzi, Marta Zerbini, Sara Masi, Filippo Prodi, and Domenico Rivetti. Surveying operations were carried out according to an integrated method that combines direct and photogrammetric surveying, developing the 3D digital reworking of the object. Cecilia Luschi, University of Florence (dida Department), cecilia.luschi@unifi.it; Laura Aiello, University of Florence, aura.aiello@unifi.it

²⁰ Paolo Cuneo, *Architettura armena dal quarto al diciannovesimo secolo*, Rome 1988, vol. I, pp. 28–57.

terrace. Judging from the situation of the entrances, buried halfway, the original ground level was much lower. In light of the evidence we have today, it is not possible to delineate the exterior shape of the church in its entirety.

Proceeding inwards, a large architrave stretches above the entrance and, after crossing the threshold, the space is organised in a single nave, now without a roof. The interior space ends with an elongated semicircular apse. The hall is marked in the middle by two semi-pillars leaning directly against the perimeter wall, which originally had to have a bearing function for the covering arc, now totally lost. The structural composition of the pillars is characterized by their arrangement in rows of one or two stone blocks. These are assembled and connected to the walls through a precise interlocking stereotomic cut.

There are two doorways along the nave. The first opens into the north wall of the nave, adhering to the counter-façade wall. It is surmounted by a rectilinear architrave and is currently totally obstructed due to collapses and embankments. The second doorway is located along the south wall, adhering to the side of the central semi-pillar, and is characterized by a different opening profile. On the inside, it is surmounted by a round stone arch composed of five shaped ashlar of different sizes that create a passage intrados. Externally, the opening is architraved by a single monolithic squared ashlar placed on the shutter of the internal intrados. An ashlar bearing an epigraph is positioned on the inner side of the left jamb of the door, as documented in this volume. Presently, the passage is buried from the exterior for approximately one meter, yet it still permits the viewer to observe the interior of the church.

Internally, at the edge of the left jamb of the arch opening, there is a rectangular window with an architrave, partially obstructed by the collapse of the wall filling. From a functional point of view, while the first doorway seems to suggest a possible connection with a further internal compartment within the compositional organization of the church, the second undoubtedly leads to the exterior.

The area of the apse is distinguished by an elevation of the floor, presumably to emphasize the

presbytery, and the apsidal basin has a span equivalent to the distance between the two extending pillars. The curve does not appear to be perfectly hemicircular. Instead, it appears to rectify itself near the two side jambs, thus presenting an elongated configuration. Above the apse, there are openings made in different rows of masonry, with a straight architrave, which takes advantage of the arrangement of the upper ashlar. In particular, the opening on the left side of the apse shows a lintel segment slightly modelled in a lowered arch. Given the architectural types present in the area, it is plausible to hypothesize that the covering of the apse was a semi-shell in stone ashlar.

Some squared stones, presumably belonging to the church building or its annexes, have been reused on the upper parts of the neighbouring houses and are recognizable by the presence of engraved crosses.