

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
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Master of Science in Sustainable Architecture
Honors theses

The universities and the education system of medieval Armenia

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The aim of this study was to examine in historical sequence the architectural development of school buildings in Armenia, focusing primarily on the buildings of higher education in the Middle Ages: *vardapetaran*. By this research I tried to determine whether the experience of monastic education in medieval Armenia generated school architecture, or other specific artistic shapes. It has been also tried to verify if there is a connection of functional and spatial character between school buildings, such as buildings intended for educational activities, the *scriptoria* and libraries, as well as the relation of these architectures to the monastic complex in whole.

Already in the beginning of the V cen. in Armenia emerged schools with education in Armenian, referred to as *Դպրոց (dprotz)*, and this type of schools existed in almost all the monasteries, while schools of a superior order - the *vardapetaran* - only in the most important monasteries. Aside from the term *Դպրոց (dprotz)*, mentioned above, schools, in accordance with their character and importance, were known by other names, too, such as *Դպրատուն (dpratun)*, *Դպրանոց (dpranots)*, *Վարժարան (varzharan)*, etc.

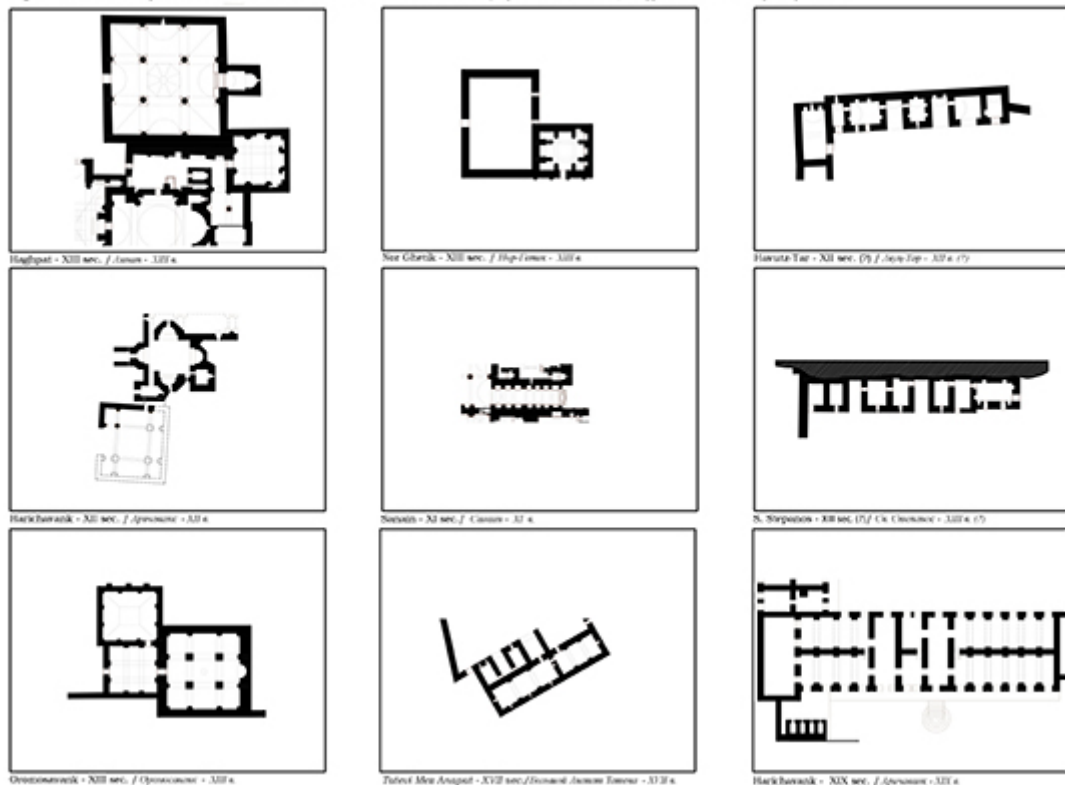
For the schools of superior order, along with the term *Վարդապետարան (vardapetaran)*, were used other terms, too, such as *Ակադեմիա (akademia)* and *Ճեմարան (tshemaran)*.

From the analysis of the *varapetarans*, examined in current work, we can identify some specific features of the buildings for education purposes. In the monastery complexes, schools were usually located inside the external fence. There was a tight connection among the teaching and learning spaces, as were the "classrooms", the *scriptoria* and the *gradaran* (libraries), and usually these were separated from the worship buildings. Often, the school buildings had a single entrance which was generally on the west side. As a rule in the school spaces there were no niches, which was the distinctive feature of the *gradaran*. The sizes and shapes of these school environments are different, as it is illustrated in the comparison table (see Annex 1). The external shapes of school buildings' structures are quite clear and simple. The walls are smooth and, referring to different examples, made of rough or processed stones. The decoration is basically very modest. Even in the buildings of the *gavit*, architects have rejected the compositional complexity, which was rather typical of this type of buildings; the covers of buildings were kept very simple and only the central sections had modest ornamentation.

We may say that in Medieval Armenia there was no specific model or a relatively widespread architectural form of a school building: it is possible to come across isolated environments (as in Sanahin and Nor-Ghetik), while in other cases a range of environments is interconnected with one another, creating in this way a distinct group. The most interesting examples of school buildings, in my opinion, are those of *gavits*, among which it is worth mentioning Haghpata, Horomosavank, Harichavank. Several arguments led me to the hypothesis that the *gavit* of Harichavank was built for specifically didactic activities. In addition, from the historical sources we know that between XI and XIII cen. in this monastery there was a school of a higher order, a real *tchemaran*.

In Armenia there are also other examples of *vardapetarans* which have been preserved in relatively acceptable conditions, but their geographical position made it almost impossible to study them more in-depth. Aside from the school buildings considered in this work, in Medieval Armenia there was a large number of different *vardapetarans*, academies and schools which, unfortunately, were destroyed over time.

Fig. 108 Tabella comparativa delle costruzioni di carattere scolastico - 1: 500 / Сравнительная таблица сооружений учебного характера - 1: 500



Annex 1

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