

CONNECTION BETWEEN EASTERN TRADITIONS AND INTERIOR DESIGN OF TRADITIONAL ARMENIAN HOUSES

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СВЯЗЬ ВОСТОЧНЫХ ТРАДИЦИЙ С ИНТЕРЬЕРАМИ ТРАДИЦИОННЫХ АРМЯНСКИХ ЖИЛЫХ ДОМОВ

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Abstract

This article presents the connection between traditional Armenian interiors and ancient Eastern traditions, with a focus on various aspects of Armenian daily life and interior design up to the early 20th century. It also provides a detailed analysis of the significance of the concept of Armenian hearth, construction features, architectural and building terminology shared across the region.

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается связь между традиционным армянским интерьером и древними восточными традициями, с акцентом на различные аспекты армянского быта и оформления интерьера вплоть до начала XX века. Также представлен подробный анализ значения армянского очага, особенностей строительства, а также архитектурная и строительная терминологии, распространённая в регионе.

Keywords: Armenian architecture, traditional house, interior.

Ключевые слова: армянская архитектура, традиционный дом, интерьер.

Throughout the centuries-long evolution of Armenian architecture, the nation's complex and often tragic history has played a pivotal role. The prolonged absence of statehood, along with centuries of coexistence with neighboring peoples, led to mutual cultural influences that shaped not only Armenian daily life but also that of surrounding people. Inevitably, regardless of our attitude towards those peoples, cultural blending took place, including in architecture and construction, which became integral aspect of daily life since everyday life often required adapting to or accepting different rules of the game. Architecture and construction were no exception, as they too were an important part of our daily life. This phenomenon is particularly evident in ethnographic materials, especially in examples of traditional vernacular residential architecture, most notably in the terminology used by ordinary people, as well as in various customs that were practiced in the same regions. For instance, in Kharberd vilayet, the homes of *aghas* (informal leader of the village) and notables - among the most lavish, were divided into two parts: *haremlik* and *selamlık*. Interestingly, although neither Kurds nor Armenians traditionally practiced *namahrami* (the custom requiring women to avoid being seen by men), they still built a separate structure near the guesthouse specifically for women and children, where they dined apart from the men. The doors of the *ghonakh* (guesthouse) compound were called *ghanatly*, referring to double doors. The main entrance door also had two leaves. On the second floor of the *agha's* house was the *divankhane* or guestroom, next to which were the dining room and armory [1, p.204].

Another noteworthy aspect is the wooden ceiling, which, although supported by beams, was covered by a

decorative layer what we now call a false ceiling. Ethnographic descriptions mention the house of Seyit-Jafer in the village of Dashtak, where the sacred fire was located on the right side of the entrance. This fire was not used for baking bread or lavash, only for *lokhme* (sacred bread). Such sacred hearths, called *khanetan*, had to burn continuously throughout the year. If the fire went out accidentally, the house had to be rebuilt, and the new fire had to be brought from another still-burning hearth. The hearth was overseen by the family elder, while the grandmother granted permission to transport the fire between homes, and only the great-grandfather could allow it to be taken out of the village. Invaders, enemies, or wrongdoers were forbidden from receiving fire. Households with a sacred hearth enjoyed immunity, neither their members, nor their livestock could be stolen.

In the case of inheritance, the responsibility of maintaining the hearth fell to the eldest son; daughters had no such right. However, if a daughter bore a child, she was obliged to bring wood from the forest to keep the hearth burning. The firewood was called *lota*. This tradition was shared by both Armenians and Kurds.

During the summer in the *yayla* (highland pastures), a new hearth was lit from the sacred flame, and this process was ceremonial. An unmarried boy carried the fire. The mother lit a torch made from twigs, gave it to the fastest boy, who kissed her hand for a blessing. The route to the *yayla* was divided into seven equal parts, with young boys waiting along the way to relay the fire. The first boy to arrive received gifts: the groom's belt, *tatman* (woolen footwear), a pair of *booj* (woolen slippers), and for one day he was treated like a

king. A sacrificial offering was made at the new hearth [1.p.214].

This sacred *tonratoon* (oven house) featured carpets with coverings called *ghunti minder*, and cushions made from carpet pieces. Clan houses of the same region also had unique construction rituals. Before building, a ceremony was held: the family elder dug the first foundation pit, the priest blessed the house, a sacrificial offering was made, and the grandmother poured a handful of wheat or barley into the pit while reciting a protective prayer, naming all four cardinal directions, crossing herself three times, and placing symbolic items - a piece of wood, a horseshoe, garlic, blue beads, warm ashes from the oven, and chickpeas into the pit.

Once the foundation (about one meter deep) was laid, the builder received gifts: a pair of *toma-tozlookh*, woolen *booj*, *tatman*, or other handwoven items.

These customs existed not only in Western Armenia but also in Eastern Armenia. In Mkrtich Armen's work *Hegnar Aghbyoor The Spring Heghnar*, he describes a Gyumri resident placing an axe, vodka, ring, and cross in the four corners of his new home during construction. Some traditions were shared across both regions, for example, newlyweds often stayed in the pantry, possibly symbolizing fertility.

An especially fascinating feature of Javakhk (Armenian-populated province, now in modern Georgia) homes is the *yazloogh* room, also called the summer room, which had large wall-sized windows. In Eastern Armenian interiors, *takht* (raised seating platform) played a key role. In Javakhk, two such platforms called *sat* were placed next to the fireplace, in the *oda* section adjacent to the stable. Only wealthy families could afford to cover the *sat* with carpets.

As for interior renovation, many related terms were of foreign origin and are no longer in use. The film *Namoos* vividly displays strict Armenian moral codes; in some cases, even stricter than regional norms.

Gevorg Stepanian's article, quotes a section from *Mshak* daily that in Shamakhi, Armenians and Tatars (now Azerbaijanis) lived in separate quarters, and the Armenian homes were more luxurious - single, double, or even triple-storied. In Goghtn district, houses were constructed following Armenian, Persian, or European styles [2.p.83].

The typical Armenian house type, *karadam*, common in Karabakh, Zangezur, Goghtn, and Nakhichevan, had roofs supported initially by four columns, later

two, and eventually just one. The wall niches were called *ptrkhan*, and the central room eventually became a pantry. According to ethnographer Lalayan, Persian influence introduced larger windows and *ptrkhan* into *karadam*-type homes. Persian-style homes had four rooms, a pantry (*maghaza*), and a *bagdaduts-choolan* (storage room) [3,p110].

Mkrtich Armen's *Hegnar Aghbyoor The Spring Heghnar* emphasizes that Gyumri's architectural identity was shaped by migrants from Western Armenia, calling it "a city of newcomers." Already in 1920, the cohabitation of Armenians, Greeks, and Turks had changed significantly, it was no that before the Armenian Genocide [4.c.24]. One aspect of this was separation of bathhouses for Christians and Muslims.

Conclusion

The connection between Armenian residential architecture and Eastern traditions is evident. This study explored architectural elements, interior and exterior design features, traditions, and terminology likely influenced by Ancient East. Terminology, in particular, needs further research, as it offers deep insight into the historical and cultural exchange that shaped Armenian domestic architecture.

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