

Armenia



The First Christian Nation

301 AD

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THE FIRST CHRISTIAN NATION
301AD

The history of Armenia traces back nearly 5,000 years. Armenia lies in the highlands surrounding the Biblical mountain of Ararat where, it is said, Noah's Ark came to rest after the great flood.

In 301 AD, Armenia was the first nation to accept Christianity as a state religion. King Tiridates III proclaimed Christianity as a State Religion after he was converted to Christianity by Gregory The Illuminator, following his imprisonment, by the King, in a dungeon for 13 years, due to his proselytizing Christianity throughout the Kingdom.

To date, Armenian's have maintained their Faith and Christianity; however, it came with considerable trials and tribulations. Due to its being in the crossroads of the Silk Road and, at first, surrounded and invaded by Pagan countries, Mongols and finally the Ottoman Turks, who in 1915 perpetrated the first genocide of the twentieth century, where approximately 1,500,000 Armenians lost their lives.

This book is a visual compilation of a few of the 4,000 ancient Armenian Churches and Monasteries, which are still standing and many of which are still functioning.

About the Author

Berj Alex Bahtiarian

Berj Alex Bahtiarian worked and lived in Armenia for approximately ten years, during which time he traveled to, photographed and digitally painted, a number of ancient monasteries and churches.

“I visualized the history, the stories, the trials, tribulations and pleasures of the people that lived in and walked through these buildings. I was standing in the middle of structures dating back as far as seventeen hundred years and was fascinated by all of them. In a small way, I wanted to document it, in my own way”.



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Cover Photo:

The Monastery of Khor Virab and Mount Ararat

Back Cover Photo:

The ruins of the “Church of the Hripsimian Virgins”

Location: Western Armenia

In the mid 10th Century the city of Ani was known as the
“City of 1000 Churches”.

Dictionary

The Meaning of Armenian Names and Words

Geghard – Spear

Khor Virab – Deep Dungeon

Khachkar – Cross Stone

Noravank – New Monastery

Saint Astvadzadzin – Holy Mother of God

Saghmos – Psalm

Sevan – A name

Vank – Monastery

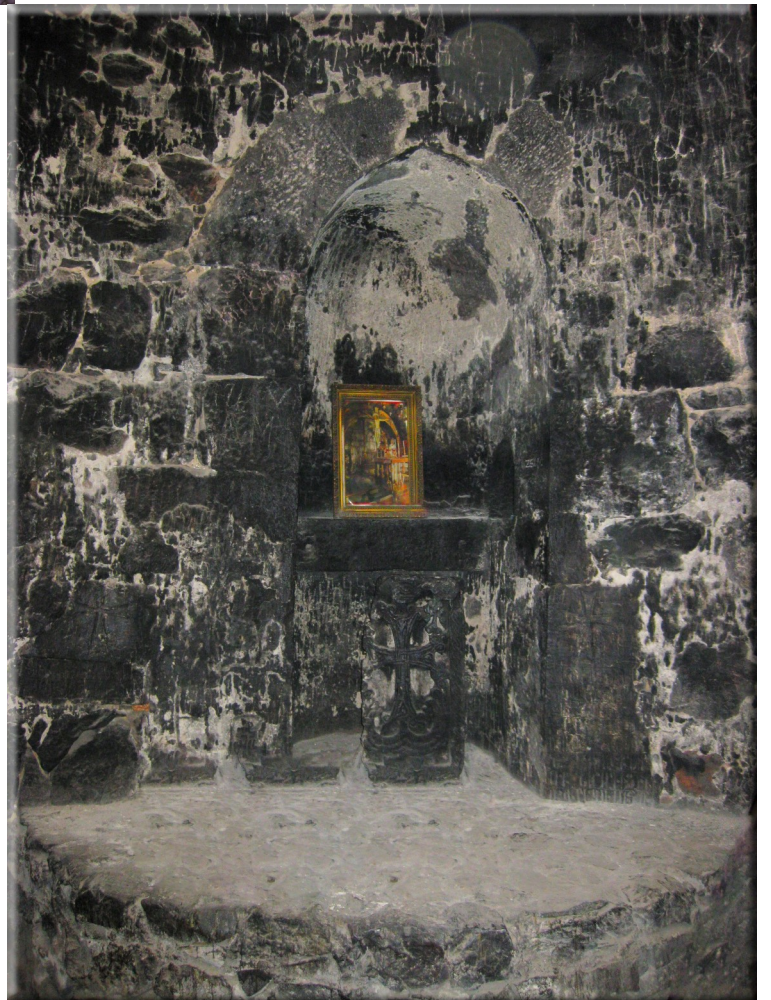


4th Century - Khor Virab
Mount Ararat Background





The Dungeon



The Monastery of Khor Virab



Khor Virab, (Deep Dungeon), adjacent to the Turkish border, is notable as the site where King Tiridates III imprisoned Gregory the Illuminator, for thirteen years for proselytizing Christianity, until the King freed him, converted to Christianity and declared Christianity as its national religion.



4th Century - Geghard Monastery



The monastery complex, founded by Gregory the Illuminator, in the early 4th Century, was carved into the mountain, which was the site of a spring, which had been sacred in pre-Christian times. However, the main chapel, as it stands today, was built around it in 1215 AD.

The monastery became famous because of the relics it housed. The most celebrated of which was the spear which wounded Jesus on the Cross. The spear was allegedly brought to Armenia by the Apostle Thaddeus and is today housed in the museum in Echmiadzin, the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church.



4th & 9th Centuries - Sevanavank



History has it that a pagan temple once occupied this site overlooking Lake Sevan (approximately 6,200 feet above sea level), but was replaced by a church in 305, by Gregory the Illuminator.

This region was one of the first places of the spread of Christianity in Armenia.

Two additional churches, were built within the monastery in the 9th century.

Armenian chroniclers first mentioned the city of Ani as far back as the 5th Century as a fortress controlling that portion of the Silk Road.

It wasn't until the mid 10th century that it reached its splendor, became the capital of Armenia and known as "City of 1000 Churches".

Ani, with its many churches and fortifications, at the time, was amongst the most technically and artistically advanced complexes in the world. At its height, Ani was also one of the world's largest cities.

Today, the archaeological site of Ani is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

*5th Century
Remains of the Church of the Hripsimian Virgins
Ani, Western Armenia*





*6th Century - St. Astvadzadzin Church
Jrapı, Armenia*



*St. Astvadzadzin Church built during the latter part of the 6th century
and is about 1 km south of a 1st millenium BC cemetery.*

The church was rebuilt in 1885 and still used today.



7th Century - Harichavank, Harich, Armenia



Harichavank, once known as one of the most famous monastic centers in Armenia, was devoted to the writing, copying and illuminating manuscripts, by the monks.

Although the Monastery was built sometime in the 7th century, the existence of the village, known as the fortress, at the time, dates back to the 2nd century BC.



*7th Century - St. Christopher Monastery,
Dashtadem, Armenia*



A restored, 7th century, Armenian Church located in a cemetery 2.2 kilometers (1.4 mi) southeast of Dashtadem village.

Adjacent to the church is a 13th century rectangular tower with sloped walls. It has small windows, but no door to access the interior.

The Khachkars (Cross Stones) are a part of the cemetery.



9th Century - Datev Monastery



Built on a plateau, the monastery was established in the beginning of the 9th century. The complex became a center of study, a center for economics and politics in the region and in the 13th century established a university.

In 1995 Datev Monastery was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

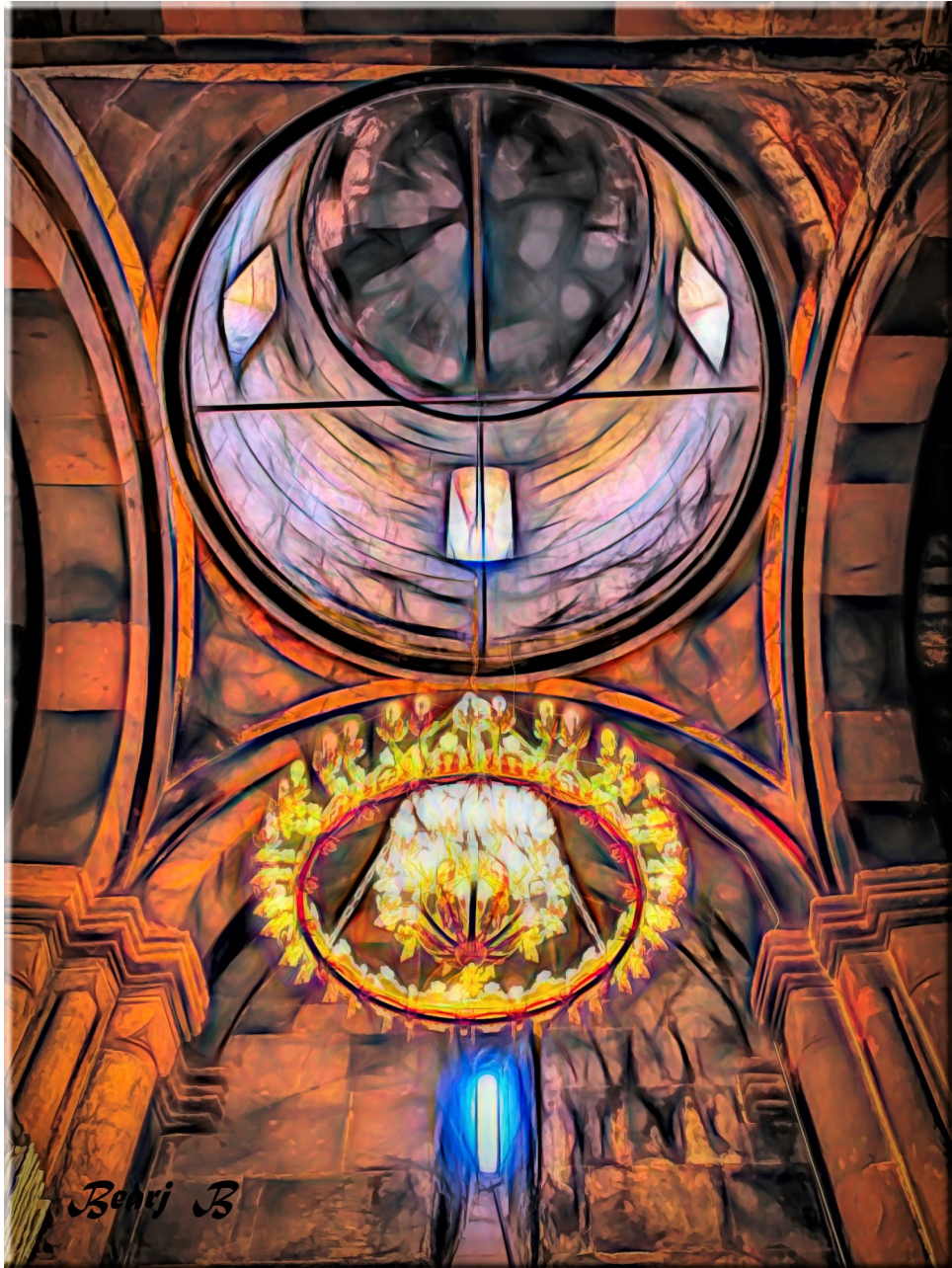


10th Century - Gndevank Monastery



Located in a canyon, which is snowed in most of the winter, this small monastery built around 931 – 936 AD, is still functioning.

There are five monks living there year round who care for the church and grounds. During the winter, they are mostly isolated, receiving deliveries of supplies about once a month.



*12th Century - Saghmosavank
The Monastery of the Psalms*



According to legend, Gregory, the Illuminator, was the founder of the church. Which would have been in the 4th Century. It is said that Saint Gregory saw this place from the slopes of Mount Aragats and decided to build a church there. Later he taught psalms to clergymen in the monastery.

However, Saghmosavank is mentioned in historical sources only since the beginning of the 12th century.



*A Khachkar
(A Cross Stone)*

*A unique Armenian art-form which
reached its peak in the 12-13th
Centuries.*

*Even today, they are used as corner
stones for churches and other
buildings*

*They are recognized by UNESCO as
a part of Armenia's culture*

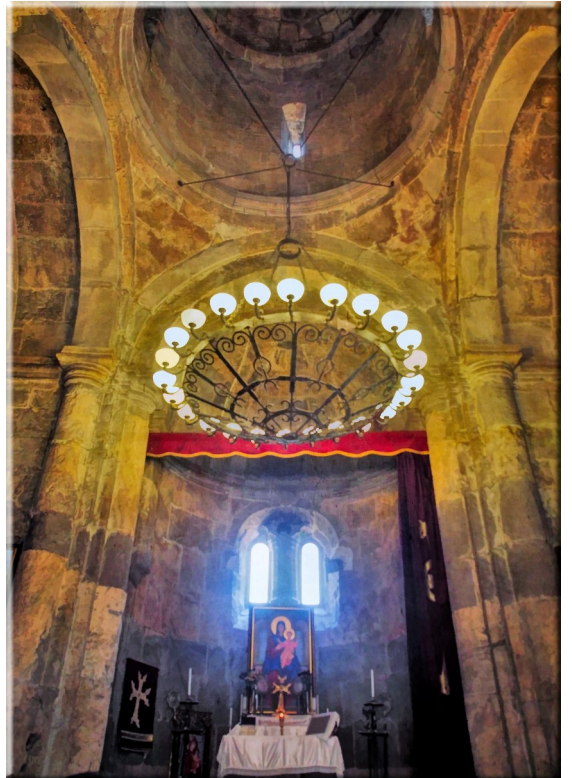


12th Century - Goshavank Monastery



The Monastery of Gosh, named after its founder, Mkhitar Gosh, replaced the older monastery of "Ghetik", which was destroyed by an earthquake in 1188 AD.

Mkhitar Gosh, a statesman, scientist and writer, was the author of the first criminal code, was instrumental in building the monastery.



13th Century - Haghartsin Monastery



Actually the oldest building in the complex is St. Gregory the Illuminator's Church, which was built between the 9th and 10th centuries. The monastery is also the site of the first musical university of Armenia.

Current renovation began in 2011.

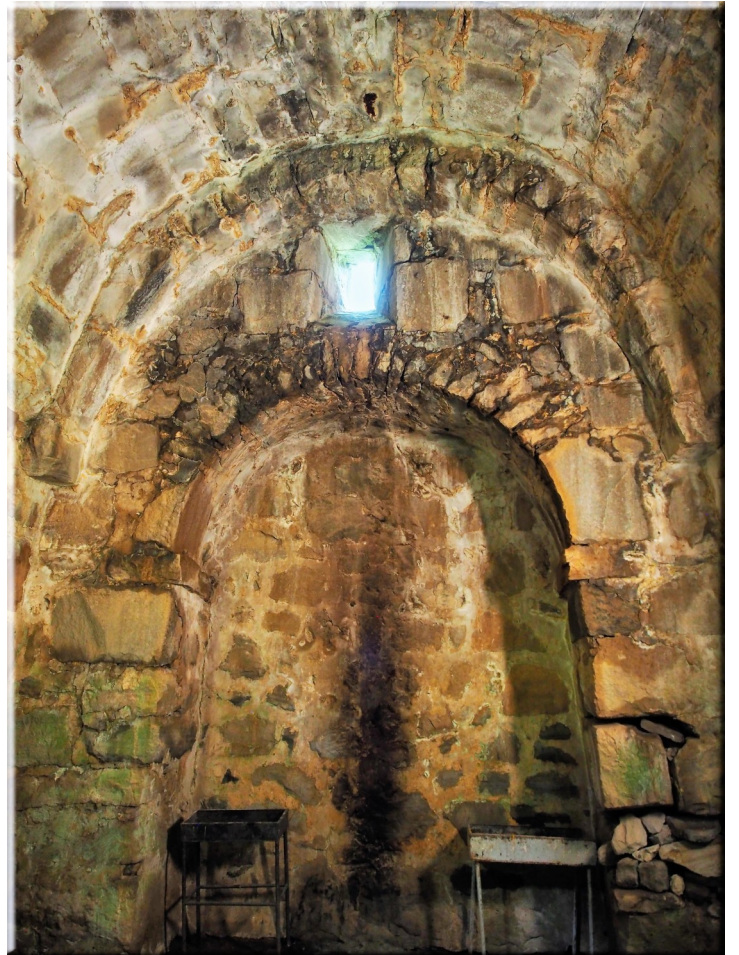


13th Century - Noravank Monastery



Founded in 1205 AD by Bishop Hovannes, the former Abbot of Vahanavank, the monastery is located in Syunik Province of Armenia, which is home to one of the oldest wineries in the world. Dating back over 6,000 years.

The largest church in the Noravank complex is St. Astvadzadzin Church, which is unique in that it has access to the second floor by way of narrow steps jutting out from the face of building.



13th Century - St. Mary's Church, Matosavank



After a long hike in the forest, outside of the city of Dilijan, Armenia, you come upon the remains of St. Mary's Church, built in 1247 AD, which is all that is left of the Matosavank monastery, which has been taken over by nature.

