

THE COMBINATION OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN ARMENIAN
VISUAL ARTS

Laporte-Eftekharian S. (GRIM - Groupe de recherche en iconographie médiévale,
France)

s.laporte@scarlet.be

Keywords: visual arts, ornament, iconography, tradition, modernity.

The dialectic between figure and ornament is particularly relevant in Armenian art: whether in illuminated manuscripts or in khatchkars, the coupling of both modes of expression has been constant for centuries and combines Armenian traditional patterns with multiple influences (Byzantine, Sassanid, Latine). Figurative and ornamental art coexist in religious architecture as well, the Palatine Church of the Holy Cross on *Akhtamar* Island offering one of the most salient examples with its mural paintings, bas-reliefs and friezes.

I intend to analyze an ornament whose presence is continuous in Armenian art: it is to be found even before the beginning of the Christian era and has been used as a major religious symbol for centuries. I will illustrate my purpose with examples taken not only from the geographical area of Armenian Highland but as well from abroad, as Armenian patrons of the Diaspora also did make use of this ornament in the churches that they built. By adopting part of their iconographic repertoire from new sources and combining them with traditional ornaments, the artists working for them succeeded in blending tradition with modernity. In appropriating these aesthetic achievements of the Diaspora, the artists of the Motherland will then in turn progressively but definitely enter the new period of modern Times.