

# Structure of the New Julfa Churches of Isfahan after the Migration of Armenians in the Safavid Era

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## Abstract

Armenia is one of the areas witnessing the successive attacks from different ethnic groups due to its appropriate geographic location. The frequent attacks by the Ottoman in this territory caused the Armenians to migrate from the Julfa region to Iran during Shah Abbas I, thus the construction of distinct churches with Armenian churches in Esfahan was fulfilled. The aim of the present study was to explain and analyze the restructuring of new Armenian churches in Esfahan, relying on the history of Armenian churches and influence by the mosques in Esfahan. The hypothesis of the present study is based on the importance of holding the "religious ceremonies" causing the reliance on the main indicators of the spatial organization of churches, and on the other hand, the influence of the elements of the Safavid era New Julfa churches. The research method in this study is based on desk studies, documentation, field observation, and photography, with a comparative and descriptive-analytical approach. The results of this research indicate that Shah Abbas I who was well aware of the Armenian capabilities, facilitated their migration to Iran that made these people follow the new Julfa churches in accordance with the physical characteristics and instruments of the Safavid era's religious buildings (such as geometry of square and rectangular plan forms, the application of spherical domes instead of cones and the use of decorative artifacts and plant designs in the inner surfaces of the church). This trend which not only distinguished these churches from the architecture of the Armenian churches, but also by following the dominant principles of the Armenian church structures in the interior space of the churches, the Armenians could maintain their independent ethnic and religious identity in that respect.

**Keywords:** Isfahan; Safavid era; New Julfa; Church; Armenia

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most important political events in the time of Shah Abbas I was the Iran-Ottoman wars in the land of Armenia; frequent attacks of the Ottoman army, led to the destruction of this land and the migration of Armenians to Iran and to Isfahan. This migration is not limited to these people, but it was politically and strategically important, and the purpose of Shah Abbas I was not only the comfort and well-being of the Armenian people, but also military measures, including the destruction of the Armenian region, with the aim of preventing the establishment of a military base for the Ottomans in this area. For utilizing the capabilities of the Armenians in achieving his goals and preventing these immigrant people from returning to their homeland, Shah Abbas I considered special privileges for them, to the extent of constructing a specific area for the residence of the Armenians in Isfahan, which was named "Julfa", derived from Aras Julfa – the Old Julfa – in the Armenian territory. In addition, not only did he issue commands for their autonomy in the area, but also agreed to provide them with material and spiritual

needs by giving religious freedom and building a church in Isfahan.

The churches built in the Safavid era in the Julfa neighborhood of Isfahan created unique examples of combined Islamic art and architecture.

In this regard, considering that every cultural work has a special status, the churches of Isfahan are not excluded from this and are important for religious life, just like mosques. Therefore, the church is considered as one of the institutions necessary for the Armenian community of Isfahan. If we have a brief look at their structures for the continued Armenian religious life in Isfahan, we will notice the connection of the Safavid society with the Armenian inhabitants.

In fact, similar to any other cultural works, churches can express and reveal a part of the history of Safavid period and the ruling community. In fact, churches are a manifestation of the religious life of the immigrant ethnic group, and the way they are constructed and the state of their adaptation to the cultural and religious conditions of Isfahan region, as well as the elements and decorations related to the Safavid era in them and the combination of

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the Armenian-Iranian culture and art and the Safavid style are important. However, what is of particular importance is the analysis of the churches decorations, in particular, the elements belonging to the Safavid era architecture that are related to the elements used in the churches including the formation of churches, the geographical location and the difference between the churches of Julfa and the churches of Armenia with respect to the above structures. Given the history of Armenian churches architecture, this research is analyzing the changes in churches of new Julfa in Isfahan. Here, one can ask the following question: What changes in the structure of the new Julfa churches were made in Iran following the migration of Armenians? In this regard, it was tried by a comparative study to identify the changes made in the architecture of the New Julfa churches, in which the physical construction, decorations structures, and structures of the mosques and religious buildings of the Safavid era were specifically

considered as a case study. It can be notified through this comparison that by combining the architecture of the churches of Armenia and utilizing the architectural features of the mosques of Iran during the Safavid period, the Armenians were able to create unique examples of the new Julfa churches.

## 2. Research Backgrounds

Considering that studying the history and architecture of sacred and religious places requires paying attention to various factors influenced by the thinking and art of any period, exploring the previous studies that evaluated these buildings and the effects of religious ideology can be effective (Table 1).

Table 1  
A number of articles submitted with respect to the research topic

Researchers	Research title	Research aims	Findings and results
Nasr (1996)	Islamic art and Spirituality	The study of unifying factors in Islamic buildings	Presenting symbols, motifs and decorative arrays used in the Islamic buildings
Malkomian (2001)	Armenian churches in Iran	Explanation and background of the emergence of Christianity in Iran and Armenia, as well as the formation trend of Armenian churches and their architectural structures	Presenting and expressing the name and history of Esfahan churches along with the structure of the common meanings and terminology of the ceremonies in the church
Hovian (2001)	Armenians of Iran	History of Esfahan Churches	Providing the details about the images and decorative arrays used in Esfahan churches
Aarabi Hashemi (2000)	Julfa churches of Armenians	Investigating the establishment date of churches and their increased number	Presenting historical and geographical data of the Julfa region churches, Large Sq. and Small Sq.
Okhovat et al. (2008)	The manifestation of Islamic philosophy and Christian philosophy in the geometry of mosques and churches	Investigating the geometry of spatial connections in the mosques and churches, the distinctions and differences and the impact of religion philosophy on the design process	Religious instructions can help obtain general goals for organizing the space
Zamani (2008)	Effectiveness of the decorations of Esfahan churches achieved from the Safavid period architecture	Investigation of the effectiveness of the architecture of Esfahan churches achieved from the Safavid period	The use of geometric designs, muqarnas and arabesque designs are the commonalities in the decoration of the Safavid architectural buildings and churches in Esfahan.
Pahlevanzadeh (2012)	Formation of mosques and their physical differences with the sanctuaries of other religions, synagogues and churches	A description of the formation of mosques and its impact on the patterns of later mosques, and investigating the differences and similarities with other religions	The purpose of religious spaces to promote the spirituality, institutionalizing the religious behavior of the public and the unity of the worshippers, and being present before God
Fathi Azar and Hamzehnejad (2014)	Semantics of the centrality on mosque and church	Investigating the reasons for the formation and general body of the mosque and the church and the attitude of Muslims and Christians in their temples with the category of structuralism	The centrality in the church leads to the materialism and relationship of the church with the elements and symbols of this world. However, the centrality in mosques has been formed by functional requirements, so the centrality in the mosque leads to the silence in the mind and the definition of the spatial unit

What distinguishes this research from the other cases that were discussed earlier is the examination of the conformity of the structures of the Armenian art and Islamic architecture in Esfahan Julfa churches. In fact, the spatial organization and plans, facades and decorations, and ultimately the materials and structural forms of the churches are analyzed in details in the course of such a discourse.

### **3. Comparative study of Armenian Churches and the New Julfa Churches in Isfahan**

The geographic and strategic location of the Armenian region and its location on the way of Silk Road and connecting Central Asia to Europe, on the one hand, created not only a mediating role in the intercultural transformations, but also it was considered as the transit route of commercial goods and the aspect for the relations between the East and the West. However, due to the influx of governments and their use of this location, it had no possibility to exploit the profits of commercial activities, and repeatedly witnessed the attacks of its neighboring countries, including the Ottoman state.

With the beginning of the reign of Shah Abbas I (996-1038 H./ 1588-1629 AD), the foreign situation of Iran was quite disturbed.

The Armenians lived in a very turbulent time during this period, and because of heavy taxes, religious harassment and insecurity, many residents of the areas sought refuge in the Safavid regime and encouraged Shah Abbas to take back the provinces that were assigned to the Ottomans (Turkaman, 1971: 637; Ghoukasian, 2016: 79). Thus, he decided to take over Yerevan. The route to enter Armenia was through the city of Julfa, and he had no option but to pass through city. However, it he encountered no difficulties to pass through the places that the Armenians

were residing, and he was entirely supported by them. Apparently, Shah Abbas was faced with the unique welcome from the Armenians in Armenia, which is a sign of the insurgence by the Ottomans in this region. In any case, the Safavid Shah could take many parts of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Qarabag without any war (Davrizhetsi, 1988: 16; Turkaman, 1971: 637; Mannajem Yazdi, 1987: 268). Then he moved the inhabitants of the Yerevan area, who had become homeless, to Iran (Karapetian, 2006: 32; Sarkisian et al., 1981: 258).

After the Armenians arrived in Iran, Shah Abbas I decided to settle them by the Zayandehrood River in an area, where the climate and living conditions were similar to their homeland (Jenab, 1992: 193; Falsafi, 1960: 206). However, it did not take long for the region to become a great magnificent city, and Shah Abbas called the name of the residence of Julfa, after the name of Aras Julfa, because of the Armenian attachment to him and welcoming him in Armenia (Pasdermajian, 1990: 294; Raien, 1977: 27).

By establishing many gardens in the new Julfa and turning this area into a fertile environment, he permitted the construction of churches and industrial facilities, decorations and independent operation of the council of churches (Derhohanian, 2000: 62, 63; Minasian, 1966: 5). Based on the existing information, there were 6 churches in Isfahan region and 24 churches in New Julfa until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century AD, among which 13 churches remained by now, since some of the churches were destroyed or abandoned at the period of Mahmoud Afghan (Derhohanian, 2000: 501). Today, some of the churches are entirely ruined and some are abandoned, and only 13 churches remained (Minasian, 2004: 55; Mirazimi, 2000: 237) (Table 2).

Table 2  
Name of the Existing Churches in New Julfa in Isfahan

Existing churches			
Name of the church	Year of construction	Location	Founder
Hagob Church (Yakob)	1016 H. (1607 AD)	Julfa Grand Sq.	With the cooperation of people
St. Georg Church	1020 H. (1611 AD)	Small Sq., Hakim Nezami St. (Gharib Ln.)	Khajeh Nazar
St. Mary's Church (Astuatsatsin)	1022 H. (1613 AD)	Julfa Grand Sq.	Khajeh Avetik(Baba Kian)
Stepanos Church	1023 H. (1614 AD)	Hakoup Jan District	With the cooperation of people
Yovhannes Mekrich-Meguerditch Church (St. John)	1031 H. (1621 AD)	Julfa Chaharsou District	Khajeh Yaghiazar Lazarian, With the cooperation of people
Catarine Church	1033 H. (1628 AD)	Julfa Chaharsou District	Khajeh Yaghiazar Lazarian
St. Bethlehem Church	1038 H. (1628 AD)	Julfa Grand Sq.	Khajeh Petros Valijanian
Nikoghayos Hayrapet Church	1040 H. (1630 AD)	Faragol (Fitan) District	With the cooperation of people
Gregory Lusavorich Church	1043 H. (1633 AD)	Julfa Small Sq.	Khajeh Khachk, with cooperation of people
Sarkis Church	1070 H. (1659 AD)	Yerevanis District	With the cooperation of people
St. Minas Church	1070 H. (1659 AD)	Daverj	With the cooperation of people
St. Nerses Church	1071 H. (1660 AD)	Koucher District	Avetik Dilanian (Odis Gilanian)
Vank Cathedral (Saint Amenaprgich)	1075 H. (1664 AD)	Julfa Grand Sq.	Kalif David, with cooperation of people

New Julfa architecture in Isfahan is unique due to the combination of Armenian and Persian architectural styles. Since the New Julfa Terrain was very flat and suitable for urbanization, it soon became evident in the development of its neighborhoods. Armenians of Isfahan - in the early 17th century AD, were the only Christians who had direct contact with Muslims. Therefore, if a politically motivated policy were not taken into account, it would have been possibly lead to religious disputes. Thus, Armenian architects decided to build churches in Iranian architecture style, sometimes similar to mosques.

Considering that Armenian architecture is influenced by the geographical location of this land and it is located between Iran and Greece and in a battlefield between the two mentioned governments, but in those days that Armenia could feel tranquility, it adapted from the Byzantine architecture and designs and created unique architectural constructions (Shavazi, 2002: 119 & 193). Meanwhile, before the emergence of Christianity, the Armenian religion was based on Mithraism and the religion of Anahita or Zoroastrians; Mithra was an Indo-

Iranian sun god in Hinduism, and he is praised as the binomial Mithra-Varuna (shekari niri, 2019: 37). By converting to Christianity, they continued praying God with conversion of their prayer places to the churches. Hence, despite the fact that the Armenians forgot Mithraism after the emergence of Christianity, the effects of this religion was quite evident in Armenia. Therefore, it can be said that while the Armenians favored the Religions of Mithraism and Zoroastrianism, they had the same architecture as the architecture adapted from these religions. However, unfortunately, references have not only pointed to this subject, but the texts suggest that they did not have a particular architecture before they followed Christianity. Certainly, however, the Armenian churches have been formed in their continuity with the religion of Mithraism since what can be deduced from the available evidences around churches such as the Qara (Black) Church is the possibility of building churches on fire temples, as the remains from the pre-Christianity are existing around it (Pourjafar & Shahidi, 2009: 24, 111) (Table 3).

Table 3  
Garni Temple in Armenia



By withdrawing from the controversy, the Armenian Church, especially the Byzantine Church, was trying to establish its own church independently. The churches of Armenia differed from those of the European churches, which had an extended cross pattern, and that the pattern was derived from the same architecture of prayer houses, which were mostly based on the pattern of four galleries that were gradually converted into an Armenian church by addition of extensions. The buildings of these churches had a dome in its center, which joined four galleries on four sides and converted into a vaulted or contracted cross pattern (Memarian, 2008: 212). An example of this pattern can be seen in the plan of the Etchmiadzin Cathedral in which the altar of the cathedral has allocated one of the galleries to itself and its entrance is at the opposite gallery in front of the altar.

On the other hand, although some of the churches have a basilica plan, the Armenian Churches plan is cross-shaped. In addition, under the influence of the Mithraeum buildings, they have three corridors joining each other, with the larger width of the middle corridor that were separated by the middle columns with arched ceilings. Evidence suggests that this pattern can often be observed in ancient Armenian churches such as the Gaghard,

Zvartnots, Khor-Virap, Tatev, Haghpat & Sanahin churches.

New Julfa churches are generally set in a rectangular square plan, but according to the temporal and spatial needs, the internal spaces and exterior shape of them have been altered. Thus, these churches can be classified into three categories.

1. Among the New Julfa Churches, the Hakoup Church is distinguished from other churches with its own single-section hall. This church has a quadrangle altar with arches, a few skylights and three small onion-shape domes.
2. Two other types of plans are used in other churches. One of these two types of architectural style is the three-part basilica style architecture, in which the interior is divided into three parts by the four main columns, and in principle, the middle level of the two lateral sections is larger. In these types of churches, the whole weight of the dome and the stems, i.e. supporting ring and the compressive and dispelling forces, are transferred and neutralized via vaults and the roofs on the columns. Sarkis, Stepanos,

Hovannes and Minas Churches are in this category.

3. Other types of plans are related to churches where, by removing the middle pillars and attaching them to thick walls and lateral barriers that are stable, the whole volume of the dome base and the dome is leaning against the arches and vaults, and as a result, the main hall of the inner area of the church becomes larger and more room for prayer and religious ceremonies are provided. This pattern is seen in Georg, St. Mary's, Catarina, Bethlehem, Nikolayos, Gregor, Norses and Vank Churches/Cathedrals.

Regarding the available references, it seems that what at first glance distinguishes Armenian churches from other churches of Christianity is their eastern-western orientation (Hovian, 2004: 15 and Burkhart, 2011: 61). In fact, the Armenian churches of Armenia have been built eastward under the influence of the Mithraism religion temples, which after the Armenian migration to Iran continued to evolve in the Julfa churches of Isfahan, and their altars are higher than the churchyard level similar to the Armenian churches.

Therefore, the most important features of the churches of Armenia can be found in the eastern and western directions as well as the placement of the altar on the east and its elevation from the ground level, which has been provided through two rows of access steps to the altar. The evidences and images remained from the Christian churches paintings in the early periods of Christianity indicate the dominance of the dominant thinking on the paintings and selection of the required subject based on the tradition of Armenian paintings. In the images, not only the Bible characters and the images of the saints are considered, but also the Armenian national and religious characters can be observed (Baybordian, 1996: 16). In addition, the decorations of the Armenian churches contain vegetarian and geometric patterns inspired by Armenian filigree, as if they were covered with woven borders and they cover all the levels and the doorways and are eye-catching, as an example of these patterns can be seen at Etchmiadzin Cathedral (Shavazi, 2002: 90). In addition, angelic images and numerous carvings of fruits such as grapes and pomegranates, and wild animals such as lions attacking cows, patterns of snakeheads, and images of eagles with extended wings are seen in some Armenian churches such as Gaghard, Zvartnots and Tatev.

However, the beautiful art and culture of Iranian and Armenian ethnicity combined with Mugharnas, girih tiles,

plant motifs such as arabesque and iconography can be seen in the entrance view of the Julfa churches in Isfahan. The other feature of the architectural style of the Armenian churches is the domes that are mainly conical and straight, with their cylindrical corners mounted on the pendants. The shape of the pendants is based on the style of Asia Minor and represents the combination of Armenian art with Constantinople and the creation of the semi-Iranian-semi-Asian minor architecture as an Armenian architecture (Shavazi, 2002: 81).

This method of constructing conical domes can be found in the ninth to eleventh centuries AD, in Armenia, which was also promoted through brickworks during the Seljuk period. For example, the Zvartnots Church has a circular conical dome that later became the pattern of other Armenian churches, and after the migration of Armenians to Isfahan, the domes of the Nerses, Catarina and Gregor Churches were also built on that basis, but on a smaller scale with no projection of the skyline of the city and far from the views of the visitors outside the building.

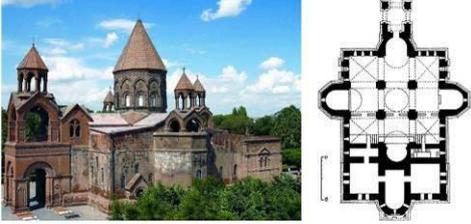
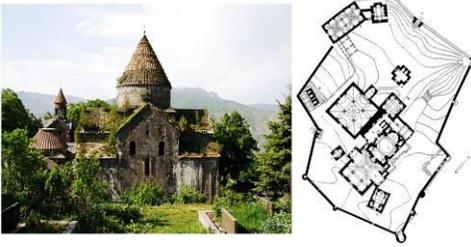
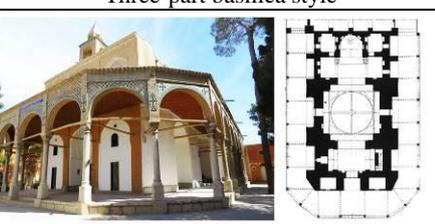
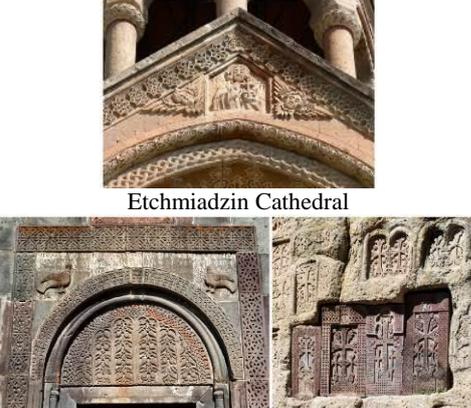
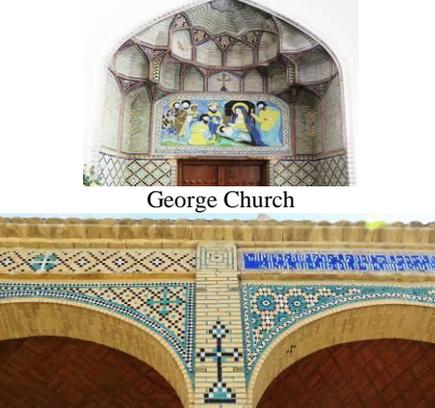
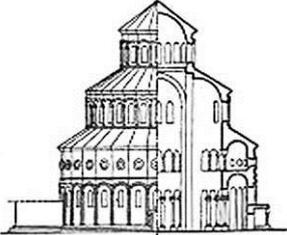
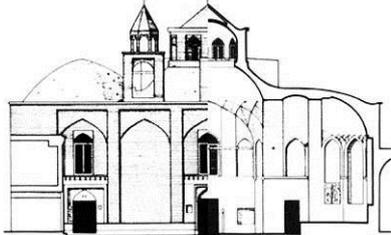
The Armenian Arches were initially a complete crescent or horseshoe until the double-slab domes constructed with stone that were suitable in Armenia were increased (Shavazi, 2002: 81, 82). The main materials used in the Armenian churches are stones because of durability and resistance, which enhanced its natural attributes by the contradiction between the smooth surfaces and the sharp edges (Kumaraswami, 2010: 159; Malekmian, 2010: 116-117). Accordingly, in the Armenian school of thought, stone is considered as one of the main elements of constructions, but the use of mosaics and marble plates became a completely subordinate factor, and with the extensive uses of stones, the sculpture will be of particular importance (Shavazi, 2002: 93) (Table 4).

#### **4. Common and Differentiating Factors Between the New Julfa Churches and the Mosques of The Safavid Era In Isfahan**

Following the arrival of Armenians in Iran, the religious and cultural conditions of the Safavid community and the geographical location of the Isfahan region made the Armenian architects to create unique buildings by combining their own arts and architecture, and what was common in the Safavid period and Islamic art. What at first glance attracted the researchers to the architecture of the Safavid buildings are the magic of space, and then the existing patterns in it. By starting the reign of Shah Abbas I, we see changes in the content of the symbols by the artists in the art of the Islamic era.

Table 4

Adaptation of the Architectural Structure of Armenian and New Julfa Churches of Isfahan

Architectural features	Armenian Churches	New Julfa Churches
Spatial organization and plan	 <p data-bbox="399 533 888 584">Etchmiadzin Cathedral Four galleries (vaulted or contracted cross pattern)</p>	 <p data-bbox="1070 533 1251 584">Hagob Church Single-section hall</p>
	 <p data-bbox="563 819 724 853">Gaghard Church Three-part basilica style</p>	 <p data-bbox="1043 819 1278 853">Minas Church Three-part basilica style</p>
	 <p data-bbox="416 1111 871 1162">Haghpats Church Cross-shaped with corridors joining each other</p>	 <p data-bbox="975 1088 1350 1162">St. Mary's Church Attaching middle pillars to thick walls</p>
Decorations and motifs	 <p data-bbox="416 1581 871 1671">Etchmiadzin Cathedral Gaghard Church Vegetarian and geometric patterns inspired by Armenian filigree</p>	 <p data-bbox="975 1581 1350 1648">George Church St. Mary's Church Mugharnas and girih tiles application</p>
Structural materials and forms	 <p data-bbox="536 1917 759 1977">Zvartnots Church Circular conical dome</p>	 <p data-bbox="1054 1917 1270 1977">Nerses Church Circular conical dome</p>

(Source: Authors; Republic of Armenian, 1999, 7 & 29; Piotrowski, 2015, 10; Carlie, 2014, 4)

Perhaps this can be attributed to the impact of Renaissance art and elements of individualism and the devotion of religious elements, naturalism, exuberance, diminution of visual elements, and distance from religious art, which became concrete in the works of Iranian artists (Mousavi Gilani, 2011: 146-150). On the other hand, it plays an important role in the allegory and symbolism of "imagination," and by dealing with "limbo", which is the interface between the great world and the minuscule and with the knowledge gained about heaven by the Quran verses and narrations, the artist deals with the deciphering of motifs and geometry that let us know about his intuition in the world of imaginations. Imagining the paradise from the point of view of a Muslim artist is through the verses of the Quran and the narrations regarding the Imams, which can deal in discovering the world of imagination and fantasy and depict it. Therefore, what forms the urban space does not differ from the concept of architecture, as the shape of the garden is seen on the carpet, and it is also observed on the ceiling. On the one hand, with the security and prosperity created in the Safavid era, and on the other hand, by the increased influence of the West, the painters copied elaborately the works of Europeans and they were away from the imaging of the book, which sometimes even led to absolute imitation and the European art was also considered by the artists as a pretext under the required influences by them. However, before that, artists and artisans used to select their pictorial texts among the works of Iranian masters and in a few cases of Chinese paintings. Accordingly, this created a suitable ground for the flourishing and development of Islamic art, so that this period can be considered one of the most creative periods in Islamic art. Therefore, the Safavid era is seemingly a period of blending of philosophy and religious law and ruling the Shiite-Iranian space in architecture. Accordingly, the development of emergent decorative coatings in areas such as the Safavid and Ottoman states that were known as cultural centers during their period could bring together a set of ethnic, cultural and linguistic elements, and somehow, the sense of cultural cohesion to existence (Najib Oglu, 2000: 298). The plans of the mosques and churches and the geometric shapes used in them are different from each other. Since the churches are located in Julfa checkered texture and the urban texture has the priority, they are mainly right-angled and their geometric shapes are simpler. Perhaps, unlike mosques that face the Qiblah, the angled shapes are less likely to be seen in churches. For instance, the change in the direction and the deviation of the mosques in the plan of the Imam Mosque, Jame' Mosque in Isfahan and Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque towards the Qiblah can be observed, so that their intersection with the direction of the Naghsh-e Jahan Sq. reflects the creativity of the architect. Entry to the church yard is possible mainly from one or two entrances, which is similar to large mosques. This possibility, of course, depends on the position of the mosque in urban texture, as some of the mosque surroundings, which have been

combined with residential texture, only have an entrance, but for the city's mosques, it leads to more entrances. In addition, according to the direction of the altar to the southwest in the mosques, the direction of movement in space is also purposeful and to enter the mosque, individual individuals are first guided to the yard and then to the nave. In fact, the lack of direct access to the yard reveals the attention towards the spatial hierarchy, pauses and thinking in the mosque, and direct access to the nave represents the grading of movements. Among the common points of the churches in Isfahan that distinguish them from the churches of Armenia, and in some way associate the style of setting up mosques and houses of Isfahan during the Safavid period is observing the same hierarchy in entering to the building from the vestibule to the main courtyard. For example, the churches of Stepanos and St. Mary's have hierarchies such as vestibules, courtyards, porches and courtyards, and in some, like the Gregor Church, the the corridor is emphasized.

On the other hand, Armenian extrovert architecture turned into an introvert architecture in Isfahan Julfa churches by the creation of courtyards and tall walls. In fact, the mosques use the element of the courtyard in a number of functions, and as an element of the organization of the mosque space, the courtyard cannot be separated from its other spaces and is considered as an integral part of the mosques space, which is why it plays an essential role in the Muslim prayer ritual.

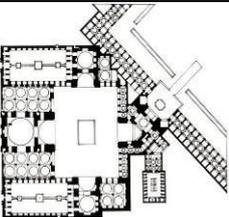
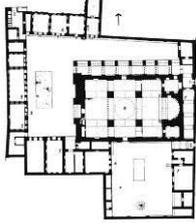
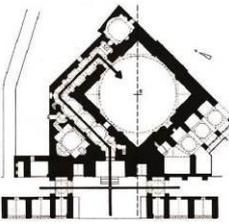
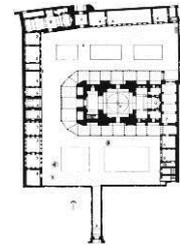
However, the yard does not have such a role in churches and it is an external element for the functions of the church, because the church ceremonies are often held indoors leading to the altar and the courtyard located in the church is not related to the required functions and it only shows adherence to Isfahan's style, which is deliberately based on introversion that contains elements such as the place of residence of the monks, and the yard is considered as a complementary function of the church and can be distinguished from it. Therefore, this element cannot have elemental characteristics such as the courtyard of the mosque, such that the courtyards of the mosques are often composed of square and rectangular geometric shapes, while some of the churches of Isfahan, including the Church St. Mary's, the Church of Stepanos and the Church of Catarina face not only with a micro-compound space, but also they have no single and unique generality, by being placed in the middle of the courtyard. Symmetry and balance in the courtyard of the mosques is another hallmark showing it builds itself through height, materials, and constructive elements, while there is no symmetry in the courtyard of the church, even on one side. Presence of the pond in the middle of the mosque courtyard not only reflects the spiritual space of the mosque in the individual's sense, but also insists on maintaining symmetry with the reflection of the sky and the image of the mosque in the water. This is while the pool in the courtyard of the churches of Isfahan not only does not have such a concept, but the churchyard is

without a pond and only includes plants. In addition, the role of half-space spaces such as verandahs in the mosques enhances the inner spaces and leads to the gradual passage from open-space, i.e. the courtyard, to the closed-space, i.e. the nave. In addition, the entrance porch in the center for entering into the dome house of the mosques prevents the confusion of the believers, while in churches and in accordance with the extraversion of the churches, passing from the open space to the indoor space takes place in a single passage. If a porch is also at the entrance, it is used merely as a prelude and the porches of the courtyard are related to the functions of the monks and are not related to the main function of the church. "Madoor", a small prayer room, is one of the places where the devotees worship in the church, located in the seven New Julfa churches. They are independent of the main building and in the eastern side of the courtyard. This element has a platform and altar higher than the ground, and there are several rooms on its sides, built behind the arches. Now, it may be said that such a space is not connected with the porch of the mosques, because the presence of the altar on some porches has created a place like a nave for the prayer of the believers. Regarding the spatial extent of the naves in the mosque and churches, it can be said that the mosques witness the priority of the transverse axis in relation to the long axis, which would increase the space for the prayers. In contrast, the longitudinal axis is before the transverse axis in the internal courtyard of the churches of Julfa in Isfahan, and the Christian believers face limited spaces. What distinguishes between the church and the mosque is the lack of a central element in the Islamic prayer room unlike the churches. The altar in the churches of Isfahan, derived from the advent of Jesus Christ and Mithraism religion, is often located on the east side of the courtyard and above the earth's surface (Eliadeh, 1996: 46). The greater height of the altar and its separation from other spaces is the last step in the pilgrimage, which is especially for the bishops and priests, and no one has the right to enter it (Mokhles, 2014: 40). In addition, it reveals the arc of the port, has the tendency to go up showing the candle flame (Burkhart, 1990: 114; Nasri, 2008: 74; Akhovat et al., 2008: 16). In addition, it can be said that the altar of the church is considered the central point of the church space, because people go in front of the altar to fulfill their religious obligations. In other words, the altar in the church and the light from the related windows provide holiness to the altar, so that during the stages of entering from the entrance to the altar they are considered as the hierarchy of the worship. However, since Muslims believe in the infinity of the existence of God, they are unwilling to establish an objective centrality inside the mosques and only follow an external center (Kaaba). In fact, by creating peace, harmony, and lack of struggles of worldly life, the space inside the mosques provides the conditions of worship and believers' thought in every

place of it. Accordingly, the altar in the mosques is merely an element for determining the direction of the Qiblah and is not a sacred place (Madadpour, 2005: 486 and 487). We see a centrality in Islamic architecture, as it is seen in these buildings to maintain the unity of sky and the earth with a concentric plan and a uniform dome-shaped roof, in such a way that the plan of the quadrangle plan of the construction is a symbol of the earth and the dome-shaped roof is related to the sky. By creating an element such as the dome base, it has been tried in these constructions to promote the relationship of the earth with quadrangle plan and the sky as the dome (Burkhart, 1990: 136; Parvizi and Pourmand, 2012: 33). In contrast, the evolution of the plan of the churches from the basilica form to a centralized form of dome shows the descent of the Holy Spirit from heaven to the earth and the incarnation of Christ in the church, since the Christians believe that with the incarnation of Jesus, the Son of God, there is a possibility of reconciliation between man and God through faith in the Holy Prophet (Taheri Akradi, 2012: 54) (Table 5).

One of the consequences of the spiritual connection of Islam and Islamic art is the principle of monotheism and the importance of a void space in the Islamic art. Therefore, by repeating the form, the use of arabesque patterns makes it possible that the void space, besides preventing the staring at a point and helping to free the action of the eye and mind, to "... penetrate into the heart of matter, remove the darkness, and make it transparent against the divine light ..." (Nasr, 1996: 181). Accordingly, avoiding the use of the image in the Islamic building and the prohibition of any sacred image, unlike Christianity, provides the role of using arrays such as the arabesque patterns to achieve inner calm and thinking of God. In fact, the invention of geometric and vegetative motifs for the prohibition of images of creatures illustrates the creativity of Islamic artists in representing divine verses (Navaei and Haji Ghassemi, 2011: 174). Accordingly, even the glamorous Iranian art of the Safavid era can be faithful to this principle and, while proclaiming its poverty, considers the void space as a means of divine presence in the material body of the human being on earth. In fact, wherever the veil of the body is removed and the space and role of the human being eliminated, the divine light is reflected. Actually light is the most significant feature of Iranian architecture; it is not regarded as this only as a material element but as a symbol of divine reason and also the divine presence (Alborzi et al, 2017: 10). Therefore, by its simplicity and its ornamentation, the mosque can be able to recall multiplicity while considering the unity. However, the role of space in the Western architecture is defined in another way, and the positive form of a space becomes meaningful by the presence of the sculptures, objects and the target images.

Table 5  
Adaptation of Spatial Organization and Plan of Safavid Mosques and New Julfa Churches of Isfahan

Architectural features	The common feature	The differentiation	
		Safavid mosques	New Julfa churches
Geometrical shape	*Composition of geometric shapes	* Angled and in line with Qiblah 	* Orientation with urban texture 
Indoor and outdoor communication	* The use of the yard in both buildings as an indoor open space	* The importance of the yard in holding the ceremony * Yard: Indivisible component and the rectangular plan	* Required to perform worship rituals in a confined space * Yard: Unnecessary component with a combined plan
Entrance	* Hierarchy of entry into the building	* The number of entrances varies depending on the size of the mosques and their neighborhood or city scale 	* The number of entries is often one and sometimes two 
Orientation	-	* Qibla direction (southwest)	* Adaptation of the church to the east-west axis
Spatial extent of the naves	-	* Transverse axial precedence over longitudinal axis	* Longitudinal axial precedence over transverse axis

(Source: Authors; Hagnazarian, 2006; Honarfar, 1971)

Nevertheless, space in Islamic architecture has a negative sense, and instead of using the positive objects, it is defined by the absence of physical body or materiality. Moreover, the reason for the use of images in churches can be related to the goal of the church's painters concerning the worshipping aspects in order to obtain acceptable representation of religious instructions. On the other hand, images for illiterates are as written letters to literate people (Prakurat, 1996: 163; Nasri, 2010). The presence of colored and engraved glasses also makes it easier to see the elements, decorative arrays, and the transformation of the light of the outer world into eternal bliss that transmits more sincerity to the space of the church and is a symbol of divine light and mercy (Burkhart, 1990: 80, Taheri Akardi, 2012: 54). Accordingly, in relation to the decorations of these two religious buildings, it can be said that the church's painted glass can refine the outside light and only let the pure ink of that color inwards. However, the tiled surface of the mosques can be considered significant in terms of the same function instead of the painted glass. The surface can be like a mirror that draws all its internal space towards human beings and leads him to the path of conduct that is the "eighth world" - and according to Sohrevardi, it is the journey to "nowhere". In fact, the level of tile work in Iran, like the surface of the Byzantine mosaics, provides its own light (Styrullin, 1998: 9). On the other hand, what distinguishes Islamic art from Western art is that Western art is in opposition to its former arts and its negation, and it seeks to forget the arts of the ages before it; but Islamic art aims to uplift and

reform the sovereignty of time in order to promote itself. The features of the decorations in the interior architecture of the Safavid art period include the decoration of motifs and lines on the stone, and in particular marble, mirroring, tiling, lacquering, gold-engraving decoration, painting of decorative motifs on the white backgrounds or in the form of stucco and cured-plaster works. Thus, such techniques and methods are related to the pre-Safavid periods, but its peak and development can be attributed to the Safavid period, and its good example can be felt by the increased architectural works in this period and the use of such techniques. The use of tiles in contrast to the bricks, in the front and portal of the mosques represents the guide for the passersby for finding the main entrance of the mosques (Soltanzadeh, 1993: 146 and 174; Navaei and Haji Ghassemi, 2011: 26). Similarly, designs and patterns in the Safavid period had a significant upward trend over their predecessors, and the variety of movements in plant designs, arabesque patterns and their elegance in their execution can be considered as its features, in which the arabesque patterns have the same beginning and the end, indicating the God's Divine nature, the effect of centralizing patterns (candles and vases in geometric and vegetative patterns) is a symbol of unity, which are similar in shape with the vegetation forms found in nature and consistent with the concepts of immortality and vitality. It can be said that the emergence of tile technique, especially the 7-colored tiles, has been manifested in churches and cathedrals such as the Vank, St. Mary's, Bethlehem, and Stepanos, which can be observed in the forms of arabesque patterns, plantations,

i.e. cypresses, on the periphery or on the gables of the inner walls of the courtyard.

In addition, one of the influential elements in Julfa Churches in Isfahan, both in terms of formwork and decorations, is the interior spaces of the domes. For example, the space below the dome of Jame' Mosque and the Bethlehem Church in Isfahan indicates the similarity of the two buildings with the use of the arches leading to the ceiling, with the installation of windows in the dome base also known as other elements of Iranian architecture in this church.

In addition, the hierarchies of the chains of the arabesque patterns represent multiplicity from the large scale to the small one ultimately ending with the central medallion in the dome of the Imam Mosque, which represents the achievement of unity, and this is used in Bethlehem Church of Isfahan, using the centralized medallion patterns. In addition, despite the fact that the colors used in the arabesque decorations of both buildings are often azure and yellow-gold in the designs, the presence of the angel designs with four wings in the church is replaced by the vegetation patterns of the mosque, indicating the combination of the two Islamic and Christian arts. Besides, the dome base margins of most of the mosques of Isfahan, including the Jame' Mosque, are decorated with Quranic verses and white "thuluth" font in the azure background, which is usually decorated with vegetation or pictures of saints in the Julfa's churches. The significance of its color and variety was not only higher in the tilework of the Safavid period than its predecessors, but in that period the spectrum of colors such as azure, turquoise and yellow was considerable. Hence, by referring to verse 13 of Surah al-Nahl, the color of the divine sign indicates the wisdom secret and sign of the wise. Thus, the strong distinction in colors, which provides pleasure, complements the unity of the building, and the order of colors on the façade creates an independent personality for each color (Navaei and Haji Ghassemi, 2011: 288). On the other hand, the rotating movement of colors from the center to the outside represents the hierarchy of existence on the façade (Styrullin, 1998: 137; Dehghan, 2007: 278; Navaei and Haji Ghassemi, 2011: 288 and 290). Inscription is one of the other designs that, despite its importance in periods such as Seljuks and Ilkhanids, became more diverse in the Timurid and Safavid periods, and enjoyed unique compositions in this regard (Makinejad, 2009: 45-41). Moreover, the Koufi and Nastaliq fonts used in the inscriptions reflect the social, cultural, and religious conditions of the time, and the inscriptions are often written with the Koufi script as the most spiritual Arabic script (Shayestehfar, 2001: 65; Al Saeed and Parman, 1984: 143). On the other hand, the use of geometric designs has a symbolic aspect and reflects the principles of belief in the religion of Islam. "The circle is the symbol of the universe-the sky, and the square is the symbol of earth-worldly life" indicating an example of symbolism (Parvizi and Pourmand, 2012: 36; Asgari and Eqbali, 2013: 47). The rotating square design consisting of two or more squares is one of the most popular

geometric patterns in the mosques and religious buildings of Isfahan, which can be seen from the interior of Jame' Mosque, Aqanur Mosque, and the interior of the Imamzadeh of Harunia, performed with plantation and geometric patterns, as well as various techniques including gypsum, moaqali and 7-colored tiles and bricks works. The only sample of the project is present in the southern facade of the Minas Church in Isfahan, which is furnished with brickwork and geometric patterns.

Considering the decorations of the vault to the ceiling at the entrance to the Aqanur Mosque and the altar of Bethlehem Church, it can be said that in both buildings there are the three larger arches that are led by small arches and indented to the ceiling. However, the decorations of the arches and central ornamental loop in the church are depicted with images of Jesus and historical narratives, while in the Aqanur Mosque, the Qur'anic verses are depicted with a white koufi font in the turquoise color background of and geometric designs. Muqarnas is among the other three-dimensional decorative elements, which is often used in mosques to decorate niches or entrances, and on the other hand, it is used as a reinforcement element, which usually has the task of transferring the load between the dome supports to the quadrilateral foundation. This element consists of three parts including goblets, fins, and plates, decorated by plantation and geometric patterns in the Safavid period. For instance, the altar of the Ilchi Mosque can be pointed, with its gables used vegetation patterns in white background, and its lower border is decorated with azure scriptures of verses of the Holy Quran and the white thuluth font. The reflection of Muqarnas and its combination with portrait drawings can be seen in the western entrance of the inner courtyard of Vank Cathedral and the entrance to the northern courtyard of the Church of Georg, which is decorated with monuments and geometric designs in the gables and Muqarnas components; it has benefitted from an Armenian inscription with yellow font in an azure background.

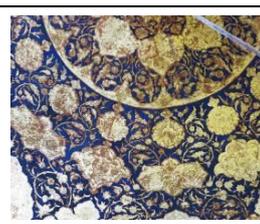
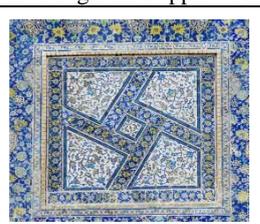
Thus, the effects of the decorative elements of Safavid era on the Julfa churches can be observed, since for the first time in the history of the architecture of the Armenian churches, applying the Islamic art designs in the churches of Isfahan, using plinth stone for the lower parts of the interior walls and also the use of glazed tiles with geometric patterns in azure and yellow gold colors became common. Moreover, the use of large windows in the churches of Isfahan is far more than the churches in Armenia, the reason of which could be revealing the decorations and paintings used on the interior walls. Presumably, the other apparent feature of the churches in Isfahan is the paintings and decorations on the interior walls of the church, which could have had a great impact on the Armenian churches after the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Until then, none of the Armenian churches used decorative artifacts and the Armenian clerical tradition was such that the interior walls lacked any decorations; the outer walls were only with carvings. By combining the Armenian and Persian arts, inspiring from European styles, and using the

subjects adapted from the holy Bible, the Armenian artists drew unique images on the interior walls of the churches in Isfahan. Despite the fact that among the features of the wall paintings of the religious buildings in Julfa, and especially the churches of Isfahan, there are few personalities and paying attention to the single figures that represent a particular personality in the history of the church, it can be said that the evolution of painting in the Middle Ages led to the emergence of the New Julfa school of thought that was able to make the traditional painting dominant by going beyond the borders. The interpretation that can be presented from the New Julfa School of thought (New Julfaism) reflects the Armenian influence, their lifestyle, and the cultural and social relation of the Iranians and Europeans, as the wall paintings of the Julfa churches including the Iranian art are based on symbolic and subjective concepts often seen with a view of the nature and the presence of a single tree and the blue sky together with clouds. In fact, symbolism is an integral part of Christian art, and images of the shepherd and the vine tree are depicted as the symbols of Christ in the churches of Isfahan (Kessler and Neil, 2005: 201; Nasri, 2008: 74; Okhovat et al., 2008: 16). Thus, during the Safavid period, in addition to the economic prosperity and the creation of a center for artists and merchants (Asadi & Soltanzadeh, 2019, 28), Isfahan provided the ground for the evolution of Iranian painting and the impact of European art, to the extent that its prevalence can be clearly seen until the end of the thirteenth century H. / nineteenth century AD. Besides, the decorations and motifs used in Armenian churches were more likely to be based on non-religious subjects. On the other hand, there are probably similarities in the style of the wall paintings of this region and the Julfa of Isfahan, which stems from the competition and communication that artists had in the 11<sup>th</sup> century H./ 17<sup>th</sup> century AD. The creation of the necessary ground for the gathering of artists in Isfahan during the Safavid period should not be ignored, which ultimately led to the development and intellectual development of artists. In fact, until the seventeenth century AD, there was no tradition of drawing paintings in the Armenian churches, and the stone building of the churches were more consistent with the church traditions at that time for engraving works rather than decorative paintings. For example, among the Julfa Churches in Isfahan, in addition to the Vank Cathedral, which is covered with biblical traditions with the technique of painting on the plaster, it is possible to point out the entrance and the inner margin of the staircase of the Church of Stepanos, which has historical and religious statements. Moreover, the decorations under the dome in Bethlehem and Sarkis Churches are also arranged with this technique, which could be in conformity with the Imamzadeh of Harunia, with a beautiful depiction of the Imams and the images of the entrance ceiling. In addition to the aforementioned issues, Ali Mosque in Isfahan also has such a technique with plantation designs that appeared in the Church of St. Mary's.

Hence, in general, the paintings of Julfa churches of Isfahan can be divided into two categories. The first category includes paintings depicted on the canvas or wooden plates located above the altar or other parts of the church. The second category is the wall paintings of churches, which are often decorated with plantation and arabesque designs. Therefore, in the decorations of the new Julfa churches, one can see the intertextual relationship between the styles of European, Armenian, Iranian and Islamic arts. Further, the role of the structure in the manifestation of the decoration can be seen in such a way that the ceilings located between the vaults and arches with their subtleties and delineations and their precise geometric border lines in the interior of the dome not only have provided specific glory to the vast hall, but also they created the most beautiful wall images, creating a passionate atmosphere for the expression of religious beliefs. This style is a striking example of the combination of miniatures and Western European, Iranian, and Armenian paintings, which is considered a special and new style, in that regard (Table 6).

The geographical location of Isfahan and the prevalence of materials such as clay and brick are the requirements of the unique climatic structures of this region in its historical buildings. In other words, given the fact that these materials are not sufficiently strong and that they will not be desirable by placing more columns for the transfer of loads from the pillar to the ground, application of the dome roofs can be among the appropriate approaches for the constructions of this area, both structurally and climatically, since by transferring the material loads to its circular section, the dome can provide the possibility of the extensive coverage without any pillars. On the other hand, since the climate of the city of Isfahan is warm and dry, dome roofs can be a good solution in the absence of direct sunlight throughout the day, and in addition to the installation of windows in the base, without providing the necessary light in the interior, can It plays the role of winding and causes the flow of wind and cooling of space. An example of this is observed in the Abbasi Jame' Mosque, which, in addition to the above characteristics, has a discrete double-layer dome that could create an insulator between two layers to prevent heat from penetrating into the hot seasons and preventing heat from escaping in the cold seasons. Accordingly, one of the characteristics of the distinction between the churches of Isfahan and Armenia is the dome. The churches of Armenia have small and conical domes, but the common method of constructing mosque domes are used for the churches in Isfahan with large and mainly double-layer domes. What can be seen from the prominence of this style is the manner in which the domes of related to the Iranian style are placed on compatible plans with the domes of the Armenian architecture, which can remain after a few years. Examples include the Church of Bethlehem and Vank Cathedral, which have double-layer discrete domes, and other churches have double-layer continuous domes.

Table 6  
Adaptation of Decorations and Motifs of Safavid Mosques and New Julfa Churches of Isfahan

			
Entrance of the mosque's Nave of Aqanur	Altar of the Church of Bethlehem	Dome of the Abbasi Jame' Mosque	Dome of the Bethlehem Church
The common feature: Application of three arches with central candles The differentiation: (Mosque) Writing Quran verses with Kufic script with geometric motifs; (Church) Pictures of Jesus and historical narratives		The common feature: Unified hierarchy of motifs in the interior of the dome The differentiation: (Mosque) Writing verses of the Qur'an on the fringes of decorations; (Church) Use of plant motifs or icons on the margins of the ornaments	
			
Interior of the Imamzadeh of Harunia	Inner courtyard of the Stepanos Church	The altar of the Illichi Mosque	The entrance to the inner courtyard of the Vank Church
The common feature: Using images in historical narratives		The common feature: Plant and geometric motifs in gables and Mugharnas application	
			
Imamzadeh of Harunia	Bethlehem Church	Abbasi Jame' Mosque	Minas Church
The common feature: The medallion pattern in the decorations The differentiation: Using the gilding technique in the church		The common feature: Rotating square design The differentiation: Applying brick technique in church	
			
Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque	Vank Church	Interior of the Ali mosque	St. Mary's Church
The common feature: Using tiling technique, especially seven-color tile		The common feature: Using plant motifs with plaster painting techniques	

In addition, most Isfahan churches are well adapted to mosques, including the Aganur Mosque, with the use of its Karbandi, cache, and arch. Also during the entrance to the churches of New Julfa, the use of these elements of Islamic monuments such as the pirneshin platform seems significant, as exemplified in the Minas Church in accordance with the Ali Mosque in Isfahan.

On the other hand, half-steep arches of the domes, their edges, multiple rows of arches, and the presence of small arch indicate the coordination of the churches of Julfa with other buildings of the Safavid period. In addition, the

bell chambers, which are the integral parts of churches, can be compared with the minarets of Islamic religious constructions, in which most of the chambers have a quadrilateral plan, with top arched roofs and a sharp dome and triangular plates located in the roofs, the side of the west corner and northeast of the churches. Of course, despite the difference in the appearance of their spire dome in the high bell tower and the low bell tower, bell towers continue to emphasize their influence on Islamic art using structural forms and materials such as Mugharnas and tiles.

Accordingly, in terms of religious principles and plan, all the churches of Isfahan were in accordance with Armenian churches, and regarding the external appearance, they were different from the Armenian architecture, in such a way that in spite of the interior paintings of the new Julfa churches, the exterior of the churches of Isfahan are simple, without any decorations and with frames as in houses of Isfahan revealing the extensive attention of the Armenians of Julfa to the churches and their uses it as a sanctuary against political disasters and transformations. Thus, it can be said that Armenian churches are a combination of Iranian and Armenian artistic styles, and what was related to the purpose; moreover, the main plan of the building and its religious ceremonies was towards the Armenian style, but as determined by the Safavid architects, the Iranian style influenced the decorations, and the Armenians sometimes used the Iranian ideas, to their best, to draw the narrations of their holy book. According to what has been said, the graffiti art and wall paintings of the Churches of Julfa in Isfahan also interacted with the conditions of the Iranian society and culture of Safavid, where historical developments can affect the content of these works of art and their transformation. On the other hand, Max Scheler points out in his book "On Eastern and Western Christianity" that the images of Christian churches are derived from the events in the Bible. In other words, he believes that the politicians of a country should not influence the religious beliefs of a nation (Ashtiani, 2004: 86 and 87). Therefore, despite the tradition of secular Shi'a in the Safavid period, Shah Abbas I tried to create an open political and economic atmosphere for the Armenian religious freedom to perform his religious ceremonies. Therefore, except for the exterior of the church, which is

in conformity with the structure of Iran- Islamic city of Isfahan, Armenian artists were able to narrate Biblical stories in the designs and images of the churches in Isfahan (Table 7).

### 5. Conclusion

Due to the appropriate position of Armenia, the Ottoman government was repeatedly wanted to subdue this land. Since some of these areas belonged to the Safavid government, there were conflicts with this government at the time of the Safavid kings, which led to the wars between the Ottoman and Safavid government in the Armenian region. Following the devastation that took place, Shah Abbas I eventually decided for moving of the inhabitants of that region to Iran after conquering the Armenian region. The decision of the Shah Abbas I was effective in satisfying the migrant people for not returning, by providing proper conditions for their residence in their new homeland through inducing concessions and privileges in line with 1) No superiority of the Muslims toward the Armenians, 2) Autonomy of the Armenian community, and 3) Freedom of religion, and the permission for constructing churches. After issuing his command for the construction of churches, Shah Abbas I considered the constructions subjected to the conditions in order to prevent the conflicts of the religious residents of Esfahan with the Armenians. Although it can be said that other conditions such as the climate, type of materials and observing the quality and quantity in using bricks and adobes were effective in choosing this kind of architecture.

Table 7  
Adaptation of Structural Forms of Safavid Mosques and New Julfa Churches of Isfahan

			
Minaret of Abbasi Jame' Mosque	Bell of the Nerses Church	Abbasi Jame' Mosque	Vank Church
The common feature: The pyramid on the rectangular plan The differentiation: (Mosque) low slope of the pyramid; (Church) High slope of the pyramid		The common feature: Double-layer discrete domes with the not so steep arches of the domes, their edges and multiple rows of arches	
			
Aqanur Mosque	Sarkis Church	Entrance of the Ali Mosque	Entrance of the minas Church
The common feature: Using the Karbandi, cache and arch		The common feature: Using the pirneshin platform at the entrance of the building	

The results of this study can be considered in two parts. The first part was expressed in order to achieve the comparative characteristics of Armenian churches and New Julfa in Esfahan, based on three architectural features including spatial organization, decoration, and structure. Accordingly, it can be said that the churches of Esfahan are based on the religious needs of the Armenians and originated from the tradition of Armenian churches regarding the plan of the building and the division of the places. In this respect, the four-sided and cruciform pattern of the Armenian churches is represented in the form of three spatial structures of the Julfa churches - including the one-section hall, the three-part basilica, and the space created by the integration of the columns with the walls. On the other hand, the plant and geometric motifs in the Armenian churches, inspired by the animal and tapestry motifs, have been replaced by “muqarnas”, “girih tiles” and “arabesque patterns” in the churches of New Julfa. Moreover, the structural heritage of Armenian churches is still reflected in the conical domes of the Julfa churches, demonstrating their commitment to this technique.

By comparing the churches of New Julfa and the mosques in Esfahan from the Safavid period, the second part of this study examines their commonalities and differences. The spatial organization of Esfahan churches indicates the influence of mosques on them in some of the architectural features such as the relationship between indoor and outdoor spaces and the entrance to the building. However, the spatial organization of Armenian churches in the churches of New Julfa can be observed by crossing the outer space and entering the main courtyard of the churches. Regarding the decorations of the churches of New Julfa, it can be said that the use of enamel tiles, plant and geometric motifs can be seen in the interior decoration of the churches, and the drawing of the sun and medallion designs together with arabesque patterns and their integration with the Christian motifs are observed under the dome. Moreover, the important point regarding the patterns in the churches is the fact that the tradition of constructing churches by the Armenians indicated very simple interior walls with no decorations and the decoration of the exterior walls only by lithography. However, influenced by Armenian art, Islamic art, and even European art, the Armenian artists of Esfahan drew beautiful motifs from the Holy Bible on the walls of Esfahan churches, while the ornamental motifs of Esfahan churches are inspired from the Iranian paintings, and especially from the Safavid school of thought. The structural impact of Iranian architecture on church construction can be seen by the widespread use of bricks. Furthermore, Esfahan churches and other Safavid buildings are similar, and this phenomenon can be observed in the way that half-dense arches are used, the presence of small arches, and their edges. Being influenced by the Safavid architecture in that period was the reason to persuade both the Armenian and Iranian architects to construct a different way of building

churches in Isfahan compared to what was common in Armenia.

Therefore, Esfahan churches can be regarded as one of the prominent elements of culture in any community as any other religious constructions. In addition to focusing on the architectural structure of the Armenian churches, this study has also addressed the changes in the influence of Esfahan mosques on the structure of the new Julfa churches in Esfahan.

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