

Gyumri - City of Architectural Heritage And its Problems of Preservation

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Keywords: architectural heritage, preservation, conservation, vernacular solutions.

Abstract. Gyumri has become a city since the middle of the 19th century, after it came under the control of Russia. This has brought not only constant and stable life to the region but also put starting for cultural and construction development. Together with the national traditions in building art new prosper style was based in architecture that was realized in frames of a large building space of the city. Now this district called “Kumayri” is the most famous part of the city and demonstrates the complex of its cultural heritage. The last 30 years have led to a decline in the funds and capabilities to lose the achievements for the period before the 1988 earthquake for the city once being an example of regularly organized and originally preserved civil architecture with national materials and master arts. In the result of the last period governmental defaults, Kumayri has come to a very neglected and launched situation that has brought it to collapsed and demolished condition. Even the last events “to recover” the situation by reconstructing of some structures and streets cannot be treatment for such historical space. Only the complex and governmental support with any free shaped innovation can protect and save it for people to develop it in future.

Introduction

Gyumri-Kumayri, is a city in Armenia better known as its cultural center, that was fortified in the first half of the 19th century. After the Russian fortress was built in 1837 the city was renamed as Alexandropol, in honor of Tsar Nichola’s wife 1st Empress Alexandra Feodorovna. Since 1840, it was the third of cities in Caucasus of that time, after Tiflis and Baku, and was developing mainly in a variety of handicraft directions. This was facilitated by the fact of the operating railway also, which at first connected 3 cities - Tiflis, Alexandropol, Kars, and later was also intended for the southern branch to Baku. As a result, the city began to develop rapidly and become charming with beautiful houses for merchants and craftsmen (one-story and two-story), which formed its urban appearance.

Traditional building art

Certain areas of the city were gradually organized according to traditional building formations. For almost half a century, hundreds of mansion houses were built in the city [1], which, together with the already erected and existing churches, created a unique image of the city with national flavor and cultural heritage.

The historical center of the city, the so-called "Kumayri", has transformed into a reserved museum in nowadays and, in essence, was created to preserve the cultural values of history of architecture and folk crafts for nearly 2 centuries. It includes the central part of the city with a rectangular scheme of streets, which in some places formed squares for markets and bazars.

Essentially, the development of the city at the end of the 19th century was free, but according to a certain scheme, which was followed by individual builders and developers. Responsible for all the construction activities of that time was the chief engineer of the construction of the "Russian Fortress" and according to his "drawings" the first street networks and houses of the city were created, which originally were built "independently", without a plan and strategy (Fig.1).

Study and preservation of the heritage

The process of creating museums in the field of historical and architectural monuments has been started in the distant Middle Ages. It was based on two possible factors - to preserve the historical monument and the adjacent territory with its characteristic nature and landscape, as well as objects of a certain artistic value - paintings, church-religious-historical objects in their native environment. From this point of view, the first museum churches appeared in Europe, Italy, France [2] and also in Russia, where religious buildings were turned into museums with different functional requirements [3].

Thus, the idea of museums was created to preserve a large extent of their historical, cultural, scientific and artistic values in their historical, cultural and natural environment [4]. The main purpose of the museums is to inviolate immovable monuments (individual architectural structures, churches, historical and natural complexes, industrial buildings), as well as the restoration and preservation of intangible heritage (building and ethnographic traditions) in the historical and cultural environment and their elements [5].



Fig. 1. Fragments from old Gyumri “Kumayri” district

From the 70s-80s of the 20th century, obvious study of the historical and architectural heritage of Armenia started that includes its main cities. Gyumri (then Leninakan) represented a huge field of research not only for residential buildings, but also for public and industrial structures [6].

It was decided to assign passport-documents to all buildings located on the territory of the Gyumri "Kumayri" reserve, where historical data, information on measurements, plans and certificates of protection would be recorded. The work was carried out for all existing historical buildings and for those that were in ruins and disrepair. For this, all existing positions were recorded for accounting and documentation of the structure, and for its further preservation. However, a huge part of this work was lost after the 1988 earthquake (Fig.2).

Historical buildings were registered again, but later again they came into disrepair or on the verge of collapse. The document that passport was with all the data (historical data, drawing or measurement, analysis of the condition of the building and its structure, recommendations, links, etc.), hold the main information for some already non-existent buildings. In some reason such ones were not included in the list [7].

As a result, in 2002. the “List of Historical and Cultural Monuments of Gyumri” (10) was created, that included mainly residential buildings (873 units), as well as churches (9 units), citadel - castles

(4), burial fields (4) and cemeteries (2), monuments (23 units), house-museums (6 units), public buildings (48 units), schools and colleges (9 units), hospitals and medical institutions (6 units), military (8 units) and industrial buildings (30 units), as well as 7 reliefs on the walls of the halls of famous factories and various small forms of architecture – in total 1023 units.

Most of these structures refers to the architectural heritage of the city, that was founded on the traditions of local buildings and classic Russian - European building arts. This diversity has greatly influenced the cultural life of the city, especially its architecture. Her high creative qualities were also combined with high construction quality that withstood the strongest and most destructive tremors of the 1988 earthquake when the central core of the old city was mostly preserved. This testifies and represent the high master skills of the builders and the quality of their creations.



Fig. 2. Destroyed condition of buildings in “Kumayri”

Steps for preserving historical heritage

In recent years, some directions have been outlined for the conservation and preservation of the architectural heritage that has already been introduced into the documented environment. Since special organizations and bodies were created, then apparently should deal with the issues of preserving the architectural and cultural heritage of the city.

Commissioned by the European Union and the European Consulate, the program “Community-based Urban Development Strategies in Historic Cities (COMUS)” was created (11). Directed works were carried out in a certain sector of the city, formed by the streets of Gorky-Abovyan-Tsereteli-Vardapetats. On examples from 5 different categories of buildings (church, house-museum, residential building), in different degrees of their preservation, the following activities were implemented:

- a. Summary: location and management,
- b. Administrative information,
- c. Conclusion on the status,
- d. Available information, sources, including approved planning programs, financial calculations, costs and expenses.

The most important part of the project was devoted to the historical study of these structures, the basis of their technical studies and in result the appropriate conclusions were made [8]. This primarily concerned the condition of historical architectural structures with their existing real condition, and they were mostly disappointing. A great number of historical events (mainly the earthquake of 1988), various reconstructions and construction impacts on these structures have partially or completely make to lose their original appearance and left them in critical condition.

To preserve such historical monuments in their historical environment, it is necessary not only to assess their architectural and construction significance in the documentary shape and cameral research, but implement a number of actions to preserve their real constructive and architectural images for their further existence on these bases. And as starting it is necessary to take into account the following components that caused this destruction:

- a. the urban environment is distorted, the urban planning environment is disrupted due to irregular construction in the area,
- b. establishment of many distortions of private buildings at the expense of the public sector in recent years,
- c. the presence of many abandoned and dilapidated buildings,
- d. unsatisfactory condition of the internal street network,
- e. too high groundwater level and inconsolable condition of the water supply collector of the sectors.

Research has shown that there is no elementary protection for not only the monuments, but also for other neighboring buildings. If the formers are considered monuments of history and architecture, then especially for them it is necessary to give priority attention in the form of real actions, and not only in signs and reports.



Fig. 3. Reconstructions in central parts of Gyumri - "Kumayri"

Museum "Kumayri" with its architectural and construction features is a type of "vernacular" formation. A. Ivanov draws parallels with Alexandropol with the "higher" architecture of Yerevan (Kond, Hin Nork, Qanaqer, Noragyukh), where, unlike Alexandropol, the architecture of the upper class, built by the "lower" layers, is considered when the developer does not think about the aesthetic side designs, but solves the day-to-day basic problems [9].

Conclusion

The architectural and historical heritage of Gyumri today is in a mostly unfavorable and insufficient condition, despite the large-scale "reconstruction work" on the territory of "Kumayri". From 2014 to 2017, several streets and intersection were renovated, with lighting and decorative upgrades (lanterns, benches, sidewalks, flower decorations, etc.). But the condition of many residential buildings on these streets is still deplorable, since no actions were taken to conserve, reconstruct or simply guard them. These houses are not under state supervision, but in private, which owners, in very different reasons, do not coordinate their actions with a single unifying and protective programs. As such, even if they exist, they are only on paper or individual documents, the implementation of which no one is in a hurry or even intends to realize. As the result, "old and crippled houses" from the last century and even the earlier ones suffer, and no one cares about this.

If we take into account that such an example of the preservation and reconstruction of historical houses already exists in Tbilisi and many cities in Russia [10], instructively such an experience can be accepted for the citizens and the owners of historical buildings to reveal activity and self-expression (by coordinating with all reconstructions with professional institutions), to preserve and give them a chance of a new existence. Many of them can overcome into a new expression of modern activity (in the frames and shapes of restaurants, cafes, workshops, educational institutions, hotels,

"guest houses", art galleries, etc.). Thus, it will be possible to revive the historical environment of an almost 200-year-old city into the city of traditions, crafts and art.

The complex of "Kumayri" is a single architectural ensemble that has collected all the historical components of the architectural heritage together with the art of folk crafts, and retained that single sense of dignity for its preservation.

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