

ICOA1904: ANCIENT STONES FOR BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS CLOSED BORDERS

Subtheme 02: The Role of Cultural Heritage in Building Peace and Reconciliation

Session 1: Heritage as Peace Builder, Tying and Benefitting Community

Location: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

Time: December 13, 2017, 14:30 – 14:45

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Abstract: During recent years, there has been a positive development in how the Armenians and the Turks are dealing with an important part of their common past. This has happened in spite of a closed border, absence of official relations, and inability to agree upon a common understanding of the disasters of the early 20th century.

Eastern Anatolia is still full of remains from the Armenian communities that were scattered over much of the territory of the Ottoman Empire until its break down during the First World War. Among them are some very important buildings reflecting the rich ecclesiastic and monastic architecture which constitutes the unique and seminal contribution of Armenian medieval architecture to world heritage. It is an architecture that also thrived through impulses from other cultures – an example of give and take, which is important to help better understand that even seemingly opposed identities may after all be related. This heritage holds an important potential for local communities to develop income from cultural tourism.

Today the Armenian heritage is no longer threatened by conflict but first of all by forces of nature and shortage of funding. Turkish and Armenian experts, supported by actors from the international community are working together in a common effort to find solutions for safeguarding the most important monuments as a resource for building a better future of reconciliation based on mutual understanding, shared interests and socio-economic development.

Key words: *reconciliation, conflict, disaster, identity*

Background

When the First World War broke out, it spelled the downfall of three multi-ethnic empires, The Russian, The Habsburgian and The Ottoman. The first transformed major parts of its territory into the Soviet Union, whereas the latter two split up into a number of independent states more or less defined as nation-states. During the accompanying chaos of the imperial break up, ethnic cleansing took place, with large groups of people forced to leave their homelands. This also happened to a majority of the Armenians that used to live among other ethnic groups in what later became the territory of The Turkish Republic, many of them were killed or died from exhaustion, illness or starvation, in the 1915 purge to drive the Armenians out. Armenians had lived there since long before the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires.

The Armenians have left an impressive Medieval architectural heritage especially in Eastern Anatolia in the form of churches, monasteries and fortifications, alongside humbler vernacular buildings. When the Armenian communities were destroyed, these buildings were left both without their original function and without a community to identify with them – as heritage. Since then a serious degradation and loss of buildings has taken place. The region is very seismic, so alone for this reason much has been lost. Other factors have been the termination of use and maintenance. Also, exploitation of the historic buildings as quarries for building materials has been an important factor. Finally, there was a period during the earlier parts of the twentieth century, when Armenian heritage in Turkey was purposefully destroyed. Also in the Armenian Republic on the other side of the closed border there are huge preservation problems for the same kind of monuments.

The Armenian ecclesiastic and monastic architecture is among the oldest and most influential in the global development of Christian architecture. But its significance was widely ignored until the end of the nineteenth century when it began to capture the attention of travellers and scholars from Russia and from other parts of Europe. Even today little is known by a wider audience, beyond Armenia and Turkey and beyond the Armenian diaspora and a narrow international circle of specialists.

In Armenia, and in the Armenian diaspora there is a considerable focus on Armenian heritage in Turkey. For Turkey, the Armenian heritage represents an asset for development of tourism and also an arena for reaching out to the Armenian neighbour. But in a politically volatile context and with major unresolved issues both in the past and the present a high degree of awareness of how to avoid politically sensitive issues is necessary in order to involve joint projects on heritage between Armenians and Turks.

International efforts to salvage Armenian heritage in Turkey

National and international efforts to help salvage threatened Armenian built heritage in Turkey has unfolded since the 1990' by the Turkish Ministry of Culture, World Monuments Fund, Anadolu Kültür and others. Towards the end of the first decade after 2000 important breakthroughs took place with the restoration of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Aghtamar/ Ahtamar funded by the Turkish Ministry of Culture, completed in 2007. In spite of several controversies and criticisms the project ended up as a perceivable gesture of recognition on the side of the Turkish authorities of the Armenian heritage. However, the efforts made for Armenian heritage in Turkey did not initially include experts from Armenia.

However, in 2009 the Turkish Minister of Culture publically expressed his wish to see cooperation between Turkey and Armenia to protect cultural heritage in Turkey. (Vercihan Ziflioğlu, 2009). These were also the years of a cautious rapprochement between the two countries. That however was complicated and eventually stalled by various other political issues in both countries including the unresolved conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh. The latter issue was also referred to by the Turkish Minister of Culture in his aforementioned expression of his wish for cooperation with the Armenian side.

Restoration in the walled Medieval city of Ani

Ani is an abandoned and ruined Medieval city in the Kars Province of Eastern Anatolia. The city is delimited by impressive walls and steep gorges. It is situated at the Aras/ Arax River that forms the modern border between the Turkish Republic and the Republic of Armenia. Today this border is closed. There are traces of habitation from prehistoric times and into recent decades, where a village inside of the walls was moved to the outside in order to improve conditions for preservation of the monuments.

“The city flourished in the tenth and eleventh centuries CE when it became the capital of the medieval Armenian kingdom of the Bagratides and profited from control of one branch of the Silk Road. Later, under Byzantine, Seljuk and Georgian sovereignty, it maintained its status as an important crossroads for merchant caravans. The Mongol invasion and a devastating earthquake in 1319 marked the beginning of the city’s decline. The site presents a comprehensive overview of the evolution of medieval architecture through examples of almost all the different architectural innovations of the region between the seventh and thirteenth centuries CE” (UNESCO 2016).

Ani has been a main focus of attention for Turkish heritage authorities, NGOs and for international specialists and organisations like UNESCO and World Monuments Fund (WMF). In 2016, it became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Before that back in 1996 WMF placed the city on its watch list and together with the Turkish Ministry of Culture initiated work to document some of the most important buildings. In 2009 an agreement was made between the Turkish authorities and WMF to initiate more wide-ranging stabilization work on the Cathedral of Ani and The Church of the Holy Redeemer (Surp Amenap’rkitch). These two represent some of the most important medieval Armenian contributions to world architecture. The stabilization works were conducted in an impeccable way and has bought time for the development of proper restoration work.

Turkish-Armenian workshops

However, the works conducted in Ani still lacked involvement by Armenian experts. So, in order to facilitate that, a project was developed jointly by the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage (NIKU), Anadolu Kültür (a Turkish NGO) and WMF, sponsored by the Norwegian Embassy in Ankara. The project was developed in understanding with Turkish and Armenian authorities. The aim was to bring in a group of experts from Armenia, to work together with their Turkish colleagues and other experts from different countries, France, United States, Macedonia and Norway, including experts who were involved in the ongoing restoration works in Ani. The project undertook to explore the area around Ani, where important but less well documented monuments were known to be present. In the autumn of 2013 a field workshop was undertaken visiting a number of sites to assess their importance, their present state of preservation and exposure to risk, the present state of ownership and use, and their potential as an asset for the local population with whom interviews were conducted. The result came out the year after in a

report containing a series of suggestions and recommendations that was submitted to the Turkish Ministry of Culture). The report was edited jointly by Anadolu Kültür, NIKU and WMF, with the latter as publisher (WMF, NIKU and Anadolu Kültür 2014).

The 2013 field Workshop was followed by another the same in the Mush Province of Eastern Anatolia in the autumn of 2014, this time only with experts from Armenia and Turkey and one from Norway. Also, this workshop was sponsored by the Norwegian Embassy. (Anadolu Kültür et al 2017).

Turkish-Armenian exhibition project

Then this year, 2017 a new project was started again with funding from the Norwegian Embassy in Ankara, this time with the aim of producing a joint Turkish-Armenian exhibition to introduce a wider audience in the two countries and beyond to the unique heritage of Ani and the area around it. The purposes are to convey an impression of the Medieval Armenian architecture, to tell the story about the many different cultural influences that inspired it, and the way it developed this inspiration and passed the result on. Another aim is to introduce the audience to the restoration work that has already been undertaken, and to major challenges that still need to be met in order to preserve the most precious monuments. The exhibition will consist of audio-visual material, printed stills, and videos on screens plus some 3D printed replicas of objects and details of objects. The exhibition will during the first half of 2018 be opened in Yerevan, Armenia and in Istanbul, Turkey. Later the same year it will be presented for a Norwegian audience in Oslo, before continuing to other museums and exhibition venues in Europe and beyond.

Concluding remarks

The Medieval Armenian architectural heritage constitutes a major contribution to ecclesiastic and monastic architecture in Eurasia. It is a potential asset to social and economic development for local communities in impoverished regions of both Turkey and Armenia.

But this cultural heritage is also an asset for development of dialogue between Turkey and Armenia. It is a way of building relations on a thematic platform that is less sensitive than other issues, such as the events that in 1915 terminated thousands of years of Armenian communities in much of present day Turkey.

The results of the projects described above were achieved first of all through a commitment by all parties to focus on these key issues: 1) what is the quality and condition of each monument; 2) which are the most important; 3) which of them can be saved, and how; 4) in which order of priority should they be stabilized and eventually restored; 5) what local community values and benefits can be generated from the preservation of each monument. Important for the success especially in the beginning was also the involvement of experts from third countries. Now however there are well established professional relations between Turkish and Armenian experts.

It is challenging to work with heritage projects across borders in a part of the world that goes through a period of instability where major geopolitical upheavals interact with domestic political dynamics. Even more challenging, when the projects attempt to span closed borders. It is a challenge though that also offers the possibility to illustrate that the potential of cultural heritage reaches far beyond heritage itself.

Biography

Carsten Paludan-Müller is international senior advisor for heritage, conflict and reconciliation at the Norwegian Institute of Cultural Heritage Research, NIKU of which he was General Director from 2003 – until September 2017). He is an archaeologist educated at the universities of Copenhagen and Cambridge, research associate of the University of York, and corresponding member of the German Archaeological Institute. He has worked/ is working with the Council of Europe and the European Commission. His focus is on heritage, identity, conflict and reconciliation.

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ICOA1904: DE VIEILLES PIERRES POUR CONSTRUIRE DES PONTS PAR-DELÀ LES FRONTIÈRES FERMÉES

Sous-thème 02: Le rôle du patrimoine culturel dans la construction de la paix et de la réconciliation

Session 1: Le Patrimoine En Tant Que Constructeur De Paix, Communautaire De Types Et De Bénéfices

Lieu: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

Date et heure: 13 Décembre, 2017, 14:30 – 14:45

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Résumé: Au cours des dernières années, on assiste à une évolution positive dans la manière dont Arméniens et Turcs traitent une partie importante de leur passé commun. Cela s'est produit malgré une frontière fermée, l'absence de relations officielles et l'incapacité à s'entendre sur une approche commune des désastres du début du XXe siècle.

L'Anatolie orientale regorge encore de vestiges des communautés arméniennes qui ont été dispersées sur une grande partie du territoire de l'Empire ottoman jusqu'à l'effondrement de ce dernier lors de la Première Guerre mondiale. Parmi ceux-ci se trouvent quelques bâtiments très importants reflétant la riche architecture ecclésiastique et monastique qui constituent la contribution unique et séminale de l'architecture médiévale arménienne au patrimoine mondial. C'est une architecture qui a aussi prospéré grâce aux impulsions d'autres cultures - un exemple d'apports mutuels qui est important pour aider à mieux comprendre que même les identités apparemment opposées peuvent malgré tout être liées. Ce patrimoine représente un potentiel de ressources économiques important pour les communautés locales grâce au développement du tourisme culturel.

Aujourd'hui, le patrimoine arménien n'est plus menacé par les conflits, mais bien plus par les forces de la nature et le manque de financement. Des experts turcs et arméniens, soutenus par des acteurs de la communauté internationale, œuvrent ensemble pour trouver des solutions de sauvegarde des monuments les plus importants en tant que ressource pour une meilleure chance de réconciliation fondée sur la compréhension mutuelle, les intérêts partagés et le développement socio-économique.

Mots clés: *réconciliation, conflit, désastre, identité*