

## **The Importance of Preserving the Historical and Cultural Monuments of Armenia**

Inesa Beglaryan

Yerevan State University, 1 Alek Manukyan St, Yerevan 0025, Armenia

Corresponding email: Inesabeglaryan @yahoo.com, Contact number: +374 60 710000

### **Abstract**

The Republic of Armenia is rich with historical and cultural monuments, which are permanent witnesses of the Armenian culture, history, and creative spirit. Historical and cultural monuments represent an excellent potential for the country's development, apart from the fact that they are part of the national and world heritage. Hence, their conservation, preservation, and presentation are immensely important. This paper aims to identify and present the essential aspects of preserving and using Armenia's historical and cultural monuments. The article discusses the following major points: to classify the historical and cultural monuments of Armenia ; to define the role and significance of historical and cultural monuments; to analyze the key factors related to the use and preservation of the historical and cultural monuments of Armenia; to present the historical and cultural monuments of Armenia in the context of the sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Historical and cultural monuments, heritage, preservation and presentation

## 1.0 Classification of historical and cultural monuments of Armenia

Historical and cultural monuments, as the most important component of historical and cultural heritage, have an invaluable role and importance for every country (Conrad & Fehlings, 2023). Historical and cultural monuments of the territory of the Republic of Armenia include more than a thousand historical structures, forts, fortresses, residences, more than one thousand and two hundred monastic complexes, churches, cathedrals, chapels, sanctuaries, residential, public, and industrial building, tens of thousands of monuments of memorial and monumental art, lithographic inscriptions, petroglyphs, the chronology of which covers from the Stone Age to the present day. They are spread over the entire territory of Armenia, including about four thousand conservation-territorial units with a total area of about fifteen thousand hectares. Immovable monuments of history and culture are the structures with historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural value, their co-structures and complexes with the territory they occupied or historically connected with them, the elements and fragments of archaeological, artistic, lithographic, ethnographic nature (Gwardzińska, 2018; Eyvazova, 2019).

Monuments with exceptional historical and cultural value can be included in the list of world cultural heritage by international standards. Thus, pearls of Armenian medieval architecture such as the Geghard monastic complex, monasteries of Haghpat and Sanahin, Churches of the Mother See of St. Etchmiadzin, ruins of Zvartnots Church were included in the UNESCO list of World Cultural Heritage, and 2010, UNESCO took the Armenian cross-stones (called Khachkar, as shown in Figure 1.1) under its protection. These monuments are a valuable part of world culture and are distinguished by several features. A brief introduction of the monuments included in the list of UNESCO World Cultural Heritage objects is presented.



**Figure 1.1:** The remained monument, Khachkar

The monastery complex of Haghpat is a typical example. The complex (as shown in Figure 1.2) was built in the 10th through 13th century. It is in the Lori region and lies on a plateau encircled by gorges. This complex is one of the most significant cultural centers of medieval Armenia. The complex includes the monastery of St. Nshan (as shown in Figure 1.3), two churchyards, three chapels, a refectory, a bell tower, a library, gravestones, and Khachkars. This church is one of the best examples of a new architectural direction adopted throughout the medieval period of Armenia.



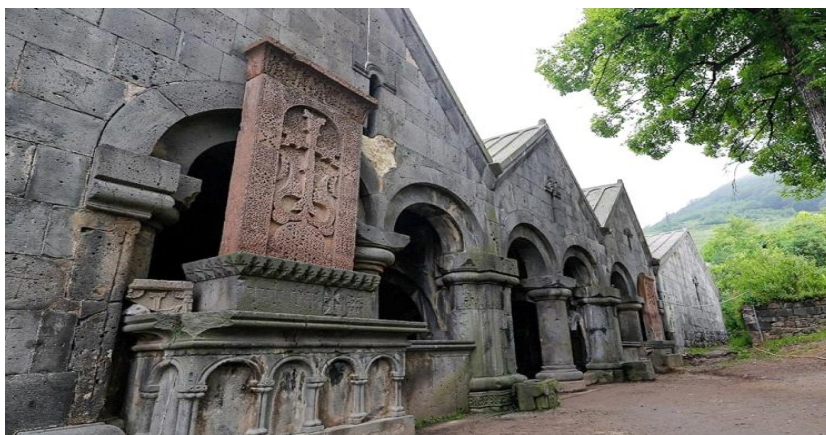
**Figure 1.2:** The monastery complex of Haghpat



**Figure 1.3:** The monastery of St. Nshan

Meanwhile, the Sanahin represent cultural values from ancient days to modern society. The medieval complex of Sanahin (as shown in Figure 1.4) is located in Lori, Armenia. The monastery of Sanahin was one of the region's most important cultural and educational complexes, which had a school with a huge adjacent library. The general structure consists of St. Astvatsatsin and

Amenaprkich churches, three churchyards, a bell tower, a library, and the St. Gregory chapel. More than 50 Khachkars (cross-stones) have been preserved in the territory of this monastery complex. The appearance of the Sanahin is shown in Figure 1.4.



**Figure 1.4:** The medieval complex of Sanahin

Additionally, the remains of ancient churches symbolize the religious history of Armenia. The Etchmiadzin Cathedral (as shown in Figure 1.5) is the mother church of the Armenian Apostolic church and one of the best examples of the early Christian era architectural monuments. It was built in the early 4th century. The bell tower and the complex museum were constructed in the 17th and 18th centuries. The museum also has a large collection of manuscripts and artworks from different periods. Likewise, the Zvartnots Cathedral demonstrates the architectural structure affected by the religious culture. The Zvartnots Cathedral was built from 641 to 661. It is one of the distinctive examples of Armenian church-building history.

This building was a three-stored cylindrical structure with gradually dwindling floors and five entries and was covered by sculptures of grapevines and statues. Unfortunately, Zvartnots collapsed in the tenth century. How it happened is still debated, though most argue for one of two theories: an earthquake or attacks arising from repeated Arab raids. The remaining ruins of Zvartnots were uncovered at the beginning of the twentieth century (as shown in Figure 1.6).



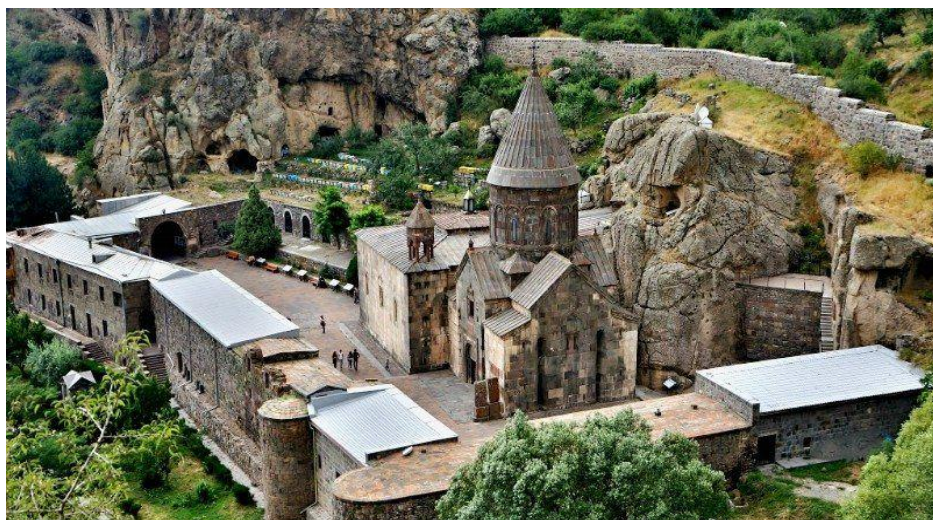
**Figure 1.5:** The Etchmiadzin Cathedral



**Figure 1.6:** The Zvartnots Cathedral

The Geghard is taken as an example of an ancient monastery. The monastery complex of Geghard (as shown in Figure 1.7) is one of the oldest monasteries in Armenia. The main chapel was built in the 12th century, while the monastery complex was founded in the 4th century. It used to be known as Ayrivank because its structure was partially carved out of the adjacent mountain. The name commonly used for the monastery today, Geghard, meaning "the Monastery of the Spear", originates from the spear which had wounded Jesus at the Crucifixion, allegedly brought to Armenia by Apostle Jude (Thaddeus). The complex is truly unique as cliffs in the Azat River gorge surround it. The combination of architecture and nature makes it a fascinating

sight.



**Figure 1.7:** The monastery complex of Geghard

Moreover, there are historical sites on the Tentative List of UNESCO, such as the monastery of Noravank and Tatev (as shown in Figure 1.8) with the adjacent areas of the Vorotan Valley. Regarding distribution, the historical and cultural monuments are spread over the entire territory of the Republic of Armenia. The map of heritage (as shown in Figure 1.9) shows the distribution of historical and cultural monuments.



**Figure 1.8:** Tatev monastery



**Figure 1.9:** Spatial distribution of RA historical and cultural monuments

## **2.0 The role and significance of historical and cultural monuments in Armenia**

The essence of a monument is brought to life through its purposeful utilization. According to the Law on the Protection and Use of Immovable Monuments of History and Culture of the Republic of Armenia (Mucci, 1998). The monuments mainly serve scientific, educational, cultural, and cognitive purposes and their original and adaptive functional purpose. The use of monuments for economic and other purposes is allowed if it corresponds to the monument's original purpose and inherent characteristics, does not damage the integrity of the monument, and does not degrade or spoil its historical, scientific, and artistic value.

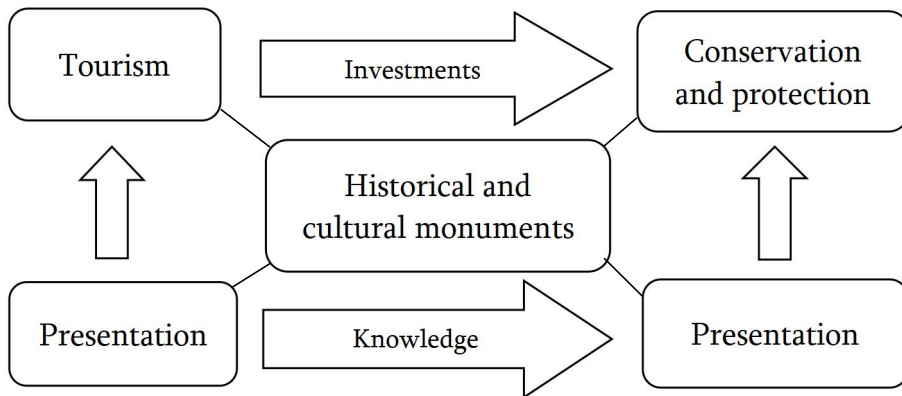
Moreover, the management and use of the monument must be done with the awareness of the uniqueness of its historical and cultural value and the irreversibility of possible losses (Giambruno & Pistidda, 2022). Ancient and medieval city centers, settlements, fortifications, castles, burial grounds, cemeteries, defunct bridges, reservoirs, churches, monastic complexes, and other structures, as well as monumental works of art related to them that are not subject to full restoration and use in their original form, are used exclusively for scientific, educational, cultural, and cognitive purposes within their initial functional significance.

The immovable monuments of history and culture have been and remain one of the best symbols for the Armenian people always to present the world themselves as silent witnesses from centuries, and the efficient ways of organization of their preservation and use can act as a catalyst for the development of tourism in the region (Vardapetova, 2018). In terms of sustainable development, historical and cultural monuments are used as recreational resources for the region's economic development, which can be efficient in serving their preservation as well (Yegemberdiyeva et al., 2020). Additionally, the management of monuments in the context of sustainable development allows for maintaining a balance between resources and visitor demands.

In terms of education and entertainment, the presentation of historical and cultural monuments among people of different ages and socio-economic groups facilitates the possibility of creating an environment that can provide knowledge and awareness about the conservation and protection of the monuments. The emergence of interest in them is due to the cultural and cognitive demands of society and their properties as recreational resources (Karakashian, M., 1998). Historical and cultural monuments are irreplaceable and endowed with attractiveness and uniqueness.

Attractiveness is the main property of tourism resources, and uniqueness can ignite a sense of interest. These elements are what give the tourist attractions global significance and value.

The basis for the use of historical and cultural resources and various facilities for tourism purposes is the tourists' and travellers' interest and their impression (Tovmasyan, G., & Gevorgyan, M., 2022). The interest in discovering new destinations and attractions through culture, history, and art, and gaining knowledge increases continuously among travellers. Hence, as a result, steady growth is observed in the field of historical and cultural tourism. This, in turn, contributes to preserving historical and cultural monuments. The flow diagram is presented in Figure 2.1 to illustrate this connection graphically.



**Figure 2.1:** Graphical connection for historical and cultural monuments

As shown in Figure 2.1, the rich historical and cultural heritage of Armenia includes immovable monuments of history and culture. It is an important prerequisite for developing tourism, particularly cognitive, historical, cultural, and religious tourism (Rapp, 2017). A great historical heritage from centuries, hundreds of thousands of monuments, monasteries, cultural centers, temples and cross-stones, and scenic places of nature appear to resemble a captivating exhibition within an open-air museum.

Concurrently, Armenia has a unique opportunity to contribute to creating and promoting a so-called combined tourism product (for example, combining historical and cultural tourism with rural, ecotourism, and adventure).

Most of Armenia's historical and cultural monuments are located in regions where tourists can get acquainted with local traditions, customs, and traditional Armenian cuisine while enjoying nature. Thus, through historical and cultural monuments based on historical and cultural tourism, in combination with other types of tourism, a unique tourist product can be presented. There are great prerequisites for the development of agrarian tourism in Armenian regions. Additionally, the location of historical and cultural monuments near natural monuments has great potential for the development of ecotourism, which is currently the main direction of the sustainable development of international tourism (Semenova et al., 2017).

### **3.0 Analysis of the key factors related to the use and preservation of monuments**

There are several key factors regarding the processes implemented in protecting historical and cultural immovable heritage, such as registration, study, preservation, restoration, and use of historical and cultural monuments. As such, the development of cooperation between international organizations such as UNESCO ICOMOS and the National Commission, of Armenia is an important factor as well in terms of the effective solution of problems of preservation, restoration, and purposeful use of historical and cultural heritage (Movsesian et al., 2020). Regarding the preservation and presentation of the monuments, it is essential to consider the restoration of the monuments to prevent further deterioration of historical and cultural monuments or to bring them back to their original structure and appearance. It's worth mentioning that the Department of Historical and Cultural Monuments Preservation and the Armenian Society for the Preservation of Historical Monuments have restored and reconstructed more than 300 monuments using different restoration methods. In terms of maintenance and service, it is important to ensure a positive experience for the visitors to Armenian attractions and, in this manner, contribute to the preservation of Armenian monuments, creating a sustainable source of income for the further development of these sites, strengthening the connection between communities and their nearby monuments. In the age of information technology and technological development, it has become easier to inform and spread awareness about the rich and diverse Armenian cultural, historical, and natural heritage among the residents of the communities living in the vicinity of the monuments, the Armenian public in general, as well as the international visitors arriving in Armenia (Tovmasyan, 2020). Another important factor is organizing various events and activities to support raising awareness and preservation of Armenian monuments, including research, professional networking, conferences, and workshops.

In addition, providing historical and cultural monuments, special protection areas, and other places of exceptional tourist attraction with the necessary infrastructure is of great importance regarding their use and preservation. The most essential economic infrastructures of Armenia that directly or indirectly affect the development of tourism are the hotel industry, the transportation, and the telecommunications sector. These factors are directly related to the geographical location of the tourist destination, which plays an important role as one of the factors of its attractiveness. It is necessary to enrich tourist routes so that they are not limited to a natural or historical-architectural object and combine the natural, historical, architectural, and ethno-cultural prerequisites for tourism development. It is also crucial to consider that the competitive

advantages of the tourism sector are currently mainly formed in the information field. Information technologies act as modern innovative resources for increasing competitiveness. Modern technologies designed for developing and selling tourism products can provide up-to-date information about the availability of vehicles, tickets, transportation accommodation, etc. in a short time. Thus, developed infrastructure is important from the point of view of tourism which in turn will contribute to the preservation and continuous use and presentation of monuments (Pant, 2005).

#### **4.0 The presentation of monuments for sustainable development**

Historical and cultural monuments are objects of world cultural heritage and important tourist destinations, which, if effectively managed, can have a great impact and potential for local economic development. It contributes to preserving historical and cultural heritage, including monuments, and achieving sustainable economic development, as mentioned by the UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Program in 2013 (Liburd & Becken, 2020). The development of sustainable tourism with the presentation of the world cultural heritage is done through the awareness, capacities, and balanced participation of all the associated parties, preserving this heritage and its global value and, in parallel, providing the necessary income from tourism for its preservation, the development of the local population and for society in general meanwhile ensuring a quality experience for visitors.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that tourism is the only sector of the economy that directly and indirectly impacts the development of almost all the branches of the economy. It hugely impacts such sectors of the economy as agriculture, transportation, construction, consumer goods, etc. It also contributes to developing science and culture, deepening intercultural cooperation and international contacts. Tourism is developing at a stable pace in the Republic of Armenia.

In recent years, it has become one of the economy's most rapidly and dynamically developing branches. Priority is given to developing inbound and domestic tourism, in which historical and cultural monuments act as an important resource. Therefore, it is necessary to implement measures that will satisfy the needs of travelers and contribute to the increase in employment prospects, the development of international relations, the preservation of touristic resources and the environment, and the rational use of historical and cultural monuments. It is essential to ensure sustainable development of the sector without harming natural and cultural values. This procedure develops mechanisms that contribute to the development of the sector while preserving historical and cultural monuments for future generations (Alberini & Longo, 2009; Barthel-Bouchier, 2016). In sustainable development, it is important not

only to preserve and transfer historical and cultural monuments as a national and universal value to the next generations but also to transfer the skills of their use and management.

In conclusion, the role and significance of Armenia's historical and cultural monuments in terms of the national and world cultural heritage is invaluable. They are considered valuable assets in the country's economic development as an important component of domestic and inbound tourism products. It is essential to ensure sustainable development, preserve and transfer this heritage to future generations, and present the values and beauty of culture and history to the world.

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