

CURRENT RISKS AND CHALLENGES FOR HISTORICAL TERRITORIES

using an example of Tatev Monastery, Tatev Hermitage and Vorotan Gorge in Syunik, Armenia.

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The Tatev Monastery, the Tatev Hermitage and the territories of the Vorotan Gorge are located in the southeast of Armenia, not far from the borders with Azerbaijan and Iran. In addition to the monastery of the 9th century, there are 3 monastery hermitages of the 17th century, 22 churches of the 10th-17th centuries and 7 villages, dated from the 4th century. Four of them are not currently inhabited.

There are also 4 caravanserais of the 13th -17th centuries, bridges, historical roads, as well as more than 100 khachkars. All these heritage sites are located in a picturesque landscape with different climatic zones, in which there are about 20 natural heritage sites. In addition, the territory is also interesting for its archaeological finds, presumably dating back to the Bronze Age.

Almost in 616 year there was established the Syunik Eparchy here. Written sources from the 12th century confirm that at least from the 11th century this territory was a single administrative, spiritual and economic complex belonging to the Armenian Kingdom of Syunik.

And the fact that people have lived here continuously since the Bronze Age is confirmed by archeology, cave dwellings, menhirs and dolmens that have survived here up to this day. In a word, this is a unique place where, in addition to the original architecture and picturesque nature, you can trace the lives of people over several millennia and the history of the development of Armenian culture on visible objects. Since 1995, the site of the Tatev Monastery and the Tatev Hermitage and the territories of the Vorotan Gorge are on the Tentative List of World Heritage Sites.

A little more about the territory.

Distinguished by its favorable climate and the presence of fresh water, located on important trade routes from Asia to Europe, this gorge has been actively used by people since ancient times.

In the 1st century, Saint Thaddeus, one of the apostles of Christ and one of the founders of the Armenian Apostolic Church, comes here. Here, in the Tatev Monastery, the disciple of St. Thaddeus, the Monk Evstatious, is buried. Since the 4th century, the first Christian Armenian shrines appeared here. And since that time, a system has been formed in which, since the 9th century, the Tatev Monastery has been a system-forming element, and 3 Hermitages, 22 churches and more than 100 khachkars form a single sacred landscape of the Vorotan Gorge.

The ancient paths and roads have also been preserved to this day. They are marked by caravanserais, bridges, roadside chapels, and khachkars.

The ancient water use system is clearly visible, which is still used by residents for agriculture. The location of ancient settlements is certainly related to water sources.

As a result of the sum of all factors over the centuries, a unique integral cultural landscape has emerged, which includes:

- various climatic zones, allowing for diverse agriculture;
- system of settlements historically associated with the Tatev Monastery;
- system of spatial connections – both visual and functional;
- and, finally, a symbolic system formed by sacred objects with the dominant feature being the Tatev Monastery.

What risks does this territory face today?

The most significant risks for this territory are NATURAL risks - the danger of earthquakes and landslides.

POLITICAL risk in the context of a protracted conflict with Azerbaijan.

TOURISM - massive and unorganized - also poses a threat not only from the point of view of anthropogenic load, but also as a reason to “improve this place for tourists,” the result of which it may lose its authenticity and mystical atmosphere.

Another risk is the MANAGEMENT of large areas of cultural heritage, where the interests of different representatives and segments of society intersect. Solving this problem requires not only a management plan, but also improved legislation and work with local communities, including educational initiatives.

What can we do today and what is doing now to prevent the loss of this unique monument?

First of all, it must be protected not only at the national but also at the international level. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture of Armenia is currently working on preparing a dossier for nominating the property as a UNESCO World Heritage Site on the main list in accordance with the 1972 UNESCO Convention.

Additionally, in December 2023, UNESCO approved Armenia's application to include this site in the list of sites "at risk of destruction as a result of military conflict" in accordance with the 1954 Hague Convention.

As for management issues, use of facilities and tourism, proposals for these areas of work will certainly be included in the management plan. But, in order for decisions not to be formal, it is necessary to conduct systematic work with all participants in the process and at all levels.

This work can also be undertaken by professional educational institutions.

One of such institutions in Armenia is the RE-school. This is an international non-governmental project in which Russian, Armenian and French specialists participate. The RE-school methodology involves a multidisciplinary approach to research and work with historical territories and objects.

This spring, with the support of private charitable foundations - "FUND 301 - land of wisdom" and the "Amaryan Brothers Foundation", an expedition to Syunik was organized with the participation of professors from the Re-school, National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia, Ecole de Chaillot, France and 28 students - young architects, economists, urbanists, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, archaeologists.

The result of the expedition was a comprehensive study of the territory in different directions and contexts, some parts of which I show in this presentation. The criteria for nomination, the boundaries of the property and the formulation of the Outstanding Universal Value were also proposed.

In addition, it seems to me that an important part of our expedition was communication with the residents of Syunik, both with ordinary citizens and with

representatives of the district administration and communities. It is important to note that almost all residents of Syunik realize the value and importance of preserving the cultural heritage of the Vorotan Gorge and are ready to contribute to this process. We managed to informally discuss with them the main issues and problems related to the inclusion of the site in the UNESCO list and leave them with the main instructions and the first vision of the roadmap.

As a result, not only students, but also local residents and the administration received educational practice.

As for the natural risks. Tatev monastery and other objects of Vorotan gorge suffered from the earthquakes constantly, during all the period of their existence. But every time they were reborn and restored. This means that except monitoring of the sites we need to preserve authentic local skills and technologies. We must keep the knowledge about materials and structures. And that's why we need to develop this course in our educational programs, concerning the cultural heritage.

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone for their attention and note that I would like to believe that love for cultural heritage can unite a wide variety of people and be an important motivation for peace and creation.