

ARMENIA

Castle Amberd

Castle Amberd is one of the famous and valuable architectural complexes of Armenia. Once it was a powerful castle, one of the nine defending castles of Ani. It is situated near the village of Burakan in the Aragatsotn region, on the slope of Mount Aragats. Castle Amberd was built on a promontory formed by rivers, with three sides surrounded by impregnable canyons leaving only the north side accessible.

Its History

The great architect Toros Toramanian supposed that in pre-Christian times this place was chosen as a fortress because of the natural strength of the site. This is proved by some partially preserved pre-Christian battlements in the south-west. Tokarsky, one of the scientists who have explored the ruins of Amberd, supposes that the present castle was built in the 7th century and that it became the property of the Bagratunies in the 9th century when it was reconstructed and enlarged in the north. According to historians, the Bagratunies later bequeathed the castle to Vahram Pahlavuny, to whom the prosperous period of the castle was ascribed.

Description of the castle

The castle battlements were built with huge basaltic stones and

mortar and reinforced with thick brick towers which spring from the promontory on three sides. This position of the castle on the Aragats slope not only made it impregnable, but also offered an opportunity to overlook the entire Ararat valley. The castle with its structures appears like a small town with numerous buildings of different functions (sacred, residential etc). The princely palace is situated in the castle citadel. The northern battlements of the castle were reinforced in the Middle Ages and the second battlement was added, with forcing towers of up to 12 meters. At the end of the promontory is the domed Chamer-like church with fan-shaped spire built by Vahram Pahlavuny in 1026.

Within the three-storey palace situated in the north of the promontory the palace reservoir and some other rooms have been preserved. Two similar but bigger reservoirs are within the castle walls, one of which was built for animals. A bit further to the north, not far from the Palace, is also situated the castle's well-preserved bath-house with stove and two domed small rooms built in the Middle Ages. Immediately next to the bath-house is the chapel, now in ruins.

The castle has two guarded entrances from the sides of the Arkhashan and the Amberdadzor rivers which adjoin to the battlements. Inside the battlements a number of residential buildings and outbuildings can be found.

Archaeological and research work at the castle site was carried out in 1922, 1935 and 1964. Some restoration work was done in the 1970s, mainly at the church. In 2004 restoration and stabilisation work began on structure of the castle.

Although much has been done with regard to stabilization and research, the castle, especially the palace and the citadel, is nonetheless still classified as an endangered monument.



View of the citadel (Photo: Edward Grigorian)

The technical state of the citadel and the palace

The stone walls have been constructed directly on natural shale rock foundations. The walls are built of huge solid basaltic stones with mortar filling. There are numerous cracks in the walls, which are the result either of earthquakes or of the deterioration of the foundation stones. The rock surfaces have been wind-beaten because of the climate. The temperature varies between 35° C in summer and minus 35° C in winter. Due to the destruction of the foundations, the north-east tower has collapsed and fallen into the nearest canyon. The wall originally adjoining this tower is now in danger of falling into the canyon as well. The crack between the wall and the next tower is growing wider and wider, threatening the already damaged wall.

Recent research has proved that the damage to the northern and southern walls have occurred in the last 50 to 60 years. This is shown by old photos, where we can very distinctly see that there

were no cracks then. The main difficulty and problem are that the walls of the citadel and the palace have lost the constructive bond. The walls of 12 to 13 metres height, which have stood for several centuries, have lost their stability, and the process of intensive destruction has begun, endangering the existence of the monument.

The research and stabilisation process of Amberd Castle is being prevented by the circumstance that the middle battlement with all its areas of destruction is between the palace and the northern battlement. To clear and reinforce the inner part of the ruins is full of risk, as for hundreds of years the battlements have leaned upon the ruins. The clearing of the ruin might worsen the already unstable situation.

As a result, the existence of this monument of unique historical-cultural value is endangered. An urgent and immediate intervention will be necessary to stabilise and preserve Amberd Castle.

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View from the citadel towards the church (Photo: Edward Grigorian)