

ARMENIA

Erebouni Fortress

Erebouni fortress is located south-east of Yerevan city, on the top of a hill called Arin-Berd. In 1950, during archaeological excavations a cuneiform inscription was discovered at Arin Berd which clarified the facts of construction of Erebouni fortress-town. The value of



Erebouni Fortress, portico

the monument increased significantly due to the comment of Urartu expert M. Israyelyan that it was the “birth certificate” for Yerevan city, the first real scientific document.

History

Erebouni was founded by King Argishti I in 782 BC as a strategic military center in the Aza country of the Ararat valley. In the 6th c. BC the Urartu kingdom collapsed, but Erebouni continued its history during the Achaemenid Empire and the early Armenian and Hellenistic periods. This is proved by structures and archaeological artifacts discovered in Erebouni (two millet coins, an Emperor Augustus coin, three silver horn-shaped cups and a vessel).

Description of the fortress and present structural situation

The fortress built on top of a hill was inaccessible from two sides, and the main gate was surrounded by three layers of walls reinforced by counter forts. The walls were 12 m tall and 3.5–4 m wide. The lower layers of the walls were built using irregular stones, and the upper layer was made of raw bricks.

The location of the fortress was not accidental. It was inaccessible, but at the same time connected with other Urartian cities in the Ararat valley: Argishtihinili and, later on, Tejshebaini.

Cuneiform inscriptions found in Erebouni fortress give us short information about construction works carried out under the kings of Urartu, Argishti I, his son Sardur II, and Rusa III.

Erebouni is a magnificent architectural complex that consisted of a palace, structures for religious worship and service quarters. The palace with its Susi temple and open columned courtyard was situated on the north-western part of the hill in the centre of the citadel. Civil structures were built on the northern part of the hill and service rooms for the temple on the southern part. Residential and service quarters around the inner courtyard were built on the northern part of the hill, covering almost the entire slope.

Another very important structure in the south-west of the citadel is a large temple with column hall dedicated to Khaldi, the great god



of Urartian myth. The main hall of the palace is on the right side of the square. During later reconstructions it was transformed into rooms with vessels, where the bottoms of the vessels survived. On both sides of this room there were bedrooms for soldiers and, next to them, residential and other auxiliary structures. The walls of the temple were decorated with frescoes showing images of sacrifice, parades of gods, and other ritual pictures.

A definition of the historic and cultural value of this fortress has to take into account that the fortress continued the traditions of construction of central Urartu and Mesopotamia.

Research and excavations in this area of the fortress were undertaken in 1950–1968, then again in 2004 and 2006, and continue until today. Reconstruction works were carried out in the 1980s on the structures next to the columned courtyard. Excavations and reinforcement works continue, although the monument, especially the palace rooms, the temple to Khaldi, and the walls of certain rooms are considered to be highly endangered.

Technical state of the citadel structures

In some parts foundations do not exist as the walls were built on rocks, but the construction of other parts was carried out using basalt and tuff stones with clay mixture to fill holes in the walls, a method which provided additional reinforcement to the foundation. The lower level of the walls in Erebouni was more than 1 m tall. The foundation walls were built from basalt and tuff stones, on top of which the brick walls with clay mixture were built.



Erebouni Fortress, damaged wall paintings

Ruinous state of the surrounding walls



As the monument has been exposed to the weather for a long period, it is in quite a ruinous state. Some parts of the fortress wall around the monument have collapsed, the wall of the portico (guest hall) has cracked, also damaging the repainted copies of the frescoes. The roof of the Khaldi temple has collapsed, the walls have decayed and cracked, and the repainted frescoes have almost disappeared. The raw brick walls of the structures which were 2.5–3 m tall after the excavations no longer exist and only the stone foundations remain.

As concerns the frescoes recreated on the walls of the palace and adjacent hall nothing but traces of paint remains. The roof of the palace rooms and the wall of the hall have collapsed. The second room of the palace where the brick wall still exists is at risk of collapsing.

On the left side of the fortress, the raw brick walls of the service quarters which have partially survived are now at risk of decaying, and they need to be reinforced and reconstructed.

In the past years an Armenian-French archeological team has continued the excavations on the territory of the citadel. In 2010, the team opened a structure next to the Khaldi temple, possibly a place of worship. During this excavation, in the room adjoining this structure, remains of frescoes were uncovered on the floor, which had probably fallen from the collapsed wall. Professor David Stronach of Berkeley University, California discovered next to the Khaldi temple a niche decorated with frescoes. He moved them to the museum, restored and reinforced them in order to be able to put them back into the niche for display, when needed.

Although an agreement was signed between the French archeological expedition and the management of the Erebouni historic-archaeological museum-preserve that parallel to the excavation work a reinforcement of the excavated parts and a restoration of the damaged sections be carried out, the existence of the historic-archaeological preserve is in danger. The 3 000 year-old citadel needs to be restored, reinforced and protected immediately.

It can be stated with confidence that the monument still hides many secrets and that their discovery and research will give additional value to the history of Erebouni fortress.

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