

## PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

# The Study of Armenian Architecture in the Works of Ghevond Alishan

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## ABSTRACT

This article discusses the parts of Ghevond Alishan's fundamental works related to architectural heritage. Our goal was to reveal the approaches and research methods that Alishan the Armenologist was guided by when presenting the architectural heritage. All the types of architectural monuments and groups of monuments (such as settlements, cities, fortresses, people's houses, monastic complexes, churches, engineering structures) to which the great scientist referred were observed. The article singles out the important directions of architectural heritage research. The important mission of Alishan's research, both for its time and in general, in the archiving, comprehensive research, popularization and transmission of the Armenian architectural heritage has been appreciated.

## ARTICLE DATA

**Article History**

Received 25 January 2022

Revised 30 January 2022

Accepted 25 November 2022

**Keywords**

Ghevond Alishan

Armenian architecture

World architecture research

Topographies

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ghevond Alishan has a special place among the grateful people of Armenian architectural science. The issue of comprehensive research on Armenian architecture has received constant attention and discussion in the works of Alishan. He is one of the founders of the School of Armenology and was of the opinion that there is no history without geography and chronology, and that architecture does not exist without space and environment.

The great Armenologist dedicates all his potential to the region – to the Armenian world and landscape – in which inseparable parts are architectural monuments and whose history Alishan presents in his works.

Many researchers have referred to Alishan's life and activities. Starting with the Mekhitarists (Simon Yeremyan, Arsen Ghazikyan, priest Leon Zekiyan, etc.), then also the biographers, historians and literary critics of the Soviet-Armenian period (Ashot Melkonyan, Edik Minasyan, Suren Shtikyan, Irma Safrazbekyan, Aelita Dolukhanyan, etc.) referred to his literary and historical work. The materials related to

Armenian architecture published in "Bazmavep" were coordinated and classified by David Kertmenjyan [1] and Ashot Grigoryan discussed the ecological mystical perceptions of Ghevond Alishan [2].

The aim of the presented examination was to reveal the approaches and research method by which Alishan the Armenologist was guided in presenting the architectural heritage. In order to achieve the goal, the basic works of Alishan were read in detail, the parts where the Armenian architectural heritage is presented were separated. They are systematized and presented as part of the theory of Armenian architecture. Both the study of world architecture and the development of Armenian architectural science had at its roots bibliographies and topographies, which were the basis for new developments in the theory and history of 19th century architecture, providing a transition to modern manifestations of architectural thought.

Naturally, in this development, the mission of Alishan's research to archive Armenian architectural heritage, comprehensive research, popularization, and passing it on to future generations may play a role.

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## 2. ALISHAN'S INNOVATIVE METHOD OF REPRESENTATION OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AND RESTORATION OF MONUMENTS

From the beginning, Alishan presented the geography and history of Armenia together with a general description of historical and architectural monuments and antiquities. Unlike previous researchers (A. Kostandyants, M. Taghiadyan, S. Jalalyants, M. Barkhudaryan), who wrote their works during their travels based on the rich and factual materials collected by travelers (Tavernie, Zh. Chardin, I. Chopin, etc.), Alishan made his multifaceted descriptions of Armenia, literary, historical-geographical generalizations, based solely on in-depth knowledge gained, arguments drawn from various scientific studies and historians. It is noteworthy that the eminent scientist has never been to Armenia, but as a result of large-scale source studies and accumulation of a large scientific resource, he was able to clarify and document many historical-geographical names, describe and locate many antiquities. This, unfortunately, is a possible feature of the scientist Alishan compared to the representatives of the Armenian architectural complexes before that.

He intended to summarize the history-geography of all 15 Armenian worlds in his work "Topography of the Great Armenians". However, he managed to publish only the works "Shirak", "Sisuan", "Sisakan", "Ayrarat", which are very valuable works in terms of research of architectural monuments and have become the subject of our discussion.

"The Topography of the Great Armenians" was published in Venice in mid-1855 [3], which was a great success and was considered by contemporaries (Marie Jean Brosse, Edouard Dulorie) [4]. The information about the historical-geographical and monuments of Armenia before Alishan was extremely fragmentary, contradictory, rather contradictory than complementary. European-Russian travelers (Tavernier, Chopin, Chardin) provided informal descriptions of several Armenian provinces, including illustrations of 19th-century scientific concepts about Armenia and its culture.

In "Topography of the Great Armenians", Alishan presents both the natural and cultural landscape of Armenian world. Climatic characteristics of rivers, mountains, different places, scientific descriptions of flora and fauna are an inseparable part of the historical states of Armenia (Vaspuakan, Syunik, Artsakh, Ayrarat, Tayk, etc.) and the historical-geographical description and scientific history of the antiquities (folk houses, Etchmiadzin Cathedral, Van

Fortress etc.). This was a completely new approach and a new methodology.

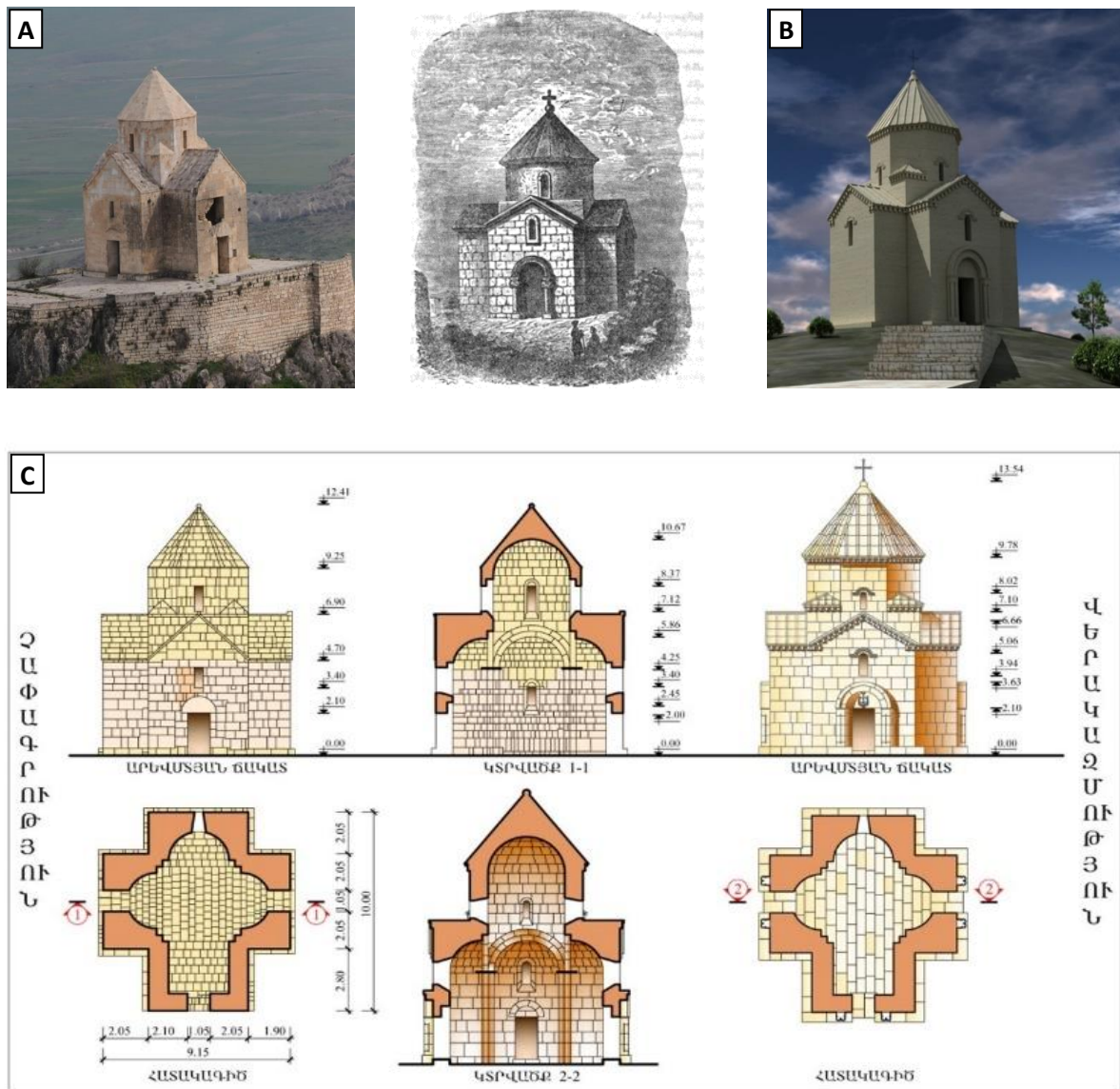
In some cases, the materials in "Topography of the Great Armenians" still have significance today. For us, the information and the picture mentioned in the work about the church near Shushi, which is surely the central dome church of Vankasar in the Askeran region of the Artsakh Republic, which is also known as Tigranakert Church in medieval Armenian sources, were useful to us. Today, it stands on top of a mountain, altered in the 1980s as a result of Azerbaijan's fraudulent "restoration". The proposal to restore the church was made because of a combination of original measurements, factual evidence, comparative materials (particularly Karashamb, Aylaber, St. Astvatsatsin three-altar churches in Talin), rich medieval cultural layer and architectural complexes of the region. Thus, the whole bankruptcy of the version of considering the material cultural monuments created by the Artsakh part of the Armenian people as Afghan is revealed [5]. Today, after the second Artsakh war, the church of Vankasar appeared again in the "captivity" of Azerbaijan.

Alishan wrote "Artsakh" with concern of presenting the comprehensive life of Artsakh, the 10th state of Armenia, as completely as possible and in appropriate chronological order, which he greatly succeeded in doing. While studying the architectural heritage of Artsakh [6], Alishan's descriptions of individual monuments were important to us [7] (Fig. 1).

### 2.1. Comprehensive Research of Cultural Heritage in the Work of "Shirak"

Alishan's first work on the historical geography of 15 Armenian provinces was "Shirak", published in 1881. Shirak attracted Alishan's attention especially because the capital Ani, seat of Bagratuni, was located here, the glory of medieval Armenian urban development with its rich architecture. Ani is presented with a comprehensive examination: landscape and location, fortifications, churches, mosques, civil buildings, tombs, bridges. The dimensions of the structures are presented in meticulous detail and skill.

In the work, the author also presented the important centers that played a significant role in the intellectual and cultural life of the Armenian people - the monasteries and deserts - Dprevank, Horomos, Tekor, Marmashen, Haricha monasteries. In addition to presenting the architectural features of the individual structures of the complex, the old and new inscriptions and their decipherments, as complete a biography of the famous monks of the monastery as possible, and the general description of the inscriptions in the monastery are given here [8].



**Figure 1.** The church of Vankasar – A: the condition after the Azerbaijani "restoration" – B: as presented by Ghevond Alishan – C: the proposal for restoration according to L. Kirakosyan.

Four years after the publication of "Shirak", in 1885, the next work of Alishan entitled "Sisuan and Leo the Great" was published in Venice, which came to prove that its author continued to firmly implement his huge idea of locating the whole of Armenia. It was highly appreciated by contemporaries; it was translated into French with partial reductions [9].

## 2.2. Specifics of the Work "Sisua and Levon the Great"

The writing style of "Sisuan and Leo the Great" was different from the previous ones. As the researchers rightly point out, Alishan uses toponyms, antiquities, cases and faces, conclusions and evidence in the form

of self-assured expressions such as "I think", "it seems to me", "as a rule", "I do not know for sure", "maybe". This has its justification. The historian-geographer represented and mapped a country that had been in history for four hundred years, and to clarify this or that question he could not use the services of his acquaintances on the ground, which he did when mapping "Shirak Ashkharh". He collected materials and facts from the topographies of European geographers (H. Kippert, E. Ryan, W. Langlois), mainly from various works of Armenian historians (Matteos Urhayetsi, Agatangeghos, Samvel Anetsi, Vahram Rabuni, Smbat Gundstable) and European historians (Macheras, Hovhannes Dardel, Francesca Rivola, Abulfaraja Assori). It was difficult to make

adjustments, because the settlements, cities and fortresses of Cilician Armenia, depending on the whims of the conquerors of different times, were subject to many renamings. Several places were given several names, which was often confusing. In spite of all this, the author presents very valuable work which in many parts has the significance of a primary source [10] and contains important information about the historical-architectural heritage of historical Cilicia. The important buildings in the city of Sis (Catholicosate, the Rubinyans' Palace), the institutions that are the center of care and culture are described in detail [11]. This work was also politically important for the Armenians. Cilicia cities and fortresses, churches and settlements came to validate the Armenianness of the area, which the Ottoman Empire could not tolerate. The work "Sisuan and Leo the Great" was once banned there [12].

The study "Ayrarat", which was dedicated to the topography and historical-architectural heritage of the province of the same name in Armenia, was published in 1890. This period was a period of cruelty and austerity for the Armenian people and non-Muslim nations, which was associated with the name of the "Red Sultan" Abdul Hamid.

The work presents in detail all the provinces of Ayrarat "world" with their historical-architectural monuments. For example, historical Kars with its entire complex is discussed in detail: the fortress, the towns, the Vardan Bridge and the Church of the Apostles. Alishan does not consider it superfluous to present the architectural monuments of historical Shirak (Ani, Khtskonk, Tekor) once again. The church of Mastara, the Katoghike of Talin and the inscriptions belonging to him were discussed in Aragatsofn. Father Ghevond did not miss the cuneiform inscriptions of the Van kingdom in the capital of Armavir. The constructive and decorative nodes of the structures, monuments, khachkars were used (e.g. the sculpture of the vestibule of Mren Church, the vestibule of St. Karapet Church of Hovhanavank, the khachkar placed in the porch). The complex of Etchmiadzin with its ecclesiastical, educational, economic and fortification components was examined in detail. The work surprises with abundance of graphic and illustrative materials accompanying the detailed information of many monasteries and deserts built in Ayrarat.

### **3. "AYRARAT" AND "SISAKAN" AS SOURCES OF HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE RESEARCH**

The pages of "Ayrarat" present in detail the late medieval Yerevan Fortress, the districts (Shahar, Karhank, Kond, Nor Tagh) and the religious structures

(churches, mosques) [13]. In this work, Alishan worthily mentions the archeological monuments, archeological sites, in particular the capitals of Artashat and Dvin [14].

After the publication of "Ayrarat", all of Alishan's works were banned from entering Turkey. This was understandable, because the author, through his scientific activity, evoked the same patriotic moods as he did through fiction. Instead, the book was highly praised by intellectuals outside Turkey ("Handes Amsorya" – 10 18 1890, reviewer H. Tashyan; "Ardzagank" – 1890 No. 20, reviewer: St. Malkhasyants; "New Century" – 1890 No. 170, reviewer: P. Proshyan; "Mshak" – 1901 No. 256, reviewer: St. Malkhasyants).

In 1893 Alishan wrote the fourth famous work, "Sisakan", which was published in Venice and where the author examined the "Syunik world". The historical sites, monasteries (Ayrivank, Sjanavank, Noravank), churches and caravanserais are presented with the same diligence and thorough examination [15]. Unfortunately, this work became the "swan song" of Alishan's scientific endeavor. His 20–22-volume project to write an exam study of all "worlds" (provinces) of Armenia was interrupted because of the death of a great scientist. However, what was done was enough to say that Alishan once opened a new page in the field of Armenian geography and historiography, particularly in the theory and history of Armenian architecture. With a lively way of telling and analyzing himself and with a pictorial thinking and original writing style, he was able to complement one with the other and to reason, explain and complete one with the other. These are works in which specialists in all fields can find abundant material for scientific study and examination.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

The study of Ghevond Alishan's architectural heritage is an important part of the history and theory of Armenian architecture.

Architectural monuments in Alishan's works are viewed in the natural landscape, emphasizing one important feature of Armenian architecture: the harmonious unity with nature.

Alishan discussed all the components of the Armenian architectural heritage: settlements, cities, fortresses, people's houses, monastic complexes, churches, engineering structures.

Historical-architectural heritage is presented by the method of documentary analysis based on historical-geographies, which was once a new, comprehensive expression of scientific thought.

The materials related to the Armenian architecture in Alishan's works in some cases have the importance of primary sources and are still a major factor in the restoration of monuments and the preparation of reconstruction projects.

Alishan's works undertook the mission of recognizing and popularizing the Armenian historical-architectural heritage.

Surveys and analyzes related to Alishan's architectural heritage contain rich materials for scientific research and open new perspectives.

Topographical representations of architectural complexes and monuments in Alishan-Nahapet's works are relevant and can be especially relevant today, to reveal the mechanisms of preservation and enforcement of Armenian architectural heritage outside the territory of the Republic of Armenia (Turkey, Azerbaijan).

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