



FIELD REPORT

Dear Volunteers:

It is hard to believe a year has passed since we last met in Armenia. I hope you all are doing well and I wanted to bring you up to date on my research activities since last summer.

By the end of my three expeditions, you had helped me document four houses and twenty-four blocks. The houses we worked on this year were quite large and we worked with some amazing families. Your drawings, photographs and oral histories continue to help me piece together the evolution and development of this unique architectural fabric. With your help I have concluded the data collection of this portion of the research and will now turn my attention to analyzing the information, and begin the process of identifying and writing about an Armenian Pattern Language.

This past October, I made a trip back to Gyumri with one of the volunteers from Team 2, a structural engineer who provided some exciting insights regarding the design and construction of the sod roofs that were so prevalent in Gyumri during the Aleksandropol years. We stayed in touch after his expedition and he graciously agreed to help me do a structural assessment on one of the houses I have been slowly documenting over the past few years. I have been working to get financing from the World Monument's Fund to restore and renovate this house and this structural assessment will help me through that process.

During the rest of the year I have been busy teaching my design studios, developing and teaching a new course, and documenting student work to exhibit during the School of Architecture's recent accreditation. My semester ended at the end of April and I am back in Armenia working to wrap up the last bits of the project. I have only been here a week but have already spent half of that time in Gyumri working with Shoghik, Tamara, and Armen, and visiting some of the families we worked with last summer. The families speak so fondly of their time with you and show me the photos that you took of them. I hope your time in Armenia was as memorable.

I will try and keep you posted as I write about this work so don't be surprised if you receive an email with an article attached. My experience with Earthwatch these past three years has been quite fulfilling and I owe much of the success of the project to great volunteers like you. Best wishes to you all and I hope you have a safe and happy summer.

With warm regards,

Jane



SECTION ONE

Project Title: Armenia's Architectural Heritage
Principal Investigators: Jane Britt Greenwood, AIA
Research Area: Gyumri, Armenia 40.78° N, 43.84° W
Date field report completed: May 2010
Period covered by this report: Jun 2009 - May 2010

Top Highlight from the Past Field Season

There were actually two highlights from the summer 2009 expedition season: one based on archival research and one based on volunteer research.

Prior to the arrival of each expedition team, I identify the houses that I want to document based on the estimated date of construction. This information currently comes from a website entitled "Alexandrapol Digital Archive" produced by City Research Center. However, this database neither includes all the houses in the KHD (Kumayri Historic District) (we have researched and documented seven houses not included in this database) nor does it contain much information regarding the history of the house (original owners, process of design approval and construction, original architectural drawings, etc.)

Since I arrived in Armenia a few weeks ahead of the first team, I was able to make a quick trip to the National Archives in Yerevan to look for information specific to the houses I wanted to document. And, for the first time, I found information in the archives about one of the houses. In addition to finding copies of the original drawings, I also found some history of the structure and discovered that the building was originally designed as a hotel, not a private house as referenced in the Alexandrapol Digital Archive. I will be able to compare these original documents to the existing conditions and learn more about the original design intentions.

The second highlight for the summer occurred in conjunction with the professional skills of one of the volunteers and dealt with the design and construction of sod roofs. Using sod roofs at the turn of the 20th century on houses designed in such a formal neo-classical style has always been an aspect of the architecture of the Kumayri Historic District that has intrigued and fascinated me. This has also been information I have been searching for in the archives but, to date, have found no mention or indication of their use. Thanks to our volunteer who is a structural engineer from the UK, we were able to finally draw, sketch, and begin the process of analyzing the design, construction, and structural integrity of these roofs.

Non-technical Overview of Results

Given the sheer size of the Kumayri Historic District (1600 structures), I have worked to focus the documentation process on representative structures built from the time Aleksandropol became a city (1840) to when it's name changed to Leninakan (1920). Each summer for the past three years, with the help of the "Alexandropol Digital Archive" (ADA), I identified houses for Earthwatch volunteers to document that fell within the following time frames: 1840-1860, 1860-1880, 1880-1900, and 1900-1920. Therefore, over the life of this grant, the houses documented fall within the following time frames:

- 1840-1860: None
- 1860-1880: Gorki 2, Gorki 8, Cheraz 24
- 1880-1900: Abovyan 254, Jivani 98, Ghorghanyan 238, Ghorghyan 97, Varpetats 172/Gorki 30, Hanesoghlyan 8
- 1900-1920: Jivani 108/110, Gai 5, Hanesoghlyan 6, Gorki 5

Seven houses not currently referenced in the "Alexandropol Digital Archive." (Teryan 83/Abovyan 163, Rustavelli 27, Jivani 50, Jivani 52, Abovyan 111, Shiraz House Museum, Jivani 48) were also selected for documentation simply based on their visually unique architectural qualities. Research activities in the National Archives will continue the search for historical background on all twenty houses documented to date.

Working with this sample of buildings, I will now begin the process of developing an Armenian pattern language: a graphic representation of an architectural language specific to the Shirak region of Armenia, the city of Gyumri, and the structures of the Kumayri Historic District.

Identifying and isolating architectural characteristics common to each twenty-year time frame will also become the basis to more scientifically date the other documented structures. And finally, by mapping the houses onto the block surveys according to the date constructed will provide a framework for theorizing the way in which the city grew, evolved, and changed over time.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the logistics coordinator, tour guide, driver, Armenian staff, research assistant, student, friends of the project, the Kumayri Museum Preserve, Hotel Berlin, State University Guest House, staff, EW Project Manager, Team 1 Volunteers, Team 2 Volunteers, Team 3 Volunteers, and the families of Gyumri.

SECTION TWO: TECHNICAL RESULTS

1. REPORTING ON RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Objective 1

Document houses in the Kumayri Historic District of Gyumri, Armenia

Progress towards/against Objective

During the summer of 2009, 11 Earthwatch volunteers worked to document four houses. Free hand measured drawings of floor plans, and interior and exterior elevations were produced,

along with photographic documentation, and in some cases, the recording of oral histories. An overview of the data collected follows:

- Gai 5: Five volunteers produced 38 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations and recorded 1 hour of oral history. From this information, staff member Tamara Mkrtchyan produced 35 AutoCAD drawings of floor plans, interior and exterior elevations.
- Gorki 5: Three volunteers produced 75 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations, and 241 photographs. From this information, architecture student Tyler Pence and staff member Tamara Mkrtchyan produced 107 AutoCAD drawings of floor plans, interior and exterior elevations.
- Hanesoghlyan 6: Three volunteers produced 32 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations and recorded 1 hour of oral history. From this information, staff member Tamara Mkrtchyan produced 50 AutoCAD drawings of floor plans, interior and exterior elevations.
- Hanesoghlyan 8: Eight volunteers produced 112 sketches of plans and interior/exterior elevations, and 49 photographs, and recorded 30 minutes of oral history. From this information, architecture students Eric Martin and Tyler Pence, and staff member Tamara Mkrtchyan produced 131 AutoCAD drawings of floor plans, interior and exterior elevations.

Objective 2

Perform visual surveys of city blocks

Progress towards/against Objective

The Kumayri Historic District stretches from the Black Fort located at the western edge of the city to the Gyumri train station to the east, and from Armenian Woman Square to the north to the bus station to the south. Within this area of roughly 250 hectares one can find over 1600 historic structures that embody the memory of a time when Aleksandrapol was a thriving, vibrant city. In order to learn how the city grew and evolved over time, the volunteers have been performing visual surveys of city blocks.

Under the guidance of research assistant Kristin Rugroden and architecture student Eric Martin, EW volunteers surveyed 24 of 40 initially identified blocks. They recorded addresses, assessed damage from the 1988 earthquake, and identified houses that have been repaired, restored, or reconstructed. This number, combined with the completed surveys from SU08, brings the total number of blocks surveyed to thirty-four. Information from an on-line database produced by the City Research Center will be combined with information collected by the volunteers and transferred onto city maps in an effort to learn how the city evolved according to construction patterns and architectural styles.

In addition to the data gathering, Eric Martin was also able to systematically organize all photographic images according to block, street name, address, and a tag for sorting. Also included in this data is a photo of each block from Google Earth, contact sheets of all photos, and individual photos of buildings and architectural details.

Objective 3

Developing a Pattern Language

Progress towards/against Objective

One thing that has become abundantly clear as this research progressed is the degree of subtlety and architectural sophistication inherent in the historic houses of Gyumri. The vast number of structures located in the Kumayri Historic District, coupled with resistance from some home owners and lack of volunteer experience, made it impossible to document very many houses. However, the strategy of documenting representative structures from four 20-year time frames (1840-1860, 1860-1880, 1880-1900, 1900-1920) will provide a basis from which to begin the process of developing an Armenian Pattern Language.

The PI plans to spend the summer of 2010 in Armenia working to finalize all AutoCAD drawings, correcting dimensional data where needed, and documenting the final six city blocks. Once the data collection is updated and finalized, the process of analyzing and disseminating the findings will begin.

2. PARTNERSHIPS

The most important -- and significant -- partnerships to evolve from this research are the relationships that have developed between the PI and the families of Gyumri.

Working with a great local staff of translators and research assistants, the PI was quickly able to engage members of the community in the process of documenting their houses. Interacting with the families was always a joy, but there was never any guarantee that they would allow us to document their homes until we arrived and they actually invited us in. This was, without a doubt, the most stressful part of this research endeavor.

Over the course of three summers (10 expeditions) the PI and her Earthwatch volunteers became a familiar sight on the streets of Gyumri; however, recruiting families continued to be the most challenging component of the work. While some families did refuse to work with us, the vast majority eagerly invited us into their homes. Without the openness and willingness of those twenty families, this project would not have been so successful. The PI still stays in touch with the families and plans to give them copies of the work that the volunteers, architecture students, and research assistants helped the PI prepare.

While the families ultimately made this project possible, there are also other strong ties that developed between the PI and local professionals in both Gyumri and Yerevan. The PI enthusiastically spent time sharing her research with local architects, contractors, developers, artists, and archaeologists, as well as international aid agencies, museum directors, and local governmental ministers. As this research continues to evolve, the PI will continue to interact with these individuals in the hope that future collaborations and partnerships will emerge.

3. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Removed or Modified Objectives

N/A

3.2. New Objectives

N/A

4. DISSEMINATION

Printed:

PI was a committee member for the following graduate thesis: "Resistance in Armenian Vernacular Architecture" by Kristin Rugroden. University of Idaho: Department of Sociology/Anthropology/Justice Studies.

Visual:

In conjunction with the accreditation of Mississippi State University's School of Architecture (S/ARC) program, each faculty member was required to provide graphic images of their research. The PI submitted samples of work completed to date with one slide referencing the Earthwatch Institute and naming all the volunteers. Once the accreditation visit concluded, all information provided by S/ARC faculty members was loaded onto a computer that was prominently displayed in the main office. Played on a continuous loop, the presentations are viewed by visitors to the College of Architecture, Art, and Design, and the S/ARC.

Mass Media:

The following article was written by volunteer Joe Sidor: "Facts Around the World: Armenia." Redlands Daily Facts, Redlands, CA. August 4, 2009.
[http://www.redlandsdailyfacts.com/news/ci_12991528]

Meetings and conferences:

"Armenian Monuments Awareness Project." [Gyumri, Armenia]: 26 July 2009. PI was invited speaker at unveiling of interpretative panels for the Slobodka neighborhood in the Kumayri Historic District.

The PI always presents a lecture on her research to her Architecture Appreciation and The Architecture of Housing classes at Mississippi State University.

Forthcoming: Invited presentation to the Department of Law, American University of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia scheduled for 26 May 2010. Additional invited lectures are anticipated during the summer of 2010 while the PI is in Armenia.

Other:

During the summer of 2009, the PI submitted a teaching/research proposal entitled "Preservation, Conservation, and Critical Regionalism: Determining the Future of Historic Armenian Houses in a World of Global Modernization" for a Fulbright Scholarship. In December 2009, she learned she had passed the peer review process in the US and that her proposal was sent to the US Embassy in Armenia for further review. In May 2010, the PI learned that she was an Alternate for a Fulbright Scholarship to Armenia. If one of the other three scholarship recipients does not accept the award, or if the American Embassy receives additional funding, then the PI will spend the 2010-2011 academic-year in Yerevan. In the meantime, the PI is working with faculty from the American University of Armenia to revise the proposal in order to

re-submit it in July 2010. The teaching and research proposed in this application evolved as a result of the Earthwatch sponsored research to date.

5. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION

All the local staff were beneficiaries of specific training that helped them fulfil their job role: translators were able to hone their English skills through interaction with the volunteers, and AutoCAD technicians were able to learn more about digital technology through their interaction with architecture students that came from the US with the PI.

6.1. CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS, AGENDAS, POLICIES, MANAGEMENT PLANS

N/A

6.2. CONTRIBUTIONS TO LOCAL, NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONVENTIONS, AGENDAS, POLICIES, MANAGEMENT PLANS

N/A

7. ACTIONS OR ACTIVITIES THAT ENHANCE NATURAL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Education & Awareness:

As an architect and educator, one of the over arching goals of this research has been to educate Earthwatch volunteers, citizens of Gyumri, and architecture students regarding the role of residential architecture in preserving cultural identity. When Earthwatch volunteers leave this project they are able to “see” the built environment in a way they never did before. Local families also have a better understanding and appreciation for the historic value of their homes and thus “see” them in a more positive and protective light. Architecture students leave this project “seeing” historic architecture in a way that will make them more sensitive to the way in which architectural aesthetics can evolve as a by-product of environmental and cultural issues.

8. LONG TERM IMPACT OF PROJECT

Cultural Heritage Enhanced, restored or maintained

Educating the citizens of Armenia regarding the value of their cultural heritage will be a long-term endeavor that will – unfortunately - not come to pass as a result of this research. With the exception of religious structures, the country has already lost much of the small-scale architectural gems that embodied the strength and resilience of this amazing culture in the face of adversity. However, the undisputed forces of corruption will only continue to facilitate the move towards a complete “architectural genocide”. Many citizens already bemoan the loss of historic houses, but until officials of the Armenian government refuse to allow the demolition of historic structures in order to build large-scale housing blocks that remain empty, there is no hope of saving what is left of Armenia’s secular cultural identity.

