

= Temple of Garni =

The Temple of Garni (Armenian : ?????? ?????????????? ?????? Gaʔnii het ʔ anosakan taʔar , lit . " pagan temple of Garni ") is a classical Hellenistic temple in Garni , Armenia . It is perhaps the best @-@ known structure and symbol of pre @-@ Christian Armenia . It was probably built by king Tiridates I in the first century AD as a temple to the sun god Mihr .

After Armenia 's conversion to Christianity in the early fourth century , it was converted into a royal summer house of Khosrovidukht , the sister of Tiridates III . According to some scholars it was not a temple but a tomb and thus survived the universal destruction of pagan structures . It collapsed in a 1679 earthquake . Renewed interest in the 19th century led to excavations at the site in mid @-@ 20th century and its eventual reconstruction between 1969 and 1975 . It is the only known Greco @-@ Roman colonnaded building in Armenia and the only standing such building in the former Soviet Union . It is one of the main tourist attractions in Armenia and the central shrine of Armenian neopaganism .

= = Location = =

The temple is at the edge of a triangular cliff and is part of the fortress of Garni (Armenian : ?????? ?????? , Gaʔnii amrots or ?????? ?????? , Gaʔnu amrots) . One of the oldest fortresses in Armenia , it is mentioned as Gorneas in the first @-@ century Annals of Tacitus . The site is near the village of Garni , in Armenia 's Kotayk Province and is officially known as the Garni Historical and Cultural Museum Reserve (Armenian : « ?????? » ?????? @-@ ?????????????? ????????? @-@ ??????????) , which includes the temple , a bath complex , a royal summer palace , the seventh century church of St. Sion and other minor items (e.g. , medieval khachkars) . In total , the list of intangible historical and cultural monuments approved by the government of Armenia includes 11 items . It occupies 3 @.@ 5 hectares (8 @.@ 6 acres) and is supervised by the Service for the Protection of Historical Environment and Cultural Museum Reservations , an agency attached to the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia .

= = History = =

The precise construction date of the temple is unknown and is subject to debate . The dominant view is that it was built in 77 AD , during the eleventh year of the reign of king Tiridates I. In 1945 the painter Martiros Saryan discovered a Greek inscription , which named Tiridates the Sun (Helios) as the founder of the temple . The inscription , which probably came from the fortress wall of Garni and not the actual temple , is damaged and various readings are possible . One reading and translation is :

Early medieval historian Movses Khorenatsi attributed the inscription to Tiridates III . Most scholars now attribute the inscription to Tiridates I. Considering that the inscription says the temple was built in the eleventh year of reign of Tiridates I , the temple is believed to have been completed in 77 AD . This date was proposed by Alexander Sahinian and has since gained general acceptance in Armenia . The date is primarily linked to the visit of Tiridates I to Rome in 66 AD , where he was crowned by Roman emperor Nero . To rebuild the city of Artaxata (Artashat) , destroyed by the Roman general Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo , Nero gave Tiridates 50 million drachmas and provided him with Roman craftsmen . Upon his return to Armenia Tiridates began a major project of reconstruction , which included rebuilding the fortified city of Garni . It is during this period that the temple is thought to have been built . The temple is believed to have been dedicated to Mihr , the sun god in the Zoroastrian @-@ influenced Armenian mythology and the equivalent of Mithra . Tiridates , like other Armenian monarchs , considered Mihr their patron . Some scholars have argued that the historical context during which the temple was built , i.e. after returning from Rome as king , it is natural that Tiridates dedicated the temple to his patron god . James R. Russells finds the view of the structure being a temple of Mihr baseless . Russell is also sceptical that the inscription refers to the temple .

According to a different interpretation of the extant literary testimonia and the evidence provided by coinage , the erection of the temple started in 115 AD . The pretext for its construction would have been the declaration of Armenia as a Roman province and the temple would have housed the imperial effigy of Trajan .

A newer alternative theory proposed by Wilkinson (1982) suggests that the building is a tomb , probably constructed circa 175 AD . This theory is based on a comparison to Graeco @-@ Roman buildings of western Asia Minor (e.g. Nereid Monument , Belevi Mausoleum , Mausoleum at Halicarnassus) , the discovery of nearby graves that date to about that time , the discovery of a few marble pieces of the Asiatic sarcophagus style , and other arguments such as the unlikelihood that a pagan temple would survive destruction during Armenia 's conversion to Christianity when all other such temples were destroyed . It might have been the tomb of an Armeno @-@ Roman ruler such as Sohaemus or possibly Aurelius Pacorus (Bakur) .

= = = Decline = = =

In the early fourth century when Armenian King Tiridates III adopted Christianity as a state religion virtually all known pagan places of worship were destroyed . The Temple of Garni is the only pagan and Hellenistic structure to have survived the widespread destruction . It remains unknown why the temple was exempted from destruction , but philosopher Grigor Tananyan argues that its status as a " masterpiece of art " possibly saved it from destruction . He suggests that the temple was perceived to be a " quintessence of an entire culture . " Robert H. Hewsen suggested that the reason why it was not destroyed is because it was not a temple , but a tomb of a Roman @-@ appointed king of Armenia . He also noted that in the seventh century a church was built immediately next to it and not in its place .

According to Movses Khorenatsi the temple was at the time converted into the summer house of Khosrovidukht , the sister of Tiridates III . As its purpose changed the temple underwent some changes . The sacrificial altars in the outside of the temple and the cult statue in the cella were removed . The opening in the roof for skylight was closed . The stone structures for removal of water from the roof were also removed , while the entrance of the temple was transformed and adjusted for residence . Almost nothing is known about the subsequent history of the temple .

= = = Destruction and reconstruction = = =

The entire colonnade of the temple collapsed in a devastating June 4 , 1679 earthquake , the epicenter of which was , according to many scholars , located in gorge of Garni . Most of the original building blocks remained scattered at the site , allowing the building to be reconstructed .

European travelers mentioned the temple in their works as early as the 17th century . Jean Chardin (1673 , who visited Armenia before the earthquake) and James Morier (1810s) both incorrectly described it through local informants since they never actually visited the site . Upon Robert Ker Porter 's visit the fortress was called " Takht @-@ i Tiridates " (" Throne of Tiridates ") by the locals . Ker Porter described what he saw as follows : " a confused pile beautiful fragments ; columns , architraves , capitals , friezes , all mingled together in broken disorder . " Another European to visit and document the ruins of the temple was Dubois de Montpereux , who referred to the fortress as " Takh Terdat " . In his 1839 book he proposed a reconstruction plan .

The first known proposal to reconstruct the temple was made by the archaeologist Aleksey Uvarov at the fifth All @-@ Russian Archaeological Congress in 1880 . He proposed its stones be moved to Tiflis (in Georgia) and be reconstructed there according to de Montpereux 's plan . Lori Khatchadourian suggests that the plan " could be read as an attempt at co @-@ opting Armenia 's Roman past to the glory of Russia through the relocation of its most iconic monument to the nearest administrative center . " The governor of Erivan , citing technical difficulties , did not implement the plan .

In the subsequent decades scholars such as Nikoghayos Buniatian , Babken Arakelyan , and Nikolay Tokarsky studied the temple . In 1909 ? 11 , during an excavation led by Nicholas Marr , the

temple ruins were uncovered . Buniatian sought to reconstruct the temple in the 1930s .

In 1949 the Armenian Academy of Sciences began major excavations of the Garni fortress site led by Babken Arakelyan . Architectural historian Alexander Sahinian focused on the temple itself . It was not until almost twenty years later , on December 10 , 1968 , that the Soviet Armenian government approved the reconstruction plan of the temple . A group led by Sahinian began reconstruction works in January 1969 . It was completed by 1975 , almost 300 years after it was destroyed in an earthquake . The temple was almost entirely rebuilt using its original stones , except the missing pieces which were filled with blank stones intended to be easily recognisable . In 1978 a monument dedicated to Sahinian was erected not far from the temple .

= = Architecture = =

= = Overview = =

The temple follows the style of classical Ancient Greek architecture which began developing in the seventh century BC . Scholars have variously described the structure as Greek , Roman or Greco-Roman and have usually linked it to Hellenistic art , often pointing out its distinct features and local Armenian influence . Some scholars have emphasized the Armenian influence on its architecture , calling it " Armenian Hellenic " (Sahinian) , while others have completely dismissed this view , calling it a " foreign structure on Armenian soil " . Toros Toramanian , for instance , stressed the singularity of the temple as a Roman style building on the Armenian Highlands and " remarked that the Garni construction essentially had no influence on contemporary or subsequent Armenian architecture . " Sahinian , on the other hand , called it a " product of the architectural constructional art of the Hellenistic period " that entirely resembles the 9th century BC Urartian Musasir temple .

More specifically , it is a peripteros (a temple surrounded by a portico with columns) built on an elevated podium . It is constructed of grey basalt quarried locally . The temple is composed of a portico (pronaos) and a cella (naos) . The temple is supported by a total of twenty-four 6 @ 54 metre (21 @ 5 ft) high columns of the Ionic order : six in the front and back and eight on the sides (the corner columns are listed twice) . Based on a comparative analysis Sahinian proposed that the columns of the temple of Garni have their origins in Asia Minor .

= = Exterior = =

The triangular pediment depicts sculptures of plants and geometrical figures . The staircase has nine unusually high steps ? 30 centimetres (12 in) high , about twice as high as the average height of stairs . Tananyan suggests that the unusually high stairs compel a person ascending the staircase to feel humbled and make physical effort to reach the altar . On the both sides of the staircase there are roughly square pedestals . Atlas , the Greek mythological Titan who held up the earth , is sculpted on both pedestals in a way seemingly trying to hold the entire temple on its shoulders . It is assumed that , originally , pedestals held up altars (sacrificial tables) .

The exterior of the temple is richly decorated . The frieze depicts a continuous line of acanthus . Furthermore , there are ornaments on the capital , architrave , and soffit . The stones in the front cornice have projecting sculptures of lion heads . A fragment of the architrave bearing a lion head was removed by Captain J Buchan Telfer in the late nineteenth century and bequeathed by him to the British Museum in 1907 .

= = Cella = =

The cella of the temple is 7 @ 132 metres (23 @ 40 ft) high , 7 @ 98 metres (26 @ 2 ft) long , and 5 @ 05 metres (16 @ 6 ft) wide . Up to 20 people can fit inside the cella . Due to the relatively small size of the cella , it has been proposed that a statue once stood inside and the

ceremonies were held in the outside . Furthermore , white marble sculptures of bull hooves have been discovered some 20 metres (66 ft) from the temple which could possibly be the remains of a sculpture of the god Mihr , who was often portrayed in a fight with a bull .

The cella is lit from two sources : the disproportionately large entrance of 2 @. @ 29 by 4 @. @ 68 metres (7 ft 6 in by 15 ft 4 in) and the opening in the roof of 1 @. @ 74 by 1 @. @ 26 metres (5 @. @ 7 by 4 @. @ 1 ft) .

= = Current state and use = =

= = = Tourist attraction = = =

The temple of Garni , along with the nearby medieval monastery of Geghard , is one of the main tourist attraction sites in Armenia . Most people visiting Garni also visit Geghard . The two sites are often collectively known as Garni @-@ Geghard (?????? @-@ ??????) . In 2013 some 200 @, @ 000 people visited the temple . In recent years many notable individuals have visited the temple , such as Cypriot President Demetris Christofias , Polish First Lady Anna Komorowska , Austrian President Heinz Fischer , Spanish opera singer Montserrat Caballé , Greek President Karolos Papoulias , American TV personalities Khloé and Kim Kardashian , American keyboardist Derek Sherinian , American comedian Conan O 'Brien . O 'Brien , who visited the temple in October 2015 with his Armenian assistant Sona , filmed an episode in Armenia which included dancing at the temple of Garni . The episode aired on his late @-@ night talk show on November 17 , 2015 and scored 1 @. @ 3 million viewers .

= = = Preservation = = =

The temple and the fortress are part of the Garni Historical and Cultural Museum Reserve , which is supervised by the Service for the Protection of Historical Environment and Cultural Museum Reservations , a government agency attached to the Armenian Ministry of Culture . In a 2006 survey the state of conservation of Garni was rated by over three @-@ quarters of the visitors as " good " or " very good " . In 2011 UNESCO awarded the Museum @-@ Reservation of Garni the Melina Mercouri International Prize for the Safeguarding and Management of Cultural Landscapes for " measures taken to preserve its cultural vestiges , and the emphasis placed on efforts to interpret and open the site for national and international visitors . "

= = = Neopagan shrine = = =

Since 1990 , the temple has been the central shrine of the small number of followers of Armenian neopaganism who hold annual ceremonies at the temple , especially on March 21 ? the pagan New Year . Celebrations by neopagans are also held during the summer festival of Vardavar , which has pre @-@ Christian (pagan) origins .

= = = Notable events = = =

The square in front of the temple is a site of occasional concerts . In 1985 the Soviet televised music festival Pesnya goda (" Song of the Year ") was recorded at the temple . Another major concert was held on July 2 , 2004 by the National Chamber Orchestra of Armenia , conducted by Aram Gharabekian . The orchestra played the works of Aram Khachaturian , Komitas , Edvard Mirzoyan , Strauss , Mozart , and other composers .

The torch of the first Pan @-@ Armenian Games was lit near the temple on August 28 , 1999 .

= = = Depictions = = =

The temple was depicted on the obverse side of 5000 @-@ dram banknote , which was in use from 1995 to 2005 .

= = Incidents = =

On September 25 , 2014 Maksim Nikitenko , a Russian tourist in his early 20s , defaced the temple by spray painting " ? ???? ???? ???? " (literally translating to " In the world , idol is nothing ") . The painting was cleaned days later . The Armenian state service for protection of historical and cultural reserves filed a civil lawsuit against Nikitenko in February 2015 , in which the agency requested 839 @,@ 390 AMD (~ \$ 1 @,@ 760) to recover the damage resulting from vandalism . In an April 2015 decision the Kotayk Province court ruled to take Nikitenko into custody for 2 months and fine him the requested amount .

= = Gallery = =