

Gayane Nahapetyan¹, Lyuba Kirakosyan¹

¹National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia, Yerevan, RA

Abstract: *The erection of memorials and monuments plays an important role in the historical memory of humanity, self-recognition of society and awareness of the social nature of memory. From this point of view, we looked at the architectural-spatial environment of Tsitsernakaberd, the memorial complex dedicated to the victims of the Genocide, the organization of which is subject to the perpetuation of historical memory and is one of the manifestations of the preservation of national identity. It finds its parallels in world practice. The motivation for the construction of the memorial complex was the fiftieth anniversary of Yeghern. The Tsitsernakaberd hill has been completely culturalized, the landscape has passed through four conceptual lenses: "text", "arena", "performance" and "wound", achieving the harmony of hand-made and non-handmade. In the work, a complete examination of the architecture of the memorial complex was carried out by the method of comparative analysis of professional literature and personal observations. In conclusion, it can be said that the memorial dedicated to the memory of the Genocide victims, apart from its historical and artistic significance, is also a universal value and a sacred place for all those who consider human life as an absolute value regardless of nationality, religion or race.*

Keywords: *ethnic, memory, memorial, architecture, metaphor, monument, ideological, artistic, historical.*

Gayane Nahapetyan*

E-mail: gnahapetyan1984@gmail.com

Received: 10.07.2024

Revised: 05.08.2024

Accepted: 28.08.2024

© The Author(s) 2024



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License

Introduction

The history of humanity is the story of the philosophical space-time connection of the Trinity of past, present and future. Throughout history, the concept of memory has been important, as it links this chain of unity. Memorial complexes have been created since time immemorial and preserve their traditionality till now as a materialized manifestation of human memory [1]. Memorial complexes play an important role in increasing the social awareness of collective memory, thus even today they are still being built in various forms [2].

However, since the late 19th century to the present, changes in the architectural composition of memorial complexes have altered the relationship between visitors and memorial complexes. Until the 19th century, monuments were simply built to perpetuate the memory of individuals or heroes, representing pictorial objects inaccessible and visible from afar, modern memorial complexes, on the other hand, allow the user to be widely involved in the memorial acts by touching, listening and participating [3]. Memorial complexes do not merely reflect ideas about the past, but confirm and insure the past. Becoming widespread around the world is, to some extent, a reference to the present, current political situations and circumstances, as collective memory is anchored in the present. Memorial complexes are part of the socio-political process which show how people value, discuss or heal historical wounds [4]. They also provide a sense of belonging and ownership among citizens, enhancing the touristic, economic and cultural value of the area.

The problem and the multilayered aspects of studying the structural features of memory have regularly been and are being touched upon by a number of scholars from all over the world [5]. As for the policy of commemorating the victims of the Great Genocide it has been addressed by Armenian scholars such as

Harutyun Marutyan, Karen Balyan and Levon Abrahamyan [6-8], considering the memory of the Armenian Genocide as one of the current pillars of the Armenian identity.

The Armenian Genocide has long gone beyond the position of being a purely Armenian tragedy and has entered the realm of world history. Certainly, the role of the Memorial Complex in this case was tremendous.

According to Harutyun Marutyan, "Memory and especially historical memory are among the most important elements that define the terms "ethnic community (ethnic)", "nation" and "national identity" [6].

The above-mentioned authors referred to the idea of memory, the genocide and the memorial separately. Some authors approached this question more superficially [9]. Therefore, this work is an attempt to present these three ideas on one plane, in a comprehensive way. Therefore, the aim of the research is to analyze the spatially organized materialized environment of the Genocide Memorial Complex, connecting it with the historical memory, as well as emphasizing the role of the landscape of the Memorial Complex and architectural composition in the application of architectural landscape elements in the urban area and the importance of realizing the user's sensory experience in the memorial space.

Methods and Materials

In the work, a complex examination of the memorial complex was performed, which was carried out by the method of comparative analysis of professional literature and personal observations. Archival documents and photographs were also used, which made it possible to restore important episodes related to the historical period of the Yeghern Memorial and the motivations for its construction.

Given the fact that the role of monuments and memorial complexes is great in historical memory, the self-recognition of society and the awareness of the social nature of remembrance, a number of scholars around the world now show a growing interest in memorial complexes and what the influence of construction, interpretation and disputability of a place or area in this process is.

From this point of view we have observed and studied the architectural-spatial environment of the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex dedicated to the victims of the Genocide. The organization of the Memorial is subject to the perpetuation of historical memory, which greatly helps the nation to preserve the national identity created in the fusion of common experience and centuries-old culture.

The motivation for building the Memorial Complex was the fiftieth anniversary of the Genocide. And this Complex is the living expression and materialization of these fifty and more years of condensed terrible feelings and indomitable faith, which has gone beyond its historical and artistic significance and has become a holy place for all Armenians, and why not, for foreigners, for whom human life is an absolute value regardless of nationality, religion or race.

Armenian architects achieved all this as a result of deep analysis and long discussions, connecting the world classical experience with their national heritage. By studying the landscape through four conceptual lenses, which are "text", "arena", "performance" and "wound", they achieved a perfect harmony of the environment, and the entire Hill was culturalized.

From the foot of the Tsitsernakaberd Hill, the commemoration road rises to the ideological culmination, where the Memorial Complex erects. It is a set of three large monuments bearing theological significance: the memorial wall, the temple of eternity with the unquenchable fire in the center, and the memorial column.

In this paper, a complete examination of the Memorial Complex has been carried out by means of a comparative analysis of professional literature and personal observations.

From Memory to Memorial Complex

Since time immemorial, people have realized that nations or tribes simply cannot exist without memory, remembrance or ethnic memory. Consequently, megaliths, tombs and memorial columns like obelisks were built to materialize historical memory, which is the basis of national identity.

The great philosopher [10] perceives memory in a completely different way other than sensation or

perception. Without the eye we cannot have the sensation of "blue", but through the eye we still do not have the memory of "blue" at all. For the eye now to give us that sensation, some blue object must appear in front of it. Architecture, or in this case, memorial complexes, serve as that "blue object" for the user. The perception brought to life by memory is considered to be new and in no case the preserved old one. A memory is something that can be re-imagined, and it does not mean that the imagination can become alive once again. Something that appears once again is different from the imagination itself. "I remember"- means I am experiencing something once again that no longer exists. I connect the experience of the past with my present life. This refers to every memory. So, of course, no feeling is wasted, as the soul preserves it as a memory, while the spirit draws from it whatever can enhance its abilities and its bio content.

If the spirit stores the intangible treasures or more precisely the intangible culture, the architecture transforms the intangible culture into an already visible, tangible, material culture, filled with the ideology, aspirations and heroism of the national spirit. Here already physical parameters, types of feelings, and social goals are combined in memorial complexes, making the memory of war or atrocity a part of public life, a celebration of the past or a commemoration of the past. The forms of significance of memorial complexes are influenced by reinterpretations of political history that reinforce, contradict or emphasize the status of the past events.

Results and Discussion

The Term Genocide and the Motivation to Build the Memorial Complex

The Genocide was the state policy of mass deportation and extermination of the Armenian population in Western Armenia, Cilicia and other Armenian-inhabited areas of the empire, as well as in Eastern Armenia, of the Ottoman Empire and the Kemal government during the First World War (1914-18) and the following years. It is characterized as the first genocide of the 20th century. This was an unprecedented tragedy that happened to Armenians. This undeniable fact is stubbornly not accepted by the Turkish government. Following the latter, many states of the world keep their eyes closed against the reality.

The term Genocide was defined and popularized in 1944 by a Polish lawyer of Jewish origin, Professor Raphael Lemkin. The Armenian Genocide carried out by Ottoman Turkey in 1915 also corresponds to this definition. According to Lemkin, Genocide is not only the physical annihilation and elimination of a national or religious group, but also the destruction of its national-spiritual culture. It is worth mentioning that this Genocide continues up to now. In the territories occupied by Azerbaijan, many memorial complexes are being physically destroyed and desecrated with the aim of destroying the collective and historical memory of the ethnic group (memorial complexes dedicated to those who died in World War II and Artsakh War I in Talish Village of the Republic of Artsakh)¹.

Rituals, customs, myths, shared historical memories and traditions are ways and actions to bind members of a nation and define their relationships. And since our national understanding of the past is always a tool for solving current problems, it was important to present the collective memory in the form of a monumental structure [11], which was implemented in the case of the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex.

The motivation for building the Memorial Complex was the half-century anniversary, when people were powerless to bear the silence and indifference of others. And it was an absolutely spontaneous demand and eruption of ethnic memory.

The Genocide has never been forgotten, but for many years it has outwardly been silenced. This was conditioned by the fact that the spread of any national ideology was prohibited in the Soviet Union. However, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Genocide, the entire Armenian nation, especially the youth, as well as the Government of the Republic were preparing for that sad anniversary.

¹ <https://monumentwatch.org/>.



Fig. 1. *The Construction process of the Tsitsernakabert Memorial*



Fig. 2. *First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia (CPA) Anton Qochimyan lights the unquenchable fire of the memorial*

On December 13, 1964, the 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPA Ya. Zarubyan sent a letter of justification to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on officially celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Genocide, with the list of envisaged events. Based on the Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Armenian SSR dated March 16, 1965, the program and conditions of the republican tender for the construction of the monument commemorating the victims of the Great Genocide were published in the newspapers. On April 24 of the same year, a solemn meeting was held at the Yerevan Opera House, during which the beginning of the competition was officially announced. 78 projects were submitted to the Competition. A prestigious committee consisting of 12 people chose the project with the code "Flag of the USSR", the authors of which were A. Tarkhanyan and S. Kalashyan. 776.800 rubles were allocated for the construction, and "Yerkimshin" trust was chosen as the contractor. Initially, the official opening ceremony of the Memorial Complex was envisaged on April 24, 1967, but was later changed on November 29, the day of Sovietization of Armenia (Figs. 1,2).

The Volumetric-Spatial Composition of the Memorial Complex

After all, what is Architecture?

To enclose a part of space within certain boundaries. To give body, form and life to that space. To convey to it our physical and spiritual movement. Also to surrender to it and participate in the life of the Whole through a balanced, unobtrusive and harmonious structure. To be one and live a complete, full life with structure. When the structure, symbolizing us, is weight and symmetry, our consciousness is no longer blurred, it returns to its center, national self-awareness and ethnic memory, then it spreads and radiates. The free movement of the body, unfettered breathing and mental satisfaction are the three impulses that form true architecture [12].

Here, with the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex, our architects found the body, form and life that should express and preserve the historical destiny of the nation.

According to the researchers, the construction of the memorial complex, which essentially meant recognition of the fact of genocide by the Soviet government, should at the same time extinguish the wave of the national movement in Armenia. Therefore, the monument symbolizing the genocide could not be located in the center of Yerevan, near the main square or the opera, in order to avoid mass visits. Therefore, the

Tsitsernakaberd hill was chosen for the construction of the memorial, in a remote, undeveloped, very inaccessible place in Yerevan.

Tsitsernakaberd Hill is located on the right bank of the Hrazdan River-in the western part of the capital and has an area of 132 hectares. After planting trees, it turned into a park, and was chosen as the site for the Memorial Complex. Studies show that the measurement of physical elements and the user's sensory experience are best taken into account when designing the Memorial landscape. It is ideal for the commemoration and the space provided. Simpler forms of the composition and symbolic messages allow users to more easily interact and understand the concept and purpose of the Memorial Complex.

Tsitsernakaberd Hill has been completely culturalized, the landscape has passed through four conceptual lenses [13,14], as is usually or traditionally done in the case of memorials: "text", "arena", "performance" and "wound", reaching the harmony between anthropogenic and naturogenic.

From the foot of the Tsitsernakaberd Hill, the commemoration road rises to the ideological culmination, where the Memorial Complex erects. Along this entire road, radio receivers are placed that play spiritual or national music (especially on Memorial Day), as if to commemorate the innocent victims. And this "liturgy" immediately cuts off the visitors from the busy daily life of the city, allowing them to immerse themselves into the arms of history, to awaken the ethnic memory, to review their present and, why not, not to get bored after a rather long ascent. Similar elements in memorial complexes (water, color, music, plants, scents, furniture, fire) are tools that architects use to create certain sensory impressions in memorial complexes [3]. We can consider this as the first successful element that guides visitors inside the Memorial Complex.

Inside is the Memorial Complex which erects as a set of monuments with three major theological meanings: the memorial wall, the temple of eternity with the unquenchable fire in the center, and the memorial column (Fig.3).

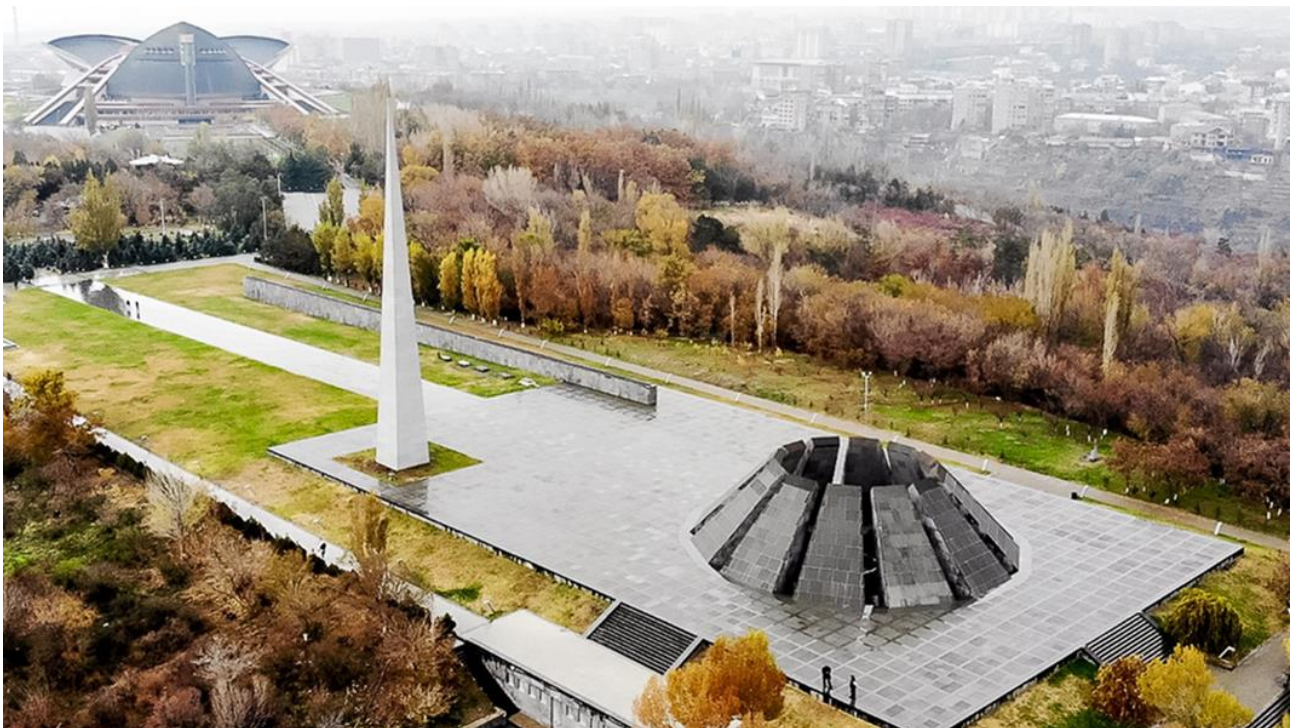


Fig. 3. General view of the Memorial from the South

The names of the locations, where the atrocities took place, are engraved on the hundred-meter-long memorial wall. This text metaphor symbolizes the ratification for historical events. Since 1996, the jars of soil taken from the graves of those who raised the voice of protest against the Armenian Genocide have been buried on the opposite side (Fig.4).



Fig. 4. *The wall where the names of the main towns affected by the Armenian genocide are engraved*



Fig. 5. Twelve slabs grouped in a circle protecting, 1.5 meters deep, the “eternal flame”, a sign of mourning

The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute^{2,3,4}

The museum building summarizes the organization and ideological integrity of the spatial environment. Apart from museum-related functions, it also seems to museumize historical memory with documents (Fig.7).

The Memorial Hall is located in the performance metaphor: the 12 basalt chamfered pylons bowed to the unquenchable fire, forming a cone-shaped structure with an open volume, symbolize the tomb of the victims of the Great Genocide, where the ritual ceremonies are performed, and the unquenchable fire located in the center is the expression of the "unhealed wound".

The Temple of Eternity consists of 12 stone slabs. The number 12 is chosen based on geometrical laws, however the people consider that these columns symbolize the 12 largest states in Western Armenia (Fig.5).

In the arena metaphor, the 40-meter memorial column rising to the sky is a symbol of the national revival of the Armenian people (Fig.6).

² Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute. Activity, Yerevan. <http://www.genocide-museum.am/arm/structure.php>

³ Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute. Genocide, Yerevan. <http://www.genocide-museum.am/arm/genocide.php>

[illegible]



Fig. 6. *The erect monument symbolizes rebirth*



Fig. 7. *The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute*

This scientific-cultural institution is located in the southwestern part of the Memorial Complex and occupies an area of 2000 square meters. It has an inner courtyard, the words of witnesses of the first Genocide of the 20th century are engraved on the 12 faces of the basalt wall. Among them are Henry Morgenthau, Fritjof Nansen, Anatole France, Jacques de Morgan, Valery Brusov and others. The map of



Fig. 8. *Inside the museum*

Western Armenia with an area of 45 square meters was carved on the wall of the Hall, on which the places of massacre and displacements are marked. In 1995-2013, the exhibition materials were presented in the 3 halls of the Museum, mainly in the form of documents, copies of photo documents, ancient press and literature dedicated to the Hamidian massacres, the immolation of Adana and the Armenian Genocide. The Museum has a cinema hall, a scientific library, archival funds and offices (Figs. 8,9).

Compared to the Monument, the propaganda value of the Museum is incomparably greater [15].

Such sensitive sites have also become pivotal for diplomacy between friendly countries, mostly in the form of state visits that include promises that such atrocities will never happen again [16].



Fig. 9. *Display in the information centre*

Conclusion

In this research, an attempt was made to show how a properly organized architectural volume-spatial composition can best contribute to the preservation, strengthening and perpetuation of collective memory. And one of the important prerequisites for the survival of the nation is the collective memory.

Having subjected the component parts of the memorial to a deep analysis, we have come to the following conclusions:

1. The examination of the Yeghern monument complex clearly reveals the ideological content of the ensemble and the interconnectedness of form-creating elements.
2. The area has been completely culturalized.
3. In accordance with the classical traditions of Armenian architecture, the unity of hand-made and non-hand-made is noticeable.
4. Yeghern Memorial stands as a stone witness of historical memory in the spatial support of Yerevan and has become one of the symbols of the city.

Thus, the results of the work can be useful for researching and raising new, heroic, constructive memories within the framework of both architectural heritage and modern architecture.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

References

- [1]. M. Bacci, G. Bianchi, S. Campana, G. Fichera, Historical and Archaeological Analysis of the Church of the Nativity. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 13 (4), 2012, e5-e26.
Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2012.10.003>
- [2]. A. Ghambaryan, Tsitsernakaberdi khorhurdy. *Hishoghutyunits veratsnund*. Yerevan, 3, 2012 (in Armenian). Available at: <http://yhm.am/archives/906>. Accessed on March 26, 2024.

- [3]. Y.Attwa, M.Refaat, Y.Kandil, A Study of the Relationship Between Contemporary Memorial Landscape and User Perceptionv. Ain Shams Engineering Journal, 13 (1), 2022, 101527. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asej.2021.06.013>
- [4]. E. Macaulay-Lewis, The architecture of memory and commemoration: The Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial Arch, Brooklyn, New York and the reception of classical architecture in New York City. Classical Receptions Journal, 8 (4), 2016, 447-478. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/crj/clw001>
- [5]. H.Simonyan, Hayots patmutyun, YSU Publishing House, Yerevan, 2012 (in Armenian).
- [6]. H. Marutyan, The Memory Menagement Issue, 21-st century, 1, 2007, 96-97.
- [7]. Karen Balyan, Memorial Yegern, Tatlin, 2015 (in Russian).
- [8]. L. Abrahamian, A. Byford, Yerevan: Memory and Forgetting in the organisation of post-Soviet urban space 1, in: A. Baiburin, C. Kelly, N. Vakhtin (eds.), Russian Cultural Anthropology after the Collapse of Communism. Routledge, London, 2012. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203116012>
- [9]. M. Dabagh, Hishoghutyuny vtangi mej e. haykakan pordzy mijazgayin nor kaghakakanutyan hamatekstum. 21-rd dar, 1(35), 2011 (in Armenian).
- [10]. R. Steiner, Esoteric Studies. The Descent of the Spirit, Man as an Image of Spiritual Beings. Anthroposophic Press, 1946.
- [11]. Pascal Moliner, Inna Bovina, Architectural Forms of Collective Memory. International Review of Social Psychology, 32 (1), 2019. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.5334/irsp.236>
- [12]. K.Zaryan, Yuri Khachatryan, Depi Ararat. Sargis Khachents, 2001 (in Armenian).
- [13]. A.M. Shanken, Research on Memorials and Monuments. Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 84, 2004, 163-172. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.22201/iiie.18703062e.2004.84.2166>
- [14]. D.H. Alderman, J.P. Brasher, O.J. Dwyer, Memorials and Monuments. International Encyclopedia of Human Geography, 2, 2020, 39-47. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102295-5.10201-X>
- [15]. H. Marutyan, Museum and Monument (Comparative Analysis of Armenian and Jewish Experience). Historical-Philological Journal, 3, 2014, 58-79.
- [16]. Tatiana Voronina, From Socialist Realism to Orthodox Christianity: "Blockade Temples" in Saint Petersburg. Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research, 10 (3), 79-105. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.25285/2078-1938-2018-10-3-79-105>

Gayane Nahapetyan (RA, Yerevan) - National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia, lecturer at the Chair of Theory, History and Heritage of Architecture, gnahapetyan1984@gmail.com

Lyuba Kirakosyan, Doctor of Science (Architecture) (RA, Yerevan) - National University of Architecture and Construction of Armenia, Professor at the Chair of Theory, History and Heritage of Architecture, kirakosyanlyuba@gmail.com