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Armenian Architecture through the Pages of Robert G. Ousterhout's Book "Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands"¹

Among the historians of Byzantine architecture, professor of the University of Pennsylvania Robert G. Ousterhout holds a prominent place due to the nature of his scientific interests and distinct individuality manifested in a combination of full-scale study of monuments and skillful formulation of historical and theoretical issues. A new perspective on the development of building art, architectural composition, function and symbolic content of buildings and complexes is common to his articles and monographs on the architecture of Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Cappadocia.

In his new monograph "Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands" [10], along with the Byzantine regions, R. Ousterhout pays attention to the architecture of Christian countries that surrounded Byzantium and had close historical and cultural ties with it, as well as Muslim political entities on the territories torn away from the empire. This fact sets this book apart from most of the previous review studies on Byzantine art and architecture, in which only those territories related to Christian countries were included in the circle of the problems discussed. Some other innovations include a survey of the post-Byzantine architecture up to its later forms of development, discussion of the problem of reproducing the ideas of Byzantine architecture to the rival powers — the Ottoman and Russian empires — and, in the epilogue of the book, to the architecture of Modern and Contemporary times. Twenty seven chapters of the book are arranged in chronological order. At the same time, the author, apparently, did not have the goal of presenting exclusively the history of typology and style. The chapters are devoted to specific problems and phenomena of one of the largest regions of the East.

Over the past decades, there have been fewer and fewer such fundamental works on Byzantine architecture. Modern historical science, meeting the requirements of the time, allows unrestrained accumulation of material. Interpretation of this amount of material is

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necessary, but this process is complicated by a number of problems associated with logical analysis. Computerization of the process certainly helps, but does not replace individual interpretation that deals with the intricacies of art history analysis and generalizations. Therefore, the attempts to historically and theoretically understand the accumulated material are increasingly moving away from the realities of actual monuments and phenomena to the direction of abstract philosophical reflections. Against this background, a book on the development of the Late Antique and Medieval architecture in the Balkans, published in 2010 by Professor S. Ćurčić, turned out to be an exception [1]. The extensive research of R. Ousterhout, who covered the entire Byzantine world with his systematic analytical review, became the second major study of the history of Byzantine architecture in all its diversity and variety of interaction with the neighboring traditions of monumental architecture. The author dedicates it to late S. Ćurčić, “his teacher, mentor and friend”, hoping that an attentive reader will discover his presence on the pages of this book. Besides, in the introduction to the book the connection between it and the 1964 monograph of R. Krautheimer is established [10, pp. xiii–xiv]. S. Ćurčić himself worked on the expanded edition of the latter — the most significant book on the history of Early Christian and Byzantine architecture [6; 7].

Among the topics discussed in R. Ousterhout’s multifaceted new book, one is of particular interest to the author of this article, as it is connected to his own research. That is an issue of medieval Armenian architecture in the context of the architecture of the Byzantine world and the entire East.

Short but quite integral sections on the architecture of Armenia are included to the three chapters of the book, which correspond to 1) the transitional period (7th–9th centuries), 2) Middle Byzantine period (843–1204), and 3) Late Byzantine period (1261–1453). The first of these sections, entitled “Transformation at the Edges of Empire,” deals primarily with the Caucasus (in Russian terminology a more accurate term is the Transcaucasia, although it does not include most of the Armenian Highlands) where Armenian and Georgian churches are analyzed altogether, as it was suggested in my monograph in order to revive an almost forgotten scholar tradition [3]. It’s pleasant to note that aforementioned book, along with the works of Ch. Maranci on Armenian architecture [8; 9; 5], formed the basis for the described section of the R. Ousterhout’s book. According to the established tradition, noting the difficulties faced by the Byzantine Empire in the 7th–8th centuries, the author points out that along the eastern and southern borders, the architecture developed independently of the processes inherent to Constantinople and the regions under its direct influence. He also describes the architecture of the 7th century, when the “...flourishing of architecture in the Caucasus is unparalleled in contemporary Byzantium, with finely constructed stone buildings and the introduction of a variety of new and innovative building forms. These monuments should be considered alongside the main line of Byzantine developments” [10, p. 268]. While agreeing that there were cases of transmission of architectural ideas as a result of visits of Constantinople by the Armenian elite and imperial military companies to the Transcaucasia region, the author notes that “it may be best to view the architectural production of the seventh-century Caucasus as a parallel development to what we have observed within Byzantium” [10, p. 268]. That notion is fundamentally different from that of the most studies conducted in the 19th and early 20th centuries, where architecture of the region was represented as a provincial Byzantine one. Such a notion also differs from the

concepts of J. Strzygowski, who for the first time appreciated the greatness of the Armenian architectural tradition and considered that centric structures represented “Aryan” development [11]. As R. Ousterhout indicates, “While much of his formal analysis of the monuments remains valid, subsequent generations have been put off — understandably so — by his proto-Nazi sentiments” [10, p. 268]. In general, R. Ousterhout’s assessment, similar to my own, can be perceived as the developed R. Krautheimer’s thought that “Of all the border countries of the Empire, Armenia is the only one to deal with Byzantine architecture on an equal footing. But the differences between Byzantine and Armenian building — in design, construction, scale, and decoration — cannot be too strongly stressed” [7, p. 330].

R. Ousterhout also points out the role of the Roman heritage and the development of the Late Antique building tradition in early Christian Armenia, while showing the difference with construction techniques of Syria. It is with this heritage that the author associates not only the origins of some architectural forms, but also wall inscriptions depicting the history of buildings, unlike in other Byzantine regions [10, p. 269]. While not representing architecture of the Caucasus in its entirety, the author analyzes only a few 7th-century churches, mainly Armenian, in accordance with the architectural typology, which in this study is limited to the “cross-domed basilicas” (churches in Mren, Gayan, and Vagharshapat and Georgian church in Tzromi), tetraconchs with corner niches (Djvari church in Mtskheta, Hripsime in Vagharshapat), a cross-shaped domed church (Talin, Pemzashen), and only mentions the types of domed hall (Aruch), cross-domed triconch (Talin) and tetraconch with an ambulatory (Zvartnots). Such a limitation, that is absence of dozens of monuments and architectural types as six- and eight-apsed buildings, tetraconchs like Mastara, simple tetraconchs, turns this review into an accompaniment to the theme of Byzantine architecture, which is presented in detail in other sections of the book. This fact underlines the purpose of the study, which involves an analysis, first of all, of the traditions of Byzantium itself and, secondly, of its neighboring countries.

The next piece devoted to Armenian architecture in great detail describes the city of Ani, the capital of the Bagratid era. The section unravels Anian characteristic feature: the city walls and towers, as well as the churches, are made of carefully hewn stone blocks with a concrete-rubble core, as well as polychrome masonry and the presence of apotropaic symbols on walls [10, p. 458].

Following the description of the Surb Khach church on Aghtamar Island, the author’s attention is paid to the Ani Cathedral, layout composition of which was based on the plan of the Mren Cathedral, but with a significant increase of the central cell [10, p. 456]. While noting that the plan of the Ani Cathedral fascinated Western visitors who compared it to the churches of the European Romanesque, at the same time the author distinguishes the structure of Armenian and European buildings. The latter, in his assessment, are more rational, while Armenian masters allowed some discrepancies between external and internal structure [10, pp. 459–460]. This short passage also describes in detail the six-foiled church of St. Gregory or Abughamrents, the Gagkashen church in Ani, which repeats the architectural idea of Zvartnots, tetraconch-church of the Apostles with dome chapels in the corners and the zhamatun of the Horomos monastery, built in 1038, which presumably served as the king’s mausoleum. This particular monument was analyzed based on the results of a published

collective monograph about Horomos [4]. R. Ousterhout insists on the uniqueness of the zhamatuns or gavits, arguing that they had no connection to the Byzantine narthexes or liti, although they had been compared [10, p. 469]. At the same time, a full-scale picture of the Armenian architectural typology has not been presented: there are no references to the triumphal arch of Horomos, the Shepherd's Church outside the walls of Ani, the library of Sanahin, the variations of the domed halls, which represented the most common type of churches in the Bagratids era and beyond.

At the end of the section, it is stated that the typology of Georgian architecture, in contrast to the Armenian one, followed the steady patterns. "Nevertheless, the rich developments in both Armenia and Georgia of the tenth and eleventh centuries offer an important correctives to discussions of the period, which tend to center innovation in Constantinople", concludes the author [10, p. 477].

In chapter twenty three, "The Difficult Thirteenth Century" [10, pp. 587–590], the passage on Armenia follows the excerpt on the Seljuks of Rum and not the architecture in the Byzantine regions. This was done, firstly, in order to emphasize the medial geographical position of the Seljuk sultanates between the Armenian principalities and Byzantium, and secondly, as it seemed, to elaborate the thesis about the borrowing of some forms that had developed during this era from the Seljuk architecture, for example, muqarnas (stalactite) vaults [10, p. 588]. However this issue does not yet have a clear solution. In this short text, the architecture of zhamatuns or gavits, which were most widely used in monastic ensembles, is perfectly represented, the types of ceilings of these spacious halls have been described, as have the imitations of complex ceilings in the rock churches of Geghard monastery. But nothing has been said about such typologically interesting structures as belfries and tiered tombs, about the elegant decor of monastery churches of the late 12th to the first third of the 13th century in Ani, Haritchavank, Gandzasar, or about the development of memorial architecture, inter alia the art of khachkar. The following chapters do not discuss the development of Armenian architecture in the late 13th — first half of the 14th century at all, when the outstanding sculptures in Noravank, Areni, Yeghegis and Yeghvard represented a parallel alternative to the development of the Palaiologos' architecture of Byzantium and, at the same time, reflected deep connections with the Muslim East.

Armenian buildings, craftsmen, peculiarities of construction techniques are discussed in other chapters of the book as well. In the case of the Middle Byzantine churches of Constantinople, the author, following the conclusions of C. Mango, considers the hypothesis on the origins of their compositions lying in the Armenian architecture [10, pp. 365–366]. In chapter twenty one, devoted to the master builders, the author turns his attention to a schematic working drawing of a stalactite vault executed on the wall of the gavit of the Astvatsnkal monastery. He once again publishes the drawings from our collaborative article about this finding [2], and analyzes photos of the drawing which was lost for years and re-discovered during our expedition in May 2015 [10, fig. 16–6]. The possibility of architectural drawings by the Anian architect Trdat is also discussed in the text of the monograph [10, p. 385].

Each of the aforementioned in this review sections presents as a sharp, informative text, reflecting in many cases the author's own view of various phenomena. Robert G. Ousterhout's representation of Armenian architecture within the greater topic of the Byzantine world

architecture should be recognized as a significant achievement. His systematic survey is valuable for studying the Armenian art and architecture. The author was able to give capacious characteristics to a variety of monuments, as well as emphasize those features that turned out to be especially significant to the specialists in Byzantine architecture.

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Title. Armenian Architecture through the Pages of Robert G. Ousterhout's Book "Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands".

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Abstract. In his new monograph, along with the Byzantine regions, R. Ousterhout pays attention to the architecture of countries that surrounded Byzantium. Among the topics discussed in R. Ousterhout's multifaceted new book, one is of particular interest to the author of this article, as it is connected to his own research. That is an issue of medieval Armenian architecture in the context of the architecture of the Byzantine world and the entire East.

R. Ousterhout points out the role of the Roman heritage in early Christian Armenia. Following the description of the Surb Khach church on Aghtamar Island (915–921), the author focuses on the metropolitan city of Ani and its Cathedral, which are compared by scholars to the churches of the European Romanesque. At the same time the author distinguishes the structure of Armenian and European buildings. Mentioning the zhamatun of Horomos monastery (1038) and the same-type constructions of the 13th century, R. Ousterhout insists on their uniqueness.

In the chapter devoted to the master builders the author turns to a schematic working drawing of a stalactite vault executed on the wall of the gavit of the Astvatsnkal monastery. He analyzes photos of the drawing, which was lost for years and re-discovered during our expedition in May 2015.

The author was able to give capacious characteristics to a variety of monuments, as well as emphasize those features that turned out to be especially significant to the specialists in Byzantine architecture.

Keywords: Robert G. Ousterhout; The Building Traditions of Byzantium; Armenian architecture; Roman heritage; Ani Cathedral; zhamatun of Horomos; drawing of a stalactite vault.

Название статьи. Вопросы армянской архитектуры на страницах книги Роберта Оустерхаута «Средневековая восточная архитектура: Строительная традиция Византии и соседних стран».

Сведения об авторе. Казарян Армен Юрьевич — доктор искусствоведения, директор филиала ФГБУ «ЦНИИП Минстроя России» Научно-исследовательский институт теории и истории архитектуры и градостроительства (НИИТИАГ); заместитель директора по научной работе. Государственный институт искусствознания Министерства культуры РФ, Козицкий пер., д. 5, Москва, Российская Федерация, 125009. armenkazaryan@yahoo.com

Аннотация. В своей новой монографии, наряду с регионами собственно византийскими, Р. Оустерхаут уделит внимание развитию зодчества в странах, окружавших империю. Среди проблем, затронутых в многогранной новой книге Р. Оустерхаута одна представляет для автора настоящей статьи особый интерес в связи с тематикой собственных исследований. Это проблема средневековой армянской архитектуры в контексте зодчества византийского мира и всего Востока.

Р. Оустерхаут отмечает роль римского наследия в раннехристианской Армении, анализирует некоторые храмы VII в. Вслед за описанием церкви Сурб Хач на острове Ахтамар начала X в., внимание уделено столице Ани. Отмечая, что композиция Анийского собора интриговала западных посетителей, которые сравнивали его с храмами европейской романики, автор в то же время дает понять разницу между структурностью армянских и европейских построек. Описывая жаматун монастыря Оромос (1038) и однотипные постройки XIII в., Р. Оустерхаут настаивает на их уникальности.

В главе 21, посвящённой мастерам строителям, автор обращается к выполненному в масштабе схематическому рабочему чертежу сталактитового свода на стене гавита монастыря Аствацкал, анализируя фотографию этого чертежа, который был на годы утерян и вновь обнаружен в ходе нашей совместной поездки в мае 2015 г.

Автору удалось дать ёмкие характеристики многим памятникам, сделать акценты на тех их чертах, которые оказались особо значимыми взору специалиста по византийской архитектуре.

Ключевые слова: Роберт Оустерхаут; Строительная традиция Византии; армянская архитектура; римское наследие; Анийский собор; жаматун Оромоса; чертеж сталактитового свода.