

SCTCMG 2021
International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of
Modern Globalism»

ACTIVITIES OF THE ARGUN MUSEUM-RESERVE FOR THE
PRESERVATION OF MONUMENTS IN CHECHNYA

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the activities of the Argun State Historical, Architectural and Natural Museum-Reserve of the Chechen Republic for the preservation and identification of new monuments of medieval architecture in the mountainous regions of Chechnya. The Argun Museum-Reserve has the status of an object of historical and cultural heritage of federal significance. The objects of the cultural heritage of the museum-reserve are an important factor not only of the cultural heritage, but also of national originality and identity. The authors state that in the course of hostilities on the territory of Chechnya in the 19th century and late XX – early XXI centuries, a significant part of the monuments of medieval architecture were destroyed. The article provides a brief historical excursion into the history of the study of medieval monuments on the territory of Chechnya. In this context, it is noted that the study of archaeological sites in mountainous Chechnya began only in the second half of the 19th century. Currently, active work is underway to restore the architectural monuments of the Argun Museum-Reserve. The tasks are complicated by the lack of funds not only for the restoration of architectural monuments, but also for the state historical and cultural expertise. However, despite all the difficulties, work on the identification and restoration of monuments of medieval stone architecture continues, which is an important condition for the preservation of cultural heritage sites for future generations.

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Keywords: Argun Museum-Reserve, medieval architecture, cultural heritage, restoration, architectural complex



1. Introduction

Research work on the territory of Chechnya, especially in its mountainous regions, due to permanent hostilities, began only in the second half of the 19th century. In 1886, in the western regions of mountainous Chechnya, the study of medieval architectural monuments was carried out by the expedition of the Moscow Archaeological Society headed by Miller (2020).

At the beginning of the XX century, Russian scientists Gan (1902) and Ivanov (1902, 1904) made expeditions to the mountainous regions of Chechnya in the upper reaches of the Arguna, Gekhi, Fortanga rivers, in the vicinity of the Galanchozh and Kezenoy-am lakes, which until that time were considered inaccessible. They described medieval architectural structures, clothes, details of the life of the inhabitants of these places, recorded ancient legends, genealogical legends.

Purposeful research of archaeological sites on the territory of Chechnya began in 1935, when the North Caucasian archaeological expedition was created, which in the post-war period was headed by the outstanding Soviet archaeologist E.I. Krupnov. In 1956, this work was continued by the Gorny (Argun) detachment of the North Caucasian archaeological expedition led by V.I. Markovin. In 1966, Vinogradov and Markovin (1966) published the book “Archaeological Monuments of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic”, which included a list of the archeological monuments of the republic known at that time. The results of the detachment's activities were later summarized in the scientific works of S.Ts. Umarov (Umarov, 1970). Since the 70s of XX century, Dautova (1976), Isaev et al. (2017) continued to study the medieval monuments of mountainous Chechnya.

2. Problem Statement

During the hostilities on the territory of Chechnya in the late XX – early XXI centuries, the regulatory framework for cultural heritage objects of the Argun Museum-Reserve was lost, a significant part of the architectural monuments of various eras on its territory was completely or partially destroyed. Currently, active work is underway to identify the lost architectural monuments of the Argun Museum-Reserve of the Chechen Republic for their inclusion in the Unified State Register of Cultural Heritage Objects (Historical and Cultural Monuments) of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

3. Research Questions

The subject of the research is the results of the activities of the Argun State Historical, Architectural and Natural Museum-Reserve for the preservation and identification of objects of stone architecture in mountainous Chechnya.

1. The history of the formation of the museum-reserve.
2. Research activities aimed at identifying and preserving objects of architecture on the territory of mountainous Chechnya in the XIX–XXI centuries.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research work is the activities of the Argun Museum-Reserve, aimed at preserving and identifying architectural monuments in mountainous Chechnya.

5. Research Methods

The fundamental principles of research are historicism, scientific objectivity. Involvement of a wide range of sources will make it possible to impartially study the facts in all the variety of specific historical conditions. Among the specific methods used by us are methods of collecting information, statistical analysis, which make it possible to solve this problem most objectively.

6. Findings

In order to preserve the unique historical and architectural monuments of Chanty-Argun and Sharo-Argun gorges, the Argun Museum-Reserve was created by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR as of November 15, 1988. In 1995, by the decision of the Russian government, the Argun State Historical, Architectural and Natural Museum-Reserve received the status of an object of historical and cultural heritage of federal significance. Argun Museum-Reserve is unique. The open-air museum includes the territory of five mountain regions (Itum-Kalinsky, Sharoevsky, Shatoevsky, Vedensky, Achkhoy-Martanovsky) of the Chechen Republic with a total area of 233.8 thousand hectares. On the territory of the museum-reserve there are hundreds of monuments of ancient and medieval architecture, which are of particular historical, cultural, scientific value. Fighting and residential towers, castle complexes, necropolises, sanctuaries are objects of the cultural heritage of the Chechens, descendants of the ancient Nakh civilization (Bagaev, 2008; Munchaev, 1975) testifying to the high level of development of architecture.

According to the outstanding Caucasian expert Berge in the 19th century. In the Argun Gorge, battle towers were encountered at every verst: The tower stood on the right slope of the Black Mountains at the beginning of the Argun Gorge, opposite the village of Chishki, the next one was on a cape at the confluence of the Argun and Sharo-Argun rivers, at the entrance to the village of Zonakh (Berge, 1859). And this is despite the fact that a large number of towers, residential and military, in the mountains of Chechnya were destroyed during the Caucasian War. For instance, Seidlitz (1873), who visited many Chechen mountain villages, wrote:

In the village of Khaibakh, under high cliffs of yellow limestone, another pointed, very beautiful tower survived from destruction by Shamil for the disobedience of the inhabitants. However, many of these elegant remnants of distant antiquity were also destroyed by the Russians during the suppression of the mountainous Chechens. (p. 151)

As noted above, in the course of hostilities on the territory of Chechnya in the late XX – early XXI centuries, the legal basis for cultural heritage objects of the Argun Museum-Reserve was lost, a significant part of the monuments of stone architecture was destroyed. The acuteness of this situation is

complemented by the fact that there are not enough funds not only for the restoration of destroyed cultural heritage sites, but also for the state historical and cultural expertise of architectural monuments located in the remote gorges of mountainous Chechnya. At present, active work is underway to identify lost architectural monuments for their inclusion in the Unified State Register of Cultural Heritage Objects (Historical and Cultural Monuments) of the peoples of the Russian Federation (hereinafter referred to as the register), which is a prerequisite for financing restoration work of cultural objects. The register is maintained by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation on the basis of data provided by the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. In our republic, this work is carried out by the Committee of the Government of the Chechen Republic for the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage.

To register objects, employees of the Committee of the Government of the Chechen Republic for the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage and the Argun Museum-Reserve regularly travel to objects of history and culture, collect all the necessary information about the monument, and take photographs. Since 2001 by 2020, 429 cultural heritage sites were entered into the register on the territory of the Argun Museum-Reserve, and for 359 newly identified sites, it is necessary to organize a state historical and cultural examination in order to justify inclusion in the unified register, which requires significant financial investments.

On the territory of the Argun Museum-Reserve there are monuments of both regional and federal significance (Table 03). In the Itum-Kalinsky region, there are two federal monuments "City of the Dead" Tsoi-Pede – the ancient shrine of the Malchistinsky society (XV–XVIII centuries) – and the Historical and Architectural Complex of the Middle Ages "Pakoch" (Table 01). At the entrance to the "City of the Dead" there are two pillar-like sanctuaries, 42 ground and semi-underground crypts, between them there are underground crypts (Table 02). Some of the crypts are decorated with petroglyphs. Each crypt bears the Chechen name "malkh-kash" – "solar grave", and the general name of the necropolis Tsoi-Pede (Tslai-Pkhyeda) means "Settlement of a deity" (Aliskhanova and Khadzhiev, 2019).

Table 1. Objects of cultural heritage (OCHs) of federal significance

No.	Administrative district	Monument type	Number
	Historical and architectural complex "Choi-Pede"	Complex – 6 OCHs	1
		battle tower	2
		necropolis (42 crypts)	1
		sanctuary	2
	Historical and architectural complex "Pakoch"	Complex – 4 OCHs	1
		battle tower	1
		residential towers – (3 RTs)	1
		mosque	1
	Bcero:		10

Table 2. Objects of cultural heritage of regional significance located on the territory of the Argun State Historical, Architectural and Natural Museum-Reserve, included in the Register

No.	Administrative district	Complexes	Battle towers	Residential towers	Semi-battle towers	Crypts	Mosques	Other	Total
1.	Shatoy district	1	3	1	1	-	-	2	8
2.	Vedensky district	6	6	2	-	-	3	1	18
3.	Sharoytsky district	5	6	39	1	-	4	2	57
4.	Itum-Kalinsky district	27	55	96	15	51	2	8	254
5.	Achkhoy-Martanovsky district	12	6	50	9	7	3	5	92
	TOTAL:	51	76	188	26	58	12	18	429

Table 3. Identified objects of cultural heritage located on the territory of the Argun State Historical, Architectural and Natural Museum-Reserve

No.	Administrative district	Complexes	Battle towers	Residential towers	Semi-battle towers	Crypts	Mosques	Other	Total
1.	Vedensky district	-	1	15	-	-	1	6	23
2.	Sharoytsky district	1	3	31	-	-	3	-	38
3.	Itum-Kalinsky district	9	10	38	5	49	14	6	131
4.	Achkhoy-Martanovsky district	16	13	83	6	16	5	28	167
	TOTAL:	26	27	167	11	65	23	40	359

In 2019, the staff of the reserve in the Achkhoy-Martan district identified new monuments in the upper reaches of the Fortanga River and its right tributaries. In this area, not only new monuments were identified, but also information on the state of the monuments registered in the 60s of the XX century was updated, access to which was limited until recently. So, in the village of Katarashka abandoned by residents in the second half of the 19th century, as a result of search work, a tower complex was discovered: a combat tower, four residential towers and a crypt. The tower complex is located in the southern part of the Katarashka village. The battle tower is in a dilapidated state, the attached residential tower is better preserved, its roof and floors are also destroyed. Three detached residential towers are heavily ruined, their roofs and ceilings are destroyed. They have an elongated plan and taper noticeably upward. On the outskirts of the village there is a two-storey tower-like crypt with a square opening on the facade and a petroglyph in the form of a human palm above it. All structures of the village of Katarashka were built using a single construction technique (large stones of various sizes, abundant use of clay-lime mortar, careless masonry), and, most likely, at the same time.

In the village of Moshta (Meshta), seven monuments of medieval architecture were identified: two battle towers and five residential towers of different preservation. The first battle tower was preserved at the level of the fifth floor: the height of the preserved part of the wall is about 20 m. The battle balconies – mashikuli – are built into the base of the upper floor. The entrance is located on the third-floor level from the facade side. The first floor has been backfilled to enhance the stability of the structure. There are

window openings and loopholes on the walls of the tower. The second tower is worse preserved. Its height is about 11 meters, the entrance is at the level of the second floor from the side of the facade, on the walls of the tower there are window openings and loopholes. Residential towers are mostly two-story, with the exception of one, which has three floors. The roofs and ceilings of the battle towers have not been preserved. The structures have an elongated plan and are narrowed upward due to the inclination and thinning of the walls. All structures in the village of Moshta were built using a single technique (large, lightly processed stones, abundant use of mortar, thick seams).

In the village of Khaikhe (Khaikharoi, Khevkhari), which is known in the scientific literature for its towers built into rocky niches, in addition to structures of this type, combat and residential towers of various preservation have been identified.

In 2 km southeast of the village of Tsecha-Akhk, the staff of the Argun Museum-Reserve discovered a necropolis consisting of five aboveground and underground crypts built of stone on clay-lime mortar. All burial structures, with the exception of one, were badly destroyed. Preliminary studies carried out in the gorge of the Fortanga River and its right tributaries show the unity of architectural traditions in this region of Chechnya. In terms of their shapes, sizes and proportions, the medieval architectural structures of the Orstkhoi society gravitate towards the medieval monuments of Maista and Sharoi. Apparently, residential and military towers built before the 16th century prevail here.

As a result of field studies of a researcher Ramzan Bakanaev in 2020 in the Shatoi depression, the foundations of several tower complexes were identified: towers, 5 semi-combat and 6 residential towers, about 10 crypts at the confluence of the Gyulsi-akhk and Tevzan-akhk rivers; Yukerch-Keloi was (residential tower) on the outskirts of the village of Yukerch-Keloi.

The foundations of the battle and residential towers were discovered in 2019 in the Tazbichi gorge, in the vicinity of the village of Nizhniy Dere.

In accordance with the Federal Law, the Argun Museum-Reserve sent the applications for the inclusion of the identified objects with signs of cultural heritage objects in the register to the regional body for the protection of cultural heritage objects, the Committee of the Government of the Chechen Republic for the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage.

On the territory of the museum-reserve, work is being actively carried out on the restoration of cultural heritage objects. The general rules for carrying out work to preserve a cultural heritage object are defined in Art. 45 of the Federal Law of 25.06.2002 N 73-FZ (Federal Law "On cultural heritage objects (historical and cultural monuments) of the peoples of the Russian Federation"). The very procedure for carrying out repair and restoration work requires the development of scientific and project documentation. The main content of the restoration work of the tower architecture of the Argun Museum-Reserve is the reconstruction of the lost volume of the tower; masonry scraping; crack injection; restoration of masonry walls, vaults; the device of floor coverings; reconstruction of interfloor floors; reconstruction of door and window fillings; improvement of the territory of the monument; installation of an information label.

From 2015 to 2020, 207 cultural heritage sites of the Argun Museum-Reserve have undergone restoration. For instance, in 2020, the large Khoysky Historical and Architectural Complex (HAC) was restored in the Vedensky District. As a result of the restoration work, the Khoi battle tower, a mosque, 101 residential towers, 37 semi-underground stone structures with arched vaults have been restored. In

the gorge of the river Tsecha-Akhk in the Achkhoy-Martan district, the watchtower and the barrier wall of the Egichozh HAC have been restored. The Bechig residential tower and the Khaskalinsky battle tower were restored.

7. Conclusion

The ancient architecture of mountainous Chechnya is a unique phenomenon in world culture. Today, many monuments of stone architecture are on the verge of complete destruction. They were not spared neither time nor elements. Surely, they need to be saved. But these structures are so unique that any careless, inept interference in their fate can lead to their final loss. The Argun Museum-Reserve carries out activities aimed at identifying and preserving the ethnographic cultural heritage in the places of their historical origin. For modern Chechnya, the cultural heritage sites of the museum-reserve are a unique material for fostering national identity, self-respect, and pride. The work to identify the monuments of medieval stone architecture continues, as does the monitoring of monuments already registered and under state protection, which is an important condition for ensuring the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Chechen Republic for future generations.

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