

ソビエトと現代ジョージアにおける宗教的遺産の保存および復元 バグラティ大聖堂の例に基づいて

Preservation, Restoration and Use of Religious Monuments in Soviet and Contemporary Georgia:
research based on the case of Bagrati Cathedral

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1. Introduction

The idea of undertaking this research was triggered by an event that took place in 2017, although the ground had been prepared long ago: after years of local and international scale debates over its values and authenticity, an 11th-century masterpiece of Georgian ecclesiastical architecture and a very powerful national and religious symbol—Bagrati Cathedral, was excluded from the World Heritage List due to its modern, full-scale reconstruction. The World Heritage Committee concluded that although intended for its functional continuity and liturgical requirements, reconstruction destroyed much of the cathedral's authentic substance and craftsmanship present in the ruin, as well as its spirit and the “breath of history,” and it no longer possessed the values required for carrying the World Heritage title.

Bagrati Cathedral is a rare example of a World Heritage Site whose status had been revoked because of its reconstruction, and in many ways a special case in regard to internationally recognized conservation and restoration principles which clashed with the local politics and aspirations, religious manifestations, and approaches to church architecture —ruined or intact. At the same time, Bagrati Cathedral (or rather its World Heritage status) can be viewed as a “victim” of broader socio-political and religious processes that have been shaping Georgian nationhood for the last couple of decades.

In 1994, when the Cathedral entered a World Heritage List as a serial property under the criteria iv,

it was roofless and dome-less, but not entirely a ruin. Its walls, porticos, and decorative elements had been meticulously restored for years, under the strict conservation principles that Georgian restorers practiced under the Soviet rule. Indeed, there had been several attempts to ascertain the complete architectural image of the monument, but demolished some three centuries ago, it did not provide solid documental evidence. Moreover, due to the dominating ideological scene in the country which prohibited religious expressions, the Cathedral was never fully rebuilt (fig.1). Not until 2008, when already in independent Georgia, a full-scale reconstruction plan for the monument was announced and, despite the conflictive process putting the World Heritage status of the monument under the risk, executed (fig.2).



Figure 1. Half-restored Bagrati Cathedral as it entered the World Heritage List in 1994.

The fact that despite long-term restoration works performed in Soviet years, the idea to place a dome on Bagrati Cathedral was only realized recently, highlights the contrast in the approaches to heritage preservation between the two periods. During the communist regime, isolated and under ideological pressure, anastylosis and faithful restorations dominated the full-scale reconstructions. A strictly material-based heritage politics went hand in hand with the Venice Charter by placing emphasis on original architectural elements, but removed the associative and functional connotations from the sacred monuments and narrowed the scope of heritage preservation down to solving the architectural and engineering issues.

After the collapse of communism and especially from the early 2000s, with the arrival of the western-educated government and gradual empowerment of the Orthodox Church, Georgia found itself in a chaotic transitional process, in search of identity, trying to wash down the Soviet imprints and present itself as a modern and progressive country. In the processes of nation-building, the role of cultural heritage proved to be paramount. In all former Soviet republics, heritage became one of the main actors in asserting their uniqueness and individuality, after emerging from the USSR's ideologically acceptable versions of the common past, present, and future. Churches and monasteries were no longer seen as mere architectural phenomena and the prime concern became re-establishing their once oppressed religious and functional values.

Accommodating multiple interpretations of the past, however, proved to be difficult for Georgia amidst transition. Accepting the modified approaches to preservation of particularly World Heritage Sites by the country turned out to be challenging for ICOMOS/UNESCO as well. Bagrati Cathedral's story pointed at the significant differences of perception and values between the civil and Church

authorities, international and local heritage experts, and brought into question some of the well-established frameworks of heritage reconstruction and its relation to authenticity and integrity of the architectural heritage.



Figure 2. Conflicts over structural changes and compromised authenticity led to revoking Cathedral's World Heritage status in 2017

2. Research Aims

Employing Bagrati Cathedral as a case study and putting it in the center of the longer historical narrative of heritage restoration in Georgia, this research aims to:

1. Study the historical development of Georgia's architectural heritage preservation from the emergence of the scientific principles of restoration in the first half of the twentieth century—which falls on the Soviet regime in the country, up to the years of independence (from 1991 onward) and modern days. Bagrati Cathedral's case is brought to carry out a multi-layer historical analysis and comparison between communist and capitalist conceptualizations of heritage, religious-versus-secular approaches, and the methods of restoration.
2. Since the issues related to the reconstruction and removal of Bagrati Cathedral from the World Heritage List exceed the local problematics, this research also aims to address the questions of authenticity—as understood in contemporary

conservation principles, as well as the issues of reconstructing the “sacred ruins” in Georgian and the World Heritage context.

3. Methodology and Design

This research provides a comparative analysis of religious heritage preservation in Soviet and post-Soviet years, utilizing Bagrati Cathedral’s reconstruction as a case study to acquire a broader picture of heritage-related decision-making in Georgia.

The study relies heavily on primary data gathered through the content analyses of Soviet and contemporary periodicals, UNESCO and ICOMOS documents, expert mission reports, and interviews with the representatives of the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia. Thesis also uses the archival and library material of theoretical and contributory publications, including the reports of restoration works, drawings, and photographs. Reviews of publications reveal interesting details of the contradictions in heritage management in different periods and the inconsistency in the approaches.

The thesis is structured into seven chapters, with each chapter describing the particular period in Bagrati Cathedral’s story in relation to the corresponding socio-political background of the country, heritage perception, and dominating methods of restoration.

The first chapter is introduction; the justification and originality of this research, its questions, and objectives are outlined. Chapter two aims to create a base and general understanding of what makes up a Georgian cultural heritage and the role of the church architecture in it. The typology, building materials and construction techniques of the two main types of churches are given, along with the architectural description of Bagrati Cathedral, and its place in Georgian ecclesiastical architecture. A broad analysis

of the first restorations and unusual transformations of the sacred heritage under the Imperial Russian rule in the country, are also analyzed. The chapter shows that in pre-Soviet years Georgia, Bagrati Cathedral was still in a completely ruinous state, with its walls barely standing and covered with vegetation. Yet, local clergy and believers tried utilize it for the religious services by transforming the sections of the building into small chapel. The drawings, which illustrate the attempts of imagining its complete architectural form, emerge in the early 20th century, but the cathedral remained a ruin until the arrival of the Soviet government. Chapter three shifts focus on describing the heritage politics under communism in Georgian SSR and sets to explore the establishment of scientific principles of restoration. Several examples are brought to show how the religious architecture—which have always been dominating over the other types of monuments both in number and significance, were protected legally and conserved in practice under ideological pressure and prohibition of their symbolism and intangible connotations. This period in the heritage conservation history of Georgia was full of paradoxes: monuments were deprived of their functions and ideologically abused while meticulously repaired and restored as the architectural masterpieces and “people’s material culture.” Restorations were based on solid research, employing anastylosis, and the traditional building techniques of Georgian ecclesiastical architecture (discussed examples include Samtsevrissi (7th-c.), Anchiskhati (6th-c.) and Tsromi (7th-c.) churches). Soviet period art historians and restorers rejected the idea of complete reconstructions based on conjecture, although advocated the reversible interventions and adaptive transformation of the houses of worship into museums, clubs, theaters, and storehouses. Soviet years and especially the period after the Second World War, saw the first methodological conservation of Bagrati Cathedral as well. It was partially rebuilt using

the fallen stones and consolidated using the reinforced concrete, where necessary. Rebuilding the roof and the dome of the monument, however, was not discussed on the grounds of insufficient evidence. Following the principles of Venice Charter and sharing the view that “restoration must stop where conjecture begins,” reconstructing the ruin was ruled out from the restoration practice. Besides, amidst the anti-religious agitation and deprivation of its religious function, the monumental ruin of the once monumental cathedral provided much more spectacular and attractive image for the visitors.

The adverse impact of Soviet politics, which caused the suppression of symbolic values of ecclesiastical heritage, was revealed especially heavily after the collapse of the communist regime. Chapter four of the thesis analyses the changes in heritage preservation felt after breaking away from the USSR. The decision on Bagrati Cathedral’s full-scale reconstruction was made soon after the new government took power and pushed the series of reforms aiming to discard the Soviet system, reverse the decade of corruption and ineptitude, and reclaim the place in the mainstream of European history. This reconstruction carried a massive symbolic message and was intended to promote the country’s reunification, demonstrate the power of the newly elected government, and the revival of Orthodox belief. The UNESCO’s warning could not contest this enthusiasm that reconstructing the ruin would cause the loss of its values and authenticity and lead to its removal from the World Heritage List.

Chapter five sets to explore the underlying reasons for the conflict between UNESCO and Georgia around Bagrati Cathedral, and seeks to answer why the parties failed to restore the functional use of the monument while retaining its World Heritage worthiness. The step-by-step decisions, contradictory and opposing ideas of the stakeholders, restoration

methods by Georgian and foreigner architects, and the reasons behind the controversy are discussed based on the legal documents, UNESCO documentations, and the published responses from the State Party Georgia. It is argued that the contradictory viewpoints on the monument’s fundamental values and uses, led to the conflict. Moreover, this mismatch between the interpretations (Bagrati as a ruin and Bagrati as a living church) contributed to developing the opposing opinions on the method of reconstruction favored by each stakeholder, respectively. The impossibility of finding the compromise and balance between these values, however, highlights the flaws of the contemporary heritage preservation system in Georgia, as well as the inconsistencies (especially the ambiguous concept of authenticity and limits of reconstruction) in the World Heritage system. Bagrati Cathedral’s case illustrates how political or religious imperatives and changing socio-ideological contexts over time each have a considerable impact on the decisions over heritage preservation.

Chapter six of the thesis summarizes the historical narrative and returns to the questions posed in the opening section. Some personal viewpoints on Bagrati Cathedral’s reconstruction and delisting are also proposed. The subject of reconstructing a World Heritage Site and still fitting inside the requirements of the international conservation principles is discussed by drawing parallels with other reconstructed monuments in the World Heritage List. The issues of Bagrati Cathedral’s authenticity is discussed from both local and international perspectives.

Chapter seven presents a concluding part of this thesis, and based on the lessons learned from Bagrati Cathedral’s story, several viewpoints concerning the issues and possible solutions of religious heritage preservation in Georgian reality (and in the World Heritage context) are proposed to two main stakeholders at the main decisional level—State Party

Georgia and UNESCO/ICOMOS.

3. Conclusion and Final Thoughts

General conclusions of this research can be formulated as follows:

Restoration and reconstruction of religious monuments are not new or alien to Georgian tradition. Whether for functional continuity or architectural interests, rebuilding was always given priority. Soviet years marked the beginnings of scientific architectural conservation in the country. Monuments were meticulously restored, but heritage preservation was narrowed down to solving the architectural and engineering issues and dismissed the sacred, intangible values of religious buildings. In independent Georgia, the approach took a radical shift in putting more emphasis on the religious use and integrity of general image over the authenticity of materials. The obsession with reconstruction, often accompanied by authoritative and non-transparent decision-making, has an apparent ideological footing and is a well-known phenomenon for the countries liberated from long occupation and struggling in the process of nation-building. Bagrati Cathedral fits in this story as witness of its own changes as well as significant periods of shifting political ideologies and cultural transformations in the country. Its' reconstruction—as a tool to deal with the traumatic experiences—was a foreseeable development for post-Soviet Georgian heritage politics. However, its deletion from the World Heritage List, as argued in this thesis, is a result of Georgia's belated ill-attempt to heal the Soviet scars and UNESCO's reluctance to cooperate with it.

More than anything else, however, Bagrati Cathedrals' story demonstrates that although there is no absolute principle or golden rule on how to treat the ruined religious monuments, reconstruction is never a mere physical act but a multifaceted process, encompassing

various socio-economic and political aspects and it has to be a democratic right of all individuals concerned to decide which past to remember and restore.

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