

UNESCO
World Heritage Centre

CITY - MUSEUM RESERVE OF MTSKHETA (REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA)

STUDY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MTSKHETA
HERITAGE AND TOURISM MASTER PLAN

INTERNATIONAL EXPERT TEAM MISSION REPORT

REPORT
ON THE PROTECTED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND MONUMENTS

GENERAL REMARKS - SUGGESTIONS

□) Areas of absolute protection

□.1. It is absolutely essential that the State of Georgia New Urban Planning Law for space organisation be applied as soon as possible. It should include separate sections regarding the protection of architectural heritage and archaeological sites in accordance with the demands of contemporary international legislation and international declarations (Venetia Charter - 1964, Convention for the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage - 1972, Amsterdam Declaration - 1975, Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage in Europe - Granada Convention - 1985, European Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage, Revised in Valetta - 1992, Recommendations: 880(979) of the Parliamentary Assembly and (76)28, R(80)16, R(81)13 of the Committee of Ministers of the European Council).

□.2. Areas where archaeological excavations are taking place, various sections where archaeological finds are being made (e.g. gates of the ancient city) and the medieval monuments (churches) need to be immediately declared areas of absolute protection. Any excavation, building activity, reconstruction or addition (e.g. construction of bell tower, additional fencing or surrounding wall, etc.) should not proceed without the prior permission of the Central Archaeological Council. Such permission should be granted after an on-site inspection and a detailed examination of:

- a) A study concerning the purpose and advisability of the project; and
- b) The detailed study of construction, excavation, etc.

More specifically, the areas that are suggested for declaration as areas of absolute protection are the following (mentioned also in the attached plans):

- 1) Archaeological site Bagineti (Armaztsikhe).
- 2) Archaeological site Samtavro Burial Ground.
- 3) Archaeological site Djvari Monastery.
- 4) Archaeological site Svetitskoveli Cathedral.
- 5) Archaeological site Antiokia.
- 6) Archaeological site Samtavro Nunnery.
- 7) Archaeological site The Gate.
- 8) Archaeological site Getsimania.
- 9) Archaeological site The Tomb.
- 10) Archaeological site Bebristskhe.
- 11) The oldest traditional house of the settlement.

B. Establishing buffer zones to ensure the harmonious development of the structured environment around the protected cultural articles.

“In the surrounding of monuments, within groups of buildings and within sites, each Party undertakes to promote measures for the general enhancement of the environment” (European Council Committee of Ministers, Resolution (76) 28 - Ancillary Measures, article No7). In respect of this, special studies for the protection – improvement – adaptation of the constructed and natural environment in line with the character of the monuments need to be produced concerning the wider area around the above monuments and protected areas. These studies will set out special conditions that will concern both the already existing buildings and – particularly - new buildings erected under pressure to satisfy the contemporary needs.

C. Signposting – Information about the Monuments and the Archaeological sites.

C.1. A special Study for Signposting Monuments and Archaeological Sites – finds (in Georgian and a western European language) all over the area of the town. Explanatory signs erected at all monuments and archaeological sites.

C.2. A special Study into Establishing and Signposting Routes within the town (in Georgian and a western European language). Explanatory signs indicating the routes connecting one monument – archaeological site with another.

C.3. A special programme for signposting and improving the system of the walls, towers and gates of the ancient city and the monuments associated with them, at every well-known spot within the network of buildings in the town.

D. Organisational and technical upgrading and recruiting of specialised personnel for the (local) Regional Archaeological Museum.

The great value, the timelessness and the plethora of finds in the wider area of the town of Mtskheta make it necessary to construct a New Building for the Regional Archaeological Museum, which will be one of the central museums of Georgia. The present and future finds from the archaeological sites will be exhibited in a systematic manner and according to the specifications and contemporary concepts of Museology in this museum. With this in mind, the possibility of transferring finds currently housed at the Janashia State Museum of Georgia to the New Regional Archaeological Museum should be examined.

In order to meet the increased specialised demands for conservation of the finds, it is absolutely essential that an exemplary Laboratory for the Conservation of Ceramic, Metal and Stone Artefacts be set up. It follows from this that it is also essential that an exemplary specialized archaeological library should be established.

We should emphasise the great importance of the finds from this area in the study of the prehistory and history of Georgia and in the study of the cultural interaction – in this area – between the peoples of the Mediterranean Basin and the Black Sea. The extensive unexcavated archaeological sites promise a rich future in terms of finds. One feature of the Mtskheta region is that it is situated just a short distance (approx. 15 km.) from the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, and as a result access to the site does not present any special difficulties for any future researchers and tourists who wish to combine a visit to the Museum with one to the very archaeological sites.

As a result of all this, we consider that the region could become an International Centre for Specialised Studies for students and postgraduate researchers (archaeologists, architects, conservationists, historians, specialists in the observation of flora and fauna), who could study material dating from prehistoric times, through the medieval period and up to and including the 19th century.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROTECTION AND INTEGRATED CONSERVATION – REHABILITATION POLICY WITHIN THE BORDERS OF THE “TRADITIONAL” PART OF THE TOWN.

From the very beginning, emphasis should be given to the possibilities provided by new technologies in implementing a rotating master plan, in which the measures taken and their effectiveness are evaluated and modified periodically. As a result, it will be beneficial for the future body involved in implementing the master plan to maintain and update all data (town planning data, land registry data, and socio-economic data) via a database, which is updated periodically. A key requirement will be close administrative monitoring of the region for a number of years after the initial stages of the project, so that any necessary amendments can be made. One of the key organisations involved within this could be the “Heritage and Tourism Station”, as described in “Heritage and Tourism Policy in Georgia”, by Bernard Bizet (Synopsis, June 1998).

□) Measures Regarding Residents.

□.1. Clear building restrictions should be drawn up, which will be implemented via the granting of building permission by local authorities (local government technical service and local archaeological service): These factors – structure surface - roofing surface – structure height (storeys) – proportions of openings (closed and open) – requirement for tiled roofs (and not metallic) – preservation of the view of neighbouring dwellings – use of traditional materials – restrictions imposed on colours of paint used, - requirement to use specific types of wood in the fences construction with stone bases etc.- will necessarily be key elements in the preservation of the character of this part of the town.

□.2. To compensate for the imposition of these restrictive measures, financial and other beneficial incentives for local residents should be provided. Such incentives could be directed towards the following types of case:

□.2.1. The restoration of old buildings in the protected area to which changes (reversible) have already been made that have altered the character of the settlement, such as: metal roofs, changing the external appearance of the building to give it an “Austrian” agricultural cottage look or buildings with several storeys.

□.2.2. New constructions to be of limited size and specific character, such as the replacement of damaged roofs, internal modernisation, improved sanitation and small additions, which are aimed at improving living conditions for the residents. These new improvements will only be permitted with the approval of the local authorities (local government technical service and local archaeological service). Where any digging works are involved, these will take place only in the presence of an archaeologist.

□.2.3. Financial measures will be taken to benefit those who own any elements of the architectural heritage (tax relief for purchasing, granting loans, repair work grants etc.).

□) Measures regarding the State

B.1. As a general principle, a seismic hazard study of the whole town and the wider area must be carried out – initially – and afterwards a zone by zone analysis of the areas around the monuments.

□.2. Putting all mains supplies underground: electricity cables, telephone lines, T.V., water and gas mains – which are visible in many areas of the town, either lying on the ground or up in the air, which presents obvious risk to the inhabitants. A single cable TV- line for each building quarter.

□.3. Traditional stone paving for side roads in the town.

□.4. Attempts to reclaim disused buildings by state services, equipping them with contemporary facilities (e.g. disused building of «Traditional Arts and Craft Centre» at the entrance to the town).

□.5. Improving health and safety standards in the riverside zone by removing all the makeshift or illegal structures and rubbish. Ensuring access for walkers in all suitable spots and the provision of seating. Reclamation of disused facilities (refreshment centres, etc.).

□ 6. Improved health and safety standards for the settlement by removing all forms of rubble -waste. Transfer of the rubbish dump to another suitable site, with environmentally friendly underground disposal. In the medium term, the settlement should be equipped with a central network for biological cleaning which will make the greatest contribution to cleaning up what is at present polluted river water.

C) Activation of acceptance mechanisms

C.1. In the efforts to gain acceptance, and much more importantly, to implement the recommendations of the Master Plan which is being designed, a basic factor will be that of obtaining the consent of local residents. Measures such as restricting planning permission (surface), restrictions concerning the height of buildings, traffic and car parks - are disincentives, which must be balanced through with other incentives. These incentives should be either of an economic character (subsidies, loans) or related to the possibility of granting the rest planning surface in another area, which is outside the traditional centre, together with qualitative incentives - such as improvements in living conditions both at a personal and at a community level (Resolution (76) 28, III. - "National integrated conservation policies").

C.2. It would be of great benefit to promote a general climate - a mood - among the locals which has two main elements to it:

a) A sense that what has been programmed by the Master Plan will be implemented in due course, with responsibility in an atmosphere of assistance - both material and scientific/technical, without any violation of the law, and in a spirit of flexibility rather than rigidity.

b) At the same time, a sense of pride should be inculcated in the timeless and intercultural historical values of the area, thus encouraging awareness of the need to protect and elevate these values with respect for traditional buildings and the exceptional natural environment - (Resolution (76) 28, III. - D. "Informing and educating the public").

ANALYTICAL PRESENTATION OF THE EXISTIN STATE AND THE MEASURES TO BE TAKEN FOR THE PROTECTED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF THE TOWN

I. Archaeological site ARMAZTSIKHE.

The acropolis of ancient Mtskheta, residence of the Kings of Kartli (Iberia) is situated on the high hill **Bagineti** on the right bank of the Mtkvari, at the confluence of the Mtkvari and the Aragvi rivers. Roman historians and medieval chronicles mention the Iberian city. Minor excavations were carried out in 1880. Large-scale archaeological excavations started from 1944, were resumed in 1985 and are still continuing. They revealed that the adobe town walls (built about at the first half of the 1st century A.D.) surrounded the hilltop and the side sloping down towards the river, an area of 30 ha. The excavations at Armatzikhe uncovered town walls with towers, a colonnaded hall (1st-2nd c. A.D.), a six-apsed building, a wine cellar and two enfilade-type baths. Rich treasures of a sarcophagus-burial tomb, a 7th-8th c. hall church and other monastic buildings were excavated. It is considered that only 1/50 up to 1/100 of the archaeological area has been excavated until now.

1. Organisation and Protection Study of the Primary Excavation Site (short-term)

1.1. General clearing of various types of objects, rubbish, dirt and plants on the excavation site and in the buildings that may impede work carried on or prevent visitors from approaching.

1.2. Construct a large drainage flow system surrounding the perimeter of the entire excavation site area.

1.3 IMMEDIATE conservation work for monuments in situ: stonework, plasterwork, coatings, the covering of the interior walling with prefabricated tiles, as well as the hypocaust system in the hot baths. Uncover and conservation of the buildings' pipeline system for water supply and drainage.

1.4 IMMEDIATE protection of the original floors (e.g. in hot baths) by placing an insulating filter, which protects against damp (e.g. insulating asphalt felting). Laying a protective thin gravel or earthen lining.

1.5 Roofs must IMMEDIATELY be placed above the excavated area in order to protect the buildings, finds and graves from the elements as they come to light. During the first stage of intervention, installation of lightweight protective rooftops is suggested, which in some cases will unify larger areas. Particular attention must be paid to the support structure points in order to avoid destroying valuable materials. A prefabricated wooden superstructure would be preferable, as it can be extended and easily maintained and offers protection from rain, hail, and snow - to the buildings and the finds and also from the sun - to the excavators and the visitors.

These short-term constructions will be used in conjunction with the results of actual measurements and the experimental construction of a research model as a pilot in order to arrive at the final housing proposal, that will be implemented in stages, during the consecutive phases of the completion of the excavations.

2. Visiting Organisation Study (medium-term)

2.1 Full perimetric protection of the archaeological site with a stone-based metallic Railing or (in the first stage) at least with a metal net fence.

2.2. Establishment of the boundaries of each section of the archaeological site that will be accessible to visitors and protection of the areas that are still being studied.

2.3. Ensuring easy access: visitor routes marked by paved footpaths using local natural paving stones. Ramps set at a gentle incline in areas where the slopes are steep. Wooden walkways with metal bases above the excavation areas.

2.3. Placement of signs alongside routes and monuments in order to provide visitors with explanations and depictions of the original forms of the monuments or to provide characteristic details of how they operated (e.g. the baths).

2.4. Development of essential facilities at the entrance area: Information material, café refreshment centre, toilet facilities. Selection of rest spots which afford a particularly beautiful view of the settlement, the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral and the Djvari Monastery. The rest spots should be sheltered, with litterbins and a tap for water. Also, they should not be visually unpleasant.

□□. Archaeological site SAMTAVRO BURIAL GROUND.

The largest ancient burial ground in the Caucasus is situated on the left bank of the Aragvi River, in the field stretching from Bebristsikhe Castle to the Samtavro Nunnery. Archaeological excavations of the burial ground started in 1874 and are still continuing. More than four thousand burials of various types and various periods have been discovered, lying in several strata. The oldest of these are Bronze Age tumuli dating from early 2nd millennium B.C. The latest cists of the cemetery date back to the 8th-9th centuries. Fragments of 2nd-1st century B.C. buildings have been excavated on the territory of the burial ground and 8th -7th century B.C. houses, on the neighbouring hills. The archaeological finds uncovered in the tombs: earthenware, iron and glass vessels, plates and dishes, bronze and iron arms and armour, jewellery etc. are kept at the Janashia State Museum of Georgia and the Mtskheta Museum of Ethnography and Archaeology.

1. Organisation and Protection Study of the Main Excavation Site (short-term).

- 1.1 General clearing of the excavation site and buildings from various types of objects (old cars, etc.) rubbish, dumped soil and plants that may impede either excavation work being carried out or prevent access to visitors.
- 1.2 Construct a large rainwater drainage system surrounding the perimeter of the entire archaeological site or around the excavation site. The ground is comprised of small stones (conglomerate) and is easily washed away by rainwater.
- 1.3 IMMEDIATE conservation of monuments in situ: burial stone plates, historic buildings (homes with fireplaces dating from the 8th to the 7th century B.C. and from the 2nd to the 1st century B.C.) in the necropolis. IMMEDIATE partial restoration work to the grave monuments.
- 1.4 Full external protection of the archaeological site with a high metal railing with a stone base (in the areas where this is not possible, use a metal net fence). Construction of a new protective metal railing around the area where finds have been made.
- 1.5 Conservation of the metal frame of the current roof over the excavation site. Replacement of the roof covering (corrugated asbestos sheets) with rustproof iron sheeting (that will be painted a dark brown colour), as the existing structure is a health risk, whilst it is also contrary to European Community legislation.
- 1.6 Remove all cables of any nature (electrical, etc.) that come into or near the archaeological area.

2. Visiting Organisation Study for the Samtavro Burial Ground (short – medium term).

- 2.1 Establishment of the boundaries of each section of the archaeological site that will be accessible to visitors and protection of the areas that are still being studied - excavated.
- 2.2. Ensuring easy access: visitor routes marked by paved footpaths using local natural paving stones. Ramps set at a gentle incline in areas, where the slopes are steep. Wooden walkways with metal bases above the excavation areas.
- 2.3. Placement of signs alongside routes and monuments in order to provide visitors with explanations and depictions of the original forms of the monuments or to provide characteristic details of how they operated (e.g. ancient houses).
- 2.4. Development of essential facilities close to the entrance area: Information material, café-refreshment centre, toilet facilities. Exploitation of the already-existing stone building, after rehabilitation work.
- 2.5. Selection of rest spots which afford a particularly beautiful view of the town, the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral and the Djvari Monastery. The rest spots should be sheltered, with litterbins and a tap for water. Also, they should not be visually unpleasant.

3. Joint Study (long-term) for the Organisation and Protection of the Armaztsikhe (Bagineti) and Samtavro Burial Ground Archaeological sites.

- 3.1 Completion of the systematic excavation works in those areas, which have shown indications of holding possible finds.
- 3.2 Uncovering of buildings and graves. On – site rectification work and conservation – protection work of archaeological find (buildings and objects). Transfer of the most valuable finds to the Regional Museum for conservation, validation, study and safekeeping.
- 3.3 Construction of permanent protective roofs above the excavation site and protection of the entire area. These structures are necessary for two fundamental reasons:
 - A) They represent a convenient method of the conserving archaeological finds in situ in the worst possible weather conditions of the area.
 - B) By covering the archaeological areas with a roof, which in turn will be covered with soil, the areas will be returned to their original condition. This way, they will not appear as “open wounds” on the Kartli hillsides when seen from the surrounding heights, which offer such astounding views.

The final study for the permanent roofs for the Bagineti (Armaztsikhe) and the Samtavro Burial Ground archaeological sites will involve a complex architectural, static and

electromechanical study, covering also seismic hazards, technical research into the condition of the ground in addition to a study into means of simulating natural cooling and natural lighting. The basic "philosophy" behind the final organisational scheme for the archaeological sites will be the utilisation of natural elements (sun, air, water) in conjunction with the earth, which has protected these ruins for so many centuries. The use of a flexible iron or (stick-pressed) wooden structure is recommended. This cover should be made of a latticework in suitable corrugated form, offering the following possibilities:

- Controlled use of natural ventilation and natural lighting.
- Coverage of the exterior surface with natural soil and appropriate plants.
- Heat insulation and waterproofing.
- Flexible installation of support columns to enable them to be adjusted according to requirements arising from archaeological finds.
- Coverage of the entire archaeological site and creation of controllable heating and ventilation conditions throughout the year.

The following targets will be expedited once the permanent roof, which will cover the whole area being excavated, is fitted:

a) Protection of the monuments, workers and visitors using more resilient materials and complete control of the sunlight striking the site (neutralisation of ultraviolet and infrared radiation from the sun).

b) External restoration of the landscape, as a result of completely concealing the roof with soil from the local area.

c) Ensuring ease of movement for visitors to the site as well as accessibility to monuments (including people with special needs). The monuments will be protected from visitors' wandering aimlessly around without supervision. Organising the pathways will increase the possibilities for access to the site for visitors.

d) Upgrading the educational role of the archaeological sites, with the possibility of organising theme-based exhibitions in various areas, with suitable showcases for finds in addition to wooden seats at visitor assembly points. In this way, the visitor routes, which will be organised at the Armaztsikhe and Samtavro Burial Ground archaeological sites, beneath the permanent roofs, may include:

- General observation routes.
- Amphitheatre-shaped areas, which will make it possible to provide information to groups of visitors or to meet educational needs for special groups (students, etc.)
- Information points to provide information about the techniques used in excavations and maintenance of finds.
- Thematic units about the organisation of urban planning for the acropolis or settlement, architecture of the buildings, building materials, equipment used in the houses and the palaces, the activities which took place within there, the workplaces, social - political organisation and religion. Similarly, in the case of the necropolis, thematic units regarding funeral traditions, burial methods, grave gifts and the art behind some of the finds.

III. Archaeological site DJVARI MONASTERY

Djvari (Mtsketa Holy Cross) Monastery stands on the rocky mountaintop at the confluence of the Mtkvari and Aragvi Rivers, from where opens the best view to the wider area of Mtskheta. The complex consists of several buildings, erected in different periods: minor and great churches, remnants of the dwellings and a fortification enclosure. To the north of the main church is erected a minor church with an aisleless nave, with cross-groined vault and a parekklesion. The church is built of greenish quadrilateral limestones. The Katholikon (main church, 586/7-604 AD) is a domed tetraconch, encased in a rectangle, with corner rooms and four smaller exedrae of horseshoe shape inserting on the diagonals. Djvari church had a great influence on the further development of Georgian, as well as of Armenian architecture. In the

17th-18th centuries a wall was built around the monastery. The fragments of the walls and the ruins of the towers still survive to the east and south of Djvari church.

1. Conservation and protection needs of the monument and the surrounding wall.

A. The main church.

A.1. On the outside surfaces of the church, the following have been noted (in places):

- 1.1. Extensive flaking of the external surface of the building stones: Especially serious is the damage to the stones on the higher level around the eastern arches and on the lower level around the base of the church, particularly on the eastern façade - above the crepidomas.
- 1.2. Some of the building stones are coming loose and falling.
- 1.3. Serious damage and some cracks.
- 1.4. Growth of mould, blackening due to soot, incidence of parasites (particularly in the southern porch).

A.2. In some areas the building stones inside the church show signs of being in need of repair - in places.

A.3. The bas-reliefs representing the church's benefactors and the Kings of Georgia that decorate the external surfaces of the church (which are significant both in terms of their architectural and morphological value and in terms of the historical information they provide) are well known. They are found above the narrow oblong windows, which open onto the four, semi-circular arches and accompanied by explanatory inscriptions. There are also depictions of Christ and the angels, which are found on the semi-circular lintel above the main southern entrance and other secondary entrances. Semi-circular stone cornices, which have carved decorations, also surround all the openings into them.

All the above bas-reliefs have suffered a lot of damage over the course of time and they are continuing to suffer damage as a result of the inclement weather conditions. Many of the scenes depicted have disappeared forever.

Recommendations

1) Conservation and partial restoration work is necessary for the serious damaged limestone blocks of the external facades of the church. Cleaning soot, mildew and parasites from certain building stones and capitals.

2) It is absolutely essential that the building stones on which the depictions are carved be carefully removed immediately. They should then be taken away to a special centre for stone conservation work, so that the parts, which are crumbling, can be strengthened. They can then be kept on a suitable organised exposition display in the Regional Museum. In their place replicas can be mounted (as happened with the sculptures and architectural bas-relief of Orsanmichele Church or the Campanile of Giotto in Florence), in accordance with article 8 of the 1964 Charter of Venice. The replicas should be appropriately distinguishable from the authentic building stones.

B. Northern small church and parekklesion

1) Attempts (now stopped) for restoration the northern church and parekklesion pose a significant problem. The "reconstruction" has a strongly "artificial" appearance, with extensive use of new building stones for the external facing of the walls. The work has today led to a situation where significant sections of the original construction have been concealed, destroying the authenticity of the monument. Use has also been made of reinforced concrete to strengthen the monument's superstructure.

All these new additions should be removed immediately. Since the work stopped, the small church and the parekklesion have remained almost entirely roofless. The unprotected original stone structures are at risk of flaking, coming loose and falling. The appearance of the building from the outside, with its half-destroyed handy wooden roof, is extremely off-putting for visitors.

2) Another obvious problem is the southern construction, next to the central entrance. Measures taken to stabilize the structure, (iron supports), cannot be considered satisfactory from a point of view of deontology, effectiveness, conservation methodology and final

appearance of the building. Serious problems are evident concerning maintenance and stabilization of the stone structure of the building, as well as the existing in this place part of the wall system. A new roof for the building is required.

C. Surrounding walls

From 1997 to 1998 the walls were partly restored. Today serious problems are evident relating both to conservation work on the original masonry of the walls and the fact that the walling is collapsing. Weeds and small trees are growing from the mortar in the wall. Visitors have unrestricted access, even to sections, which are ready to collapse.

Recommendations

- 1) Specialised cleaning of the stone structure of the surrounding wall to remove plant growth. Application of herbicide.
- 2) Repair work to be carried out to the walling: careful repairing of the construction joints, restoration – replacement work in some sections. A protective layer to be added on to the upper level, against inclement weather conditions.
- 3) Removal of certain later minor constructions or replacement where necessary (e.g. small wooden gates).

2. Site Management

□. Access

□. 1. Regional

The existing road network is satisfactory, with the exception of the retaining walls aside the road that are not in well-preserved condition. There exists great lack of signposting in Georgian (even locals have difficulty finding the right direction) - almost a complete lack of signs in any western language. Cars park absolutely anywhere. Larger and more organised car parks should be created.

Recommendations

After completing their visit to the monuments inside the city (following an internal route), visitors could, using the Cathedral of Svetitskoveli as a pick up point, be driven to the monument by minibus. After their visit they could follow the old pathway which goes down a gentle slope through the traditional animal enclosures - there is a beautiful view from there of the whole of the surrounding area - and go down to what is today the motorway. There is already an underpass here that could be enlarged. A small-scale refreshment stall could be built next to the river. At a later stage crossing the river could be made possible either by means of a small suspension bridge or by water-borne transport (raft or boat). Of course, those who wish to use the path to go up to the monument may do so.

- Re-opening and maintaining the old path, adding paving stones and protective walling. Special rest stations can be organised with seating and drinking water, shelter to avoid the sun and the rain, litter bins. A small refreshment stand could be built using local materials.
- Approach to the crypt inside the substructure, under the parekklesion.
- Approach to the chapel at St. Nino's Spring (to the south of the main church, midway down the slope) and restoration work.
- A similar approach could also be successful with the access to the small nearby lake on the hilltop, which has a beautiful view towards the monument.

□.2. Local.

- Repair - widening - lengthening of the existing paved road - path that affords access to the monument. Construction of ramps for those with special needs. Construction of small protective walls at intervals.

□. Entrance

Small, unmaintained and inadequate for contemporary and future needs.

B.1. Construction of new entrance (ticket office and the guard's house) using traditional materials (stone-clad).

C. Security - railings

Inadequate. They have been destroyed in some places or do not exist at all.

C.1. The existing railings have to be replaced with new ones that would provide greater security to guard the surrounding area of the monument.

D. Safety measures for visitors

D.1. In some particular sections of the area there is a great danger that visitors may fall. This is especially true for the large number of small children, who visit (school visits). Protective iron railings must be installed immediately, not only around the perimeter of the area, but also along some particular parts of the surrounding wall.

D.2. Generally, there is a need to define which particular areas can be visited at the monument.

D.3. Seating should be provided in spaces, which are available round the monument.

E. Facilities

E.1. It is necessary to build modern WCs (including toilet facilities for people with special needs) near to the entrance.

E.2. General cleaning up of the surrounding area to remove all the rubbish. Installation of plain metal rubbish bins, preserved inside stone building enclosures, with signalisation.

F. Information material

F.1. An information board should be put up concerning the historical and architectural significance of the monument with a picture depicting a reconstruction of the monument and the surrounding area. The information should be both in Georgian and in English (or French).

F.2. Printing and distribution of modern information material with:

- Easy-to-understand content for non-specialist visitors.
- Greater specialised content.

Books, brochures, leaflets with cultural - tourist routes in the city and in the wider area, picture postcards, slides.

G. Lighting

Totally insufficient, with outdated lighting units, which are in a poor condition.

The monument is visible from a long distance and therefore it should be the illuminated landmark of the city of Mtskheta at night as well.

G.1. It is necessary to produce a Specialised Study on the Lighting of the monument and the entire surrounding area. Construction of new local and regional lighting networks.

SUMMARISED PROPOSALS

Generally, the immediate needs are:

A. A full Specialised Study concerning conservation - protection - partial reconstruction and restoration that would include the church and the park, as well as the immediate surrounding area. Conservation - reconstruction work to the preserved and damaged parts of the building stones of the external surface of the monument should go ahead on the basis of this Study.

B. A Study concerning conservation of the surrounding walls and how to fully capitalise on the benefits offered by the wider area around the monument.

C. Medium term – long-term objectives: Establishment of the degree of absolute protection for the area around the monument. Establishment of a zone for controlled – organised agricultural development in the wider area.

C.1 One of the chief characteristics of the natural environment is the catalytic emptiness of the hill opposite the town. It is imperative that in the future, the relationship is maintained between the “constructed,” = man-made environment and the “unbuilt,” = natural environment, the same that has been preserved over the course of centuries. It is essential that new, large-scale buildings of any nature be not built, as they may upset the balance of this relationship. The religious building, however, is completely in harmony with the natural environment – it is elevated and promoted within it, and it also maintains productive relationship with it, as if it is born from within it.

C.2 In this respect, not even tall plants should be planted, except in a few, controlled areas and perhaps in order to disguise appropriately the road axes. To face this problem, we will have to include a Sound Insulation Technical Study, examining the possibility of creating sound screening by alongside the length of the large, main road axis that passes by the area, by high evergreen hedges, in combination either with:

- a) An appropriate walling made of noise-proof, prefabricated elements.
- b) Embankments of appropriate high.
- c) Road cuttings (lowering the level of the road).

These measures would decrease the serious traffic noise pollution that detracts from the landscape.

IV. Archaeological site SVETITSKHOVELI CATHEDRAL.

Svetitskhoveli Cathedral is the most significant of the city of Mtskheta's monuments that are on the World Heritage List. In general, the monument is in a satisfactory state of maintenance. However, despite its great importance, it is now in imminent danger due to the large-scale interventions of the local church authorities. These interventions, which have been carried out on the authorities' own initiative in the name of the monastery's current operational needs without any control by the local or central services responsible, are beyond any scientific deontology concerning protection of and respect for monuments and they are in blatant violation of UNESCO's international protection conventions.

In particular:

1. The local church authorities have gone ahead with the irreversible construction of two underground areas which:
 - are extremely large - totally disproportionate to the monument and its present-day needs
 - have been constructed with complete disregard for scientific deontology, study of needs, adaptation to the surrounding area and archaeological research - documentation of excavations.

A) The first basement, which is in the courtyard, has been constructed along the inner flank of the walls. It is about 35m long x 6m wide x 4m tall. Its sidewalls are made of 60 centimetre-thick concrete which projects almost 1.5m from the ground. It has been incorporated into the outer walls of an older building that stood in the same place.

B) The second basement has been constructed along the outer flank of the walls and reaches up to the south gate. It lies on the remains of an 11th-century palace, which was restored during 1963-64 and 1997-99. It is of almost the same dimensions as the other basement and will be covered with pre-fabricated elements made of reinforced concrete.

The excavations needed for the creation of the above basements, were carried out «completely unbeknown» to the local and central archaeological authorities, without the permission of the Central Archaeological Council, without any control, and without any scientific documentation concerning the site stratification or the finds themselves. Some of the latter were taken to the Regional Archaeological Museum. There are more than 50 architectural and decorative stone items: spindles from pillars with bas-relief Georgian decorations of Christian times, capitals from Corinthian-style pilasters of the Roman period, cornices with rough floral decoration, in imitation of the Byzantine decorations in Constantinople, etc, that "were found in the grounds of the Cathedral".

At this point, we must emphatically stress that, not far from the basement excavation and in close proximity to the Cathedral, the Archaeological Service carries out systematic sectional excavations during which gold objects of exquisite artistry have been found, such as gemstones from rings with relief decorations (of the Roman period, with Greek inscriptions and names of Queens). A masterpiece silver sheath for quills that belonged to a famous king and bore sculptured representations of the nine Muses, of Homer, Dimosthenes and Theucydides with Greek inscriptions was found in the same place a month ago!

All the above bears witness to the fact that valuable information about the earlier construction phases of the cathedral complex and, possibly, other precious objects were lost during the illegal excavations performed in order for the basements to be built.

2. A wall enclosed the Svetitskhoveli grounds as early as the 11th century and was restored in 1787. The lower part of the original brick-built gate is still preserved. According to tradition, the original superstructure ended in a bell tower. In the eighteen thirties, in view of the visit of the Russian emperor Nicolas I to the Caucasus, the clergy erected a new bell tower, as can be seen in a photograph taken in 1857.

Today, with the agreement of the Archaeological Council, the local church authorities are proceeding with the erection of a new bell tower, right above the original middle-ages gate in imitation of the preserved medieval Georgian bell towers. This is in sharp contrast to the meaning behind paragraph 9 of the Charter of Venice that says "The process of restoration ... must stop at the point where conjecture begins..." A very short distance away stands the gate (1029), which today is used to gain access to the monument. Extensive excavation work is being carried out within the interior in order to construct a large concrete staircase to afford access from the upper entrance level to the lower level of the courtyard of the monument.

3. In the south-east corner of the grounds, between 1788 and 1811, Catholicos Anton II's palace was built. This structure was rebuilt several times in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries and therefore it has long since lost its original form. Since the monument was added to the World Heritage List, the opinion has been expressed that it would be better to remove the structure. However, the local church authorities have gone ahead with arbitrary additions built of concrete and aluminium, entirely changing the external appearance of the walls of the courtyard and - most importantly - doing so at an insultingly short distance from the Cathedral!

4. Inside the Cathedral there are murals of exceptional historical and artistic value dating from the 17th century, which include depictions of episodes from the Gospel and the Old Testament, episodes of the convention of Karlti, portraits of donors and historical portraits. In particular, we may note:

- Psalms 148 – 150, which cover a large area of the southern wall of the church (dating from the second half of the 17th century).
- The paintings of the Catholicos throne (1688 – 1691).
- The frescoes on the Pillar erected at the site of the burial of Christ's robe painted (1678 – 1688).
- Frescoes on the sides of the southwest pillar supporting the dome (17th century).

Despite conservation work carried out in the distant past, it is easy to see that nothing has been done in the modern period to conserve or protect the murals. The lower sections in particular, which are in closest proximity to visitors, are in immediate danger of being destroyed. Most of the murals on the southern wall of the church, which was also the "seat back" at this point, have already completely disappeared!

Recommendations.

A) Inside the Church:

A.1. IMMEDIATE conservation work should be carried out on the murals in situ. Once the work has been completed, a protective transparent covering should be installed (e.g. a pane of plexi-glass or unbreakable glass with a metal frame) which will prevent visitors from touching the murals.

A2. Internal lighting should be installed below the existing floor glass panes, on the lower part of the earlier protochristian church.

A3 Information should be provided next to the glass panes, in the form of plans and photographs of the foundations of the earlier church, to help visitors better understand the prehistory of the monument.

B) Outside in the grounds of the Church:

There is a serious problem concerning overlapping authority over religious monuments belonging to the city museum reserve of Mtskheta on the World Heritage List, which exists under the pretext of the need to satisfy contemporary requirements concerning the running of the church.

B.1. Before work can be completed in the outside areas of the Cathedral, the systematic excavations required must be completed under the direct supervision of the local archaeological authorities. These excavations are sure to bring to light much valuable information about the early history of the monument and will also probably result in some valuable finds from the many graves existing in the area around the church.

B.2. All excavation work already carried out inside and outside the monastery grounds must be systematically checked. The future use of all the areas being developed should be controlled, as should the various items of machinery (air turbines?) having already been placed on the site.

B.3. In the interior of the yard there were large deposits of the earth sloping down from the external walls to the monument, which were removed in 1978. Later additional monastery buildings were removed, as well. As a result of these the modern courtyard is levelled and the walls are revealed. Particular care is required for the Final Study for the development of the area surrounding the monument. Work in the courtyard of the monastery must be done in such a way, as to avoid the ultimate development of some «standardised» expanse which bears no trace of the original structures and of their past character. Areas should be created where visitors may relax, gaze and ponder what is around them. The addition of appropriate small flowering plants, medium height plants and small trees would play a vital part in this. The possibility of offering tours around and inside the walls of the monastery should also be examined.

B.4. Apart from the above, the fact that the underground basements are now open a short distance from the foundations of the Cathedral and the surrounding wall, have formed two «tunnels» with rigid side walls, the “behaviour” of which in future earthquakes is still unknown. We consider the a Static Analysis Study of the behaviour of the monument in the event of a future earthquake to be necessary, given the current circumstances.

C) Around the grounds of the Cathedral, (buffer zone).

C.1. Recent interventions made should be reversed and the ruins existed along the length of the southern external side of the grounds (Kalinka Road.), should be restored to the original conservation work state they were.

C.2. Along the whole length of the road surrounding the monastery, (Kalinka Road, Mamylashvili Road and Komsomolskaja Road) should be made:

- A restoration study of the facades of the old houses and the wooden fences.
- An adaptation study for the new constructions in the area, for which contemporary materials have been used, that do not match the character of the town (Refreshment centres etc).
- Repairs to the pavements, to the metallic railing of the immediate surrounding area and the installation of small seating areas.

V. Archaeological site ANTIOCHIA.

The church known as Antiochia stands on the outskirts of Mtskheta, southeast of the town, at the confluence of Mtkvari and Aragvi rivers. It should have been built prior to the 6th century. The oblong, hall – type main building of the church is faced with smoothly cut stone. It has a horseshoe – shaped apse. The church was thoroughly repaired in the 15th century. A porch

with a rectangular ground plan, with a double – arched entrance in the north wall, was added to the west door of the church. In the 18th century a defence tower was built upon the porch. The monument has recently undergone conservation work and has been partly restored. The territory of the church was walled to the west, with an arched gate built into the wall. From 1997 to 1999 the interior of the church was plastered and painted. Nonetheless, certain basic comments can be made regarding the monument and the immediate area around it:

Recommendations

- 1) The zone built around the base of the monument to protect it from rainwater has been reconstructed using a different material from that of the monument's original building stones, resulting in a sharp and un-aesthetic contrast. This protective zone should preferably be replaced.
- 2) The later murals are not only devoid of any value, but also compromise the authenticity of the building. These should be removed and the internal walls of the church should also be "cleaned".
- 3) The monument has been built next to one of the settlement's historic gates, which today lies in ruins. During the conservation work no effort was made towards displaying or highlighting the ruins of the gate. It is essential that the excavation works in the surrounding area be completed. Visitors should not be able to walk around uncontrolled (barriers should be installed and signs displayed indicating the correct course to be followed) in order to protect the finds. In addition, information boards should be installed with a plan (illustration) of the area and explanatory text.
- 4) The newly constructed bell tower does not suit (match) the medieval character of the monument and it would be more suitable for a later church construction. It must be replaced by a more simple and suitable structure.
- 5) It is absolutely essential that measures be taken to restore the view from the monument:
 - A) Eastwards – to the river.
 - B) Westwards – to the Svetiskhoveli Cathedral and the unique historic old house located in the settlement. To achieve this, the ugly and visually disturbing more modern structure, which blocks the view towards the centre of the settlement must be demolished and appropriate landscaping work carried out.

VI. Archaeological site SAMTAVRO NUNNERY.

Samtavro Nunnery in the north part of Mtskheta. In the 480s King Vakhtang made Samtavro a cathedral church. In 1811 the Samtavro Episcopate was abolished, and in 1820 a nunnery was founded. Cathedral of the Saviour, that still stands today, was built between 1030 and 1050 and is one of the best examples of 11th century Georgian architecture. It is an inscribed – cross – type building, with the dome resting on the projections of the apse walls and two free – standing pillars. On both sides of the altar apse the church has apsed pastophoria, on top of which there are first floor rooms. There is only one window in the central apse. The cathedral is faced with smooth sandstone tiles outside, and richly decorated. During the 19th century the façade masonry was partly renovated. The dome of Samtavro Cathedral evidently collapsed during the earthquake of 1283 and was restored soon after. The upper part of the drum was repaired again in the 17th century.

In the 19th century the inside of the Church was coated with plaster. Cleaning work revealed the older surfaces with murals that have survived in the sanctuary and in the dome of the Cathedral and date from the mid – 17th century. The frescoes in the sanctuary (a fragment of the Virgin Seated on the Throne – in the conch; The Apostles and Church Fathers in the apse) are some of the most interesting examples of Georgian mural painting and reflect the common features of the Post – Byzantine period painting. The dome frescoes (the Pantocrator, a host of Angels and the Virgin among the Prophets – on the drum; The Evangelists – on the pendentives) are the handwork of Russian painters invited by the Georgian kings.

To the northwest of the Cathedral there is a three – storey bell – tower built in the 15th to 16th centuries. Its walls are faced with smoothly hewn stones. The ground floor adjoins the monastery wall and serves as the gate to the territory of the nunnery. The first floor is open on three sides with double arches and has a door on the fourth (west) side, with stone steps leading up to it. The second floor is a belfry with twelve arches.

Recommendations

- 1) Work is currently underway to remove the plaster applied later over the lower areas of the inside of the church. Sadly, not only has the top layer plaster been removed, but also all the previous layers (with their murals -?), certain of which should have been left to bear witness to the previous phases in the history of the monument.
- 2) In addition, archaeological excavations are underway at the base of the eastern piers and also in the altar. In this latter area, particular note should be taken of the fact that some later (and unremarkable) marbling work has been carried out. The original murals, remaining hidden there, need to be uncovered and conservation work carried out. Also, the original arrangement of the main apse of the altar should be uncovered, together with the small side arches built in to the walls - on both sides.
- 3) The roof of the church has been covered on the outside with rustproof iron sheeting – work, which admittedly has been carried out with care and attention in order to tackle the serious problems of damp and rainwater. Nevertheless, the external surfaces of the church roof are strikingly different in appearance from the traditional tiled roofs of the dwellings within the settlement and are particularly different from those of other medieval churches in Georgia, which have always been covered with chiselled stone. It is essential that the iron sheeting, which has been used to cover the roof, be replaced with traditional stone covering.
- 4) The bell tower presents a serious problem of divergence from the perpendicular. More precisely, the whole structure slopes towards the south, possibly as a result of underground water or unstable ground. It is essential that this problem be tackled immediately by a specialised study of the construction and the ground beneath to reveal the cause. Also, it will demonstrate what measures are necessary (drainage of the underground water and stabilisation of the earth / building).

VII. Archaeological site THE GATE.

A fragment of the north gate, dating from the 5th – 6th century (excavated from 1965 to 1967) is conserved under the cinema building. The walls of the gate were faced with hewn stone slabs. On the outside a massive tower protected the gate. The town wall and the gate were built upon an earlier settlement and burial ground. 4th – 5th century house walls and cobblestone foundations, wine jars and granary pits, burials, were found here.

Recommendations

1. The archaeological site must be enlarged, protected and generally promoted by incorporating it into a wider architectural composition of a New Regional Archaeological Museum. This museum could probably also include the existing cinema auditorium.
2. The archaeological site should be incorporated into the overall Programme to provide signs and promote the system of ancient walls, towers and gates into the old part of the town.

VIII. Archaeological site GETSIMANIA.

This is a small archaeological site with the ruins of a church and a cemetery at the western entrance of the city, aside to the main road. Getsimania is one of the oldest of the churches still surviving in Mtskheta. It was built no later than the 8th century. One can only see part of the apse wall with its large window, and traces of the other walls. The walls are faced with large, crudely processed sandstone blocks. There are 18th – 19th century tombstones scattered around the church. It is today abandoned.

Recommendations (immediate):

- 1) The area should be cleared of rubble, earth etc. The local rubbish dump in the adjacent site should be removed.
- 2) Architectural study and conservation work – partial restoration of the ruins of the small church which are evident today on the site: cleaning up of plant growth, Strengthening and rejoining of the building stones and partial reconstruction of the apse.
- 3) Systematic excavations should be made in order to uncover all the remains of the small church, still hidden underground today.
- 4) The gravestones, scattered around the surrounding areas, should be collected and appropriately repositioned.
- 5) The boundaries of the archaeological site need to be clearly defined and the site protected. Metal railings with a stone base should be installed around the site together with a cabin for the gate attendants.
- 6) Explanatory information boards made of metal need to be put up (in Georgian and in a western language), and seating for visitors should be installed. The area should be partially planted (particularly along the side of the surrounding buildings).
- 7) The site should be signposted at the side of the main road. The ruins of the small church should be lit up at night. There should be a small car parking on the opposite side of the central road.

IX. Archaeological site THE TOMB.

This mausoleum-type tomb (last quarter of the 1st century, excavated in 1951) is situated on the right bank of the Mtkvari River, 300m. south of the Mtskheta railway station. It is a vaulted-one-chamber tomb, the walls of which are made of broken stone and plastered with clay. The pedimental front of the tomb is faced in smoothly hewn stone and the gable roof is covered with tiles. Although the tomb had been robbed in earlier times significant finds were still made (bronze statuette, piece of furniture, earthenware bowls and oil lamps, glass vessels, gold medallion, gems, necklaces, gold and silver coins), kept at the Janashia State Museum of Georgia.

Recommendations

- 1) The archaeological site should be IMMEDIATELY become independent of the immediate neighbouring buildings, which should be expropriated.
- 2) Study for the arrangement of the surrounding area and the promotion the monument. Drainage system should be constructed around the site. A suitable roof should be constructed over the monument for protection (to similar specifications as those already referred to). Protective railings. Lighting.
- 3) Exploratory archaeological excavations for any graves, possibly existing in the immediate surrounding area.

X. Archaeological site BEBRISTSIKHE.

Bebristsikhe stands on top of the hill on the right bank of the Aragvi. It was built in the early Middle Ages and played an important part in the system of fortifications of Greater Mtskheta – it defended the city from the north and controlled the road running the Aragvi valley. In the Middle Ages there were also living quarters in Bebristsikhe. The walls of the citadel are high, and in some places they are more than 2m thick and are additionally reinforced by buttresses. The citadel was partly restored during the 1980s. the lower part of the fortress, a walled-in courtyard, was situated to the east of the citadel. Only one square tower and a wall fragment survive to this day.

Recommendations

- 1) Partial conservation work to the wall and cleaning of the internal area of the acropolis.

- 2) Access to the site must be made clear: the route to be followed by visitors should be defined by means of a path made from local natural paving stones. Smoothly climbing access ramps should be installed in areas where there is a steep incline. Wooden walkways with a metal base above hazardous areas.
- 3) The areas, which will be accessible to visitors, should be clearly defined and protective measures taken in hazardous areas.
- 4) Covered rest spots/ viewing spots should be organised with seating, litterbins and drinking water. Lighting.

XI. THE OLDEST TRADITIONAL HOUSE IN THE SETTLEMENT.

This is a large-scale two-storey dwelling, with characteristics relating to its agricultural use, and used to house traditionally large families. It has a neat structure made from large conglomerate stones, placed in layers with alternating inclines. Horizontal wooden beams support the building stones at all levels. The walls are wide and of consistent thickness at all heights, both outside and inside. The inside is divided into separate sections, which communicate with each other. On the first floor, there are more openings, symmetrically arranged on the façade. The balcony doors in the centre of the façades led to three large wooden balconies, which are now half-destroyed. The roof has two steep inclines, an indication of the continental climate of the area, and is constructed high as to result in an additional floor being available within it. It appears that originally, the façades were plastered. Some of the building is today still inhabited. Its condition now though is poor. Whole sections of the balconies and the roof have collapsed. The façades have been altered due to later changes and additions.

Recommendations (immediate)

- 1) The dwelling should be declared a representative monument of the town's recent period (19th century) and listed for preservation. This will result in the state undertaking various obligations and providing funding as with the other monuments in the town.
- 2) Serious work is required:
 - 2.1. Repair, restoration and rehabilitation work in the house. This should be done in such a way that the building is restored, but suitable living conditions for its present inhabitants are ensured.
 - 2.2. Landscaping of the surrounding area and promotion of the building, which today is literally not visible.Following this work, the house can be opened for visitors on set days and at set hours.

Alkis Prepis
Athens, October 2001