Haghpat Monastery

Haghpat Monastery, also known as Haghpatavank ("Հաղպատավանք" in Armenian), is a medieval Armenian monastery complex in Haghpat, Armenia. Described as a "masterpiece of religious architecture and a major center of learning in the Middle Ages", this venerable institution of the Armenian Apostolic Church was placed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1996.

The monastery was founded by Saint Nishan (Sourb Nshan) in the 10th century during the reign of King Abas I. The nearby monastery at Sanahin was built around the same time. The monasteries at Haghpat and Sanahin were chosen as UNESCO World Heritage Sites because: The two monastic complexes represent the highest flowering of Armenian religious architecture, whose unique style developed from a blending of elements of Byzantine ecclesiastical architecture and the traditional vernacular architecture of the Caucasian region.

The location of Haghpat Monastery was chosen so that it overlooks the Pambak River in northern Armenia's Lori region. It was built, not on a peak, but halfway up a hillside on a site chosen to afford protection and concealment from prying eyes and also in response to a kind of monastic humility. It is built on a verdant promontory located in the middle of a mountain cirque, which is often wreathed in clouds. A peak on the opposite side of the river is over 2,500 meters high. The monasteries of northern Armenia are not isolated, unlike their counterparts in the country's arid regions. They were built in a village environment. Haghpat, for example, is surrounded by many hamlets.

The small church of St. Nishan is Haghpat's earliest surviving building. It was begun in 966-67 and was later enlarged and embellished under the direction of Trdat the Architect. The largest church in the complex, the Cathedral of St. Nishan, was built from 967-991. It is: a typical example of tenth century Armenian architecture, its central dome rests on the four imposing pillars of the lateral walls. The outside walls are dotted with triangular recesses. A fresco in the apse depicts Christ Pantocrator. Its donor, the Armenian Prince Khutulukhaga, is depicted in the south transept (a transversal nave intersecting the main nave). The sons of the church's founder, Princes Smbat and Kurike, are shown with Queen Khosravanuche in a bas-relief on the east gable. Apart from one or two minor restorations carried out in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the church has retained its original character.

There are several other structures at the site as well. There is the small domed Church of Sourb Grigor (St. Gregory) from 1005. Two side chapels were added to the original church; the larger one built in the beginning of the 13th century and the smaller, known as "Hamazasp House", built in 1257. In 1245, a three-story tall free-standing belltower was constructed. Other 13th century additions include the chapel of Sourb Astvatsatsin, the scriptorium, and a large refectory which is outside of the monastery limits.

There are also a number of splendid khachkars (cross-stones) of the 11th-13th centuries standing on the territory of the monastery, the best known among them is the "Amenaprkich" (All-Savior) khachkar which has been standing since 1273.

The monastery has been damaged many times. Sometime around 1130, an earthquake destroyed parts of Haghpat Monastery and it was not restored until fifty years later. It also suffered numerous attacks by armed forces in the many centuries of its existence and from a major earthquake in 1988. Nevertheless, much of the complex is still intact and stands today without substantial alterations. Today the area is an increasingly-popular tourist site.

Sanahin

Sanahin ("Սանահին" in Armenian) is a village in the Northern Lorri province of Armenia, now considered part of the city of Alaverdi (the cable car that connects it with the Alaverdi centre is supposed to have the steepest climb in the whole former USSR). The village is notable for its monastery complex, founded in the 10th century and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site along with monasteries in Haghpat.

The name Sanahin literally translates from Armenian as "this one is older than that one", presumably representing a claim to having an older monastery than the neighbouring Haghpat. The two villages and their monasteries are similar in many ways, and lie in plain view of each other on a dissected plateau formation, separated by a deep "crack" formed by a small river flowing into the Debed river.

As with Haghpat, Sanahin is frequented by an increasing number of tourists, due to its recent inclusion on the itineraries of numerous Armenian tour agencies, the beauty of its monastery complex matching that of Haghpat's. The complex belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Church with numerous khachkars (stones with elaborate engravings representing a cross) and bishop gravesites scattered throughout it.

Sanahin was also the birthplace of the two well-known Mikoyan brothers. Artem Mikoyan was a well known airplane constructor, and one of the "fathers" of MiG. Anastas Mikoyan was the politician with the longest career of any member of the Soviet politburo. He was involved in negotiating the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was a member of the Soviet delegation trying to improve relations with Tito's Yugoslavia, and played a major role in the Cuban Missile Crisis negotiations. A fraction of visitors to the monastery also stop at the small nearby museum in the former school, run by Mikoyans' relatives.

Source: -- UNESCO (whc 1996) – 777bis. [http://www.worldheritagesite.org]