

Platform of Anatolian Religions and Beliefs Platform / Those who are backing our cultural heritage Vanguards of Our Cultural Heritage / Chapter 18

"Restoration of the Ancient City of Ani" with Yavuz Özkaya

TOPICS: First Meeting with Ani and Impressions, Project Process and Challenges, Restoration Techniques and Practices, New Information and Discoveries, Protection of Cultural Heritage and Social Awareness, Future Plans and Goals in Ani

Nükhet Everi: In this episode of our cultural heritage interviews for the Anatolian Religions and Beliefs Platform, I am taking you to the ancient city of Ani. Our guest is Yavuz Özkaya, a high master architect and President of the Association for the Protection of Cultural Heritage. Mr Yavuz, can we get to know you a little bit could you please introduce yourself?

Yavuz Özkaya: I graduated from Middle East Technical University's, Department of Architecture. After my graduation, I worked in various architectural offices and then started my Ph.D. in art history in the U.S. However, my doctoral studies were interrupted. and I returned to TurkeyTürkiye and established my own office. I have been working in the field of cultural heritage conservation for a long time and I have taken part in many important projects in this context.

Nükhet Everi: How did you first meet Ani? What were your first impressions?

Yavuz Özkaya: In 2005, I worked in Kars for a year. During my first visit to Ani, I was amazed. I could not believe my eyes; there was a huge abandoned area and buildings, each of which was a jewel. Ani is an ancient city located in northeastern TurkeyTürkiye, on the border with Armenia, and has been home to different civilisations throughout history. The first time I saw it, I thought that this marvellous city should be protected and since then Ani has become a special place for me.

Nükhet Everi: How did your restoration projects in Ani progress? What difficulties did you face?

Yavuz Özkaya: Firstly, I received an invitation from the mMinistry of Culture for the conservation projects of two buildings. We were asked to complete the projects in two or three months, but this time was very limited. In this process, we created three-dimensional data of the buildings using laser scanning devices and with which we documented the buildings. with these data. InDuring the first stage, we solved the problems that required urgent intervention. Later, we prepared similar projects for the Small Church of Abu Hamrents and the Church of Pirkesh the Holy Redeemer (Surb Prkech). The biggest challenge in these projects was to preserve the existing condition of the buildings and makeundertake restorations in accordance with the original.

Nükhet Everi: What techniques and practices did you use in the restoration works?

Yavuz Özkaya: In the restoration works, we started with a detailed analysis of the buildings. We created three-dimensional models of the buildings using laser scanners. These models allowed us to examine the current condition of the buildingsedifices in detail. We also carried out delicate cleaning and material analyses on the buildings and carried out meticulous work on the frescoes and stone decorations. We utilised modern engineering techniques to preserve the structural integrity of the structures and took measures to increase their earthquake resistance.

Nükhet Everi: Did you come across any new information during your work? Could you tell us about these discoveries?

Yavuz Özkaya: Yes, we have reached obtained a lot of new information during the works. We made important discoveries especially onof frescoes and stone decorations. For example, we uncovered

previously unnoticed details in some of the frescoes. In collaboration with experts in medieval Armenian architecture, we deepened our historical and structural analyses of the buildings, which provided us with new information about their historical development and intended use. We also discovered previously undiscovered rooms and passages on the ground floors of some of the buildings.

Nükhet Everi: What should be done to raise public awareness about for the protection of cultural heritage?

Yavuz Özkaya: It is very important to raise awareness in society for the protection of cultural heritage. For this, first of all, we should firstly include more cultural heritage issues in the education system. The importance of historical and cultural values should be explained to students in schools. In addition, Furthermore, local people should also be aware of about this issue. Events and tours organised in important cultural heritage sites such as Ani can help the public understand the value of this heritage. Media and social media can also play an important role in this regard. The protection of cultural heritage is the responsibility of everyone, not just experts.

Nükhet Everi: What are your future plans? How will you continue your work in Ani?

Yavuz Özkaya: Our future plans include investigating the seismicity of the structures in Ani, ensuring that the structures under the protection roofs dry out, and conducting new analyses using three-dimensional data of the structures. We also plan to create identity cards for all the buildings in Ani and submit them to UNESCO. These identity cards will contain detailed information about the history, architectural features, and restoration processes of the buildings. In addition, Moreover, we aim to better understand the historical texture of the city by conducting regular archaeological excavations and research in Ani.