

Destruction of Artsakh's Architectural Heritage and Mechanisms of Extortion in Azerbaijan

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Abstract. The Armenian architectural heritage in the territory of Azerbaijan has been under threat for years, and today, that state cannot be the guarantor of the preservation of that heritage. The policy pursued by the Azerbaijani authorities towards Christian Armenian architectural monuments mainly had several directions: keeping silence of them in official publications, reference books, guidebooks, the distortion of ethno-cultural and religious affiliation - "albanization", the deliberate destruction and alteration of monuments, various barbaric acts against the monuments (explosions, destruction of buildings, using the monuments as a constructing material, conversion of churches into barns, stables, warehouses and structures of other meanings), the transformation of Armenian churches into Muslim monuments, the concealment of many Armenian monuments by covering them with earth, the prohibition of visits and research, changing the architectural appearance, image and identity of monuments under the guise of restoration and protection.

Introduction

When raising questions about Artsakh and preservation of architectural heritage in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, we are directly related to the term "ethnocide" or "cultural genocide". The term was put into circulation by Raphael Lemkin, a specialist in international criminal law. He considered genocide not only the annihilation of an ethnic or religious group, but also the destruction of its native culture [1,2]. Based on the provisions proposed by Lemkin in 1948 the UN adopted "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide". One of the 5 definitions of cultural genocide was dedicated to monuments. Systematic destruction of historical-religious monuments or their use for other purposes, destruction, dissolution of documents of historical, artistic, religious value or objects used in religious rituals [3].

Methodology

Almost 100 years and more observing the process of preservation of monuments and cultural heritage in the territories of Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh), we can state that the losses and damages fully comply with the standards of the term cultural genocide accepted by international bodies. After the first Artsakh war, our observations and ratifications in the liberated territories provided an opportunity to substantiate the above-mentioned assertion [4].

The purpose of the present examination is to present the mechanisms by which Azerbaijan tries to destroy and extort Armenian history and culture by inventing its own history.

During the Soviet period, the Armenian cultural monuments in the territory of the Azerbaijani SSR were in the absolute majority - about 11 thousand, and their number in Karabakh alone reached 1700 [5]: However, the official documents showed a completely different picture. Of the 591 state-protected monuments, only twenty-five were Armenian, of which only seven were in Nagorno-Karabakh, where even the Gandzasar monastery complex was missing.

In this period, explosions were carried out in the caves of Mets Taghlar, Azokh, Amaras, Kagankatuyk settlements. Excavations were carried out in the tomb of Grigoris (Amaras Monastery), holes were dug under the Dadivank monuments under the pretext of conducting geological research...

Two bridges of the 12th-13th centuries, 3 chapels of the 13th-17th centuries, about 70 khachkars, tombs without a law fell victim to the construction of the Sarsang Reservoir, using stones in the dam or leaving them at the bottom of the reservoir.

The polished stones of Armenian monasteries and churches were used to build houses and buildings in the villages. For example, Getamijo St., destroyed in the 1950s, the village of Vank was formed around the Astvatsatsin Monastery, whose houses, even the walls of buildings were built by using the stones of Astvatsatsin Monastery. Many stones belonging to the monastery buildings were found within the school walls of Tsar village¹.

An example of the destruction of a monument is the use of stones as a building stone is the government sanatorium built of stones of Armenian medieval churches near the Hot Water (Istisu) sanatorium [6].

The structures of the Charektar monastery (now the village of Charektar, Martakert region, NKR) in the Upper Khachen province of Artsakh had been altered and used as cattle barns for decades [7] (Fig.1).



Fig. 1. The view of the Charektar Monastery in Soviet period. The photos - by the author

The policy of destroying the identity of the monuments by the Azerbaijanis was also done under the name of repairs and "reconstructions". The victim of these works was St. Sarkis Church, which was covered with bricks, and because of that has lost the Armenian architectural style. It was used as a Peoples' Friendship Palace [7]. The size of the 7th century church in Vankasar has also changed [8] (Fig.2).

One form of extortion against Armenian historical and architectural monuments was declaring them as "Albanian" - the circulation of anti-scientific theory from the late 1960s to the early 1970s. According to this theory, the Christian monuments in the territory of Nagorno Karabakh do not belong to the material culture of the Armenians, but of the Muslim-Azeris, whose ancestors were the inhabitants of the 9th century state of Aghvank, who were Christians. Hundreds of monuments in the territory of Artsakh (Khatravank, Dadivank, Gandzasar, etc.) were declared and continued to be declared as Albanian, therefore Azerbaijani [9].

The elimination of the khachkar field of Julfa is a classic example of the physical destruction of monuments used by Azerbaijan.

During the First Artsakh War, the destruction of monuments reached large sizes, when churches and monasteries were deliberately blown up, shelled and bombed. As a result, the standing monastery of Yeghnasar near Getashen was reduced to rubble. Gandzasar, Amaras, Dadivank temples, Togh village church and other monuments were shelled [10]. The St. All Savior Ghazanchetsots Church

¹ Armenian inscription stones were found in the walls of the school.



Fig. 2. Vankasar Church after Azerbaijani "reconstruction"



Fig. 3. St. All Savior Ghazanchetsots Church after the bombing
Photo-by: meganewes.am/assets/uploads/7vu8puzzo7ftn596c1mz1605464215

of Shushi was set on fire three times during those years. In 1991 the Meghretsots Church in Shushi was turned into a summer cinema, the Kanach Zham (Green Hour) into a mineral water hall, and the Shushi Amenaprkich Ghazanchetsots Church into an ammunition depot [11] where Azeris stored Grad missiles during the war [12].

During the second Artsakh war, the Church of the Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots was targeted by the enemy. The dome of the church and the roofs of the crosses were damaged on 8 October 2020. The church hall was completely filled with construction debris. Today, after crossing to the Azerbaijani side, the debris was cleaned and work typical of the "reconstruction" of Azerbaijan began. The church has been declared Orthodox. The condition of the construction protocols belonging to the structure is unknown (Fig.3).

Immediately after the end of the war, the dome of the church Kanach Zham (Green Hour) in Shushi was blown up. Today, Armenian cemeteries (Shushi, Hadrut, Talish) are destroyed and desecrated in the occupied territories, using tombstones and khachkars for the construction of the Shushi-Hadrut road. The Armenianness and medieval belonging of the church in the village of Tsakuri in the Hadrut region is denied by President Aliiev during his visit, contrary to the preserved

protocols, which will surely be deleted in the near future, as usual. The genocidal policy towards the Armenian culture created by them is still pursued with the encouragement of the president of the state. The traces of Armenianness in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh are being destroyed, desecrated and altered.

Conclusion

The Armenian architectural heritage in the territory of Azerbaijan has been under threat for years, and today, that state cannot be the guarantor of the preservation of that heritage.

The Azerbaijani policy of destruction and extortion of the Armenian architectural heritage presents several directions of implementation:

- absence of involvement of monuments in official publications,
- distortion of ethno-cultural-religious affiliation (Dadivank, Khatravank Gandzasar),

- deliberate destruction of monuments (Yeghnasar Monastery, Jugha khachkars, Dadivank),
- carrying out various barbaric acts against the monuments: arson (Ghazanchetsots St. Amenaprkich in Shushi), explosions (Handaberd Monastery), shelling (Ghazanchetsots St. Amenaprkich, Togh Church, Gandzasar, Amaras), desecration (Shushi, Hadrut),
- use of buildings as building stone (Getamijo St. Astvatsatsin Monastery, Tigranakert),
- transformation of churches into barns, warehouses and other buildings (Charektar Monastery, Shushi Green Hour, Shushi Meghretsots Church, Shushi Ghazanchetsots St. Amenaprkich),
- transformation of Armenian churches into Muslim structures, concealment of many Armenian monuments by covering them with land,
- architectural transformation of the monuments, image and identity under the guise of restoration and preservation (Vankasar Church, St. Sargis Church in Gandzak).

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