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**Digest on the topic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh),
Armenian religious and cultural heritage**

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Foreword

Azerbaijan continues to destroy the objects of the Armenian Christian and cultural heritage, continues its appropriation, falsifications, the policy of cultural genocide (culturicide), cynically ignores the appeals of international organizations, violates international conventions and law. The Appendix at the end of the Bulletin contains photographs of acts of cultural vandalism of some Armenian objects, as well as the objects under threat of destruction.

At the end of 2021, about 2 thousand monuments remained in the territories of the Republic of Artsakh occupied by Azerbaijan, incl. 122 churches, 13 monasteries, 52 castles, 536 khachkars, as well as 20885 museum exhibits, 617 thousand books and other literature.

This Bulletin presents the digest for December 2021, it includes 50 events with links to 35 web sources (4 from Russia, 16 from Armenia, 3 from Artsakh, 8 from the West, 4 from the Armenian diaspora).

The most important are the following events in December:

- criticism of the unacceptable attitude of the Turkish authorities towards the Armenian religious heritage in the report dated December 6 of the US Commission on Religious Freedom
- the decision of the International Court of Justice in The Hague against Azerbaijan dated December 7 and the statement on December 13 on the continuation of demands from Armenia
- criticism from the Artsakh Ministry of Culture (December 10) and "Monument Watch" project of the UNESCO decision of December 3, which appointed Azerbaijan a member of the Committee for the protection of cultural property during the armed conflict
- exhibitions at the Museum of the Bible in Washington DC (from December 11) and at the Armenian Museum of America in Watertown (from December 14)
- a joint statement by the leaders of a number of confessions in Israel against the anti-Christian policy of the authorities and the impunity of the acts of radical groups (December 13)
- presentation of the digest "Azerbaijan is the enemy of civilization" on December 14
- round table in the Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church in St. Petersburg on December 16
- publication of John Eibner's report in English and Russian on December 18
- Ashot Beglaryan's article about apostates within a Christian church who serve the Baku authorities (December 21)
- appeal of the World Monuments Fund for the Protection of the cultural heritage of Karabakh dated December 23.

The International Association for the protection of Armenian religious and cultural heritage is open to the friends of Artsakh, it unites experts from a wide range of organizations and specialties, including:

- from the Republic of Artsakh - the Ministry of education, science, culture and sports, the Service for the protection of the historical environment, the Center for Caucasian studies of Mesrop Mashtots University, the Association of young scientists and specialists of Artsakh, NGO "Deoccupation of Shushi", "Council of the Hasan-Jalalyans"
- from Armenia – NGO "Crossroad" ("Khachmeruk"), Academy of political studies, NGO "Against the Violation of Law", Research on Armenian architecture Foundation (RAA), Assembly of Azerbaijani Armenians, Research Center "Alternative", Institute of archeology and ethnography, Yerevan State university
- from Russia - the Institute of political and social research of the Black Sea-Caspian region named after V. Artsruni, Coordination Council of Russian-Armenian Organizations, Armenian Scientific Center ARMAEN and others.

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Discrimination, falsification and violation of the right to freedom of religion

December 6

Armenian religious heritage sites remain under threat. In early 2021 the Surp Toros Armenian church in Kütahya was demolished after coming into the possession of an unknown individual—despite holding protected status. In August bulldozers destroyed an Armenian cemetery in Van Province, the same month an Armenian church and cultural center in Malatya hosted its first mass following a restoration. Although many attacks on cemeteries in Turkey appear to be the work of non-state actors, the Turkish government has also been implicated in the destruction of religious minority burial sites. Moreover, authorities often fail to catch or prosecute non-state actors responsible for these crimes, creating an environment of impunity. Similarly, the Turkish government frequently fails to halt construction projects that threaten cemeteries; for example, in March 2021 the opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) Member of Parliament (MP) Garo Paylan submitted a parliamentary inquiry to ask why the government had not halted the construction of a state-owned bank over an Armenian and Catholic cemetery in historic downtown Ankara¹.

December 13

Primate of the Jerusalem Orthodox Church Theophilos III, Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem Nurkhan Manukyan, Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa and other Christian leaders of the region signed a corresponding appeal to the Israeli authorities. It states that Christians throughout the Holy Land are the victims of frequent and sustained attacks by extreme radical groups who systematically use similar tactics to drive the Christian community out of Jerusalem. It is noted that efforts at the national level to influence the situation are nullified due to the inability of local politicians, officials and law enforcement services to curb radical groups whose members intimidate local Christians, attack priests and desecrate holy places and church property. At the same time, the decrease in the Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land affects the flow of pilgrims and tourists, the income from which significantly replenishes the budget of Israel. "In an effort to weaken the Christian presence, radical groups continue to buy up strategically important properties in the Christian Quarter, using covert machinations and intimidation tactics to evict residents from their homes. This leads to a significant reduction in the Christian population and further disruption of the historical pilgrimage routes between Bethlehem and Jerusalem," the heads of the Churches said. In connection with the public statements by the authorities of Israel, Palestine and Jordan about their readiness to stand up for religious freedom, the appeal calls for a dialogue to counter radical groups in Jerusalem. Also, the heads of the Churches propose to create a special Christian cultural heritage zone in the city in order to ensure the integrity of the Christian Quarter, as has already been done in Israel's legislation in relation to the Jewish Quarter².

December 14

The servicemen of the Russian peacekeeping contingent ensured the safety of visiting the Amaras monastery complex on the line of demarcation of the parties in Nagorno-Karabakh to about 100 pilgrims and local residents. Pilgrims, including students of Shusha university, arrived in the Martuni district for a church service in Amaras from the city of Stepanakert and the settlements nearby to the monastery. Peacemakers ensure the safety of pilgrims while traveling and visiting the Amaras monastery complex and during church services. As a result of the agreements reached, the Amaras Monastery was in close proximity to the line of demarcation of the parties in Nagorno-Karabakh. The servicemen of the Russian peacekeeping contingent regularly ensure the safety of pilgrims wishing to visit this shrine³.

¹ <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12/2021%20Turkey%20Country%20Update.pdf>

² <https://spzh.news/ru/news/84928-hristian-khotyat-izgnaty-so-svyatoj-zemli—glavy-cerkvej-ijerusalima>

³ https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12400005@egNews

<https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2021/12/22/Artsakh-Amaras-monastery/2617666>

December 14

Armenian Catholic Patriarch Raphaël Bedros XXI Minassian invokes a peace 'without preconditions' between Yerevan and Ankara... An "essential element" (in Nagorno Karabakh) is that this peace, the dialogues through which it can be achieved, must be "without preconditions" within a "free" relationship of exchange and confrontation. It remains open the table on Nagorno-Karabakh where "we lost the battle, but not the war"... The Armenian Church intends to protect and safeguard "the rights and lives" of Catholics living in those territories. And in a perspective of dialogue and confrontation, it wants to put at the center of attention also the issue of "religious freedom" that must be mutual and valid "for all" in Armenia as in Nagorno-Karabakh, because "in the end we believe in one God"⁴.

December 14

During the 9th session of the UN Convention against Corruption, held on December 13-17 in Sharm el-Sheikh (Egypt), the Azerbaijani delegation decided to abuse the platform and, instead of touching upon the manifestations of rampant corruption in their own country, began to discredit Armenia, Artsakh and Armenian organizations and individuals of the diaspora... The purpose of the event entitled "Misuse of fundraising activities for corruption and related criminal purposes", organized by the Azerbaijani delegation, was to designate Armenian organizations as institutions financing terrorism and to present the realization of the right of the people of Artsakh to self-determination as separatism and terrorism... A member of the Armenian delegation, Consul of Armenia in Egypt Rafayel Movsesyan took the floor, strongly criticized the anti-Armenian event organized by Azerbaijan and demanded that Azerbaijan stop hate propaganda against famous Armenian organizations and figures who tried to draw the attention of the international community to the violence against the civilian population of Artsakh, crimes against humanity, violations of international humanitarian law, the destruction of the Armenian cultural and religious heritage during the war in 2020 and the humanitarian crisis created as a result of the aggression of Azerbaijan. He reminded Azerbaijan of the December 7 decision of the UN International Court of Justice on interim measures on Azerbaijan, which requires Azerbaijan to take steps to stop propaganda of racial hatred and discrimination against persons of Armenian descent, including by officials and state institutions. A very limited number of foreigners physically participated in the meeting, who left the hall immediately after the speech of the Armenian delegation⁵.

December 15

Resident Taghavard community are deprived of the opportunity to visit the graves of their relatives to honor their memory. Over the past year, the residents of the Taghavard community have repeatedly raised the issue of access to the community cemetery, which came under Azerbaijani control after the 2020 war. The cemetery is located in the occupied part of the community, which is only a few kilometers away from the part of the community where the residents of Taghavard live today... The attention is drawn to state bodies, Russian peacekeepers, as well as international human rights organizations and organizations carrying out humanitarian missions to this humanitarian issue. This important issue concerns not only the residents of Taghavard but all the residents of the occupied territories of Artsakh⁶.

December 21

About the falsifications of the Baku authorities, their henchmen and apostates for the appropriation of the Armenian religious heritage. Not only ancient temples and stones, bearing the stamp of antiquity and containing universal meaning, suffer from the godless Baku policy, but also living people of different nationalities and religions, including the Udins, whom the political regime of Azerbaijan uses as a bargaining chip in its dirty games. They turn representatives of the clergy of this ancient and worthy Udi people into clowns in their cheap circus. The real Udis,

⁴ <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Armenian-Patriarch-invokes-a-peace-'without-preconditions'-between-Yerevan-and-Ankara-54709.html>

⁵ <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1070774.html>

⁶ <https://www.artsakhombuds.am/en/news/609>

who are linked by centuries of history with the Artsakh people, must themselves tear off the masks from these shameful actors⁷.

December 22

President Sarkissian's interview with Asia Times. Question: "Do you agree with the interpretation that there is a religious element to the conflict going on between Armenia and Azerbaijan? The same way Armenia has deplored Azerbaijan's desecration of churches in the Republic of Artsakh, the President of Azerbaijan has also complained that Armenia has destroyed at least "70 mosques" in the disputed territories."

Sarkissian: "I don't agree at all that this war or conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh had ever a religious aspect. First of all, there are only a few mosques there; there are a lot of Armenian churches. But then, I personally had encouraged the complete renovation of a mosque in Shushi, which was finalized by two Armenians and one Muslim guy. It was fully renovated. I visited there; they had specialists, architects and religious people advising what to do. It's a beautiful mosque. And if the Azeris recover even one church, please send me the photo. This is not a religious war. Seventy mosques were destroyed? I don't know – I hear from you about it. You should be very specific there. In the case of Armenian churches, they are very specific; they are where they are; they are where they have been for hundreds or thousands of years. And we know exactly which one is destroyed. Unfortunately, we have become professional in registering the destruction of Armenian churches, heritage and culture, first of all, in the Ottoman Empire, in Turkey. There are hundreds of old churches that were converted into mosques, and there's a lot of historic evidence. And if you want to compare the attitudes, is there any chance that the Armenians can say or complain that there are Armenian churches destroyed on the territory of Iran? Have you heard about that? No, I haven't heard it, either. And in fact, during history, regimes changed in Iran, but with all regimes, Armenian communities in Iran were basically flourishing, and in fact, the Islamic Republic of Iran has spent money on the renovation of Armenian churches"⁸.

December 23

The Armenian Embassy in Greece responded to Baku about "vandalism" against the Russian Church in Artsakh. "This is another groundless attempt to arouse hostility towards Armenians in friendly countries. The country, which deliberately destroys cultural monuments, is trying to cover up its own vandalism with baseless accusations," the statement of the Armenian Embassy says. The UN International Court of Justice in the decision on the case of Armenia against Azerbaijan on December 7, among other things, ordered Baku to take all necessary measures against incitement of hatred towards Armenians by state organizations, as well as to prevent and punish all manifestations of vandalism and desecration of Armenian cultural monuments. Meanwhile, Azerbaijani officials do not stop such actions in any way, the embassy said. It should be noted that the Artsakh authorities also preserve the cultural heritage of the Greek community, which lived for several centuries in the village of Mehman in the Martakert region (the Greek community still lives in Artsakh)⁹.

December 24

Interview on December 24 with Grigory Ayvazyan in the "Direct Text" program of the "Noyan Tapan"¹⁰.

⁷ <https://aga-tribunal.info/a-beglaryan-21-12-2021/>

⁸ <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1071438.html>

⁹ <https://artsakhpress.am/rus/news/156021/>

¹⁰ <https://aga-tribunal.info/g-ayvazyan-24-12-2021/>

Vandalism, destruction, misuse and appropriation of religious sites and monuments

December 1

Interview with Ashot Hakobyan, Deputy Director of the Research on Armenian Architecture Foundation (RAA), on various encroachments on the Armenian cultural heritage located outside of Armenia. "For centuries, they tried to either destroy us or appropriate the churches and other cultural centers built by the Armenians... Since 1915, Turkey has been destroying the Armenian cultural heritage on its territory, especially the Christian heritage - churches, monasteries, chapels, cemeteries, khachkars... In Western Armenia today at best, about 10-20% of the Armenian cultural heritage has been preserved - in good and bad shape, that is, in a neglected, ruined state, in some cases only stones remained"¹¹.

December 21

From an interview of "Regnum" information agency with the head of the Artsakh Foreign Ministry. Modest Kolerov: What is the fate of the Armenian monuments and museums remaining under the occupation? David Babayan: Unfortunately, most of them, apparently, were plundered and destroyed, but the final picture can be established only after international monitoring¹².

International organizations and religious freedom

December 7

International Court of Justice demanded the provisional measures to protect certain rights claimed by Armenia vs Azerbaijan: "Take all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artefacts"¹³.

December 7

Azerbaijan was elected a member of the UNESCO Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of an Armed Conflict. Concerns about the preservation of cultural sites in Nagorno-Karabakh are made all the more urgent by the Azerbaijani government's history of systemically destroying indigenous Armenian heritage — acts of both warfare and historical revisionism. The Azerbaijani government has secretly destroyed a striking number of cultural and religious artifacts in the late 20th century. Within Nakhichevan alone, a historically Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani forces destroyed at least 89 medieval churches, 5,840 khachkars (Armenian cross stones) and 22,000 historical tombstones between 1997 and 2006.¹⁴

December 8

Statement by the Foreign Ministry of Armenia regarding the orders issued by the International Court of Justice. It is noteworthy that Azerbaijan has been explicitly obliged by the Court to take all necessary measures to prevent discrimination and its incitement "including by its officials and public institutions." The Armenophobic rhetoric consistently espoused by the highest leadership of Azerbaijan, the inhumane treatment of Armenians under Azerbaijan's control or jurisdiction, and the destruction and desecration of the Armenian cultural and religious heritage are insurmountable obstacles to the de-escalation of the situation and peaceful development of the region. The Court's orders on provisional measures recognize these realities and create legally binding obligations under international law to address them. Armenia will consistently pursue Azerbaijan's compliance with the Court's orders, and will inform the Court of any violation¹⁵.

¹¹ <https://www.aravot-ru.am/2021/12/01/371586/>

¹² <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3457547.html>

¹³ <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/180/180-20211207-PRE-01-00-EN.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://mirrorspectator.com/2021/12/09/azerbaijan-elected-to-unesco-culture-protection-committee/>

¹⁵ https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2021/12/08/CERD_decision/11225

December 8

The UN Court ordered Azerbaijan to prevent racial discrimination against Armenians and fight against vandalism in relation to cultural and religious sites important for Armenia¹⁶.

December 8

UNESCO encourages Azerbaijan's vandalism of Armenian cultural values. Not surprisingly, the same UNESCO did nothing when the khachkars of Jugha were removed, the same UNESCO did nothing when an entire civilization was destroyed in Palmyra. Maybe it is time for the responsible countries to review the activities and goals of this international organization¹⁷.

December 9

Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the occasion of the International Day of Commemoration of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide. In 2015, due to Armenia's efforts, December 9th was included in the list of UN International Days as the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and the Prevention of this Crime. A resolution on the prevention of genocide, initiated by Armenia and adopted with consensus by the UN Human Rights Council in 2020, clearly states that "the justification of genocide, bias assessment and denial of past crimes increases the risk of a recurrence of violence." Historical memory, education and the dissemination of accurate information concerning previous genocides are essential to prevent a recurrence of genocide. The deliberate destruction of cultural heritage should also be condemned as it is a cultural heritage that creates the opportunity to preserve national or religious identity. Manifestations of domination over national, ethnic, religious, or racial groups or justifications of the use of force against the latter are unacceptable. The Republic of Armenia will continue to work diligently to raise awareness of past genocides, the dangers of their impunity, and the new challenges¹⁸.

December 9

His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians; received Mr. Viktor Richter, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Republic of Armenia. During the conversation, a reference was made... to preserve the Armenian spiritual and historical heritage under the control of Azerbaijan¹⁹.

December 9

The medieval Armenian monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh must be protected... The Azerbaijani state-sponsored destruction of the Armenian cemetery in Julfa, Nakhchevan in 1997–2006 and vandalism in the formerly Armenian city of Shushi this past November have set alarming precedents. Heritage organisations including Unesco, the World Monuments Fund and ICOMOS, as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, have underlined the urgent need to inventory the monuments and to monitor their condition in the short and long term... Unfortunately, the rich historical legacy of the Armenian monuments of Karabakh has been targeted by vandals who have broken, scraped, and sometimes recycled stones for building²⁰.

December 10

Lusine Garakhanyan, the minister of education, science, culture and sports of the Republic of Artsakh commented the election of Azerbaijan as a member of UNESCO Committee. The fact that Azerbaijan was elected a member of the UNESCO Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict was itself a cause for deep concern and distrust towards the above-mentioned international organization with the mission of preserving the world cultural heritage. Especially in recent decades, arguments about Azerbaijan's policy of open vandalism against the Armenian cultural heritage under the guise of anti-Armenianism have been

¹⁶ <https://spzh.news/ru/news/84682-azerbajdzhan-prizvali-borotysya-s-oskvernenijem-armyanskih-religioznyh-obektov>

¹⁷ <https://aga-tribunal.info/unesco-8-12-2021-en/>

¹⁸ https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2021/12/09/Genocide_Day/11227

¹⁹ <https://www.armenianchurch.org/index.jsp?sid=3&nid=4675&y=2021&m=11&d=9>

²⁰ <http://www.mutualart.com/ExternalArticle/The-Medieval-Armenian-Monuments-in-Nagor/10EC564B97CC7B17>

repeatedly presented on various international platforms. However, as a result, the country not only was not held accountable, but also pursued a very aggressive policy of continuation, especially during and after the war unleashed by itself in September 2020, initiating and destroying thousands of different historical and cultural monuments of exclusively Armenian origin in the occupied territories of the Artsakh Republic. At present, the instructions on the destruction of Armenian monuments at the level of the President and the removal of Armenian letters from the monuments on the background of anti-Armenianism in Azerbaijan are serious evidence that the country continues to be an enemy of human civilization²¹.

December 10

Artsakh State Minister Artak Beglaryan: "We use the levers we have, we also work with the competent bodies of the Republic of Armenia so that information is also transmitted through their channels, pressure is exerted on the relevant international bodies, but the result is not visible. It would be a result for us if, for example, UNESCO visited Artsakh and the occupied territories in general, introduced mechanisms of investigation. But for more than a year, UNESCO has publicly stated that it wants to enter, even repeatedly pointed out that there are obstacles on the Azerbaijani side, but they do not take any bold decision, especially in the case when the UN and UN structures have this opportunity under international law, regardless of the will of states, to visit different territories in order to protect human rights and monitor the level of protection of human rights"²².

December 13

On the continuation at the second stage of the claim in the UN International Court of Justice in the Hague against Azerbaijan. At the first stage, the Court demanded from the Azerbaijani authorities, in that number, to prevent and suppress acts of vandalism and desecration of the Armenian cultural heritage (including churches, other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artifacts)²³.

December 19

Resident Leon Giritlyan noticed the blasphemous use of a tombstone as an element in a fountain in a village in Turkey. On December 15, he complained to the authorities and to the General Department of cultural monuments and museums of Turkey. The tombstone was stolen from a destroyed Armenian cemetery in the village of Karsak, inhabited by Armenians before the Armenian Genocide, in the Bursa region. This tombstone was installed in the fountain in 1999. On December 17, the above mentioned Department handed over the tombstone to the city museum of Iznik²⁴.

December 23

Statement of World Monuments Fund on safeguarding cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh. As an organization committed to safeguarding our shared global heritage, World Monuments Fund (WMF) continues to call for the protection of all cultural property within the Nagorno-Karabakh region. WMF is reaching out to both sides to stress the importance of safeguarding humanity's cultural achievements. Recalling that the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia are both parties to the 1954 *Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* and the 1970 *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, WMF encourages both nations to honor these commitments fully and proactively safeguard the local heritage. We stand ready to offer support for the documentation and preservation of the many distinct, rich layers of history within Nagorno-Karabakh²⁵.

²¹ <https://aga-tribunal.info/karakhanyan-10-12-2021-en/>

²² <https://click.ru/ZqLki>

²³ <https://newsarmenia.am/news/armenia/armeniya-gotovitsya-k-sleduyushchemu-etapu-razbiratelstva-vsude-oon-protiv-azerbaydzhana/>

²⁴ <https://aga-tribunal.info/en/raa-19-12-2021-en/>

²⁵ <http://crossroadorg.info/en/wmf-15-11-2021-en/>

State policy regarding believers and freedom of religion

December 1

Igor Dimitriev ("Russian Orientalist" Telegram channel): over the next several decades, Turkey and the Turkic world surrounding Armenia will gradually erode Armenian identity and Armenian statehood... Azerbaijan and Turkey are unlikely to unleash a new large-scale war for Karabakh again. But it is quite possible that they will periodically deliberately resort to provocations in order to aggravate the situation. Such aggravation is necessary for Azerbaijan and Turkey in order to persuade both the Armenian establishment and the Armenian society as a whole to global concessions. In the end, Armenia will have to come to terms with this. The expert cited Serbia as an example of such a national surrender. No matter how the Serbs resisted the secession of Kosovo, in the end they were forced to come to terms with it²⁶.

December 2

Statement by Ararat Mirzoyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia at the 28th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council: Inquiry into the cases of enforced disappearances, protection of cultural heritage necessitates the strong engagement of the OSCE and its relevant mandates²⁷.

December 6

At the event dedicated to the "Revival of Hakobabank" project, the State Minister of the Republic of Artsakh said: "Against the background of encroachments on the Armenian heritage and national identity, the "Revival of Hakobabank" project acts as a symbol of the revaluation of values. It is also a struggle to preserve the Christian value system. Hakobabank is a link that will help us show the world and the international community that we are fighting not only for physical but also for cultural existence. Therefore, for our government, this is a war for values, culture and identity. By supporting the "Revival of Hakobabank" project, we set ourselves the task of showing the whole world that we stand up for the protection of our property and are responsible for our values"²⁸.

December 7

The election of Azerbaijan as a member for a four-year term to the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and appointed as responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Second Protocol for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, adopted by UNESCO in 1999, in this case, has many contradictions. Even after the adoption of the Second Protocol in 1992, Azerbaijan is one of the rare states that violated the provisions of this Protocol more than anyone else. As mentioned above, the Protocol was adopted in order to assess the significance of the cultural property in the event of armed conflicts. Criminal liability was established for violations both at the personal and state levels, which were related to the threat of harm or destruction of cultural property in the occupied territories in order to prevent the possibility of turning a cultural object into a target, in order to prevent the destruction of historical evidence, vandalism, robbery and any act of hostility. However, contrary to reality, Azerbaijan, instead of being held accountable for its violations, becomes an authorized representative for the implementation of the Convention²⁹.

December 8

Ashot Beglaryan: "Today, as a result of last year's unprecedented aggression of Azerbaijan, Turkey and international terrorism against little Artsakh, the city of Shushi, the historical cultural center of the local Armenians, is reoccupied and, like thirty years ago, before its liberation in May 1992 by an Armenian soldier, again turns into a hornet's nest, from where the whole Artsakh is

²⁶ <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3438767.html>

²⁷ https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2021/12/02/28_OSCE_Ministeial/11206

²⁸ <https://nt.am/ru/news/309430/> <https://www.rearmenia.com/ru/project/3699d58d-d9d0-45e0-aba8-f36e41401211> <https://www.shoghakat.am/en/telecasts/25535>

²⁹ <https://monumentwatch.org/alerts/azerbaijan-was-elected-as-a-member-of-the-unesco-cultural-heritage-committee-in-the-event-of-an-armed-conflict/>

terrorized. Obviously, the Baku regime will make every effort to completely destroy the Christian heritage of Shushi, as was done, for example, in the once Armenian Nakhchivan... "30

December 10

Violating the authority assumed in the face of the OSCE Minsk Group and the Co-Chairs, the obligation to refrain from the use of the threat of force, September 27, 2020, Azerbaijan, with the participation of Turkey and international terrorist organizations, carried out large-scale military operations against the Artsakh Republic, in which thousands of our compatriots fell victim, most of the territory of the republic was occupied, and the material and national cultural heritage was destroyed. In the post-war months, in the conditions of Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian hatred, provocative, aggressive rhetoric and corresponding actions, the Armenians of Artsakh, being faithful to the historical decisions of 1991, are overcoming their difficulties and building their future³¹.

December 13

The Armenian Ambassador to Lebanon, Mr. Vahagn Atabekyan visited His Holiness Catholicos Aram I. During the meeting, matters concerning the Armenian people within the geopolitical and religiopolitical spheres were discussed³².

December 13

Naira Zohrabyan. Azerbaijan is trying to present the Armenian cultural heritage in Artsakh as Albanian. We have been in Artsakh for many years these days, we saw united Artsakh. Today we see our divided Artsakh under the control of Azerbaijan, we see cultural vandalism, we see everything that happens to our prisoners of war. In any case, I want to congratulate Artsakh on its independence, a 30-year struggle for its right to self-determination, and, in spite of everything, I am sure that this struggle will continue³³.

December 18

A report by John Eibner at the conference in Etchmiadzin was translated in Russian... My starting point is thirty years ago. In October 1991, I visited Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) on the first of many CSI human rights fact-finding and humanitarian missions. It was a profound experience for me as a young historian and journalist. I was then confronted by the ethnic-religious cleansing that was taking place in the tiny Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno Karabakh. I was also confronted by the broader geopolitical context in which crimes against humanity were taking place... We encountered a History Redux; the continuation of the process of ethnic-religious cleansing of Armenian Christians from their ancient homeland. The largely dormant historical dynamic of the Armenian Genocide had been revived as Perestroika and Glasnost destroyed communist totalitarianism and the Soviet Union collapsed... The process of this genocide was not only anti-Armenian. It was fundamentally anti-Christian and had deep roots in the long tradition of violent jihad³⁴.

³⁰ <https://aga-tribunal.info/a-beglaryan-8-12-2021/>

³¹ <http://www.nankr.am/en/4442>

³² <https://www.armenianorthodoxchurch.org/en/archives/42053>

³³ <https://www.aravot-ru.am/2021/12/13/372545/>

³⁴ <https://aga-tribunal.info/en/eibner-9-9-2021-en/>

Charitable and humanitarian aid to needy believers and religious communities

December 6

Video of the service in the church of St. Grigor Narekatsi, consecrated by the Bishop of Artsakh Vrtanes. A church locates on the territory of the military garrison, where priests help the victims of the fall war of 2020³⁵.

December 13

Armenian Missionary Association of America Executive Director/CEO Zaven Khanjian recently visited the family of Vahe Karamyan, a hero martyred in the 44-day war³⁶.

December 14

Only about 25,000 of the refugees have been able to return to their homes. The others are stranded in Armenia, fighting to survive and to get back on their feet... Members of the international Catholic pastoral charity *Aid to the Church in Need* (ACN) visited Armenia to take a close look at the situation and to find out where the organisation can most effectively help now that state aid is no longer available and many charity organisations have left... As is so often the case, the Catholic Church is the one to step into the breach and take care of the people when state aid is no longer available. The Church provides not only spiritual and psychological assistance to help deal with the trauma, but also material aid³⁷.

Civil society initiatives for religious freedom

December 8

Azerbaijan's Cultural Genocide Leaves Centuries-Old Armenian Heritage on the Brink of Destruction. The Armenian National Committee of Canada (ANCC) is marking Cultural Genocide Awareness Day, calling upon the Canadian Government to remember and condemn past and ongoing cultural genocides, work to preserve the riches of our diverse history and celebrate the contributions of threatened Indigenous cultures everywhere³⁸.

December 11

The virtual exhibition — organized and hosted by the Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC — features seven key religious sites and objects (Amaras, Dadivank, Gandzasar, Kazanchetsots, Khandaberd, Tsar, Tsitsernavank) that offer insight into the diverse and exquisite Armenian art, architecture, and visual culture of the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, with roots in the fourth century. The opening page of the exhibition includes details about Armenia and its Christian history, a brief overview of the conflict in the region, and the devastating impact this has had on the local cultural heritage... With a focus on the religious heritage and cultural value of the Armenian sites in Artsakh, the interactive exhibition *Ancient Faith: The Churches of Nagorno-Karabakh* situates the buildings and objects in their respective contexts of creation, display, and use, while revealing their deep historical roots, meanings, and functions. The exhibition brings to the attention of broader audiences the history, art, and culture of medieval Armenia, as well as its current endangered state in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh due to ongoing conflicts on the

³⁵ <https://www.shoghakat.am/en/telecasts/25538>

³⁶ <https://amaa.org/visit-to-family-of-martyred-hero-vahe-karamyan/#more-47427>

³⁷ <https://aidtochurch.org/news/our-news/armenia-refugees-from-nagorno-karabakh-fight-for-survival-with-the-help-of-acn> <https://acninternational.org/armenia-refugees-from-nagorno-karabakh-fight-for-survival-with-the-help-of-acn/>

³⁸ <https://www.anccanada.org/3181-2/>

ground. Much can be learned from such efforts, which aim to educate and ensure the preservation of these important monuments and sites now and into the future³⁹.

December 14

The exhibition "Armenian creativity, culture, and survival" in Armenian Museum of America, in Watertown, Massachusetts... the museum took a stand against the "resumption of war" and the threats against Armenian culture in the Artsakh region, expressing "solidarity with colleagues in the scholarly and cultural heritage community around the world, who are calling attention to the threat of cultural genocide and ethnic cleansing in Artsakh"⁴⁰.

December 16

A scientific and public session "Society for peace in Nagorno Karabakh: a year later" was held in St. Petersburg, Russia. The participants of the scientific and public session emphasize that the solution to the problems of preserving Christian monuments is impossible by military means and violence. Following the session, an appeal will be sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation with a request to include the issue of preserving Christian relics in the agenda of discussions on peace initiatives and interstate agreements, as well as to facilitate international monitoring missions organized both under the auspices of Russian public and scientific organizations, and under patronage of UNESCO⁴¹.

December 14

Presentation of the collection "Azerbaijan - the enemy of civilization". The bibliographic journal "Azerbaijan - the enemy of civilization" is called upon to bring the inhuman, barbaric policy of Azerbaijan to the international arena and to develop methods of combating it. The pages of the collection contain materials on the state of the historical and cultural heritage of the Armenian people, which is encroached on by official Baku both in the past and today. The facts of the cultural genocide, committed since 1918 - since the artificial creation of the state of Azerbaijan, will continue to be covered in the pages of the magazine. The purpose of the publication, which is planned to be translated into different languages and in the near future to present to the reader in foreign language versions, is to show the world, based on the facts, that Azerbaijan is really an enemy of civilization and that the concepts of "civilization" and "Azerbaijan" are incompatible. The issue of cultural genocide, systematically carried out by Azerbaijan, should be on the agenda of our every day⁴².

International, inter-religious and inter-confessional dialogue

December 13

The meeting of Foreign Minister of Armenia with head of Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs in Palestine... During the meeting, the issues related to the rich Armenian historical, cultural and religious heritage in the Holy Land were also discussed⁴³.

December 13

Catholicos of All Armenians hosted delegation of Higher Presidential Committee of Church Affairs in Palestine... At the meeting, a reference was made also to the protection of the

³⁹ <https://www.medievalists.net/2021/07/armenian-art-and-contested-lands/> <https://www.museumofthebible.org/location/ancient-faith-the-churches-of-nagorno-karabakh>

⁴⁰ <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2022/01/h2-armenian-culture>

⁴¹ <http://mitropolia.spb.ru/news/otdeli/?id=200139> <http://crossroadorg.info/en/16-12-2021-en/>
<https://crossroadorg.info/en/resolution-16-12-2021-en/>

⁴² <https://aga-tribunal.info/book-16-12-2021/>

⁴³ https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2021/12/13/fm_palestine/11242

Armenian Christian sanctuaries and historical-cultural heritage. The importance of the strengthening of the relations and dialogue between churches and religions was emphasized⁴⁴.

December 13

Erik Zemmour, the far-right candidate in the French presidential elections in 2022, called for better defense of Armenia, a Christian country in the middle of the "Islamic ocean"... Erik Zemmour also visited the Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan⁴⁵.

December 15

The Armenian Church, Holy See of Cilicia participates in the 100th anniversary commemoration of the International Missionary Council (IMC)⁴⁶.

December 17

Statement by Vahe Gevorgyan, Deputy-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, at the 5th Ministerial Meeting of the Ancient Civilizations Forum... Our shared objective of protecting the cultural heritage of ancient civilizations and its transmission to future generations through continuous communication and cooperation is crucial as ever. Cultural heritage is a driving force of identity and historical memory for societies. We strongly believe that the only way to protect global heritage is to apply a system based on the principles of dialogue, respect for cultural diversity and cultivation of peace. As a platform promoting dialogue and collaboration, this Forum, indeed, can play an essential role in meeting today's global challenges and proposing constructive responses. The fulfillment of this objective requires joint efforts and commitment to encourage peace and sustainable development. Armenia is keen to contribute to the actions in this regard. Cooperation on preserving cultural heritage has a special meaning for the Armenian people. We have monuments worldwide built by the Armenian communities in about one hundred countries⁴⁷.

December 21

His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians received the Delegation led by Mrs. Valerie Pecresse, President of the Regional Council of Ile-de-France... During the conversation, a reference was made to the issue of preserving the Armenian spiritual and cultural heritage in the territories under the control of Azerbaijan; the restoration of the Armenian Churches damaged during the war; using the mediation efforts of international organizations⁴⁸.

December 21

From PM Pashinyan's speech in Tbilisi, Georgia: "we need to develop a qualitatively new agenda for Armenian-Georgian cultural relations, that is, to shift from a purely participatory framework to the field of joint cultural initiatives, including the joint applications for cooperation with international organizations"⁴⁹.

December 27

Russian State Duma Deputy Vitaly Milonov visited Artsakh and met with President Arayik Harutyunyan. They discussed the situation in the region, the need to preserve and restore churches, Christian communities and life in the republic in the post-war period⁵⁰.

⁴⁴ <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2021/12/14/Catholicos-Presidential-committee-Palestine/2613301>

⁴⁵ <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/3449312.html>

⁴⁶ <https://www.armenianorthodoxchurch.org/en/archives/42102>

⁴⁷ https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2021/12/17/dfm-ancient_civilization_speech/11245

⁴⁸ <https://www.armenianchurch.org/index.jsp?sid=3&nid=4678&y=2021&m=11&d=21>

⁴⁹ <https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2021/12/21/Nikol-Pashinyan-Speech/>

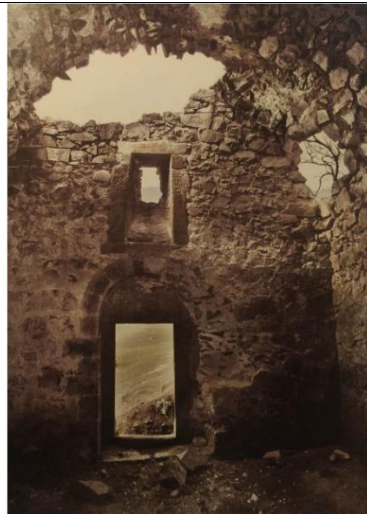
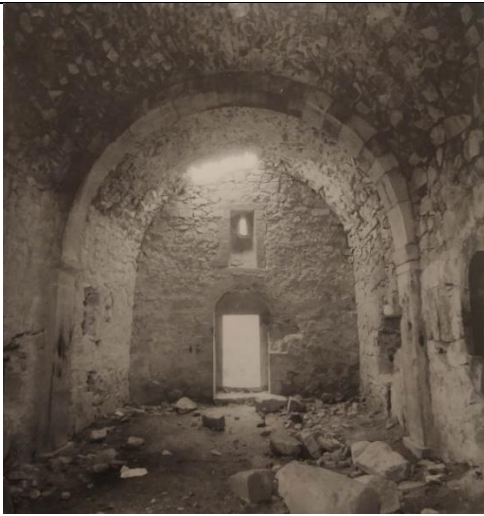
⁵⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/milonov/posts/5302647546430608>

UNTIL 2020

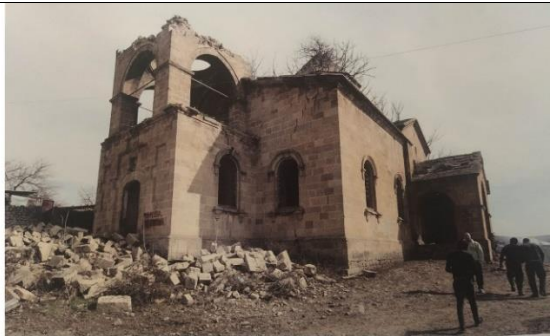
Photos from Samvel Karapetyan's book "Azerbaijan out of civilization" (2017)



Церковь Св. Воскресения с. Башхик (Камо, Шаумянский район) в 1989 и 2007 гг. после окончательного уничтожения в конце 1990-х.



Внутренний вид церкви селища Мрцунис (Геташен, Шаумянский район) в 1989 и 2007 гг.

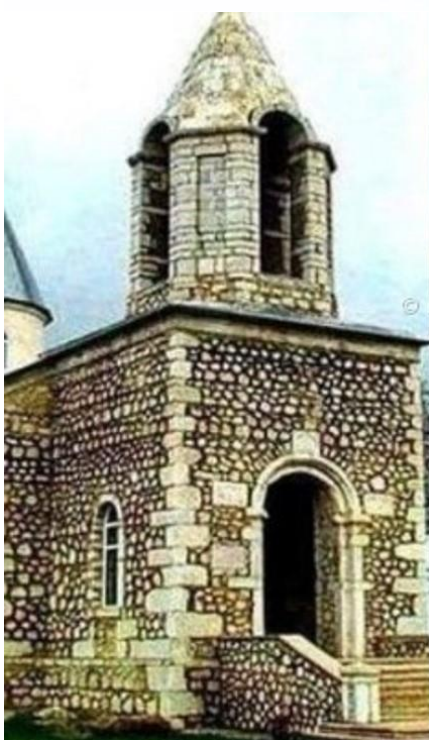


Церковь Св. Богородицы с. Матраса (Шамахинский район, построена в 1864 г.) в 1984 и 2013 гг.



Cross-stones (khachkars) in Jugha, Nakhijevan region. On the left photo of 1915. Azerbaijan started the destruction as early as the Soviet years. The soldiers of Azerbaijan army crumbled thousands of cross-stones into rubble in 2005.

FROM 2020



UNDER THE THREAT



The Bri Yekhtsi Monastery is located in the Martuni region, 600 m north-east of the village of Hatz, at a distance of 300-400 m from the modern Armenian-Azerbaijani border and requires special observation. This monastery is the largest in Artsakh in terms of its territory. It consists of a chapel-church located at the top of the hill, two separate churches united by a common porch, a fourth church at the foot of the hill and three framed khachkars.



The church of Pirumashen is located in the territory of Sarushen community of Askeran region of Artsakh, about 0.5 km south-west of the village, on the right edge of the Stepanakert-Hadrut highway, near the current border. The building was completely restored in 2012-2014. Special monitoring is required, as the adjacent highway is also used by Azeri columns heading to Shushi.



Churkhush church is located in Hin (Old) Taghavard village under Armenian control, at a distance of 40 meters from the current border. Probable time of construction – 17th century. The church has been a famous place of pilgrimage for the residents of Taghavard and neighboring villages. The candle-lighting in the church continues up to day. According to the residents of Taghavard, the church was shelled by the Azerbaijani air force on November 10 at 1 p.m., 2020. As a result, the church was turned into ruins.

