

Abstract: *In recent decades, articles on Aghvank architecture have been published in scientific literature, showcasing notable differences from materials published before the 1970s. These newer publications present conflicting results and conclusions, reflecting diverse scientific approaches. As a result, the Azerbaijani scientific community portrays the entire Christian culture of Artsakh, particularly its architecture, as a component of the Aghvan heritage. This paper comprehensively reviews existing scientific materials on Aghvank architecture, spanning publications from both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, as well as compares the articles authored by Azerbaijani scholars with those that have been written in foreign languages and published in periodicals. After conducting research, it is evident that Azerbaijani historians have increasingly attempted to claim the Christian culture and architecture of Artsakh as their own over the past 40 years. This has led to a loss of objectivity and scientific approach towards existing materials and methods. The study aimed to show the dynamics of the "scientific study" of Azerbaijani architecture, the editing of the "new history" of the medieval culture and architecture of Aghvank in the Caucasus in recent decades, to highlight the main contradictions evident in the results of research by Azerbaijani and foreign scientists. Today, in the context of the occupation of the entire territory of Artsakh and its architectural heritage, such a discovery is becoming increasingly important.*

Keywords: *Artsakh, Bun Aghvank, Aghvank architecture, Sudagilan, Mamrukh, Nyugdi.*

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Introduction

Currently, Azerbaijan has militarily occupied the entire territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which historically belonged to Artsakh, forcibly displacing the Armenian population that has resided in Artsakh for centuries. It is noteworthy that, until the 1920s, there was no mention of a nationality known as Azerbaijan among the people of the Caucasus [1]. Azerbaijan now faces the significant challenge of crafting a "history" to justify all its actions against the Artsakh population. Under these conditions, it is vital to consider how the existing architecture in Azerbaijan was presented from the beginning of the 20th century to the present day. The works of Russian and Soviet historian, archeologist, and Caucasologist I.P. Sheblikin [2], Soviet art critic, researcher of Near and Middle East architecture L.S. Britanitsky, and Soviet art historian, orientalist, and academician B.V. Weimarn [3] on Azerbaijan's medieval architecture, which were published until the 1970s, were examined.

Special attention was paid to the works of Azerbaijani scientists Mikael Huseinov, Sadikh Dadashev [4-6], Vagab Salamazadeh, and Kamil Mamedzadeh [6], which were published *pre-1970s and post-1970s*, comparing the content and methodological changes that developed in the last few years.

Russian archaeologist, ethnographer, and anthropologist Viktor Shnirelman and American scientist, Caucasologist, specialist in Armenian and Caucasian Aghvan history Robert Huysen also referred to Aghvan architecture and culture in the territory of Azerbaijan. And, certainly, the studies of the Russian archaeologist, art critic, and historian Anatoly Jacobson on the Armenian architecture of Artsakh are vital.

This study compares the aforementioned works from recent years with the studies conducted by non-Azerbaijani scientists during the same period, highlighting the modernity and novelty of this research.

This article aims to uncover the falsehoods which the scientific community of Azerbaijan—consistently attempts to present as new scientific findings and discoveries to the world under the state’s patronage and in strict accordance with the prescribed task. Now, it becomes more problematic when the scientific world of Azerbaijan, deprived of healthy scientific criticism, is seeking to justify its persistent occupation policy toward Armenians, Armenia, and Artsakh. This issue is particularly pressing today, especially considering that the cultural heritage crafted by the Armenians remains entirely unprotected in Artsakh and is in a highly endangered condition in Syunik.

Materials and Methods

The Azerbaijani scientific community now portrays Aghvank architecture, especially cult architecture, as an inherent component of Azerbaijani architecture. Consequently, to provide a comprehensive overview of studies on Aghvank architecture, the scientific literature on Azerbaijani architecture was examined and analyzed.

The analysis of scientific studies and publications, depending on the period and the authors, was chosen as a method for the research. Two main stages were considered for comparison. The first stage includes publications from the 40s to the 70s of the XX century. The second stage comprises publications from the period of political independence and free scientific activity in Azerbaijan, which covers the period from the 70s to the present day.

Results and Discussion

Caucasologist Ivan Sheblikin conducted the first scientific study on Azerbaijan’s history, culture, and architecture [2]. This study presents descriptions of Azerbaijan’s main architectural monuments in the XI–XIV centuries and provides a brief overview of the architecture preceding that period. The work describes numerous monuments: castles, palaces, tombs, and palace structures, which were documented and studied in

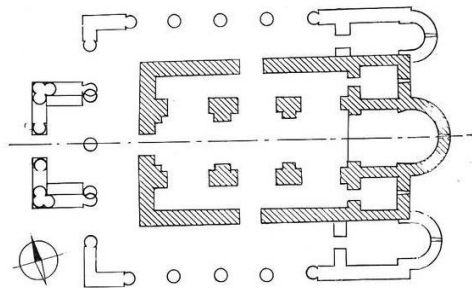
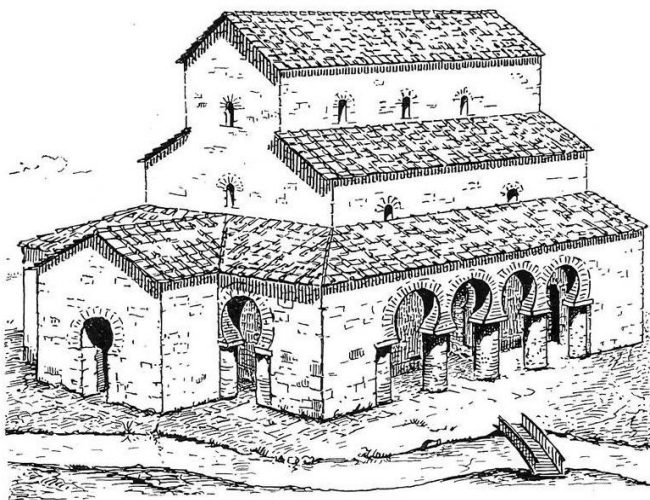


Fig. 1. Plan and restructuring of the basilica temple near Kum village

the 1930s. There is not even a hint of a Christian structure here. The latter are not considered structures and monuments of Azerbaijani architecture. Moreover, nothing is said about the medieval monasteries and churches of Aghvank.

The second significant work on architecture within the territory of Azerbaijan was published in 1947, under the editorship of S.A. Dadashev and M.A. Huseinov [4]. The first part of the book focuses on the period predating the 11th century. Authored articles include "The Architecture of Azerbaijan until the 5th Century BC" by N. Gorchakova, K. Mel, and P. Sheblikin; "Monuments of the Kum and Ledit Settlements" by P. Baranovsky; and "8th-11th Century Monuments" by P. Sheblikin. Of particular significance in the book is Baranovsky's article, which presents, for the first time, the early Christian basilica temple of Kum village on the left bank of the Kur river in the Kakh region of Azerbaijan (Figs. 1,2), as well as the round temple of Ledit village in the same region (Fig. 3) [4].



Fig. 2. *Kum, general view of the basilica from the southwest and outer colonnade¹*

In 1948, the Academy of Architecture of the USSR released a book titled "Architecture of Azerbaijan" [5,6], under the authority of S.A. Dadashev and M.A. Huseinov. Here, Aghvank is mentioned only in the introduction, in two sentences: "In the Roman era, the state that occupied the territory of Azerbaijan was called Albania. There is a mention of the Albanian cities in Ptolemy (first half of the 2nd century)" [4].

Russian historian and orientalist Kamilla Trever studied the history and culture of Aghvank. Her work "Outlines of the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania, IV century BC - VII century AD" was the first generalizing work dedicated to the issues of the history, socioeconomic relations, and material culture of Aghvank. In the section concerning the architecture of Aghvank [7], the monuments of Kum and Lekit villages are discussed, citing the results of Baranovsky's studies. The ruins of the early medieval church and adjacent buildings discovered by R.M. Vaidov during the excavations of Sudagilan in 1949 near Mingechaur, on the city's left bank (Fig.4) [8], are only briefly touched upon in the discussion. Nevertheless, the broken stone inscriptions in the church ruins [9] allows to date it to the 7th century [10].

The literature also mentions the chapel built near the village of Nyugdi in the Derbent region of Dagestan at the place of martyrdom of St. Grigoris, where St. Grigoris Church is located [11].

In 1968, the book "Architecture of Azerbaijan XVI-XIX centuries" was published by the publishing house of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR, authored by A.V. Salamzade and edited by M.A. Huseinov. The first chapter of the book delves into cult structures, where not a single word is mentioned about Christian cult structures, particularly Aghvanic and, as is often presented now, Udi cult structures [12].

¹ <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=109991412>

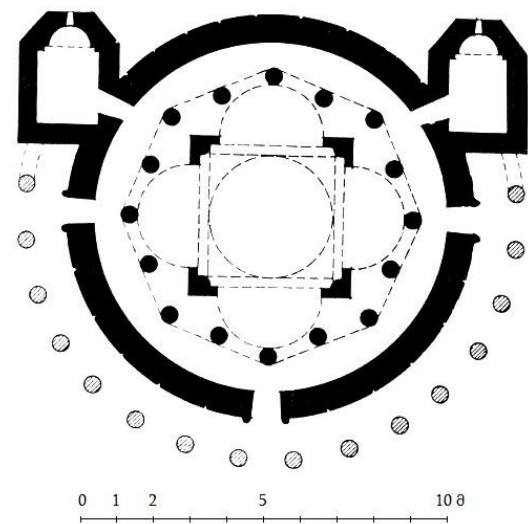


Fig. 3. General view and plan of the ruins of the Round Temple in Lekit village²

From 1966 to 1977, the Civil Construction and Architecture Committee under the USSR's Ministry of Construction, in collaboration with the Research Institute of Theory, History, and Prospective Problems of Soviet Architecture, released the 12-volume "History of World Architecture." This monumental work is the most extensive and authoritative publication of the professional literature in this field [13]. The architecture of Azerbaijan is presented in the 6th chapter of the 8th volume [14]. The first sub-chapter is about the architecture of Azerbaijan in the IV-VII centuries [11]. "Monuments of Christian religious construction are the nearby basilica in Kum village and the round temple in Lekit village" [14]. The text describes the basilica of Kum village and the rotund temple of Lekit village in great detail. It also mentions the relationship between these structures and the similar religious structures of the same period in Armenia, Georgia, Syria, and Byzantine. None of the following chapters discuss Christian architectural structures as a part of Aghvani or Azeri architecture.

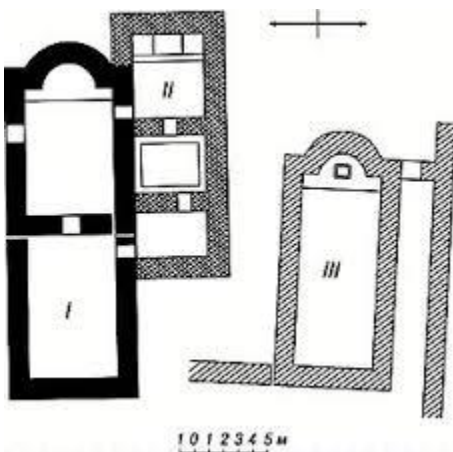


Fig. 4. Plan of the foundations of the Sudagilan church complex (I-VII-IX centuries, II-VIII-IX centuries, III-V-VI centuries) and headstone

R.B. Geushev, a scholar from Azerbaijan who has studied the history of Aghvank, argues that the Gandzasar monastery is not Armenian but Aghvanic [15]. In 1978, Geushev defended his doctoral thesis in Tbilisi, titled "Christianity in Caucasian Albania," and subsequently published it [16]. The scientific novelty of the topic is: "The scientific novelty of the work lies in the fact that, to the best of the available capabilities, for the first time in a monographic plan a relatively complete history and history of the material culture of Christianity in Caucasian Albania is given as a natural part of the Azerbaijani people history" [16]. Here, the

² <https://xn--h1ajim.xn--plai/index.php?curid=16909099>

first attempt is made to own the monastic monasteries of Artsakh and Utik, declaring them aghvanic, regardless of the period and region. "The map of the distribution of monastic buildings in Azerbaijan shows that almost all bishoprics had several monasteries. Albanian monasteries were also built outside Albania" [16].

In the following years, Azerbaijani scientific thought exhausted its studies into the history and theory of Aghvank architecture itself and set a task to present the culture, architectural structures, and monuments on the right side of the Kur River as Aghvanic.

Soviet orientalist Zia Buniyatov played an important role in this issue, providing the historical basis for the privatization of Armenian religious structures. The primary focus of the scientific debate has shifted from the reliability of scientific evidence and research to plagiarism and deliberate mistranslation of literary sources.

Soviet and Russian archaeologist and ethnographer Victor Schlimerman has deeply studied the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict with its cultural and political issues. Speaking about the activity of Azerbaijani scientists, led by Z. Buniyatov, distortions of historical materials and sources, he notes: "Another way to downplay the presence of Armenians in ancient and medieval Transcaucasia and belittle their role is to republish ancient and medieval sources with notes, replacing the term "Armenian state" with "Albanian state" or other distortions of the original texts. During the period of the 1960s-1990s, numerous reprints of primary sources were published in Baku, which academician Z. M. Buniyatov was actively involved in.

However, in recent years, when discussing ethnic processes and their role in the history of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani authors sometimes generally avoid discussing the appearance of the Azerbaijani language and Azerbaijanis there, leading the reader to believe that they have existed there from time immemorial. Hardly Azerbaijani historians did this solely out of their own free will; they were likely influenced by the orders of the party and government structures of Azerbaijan" [17].

Soviet archeologist, art and architecture history researcher A.L. Yakobson has published many articles and works on Armenian architecture and, in particular, Gandzasar Monastery [18]. Speaking about the Gandzasar monastery, he mentions its belonging to the Armenian architectural school and strongly criticizes its Albanianization. "It is not clear why the authors needed to distort the semantic and artistic content and origin of the Armenian medieval decorative art, easily and mindlessly "connecting" it either to the art of Albania, which did not exist at that time (and in the authors' understanding, to the art of Azerbaijan), or directly to the art of Azerbaijan. Our summary is short. It is with regret that we have to admit that the article by D. A. and M. D. Akhundov is biased in its meaning and spirit. This kind of article, in our opinion, can only disorient the reader" [19].

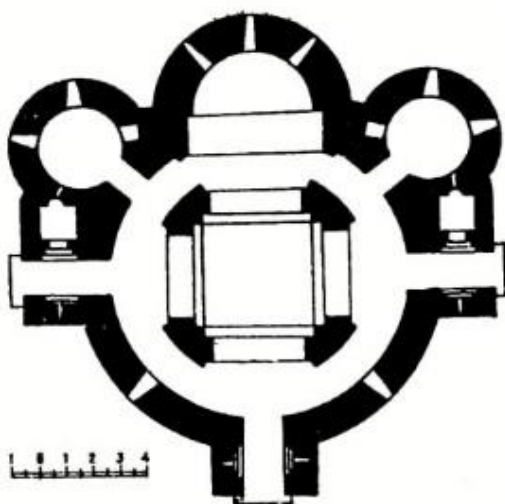


Fig. 5. A medieval Christian round church near the village of Mamruk in the Zakatala region of Azerbaijan

Azerbaijani scientist G.S. Mammadova defended her doctoral thesis on the topic "Cultural Architecture of Caucasian Albania" [20] and, in 2004, published the monograph "Architecture of Caucasian Albania" with an additional edition [21]. In her research, the author also describes the round church near the village of Mamruk (Fig. 5), expanding the influences that the Aghvanian, namely Azeri architecture left on the neighboring countries. The third chapter of the book talks about the Aghvank architecture of the 8th-10th centuries. Here, the author separates the architectural style of the Syunik school from the Armenian school and associates it with the influence of Aghvank. "However, the architecture of Caucasian Albania cannot be complete without religious structures on the territory of neighboring countries in areas historically associated with Caucasian Albania. In Syunik, roofing slabs

replaced tiles earlier than in other areas. The trumpet arch was preserved here for a long time as the most effective design for changing from the base square to the drum. These and other features distinguish the architecture of Syunik from the Armenian one" [21]. The author unequivocally classifies the monastic complexes and religious structures of all later centuries, including Gandzasar, Khutavank, Amaras, Dadivank, and other monasteries, to the "Aghvanic" school of architecture, accusing Jacobson of partiality and unprofessionalism [21].

In these years, another thesis has been defended with similar topicality and goals. Candidate of architecture A.T. Salimova in 1998 defended a thesis titled "The creative roots of the Emergence of the cult ritual architecture of Caucasian Albania". From 1993 to 1996, she participated in several conferences and published articles on the aforementioned topic in Baku (Fig. 6) [22].

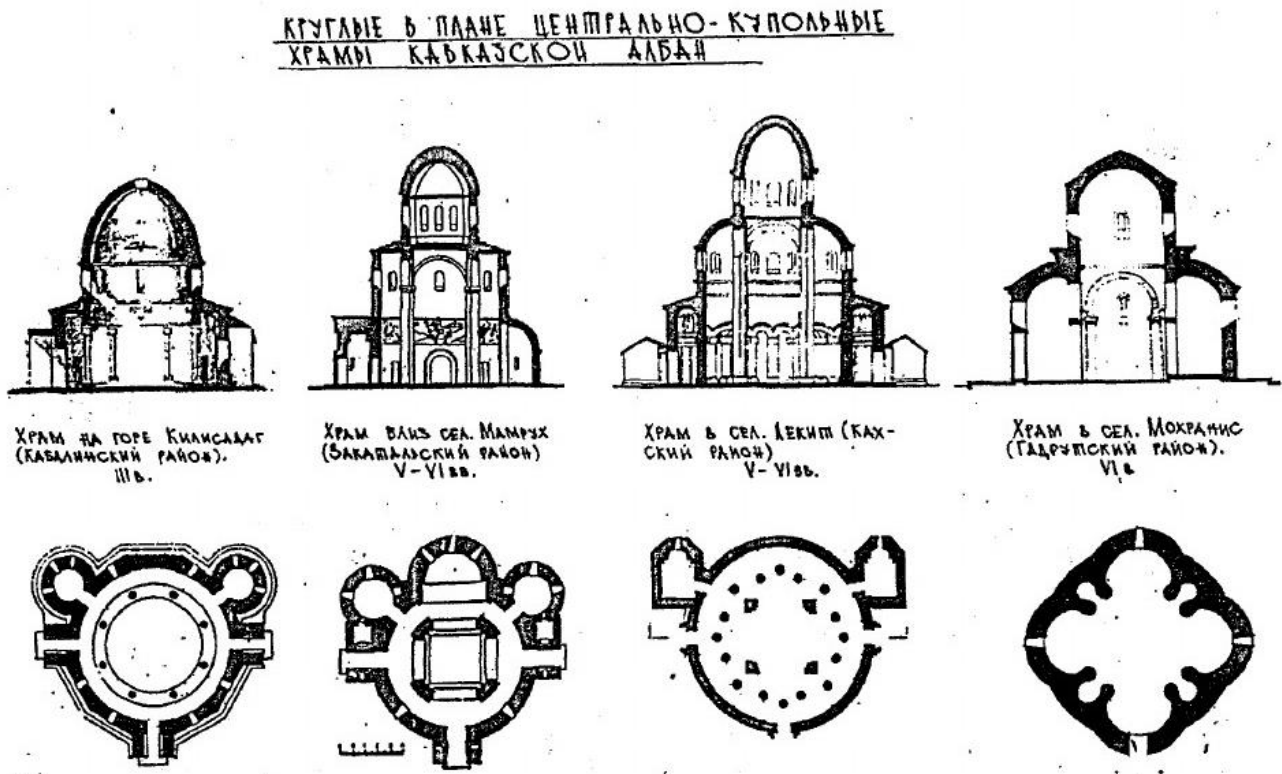


Fig. 6. A list of all churches from A. Salimova's thesis, where the church of Mokhrenes village of Dizaki, which is clearly different from the first three churches, is presented as an aghvanic

Azerbaijani historian, doctor of historical sciences, and professor F. Mamedova is also one of the researchers of the history and culture of Aghvank in the Caucasus. In 1986 her monograph "Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania" was published [23], which was strongly criticized both by scientific experts [24] and Azerbaijani scientists. Shnirelman considers her the main propagator of the "Albanian myth" [17], and Azerbaijanis, in the person of Yaghub Makhmudov, director of the History Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, consider her a "traitor to the fatherland" and "Armenian spy" for including Great Haik on the "Aghvank and neighboring countries" map³.

Mamedova herself states that Heydar Aliyev personally demanded from F. Mamedova that every book published by Armenians be subject to scientific criticism⁴.

³ Albania or Atropatena? How they "compose" the ancient history of the Caucasus Archival copy dated January 6, 2014, on the Wayback Machine. "Echo" (Baku), No. 76 (1316), April 29, 2006.

⁴ "Echo" newspaper, No. 76 (1316), April 29, 2006: "Armenians published 15-19 books a year, and Heydar Aliyev demanded scientific criticism for each book. So I began to untie the Armenian knot. One map is considered 4 years of work by a scientist. And I have 7 such maps. I thought that I would be praised for these maps but it turned out to be the opposite...".

In 2005, her book "Caucasian Albania and the Albanians" was published, in which Mammadova albanianizes not only Eastern Armenia but also Kilikia, its people, kings, clergy, their spiritual culture, literature, jurisprudence, and material values [25].

The modern American scientist, Caucasologist Robert Huysen, also studied the history of Armenia and Caucasian Aghvank [26]. Speaking of the theory of literature related to the topic, he notes the unreliability of many historical publications from the Soviet period. «Scholars should be on guard when using Soviet and post-Soviet Azeri editions of Azeri, Persian, and even Russian and Western European sources printed in Baku. These have been edited to remove references to Armenian and have been distributed in large numbers in recent years. When utilizing such sources, the researchers should seek out pre-Soviet editions wherever possible». Unfortunately, Azerbaijan behaves barbarically with the cultural values that cannot be owned, such as cross-stones. The Azerbaijani government has not yet found a way to take possession of them (Figs. 7,8)⁵.



Fig. 7. *Jugha cemetery before destruction*

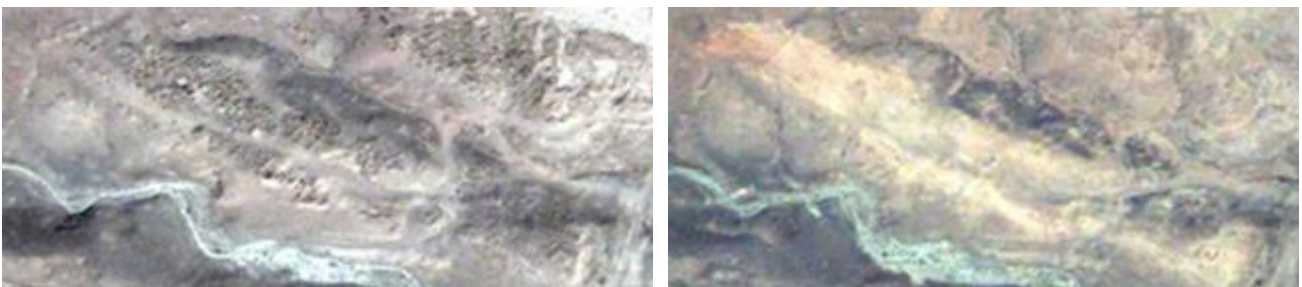


Fig. 8. *Satellite images of the cemetery taken on 23.09.2003 and 28.05.2009.
The shadows from the cross-stones are no longer visible*

⁵ High-Resolution Satellite Imagery and the Destruction of Cultural Artifacts in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan
<https://www.aaas.org/resources/high-resolution-satellite-imagery-and-destruction-cultural-artifacts-nakhchivan-azerbaijan>

Conclusion

Research on the culture and architecture of Aghvank remains a subject of great interest, with different points of view being expressed in various scientific studies. In this article, we reviewed and compared studies carried out mainly by Soviet scientists before the 1970s with the articles written after that period. Our analysis showed that:

1. It should be noted that in the materials published before the 1970s, the architecture of Aghvank was only represented by early Christian monuments that were found on the left bank of the Kur River in Aghvank itself. As a result, it was not considered a part of Azerbaijani architecture. These articles were written by both Azerbaijani and Russian scientists.
2. In the 70s of the 20th century, a new wave began when Azerbaijani authors not only included the entire culture and architecture of Artsakh and Utik in Aghvan architecture but also blamed those scientists who denied that the mentioned monuments belonged to Aghvan, that is, to Azeri.
3. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, during the political and scientific independence of Azerbaijan and the following years, scientific theses are being defended in Azerbaijan, where the trends of privatization of Armenian architecture are acquiring so much momentum that an attempt is already being made to alienate Syunik from Armenian culture, as well as the architectural schools of Kilikia.
4. Powerful state patronage in scientific policy has been condemned by Russian and Western scientists as unscientific and false approaches.
5. The authorities of Azerbaijan persistently and continuously establish a scientific foundation to support the implementation of a well-developed strategic plan aimed at occupying Armenia.
6. All the monuments in Azerbaijan that cannot be privatized (cross-stones, churches, and settlements) are at risk of vandalism and destruction.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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