# POST-WAR SITUATION OF BORDER MONUMENTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SYUNIK AND TAVUSH REGIONS

**Hamazasp Abrahamyan**[1,2], **Haykuhi Muradyan**[1,3]*

[1]*Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Yerevan, RA*
[2]*History Museum of Armenia, Yerevan, RA*
[3]*Yerevan State University, Yerevan, RA*

***Abstract:*** *This paper examines how changes in geopolitical borders affect access to monuments, their preservation, and the cultural landscapes, focusing on a comparative study of the Syunik and Tavush provinces. Through media monitoring, online sources, field observation, and interviews conducted during fieldwork from 2023 to 2025, we document changes in monument status in these areas. In Syunik, we identify three types of heritage vulnerability: monuments under adversary control, monuments inaccessible in militarized zones, and monuments facing ongoing threats. Tavush faces a more complex situation, where heritage issues from the 1990s overlap with new challenges posed by the 2024 border demarcation. Our analysis highlights the importance of timing. Syunik faced a sudden loss, while Tavush shows a decades-long buildup of vulnerabilities. Both cases illustrate how border changes reshape cultural landscapes, disconnect communities from their heritage, and create new challenges for cultural heritage protection. The article demonstrates how monuments can be affected by both warfare and administrative decisions. This study suggests that heritage in conflict zones needs management frameworks that incorporate cultural protection into border management and national security policies.*

***Keywords:*** *Cultural heritage, border communities, preservation, accessibility, heritage in a conflict zone.*

**Haykuhi Muradyan***
E-mail: haykuhi.muradyan@gmail.com

Received: 04.07.2026
Revised: 15.08.2026
Accepted: 16.09.2026

© The Author(s) 2026

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License

## Introduction

On April 3, 2023, Armenian authorities relocated a khachkar (cross-stone) from the "Greater and Lesser Syunik" memorial complex shortly before Azerbaijani forces assumed control of the area. Satellite imagery later showed that the memorial complex itself was no longer standing, and its destruction has been reported[1] (Fig.1). This episode is not an isolated act of wartime vandalism but a visible instance of a broader, ongoing crisis facing Armenia's cultural heritage in the aftermath of the 44-day Artsakh war of 2020. Along Armenia's eastern border, monuments that have anchored generations of community identity now face destruction, seizure, or severed access — and this crisis is unfolding not as a single rupture but as an uneven, ongoing process.

Existing scholarship on heritage in conflict zones tends to treat destruction and post-war reconstruction as its two poles, with comparatively little attention to how *shifting borders* reshape heritage over time. Much of this literature implicitly treats "conflict heritage" as a unified category, obscuring how the *temporality* of border change — sudden rupture through war versus gradual erosion through unresolved territorial dispute — produces materially different outcomes for the monuments and communities involved. This is where critical heritage studies offers a necessary corrective. Smith's [1] foundational argument that heritage is not a passively inherited "thing" but a discursive *process* — continually enacted through practices of memory, identity, and

[1] MonumentWatch Initiative, Ochnchatsvel e Adrbejani verahskoghutyan tak antsats Mets ev Pokr Syunik hushardzane. July 31, 2024 (in Armenian). Available at: https://tinyurl.com/574y868a (accessed on November 02, 2026).

belonging, and framed by what she terms the "Authorized Heritage Discourse" [1] — reframes the loss of a monument as more than the loss of a material object. When access to a khachkar or memorial complex is severed, the ongoing social practice through which a community re-performs its relationship to place and past is disrupted. Harrison [2] extends this process-based view further, arguing that heritage should be understood as continuously *produced and reproduced* under present conditions rather than simply inherited from the past — a framing that lets us treat Syunik's sudden rupture and Tavush's decades-long erosion not as variants of the same "conflict heritage" phenomenon, but as two distinct modes of heritage production under duress.

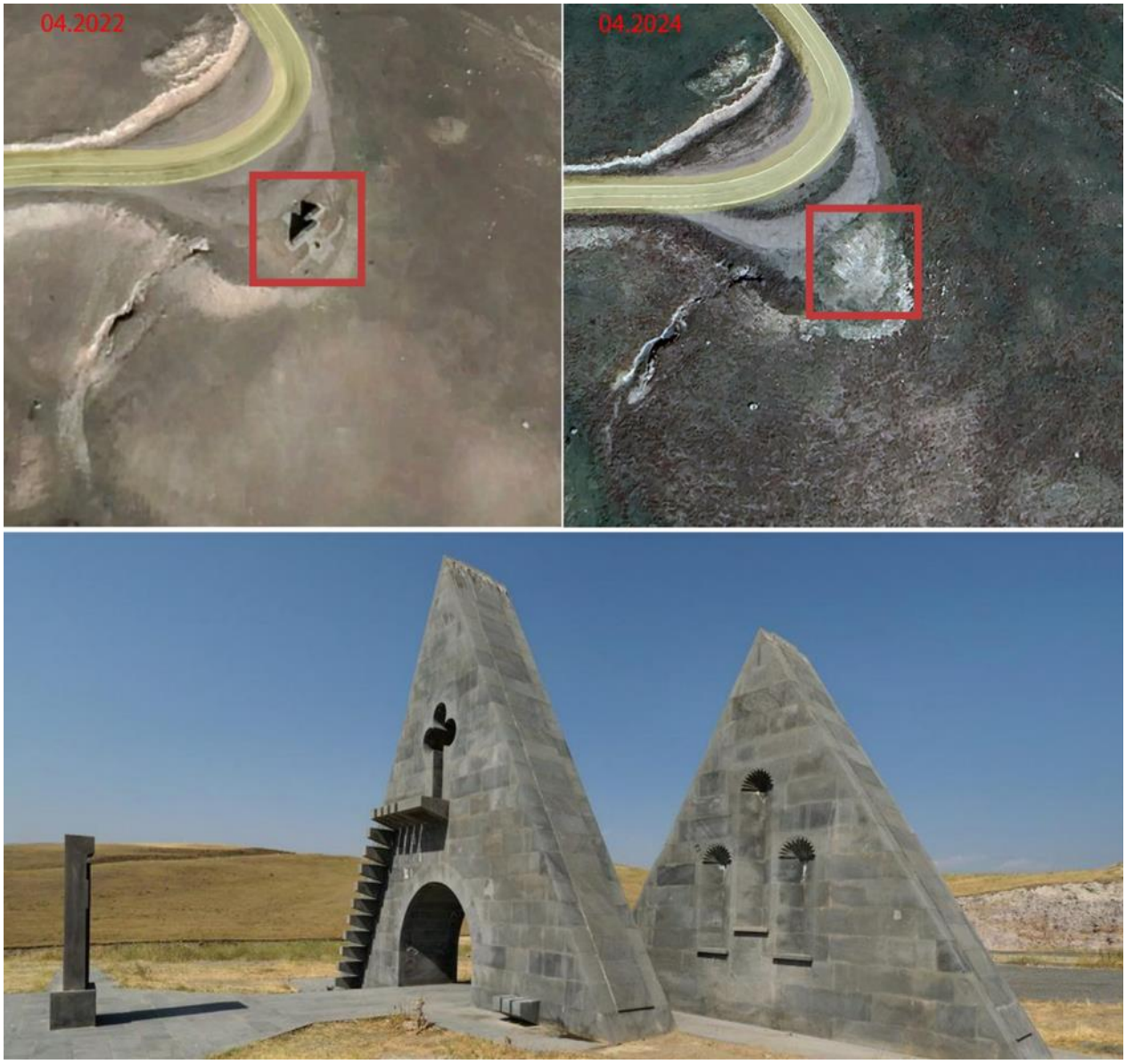



**Fig. 1.** *Satellite image of the "Greater and Lesser Syunik" monument. Google Earth Pro imagery, April 2022 (left) and April 2024 (right), accessed 25 July 2026; lower photograph: MonumentWatch. Comparison prepared by H. Abrahamyan*

Heritage in contested border zones is, moreover, rarely a matter of shared loss. Tunbridge and Ashworth's [3] concept of *dissonant heritage* captures how a single site can carry incompatible meanings for different groups — a resource of identity and legitimacy for one, and an object of reinterpretation or erasure for another (see also [4]). Azerbaijan's "Albanianization" campaign, which recasts Armenian ecclesiastical monuments within an alternative historical lineage, clearly operationalizes this dissonance as policy: heritage functions simultaneously as cultural erasure and as a claim to territorial legitimacy. Meskell's [5] analysis of the geopolitics of UNESCO and the World Heritage regime situates this within a wider, recognizable pattern in

which heritage designation and destruction serve as instruments of *soft power* and territorial claim-making well beyond this particular conflict — a pattern also evident in Azerbaijan's earlier, extensively documented destruction of thousands of khachkars and churches in Nakhchivan[2]. Bevan's [6] concept of the deliberate destruction of architecture and monuments as an assault on a group's memory and identity—rather than incidental collateral damage—offers a sharper vocabulary for episodes such as the destruction of the Syunik memorial.

Border studies provides the second theoretical anchor for this analysis. Paasi [7,8] has long argued that borders are not fixed geographic lines but ongoing social processes: institutions that are continually produced, contested, and re-inscribed through practices of security, identity, and exclusion. In militarized settings, this process takes on particular force: borders become sites of violence, restricted access, and disputed sovereignty that reshape everyday life for nearby communities, altering how residents relate psychologically and practically to land, movement, and heritage. Reading Paasi's border-as-process alongside Harrison's [2] heritage-as-process suggests a productive symmetry: both borders and heritage in this region are actively made, not merely defended or lost, and the interaction between these two ongoing processes produces the uneven vulnerability we document.

We term this convergence of processes a "post-war heritage crisis" — a condition in which monuments face compounding threats from active warfare, administrative boundary-making, military access restriction, and cultural appropriation simultaneously, rather than through any single mechanism. This crisis affects a large number of monuments across Armenia's border provinces, yet, to our knowledge, has not been documented systematically. Comparing Syunik and Tavush — two regions with sharply different border histories — allows us to explore how three factors may shape divergent outcomes: (1) the *temporality* of border formation, sudden versus gradual; (2) the *degree of militarization*; and (3) the *extent of entanglement* with geopolitical strategies of cultural appropriation.

This study makes three contributions. First, we document the post-war status of monuments along Armenia's eastern border, categorizing sites by accessibility, control, and threat level. Second, we demonstrate how the temporal dimension of border change shapes divergent vulnerability patterns: Syunik illustrates the consequences of sudden rupture, in which a deep hinterland once shielded by Artsakh became, within months, a militarized frontier with monuments transferred to Azerbaijani control; Tavush illustrates the consequences of accumulated vulnerability, having remained a contested and periodically inaccessible border zone since the collapse of the USSR, through the 1990s conflict, the 2020 war, and the ongoing 2024 demarcation process. Third, drawing on Smith's [1] process-based conception of heritage, we suggest that these disruptions extend beyond physical destruction to include symbolic loss, the severing of community ties to place, and the emergence of new, adapted practices of memory-making — contributing to what we describe as a "cultural geography of loss".

This research is guided by three questions. First, how have the 44-day war and subsequent border changes affected the status, accessibility, and preservation of monuments across Armenia's border provinces? Second, what differences distinguish Syunik and Tavush in their patterns of heritage vulnerability, and to what extent are these differences attributable to the timing and militarization of border change? Third, what does the evidence we have, drawn mainly from Tavush, suggest about how border communities adapt their cultural and memory-making practices when monuments become inaccessible, destroyed, or appropriated? We selected Syunik and Tavush for comparison precisely because their trajectories diverge along the temporal axis central to our argument: Syunik experienced sudden transformation after 2020, while Tavush's vulnerabilities have accumulated across three decades of unresolved contestation.

[2] S. Maghakyan, S. Pickman, A Regime Conceals Its Erasure of Indigenous Armenian Culture. Hyperallergic, February 18, 2019. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/439t5wed (accessed on November 02, 2026).

## Materials and Methods

This study uses a comparative case-study design to examine changes affecting cultural heritage in Syunik and Tavush. The regions were selected because they represent different border-related experiences, allowing the study to compare patterns of heritage control, accessibility, preservation, and community responses. This approach supports an interpretive comparison between these two selected regions.

The fieldwork documented the condition, accessibility, and surrounding context of selected heritage sites in both regions. Site selection was based on relevance to the research topic, available reports, and physical accessibility. Field observations and photographs provided first-hand evidence where access was possible.

Semi-structured, open-ended conversations with residents and a local museum director in Tavush provided insights into the local significance of monuments, changes in their use, and community perspectives. These conversations complemented physical observations by adding local knowledge and experiences.

Media reports, online sources, and relevant institutional statements were used to identify reported changes and provide additional information about sites that could not be visited. These sources were selected for their relevance to heritage preservation, border changes, and reported threats to cultural monuments.

The findings were compared across regions using common criteria, including site accessibility, physical condition, effective control, and reported threats. The study cross-checked field observations, interview accounts, and published reports where possible, and identified uncertain or unavailable information accordingly.

The study acknowledges limitations arising from restricted access to border areas, uneven field observations, and the limited number of interviews. Consequently, some findings rely on secondary sources or interpretation rather than direct observation. The results are therefore context-specific. The two regions were chosen because one has a thirty-year history as a contested border region, while the other became a frontline region only after the 2020 war.

### The Syunik Case

Syunik Province illustrates the effects of a sudden geopolitical shift. Unlike other Armenian border regions, Syunik faced few direct border threats after the 1994 ceasefire. Artsakh served as a buffer, with the militarized contact line located more than 50 kilometers from Armenia's borders. Communities enjoyed uninterrupted relationships with their cultural landscape: accessible monuments, active pilgrimage routes, and heritage sites that required no security measures. Syunik's cultural geography relied on territorial stability. The 44-day war changed this. The trilateral statement of 9–10 November 2020[3] brought Azerbaijani forces to Armenia's border, creating an active military front. Changes accelerated from 2021 to 2023, starting with the closure of the Goris-Kapan highway in August 2021. This closure occurred when 21 kilometers, along with parts of Shurnukh village, fell under Azerbaijani control[4]. In September 2022, forces advanced 100–300 meters at multiple locations. The Tegh-Berdzor (Lachin) corridor closed in spring 2023, followed by the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh in September 2023. Each event militarized Syunik's landscape and restricted access to heritage sites. The region shows how sudden border changes can trigger a series of crises. Our fieldwork in Syunik from 2023 to 2025, centered on Goris (see Materials and Methods), identifies three categories of monuments based on the impact of border changes: 1. Monuments under adversary control: Sites transferred to Azerbaijani jurisdiction that face destruction or appropriation. 2. Monuments in militarized neutral zones: Sites that are nominally under Armenian control but are inaccessible due to tensions, minefields, or observation. 3. Monuments near the border with maintained access: Currently accessible sites that face constant targeting

[3] Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the President of the Russian Federation. November 10, 2020. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/ybj73ywc (accessed on November 02, 2026).

[4] RFE/RL's Armenian Service, Yerevan Accuses Azerbaijan of Blocking Major Road Connecting Two Parts of Armenian Region. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 26, 2021. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/56ccnx7e (accessed on November 02, 2026).

threats. This is not merely a description; it reveals different types of loss. Category 1 represents physical loss. Category 2 indicates functional loss. Category 3 refers to precarious preservation. Together, they demonstrate how border transformation leads to different degrees of cultural dispossession.

**Category 1: Adversary Control**

The most extensive losses involve monuments transferred to Azerbaijan and subsequently destroyed. The "Greater and Lesser Syunik" memorial is an example. Located at the former Armenia-Artsakh border junction, the memorial was erected in 2004 by Syunik Governor Suren Khachatryan. Sevada Zakaryan designed it, and Maksim Hakobyan of Zangezur Copper-Molybdenum financed it. A khachkar was added in 2007 [9] (Fig.2).

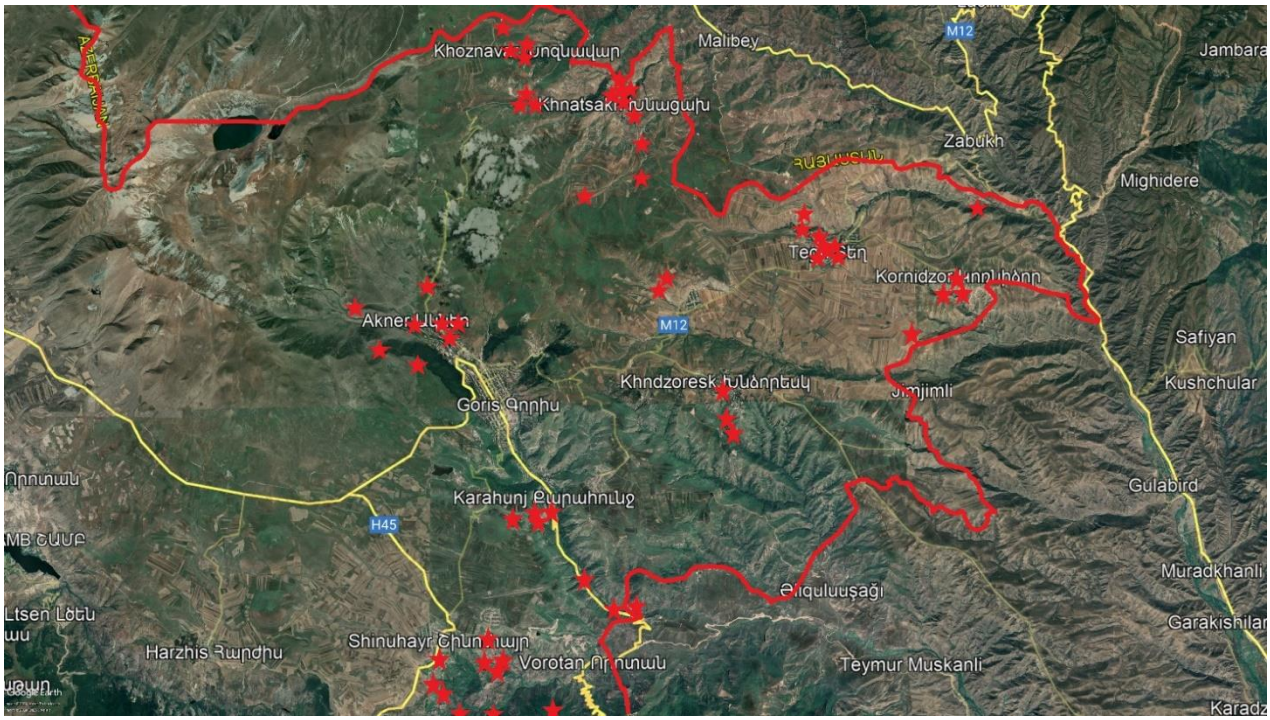



**Fig. 2.** *The border and monuments in the Syunik region (Tegh, Goris, Shinuhayr) [9]*

This memorial honored Syunik's historical unity and served as a symbolic gateway to Artsakh. When Azerbaijan closed the Berdzor road in late March 2023 and opened the Kornidzor route in early April, the memorial fell into Azerbaijani territory. Authorities could not relocate the entire structure in time, so they removed only the khachkar on April 3, 2023[5]. This emergency relocation had a significant impact. The monument, designed for a specific landscape and embedded in a commemorative complex, was severed and moved to prevent destruction. Removing the khachkar was an emergency measure permitted under Article 7 of the Venice Charter[6], and it cost the memorial its setting (see Tavush, Subcategory 2b). Google Earth imagery dated April 2024, compared with April 2022, shows the standing memorial is no longer there, and MonumentWatch reports its destruction (Fig.1). This aligns with Azerbaijan's documented pattern of systematically destroying heritage in Nakhchivan. Thousands of khachkars and medieval cemeteries were demolished between 1997 and 2006[7], and similar destruction occurred in territories occupied during and after the 44-day war. Bevan [6] argues that such sites become targets in war precisely because they anchor collective

[5] MonumentWatch Initiative, The "Greater and Lesser Syunik" Memorial on the Border of Syunik and Artsakh Came Under the Control of Azerbaijan, Appearing Under Threat of Destruction. April 18, 2023. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/4rp4feb9 (accessed on November 02, 2026).

[6] ICOMOS, International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter), 1964. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/3vh9t6y8 (accessed on November 02, 2026).

[7] S. Maghakyan, S. Pickman, A Regime Conceals Its Erasure of Indigenous Armenian Culture. Hyperallergic, February 18, 2019. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/439t5wed (accessed on November 02, 2026).

identity and historical claims. Architect Zakaryan understood this when he advocated relocating khachkars in conflict zones, even proposing symbolic rescues that counter cultural erasure. The available evidence does not document where the relocated khachkar now stands or whether it has become a focus of commemoration.

**Category 2: Militarized Neutral Zones**

A second category includes monuments that are nominally in Armenian territory but are inaccessible due to militarization. These sites exist in legal and spatial uncertainty. They are registered as Armenian heritage and are within Armenia's borders, yet they are effectively severed from the communities that care for them. Warning signs along access roads forbid entry to "state border," "mined zones," and "observed areas" (Fig.3), turning cultural landscapes into security zones. Tegh village pilgrimage sites illustrate this situation. Srneghtsi (Fig.4) and Kotrats Eghtsi, both important religious monuments, came under direct Azerbaijani observation after advances in September 2022. Community members told us they have been unable to approach these sites since 2022 because of border tensions (Interview, Tegh village, 2024). The consequences extend beyond just physical access. Religious practices traditionally performed at these sites, including matagh (ritual sacrifice), have been moved to Tegh's central church. This shift changes the spatial and ritual nature of the practices. Matagh at a pilgrimage site means something different than it does at a village church. The former connects communities to sacred landscapes and historical continuity, while the latter becomes a substitute ritual marked by absence and loss. The "Shurnukh Crosses" burial mound in Kornidzor (Fig.5), located 2.2 kilometers southwest of the village on a plateau surrounded by streams, shows similar patterns. Six stelae and khachkars found during agricultural work are gathered there. To reach it, now just 200–300 meters from the border, one must pass three warning signs that prohibit entry to the state border. Yet, in this borderland complexity, residents still cultivate fields and graze livestock there despite these restrictions. Border guards track local movements but completely restrict access during heightened tensions. Category 2 differs from Category 1 because its status is unclear. It is not lost to enemy control, but it is not truly accessible either. It exists in a suspended state, neither destroyed nor functional, waiting in geopolitical limbo. This creates unique preservation challenges. Technically, these sites fall under Armenian jurisdiction, so they appear in registries and documents, yet monitoring, maintenance, and documentation are impossible. These sites exist in a state of simultaneous presence and absence, complicating both governance and community memory.




**Fig. 3.** *Warning sign in the Tavush region. Photo by Hamazasp Abrahamyan*

Qarahunj village presents a related but less certain case. More than 10 of approximately 58 state-registered monuments now lie beyond Armenian control or access. After Azerbaijan took over the 21-kilometer section of the Goris-Kapan highway, Qarahunj village on the ridge road lost its strategic significance. More critically, monuments registered under the village's jurisdiction but located 5 to 6 kilometers south, near the old road in former summer pastures, became inaccessible or difficult to reach. Sites in Harani Gorge, at Surik's Lake, and Siridzh Fortress were accessible immediately after 2020. However, as tensions increased between 2021 and 2023, accessibility issues worsened. Unlike the "Greater and Lesser Syunik" memorial, which is a single visible structure, the Qarahunj monuments represent dispersed landscape heritage. Their inaccessibility is less dramatic, but no less damaging. This situation does not involve monuments being destroyed in one act; instead, it causes heritage to fade slowly from community life. The preservation status of these monuments is unknown, and their cultural functions have been suspended. The loss is both material and relational—monuments exist, but communities cannot reach them. Because the condition of these monuments is unknown and the evidence we have concerns access, not damage, we treat them as a functional loss rather than a confirmed physical loss.



**Fig. 4.** *St. Srneghtsi church in Tegh village. Photo by Hamazasp Abrahamyan. Taken on 22 September 2023*



**Fig. 5.** *Shurnukh Crosses in Kornidzor village. Photo by Hamlet Petrosyan. Taken on 30 October 2023*

**Category 3: Constant Threat**

The final category includes accessible monuments that are constantly at risk during military operations. They function normally during calm periods but can quickly become targets during escalations. The operations in September 2022 illustrate this. During that two-day conflict, Azerbaijani forces targeted locations across Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, and Syunik[8]. In Goris, shells damaged structures in Akner (one house), Verishen (four houses, one livestock facility), and the Qarashen ceremonial hall in Tegh[9]. Our mapping of these targets shows a pattern: shells fell not only in the immediate border areas but also deeper within the region. In every case, many registered monuments, both of republican and local significance, were located within hundreds of meters of the targeted structures. Attacking civilian buildings also threatens nearby heritage sites. Although no monuments were directly hit in September 2022, the proximity of impacts shows their vulnerability. Similar patterns occurred in the February 2024 shelling of Nerqin Hand and the nearly daily bombardments near Khoznavar and Khnatsakh in spring 2025, which damaged private and community structures. Category 3 monuments face constant vulnerability. Unlike Category 1 monuments, which are already lost, or Category 2 monuments, which are functionally inaccessible, these monuments remain part of community life. However, communities live with the constant awareness that any escalation could change their status at any moment. Communities continue to use, maintain, and engage in practices related to these monuments, knowing that their preservation relies entirely on the unpredictable nature of geopolitical stability. There is an anticipatory sense of loss; the monuments exist now, but their future is highly uncertain.

**Syunik's Cultural Geography of Loss**

The three categories show how changes along the border lead to different forms of loss, rather than a single heritage crisis. Category 1 involves physical destruction and symbolic erasure, where heritage is actively eliminated. Category 2 refers to functional suspension, where heritage exists but cannot serve its social purposes. Category 3 is about precarious preservation, where heritage is maintained under the constant threat of violence. Together, these categories depict a vulnerability gradient from complete loss to fragile survival. These changes significantly affect communities' relationship to their heritage. When monuments are destroyed or made inaccessible, communities lose more than physical structures; they also lose anchors of collective memory, sites for ritual practices, and landmarks that shape their cultural landscapes. The move of the Tegh matagh from the pilgrimage sites to the village church shows how ritual practice can be displaced. The relocation of the khachkar from the "Greater and Lesser Syunik" memorial shows an emergency removal, but we have no evidence of how the khachkar is used now, so we do not claim a new commemorative practice around it. However, displacement carries its own cost. A relocated khachkar and a ritual moved to a village church are not the same as the monument and the practice in their original contexts. They carry traces of rupture, reminding communities of loss as much as preservation. Syunik exemplifies a "cultural geography of loss." It is a landscape where heritage varies in accessibility, and communities navigate restrictions on their own practices. Preservation relies on unstable geopolitical factors beyond local control. Heritage governance operates in an ongoing crisis, where standard preservation methods, which assume access, cannot be applied. The task is therefore less about maintaining a stable heritage landscape than about documenting, adapting, and remembering amid continual loss.

**The Tavush Case**

Where Syunik experiences a sudden break, Tavush Province faces long-standing heritage challenges. Unlike Syunik's quick shift in 2020 from a remote area to the frontline, Tavush has been a disputed border area

[8] Armenia, Republic of, Ministry of Defense, HH pashtpanutyan nakhararutyan haytararutyune. September 14, 2022 (in Armenian). Available at: https://tinyurl.com/cjtuu29z (accessed on November 02, 2026).

[9] S. Petrosyan, 2022-i yerkorya paterazmi hetevanqov hamaynqnerin u bnakichnerin patcharrvats vnasnern u korustnere. Hetq Investigative Journalists, January 20, 2023 (in Armenian). Available at: https://hetq.am/hy/article/152294 (accessed on November 02, 2026).

since the Soviet Union collapsed. The heritage crisis here is not simple; it is layered. Issues from the 1990s Artsakh war combine with post-2020 militarization. More recently, pressures have also come from the 2024 delimitation and demarcation and from Azerbaijan's intensified campaign to redefine cultural identities. Understanding Tavush's complex history is essential for grasping how heritage vulnerability evolves, how communities respond to ongoing insecurity, and how new geopolitical challenges add to past losses. The 2024 border changes represent a critical moment. The process, which began in spring 2024 near border villages such as Voskepar and Kirants, aims to create a clearly drawn, internationally recognized Armenia-Azerbaijan border for the first time since independence[10]. Delimitation defines the boundary line in agreed texts and maps; demarcation marks that line on the ground. While these are standard international procedures, they unfold amid power imbalances and ongoing territorial disputes. The immediate impact on heritage is significant: some previously accessible monuments are now just meters from newly marked borders. One, the Kirants "Eagle" khachkar, has been moved to avoid transfer to Azerbaijan. Others remain uncertain as demarcation proceeds along the entire eastern border.

**Albanianization**

Territorial pressures increase along with Azerbaijan's deliberate cultural appropriation, known as the "Albanianization thesis." This concept redefines Armenian heritage, especially medieval churches and monasteries, as belonging to ancient Caucasian Albanians, a distinct historical group in parts of the South Caucasus until early medieval times. By asserting a link between Caucasian Albania and modern Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani officials claim ownership over Armenian monuments, denying Armenian identity and historical continuity. This is not merely an academic dispute; it has real political implications. Monuments labeled as "Albanian" can be taken, altered, or destroyed without recognition of the targeted Armenian heritage. This narrative has roots in the 1930s Soviet era but was solidified in the 1960s by Soviet Azerbaijani historians, notably Z. Bunyadov, and developed further in the 1980s by D. Akhundov [10]. The Albanianization story evolved into a way of building Azerbaijani national identity, dominating through the 1980s. After the 2020 Artsakh war, it became more aggressive, transforming into a political tool for the Azerbaijani state aimed at claiming and reinterpreting Armenian heritage. As noted above, Armenian monuments in Nakhchivan were destroyed on a large scale between 1997 and 2006[11]. After 2020, similar trends have appeared in areas formerly controlled by Armenians in Artsakh, where churches lose their Armenian inscriptions and iconography, are relabeled as "Albanian," and are presented to the world as Azerbaijani heritage [10].

Parallel to this is the "Western Azerbaijan" thesis, which poses a more immediate threat to Armenia. This propaganda campaign asserts that Armenia's current territory—especially in the eastern and southern provinces—constitutes "Western Azerbaijan," lands that allegedly belong to Azerbaijan and should be repopulated by displaced Azerbaijanis. Baku has recently promoted this narrative, including through state-funded international events[12]. The main danger is that it is no longer limited to Azerbaijani and Turkish audiences but is spreading to other countries too. By labeling Tavush monuments as "Albanian" and claiming Tavush itself as "Western Azerbaijan," Azerbaijan establishes a dual framework for territorial and cultural appropriation. Thus, it asserts control over both the land and the heritage tied to it while rejecting the Armenian historical presence. For Tavush monuments, the risks come not just from possible military actions or border alterations but also from ongoing ideological campaigns that question their identity. Our 2023–2025 fieldwork in Tavush shows that we must understand monument status through these overlapping historical layers. We categorized Tavush monuments into two main groups with subcategories.

[10] Lurer, Sahmanazatman protsese 2024-in shat arrarkayatsav. Pashinyane arrajika qayleri masin. January 31, 2025 (in Armenian). Available at: https://1lurer.am/hy/news/1258100 (accessed on November 02, 2026).

[11] S. Maghakyan, S. Pickman, A Regime Conceals Its Erasure of Indigenous Armenian Culture. Hyperallergic, February 18, 2019. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/439t5wed (accessed on November 02, 2026).

[12] R. Canbäck, Azerbaijan's 'Western Azerbaijan' Campaign Exposed in Leaked Documents. OC Media, November 3, 2025. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/mw2nx5y5 (accessed on November 02, 2026).

**Category 1:** Status changed after the Soviet Union's collapse and the 1990s military operations

- 1a: Cross-border pilgrimage sites made inaccessible by border closures
- 1b: Border-adjacent monuments with fluctuating accessibility

**Category 2:** Status changed after the 44-day war and the 2024 demarcation

- 2a: Monuments affected by demarcation-delimitation processes
- 2b: Relocated monuments
- 2c: Monuments targeted by "Albanianization" discourse
- 2d: Monuments gaining new accessibility post-2020
- 2e: Monuments in former enclave territories

This captures Tavush's temporal complexity: some monuments have been vulnerable since the 1990s, others only recently, and some have undergone multiple status changes over time. Tracing these patterns helps to explain how border insecurity accumulates and how communities may develop long-term adaptive strategies.

**Category 1:** Soviet Union Collapse and 1990s Border Formation

The first category covers monuments whose status changed following the Soviet collapse and the 1990s Artsakh war. Throughout Tavush, along the province's entire border with Azerbaijan, the early 1990s saw military engagements that resulted in territorial and positional changes (Fig.6). These conflicts established a border regime that persisted, with varying tension, until 2020. For heritage, this created a contested borderland where monument accessibility became security-dependent: during relative calm, communities could approach border-adjacent sites; during escalations, the same monuments became unreachable.

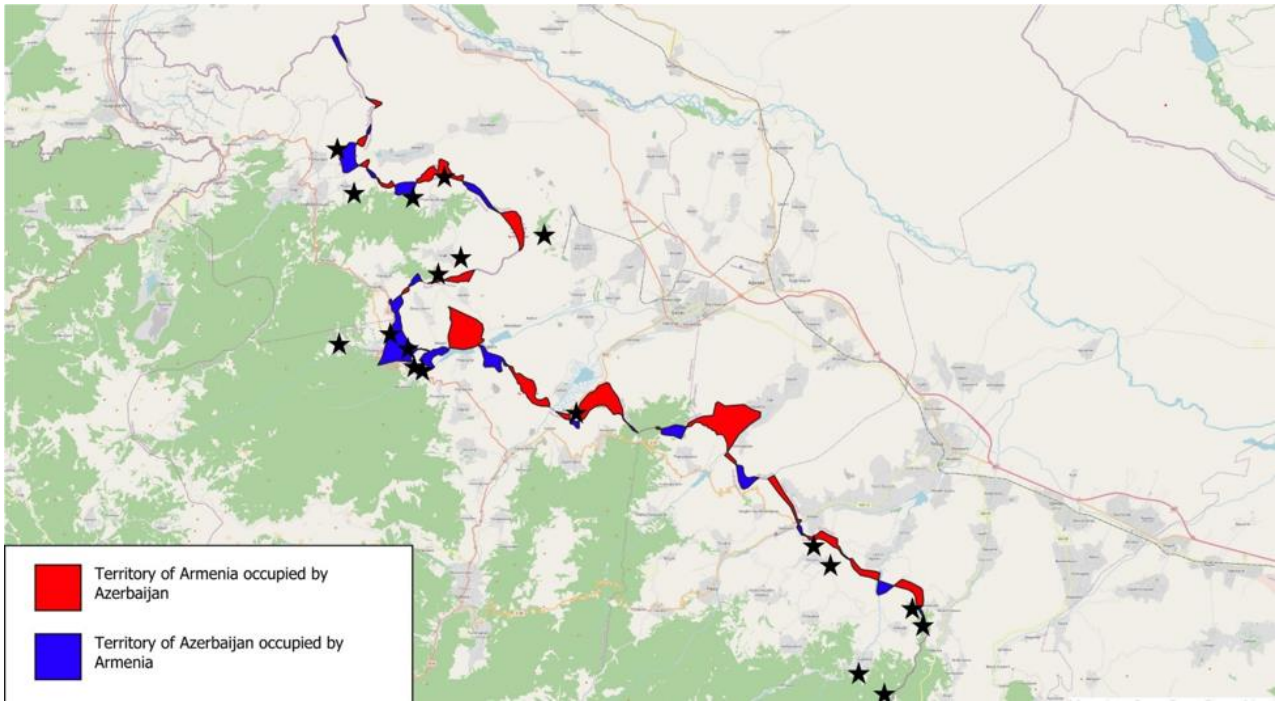



**Fig. 6.** *Border changes in the Tavush region and observed monuments. Map: SilverTheGamer, License: CC BY-SA 4.0*

*Subcategory 1a: Cross-Border Pilgrimage Sites*

We identified pilgrimage sites historically serving communities on both sides of what became the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. When the borders closed in the early 1990s, these sites became inaccessible

to pilgrims from the Azerbaijani side and, in the case of Holy Sargis, to the nearest Armenian villages (interviews 2 and 3), altering their function and meaning. The most significant is the Holy Sargis Monastery of Gaga Fortress. Documented in 12th-century literature and inscriptions, this sanctuary is one of the two most important sites dedicated to Saint Sargis the General in Armenia (with Holy Sargis of Ushi), where tradition says the martyred general's relics are preserved [11].

Until border closures, even during Soviet anti-religious campaigns, the monastery remained a key regional pilgrimage destination, visited by Armenians and Azerbaijani Muslims from the area, reflecting a multi-communal sacred geography. Border closure represented not just political division but rupture in religious practice and intercommunal connection. Holy Sargis lies on the Azerbaijani side of the line: on the 1985 map kept in the Berqaber museum, it falls within the Azerbaijan SSR, and residents of Koti and Berqaber, who can see it from their villages, have had no access to it for over thirty years. Its current condition is unknown, and we have no recent photograph (interviews 2 and 3). Its cross-border pilgrimage function has been suspended for the same period. This is a distinct form of heritage loss: the monument survives, but its historical role as a bridge between communities has been cut. The case shows how borders transform not just physical access but also the social and spiritual meanings of heritage sites.

*Subcategory 1b: Border-Adjacent Monuments with Fluctuating Access*

The second subcategory comprises monuments that became inaccessible or hard to reach after the border was established in the 1990s. Most monuments in this study belong here. Virtually all Tavush border settlements contain state-registered monuments that periodically become inaccessible during heightened tensions. The Khoranashat monastic complex in Chinari village (Fig.7) exemplifies this. This medieval monastery, architecturally and historically significant, sits close enough to the Azerbaijani-controlled side that during military confrontations, such as the July 2020 "Tavush battles", access becomes impossible due to direct fire risk and military restrictions.



**Fig. 7.** *Khoranashat monastery in Chinari village. Photo by Nzhdeh Yeranyan*

Similarly, the Aygehovit observation tower, Verin Yeghtsadzor church in Aygedzor, and numerous other sites have experienced decades of fluctuating status. During periods of relative stability, local communities can reach these sites for maintenance, documentation, or religious observance. During escalations, the same sites enter a security perimeter that bars civilians. These monuments' preservation and use depend largely on the military and political climate. Unlike monuments in neutral peacetime contexts where preservation planning can assume continuity, Tavush Category 1b monuments exist in permanent contingency.

Before the 2024 demarcation, Voskepar's Holy Mother of God Church also belonged here. For decades, the church occupied an ambiguous position: Armenian-controlled but dangerously close to Azerbaijani positions, making regular access risky. The 2024 demarcation changed this status (see Category 2). The example shows how individual monuments can migrate between categories as geopolitical conditions evolve: heritage vulnerability in border zones is dynamic, not static (Fig.8).

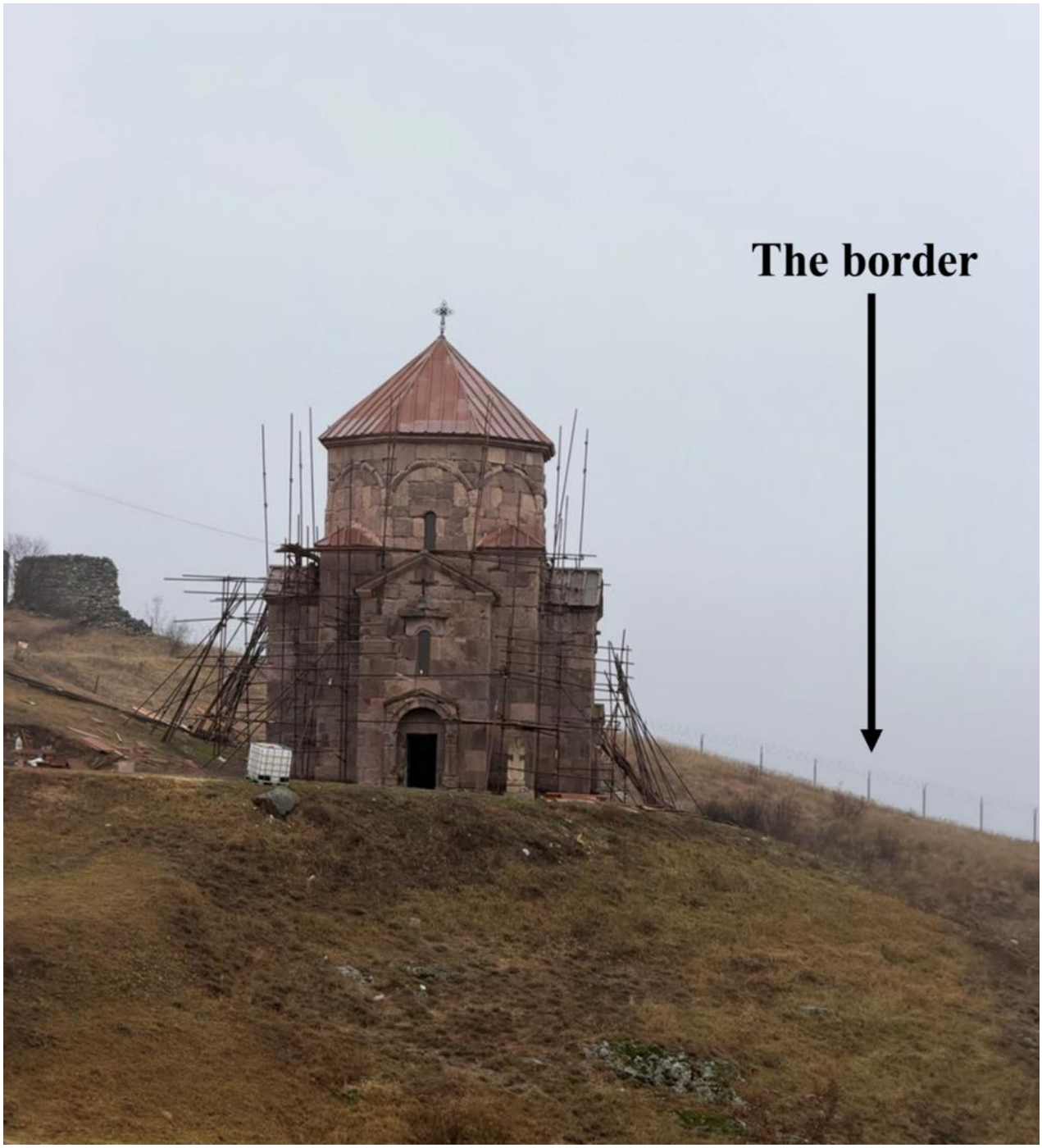



**Fig. 8.** *Voskepar church on the border. Photo by Hamazasp Abrahamyan*

**Category 2:** Post-2020 Developments

The second major category covers monuments whose status changed after the 44-day war and the border modifications that followed, especially the 2024 demarcation. It has five subcategories, each representing a distinct mechanism of status change.

*Subcategory 2a: Demarcation-Delimitation Effects*

As demarcation work progressed in spring 2024, several monuments that had previously stood in contested gray zones suddenly found themselves right next to the border or, in some cases, on the wrong side of newly marked boundaries. Voskepar's Holy Mother of God Church provides the clearest example. This early medieval church, dated to the seventh century [12], belongs to the "Mastara type" of Armenian ecclesiastical architecture, a distinctive form with a central dome and cruciform plan (like Holy John of Mastara, Holy Gregory of Harichavank, Holy George of Artik, Church of the Holy Apostles in Kars). It underwent major restoration in 1975–1977, and scaffolding (Fig.8) suggests that a new restoration is in progress.

After the 2024 demarcation, the church stands about 7 meters from the newly marked border (measured from the second line of barbed wire). While in Armenian-controlled territory, this proximity creates acute vulnerability. The church's security depends largely on the stability of an initialed but unsigned peace agreement and on the continuation of the current border arrangement. Any future military confrontation, border adjustment, or breakdown of the demarcation agreement could put this monument, which has stood for fourteen centuries, at risk of destruction or transfer to Azerbaijan. The church shows how precarious heritage remains in demarcated but still-contested borderlands.

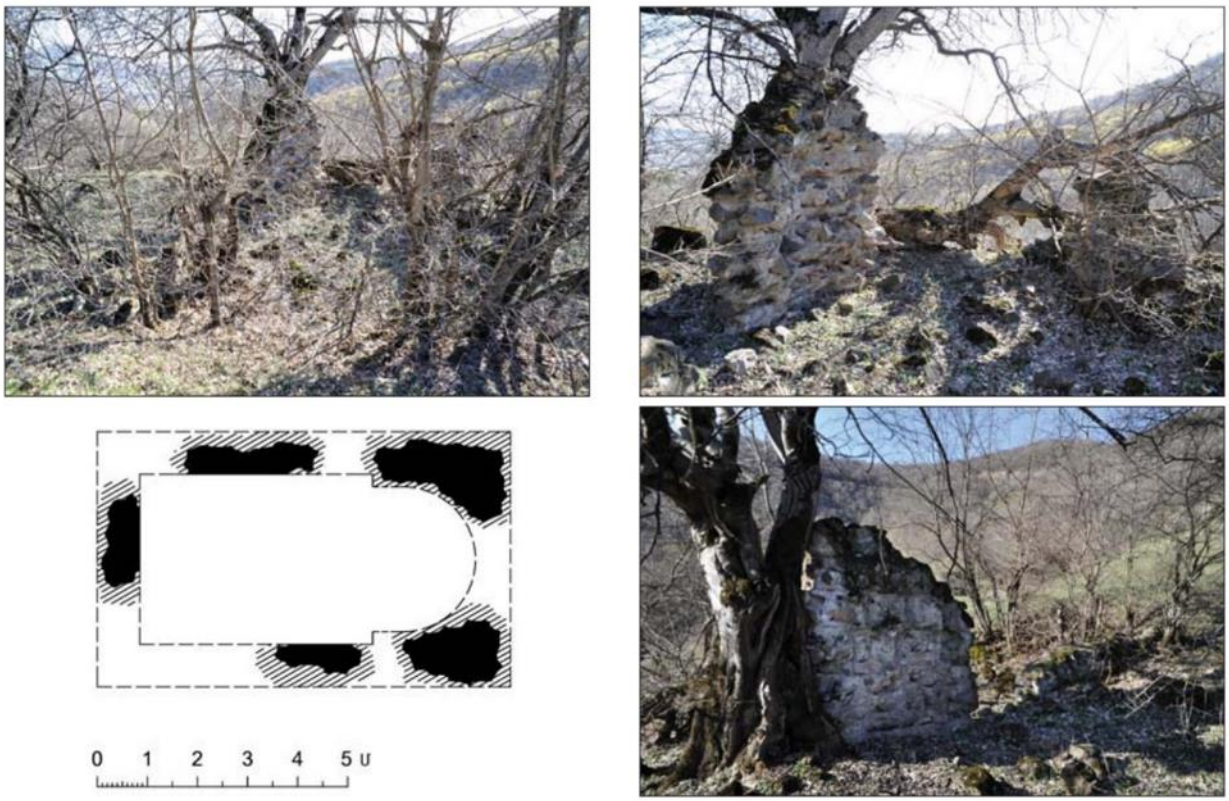



**Fig. 9.** *Gomadzor church in Voskepar: photographs and plan (measurement by Ashot Hakobian) [12]*

Gomadzor Church in Voskepar (Fig.9) faces an even more precarious situation. The church, also known as the church of Mukel Agha, stands on a forested slope on the left side of a small gorge, about 0.5 km southeast of the village [12]. It is a single-nave vaulted building measuring 8.25 × 5.10 m externally, with an entrance that probably opened on the south side. Only the lower parts of the wall cores survive, with traces of finely dressed stone facing; the authors of [12] date it probably to the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. It currently

stands in Armenian-controlled territory (N 41°03′33.60″, E 045°00′46.20″). Its transfer is a scenario, not an established change: if the demarcation line is implemented, the church would fall outside Armenian control. Unlike the Holy Mother of God Church, which stands 7 meters inside the border, Gomadzor is in administrative limbo: nominally Armenian, but positioned so that further demarcation could transfer it. This poses a preservation dilemma: should resources be invested in documenting and stabilizing a monument that may soon be lost? The case reveals how demarcation can create new categories of endangered heritage even without active warfare.

*Subcategory 2b: Relocated Monuments*

When monuments face imminent transfer to Azerbaijan, relocation may become the only way to preserve them. The Venice Charter regards a monument as inseparable from its setting, but Article 7 permits moving it where its safeguarding demands it[13]. Kirants' "Eagle" monument exemplifies this extreme measure (Fig.10). Erected in 2020 near the village entrance, this modern khachkar commemorated local history and identity. As the 2024 demarcation advanced, the khachkar was set to fall within the Azerbaijani-controlled section, along with several Kirants houses. After a new road bypassing the transferred territory was built, the authorities dismantled the khachkar, a step that was controversial, and re-erected it 400 meters from its original position[14].




**Fig. 10.** *Kirants' "Eagle" monument.*
*Photo source: https://shorturl.at/vUBS3*

The relocation of the "Eagle" monument mirrors the earlier emergency removal of the khachkar from Syunik's "Greater and Lesser Syunik" memorial. In both cases, the monument lost its original setting. Both also reflect the same constraint: in conflict zones, the choice is often between relocating a monument and seeing it destroyed. The relocated Kirants khachkar now stands as a monument not only to what it originally commemorated but also to displacement itself, a physical reminder that border changes have severed and reconfigured the community's cultural landscape.

These relocations raise questions for heritage theory and practice. International charters generally emphasize in situ preservation, on the grounds that monuments derive meaning from their relationship to place. But what happens when place itself becomes enemy territory? The Kirants and Syunik cases suggest that, in extreme circumstances, preservation may require accepting displacement, with a loss of setting and integrity that is real but not itself a breach of conservation doctrine. This points to a further category of heritage: relocated monuments that witness geopolitical violence and bear the scars of removal while continuing to function as commemorative objects.

[13] ICOMOS, International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The Venice Charter), 1964. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/3vh9t6y8 (accessed on November 02, 2026).
[14] MonumentWatch Initiative, “Eagle” Monument of Kirants Dismantled. November 19, 2024. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/ys4ds76s (accessed on November 02, 2026).

*Subcategory 2c: Albanianization Targets*

A further threat to Tavush monuments is discursive appropriation through Azerbaijan's Albanianization campaign. After the 2024 demarcation, Azerbaijani media described several Tavush churches as "Albanian monuments"[15], which we read as a signal of intent to reinterpret these structures' historical identity should they come under Azerbaijani control. Holy Trinity Church of Kirants and Holy Mother of God Church of Voskepar have been specifically named, with the claim that other monuments in the region share the same "status."

Holy Trinity Church of Kirants is a nineteenth-century three-nave basilica built of local rough-hewn stone, a type common throughout the region (compare Holy George of Barekamavan, Holy Mother of God of Achajur). In the Soviet era, the church was converted into a warehouse. The current restoration aims to return the structure to its original appearance. Its most distinctive feature is three pairs of complete stone columns supporting the roof. Critically, the date "1888" is preserved on the upper exterior of the southern sacristy window, next to a fragment of an Armenian inscription. Together they attest both the construction date and the church's Armenian character.

Yet Azerbaijan's Albanianization narrative dismisses such evidence. By claiming medieval and even 19th-century Armenian churches are actually "Albanian," Azerbaijani authorities create a framework of cultural appropriation that operates independently of historical fact. The designation serves several functions: it legitimizes potential territorial claims (if heritage is "Albanian"/Azerbaijani, the territory should be too); erases Armenian historical presence; and, judging by what happened to Armenian monuments in Nakhchivan and Artsakh, may prepare the ground for alteration or destruction should they fall under Azerbaijani control. The fate of Armenian churches in Nakhchivan and post-2020 Artsakh, where inscriptions were removed, interiors stripped, and Armenian iconography replaced [10], suggests that Albanianization is not merely rhetorical but can serve as a blueprint for physical transformation.

Voskepar's Holy Mother of God Church faces the same discursive threat. As noted, this is a seventh-century church of the Armenian Mastara type. The church is cruciform in plan. Its crosses, set on spheres with ribbed additions to the cross-arms, resemble anchors or ship keels, a characteristic Armenian architectural motif [13]. No Albanian inscriptions, symbols, or architectural elements are known. Yet its "Albanian" designation in Azerbaijani media[16] puts it on a potential list of appropriation targets. Standing 7 meters from the border, the church is doubly vulnerable: physically (proximity to a militarized boundary) and symbolically (targeting by Albanianization discourse).

*Subcategory 2d: New Accessibility Gains*

Paradoxically, some Tavush monuments gained access after the 44-day war, revealing the uneven and sometimes counterintuitive effects of geopolitical change. Before the war, frequent skirmishes along the Tavush border culminated in the July 2020 "Tavush battles." During these, border monuments became inaccessible. During the 44-day war and the period that followed, when military attention shifted to the Artsakh borders, no military clashes were recorded in Tavush (interview with Samvel Saghoyan, head of Chinari village). With no fighting in the region, even border-adjacent monuments under observation became accessible.

This includes previously hard-to-reach sites such as the Khoranashat church in Chinari, the Holy Mother of God Church in Voskepar (before the 2024 demarcation brought it within 7 meters of the border), Berdavan Fortress, and others. Communities could approach these for religious observance, maintenance, and documentation in ways impossible during active confrontation periods. This temporary improvement shows

[15] MonumentWatch Initiative, Azerbaijani Reactions to the Renovation Works of Kirants and Voskepar Churches. June 13, 2024. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/46fm7x5b (accessed on November 02, 2026).
[16] Ibid.

that heritage accessibility in border zones is not simply a function of proximity but depends on how military attention and conflict intensity are distributed at a given moment.

However, improved accessibility proved short-lived for many sites. The 2024 demarcation process and renewed border tensions again restricted access to several temporarily reachable monuments (for example, Verin Yeghtsadzor in Aygedzor, the Aygehovit watchtower, and numerous khachkars and gravestones; fieldwork, 2024). The pattern shows how volatile heritage status in conflict zones can be: monuments can move from inaccessible to accessible and back within a few years, depending on shifting military and diplomatic circumstances. This volatility makes long-term preservation planning very difficult and points to the need for flexible, adaptive heritage governance.

*Subcategory 2e: Former Enclave Territories*

Finally, we considered monuments in former enclave territories, that is, Armenian villages surrounded by Azerbaijani territory in the Soviet period, and vice versa, such as the monuments of the Upper Voskepar enclave [12]. The 44-day war and the trilateral statement of 9–10 November 2020 triggered discussion of a possible reactivation of the enclave issue, with various parties circulating proposals for territorial exchange or access arrangements (Armenpress, https://armenpress.am/en/article/1262858, accessed 15 October 2026). These discussions created deep uncertainty for monuments in or near former enclave territories.

The status of monuments in this subcategory remains officially unclear, leaving them in administrative and legal limbo. Are they secure within Armenia's internationally recognized borders, or could they become subject to future territorial arrangements? The ambiguity itself creates a preservation problem: communities and heritage authorities do not know whether to invest in long-term conservation or prepare for potential loss. This uncertainty adds a psychological burden for border communities, who face not only present insecurity but also the prospect of future territorial concessions affecting monuments they have looked after for generations.

The complexity of Tavush's heritage situation, which spans several categories and subcategories, several historical moments and several kinds of threat, reveals a pattern different from Syunik's. While Syunik experienced a sudden rupture, Tavush shows accumulated, multi-temporal vulnerability. Monuments here face not a single crisis but a series of overlapping pressures: decades-old accessibility issues from the 1990s; renewed militarization after 2020; the physical reconfiguration of the border in the 2024 demarcation; and the ideological threat of Albanianization, backed by "Western Azerbaijan" territorial claims.

This layered vulnerability produces distinct community responses. In Syunik, the only documented adaptation is moving the Tegh matagh to the village church. In Tavush, communities have lived with heritage insecurity over three decades. In our interviews, communities describe continued use of accessible sites, distrust of the border arrangement, and local memory work such as the Berqaber museum (see the extracts below).

The interview extracts below illustrate these responses. Asked whether the risk that Voskepar’s church might pass to the other side had gone, a Voskepar resident answered: “It has not gone, of course it has not gone, as long as there is no clear border”, and said that local people look at the border “mostly with distrust” (interview 1, 11 May 2024). The same resident described the area around the church as open to visitors without a permit. In Berqaber, the director of the village museum, founded in the 1960s, keeps a Grad shell fired at the founder’s house among its exhibits. The museum has no photograph of Holy Sargis, the largest monument left beyond the line, “because for over thirty years it has been seized and we have no access there” (interview 3, 12 May 2024).

**Table 1.** Comparative inventory of the sites discussed

| Site (type, period) | Control as of September 2026 | Physical condition | Access | Reported threat | Category | Evidence and confidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| **SYUNIK** | | | | | | |
| "Greater and Lesser Syunik" memorial (2004; khachkar added 2007) | Azerbaijani since Mar–Apr 2023[17] | Standing structure not visible in April 2024 imagery vs April 2022; destruction reported[18], khachkar removed 3 Apr 2023 | None | Realized | Syunik 1 | Satellite pair + MonumentWatch: disappearance high; cause reported |
| Qarahunj monuments (more than 10 of c. 58 registered; incl. Harani Gorge, Surik's Lake, Siridzh Fortress) | On the border | Unknown | Difficult or none; worsened 2024 | Inaccessibility and lack of control | Syunik 2 | Authors' figures |
| Srneghtsi church, Tegh (Fig.4) | Armenian | Standing church | None since 2022 (community members) | Under Azerbaijani observation since Sept. 2022 | Syunik 2 | Authors' figures |
| Kotrats Eghtsi, Tegh | Armenian | Partially ruined church | None since 2022 (community members) | As above | Syunik 2 | Interview, Tegh village, 2024 |
| Shurnukh Crosses, Kornidzor (Fig.5) | Armenian; 200–300 m from border | Partially ruined monument | Restricted; three warning signs; fields still used; closed in tension | Border proximity | Syunik 2 | Field observation, 30 October 2023 |
| Registered monuments near shelled buildings (Akner, Verishen, Tegh; Nerqin Hand; Khoznavar, Khnatsakh) | Armenian | No monument directly hit (2022); physical condition varies | Accessible | Shelling of nearby structures | Syunik 3 | [9][19] |

[17] MonumentWatch Initiative, The "Greater and Lesser Syunik" Memorial on the Border of Syunik and Artsakh Came Under the Control of Azerbaijan, Appearing Under Threat of Destruction. April 18, 2023. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/4rp4feb9 (accessed on November 02, 2026).

[18] MonumentWatch Initiative, Ochnchatsvel e Adrbejani verahskoghutyan tak antsats Mets ev Pokr Syunik hushardzane. July 31, 2024 (in Armenian). Available at: https://tinyurl.com/574y868a (accessed on November 02, 2026).

[19] Armenia, Republic of, Ministry of Defense, HH pashtpanutyan nakhararutyan haytararutyune. September 14, 2022 (in Armenian). Available at: https://tinyurl.com/cjtuu29z (accessed on November 02, 2026).

Table 1 (continued)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **TAVUSH** | | | | | | |
| Holy Sargis Monastery, Gaga | Azerbaijani side (1985 map: Azerbaijan SSR; interviews 2, 3) | Unknown: no access for over 30 years, no recent photograph | None for the nearest Armenian villages since the early 1990s; visible from Koti and Berqaber | Completely inaccessible | Tavush 1a | Interviews 2, 3 (12 May 2024); 1985 map (Berqaber museum); [11] |
| Khoranashat monastery, Chinari (Fig.7) | Armenian | Medieval monastic complex | Impossible during fighting (July 2020); open after 2020 | Fire risk in escalation | Tavush 1b, 2d | Fieldwork 2024 |
| Aygehovit tower; Verin Yeghtsadzor church (Aygedzor) | Armenian | Medieval three-story watchtower | Fluctuating | Escalation | Tavush 1b | Fieldwork 2024 |
| Holy Mother of God Church, Voskepar (7th c.; Fig.8) | Armenian | Restoration in progress? (scaffolding, Fig.8) | Open without a permit at interview date (interview 1); restricted in tension (fieldwork, October 2023) | Proximity (c. 7m, measured from the second line of barbed wire); named "Albanian"[20] | Tavush 1b, 2a, 2c, 2d | Photograph 7 December 2025; distance measured from the second line of barbed wire |
| Gomadzor church, Voskepar (probably 12th–13th c.; Fig.9) | Armenian | Core walls only | Still accessible | Scenario: transfer if demarcation continues [12] | Tavush 2a | Photographs, plan and description [12]; scenario [12] (23 July 2023) |
| "Eagle" khachkar, Kirants (2020; Fig.10) | Original site in section to be transferred | Dismantled; re-erected c. 400 m away | Accessible | Realized (relocated) | Tavush 2b | Photograph 7 December 2025[21] |
| Holy Trinity Church, Kirants (19th c., 1888 inscription) | Armenian | Restoration in progress | Accessible | Named "Albanian"[22] | Tavush 2c | Field observation |
| Berdavan Fortress | Armenian | Standing | Gained access after 2020 | Renewed access restrictions (see text) | Tavush 2d | Field observation |
| Monuments in former enclave territories | Unclarified | Varies by site | Variable | Future arrangements uncertain | Tavush 2e | [12]; Armenpress (accessed 15 October 2026) |

[20] MonumentWatch Initiative, Azerbaijani Reactions to the Renovation Works of Kirants and Voskepar Churches. June 13, 2024. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/46fm7x5b (accessed on November 02, 2026).
[21] MonumentWatch Initiative, "Eagle" Monument of Kirants Dismantled. November 19, 2024. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/ys4ds76s (accessed on November 02, 2026).
[22] MonumentWatch Initiative, Azerbaijani Reactions to the Renovation Works of Kirants and Voskepar Churches. June 13, 2024. Available at: https://tinyurl.com/46fm7x5b (accessed on November 02, 2026).

**Conclusion**

This comparative analysis shows that border shifts do not merely redraw territorial lines—they restructure the conditions under which heritage exists, reshaping cultural landscapes, reconfiguring communities' relationships to their own past, and exposing monuments to new and unevenly distributed forms of vulnerability. Comparing two regions with divergent border histories lets us move beyond a single-case account toward a broader argument: heritage vulnerability in militarized border zones is not uniform, but in these two cases, its character appears shaped by the *temporality*, *militarization*, and *geopolitical instrumentalization* of border change. These findings carry implications that extend beyond the specific regions studied here.

Sudden border ruptures and gradual, accumulated border contestation do not merely differ in speed — they produce qualitatively distinct experiences of loss and, correspondingly, different demands on heritage governance. When rupture is abrupt, communities may face shock, dislocation, and the need for rapid adaptation with little preparatory time. When vulnerability accumulates over decades, communities may instead develop anticipatory grief and long-term coping strategies, adaptations that are themselves fragile and can be overwhelmed by new pressures layered on top of old ones. We offer these as interpretations (see the limits noted below). This suggests that heritage protection frameworks built around a single, generic model of "conflict heritage" or "heritage at risk" may not capture this difference: policy and preservation responses need to be calibrated to whether a community is confronting sudden trauma or cumulative erosion, since these call for different forms of support, timelines for intervention, and modes of documentation.

Vulnerability in border zones is inherently multi-dimensional. Our analysis indicates that monuments in contested border regions are rarely endangered by a single mechanism. Instead, physical destruction from military action, administrative jeopardy from boundary demarcation, functional loss from restricted access, and symbolic erasure through appropriation operate simultaneously and often independently. A monument can remain physically intact while becoming functionally lost to the community that once maintained it, administratively vulnerable to future transfer, or symbolically targeted for reinterpretation — sometimes all three at once, sometimes on entirely different timelines. This challenges heritage-management frameworks developed for peacetime contexts, which tend to conceptualize risk primarily in physical terms (damage, decay, structural integrity). Extending Smith's [1] process-based conception of heritage, our findings suggest that in militarized border contexts, "risk" must be understood as encompassing access, governance status, and symbolic contestation together — not physical condition alone. This has a practical corollary: documentation and monitoring systems designed for conflict-affected heritage should track these dimensions independently, since intact structures can still represent active and escalating losses.

Heritage loss in border zones is inseparable from disrupted community practice. Beyond damage to monuments themselves, our findings point to a subtler and more pervasive form of loss: the severing of the practices — pilgrimage, ritual, maintenance, commemoration — through which communities continually reconstitute their relationship to heritage sites. This aligns with, and extends, Smith's [1] and Harrison's [2] argument that heritage is not a static inheritance but an ongoing social process; when access is cut, or a site's status becomes uncertain, it is the process itself that is disrupted, not merely an object that is lost. We term this broader pattern a "cultural geography of loss" to capture how border change reorganizes the relationship between people and place at a scale larger than any individual monument — relocating rituals, reshaping collective memory, and altering the everyday geography through which identity is enacted. This suggests that heritage governance in contested border regions cannot be adequately addressed through physical conservation alone; it must also attend to the maintenance, or deliberate adaptation, of the practices that give heritage its social meaning.

Taken together, these findings suggest a more general reframing of how heritage is threatened in militarized border contexts: not as a static object subject to a bounded set of physical risks, but as a relationship — between

people, place, and practice — that is continuously vulnerable to the ongoing, unfinished process of border-making itself. Just as Paasi [7,8] argues that borders are perpetually produced rather than fixed, our findings suggest that heritage vulnerability along contested frontiers is similarly an ongoing condition rather than a discrete event, requiring monitoring, protection, and community-support frameworks that can respond to threats evolving in tandem with the border itself. The typology may be worth testing in other contested, actively negotiated, or intermittently militarized borderlands, such as those in the Balkans or South Asia. If it holds there, the governance challenge would be similar: protecting heritage in such contexts means protecting not only structures, but the ongoing relationships between communities and the places that hold their memory.

Our evidence on community responses comes mainly from Tavush, where we recorded interviews; for Syunik it consists of field observation, imagery, published reports and one interview in Tegh village. The distinction we draw between sudden and accumulated loss is therefore tested here chiefly on the monuments and their status, and only tentatively on how communities experience loss. A study based on systematically recorded and analyzed interviews in Syunik villages, such as Tegh and Kornidzor, would show whether the distinction also appears in how people describe it.

**Acknowledgment**

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Higher Educational and Scientific Committee of the Republic of Armenia for supporting this research within the framework of project 23RL-6A006, “Interdisciplinary Armenian Cultural Heritage Studies”.

**Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**Funding**

The research is supported by the Higher Educational and Scientific Committee of the Republic of Armenia, project 23RL-6A006 "Interdisciplinary Armenian Cultural Heritage Studies".

**Ethics Statement**

The study followed the Journal’s Research Ethics and Integrity Statement. The interviews cited in the article were open, semi-structured conversations held in Armenian during fieldwork. In Tavush, three conversations were recorded on 11 and 13 May 2024, lasting about one and a half hours each, with residents of Voskepar and Koti and the director of the village museum in Berqaber. We recorded five further interviews in Tegh village, Syunik, in 2024. Before each conversation, participants were told the aims of the research and how the material would be used, and they gave informed oral consent to the recording and to the use of their words in publication. Interviewees are identified only by place and year of the interview, not by name.

**References**

[1]. L. Smith, Uses of Heritage. Routledge, London, 2006.
[2]. R. Harrison, Heritage: Critical Approaches. Routledge, London, 2013.
[3]. J.E. Tunbridge, G.J. Ashworth, Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 1996.
[4]. G.J. Ashworth, B. Graham, J.E. Tunbridge, Pluralising Pasts: Heritage, Identity and Place in Multicultural Societies. Pluto Press, London, 2007.
[5]. L. Meskell, A Future in Ruins: UNESCO, World Heritage, and the Dream of Peace. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018.
[6]. R. Bevan, The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War, 2nd ed. Reaktion Books, London, 2016.
[7]. A. Paasi, Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 1996.
[8]. A. Paasi, Boundaries as Social Processes: Territoriality in the World of Flows. Geopolitics, 3 (1), 1998, 69–88. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14650049808407608

[9]. H. Abrahamyan, Hushardzane sahmanin. Pahpanutyune ev matcheliutyune. History and Culture, 21 (2), 2024, 220–234. DOI: https://doi.org/10.46991/hc.2024.21.2.220 (in Armenian).
[10]. H. Petrosyan, A. Leyloyan-Yekmalyan, H. Muradyan, A. Tigranyan, Azerbaijan's Policy of Extortion and Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage in Arts'akh, in: I. Dorfmann-Lazarev, H. Khatchadourian (eds.), Monuments and Identities in the Caucasus: Karabagh, Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan in Contemporary Geopolitical Conflict. Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2023, 391–408.
[11]. S. Karapetian, Hyusisayin Artsakh. RAA Scientific Research Series, Book 6. Gitutiun Publishing House of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, 2007 (in Armenian).
[12]. S. Karapetian, E. Abrahamian, A. Hakobian, R. Kortoshian, G. Movsissian, H. Hovhannissian, A. Gevorgian, The Historical Monuments of Voskepar. Research on Armenian Architecture, Yerevan, 2013.
[13]. H. Petrosyan, Khachkar. Tsagume, gortsarruyte, patkeragrutyune, imastabanutyune. Printinfo, Yerevan, 2008 (in Armenian).

***Hamazasp Abrahamyan, Researcher*** *(RA, Yerevan) - Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography; History Museum of Armenia, abrahamyanhamazasp@gmail.com*
***Haykuhi Muradyan, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Cultural Studies*** *(RA, Yerevan) - Yerevan State University, Associate Professor at the Chair of Cultural Studies; Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Head of the Cultural Heritage Monitoring Research Group, haykuhi.muradyan@gmail.com*