THE ROLE OF SPRING MONUMENTS IN SHAPING THE MONUMENTAL LANDSCAPE OF MOVSES VILLAGE, TAVUSH PROVINCE

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Abstract: *This article provides a cultural analysis of spring monuments in Movses, a border settlement in Tavush Province, Armenia. The study aims to reveal how these structures were shaped by the interaction of local traditions, Soviet cultural policies, and spatial conditions, while also considering the possible role of environmental factors. It employs a combination of methods, including fieldwork, architectural and typological analyses, and spatial comparison. This approach enables the study of spring monuments not only as water infrastructure but also as essential elements in shaping community memory, identity, and the cultural landscape. The case of Movses demonstrates that springs function as living cultural heritage, blending prototypes of medieval springs, Soviet-era monument traditions, and contemporary expressions of memory. This research also contributes to studies of border communities by emphasizing how medieval traditions and modern cultural practices continue to influence community memory and landscape development.*

Keywords: *spring monument, memorial policy, memory practice, Tavush, Movses Village.*

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Introduction

This article examines spring monuments as a key element influencing the construction of new monuments in Movses. It analyzes how their traditional types formed, the subsequent developments they underwent, and the reasons behind these changes. The choice of Movses village is due to the high number of spring monuments there (24 documented, Fig.1). The study poses several important questions: why are spring monuments so prevalent in Movses; what role do springs play in the daily lives of residents; whether their commonality is connected to climate features; whether the tradition of spring construction, which became popular during the Soviet era, persists; and what influence these monuments have had on shaping community identity, memory, and daily culture.

The research uses integrated methods that combine analysis of historical sources, field research, architectural and typological studies, and spatial comparative analysis.

Fieldwork conducted in Movses in 2024–2025 included observing springs, interviewing residents, and holding focus group discussions, which revealed the cultural and social significance of springs within the community. Within the framework of the study, approximately 15 local residents were interviewed, including the village administrative head, the school principal, a history teacher, the priest, and other community members. The selection of interviewees was based on purposive sampling, taking into account the recommendations of the aforementioned individuals, as well as the participation of residents encountered during the field reconnaissance of the monuments.

Architectural and compositional analysis focuses on the structural, volumetric, and morphological features of the springs to determine the influence of medieval prototypes and their modern developments [1].

In a broader context, a comparative analysis was conducted to compare the number of documented springs in Movses with that of other villages—especially Aygedzor, Barekamavan, Koti, and Dovegh—to assess how distinctive Movses's spring heritage is; the possible role of climatic factors is treated as a hypothesis.

This approach integrates historical, material, and socio-cultural data to reveal the distinctive features of Movses's spring-monument landscape.

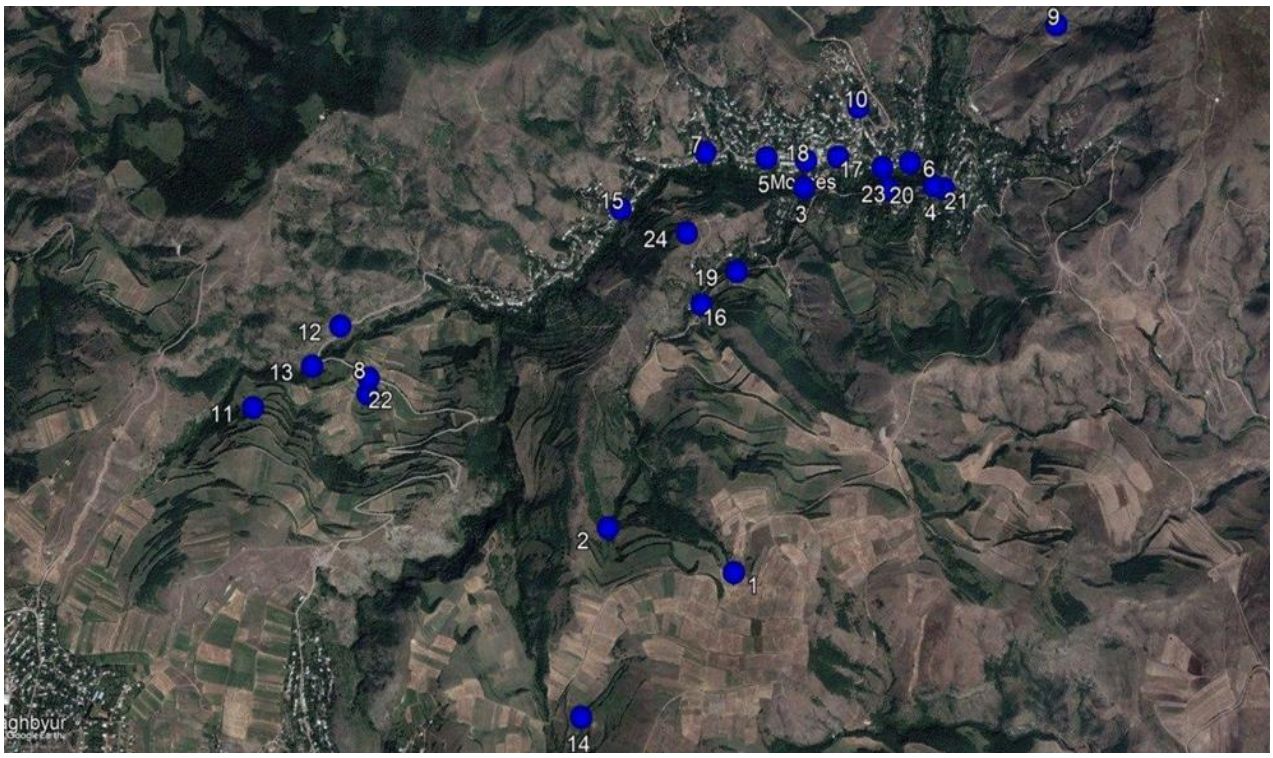


Fig. 1. *Map of the Location of the Springs Monuments in Movses*

Spring Monuments of Movses Village

The border village of Movses is situated in Tavush Province, Armenia, near the Armenian–Azerbaijani border in the northeast (coordinates: 40.9056311, 45.4910263). Its current residents migrated here in the 18th century from the Jraberd district of Artsakh (Karabakh). The village is also known as Moses, Movsesgyugh, and Movsesgegh. Its name originates from the former settlement of "Old Movses," which existed in this area between the 14th and 17th centuries [2].

Within the scope of Armenian spring development, the Movses settlement is particularly important. The earliest springs date back to the medieval period, including the Gyulluk and Old Movses springs. In the pre-Soviet era, the Yerraghbyur (Three Springs) spring is also documented. Later, the tradition of spring construction was "revived" during the Soviet period, influenced by Soviet memorial policies, and gained renewed momentum in the post-Soviet era, largely preserving Soviet-era traditions [2][1]. In Armenia, the widespread presence of springs is closely linked to the country's dry climate and historical water scarcity. As a result, water supply and drainage issues were critical factors in selecting settlement locations and building patterns. The availability of natural springs (akars) was especially valued, initially for household use and later for irrigation needs [3]. The possible relationship between the abundance of springs and the settlement's natural environment is considered a research hypothesis. Movses's mild temperate climate, forested surroundings, and location along the low-lying banks of the Mosesget River may have contributed to the availability of water resources. However, the direct influence of these environmental factors on the construction and distribution of spring monuments requires further investigation.

Primary water sources, often reliant on natural conditions, frequently dried up due to natural disasters such as earthquakes and climate change. As a result, existing settlements, fortresses, and monastic complexes were compelled to find new water sources and develop water-supply systems, eventually leading to the creation of

[1] It should be noted that of the 24 springs we documented, only two are included in the State List of Immovable Monuments of History and Culture of the Tavush Province of the Republic of Armenia (entries 10.45, village of Mosesgegh, nos. 11 and 12: https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/13320). This situation is likely because the monument register was compiled as early as the 1980s, mainly focusing on springs with classical architectural features and those built under state initiative.

spring monuments that commemorated and preserved these efforts[2] [4-7]. Numerous written records, rock-cut inscriptions, khachkars, and other monuments testify to and honor the construction of water-supply systems and springs. Water was culturally sacred, and a central theme was attributing healing properties to it, much like the healing functions often associated with Christian sacred sites [8].

During research in Movses, 24 spring monuments were documented (Table 1). For comparison, springs were also studied in Aygedzor, Barekamavan, Koti, and Dovegh, where no more than three springs were documented in each: three in Aygedzor, two in Barekamavan, three in Dovegh, and two in Koti (both of the latter being included in the State List of Immovable Historical and Cultural Monuments of Tavush Province, Republic of Armenia). Thus, Movses has a considerably larger number of documented spring monuments than the other settlements studied. This comparison is based only on the number of documented springs and does not claim to establish their density.

The earliest springs mentioned in the village are the Gyulluk and Old Movses springs; however, nothing is known about their architectural appearance. The next spring monument in the village, chronologically, is the Yerraghbyur (Three Springs) spring, which locals also refer to as Sarnaghbyur, the Great Spring, Three Springs, or the Lovers' Spring (Fig.2). According to local accounts, the spring was built by local craftsmen as early as the 19th century, and its source ("akar") was located on-site. From the 18th to the early 20th centuries, springs were among the most important social, economic, and cultural structures in settlements, especially in rural areas. They provided drinking water to people and were also used to water livestock.

Generally, these springs were open-air structures without roofs, consisting solely of a water-collecting basin, the source, and a trough. Meanwhile, some springs had covered source areas, occasionally included architectural or sculptural details, and often bore commemorative inscriptions [9].

The Yerraghbyur spring belongs to the same volumetric-architectural type as other contemporary springs, with one difference: this site has three springs (hence the name). It lacks a water-collecting basin, a covered source, or any commemorative inscriptions or sculptural details. According to residents, the spring was once the village's only water source, and people would wake up at 4-5 a.m. to fetch water (Field Ethnographic Materials, interview with informant J. B.). During the Soviet period, as in other settlements in Soviet Armenia, spring monuments dedicated to the victims of the Great Patriotic War (World War II) were also built in Movses[3] [10-13]. The earliest of these monuments, located within the village's residential area, dates to 1962 (Fig. 3).

[2] The earliest monumentalization of springs, or water in general, can be seen in vishap (dragon) stelae. Several scholars suggest that these monuments were erected near water sources and springs and were linked to the water cult [4-6]. As fully developed architectural structures, the earliest springs in Armenia date from the 5th to 7th centuries. Excavations at Dvin uncovered remains of a spring system where water was transported through clay pipelines and discharged via a horizontal spout within a vertical slab [7]. From the 12th to the 13th centuries onward, springs took on increasingly complex architectural designs. These include structures with single, double, and sometimes triple arches, usually featuring a semi-open hall. Inside the hall, one often finds a water-collecting basin, a spring outlet, and a trough (examples include Haghpat, Tatev, Sanahin, Makaravank, Khorakert, and others). This architectural style continued until the 18th–19th centuries, though on a smaller scale (such as the springs at Surb Gayane, Sanahin, the Failabazar spring in Yerevan, the T'yaki spring, and others). This architectural tradition acquired a new commemorative significance during the Soviet period. In particular, when architect Rafael Israelyan began designing memorials dedicated to the victims of the Great Patriotic War, he drew upon the architectural prototypes of medieval Armenian springs. Their characteristic forms and spatial organization were reinterpreted within the framework of modern memorial architecture, linking the historical tradition of spring construction to the emerging practice of commemorative monument building. Thus, medieval spring architecture became not merely a formal reference but also a source of inspiration for developing a distinctive memorial typology in the Soviet period.

[3] It should be noted that, following the establishment of Soviet rule in Armenia, the Communist Party and the government undertook substantial initiatives aimed at the construction of new monuments in Soviet Armenia. These efforts were carried out both as ideological propaganda and as part of the broader project of shaping a new "national and socialist" cultural landscape [10,11]. At the same time, the Tsarist government not only failed to encourage but actively impeded the erection of monuments dedicated to prominent cultural figures of smaller nations, including the Armenian people [12]. The Great Patriotic War introduced important adjustments, and during the war years, this policy appears to have shifted. The Soviet authorities moderated their stance toward religion and religious institutions, while religious and cultural heritage was increasingly instrumentalized in constructing new national cultures [13]. Thus, it may be argued that conditions were gradually created for the development of monument-building practices incorporating national motifs and symbolic elements. In Movses, the Soviet commemorative culture in the village is reflected in monuments dating to different periods and representing various architectural forms. In particular, spring monuments were constructed in the 1960s, which can be regarded as a distinctive manifestation of Soviet-era monument building in Armenia. Later, in the 1980s, a statue of a kneeling soldier on a tall pedestal was erected in the courtyard of the village House of Culture. These monuments show that commemorative practices in the community continued across decades of the Soviet period, taking on diverse artistic and compositional forms. From the 1990s onward, springs were built mainly at the initiative of the relatives and friends of the deceased, showing a shift from the state level to the family and community level.

Table 1. List of Spring Monuments in Movses

N	Spring Monument	Date	Inscription/Information
1.	Old Movses Spring	14th-17th centuries	The spring is still preserved but has no architectural structure.
2.	Gyulluk Spring, later Yerjanik Spring	14th-17th centuries, current structure 1982	Dedicated by friends to the memory of my son Yerjanik Youzbashi Hovakimyan (1959–1980), killed in Democratic Afghanistan, and the young people of Movses who died in the Great Patriotic War. The dates 1959–1980 given on the monument are the years of birth and death of Yerjanik Hovakimyan, who was killed in Afghanistan in the spring of 1980; they do not refer to the victims of the Great Patriotic War.
3.	Yerraghbyur Spring	19th century	Later, a khachkar was installed nearby, dedicated to Hamlet Khachatryan.
4.	Spring Monument dedicated to the Great Patriotic War	1962	----
5.	Soviet-period classical spring monument	1960s	----
6.	Soviet-period classical spring monument	1960s	Broken
7.	Artur Poladyan Spring	1960s, rebuilt 2009	Inscription after reconstruction: dedicated to Artur Poladyan.
8.	Spring monument dedicated to Karlen Ivani Avalyan (Loris Spring)	1970s	"With hope, light, and work, I came into the world—Master of plow, song, and steering. Enchanted by the love of a wife and the cry of a child. Victim of fate at an early age. To the renowned mechanizer Karlen Ivani Avalyan (1930–1966) from his friends. Loris."
9.	Vladimir Papyan Spring	1997–1998	Built in 1997–1998 in memory of Vladimir Papyan, who was killed by a sniper in 1995. In the Qrdash settlement, near the Armenian–Azerbaijani border.
10.	Khachakir Spring (Kyaru River Spring / Garu River Spring)	Probably 1980s	No inscription; cross carved above the water spout.
11.	Edik Chopuryan Spring	1990s	----
12.	Arto and Arpik Badalyan Spring	1993	Dedicated to Arto and Arpik Badalyan; inscription on a separate stone placed on the spring.
13.	Hrachya Atyan Spring (Avo)	1995	----
14.	Samvel Asilyan Spring	1996	----
15.	Zhenya Derenik Spring	2002	Zhenya Derenik, 2002
16.	Piruza Spring	2004	Piruza, 2004
17.	Sergey Spring	2004	2004, “Be fortunate, Sergey”
18.	Vrur Spring	2005	Vrur, 2005
19.	Serozh Spring	2005	Serozh Aperyan, 2005; cross carving
20.	Abo Spring	2010s	Abo 49; on a separate sign, dedicated to Albert Adyan (1957–2006)
21.	Ando Spring	After 2010	Ando 1985–2010
22.	Lyudmila Spring	----	"Blessed is she with a pure heart, for they shall see God"; in memory of Lyudmila Aperyan
23.	Argam Spring	2010s	With golden paint applied
24.	Arman Spring-Khachkar	After the 44-Day War	Dedicated to Arman; on a separate stone: “With a world full of dreams and desires, I departed with boundless longing.”



Fig. 2. *Yerraghbyur (Three Springs) spring. Photo by Anush Safaryan*



Fig. 3. *Spring monument (1962), dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Great Patriotic War (World War II). Photo by Anush Safaryan*

Margar Margaryan, a resident of the village, designed the monument[4]. The spring monument features a distinctive volumetric-architectural style, emphasizing the arch-niche design, the use of rosettes, the sculptural shaping of paired columns, and decorative motifs like the grapevine pattern and similar ornamentation.

Architecturally, the spring monuments dedicated to the Great Patriotic War mostly replicate the designs of classical medieval and, in part, 18th- and 19th-century springs, incorporating elements such as a flat or gabled roof, an arch-niche, a rosette (from which water flowed), and sometimes a water-collecting basin. The first such spring monument documented by our research was built in 1943 in Parakar by Rafael Israelyan [14-16][5].

Interestingly, in decorating these springs, the architect-sculptors also attempted to incorporate elements characteristic of khachkar (cross-stone) design, such as the arch-niche, sculpted borders, rosettes, and vegetal-geometric motifs [17].

In the village, *about five Soviet-period spring monuments* have been documented, each built in a different neighborhood. With some differences, they share the same architectural style (Figs. 4,5).

Among the Soviet-era spring monuments, only one stands out as unique—the well-known Loris Spring, which, according to its inscription, is dedicated to the mechanizer Karlen Avalyan. The spring is situated at the edge of the road leading into the village. While maintaining the main features of previous designs, it differs in the arch area, which is accompanied by a prominent inscription:

I came into the world with hope, light, and labor - I became a master of plow, song, and helm.
I admired a woman's love, a child's cry - In early youth, I became a victim of fate.
To the renowned mechanizer Karlen Ivani Avalyan
1930–1966, from his friends. Loris

[4] Residents noted that Margar Margaryan was a master stonemason and that this spring monument was not the only work he had constructed.

[5] However, it should be noted that Rafael Israelyan's architecture was by no means a simple replication of Armenian medieval examples**.** As Harutyunyan observes: "…Israelyan began to use steel and concrete structures, which allowed him to design more freeform, sculptural, and even abstract architectural forms. The national component remained present in his architecture, primarily expressed through the reinterpretation of clearly traditional architectural elements and their symbolic representation. Nevertheless, Israelyan's goal was to create contemporary architecture in which the principles and aesthetics of modernist design could be applied, synthesizing them with local architectural traditions or ensuring the continuation of their legacy" [16].

Above the inscription, a photograph of Karlen Avalyan is mounted on one side, and on the other, his working tool, the tractor, is displayed. The spring monument is complemented by a small rest pavilion, which also houses khachkars and fragments collected from the surrounding area. Together, these elements create a landscape-cultural ensemble of memory (Fig.6).

The next wave of spring construction in the village honored individuals who died during the *First Nagorno-Karabakh War and its aftermath*, including *Edik Spring, Hrachya Spring, Samvel Spring, Vladimir Spring*, and others. The deceased's relatives and friends built all of these. Constructed during the 1990s (the Vladimir Spring, built in 1997–1998, commemorates a man killed by a sniper in 1995), they closely resemble the architectural designs of previous monuments, with minor variations. Around these springs, the surrounding environment was also arranged, typically including a pavilion (with a table and chairs, sometimes incorporating khachkars) that provided space for gatherings, meals, and other community events (Fig.7).



Fig. 4. *A spring monument from the Soviet period. Photo by Anush Safaryan*



Fig. 5. *A spring monument from the Soviet period. Photo by Anush Safaryan*



Fig. 6. *A spring monument dedicated to the memory of Karlen Avalyan. Photo by Anush Safaryan*

Subsequently, spring construction in Movses did not decline. New springs began to be built in memory of deceased relatives, both within the village and beyond its residential boundaries, including Piruza Spring, Zhenya and Derenik Springs, Sergey Spring, and Serozh Spring[6] [17-19] (Figs. 8,9).

[6] The study of Armenian spring monuments has led us to conclude that the “reuse” (recycling) of heritage [17-19] in Armenia did not begin after the collapse of the Soviet regime, but during the Soviet period, reaching particular intensity in the 1950s–1960s.

The village springs were central to both the water supply and social visits**.** Residents recall how, on festive days, it was customary to go to the spring and organize communal meals or "kef" gatherings. Family members to whom a spring monument was dedicated would also visit it on birthdays and death anniversaries.

The spring monuments of Movses highlight the *unique local expressions of Soviet monumental efforts***.** They are more than just engineering feats; they stand as symbols of *collective memory, community identity, and the layering of Soviet and local cultural traditions.* In this way, a spring becomes not only a water source but also a *keeper of memory and values***.**



Fig. 7. *Spring monument accompanied by a pavilion. Photo by Anush Safaryan*



Fig. 8. *Piruza Spring. Photo by Anush Safaryan*



Fig. 9. *Sergey Spring. Photo by Anush Safaryan*

In Movses, spring construction has become both a practical and a commemorative practice**.** Almost every spring bears an inscription, sometimes commemorating an event, but more often dedicated to an individual. Many of them include sculptural and architectural elements**,** occasionally combined with local national motifs.

The tradition of spring construction in Movses serves not only as *infrastructure for daily life* but also as a *tangible medium of memory*. The example of the *Yerraghbyur Spring* demonstrates that as early as the 19th century, a spring could act as a central hub of rural life, blending *economic, social, and cultural roles***.** In residents' memories, the spring is seen as a shared space of experience, where everyday interactions, rhythms of time, and community self-awareness evolved. In this way, it can be regarded as a *site of memory*, where the physical space functions as a vessel carrying the experiences of the past [20].

The spring monuments dedicated to the victims of the Great Patriotic War, constructed during the Soviet period, add a new layer of memory to the village's spatial structure. They are formed as official, institutionalized embodiments of memory, where the vital function of water is intertwined with ideas of sacrifice and heroism. The use of medieval spring designs and khachkar (cross-stone) motifs in their architectural composition attests to the continuity of cultural memory**,** as symbolic forms from the past are reinterpreted within a new historical context [18].

The rise of *personalized spring monuments*—such as the *Loris Spring* dedicated to Karlen Avalyan—illustrates the process of *privatization and individualization of memory*. Here, remembrance extends beyond traditional state- or collective-hero narratives, becoming biographical storytelling expressed through photographs, inscriptions, and material symbols (such as the tractor). The pavilion surrounding the spring, along with the inclusion of khachkars, forms a *landscape-cultural ensemble* that makes memory both physically visible and socially meaningful.

The springs built in memory of the victims of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, as well as those constructed in subsequent years to commemorate deceased relatives, indicate that the memory landscape in Movses is a continuously expanding and living system. The social environment organized around these springs—pavilions, gatherings, communal meals—demonstrates that memory here is not limited to silence or mourning but is integrated into the community's everyday life, becoming a factor of communication and continuity.

Thus, in Movses, springs function as material mediators of memory, connecting the past, present, and future and echoing the continuity of flowing water.

Conclusion

The example of spring construction in Movses village shows that springs aren't just technical or architectural features. They create a *memory landscape* where water, the built environment, and human recollections are woven into a unified whole. Springs built in different historical eras carry unique layers of memory—*domestic, collective, official, and personal—yet together they form a spatial map of community identity.*

Through these springs, memory becomes visible, tangible, and actionable, preserving past experiences not only through inscriptions or stories but also through everyday practices. In this sense, the springs of Movses can be regarded as a classic example of a memory landscape, in which the monument is not "detached" from life but integral to it, ensuring the continuous transmission of memory across generations.

As a result, a distinct monumental landscape emerges, where temporal ideology merges with local spiritual and communal culture. Movses' uniqueness is reflected in the large number of documented spring monuments (24, compared with two to three in each of the other settlements studied) and the social logic of their construction. Spring-building has become a family- and lineage-driven initiative, in which practices of remembrance are intertwined with reinforcing social ties and shaping public space.

Thus, the spring monuments of Movses can be seen as *"living monuments*," simultaneously reflecting Soviet ideology while highlighting the continuity of local identity. They show that in border communities, the culture of memory is shaped not only by government policies but also by local social efforts, turning a spring from a mere water source into a *central symbol of community values, honor, and the preservation of historical memory.*

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Ethics Statement

The authors confirm that this study was conducted in accordance with the Journal's Research Ethics and Integrity Statement and that all ethical requirements applicable to the study have been fulfilled.

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