

AZERBAIJAN: Vandalism as usual

At the beginning of the 21st century, Azerbaijan demolished
Armenian cultural heritage

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF NAKHICHEVAN

The historical Armenian region of Nakhichevan, constituting an autonomous region within the borders of the modern Republic of Azerbaijan, was a part of the Armenian statehood since the 6th c. B.C. This land is of primary importance for the historical memory and cultural heritage of Armenian people. Folk etymology connects "Nakhichevan" with the Biblical flood after which Noah's ark rested on the top of Mt. Ararat. Descending from Ararat, Noah and his family made the "First stop" (in Armenian *Nakh-Ichevan*) on this land.

The attachment of the region to historical Armenia was mentioned in numerous written accounts of antique and medieval authors – Strabo, Ptolemy, Josephus Flavius, Plano Carpini, William of Rubruck and others. The territory of Nakhichevan was a part of the Syunik *nahang* - one of 15 historical regions of Armenia. In the 4th century A.D. Mesrop Mashtots – the creator of the Armenian alphabet - established here the first Armenian school which taught the new alphabet.

There is a lot of information about the Armenian identity of Nakhichevan region in the historical annals of Armenian historians and geographers from the early medieval period. They mention that within the 10th-13th centuries the region was ruled by Artsruni, Orbelyan, Proshyan and other Armenian princedoms.

The European traveler William of Rubruck (13th c.), while passing Nakhichevan city – the center of this Armenian land, wrote: "In the times before, there were eighty Armenian churches here, but now only two small churches are left, and others were ruined by Saracens."

The city of Nakhichevan remained one of the centers of Armenian culture in the 14th-18th cc. During this period, it turned into one of the main centers of Armenian manuscript writing, stone-carving and architecture. The city of Nakhichevan became famous for its scriptoriums and Armenian schools. Today, the collection of Matenadaran, a museum-institute of Armenian manuscripts in Yerevan, contains dozens of handwritten manuscripts made in Nakhichevan.

The region was drastically de-Armenized during the Turco-Persian wars in 16th-17th cc., when in the beginning of the 17th c. the Persian Shah Abbas I deported almost entire Armenian population from Nakhichevan and Ararat valley to Persia, settling nomadic Turkic tribes in their place.



Map of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic



The "forest of cross-stones" at Old Jugha cemetery (the second hill) in the 1900s
CURRENTLY FULLY DESTROYED



This beautiful stonework (16thc.) didn't deter vandalism



It is hard to believe that at the beginning of the 21st century these monuments perished totally

After that, during two centuries, Nakhichevan region was intensively Turkified by the nomadic tribes that would later become known as 'Azerbaijanis'. As a result of demographic change, within a century the Nakhichevan region lost its dominant Armenian identity.

From the beginning of the 20th century until the end of the 1980s, the ethnic cleansing of Armenians from their native land continued. It started from the so-called "Armenian-Tatar (Azerbaijani)" clashes in 1905/6. To describe these horrific events in and around Nakhichevan in that period it is enough to quote from the September 13, 1905 Paris edition of the *New York Herald*. It reads:

Holy War Waged

"St. Petersburg: The districts of Zangezour and Jebrail are swarming with Tartar bands under the leadership of chiefs, and in some cases accompanied by Tartar police officials. Green banners are carried and a 'Holy War' is being proclaimed. All Armenians, without distinction of sex or age are being massacred. Many thousand Tartar horsemen have crossed the Perso-Russian frontier and joined the insurgents. Horrible scenes attended the destruction of the village of Minkind. Three hundred Armenians were massacred and mutilated. The children were thrown to the dogs and the few survivors were forced to embrace Islamism".

In the beginning of the 1920s, due to the geopolitical calculations of Kemalist Turks and Bolsheviks, Nakhichevan region was transferred to Azerbaijan under the Moscow and Kars agreements between Turkey and Bolshevik Russia signed in March and October 1921. Those agreements made a reservation saying that Azerbaijani "protection" over Nakhichevan cannot be transferred to a third country, i. e. Armenia. The same fate awaited another Armenian-populated region – Nagorno-Karabakh, which also became part of the Soviet Azerbaijan and remained there until 1991, when the Armenian populated region proclaimed its independence based on existing Soviet and international legal procedures for secession from Azerbaijan.



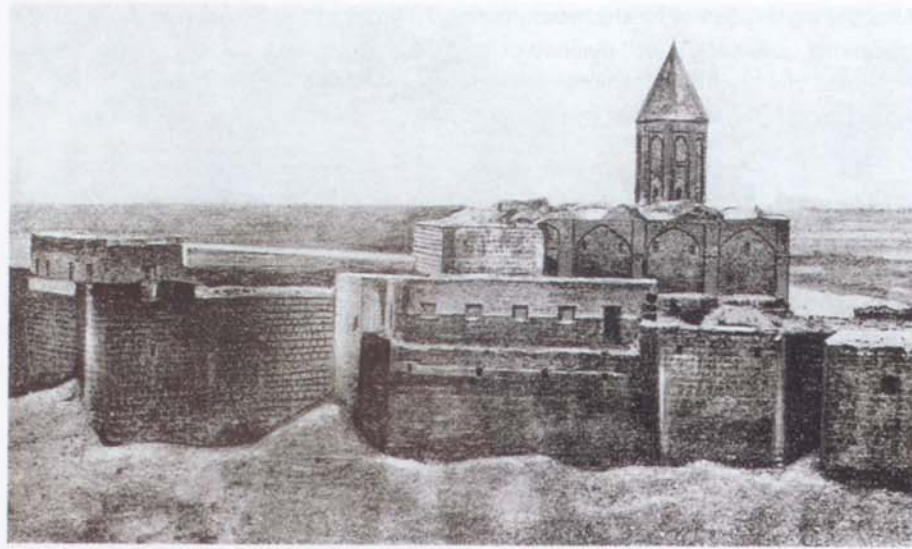
A view of Old Jugha cemetery prior to destruction. 1980s



Three out of thousands of victims of Azerbaijani vandalism

After the annexation of Nakhichevan, during 75 years of the Soviet rule, Azerbaijan's leadership undertook a well-planned policy of eliminating of Armenian population and Armenian identity from Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh by all possible means: forced migrations, violation of human rights and discrimination, destruction of historical monuments, etc.

At the moment Nakhichevan was proclaimed an autonomous republic in 1923, Armenians constituted around 40 percent of its population. The original flag of the Nakhichevan Autonomieus Republic was bilingual – Armenian and Azerbaijani Turkic. Today the Nakhichevan autonomous republic is totally de-Armenized. It means that NO SINGLE Armenian is left in the region with a territory of 5,5 thousand square km. The only witnesses of previous Armenian presence in this territory were (unfortunately, now we can speak about it only in the past) the medieval Armenian churches, monasteries, cemeteries and monuments (a total of over 4000 monuments) which Azerbaijan intentionally destroyed in the beginning of the 21st century.



Karmir Vardan church (5th-13th cc.) in Astapat, Nakhichevan region. 1900s



The view of the same church in 1970s. CURRENTLY TOTALLY DESTROYED

VANDALISM AGAINST ARMENIAN MEDIEVAL MONUMENTS IN NAKHICHEVAN

THE FIRST WAVE OF DESTRUCTION

The medieval cemetery near the former Armenian-populated city of Old Jugha (nowadays Julfa) is situated in the south of Nakhichevan, a region under the sovereignty of the modern Republic of Azerbaijan. This cemetery, where burials date to the early Middle Ages until the destruction of the town by Persian troops in 1605, is an outstanding testimony of Armenian cultural presence in Nakhichevan. Thousands of unique tombstones and *Khachqars* (cross-stones in Armenian) with impressive carvings with Christian motives date from the 15th to the early 18th c.

Old Jugha's cemetery is the largest Armenian cemetery known, unrivalled in the scope, variety and creative art of its khachqars. It occupies a shoehorn shaped area of 1600 square meters extending from north to south up to the river Arax. The cemetery lies on two hills at the bank of Arax river, which flows between Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic (Azerbaijan) and Iran. The monuments of the cemetery were visible from the Iranian side.

According to the European traveler Alexander Rodes, there were about 10,000 khachqars at the Old Jugha cemetery in the 17th century. About 5,000 khachqars, capital tombstones, as well as 3 churches and a chapel remained in the cemetery at the beginning of the 20th century, all in good condition.

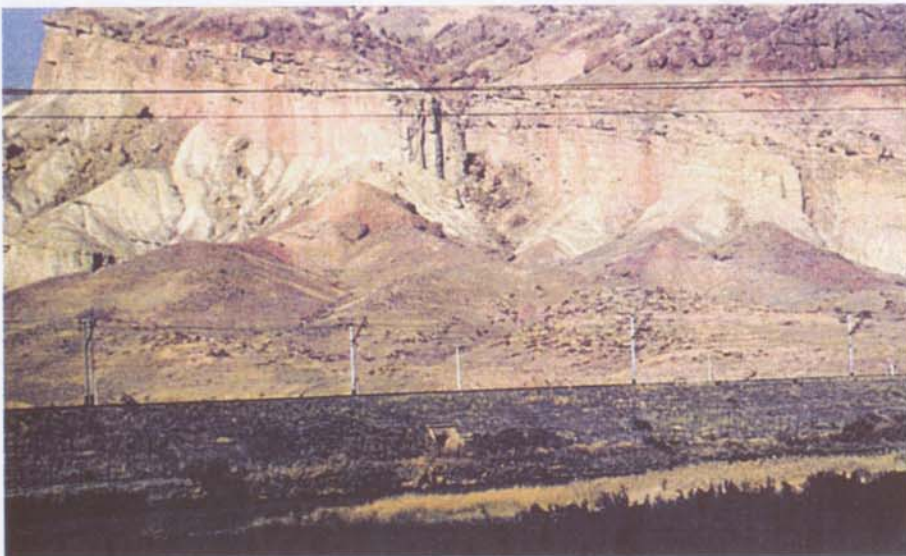
In the beginning of 20th century, a large portion of the cemetery with khachqars and tombstones underwent the first wave of destruction. Nearly half were destroyed in 1903-1904, when a railway was built there without consideration of these historical monuments.

Exactly the same policy towards the Armenian monuments of Nakhichevan continued during the Soviet time. This kind of approach by the Soviet Azerbaijani government was more than practical: the cross-carved stones of Armenian memorials were broken into pieces and used as material for road pavement and other construction purposes.

Within this period, dozens of monasteries, churches and other Christian monuments were leveled to the ground. In the 1970s, only 2700 khachqars survived in Old Jugha Armenian cemetery.



The view of Old Jugha medieval cemetery before the 1998-2002 destructions. View from the Iranian side



Mission nearly completed...2002

THE SECOND WAVE OF DESTRUCTION

(1998-2002)

The policy of systematic destruction of Armenian cultural monuments in this region started after Azerbaijan became an independent state. It intensified at the end of the 1990s. In 1998, the representatives of Armenian community of Iran during their pilgrimage to the Armenian St. Stephan's Cathedral near the Iranian-Azerbaijani border accidentally documented Azerbaijani actions aimed at total destruction of Old Jugha cemetery with bulldozers.

The eyewitnesses, who photographed and documented this vandalism, said that the demolished khachqars were carried away on a flatbed train, while another group leveled them to the ground. The group was told that this operation had been taking place for a week. The transportation of destroyed monuments by the state railway is clear evidence that this was a planned action by the government of Azerbaijan.

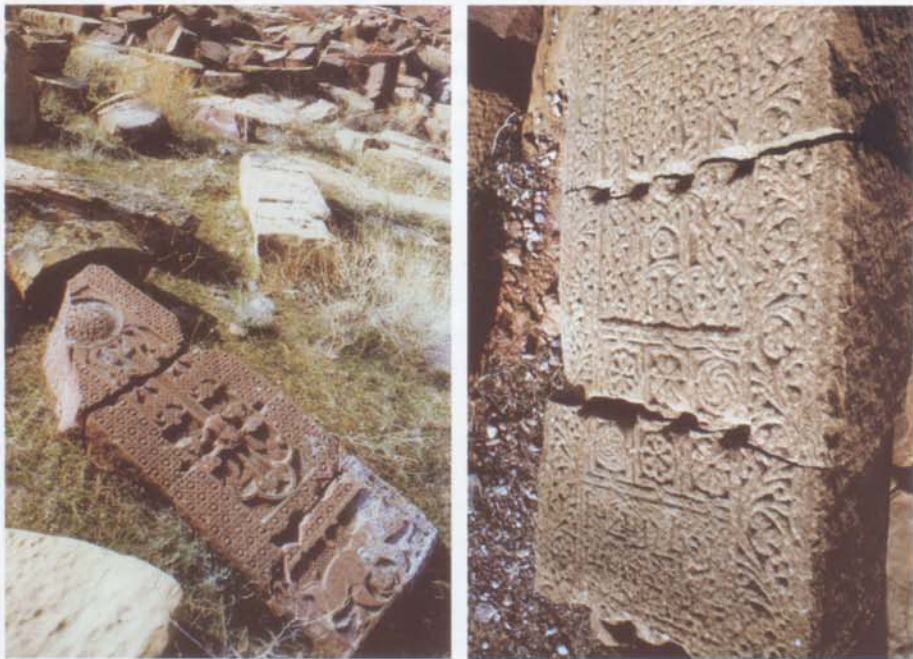
Nshan Topusian, head of the Atrpatakan diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church and Iranian border guard soldiers photographed these vandalistic actions from the same point of the Iranian border. The destruction lasted for three weeks and about 800 khachqars were taken away. There is a reason to believe that these cross stones, if not destroyed right away, were used as construction material for foundations of new houses in order to hide their removal. Protests on behalf of UNESCO and affiliated organizations did finally put a stop to these vandalistic activities.

In November, 2002, the destruction not only of tombs, but also of the still remaining churches and cloister grounds in the area has been resumed. A great number of workers were dismantling valuable relics of medieval Armenian culture partly by demolishing them and partly by taking them away on trucks to an unknown destination. By these barbaric acts the official policy of Azerbaijan intends "to prove" that no Armenians have ever inhabited Nakhichevan region.

"On behalf of Armenians both in Armenia and the Diaspora, I appeal to you to undertake immediate measures to end the vandalism, which can be deemed as a gross violation of human rights and desecration of holy monuments which have served as a site for prayer and pilgrimage. We are deeply angered that such violation is taking place overtly, as the world stands idly indifferent," stated the Head of Armenian Church in an appeal to Conrad Raiser, the President of World council of churches.



1998 photo showing the train used to transport crushed gravestones



Traces of "Azerbaijani history" over the Armenian one...

It was the silence and indifference of the international organizations and bodies responsible for protection of cultural monuments, as well as Azerbaijan's awareness of its impunity that allowed Baku to continue destroying Old Jugha cemetery and accomplish its barbaric policy of tearing down Armenian historical monuments in Nakhichevan.

Now, in the beginning of the 21st century, we can only state that almost all the Armenian Christian heritage in Nakhichevan – over 4000 churches, monasteries, chapels, cross-stones, cemeteries etc., dating from the 5th to the 19th centuries, **HAS CEASED TO EXIST.**



The view of the cemetery before 1998...



...and after
One can clearly see the traces of wedges used to cut cross-stones into pieces

Letter to the Permanent Representations to the Council of Europe

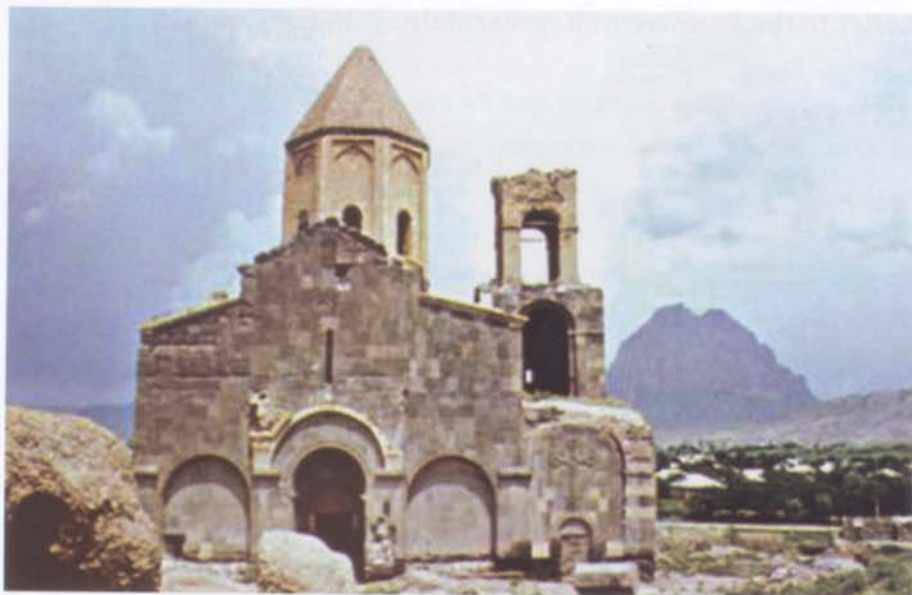
In November 1998 eye witnesses from the Iranian border zone observed tombstones being excavated by a crane and loaded onto railroad wagons on the cemetery grounds across the river Araxes. The ripped-up ground was then made even again by bulldozers. This destruction lasted for three weeks and about 800 Khatchkars were taken away. There is reason to believe that these cross-stones - if not destroyed right away - were used as building material for foundations of new houses to hide their removal. The transportation by the State Railway is clear evidence of the planned action by the Government of Azerbaijan. Protests on behalf of UNESCO and affiliated organisations finally put a stop to these barbarous activities.

To our great regret the cultural outrage is going on. Reliable sources informed us that the destruction not only of the tombstones but also of the still existing, though greatly reduced churches and cloister grounds in the area was resumed on 9 November 2002. A great number of workmen are again dismantling valuable relics of Middle Age Christian culture partly by demolishing them and partly by taking them away on trucks to an unknown destination. And yet again this cannot be done without the permission of the government. One cannot avoid drawing a parallel to the fundamentally motivated destruction of the Buddha statues by the Taliban in Afghanistan, which was accompanied by world-wide protest. Similar to that case we are here confronted with the systematic obliteration of religious monuments of a foreign culture, the only difference being that the destruction in Nachichevan concerns the European history of civilization. Azerbaijan signed the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 1993 and is represented in the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe. Azerbaijan consequently committed itself to the aims of this institution and should be asked to account for its action in Nachichevan.

Dr. Armen Haghazarian

Dr. Dieter Wickmann

From <http://www.international.icomos.org/risk/2002/azerbaijan2002.htm#>



Aprakunis St. Karapet monastery (9th-17th cc.), 1980s photo



The site of the monastery in 2005. Photo by Stephen Sim

CE Parliamentary Assembly

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, SCIENCE AND EDUCATION

SYNOPSIS No. 2003/51

4 APRIL 2003

The Sub-Committee on the Cultural Heritage (Committee on Culture, Science and Education) meeting in Strasbourg on 3 April 2003 with Mr Legendre in the chair:

- expressed concern for cultural heritage in Iraq as a result of the present war;
- discussed a preliminary draft report on the promotion of art history (Rapporteur Mr. O'Hara, UK, SOC);
- expressed regret at the resignation of the General Rapporteur on Cultural Heritage (Mrs. Melandri, Italy, SOC) and asked its Bureau to follow up specific issues pending the designation of a successor;
- asked its Chairman to forward to the President of the Italian delegation for comment a memorandum by Mrs Melandri on the privatisation of cultural property in Italy;
- asked Baroness Hooper to examine the question of EU structural funding of action relating to the cultural heritage;
- **decided to arrange fact-finding missions** on the effects of the flooding in Central Europe (Prague) and **on damage to the Armenian cultural heritage in Nakhichevan (Jugha)**;
- authorised its Chairman to write to the President of the Ukrainian delegation concerning new building in the proximity of St Sophia Cathedral (Kyiv);
- decided to resume its fact-finding missions on the situation of cultural heritage in individual countries of Central and Eastern Europe on the basis of a proposal made by Mrs Petrova-Mitevaska in relation to "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia";
- decided to hold its next meeting in Strasbourg on 19-20 June 2003 on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary Congress of Europa Nostra.

Christopher Grayson, João Ary, Bonnie Theophilova

cc. Secretary General of the Assembly

The Directors and all staff of the Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly

Secretaries of National Delegations to the Assembly

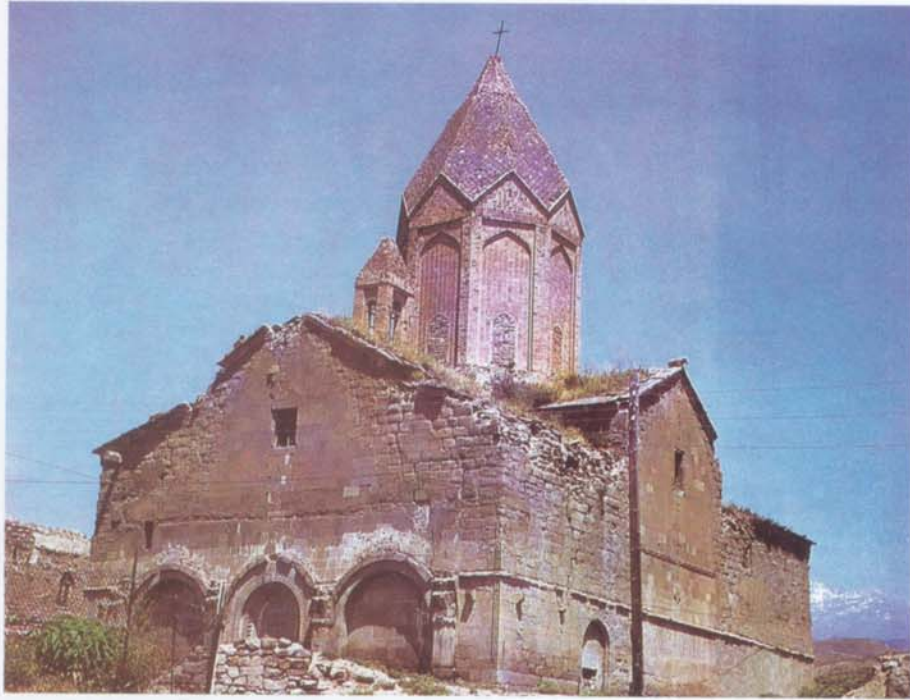
Secretaries of Political Groups of the Assembly

Directors General

Director of the Private Office of the Secretary General

Secretary of the Committee of Ministers

Director of Communication and Research



St. Hakob church (12th-17th cc.) in Shoroth. 1980s photo



The site of the church in 2005. photo by Stephen Sim

The acts of vandalism committed on the part of the Azerbaijani side temporarily ceased only after the UNESCO and other prestigious international organizations interfered. When another international body, ICOMOS, was informed and given photos of this barbaric act in a remote frontier area by RAA (Research on Armenian Architecture) in January 2003 and by ICOMOS Armenia in February 2003, the destruction, which cannot have been carried through without the consent of the Azerbaijan government, was already completed.

Armenia expressed its regret over the fact that in November of 2002, the Azerbaijani leaders resumed the process of destroying Armenian graves in Nakhichevan. In this connection, Armenia urged the Council of Europe to interfere and put an end this shameful destruction. A proposal has been made to create a special CE commission that would attend the returning of gravestones to cemeteries, if "only they have not been destroyed forever".

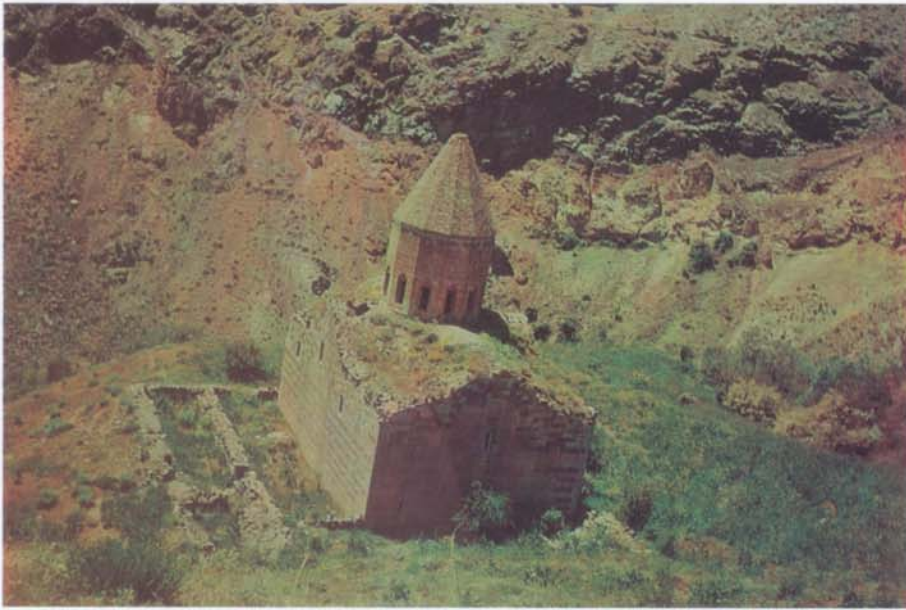
In 2003, Armenia sent a letter to the UNESCO Secretary General Koichiro Matsuura expressing their concern, and inviting UNESCO to send a commission of experts to Nakhichevan to see the destruction first-hand. "These khachqars, or stone-crosses, are unique tombstones in that they are simultaneously sculpture, archive and marker. Their removal is in line with Azerbaijan's mission to expunge the historical record and remove all documentation of Armenian presence on those lands," the letter said. It had resulted in the slowing down of activities by the Azerbaijanis for a while.

In 2003 Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan called on the conference to take concrete decisions about future steps, and said the Armenian government, having signed the Convention on Protection of Cultural Monuments in Conflict Areas, as well as one on the Preservation of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, is prepared to protect its rights under these international agreements as well.

On 9th December 2002, the BBC reported that the permanent representative of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic in Baku, Hasan Zeynalov, not only dismissed concerns over the destruction of Armenian monuments and accused Armenians of fabricating these stories, but also claimed that **"Armenians have never lived in Nakhichevan, which has been Azerbaijani land from time immemorial, and that's why there are no Armenian cemeteries and monuments and have never been any."**

Another sad fact is that in 2005-2009 the UNESCO Secretary General Koichiro Matsuura paid several visits to Azerbaijan, a country involved on the highest level in the destruction of hundreds of Christian monuments on its territory. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev awarded Mr. Matsuura "the highest distinction of the country, the Order of Glory".

NO COMMENTS.



St. Hakob Hayrapet church in Pharaka (17th c.)
CURRENTLY FULLY DESTROYED



St. Stephanos church in Agulis (12th 13th cc.). View in 1980s
CURRENTLY FULLY DESTROYED

THE THIRD WAVE OF DESTRUCTION

In the beginning of 2005, Azerbaijan committed a new act of vandalism, this time destroying the Armenian-language lapidary inscription on a church located in one of Azerbaijani villages. A Norwegian humanitarian organization sponsored the restoration of the Armenian-Apostolic church in Nij village in Azerbaijan, which had a lapidary inscription in Armenian. During the "restoration", Azerbaijani workers erased the Armenian inscription, after which the Norwegian organization sponsoring this project.

Commenting on this fact, the Norwegian ambassador Steiner Gill accused Azerbaijan of violating the International convention on the protection of monuments and the promise not to destroy the Armenian-language inscription, which was given prior to the restoration works. The Norwegian diplomat reaffirmed that the destruction of any monument is an act of VANDALISM.

In 2005, the Scottish architect Stephen Sim visited Nakhichevan to review the condition of Armenian churches and monasteries on the territory of this autonomous republic. Not surprisingly, he failed to find any centuries-old Christian heritage there, since all of them... were bulldozed and leveled to the ground between 1995 and 2005.

"FINAL SOLUTION" FOR JUGHA CEMETERY

In mid December 2005, the representatives of the Armenian Prelacy of Atrpatakan documented horrific scenes of what had been left of the remaining parts of the Armenian medieval monuments in Old Jugha cemetery. This time Azerbaijan was well-prepared, and soldiers of the Azerbaijani army were involved in the acts of vandalism. Azerbaijani soldiers, armed with scrap-irons and sledge-hammers were crashing into pieces the remains of the medieval Armenian cemetery under the command of their officers.

Trucks and cranes were used during the demolition of the Armenian cemetery. The broken and smashed monuments were loaded in a truck which later emptied into Arax River (see photos).

Again and again, Armenia raised its voice urging the international community to interfere and stop the Azerbaijani vandalism ...

By January 19, 2006, the European Parliament adopted a resolution urging "Azerbaijani authorities to stop the ongoing destruction of mediaeval Armenian cemeteries and historic carved stone crosses in Southern Azerbaijan."

¹ From Azerbaijani News site, February 26, 2005, URL: <http://www.day.az/news/politics/21168.html>



Archive photo of Old Jugha cemetery. 1970s view



Armenian tombstones from Jugha cemetery with Armenian inscriptions, 16th-17th cc.

Armenian National Committee urges U.S. Ambassador in Azerbaijan Reno Har-nish to Personally Intervene to Halt Destruction; Raises Alarms with Members of Congress over Systematic Demolition of Ancient Armenian Christian Heritage. They demanded:

- 1) Immediately travel to Djulfa to personally survey the damage and intervene against any continued demolition.
- 2) In the name of the U.S. government and on behalf of the conscience of the international community, demand that Azerbaijan respect the terms of its 1993 agreement to join the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, and immediately end this destruction.
- 3) Demand that, to the extent possible, these sites be restored, under the appropriate supervision of Armenian experts and other internationally recognized authorities on Armenian religious monuments.
- 4) Offer a full and public reporting on this systematic, state-sponsored eradication of these treasures of world cultural heritage.

Armenian foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian addressed a letter to UNESCO Director General Koichiro Matsuura Calling upon UNESCO to Stop Destruction of Armenian Monuments in Nakhichevan

The letter says,

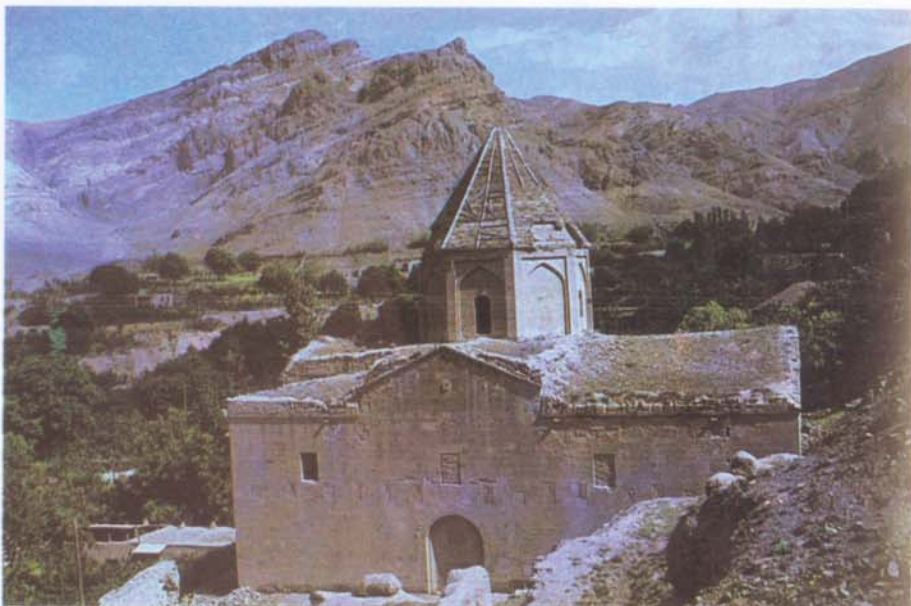
"I wish to call your attention to an act of great cultural and political significance. At this moment, Azerbaijani soldiers, supported by arms and equipment, are destroying the remnants of historically and religiously significant headstones in a medieval Armenian cemetery in Nakhichevan, Azerbaijan.

This area, which is situated between Armenia and Iran, was home to a majority Armenian population for generations. The cemetery in question held more than 10,000 individually carved, artistically unique headstones called Stone Crosses khachkars. The Azerbaijani government began their destruction in the 20th century, continued with great force in 2002, and during these last three days has resumed this work with a vengeance to attempt to wipe out traces of Armenian presence on those lands.

These acts of vandalism and violence, this callous demonstration of malice and intolerance comes at a time when the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the international community at large are extolling the virtues of preserving our common patrimony.

Director General, it is with a great sense of anger and regret that I write this letter. I do so, however, hopeful that the ire and disapproval of the international community will be brought to bear on Azerbaijan in order that they cease from carrying out these acts which are tantamount to ethnic cleansing only this time, there are no people left, and they have resorted to cleansing the memory of those people.

I urge you to use your office to put a stop to what amounts to destroying our common cultural heritage".



St. Christophor church (17th c.) in Agulis. 1970s photo
CURRENTLY FULLY DESTROYED



Otsoph St. Astvatsatsin church, 12-17 cc.
CURRENTLY FULLY DESTROYED

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION ON CULTURAL HERITAGE IN AZERBAIJAN

The European Parliament ,

- having regard to its resolutions of 9 June 2005 and 27 October 2005 on Azerbaijan,
- having regard to its resolution of 19 January 2006 on the European Neighbourhood Policy,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on the South Caucasus and especially its resolution adopted on 11 March 1999 and its recommendation adopted on 26 February 2004,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on the South Caucasus and especially its resolution adopted on 11 March 1999 and its recommendation adopted on 26 February 2004,
- having regard to the decision taken by the Council on the 14 June 2004 to include both Armenia and Azerbaijan in the European Neighbourhood Policy, in particular for the purpose of fostering goodneighbourly relations, especially through respect for minorities,
- having regard to the obligations of Azerbaijan and Armenia towards the Council of Europe, especially through the European Cultural Convention, the revised European Convention for the Protection of Archaeological Heritage, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, that they have ratified and undertaken to respect,
- having regard to the UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its 1954 Protocol, to which both Armenia and Azerbaijan are party, as applicable to occupied territories,
- having regard to the 2003 UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage whereby the international community recognises the importance of the protection of cultural heritage and reaffirms its commitment to combat its intentional destruction in any form so that such cultural heritage may be transmitted to the succeeding generations,
- having regard to the report of ICOMOS and the intermediary report on freedom of worship and religion made by the UN Committee for Human Rights,
- having regard to Rule 115(5) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas allegations have been made by Armenia that campaigns to destroy the Armenian cemetery at Djulfa in the region of Nakhichevan were carried out by Azerbaijani forces in November 1998 and December 2002; whereas the most recent destruction took place in December 2005, as evidenced by the recent video footage from the Armenian authorities,

B. whereas there were numerous reactions to these actions from the international community; whereas Azerbaijan has not provided answers to inquiries from Mr. Abdelfattah



A view from the cemetery. 1970s photo
CURRENTLY FULLY DESTROYED



Early gravestones from Old Jugha cemetery. 1970s photo
CURRENTLY FULLY DESTROYED

Amor, the former special rapporteur of the United Nations, concerning the events in November 1998 and December 2002,

C. whereas serious allegations have been raised about the involvement of the Azerbaijani authorities in the destruction of these monuments,

D. underlining the exceptional nature of this archaeological site, which still had 6000 'khatchkars' remaining – crosses carved in stone typical of Armenian religious art – and which testifies to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the region,

E. whereas the destruction or desecration of any monuments or objects of cultural, religious or national heritage infringes the principles of the European Union,

F. whereas that destruction is taking place in the context of the suspended conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh,

G. whereas there might soon be a favourable outcome to the negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh and agreement might be reached on the principles for settling the conflict in spite of the unproductive meeting in Rambouillet between the presidents of Armenia and of Azerbaijan on 10 and 11 February 2006,

H. recalling that the European Neighbourhood Policy aims to establish a privileged partnership with Azerbaijan and Armenia on the basis of common values, including respect for minorities and their cultural heritage,

1. Condemns strongly the destruction of the Djulfa cemetery as well as the destruction of all sites of historical importance that has taken place on Armenian or Azerbaijani territory, and condemns any such action that seeks to destroy the cultural heritage of a people;

2. Calls on the Council and the Commission to make clear to Armenia and Azerbaijan that all efforts must be made to stop the practice of ethnic cleansing which has led to such actions, and to find ways to facilitate the gradual return of refugees and displaced people;

3. Demands that Azerbaijan and Armenia respect their international commitments - notably in the cultural realm - and especially those deriving from their accession to the Council of Europe and incorporation into the European Neighbourhood Policy;

4. Stresses that respect for minority rights including historical, religious and cultural heritage is conditional on the genuine and effective development of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which must also lead to the establishment of goodneighbourly relations between all the countries concerned;

5. Demands that Azerbaijan allow missions dedicated to surveying and protecting the archaeological heritage on its territory, especially Armenian heritage, such as experts working with ICOMOS, and also allow a European Parliament delegation to visit the archaeological site at Djulfa;

6. Calls on Armenia and Azerbaijan to abide by their international commitments, in particular in the area of culture and of safeguarding cultural heritage, entered into within international bodies such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe, and calls on them to do their utmost to protect archaeological, historical and cultural heritage on their territories in order to prevent the destruction of other endangered sites;

7. Invites the Commission and the Council to incorporate a clause on protecting those territories' invaluable archaeological or historical sites into the action plans currently being discussed in a European Neighbourhood Policy context;

8. Invites the Commission and the Council to make the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy action plans conditional on respect by Azerbaijan's and Armenia's for universally accepted principles, in particular their obligations as members of the Council of Europe, regarding human and minority rights, and calls on the Commission and the Council to incorporate into these action plans specific provisions for the protection of the cultural heritage of minorities;

9. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the national parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Government and the President of Armenia, the Government and the President of Azerbaijan, as well as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Director-General of UNESCO, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The EPP-ED Group condemns the destruction of Armenian historical sites in Azerbaijan

The EPP-ED Group, the largest group of the European Parliament, initiated a resolution condemning a destruction of the Armenian medieval burial ground in the Julfa site in Nakhchivan.

The archaeological site is exceptional as there were about six thousand of the "khatchars" remaining - crosses carved in stone typical of ancient Armenian religious art - and which are a sign of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the region.

"We have reasonable evidence that the destruction of these sites was carried out not longer than three months ago, when the Azerbaijani authorities had a clear duty of care to protect them. The destruction cannot be directly linked to the military conflict of Nagorno Karakh 15 years ago as the Julfa site in Nakhchivan was never part of the war zone. It has been also testified by independent sources that entry to the cemetery requires crossing through Azerbaijani army controlled territory, which would make such a thing almost impossible without official support," said Charles Tannock MEP, one of the key players in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament.

"We took this initiative to table a resolution which condemns the destruction of the Armenian heritage. We proposed a mission to Nakhchivan in order to inspect the situation on the spot. The destruction of these historical monuments is irreversible and thus must be condemned once and for all," said Jacques Toubon MEP from France.

"The Armenian people, who have suffered from genocide and massive expulsions from their homes, cannot be left to witness the total extinction of their cultural heritage," said Ioannis Kasoulides MEP from Cyprus.

"We are at a critical juncture of talks between Armenian President Kocharian and Azerbaijani president Aliev in Rambouillet in France on finding a solution to the dispute between these two countries so I believe that any further planned destruction of Armenian heritage will not be conducive to lasting peace in region," concluded Charles Tannock.

For further information

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DECEMBER 2005, Republic of Azerbaijan
Iranian-Azerbaijani border

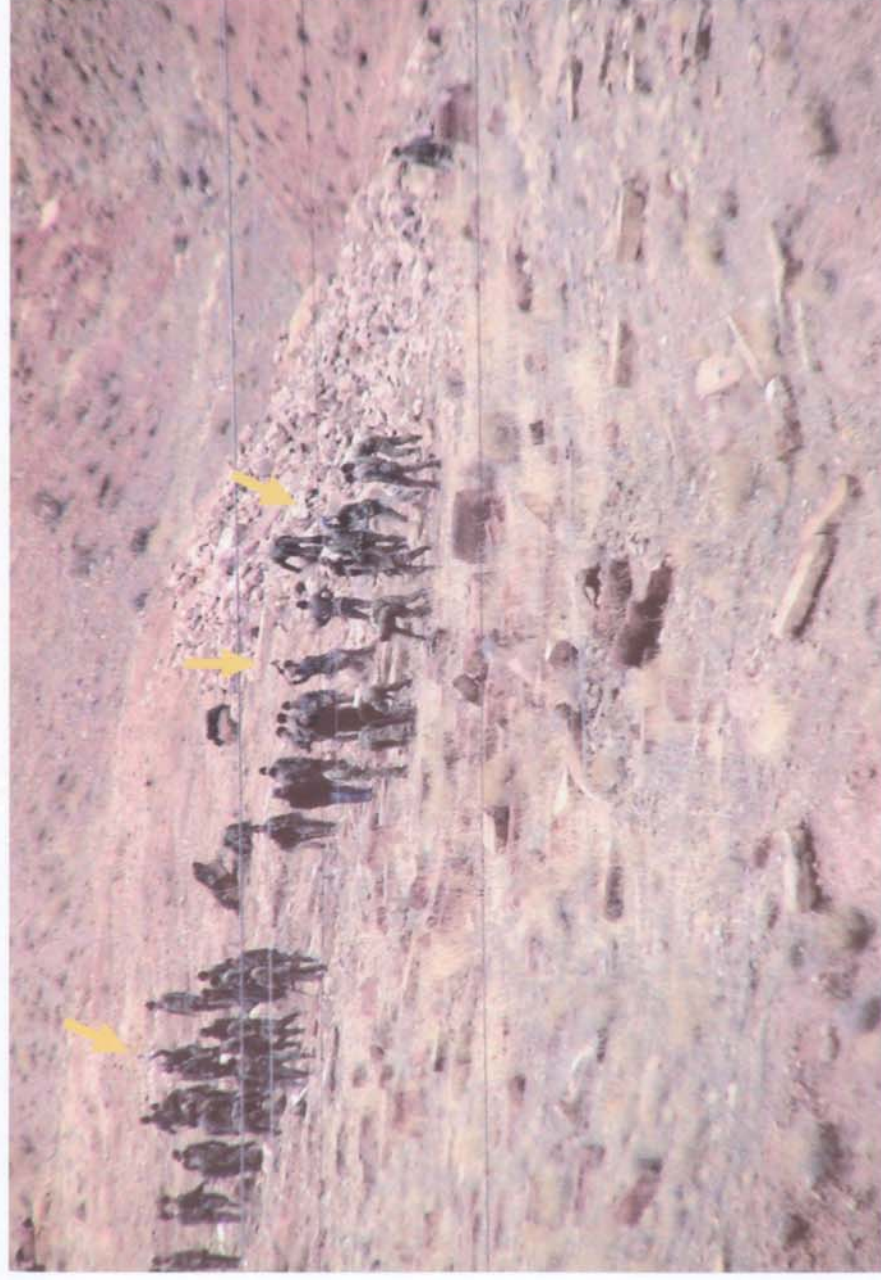
**THE LAST DAYS OF THE FAMOUS
ARMENIAN MEDIEVAL CEMETERY OF
OLD JUGHA**

CAN NOW BE SEEN IN THESE PHOTODOCUMENTS ONLY...

WARNING: The photos are low quality as they were taken from a distance of 1,5 - 2 km



Panoramic view of Old Jugha cemetery: Azerbaijani soldiers starting the demolition of Armenian graves and cross-stones, December 2005



Vandalism in progress... Arrows show uniformed Azerbaijani soldiers using sledge-hammers



A tractor gathering the crashed pieces of gravestones and khachqars...



...a crane and heavy trucks transporting removed and fragmented historical relics



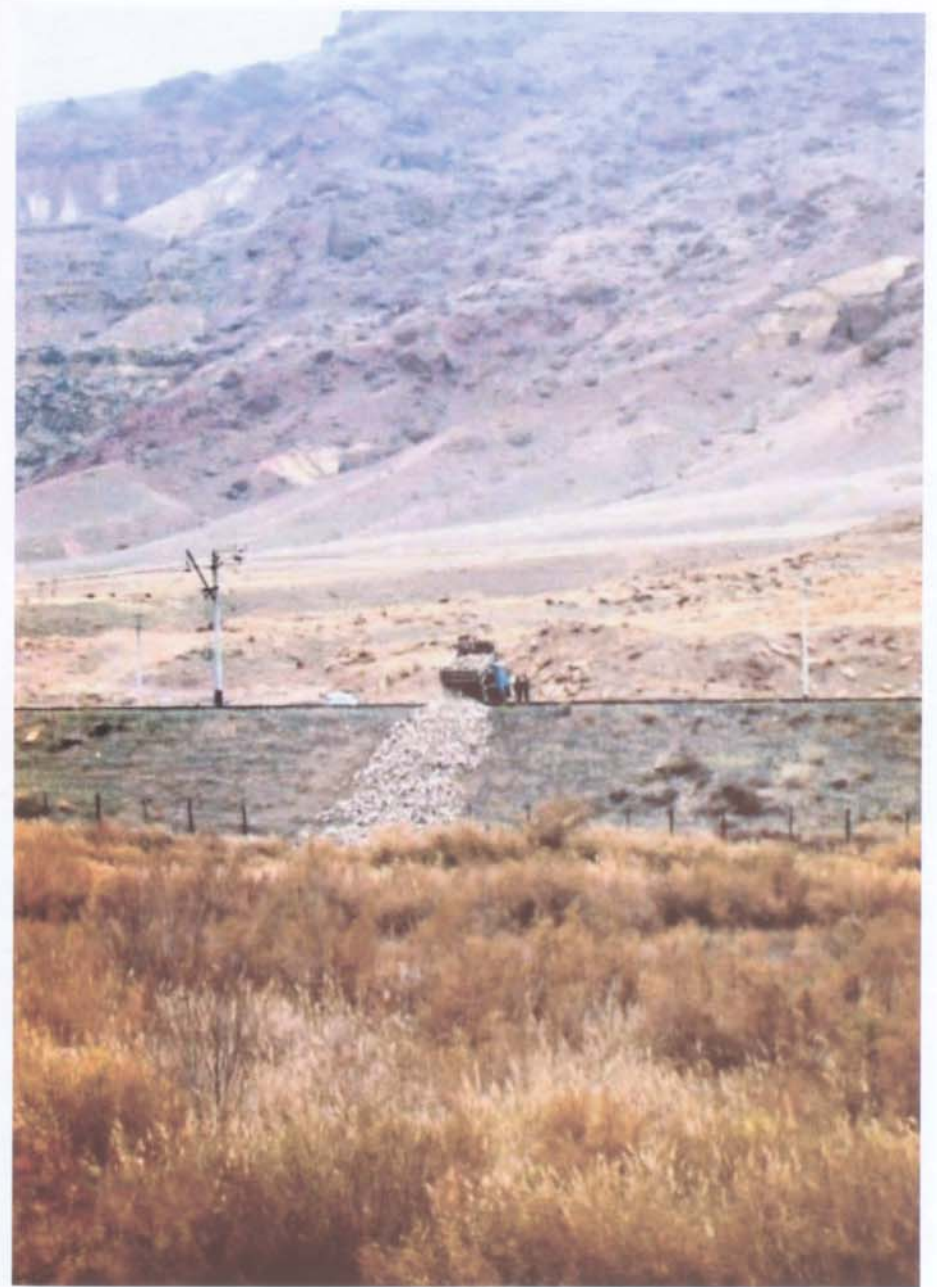
The crane fills the truck with unbroken and already smashed cross-stones



...to dump them into Arax River



Another truck dumping Armenian cultural heritage into the river



Rewriting the history of Nakhichevan region *a la Azerbaijan*



Azerbaijani officers and soldiers fighting against the Armenian dead



A closer view where crosses and ornaments on the removed monuments are almost visible



A panoramic view of the scene of demolition of the Armenian medieval cemetery of Old Jugha, December 2005



Fail accompli... A shooting ground of Azerbaijani army opened on the territory of Old Jugha cemetery after its demolition

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Photos by

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Դ 357

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