

Monuments and Identities in the Caucasus

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VOLUME 31

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Visit to the ancient Julfa cemetery, region of Nakhichevan, by a group of Armenian scholars (Sh. Nazaryan, G. Abgaryan, R. Titanyan, A. Matevosyan, S. Lalafaryan, A. Mnatsakanyan and others) in autumn 1961. A. Ayvazyan, *Nakhichevan. Sketches*, Yerevan 2019, 299.



The destruction of the ancient Julfa cemetery by Azerbaijani military in December 2005. Photograph taken from the territory of Iran by Bishop Nshan A.G. Topouzian; courtesy of the Fund 'Terre et Culture', Paris (Ref. v-32523)

Monuments and Identities in the Caucasus

*Karabagh, Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan in
Contemporary Geopolitical Conflict*

Edited by

Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev
Haroutioun Khatchadourian



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The logo for the TSEC series is based on a 14th-century tombstone of the Church of the East from Quanzhou, South China, courtesy of the Quanzhou Maritime Museum of Overseas Communications History.

This book has been sponsored by contributions from: National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (Belmont, Massachusetts); The Knights of Vartan Fund for Armenian Studies (Belmont, Massachusetts); Armenian General Benevolent Union (Paris); Representation of the Republic of Artsakh in France (Paris); All-Armenian Foundation Financing Armenological Studies (Yerevan); ERC, under Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme; DFG, under Germany's Excellence Strategy (research project 'Understanding Written Artefacts: Material, Interaction and Transmission in Manuscript Cultures', University of Hamburg); Armineh Grigorian (Paris).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Dorfmann-Lazarev, Igor, editor, author. | Khatchadourian, Haroutioun, editor, author

Title: Monuments and Identities in the Caucasus : Karabagh, Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan in contemporary geopolitical conflict / edited by Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev, Haroutioun Khatchadourian.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, [2023] | Series: Texts and studies in Eastern Christianity, 2213-0039 ; volume 31 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023034024 (print) | LCCN 2023034025 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004677371 (hardback) | ISBN 9789004677388 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Cultural property--Azerbaijan. | Cultural property--Armenia (Republic)--Arts'akh. | Monuments--Azerbaijan. | Monuments--Armenia (Republic)--Arts'akh. | Nationalism--Azerbaijan. | Azerbaijan--History | Arts'akh (Armenia)--History.

Classification: LCC DK692.6 .M66 2023 (print) | LCC DK692.6 (ebook) | DDC 363.6/9094756--dc23/eng/20230810

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023034024>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023034025>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2213-0039

ISBN 978-90-04-67737-1 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-67738-8 (e-book)

DOI 10.1163/9789004677388

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

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Foreword

This book represents an excellent example of what scholarly research is able to do in the face of a catastrophe: in detachment and with objectivity, to recognise a disaster, to situate it within historical perspective, to describe events and to identify those responsible. By unveiling knowledge, research can ultimately restore those traces of humanity whose destruction and obliteration has been the purpose of antagonistic forces, not least of governments and agents of state. The doings of such states are often achieved thanks to the indifference of the wider world. Such a force strives to consign its antagonist to perpetual darkness and the unknown condition of what is forever forgotten.

The catastrophes to which we refer consist in the deliberate and methodical eradication of all human traces after a territory has undergone a demographic transformation. The long-drawn-out genocide to which the Armenians have been subjected is leading now not only to the disappearance of the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh (Art'sakh)—which had once lain within the boundaries of the Persian Empire and then on the southern borders of the Russian Empire—but to the eradication of all evidence of their habitation there over millennia.

The definition of the crime of genocide, conceptualised by Raphaël Lemkin, was endorsed by the United Nations on 9 December 1948 in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. As Marcello Flores writes in his *Introduction* to the present volume, this definition encompasses cultural annihilation, distinct from any systematic policy of mass murder perpetrated against a targeted population. Indeed, it is possible to destroy a national, or a religious, or an ethnic group without actually committing murder. A genocide can also be carried out by breaking the personal and emotional bonds uniting a given group within a territory and by obliterating the cultural heritage it has left therein.

Cultural heritage can be both material and immaterial: a genocide can be enacted through annihilating the linguistic, spiritual, symbolic, religious and social attachments that give cohesion to a human society—as it can through the destruction of monuments, churches and cemeteries. The preservation of a monument can itself be genocidal, when it is accompanied by, and often conditional upon, the alteration of its function. A place is not a place by any other name: the re-naming of places has always been favoured by tyrants as a form of nominal obliteration without the inconvenience of material destruction.

A human group can survive even when it is demographically erased from the map, as long as traces of its humanity—such as shrines, cemeteries, lib-

raries and museums—endure. However, when it simultaneously undergoes a double ‘final solution’—both physical destruction and cultural eradication—that human group is threatened by a complete disappearance from the face of the earth.

We know that Raphaël Lemkin shaped the notion of the crime of genocide while referring to the ‘final solution of the Jewish question’ attempted by Nazi Germany. In his major work published in 1944, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*, Lemkin coined the term *genocide* in order to define a crime that had no name. Yet he had already started to investigate the genocidal phenomenon long before he proposed a name for it—soon after the end of the First World War. This means that in this preliminary research Lemkin referred precisely to the historical case of the annihilation of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. In 1933, he addressed the Fifth Conference for the Unification of Penal Law in Madrid (14–20 October 1933) with a proposal aimed at including within the definition of genocide both physical extermination and metaphysical destruction.¹ The first one speaks of ‘acts of barbarity’, and the second of ‘acts of vandalism’.

The double concept elaborated by Lemkin in 1933, in its possible criminological qualifications, coherently accounts for the historical situation of the Ottoman Armenians during the Great War. The Armenians were transformed by the Young Turks of ‘Union and Progress’ into a fundamental racial enemy. It is in the quality of a racial enemy that a very large majority of the Ottoman Armenians were murdered as a human group, mainly during the paroxysmal phase of the extermination, between January 1915 and the end of 1917. Between 1918 and 1922, genocidal policies against the Armenians were started again and were finalized by the national revolution led by Mustafa Kemal.² The ideology and the politics of genocide denial were conceived by the Turkish state at the time of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. To the Caucasus the genocidal enterprise was exported in 1918, and it is renewed today by the Azerbaijani state. As for the phase of denial, which still lasts, this concerns not only the truth of the genocide, but the whole of the history of Armenia since ancient times. Histori-

1 At that time (October 1933), Lemkin was Lecturer in Comparative Law at the Institute of Criminology in the Free University of Poland and Deputy Prosecutor of the District Court of Warsaw.

2 See the major work by Raymond H. Kévorkian, *Finalizing a Genocide. Mustafa Kemal and the Elimination of Armenian and Greek Survivors (1918–1922)* (*Parachever un génocide. Mustafa Kemal et l'élimination des rescapés arméniens et grecs (1918–1922)*), Paris: Odile Jacob, 2023 (in French). See also Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide. Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

ans who study the genocide of the Armenians legitimately describe theirs as a never-ending genocide.³

After the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku between 1988 and 1990, a process of ethnic cleansing and cultural annihilation massively affected the Armenian populations of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the territory of Nakhichevan. Only the population of Nagorno-Karabakh could be protected from these policies after Armenia's victory over Azerbaijan in 1994. After Armenia's defeat in the war of 2020, however, the risk of genocide of the Armenians of Karabakh became very high. An act of genocide was the complete siege to which the territory of the Autonomous Republic (already amputated after 10 November 2020) was subjected from 12 December 2022 to 19 September 2023. Indeed, the total confinement of the Armenian population of Karabakh represented nothing less than an organised starvation. It is the terror provoked by Baku that explains why on 19 September 2023—the day the Azerbaijanis launched the military conquest of the territory—the population of Karabakh fled in its entirety to the Republic of Armenia. The Armenians of Karabakh thus resigned themselves to accepting the definitive loss of their homeland to the Azerbaijani state. The government in Baku immediately proceeded with the eradication of all vestiges of the history of Armenian settlement in this territory. This policy of destruction might now be extended to the territory of the Republic of Armenia. The southeast of Armenia (the region of Siunik), and even the entire Armenia, may also soon become a lost reality, imprisoned in the darkness of vanished civilisations.

The idea of the present book was conceived by a group of noted historians, art historians and anthropologists at a particular historical moment, the immediate aftermath of the military defeat of 9 November 2020. The investigations conducted by the authors are of utmost importance for us all, not only for those immediately concerned with the Caucasus. They attain three objectives: the authors expose the 'vandalism' of the Azerbaijani state against the most precious monuments and traces of Armenian societies in the Caucasus; they agree in determining the heavy responsibility of nationalism and denial in the work of destruction; through a careful analysis and thorough documentary inquiries, they contribute to an invaluable project of creating a record of a cultural heritage which would otherwise disappear. Karabakh will inevitably follow the destiny of Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan where Armenian culture has already been completely erased.

3 See my recent essay: *Armenia. A Never-Ending Genocide and a Vanishing World (Arménie : un génocide sans fin et le monde qui s'éteint)*, Paris: Belles Lettres, 2023.

The scholarly and documentary qualities of *Monuments and Identities in the Caucasus* are many: its methodological rigour, the way it embeds recent events within the scope of history, and its theorizing of a present crisis. All these make this a work of enduring value for the understanding of historical societies, the identification of what threatens a society, and the practicalities involved in the preservation of memory. This book asks us to think more deeply on what we mean by those repositories of memory we know as museums, libraries, archives. In preserving the memory of the eradicated societies of Karabakh, Nakhichevan and Azerbaijan, we may yet make those societies exemplary for others subjected to tyranny and genocide.

Through its sense of scholarly and ethical commitment, this book proves that knowledge of the past not only makes possible an understanding of the present: it also enables us to act. The warning of Marc Bloch, an outstanding researcher as well as a Resistance fighter, who imagined new tasks for the 'historian's craft' at the time of the Nazism and the extermination of the Jews of Europe, was heard at a very dark moment.⁴ *Monuments and Identities in the Caucasus* offers to its readers the possibility of learning about research in action, about how to take action through scholarship.

Professor Vincent Duclert,

École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, France

10 November 2023

4 'Misunderstanding of the present is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past. But a man may wear himself out just as fruitlessly in seeking to understand the past, if he is totally ignorant of the present', in Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft (Apologie pour l'histoire ou Métier d'historien)*, New York: Knopf, 1953.

Preface

The idea of this book arose from the tragic events that occurred in the autumn of 2020 in Artsakh/Karabakh, an ancient land lying in the highlands of the Lesser Caucasus. As we moved forward in our work of research and editing over the past two years, many of our worst apprehensions concerning the fate of Artsakh and its monuments came, alas, to be realised. That landscape has for millennia shaped perceptions of space and time, and has indeed created and sustained the collective memory of its inhabitants. They live today under siege. This book thus holds a double purpose: to tell the story of Artsakh, as well as that of the neighbouring Nakhichevan, and to reflect on the ways in which what now remains of the cultural landscape and artistic heritage may be safeguarded, documented and studied.

We should like to record the financial support that has helped us through the various stages of our editorial work. We are grateful to the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research and to the Knights of Vartan Fund for Armenian Studies (Belmont, Massachusetts), to the Armenian General Benevolent Union (Paris) and to the Representation of the Republic of Artsakh in France (Paris). Our special thanks go to Armineh Grigorian (Paris).

I. Dorfmann-Lazarev also wishes to acknowledge an important contribution from the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, and another from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft under Germany's Excellence Strategy in the framework of the research project 'Understanding Written Artefacts: Material, Interaction and Transmission in Manuscript Cultures' carried out at the University of Hamburg. Furthermore, he would like to record the grant received from All-Armenian Foundation Financing Armenological Studies (Yerevan). He warmly thanks his colleagues in Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, and in particular Professors Ivan Christov and Yoana Sirakova, as well as Professor Charles Lock of University of Copenhagen, for their moral support.

We both are greatly indebted to Dr Peter Phillips, SOAS, University of London, and to Peter Janssen S.M., Wellington, who have generously revised the manuscript of this book, offering us their invaluable advice on matters not only stylistic. Their deep and sympathetic understanding of the issues involved has smoothed the way of the papers originally written in Armenian, French, Italian and Russian.

We should also like to express our sincere gratitude to the Chief Editor of the series 'Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity', Dr Ken Parry of Macquarie University, Sydney, who initiated the proposal for the volume, and to Professor

Emma Loosley Leeming of the University of Exeter: their critical comments made on several drafts of this book have improved it enormously. Naturally, we are alone responsible for the shortcomings that remain.

Finally, our largest debt must be to our contributors each of whom, whether in Armenia, France, Italy, Russia, Switzerland, Turkey or the USA, promptly responded to our invitation. Without their profound knowledge of the terrain and its monuments, those which survive and those which have disappeared, we would not have this volume. It is only thanks to their scholarship and to their witness (or 'fieldwork') that this book can provide not only a balanced and sophisticated historical account but an accurate inventory of monuments. Against this, the future may be able to judge the success of those responsible for their conservation.

Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev (Sofia) and Haroutioun Khatchadourian
(Paris)
Epiphany 2023

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Note on Transliteration

1. With minor deviations aimed at achieving a more precise phonetic rendering, the Armenian terms are transliterated according to the norms of Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use (PCGN) and United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN), as of 1981 (see table below).¹ The more broadly used terms and place names (both Armenian and Azeri) are not transliterated (e.g. Azerbaijan, Baku, Julfa, Karabagh or Karabakh, Kura or Kur, Nakhichevan, Stepanakert, Yerevan). The transliteration reflects the pronunciation of Eastern Armenian, i.e. the official language of the Republic of Armenia, as well as the dialect of Arts'akh.

	Armenian uppercase	Armenian lowercase	Transliteration
1	Ա	ա	a
2	Բ	բ	b
3	Գ	գ	g
4	Դ	դ	d
5 ^a	Ե	ե	e
6	Զ	զ	z
7	Է	է	ē
8 ^b	Ը	ը	ě
9	Թ	թ	t'
10	Ժ	ժ	zh
11	Ի	ի	i
12	Լ	լ	l
13	Խ	խ	kh
14	Ճ	ժ	ts
15	Կ	կ	k
16	Հ	հ	h
17	Ջ	ձ	dz
18	Ղ	ղ	ł
19	Շ	ճ	ch
20	Մ	մ	m

¹ United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) and the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use (PCGN).

(cont.)

	Armenian uppercase	Armenian lowercase	Transliteration
21	Յ	յ	y
22	Ն	ն	n
23	Շ	շ	sh
24 ^c	Ո	ո	o
25	Չ	չ	ch ^ç
26	Պ	պ	p
27	Ջ	ջ	dj
28	Ռ	ր	r
29	Ս	ս	s
30	Վ	վ	v
31	Տ	տ	t
32	Ր	ր	r
33	Ց	ց	ts ^ç
34	Ի	ի	w
35	Փ	փ	p ^ç
36	Ք	ք	k ^ç
37	ՈՒ, Ու	ու	u
38	ԻՒ	իւ	iu
39 ^d		և/ևւ	ev
40	Օ	օ	ō
41	Ֆ	ֆ	f

- The letter *և* is always transliterated as [e], also when it is pronounced as [ye].
- In order to facilitate the pronunciation of Armenian names, the semivowel [ë] is transcribed also when it is omitted in Armenian writing.
- The letter *ո* is always transliterated as [o], also when pronounced as [vo].
- The combined character *և/ևւ* is always transliterated as [ev], also when pronounced as [yev].

In literary Armenian, the stress normally falls on the last syllable of a name (but never on the semivowel [ë]).

2. Russian is transliterated following the norms of British Standard 2979: 1958 (Oxford University Press).

3. For Azerbaijani, the Latin alphabet adopted in Azerbaijan in 1992 is normally used. Chapters 7 and 9 follow the Latin alphabet in use in Azerbaijan between

1991 and 1992. When written with Cyrillic letters, the use is that of the years 1958–1991.

4. Georgian is transliterated according to the 'National Transliteration System of Georgia'.