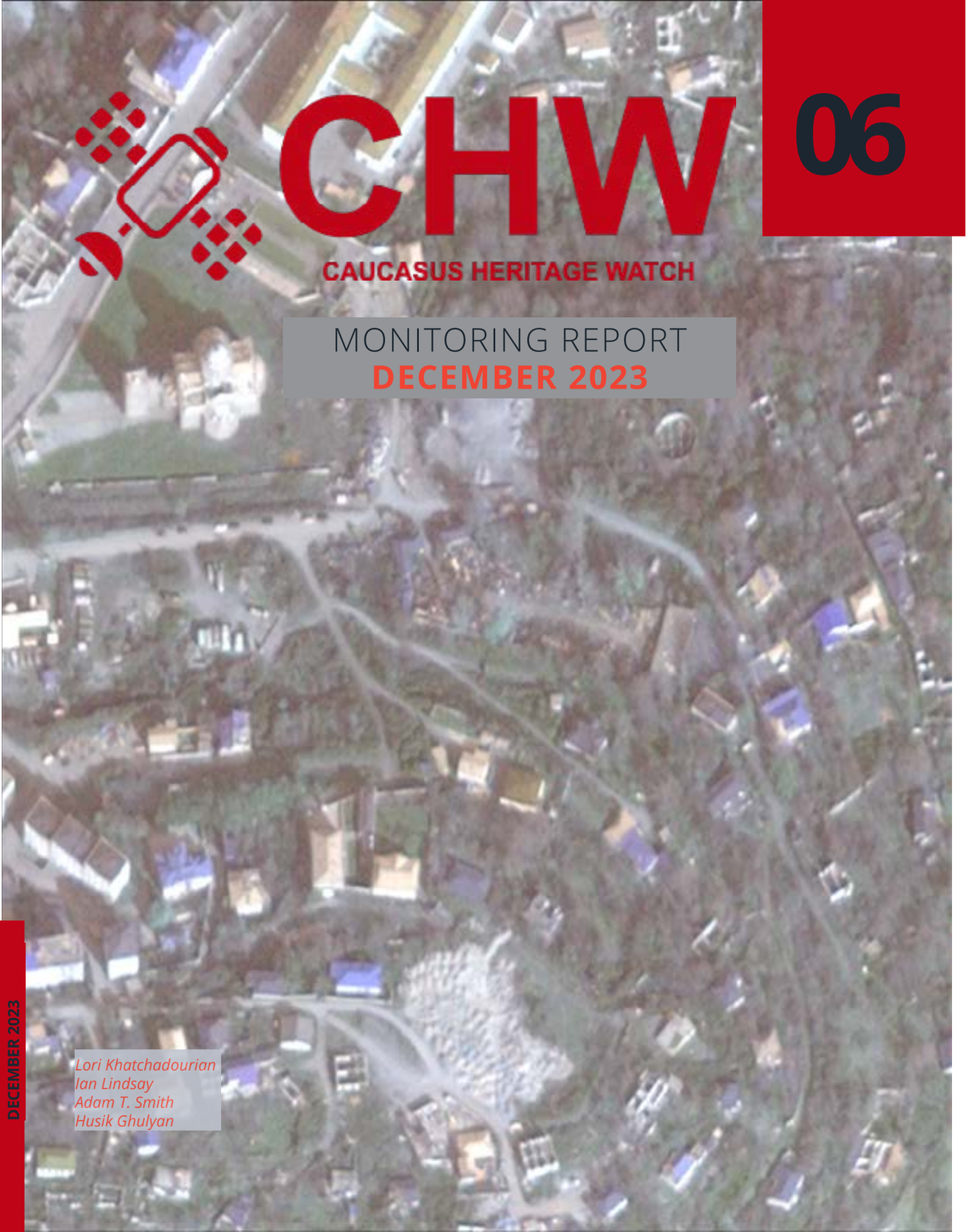


Caucasus Heritage Watch

Monitoring Report #6
December 2023

Lori Khatchadourian, Ian Lindsay,
Adam T. Smith, & Husik Ghulyan

©2023 CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

Cornell Institute of Archaeology
and Material Studies
Cornell University
261 McGraw Hall
Ithaca NY 14853
USA

CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Where We **Work** 5
Our **Mission** 7
Our **Goals** 8

OVERVIEW

From **CHW** 9
CHW **Dashboard** 11
Our **Team** 13
Funders & **Partners** 14

CURRENT OBSERVATIONS

Summary **Assessment** 15
Damaged **Heritage** 17
Threatened **Heritage** 29

SITE UPDATES

Destroyed **Heritage** 35

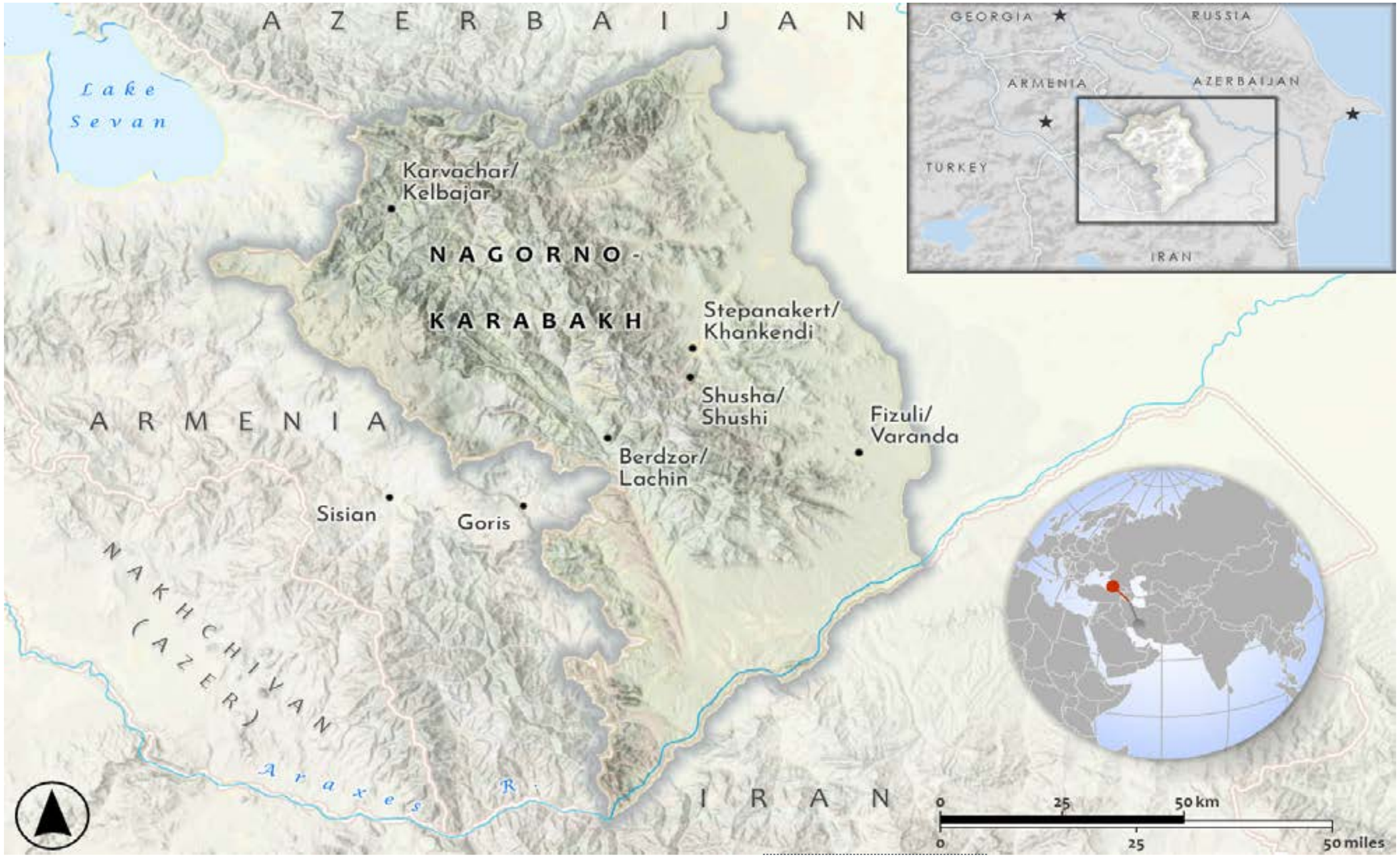
METHODOLOGY

What We **Do** 37
How We **Work** 39
Why We **Do This** 40

MEDIA MATTERS

In the **News** 41
Photo **Credits** 41
Contact **Us** 42

Find Us **caucasusheritage.cornell.edu**
Follow Us on X **@CaucasusHW**
Like Us on Facebook **@CaucasusHW**



WHERE WE **WORK**

- *Total Sites in Database: 2,087*
  Sites Currently Monitored: 271
- *Total Area of Region: approx. 12,100 km2*
  Area of Current Monitoring: approx. 4,800 km2

CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

OUR MISSION

"A people without knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots."
-Marcus Garvey

Caucasus Heritage Watch is a research initiative founded in 2020 to monitor and document endangered and damaged cultural heritage using high-resolution satellite imagery. We strive to reveal visual evidence regarding past and present cultural erasure using the latest technologies of earth observation. Our purpose is to encourage accountability, inform public policy, support truth and reconciliation, and remove cultural heritage from the front lines of regional conflicts.

CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

OUR GOALS

- **Truth-telling**: Investigating and monitoring past and future damage to cultural heritage can contribute to the work of truth and reconciliation. In contexts of war and genocide, cultural aerospace can bear witness to the condition of cultural heritage sites. These facts provide proof to counter state denialism, falsification, and other abuses that place heritage sites at the center of political conflict. Social repair can only happen when societies come to terms with troubled pasts and difficult truths.

- **Deterrence**: There are few instruments for deterring the destruction of cultural heritage within a state's sovereign borders. Satellite-based monitoring has the potential to discourage or restrain state actors from intentional erasure both through the act of bearing witness, and by the dissemination of authoritative research to relevant national and international agencies and publics.

- **Accountability**: In contexts of conflict and genocide, abuses to cultural heritage are often clandestine, making it difficult to hold actors accountable. Satellite-based monitoring that reveals the destruction of cultural heritage can provide a forensic resource so that the public can hold responsible parties accountable for harms, including their own leaders.

- **Innovation**: Caucasus Heritage Watch works to develop new techniques in the use of geospatial technologies for sustained, large-scale monitoring of cultural heritage at risk. As researchers, we seek to innovate new and transferrable methodologies that can amplify our practical impact and disseminate workflows that can empower partners in the region and assist researchers in other parts of the world.



FROM
CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

December 2023

Since our June 2023 report, Nagorno-Karabakh was once again consumed by violence, as Azerbaijan launched a military offensive on September 19-20 that led to the surrender of the self-proclaimed republic. As Azerbaijan established sovereign control over Nagorno-Karabakh, the region's 100,000 ethnic Armenians fled to neighboring Armenia, fearful for their security in an authoritarian state that has committed atrocities against Armenians with impunity and indoctrinated its society to espouse virulent Armenophobia. The mass exodus of Armenians in September 2023 constituted yet another wave of ethnic cleansing in a conflict that has already seen the forcible displacement of an estimated 1.2 million Armenians and Azerbaijanis since the 1990s.

As Armenia and its international partners responded to the humanitarian crisis resulting from the influx of a population traumatized by war, blockade-induced hunger, and precarity, CHW rushed to assess the implications of the new reality for the region's cultural heritage. The people of Nagorno-Karabakh left behind not only their homes, schools, fields, and mountain pastures, but a cultural and religious landscape graced with hundreds of medieval and modern Armenian churches, monasteries, and cemeteries. These historic sites now face the same long-term threat of damage, destruction, and cultural appropriation as the roughly 280 cultural properties that CHW has been monitoring in territories ceded at the end of the 2020 war. In short, the magnitude of our task has increased dramatically.

The mass exodus of Armenians in September 2023 constituted yet another wave of ethnic cleansing in a conflict that has already seen the forcible displacement of an estimated 1.2 million Armenians and Azerbaijanis since the 1990s.

Two priorities have shaped our work in fall 2023. The first has been to mount a rapid response to the expanded crisis of Armenian cultural heritage in Azerbaijan. CHW had been preparing for this eventuality since spring 2023, when we began geolocating the cultural heritage sites of Nagorno-Karabakh with the highest possible precision. We are thus ready to launch a more ambitious program of satellite monitoring in the months ahead, using our expanded geodatabase of cultural heritage sites located in and around the former Nagorno-Karabakh.

Our second priority has been to remain focused on the hundreds of Armenian cultural properties located in the regions that were ceded to Azerbaijan in November 2020. These sites have been increasingly threatened by development, road construction, military activity, and (in at least one instance) indiscriminate destruction. The present report contains the findings from our 8th satellite-monitoring mission in these regions. Here we highlight two important developments.

First, the redevelopment of Shusha/Shushi is causing (or providing a pretext for) damage to several cultural heritage sites in this historic city. Early signs of disdain for Armenian cultural heritage in Shusha emerged in spring 2021, when we documented damage to the Shushi Northern cemetery (see Report #1), followed by the distortive restoration of Ghazanchetsots Cathedral and the destruction of the sculpture garden at the Fine Arts Museum (see Report #2). New satellite imagery shows that the pace of damage in Shusha is accelerating. In this cycle alone, a new road cut a path through the historic Yerevan Gates cemetery, densely packed with Armenian-inscribed tombstones; bulldozers dumped debris on the archaeological remains of the 19th century Meghretsots Holy Mother of God Church; and heavy machinery heaped debris on the 18th-19th century Ghazanchetsots cemetery, damaging its already fragmentary tombstones. While we currently assess these sites as damaged, the future of the Ghazanchetsots cemetery, in particular, appears more ominous. A new master plan for Shusha circulating on news outlets and public media sources indicates that residential structures are planned on the cemetery plot. Indeed, the full implementation of the plan would result in the destruction of several additional heritage sites.

Due to the new damage in Shusha, this monitoring mission revealed the greatest number of violations of a provisional measure issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December 2021…

Due to the new damage in Shusha/Shushi, this mission revealed the greatest number of violations of a provisional measure issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December 2021, which called on Azerbaijan to prevent and punish abuses of Armenian cultural heritage. If Shusha's master plan is implemented, the ICJ is now faced with a unique situation in which a state has declared in advance its intention to violate a court ruling. The destruction of Ghazanchetsots cemetery and other cultural heritage sites in Shusha can be anticipated in the near future without an international response.

Elsewhere it appears that the state is acting in cognizance of the ICJ ruling. The second significant finding of this reporting period is the enigmatic building activity at the site of St. Sargis of Mokhrenes/Susanlyg, a church whose destruction we documented in summer 2022 as the first major violation of the ICJ decision (see Report #4). It appears that Azerbaijan is either building a new structure on the site of the destroyed church (which appears on the state's monument list as a Caucasian Albanian temple) or attempting to rebuild the "temple" before the legal case before the ICJ is decided on its merits. We present the evidence of this unusual case in a StoryMap that we released on X (formerly Twitter) on November 8 and will continue to monitor it closely.

Despite the concerning developments that CHW has documented in this monitoring cycle, it is important to stress that the large majority of Armenian cultural heritage sites we have been monitoring remain, as of now, structurally unharmed. We say this not to minimize the grave threats or the real harms, including the symbolic violence of cultural appropriation through the "Albanification" of monuments. Rather, our purpose is to temper extremist and unsubstantiated claims of 'cultural genocide' or widespread destruction in Nagorno-Karabakh that circulate on social media and have been leveled at both sides of the conflict. As always, we hope our findings can support more informed debate, both among and within Armenian and Azerbaijani societies.

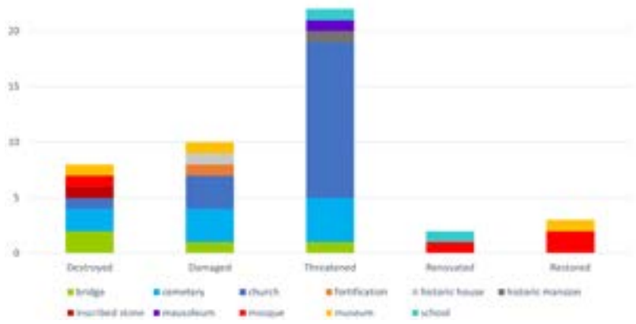
As the corpus of cultural heritage sites requiring satellite observation grows following the fall of Nagorno-Karabakh, so too do CHW's expenses. Monitoring cultural heritage using commercial satellite imagery is extremely costly, and we are grateful to the funders that make our work possible. To respond effectively to this new phase in the cultural heritage crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh we need your help. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to our Cornell-sponsored crowdfunding campaign. As always, you can follow our activities on X @caucasusHW, on Facebook, and our monitoring dashboard on our website.

Lori Khatchadourian, Ian Lindsay, and Adam T. Smith
CHW Co-Principal Investigators

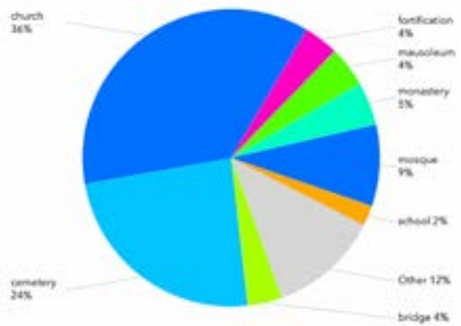


CHW **DASHBOARD**

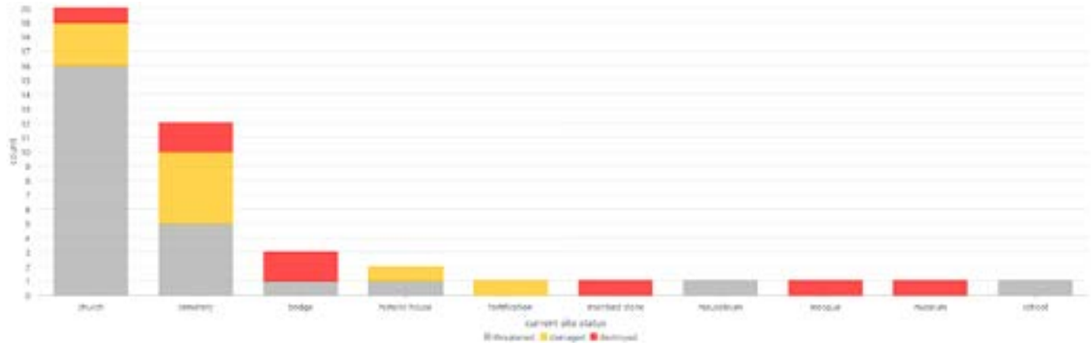
IMPACT CATEGORIES BY SITE TYPE



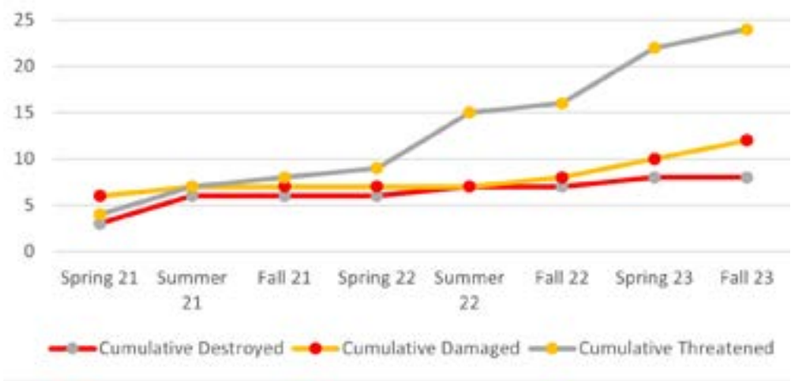
SITES MONITORED BY TYPE



IMPACTS BY SITE TYPE



CUMULATIVE IMPACTS OVER TIME



IMPACTED SITES LIST

Destroyed Sites

Site #	Name	Type	Observation Dates	Mission	Report
HT.069-1	Mets T'agher/Böyük Tağlar N. Cemetery	cemetery	Spring 2021	1	1
LN.004-0	Yusifbeyli Mosque	mosque	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.052-2	Ghazanchets'ots' Inscribed Stone	inscribed stone	Spring 2021	1	1
AN.342-0	Sghnakh cemetery	cemetery	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.070-0	Makun Bridge	bridge	Summer 2021	2	2
SH.241-1	Fine Arts Museum sculpture garden	museum	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.061-0	St. Sargis Church of Mokhrenes	church	Summer 2022, Fall 2023	5,8	4,6
HT.072-0	Halevor Bridge	bridge	Spring 2023	7	5

Damaged Sites

Site #	Name	Type	Observation Dates	Mission	Report
SH.052-0	Ghazanchets'ots' S. Amenap'rkich	church	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.053-0	Kanach Zham or S. Hovhannes Mkrtich	church	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.054-0	Surb Meghrets'ots'	church	Spring 2021	1,8	1,6
SH.074-0	The Zhamharyan's house	historic house	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.093-0	Shushi Eastern Rampart	fortification	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.101-2	Shushi Northern Cemetery	cemetery	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.063-0	Shusha/Shushi Geological Museum	museum	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.072-0	Halevor Bridge	bridge	Fall 2022	6	4
LN.177-0	Cemetery near Vazgenashen / Hajisamly	cemetery	Spring 2023, Fall 2023	7,8	5,6
MT.212-0	Cemetery near Gizil Kangarli / Nor Maragha	cemetery	Spring 2023	7	5
SH.103-0	Ghazanchets'ots Cemetery	cemetery	Fall 2023	8	6
SH.105-0	Yerevan Gates Cemetery	cemetery	Fall 2023	8	6

Threatened Sites

Site #	Name	Type	Observation Dates	Mission	Report
AN.226-0	S. Astvatsatsin	church	Spring 2021	1	1
AN.344-6	Vank'asar	church	Spring 2021	1	1
HT.074-0	Amenap'rkich Church	church	Spring 2021	1	1
KR.022-0	School in Tsar/Zar	school	Spring 2021	1	1
AN.225-0	T'ukhnakal Mansion	historic mansion	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.071-0	Tahis Bridge	bridge	Summer 2021	2	2
MI.023-0	S. Astvatsatsin Church	church	Summer 2021	2	2
KR.009-1	Mrchmants' Church	church	Fall 2021	3	3
LN.055-1	Ughtamejk' Cemetery	cemetery	Spring 2022	4	4
HT.173-0	Mokhrenes Cemetery	cemetery	Summer 2022	5	4
LN.016-0	Arakhish Church	church	Summer 2022	5	4
LN.016-1	Arakhish Cemetery	cemetery	Summer 2022	5	4
LN.017-0	Zorakhach' Church	church	Summer 2022, Fall 2023	5,8	4,6
LN.187-0	Vakunis Church	church	Summer 2022	5	4
MT.161-0	S. Yeghishe of Mataghis	church	Summer 2022	5	4
KR.008-0	The Church of Yeritsushen	church	Fall 2022	6	4
LN.156-0	St. Poghos-Petros Church of Shalva	church	Spring 2023	7	5
LN.176-0	Vazgenashen Church	church	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.056-0	Amenap'rkich Church	church	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.213-0	Gavurgala Church	church	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.452-0	Gyzyl Kangarli Historical Cemetery	cemetery	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.453-0	Mausoleum near Gizil Kangarli / Nor Maragha	mausoleum	Spring 2023	7	5
AN.003-0	S. Astvatsatsin of Avetaranots'	church	Fall 2023	8	6
HT.088-0	Kavak'avank' Church	church	Fall 2023	8	6

OUR TEAM



LORI KHATCHADOURIAN

Associate Professor, Near Eastern Studies
Cornell University

Prof. Khatchadourian has been working in the South Caucasus since 1995, first in political development and since 2003 in archaeology. Her work has been supported by the NSF, NEH, and ACLS, among other granting organizations. She is the author of Imperial Matter.



IAN LINDSAY

Associate Professor, Anthropology
Purdue University

Prof. Lindsay has been studying the history and prehistory of the South Caucasus since 2000, with support from the National Science Foundation and other agencies. His archaeological practice incorporates the use of GIS and terrestrial and aerial remote sensing techniques.



ADAM T. SMITH

Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences, Anthropology, Cornell University

Prof. Smith has been conducting archaeological research in the Caucasus since 1992. He is the co-founder of Project ArAGATS, the oldest international archaeological collaboration in the region. He is a former Guggenheim fellow and author of numerous works on the region.



HUSIK GHULYAN

Lead Researcher, CHW

Dr. Ghulyan is an independent researcher and PhD in Urban & Environmental Studies. His dissertation examined the production of urban space in Turkey. His current research studies the political geographies of modern & Soviet Armenia.



SALPI BOCCHIERIYAN

Monitoring Consultant, CHW

Ms. Bocchieriyan is an archaeologist at Death Valley National Park and has an MA in Archaeology from Cornell University with a thesis on mortuary practice in ancient Armenia. She has also worked in Greece, Turkey, and Romania.

OUR FUNDERS

We are deeply grateful to the individual donors and organizations that support CHW's work.

Funding and facilities for this monitoring report have been generously provided by these institutions:

The Armenian General Benevolent Union
The Aragats Foundation
Cornell University
Purdue University

We are also supported by public donations to our efforts. You can join the public network supporting CHW by donating to us through The Aragats Foundation's CHW funding campaign. Click the link or scan the QR code at right to donate. If you are interested in exploring how you can help support our work, get in touch with us.

OUR PARTNERS

MONUMENT WATCH

INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY & ETHNOGRAPHY, RA

RESEARCH ON ARMENIAN ARCHITECTURE

IMPACTED **SITES**

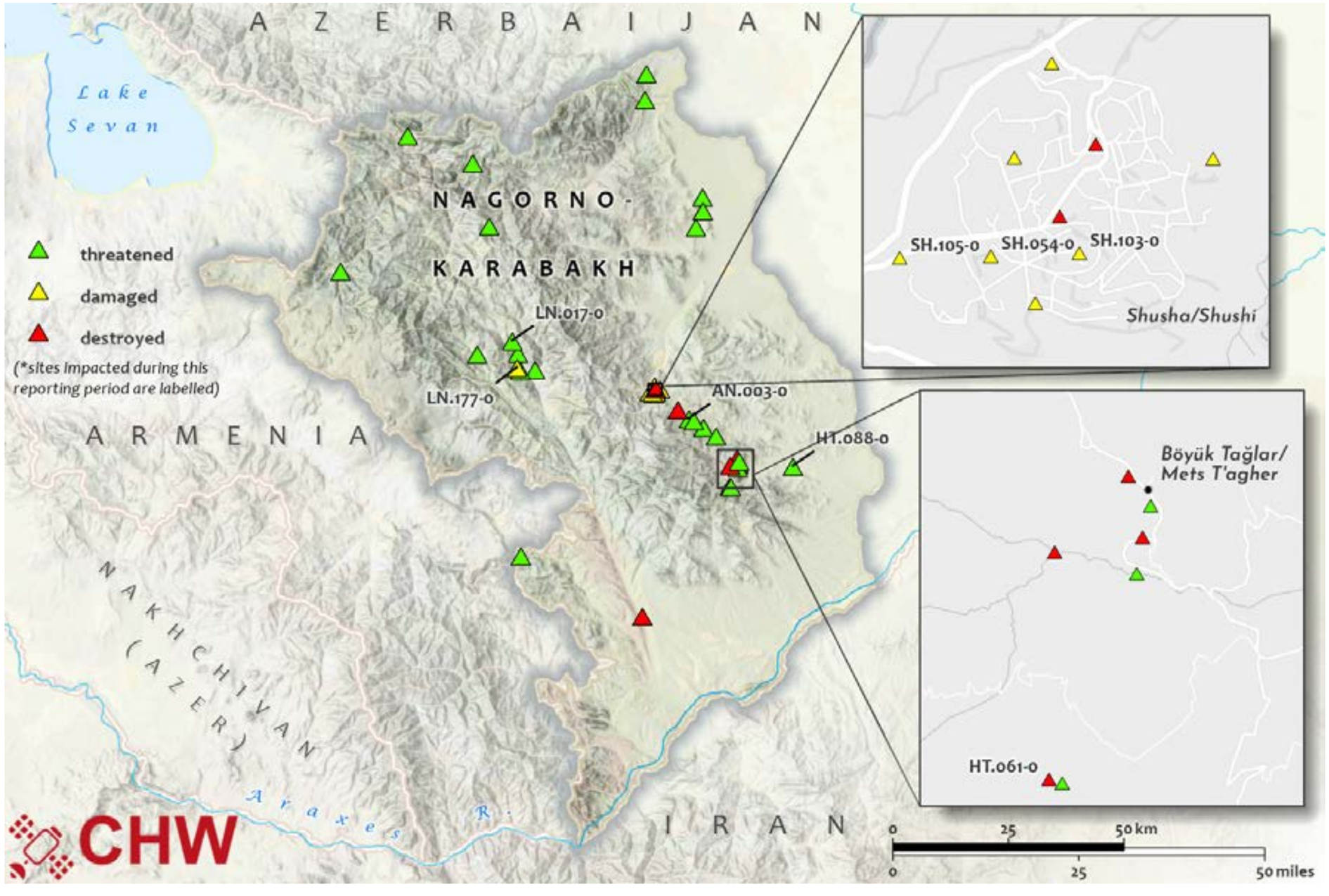
Summary Assessment

In our last Monitoring Report (#5 June 2023) we noted two concerning trends imperiling heritage in the Nagorno-Karabakh region: a geographic broadening of adverse impacts to cultural heritage sites across the territory ceded to Azerbaijan in 2020 and an expansion of the forces impacting heritage to include the construction of new military facilities. The latter observation appears to have been an accurate harbinger of the fall 2023 renewed violence that resulted in the ethnic cleansing of the entire Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. It is unclear at present whether the events of September 2023 will lead to a reduction in the threat to cultural heritage posed by military emplacements. But there are already very clear signs that the primary tool of cultural destruction will not be war but development.

To summarize our fall findings:

- Four sites have been damaged, three in Shusha/Shushi as a result of new work (SH.054-0, SH.103-0, SH.105-0) and one (LN.177-0) as a result of the expansion of continuing work;
- Three sites are newly threatened by encroaching construction activity, one as a result of adjacent development work (LN.017-0) but two as a result of targeted interventions at the sites (AN.003-0 and HT.088-0).
- Lastly, we share our current information on rebuilding currently underway on the former site of St. Sargis of Mokhrenes/Susanliq, a church we reported destroyed in July 2022.

Since CHW began its monitoring program, we have now documented 44 impacted sites (threatened, destroyed, or damaged), 16% of the heritage inventory monitored at present. The escalating scale of impacts should be deeply concerning to anyone concerned with the preservation of the fragile, irreplaceable remains of the human past.



Damaged Heritage

LN.177-0	Cemetery near Vazgenashen / Hajisamly
Dates	14th-16th centuries
Baseline Image	2022-10-15 / SkySat
Monitoring Image	2023-04-28/29 & 2023-10-21 / SkySat
Current Status	Damaged
Notes	This 14th-16th century cemetery is reported to contain carved cross stones (khachkars), including one inscribed in Armenian dating to the 14th century. Our initial report on damage to the site in June 2023 noted encroachment into the territory of the cemetery on the southern and northeastern edges. Since that time, a significant area of the cemetery has been damaged by continued earth moving activity in the northeast, particularly in the three areas identified by red arrows in the image at right (bottom). A 2011 plan (shown below) compiled by the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh shows the outline of the conservation zone. Most of the khachkars in this cemetery are embedded in the ground, so it is not possible from satellite imagery to determine how many have been destroyed.
Alerts	CHW released a social media alert on May 18, 2023.
Image Credit	Below left image courtesy of Zohrab Yrkoyan. Below center and right, images from Ministry of Culture of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, courtesy of Monument Watch.









Damaged Heritage

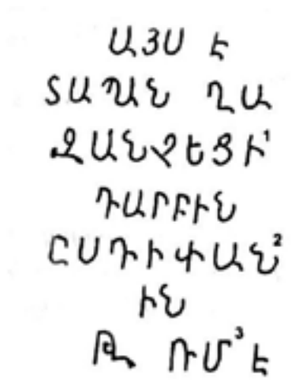
SH.054-0	Meghretsots St. Astvatsatsin Church
Dates	1838
Baseline Image	2021-10-25 / GeoEye1
Monitoring Images	2021-04-10 & 2023-11-03 / SkySat
Current Status	Damaged
Notes	This church was built by immigrants from Meghri in 1838. All but the apse of the church was demolished during the 1960s when the structure was paved over and turned into an outdoor movie theater. In 2017, archaeological excavations at the site removed the asphalt layer to expose the church's original foundations. CHW issued an initial damage assessment for SH.054-0 in Monitoring Report #1 from June 2021. At that time, satellite imagery indicated damage to the north wall (arrow A) sustained most likely as a result of the 2020 war. New imagery from November 3, 2023 indicates that demolition debris (arrow B) was recently dumped on the foundations of the old church, likely using heavy machinery.
Alerts	CHW released a social media alert on November 20, 2023.
Image Credit	Photo by N. Yeranyan, courtesy of Monument Watch.





Damaged Heritage

SH.103-0	Ghazanchetsots Cemetery
Dates	18th-19th centuries
Baseline Image	2023-10-05 / SkySat
Monitoring Images	2023-11-03 / SkySat
Current Status	Damaged
Notes	Between Oct. 5 and Nov. 3, another Armenian cemetery in Shusha/i was damaged. It appears that bulldozers dumped heaps of debris atop the old Ghazanchetsots cemetery (southeast of the cathedral), endangering the already fragmented tombstones. The location of the cemetery is confirmed by maps, publications, and recent photographs. The 18th-19th c. cemetery had been severely damaged during the Soviet era. By the 1990s, 45 tombstones remained. One marks the passing of Stepan, a blacksmith from Ghazanchi village in Nakhchivan, who died in 1758. He was one of many Armenian migrants from that village whose name was given to the city's well-known cathedral. Stepan's tombstone recalls the destruction of the Armenian cemetery in his native village, the Old Cemetery of Ghazanchi/Shahkert. CHW documented its erasure in our investigation into the recent destruction of Armenian cultural heritage in Nakhchivan. In that investigation, we also documented the destruction of the medieval Armenian monastery in the blacksmith's native Ghazanchi.
Alerts	CHW released a social media alert on November 27, 2023.
Image Credit	Photos courtesy of Monument Watch. Inscription from: Հարությունյան, Հ. 2008 Շուշիի տապանաքարերի արձանագրությունները.





Damaged Heritage

SH.103-0	Ghazanchetsots Cemetery (continued)
Supporting Materials	Geolocation of SH.103-0 was supported by a number of sources that CHW cross-referenced to get an accurate estimation of the full extent of the cemetery.

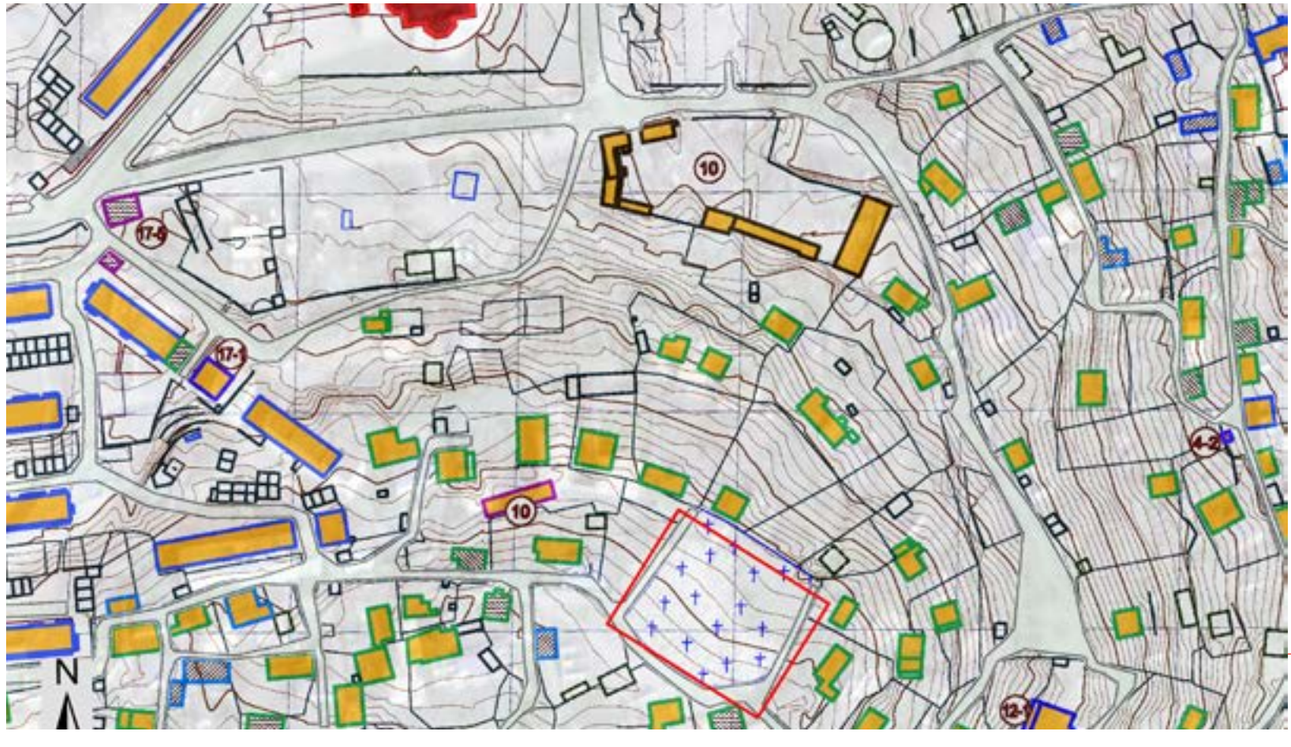






A declassified 1980 KH-9 Hexagon image (above) captured by an American reconnaissance satelllite shows Ghazanchetsots Cemetery as an open area 225m southeast of Ghazanchetsots cathedral. The surface of the field is stippled by the reflectance pattern of the tombstones still extant.

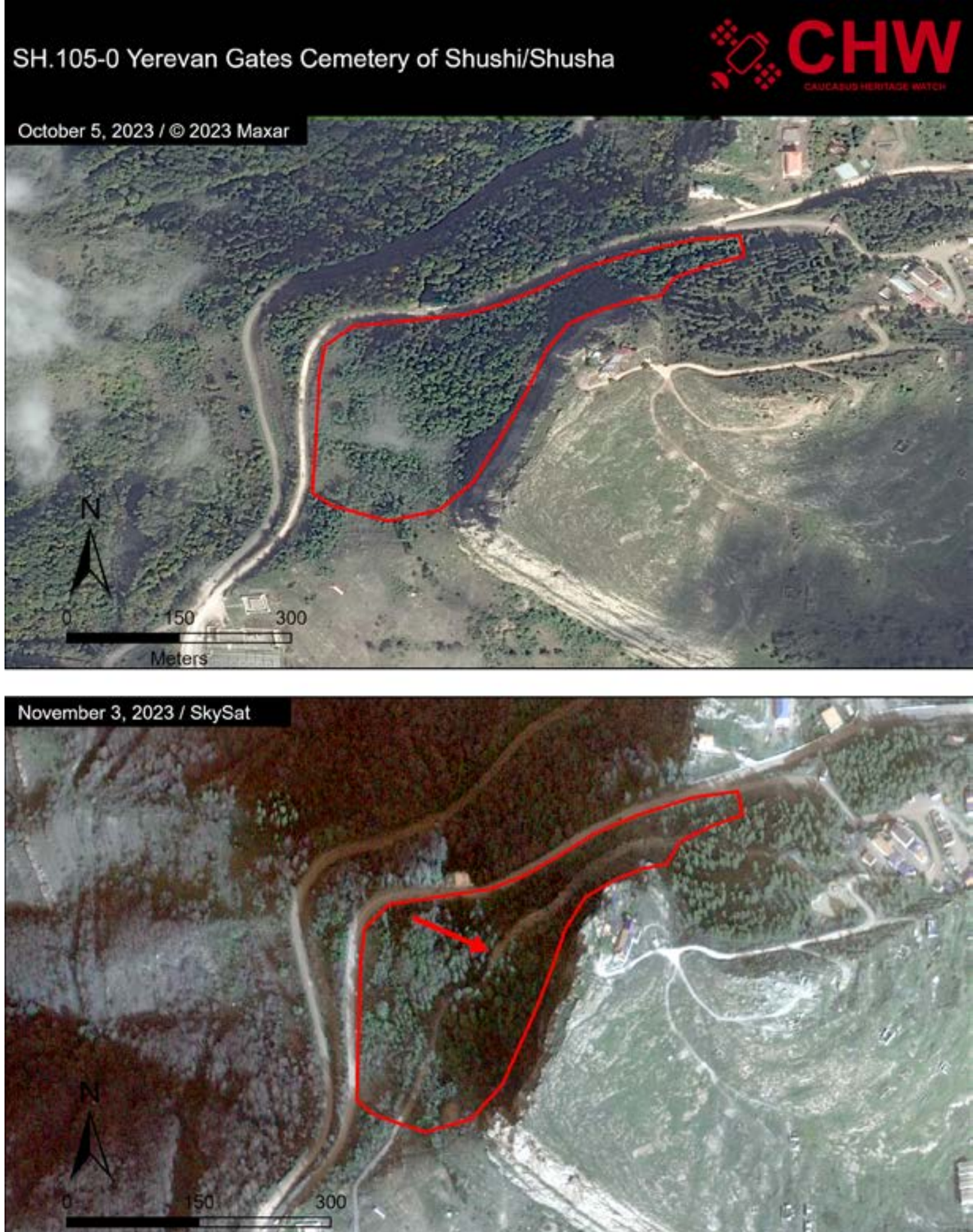
A map of historic Shushi produced by the State Agency of Protection of Heritage of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic shows the location of the cemetery clearly marked with crosses.



Damaged Heritage

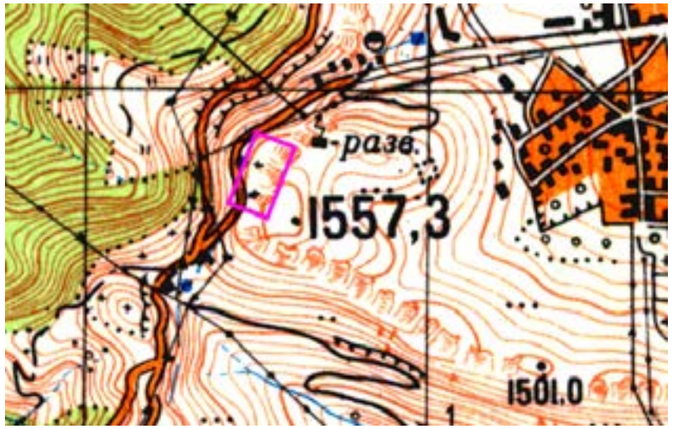
SH.105-0	Yerevan Gates Cemetery
Dates	1802-1913 (Based on the monument list for Shushi/Shusha compiled by the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic).
Baseline Image	2023-10-05 / SkySat
Monitoring Images	2023-11-03 / SkySat
Current Status	Damaged
Notes	Between Oct. 5 and Nov. 3 bulldozers carved a road through an historic Armenian burial ground in Shusha/Shushi known as the Yerevan Gates cemetery (noted in the purple rectangle in the 1974 Soviet topographic map below). The official monument list of NKR lists 78 tombstones dating to between 1802 and 1913. Harutyunyan (2008) transcribed the inscriptions, the vast majority of which were written in Armenian, and documented the representation of 120 extended families. Dense forest obscures the cemetery. We used maps and publications of Shusha/i to trace its borders. It is unclear how many tombstones were damaged, but research shows that burials covered the area. The tombstones of women and men, young and old, tell stories of kinship, occupation, faith, status, and more. And they ask that the deceased may rest in peace.
Alerts	CHW released a social media alert on November 22, 2023.
Image Credit	Photo below courtesy of Monument Watch.





Damaged Heritage

SH.105-0	Yerevan Gates Cemetery (continued)
Supporting Materials	Geolocation of SH.105-0 was supported by a number of sources that CHW cross-referenced to get an accurate estimation of the full extent of the cemetery.



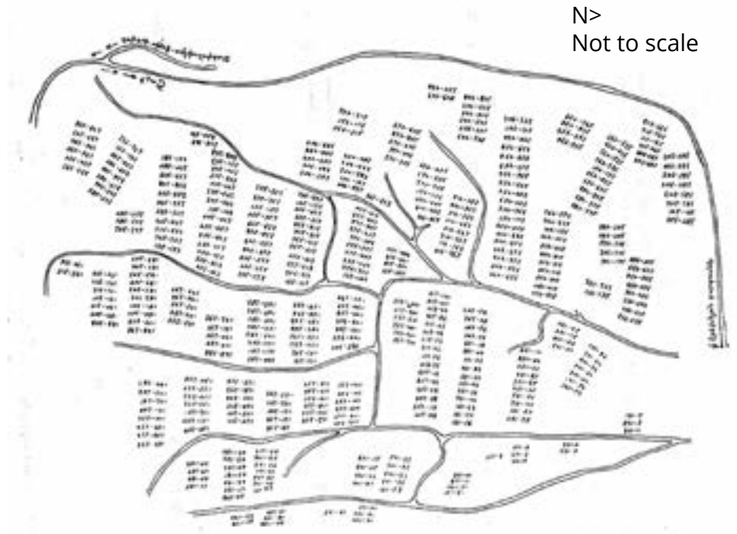
A 1974 1:50,000 scale Soviet topographic map (J-38-10-V) clearly shows the presence of a cemetery in the area, marked by black crosses (highlighted by the purple rectangle).



An estimate of the extent of the cemetery (indicated by the red arrow below) was included in a planning map for the town of Shushi produced by the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.



Photos of the cemetery published in a 2008 inventory of the town's cemeteries clearly showed the tombstones covering the entire area up to the edge of a tall cliff that marks the edge of the plateau on which Shushi/Shusha is built. We are thus able to conclude based on all available sources that the cemetery covered the entire territory between the road and the bluff, as shown in the satellite images on page 26, above. Photos from: G. Harutyunyan 2008 *Shushi: Novovyyavlennye Istoricheskie Nadpisi*. Committee for the Preservation of Monuments, Stepanakert. Plates 90-92.



A map of the cemetery published in 2008 shows the wide distribution of tombstones and walking paths through the forest. Հարությունյան, Հ. 2008 Շուշիի տապանաքարերի արձանագրությունները.

Threatened Heritage

AN.003-0	S. Astvatsatsin of Avetaranots / Chanakhchi
Dates	1651
Baseline Image	2023-04-23 / SkySat
Monitoring Image	2023-09-26 / © Maxar
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	Dated to 1651 by an inscription above the entrance, the church was reported to contain numerous relics dating to the 17th century. It is one of the largest three-nave vaulted churches in the region. A September 26 satellite image (at right, bottom) shows worrying new activity at the church. Sizeable vehicles are parked against the south wall (arrow A) atop a freshly graded surface (arrow B). While the purpose is unclear, CHW is concerned about the well-documented Armenian founding inscription on the church from 1651.
Image Credit	Photo below courtesy of Monument Watch.
Citation	To learn more about S. Astvatsatsin of Avetaranots, see site entry on Monument Watch's website.



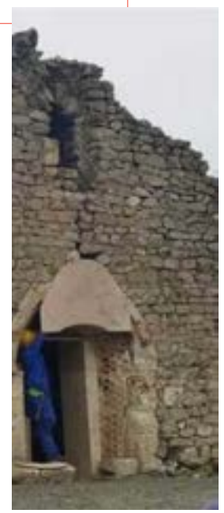




Threatened Heritage

HT.088-0	Kavak'avank' Church
Dates	1742
Baseline Image	2023-04-15 / SkySat
Monitoring Image	2023-10-05 / SkySat
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	Kavak'avank' Church is the only standing structure from what was once a monastic complex. The church was rebuilt in 1742 but the original construction date of the monastery is not known. A number of Armenian inscriptions and icons on the church were destroyed during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War but the structure itself survived. On July 1, 2023 Monument Watch issued an alert that the site was being altered based on a video posted on Facebook. The video shows work being done on both the interior and exterior of the church, including the emplacement of a new lintel over the entry. Satellite imagery from October 5, 2023 confirms new ongoing work at the site, most visible as a newly bulldozed road leading to the front entrance of the church.
Alerts	Monument Watch issued an alert on July 1, 2023 based on videos of work at the church circulating on social media.
Image Credit	Photo below left courtesy of Monument Watch. Screen capture below right from video shared on Facebook.









Threatened Heritage

LN.017-0	Zorakhach' Church
Dates	17th-18th centuries
Baseline Image	2021-10-10 / SkySat
Monitoring Images	2023-04-29 & 2023-10-31 / SkySat
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	Zorakhach' church is a single-nave basilica with a semicircular vault under a gabled roof. Its walls incorporate reused gravestones of the 16th-17th centuries. CHW first observed earthmoving activity less than 10m away from the church in July 2022 (see Report #4). This work remained stable until recently, when a new image from October 31, 2023 shows a substantial increase in the scale of work in the area and the encroachment of bulldozed earth to less than 5m from the church.
Image Credit	Photos below courtesy of Monument Watch.
Citation	To learn more about Zorakhach' Church, see the site entry on the Monument Watch website.





Destroyed Heritage

HT.061-0	St. Sargis Church (Mokhrenes/Susanlyg)
Dates	Constructed in the 18th or 19th century
Baseline Image	2022-08-23 / SkySat
Monitoring Image	2023-09-26 / ©2023 Maxar
Current Status	Destroyed / New Construction
Notes	In CHW's Monitoring Report #4, we revealed the destruction of St. Sargis sometime between March and July 2022. The demolished church is clearly visible in the August 2022 satellite image (right, top) that we tasked to confirm destruction. In a detailed StoryMap, CHW tracks how the site was cleared by April 2023. By September 2023 a new structure was rising on St. Sargis's former site (right, bottom). Construction entailed the grading of adjacent terrain (arrow A), erection of what appears to be a gate (arrow B), and the emplacement of construction vehicles amidst the ruined village (arrow C).
Image Credit	Images below courtesy of Monument Watch and Research on Armenian Architecture
Media	CHW first announced the destruction of St. Sargis on social media on September 12, 2022. That same day, it was reported in the Cornell Chronicle. The news of the destruction also appeared in Hyperallergic on September 16, 2022.
Citation	Monument Watch has an entry about St. Sargis.







WHAT WE **DO**

Monitoring

Our inventory of cultural heritage sites in Nagorno-Karabakh has grown to include over 2000 entries spread across an area of roughly 12,000 square kilometers.

At any particular moment, we have hundreds of discrete locations under satellite surveillance, including churches and mosques, cemeteries and fields of carved stones, bridges, and other cultural properties that tell the dynamic story of centuries of life in the region. The locations that we monitor change as conditions on the ground change. Our site inventory is the result of extensive consultations with our partners, who share our concern for heritage preservation in the South Caucasus. Our partners are fundamental to what we do, providing expertise, experience, and eyes on the ground.

Because the CHW team is composed of researchers with a long history of working in Armenia, thus far our partners are Yerevan-based. We welcome new partnerships with specialists in Azerbaijan who support our mission and wish to assist in this work.

At present, our monitoring is focused on the hundreds of Armenian historical monuments that now fall under Azerbaijan's jurisdiction following the November 2020 ceasefire. As our historical investigation of cultural erasure in the Azerbaijani province of Nakhchivan clearly demonstrates, Armenian monuments are currently at the most risk. This assessment is bolstered by explicit threats against cultural heritage sites issued by Azerbaijani officials, from the President and Minister of Culture to the Chairman of the Union of Architects.

CHW's monitoring effort is specifically focused on heritage monuments. It is not within our mission to document the wider destruction of towns, villages, and cities over the 30 years of conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. We focus on historic sites that have been the subject of archaeological, architectural, or art historical research and are included on Soviet or post-Soviet state inventories of cultural properties.

But it is important to note that we see the wider, heart-breaking destruction that has impacted the lives of so many Azerbaijani and Armenian families. We deplore the combination of violence and poverty that has created Nagorno-Karabakh's ravaged landscape. And we surveil these areas with a deep sense of empathy for the lives lost and futures upended. Nevertheless, we draw a distinction between the destruction and abandonment of villages over the course of this long-standing conflict and the systematic attempts to eradicate heritage properties as a means to erase communities from the region's past and thus rewrite the region's history.

There are some kinds of threats to cultural heritage that CHW is not well-equipped to address. Satellite imagery provides evidence of damage or destruction, but it cannot detect acts of desecration or directly combat heritage appropriation. Since the 2020 ceasefire, representatives of Azerbaijan's government have embarked on an extensive campaign to claim Armenian heritage sites as either non-existent or as "Caucasian Albanian". Both represent fraudulent historical claims unsupported by international research. The vast majority of experts in the region's art, architecture, and archaeology have all rejected Azerbaijan's revisionist claims as patently false. Nevertheless, the Caucasian Albanian propaganda has sparked some iconoclastic efforts to erase Armenian imagery and inscriptions from buildings and monuments. We are aware of these threats and track them via social media, but as these subtle but significant forms of erasure are not visible from our satellite imagery, we will have to rely on partners to document such abuses.

Archival Research

CHW recognizes that the cultural heritage of the South Caucasus and neighboring Turkey has already been targets of multiple waves of damage and destruction in recent history. We are actively engaged in forensic research projects that work to document aspects of past episodes of abuse to cultural heritage using a wide range of source materials.

In September 2022, CHW released our first special report, detailing the results of our forensic investigation into the fate of Armenian cultural heritage sites in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan (Arm. Nakhichevan). That research revealed the complete destruction of 108 medieval and early modern Armenian monasteries, churches, and cemeteries between 1997 and 2011. This figure represents 98 percent of the Armenian cultural heritage sites we were able to locate and assess for the investigation. These findings provide, for the first time, conclusive forensic evidence that silent and systematic cultural erasure has been a feature of Azerbaijan's domestic ethnic policy.

The findings from this special investigation are available in two formats. Our Special Report, *Silent Erasure: A Satellite Investigation of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan* can be found in the Reports page of our website in both abridged (2.2 MB) and full (29 MB) versions. We have also produced an online platform that presents the visual evidence for each destroyed site in an interactive format called ArcGIS StoryMaps. The StoryMaps provide historical information about every site, photographs, geolocation, and a side-by-side comparison of satellite imagery demonstrating the monument as it stood, and its disappearance.

In April 2023, CHW released our second special report focused on the treatment of Azerbaijani heritage sites in Nagorno-Karabakh during the years of Armenian control between the first and second Nagorno-Karabakh wars. CHW's research revealed that the treatment of mosques, mausolea, and historic cemeteries under Armenian control varied widely and changed over time, reflecting the complexities of the disputed region's shifting political, geopolitical, and economic realities. Armenian authorities of NKR failed to prevent both widespread looting and several instances of targeted destruction. At the same time, the forensic evidence we presented showed no attempt to systematically erase the material traces of Azerbaijani history and cultural life.

The findings from our second special investigation are also available in two formats. Our Special Report, *Between the Wars: A Satellite Investigation of the Treatment of Azerbaijani Cultural Heritage in the Unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, 1994-2020* can be found in the Reports page of our website in both abridged (15 MB) and full (68 MB) versions. We have also produced an ArcGIS StoryMap online platform that presents the visual evidence for our assessments of each site.

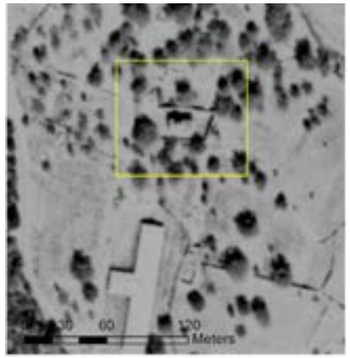


HOW WE **WORK**

Satellite Tasking

CHW documents changes in the built environment of cultural landscapes using high resolution satellite imagery. In order to monitor the condition of currently endangered sites, we task satellites to capture images throughout the year, providing a regularly updated stream of information on the physical integrity of cultural heritage in the region. We request imagery based on known or reported threats as well as our analysis of potential risks. Each site is examined by comparing recent captures to prior imagery in the CHW database.

Evidence for damage or destruction is passed from individual monitors to the team for group evaluation. If full agreement is reached, the site is flagged as either destroyed, damaged, or threatened. Consultations are held with our partners as the team works toward a strategic response. When CHW and its partners conclude that public scrutiny might blunt further intentional or accidental damage to a site or other sites in the vicinity, we use social media to broadcast the threat and to help focus the attention of relevant organizations, analysts, journalists and authorities. A GIS-powered dashboard on our website provides a summary of our current understanding of damaged and destroyed sites, as well as those that may be at elevated risk due to changes on the landscape. And at regular intervals during the year, we produce summary reports that document in greater detail evidence for impacts on cultural heritage, including findings of damage and threats beyond those reported on social media.



Archival Analysis

Methodologically, our archival work entails in-depth reseach using a wide range of sources, including Soviet maps, scholarly publications in all of the regional languages, state lists, repositories of declassified Cold War-era satellite imagery (e.g. KH-9 Hexagon), more recent satellite platforms like GoogleEarth, as well as archival and current photography. These sources make it possible to create a more complete documentary record of the condition of sites in the region than is currently available.

Making Our Findings Public

Our goal is not to simply document heritage destruction but to deter it; it is therefore important for our observations to be broadly disseminated. We have chosen X (formerly Twitter) (@CaucasusHW) and Facebook as platforms for broadcasting impact notices and threat alerts. These are meant to complement our regular reports by providing more timely assessments. Before we post, our threat alerts and damage assessments go through a series of protocols that require careful thought, consultation, and evaluation. If a CHW monitor detects damage or an immediate potential threat, the full CHW team is notified. If the other team members verify the situation of concern, our next step is to consider what steps to take. A decision to push the issue to social media is taken only when CHW believes public scrutiny might ameliorate the situation and/or spur public bodies to action, including journalists, multinational organizations, and civil society activists. If concerns emerge that publicity might make a situation worse, we reserve the observation for the next report. If we determine that public attention is merited, we then consult with our partner stakeholders, experts in the archaeology and architecture of the region, to seek their input on both our monitoring observation and publication plan. We then prepare the impact imagery from our archive and compose the written assessment for our report and/or social media.

WHY WE **DO THIS**

There are a number of reasons why we founded CHW. None of them are about partisanship in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We value the heritage of all communities. But we deplore and condemn heritage erasure and other deliberate abuses of tangible heritage. We seek to not only prevent destruction where we can but also clearly and soberly place responsibility where it belongs.

It might be naive to suggest that we can forestall heritage erasure once initiated; but by documenting events in something close to real time, we change the traditional form of narrating cultural erasure. Forensic accounts of cultural erasure are typically elegies of loss, where accountability is clouded by distortions of the historical record by those in power. By doing the forensic work in real time, we are sounding an alarm rather than writing an elegy. And where possible, we are assigning culpability directly rather than diffusely. Where we are unsure, we will say so. Where the images clearly demonstrate, we will say so. Where we simply don't know, we will say so.

Past damage to cultural heritage does not justify or excuse current or future attacks. CHW does not condone assaults on cultural heritage past or present by either party in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. And we strongly reject the immoral logic of "what about-ism" that seeks to justify damage today by pointing to episodes of destruction in the past. Our goal is to break the cycle of endless recrimination by recognizing past destruction but also keeping a watchful eye on the present. Only through regular, publicly visible surveillance can we hope to clearly establish accountability and ultimately take the region's heritage off of the front lines of the conflict.

In October, CHW was featured in an article on cultural heritage destruction in Nagorno-Karabakh on Meduza.

Later that month, Radio France International published an article on heightened fear of heritage destruction based on an interview with CHW co-founder, Dr. Lori Khatchadourian.

That week, The Armenian Weekly ran a story based on a lecture that the CHW team gave at Harvard University.

On October 26, 2023, Le Quotidien de l'Art raised the alarm about Armenian heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh with an article that featured the work of CHW.

CHW's work has also featured in Armenian press interviews with partner organizations and experts in medieval Armenian architecture.

CHW also made its first appearances in the Arabic-language press, in two articles that followed up on our StoryMap update about St. Sargis: one released by the Catholic News Agency and another by Coptics Today.

As a public-facing monitoring organization, we welcome media inquiries. Please contact us at chw@cornell.edu.

IMAGE CREDITS

Except where noted at right and in the text, images are from SkySat captures of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

The CHW logo and website were designed by Garen Harboyan & CodOptix.

Page	Scene	Source
Cover	Satellite view of the damaged cemetery of Ghazanchetsots (see SH.103-0).	SkySat, November 3, 2023.
3	Photo of the Yerits Mankants Monastery	Credit: Photo by H. Petrosyan courtesy of Monument Watch
5-6 & 19-20	Regional Map	©CHW 2023.
7	View of the Setants Rivulet	Credit: Photo by Zohrab Yrkoyan courtesy of Monument Watch
9-10, 12	Satellite Imagery	SkySat. October 2021 ©CHW 2022.
13-14	1:25,000 topographic map of 1955 Glavnoe Upravlenie Geodesii J-38-22-A-a.	Courtesy: Eastview Cartographic.
38	Satellite Imagery	August 26, 2003 QuickBird 2 image of the former site of St. Stepanos or Karmir Monastery of Astapat, Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan. Courtesy: Maxar and Eastview Cartographic.
40	Satellite Imagery	SkySat July 2021 ©CHW 2022

Land Acknowledgements:

Cornell University is located on the traditional homelands of the Gayogohó:no' (the Cayuga Nation). The Gayogohó:no' are members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, an alliance of six sovereign nations with a historic and contemporary presence on this land. The confederacy precedes the establishment of Cornell University, New York state and the United States of America. We acknowledge the painful history of Gayogohó:no' dispossession, and honor the ongoing connection of Gayogohó:no' people, past and present, to these lands and waters.

We acknowledge Purdue University is located on the traditional homelands of the Woodland People. We honor and appreciate these indigenous caretakers, which include the Bodéwadmik (Potawatomi), Lenape (Delaware), Myaamia (Miami), and Shawnee People.

How to cite this report:

L. Khatchadourian, I. Lindsay, A. T. Smith, & H. Ghulyan. 2023. Caucasus Heritage Watch Monitoring Report #6, December 2023. Ithaca: Caucasus Heritage Watch.

Support the work of Caucasus Heritage Watch with a tax-deductible donation to the Aragats Foundation today. Scan the QR code below or click the link to visit the Aragats Foundation's PayPal donation site. Every dollar you give in support of CHW will go to ensuring we can continue our work into the future. The Aragats Foundation is a registered 501(c)(3) charity.

©2023 CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

Cornell Institute of Archaeology
and Material Studies
Cornell University
261 McGraw Hall
Ithaca NY 14853 USA

Twitter
@CaucasusHW

Facebook
@CaucasusHW

Email
chw@cornell.edu

Website
caucasusheritage.cornell.edu

06



CHW

CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH