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Caucasus Heritage Watch

Monitoring Report #7
June 2024

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CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

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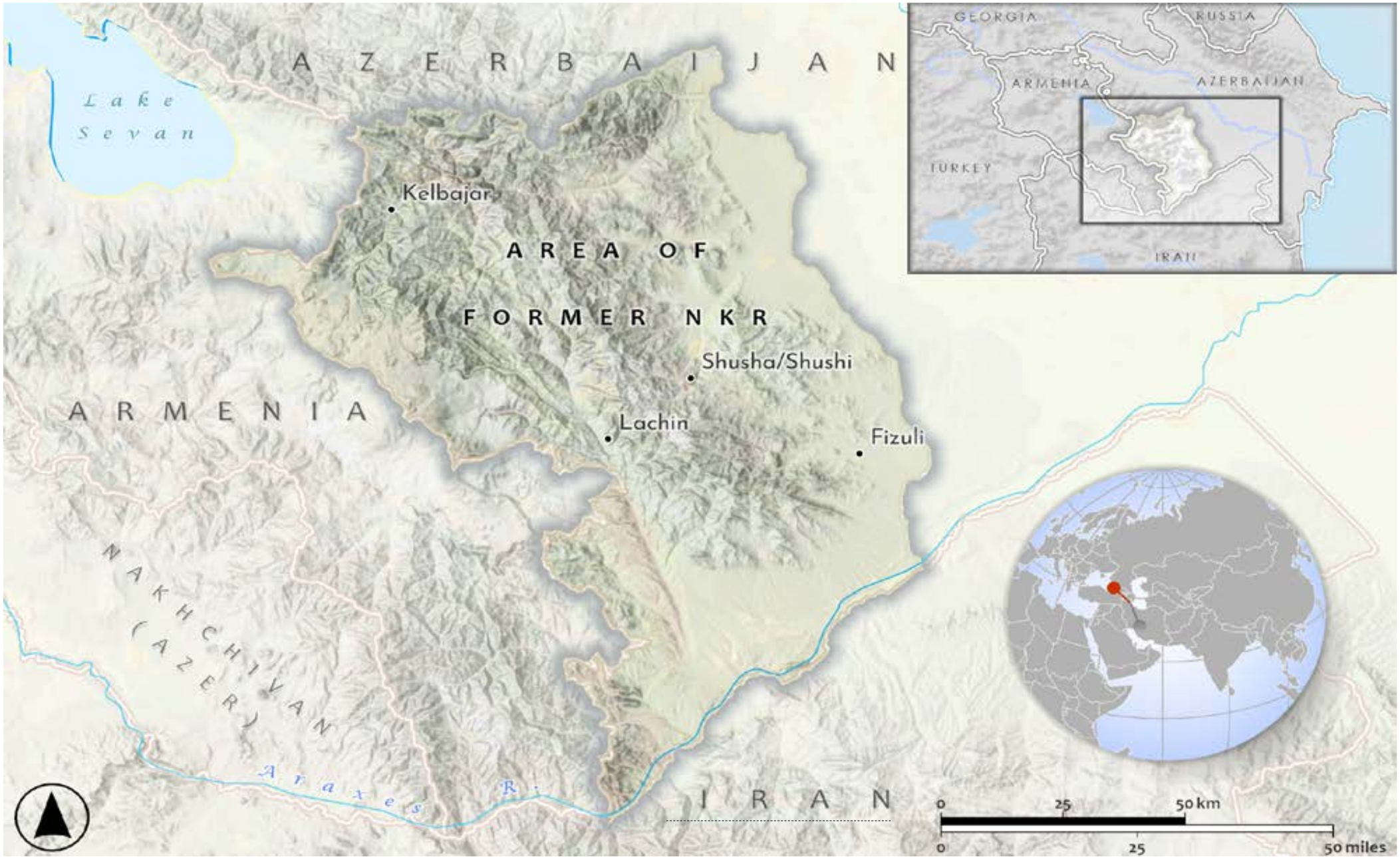
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WHERE WE **WORK**



- *Total Sites in Database: 2,105*
  Sites Currently Monitored: 452

- *Total Area of Region: approx. 12,100 km²*
  Area of Current Monitoring: approx. 7200 km²



FROM
CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

June 2024

Our last monitoring report (#6) was released in December 2023 in the aftermath of the final expulsion of Armenian residents in Nagorno-Karabakh in late September. For a brief moment, global attention focused on the welfare of some 100,000 people fleeing to safety in Armenia, while in the months since, as humanitarian aid reached the forcibly displaced population, a related calamity has preoccupied the region's heritage observers: the abandonment of centuries-old cultural landscapes, now endangered by Azerbaijan's zero-tolerance for Armenian cultural remains. At CHW, we had been preparing for this eventuality for months. During the blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh (December 2022-September 2023), we worked to geolocate the hundreds of additional cultural heritage sites that would require monitoring if Azerbaijan gained control of what remained of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). With the collapse of the NKR in September 2023, we added an additional 181 sites into our monitoring routines. We also expanded our capacity through new educational initiatives, training Cornell and Purdue students committed to learning the skillsets of heritage forensics.

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Since the end of the 2020 Second Karabakh War, Baku has been signaling its plans for massive infrastructure and redevelopment projects in Karabakh, along with its utopian vision for turning the ethnically cleansed territories into a "green energy zone" with extensive solar and wind energy farms. As reported in the international press, such rapid development, including massive highway construction projects, hydroelectric power plants, two international airports (just 100 miles apart), and planned housing developments, is wreaking havoc on the environment per the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and threatening cultural properties in the path of omnipresent earth movers.

This winter, barely two months after the last of the embattled Armenians fled Azerbaijan's lightning attack on NKR in late September, Baku was awarded the honor of hosting the 29th Session of the Conference of Parties (COP29) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. As many international journalists and environmental NGOs have expressed, Azerbaijan is the latest in a series of authoritarian petro-states selected to host the event ostensibly designed to showcase environmental initiatives to mitigate the harm caused by global dependence on oil. The preparations for this event may have a grave impact on the region's Armenian cultural heritage.

For the past year, as both Armenia and Azerbaijan were vying to host COP29, and as Azerbaijani and Turkish construction firms were tearing up and tunneling through the Karabakh landscape, the Aliyev government was advancing the accusation through the British PR firm, Portland Communications, that it was Armenians who had despoiled Karabakh's natural heritage. President Aliyev has claimed that 50-60,000 hectares of forest (roughly the area of the city of Chicago) were eradicated under the NKR administration, a claim that Global Forest Watch handily refuted using satellite imagery. Such hyperbole directed at global audiences recalled an earlier complaint to the UN that Armenians in NKR had destroyed 65 out of 67 mosques in Karabakh under their stewardship (a claim CHW refuted in our special report, Between the Wars). Of immediate consequence for the cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh is that COP29 has become an engine for fast-tracking development projects that Azerbaijan will use to 'greenwash' its well-documented record of human rights, environmental, and heritage abuses. Overall, our Spring 2024 monitoring cycle has revealed the greatest number of impacted sites since Spring 2021 when we began monitoring cultural heritage following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. We are deeply concerned that the total number of destroyed heritage sites rose by 75% between our Fall 2023 and Spring 2024 missions, along with a 29% increase in sites classified as threatened. Two regions of the former NKR highlight these troubling developments.

First, in the Kalbajar district, on top of the threats already posed by ongoing construction of the Kalbajar-Lachin Highway (see map pp. 15-16), CHW documented the impact of planned developments in and around the village of Zar/Tsar. In our recently released story map "'Wreckage upon wreckage' in Kalbajar" we report on the fate of two unique schools built during the Soviet era with fragments of medieval "spolia," or building materials recycled from historic Armenian monasteries, churches, and cemeteries. Both schools fell to Azerbaijani bulldozers this spring, testimony to the continuing cycles of hatred and destruction that have caused loss after loss to the region's cultural heritage. In the same area, we are closely watching two Armenian churches threatened by the new gridded housing development on the outer edge of Zar village. The pair of 13th century churches are the only structures still standing among the bulldozed ruins of the town, and we encourage international contractors to comply with the December 2021 International Court of Justice ruling that called on Azerbaijan to prevent and punish the vandalism and destruction of Armenian cultural heritage.

Second, we continue to pay close attention to development activity in Shusha, which this cycle has claimed two significant Armenian heritage sites. In the most flagrant violation of the aforementioned ICJ decision, the mid-19th century St. John the Baptist (S. Hovhannes Mkrtich) Church, known locally as "Kanach Zham", was completely leveled; CHW was able to narrow the destruction episode to between December 28, 2023, and April 4, 2024. Within this same time frame, the 18th-19th century Ghazanchetsots cemetery in Shusha was also destroyed. Our December 2023 report (#6) noted the vulnerability of this historic cemetery, which was already being used as a dumping ground for construction refuse since last fall, and the eradication of the site is now complete to make way for a planned housing development. We noted at the time that without an international response, the cemetery's destruction seemed inevitable, and it was.

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Elsewhere, satellite monitoring is shedding light on the destruction of modest sites – each relatively unremarkable on its own – but whose elimination is part of the slow and steady work of cultural erasure; a small historic cemetery near Garabulag (Khojaly district), or a small sacred place once marked by 9th and 13th century khachkars (carved cross stone) near Chartar (Khojavend district), now bulldozed. Sometimes the work of cultural erasure consists of just such banal, incremental destruction events – a few *khachkars* here, a few tombstones there.

Finally, we should note that only one of the impacts documented in this cycle are in the territories retaken by Azerbaijan in September. But as Azerbaijan continues to turn Karabakh into a gold rush for well-connected construction firms, CHW will remain vigilant in our continued monitoring efforts in the region. 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 the former Nagorno-Karabakh we need your help. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to CHW through Cornell University or the Aragats Foundation. As always, you can follow our activities on X @CaucasusHW, on Facebook, and our monitoring dashboard on our website.

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



OUR TEAM



LORI KHATCHADOURIAN

Associate Professor, Near Eastern Studies & Anthropology, 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

This report has been made possible in part by a grant from the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU).

We are also deeply grateful to the individual donors and organizations that support CHW's work, including:

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

CAUCASUS HERITAGE WATCH

OUR **MISSION**

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.

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.

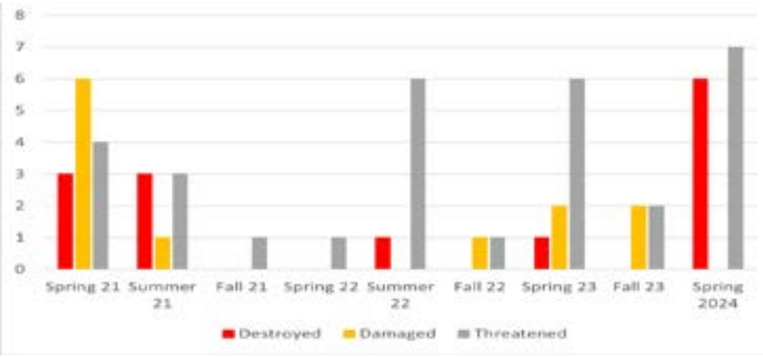
- **Innovation**: Caucasus Heritage Watch works to develop new techniques in the use of geospatial technologies for sustained, large-scale monitoring of cultural heritage at risk. As researchers, we seek to innovate new and transferrable methodologies that can amplify our practical impact and disseminate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

CHW **DASHBOARD**

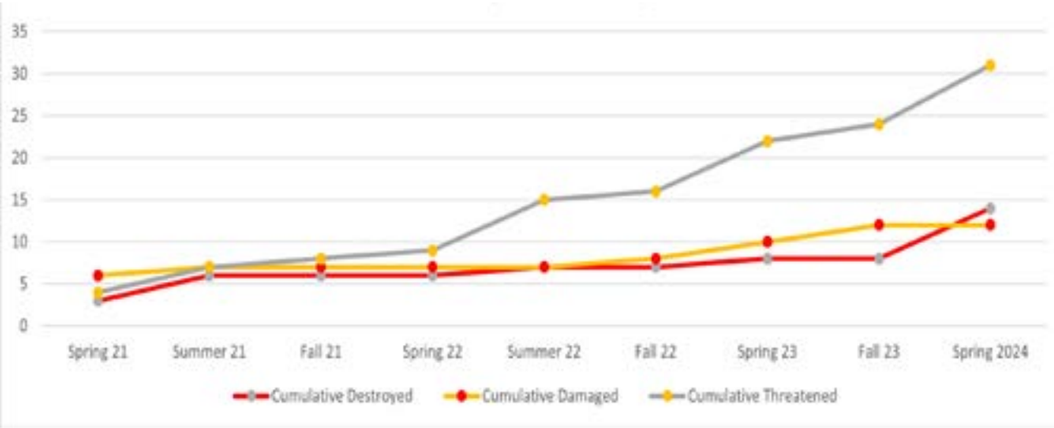
IMPACTS BY SITE TYPE



IMPACTS BY MISSION



CUMULATIVE IMPACTS OVER TIME



LIST OF **IMPACTED SITES**

Destroyed **Sites**

Site #	Name	Type	location (Az./Arm.)	Observation Dates	Mission	Report
HT.069-1	Mets T'agher Cemetery	cemetery	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Spring 2021	1	1
LN.004-0	Yusifbeyli Mosque	mosque	Afandilar/Aygek	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.052-2	Ghazanchets'ots' Inscribed Stone	inscribed stone	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
AN.342-0	Sghnakh Cemetery	cemetery	Sığnaq/Sghnakh	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.070-0	Makun Bridge	bridge	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Summer 2021	2	2
SH.241-1	Fine Arts Museum Sculpture Garden	museum	Shusha/Shushi	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.061-0	St. Sargis Church	church	Mokhrenes/Susanlyg	Summer 2022, Fall 2023	5,8	4,6
HT.072-0	Halevor Bridge	bridge	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Spring 2023	7	5
AN.038-0	Ghuze T'agh Cemetery	cemetery	near Garabulag/Aknaghbyur	Spring 2024	10	7
KR.022-0	Zar school	historic school	Zar/Tsar	Spring 2024	10	7
KR.063-0	Chirag school	historic school	Chirag/Chragh	Spring 2024	10	7
MI.079-0	Kohak	sacred place	Chartar	Spring 2024	10	7
SH.053-0	S. Hovhannes Mkrtich/Kanach Zham	church	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2024	10	7
SH.103-0	Ghazanchets'ots' Cemetery	cemetery	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2024	10	7

Damaged **Sites**

Site #	Name	Type	location (Az./Arm.)	Observation Dates	Mission	Report
SH.052-0	Ghazanchets'ots' S. Amenap'rkich	church	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.053-0	S. Hovhannes Mkrtich/Kanach Zham	church	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.054-0	Surb Meghrets'ots'	church	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1,8	1,6
SH.074-0	The Zhamharyan's house	historic house	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.093-0	Eastern Rampart	fortification	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.101-2	Northern Cemetery	cemetery	Shusha/Shushi	Spring 2021	1	1
SH.063-0	Geological Museum	museum	Shusha/Shushi	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.072-0	Halevor Bridge	bridge	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Fall 2022	6	4
LN.177-0	Cemetery	cemetery	near Hajisamly/Vazgenashen	Spring 2023, Fall 2023	7,8	5,6
MT.212-0	Cemetery	cemetery	near Gizil Kangarli/Nor Maragha	Spring 2023	7	5
SH.103-0	Ghazanchets'ots Cemetery	cemetery	Shusha/Shushi	Fall 2023	8	6
SH.105-0	Yerevan Gates Cemetery	cemetery	Shusha/Shushi	Fall 2023	8	6

Threatened **Sites**

Site #	Name	Type	location (Az./Arm.)	Observation Dates	Mission	Report
AN.226-0	S. Astvatsatsin	church	Madadkend/Madatashen	Spring 2021	1	1
AN.344-6	Vank'asar	church	Aghdam	Spring 2021	1	1
HT.074-0	Amenap'rkich Church	church	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Spring 2021	1	1
KR.022-0	Zar school	school	Zar/Tsar	Spring 2021	1	1
AN.225-0	T'ukhnakal Mansion	historic mansion	Moshkhmhat	Summer 2021	2	2
HT.071-0	Tahis Bridge	bridge	Böyük Tağlar/Mets T'agher	Summer 2021	2	2
MI.023-0	S. Astvatsatsin Church	church	Taghaverd/Taghavard	Summer 2021	2	2
KR.009-1	Mrchmants' Church	church	Marjimak/Mrchmants	Fall 2021	3	3
LN.055-1	Ughtamejk' Cemetery	cemetery	Eyvazli/ Doghar	Spring 2022	4	4
HT.176-0	Mokhrenes Cemetery	cemetery	Mokhrenes/Susanlyg	Summer 2022	5	4
LN.016-0	Arakhish Church	church	Arikli/Arakhish	Summer 2022	5	4
LN.016-1	Arakhish Cemetery	cemetery	Arikli/Arakhish	Summer 2022	5	4
LN.017-0	Zorakhach' Church	church	Arikli/Arakhish	Summer 2022, Fall 2023	5,8	4,6
LN.187-0	Vakunis Church	church	Pichanis/Vakunis	Summer 2022	5	4
MT.161-0	S. Yeghishe of Mataghis	church	Madagiz/Mataghis	Summer 2022	5	4
KR.008-0	The Church of Yeritsushen	church	Ghamishli/Eghegnut	Fall 2022	6	4
LN.156-0	St. Poghos-Petros Church	church	Shalva	Spring 2023	7	5
LN.176-0	Vazgenashen Church	church	Hajisamly/Vazgenashen	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.056-0	Amenap'rkich Church	church	Talish	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.213-0	Gavurgala Church	church	Boyahmadli/Nor Haykajur	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.452-0	Gyzyl Kangarli Historical Cemetery	cemetery	Gyzyl Kangarli/Nor Maragha	Spring 2023	7	5
MT.453-0	Mausoleum	mausoleum	near Gizil Kangarli/Nor Maragha	Spring 2023	7	5
AN.003-0	S. Astvatsatsin	church	Chanakhchi/Avetaranots	Fall 2023	8	6
HT.088-0	Kavak'avank' Church	church	Chiraguz/Irakus	Fall 2023	8	6
HT.039-0	Ptkat'aghi Vank'	church	Hunarli/Tsakuri	Spring 2024	10	7
HT.039-1	Ptkat'aghi Cemetery	cemetery	Hunarli/Tsakuri	Spring 2024	10	7
KR.018-0	S. Sargis	church	Zar/Tsar	Spring 2024	10	7
KR.019-0	S. Grigor	church	Zar/Tsar	Spring 2024	10	7
MT.456-0	S. Mariam Astvatsatsin	church	Gozlu/Vaghuhas	Spring 2024	10	7
SH.240-0	S. Astvatsatsin	church	Dashalty/Karin Tak	Spring 2024	10	7
SH.257-0	K'arin Tak Cemetery	cemetery	Dashalty/Karin Tak	Spring 2024	10	7

SUMMARY **ASSESSMENT**

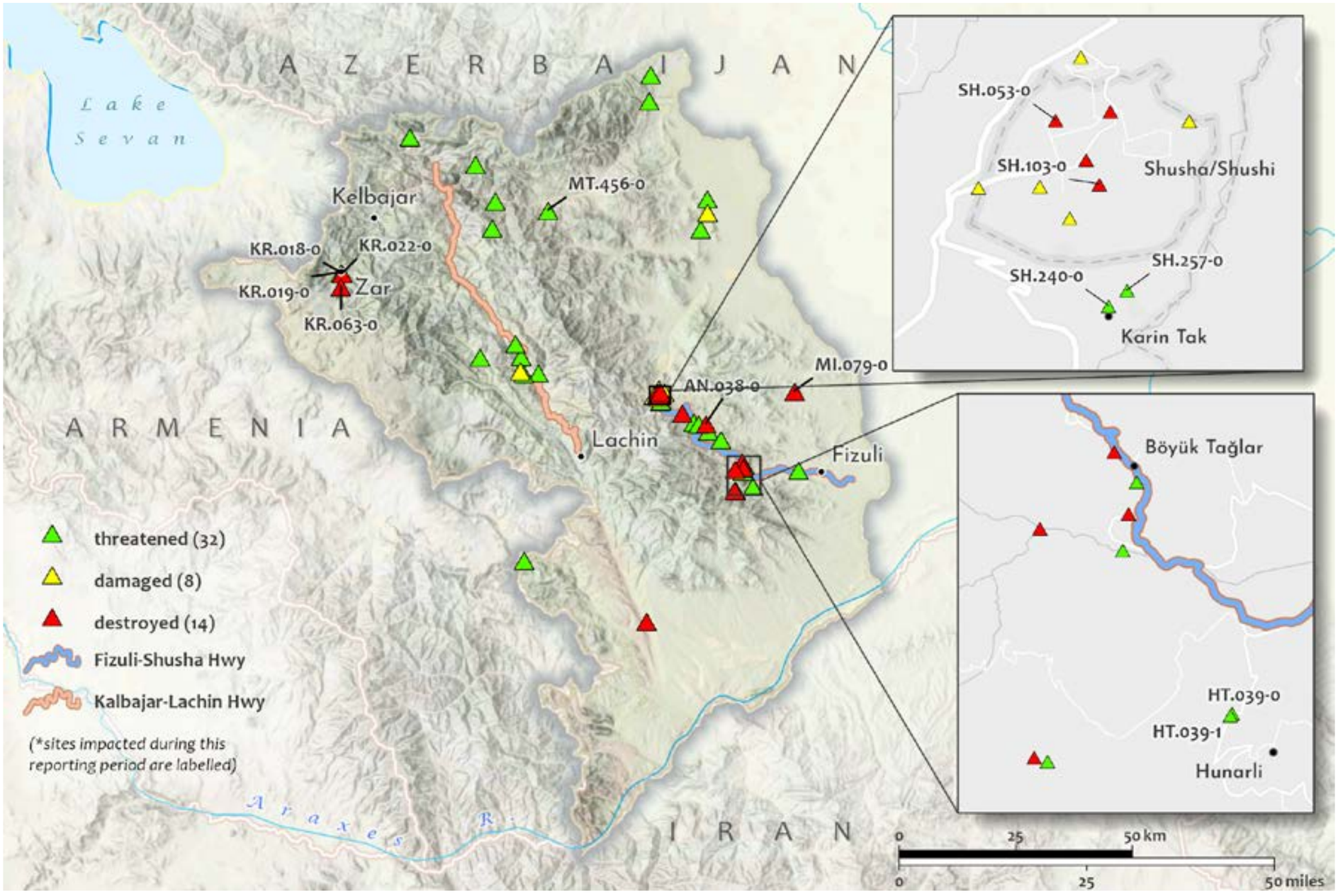
As a result of the September 2023 expulsion of Nagorno-Karabakh's Armenian population, our Spring 2024 monitoring expanded to include 181 additional sites, bringing our total current inventory to 489 sites distributed across more than 7000 km².

In Spring 2024, we continue to see the adverse effects of Azerbaijan's development program on Armenian cultural heritage in the former Nagorno-Karabakh. The most visible impacts continue to take place in the town of Shusha/Shushi where, in addition to the erasure of the 18th-19th century Ghazanchetsots cemetery, we documented the demolition of the 1847 Surb Hovhannes Mkrtich Church (Kanach Zham). Elsewhere, a sacred place, known as Kohak, was also destroyed. It contained three khachkars dating to the 9th and 13th centuries. Yet another historic cemetery containing 19th and early 20th century tombstones, this one near Garabulag/Aknaghbyur, was also destroyed, along with the ruins of the shrine (or maturr) in the middle of the cemetery.

Churches and cemeteries have borne the brunt of cultural heritage abuses in the former Nagorno-Karabakh since 2020. This monitoring round alone, we documented 3 such sites as destroyed and nine more as under immediate threat. The nature of threats to Armenian cultural heritage continues to arise out of large-scale earth moving conducted as part of regional redevelopment and road-building schemes. Nowhere is this more visible than in the villages of Zar and Karin Tak. Karin Tak was demolished in its entirety. Only the Armenian church near the center remains standing, surrounded by the visible scars of the bulldozer. Zar fell into ruins after Armenian forces seized Kalbajar during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, drove out its Azerbaijani inhabitants, and looted its properties. There, a massive new development program has stranded the 13th century Armenian churches of St. Sargis and St. Grigor amidst the wreckage of repeated cycles of violence.

While sacred sites appear to be most targeted for attack, destruction of secular sites comes at a significant cost for heritage and history as well. As we detail in a separate story map, the demolition of schools in Zar and Chirag destroyed priceless artifacts of medieval Armenian ecclesiastical buildings whose art and inscriptions had been used as spolia.

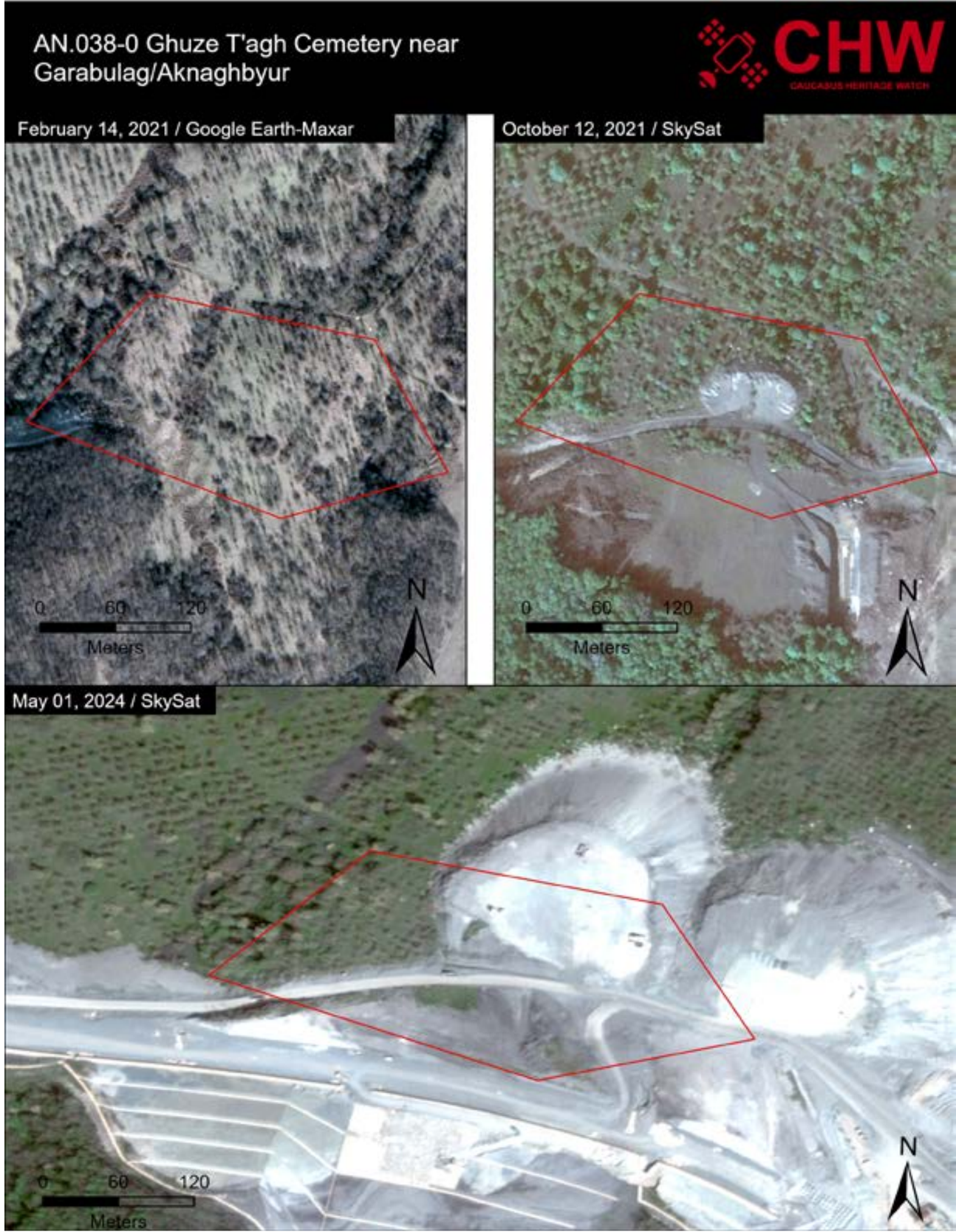
Overall, CHW's Spring 2024 monitoring documented more destroyed (6) and threatened (9) sites than any of our prior missions.



Destroyed Heritage

AN.038-0	Ghuze T'agh Cemetery
Location	near Garabulag/Aknaghbyur
Dates	19th - early 20th century
Baseline Image	2023-10-05 / SkySat
Monitoring Image	2024-06-02 / WorldView 2 ©2024 MAXAR
Current Status	Destroyed
Notes	The cemetery is located southwest of the village. It has not been systematically studied, but according to inscriptions on the tombstones, the cemetery dates to the 19th and early 20th centuries. The number of tombstones is unknown. CHW was able to determine the precise limits of the cemetery using a plan included on the official certificate for the site, created by the Ministry of Education and Science of the unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and provided by our partner, Monument Watch. That certificate also shows that the remains of a shrine, or "maturr" existed in the cemetery. The cemetery was last seen fully intact in February 2021 (at right, top left). By October 2021 (at right, top right) earthmoving related to roadwork had already severely impacted the area of the cemetery. As of May 1, 2024, CHW assesses the cemetery as destroyed.
Alerts	None
Image Credit	From the site certificate created by the Ministry of Education and Science of the former Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh and provided to CHW by Monument Watch.





Destroyed Heritage

KR.022-0	Zar School
Location	Zar/Tsar
Dates	Structure: 1950s; Spolia: Medieval
Baseline Image	2023-10-05 / SkySat
Monitoring Image	2024-06-02 / WorldView 2 ©2024 MAXAR
Current Status	Destroyed
Notes	The Zar school is a truly unique heritage site. It was built in the 1950s using "spolia" from medieval Armenian churches and cemeteries in the area -- including inscribed stones, khachkars, and ornamental relief elements. Soviet Azerbaijan destroyed the medieval monuments during the 1940s and 1950s. The school was active until Armenian forces drove Azerbaijani families out of the village in the spring of 1993. The building was looted and fell into ruins until it was razed in the spring of 2024. The structure thus constitutes a unique testament to repeating cycles of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh, from cultural erasure by the authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan to heritage mining by Armenian residents of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, to its ultimate bulldozing by Azerbaijan following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. The skeleton of the building remained intact for several CHW missions following the 2020 war, even after work on the adjacent road led to a threat alert in June 2024 (at right, top). Between October 5, 2023 and June 2, 2024, the school was razed (at right, bottom), along with most of the other ruins of Zar/ Tsar.
Alerts	CHW released a social media alert and accompanying story map on June 13, 2024. The story map, which contains numerous photographs, can be found at the link.





Destroyed Heritage

KR.063-0	Chirag School
Location	Chirag/Chragh
Dates	Structure: 1950s; Spolia: Medieval
Baseline Image	2023-10-05 / SkySat
Monitoring Image	2024-06-02 / WorldView 2 ©2024 MAXAR
Current Status	Destroyed
Notes	Like the Zar school, the Chirag school was also built in the 1950s using "spolia" from medieval Armenian churches and cemeteries in the area. Soviet Azerbaijan destroyed the medieval monuments during the 1940s and 1950s. The school was active until Armenian forces drove Azerbaijani families out of the village in the spring of 1993. The building was looted and fell into ruins until it was razed in the spring of 2024. The structure thus constitutes a unique testament to repeating cycles of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh from cultural erasure by the authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan to heritage mining by Armenian residents of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic to its ultimate bulldozing by Azerbaijan following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. The skeleton of the building remained intact for several CHW missions following the 2020 war, even after work on the adjacent road led to a threat alert in June 2024 (at right, top). Between October 5, 2023 and June 2, 2024, the school was razed (at right, bottom).
Alerts	CHW released a social media alert and accompanying story map on June 13, 2024. The story map, which contains numerous photographs, can be found at the link.
Image Credit	Sundial fragment in wall of former Chirag school. Photograph courtesy of Research on Armenian Architecture



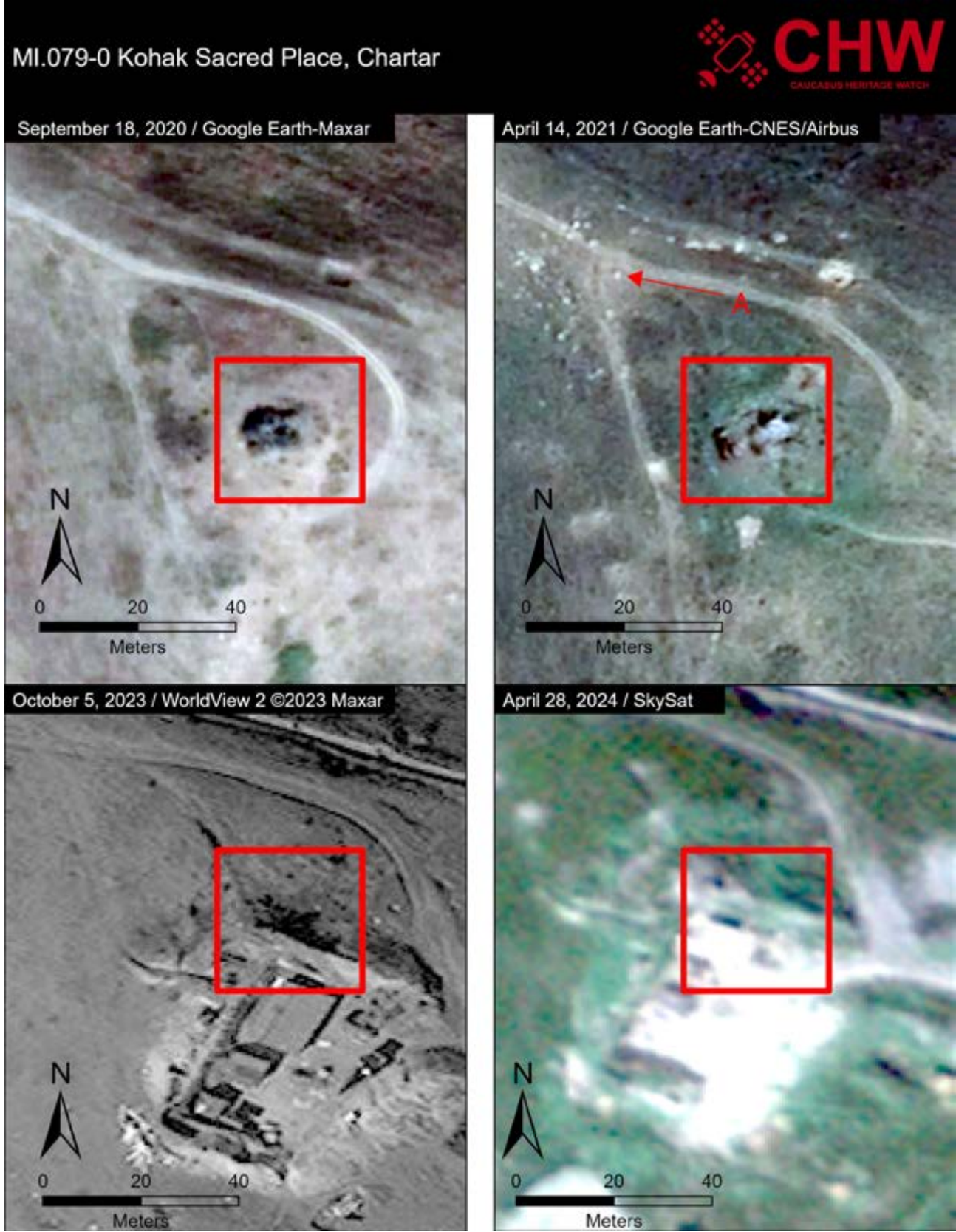




Destroyed Heritage

MI.079-0	Kohak Sacred Place
Location	Chartar
Dates	9th-13th centuries
Baseline Image	2020-09-18 / Google Earth-Maxar
Monitoring Image	2021-04-14 / Google Earth-CNES/Airbus & 2024-04-28 / SkySat
Current Status	Destroyed
Notes	Described on the monument list of the former NKR as a "sacred place", this site, located on the top of a hill, consisted of the ruins of a church, amidst which were three khachkars and one khachkar pedestal. One of the khachkars dated to the 9th century, while the other three dated to the 13th century. The church -- a single nave basilica with a semi-circular apse -- was already in such a ruinous state when officials of the former NKR documented it that it was difficult to determine the full site plan. The site appears to have been initially impacted by shelling during the Fall 2020 war. An April 14, 2021 image (at right, top right) shows the central area has collapsed and stone ejecta litters the area to the northwest (A) suggesting a strike from the southeast. Most of the site was destroyed by October 2023 (at right, bottom left) and by April 28, 2024 (at right, bottom right), earthmoving and construction appear to have destroyed the last remnants of the sacred place.
Alerts	None
Image Credit	From the site certificate of the Ministry of Education and Science of the former Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, provided to CHW by Monument Watch





Destroyed Heritage

SH.053-0	St. Hovhannes Mkrtich Church (Kanach Zham)
Location	Shusha/Shushi
Dates	Constructed 1858
Baseline Image	2018-10-25 / GeoEye1
Monitoring Image	2023-12-28 / SkySat & 2024-04-04 / Airbus-Google Earth
Current Status	Destroyed
Notes	St. Hovhannes Mkrtich Church (known as Kanach Zham) was significantly impacted during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020. As we reported in CHW Monitoring Reports #1 and #2, the church originally possessed two cupolas, both clearly visible in baseline imagery from October 25, 2020 casting tall peaked shadows. An April 2021 image published in CHW Monitoring Report #2 showed the wartime damage to the structure which included the removal of the western cupola and a hole in the roof where the eastern cupola had been. Subsequent imagery, including the December 2023 image at right, indicated that the debris left by the 2020 fighting had been removed and some effort had been made to stabilize the eastern cupola and perhaps repair the hole in the roof. However, imagery released on Google Earth from April 4, 2024 clearly shows the complete demolition of the church.
Alerts	CHW released a social media alert on April 18, 2024
Image Credit	Photo below left Kanach Zham church in 1979 from Mkrtchyan, S. 1990 *Shushi: Starinnye Otkrytki*. Yerevan. Plate 60. Photo below right courtesy of Monument Watch.







Destroyed Heritage

SH.103-0	Ghazanchetsots Cemetery
Dates	18th-19th centuries
Baseline Image	2023-10-05 / SkySat
Monitoring Images	2023-11-03 / SkySat
Current Status	Destroyed
Notes	In our last CHW Monitoring Report, we documented damage to the Ghazanchetsots Armenian cemetery in Shusha/Shushi as our satellite imagery showed piles of debris had been heaped atop the site. 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. Between November 3, 2023 and April 29, 2024, the entire territory of the cemetery was razed and the surface graded. Vehicles can be seen in the most recent image at right parked atop the former cemetery.
Alerts	CHW released a social media alert on November 27, 2023 and another on April 19, 2024.
Image Credit	Photos courtesy of Monument Watch.





Threatened Heritage

HT.039-0, HT.039-1	Ptkat'aghi Vank' Church & Cemetery
Location	Hunarli/Tsakuri
Dates	1670
Baseline Image	2023-10-08 / SkySat
Monitoring Images	2024-04-20 / SkySat
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	All that remains of this 17th century monastery are the ruins of its church (A), a single-naved hall with semicircular apse on the eastern side. More information about the church can be found on the Monument Watch website, here. A cemetery (B) sits in the forested area to the southwest of the church. Between October 8, 2023 (at right, top) and April 20, 2024 (at right, bottom) a 7-8m wide path was cut that skirted around the northwest corner of the church and intruded into the southeast corner of the cemetery (C).
Alerts	None
Image Credit	Monument Watch









Threatened Heritage

KR.018-0, KR.019-0	St. Sargis and St. Grigor Churches
Location	Zar/Tsar
Dates	St. Grigor: 1274; St. Sargis: 1279
Baseline Image	2023-10-05 / SkySat
Monitoring Images	2024-06-02 / WorldView 2 ©2024 MAXAR
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	The churches of St. Sargis and St. Grigor, in Zar, are both single nave chapels built in the 13th century. More information can be found on the Monument Watch website, here. St. Sargis is particularly threatened due to the 8 Armenian inscriptions on the walls of the church. Between October 5, 2023 and June 2, 2024, the standing ruins of Zar were removed and the terrain graded. Only the two Armenian churches remain standing.
Alerts	Mentioned here, in CHW's story map about the destroyed schools of Zar and Chirag, which we released as an alert on social media on June 13, 2024.
Image Credit	Photo of the western facade of St. Sargis, courtesy of Monument Watch







Threatened Heritage

MT.456-0	Surb Mariam Astvatsatsin of Vaghuhas/Gozlu
Location	Goslu/Vaghuhas
Date	2012
Baseline Image	2024-01-06 / SkySat
Monitoring Images	2024-04-28 / SkySat
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	This white limestone church was begun in 2007 and consecrated in 2012. Additional information can be found on the Monument Watch website, here. Between January 6 and April 28, 2024, earthmoving activity around the church destroyed the patio and a structure just to the southwest, where candles and souvenirs were sold.
Alerts	None
Image Credit	Monument Watch

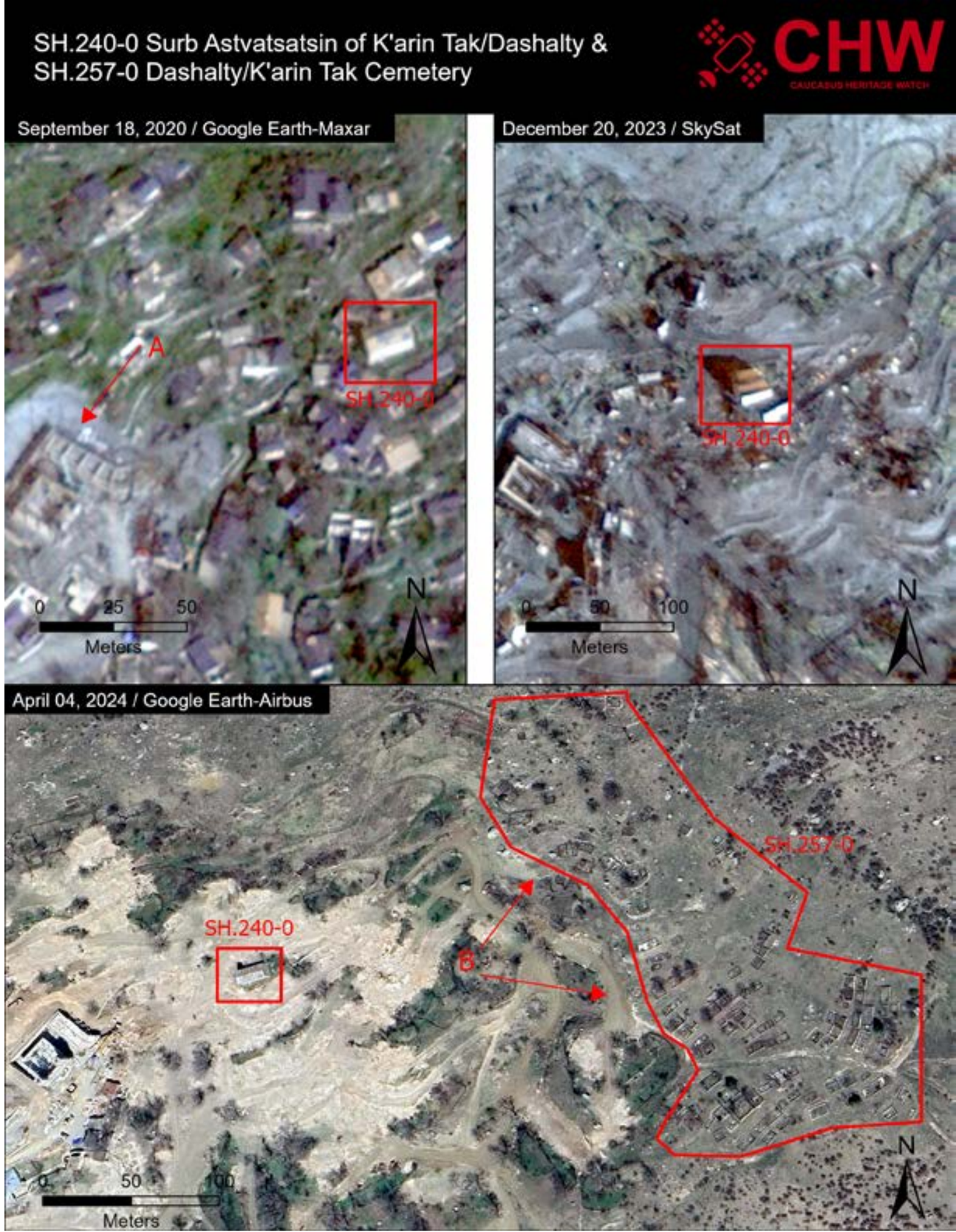






Threatened Heritage

SH.240-0, SH.257-0	Surb Astvatsatsin church & village cemetery
Location	Dashalty/Karin Tak
Dates	Surb Astvatsatsin: 1841; Cemetery: modern (founding unknown)
Baseline Image	2020-09-18 / SkySat
Monitoring Images	2023-12-20 / SkySat & 2024-04-04 / Google Earth-Airbus
Current Status	Threatened
Notes	The Surb Astvatsatsin church of Karin Tak sits on the eastern side of the historic Armenian village. According to inscriptions on the church facades, it was built in 1841 and renovated in 1903. The single nave basilica was renovated again in 2000. Additional information can be found on the Monument Watch website, here. A September 18, 2020 image shows the initial stage in the construction of a new mosque (A) amidst the standing houses of the village (at right, top left). A December 20, 2023 image (at right, top right) shows work on the mosque continuing even as the homes of the entire village have been razed. Only a single structure remains standing amidst the ruins: Surb Astvatsatsin church. By April 4, 2024 (at right, bottom) the bulldozers had demolished the village, approaching the edge of the cemetery (B). The church remains standing amidst the debris.
Alerts	None
Image Credit	N/A



WHAT WE **DO**

Monitoring

Our inventory of cultural heritage sites in the former Nagorno-Karabakh includes over 2000 sites 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 are fundamental to what we do.

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 Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. 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.

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 have conducted forensic research projects 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.

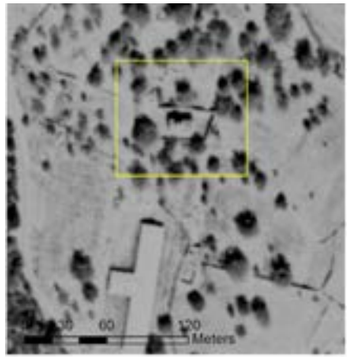
The findings from our second special investigation are also available in two formats. Our Special Report, *Between the Wars: A Satellite Investigation of the Treatment of Azerbaijani Cultural Heritage in the Unrecognized Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, 1994-2020* can be found in the Reports page of our 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 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.

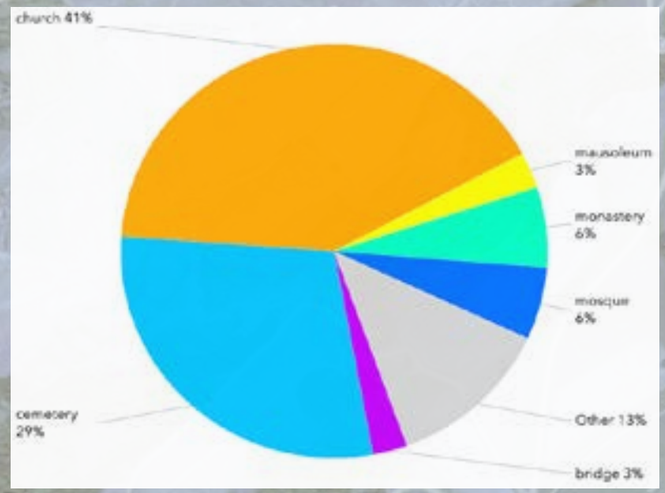
WHY WE **DO THIS**

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.

SITES CURRENTLY MONITORED BY TYPE



CHW has issued three alerts on X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook over the last three months, including destruction alerts for Kanach Zham (SH.053-0), Ghazanchetsots Cemetery (SH.103-0) and the schools of Zar/Tsar and Chirag/Chragh, for which we also released a Story Map.

In January 2024, CHW's approach to heritage monitoring was featured in an article in HetQ. Destruction alerts from this round were picked up by OC Media, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and iDNES.cz.

Longer examinations of the conflict featuring the work of CHW were published by IDEA, Climate Home News, and Hyperallergic.

Deutschlandfunk aired a piece that featured an interview with CHW co-founder Adam T. Smith.

CHW shared its satellite imagery with a range of other media sources investigating heritage abuses in the region as well.

As a public-facing heritage 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		SkySat
3	Photo of Mayraberd (Ashkeran) Fortress	Credit: Photo Adam Jones from Kelowna, BC, Canada, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons
5-6 & 15-16	Regional Maps	©CHW 2024.
9-10	1:25,000 topographic map of 1955 Glavnoe Upravlenie Geode-sii J-38-22-A-a.	Courtesy: Eastview Cartographic.
11	Bridge over the Karkar River	Credit: Photo Marcin Konsek /wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.
7, 8, 13-14	Satellite Imagery	SkySat. October 2021.
37-38	Satellite Imagery	August 26, 2003 QuickBird 2 / Maxar-Eastview Geospatial
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.

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