

*Dr. Hamlet L. Petrosyan*  
*Head of Department for Cultural Studies,*  
*Yerevan State University*

## **Monuments in Conflict Zones.**

### **Identity and Preservation**

**(based on digital database created by author in 2006-2008).**

1. Armenian-Azeri conflict besides some other characteristics is also distinguished by high cultural aspect, which in its turn represents a peculiar expression of ethnic identity of both sides. Dispute about Nagorno Karabakh started, continued for decades and currently, to an identifiable degree, continues as a historical dispute. And the historical-cultural monuments in this dispute play the role of most reliable arguments. Their role is increasing also by the fact that there is a particular auditorium and a “court” in the form of different international organizations.
2. During the Soviet period, up to the mid 1960s, while the study of national cultures was limited by international approaches, in the Soviet academic science (including Azeri science) under the term Azeri monuments all the Moslem monuments on the territory of Atropatene and Transcaucasus had been implied, plus some varieties of folk-country life of recent past. Bright examples of such approaches are, for instance, books on architecture of Azerbaijan published in Moscow and Baku in the beginning of 1960s.
3. By 1970s a glaring tendency of proclamation as Azeri not only Moslem but also all Christian monuments on the territory and surrounding regions of ASSR (Azerbaijan Soviet Socialistic Republic) can be traced. But, as the difference between the Armenian-Christian and Moslem monuments is enormous, one of the levers of appropriation became the creation of so called *Albanian* link: ascription of Armenian-Christian monuments of

Karabakh to Albanians - non-existent on this territory neither in historical past nor in present. And from Albanians to contemporary Azerbaijanis.

4. The political and artificial core of such an approach fully revealed itself during the military conflict; the practical result of this is the destruction of Armenian historical monuments on the territory of contemporary Azerbaijan, and the apogee was the demolition of several thousand Khachkars of Old Jugha from the face of the planet.
5. The considerable part of Moslem monuments of Nagorno Karabakh is located on the liberated territories. Among them there are none that can be dated earlier than the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
6. The main part of these monuments is well known to the scientific society. Many of them became objects of scientific research during the Soviet period and the pictures and blueprints were published. So, there is a possibility to compare their present condition with the one 50-60 years ago.
7. In such a comparison any unbiased observer can unambiguously come to a conclusion that these monuments, with consideration of time and in particular cases the military actions, remain in the same conditions as they were before the conflict.
8. This, of course, does not mean that these monuments are in perfect condition, or that the work to preserve these monuments is done on the required level. Some of them are in need of urgent strengthening, some in clean-up. But in the similar or sometimes worse conditions are dozens of Armenian monuments.
9. One of the most important factors of preservation of Moslem monuments in Nagorno Karabakh is the traditional respect toward any historical monument by Armenian population. Second, significant factor is the perception of these monuments not as ethnic Azeri but as Moslem in general. Another important factor is the civilized, if not caring, then at least neutral position of Karabakh authorities toward these monuments.