

The Destruction of the Armenian Cemetery in Djulfa, Nakhichevan (Azerbaijan)



Compiled by the
Armenian National Committee
of America - December, 2005

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The historic Armenian Cemetery of Djulfa (known in Armenian as *Jugha*) is located in the southern portion of Nakhichevan, near the Iranian border. Nakhichevan is a historic part of the Armenian homeland and was an integral part of the first Armenian Republic of 1918-1920. It was arbitrarily severed from Armenia and placed under Azerbaijani rule as part of the Soviet Union's accommodation with Kemalist Turkey and Moscow's "divide and conquer" gerrymandering of borders in order to facilitate its control of the region. During the Soviet era, the indigenous Armenian population was pushed out of Nakhichevan through discrimination, economic pressure, and other policies advanced by the Soviet Azerbaijani authorities.

Map: **Research on Armenian Architecture (RAA)** - www.raa.am

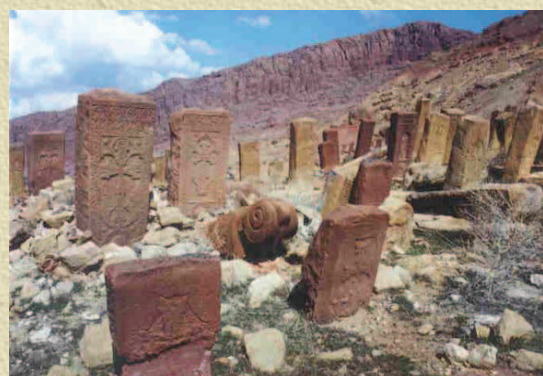
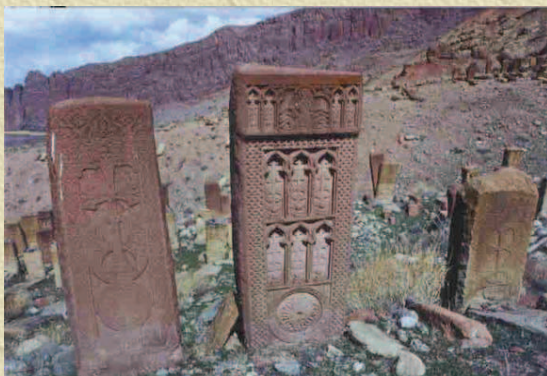


The historic Armenian cemetery in Djulfa spans the 6th through 17th centuries. At its peak, there were some 10,000 intricately carved stone crosses (*khatchkars*) across three hills, marking the different eras of Armenian history. By 1998, following systemic destruction of the khatchkars by Azerbaijani authorities over the decades, only 2,000 remained.

Photo: Djulfa Armenian Cemetery
Photograph circa 1987, Research on Armenian Architecture.

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Khatchkars are cross-stones about one meter wide and up to 2.50 meters high, richly decorated with Christian symbols, flowers and arabesque climbing plants as well as with subjects from daily life.

Photos: Khatchkars from Armenian Cemetery in Djulfa. Research on Armenian Architecture, 1987

Historical text from <http://www.international.icomos.org/risk/2002/azerbaijan2002.htm>

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These delicately engraved stones represent a 1500-year-old tradition of Armenian stone masons. Khatchkars are unique and were used as free-standing steles but also as ornaments in the masonry of Armenian churches and cloisters. Since the early Middle Ages they have been used as tombstones in cemeteries.

Photos: Khatchkars from the Armenian Cemetery in Djulfa. Research on Armenian Architecture, 1987
Historical text from <http://www.international.icomos.org/risk/2002/azerbaijan2002.htm>

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In 1998, Azerbaijani forces continued the systematic destruction of the remaining 2,000 khatchkars in the Djulfa cemetery. Eyewitnesses on the Iranian border cited the use of bulldozers to demolish the stones, the remnants of which were transported by train (see above.) Following three weeks of attacks, roughly 800 khatchkars were destroyed. Through the intervention of groups such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, the demolition was halted.

Photo: Research on Armenian Architecture, 1998.

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On November 9, 2002, the demolition of the Djulfa cemetery resumed, with the hundreds of the remaining khatchkars destroyed.

Photo: Djulfa cemetery hillside with khatchkars razed.
Research on Armenian Architecture, November 2002

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Armenian cemetery of Djulfa khatchkars in ruins.

Photo: Research on Armenian Architecture, 1998

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Armenian cemetery of Djulfa khatchkars in ruins.

Photo: Research on Armenian Architecture, 2002



Armenian cemetery of Djulfa khatchkars in ruins.

Photo: Research on Armenian Architecture, 2002



Beginning December 10, 2005, approximately 200 Azerbaijani soldiers amassed at the Nakhichevan-Iran border to demolish the remaining grave markers at the Djulfa Armenian cemetery.

Photo: Armenian Apostolic Church Diocesan Council, Tabriz, Iran – 12/2005

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Azerbaijani soldiers broke the remaining cemetery stones (*dabanakars*) with sledgehammers and axes.

Photo: Armenian Apostolic Church Diocesan Council, Tabriz, Iran – 12/2005

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Photo: Armenian Apostolic Church Diocesan Council, Tabriz, Iran – 12/2005

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The broken cemetery stones were rolled down into the Arax river.

Photo Credit: **Armenian Apostolic Church Diocesan Council, Tabriz, Iran – 12/2005**

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Photo: Armenian Apostolic Church Diocesan Council, Tabriz, Iran – 12/2005

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Soldiers removing remnants of the Djulfa Armenian cemetery graves.

Photo: Armenian Apostolic Church Diocesan Council, Tabriz, Iran – 12/2005

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Do Your Part to Preserve Armenia's Rich Cultural Heritage

- Please call on the U.S. government to forcefully protest this systematic, blatant, and thoroughly documented desecration of world heritage.
- Ask the U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan to demand that the Azerbaijani government cease all attacks on Armenian cultural and religious sites, visit the site himself to survey the damage, and facilitate an independent investigation of all Armenian historical monuments throughout Azerbaijan.
- More broadly, encourage the U.S. government to work through international groups such as UNESCO and ICOMOS, to prevent similar assaults by the Turkish, Azerbaijani and Georgian governments on the extensive Armenian cultural legacy in the region.

Your efforts will support the work of the ANCA with the U.S. State Department, Congress, UNESCO, ICOMOS, the media, and cultural preservation experts to demand that Armenia's neighbors honor their international commitments to protect the region's rich Armenian cultural heritage.

Visit the ANCA website to learn about how you can make a difference:
<http://www.anca.org>

Resources:

For more information about the Armenian cemetery in Djulfa, Nakhichevan (Azerbaijan) and its subsequent destruction, visit:

- **Research on Armenian Architecture**
http://www.raa.am/Magazine/FR_News_EE.htm
- **International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)**
<http://www.international.icomos.org/risk/2002/azerbaijan2002.htm>
- **Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia**
<http://www.cathcil.org/v04/doc/Photos/Pictures109.htm>

To watch video footage of the final destruction of the Armenian cemetery in Djulfa, Nakhichevan (Azerbaijan), visit the:

- **Hairenik Online TV Station:**
http://www.hairenik.com/Haireniktv/HA_TV_Clip04.htm (12 minute video clip)
http://www.hairenik.com/Haireniktv/HA_TV_Clip04b.htm (4 minute hi-res video clip)

Special thanks to the Research on Armenian Architecture (RAA) – Dr. Armen Hagnazarian, Jora Manoucherian, Samvel Karapetian and RAA team – for their guidance and invaluable effort to call international attention to the desecration of Armenian monuments and holy sites in Djulfa, Nakhichevan as well as, throughout Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia and around the world.

For more information about RAA activities and publications, visit: www.raa.am

Slide presentation compiled by the Armenian National Committee of America, December 29, 2005. For more information, visit www.anca.org