

Azerbaijan reportedly destroys Armenian church in Shusha

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The Caucasus Heritage Watch has reported that Azerbaijan has destroyed a 177-year-old church in the city of Shusha (Shushi), in Nagorno-Karabakh.

On Thursday, Caucasus Heritage Watch, an open-source cultural sites watchdog, reported that the St Hovhannes Mkrtych church had been destroyed by Azerbaijan.

They analysed satellite imagery appearing to show that the church was completely destroyed between 28 December 2023 and 4 April 2024.

The group covers the erasure of Armenian heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan has previously been accused of destroying or erasing Christian Armenian heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh. Following the end of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, Azerbaijani authorities openly accused Armenians of appropriating what they said were Caucasian Albanian monuments and churches — referring to a Christian kingdom that existed in the South Caucasus in the first millennium.

[Read more: The battle over Christian monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh]

‘In the aftermath of the war, the Baku diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church laid claim to the building and pledged restoration. Nevertheless, the church is now gone’, said Caucasus Heritage Watch of the church, whose erasure they called the most ‘egregious violation yet of a December order by the International Court of Justice’.

The UN Court obliged Azerbaijan to take ‘all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage’.

Monument Watch, an Armenian academic platform focused on cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh, stated that the church was built by Hovhannes and Baba Stepanyan Hovnanents in dedication to their deceased brother Mkrtich in 1847.

However, some other Armenian sources claim the church was built in 1818.

After Azerbaijan took control of Shusha during the 2020 war, Fip, an Armenian fact-checking platform, claimed that the church’s dome and bell tower were ‘almost completely destroyed’, citing footage posted on Azerbaijani social media.

At the time, Fip reported that it was one of the city’s only two functioning churches before the war.

Baku has also announced that it is restoring the Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, the other church in Shusha, to its ‘original form’, which Yerevan maintains is ‘vandalism [...] aimed at depriving the Shushi Mother Cathedral of its Armenian identity’. Read in Georgian on On.ge. Read in Russian on Jnews.

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