

## = Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran =

The Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran , located in the West Azerbaijan and East Azerbaijan provinces in Iran , is an ensemble of three Armenian churches that were established during the period between the 7th and 14th centuries A.D. The edifices ? the St. Thaddeus Monastery , the Saint Stepanos Monastery , and the Chapel of Dzordzor ? have undergone many renovations . These sites were inscribed as cultural heritages in the 32nd session of the World Heritage Committee on 8 July 2008 under the UNESCO ? s World Heritage List . The three churches lie in a total area of 129 hectares ( 320 acres ) and were inscribed under UNESCO criteria ( ii ) , ( iii ) , and ( vi ) for their outstanding value in showcasing Armenian architectural and decorative traditions , for being a major centre for diffusion of Armenian culture in the region , and for being a place of pilgrimage of the apostle St. Thaddeus , a key figure in Armenian religious traditions . They represent the last vestiges of old Armenian culture in its southeastern periphery . The ensemble is in a good state of preservation .

## = = Location = =

The Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran are located in the West Azerbaijan and East Azerbaijan provinces in Iran . The ensemble consists of three Armenian churches that were established during the period between the 7th and 14th centuries A.D. The edifices ? the St. Thaddeus Monastery , the Saint Stepanos Monastery , and the Chapel of Dzordzor ? have undergone many renovations . The three churches lie in a total area of 129 hectares ( 320 acres ) . The St. Thaddeus Monastery also known as " Kara Kelisa " or " Black Church " in West Azerbaijan province is about 18 kilometres ( 11 mi ) from Maku . The Saint Stepanos Monastery is 17 kilometres ( 11 mi ) to the west of Jolfa city , East Azarbaijan Province in northwest Iran .

## = = History = =

The Armenian people arrived in northwestern Iran ? known as Iranian Azerbaijan ? in the 6th century B.C. , and converted to Christianity in the early 4th century A.D. A portion of the region forms part of historical Armenia . Some of the oldest Armenian chapels , monasteries and churches in the world are located within this region of Iran , and the Iranian Azerbaijan region in general is home to the oldest churches in Iran .

According to unverified reports it is believed that St. Thaddeus was buried at the site of the St. Thaddeus Monastery in the 1st century A.D. , and that St. Gregory was responsible for establishing a monastery here in the 4th century . However , there is recorded proof that St. Thaddeus Monastery dates to the 7th century . It was the second Armenian church to be built , following the Etchmiadzin Cathedral and was the seat of the diocese in the 10th century . It was destroyed in an earthquake in 1319 and was rebuilt due to the efforts of Bishop Zachariah in the 1320s .

During the reign of the Safavid dynasty in the 15th century , the monasteries were preserved . The monasteries were then deserted during the 16th and 17th centuries following a period of attacks by the Ottomans that prompted many Armenians to emigrate to central Iran . Once the Safavids reestablished themselves in the area , the monasteries were reoccupied and renovated . However , during the 18th century the area became a cauldron of conflicts for domination among the Russian , Ottoman , and Persian empires . When the Persians finally gained control , the monasteries were damaged . During the Qajar era , Armenians regained control over the monasteries and they were rebuilt . The existing St. Thaddeus Monastery was rebuilt in 1814 and refurbished in the 1970s .

Similarly , it is recorded that Saint Stepanos Monastery was first established in 649 A.D. and a new building constructed at the same location in the 10th century . It was a major Christian church during the history of Armenian independence and development . After it suffered damages due to earthquake , it was rebuilt by Bishop Zachariah in the 1320s . During the entire 14th century , it was the centre of influence in the region for Christian missionary work . This period marked the creation of literary manuscripts and paintings on religious themes . The monastery was rebuilt during the

period from 1819 to 1825 and again became a center of religious activity . It was refurbished in the 1970s , and again during the period from 1983 to 2001 .

The Dzordzor Chapel was built on the bank of the Makuchay River at Dzordzor by Bishop Zachariah in 1314 on very modest lines , making use of the vestiges of an earlier religious monument dated between the 10th and 12th centuries . During the period of Ottoman rule , some parts of the building were destroyed . Later , the chapel came under threat of submergence from a proposed dam and had to be shifted to a new location upstream .

= = = World heritage status = = =

The three monasteries of the ensemble were inscribed on 2008 under UNESCO criteria ( ii ) , ( iii ) , and ( vi ) for their outstanding value in showcasing Armenian architectural and decorative traditions , for being a major centre for diffusion of Armenian culture in the region , and for being a place of pilgrimage of the apostle St. Thaddeus , a key figure in Armenian religious traditions . They represent the last vestiges of old Armenian culture in its southeastern periphery . The ensemble is in a good state of preservation .

= = Architecture = =

The three monuments represent a blend of architectural styles from the Byzantine , Persian , Eastern Orthodox , Assyrian , Persian , Muslim , and Armenian cultures .

= = = Saint Thaddeus Monastery = = =

The Saint Thaddeus Monastery ensemble is in two zones , the first of which covers an area of 29 @. @ 85 hectares ( 73 @. @ 8 acres ) and comprises four chapels and the monastery itself . A compound wall of 64 by 51 metres ( 210 ft × 167 ft ) with towers at the corners encircles the main monastery complex . Adjoining this wall , residential quarters have been built for the monks . In the interior courtyard , the main religious structures are located in a space of 41 @. @ 7 by 23 @. @ 6 metres ( 137 ft × 77 ft ) . There is a large entrance that is built on four pillars . The main church ? the so @- @ called White Church ? is built on a Greek cross plan . It has an umbrella @- @ shaped dome and a bell tower . There is also a Black Church , the oldest part of the ensemble , which is also crowned by a dome . The exterior artwork consists of cut @- @ stone fascia of different colours , an Armenian architectural art form . The ornamentation in the interior is a blend of Armenian and Persian themes . There are also three more chapels to the northeast of the main monastery .

The second zone is about 2 kilometres ( 1 @. @ 2 mi ) away to the southeast of the monastery , occupies an area of 1 @. @ 98 hectares ( 4 @. @ 9 acres ) , and is the location of a fifth chapel , the Chapel of Sandokt . In one of the two cemeteries next to this chapel there is a sarcophagus .

= = = Saint Stepanos Monastery = = =

The Saint Stepanos Monastery ensemble is in the gorge of the Araxe River , which borders Azerbaijan . The central zone of the monastery is in an area of 72 @. @ 06 hectares ( 178 @. @ 1 acres ) . The main chapel is located on a steep slope within an enclosed wall in an area of 48 by 72 metres ( 157 ft × 236 ft ) . There are also residences built for the monks next to the monastery . The length of the church , built in a Greek cross form , is 27 metres ( 89 ft ) and its height is 25 metres ( 82 ft ) . A four @- @ pillared entrance is topped by a bell tower built in two levels ; the first level is rectangular in shape , and at the second level there are pillars supporting an umbrella @- @ shaped dome . Built in the style of Armenian religious architecture , it has cut @- @ stone fascia . Within the church there are paintings that are based on similar ones at the Echmiatsin Church , which is a blend of Christian and Islamic art forms .

Downstream of the monastery is an area of 10 @. @ 85 hectares ( 26 @. @ 8 acres ) where the village , the cemetery , and an associated church are located . The village is destroyed except for

the church , which is built in the form of a basilica , with four pillars supporting a cupola . The cemetery in the village has tombs dated to 16th century .

Upstream , about 10 kilometres ( 6 @. @ 2 mi ) away , is the Chupan Chapel ( Chupan meaning " shepherd " ) , located close to the town of Jolfa on the bank of the Araxe River in an area of 4 @. @ 18 hectares ( 10 @. @ 3 acres ) . It is well preserved and is built to a rectangular plan of 5 @. @ 5 by 6 @. @ 5 metres ( 18 ft × 21 ft ) . It has a dome that is supported over a tambour , but the rest of the structures next to the chapel are in ruins .

= = = Chapel of Dzordzor = = =

The old Chapel of Dzordzor lies in the Makuchay River valley , occupying an area of 0 @. @ 79 hectares ( 2 @. @ 0 acres ) . What is present now is a remnant of the large monastery that once existed there , as the entire chapel has been shifted to a new location 600 metres ( 2 @, @ 000 ft ) away due to submergence resulting from a dam that was built on the river . Before the building was dismantled , detailed plans were made and the dismantled elements numbered so that they could be reassembled to the same design at the new site . Of 1500 stones used at the new site to rebuild the chapel with the dome , only 250 were new stones as all the numbered stones from the old site were able to be reassembled according plan . This reconstruction was carried out during the period 1987 ? 88 .