

## Armenian monastic ensembles (Iran)

No 1262

*Official name as proposed*

*by the State Party:* The Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran

*Location:* Provinces of West Azarbayjan and East Azarbayjan

*Brief description:*

The monastic ensembles of St. Thaddeus and St. Stepanos, and the Chapel of Dzordzor, are the main heritage of the Armenian Christian culture in Iran. They were active over a long historical period, perhaps from the origins of Christianity and certainly since the 7th century. They have been rebuilt several times, either as a result of regional socio-political events or natural disasters (earthquakes). To this day, they remain in a semi-desertic environment in keeping with the original landscape.

*Category of property:*

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a serial nomination of three *group of buildings*.

### 1. IDENTIFICATION

*Included in the Tentative List:* 25 May 1997

*International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination:* No

*Date received by the World Heritage Centre:* 31 January 2007

*Background:* This is a new nomination.

*Literature consulted (selection):*

Der Nersessian S., *L'art arménien des origines au XVIIe siècle*, Arts et métiers graphiques, Paris 1977.

Erlande-Brandenburg A., "La stéréotomie: l'Arménie" in A. Chastel et al., *Le grand atlas de l'architecture mondiale*, Encyclopædia Universalis, Paris 1988, p. 184-185.

Khalpakhchian O.Kh., *Architectural Ensembles of Armenia, 8c.BC – 19c.AD*, Iskustvo, Moscow, 1980.

S. Stephanos, *Documents of Armenian Architecture*, No.10, Milano, 1980.

S. Thadei' Vank., *Documents of Armenian Architecture*, No.4, Milano, 1971.

Vagharshapat, *Documents of Armenian Architecture*, No.23, Italy, 1998.

*Technical Evaluation Mission:* 4-13 September 2007

*Additional information requested and received from the State Party:* ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party on 6 December 2007 about the following points:

- Request for further information about the authenticity of the reconstruction of the Chapel of Dzordzor following its removal to another site;

- Request for more detailed maps for the nominated properties, showing in particular if the villages and cemeteries are included;

- Request for maps and description sheets of the nominated villages and cemeteries;

- Request for information about tourism development projects linked to the nominated property;

- Request for an impact study concerning economic development projects for the Jolfa zone near St. Stepanos;

- Request for a schedule for the introduction of the management plan.

ICOMOS sent a second letter to the State Party on 17 January 2008 to ask for additional information about the role of the region in the management plan.

In reply from the State Party, ICOMOS received on 27 February 2008 a set of plans and a dossier answering its questions.

*Date of ICOMOS approval of this report:* 11 March 2008

### 2. THE PROPERTY

#### *Description*

The nominated property consists of three monastic ensembles of the Armenian Christian faith. Two are apparently complete and fortified; the third has been reduced to a chapel. They were created by the Armenian religious culture over the course of its history and its establishment in the north-east of present-day Iran (provinces of East and West Azarbayjan). Each zone centres on a major architectural property which is the main reason for the nomination, but also includes several complementary elements, either built or in ruins: annex chapels, cemeteries and villages which were in the past associated with the monastic way of life.

1- The fortified monastic ensemble of St. Thaddeus

The zone of the nominated property for this ensemble comprises two distinct parts:

- the main monastery zone (29.85 hectares), and four associated chapels,
- the Chapel of Sandokht zone about 2 km to the south-east of the monastery (1.98 hectares).

The main zone comprises the monastery, two cemeteries (one religious and the other public), and three annex chapels. It is situated on a promontory, in a loop of the River Makuchay (or Baron), at an altitude of

2,200 metres, about twelve kilometres from the town of Maku.

The monastery itself comprises three adjacent parts: the monastic ensemble proper, which is almost rectangular in shape (64 x 51 m), an ensemble made up of a dozen annexes built for specific functions, and a closed external courtyard for pilgrims and visitors. The monastery is fortified by a large defensive wall, reinforced by angle towers forming defensive circular salients. Some forty monastic cells and rooms are adjacent to the fortified enceinte wall, and there is an interior courtyard.

In the centre of the inner courtyard is the main religious ensemble, with the same alignment as the fortified rectangle. Its largest external dimensions are 41.7 m in length, 23.6 m in width, and 25 m in height for the central bell tower. The ensemble is formed successively of:

- A monumental entrance porch supported by four rectangular pillars;
- The central church known as the "White Church" in Greek-cross form supporting, at the crossing, the umbrella dome of the central belltower, on a polygonal tambour;
- The "Black Church", forming the heart of the spiritual ensemble; it too has a dome.

The external decorative elements include, particularly in the case of the Black Church (the oldest), the stereotomy which is typical of Armenian architectural art, with external facings cut out of stones in different tones. For the other two parts, which are more recent, rich internal and external decorations are made up of low-reliefs in niches or form panels. They present a large number of Christian Armenian and Persian themes, bearing witness to the mixture of cultural influences.

There are three chapels to the north-east (nos. 1, 2 and 3).

- The first is rectangular (5 x 8 m) with an entrance, a short nave and an apse. It is in ruins.
- The second is of the square type (4.6 x 5 m), and is also in ruins.
- The third is slightly larger (7 x 12 m) and better preserved. It is of the basilica type, with a small cupola in the middle of the nave.

The village includes chapel no. 4. It is a rectangular building of 4.5 m x 7.10 m with a vaulted roof with an elevation of at least 3 m. The chapel is reputed to have been built on the site where St. Thaddeus died, but it does not form part of the nominated property.

Finally, the St. Thaddeus ensemble is completed by a second zone including the Chapel of Sandokht (chapel no. 5), situated to the south-east of the monastery, about two kilometres away. Its plan is rectangular (5.10 m x 6.80 m). Two cemeteries are associated with this chapel, in one of which there is a sarcophagus.

## 2- Fortified monastic ensemble of St. Stepanos (St. Stephen)

This second ensemble in the nomination is situated in the gorges of the River Araxe (or Aras) in a spectacular landscape. The river forms the border with the Republic

of Azarbayjan (Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic). The monastic ensemble is located close to main royal road which in this region includes important traces of the Seljukid and Safavid periods.

The nominated property here includes three zones:

- the central zone of the fortified monastery of St. Stepanos (72.06 hectares).
- the downstream zone of the village of Darresham, its cemetery and its church, close to the River Araxe, 2 km from the monastery (10.85 hectares).
- the upstream zone of the Chupan chapel, next to the River Araxe, some ten kilometres from St. Stepanos and not far from the town of Jolfa (1.18 hectares).

The main monastery zone is situated on a steep slope, which gives it an impressive appearance, as a result of its combination of religious and defensive architectural features. The fortified ensemble is rectangular in form (48 x 72 m), and itself includes two adjacent parts. One consists of the church, and the other is devoted to the monks' cells and monastic life. Round towers reinforce the fortified wall angles.

The external dimensions of the church are 27 metres in length and almost 25 m in height. The entrance has four square pillars, as at St. Thaddeus, but above it here there is a bell-tower with two levels, the first of which is rectangular, and the second has six columns supporting a domical vault. The church itself has a Greek cross form, with in its centre a vast umbrella dome (cuspidate dome). The external walls have freestone facing which is typical of Armenian religious architecture, but they also have niches on one of the facades, one of which is deep and is directly inspired by Persian art. There is a great deal of internal painted decoration, particularly on the umbrella dome. The paintings are directly inspired by the cathedral of Echmiatsin, near Yerevan, but they also borrow motifs from Iranian iconography. They are an example of the interpenetration of the Christian and Islamic cultures.

The second part of this zone is the ruined village of Darresham and its cemetery, at a confluence in the midst of gorges. The village was definitively abandoned in 1915, during the conflict with the Ottomans. It is an ideal site for research into Armenian culture (organisation of the village, construction techniques, etc.). The only building still standing and conserved is the church, built on a basilica ground plan. Four central pillars support a cupola.

This zone includes the cemetery of the village, in which some of the tombs date from the 16th century.

The Chupan (or Shepherd) chapel is located on the path from Jolfa to the monastery. It is quite close to the entrance of the town of Jolfa (2 km away) and is quite well conserved. With a rectangular ground plan (5.5 m x 6.5m), it has a dome supported by a tambour, and annexes which are in ruins.

## 3- St. Mary's Chapel, Dzordzor

This third ensemble of the nominated property is in the Makuchay river valley, downstream from St. Thaddeus. It includes the chapel as it exists today (0.79 hectares).

The chapel is the remains of what was once a large monastic ensemble but which has now been abandoned. Initially placed at the confluence of two rivers, the chapel was moved stone by stone to a site 600 metres away so that it would not be flooded when a dam was built.

### ***History and development***

Amongst the three monastic ensembles of the nominated property, the oldest is St. Thaddeus. Legend suggests that this thaumaturgic apostle died and was buried here (1st century AD), and that Saint Gregory, father of the Armenian church, created a place of worship here (4th century AD). No specific historic or archaeological element, and no indication in the buildings themselves, has however provided confirmation of this founding narrative to date.

The first mentions in the records confirm the presence of an Armenian Christian bishop in the 7th century in the Maku valley, and then more precisely the monastery of St. Thaddeus itself, in the 10th century, as the seat of the diocese. It was also in the 7th century that the monastery of St. Stepanos was founded (1st trace in 649), and a new church was built in the 10th century. It is recorded as a centre of culture and Christian faith in a period of independence and development for Armenia (885-1079). St. Thaddeus was then one of the major sites of Armenian spiritual life.

Various regional conflicts and invasions in the Middle Ages then seriously damaged the two monasteries on several occasions: that of St. Stepanos during the wars between the Seljukids and Byzantium (11th and 12th centuries), and that of St. Thaddeus during the Mongol invasions (1231 and 1242). The new sovereign of Persia, Hulagu, and following him the Ilkhans dynasty adopted a favourable stance towards the Christians, and the monasteries were restored (second half of the 13th century). A durable peace agreement was signed between the Armenian church and the Ilkhans. During the 13th and 14th centuries the monasteries were extremely influential, particularly in relation to the Christian missions to the West.

Bishop Zachariah and his powerful family undertook in 1314 the construction of a vast monastic ensemble, slightly upstream of St. Thaddeus, on the River Makuchay at Dzordzor. It continued a more modest and earlier religious edifice whose archaeological vestiges go from the 10th to the 12th centuries, and reveal a Byzantine influence. St. Thaddeus was destroyed at around this time by an earthquake (1319). Its reconstruction was immediately undertaken by Zachariah. The two monastic ensembles were completed during the 1320s. St. Stepanos then reached the brilliant apogee of its cultural and intellectual influence (14th century). Large numbers of artistic and literary works were produced there at that time, consisting of paintings and illuminated manuscripts whose subjects were religious, historical and philosophical. Several of the original iconographic and literary works of St. Stepanos have been conserved (Yerevan, Venice).

Protected by the fortress of Maku, the region was not affected by the wars of Tamburlaine against the Ilkhan dynasty.

At the start of the 15th century, the new dynasty of the Safavids confirmed its protection for the Armenian Christians. The region however became a target for conquest for the Ottomans, who controlled Central and Western Armenia (1513). The monastic centres of the Western part then went into decline (16th-17th centuries); the Shah Abbas decided to depopulate the frontier zone in 1604 for strategic purposes. 250,000 to 300,000 Armenians then emigrated to central Iran, and the monasteries were abandoned. The monastic ensemble of Dzordzor was partially demolished, and only the chapel was left standing. However, as the Safavids consolidated their power against the Ottomans, the monasteries were reoccupied and restoration work was undertaken from 1650, at St. Thaddeus and then at St. Stepanos. In around 1700, the monastery of St. Stepanos was described by the French traveller J.-B. Tavernier as a reliquary of Armenian culture: an ossuary has just been unearthed during an excavation (2005).

At the end of the 18th century, the region was a meeting point for the ambitions of the Russian, Ottoman and Persian empires. Territorial balances were modified and the Armenian communities found themselves at the heart of the conflicts.

Initially, the new Persian dynasty invaded Georgia (capture of Tiflis, 1787). During this campaign, a large number of Armenian religious edifices were sacked, including St. Thaddeus.

The taking of Yerevan by the Russians in 1808 pushed the frontier back to the River Araxe, splitting the region into several zones under Turkish, Persian and Russian administrations. Forced population movements took place towards the Russian part. However the Qadjar dynasty protected the Armenians, encouraging a trend towards restoration and reconstruction of the religious edifices. At St. Thaddeus, the White Church was built in its present-day (1814); St. Stepanos was rebuilt between 1819 and 1825 and the village of Darresham was bought by the Armenian church.

In 1900-1910, St. Thaddeus became an active centre for Armenian resistance against the Ottomans. Following the consequences of the Soviet Revolution, the Catholicos of the Armenian church was transferred to St. Thaddeus from 1930 to 1947.

Today the monastery of St. Thaddeus is the main religious centre of the Armenians in Iran. It is an active place of pilgrimage for Western Christians but also for Muslims in the region. It has been listed by the State Party as a living heritage site.

The general architectural forms and current ground plan of the monastic ensemble of St. Thaddeus mainly date back to the reconstruction in the 1320s, following the 1319 earthquake. They incorporated, particularly for the church, earlier elements remaining from the 7th and 10th centuries, in a spirit of a reconstruction that was faithful to the original forms. Restoration works were undertaken in the second half of the 17th century. The White Church

was added at the start of the 19th century, and seems to have been rebuilt to imitate the patriarchal church of Echmiatsin (present-day Armenia).

St. Stepanos too was rebuilt in around 1330, at the behest of Zachariah, incorporating earlier elements from the 7th and 10th centuries, and was rebuilt again at the end of the 17th century.

The 1940 earthquake again seriously affected the church of St. Thaddeus. An initial restoration programme was undertaken in 1972-1973 by the Ministry for Culture and the Arts, with UNESCO support. This initial phase of emergency works continued until 1977, resulting in the consolidation of the walls, the restoration of the dome and the protection of part of the church against water infiltration.

A second study and works stage took place from 1977 to 1983, with a programme supported by the Architecture and Arts faculty of Tehran and a team of architects commissioned by the Armenian diocese. The works were a continuation of the previous stage, and new restoration works were undertaken.

The third stage from 1983 to 2001 continued and completed various works previously undertaken, and had to deal with substantial raintightness problems throughout the edifice, and conservation works, particularly in the White Church. In 1992, external restoration works were undertaken.

Since 2001, a global site programme has been set up.

At St. Stepanos, a programme was put in place in 1974 to restore the ramparts and study the archaeological elements of the village of Darresham. Works have been regularly carried out in the monastery since then. There is a general problem of stability in the alluvial soil supporting the buildings, and this has required substantial works to consolidate walls and vaults, and particularly the reconstruction of the two upper levels of the clock tower.

The Chapel of Dzordzor is in fact the remains of a much larger monastic ensemble, which disappeared at the start of the 17th century. Its vestiges were moved and re-erected because of the construction of a dam. The dismantling of the ruins of the chapel and its reconstruction were carried out in 1987-1988, under a government programme carried out in conjunction with the Armenian church.

### ***Values of Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iranian Azarbayjan***

In both architectural and decorative terms, the ensembles are the most important and significant testimony to the diffusion of the Armenian culture into Azarbayjan and Iran. Today these are the only monuments and the only sites of this culture which have been saved in this region.

The diversity and the quality of the architectural ensembles, the sculpted decorative elements and the mural paintings provide very comprehensive testimony to the artistic accomplishment of the Armenian civilisation.

The monastic ensembles have remained active places for this culture over a long historical period up to the present-day, and they are still used as places of worship and pilgrimage.

They bear testimony, through the intact quality of the landscapes, to the spiritual values of Eastern Christian monasticism.

### **3. OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE, INTEGRITY AND AUTHENTICITY**

#### ***Integrity and authenticity***

##### *Integrity*

The various properties nominated by the State Party can be considered from the following viewpoints:

##### *Architectural integrity:*

The main buildings of the monastic ensembles of St. Thaddeus and St. Stepanos, and the Chapel of Dzordzor are in a satisfactory general state of conservation and general maintenance. They are complete, raintight and can be visited, although this is not to prejudice their authenticity (see following point). The situation of the annexe chapels is more disparate: some are in ruins (no. 1 and no. 2), and the others are in poor condition, but none of them have undergone any recent large transformation.

However, the Chapel of Dzordzor which exists today is only a vestige (moved from its original site) of a monastic ensemble which was far larger in earlier times.

There are no recent built additions to the nominated properties. They therefore offer a good level of architectural readability both overall and in detail. There has not been any interior transformation of the buildings.

##### *Integrity of use:*

The main religious buildings are still dedicated to Armenian Christian worship.

##### *Integrity of landscapes:*

The landscapes around the nominated properties have not been modified. Some visual elements are unharmonious, such as an electrical transformer at St. Thaddeus and a large electric pylon on a hill overlooking the Chapel of Chupan.

ICOMOS considers that the integrity of the monastic ensembles is good, with some specific reservations concerning nearby landscapes.

##### *Authenticity*

The general question of the authenticity of the nominated properties needs to be set into the complex historical context of many regional conflicts from which Armenian communities have often suffered. There have been successive phases of sacking and restoration. Repairs and reconstructions have been carried out in a spirit of respect for the traditional forms of Armenian religious architecture and decoration, and in imitation of significant edifices of the Echmiatsin patriarchate,

particularly in the most recent period from the 14th to 19th centuries.

#### 1- St. Thaddeus ensemble:

The major restoration works undertaken since the 1970s have thoroughly respected ground plans, available data and materials. The stone comes from the same quarries. Interior restorations and stabilisation works on the edifice have been carried out in a globally satisfactory spirit of authenticity, which has not ruled out some isolated problems such as the pointing of joints with cement, which is today promoting the appearance of salt deposits.

The many low relief and painted mural decorations are authentic. The buildings of the inner courtyard of the monastery have been restored in a spirit in keeping with the original, by reference to early documents.

#### 2- Ensemble of St. Stepanos:

This ensemble meets the same general restoration and conservation criteria as St. Thaddeus. The works undertaken since the 1970s have been carried out carefully and have remained true to the heritage. They have been very extensive, covering for example the fortifications and then the reconstruction of the two upper levels of the bell tower.

In addition to the interior paintings and decorations, another element of the authenticity of the monastery is its entrance gate.

#### 3- Chapel of Dzordzor:

The authenticity of a building which was initially in ruins, before being dismantled, moved and rebuilt, must be carefully verified, as this type of action is *a priori* not acceptable in terms of outstanding universal value. ICOMOS asked the State Party for details about this operation, which was made necessary by the construction of a dam. A specific document including detailed plan and elevation views of the various operations has been provided by the State Party.

It appears that the moving and reconstruction of the Chapel of Dzordzor were carried out with care at each stage. Before removal, each stone in place was numbered, level by level. Each stone was subsequently put back into its initial position.

The upper part of the edifice, including the dome, was in ruins at the time of the operation. The stones scattered on the ground were collected and the original assembly was reconstituted wherever this was possible, as in the case of the cornice at the base of the dome.

The reconstruction of the dome required the most plausible interpretation possible, on the basis of: the remaining stones and their shape, the architectonic study of the whole structure, comparative studies based on other edifices in the Armenian religious heritage, and the opinion expressed by the Armenian prelate.

Of the 1,548 cut stones required for the reconstruction of the chapel, only 250 are not stones which came from the original building. Their colour is slightly lighter in tone,

indicating to the visitor the stones which absolutely conform to the state of the original when it was moved, and the stones which have been added.

The base for the foundations had to be adapted, as the slopes of the original location and the location of the rebuilt chapel were not the same.

ICOMOS considers that in the difficult conditions arising from the fact that the Chapel of Dzordzor was initially in ruins, and the need to move it to prevent it from disappearing beneath the dam reservoir waters, the reconstruction of the building led to an acceptable technical and architectural reconstitution. This criterion alone would not be satisfactory, but there are other factors that argue in favour of acceptance:

- The aim here is to evaluate the authenticity of a set of three monasteries, which are the vestiges of a tradition and the last conserved testimony of Armenian culture in this region.

- The history of this region has been marked by dramatic events (See 2 - History), resulting in repeated destructions of both human and natural origin, and at the same time, in a cultural tradition of reconstruction under the control of the episcopate of the Armenian church. The moving of the Chapel of Dzordzor respects this tradition.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met.
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#### *Comparative analysis*

From the viewpoint of the State Party, the nominated monastic ensembles and churches in Iran correspond to the architecture and ground plan of similar properties in Armenia and Eastern Anatolia. Furthermore, they use the traditional building materials of the region, and stone in particular.

From this dual viewpoint of architectural design and use of materials, the nominated monastic ensembles are very similar to those of Echmiatsin (Armenia), Ani and Aghtamar (Turkey). In particular, they are accomplished examples of the refined stereotomy which is characteristic of Armenian architectural culture. They also feature the most significant features developed by this culture: umbrella domes, Armenian ribs and vaults, niches, panels and sculpted decorative ensembles.

The ground plans are also highly representative of Armenian churches of the basilica type in Greek cross form, with a dome. The nominated properties are extremely rich in that they illustrate the majority of the most consummate elements of the organisation of the Armenian place of worship: entrance with bell tower, central nave beneath an umbrella dome, apses. The inspiration of Echmiatsin is very present at St. Thaddeus, in the new church, but it is integrated in an original ensemble with the old church. The ensemble is extremely representative of the evolution over time of Armenian building concepts, of which it provides an overview. There is a similar synthesis in the monastic church close to Bash Kala, in Turkey, but which today is in a very poor state of conservation.

Armenian art in low relief mural sculpture and painted interior decoration is an important element of the value of the nominated properties. Here it attains a remarkable level which is the equal of any comparable sites in Armenia and Turkey. These decorative elements furthermore incorporate motifs from the ancient Iranian civilisations, and other Christian civilisations: Byzantine, Orthodox and Roman. In addition to their typicality in representing the Armenian religious sphere, this gives a specific and significant personality to the monuments presented. They bear testimony to important interchanges of cultural values which have taken place in this region. The decorative motifs are presented in the nomination file, which provides detailed comparisons with the other places in which they can be found.

In the view of ICOMOS, the comparative analysis must be carried out with the Armenian monastic ensembles already on the World Heritage List: the monasteries of Haghpata and Sanahin (1996-2000), the monastery of Geghard (2000), and the cathedral and churches of Echmiatsin (2000). Other Armenian monuments should also be considered, such as Datev and Ani.

ICOMOS considers that the monastic ensembles of St. Thaddeus and St. Stepanos are extremely complete, with cloisters and the monks' cells, and the monastic annexes. The ground plans are comparable with those of Geghard and Datev.

ICOMOS considers that the sculpted external decorations and the interior paintings are outstanding, and are amongst the most consummate to be found in Armenian religious monuments, and that they bear testimony to Persian influences, which distinguishes them from the already listed properties mentioned above.

ICOMOS finally considers that the nominated properties are probably the last ensembles of integrity and authenticity which are adequately conserved of Armenian culture in the western and southern zone of the culture's diffusion over a long historical period.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the inscription on the World Heritage List.

### ***Justification of Outstanding Universal Value***

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- It is the supposed place of the tomb of St. Thaddeus, one of the twelve Apostles, whose miracles led to the foundation of what still today remains a place of active pilgrimage.
- Monastic places have always been of high symbolic value for the Armenian Christians, but also for Muslims and the other inhabitants of the region: Persians, Assyrians, and Kurds.
- Over the long course of history, the ensembles have been centres of monastic spiritual life, of a diocese of the Armenian church, and of pilgrimages. St. Stepanos is also a centre for

secular studies and art which is important in the history of this region.

- The property presents a very wide panorama of the architectural developments of Armenian culture at various historical periods. They also bear testimony to the interchange of human values of several civilisations.
- The monasteries have survived some 2,000 years of devastation, carried out both by man and natural disasters. They have been rebuilt in a spirit of conformity to Armenian architectural and decorative traditions. Today they are the only important vestiges of the diffusion of Armenian culture in this region.

### ***Criteria under which inscription is proposed***

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi).

*Criterion (ii): exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design.*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the region, and more particularly the Armenian monuments it contains today, illustrate the very long duration of relations between the Persian and Armenian civilisations. This region was one of the richest and most prosperous in this part of the world, but also one of the most coveted, and at the same time one of the most fertile in terms of cultural interchanges.

The monastic ensembles bear testimony to the presence and the diffusion of Armenian culture towards Persia. In return, Persian architectural and decorative elements impregnated and influenced Armenian religious art.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated monasteries are very complete examples of Armenian architectural traditions, and are set in remarkable landscapes. They developed there in an exceptional architectural and decorative continuity, between the 7th and 14th centuries, in the 17th and also in the 19th centuries. The properties embody a synthesis of remarkable quality of Armenian traditions, Byzantine influences (ground plan) and Persian influences (sculpture, decoration).

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

*Criterion (iii): bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared.*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated properties bear testimony to the Armenian cultural and religious way of life. They have been a major centre of Armenian presence and for the diffusion of its culture towards Persia and the East.

The monastery of St. Thaddeus is the second religious centre for the Armenian church, after the cathedral of Echmiatsin. It is a spiritual and cultural symbol which is today shared by several ethnic groups.

The village of Darresham offers the possibility of studying traditional ways of life in Armenian culture.

ICOMOS considers that the monastic ensembles bear an exceptional testimony to Armenian culture in what is today Persian Azarbayjan, over a long historical period up to the present day. Today these are the last vestiges bearing testimony to the presence of this culture in this region over the long course of history.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

Criterion (vi): be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the monastery of St. Thaddeus is a place of pilgrimage which has left its imprint over the long historical course of Armenian culture. It continues to exist today, in the month of June, to celebrate the martyrdom of Christ's apostle, on the supposed site of his tomb.

The monastery today plays a very important role in the life of the Armenian Apostolic church. St. Stepanos and the Chapel of Dzordzor are also visited on this occasion. These places are directly associated with living traditions. They have a spiritual importance which has always transcended the Armenian community and extended towards the other groups of people in the region, at different historical periods.

ICOMOS considers that the monastic ensembles are the place of pilgrimage of St. Thaddeus, which bears an exceptional testimony to Armenian religious traditions over the centuries, traditions which are still alive and respected.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi) and that the outstanding universal value of the property has been demonstrated.

#### 4. FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROPERTY

##### *Impact of human activities*

The village of Qara-Kelisa is situated on the edge of the monastery of St. Thaddeus, in the buffer zone of the nominated property. It is a small village with just over 100 inhabitants of Kurdish origin, with a traditional way of life. Its development appears to be stabilised.

The other nominated properties do not have any permanent staffing, except for the two caretakers at each of the two monasteries. Monks from the Armenian diocese also stay there temporarily on occasion. There is no known pollution.

The frontier region of Jolfa, in which the St. Stepanos monastery is situated, was declared a commercial and

industrial free zone in August 2003. This zone has an area of 97 sq. km.

The State Party has provided details about this free zone for economic development, which is geographically separate from the monastery zone, and is located on the other side of a range of mountains.

##### *Tourism*

The June pilgrimage attracts large crowds to St. Thaddeus and increasing numbers to St. Stepanos and Dzordzor. The pilgrims camp out in the immediate vicinity of St. Thaddeus. They number about 5,000 each year.

The total number of tourist visits has increased substantially at St. Thaddeus over the last two years, and has been growing more moderately at St. Stepanos (about 70,000 visitors a year at each site in 2006).

Hotel projects exist to build up the capacities of the region and develop tourism, particularly in the free zone of the Araxe, but they are situated outside the nominated property and its buffer zone. Inside the core zone and buffer zone, only the practical facilities which are essential for receiving pilgrims are planned (water, WC, solid waste collection). Furthermore, those who undertake the St. Thaddeus pilgrimage camp outdoors, and they will continue to do so in order to respect the tradition.

##### *Impact of climate change*

The climatic situation, with an alternation of hot summers and cold winters, has always had an impact on the conservation of the property. The White Church of St. Thaddeus, made of calcareous travertine stone is relatively fragile when subjected to climatic variations. Two hundred years have taken their toll. The older constructions are of better quality. The sandstone used in the St. Stepanos clock tower is also somewhat fragile in relation to climatic conditions.

Climate change could strengthen these negative effects on the nominated properties.

There are risks of earthquakes. In addition to the quake of 1319 which destroyed St. Thaddeus, others have been recorded in the region, particularly in 1940 at St. Thaddeus.

Flooding is not a direct threat to the heart of the monastic ensembles, but it could seriously affect the surrounding area.

##### *Risk preparedness*

The pilgrimages are managed by the Armenian diocese of Tabriz.

Risk preparedness primarily concerns controlling the water from the rivers and streams at the site.

ICOMOS considers that the main threat to the property is an earthquake.

## 5. PROTECTION, CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

### *Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone*

The nominated property consists of three ensembles (See 2 - Description).

The first nominated zone is the monastic ensemble of St. Thaddeus and the Chapel of Sandokht. This zone corresponds to a total area of 40.16 hectares.

It is situated in a buffer zone of 310.98 hectares and a larger landscape zone of 1,438 hectares.

The second nominated zone consists of the monastic ensemble of St. Stepanos, the nearby village of Darresham with its church and cemetery, and the isolated chapel of Chupan. The total area of the zone is 84.09 hectares.

The monastery of St. Stepanos and the village of Darresham are surrounded by a buffer zone of 312.79 hectares.

The chapel of Chupan is surrounded by a buffer zone of 4.00 hectares.

The St. Stepanos ensemble is surrounded by a global landscape zone of 6,365 hectares.

The third nominated zone of the Chapel of Dzordzor has a total area of 5.04 hectares. The chapel is surrounded by a buffer zone of 27.24 hectares.

The Dzordzor ensemble is surrounded by a landscape zone of 253 hectares.

ICOMOS considers that the State Party has made a determined effort in order to adequately define the nominated zones and the buffer zones.

ICOMOS also considers that the proposal of a landscape zone is very positive, in order to conserve the integrity of the environment of the monastic ensembles and thus enable the expression of their outstanding universal value.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated properties and the buffer zones are adequate.

### *Ownership*

It is the land area covered which forms the basis for the ownership deed. The ownership deeds are conserved in various locations by the Armenian church. Sometimes in-situ lapidary inscriptions certify ownership.

The St. Thaddeus ensemble is the property of the Armenian diocese of Tabriz, and the village of Qara-Kelisa is included.

The monastery of St. Stepanos and the abandoned village of Darresham are the property of the Armenian diocese of Tabriz. As for the land forming the right bank of the River Araxe, which also forms the northern frontier of Iran, ownership is shared between the Armenian diocese

and the Iranian government (it is shared through joint ownership and not geographical determination of ownership).

The Chupan chapel is located on land belonging to the government.

The Chapel of Dzordzor is located on land belonging to the government, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Energy.

### *Protection*

#### *Legal Protection*

The Law of 3 November 1930 institutes the National Heritage List. The main monuments of the nominated property are protected by this law:

- St. Thaddeus, 1956, no. 405.
- St. Stepanos, 1956, no. 429.
- Chapel of Dzordzor, 2002, no. 6157.
- Chupan Chapel, 2002, no. 7743.
- Church of Darresham, 2005, no. 12444.

Other laws complete the provisions of the natural heritage law, and reinforce the conditions of its application:

- Law of the National Town Construction and Architecture Committee.
- Urban property law.
- Law on purchase of properties, buildings and archaeological sites.

General prevention laws (Islamic law, *Law of Islamic Punishments*) help ensure the physical integrity of national monuments, e.g. by prohibiting nearby excavations.

The Act on Religious Councils (29-04-1986) governs the relations of the State Party with the Armenian community of Iran.

These laws enshrine the basic rules which apply to the core zone, the buffer zone, and the landscape zone of the nominated properties, and to the villages' expansion zone.

#### *Traditional Protection*

The presence of the Armenian church in this area provides protection, by keeping alive the symbolic and spiritual value of the place. The rule seems to be a tradition of respect for other religious groups.

#### *Effectiveness of protection measures*

The application of the protection measures is the direct responsibility of the *Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organisation* (ICHHTO).

Good coordination between ICHHTO and the Armenian clergy seems to be a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness of the protection measures.



There are two resident caretakers at St. Thaddeus and two at St. Stepanos. Monks from the Armenian diocese stay there on a temporary basis.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate.

### **Conservation**

#### *Inventories, recording, research*

The study documents concerning the campaigns of rebuilding and restoration of the monasteries (See 2, History) are kept at ICHHTO and in the archives of the province.

A programme for a cultural and tourism data base concerning churches in Iran is placed under the responsibility of ICHHTO, 2003.

Under the management plan, each site team carries out a study programme (See 5 - Management, Resources), e.g. the St. Stepanos painting programme is nearing completion, before the restorations begin.

The site monitoring reports (See 6) are deposited at ICHHTO and in the provincial archives.

A project has been announced for the publication of the completed architectural results.

A project has been announced to excavate the areas surrounding the monasteries.

#### *Present state of conservation*

The monastic ensembles of St. Thaddeus and St. Stepanos have been constantly maintained and have undergone substantial restoration programmes since the 1970s (see 2 - History of conservation). The Chapel of Dzordzor was recently rebuilt.

All these properties and their annexes are considered by the State Party to be in a good state of conservation.

#### *Active Conservation measures*

A management plan for all the properties, including the conservation and protection policy, has since 2001 been in the process of preparation and implementation. It consists in fact of a combination of two plans: the plan for the works at St. Thaddeus (to which the Chapel of Dzordzor is attached) and the plan for St. Stepanos. These plans set out short and medium term objectives (1 to 3 years) and longer-term objectives (10 years).

The conservation of the properties is carried out with the support of professionals, particularly archaeologists and architects. It is carried out under the responsibility of ICHHTO which provides the technical expertise and the funding, in partnership with the Armenian diocese.

The monastic ensembles, and the churches in particular, are permanently staffed for monitoring and for works.

For several years now, conservation has been extended to include the restoration of the courtyards, annexe buildings and immediately surrounding areas, in conjunction with providing access for the public.

ICOMOS considers that the conservation work has been substantial, carried out over a long period, and of high quality for St. Thaddeus and St. Stepanos. The results obtained are satisfactory in terms of authenticity (See 3 - Authenticity) and in technical terms (raintightness, stabilisation of walls). However, issues of cracks and dampness remain in the White Church of St. Thaddeus, linked to the relatively fragile nature of the stone, and at St. Stepanos, linked to the alluvial nature of the ground. The issue of the non-raintight space between the White Church and the Black Church at St. Thaddeus is also a cause for concern.

ICOMOS considers that the State Party has made a substantial effort over a long period for the restoration and conservation of the nominated properties. The current state of conservation is good, which does not rule out the presence of delicate technical issues that will need to be addressed in the coming years.

### **Management**

#### *Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes*

Restoration and conservation of all the nominated properties are under the responsibility of ICHHTO.

The religious and cultural organisation of the properties, and visitor reception are under the responsibility of the Armenian diocese of Tabriz.

The budget of the provincial authorities: in 2006, the financial participations were approximately as follows: ICHHTO 17%, Province 73%, visitors 10%. It should be noted that the budget has been more than tripled between 2005 and 2006, by very strongly increased provincial funding.

#### *Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation*

The general conservation and protection plan is the combination of two plans: one for St. Thaddeus and the other for St. Stepanos. (See Conservation)

The tourism development plan for St. Thaddeus will only affect the site by slight changes to provide essential facilities for pilgrimages.

The management plan in the file repeats the basic elements set out in the earlier plans. It stipulates in particular the technical and heritage objectives to be achieved in 1 year, 3 years and 10 years.

In response to ICOMOS' request, a detailed schedule has been supplied for the developments indicated in the management plan for each of the sites.

ICOMOS considers that the proposed management plan and implementation schedule are satisfactory.

### *Involvement of the local communities*

The Armenian religious authorities of the diocese are involved, but not the communities living in the area.

The provincial authorities participate in the funding of the works in a very significant way, but this is a recent development (2006).

In response to the request by ICOMOS concerning this financial intervention, the State party indicates that it is a temporary stage linked to the process of nomination of the property.

### *Resources, including staffing levels, expertise and training*

For a very long time the funding of the conservation has been carried out by the government, particularly through ICHHTO, and its personnel have been assigned to the properties. After the current temporary phase under the responsibility of the region, it will again be ICHHTO, if the property is inscribed on the List, which will guarantee the funding for the preservation and conservation of the sites, as for the other Iranian sites already inscribed on the List.

The investment and operating parts of the budgets have not been specified.

The personnel assigned to the various properties are:

- St. Thaddeus: 20 people including 17 technical staff (architect, restorers, masons, stone cutters and semi-skilled workers)
- St. Stepanos: 42 people, three-quarters of whom are engaged in technical tasks (in particular 2 architects, 3 archaeologists and 3 structural engineers)
- Chapel of Dzordzor: 4 people (1 architect).

The sources of external expertise are:

- the experts of ICHHTO, particularly those in the Iranian churches culture and tourism department, which has a scientific and technical team of 12 people (archaeologists, architects and conservators).
- the experts of the Committee for the preservation of Armenian monuments in Iran, in conjunction with the Armenian prelacy of Iran.

ICOMOS considers that the management plan and its implementation are adequate.

## **6. MONITORING**

ICHHTO is the scientific and technical director of the monitoring of the nominated property.

Monitoring is primarily carried out by ICHHTO staff assigned to the sites. This is visual monitoring by professionals.

The indicators are marks placed on the cracks. They are checked every two weeks.

Photographic monitoring is carried out once a month.

Every two weeks the technical teams carry out the observation and checking of crack monitoring reports and the photographic monitoring. For comparison, they make use of the previous reports, and more generally of the documentation accumulated by ICHHTO and the provincial archives. Since 2003, the reports have been recorded in the cultural and tourism data base of Iranian churches, under the responsibility of ICHHTO.

ICOMOS considers that the monitoring of the property is adequate.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

ICOMOS considers that the Armenian monastic ensembles of Iran demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value in that they bear testimony to the diffusion of Armenian culture into Persia over a long historical period. They significantly complement the properties representing Armenian culture previously included in the World Heritage List.

### ***Recommendations with respect to inscription***

ICOMOS recommends that the Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran, Iran, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi)*.

### ***Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value***

The Armenian Monastic Ensembles of Iran have outstanding universal value for the following reasons:

- The Armenian monasteries of Iran have borne continuous testimony, since the origins of Christianity and certainly since the 7th century, to Armenian culture in its relations and contact with the Persian and later the Iranian civilisations.
- They bear testimony to a very large and refined panorama of architectural and decorative content associated with Armenian culture, in interaction with other regional cultures: Byzantine, Orthodox, Assyrian, and Persian.
- The monasteries have survived some 2,000 years of destruction, both of human origin and as a result of natural disasters. They have been rebuilt several times in a spirit in keeping with Armenian cultural traditions. Today they are the only important vestiges of Armenian culture in this region.
- Saint-Thaddeus, the presumed location of the tomb of the apostle of Jesus Christ, St. Thaddeus, has always been a place of high spiritual value for Christians and other inhabitants in the region. It is still today a living place of pilgrimage for the Armenian Church.

***Criterion (ii)***: The Armenian monasteries of Iran are very comprehensive examples of outstanding universal value of Armenian architectural and decorative traditions. They bear testimony to very important cultural interchanges

with the other regional cultures, in particular Byzantine, Orthodox and Persian.

**Criterion (iii):** Situated at the south-eastern limits of the main zone of Armenian culture, the monasteries were a major centre for its diffusion into Azerbaijan and Persia. Today they are the last regional testimony of this culture in a satisfactory state of integrity and authenticity.

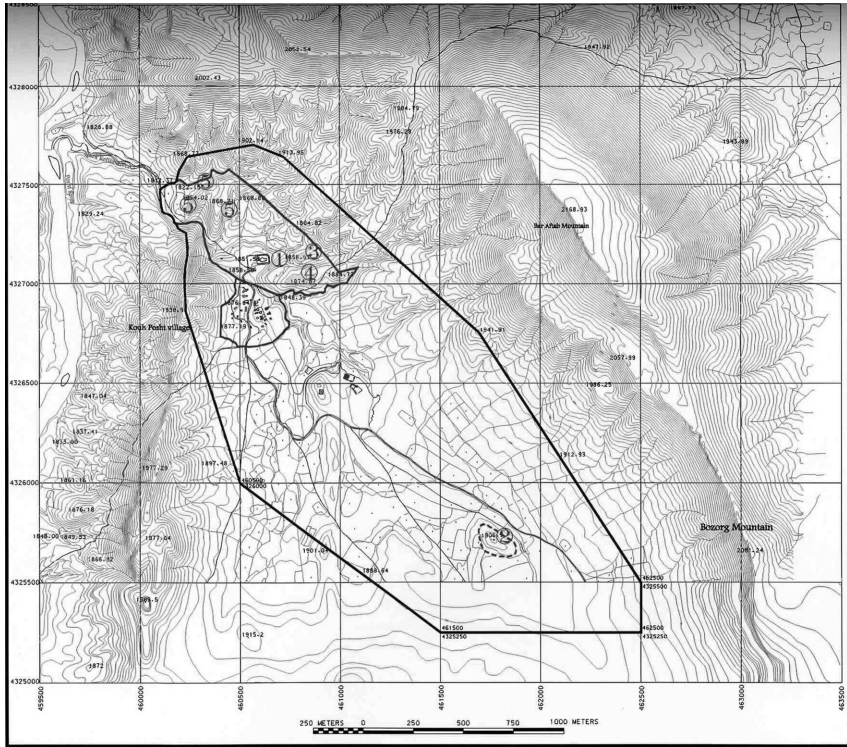
**Criterion (vi):** The monastic ensembles are the place of pilgrimage of the apostle St. Thaddeus, which bears an outstanding living testimony to Armenian religious traditions down the centuries.

ICOMOS considers that the State Party has made a remarkable long-term effort for the restoration and conservation of the Armenian monastic ensembles in Iranian Azerbaijan. Their integrity and authenticity are satisfactory, and this includes the Chapel of Dzordzor, which (because of a dam construction project) was moved and then rebuilt with an evident concern to retain authenticity.

The legal protection in place is adequate. The monastic ensemble is currently in a good state of conservation. The management plan provides the necessary guarantees for the long-term conservation of the property and the expression of its outstanding universal value.

ICOMOS recommends that the State Party should give consideration to the following:

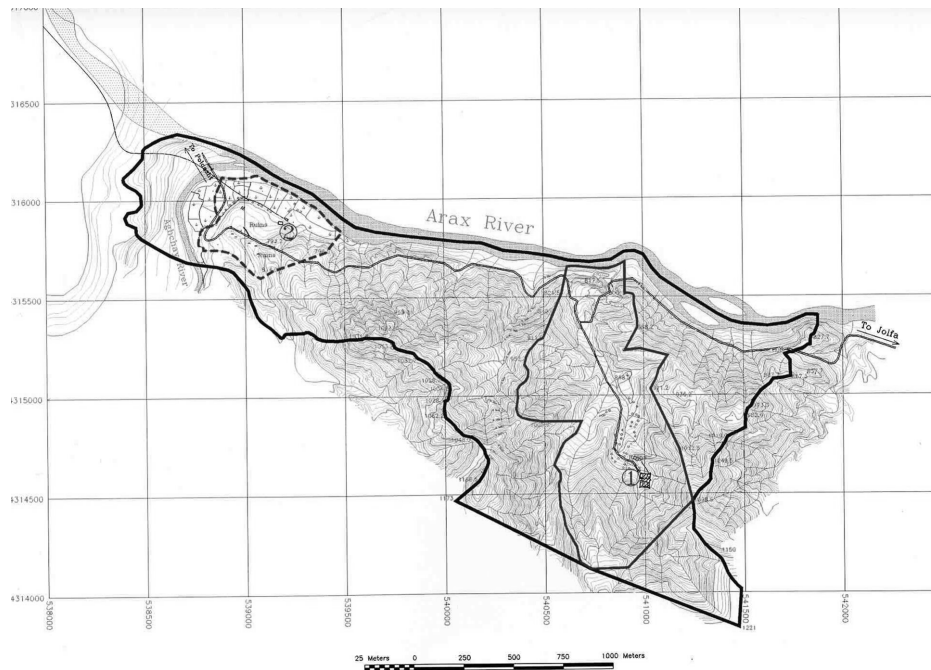
- Improving the quality of the areas around the properties, as there are some disparate elements which are not conducive to the expression of outstanding universal value (transformer, pylon, etc.).
- Ensuring the harmonious development of tourism, while respecting the outstanding universal value of the properties. Ensuring in particular the harmonious nature of the tourist facilities located in the monastic ensembles and their buffer zones.



Map showing the boundaries of St Thaddeus monastery



Aerial view of St Thaddeus monastery



**Map showing the boundaries of St Stepanos monastery and Darresham chapel**



**Cupola of St Stepanos monastery**



**Map showing the boundaries of the Dzordzor chapel**



**General view of the Dzordzor chapel**