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Nino Imedashvili and Sergi Kapanadze¹

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Introduction

Holy Dormition Cathedral of Moscow Patriarchate in Kharkiv, the church in Irpin near Kyiv, Svyatagorsk Monastery (lavra) in Donetsk, and the Holy Trinity church in the city of Zhovkva were bombed by Russia in the first days of the invasion of Ukraine². Since then, dozens of other churches and holy sites have been bombed despite President Zelensky's call that the churches are used as a shelter for civilians, including children.

A bigger shock to the Orthodox Christian World came when Russia's Patriarch Kirill "blessed"³ the war. He justified the war as a metaphysical fight against sin, against immoral Western values, and a "gay pride parade" forced on the people of Donbas, on whose behalf Kremlin had launched a "special military operation." Kirill claimed that people in Donbas were suffering for their "fundamental rejection of the so-called values that are offered today by those who claim world power." Similar spiritual and cultural sentiments were visible in Putin's speeches too. Before launching "special military operation" on 24 February 2022, Putin referred to Ukraine as an "inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space."⁴

According to UNESCO, at least 53 Ukrainian cultural sites have been damaged by Russians since 24 February, including 29 religious sites, 16 historic buildings, four museums and four monuments.⁵

Thinking back to Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008, striking similarities could be drawn. First, Putin rhetorically highlighted cultural and spiritual links with Georgia; shortly afterwards, Russian bombs destroyed Georgian cultural sites. Neither then nor now did the Russian Orthodox Church protest the destruction of the Christian sites of historical value.

² Deccanherald.com 2022. "Ukraine blames Russia for blaze at revered Orthodox church in east." Available at <https://www.deccanherald.com/international/world-news-politics/ukraine-blames-russia-for-blaze-at-revered-orthodox-church-in-east-1115345.html>

³ Margarita Arredondas, "Patriarch Kirill: Putin's spiritual leader who "blesses" war in Ukraine", Atalayar, June 7, 2022, viewed at <https://atalayar.com/en/content/patriarch-kirill-putins-spiritual-leader-who-blesses-war-ukraine>

⁴ Washington Post. 2022. "How Putin's invasion became a holy war for Russia." Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2022/03/21/russia-ukraine-putin-kirill/>

⁵ Npr.org. 2022 " UNESCO says 53 cultural sites in Ukraine have been damaged since the Russian invasion." Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/02/1090475172/unesco-ukraine-cultural-sites-damage>

In 2013 Putin thanked Georgia's Patriarch Ilia II "for doing everything ... to maintain the humanitarian, spiritual and cultural ties between our fraternal peoples."⁶ In 2008, he rejected Patriarch's appeal not to recognize the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. Russia's recognition occurred a day after Patriarch's request.

In 2008 Russia bombed 14 religious and cultural monuments and damaged seven cultural heritage sites after the hot phase of military activities was over. These monuments and sites have been abandoned since risking further demolition.

This paper is a reminder of Russia's barbaric behaviour. In this paper, we collected, examined and analyzed Russian bombed Christian sites in Georgia in 2008 and described the conditions of other damaged sites located in the areas now occupied by Russia. This paper also describes the monuments that underwent inappropriate "rehabilitation works" that erased Georgian traces.

The information below is accurate to the best of our knowledge because the Government of Georgia or other international or local experts can't verify the conditions of cultural heritage sites in the Russian-occupied regions. The information below about the damaged and abandonment monuments located in the area of bombardment in the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia is based on the reports from the local inhabitants and museum staff, the data compiled by UNOSAT satellite-based damage assessment for cultural heritage monuments in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 war and other credible international reports.⁷

⁶ Kremlin.ru. 2013. "Meeting with Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of All Georgia." Available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17362>

⁷ Information from the locals was collected between 2008 and 2013.

Situation before the 2008 Russian invasion

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, two wars broke out between the Government of Georgia and Moscow-backed separatists in South Ossetia (1991-1992) and Abkhazia (1992-1993). As a result, separatists gained control over almost the whole territory of the two regions and expelled most of the pre-war population, mainly ethnic Georgians. Since then, Moscow cemented its influence in these regions and, after August 2008, formally recognized them as independent states. After 2008 Moscow made these two regions totally dependent on Russia in terms of security and economy and, in recent years, has pursued the process of creeping annexation by creating the legal base for swift incorporation of the two regions into Russia as soon as conditions are ripe and Kremlin makes a decision.

Since the early days of the conflict, Georgian Orthodox Church was denied the right to operate in the conflict regions. Georgian priests who refused to preach in Russian were banished. On 11 March 2008, a Georgian priest was ousted from Abkhazia for preaching in Georgian.⁸ Other religious groups, though, had more freedom to operate. Even though the 1995 decree #9 issued by the separatist authorities banned Jehovah's Witnesses in Abkhazia, the decree was never enforced, and the group reported no problems. Baptists, Lutherans, and Catholics also reported that they were allowed to operate in region⁹, but the Georgian Orthodox Church reported that it was unable to do so.

The Georgian Patriarch expressed concern over the Russian Orthodox Church's support of separatism in the occupied regions. Ilia II accused the ROC of subsidizing websites encouraging secessionist sentiments and complained that the Moscow-based theological seminary was training Abkhaz priests, despite the Russian Orthodox Church recognizing Georgia's territorial integrity.¹⁰ Russian Orthodox Church never took these concerns seriously.

⁸ Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia; 2 April 2008

⁹ Humanright.ge. 2010. "US State Department About Rights of Georgian Orthodox People." Available at: <http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=12569&lang=eng>

¹⁰ Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia; 2 April 2008

State of the cultural heritage and religious sites during and after the 2008 war

Not enough is known about the condition of the cultural and religious heritage sites before the 2008 war. Sometimes, the media reported the concerns of the Georgian government that Russia and the de facto authorities attempted “to eliminate any Georgian trace from the cultural heritage” in the churches in Russian-controlled areas.¹¹ Government of Georgia addressed UNESCO to help preserve Christian monuments and especially intervene in protecting Elyr (Ilori) church located in Abkhazia, which was reported to be in poor condition.¹² Moreover, Georgia’s representative in Geneva reported that Russians directed the process of false restoration of monuments located in Abkhazia.¹³ Special report says that in 2010 Russians removed Georgian traces in the “remarkable samples of Georgian architecture as St. George's Ilori Church, Beslakhuba Church (V), Kamani Monastery (XI), Dranda Church (VI-VII), Likhni (X-XI), Mokvi monastery (X). Also, Georgian inscriptions (in "asomtavruli") on Tamar Bridge (XII-XIII) were damaged.”¹⁴ Same report provided information about the endangered and abandoned cultural and historical sites in South Ossetia, among others, including the Ikorta Church of the Archangel (XII) and Tiri Monastery (XIII – XVI). Georgian traces were entirely erased and were repainted in Russian style in Gomarta's St. George church (XV), Achabeti Fortress (XVI), Tsunari's (Khetagurovi), Virgin Church (XIV), Tskhinvail's Zguder St. George's Church (XVII) and Tskhinvail's St. George's Church (XV).¹⁵

On 7 August 2008, after a long period of military incidents between Moscow-backed separatists and Georgia’s military, the Russian regular army intervened in the Georgian region of South Ossetia. Russian troops were in South Ossetia even before August 7 in violation of international law and local peace agreements¹⁶; however on August 7, Russian intervention became massive. According to the report of the National Security Council of Georgia, “Russian

¹¹ Culture in development. 2020. “Abkhazia: Preserving Cultural Heritage”. Available at: http://www.cultureindevelopment.nl/disaster%20and%20war%20and%20culture/1568/Abkhazia:_Preserving_Cultural_Heritage

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Report of Georgian permanent representative in Geneva to Ms. Karima Bennouna, Special Rapporteur in the Field of cultural rights titled “The State of Georgian Cultural Heritage in the occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.” Available at:

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia,” Report, Volume I, P-1-33. Available at: http://www.mpil.de/en/pub/publications/archive/independent_international_fact_cfm

Aggression in Georgia: facts and figures”, Georgia’s territory was subjected to aerial bombardment over 75 times, and Russian attacks took place on land, sea, air and cyberspace. The most heavy bombing took place in the Shida Kartli region (including South Ossetia), which hosts a large number of cultural heritage and religious sites.¹⁷ The Ministry of Culture’s inventory lists about 500 registered historical monuments and archaeological sites only in this region. ¹⁸

Several monuments in and around the Tskhinvali Region and in Gori were damaged by the bombings raids, and ground attacks, and arson and looting carried out by the Russian forces and Ossetian militia. ¹⁹

UNOSAT’s satellite imagery from 19 August 2008 confirmed the severe bombing of three Churches and one museum : ²⁰

Archangel church (19th century)

This church, located in Kheiti, was damaged during the shelling on the 12th of August.

Church of Saint George (19th century)

A rare example of wooden architecture. This church is located in Sveri. One building was destroyed, second was severely damaged.

Bishop’s Palace in Nikozi (10th/11th centuries)

One of the most important examples of palace architecture from the late medieval period. It was restored before 2008 and was burned and destroyed in 2008. The Archbishop’s residence and the monastery adjacent to the palace were bombed on

¹⁷ Georgian Art and Culture Center. 2008. “The cultural heritage of Georgia. Abkhazeti and Shida Kartli.” Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports of Georgia. Available at: <https://www.gaccgeorgia.org/Exhibitions/CulturalHeritageofgeorgiaAbkhazeti,%20ShidaKartli/Abkhazeti-Shida%20kartlismall.pdf>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ List of bombed monuments during the war is collected by the author from various local cultural agencies and UNOSAT satellite maps. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/map/georgia/satellite-damage-assessment-cultural-heritage-monuments-south-ossetia-georgia-damage>

²⁰ UNOSAT images available at <https://reliefweb.int/map/georgia/satellite-damage-assessment-cultural-heritage-monuments-south-ossetia-georgia-damage>

the 9th of August. The resulting fire engulfed the Palace, too, according to museum staff.

Ivane Machabeli museum (19th century)

The museum in the village Tamarasheni just north of Tskhinvali was heavily bombed and damaged.

Furthermore, locals and museum staff confirmed damages to two churches and two museums.

Ikorta church (12th century)

One of the most exciting examples of Georgian Christian architecture, this church hosts the graves of three famous Georgians (leaders of the Kakheti 1659 uprising: Bidzina Cholokashvili, Shalva and Elizbar Ksnis Eristavebi). According to the museum staff, the church was damaged by shelling on the 9 and 10 of August.

Kemerti St. George Church (9th/10th centuries)

This church was bombed on August 10. Satellite images do not reveal direct damage, but the building is located within 100 meters of the buildings whose damage is visible from the satellite (see UNOSAT chart). Residents reported that the grounds of the church were mined.

Ksani Gorge Museum-Reserve (Eristavi Palace)

This museum in Akhlagori was occupied by South Ossetian militias, and sporadic looting attempts were reported.

The Kurta and the Kekhvi branches of the Didi Liakhvi Gorge Museum

About 1500 exhibits of bronze and medieval ages were looted. According to UNOSAT, satellite imagery Kurta branch was destroyed, arson probable. Kekhvi branch was likely “severely damaged, with possible impact crater in the roof”.

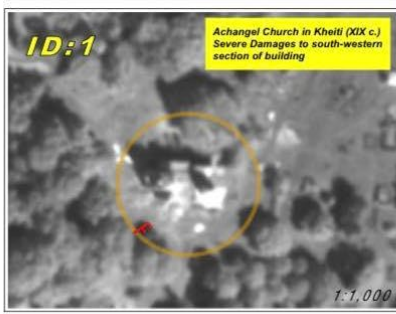
According to the museum staff and Georgian ICOM National Committee, the museum was looted on the 10th of August, 2008.²¹

According to the preservation and architecture experts, an explosion within 100 meters of an ancient building risks inflicting significant damage to the structure. UNOSAT satellite imagery shows six cultural heritage and religious monuments in proximity of less than 100 meters from the shelled or bombed areas with severe damage.

- **Church of St. Nikoloz in the village of Achabeti (18th century)**
- **Church of St. George in the village of Kekhvi (17th century)**
- **Church of St. George in the village of Kurta (9th century)**
- **Church of St. George in the village of Kemerti (IX-X century)**
- **Fortress in the village of Achabeti (16th century)**
- **George Machabeli Palace (18th century)**

Thus, based on UNOSAT and locals, during the 7-12 August, Russian bombs severely destroyed five churches and three museums. Five churches and two cultural monuments were within 100 meters of the Russian bombings and therefore were less severely damaged.

²¹ Author's Interview with local museum staff member

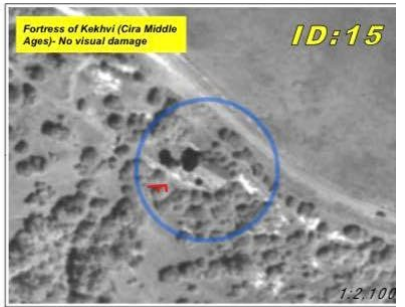
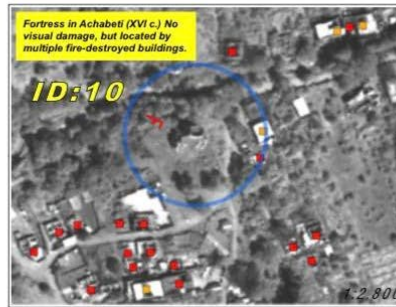
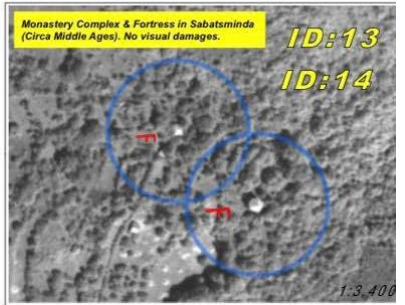
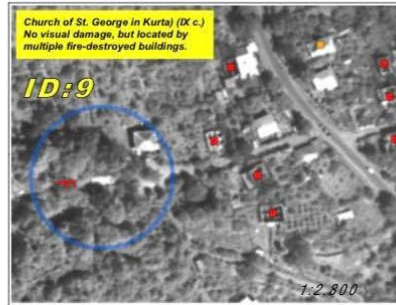
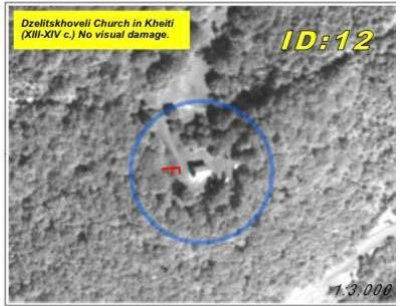
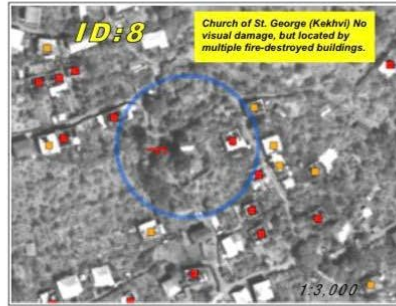
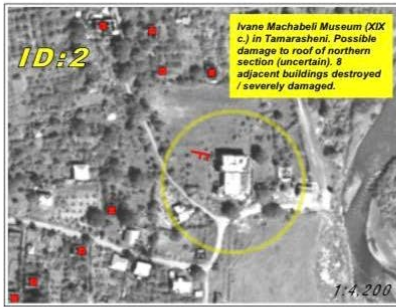


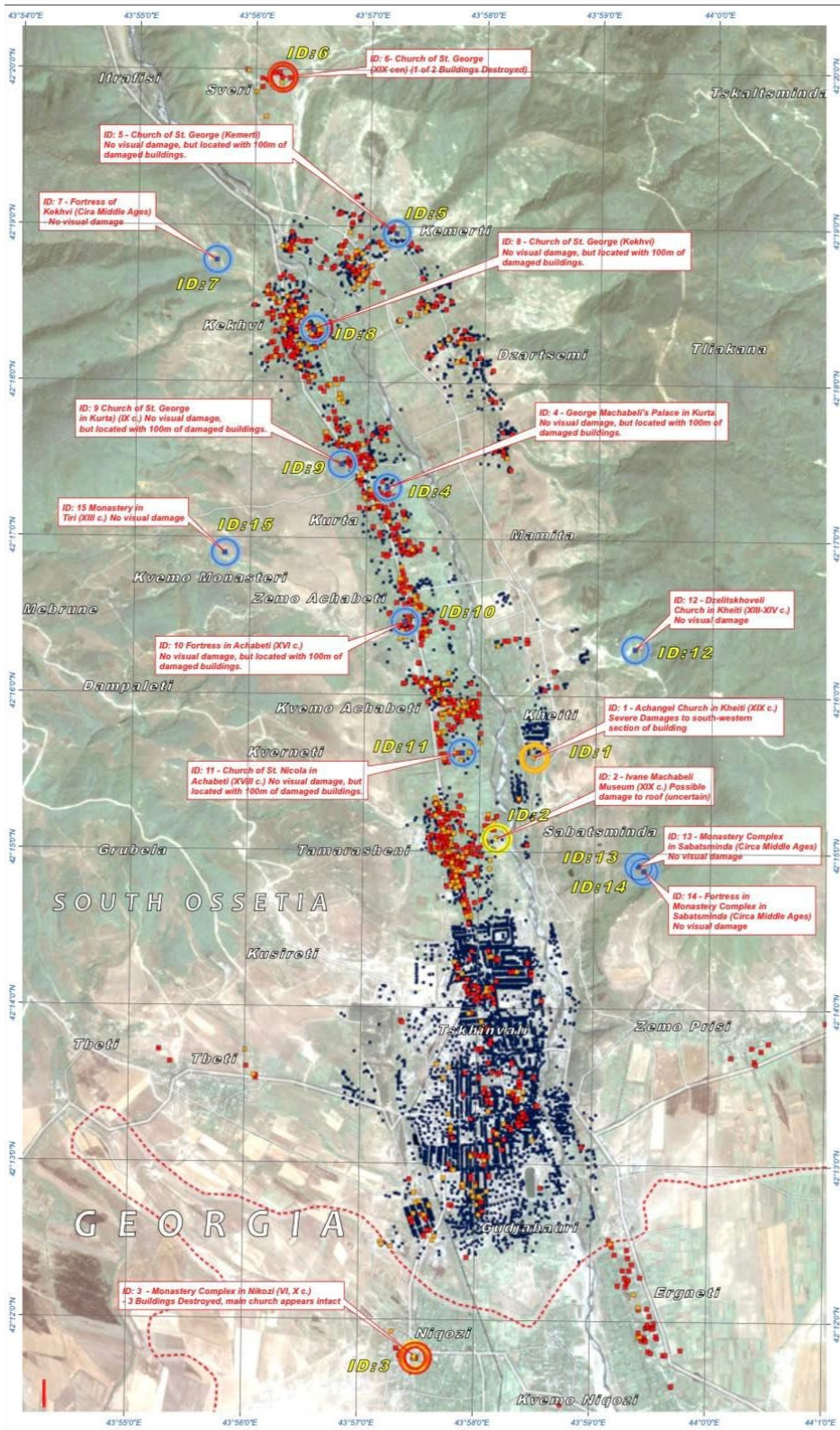
Preliminary Damage Assessment Summary:

- 3 sites have buildings which are either severely damaged or destroyed;
- 1 site has possible damage to the roof;
- 11 sites have no visible damages, however 6 are located within 100 meters of buildings which were damaged in the conflict and thus may have less-severe damages.

Notes: 1) building sites with 'no visible damage' does not imply no damages, only that none were visually identified with the available satellite imagery. Satellite-derived damage assessments can generally identify only a low percentage of buildings with limited damages.

2) Affected buildings were classified either as destroyed or severely damaged by standard satellite image interpretation methods. Destroyed buildings have been defined either by the total collapse of the structure or when it was standing but with less than 50% of the roof still intact. Severely damaged buildings were defined as having visible structural damage to a portion of one wall, or where a section of the roof was damaged but with over 50% of the roof still intact.





Analysis Description

This map presents a satellite-based damage assessment for the cultural heritage monuments within the main zone of conflict north of Tskhinvali, South Ossetia, Georgia following the armed conflict between Georgian and Russian military forces in August 2008. Damaged sites have been identified with WorldView-1 satellite imagery acquired on 19 August 2008 at a spatial resolution of 50cm. Pre-conflict imagery from Google Earth was also used. Please note, this is an initial damage assessment and has not yet been independently validated on the ground. Please send additions/corrections to the contact information below.

Map Legend

Transport Pix **Transport Lines**

- ✈ Airport
- ⚓ Port
- Main Road
- - - Secondary Road
- ⚓ Railroad

Administrative

- Approximate South Ossetia Boundary

SATELLITE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT (FOR ALL BUILDINGS)

- Building: Likely Destroyed
- Building: Likely Severely Damaged
- Building: Possible Damage
- Building: No Visual Damage Noted

FOR CULTURAL MONUMENTS

- Building: Likely Destroyed
- Building: Likely Severely Damaged
- Building: Possible Damage
- Building: No Visual Damage Noted



Map Scale for A3: 1:45,000

0 250 500 1,000 1,500 2,000 Meters

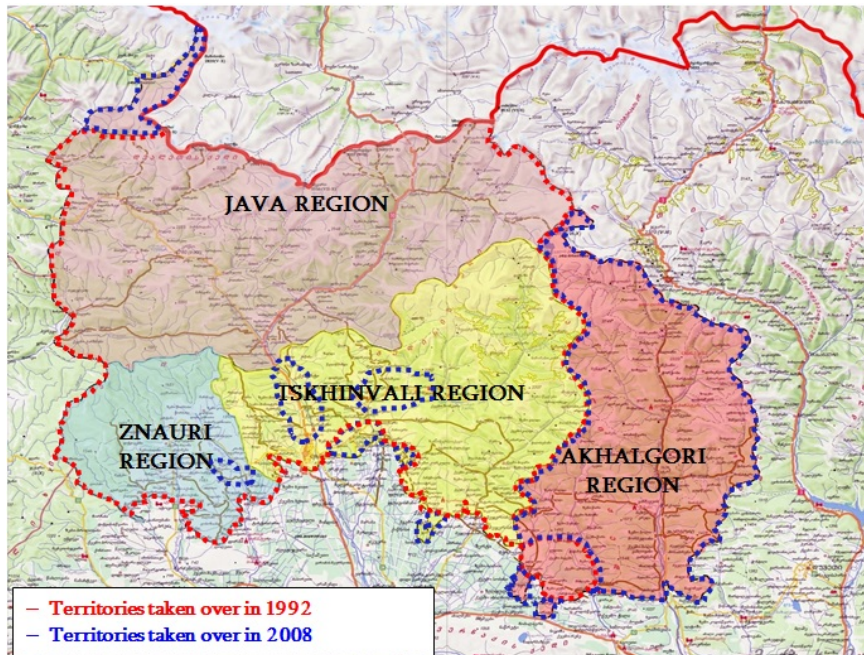
Satellite Data: WorldView-1
 Resolution: 50 cm
 Imagery Date: 19 August 2008
 Copyright: Digital Globe (2008)
 Source: U.S. Department of State - HUI
 Access Rules: NextView "EULA" - 2008
 Imagery Date: 19 August 2008
 GIS Data: USGS, UNEP, UNOSAT
 Heritage Data: Georgian National Commission for UNESCO
 Damage Analysis: UNOSAT 2008
 Projection: Pulkovo 1995 GK Zone 8N
 Datum: Pulkovo 1995

The depiction and use of boundaries, geographic names and related data shown here are not warranted to be error-free nor do they imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. This map was produced by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) Operational Satellite Applications Program (UNOSAT). UNOSAT provides satellite imagery & related geographic information to UN humanitarian & development agencies & their implementing partners.

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Situation after the 2008 war

After the 2008 war Russian controlled area in Georgia increased and included 151 additional villages.²² In the newly seized territories, Russia deployed new military bases and conducted military exercises permanently.



Source: IDFI, based on the Information of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia. 2015

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia reported that regular military exercises damaged the cultural monuments in the newly seized territory of Akhalkalaki district.²³ The list of newly damaged monuments after the war included:

- 1) Virgin Monastery complex (IX - XVIII)
- 2) The Holy Archangel's and St. George churches
- 3) Tower (the late Middle Ages)

²² See the IDFI report. 2015. "Creeping Occupation of Georgia Following the 2008 War." Accessible at <https://idfi.ge/en/changed-borders-of-georgia-after-occupation>

²³ Report of Georgian permanent representative in Geneva to Ms. Karima Bennouna, Special Rapporteur in the Field of cultural rights titled "The State of Georgian Cultural Heritage in the occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia." Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/CulturalRights/DestructionHeritage/States/Georgia.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3gddisnGIJFMbcgk301zGuZQ-bxDUTMC6u9VRQsuQVGtT63YFfdwDs>

4) The Castle (9th century), the Virgin Church (9th century)

5) St. George Church (6th century), St. George's Monastery and tower (late Middle Ages)

7) St. Marine Church (19th century).

Explosions and military manoeuvres during the exercises conducted by the Russian army were the main reasons for damaging cultural sites.²⁴

The same report listed the sites located near the military bases and therefore bearing high risks of damage to the two churches of St. George (10th and 14th centuries), St. George's Church (18th century), the Monastery of St. Saba (10th century), Virgin Church, Dzelitskhoveli Church (XIII-XIV), the Church of the Saviour (XVII-XVIII) and the museum of Ksani Gorge.

²⁴ Ibid.

International Involvement

On several occasions, local experts and cultural agencies appealed to the UNESCO World Heritage Center, the International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and the Council of Europe.²⁵ The main request was to deploy international expert missions to the Russian-occupied territories to monitor, study and participate in the process of conservation and rehabilitation of the cultural heritage and religious sites.²⁶ Georgian side also raised the issue of the destruction of Georgian cultural sites in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the Geneva International Discussions. Georgian media often reported about the poor conditions of historical sites in the occupied territories. Georgia's Group of Friends called on Russia to let access to international monitoring mechanisms in the occupied territories.²⁷ However, all diplomatic attempts were futile due to Russia's refusal to allow international missions inside the occupied regions. Currently, there is no international mechanism for protecting cultural heritage and religious sites in the occupied territories. Official information or data about the current conditions of these monuments is non-existent. According to Manana Tevzadze, chairperson of the Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield,²⁸ the only inspection by UNESCO of the sites in Abkhazia occurred in 1997, when the UNESCO mission visited 12 monuments in Abkhazia. UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) provided security guarantees for a visit. Since then, no official inspection of the monuments has taken place. In 2015-2016 the State Minister's office for Reconciliation and Civic Equality organized a visit of European experts to Abkhazia to study four monuments, however, no document was published after the visit.²⁹ Russian ICOM's Office with Russian experts also conducted the evaluation of the monuments in Abkhazia, though no restoration followed.³⁰

²⁵ Local experts and agencies appeal to International organizations. 2014. Available at. <http://blueshield.ge/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Appeal-to-international-organisations-24.03.2014-ENG.pdf>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ US Embassy in Georgia. 2018. "Joint statement of the Group of Friends of Georgia 10 years since the Russian military invasion of Georgia (August 7)." Accessible at: <https://ge.usembassy.gov/joint-statement-of-the-group-of-friends-of-georgia-10-years-since-the-russian-military-invasion-of-georgia-august-7/>

²⁸ Personal Interview with Manana Tevzadze, a chairperson of the Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield

²⁹ Personal Interview with Manana Tevzadze, chairperson of the Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield

³⁰ Personal Interview with Manana Tevzadze, chairperson of the Georgian National Committee of the Blue Shield

Since 2008 no international inspections have been allowed to South Ossetia either. Under the auspices of the Council of Europe, Georgian authorities set up an Interministerial Commission to address the damage to the Gori municipality's cultural heritage and religious sites close to South Ossetia. This area is currently under central government control but was heavily damaged during the 2008 war. Council of Europe supported the "Post-Conflict Actions for the Social and Economic Revitalisation of the Communities and the Cultural Environment in the Municipality of Gori" (PIAG) project, which aimed at rehabilitating the cultural and religious sites in the Gori municipality. Under the PIAG project, historical buildings were inspected and evaluated "to be presented to prospective partner organizations for financing."³¹ In all, the PIAG project supported the social and economic reconstruction of the historical monuments through elaborating (1) the guidelines for the repair and reconstruction process in the damaged villages, (2) supporting the Rehabilitation of Nikozi Monastery and Nikozi Village and (3) creating the Gori regional development plan.

The Georgian government appealed to the international community to evaluate cultural heritage and religious sites in the occupied regions. UNESCO expressed readiness to participate. However, Russia blocked all proposals and possibilities. From time to time, Russian media wrote about and displayed images of the Russian-financed rehabilitation of the Georgian monuments in the occupied territories. National Committee of the Blue Shield collected and analysed media reports and concluded that such "rehabilitation works" were inadequate and contradictory to international conservation standards and national Georgian conservation law and guidelines. Renovation works on the Georgian historical monuments were done in the traditional Russian style. Some "rehabilitated" monuments were remodelled as Russian churches. e.g. "onion-shaped" domes were placed on the church structure, and Russian icons were placed in the interiors.³² In some churches, modern tiles were placed instead of ancient stone tiles, and new lighting systems, doors and windows were installed. In many cases, churches were whitewashed to cover stone inscriptions in the old Georgian alphabet and thus erase any Georgian trace.

³¹ More about PIAG project see CoE website: [https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/piag#%2219678532%22:\[0\]](https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/piag#%2219678532%22:[0])

³² Personal Interview

The list of monuments which underwent such “rehabilitation works” included:

Abkhazia: Church (19th century) in village Vladimerovka in Gulripshi District (damaged during the 1992-1993 war),³³ Dranda - monastic complex of the Virgin (VI-VIII),³⁴ Ilori’s St. George Church (11th century) in Ochamchire region.³⁵

South Ossetia: Church of St. George the Victorious in Geri (also called Jer), St. George’s Church / Holy Trinity Church in Tsovbisi Village (XII)³⁶ Achabeti Fortress.³⁷

Conclusion

Ukraine was not the first place where Russia bombed Orthodox Christian sites and churches. At least 15 such religious and cultural monuments were destroyed during the August 2008 invasion of Georgia. Later seven more churches were damaged during the military trainings, including the one from IX century. Russian Orthodox Church justified the war during Putin’s wars or stayed neutral. Russia’s Orthodox Church's rhetoric helps Putin consolidate the autocratic governing style, demonize Western values and justify Russian hegemony over its neighbours. When Russian bombs destroyed historical Christian churches in Ukraine and

³³ Ekhokavkaza. 2018 “Освящен храм Покрова Пресвятой Богородицы в абхазском селе Владимировка.” accessible at: <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/29538377.html>

³⁴ Abkhazeti.info. 2014. “Драндская церковь «обрусела.” accessible at: <http://abkhazeti.info/abkhazia/2014/1391737193.php>

³⁵ Newposts. 2017. “რუსული ვანდალიზმი - ილორის წმ. გიორგის ტაძარში რუსმა მღვდელ-მსახურმა მეტლახი დააგო.” accessible at: <http://www.newposts.ge/?id=132585>. Кавказский Узел. 2011 “Абхазия представит в Женеве фотоматериалы о состоянии Илорского храма” accessible at: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/181800/>. <https://www.kvirispalitra.ge/>. 2011. “ბაგრატ III-ის ფრესკა 2005 წელს განადგურდა”. Accessible at: <https://www.kvirispalitra.ge/history/16421-bagrat-iii-is-freska-2005-tsels-ganadgurda.html?device=xhtml&fbclid=IwAR1OjNZoOxwAWjBhOezqiuNEPKNjI0AsdPI8Fr6Cc5SxylorW040QnHye0>. Imedi TV program about the conditions of monuments in Abkhazia. accessible at: <https://www.imesi.ge/ge/video/16934/imesi-dila--3-noemberi-2017-tseli-natsili-2>

³⁶ <http://osinform.org/>. 2015. “Рабочие Тирского монастыря штукатурят Гомартскую церковь.” accessible at: <http://osinform.org/51422-cerkov-v-gomart-znaurskiy-rayonrabochie-tirskogo-monastyrya-shtukaturyat-gomartskuyu-cerkov..> РЕС. 2014 «В Храме Рождества Пресвятой Богородицы в Цхинвале завершается капитальный ремонт.” accessible at: <http://cominf.org/node/1166503812>. РЕС. 2014 «В Храме Рождества Пресвятой Богородицы в Цхинвале завершается капитальный ремонт.” accessible at: <http://cominf.org/node/1166503812>

³⁷ РЕС. 2014. “Сделан первый шаг в дело возрождения исторических памятников юга Осетии” accessible at: <http://cominf.org/node/1166501285>

Georgia, Russian Orthodox Church leaders were either silent or supportive of aggression and military intervention leading to the destruction of Christian sites.

While rhetorically Putin highlights cultural links with Ukraine and spiritual ties with Georgia, Russia bombed 53 cultural sites in Ukraine and 15 in Georgia. Russia as an occupying force seems to violate International Humanitarian Law, particularly the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Event of Armed Conflict. According to the Convention, “occupation obliges State Parties to the Convention to take all appropriate measures to conduct their activities in such a manner as to protect cultural heritage.”³⁸

³⁸ UNESCO. “1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Event of Armed Conflict.” Available at <https://en.unesco.org/protecting-heritage/convention-and-protocols/1954-convention>