

KHACHKAR

A Khachkar, also known as an **Armenian cross-stone** is a carved, memorial stone bearing a cross, and often with additional motifs such as rosettes, interlaces, and botanical motifs. The cross is arguably the most familiar symbol of Christianity; but nowhere is this iconography as crucial or culturally entrenched as it is in Armenia. Wherever you go, thousands of *khachkars*, or cross-stones, pervade the conscience of the world's oldest Christian nation, providing a rare glimpse into the art of spiritual expression.

From an artistic perspective, the creative medium of rock boasts a powerful statement. Indeed, the rock has enjoyed several iconic references in the Bible. Jesus, in a famous discourse tells Peter, "*And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church;*" (Matthew 16:18). Such strong imagery was necessary for the Armenian Church's survival; qualities such as **permanence**, **stability** and **grounded faith** were perpetuated by the physical three-dimensional embodiment of the cross-stone. Armenia, with its vast mountain ranges and dormant volcanoes, would have no trouble sourcing the slate and tuff, both relatively workable, for construction purposes. In a region prone to earthquakes, man-made structures would have to prove sturdy. The rock, as a substrate of spiritual expression, signified the **eternal** and the **infinite**, amidst an unpredictable future.

Khachkars are a uniquely Armenian form of art, which evolved into an incredibly ornate form reaching its peak in the 12-13th centuries. Perhaps some of the most intricate known khachkars were designed by the great architect Momik. Khachkars are most commonly used as tombstones, but were sometimes used as memorials. The biggest khachkar cemetery in Armenia is the Noratus Cemetary while the biggest in the world is in Jugh, in Nakhichevan.

Endangered Khachkars

A large portion of khachkars, which were created in historic Armenia and surrounding regions, have become the possession of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Iran. As a result of systematic destruction of khachkars in Turkey, today only a few examples survive. More than ever, we should celebrate this important and symbolic artwork that defines our culture.

Khachkars are now making their way into Diaspora communities as well as an export from Armenia for contemporary tombstones. Find a khachkar on your church grounds!

Different types of Khachkars: *(picture examples on next page)*

- **Traditional khachkar** - a cross carved onto a stone
- **Lacework" khachkar** - has a highly detailed and elaborate design
- **Amenaprkich khachkar** - has a design with Christ on the cross
- **Tevavor"(with arms) khachkar** - a freestanding cross



Traditional- cross carved on stone



Lacework - highly detailed



Amenaprkich - with Jesus



Tevavor - free standing with 'arms



In Gyumri



Two 16th century khachkars in Etchmiadzin removed from the Julfa graveyard before its destruction by Azerbaijan.