

IRAN

The Dulab Christian Cemeteries in Tehran

This remarkable ensemble of five Christian cemeteries is located in the Dulab neighbourhood of Tehran (Iran), in the eastern part of this growing metropolis. It groups the following burial grounds:

1. Armenian Gregorian Cemetery, 2. Orthodox Cemetery (Russians, Georgians, Greeks), 3. Catholic Cemetery (Poles, Italians, French, others), 4. Armenian Catholic Cemetery, 5. Assyrian Cemetery (Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox).

In addition to family and individual graves, the cemeteries include several war memorials (Polish, Italian, Russian) and three chapels. There are several impressive mausoleums and many designed tombstones with architectural features. Some of the graves date to the mid 19th century, during the reign of Qajar Dynasty, including the mausoleum of Louis-André Ernest Cloquet (1818–1855), French anatomist and Minister to the court at Tehran from 1846 until his death. The Christians, besides many Iranians, are of several different nationalities. They include immigrants, military personnel, embassy servicemen, as well as Polish civilian refugees from the Second World War.

These hollow grounds indeed have indeed retained their use as a place of family and personal remembrance and the many layers of significance and associated values related to its commemorative and sacred nature in relation to a diversity of Christian confessions and cultural traditions. It has strong spiritual significance, being a place of admonishment, quietness and recollection amid the bustling metropolis, reminding about the meaning of life, recounting the story of those who lived before, making one conscious of one's own life and perhaps even re-evaluating it. The ensemble has also maintained its documentary, historical, artistic and didactic significances, includ-



ing many precious architectural and artistic elements. It constitutes an important Iranian and internationally significant heritage site for these reasons. This ensemble is however, in need of maintenance work and proper care and nowadays faces the growing pressure of urbanisation. Initially, it was located outside the old city boundaries. Now, as the city of Tehran has grown into a major metropolis, the cemeteries are surrounded and enclosed within the modern urban fabric. At the moment, the municipal authorities are contemplating different schemes to acquire and redevelop the site of this remarkable ensemble, e.g. removing the tombstones, turning parts of the site into a park or building facilities on the cemeteries' grounds.

These projects will seriously put the heritage, cultural and commemorative values of this remarkable ensemble at risk. There is urgent need that any potentially interested people or associations would step forward and contribute to safeguarding this exceptionally interesting and valuable cultural-historical testimony.

