Armenia, a small landlocked country in the South Caucasus, is home to an estimated 33,000 cultural heritage sites ranging from a prehistoric wine production center to hundreds of medieval churches. Since the beginning of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (1922-1991), these sites, and in particular, medieval religious complexes, have been the target of heritage revitalization projects meant to not only return heritage to a previous state or to prevent further decay but also to make heritage usable—in a sense, to revive heritage. This dissertation ethnographically explores heritage revitalization projects from the Soviet era to the present. Drawing upon 18 months of fieldwork in Yerevan and the villages of Areni and Tatev, this research reveals how, for the past eighty years, transnational heritage professionals and financers have enacted a multitude of heritage revitalization projects with little contestation, promulgating seemingly similar identity-building or developmental narratives while also pursuing alternative social, political, and economic agendas.

This dissertation shows that simultaneous yet divergent utilizations of heritage are able to flourish, rather than collide, for numerous reasons. Starting in the Soviet era, heritage regimes have allowed individual heritage professionals to privately couch ulterior uses of heritage within socialist aspirations. The multifarious nature of heritage continues into the present, where neoliberal environments and heritage mediators within the state facilitate transnational funders to invest in developmental heritage revitalization projects while assuring that all parties involved also accrue alternative incentives. Increasingly, foreign states, like the United States, are also investing in cultural heritage revitalization as a means to not only enact public diplomacy, but also as a way to gain a multitude of sociopolitical outcomes. Ultimately, this dissertation, while focusing on the history of heritage revitalization programs in a South Caucasus nation, broadens anthropological research in the former Soviet Union through archaeological ethnography, and encourages a reconceptualization of what happens to heritage in transitional phases of statehood.