

In Tajikistan, the case of vandalism at a cemetery in the Bogi Kalon village of Istaravshan district, Sughd region, was dismissed.

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In early March, unknown persons smashed five gravestones at a cemetery in the Bogi Kalon village. A 14-year-old teenager was suspected of vandalism (*according to the procedural legislation of Tajikistan, due to the fact that the case is related to a minor, we do not name him*). **Orif Sadulloev**, the chairperson of the Guli Surkh jamoat of Istavrashan, declared then that it was done negligently:

“Last Sunday, a 14-year-old teenager herded his sheep near the cemetery. When he wanted to drive one of the sheep away, he threw a stone and broke one of the gravestones. Same way, he broke four more gravestones.”

After the incident, the teenager was interrogated and let to bail. He is in care of his uncle while his parents work in Russia. However, later the case was completely dismissed.

“I spoke to the regional inspector, he was released from criminal prosecution and the case was dismissed, because he was a minor.”



Video screenshot of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan on vandalism at the cemetery in Bogi Kalon village

Crime Without Punishment

According to the law, the graves destruction or disrespect for the bodies of the dead or their graves is considered a crime under Article 243 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan “Abuse of a dead human body and places of their burial”. A guilty party is punishable by a penalty of 16,500 somoni (\$1,747.8) or imprisonment from 2 to 5 years. Cases of vandalism at the cemeteries of Tajikistan usually remain undisclosed or not completed.

According to Radio Ozodi, in 2017, almost 30 gravestones were broken in the Kushoniyon

district of the Khatlon region. The authorities stated then that a young man suffering from a mental disorder did this.

In 2015, unknown persons broke dozens of gravestones in the Revad village of Ayni district. Two years later, the guilty were never found, and therefore the case was dismissed.

At the end of 2015, in the Farkhor district, unknown persons destroyed more than four thousand gravestones in a Christian cemetery. The guilty were never found.

Persons, who desecrated the cemetery in the Yova jamoat in Ghafurov district, remained unpunished. In 2012, unknown persons destroyed gravestones and fencing on 16 graves there.



One of the graves desecrated at the cemetery in the Bogi Kalon village. Video screenshot of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan.

Controversial Accusations

Experts and local residents believe that the destruction of cemeteries in Tajikistan has religious overtone. However, law enforcement agencies argue that this is only vandalism and disruptive behavior.

In the incident in the Bogi Kalon village, many believed that the version that a 14-year-old teenager could destroy the gravestones was doubtful.



Video screenshot of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan

“He is a physically weak child and could not break gravestones. That day, children from other villages played on the sports field. Perhaps they broke the stones. If you see him, you yourself will understand that he does not have enough strength to break those stones. Even the prosecutor, seeing him, did not believe that he could have done this”, said **Sharif Abdulloev**, a boy’s psychologist, in CABAR.asia interview.

One of our sources on condition of anonymity said that, perhaps, a group of radical young people who live in this jamoat and were previously involved in civil disturbances is involved.

“Since the police do not want to deal with them, they decided to blame the child. Think for yourself how thick and heavy a gravestone is and to break it, you need to use a sledgehammer or other heavy tool. One thrown stone cannot break it, especially if a 14-year-old child threw the stone. In order to avoid the scandal, the police do not deal with those men and simply blame the minor, who can be discharged”.

According to **Mullomuhtor Mulloev**, the Center for Strategic Research employee, religious movements that consider gravestones as idolatry, may commit vandalism at the cemeteries of Tajikistan.

“The younger generation has the opinion that in Islam it is forbidden to put stones in cemeteries and this is wrong for Muslims. Those who destroy stones in cemeteries think they are doing the right thing. Children do not understand what a grave or cemetery is. I think that those who want to implement their teachings through someone else’s actions are at the bottom of it”, Mulloev noted. According to him, in order to prevent such incidents, it is necessary to strengthen educational



work in the regions of the country.
“It is necessary to hold seminars for schoolchildren, teachers, regional and local authorities more frequently. Although they work in this area, but there are cases of withholding information about crimes, information is often kept in secret. Therefore, we need to conduct more explanatory work in the regions”, Mulloev emphasized.

Mullomuhtor Mulloev. Photo: habarho.com

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