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**ԽՄԲԱԳՐԱԿԱԶՄ  
ԷՄՄԱ ԱԲՐԱԴՅԱՆՅԱՆ**

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Responsible for this issue  
**SAMVEL KARAPETIAN**

**ՏՊԱԳՐԿԵԼ Է**

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<http://www.armenianarchitecture.am>

<http://www.raa.am>

✉ [raayer@sci.am](mailto:raayer@sci.am)

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## TZARAKAR MONASTERY

by Samvel Karapetian

A cut-in-rock monastic complex is preserved on the weathered and corroded south-facing side of a south-looking range of rocks extending along the left side of a small gorge, 1.2 km west of the village of Chukurayva,<sup>1</sup> 5 kms south-east of the fortified town of Kechror, Gabeghiank District, Ayrarat Province, Armenia Maior (Kaghzvan District, Kars Region until 1920; at present: Kars ili, Kağızman ilçesi, Kötek bucağı), at an altitude of 1,949 metres above sea level (geographical coordinates: N 40°14' 51.69", E 42°54' 49.07").

The monastery consists of a church which has several entrances connected with each other, at least six chapels and other adjoining buildings. It is remarkable for its very interesting structure and extended lapidary inscriptions mentioning outstanding historical personalities of the 10th century. Despite it, however, until recently neither specialists nor topographers ever paid any attention to it: strange as it is, it was ignored even by Primate of Kars Diocese Kyuregh Srapian, who compiled quite a detailed register of the inhabited places and ancient sites throughout the region of Kars in 1878, his list including monuments of less importance situated south of Kechror.<sup>2</sup>

It was only in 1999 that the monument was first visited by a specialist, namely Scottish researcher Stephen Sim, who took photographs of it and made its schematic plan.<sup>3</sup>

Later it was visited by seismologist Shiro Sasano, who published a small-scale research work on it together with several photographs he had taken there in 2009.<sup>4</sup>

In this way, these two foreign researchers discovered the cut-in-rock monastery and made it known to the scientific world. They, however, failed to find out its name and called it after the adjacent village at present inhabited by Kurds.

Realising the importance of conducting comprehensive studies in the monastic complex, in 2008 the members of Research on Armenian Architecture (RAA) Organisation included it in their programme of scientific expeditions and carried out some work there, continuing it in 2010 as well and revealing a lot of information relating to it.

The lapidary inscriptions preserved on the western and northern walls of the only surviving church report that it was erected in the 10th century. The available sources attest that this newly-discovered monument complex is the monastery of Tzarakar, which is mentioned in medieval records, and the location of which remained unknown until very recently.

The following facts give grounds for identifying the newly-found monastery with Tzarakar:

As is known, Tzarakar was one of the renowned monastic complexes in medieval Armenia, but in the course of centuries, it lost its glory and significance and was consigned to oblivion to such an extent that in our days even its location remained obscure.

Indeed, in the late 19th century, Gh. Alishan used the available sources to point to the area where the monastery could have possibly been situated:

...Tzarakar, which is mentioned in some works by historians and geographers, is known to have stood in a naturally impregnable site in the vicinity of Kechror: first of all, a cut-in-rock monastery was erected...<sup>5</sup>

He was followed by S. Eprikian, who almost repeated the same information:

Supposedly, a monastery of this name and a village used to be situated near Kechror, Gabeghenk District, Ayrarat [Province].<sup>6</sup>

Later, however, the issue of the location of the monastery became even more tangled, for it was argued that it might have been situated in the neighbourhood of Ani.<sup>7</sup> The *Dictionary of Toponymy of Armenia and the Adjacent Lands* states:

...according to some scholars, [the monastery was probably located] near the township of Kechror, Gabeghiank

1 The original Armenian name of the village is Prut. At present (2012) it has a Kurdish population of 40 houses.

2 Thus for instance, he states: *Amidst the ruins of Kilise Kyoy, located in a gorge south of Kechevan, at a distance of half an hour, there is a semi-destroyed monastery whose name remains unknown* (Մրասխան Կ., Ստորագրութիւն Կարսի շրջակայ գիւղօրէից և վանօրէից [K. Srapian, "A Description of the Villages and Monasteries Near Kars"], ԲՀԱ [Herald of the Armenian Archives], no. 2 (1970), 92).

3 S. Sim made his research trip through the RAA's financial support. His materials are kept in the archives of the foundation.

4 Shiro Sasano and Sasano Seminar, eds., *Historical Architecture of Eastern Anatolia in the Middle Ages, under the Prospect of Interactive Building-Techniques* (Yokohama, 2009), 127-128.

5 Ալիշան Գ., Այրարատ [Gh. Alishan, Ayrarat] (Venice, 1890), 47.

6 Էփրիկեան Ս., Պատկերագրող բնաշխարհիկ բառարան [S. Eprikian, An Illustrated Geographical Dictionary], vol. 2 (Venice, 1903-1905), 238.

7 Յովհաննէսեան Մ., Հայաստանի բերդերը [M. Hovhannisian, The Castles of Armenia] (Venice, 1970), 641-643.

District, [whereas] others hold [that it was built] near Ani, Shirak District...<sup>8</sup>

The colophon of an *Ashkharatsuyts* (a geographical work), dating back to 1656, dispels this uncertainty to a great extent:

...the district of Gabeghenits and the castle of Kaput also called Artagereits—the town of Kechror is situated there together with the cut-in-rock monastery of Tzarakar, where Archimandrite Khachatur Kecharetsi's grave is found...<sup>9</sup>

This passage reveals two facts of the utmost importance: firstly, Tzarakar Monastery was cut in the rock, and secondly, most presumably, it was situated not far from the town of Kechror.

That Khachatur Kecharetsi,<sup>10</sup> a worker of education and a poet who lived between the 13th and 14th centuries, was buried somewhere near Kechror, is also attested by the following note on a map of 1691 compiled by Yermia Chelebi Kyomurjian:

Town of Kechror, bordering on Basen, and Archimandrite Khachatur's grave.<sup>11</sup>

These two records clarify that the monastery of Tzarakar was truly located near the fortress town of Kechror. Indeed, the latter does not make direct reference to it, but as already stated above, the *Ashkharatsuyts* of 1656 reports that Khachatur Kecharetsi was interred in Tzarakar Monastery, and Kyomurjian adds that Kecharetsi's grave was near the town of Kechror.

Besides written records, the etymology of the toponym of *Tzarakar* is also of great importance to the clarification of the issue of the identification of the newly-found cut-in-rock monastery with Tzarakar. Every visitor may easily see that the structures of the monastic complex are cut into quite friable masses of rock which are naturally striped and have certain colouring, looking like the parallel circular lines showing the age of a cut tree—evidently, the name of *Tzarakar*, the Armenian equivalent for *Tree Stone*, is conditioned by this resemblance meaning *a monastery cut into a tree-like stone*.

It was in 2009<sup>12</sup> that the RAA first presented photographs of Tzarakar Monastery, with its location already ascertained, in one of its publications (the present article dwells on it in greater detail).



Tzarakar Monastery and Prut (nowadays: Chukurayva) Village from space

**A Historical Introduction.** The primary sources casting light on the historical events connected with Tzarakar are three lapidary inscriptions preserved in the monastery though they have reached us in a very deteriorated state. The first of them is carved on its western facade: it is marked with irregularity of writing, for its 11 lines and the size of its letters do not seem to have any order. It is a donation inscription dated 952 mentioning Tiran, spiritual shepherd of Vanand District, and Bishop Sahak Amatuny.

ՆԱ (952). յայս | ձեռնագիր է | Տիրանոյ՝ Վանանդա վերակացուին հայոց ... շահանշահ առի էտու | ...որոստէ յազոն :ճ: (100) ... | ի կատ(ե)ւ(ան)ներուն ի ժամ հրի յազոն :ճ: (100) փասս ... հորիսացի վանս | :ճ: (100) փասս՝ Կարոց ի սորբ Գիրգորի ... | ...վասն իմն ... վասն իմ հոզոյ ... ով | այս գրոյս հակառակա նգովեալ եղիցի յա(ստուծոյ) եւ տ(եառ)ն Տիրան եւ տ(եառ)ն Սահակա Ամ(ա)տունեաց եպիսկոպոս[ա] | ...Յակոբ եւ յա(ստուծոյ) եւ կատարիչ հր(ա)մանացս աւ(ր)հն(եալ) եղիցի | որ այս [գրոյ]ս հակառակա ի Յ եւ ԺԸ (318)-ի նգովեալ լիցի բաժին ընդ սատանի է.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Հայաստանի և հարակից շրջանների տեղանունների բառարան [A Dictionary of Toponyms of Armenia and the Adjacent Lands], vol. 2 (Yerevan, 1988), 842-843.

<sup>9</sup> Թօփճեան Յ., Յուգակ ձեռագրաց Դադեան Խաչիկ վարդապետի [H. Topjian, comp., A List of Manuscripts Collected by Archimandrite Khachik Dadian], part 1 (Vagharshapat, 1898), 77.

<sup>10</sup> Ստեփանյան Գ., Կենսագրական բառարան [G. Stepanian, A Dictionary of Biographies], vol. 2 (Yerevan, 1981), 46-47.

<sup>11</sup> G. Uluhogian, Un antica mappa dell'Armenia. Monasteri e santuari dal I al XVII secolo [An Ancient Map of Armenia: Monasteries and Sanctuaries of the 1st to 17th centuries] (Ravenna, 2000), 83, 86.

<sup>12</sup> S. Karapetian, Armenia: An Illustrated Album (Yerevan, 2009), 277-279.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that some parts of the inscription which still remain undeciphered could be read more successfully if it were possible to spend more time on the spot.



A general view of Tzarakar Monastery from the south

Transl.: 401 (952). This is written by Tiran, spiritual shepherd of Vanand... shahanshah... gardener... St. Grigor ... for my soul's sake... may those who object to this writing be cursed by God, as well as ...Tiran and Bishop Sahak Amatuny... Hakob... may he who fulfills the commands be blessed and he who raises an objection to this writing be damned and fall into the devil's hands.

Another extended donation inscription of 17 irregular lines, dating from the same period, i.e. 10th century, has come down to our days in a semi-distorted state. It is engraved on the northern wall of the same church and is especially important as it mentions the founder of Vanand (Kars) Kingdom, Mushegh<sup>14</sup>:

... | ...սաթրի... | ...կարս... | ...սուրբ Գրիգոր հրաման ...յամենայն | ...թառ... | ...ձեռագիր | ... | ալոյ յաւելլու: Յանուն ա(ստոծոյ) կամա եղեւ յամենա... | ...Մուշեղա հայոց թագաւորի ետու ... | ... եւ զջրհորն լերում եւ դաշտով ի ... | [վ]անքս եւս եկեղեցիքս հրամանով ա(եառ)ն Սիրա... ...մատուցան | ... եւ ետու վասն իմ և... իոցս եւս խաբարիի հետ իմ անցման :ԺԲ:

14 Mushegh I (birth date unknown – 984, Kars), Abas' (928 to 953) son and Ashot III the Merciful's brother, is the founder of Kars Kingdom and held the royal throne from 963. He declared himself King after Ashot III had moved the capital of the kingdom to Ani, appointing him Governor of Kars and the district of the same name. Ashot III the Merciful recognised Mushegh as the lord of a principality subject to him.

(12) ար ժամ յամենայն ... | ...ն եկեղեցիքդ, որ այս վճռիս ...տե ա... բաժինս ստանալ | ... ՅԺԸ (318) նզոված է, կատարիչ(ք) հրամանաց ... դատող նորա տան | ... արհնեալ եղիցի ... | ...բապետութի(ւ)ն...:

Transl.: ...St. Grigor ...handwriting... For God's sake... Armenian King Mushegh... the monastery and churches on the order of Father... after my departure... is cursed... those who carry out the orders... may be blessed...

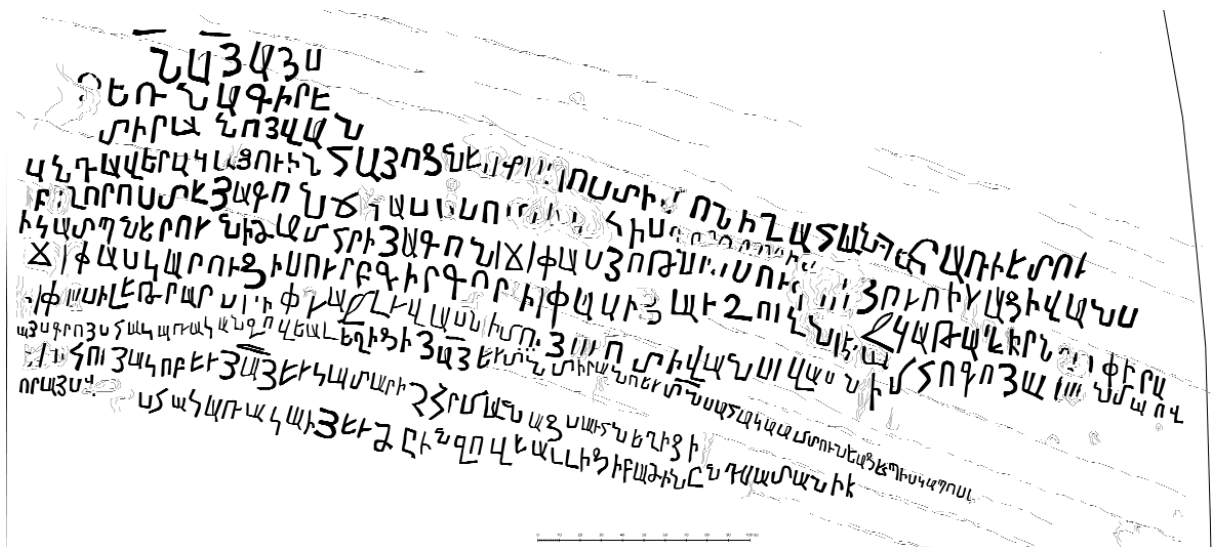
The third inscription, dated 952 like the first one, is even more distorted and consists of at least four lines (we are not sure about the existence of the fifth one). A considerable part of it has already been irretrievably lost due to natural corrosion and certain vandalistic actions probably committed by those searching for treasure in the monastery. At present only the following is legible from the inscription:

ՆԱ (952) թվականո[ւթեանս] | հայոց ...[ը Տիրան<sup>15</sup>... | պե... | ...

Transl.: In the year 401 (952) of the Armenian calendar ...Tiran...

Another donation inscription which fully shares the writing style of the aforementioned ones can be dis-

15 Presumably, Tiran, who is mentioned in this inscription, is the spiritual shepherd of Vanand District referred to in the inscription of 952.



An 11-line inscription carved on the western wall of the church of Tzarakar Monastery and its tracing

cerned inside a cut-in-rock hall located north-west of Tzarakar and ending in a fake dome (it is decorated with a cross):

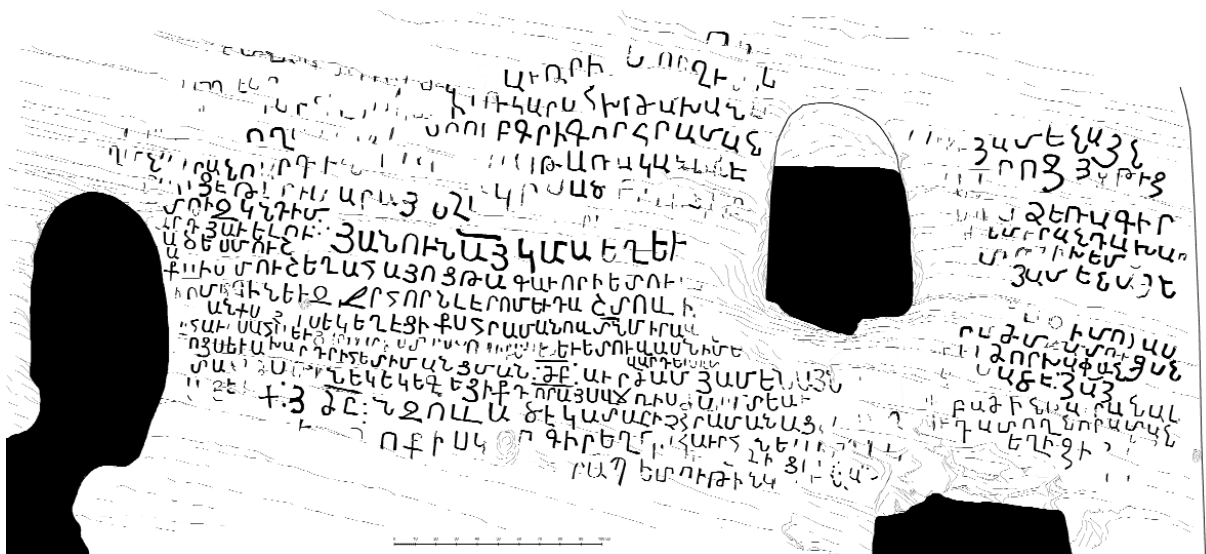
*Յս. Բս. տր. ած. ռդ/րքնի ամէն:*  
Transl.: *May Lord Jesus Christ have mercy. Amen.*

In different parts of the monastery, visitors can see several brief inscriptions<sup>16</sup> which are mostly scribbled:

16 For instance, «Ստեփան Չանփողատեան, 1890» (Stepan Janpolatian, 1890), «Գեղամ Պողոսեանց, 1903» (Gegham Poghossiants, 1903).

they were left by pilgrims between the 19th and 20th centuries, their existence showing that Tzarakar was known as a sacred place until at least the Turkish occupation of the region of Kars in 1920.

These remnants of inscriptions do not directly convey any information regarding the foundation of the monastery, but we hold that they were engraved immediately after its construction, when some income-yielding estates and production structures were donated to the newly-established sanctuary in order to secure its financial well-being. Anyway, Tzarakar must have



A 17-line inscription carved on the northern wall of the church of Tzarakar Monastery and its tracing

been founded earlier than 952, when its only dated inscription that has come down to us was carved on the western wall of its church. That the monastic complex dates back to the first half of the 10th century is also substantiated by its composition peculiarities, its stylistic and artistic features, as well as the writing characteristics of its lapidary inscriptions. Touching on the date of its establishment, Gh. Alishan, who was not even acquainted with the aforementioned inscriptions, states that it must have been erected prior to the 11th century:

...it is unknown when and by whom [it was built], but [it must have been constructed] before the 11th century...<sup>17</sup>

His viewpoint is based on the fact that in 1028 the monastery was renovated and made suitable for serving as a castle.

Likewise, Sh. Sasano arrived at a right conclusion regarding the foundation of the monastery: according to him it was built in a time period encompassing 500 years:

<sup>17</sup> Alishan, 47.



The remnants of an inscription (952), originally comprising at least four lines, preserved on the entrance tympanum of the porch adjoining the monastic church from the south

“...the caved complex was founded terminus post quem around in the sixth century while terminus ante quem around the 11th century.”<sup>18</sup>

The further history of Tzarakar is elucidated by pieces of scanty information reported by Armenian historiographers which is presented below in a chronological order. Thus, in 1029 it is mentioned in connection with some construction activity unfolded there by Prince West Sargis:

After a great number of buildings, including castles and churches, highly-honoured West Sargis erected the wonderful monastery of Khetzkonk the holy purgatory of which, known by the name of St. Sargis, was enriched splendidly. [He also constructed] the monastery of Tzarakar and fortified it with towers and solid ramparts of thick mortar. He also constructed the church of St. Gevorg there together with two other domed structures adjoining each other: St. Hovhannes and St. Sekenos.<sup>19</sup>

Information relating to this building activity is also reported by Mkhitar Ayrivanetsy:

18 Shiro Sasano and Sasano Seminar, 128.

19 Մամուլի քահանայի Անեցոյ Հատարմունքի ի գրոց պատմագրաց [A Collection of Historiographical Works Compiled by Priest Samuel Anetsy] (Vagharshapat, 1893), 106.

20 Catholicos Petros Getadardz I held office between 1019 and 1058.

...His Holiness Catholicos Petros<sup>20</sup> built Surmari and Tzarakar.<sup>21</sup>

Kirakos Gandzaketsi writes the following about the work unfolded in the late 1020s:

“In his<sup>22</sup> day the very distinguished Vest Sargis, after building many fortresses and churches, built the glorious monastery of Xts’konk’ and a church in the name of Saint Sargis; and making Tsarak’ar monastery a fortress, he built stronger walls and glorious churches in it.”<sup>23</sup>

The next record dates from 1178, when Turkish conqueror Gharachay took Kechror and the fortified monastery of Tzarakar:

On the same day, he took Tzarakar from some thieves on the order of Emir Gharachay of Kechror and sold it to Khezelaslan for much gold. And he settled it with dangerous men who did not cease bloodshed day and night until the Christians were exposed to darkness and famine..., with five clergymen being stabbed crosswise.<sup>24</sup>

21 Մխիթարայ Այրիվանեցոյ Պատմութիւն Հայոց [History of the Armenian Nation by Mkhitar Ayrivanetsy] (Moscow, 1860), 58.

22 The author means King Hovhannes-Smbat (1020 to 1041), who succeeded Gagik Bagratid I.

23 Kirakos Ganjaketsi’s History of the Armenians, <http://rbedrosian.com/kgtoc.html>.

24 Հատարումն պատմութեան Վարդանայ վարդապետին [History by Archimandrite Vardan] (Venice, 1862), 131.



In 1182 Gharachay, who still held Tzarakar under his reign, destroyed the renowned Gorozu Cross kept there:

In 631 [of the Armenian calendar] Kharachay, who had conquered Tzarakar, overthrew the cross named Gorozo with a crane...<sup>25</sup>

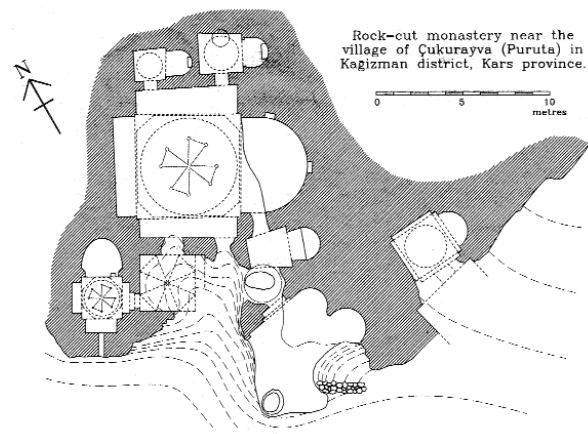
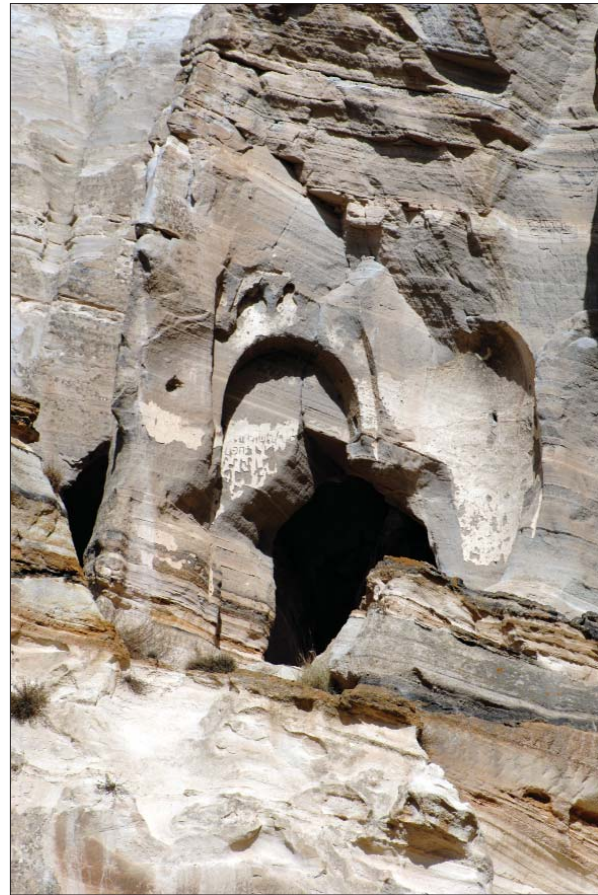
Within a short time, in 1186 the Armenians of Ani liberated Tzarakar through united forces:

In 635 [of the Armenian calendar] the inhabitants of Ani took the paternal estate of Barsegh (the bishop of Ani - translator),<sup>26</sup> mercilessly slaughtering those who were there, except the women and children.<sup>27</sup>

The sources of the subsequent centuries make almost no mention of the monastery.<sup>28</sup> However, taking into account the fact that prominent poet and worker of education Khachatur Kecharetsy was buried there in the 14th century, we can suppose that it actively continued its existence between the 13th and 14th centuries. The fact that Kecharetsy unfolded activity in this monastery and later found repose there was regarded with such great importance—even from the depth of centuries—that the map of 1691 does not mention it under its proper name and instead, simply says: *Archimandrite Khachatur's grave*.

Presumably, Tzarakar was finally ruined between 1829 and 1830, after the mass displacement and emigration of the local Armenian natives organised by Bishop Karapet Bagratid.

**Architectural Description.** The only surviving parts of Tzarakar Monastery are those of its structures which are cut in the rock, and therefore, are difficult to destroy, whereas the others have been irretrievably lost. For this reason, at present the complex is considered as only a cut-in-rock one consisting of 6 chapels and a main cruciform church with a pseudo-dome surrounded with annexes. It represents a small hall (inner dimensions: 10.67 x 8.31 metres) with a semi-circular irregular apse in the east. The bema is higher than the floor of the prayer hall by 1.15 metre. The ceiling is crowned by a semi-circular fake dome resembling an irregular circle and joining the underdome square with four corner squinches which are only of decorative use in this case. The top of the fake dome is embellished



The southern entrance to Tzarakar Monastery with the remnants of the inscription of 952; its plan according to Stephen Sim (1999)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>26</sup> Bishop Barsegh, the spiritual leader of Ani, is mentioned in the lapidary inscriptions of 1160 to 1191 (Աճառյաճ Ք., Հայոց սնճնաճմննճերի բառարան [H. Ajarian, Dictionary of Armenian Personal Names], vol. 1 (Yerevan, 1942), 396).

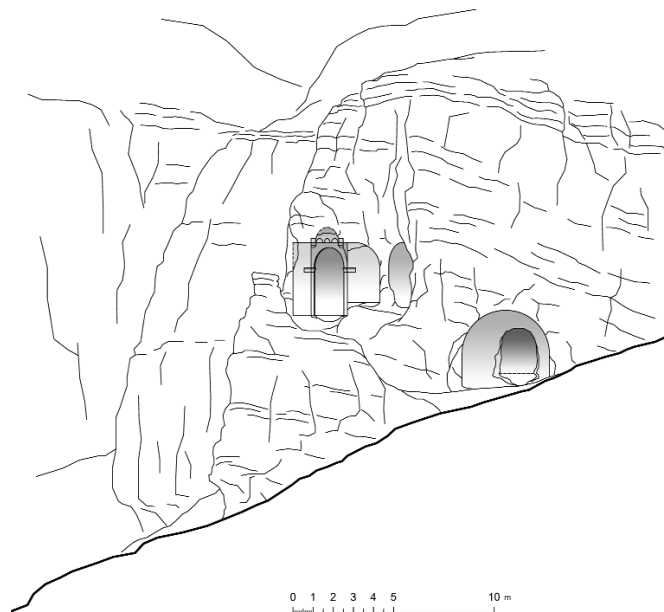
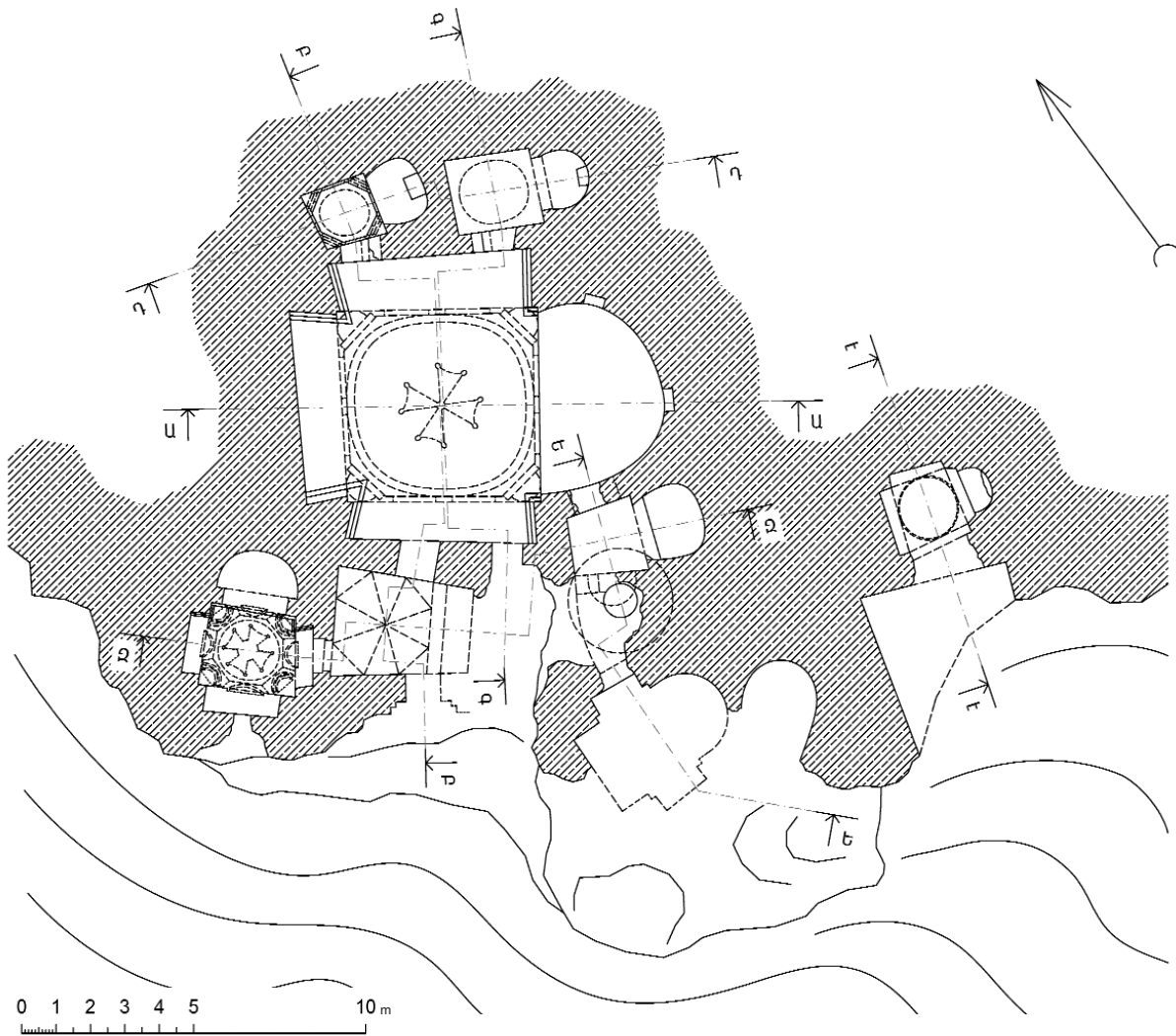
*Tzarakar formed part of the paternal legacy of Bishop Barsegh of Ani and was considered the estate of his family* (Eprikian, 238).

<sup>27</sup> Archimandrite Vardan, 133; Eprikian, *ibid*.

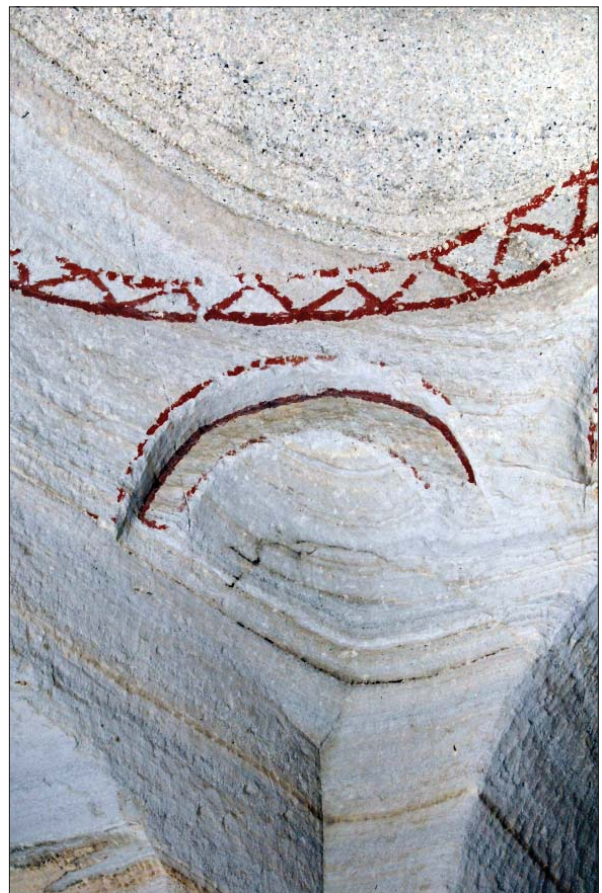
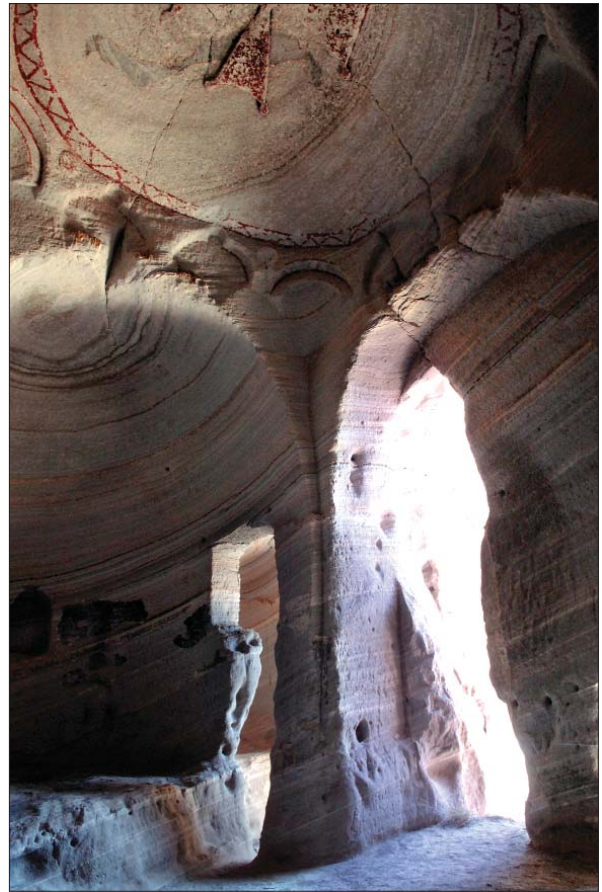
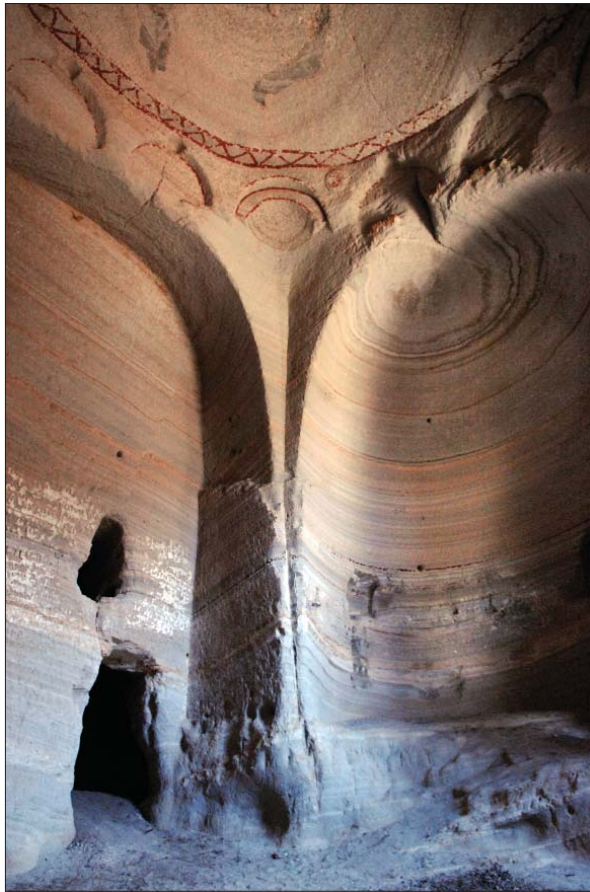
<sup>28</sup> The sources referred to above show that there *do* exist certain historical records relating to Tzarakar Monastery so that Japanese researcher Sh. Sasano has no grounds to state that “Neither historical documents nor previous authors mention about the caved churches in Purta” (Shiro Sasano and Sasano Seminar, *ibid*).

with an equal-winged cross which is accentuated with red paint together with the contours of the fake dome and squinches.

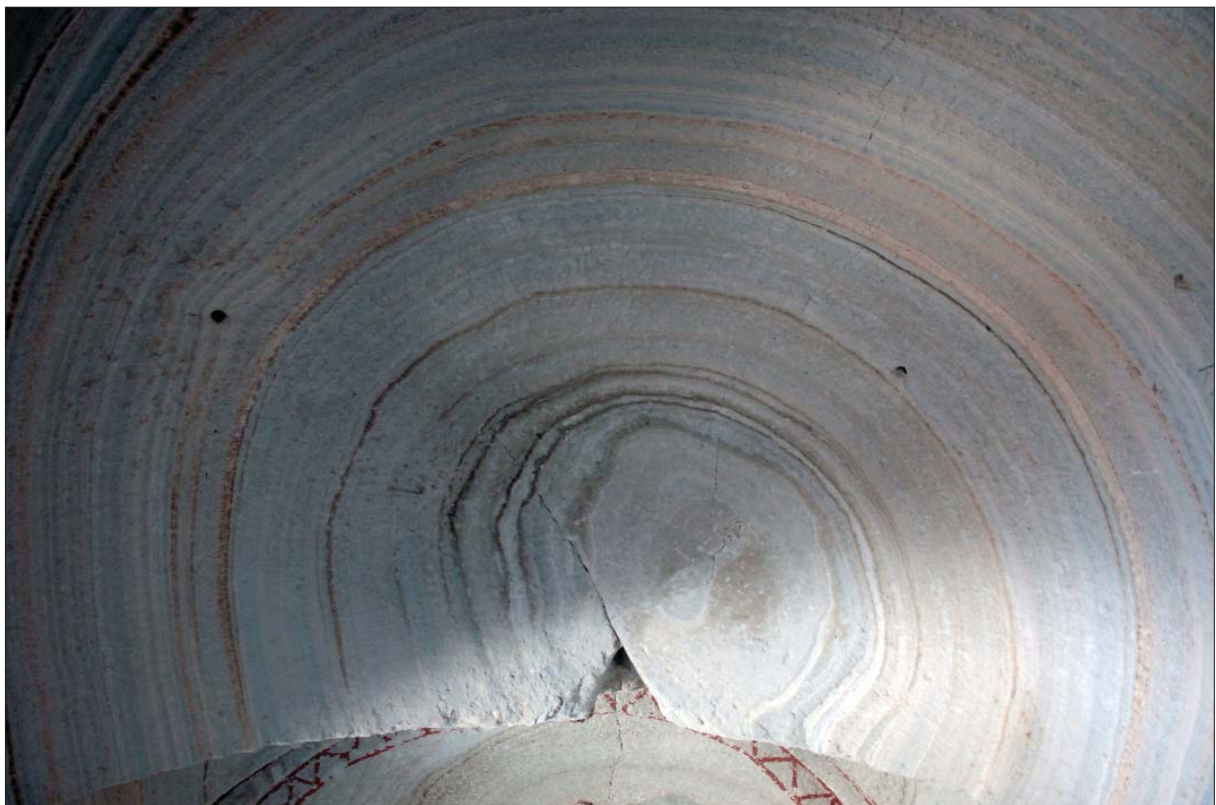
It is evident that the rock into which the monastic structures were cut is quite friable, and for this reason, it was found expedient to cover the walls with a layer of plaster to make them solid enough to bear mural paintings and inscriptions.



The plan of Tzarakar Monastery and the mountain front overlooking the south (measurement and graphical design by architect Ashot Hakobian, 2010)



The interior of the church of Tzarakar Monastery towards the north-east, south-east and south-west; its north-western squinch



The fake dome of the main church of Tzarakar Monastery and the concha of its sanctuary

The next cut-in-rock structure which comes second to the main church by its dimensions stands near the south-western corner of the latter. It almost shares the composition of the church described above, but it is smaller (4.78 x 3.72 metres). As a monument of Christian worship, it is especially noteworthy for its position towards the sides of the horizon—instead of the traditional east-westward direction, it stretches from the north southwards, that is to say, its semi-circular apse overlooks not the east, but the north. Its only entrance, which opens from the east, also serves as a means of communication with an adjacent hall. The structure is illuminated through its only window opening from the south. The chapel shares the decoration of the church: a relief of an equal-winged cross, covered with red paint, adorns the central part of the semi-circular fake dome, which joins the underdome square through squinches.

There is a structure (3.98 x 2.82 metres) between the chapel and the church which serves as an entrance hall for both of them. It is remarkable for its peculiar architectural features: it has an octahedral covering which rests on the intersecting semi-arches of the upper sections of the walls—a similar covering can be particularly seen in monuments of the 9th to 11th centuries, such as Horomos, etc. As a result of continual corrosion, the floor of this entrance hall is at present totally ruined: as a rule, friable rocks rapidly get weathered and slip downwards like sand.

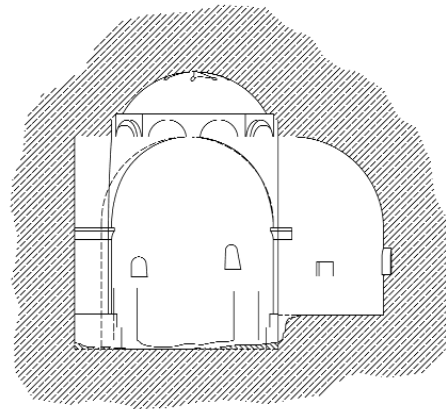
Researcher Sh. Sasano thinks that the reliefs of equal-winged crosses on the fake domes of the church and chapels of Tzarakar Monastery are the result of the possible penetration of Cappadocian clergymen into these parts of Armenia in the 6th century and the activity they unfolded there. He substantiates this viewpoint as follows:

This presumption is reinforced from its present condition in which the similar style of a cross employed in Cappadocia is discovered.<sup>29</sup>

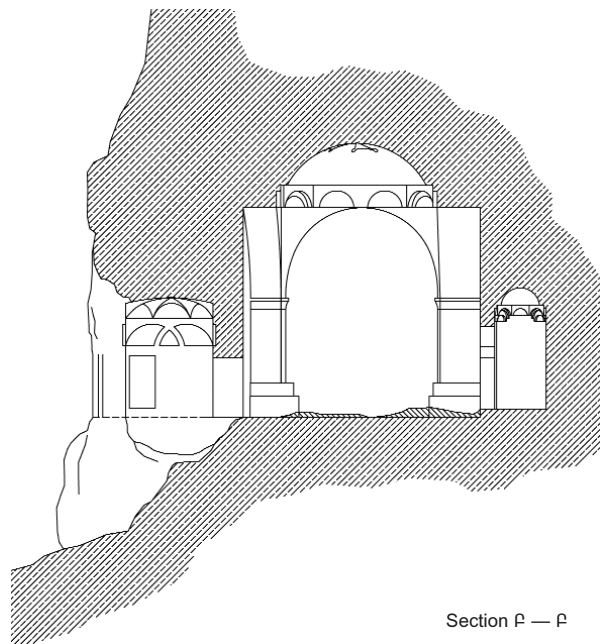
We, however, find this supposition absolutely groundless, as reliefs of equal-winged crosses were

29 **Shiro Sasano** and **Sasano Seminar**, 128. Generally speaking, the work by Sh. Sasano abounds in strange observations and conclusions which are the result of his lack of proper information relating to the subject under consideration. The same is true of his viewpoint regarding Tzarakar, according to which, “the caved church is rather rare” in the region where it is situated, whereas quite the opposite is true—the Armenian territories adjacent to the Arax valley and neighbouring the monastery of Tzarakar are particularly rich in cut-in-rock monuments of both secular and religious use such as the structures of Zivin Castle, including its church; the churches and chapels of the town site of Mezhenkert, amounting to about ten, and the church of Kers Village, Kaghzvan District.

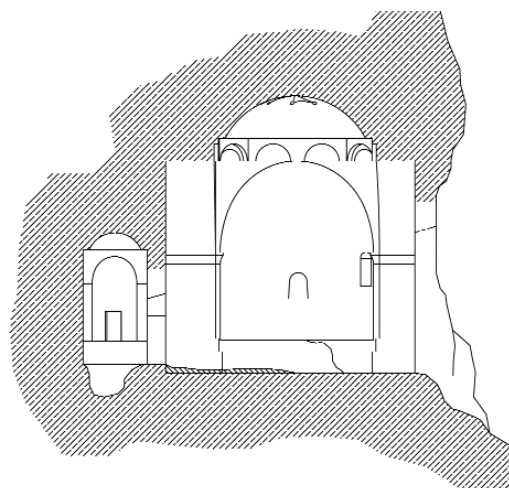
Nor are there any grounds for Sasano’s allegation that the monastic complex of Purta “must have been established rather earlier than the other monasteries left in the republic of Armenia” (ibid.).



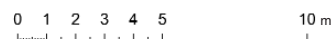
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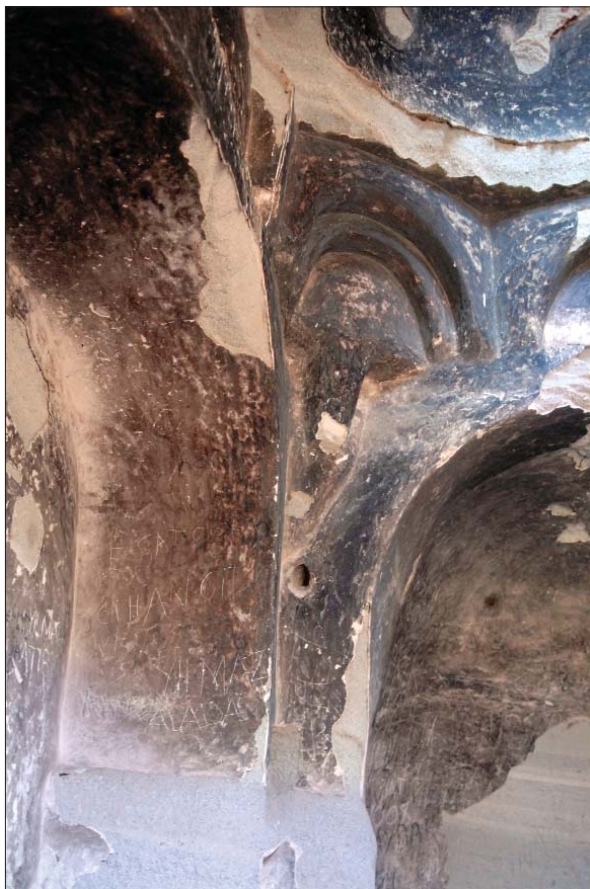
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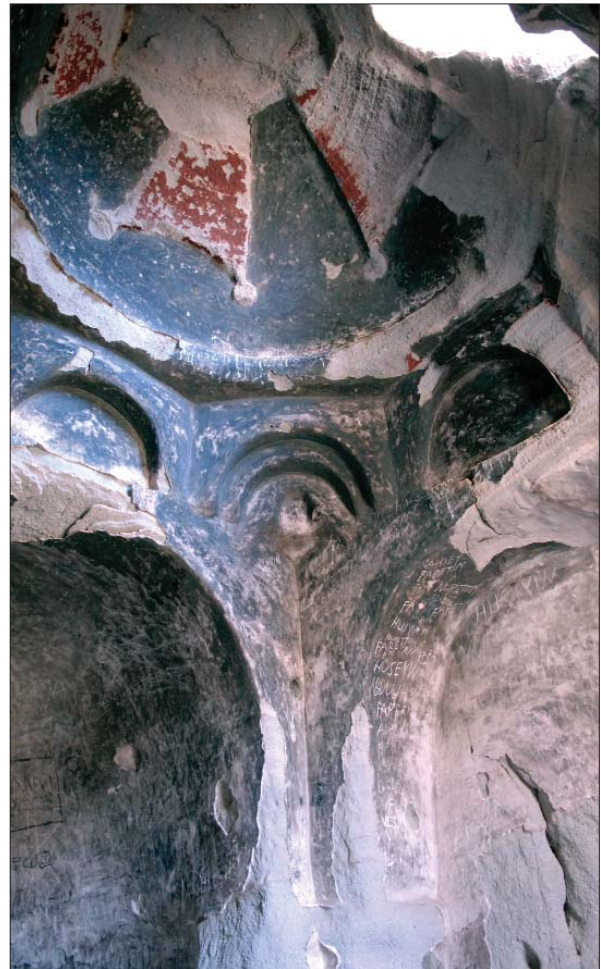
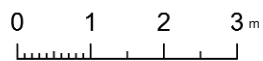
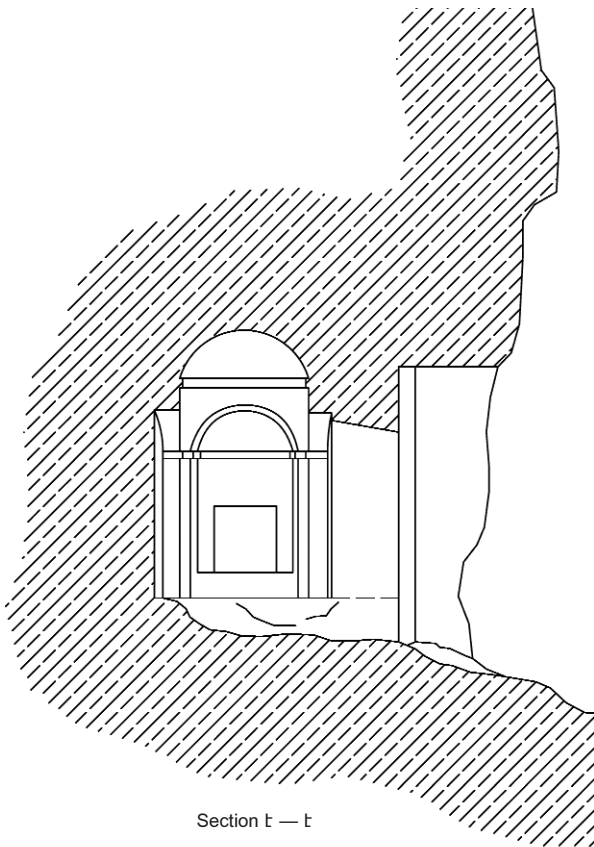
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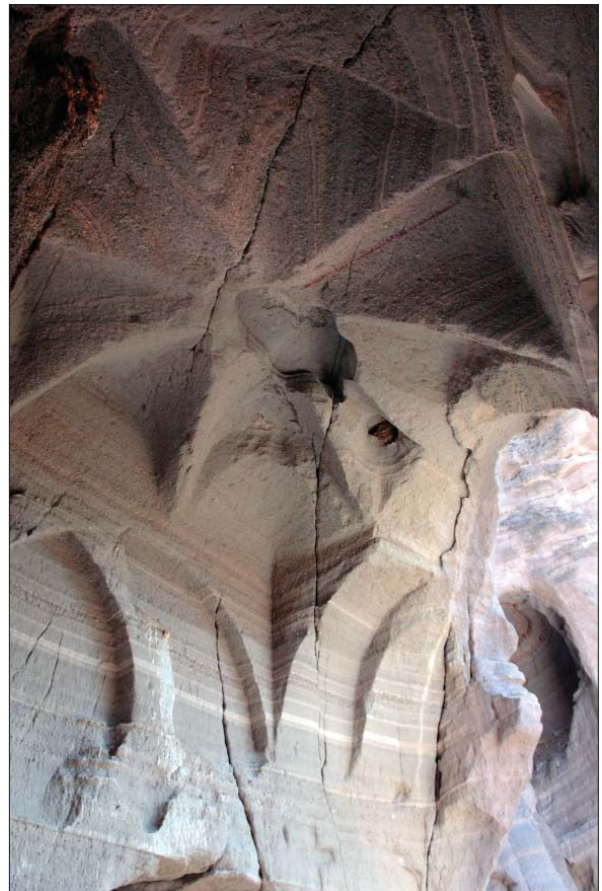
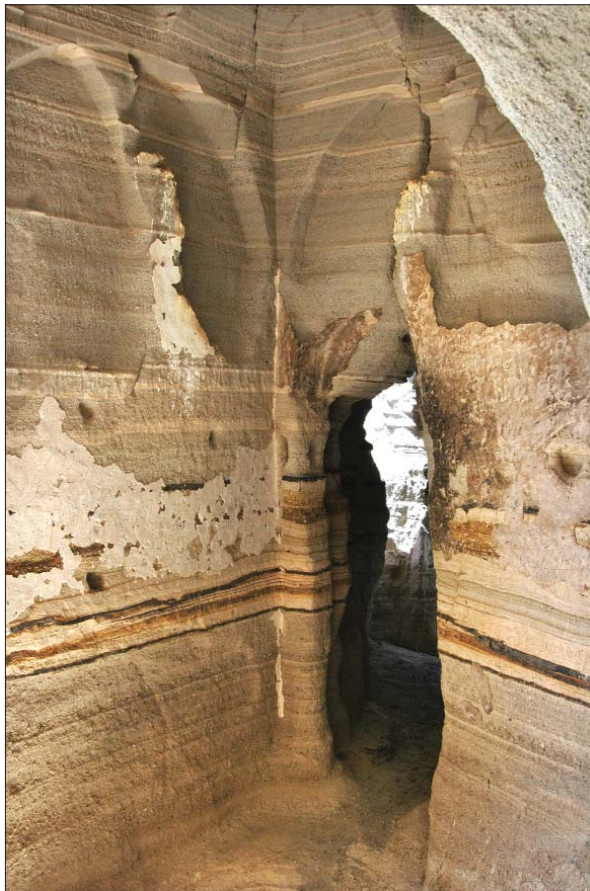
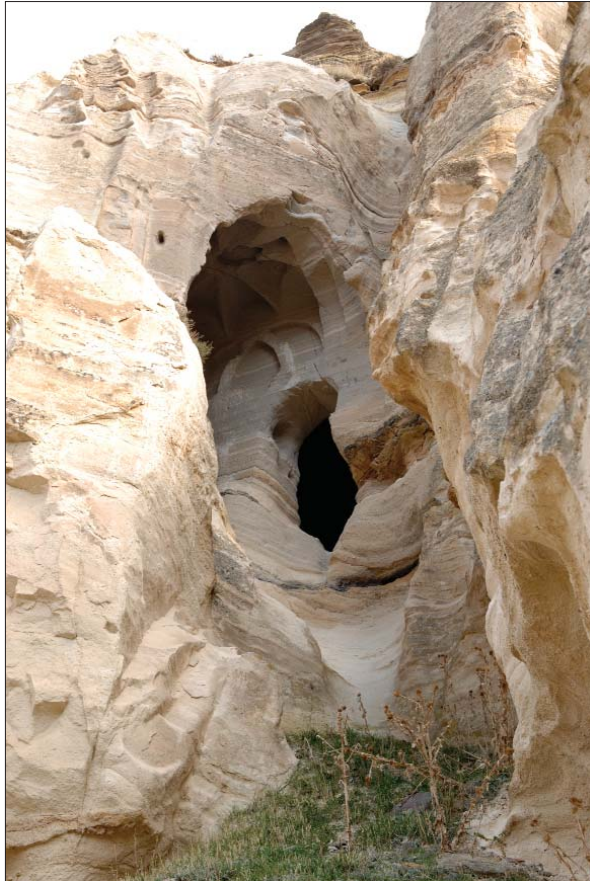
Sections of the church of Tzarakar Monastery to the east, west and north (measurements and graphical design by architect Ashot Hakobian, 2010)



The fake dome of the south-western chapel of Tzarakar Monastery; its interior to the sanctuary (north); its north-western squinch and south-western wall pylon

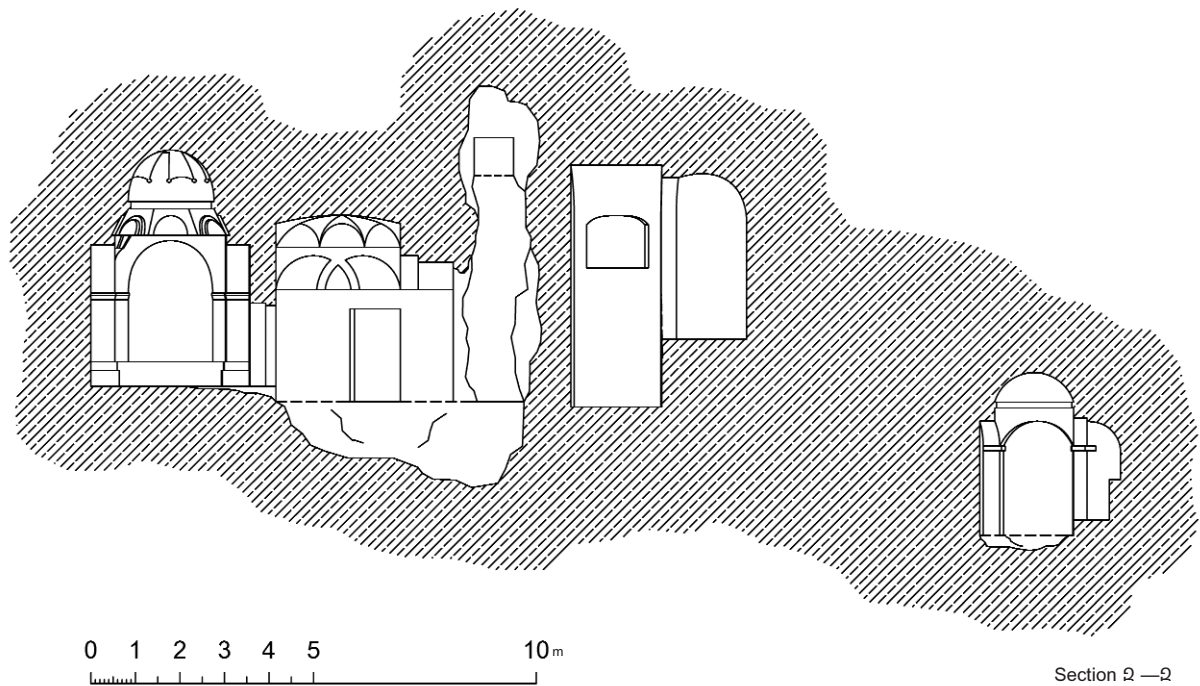


Partial views of the south-western chapel of Tzarakar Monastery



The hall situated between the church of Tzarakar Monastery and the chapel of its south-western corner





**Tzarakar Monastery. A cross-section towards the north (measurement by architect Ashot Hakobian, 2010)**

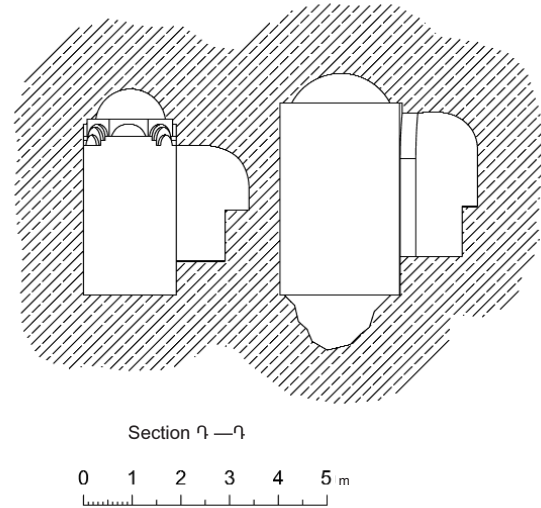
wide-spread in many other districts of Armenia and can be found in numerous monuments of the early Christian period. Besides, such reliefs were carved throughout the Armenian Highland not after the 6th century, but after the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of Armenia.

The next two chapels, which may also be considered as the northern vestries of the central church, resemble the aforementioned buildings in composition. Each of them communicates with the church through an entrance opening from the south. On the same side, each of them has a window securing its illumination.

The western chapel/sacristy (3.37 x 1.80 metres) is remarkable for its composition, decoration and architectural features. Its bema is higher than the floor of the prayer hall by 68 cms. It has a cut-in-rock altar rising at a height of 1.10 metre above the floor of the bema.

The semi-circular fake dome of this structure, which shares the composition of the church and south-western chapel almost entirely, is smooth and plain, and lacks a cross relief: its decoration is simpler, for it merely has a painted ordinary equal-winged cross.

The eastern chapel-vestry (4.06 x 2.21 metres) is slightly larger than the western one, but its covering is not distinguished for any peculiarity: thus, the underdome square joins the fake dome without squinches which might be only of decorative use, if any. Its altar-stone forms part of the original mass of rock into which the structure was cut. The bema is higher than the floor

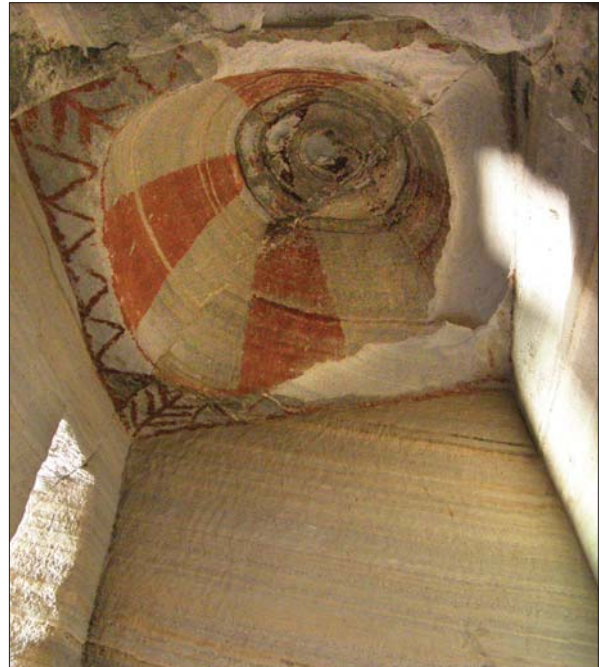
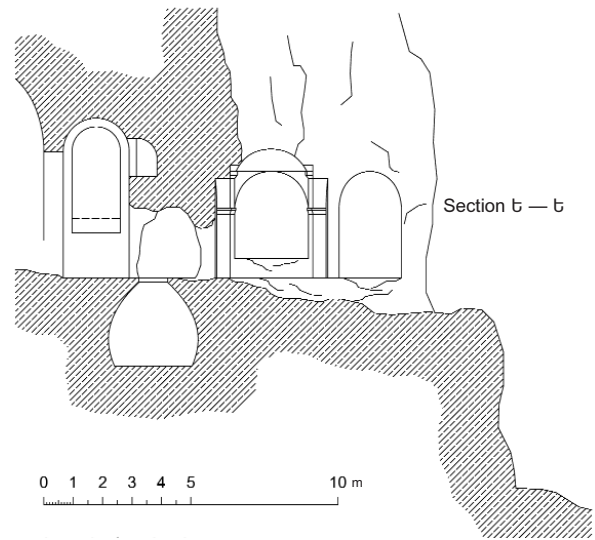


of the prayer hall by 82 cms, and the altar rises at a height of a metre above the bema. Even the cut-in-rock floor of the prayer hall did not escape the destroying hands of the searchers for treasures, and now a pit has formed there.

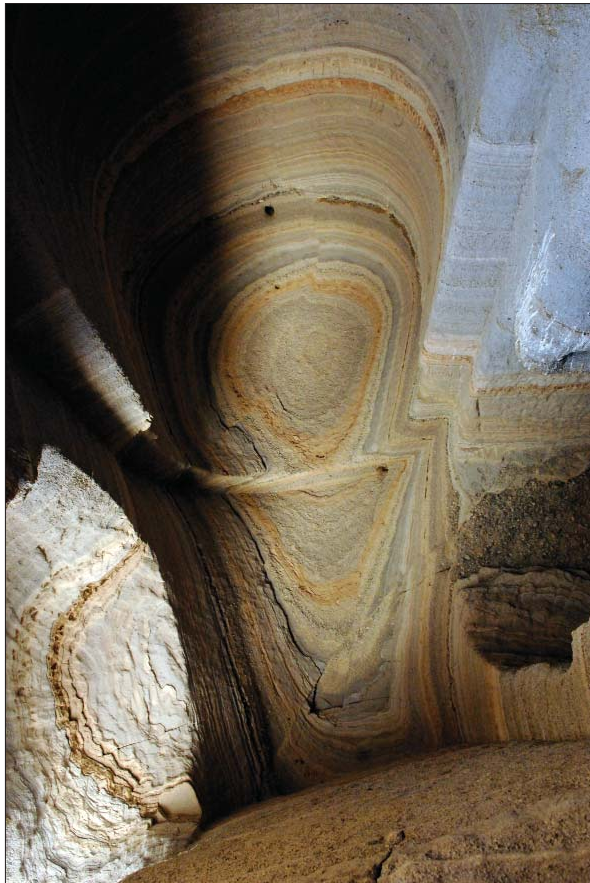
Another cut-in-rock monument of the complex is a chapel located near the southern side of the church bema. Like the other two ones, it may be regarded as the third vestry of the church. Its dimensions (3.95 x 1.99 metres) do not differ much from those of the other chapel-sacristies. Its northern door leads directly into



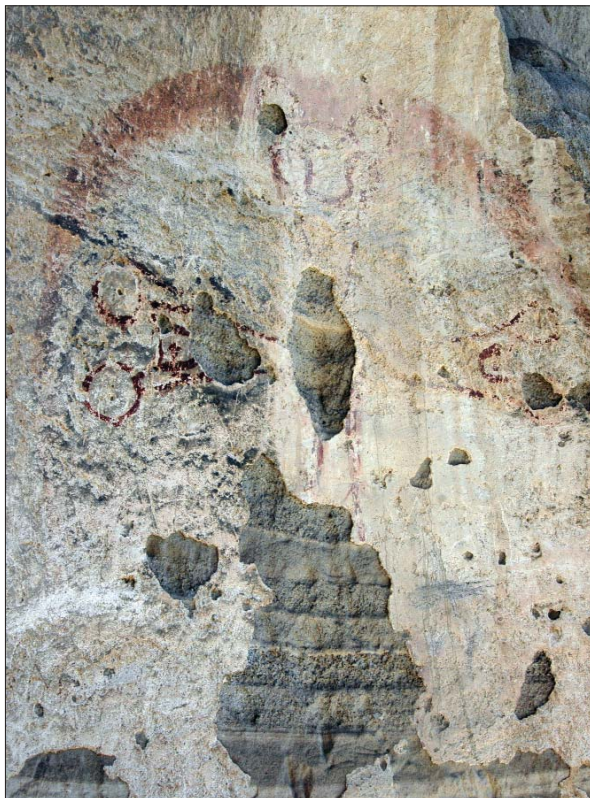
the bema of the church, while its southern entrance, which is almost totally corroded at present, provides communication with the sixth chapel. This last structure has already mostly corroded due to its centuries-



Tzarakar Monastery. Partial views of the interior of the chapel/vestry standing north-east of the church



**Tzarakar Monastery. The ceiling and western wall of the chapel/sacristy located south of the sanctuary of the monastic church**



**Tzarakar Monastery. Remnants of an equal-winged cross in red paint on the plaster**

long exposure to weather. It shares the composition of the church or the south-western chapel, but is smaller in dimensions and has an intermediate small hall with an underground well.

On the whole, the seventh chapel (3.16 x 2.42 metres), which is situated in the easternmost part of the monastic complex and has a slightly isolated position, shares the composition of the monuments described above. Its semi-circular bema has an altar-stone which is cut into the main mass of rock into which the entire complex is built. The prayer hall has a semi-circular fake dome of simple composition which is not decorated with any cross relief. The interior of the chapel used to be plastered. Its bema preserves a piece of writing left by a pilgrim who visited the monastery in the late 19th century.

A little far from these main structures, at the west-facing base of the rock range, a comparatively larger hall is cut into a semi-natural cavern. It has an irregular plan, and the level of its floor is not higher than the natural soil, the entire height of the hall hardly reaching 2 to 2.5 metres. The ceiling has a semi-circular fake dome enriched with a relief depicting an equal-winged cross. Unlike the other structures of the complex, this is the only one which freely communicates with its surroundings and is accessible for domestic animals



**The interior and fake dome of the caved hall located in the north-west of Tzarakar Monastery**



**The sanctuary of the chapel standing at the eastern edge of Tzarakar Monastery**

which attempt to avoid heat in the cool of the cavern. Inside the cavern hall, a two-line piece of writing is seen, left by an unknown person praying God for mercy.

Presenting this brief article on the monastery of Tzarakar, which lived an active cultural life during several hundred years after its establishment in the mid-10th century, we would like to stress that the study of its composition, architectural features and artistic dec-

oration, which contains certain novelties, can be easier if scholars view it and appreciate its significance on the general background of research into tens of cut-in-rock monuments preserved in numerous adjacent sites.

We hope to offer specialists such a research work in the future.



A visit to Tzarakar Monastery in 2010

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

RAA Foundation expresses its gratitude to the Ohanians for their donation of over 200 books on Armenian Studies and art history to the RAA library.

Apart from its great value and usefulness in our everyday work, that collection is also of special significance to us as it will keep our senior friend and great patriot Aram Ohanian's (Karmir Aram) memory ever living in our hearts.

Our thanks are also due to artist Arthur Khachatrian, who made another donation of over thirty books on Armenian art and culture history to the RAA library.

The members of RAA extend their cordial thanks to linguist Artem Sargissian, the editor-in-chief of the Dictionary of the Dialects of the Armenian Language (in Armenian), for presenting our library with its first 6 volumes.

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