

Karabokh
a hidden treasure



Gandzasar
Monastery & Vank Village



**MOUNTAINOUS
KARABAKH**



Gandzasar
Monastery & Vank Village



In the late 12th and early 13th centuries, the Khachen Principedom was formed in the province of Artsakh. During this period, a number of rich historical and cultural monuments were founded. Perhaps the most impressive among these is **Gandzasar Monastery**, standing majestically on a mountaintop, which overlooks **Vank Village**.

Until the 19th century, the monastery was the religious and cultural center of the region. It was built by the order of the Khacheni prince, Hassan Jalalyan from 1216 to 1238. According to renowned medieval Armenian historian, Movses Kaghankatvatsi, Hassan's brother brought the head of St. John the Baptist to Artsakh from Iberia, enshrined it and had the main church of the Gandzasar monastic complex, St. John the Baptist Church, built over it.

Other holy relics buried within Gandzasar's walls include St. Gregory the Illuminator's jaw and St. Zachariah's right hand.

THE MONASTERY ■

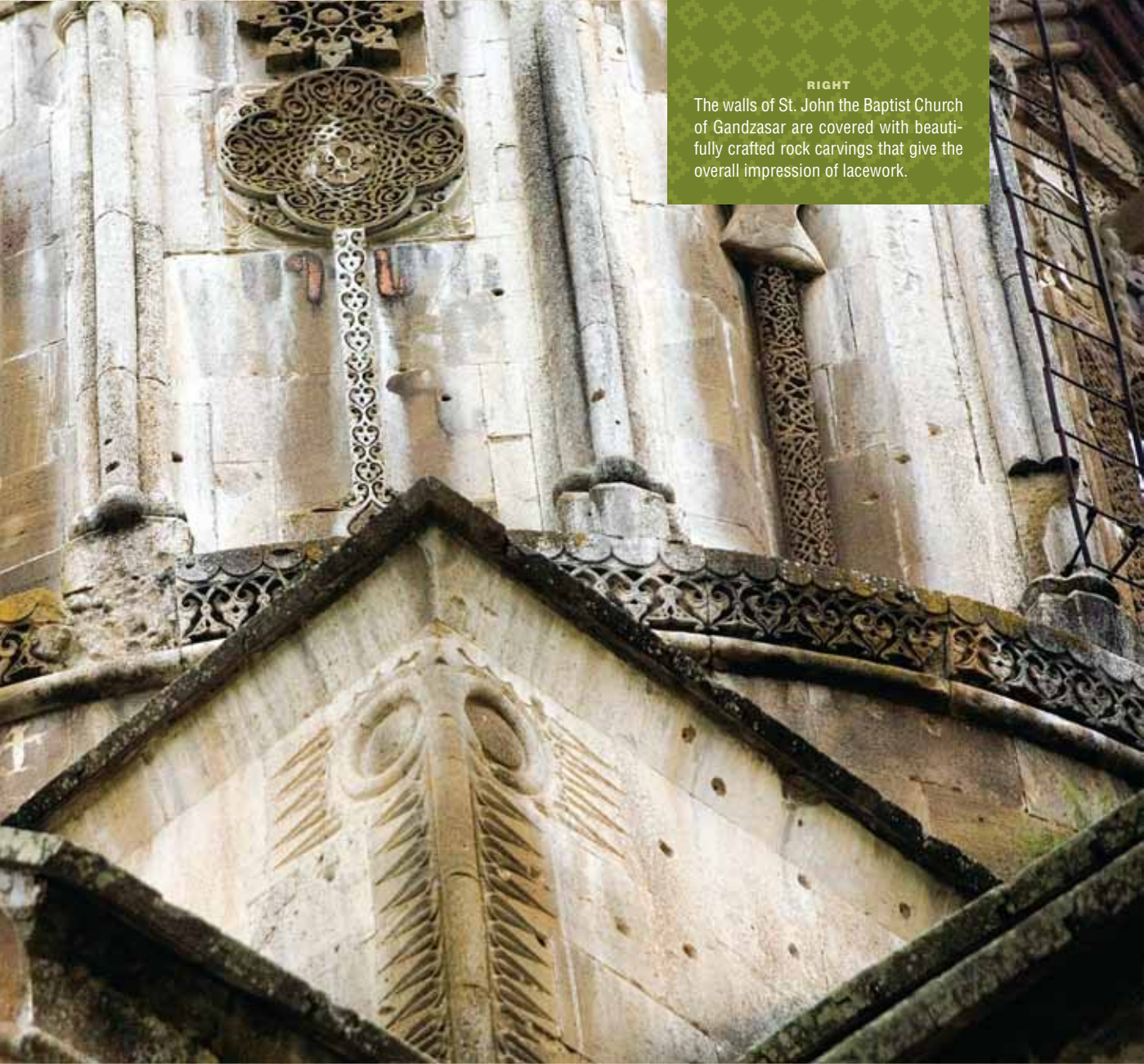
Gandzasar Monastery is one of the most splendid examples of medieval Armenian architecture. It is in keeping with the stylistic elements of Armenian churches of this period, yet its grandeur, intricate artwork, and location high up among the clouds in the lush green hills of Northern Karabakh, truly set Gandzasar apart. Charles Dill, the renowned Byzantologist scholar of Sorbonne University, has included Gandzasar in his list of international cultural treasures, one of five Armenian monuments to make the list.

The walls of St. John the Baptist Church of Gandzasar are covered with beautifully crafted rock carvings that give the overall impression of lacework. The most unique relief is found above the main entrance of St. John the Baptist Church. It is a depiction of two lions facing each other, standing as proud protectors of the church. These lions were the emblem of the Hassan Jalalyan clan. In front of the lion on the right, there is a six-pointed star. This symbol is also featured on one of the graves in the mausoleum. Although most commonly associated with Judaism, the six-pointed star is an ancient symbol that has been incorporated in the Christianity of different cultures and on Armenian Royal emblems. According to the Armenian church, it symbolizes the heavenly triumph.

In addition to the main church, the Gandzasar monastic complex includes a stone building with several small rooms, which served as the monks' living quarters. There is also a larger building which once served as a school, and later, as a monastic cell, and a newer addition to the seminary that was built in 2006.



ABOVE
Several important monuments have been preserved in the near vicinity of the mighty walled complex, including chapels, medieval dwelling places, and khachkars (cross stone carvings). The ruins of Khokhanaberd Fortress, which housed Hassan Jalal's throne, are also found nearby.



RIGHT

The walls of St. John the Baptist Church of Gandzasar are covered with beautifully crafted rock carvings that give the overall impression of lacework.



THE VILLAGE ■

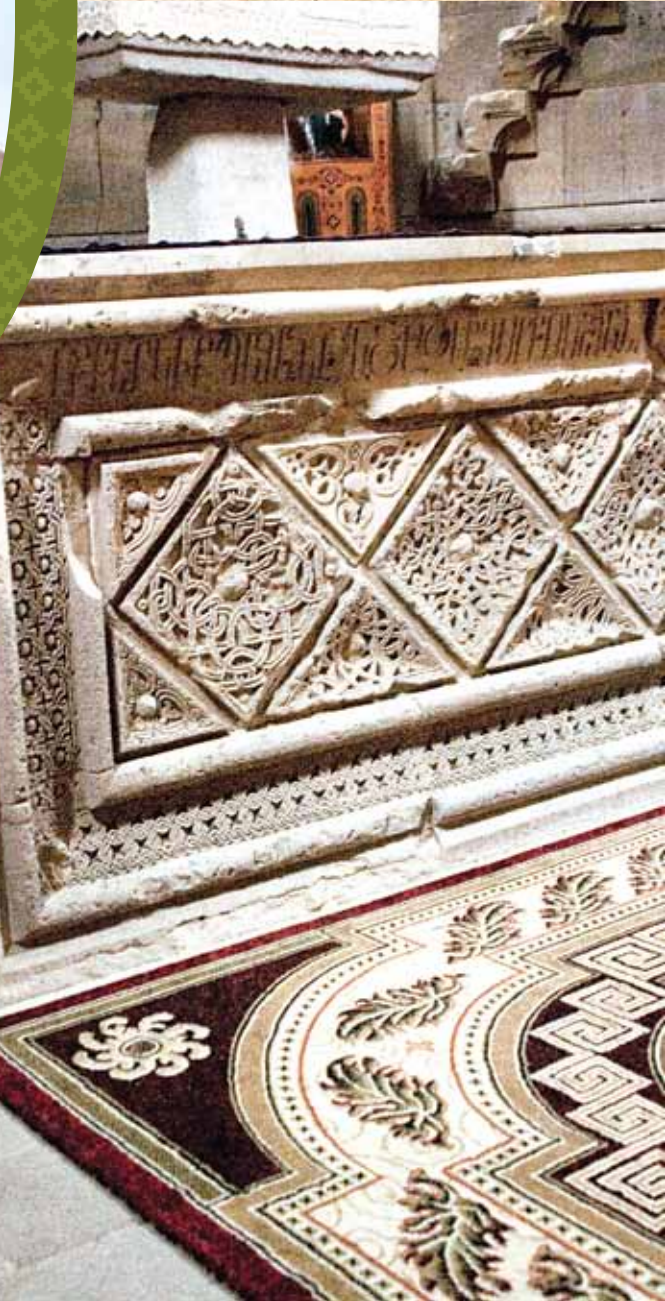
To discover true Karabakh village life, just travel a few kilometers beneath Gandzasar. **Vank village** (named after the monastic complex, *vank* meaning monastery in Armenian) offers a nice balance of comfortable lodgings (including a modern hotel complete with a Chinese restaurant and other facilities) and a taste of the peaceful village life. Over 360 families live in this quaint traditional Armenian village. They are famed for their hospitality and their sense of humor. Vank village also boasts horseback riding facilities, and the only zoo in the region.

BELOW
The spectacular view from Gandzasar – Vank village and its lush green surroundings.

Every fall, a traditional donkey race takes place at the heart of Vank village. People of all ages come from surrounding villages to take part in this unique race. The donkey race has become an anticipated annual event for the people of Karabakh and has earned the nickname, “Folmula 2”.

THE VILLAGE ■





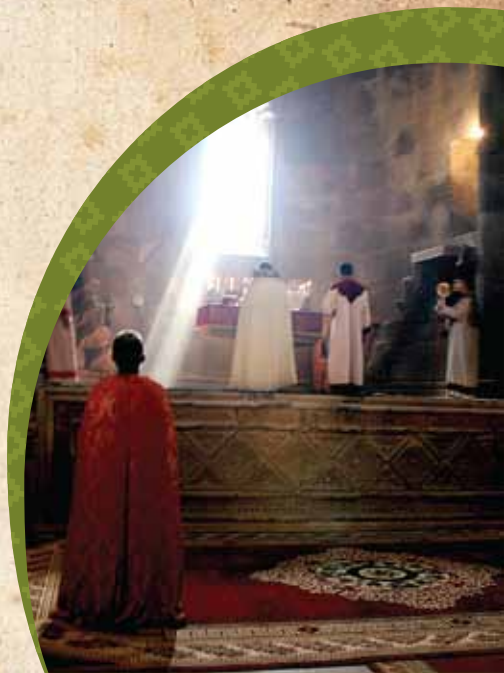


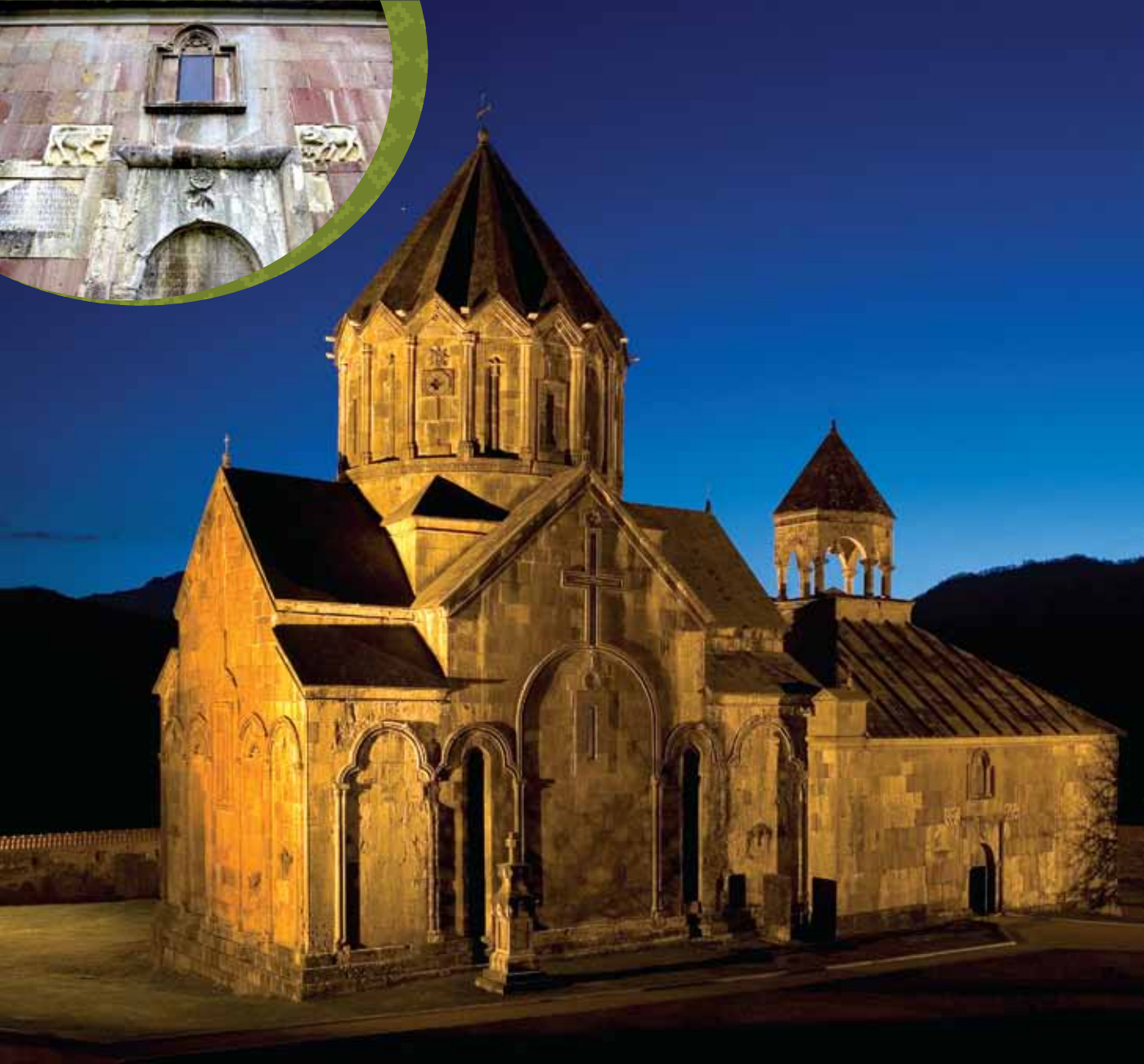
ABOVE

In the 18th century, the religious authorities of Gandzasar sent some of the first letters that helped forge a relationship with the Russian Empire where Karabakh would eventually become part of.

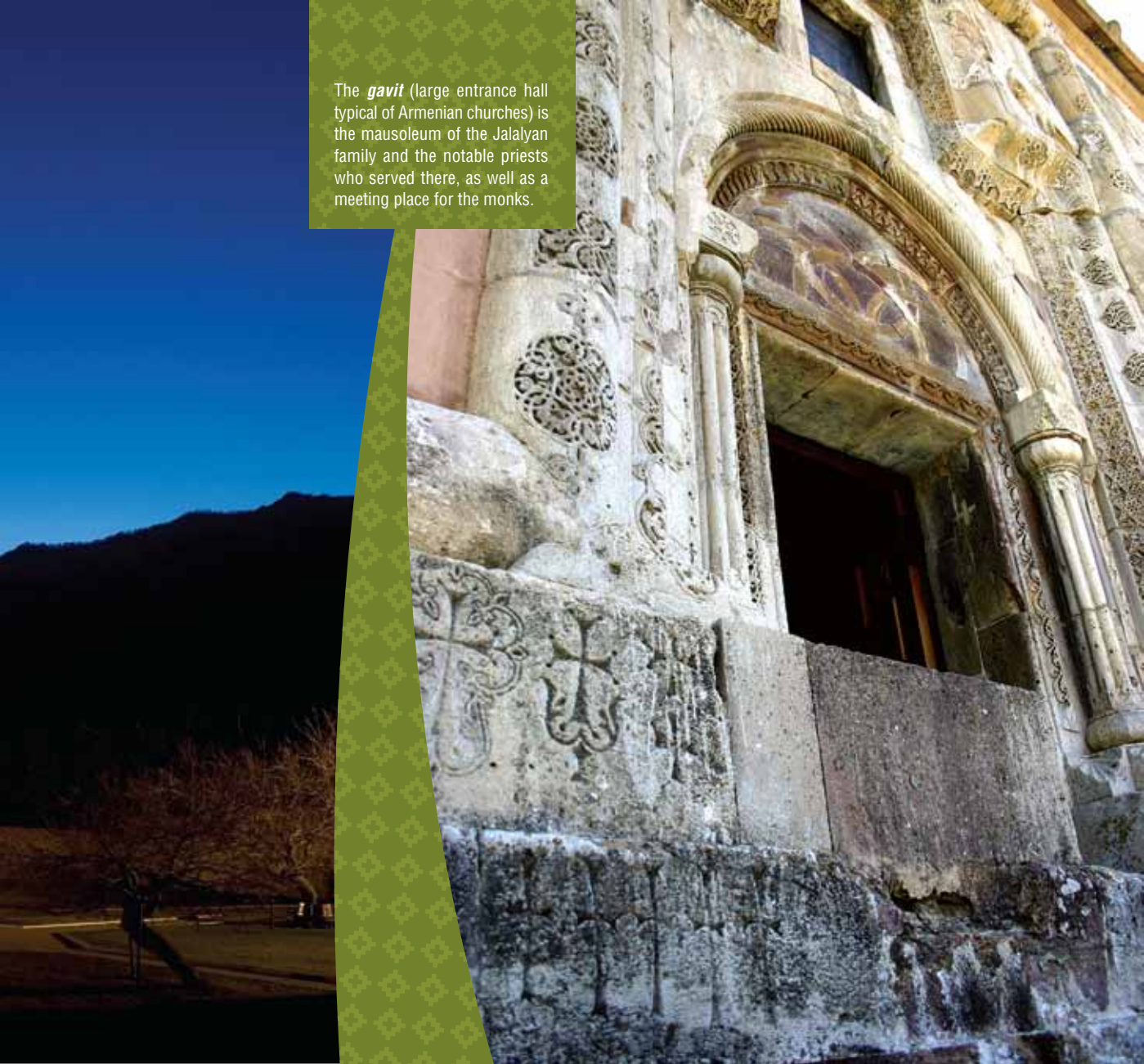
Since its early days, Gandzasar Monastery has been an important pilgrimage site, and several miracles are reported to have taken place within its walls. The most recent of these miracles happened during the Karabakh conflict of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Despite heavy shelling by the Azerbaijani army, the monastery remained virtually unharmed. One **mortar shell** was lodged in the wall directly in front of the priest's quarters, but miraculously, it never exploded. It is now displayed on the outer wall of the complex. In 1992, two images of guardian angels appeared in St. John the Baptist Church, one on each side of the altar. These images have gotten clearer over the years, and can now immediately be noticed.

A MODERN MIRACLE ■





The *gavit* (large entrance hall typical of Armenian churches) is the mausoleum of the Jalalyan family and the notable priests who served there, as well as a meeting place for the monks.



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