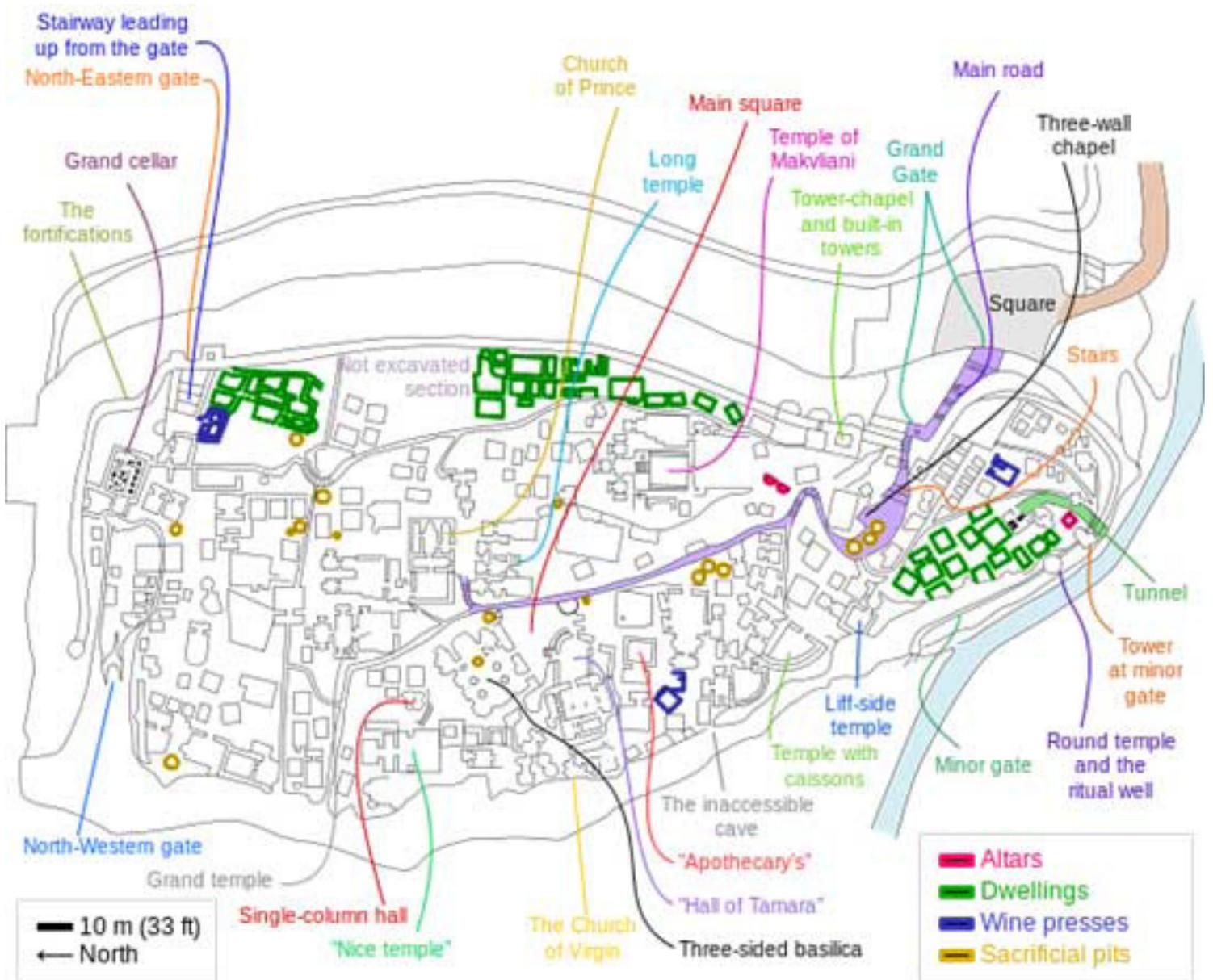


UPLÍSTSIKNE

ancient rock city on the
"Silk Road"





When I first visited this ancient rock cave town in Georgia I was surprised and immediately reminded at similar pre-historic rock hewn settlements in the Middle East like Nabataean Petra in Jordan or Madain Saleh in Saudi Arabia.

it was finally destroyed by Mongolians. Unfortunately an earthquake about hundred years ago destroyed it even further. Nevertheless it is a must see item on your agenda when travelling to Georgia. You can see on the pictures below what is left of this important ancient trade center.

Unfortunately Uplistsikhe looks rather destroyed but nevertheless the city layout is still well visible and the remaining cave structures and huge halls are amazing.

After resisting many attacks from foreign aggressors



Introduction

Uplistsikhe is an ancient fortress and rock cave city lying on a sandstone plateau approximately fifteen kilometers east of the city of Gori on the banks of the Mtskvari River. It extends

over eight hectares.

Uplistsikhe means in Georgian „lord’s fortress“ and first excavations started in 1956 and lasted over 35 years.

Ancient City

It was an important trading point on the famous „Silk Road“. A fact that created enormous wealth and cultural interchange. This inspired many artisans and plenty specialised workshops popped up around town. In addition Uplestisikhe was a religious, cultural and political center of the Kingdom of Kartli.

Experts estimated that between 5,000 to a maximum of 20,000 inhabitants populated this center during various periods. It was a town of rich traders, skillfull artisans and royal family. The king was elected amongst the trading clans like in many other mid eastern trading communities. Simple workers and farmers lived on the Kvernaki slope at the foot of the town.

Some History Facts

It is the oldest urban settlement in Georgia with its beginnings dated around 2,000 BC. So it is 2,500 years older than Wardsia and 2,000 years than David Gareji. It’s first written mentioning was about 100 AD. It’s foundation is ascribed to the mythical Uplos son of Mtskhetos and grandson of Kartlos. Several attempts in antiquity to conquer this well protected rock fortress failed.

With Christianisation around 400 AD it lost importance to Mtskheta and Tbilisi. But gained importance again when Tbilisi was conquered around 800 AB by Muslims forces. Finally it was conquered and destroyed around 1300 AB by Mongolian Ögedei Khan. A devastating earthquake in 1920 destroyed unfortunately most caves, but what is left today is still fascinating enough to visit.

Buildings and Structures

Uplistsikhe is organised in three sections, lower south, central middle level and upper north. A central „street“ is connecting all





three areas. In addition many rock hewn stairs enabled inhabitants to move with ease between quarters. The architecture consists of a mix of pagan and christian structures which also indicate the periods they were erected.

The main buildings consist of a large hall with two columns and coffered tunnel-vaulted ceiling with smoke outlets, a palace complex for the royal family and an amphitheater.



In addition there are a pharmacy with rock hewn shelves, plus bakery, prison and most importantly a market place. Close by grain storages can be seen and an area with wine press and storage.

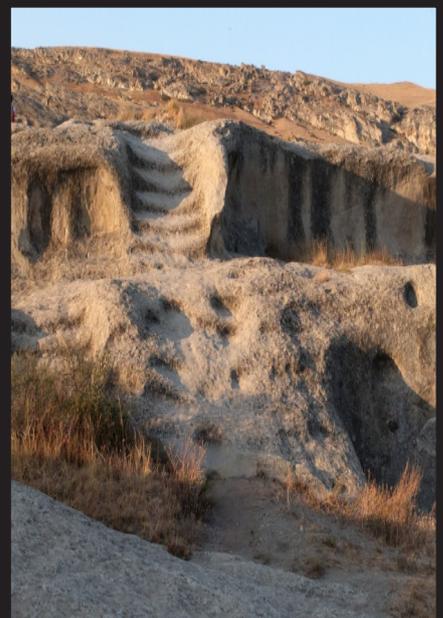
Not to forget the many pagan sacrifice places where animals were slaughtered to be offered to their gods. Later during christian times religious buildings were added like a three nave basilica carved in rock dated around 600 AD and a brick built church dated 1,000 AD.

Some cave halls have benches on two or three sides so-called tricliniae. These were used for ceremonial meals which were taken in a lying position.

A custom copied from the hellenic culture. Most cave dwellings have small vaulted niches at the back

wall which were certainly used ceremonial purposes. We can assume that small statues and devotions were placed here. These living and workshop caves are undecorated.

A complex water supply canalisation with ceramic pipes fed the towns needs from two springs Awasnebi and Achaschnebi about five kilometer away. But there was also a second supply source in case enemies destroyed the pipe system.





A rather large tunnel let with stairs directly to the river and also served as a surprise attack from behind or an escape route in need.

Archaeological Findings

During the excavations archeologists found many items of value. The list is long and the most amazing items include elaborate golden, silver and bronze jewellery, as well as beautiful sculptures and statues and many nicely shaped ceramic items. Some of these can be seen in the National Museum in Tbilisi.

Most interestingly are the discovery of the oldest grape pips from four wild grape types which were dated 2,000 BC. This proves that the oldest wine production worldwide happened so far in Georgia.

