



Orheiul Vechi

tourist guide

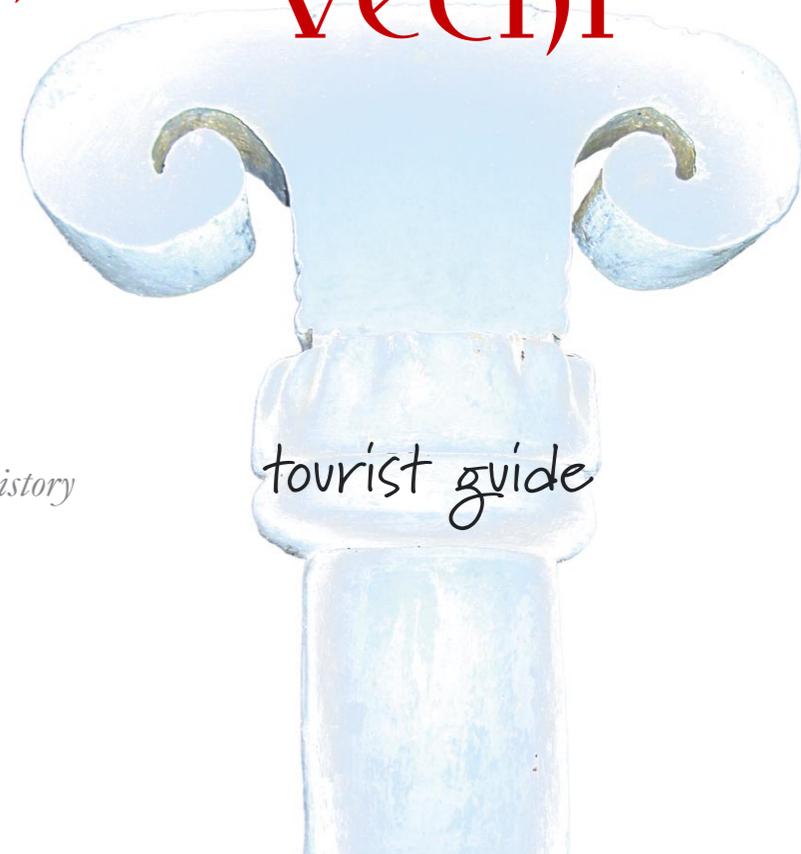


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Orheiul Vechi



*Museum complex in the open air
Hearth of old civilizations and millenary history*

tourist guide



Moldova

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“Sustainable Tourism Development” Project

The Museum Complex

Orheiul Vechi is a museum complex in the open air, formed of natural and man-made sites. The micro-zone of Orheiul Vechi represents a miraculous combination of geographic framework and human habitat, where the primary landscape organically harmonizes with the cultural one.

The originality of Orheiul Vechi's landscape is due to the defile of the Raut River, dug under the form of a canyon in the limestone strata of the former Sarmatian Sea, about 14 million years ago. Within the museum complex, the meandered course of the Raut forms two fascinating promontories that represent two veritable natural fortresses. These places, traditionally called by the locals “Pestera” (Cave) and “Butuceni” were capitalized from the oldest times; this conditioned the perpetuation of some durable fortified settlements in the area, including some towns and cave complexes with a religious character. As a result, in Orheiul Vechi's perimeter, alongside with the singular presence of the particular natural landscape, were conserved exceptional historical and archaeological vestiges and traditional peasantry architecture form within the actual Butuceni and Trebujeni villages, which gives an allure of uniqueness to the whole complex.



The route of Orheiul Vechi starts in the west, from the direction of Branesti village, having an impressive opening towards the panorama of the Raut defile. The passionate visitor will find great excitement in discovering the remarkable vestiges of the medieval towns: Sehr al-Cedid (14th c.) and Orhei (15th-16th c.) situated on the “Pestere” promontory. Then comes the Thraco-Geto-Dacian relics (10th-2nd c. BC) on the „Butuceni” promontory, the stone cave complexes (15th-19th c.) and the ethnographic objectives from the hearth of the actual villages. The repartition of these veritable monuments of heritage is a retrospective over the past. It is a gradual opening of the history, from present to the faraway times, and it is a meeting and a revival of civilizations from medieval ages into antiquity. Within the exhibition of the complex, besides the material from the mentioned periods, are shown vestiges from the Stone Age (cca. 30-20 mill. BC), Eneolithic (4th-3rd millennium BC), Bronze Age (II millennium BC) and from the early medieval period (5th-13th c.).



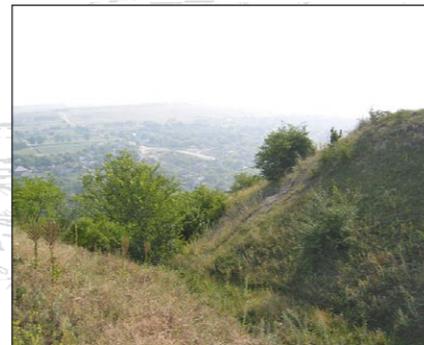
The medieval town of Orheiul Vechi was built approximately in 1330, during the reign of the Golden Horde. The settlement named “Sehr al-Cedid”, (in translation – The New Town) denotes in the first stage a typical oriental character. The town occupied the whole territory of the “Pestere” promontory including, as well, the older habitat of the natives. After the Mongols had abandoned the Prut-Dniestrian region in 1369, the area from the bank of the Raut, named by the autochthons “Orhei”, became the most important fortification at the eastern border of the Country of Moldova. Orheiul Vechi’s prosperity and heyday in that period chronologically corresponds with the years under the great reigns of Alexander the Kind (1400-1431) and Stephen the Great and Saint (1457-1504). The history of the town, and respectively of the citadel “Orheiul Vechi”, culminates at the middle of the 16th c. and ends with the transfer to Orheiul Nou, the old settlement becoming thus an ordinary village that disappears at the dawn of the 18th c.

The Fortifications of Orheiul Vechi second half of the 14th – mid 16th centuries

The medieval Orhei represented a town-citadel, protected from the north, east and south by the steep banks of the Raut, and from the west by two immense ground walls with wooden palisades and defensive moats.

The first wall [see map: site no. 1] has an arc-shaped form that stretches from the rock margin, in front of Butuceni village, up to the steep extremity in front of Trebujeni village, totalizing a length of about 570 m. The southern segment of the wall has been preserved with 2.5-3.0 m in height, and was provided with a defensive moat of 10-12 m in width from the west. In the mantle of the wall, traces of a carbonized wooden fence were attested to during the archaeological excavations.

The second wall [no. 2] is positioned in the narrowest part at the bottom of the “Pestere” promontory. The fortification of 6-10 m in height, partially deteriorated, stretches down south up to the Raut waters having a length of 580 m. The Orheiul Vechi’s fortifications were destroyed by the Tatars from Crimea in 1510.



The Orheiul Vechi Citadel second half of the 14th – mid 16th centuries

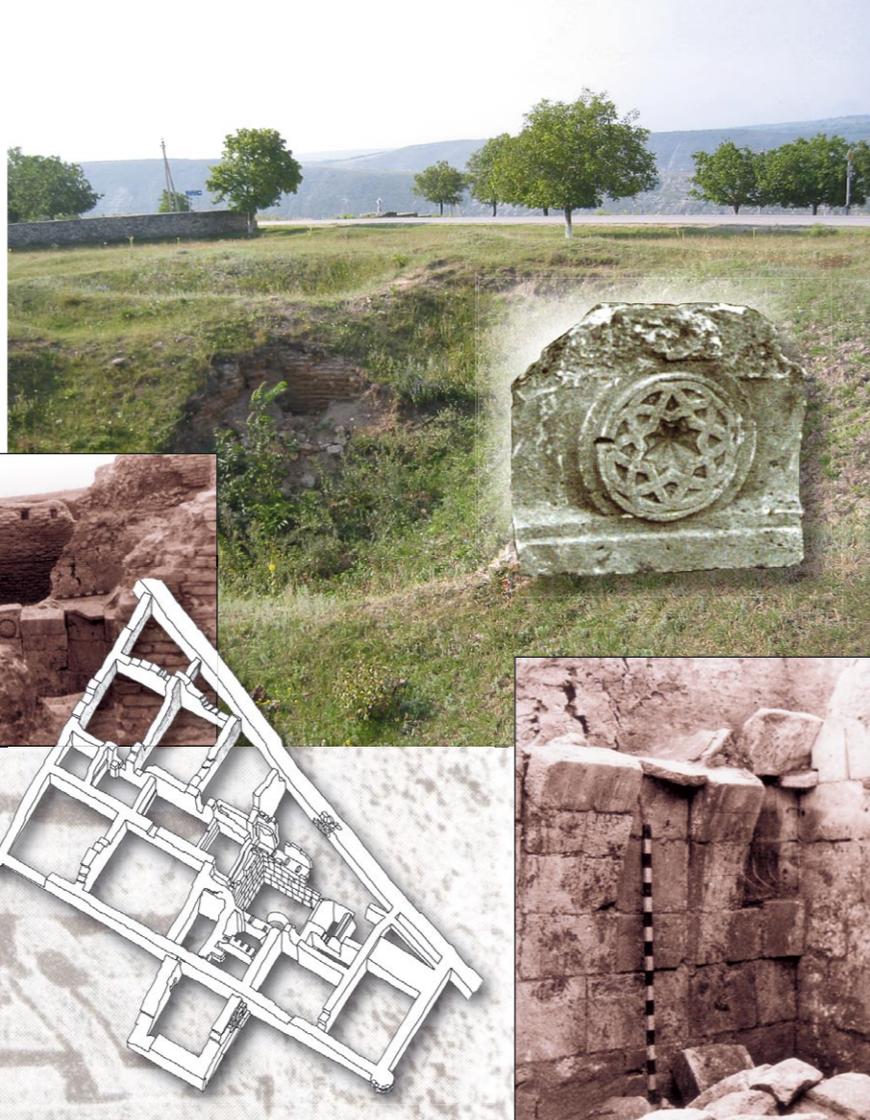
The stone citadel [no. 3] represents the central fortification of Orheiul Vechi.

It was built at the end of the 1360’s (14th century) as a military-political and administrative residence of the Mongol governor. The construction of typical oriental style possesses a trapeze-shaped form with maximum dimensions of 127.0 x 92.0 m. Those 4 circular towers, disposed at the corners, built into a special decorative style, together with those 5 fortifications situated at the mid of the sides, served as a contra-fort for the citadel’s wall. After the Golden Horde had left the region in 1369, the citadel was populated by Moldavians, and during the reign of Stephen the Great and Saint it was reconstructed and transformed into the residence of the Orhei governor. During the 15th-16th centuries the citadel sheltered concomitantly the palace of the local governor and the habitations of some townsmen.



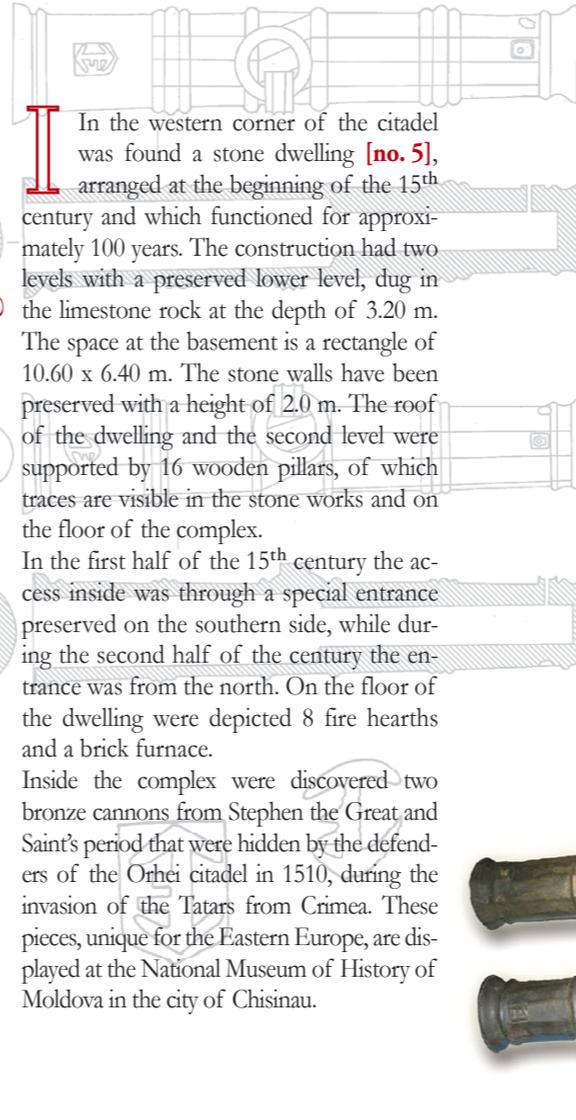
The Palace of Pircalab second half of 14th – mid of 16th centuries

In the central part of the citadel, near the northern wall, are the ruins of a monumental palace [no. 4], today under the ground, which once knew a stormy history. In the first half of the 14th century on this place was built a Muslim mausoleum that included also a crypt. Later (1366) the construction was transformed into the Palace of the regional governor; in the 15th century it became an official residence of the Orhei governors (“Pircalab”). During the reign of Stephen the Great and Saint, the position of Orhei governor was held by the most important noblemen of the Country of Moldova: Radu Gangur, Vlaicu, Gales, Grozea Micotici, Ivanco and Alexa. The palace, made of bricks, had 26 compartments and an underground room with walls of stone blocks taken from an older construction from the period of the Golden Horde.



The Medieval Dwelling 15th century

In the western corner of the citadel was found a stone dwelling [no. 5], arranged at the beginning of the 15th century and which functioned for approximately 100 years. The construction had two levels with a preserved lower level, dug in the limestone rock at the depth of 3.20 m. The space at the basement is a rectangle of 10.60 x 6.40 m. The stone walls have been preserved with a height of 2.0 m. The roof of the dwelling and the second level were supported by 16 wooden pillars, of which traces are visible in the stone works and on the floor of the complex. In the first half of the 15th century the access inside was through a special entrance preserved on the southern side, while during the second half of the century the entrance was from the north. On the floor of the dwelling were depicted 8 fire hearths and a brick furnace. Inside the complex were discovered two bronze cannons from Stephen the Great and Saint's period that were hidden by the defenders of the Orhei citadel in 1510, during the invasion of the Tatars from Crimea. These pieces, unique for the Eastern Europe, are displayed at the National Museum of History of Moldova in the city of Chisinau.



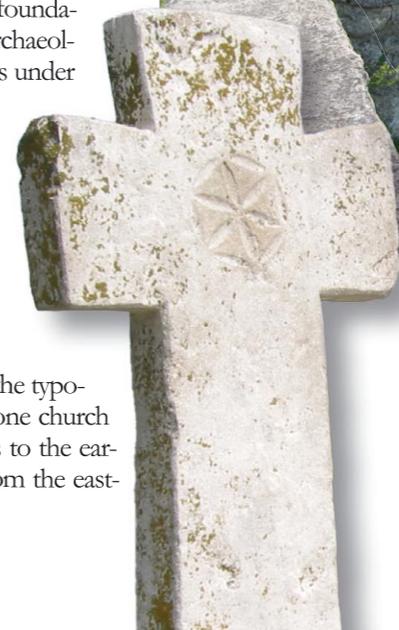
The Mosque and the Caravanserai 14th century

The monumental complex composed of Mosque [no. 6] and Caravanserai [no. 7] belongs to the period of the Golden Horde. The first complex represented a religious Muslim construction and the second one served as storage of goods. The walls of the construction attained a maximum height of 1.50 m. The mosque is square-shaped with the dimensions of 58.0 x 52.0 m; it is oriented on the north-south axis. In the center of the northern side is the entrance into the mosque, which in the 14th c. was arranged under the form of a monumental portal. In the north-eastern corner of the building are the ruins of a minaret from which were held the Muslim calls to prayer. The Islamic cult construction from Orheiul Vechi is shown on a lapidary Arabic inscription recovered at this site: *"this mosque was built by order of the pious benefactor Alih...san"*. The rectangle-shaped caravanserai with the dimensions of 56.0 x 27.0 m has two entrances on the northern and southern sides, and, in the past, it had portals with typical oriental arabesques.



The Medieval Church second half of the 14th-16th centuries

The central part of the Orheiul Vechi settlement bears intact the stone ruins of a Christian church [no. 8]. These vestiges attest to a very old religious dwelling built in an archaic architectural style. The settlement had a rectangle-shaped form composed of 3 compartments: prolonged altar, square nave and extended narthex. The entrance into the church was on the southern side of the narthex where the respective cavity can be seen. The dimensions of the church's foundations are 16.5 x 6.5 m. The archaeologists have found two graves under the floor of the nave that belonged to a man and a woman buried in golden clothes, which were the possible founders of the holy site. Near the complex, a Christian cemetery and more funeral stones having Cyrillic (Slavonian) inscriptions are seen. From the typological point of view, the stone church from Orheiul Vechi belongs to the earliest Christian complexes from the east-Carpathian region.



In the 14th c. in the town on the Raut functioned three baths [no. 9a, b, c]. The most important construction of this type is the bath at the ford, in front of Trebujeni village [no. 9a]. The toponym „feredeu”, applied by the natives to this place, conserves the living memory about this medieval bath. The bath was made of stone. The construction was rectangular with maximum dimensions of 37.0 x 21.0 m. The bath’s noticeable foundation represented a typical oriental structure evolved from ancient Roman thermae. The entrance was from the west, on the portion of the central road that stretched down to the river’s ford. The first room of the bath, the cloakroom, was used for relaxing procedures and communication; then follow two rectangular spaces with annexes destined for hygiene, two cruciform rooms with hot air for massage, also called “hammam”, it included four separated rooms for transpiration and in the eastern part is the room for the bath clerk and stocker. The heating was produced through hypocaust, a system that has at the base the circulation of hot currents through channels under the floor.



The museum complex “Orheiul Vechi” has a Modern Visitors Center [no. 10] with an Exhibition Room. There are displayed prestigious archeological vestiges discovered during the archaeological excavations. The exhibition is structured according to the historical ages and reflects all the important stages of human civilization from the Orheiul Vechi micro-zone, beginning from Paleolithic till late Medieval Ages. In the museum complex are stored heritage objects that comprise 6 thousand items of inventory (tools, arms, metal and glass jewels, coins, etc.) and more than 100 thousand fragments of ceramics. The museum collections include as well precious ethnographic items (fabrics, traditional peasant clothing, etc.), elements of medieval and modern architecture, shown during thematic exhibitions.



On the surface of the “Butuceni” promontory there are seen traces of a Thraco-Geto-Dacian fortress, highlighting 6 walls [no. 11a, b, c, d] and traces of a citadel [no. 13]. The oldest (10th-9th c. BC) is considered to be the wall from the north-eastern extremity of the promontory [no. 11d] with 364.0 m in length. From a later period dates the wall [no. 11a] from the western extremity of the promontory that blocked the access to the citadel from north-west. In the 7th-5th c. BC in the central part of the promontory were built walls [no. 11b] that protected a citadel of circa 70.0 x 60.0 m situated to the west from the actual “St. Maria” Church. In the 4th-3rd c. BC the fortress was extended and fortified from all parts with wooden fences. In the same period, in the south-eastern part of the promontory appeared another wall [no. 11c] of circa 1.5 km in length that protected the economic space of the settlement.



The PESTERA Monastery
15th-19th centuries

The “Pestera” Monastery [no. 12] is composed of: a church with 11 cells, built into the sloping bank of the Raut at circa 50 m altitude. The dwelling has the name of “St. Maria” and has an altar, nave, narthex and porch. There is a stone communion table in the altar. The altar and nave’s vault are semi spherical and that of the narthex is flat. The porch, balcony-shaped, is disposed above Raut waters, and to the west of the narthex are located the monastic cells and the access stairs to the river. The older fortifications from the riverside have been crushed down as a result of earthquakes. The present underground tunnel dates from 1820, when the cave monastery became the parish of the village. Up the tunnel in 1890, was built a belfry that frames organically into the historical landscape of Orheiul Vechi and represents, at the same time, an inalienable symbol of the cave dwelling. Near the belfry there is a massive stone cross from the 18th century. According to the legend it heals the soul and touching it and going round it leads to the fulfillment of wishes.

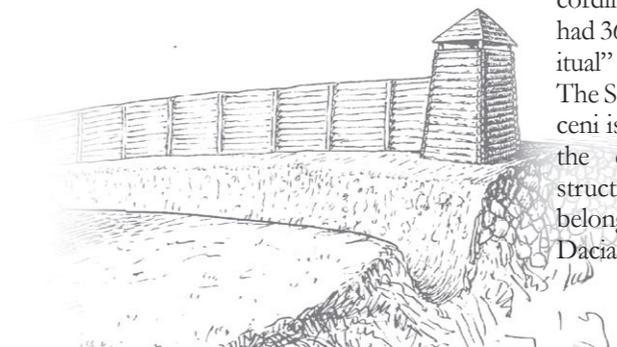
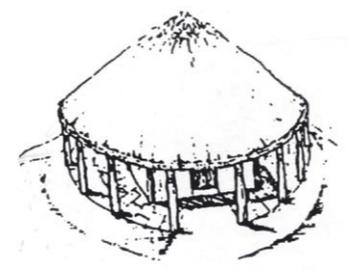
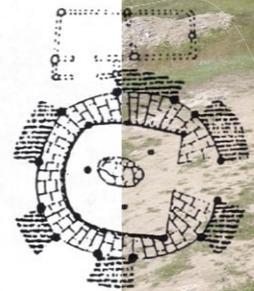
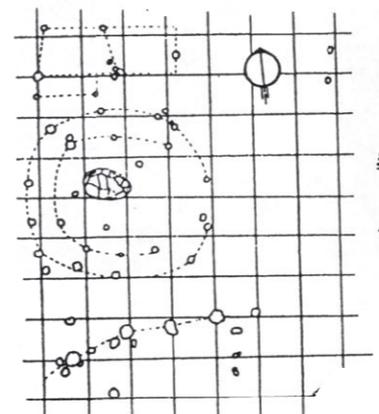


The Geto-Dacian Citadel
4th-3rd century BC

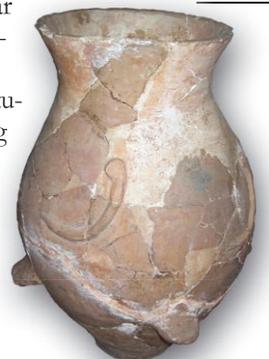
In the 4th-3rd centuries BC on the central part of the "Butuceni" promontory was situated the Geto-Dacian fortress [no. 13].

The fortification had a prolonged oval shape with the dimensions of 215.0 x 30.0/60.0 m surrounded by a wooden fence. The respective traces have the form of a row of pits dug into the rock that were preserved until present. In the eastern part, the access to the citadel was barred by a stone wall and a protective moat. Inside the fortress are found constructions of stone blocks, made according to the Greek technologies, and traditional dwellings with walls of wattle and clay. The fortress has offered up numerous artefacts of Greek origin that, compared to other Geto-Dacian settlements from the Prut-Dniestrian space, denote intensive commercial relations with the ancient world.

In 1904, in the perimeter of the central fortification was built the "St. Maria" Church that remarkably imposes itself in the historical and cultural landscape of Orheiul Vechi site.



The Geto-Dacian sanctuary from the 4th-3rd centuries BC was discovered at the level of the limestone rock and nowadays is covered with ground [no. 14]. The complex is made of a stone altar with a diameter of 1.3 x 2.0 m situated in the central part and 21 wooden pillars placed in three concentric circles, the diameter of the last one being 9.0 m. The discovered pits lead to the hypothesis that the first circle composed of three pillars represented the normal weeks of 10 days, the second circle formed of 6 pillars signified the added weeks of 5 days, and finally, the third made of 12 pillars indicated the months of 30 days. Therefore, according to the sanctuary-calendar the Gets from the citadel near Butuceni were using a solar calendar according to which the year had 360 days and 5 "spiritual" days added to it. The Sanctuary from Butuceni is the oldest among the discovered constructions of this type belonging to the Geto-Dacian civilization.



The Geto-Dacian Sanctuary
4th-3rd centuries BC

The Traditional Peasant House 19th-20th centuries

Peasant households from Butuceni village [no. 15] keep intact the archaic architectural forms specific to the 19th-20th centuries. The durable and defining element of the respective household is the stone wall that delineates the “peasant’s universe” from the rest of the world. The rural household is comprised of: a house for living, basca, cellar, loznitsa, mill, and other adjacent elements. The specific architecture includes the compulsory presence of a porch with sculpted stone pillars, a vestibule, a bedroom and a guest’s room. The house, traditionally, is ornamented with fabrics, embroideries, and other accessories handmade from local materials and natural dyes. Basca, meaning the summer dwelling, is dug into the rock and is provided with kitchen range, fireplace and furnace. The cellar represents a place for storage of wine and food products.

The loznitsa is a furnace to prepare dried fruits and the mill to obtain flour and cereals.



The Traditional Gates 19th-20th centuries

The specific note of Orheiul Vechi zone is best represented by the architecture of the gate pillars [no. 16]. Traditionally, the gate is made of board or twigs. Usually it contains two sections: the big and the small gates delimited by three pillars from refined stone. The pillars are massive having sides covered with special blue paint, “albastru of Orhei”. Sculpted compositions are on their top. The facade of the pillars is usually ornamented with astral symbols and geometric figures. A remarkable example is the ornament composed from the sky’s arcade, stellar rosettes and the solar disc stretching down on the rhombus of fertility.



The Hermitages of PESTERA Monastery 15th-18th centuries

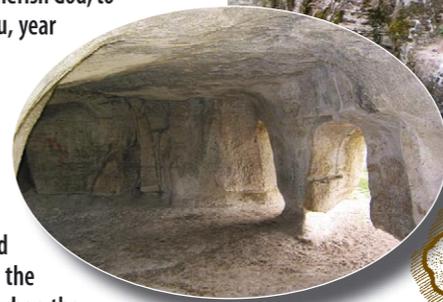
In the perimeter of the medieval town, the Raut's rock shelters about 150 cave cavities, which in the 15th-18th centuries represented the hermitages of the "Pestera" monastery [no. 17]. The monastic dwellings are arrayed in 10 levels at the altitude of 10-70 m above the river spread on a surface of about 400 m to the east of the monastery. Isolated grottos of recluse monks are highlighted. They are situated in practically inaccessible places. In other cases the cave complexes comprise from 2 to 15 rooms, representing the cellars of some monastic brotherhoods. The circular spaces are distinguished with a central room and other rooms still unfinished. In two cases are found chapels on the walls of which are seen diverse Christian symbols, crosses and Cyrillic inscriptions.



The Monastery of Bosie 15th-18th centuries

Monastery of Bosie represents a cave monastic complex situated at an altitude of circa 25 m above the Raut waters [no. 18]. The holy dwelling is composed of a church and monastic cells in enfilade. The church bears the name "St. Nicholas". It is dug into a cave and is composed of an altar and nave. In the northern part there are two entrances where in front, on a limestone platform, a porch is placed. On the church's facade is engraved a Slavonian Writing: **This church was built by the slave of Bosie, pircalab (Chief Magistrate) of Orhei, together with his wife and his children, to cherish God, to forgive his sins. Selevestru, year 7173 [1665].**

An inscription in Romanian language has preserved on the opposing side: **This inscription was made by Vasile Andeescul and with Razmeritse Leka in the days of Constantin Voda when the Ukrainians wintered in Ivancea, lead by Stetsi Hatman, and we wintered then here in year 7198, November 20 [1689].**



The hermitage of Rafail represents a cave complex situated in the south of the “Butuceni” promontory [no. 19], vis-à-vis the “St. Maria” Church, on the other bank of Raut. The holy dwelling is part of an older monastic complex which at the beginning of the 19th century was run by the pious Abbot Rafail. The monastic dwelling was almost totally destroyed by earthquakes, and especially by the disastrous effects of an explosion produced in the 20th century. At present, about 20 spaces of the hermitage are identified, situated on 4-5 levels at an altitude of 70-80 m above the water. Inside the grottos are engraved a number of Christian signs and ancestral inscriptions. Access of tourists to this site is limited.





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