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## BSB831/HERIPRENEURSHIP

### WORK PACKAGE: T1

**WORK PACKAGE TITLE:** DESIGNING A COMMON FRAMEWORK TO JOINTLY MANAGE AND COMMUNICATE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF UNESCO HERITAGE IN THE CROSS-BORDER AREA

**ACTIVITY CODE:** A.T1.2

**ACTIVITY TITLE:** Building the Heritage Experience Inventory at UNESCO designated Areas in the Black Sea Basin

**DELIVERABLE CODE:** D.T1.2.2

**DELIVERABLE TITLE:** Statement of Significance

D.T1.2.2 Statement of Significance

COUNTRY: Republic of Moldova

Name of the Asset: Cave Hermitage „Peștera” at the  
*Cultural-Natural Reserve „Orheiul Vechi”*

  
**ANTRIM** **BDC**  
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL  
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Cover: Cave Hermitage „Peștera” at the Cultural-Natural Reserve „Orheiul Vechi”, R.Moldova

Source: ANTRIM

**Significance: *Interference of human values***

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## CONTRIBUTOR

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Mariana Mischevca holds a Master degree in History from Moldova State University and a post-university research scholarship (Erasmus Mundus) at the Faculty of History at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University from Iași, România. Mariana Mischevca has worked at the Ministry of Culture since 2018, being responsible for the museum sector and intangible cultural heritage. Her main responsibilities are: elaboration of politics; coordination of the subordinated institutions' activity; coordination of the activities of the experts' commission; organization of cultural events etc. She is the national coordinator of the European Heritage Days (program of the Council of Europe) and the focal point for the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. Her knowledge of the intangible cultural heritage is a valuable asset for the project implementation. She is fluent in Russian, English, and Romanian.

PROJECT AFFILIATION: BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL  
Heritage Expert and Consultant

### Ostapov Alina

Alina Ostapov has a Master in Architecture from Technical University of Moldova, Faculty of Urbanism and Architecture, Department of Architecture. She is a doctoral student at the Institute of Cultural Heritage, specializing in Theory and History of Architecture and passed training courses „Architectural Conservation” and „Support to promote cultural heritage in the Republic of Moldova through its preservation and protection”. As well she has a certificate for cultural and creative leaders in the framework of EU - Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme.

She gained experience being involved in projects like: "Community Guided Urban Strategies in Historic Cities (COMUS)"; „Support to promote cultural heritage in the Republic of Moldova through its preservation and protection”; "From tradition to contemporaneity". Alina is a communication manager in international projects and collaborated with the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Moldova as an Expert-evaluator of cultural heritage projects. She is fluent in Romanian, Russian and has a good level of English and basic knowledge of Ukrainian.

PROJECT AFFILIATION: BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL  
Expert - Cultural Heritage and History of architecture



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## RECORD SHEET 08: ASSET NAME

Cave Hermitage „Peștera” at the Cultural-Natural Reserve „Orheiul Vechi”

### SECTION 1: ASSET ID

#### Name

Cave Hermitage „Peștera” at the Cultural-Natural Reserve „Orheiul Vechi”

#### Category

Civil

#### Unit of Recording

- NATURAL HERITAGE       MAN-MADE HERITAGE  
 INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

#### Select unit of recording

Archaeological Site

#### Subcategory

Archaeological Site

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## Website

<http://orheiuvechi.com/patrimoniu-cultural/complexe-lupestre/>

## Location

**Country:** Republic of Moldova

**Region:** Orhei District

**Locality (town, village):** Trebujeni com

**Address (street, number):**

**Geographic location (coordinates, altitude, relief, waters):** N47 18 20 E28 58 30

**Access:** The Cave Hermitage is situated in the eastern part of the Republic of Moldova, in the Orhei District, at the northern edge of Butuceni village, on the territory of Cultural-Natural Reserve „Orheiul Vechi”. The distance from the Capital Chişinău is approximately 52 km to the northeast, on the M2 and then R23 roads.

**Prices of the services:** free entrance

## Ownership

**Ownership:** Public;

**Owner:** A monks’ community.

**Present function:** Monastery hermitage

**Former functions:**

XV/XVI - beginning of the XIXth century - hermitage;

1822 - 1946 - Parish church of the village Butuceni;

1946 - 1996 - the hermitage was closed; a period of time it was used as a kolkhoz depot;

1968 - 1996 - it was under the management of the Museum Complex „Orheiul Vechi”;

1996 -until nowadays - monastery hermitage of a monks’ community

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## Gallery

Road to the cave church, BDC 2022	Bell tower of the cave church, BDC 2022	Entrance into the Cave church, ANTRIM 2022

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The cave church and the new church, ANTRIM 2022	The view from the balcony, BDC 2022	
The Cave Complex „Peștera”, ANTRIM 2019	The cells of the hermitage „Peștera”, BDC 2022	Inside of the Church, ANTRIM 2022

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The entrance in the Altar of Cave Monastery,  
ANTRIM 2022



Inside of the Church, ANTRIM 2022



The monk who lives in the cave church, ANTRIM 2022

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Bell tower above the church,  
BDC, 2019



Bell tower and the new entrance into  
the cave church, BDC, 2019



Bell tower above the church,  
BDC, 2019

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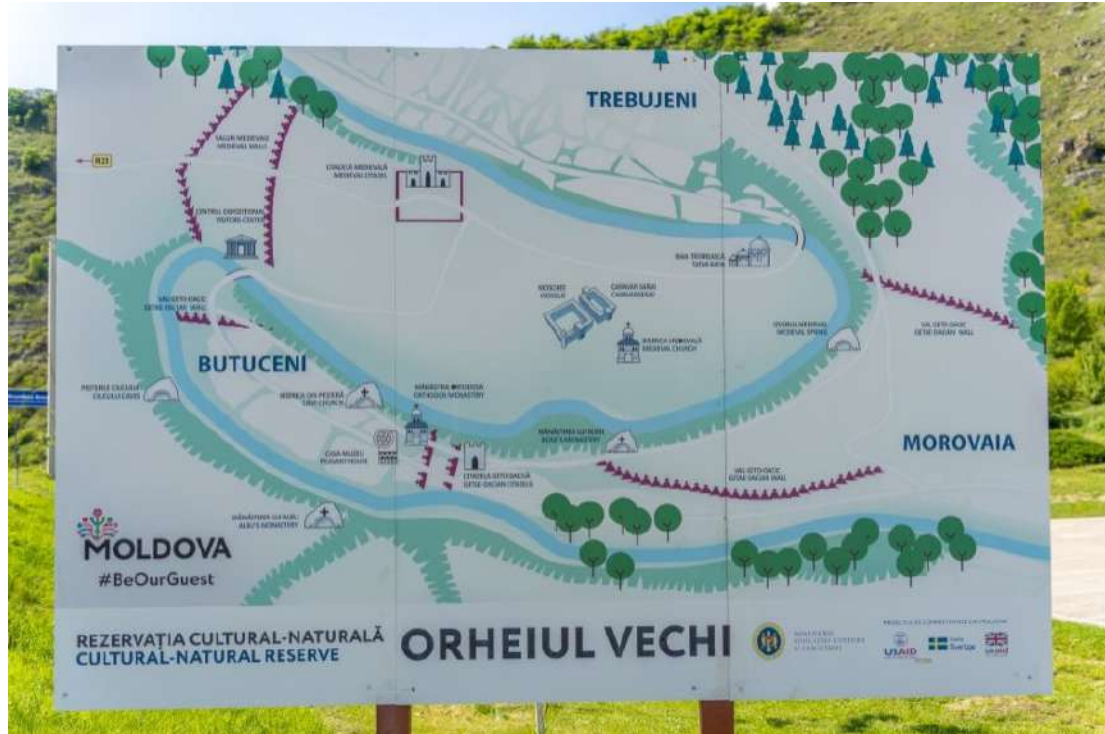


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Source: Business Development Capital SRL (BDC), 2022

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## Landscape Elements

(Buildings, streetscape; heritage, farming, vegetation, fauna, waters, etc):

The monastic hermitage „Peștera” belongs to the cave complex Butuceni, which is about 460 m long and represents a system of caves, former rooms of the hermits.

The slope is made up of multiple horizontal layers of limestone Sarmatian conchiferous. Under the influence of natural or human factors, the multitude of caves was formed, used in the past for worship, monastic cells and churches.

The Butuceni Complex consists of 72 rooms made by humans and 63 natural caves, 9 out of them having signs of human activity. Also there are 185-200 natural empty caves.

The „Peștera” hermitage consists of two basic units: the church and the body of monastic cells. Above the monastic complex, on the surface of the Butuceni promontory, a stone cross (XVIIth-XVIIIth centuries) and a bell tower (1821) are built.

The church is built on the basis of older rooms, the traces of which are very well projected in some places. It is arranged along the slope, being composed of the following compartments: Altar, Naos (nave), Pronaos, Porch and an access Gang. The length of the Church is 14.7 m, and the width is 4.0-8.0 m, the height is 2.6-3.5 m.

The plan and the interior volume clearly separate the church from the multitude of cave rooms that litter the nearby rocks. The holy place has an altar, naos and pronaos. The quasi-square altar is raised with a step of about 20 cm compared to the rest of the church. Two niches for icons and the entrance to a small room are excavated in the east wall. A niche for the diaconicon is dug in the south wall of the altar. The altar is followed by the naos room. Both rooms are covered by a heavily flattened semi-cylinder vault. Two wide openings separated by a pillar ensure the connection of the naos with the pronaos.

The pronaos is a polygonal room covered with a straight ceiling. It is equipped with three outputs. One to the north, which provides access to an external terrace with niches dug into the rock, traces of a wooden construction that in ancient times sheltered the entrance to the church. At the eastern end of the terrace there are a



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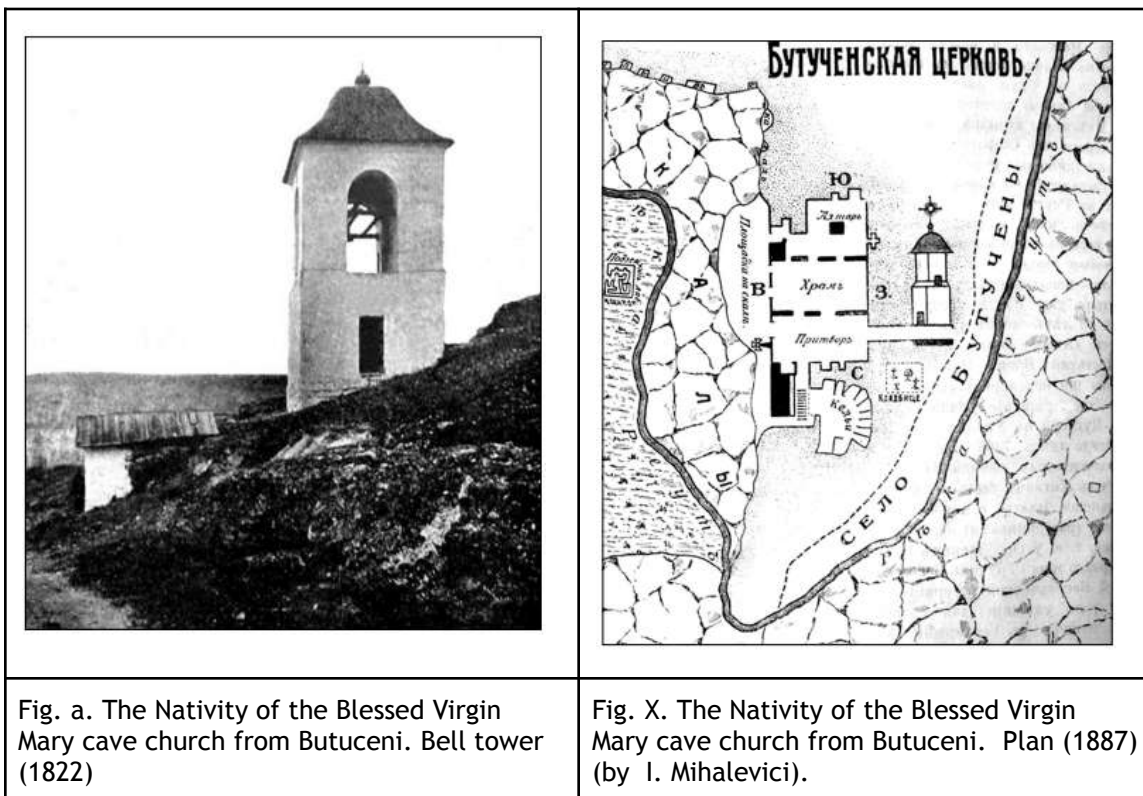


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few steps left from a steep cart, now collapsed, which once went down to the Raut River. The second exit, from the west wall of the pronaos, provided again, by means of a steep staircase, dug inside the rock, the access to the Raut River valley, at the same time making the connection with another room with 12 monks’ cells arranged around the perimeter. The third exit, the only one currently left in use, is dug into the southern wall of the pronaos, ensuring the connection of the church with the Butuceni town through a tunnel about 25 meters long.



The pronaos of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary church, initially, represented a room with many small separated rooms. Of these, only one exists in its entirety today, in the west wall of the pronaos, to the left of the exit to the terrace, and clear traces of four more cells (located in the same west wall) are also preserved. The rooms of the type just described, with several rooms-cells inside, are quite widespread in the Butuceni rocks. Access to them is difficult, often being possible only through narrow window-type openings located at considerable heights.

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The anonymous craftsmen, who carved the church, proceeded first of all to enlarge the entrance to such a room, disengaged a part of the interior rooms and lowered the treading level to a reasonable level. Then they deepened towards the east in the rock, completely executing the naos and pronaos of the holy place. The initial access to the nave seems to have been through a single opening, the northern one. Only much later (after the collapse of the path with steps that accessed the terrace in front of the church), a new staircase was carved in the west wall of the pronaos, which allowed the exit to the Raut River valley. The new access connected the church with another compartmentalized room, until then isolated. Later, during an intervention on the church, the nave was widened to the south and the second opening to the pronaos was pierced. The pronaos, in turn, was also enlarged in the southern direction (most likely with the digging of the tunnel in 1821), on this occasion a few more rooms were disabled. The tread level inside the place of worship, to prevent erosion of the stone, was covered by a layer of clay. The walls of the church had to be covered with plasters based on lime and sand. At another stage of existence, most likely during the XIXth century renovations, niches were dug in the stone floor of the church for the installation of a floor.

The portal of the southern entrance to the pronaos of the church requires special attention. The formal particularities of the framing here are characteristic of a type of portals that emerged in the architecture of Moldova in the second half of the XVIIth century and was in vogue until the end of the XVIIIth century (see in this context also the portal of the Bosie cave monastery (1665) on the same estate). For the XIXth century, this type of framing was archaic.

The building of the bell tower above the entrance to the tunnel took place in the period between August of 1821. The tower was built of stone masonry, being provided with two levels. Access to the square room on the first level is through a door in the eastern wall of the tower. A stone staircase, arranged in the thickness of the masonry, provides access to the level of the bell chamber. The floor between the levels of the tower was made of wood. The tower was equipped with a bell-shaped baroque covering made of shingles.

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## Dating/ Period and Functions

The monastic complex functioned in several stages, which fall between the 15th / 16th centuries - the beginning of the 19th century (1816).

Between 1822-1904 the hermitage was the parish church of the village of Butuceni, later it operated only during Easter and Christmas.

1946 - the "Pestera" church was closed, later being transformed into a local kolkhoz depot.

1968 - it was taken over the management of the „Orheiul Vechi” Museum Complex.

1996 - the hermitage church was occupied and restored by the new monastic community founded in Butuceni.

## Description (history, features etc.):

The hermitage, located on the estate of the same name in the land of Orhei, belongs to the rather large number of monastic settlements that disappeared at the beginning of the XIXth century. The history of the hermitage can only be treated in close relation with the history of the settlement that gave it its name and the location of the constructions of the hermitage being possible only within its territorial limits.

In the Middle Ages, the Trebujeni estate in the Orhei region included an important portion of the north bank of the Răut river, the territory on which Trebujeni, Butuceni and Morovaia are currently located. The river crosses the area forming generous meanders, flowing between high and rocky banks. Since ancient times, man has tried to adapt the caves formed here under the action of wind and rain erosion to his needs. On the portion corresponding to the Butuceni promontory, the Răut river bank contains more than 200 natural and man-made caves.

The hermitage "Pestera" in the Orhei region had a special destiny. On its territory in the XIVth-XVIth centuries there existed and prospered a strong urban and military center, recorded in the historical documents of the XVth-XVIth centuries under the name of Old Orhei as a regional center and seat of the chief governor.

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## **The "Pestera" Hermitage and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary cave church**

When "Pestera" hermitage was established is still unknown, however, this event could not have occurred later than of the XVIIth-XVIIIth centuries.

The information available to us shows that the hermitage has never had or claimed on its own land, but used the land of the Pestera settlement on which it was located. As historical practice shows, most of the monastic settlements in Moldova took over the name of the estate on which they were founded. Namely, the estate on which the hermitage was located gave it the name Pestera, and not the caves as has often been assumed. Usually in such cases, this was done on the basis of a verbal agreement with the owners of the estate (on the basis of a "permission"), the agreement, as a rule, being renewed with the change of the estate owners.

The first documentary sources on the hermitage date back to 1798 and 1800, when Abbot Paisie was assigned as the abbot of "Pestera" hermitage. After his death in the early years of the XIXth century, at a time when an epidemic raged in these places, the hermitage remained abandoned for several years.

Around 1805, according to other sources - in 1807, "Pestera" hermitage monastic settlement was reactivated under the leadership of abbot Victor, the son of Polish nobles from the village of Obodovka, Podolia. He was baptized in Orthodoxy, and later became a monk at the Horodiște cave hermitage in the Orhei region. The monk Victor, in March of 1808, when he was 35 years old, received blessing and recognition on reactivating and leading the "Pestera" hermitage. Victor demonstrated remarkable skills in administration and gathering a fairly large community of monks. Thus, in 1809, 14 people were attested in the Peștera hermitage: the abbot - the monk Victor, two hieromonks, ten monks and one novice.

No documents attesting the location of the hermitage buildings (cells, refectory, stable, warehouses (all wooden)) on the territory of the Pestera (Brănești) settlement, which at the turn of the XVIIIth-XIXth centuries came under the control of the Donici family. The area of possible locations, taking into account the use by the monks of the cave church of the Nativity of the St. Mary (which was also the patron saint of the hermitage) on the territory of the neighboring estate - Trebujeni, more precisely on the side of this estate, known as Butuceni. The fact is expressly mentioned in the documents of the time, the monks crossing the Raut River day by day to be able to use the Butuceni cave.

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The cave church from Butuceni was used by monks and before Victor's abbotship. This fact is revealed by a document dated July 2, 1810, a report to the Dicastery of Iasi, mentioning that in the year when Victor came to reactivate the Pestera hermitage, he found there a monk "living there, in the rock".

Monk Victor in February 1815 was removed from the abbotship, being transferred to Saharna monastery. It was also proposed to "scatter" the cave monks and move here the nuns from the Fântâna Doamnei hermitage (Peciște) in the same Orhei region.

### **OVERVIEW OF CHURCH LIFE TO THE LEFT OF THE PRUT RIVER FROM THE ORIGIN UNTIL 1940**

Christian life traces in the area to the left of the Prut River can be found since the first Christian centuries. According to tradition, the first preacher was the Holy Apostle Andrew himself, who preached the Gospel among the "Scythians" (according to the testimony of the church writer Eusebius of Caesarea), in the territories between the Danube and the Sea and in those in the North of the Black Sea, and therefore had to pass and through the southern part of the territory that was later called Bessarabia.

The existence of a Christian life in the region over the Prut River in the IInd-XIVth centuries, is that period about which written sources do not provide much information, is proven, in particular, by archaeological remains (objects with Christian symbols, crucifixes, Christian inscriptions, etc.) . (Old Orhei - from the XIIth-XIVth centuries).

After the creation of the medieval Moldavian state in the middle of the XIVth century, the Metropolia of Moldavia was also established, officially recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate on July 26, 1401. Its jurisdiction extended over churches, respectively parishes, throughout the country. It is known that during the time of Alexander the Good, the lands of Hotin (with time this land passed to the Rădăuți diocese), Soroca, Orhei and Lapusna were under the jurisdiction of the Suceava Metropolia, and the lands of Falcui (on both banks of the Prut River), Tighina, Chilia and Cetatea Alba - under the jurisdiction of the Romanian Bishopric. After 1598, when the Diocese of Hus was established, the following lands were assigned: Fălcui, Lăpușna, Orhei, Soroca and the entire southern part between Prut and Dniester, Bessarabia up to the Danube.

During the Russo-Turkish wars of the last decades of the XVIIIth century, some provisional jurisdictional changes took place, so that later, following the annexation of

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Bessarabia in 1812, the Romanian Orthodox community from the area between the Prut and Dniester became part of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In particular, monastic life developed on the left bank of the Prut River. The oldest settlements are the rock monasteries on the rocky bank to the right of the Dniester River: from Japca, Saharna, Țapova, Butuceni, etc.

As a rule, the monasteries were founded by lords, boyars, monks and nuns, priests, nobles or merchants. Added to these are a number of hermitages, whose number in the medieval period was quite large, but which had a weaker material base, their existence being much more unstable.

The frequent wars, invasions, and other upheavals and vicissitudes of the time permanently disturbed the church life in the area to the left of the Prut, which did not allow for a continuous progress of the political, social-economic and cultural life. Nevertheless, an intense spiritual life pulsed in that territory, there was a church organization from the beginning, churches were built in each locality (the vast majority of them wooden), monasteries and hermitages.

### **Church life in Bessarabia under Russian rule (1812-1918)**

In 1812, following the Russian-Turkish war of 1806-1812, the territory between the Prut and the Dniester, called Bessarabia, was annexed by the Russian Tsarist Empire. Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni (former exarch in the Romanian Principalities during 1808-1812) was commissioned by the Russian authorities to establish a diocese in the annexed territory, "which would no longer have any connection with the Metropolia of Moldova", but, to organize it according to the model of the Russian dioceses, to be subordinated to the Synod of the Russian Church in Petersburg.

Thus, for 106 years, the church life of Bessarabia Romanians was marked by all the changes that the Tsarist Empire and the Russian Orthodox Church went through during the period 1812-1918.

### **Church life in Bessarabia during the interwar period (1918-1940)**

The problem of the presence of places of worship in the cultures of the early Middle Ages has been raised several times. In general, it is admitted that the Christian Romanians would have had wooden churches that did not leave significant traces in

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the ground and cannot be detected through archaeological research. One of the arguments for a parallel study, could represent the research of cave churches.

One of the most important features of the cave churches is the geographical orientation of the altar, which can communicate very important chronological values, to demonstrate the period when they were built. The orientation of Christian altars in churches has wide conceptual and ritual importance. As some researchers reveal, the initial orientation of the altar was towards the west, according to the biblical preceptor (Păun 1999). From where we find it in the grandest cathedrals, for example at St. Peter and Paul in Rome, which followed the tradition of an old church from the IVth century (Păun 2000, 177). Later, through the Apostolic Constitutions, it is decided to orient the altars of Christian churches towards the east, which begins, approximately, at the end of the IVth - Vth centuries. The church is built with the altar towards the east, but the east is not only the geographical one. The lost paradise was built by God in the east. It was a heavenly sunrise. That is why God is called the East from above, not the one from below, from the earth. The "Apostolic Constitutions" say that when the land does not allow the altar to be directed towards the east, the church will be built as the land allows, "because God is everywhere".

An altar without an apse can be found at the cave church of the Butuceni monastic complex (Orheiul Vechi) (Ghid 1995, 21). It had an old history, and after its main access from the Raut River collapsed, the cave church was abandoned for a long time, so that later, the villagers of Butuceni dug a tunnel and turned it into a parish church in 1821 (Kudrinovschi 1906, 1313-1316), causing some internal changes.

However, the church has the square altar, but has the pastophoria and the diaconicon arranged asymmetrically. Set up in an integral complex, together with 12 cells, this monastery can be aligned chronologically with the rock complexes in the Buzău Mountains as a hermitage with 12 monks (Balan 1982, 180-181), being among the first monastic institutions that followed the scriptures, according to the example of the Savior with the 12 apostles.

The appearance of cave complexes in the given region was favored by the character of limestone. It allows relatively easy processing, which conditions the intense construction of living caves. About 350 complexes are known in this area. One hundred caves are dug by the humans in order to create places for Christians hermits, and about 250 are karst caves formed by nature. Some of them were used by people as shelter or defense.

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The Christian monastic cave complexes are dated based on cave inscriptions over the XVIIth-XIXth centuries. At the same time, given the general archaeological context, the extended chronology is established during the XIVth - XIXth centuries. The cave complexes focus on the surface of two slopes: the northern slope of the Butuceni promontory to the left of Răut River and the northern slope of the Mașcăuți terrace from the right of Răut, located opposite the Butuceni promontory. Isolated cave complexes are also found in other places.

The history of the Cave „Peștera” is in a strong relationship with the estate with the same name, firstly documentary mentioned from May 10th 1574.

The first schematic plan of the cave church from Butuceni was published in 1948 and it was taken from a file of the Chișinău Consistory from the 1980's.

At the beginning of the XXth century, the inhabitants of Butuceni, for the needs of the parish, built a new church, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The old cave church remained to be used only occasionally. During the Soviet period, the places of worship in Butuceni were closed, and were later handed over to the „Orheiul Vechi” Museum Complex for management. Currently, both churches are under the administration of a monastic community.

## Person and Event History

Persons, Events and Organizations associated with the History of the Building/Site/Area/ Period (start date, end date for each):

As we mentioned before, the history of the Cave „Peștera” is inseparable from the land with the same name. **In the XIVth-XVth centuries a very important and prosperous urban and military center named „Old Orhei” was located on its territory.** Some important historical events are also related to this place.

### Owners of the land Peștera

**The Voievod Petru Șchiopu** donated to the chancellor Ioan Golăi the mill with the subordinated territory located near the Răut River.

The name of the estate was mentioned in a document from 1574, which probably means that a locality was situated on this territory.

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At the beginning of the XVIIth century, the Voievod Ieremia Movilă intended to recreate the medieval fortification.

In September 1627, the Voievod Miron Barnovschi donated the land Peștera to the boyar Dănilă from Varnița. Later it was owned by the Family Catargiu (XVIIIth-XIXth centuries).

The first documentary news regarding this hermitage refers to the years 1798 and 1800, when the abbot of the Cave, Paisie, is attested. After the death of Paisie, which occurred in the early years of the nineteenth century, when these places were haunted by an epidemic, the surviving monks abandoned the hermitage.

Around 1805, the cave monastic settlement was reactivated under the leadership of the abbot Victor. In the secular world, his name was Vasile Șestotsky, he was the son of Polish nobles from the village of Obodovka, Podolia. Victor demonstrated good managerial qualities and managed to start and develop the economic life and to create a great community of monks.

In 1815, Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni decided to appoint as hierarch of the Peștera hermitage, the hieromonk Rafael. Until that time, he was a member of the ex archical states. Rafael (the secular name was Roman Mokrițki), was also from a family of Polish nobles in Podolia. According to the statistics of that year, the hermitage had a church dedicated to the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and a staff composed of eight people.

In May 1816 it was decided to dismantle the Cave hermitage.

The cave church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary has been abandoned for several years, the entrances to it being built with the departure of the monks, according to the written indication of Metropolitan Gavriil. Later the church was reactivated as a church of myrrh.

In the spring of 1816, the last inventory of the assets of the Peștera hermitage on the Peștera/Brănești estate was carried out, here four old wooden cells, an underground cellar, 2 small bells, 1 cart, 2 ox carts, 1 pair of oxen, 1 mare, 1 cow with calf, 4 three-year-old calves, 4 hives with bees and 44 hives without bees. Cartographers attest in the cave church: 2 glass windows, 2 doors, 1 bell, partly wooden, partially canvas iconostasis. 19 books were found in the library of the monastic establishment, among which 6 were mentioned as being in Russian. The survivors who remained at the

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hermitage were: the abbot, the hieromonk Rafael, the priest Theodor, the servants: Vasile, cook; Meftodie, singer; Eftimie, tailor; Hilarion, gardener; Alexie, novice to the abbot's cell; Nestor, lecturer.

In May 1816 it was decided to abolish the Peștera hermitage, in July the monks were already transferred with all their wealth to the Condița hermitage.

The inhabitants of Butuceni, left without a place of worship, had to attend the church in Mașcăuți. The road was long and exhausting, passing partly under high rocks (at that time still covered with forest) and partly through the Raut River valley, which during heavy rains and floods, was impassable. So, locals decided to reactivate the church of the former hermitage and obtained an audience in that matter with Metropolitan Gavriil, who urged them first to ensure a comfortable and safe access to the holy place.

Thus, a tunnel laying through the rock to the cave church has appeared, and on July 26, 1821, the locals submitted to the archpriest of Orhei, Nazarie Hâncul, a request to assist with opening of the cave church and permission to build a bell tower over the entrance into the tunnel.

The Archpriest investigated the situation by going to the spot and submitted a report on August 18, 1821 to Dimitrie Sulima, the new head of the diocesan seat in Chisinau. There were two "notes" attached to the report: the first, from the priests of Mașcăuți, in which they expressed their agreement for the formation of a separate parish in Butuceni; the second, from the inhabitants of Butuceni village, in which they undertook to take care of the church and to offer the priests who will be ordained here all the privileges due to the respective tagma. Archbishop Dimitrie blessed the unsealing of the church and its decoration according to the requirements, allowing the Butuceni community to look for a priest and teacher and to provide them with everything necessary for existence.

On September 22, 1822, the cave church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary from Butuceni was consecrated. Thus, in the description of the church carried out a few days later, it was mentioned that it is dug into the rock and has a belfry. The church had no fence. The altar had a stone altar covered with boards. The iconostasis was painted on canvas. It had "a niche dug in the stone, in the parts of the church", a vestry, two windows - one in the altar, another "at the church" and three doors - two "towards the abrupt cliff over the Raut River", and "one towards the village".

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At the beginning of the XXth century, the inhabitants of Butuceni built a new church in the neo-Russian style attributed to the same patron - the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The old cave church remained to be used only occasionally. During the Soviet regime, the sites of worship in Butuceni were closed, being later transferred to the "Orheiul Vechi" museum complex for management. Currently, both churches are under the administration of a monastic community.

## SECTION 2: SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT

### Designations

#### NATIONAL

The Hermitage „Peștera” is located on the territory of the Cultural-Natural Reserve „Orheiul Vechi”, which activates on the basis of the Law no. 251/2008. The Reserve was created in order to protect, preserve and save for the present and future generations the cultural landscape „Orheiul Vechi”, which represents a set of historical-cultural and natural-landscape monuments in the Raut River gorge, micro-zone of Trebujeni, Butuceni and Morovaia villages in Orhei district, with exceptional value for national and international civilization.

The Reserve includes historical and cultural heritage assets (archaeological sites, cave complexes, vernacular architecture complexes, ethnographic objectives), traditional settlements (Trebujeni, Butuceni, Morovaia villages), natural heritage assets (geological and landscape ensembles, flora and fauna) , terrestrial and aquatic surfaces in which the regulated capitalization of the natural resources is carried out, agricultural, industrial and tourist activities are practiced.

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## UNESCO

In 2014, the unit of cultural heritage *The Archaeological Landscape „Orheiul Vechi”* was created by the Order of the Ministry of Culture with a surface of 539,127 ha. In 2017, the landscape was included on the UNESCO Tentative List in 2017.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of the landscape focuses on a vision of analysis and presentation of the archaeological heritage in the central area of the Cultural-Natural Reserve „Orheiul Vechi”.

It was proposed for the nomination on the UNESCO World Heritage List based on the criteria (II) and (V) of UNESCO. According to them, the „Orheiul Vechi” represents a remarkable example of human traditional settlement, of using the landscape, of interaction between cultures, human and nature, which become vulnerable to the impact of contemporary irreversible changes. The nomination file was composed from three archaeological sites: „Peștera” (Orheiul Vechi), „Butuceni” and „Mașcăuți”, which contains archaeological artifacts from 23 ancient settlements dated from the Upper Paleolithic Era (20-30 thousands years B. Chr.) until the modern epoch.

## Statement of Significance

The Archaeological Landscape „Orheiul Vechi” is an exceptional *example of interference of human values* between the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic and Eurasian areas throughout *the early Iron Age and the Middle Ages*.

Numerous archaeological artifacts from the territory of the Archaeological Landscape „Orheiul Vechi” demonstrate the **human presence here from the Palaeolithic Era**; the historical-cultural perpetuation from the Eneolithic to the present stage; interference of civilizations: prehistoric, ancient and medieval; east-west and north-south historical-cultural dialogue; human integration in the environment and its use for socio-economic and cultural purposes.

The presence of the **cave complexes** determines the unity of the Orheiul Vechi landscape. They were **formed in the Sarmatian limestone cliffs** near the villages Butuceni and Trebujeni. They represent an example of *cooperation between human and nature that lasted for centuries*. The human being used the caves as shelters, but they had sacral goals as well. People developed the complexes and they created new

<sup>1</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6220/>

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cave rooms inside the Sarmatian limestone cliffs. The complexes chime with the other types of heritage from the territory of the Reserve: archaeological, architectural and natural one and forms a unique ensemble of cultural and natural elements that *reflect in an original way the lifestyle of the ancient people.*

Field investigations also uncovered traces of the Cucuteni culture (V<sup>th</sup> - IV<sup>th</sup> millennium BC), as well as VIII<sup>th</sup> - IX<sup>th</sup> and XIV<sup>th</sup> century settlements. *From ancient times until today, the caves were often treated as sacred places, seen as a source of religious inspiration and an appropriate location for cult practices.* Important evidence for religious practices include about 200 caves carved into the limestone escarpments along the Raut River. The earliest caves were dug in the XV<sup>th</sup> century AD. Many of them were - and some still are - the scenes of religious rituals. Most of the caves were used as shelters for the monks. In some of them, floor plans and other evidence suggests that they were used as churches or places of prayer or rituals. One can see many religious texts and symbols engraved in the cave walls, the earliest dating to the medieval period.

In the old documents, the hermitage „Pestera” was mentioned as an ancient religious place. The oral local traditions transmitted information regarding the existence of the hermitage. The activity of the hermitage during the life of several generations, allows us to talk about the existence of this monastic settlement along a long temporal segment.

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