

with north-east and north-west corners was completely preserved (H – 3 m), while the apse and the foundation of the south wall were revealed as a consequence of excavations. A plastered floor and remnants of the base of the chancel screen were uncovered in the apse.

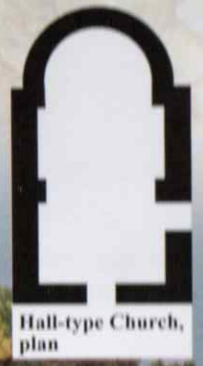
North and south walls are equipped with pilasters inside. The structure seems to have been covered with a vault which rested on an arch laid on a pair of pilasters. The church had two entrances from the west and the south. The south doorway was later bricked up because of the facility annexed to it.

The structure is mainly built with rubbles mixed with cobblestone and brick. The pilasters and the altar are built with ashlar blocks. The north wall has preserved traces of plastering.

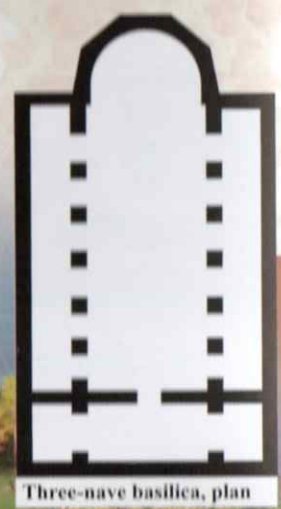
The hall-type church must have been built after the three-nave basilica ceased to function, in the tenth-eleventh centuries. Presumably, the church continued operating prior to the Turkish occupation of Tsikhisdziri.



ARCHEOLOGICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SITE OF PETRA-TSIKHISDZIRI




Hall-type Church, plan



Three-nave basilica, plan

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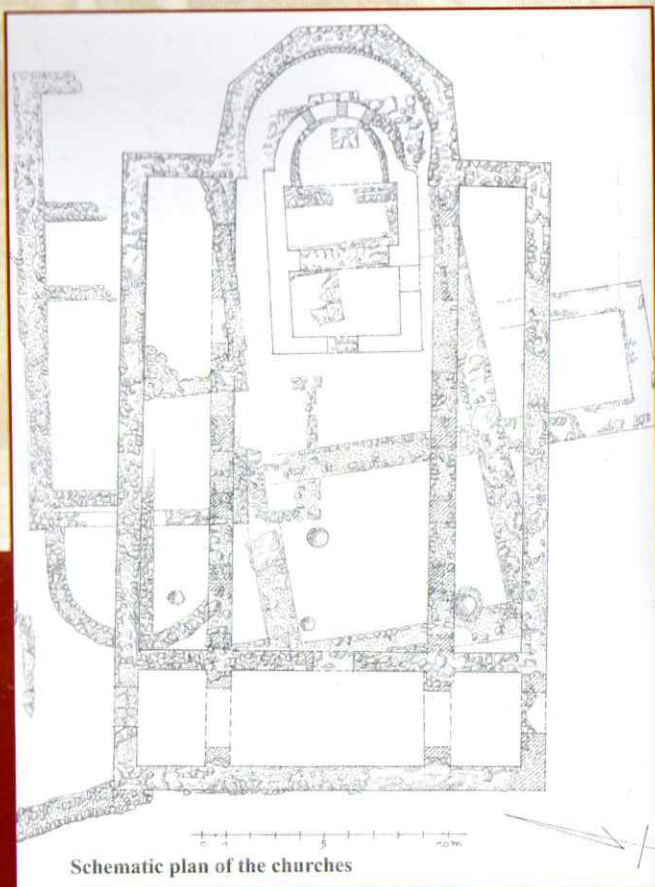
 პეტრას ციხე-სიმაგრე/Petra Fortress

CHURCHES

THREE-NAVE BASILICA

Remains of churches of two different epochs have been revealed in the center of the citadel. The ancient church, which is a three-nave basilica, is destroyed to the foundation level and it is only identifiable at the level of the plan. It has a projected pentagonal apse, a three-part narthex and rectangular columns dividing the naves. It is distinguished by its big size and an emphasized longitudinal axis (dimensions: L – 33.5m, W – 17.8 m). Compared to the dimensions of the structure, thickness of its walls is relatively insignificant, which is why it is presumed that it was roofed with wooden constructions.

The most interesting architectural detail of the basilica



Schematic plan of the churches

is the apse which is horseshoe-shaped inside and pentagonal outside. It is dressed in well-hewn, carefully arranged stone blocks, while the rest of the walls of the church are built with mixed masonry typical of the early Byzantine epoch, i. e. with the rubble of various sizes arranged horizontally on lime mortar and mixed with layers of brick to attain straightness.

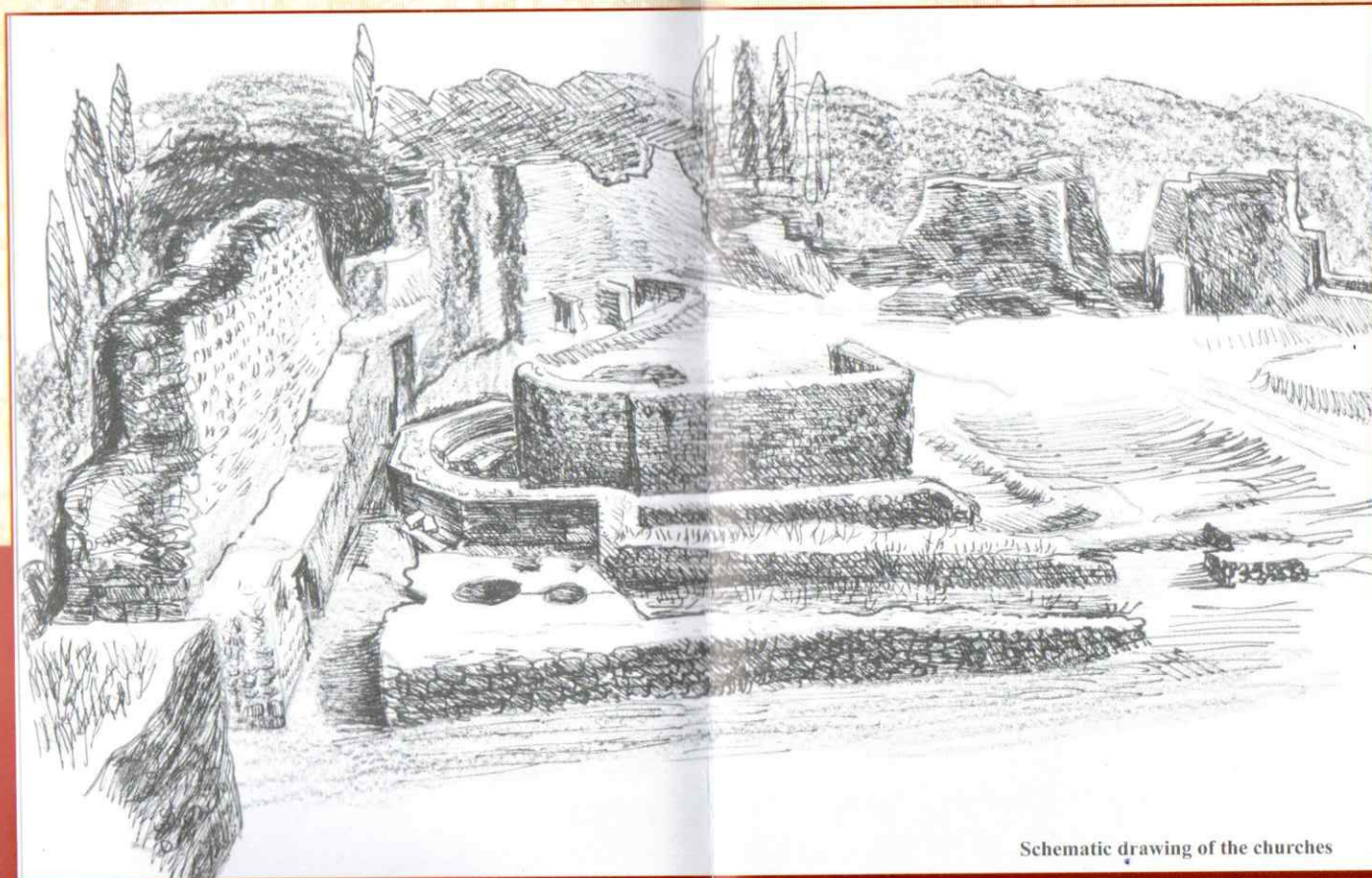
Walls of an earlier structure have been evidenced inside the central nave of the three-nave basilica, as well as outside the south and north naves. They are still under investigation.

The three-nave basilica dates to the sixth century AD and must be connected to construction activities of Emper-

or Justinian in Lazika. In addition, written sources (ancient ecclesiastical records of the patriarchate of Constantinople of the seventh -ninth centuries) document that Petra was one of the episcopal centers of Lazika Eparchy. Given the dimensions of the structure, Tsikhisdziri basilica was a rather monumental construction perfectly satisfying all the demands of an episcopal church.

HALL-TYPE CHURCH

After the destruction of the three-nave basilica, a hall-type church with a projecting semi-circular apse (L – 9.0 m, W – 9.75m) was built in its central nave. The north wall



Schematic drawing of the churches