

**SHIRAK Marz**  
**Շիրակ մարզ**

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There are 3 parts to the Shirak/Gyumri Guide, each is a separate PDF:

1. Shirak Region (Separate PDF)
2. Gyumri (This File)
3. Gyumri Walking Tours (Separate PDF)

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*Note about pronunciation: we transcribe words using local dialect, and substitute “i” for “y” as in Gyumri for Gyumri. “p.” stands for poghots (street), ‘pts.’ For poghotsner (streets), ‘pta.’ for poghota (avenue).*

*Note: GPS coordinates are in decimal degrees (DD) Latitude x Longitude. Elevation (elev.) is in meters. Population counts (pop.) are estimates for 7 km radius from place and due to ongoing migrations the numbers are not exact.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Shirak is a land of contrasts. In northwest Armenia, it is as much semi-desert as it is mountain meadow or high alpine. In the south, the high steppes crash into mountain terrain, verdant green in the spring, hues of reddish brown in the summer. Everywhere is the snow capped Aragats and dots of green in the landscape, spring fed villages and farms giving sustenance to the wayward traveler. In the north lies Armenia’s Alpine Region, a mountain meadow covered with wildflowers from April through July, with rolling hills punctuated by rugged peaks and the Georgian frontier. In the East are the foot hills of Aragats and Mt. Urasar leading to Lori’s forest land.

The region is anchored by the Akhurian river valley, an agricultural oasis that provided sustenance to millennia of civilizations, starting from Paleolithic settlements found in the Gyumri region through each epoch of Armenia’s growth. Dairy products are among the most prized of Shirak’s exports, and the season—though short due to Shirak’s high altitude, produce some of Armenia’s best fruits and vegetables (though that legendary Shirak tomato, like the elusive big one that got away, grows more succulent and delicious with each telling, and I have yet to see nary a one.)

The ancient history of Shirak is like that of its cousin the Ararat Valley, steeped in legend to some, but found by archeologists to have been inhabited 250,000 years ago, with settlements popping up along the Akhurian Valley beginning around 9000 BCE. Agriculturally based, the region has few of the metallurgical centers found South, but still had sophisticated settlements during the Bronze and Iron Ages.

The medieval history of the region is intertwined with the fates of two ruling families, the Kamsarakans and the Bagratunis. Up to the 4<sup>th</sup>

**Highlights**

- *Stay in Gyumri and savor its Belle Époque center, brisk mountain air and its joie de vivre lifestyle (on page 6)*
- *Take a walking tour of Old Gyumri (Alexandropol), the largest collection of 19<sup>th</sup> c. historic houses in Armenia (on page 6)*
- *Visit Marmashen, the monastery of the Pahlavuni princes, with its nearby ancient burial ground and 7<sup>th</sup> c BCE Urartu King Argishti stone inscription. (on page 6)*
- *Visit the mountain monasteries at Artik (on page 10) and Pempashen (on page 12), featuring Lmbatavank, Markaravank and the incredible Harichavank.*
- *Climb the western face of Aragats to Mantash Lake, with its pristine arctic waters, camping and fishing. While there visit the nearby Mets Mantash Vank and settlement, hallmarks of the Medieval period on Mt. Aragats. (on page 12)*
- *Explore the archeological sites of the Arshakuni and Kamsarakan family seats at Beniamin (on page 9), the 3<sup>rd</sup> m. BCE excavation at Horom (on page 9), the Hellenistic finds at Shirakavan, (on page 14),*
- *Make your way to the border by Kharkov, and gaze on Ani, the amazing Medieval city of 1000 churches and pride of the Bagratuni kings (on page 15)*
- *Visit the 4<sup>th</sup> c basilica at Yereruik, one of he earliest samples of its kind (on page 19)*
- *Visit “Armenia’s Siberia” and the high alpine villages around Arpi Lich, one of the migratory trails for Eurasia’s Birds (on page 21)*
- *Visit Minas Avetisian’s home museum at Jajur, with its unique collection of expressionistic art (on page 23)*
- *Pay your respects to Sisak, Misak and Apeinak at the 4000 BCE grave site in Tsoghamarg (on page 24)*

century the area was controlled by the Kamsarakans, with their royal palace believed to be found at Beniamin. They were practically wiped out when they led a rebellion against the Arshakuni kings. Later the area had become the property and patronage of the Bagratuni family, the founders of the Second Kingdom (9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries), anchored in the fabled city of Ani, just over the Turkish border near Kharkov in southeastern Shirak. Many Churches and monasteries from this period dot the landscape, following the spice trail to Ani and beyond.

The capital of the region is Gyumri, which is also Armenia’s second city and location of the largest collection of intact historic buildings in the Caucasus, over 1000 buildings from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, hallmarks of the “Armenian Belle Époque”.

**DO:**

Explore Gyumri’s Old Center with one of our walking tours. Visit the 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> cc Marmashen Monastery nested in the Akhurian Valley. Explore the monasteries and Bronze Age fortresses around Artik: Sarnaghplur, Markaravank, Lernakert & Harich. Find a guide to take you to the border and gaze on the fabled city of Ani. Explore Armenia’s Alpine country at Arpi Lich, visiting one of the idyllic villages on the flower-laden slopes around the lake. Eat at one of Gyumri’s great restaurants; drink in the Poloz Mukuch tavern in Gyumri. Go up to Georgia, cross over into Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe.

**WHEN?**

Shirak is the coldest region of Armenia. Average altitude at 2100 meters in the Alpine area. Summers are wonderful; the air is clean, days are warm, the nights are cool. Early autumn will remind one of those in New England, forests in upper Shirak change colors and warm afternoons fade into crisp cool nights. Winters are harsh and cold, wonderful for the cross-country skier or the winter hiker, but otherwise a time when the region turns in on itself, cozying up to a warm fire and long nights of imbibing and visits from friends and family. Spring is slow to come, erupting in April with wild flowers that blanket the hillsides and continue their march up the mountains until the mid August, when the snows begin to fall.

## HOW LONG? ▲

For the casual traveler, Shirak is an easy overnight trip from Yerevan, letting you visit the Monasteries & Bronze Age monuments at Artik and Maralik on the way up, a walking tour of the old center and perhaps Marmashen and return to Yerevan via the Akhurian reservoir, Jrapı and Anipemza the next day. Add more days to fully explore the Old city and savor its culture (1-2 days), Ani (1 day pre-arranged), the Alpine region (1 day), the North to Georgia (1 day) and the area around Giumri (1 day). We explore some day trips from Giumri below, which can be arranged to suit your travel route.

**Hitting the Highlights** Giumri, Marmrashen, (1-2 days). North: Lernantsk Pass, Tsoghamarg, Ghazanchi, Dzorashen, Border, Arpi Lich (1 day). West Shirak Akhurian River, Gusanagiugh, Jrapı Haikadzor, Kharkov (Ani), Yereuik (1 day). South Shirak: Maralik, Atik, Sarnaghbiur, Harich, Lake Mantash (1 day)



## NATURE ▲

Shirak lies in stark contrast to the rest of the country, with its southern area lying in predominantly semi-desert to desert mountain steppe terrain, while the northern area rises over alpine meadows called Armenia's "Siberia". From Amassia and Ashotsk, it suddenly erupts into mountain forests at the Georgian border. The Region is bordered by Mt. Aragats on the southeast, the Bazruma and Javakh Mountain ranges on the east, and Turkey to the west. The Akhurian River begins in Shirak Region, runs just west of Giumri before forming the border between Turkey and Armenia at Akhurik.

Half of the region lies on the Kars and Shirak Plateaus, a complex mountain steppe region that includes swamp and marshland, large tracts of semi-desert, mountain steppe and mountain/alpine meadows with pockets of forests nestled inside mountain clefts. The Southern area

relies mainly on irrigation and springs to cultivate agriculture.

The rock formations and scrub land vegetation that makeup the bulk of southern Shirak are unique Eco-systems, filled with desert wildlife, and the bulk of migrating steppe birds in the Spring and fall.

### Flowers

**Northern Shirak flora** include *Iris lineolata*, *I. Caucasia*, *Merendera mirzoeval*, *Colchicum Szoritsii*, *Gagea ssp.*, *Puschkinia scilloides*, *Draba ssp.*, *Lallemautia canesees*, *Ranunculus ssp.*, *Myosotis alpestris*, *Pedicularis ssp.*, *Trifolium ssp.*, *Gladiolus kotschyanus*, *Silene ssp.*

**Lower Elevation sagebrush steppe flora** includes *Gladiolus atroviolaceus*, *Nigella oxypetala*, *Actynolema macrolema*, *Gundelia tournefort*, *Verbascum saccatum*, *Lallemanita iberica*, *Roemeria retracta*, *Scabiosa argentea*, *Scorronera paposa*, *Muscari beglecta*, *Stchys inflata*, *Astragalus distyophysus*, *A. kochianus*, *Achillea tenuifolia*, *Helichrysum rubicundum*, *Silena spergulfolia*.

**River Gorge flora** include *Alkanna orientalis*, *Cerasus incana*, *Prus, salicifolia*, *Cerasus mahaleb*, *Amygdalus ferzlinia*, *Spirala crenata*, *Saxifraga cymbalaria*.

**Desert and semi-desert flora** include (non Latin names) sagebrush, steppe grass, straw flowers, poppies and daisies.

For complete information and list of species see [TourArmenia Flora pages](http://www.tacentral.com/nature/flora.asp)

**Birds** Shirak's variety of topography supports a wide variety of bird species, roughly divided between the mountain steppes and high semi-desert plains of the west and southwest to the rugged mountains and woodlands of the SE and far north. River valleys, alpine country and mountain meadow round out the areas where good birding can be had. Arpi Lich is one of two spots where the Dalmatian Pelican and the Greater Flamingo has been sighted, a rare event.

Shirak's mountain plateaus and sweeping alpine country are habitats for the *Greater Spotted Eagle*, *Steppe Eagle*, *Northern Harrier*, *Buntings*, *Eurasian Eagle-Owl*, *White Tailed Eagle*, *Cranes*, *Storks*, *Crakes*, *Flacons*, *Pheasants*, *Bustards*, *European Bee-eater*, *Rollers*, *Larks*, *Wigtails*,

*Warblers*, *Buntings*, *Eurasian Eagle-Owl*, *Alpine Swift*, *swallows*, *Dunnock*, *Black Redstart*, *White-winged Redstart*, *Golden Eagle*, *Imperial Eagle*, *Booted Eagle*, *Lammergeier*, *Eurasian Black Vulture*, *Eurasian Griffon*.

Woodland birds include the *Sparrow hawk*, *Northern Goshawk*, *Black Francolin*, *Eurasian Woodcock*, *European Turtle-Dove*, *Common Cuckoo*, *Eurasian Scops-Owl*, *Tawny Owl*, *Wood Lark*, *Red-throated Pipit*, *warblers*, *Thrush*, *Tits*, *Buntings*, *Finch*, *Starlings*, *Eurasian Jay*, *Rook*, *Long-eared Owl*, *Eurasian Wryneck*, *Flycatchers*, *Warblers*, *Eurasian Tree-Creeper*, *Finches*, *Boreal Owl*, etc.

Mountain meadows to Alpine include *Caucasian Grouse*, *Grey Partridge*, *Common Quail*, *Eurasian Skylark*, *Tree Pipit*, *Meadow Pipit*, *Water Pipit*, *Whinchat*, *Radde's Accentor*, *Ring Ouzel*, *Mountain Chiffchaff*, *Corn Bunting*, *Ortolan Bunting*, *Black-headed Bunting*, *Crimson-winged Finch*, *White-Winged Snowfinch*, etc.

For a complete list of all birds by species and habitat see [TourArmenia Birding pages](http://www.tacentral.com/nature/birding.asp)

### Thermal and Mineral Springs

Shirak is blessed with several large natural springs, including several mineral springs. All are cold water springs, with natural carbonated sulfur springs lying near Ashotsk, Amassia and Akhurian; carbonated sodium springs near Shirak and Aghin; naturally carbonated springs by Ashotsk, and Sodium Chloride springs close to Shirakavan.

For a complete list of thermal and Mineral springs see [TourArmenia Springs pages](http://www.tacentral.com/nature/natural_story.asp?story_no=4)

**Other Fauna** The largest prairie dog population in Armenia is in Shirak, located west of Maralik. Nutria, moles, jackals and wildcats are frequently seen in the region as well.

## HISTORY ▲

The Shirak region has a long history, its evolution roughly parallel to that of the Ararat Valley in the

south. Officially "founded" 2,500 years ago, when Assyrians referred to the city by its first known name Akhurian, their history is actually much older; early settlements are over 5000 years old.

### PREHISTORIC AGE ▲

Archeologists have found evidence of human activity in the Southern Caucasus as early as 1.7 million BCE with widespread settlement area going back to around 5000-250,000 BCE. Geological and paleontology evidence show that the Armenian Highlands have been densely inhabited from the time the Tigris and Euphrates rivers began flowing into the Persian Gulf, during the interglacial eras.



Likewise, inhabitants on the upper plateaus and mountains of modern-day Armenia are traced to the same time, as the volcanic domes of Aragats, Ararat began to cool, contributing to a moist environment. The rich lava soil and warmth from the cooling domes combined to create a lush environment we can only guess at now, with forests of coniferous and deciduous trees covering 70% of the land, supporting a wide variety of fauna, perhaps the most interesting example being a Tragonterian (*Mammuthus trogontherii*) elephant found in Giumri during excavations.

Other finds include remnants of a prehistoric bull, rhinoceros, horse, camel, deer and other animals found near Giumri in higher altitudes. They belong to Pleistocene era. The teeming forests and tall grasslands supported a huge variety of species. Add to this the rich mineral resources left from the volcanic eruptions of Aragats, Ararat and surrounding mountain ranges, and the conditions were ripe for human growth and development at a very early age, with several strata of occupations uncovered leading the agricultural revolution of the Copper and Bronze Age.

Much of the region's early development was due to crop production, made possible during the agricultural revolution of the late stone age. Around 15,000 years ago the first strands of domesticated wheat were propagated, along with rice, grapes and fruit trees. Later domesticated animal husbandry further allowed the creation of

settlements and religious development. In Shirak, human settlement was on a wide scale, Giumri being one of the primary spots for settlements. The inhabitants had created a complex level of being, combining obsidian and stone tools with figures and symbols related to an afterlife. The rise of fire worship may have begun at this time, perhaps related to the still smoldering volcanic peaks nearby.

By 5,000 BCE, Shirak, parallel to the Ararat Valley in the south, developed larger settlements, based on agriculture, trade and, by the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium, bronze.

## COPPER AND BRONZE AGES ▲

When you stand in Armenia, you are standing in the birthplace of metal. The ores required to produce copper, bronze and iron were abundant here, fuel to operate kilns and the water to grow the abundant crops and animal resources necessary to support large settlements. The inhabitants were among the first known to forge copper and bronze; and are the first recorded to successfully smelt iron. The first recorded astronomers, they were the earliest to create a calendar that divided the year into 12 segments of time, among the first to devise the compass, and to envision the shape of the world as round.



Early Bronze Age settlements based on the production of metal include Mt. Arteni, plus numerous settlements along the Akhurian river valley, including Giumri, Keti and Karnut. Bronze jewelry and plates, metal earrings and knives, tools and weapons, stone processing centers, pottery, ornamental clay plates and glass from each of the Bronze and Iron Age periods were found in the area of Meat-Packing and Chicken

Factories, "Kazachi Post" and Kumaiyri berd among other sites.

By the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE, Shirak's inhabitants were noted in Gilgamesh, the Sumerian epic, as part of a people's living in "the mountains of the gods", and by the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium ancestral Armenians in Shirak were a part of the Nairi Federation noted by Assyrians in cuneiform and part the second wave of Indo-European migration from Western Asia into Europe and East Asia. The kings of area of present day Shirak were called the kings of Etwikh (Etwini).

Prehistoric excavations in Shirak region include sites in Giumri (Kumaiyri), the catacomb tombs from the 14th-9th c. BCE near Artik.

Others are at Shirakavan, Yereruik, Hoghmik, Horom, Yenyol, Mets Sepasar, Pokr Sepasar, Karnut, Mets Keti, Pokr Keti, Darband (Karmrakar), Hatsik, Beniamin 1, Beniamin 2, Tirashen, Marmashen, Vahramaberd, Haikavan and Harich.

## URARTIAN, GREEK & ROMAN ERAS ▲

Fast forward to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE and the Nairi, a loose federation of tribes in a land noted in early Assyrian chronicles extending through contemporary Shirak, later conquered in the 8th c BCE by Kingdom of Urartu, becoming an outpost of the Urartian Empire. To some it was the first mention of the city of Giumri, then called Kumaiyri.

Urartu was a remarkably developed culture that had extensive contacts with the major empires of the Ancient world stretching between the Mediterranean and India, and rivaled them for trade, military and cultural hegemony. During the Urartian period the region was called Yeriakhi, or Yeriaini, also Kuliaini. Another cuneiform lies near Spandarian.

Urartian settlements in Shirak include Kumaiyri and Durubaini, and Irdaniuni. The fall of Urartu is in part traced to invading Cimmerians (also called Skythians) from the north, which entered through Shirak en route to Anatolia. The name Kumaiyri may be linked with the same invaders.

The Greek historian and military leader Xenophon (ca. 430-355) mentions the region in his book, "The Anabasis" as did the Greek historian Herodotus writing of Kumaiyri and the area in his 4th c. History. Greek-era ruins include the Hellenistic settlement in Hoghmik. The region became part of the Armenian Satrapy on the collapse of the Achaemenid dynasty with the invasion of Alexander the Great, though it remained highly autonomous during the Seleucid period. Some think Shirak was mentioned in the Anabasis, the epic journey by Xenophon and the "ten thousand" who marched through Armenia en route to the Black Sea in 401 BCE.

Not much is mentioned in historical chronicles of the city during the Roman and Parthian periods, the city acting as a regional administrative center, while resources were poured into the capitals Artashat and Vagharshapat (Echmiadzin) to the south. Another site is in the northeastern section of the city, on a hill in the area known as Vardbagh, where excavations have revealed a Roman-era cemetery lying over a Bronze Age settlement.

Other Roman/Parthian sites are Yereruik, Beniamin 1, Harich, Shirakavan, Yerezgavors, Hoghmik & Darband.

## EARLY CHRISTIAN ERA – MIDDLE AGES ▲

Grigor Lusavorich is recorded to have established churches in area on the ruins of pagan temples he had torn down and the area grew along with the country during the early Christian period, its most famous son of the age being the mathematician and astronomer Anania Shirakatsi (615).

Shirakatsi's 'Cosmography', 'On the signs of the Zodiac', 'On the clouds and atmospheric signs', 'On the movement of the Sun', 'On the meteorological phenomena', 'On the Milky Way',

etc., are preserved at the Matenadaran in Yerevan. In his work, Shirakatsi mentions the principles of chronology of the Egyptians, Jews, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans and Ethiopians, he speaks of the planetary motion and periodicity of lunar and solar eclipses.

900 years before Galileo, Shirakatsi accepted the roundness of the Earth, and expresses the opinion that the Sun illuminates both spheres of the Earth at different times and when it is night on one half, it is day on the other. He considers the Milky Way 'a mass of densely distributed and faintly luminous stars'. Shirakatsi agrees with those scientists, who believed that 'the moon has no natural light and reflects the light of the Sun'. He explains the solar eclipse as the result of the Moon's position between the Sun and the Earth. Shirakatsi gives interesting explanation to the rain, snow, hail, thunder, wind, earthquake and other natural phenomena.

The Arab Invasion ended the first era for cultural flowering to the Christina Kingdom, followed by intermittent periods of brilliance shadowed by invasions by Arab, Seljuk, Mongol and Persian armies.

In 851, the Arabs adopted more conciliatory policies towards Armenians, leading to the appointment of Ashot Bagratuni (the Carnivorous) in 861, as Prince over Armenia, beginning a long period of eminence for his family (The Bagratuni or Bagratid Dynasty). Early students of the PR machine, the Bagratunis claimed to be the descendants of David and Bathsheba and to be cousins to the Virgin Mary.

They enlarged their lands to include Shirak and Arsharunik, but Kumaiyri remained a backwater town as focus went into developing other cities; Tbilisi in the North and above all the new Bagratuni capital, Ani, just to the south. Like Kumaiyri, Ani was An Urartian stronghold, but, during the Bagratuni dynasty, it became the most sophisticated city in the Near East, growing to a population of almost 100,000, larger than any city in Europe. Religious life flourished and Ani became known as the "city of one thousand and one churches".

Armenian culture developed to a new level of artistry in church and monastery construction and the veneration of the Madonna increased in church iconography. Throughout the entire country churches and monasteries were built to ever-greater heights and grandeur, Shirak's



monasteries at Marmashen, Artik, Harich and Pemzashen prime examples. Khachkar art was also renewed, with more elaborate and realistic depictions of the crucifixion above the central cross, and with masterpieces created throughout the country, including the field of Khachkars at Ghazanchi.

Giumri's later obsession with the city may have begun during this period. Giumri was later to emulate the great capital to the south, continually comparing itself to Ani and trying to recreate the lost architecture of the great Bagratuni city downriver.

The glory was short-lived. Ani was taken over by Byzantium in 1044 to act as a buffer zone, then in 1064, under Sultan Alp Arslan, the Turks swarmed over Ani after a 25-day siege and massacred everyone in sight. The city began a slow decline for which it never recovered. In 1071 the Kingdom of Armenia ended, and, after a short deflowering during the Trebizond Empire, finally succumbed in 1239 when Tatars of Genghis Khan conquered and destroyed the city. Kumaiyri suffered the same fate.

Beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Armenia suffered through more invasions, resulting in the division of the kingdom between Ottoman Turks and the Persians in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. Base survival was the only achievement that could be noted for the following 200 years, for Shirak and Kumaiyri.



## RUSSIAN EMPIRE

The most remarkable period of development was during the 19<sup>th</sup> c. when Shirak became a part of the Russia Empire, and Kumaiyri its regional center. The area was absorbed into the Empire in 1804, during the first Russo-Persian war.

The Russian period initiated a period of tremendous growth and development for the area, propelled by the new regional capital. A heretofore-feudal society was pushed into the industrial revolution, creating an extraordinarily

rich and educated class of citizens, a new Golden Age.

At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century Alexandropol was equal in importance to Tbilisi and Baku, and a key to the defense of the western frontier and to Russia's plans to enlarge its empire into Anatolia. Repeatedly foiled by the European Great Powers who feared Russian control over the Middle East, Russia won war after war against the Turks, only to have its land gains taken back under pressure of Britain and France (who wanted to keep Turkey under their control). These wars began from Alexandropol and Shirak, who benefited from the influx of defense monies as well as the possession of historic Armenian lands.

As WWI began, the Russians quickly took the initiative and, spreading out from Shirak, took most of historic Shirak in Western Armenia from the retreating Turkish army before bogging down in battle. The Turks took advantage of the situation to begin one of the worst periods of its history, the Armenian Genocide, ending in the mass murder of half of the total Armenian population.

## GENOCIDE AND THE FIRST REPUBLIC

The region was host to thousands of refugees who escaped Turkish and Kurdish armed forces by crossing into Russian Armenia, aided by Russian troops who drove back the Turks and Kurds to allow refugees to pass through to safety in the region. Locals still retell the harrowing escapes and tragedies of their grandparents and parents during the genocide, and how the Russians saved them.

The Russian army drove deeper into historic Armenia until it faced its own implosion with the collapse of the Eastern Front and the Russian Revolution. After the fall of the Tsar, Russian troops left Armenia in 1918, leaving the country vulnerable to Turkish attack. Vowing to demolish the Armenian people, The Young Turks began an invasion of Armenia to the north, and Giumri, its' only defensive spot, helplessly surrendered on May 15, 1918. Shirak rallied after the Armenian rout of the Turks at Sardarapat on May 28 of the same year, defeating the Turkish troops and helping to establishing the first Armenian Republic.

The republic was short-lived, besieged by continued Turkish aggression and the Red Army. Valiant attempts at survival included those of Giumri native D'rastamat Kanaian ("D'ro") who

repelled Red invasions in the North and counter-attacked, entering Georgia, and moving as far as the edge of Tbilisi. A truce was declared on New Year's Eve, 1919, and the Armenian Army withdrew.

The following year the Red Army succeeded in entering Armenia at the same time Armenian Communists forced an end to the republic in 1920. Alexander Miasnikian declared Armenia part of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic on November 29, 1920 with its capital Yerevan. Alexandropol was renamed Leninakan following the death of Lenin in 1924.

## THE SOVIET PERIOD

If the regions growth in the 19<sup>th</sup> c was impressive, that of the Soviet period was extraordinary, both the population and heavy industrialization increased 8-fold within the next forty years.

Textile and Industrial complexes were developed in Leninakan, Maralik, Artik, and in several villages, which were forced into collective farms, escaping the mass starvation of the Ukraine and Russia in the 1920's.

The region faced the same sacrifices as all of Armenia during the Second World War. With a population of 2 million, Armenia contributed 650,000 soldiers, 315,000 of which died during the 6-year conflict. Some say 30% of the male population died in the region.

An industrial boom began after the war, creating jobs for 50,000 people in Leninakan alone. Huge textile and heavy industry factories were built, as were the wretched "Khrushchev" buildings that populate the region. The boom was followed by a decades long period of stagnation and corruption, creating a cynicism that still plagues the country. Corruption allowed substandard construction of the massive housing projects in the region to escape zoning regulations, contributing to the huge death toll in the 1988 earthquake.

## EARTHQUAKE AND SECOND REPUBLIC

On December 7 of that year Armenia was rocked by severe earthquakes (the epicenter was near Spitak) that killed more than 25,000 of people in a 100 kilometer band across the North of the Republic, including Leninakan. It is estimated that up to 15,000 people died in the first tremor, as poorly constructed concrete buildings collapsed on families, factories and schools. The final death toll came in at over 24,000.



This begins the saddest period of Shirak's history, as refusal to admit the depth of the problem by both Western donors and Soviet Union first blocked, then hampered aid, as poor planning and continued corruption continued with the rebuilding of the city.

At first refusing to admit to the outside world that anything had happened, the Soviet

government then refused Western offers of help, saying that the city was a Military secret that had to be guarded at all costs. Constant bungling by the Soviet authorities to help survivors and bring in aid led to bitter criticism of the central government. The Soviets finally made an appeal for aid, and for the first time in decades the Soviet borders were opened to caravans of medicine, construction material and aid workers from the West. This act is arguably the first breach in the Soviet Walls and the beginning of its end.

Diaspora Armenians, who began much of the initial response and seemed the most helpful, became the least reliable providers of assistance over time, continually waiting for the local government and international aid agencies to bear the burden of rebuilding the new city.

## SHIRAK NOW

The recovery from the Earthquake has been in fits and starts, the city of Giumri only replacing its vast tracts of domiks (temporary metal storage containers that were meant to house victims of the earthquake for a few months) in 2004, when the Norwegian Refugee Center shamed the Armenian government and Western Armenians into rebuilding the city by taking matters into its own hands to build housing.

The city still has vast tracts of damaged buildings and hulking reminders of the tragedy, but 90% of

the dislocated population has been relocated into new housing, the remainder either refusing to move from their metal homes (addicted, some say, to perpetual handouts by international aid agencies) or falling through the bureaucratic cracks.

In the region it is much different, as dispossessed, many of whom who never received any form of housing support struggle along as best they can. Following the earthquake was a second tremor, the collapse of the economy, when the ruble was devalued in one night, eliminating the entire population's savings and forcing 80% into poverty.

Constant reminders abound of this hated period, both by damaged or destroyed buildings throughout the region, and by the extreme poverty of the villagers. Shirak is Armenia's poorest region, and most able bodied persons have left the marz, in search of better life elsewhere. They work in Russia, Yerevan or in the West, and send remittances home to the relatives they left behind. Some estimate Shirak receives \$1 billion in remittances annually.

With this money the local economy has begun to revive, and –corrupt local officials aside—the region is beginning to attract investment and growth, though it is mostly restricted to Giumri and its near environs. Still, somehow, with a determination and grit the “Shiraketsis” are famous for, there are glimmers of hope in the people, and a return of their famous sarcastic humor and quick wit, as more and more rebuild their lives and contribute the economic revival of the region.

The area, blessed by stunning landscapes and extraordinary historic sites, is also blessed by some the warmest, friendliest people you may meet in Armenia, and some of its funniest.

NOTE: For additional information, see the Shirak Regional Museum Web Site: [www.shirakmuseum.am/](http://www.shirakmuseum.am/) The museum is closed, the director is a bit ‘interesting’, but the information and pictures are interesting.

## IN AND OUT ▲

**By Air** For Air Service information, see Giumri section.

**By Road** There are seven main routes into and out of Shirak, all spiraling out of Giumri, which

happen to coincide with the day trips we have devised for exploring the region. **The northern route** travels 73 km to the Georgian border and the Armenian enclaves of Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe (A306 / M1), passing Ashotsk and the Northeastern turn off on the way. **The Northeastern route** travels 74 km from Giumri to Tashir (A304 / H31), then N another 15 km to the Georgian border at Gogavan, or S 18 km to Stepanavan (A328 / M3). **The western route** travels about 12 km to the Turkish border at Akhurik (M7) and the rail gate to Kars, Turkey and Europe. The border was closed by Turkey in 1991, if it ever opens, it will be Giumri's best chance for rapid economic expansion. **The Eastern route** travels 42 km to Spitak then another 20 km to Vanadzor, in Lori Marz (A330 / M7). **The Southwestern route** travels 40 km to Kharkov and the border at Ani, then another 69 km to Echmiadzin and another 20 to Yerevan (A326 / H17). The most likely route you will take from Yerevan is the M1 Southeastern Route through Shirak Marz, 126 km from Yerevan to Giumri (104 from Ashtarak), skirting Mt. Aragats and entering Shirak Marz just after Mastara, passing Artik, Maralik, and Horom along the way.

Public Transport includes intercity buses and minivans (Mashrutni Taxis) that travel from village to village and village to town. Cars with drivers can be rented in Yerevan and Giumri, call and street taxis can be found in Giumri, most willing to drive into the region. Figure 100 AMD per kilometer plus something extra for stops (negotiate). If you stop for food, treat the driver as well. Bazmankiun (6/3 Khaghaghutian Oghak, tel. 2-22-19, 3-72-01) can arrange transport and guide, as can the folks at **Shirak Tours**, (25 Haghtanaki p. tel: 2-31-48, 3-75-59)

**By Rail** See Giumri chapter, *In and Out*.

## OVERNIGHT/EAT ▲

Giumri has several good hotels and lodgings, plus a growing number of B&Bs. Outside of Giumri, lodging is not standardized, but you will never be left out in the cold in any village, nor in most towns. The overnight will be in a family home, the amenities may be sparse, but the hospitality will be warm and inviting. You will have to insist to pay in many cases, villagers especially taking offense at the idea of selling their hospitality. 5000 AMD for bed and breakfast is reasonable. Eating out in the region is limited to roadside stands, a few cafes in Artik and Maralik and

family homes. Bottled water is generally not available outside of larger towns.

## DESTINATIONS ▲

Shirak has many destinations worth visiting, so many you will find it hard to choose, especially if you are on affixed timetable.

**Picturesque villages and locales** include Sarnaghpiur, the villages around Arpi Lich, Dzorashen, Karnut, Musaiyelian and Jrarat

**Natural areas** include Arpi Lich and the surrounding Alpine region, the mountains roads east of Ashotsk, the area around Dzorashen and the western face of Aragats (Mantash Reservoir).

**Prehistoric / Urartian excavations** in Shirak Region include those at Shirakavan, Yerazgavors, Yereruik, Hoghmik, Horom, Yenyol, Mets Sepasar, Pokr Sepasar, Karnut, Mets Ket, Pokr Ket, Darband (Karmrakar), Hatsik, Benjamin 1, Benjamin 2, Tirashen, Marmashen, Vahramaberd, Haikavan and Harich. *In Giumri*, prehistoric excavations include the South Tower (Black Fortress), Cherkezi Dzor, grounds of poultry farm, Vardbagh & Turbaza.

**Roman / Parthian excavations** include Yereruik, Benjamin 1, Harich, Shirakavan, Yerazgavors, Hoghmik, Darband and Vardbagh.

**Medieval monasteries, churches, Khachkars & ruins** will be found at Marmashen, Maralik, Pempashen, Artik, Harich, Kharkov (Ani), Ani Pemza and Ghazanchi.



## NATURE TOURING ▲

**Natural areas** include the entire eastern edge area of the marz, lined by a ridge of mountains from Mt. Ketchut down to the face of Aragats itself. This is high alpine, mountain steppe and meadow and rugged cliff country. The north west is alpine meadowland, the southwest semi-desert, marshland and rough terrain. All around the monasteries of Harich, Lmbatavank and Horomos are wild river gorges, mountain steppe and rocky terrain.

**Hiking and Mountain trekking** is spectacular throughout the marz, along the Akhurian river as it etches its way through the mountain plateau of the northwest, or up the mountain slopes of the SE and E of the region are particularly pretty and challenging, especially the mountains. Some of the most deserted area is on the lower slopes of Mt. Aragats (Lanjasar, Zohasar) and Mantash. The far NE (Mts. Achkasar, Parakh, Ashotskar and Sevasar) and around Arpi Lich are wild areas, in NE you may never meet a soul save the occasional shepherd and your own heartbeat. Follow the Akhurian river from Giumri NW and you follow trails used over millennium, from the Bronze Age and Urartian fortresses and outpost to Marmashen and monastic paths trod on a thousands of times when this was “super highway” for the region. Around Artik are a number of interesting hikes, visiting monasteries, villages and mountain canyons at every turn.

For most hikes or climbs, an experienced mountain guide is required, for safe travel and to navigate the local populations. They also know which areas are off-limits (some sections are restricted military areas, and not marked) as well as the secret cubby holes and gorges with rare delights.

**Caving** For avid spelunkers, the most spectacular images in Armenia are underground, and with more than 10,000 caves throughout the country, Armenia aims to please to subterranean explorer. Caves are located in every region of the country, but the more interesting line river gorges.

Caving in Shirak will be found near Marmashen, Kakavasar, Harich, Mets Mantash, Bavra and in caves along the Akhurian, Karnut and Chlkan rivers. For more information see [TourArmeniaCaving page](http://TourArmeniaCaving.page) ([www.tacentral.com/nature/natural\\_story.asp?story\\_no=3](http://www.tacentral.com/nature/natural_story.asp?story_no=3))

**Flower Watching** Meadow flowers begin their spectacular display in May, blooming up the mountains as the weather gradually warms until they begin to retreat with the first snows of August. June and July have the mildest weather in the region, plus some of the most spectacular flower shows, esp. in upper elevations and around Arpi Lich. Best places to look are on the everywhere in April and May, then Arpi Lich, Jerrat, Mantash, Sarnaghpiur, and roads leading east to Lori and north to Georgia.

**Birding** Spring (April-May) and Autumn (September-October) are the best times to observe migrating birds, while summer is ideal for mountain steppe, meadow and slope species that call the region home. Akhurian reservoir has marshland with water loving birds. There are some woodland species in the far north, near Georgia. Best places are the most difficult to reach: mountain crags and high plateaus, recesses of river canyons and feeder streams, as deep in the forest as your jeep (or legs) will carry you. The mountains east of Giumri, the Akhurian reservoir, towards Mantash and SE of Artik and woodlands north of Bavra along the Georgian frontier are good areas to watch.

#### Nature-Adventure Tour Operators ▲

*Ashot Levonian* (tel. 010 57 03 28, mob. 091 49 58 34), e-mail: [levash77@mail.ru](mailto:levash77@mail.ru) is an expert hiking/climbing/camping guide, his team arranges hiking, mountain climbing, caving, geology tours, churches and fortresses. They will arrange hotels in Yerevan, airport pickup, transport, sight-seeing, etc. Group support includes guide, translator, cooker, rescue doctor and driver. Standard tour is a two-week hiking trip averaging 5-10 km walking a day: Yerevan - Mt. Aragats - Alaverdi - Ijevan - Dilijan - Sevan - Martuni - Yeghegnadzor - Kapan - Meghri - Jermuk - Yerevan.

*The Armenian Mountain rescue teams "Spitak"* (tel: 010 35 00 06), 50 Halabian p., Yerevan, email: [spitak@yerphi.am](mailto:spitak@yerphi.am), [moon.yerphi.am/~spitak/adventure.htm](mailto:moon.yerphi.am/~spitak/adventure.htm), stationed in both Yerevan and Stepanavan, can organize hiking, rock climbing and mountain expeditions. Guides are experienced rescuers-rock climbers, and they can also arrange horse riding along picturesque routes, by a horse cave and "Ancient Armenian horse games."

One of the most experience mountain climbers in Armenia is *Andrey Chesnokov*, (tel. 010 57 67 57), 10 Vardanants St., Apt. #49, Yerevan, Armenia 375010, email: [ruzan@aua.am](mailto:ruzan@aua.am), who has climbed most of the mountains in Armenia and is a recommend, reliable guide.

*Armenia Green Cross* Ecological NGO ("AGCE"), 14-10 Batumi, Vanadzor (tel. 0 322 24066, fax. 58449, mob. 093 32 32 84) is a local NGO that provides eco-tours as part of its mission to preserve and enlarge ecologically vital areas of the country. Eco-tours are expert-led hiking, climbing and camping tours, including hiking and climbing equipment, tents, sleeping-bags, emergency and first aid facilities and the services of their professional rescue group (EU certification).

*Avarayr Adventure Tours*, (tel. 010 56 36 81, 52 40 42, Fax: 010 56 36 81), 1 Pavstos Biusand p., Yerevan, E-mail: [avarayr@arminco.com](mailto:avarayr@arminco.com), URL: [www.avarayr.am/](http://www.avarayr.am/) has been arranging cultural and adventure tours to Armenia for more than 12 years, one of the first to provide fully equipped hiking, climbing and adventure tours. Tours include expert guides, cooks and support staff for all tours. Tours run the gamut from hiking and climbing in the wilderness to cultural visits for the more comfort-minded. Their best seem to be tours that combine both aspects. A good, solid company.

*The Eco-Tour Center* (tel. 010 27 87 28 / 27 40 12), 2 H Hakobian St. apt. 22, 375033 Yerevan, Armenia, email: [zhanna@netsys.am](mailto:zhanna@netsys.am), [www.ecotourismarmenia.com](http://www.ecotourismarmenia.com), arranges nature tours, climbs and camping, as well as birding., flower watching and other nature tours. Contact Zhanna.

*Hike & Go*, (tel. France (+33 6) 88 34 04 11, local cell: 091 20 41 38), email: [info@hikeandgo.com](mailto:info@hikeandgo.com) an adventure travel group operating out of Armenia and France (English spoken) is an interesting group that features tours of Armenia combining traditional touring with hiking into Armenia's wilderness and off-the-beaten-path monuments, some of which can only be reached by hiking. [See web site \(www.hikeandgo.com/\)](http://www.hikeandgo.com/)

*AdvenTour Travel* (tel. 010 53 96 09, cell.: 091 42 67 45), Email: [adventour@netsys.am](mailto:adventour@netsys.am), URL: [www.armeniaexplorer.com](http://www.armeniaexplorer.com), 39 Pushkin p., Yerevan, Armenia, 375002, arranges adventure, birding, botanical and historic tours.

*Oxalis Tours*, (tel. UK (+44 20) 78 70 80 37, USA (+1 201) 984 1420; Fax: (+44 20) 76 81 31 31) 68 Landseer Road, London N19 4JP UK, URL: [www.oxalis-adventures.com/armenia/index.php](http://www.oxalis-adventures.com/armenia/index.php) provides trekking, climbing and botanical tours to Armenia, specializing in combining off-the-beaten paths with primary sites. They hire expert guides from in and out of the country and provide full tour services. Worth looking into, well organized.

#### Flower Tours

Professor Nora Gabriellian is Armenia's preeminent expert on flowers in Armenia, personally discovering several new species of endemic flowers, the latest in 2006. She is the author of the upcoming Field Guide to Armenian Flowers, the culmination of 50+ years work in the field. This seventy-something still out-hikes the fittest members of her tours and combines expert data with humor, enthusiasm and great good will. She is not easy to book (she continues to do her research and is not for the casual tourist), but if you can arrange for her to take you on a 1 to 8 day flower tour, you will never see Armenia the same way again. She doesn't have a travel agency but contact her through Rafi at (tel: 010 53-24-55) who can check her schedule and make arrangements.

#### Archeological Tours ▲

*MassTour* (tel./fax. 010 27 78 32), 8 Komitas, Yerevan, e-mail: [info@masstours.com](mailto:info@masstours.com), URL: [www.masstours.com](http://www.masstours.com), specialize in archeological tours and participation in archeological digs supervised by working archeologists include the Urartian fortress Erebuni (Arin Berd) forerunner of present day Yerevan, the Bronze Age temple-city of Agarak, Bronze -Iron Age tomb field of Aghavnatun, Paleolithic caves in the Kasakh River Canyon near the village of Apnagiugh, guided visits to the petroglyphs in the Geghama mountain range. They also run basic tour packages with expert guides. Excavation packages begin from \$750/week for full service land-expeditions.

#### GIUMRI (Gyumri)

See Giumri PDF for details.

NEAR GIUMRI ▲

NOTE: Shirak is relatively easy to navigate, making several points on our Day Trips within easy reach from Giumri. Marmashen is the closest (and is also included in Day Trip 3), but others that can be reached within 30 minutes from Giumri are [Benjamin](#) (on page 10), [Maiyissian](#) (on page 27), [Lernantsk Pass](#) (on page 27) and in just 30 minutes, the incredible Matur for four 4000-1000 BCE sarcophagi in the small chapel at [Tsoghamarg](#) (on page 28).

✚ MARMASHEN (Vahramaberd) Մարմաշեն /Վահրամաբերդ/

NOTE: [Also part of Day Trip 3](#) (on page 24)

The Monastery of Marmashen is 9 km northwest of Giumri, ironically not in the village of the same name. Instead, take Amassia highway (full of pot holes--be brave) north of town for 5 km, then *past* the village of Marmashen to the end of the next village Vahramaberd and turn left at a black metal sign with the image of a church on it. The road winds down the cliff-side into the Akhurian valley, the complex soon appears on a switch back by a new fish pond.

**History:** The history of Marmashen is paralleled to that of the Bagratunis (*a.k.a.* Bagratunis), rulers of scattered areas of the old kingdom and a junior branch of the family, the Pahlavunis, progenitors to 100 years of Armenian Katoghikos and rivals to the Bagratunis for control of the far flung kingdom. Add to this the constant pressure of Arab plots and Armenian Nakhharar in-fighting and you would have a great pot-boiler, only the struggles were real and the stakes were life and death.

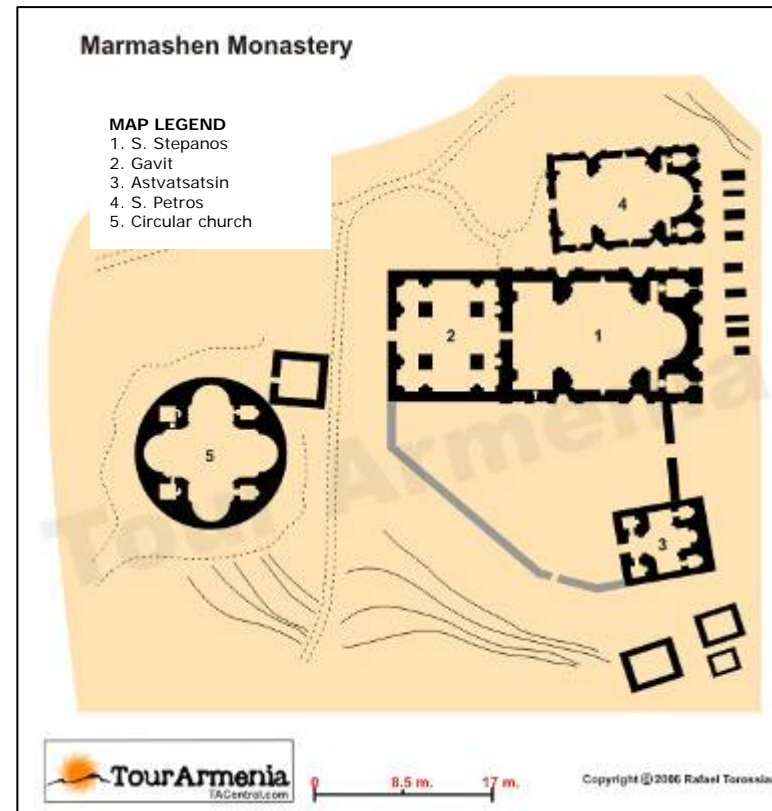
The Bagratunis took advantage of the power vacuum in the 9th-12th centuries, and created the second kingdom of Armenia, based in Ani. The period of Marmashen's sudden expansion from an early Christian chapel built on earlier pagan shrines is traced to the reign of Gagik I, who succeeded his brother Smbat II on the throne of Armenia proper. Under the rule of this king, the Bagratuni (Bagratid) dynasty of Ani attained the zenith of its power. The construction of the great Ani cathedral was completed, and the country was generously provided with new churches, chapels, monasteries and schools, Marmashen, on the fertile plain of the Akhurian

Valley, being one of the most favored, nurtured by the Pahlavunis, especially the Ishkhan (prince) Vahan (967-1045), Sparapet (Commander-in-chief) of the Armenian army and source of Bagratuni power. In 1041, he defeated the Byzantine troops at Ani, four years before it fell to them and then shortly thereafter, to the Seljuks. His military talent and heroic deeds were sung in Armenian literature and popular songs. Part of a new rebirth, a "Silver Age" in Armenia, monasteries and churches proliferated throughout the country, one of the more beautiful being Marmashen.

Commerce attained a volume hitherto unknown. Nakhitchevan, Ardzen, Baghesh (Bitlis) and many other cities became important centers in which products of Persia, Arabia, India and even of China were exchanged for the merchandise of the West. Profiting by the era of tranquility, Gagik centered his attention on commerce. Armenia became an intermediary between the Orient and Mediterranean countries, and was rewarded with an amazing increase of wealth.

Specifically the buildings you see now at Marmashen were part of a fortress area erected by Vahram Pahlavuni from 988-1029. Standing in the complex, one can imagine the pastoral beauty and enormous wealth that poured into this monastery, a center of learning, manuscript production, prayer and contemplation.

When the Bagratunis lost their power, the monastery fell to the same fate as others in Shirak. Ani fell to successive invasions and the monastery was pillaged by Seljuks (who ruined the complex) and was restored in 1225 by the grandsons of Vahram Pahlavuni, Grigor archbishop and his brother Gharib.



Additional invasions by Seljuks, Kurdish warlords, Mongols, Timor the Lame and finally the Ottomans reduced the monastery to a parish church with earthquakes, ever-shifting powers and neglect damaging the outer buildings and walls. Its status was partially restored only when the Persians took eastern Armenia for their own, and as Soviet Armenia began the current restoration efforts. Much is in disrepair, but what is left is still awe inspiring, a magnificent reminder the glory of its time preserved for all to see.

**The Complex:** The monastery has four churches, two rebuilt and two in ruins. One is circular, a miniature of the open cross form (circular) most famous at Zvartnots. The complex was originally part of a fortress, the massive stones used for the fortress walls long since taken away and used for other purposes. The Vank was oriented to the West, where both

church entrances are. This is normal for all religious monuments going back to Pagan times, but the altars were shifted to the East, to the rising sun. The complex is also orientated towards the Akhurian River, which lies to the west. Inside the compound you will find a number of fruit trees, beautiful in springtime, dripping with white flowers. An effort to replant trees all around the monastery has begun, but villagers see no practical use to the native Armenian trees that once made a forest here, spending their attention on the grove of fruit trees, which gives them income.

Such be the status of ecology in Vahramaberd.

**S. Stepanos Church**

The main (Katoghike) church, S. Stepanos is covered with inscriptions on both the north and south walls. On the south wall the inscriptions include a note that the church was built between 988 and 1029 for the Sparapet Vahram Pahlavuni.

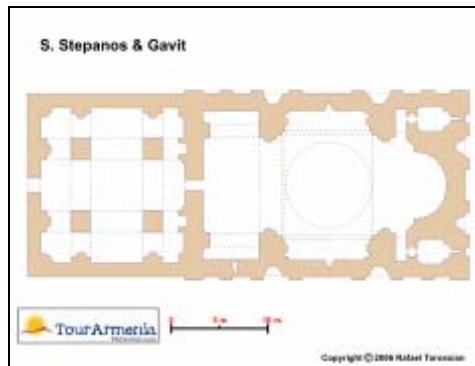
The stone work for the church is made from red tufa, some of the stones looking like they may have come from earlier, cyclopean walls. The dome is centrally positioned over the hall, making the rather large church seem compact and powerful. Walls have double niches, possibly intended for statues, though the iconoclastic era was in full swing.

The church is a classic example of religious architecture of the time: other than a few early exceptions, the dome or cupola was elevated above the other vaulted ceilings by a cylindrical drum (usually polygonal on the outside). The prevalence of the dome forced architects to think in terms of centrally planned buildings, which this is an example. The domed hall has two pairs of arches beginning from wall piers composed into bunches of columns. In comparison with similar churches of 7th c. the eastern cross-wing is shortened, bringing the altar and its two adjacent chambers (used as depositories for treasure and manuscripts) closer to the central space under the dome. The eastern apse, like that at Ani cathedral, is decorated with wall niches. As a result the dome plays a central position in the exterior composition. This was a major transition for Armenian church construction.

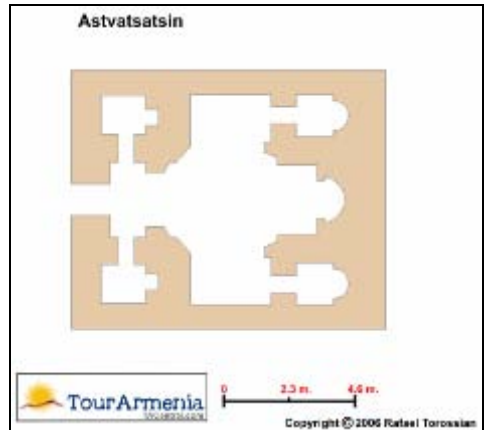
The exterior façade is decorated by two semi-columns with high rising row of arches on them. The central arch, wider than the others, includes a window with a wide outline and decorative framing. The facades are built with triangular niches creating a deep chiaroscuro effect (that's "the use of light and dark to create the illusion of depth" to all you non-art majors). The 12-sided drum, crowned by a slope roof, is decorated with bunches of semi-columns like the inside wall piers, connected by small frontons (face sculptures).



Partially damaged during the 1988 earthquake, the church has been saved and preserved by the efforts of a Professor Pant who led a team of engineers to shore of the walls by tightening the four points of the church with massive metal plates with intersecting rods. The plates can be seen at the upper corners of the outside walls.



The roofs were composite in their appearance; they had to cover the vaults and domes of a complex, though symmetric, group of inner spaces. Like the inner and outer walls and the drum, they too were made of tufa thinly cut into uniform shingles. The Katoghike is one of the best examples of the Bagratuni Armenia period.

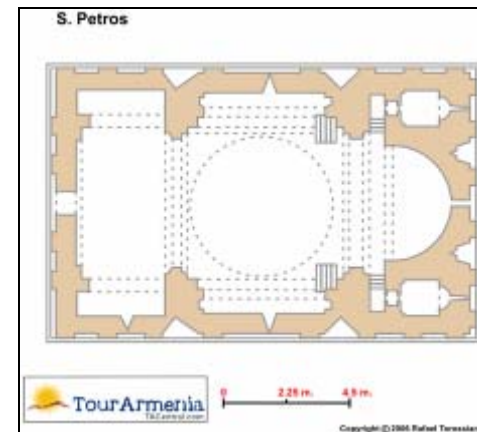


The 13<sup>th</sup> century **gavit**, in front of the main doors, now ruined, was used as a manuscript workshop, seminary and community center, its floors paved with graves of the famous and pious. It was almost square with four support columns and interlocking archways set into wall piers to support the roofing and the central dome. Its composition was typical for the time. What remains are the lower walls and some charred remains from a fire that destroyed the building. The gavit was also used as a memorial for

Vahram Pahlavuni, whose tombstone is in the northern end, a 19th c recreation (near the entranceway to the ruined chapel).

The smaller church to the south of the main structure is the 11th c. **Astvatsatsin Church**, an equally beautiful building made from polished red tufa. The church is of the central dome gall type, with a rectangular exterior and a cruciform interior with chambers in the four corners. The chambers were used as depositories for treasure and manuscripts.

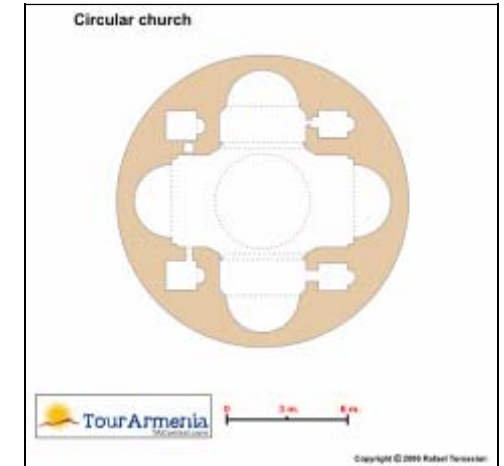
A more beautiful **S. Petros**, lies in ruins butting up to the north of the main church. Probably built at the same time as the Katoghike, all that remain are the north and east walls, showing it to have been a smaller copy of Katoghike with the same composition (central domed hall) and architectural details and decoration. The intricate details on the walls and columns show a great respect for craftsmanship and design.



In 1954-1956 archeologists uncovered remnants of a fourth, nearly **circular church**. It has a circular exterior with four apses and four small depositories inside (similar to the 11th c. St. Sarkis in Khtskonk). It is also similar to the much larger, magnificent circular church at Zvartnots. The circular design became popular in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, this structure maybe dating to the same period but more likely to the 11th-13th cc. What remains of the church are the foundation and two rows of walls.

Throughout the area you can also detect foundations of a **pagan temple** and other

buildings, a **medieval cemetery** to the east and south, and a ruined chapel on the northern hill, the small **Karmrashen or Verin (upper) Vank**.



**NEAR MARMASHEN**

Across the river (**10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> cc bridge**) is an abandoned **medieval village** and **Bronze Age graves**.



**Argishti Cuneiform** If you exit into the village of Marmashen and go to the back (NW end) of the village, there is a rutted road between some cattle sheds and the upper river valley. Follow that and look for some black rock outcroppings on the right, about 35 meters NW of the power lines. Climb down into the rocks, among them is a Cuneiform inscription by the Urartu King Argishti I (ca. 786-784 BCE) laying claim to the



Akhurian valley and the north of Armenia. The inscription reads:

*"By the Glory of Khaldi, the god Argishti says:  
I invaded the land of the Yeriakhi tribe,  
invaded Irdaniuni city up to Ishkikulu land".*

1. Hal-di-ni-ni al-su-u-shi-i-ni
2. Ar-gi-ish-ti-she a-li-e
3. ha-u-bi E-ri-a-hi KUR-ni
4. na-u-bi Ir-da-ni-u-ni
5. pa-ri Is-qi-gu-lu-u

It further refers to the people of Kuliaini, the city's first name. During the Urartian period the region was called Yeriakhi, or Yeriaini, also Kuliaini (believed corrupted over time to "Kumaiyri").

Nearby, a little more down the hill towards the river, is a **large ancient cemetery**, within sight of Marmashen Vank, but still a good 1 or 2 km away. The graves run chock-a-block up the hills, graves date back to pre-Christian period, but most of what you see are 10-11<sup>th</sup> c. Nearby are the ruins of a **Medieval church**, stones from ruined capitals have pentagonal or star engravings, another a checkerboard made by a dyslexic artist or a parallelogram pointing to the horizon.

On a nearby hill is a **fort** from the Bronze to Urartu epochs. The fort was built using huge boulders weighting 1-2 tons each, somehow carried up to this windswept spot, and on top there are a number of impressions in the stone base. These are eerily identical to those found at the astronomical observatory at Metsamor near Echmiadzin, perhaps proof that the inhabitants were also early astronomers.



**Tirashen:** Head back to Marmashen Village and go to the opposite end of the village, to another first road that runs along the river cliffs, towards Giumri. Stick to the edge of the cliff and in about 1 kilometer the dirt road butts up against the cliff and another steep road switchbacks down to the river valley, where a **reservoir with a wild marsh and an islet lay**.

The lake is idyllic, a perfect spot for a picnic. Just below the cliff you can see the remains of **Tirashen medieval village - Տիրաշեն միջնադարյան գյուղ** built to support the a ruined 11<sup>th</sup> c church and surrounding buildings. The Village would have been well hidden from one side of the river gorge, it's a hefty hike down to the ruins. To the North of the compound you will find dozens of wonderfully carved **11<sup>th</sup> c khachkars** in the huge boulders that cover the hills. The khachkars run the gamut from tiny little markings on knee-high stones to huge elaborate crosses carved into gigantic boulders. Some have fallen, earthquakes having taken their toll. Wander through the boulders to spot the various types and designs. Most are believed to date from the 10<sup>th</sup>- 12<sup>th</sup> cc, when the church and village were in their heyday.

Another **Urartian / Bronze Age cyclopean city** Just above the medieval Village and about 500 meters S, just by some dumping grounds for earthquake rubble.

➔ *END OF NEAR GIUMRI TRIP*



**EXPLORING THE REGION ▲**

These trips can be done in a single day by car, depending on how many sites you visit and how long you take at each site. All originate from Giumri, though you can change the order as you wish. **UPPER CASE** destinations are worth a longer visit while (*SIDE TRIPS*) are worth a stop if you have the time, but may have to be skipped if you want to finish in a single day.

- overnight
- camping possible
- food and drink
- thermal, mineral springs

**TRIP 1: ARTIK ▲**

**GIUMRI – (Azatan) – BENIAMIN – HOROM – (Vardakar) – (Nor Giank) – ARTIK – HARICH – (Mets Mantash) – (Lake Mantash) – (Arevshat) – (Spandarian) – PEMZASHEN – MARKARAVANK – (Lernakert) – (Maralik) – SARNAGHIUR – (Dzorakap “Turtle Stone”) – (Lanjik)**

The first day trip is a bit of bender, figure a very long day to see it all or break it into two very easy days or pick as you go.

**Stay:** Overnight in Giumri or Artik/village home (dicey).

**Eat:** Artik, Maralik cafes.

☞ Take the Yerevan Road south of Giumri. Just south of town, about 6 km, on the right side of the highway is the village of **AZATAN** (DD 40.6502778 x 43.975)

*SIDE TRIP: (Azatan - Ազատակ (till 1945 Gharakilisa, elev. 1483m, pop. 42296) is reached taking the right fork and has a striking WWII monument shaped like a fortress tower with crosses on top, two 19th century churches, a Catholic (1890) and an Armenian Apostolic (1860). The village is better known as the site of an 1826 battle between Tsarist Russian and Persian armies, a deciding factor in the wresting of Eastern Armenia from Persia and the dawning of the Armenian Enlightenment (the “Armenian Belle Époque”). Hence the name “Azatan” (or Free Land). Just outside of the village, 1 km SW of the highway are a group of megaliths. On the ‘Ghez’ hill nearby are 6th c. BCE to 1st c. CE ruins of a settlement, Azatan’s progenitors.*

*Overnight in home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.*

☞ Just down the Yerevan Highway (2-3 km) lies the **BENIAMIN**. Go to the bus stop and take the dirt road opposite (right or W) and follow it about 100 meters up a low hill to the excavation (DD 40.6833333 x 43.85)

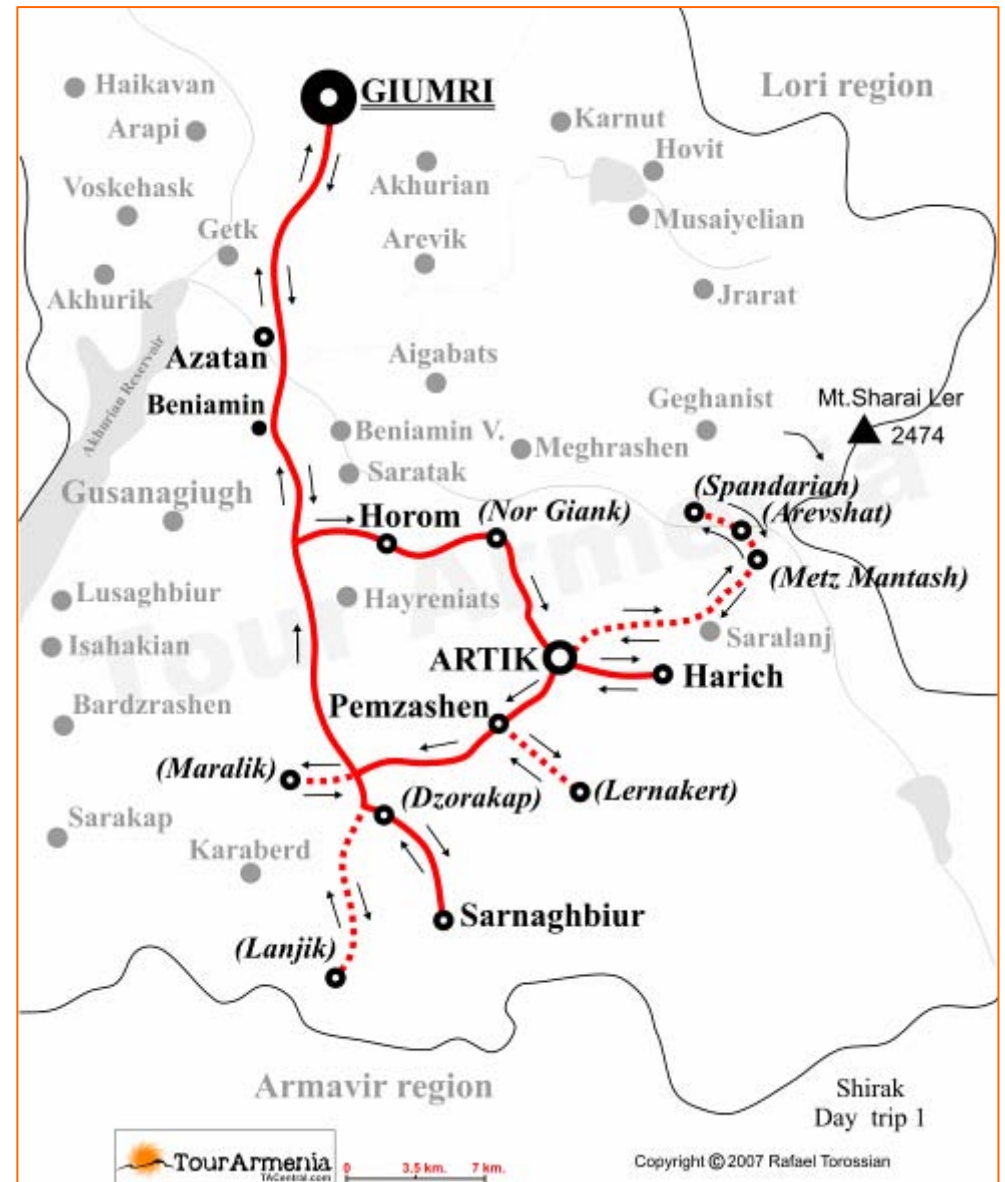
**BENIAMIN - ԲԵՆՅԱՄԻՆ ▲** (till 1945 Zhlovkhan, elev. 1584m, pop. 2080) The village was renamed in honor of a home-boy in WWII, General-Major Beniamin Galstian, but is not interesting in itself (there rare a few kiosk on the road).

Excavations in the hills to the east hold a treasure trove of archeological finds, revealing an 80-hectare settlement (8<sup>th</sup> c. BCE to 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE) stretching to the west from where you stand. Uncovered were evidences of a 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE palace with 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE layers underneath. The site was discovered in 1988, after the earthquake, when workers dug up the area to begin work on replacement housing for those destroyed in Giumri. In laying the water pipe that can be seen running through the site they uncovered the walls and numerous artifacts.

As you walk SW from the highway turnoff you will stumble upon a series of low foundations among the grass, part of which form a huge palace building, located by looking for column bases in the main room. This is a 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c BCE palace area, one of the seats of power or the late Persian and early Arshakuni dynasties. The surrounding rooms include the base for a large tower to the S and other service areas. The entire complex was under one roof, making it as large as many palaces in Greece at the same time.

Further NW of this palace, about 100m up the nearest hill are the remains of a smaller palace, dated to the 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c BCE, in the middle of the Persian Satrapy period. The rooms are smaller but no less impressive for their design and detail. Again, column bases form the period show were the main room was located. Another of these columns is outside the offices of the Shirak Regional Museum in Giumri.

Excavators believe Beniamin was also the seat of the once-powerful Kamsarakan nakharar family, overlords of Shirak and Lori regions and rivals to



the Arshakuni Dynasty in the early CE period. The Kamsarakans led an insurrection against Arshak II in the mid-4<sup>th</sup> c. and, when they lost, were practically wiped out, only to rebound in the

10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> cc, Vahram Pahlavuni being their most famous medieval progeny.



Khachatrian) artifacts from the 3<sup>rd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> millennium (undecorated ceramics, tools made of basalt, tufa, and obsidian).

On the hill slopes and higher you can see the traces of houses consisting of one-two parts built from big and middle size tufa stones, and having rectangular or oval-shaped foundations.

A team of Armenian and American archaeologists led by Ruben Badalian and Philip Kohl began excavations recently and have found well-preserved walls and artifacts (sadly not on display), though you will find innumerable potsherds and obsidian.

**Food** across the highway from the dig, **khorovatz joint**; **Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

➔ Go back to the highway and continue south about 3 km to the next large highway interchange. Turn Let (E), and follow the road 3 about 3 km to **HOROM** (DD 40.6541667 x 43.8822222) 📍 🏠 🌳

📍 **HOROM - ՀՈՐՈՄ** ▲ (elev. 1612m, pop. 4256). The village is located on the site of what was once a large city, some of whose 6 meter wide streets have been preserved and are still in use. Inscriptions can be seen on stones in and around the village. Inside the village is the S. Hripsime church (1861), cemeteries, and sepulchres can be seen. and east of town is the Horom reservoir.

But the prize is found south between Horom and Vardakar, opposite the dam, where two large hills stand wreathed with massive Bronze Age / Urartian citadel walls, the Horom Berd. The cyclopean tufa walls, fragments of which still exit enclose 4 sq. m. of territory, one of the largest Bronze- Iron Age settlements in Armenia. In the SW of the fortress lies the citadel, protected by a second set of cyclopean stone walls, and next to it a huge building built in plated, well-polished stones around which lie stone-box sepulchres.

In 1908 B. Khalantians uncovered the 9<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c BCE sepulchres, and found buried inside iron tools, javelin tips, daggers and necklaces and bronze bracelets. Later excavations in 1930 (B. Piotrovski, A. Ajjan and L. Giuzalian) uncovered artifacts from the 13<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> c BCE, and in 1967 T.



**Food** in village, **khorovatz stand**, **kiosks**; **Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

➔ Either continue South to Artik or go to the opposite side of reservoir for side trips to **(Vardakar**, (DD 40.6666667 x 43.9166667) and **(Nor Giank**, DD 40.6502778 x 43.975)

*SIDE TRIP: NE of Horom, on the opposite bank of the reservoir is **(Vardakar - Վարդաքար** -*

*till 1946 Domardash, elev. 1612m, pop. 1031), with Bronze Age and medieval ruins and khachkar shrine nearby. Opposite Vardakar is **(Nor Giank - Նոր Կյաւնք)** (till 1940 Mezhitli, elev. 5761, pop. 34615), with ruined 6-7<sup>th</sup> c. Grigor Lousavoritch church.*

➔ Continue south past Nor Giank to **ARTIK** (about 7 km, DD 40.6172222 x 43.9758333) 📍 🏠 🌳

📍 **ARTIK - ԱՐԹԻԿ** ▲ (previously "Ardik," elev. 1919m, pop. 13752) includes not only the town, but also the nearby sites at Lmbatavank, Harich and Tufashen. The town also has a fairly new **hotel**, a **restaurant**, **cafes**, **mterk** shops and **kiosks**.

The "Artik Culture" is a collection of excavations from the 3<sup>rd</sup> m BCE that are considered of exceptional importance for research of the ancient settlements of Aragats highland, and its links with the centres of civilizations in the Old East. Artifacts show links with ancient Egypt, Babylon, China and Sumeria.

Artik town is located in a canyon northeast of Aragats mountain, 20km SE of Giumri. There is a rail station on the Giumri-Maralik road. The area is rich in volcanic stone (tufa, pumice, basalt, slag), making it the largest and producer of high quality tufa and pumice stone in the USSR., particularly for its pink tufa stone. The quarry has resumed work, feeding the dreams of industrialists in Yerevan, but the current town is a sad little industrial wasteland on its edges, punctuated by 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> cc homes and old religious relics. Artik is also rich with folk architecture masterpieces such as water mills with water pipes made of huge tufa pieces, and dome-shaped roof houses (unfortunately ruined).

Overlook the industrial squalor and you will find one of Armenia's richer archeological destinations, starting in town with the latest incarnations, the 4-7<sup>th</sup> c churches and cemeteries.

Proceed into town, to the town square, which has a WW II monument. Go up Tonakian St. till you see two old churches on the left, Marineh or Astvatsatsin (5<sup>th</sup> c.) and S. Gevorg (7<sup>th</sup> c.).

The larger, **St. Gevorg** (St. Lusavorich by Alishan) was built without pillars with semicircular cruciform wings and a collapsed dome. The church has ornaments and architectural patterns like those found at Zvartnots and Mastara, placing

the date in the 7<sup>th</sup> c. though the archeologist Toros Toramanian (who first excavated Zvartnots) dated the church to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The church is constructed of native rose-color tuff stone. A blind arcade with floral and geometric motifs carved on the arches decorates the exterior.

The church is a cross winged with a central dome (now gone). The still shows the cornices of the facades and is the absolute largest of its type. Its vestry (14.0 X 14.0m) has an area of about 200 sq. m. The eastern apse has a width of 6.45m, while the others have 5.25-5.70m. The eastern and western apses are 1.75m in length. The church achieved a perfect form with its unsupported vestry, influencing the design of domes thereafter (as in Mastara).



The smaller church, St. Astvatsatsin or St. Marine (St. Harutiun after Eprikian) is 800 meters to the east of the central square. No historical data is available, but is supposed to have been commissioned by Kamsarakan rivals of the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. The Kamsarakans were a noble family vying for control of the area with the Mamikonians and later, the Bagratunis. The church is peculiar for combining the triple nave basilica form of the 5<sup>th</sup> c with the cross form central dome structures of later periods. The church is cruciform both in the interior and exterior, with cross-wings of various deepness, the eastern apsidal cross-wing shorter than the western, much deeper hall of the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. The southern and northern cross-wings are much the same. There are three sacristies on the western side. The cross of the Artik church and the doming of the square space are entirely different from churches using four pylons, emphasized in the long walls of single-nave halls (Zovuni, Ptghni, Aruch). It is also different from the four separate standing pylons of three-nave

basilicas (Tetsor, Odzun, Mren). The remains of murals are on the northeast of the dome.

Using characteristics of 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c churches, this 5<sup>th</sup> c church is important as one of the prototypes of single-apse, three-apse and four-apse cruciform central-domed churches that were widely spread in the 6-7th centuries. As it is, it is a superb example of the early "single-ship" hall church, patterned on the pagan temple it replaced.

## PRACTICALS

Area Code: 244  
 Long Distance: 0244 + local number  
 From abroad: +(374) 244 + local number  
 Mobile Phones: 091 Armentel, 093 Viva Cell  
 International callers: Armentel +(374) 91 + number, Viva Cell +(374) 93 + local number

## IN AND OUT AND AROUND

### Minivan

Minivans run regularly between Artik and Giumri (1300 AMD) several times a day. They also run twice a day between Artik and Yerevan (1300 AMD).

### Taxis

Taxis between Artik and Giumri are 3000 AMD, between Artik and Yerevan 12,000 AMD. They travel anywhere in town for 500 AMD, outside at 100 AMD per km. Call taxis can be reached at 11-11, 40-40, 11-00.

## COMMUNICATION

Fire – 101  
 Police – 102  
 Ambulance service – 103  
 Gas emergency service – 104  
 Trunk Line – 107  
 Telephone directory information – 109  
 Paging service – 189

### Phone, telegraphs

The Post Office is located on the main square. Phone cards, long distance calls (USA, Russia 150 AMD per minute) can be made here.

## MONEY, MEDICAL, ETC

### Banks

Money exchange can be done at some Mterks and at the local *Arshininvest* and the *ARCA* bank, both in the center.

### Clinic, Hospital

For a medical emergency, dial 103. There is a polyclinic and hospital, but if you can wait, you will find better equipped in Giumri.

## OVERNIGHT

### Hotel

Artik has a newish *Tur Hotel* in the Tuf District (on a back street between the town center and Lmbatavank). The bosetun is fairly clean, new and if you overlook the business going on, a respite in the middle of nowhere. 5000-10,000 AMD.

### Other

Locals are more than willing to put visitors up overnight, but pick your digs carefully. Just ask around town. Most venues are pretty rustic and may have no real facilities. 3000-5000 AMD for bed and breakfast is very fair.

## FOOD AND DRINK

The *hotel* also has a restaurant frequented by local bosses. Armenian menu, 2000-3000 AMD for multi-course meal.

A *Srjaran* is near the square, kebab and khorovatz at 500-1500 AMD per shish.

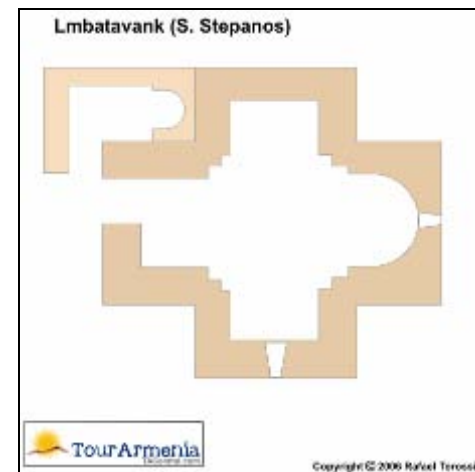
*Mterks* and *Kiosks* around the town.

☞ Take the SW road from Artik (ask for directions) to **LMBATAVANK**

✚ Just SW of Artik, on a hillside overlooking Artik lies the well-preserved **LMBATAVANK** – **ԼՄԲԱՏԱՎԱՆԿ** (also known as St. Stepanos of Lmpat - 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> cc) an architectural masterpiece with the S. Stepanos church (6<sup>th</sup> c.) and important wall paintings.

**S. Stepanos** is a small cross-shaped building with vaulted roofs, an octahedral drum topped by a dome. The northern and southern wings lie under the dome, a unique feature of this building, as was the hall that surrounded the west wing. The horseshoe shaped apse is placed in the eastern end. No inscriptions from the original

construction have been found, but it is figured to be 6<sup>th</sup> c form its architectural design: cruciform, arched gallery and octahedral dome. An inscription states the dome was reconstructed in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Unique to this church was the covering of the north and east wings with domes instead of arches (the transition to the domes are done with two rows of tromps), the absence of an original apse window (the apse window is so important to the orientation of the altar to the east, S. Stepanos is on of the only Armenian churches to not have a window, confirming to some its earlier use as a pagan temple, as the Christian church reversed the pagan altar western orientation. The existing opening was constructed later as in Artik's S. Mariam), the horse-shoe shape sacristy and arches. The latter were part of experimentation in the development of a unique Armenian Church architecture that was to become hallmarks of the style to the present.



There are a number of fresco remains, rare to find nowadays. Those in the apse on the right and left sides are thought to be contemporary with the construction of the church. One depicting Christ enthroned was in the center, while heavenly symbols surrounded him in the background of tongues of fire. There are two horsemen pictured on both sides, facing center, each holding a staff (one of which is S. Gevorg). There are numerous khachkars in the area.

*Camping in area*

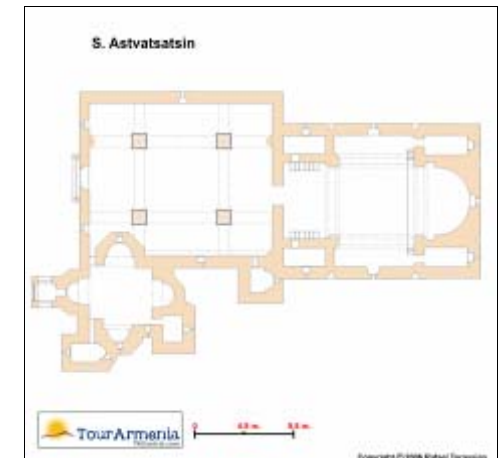
☞ Go back to the town square and take the East Road, towards **HARICH** (DD 40.5980556 x 44.075) 📍 🏠 🌊

✚ **HARICH** – ՀԱՐԻԺ (before "Ghepchagh," elev. 2487m, pop. 5594) Archaeological excavations begun in 1966 indicate that the nearby village of Harich was in existence during the 2nd century BCE and was one of the more well-known fortress towns in Armenia.

One kilometer SE is an 18<sup>th</sup> c. *cave church* in a gorge, as well as sepulchres carved in the cliff stone.

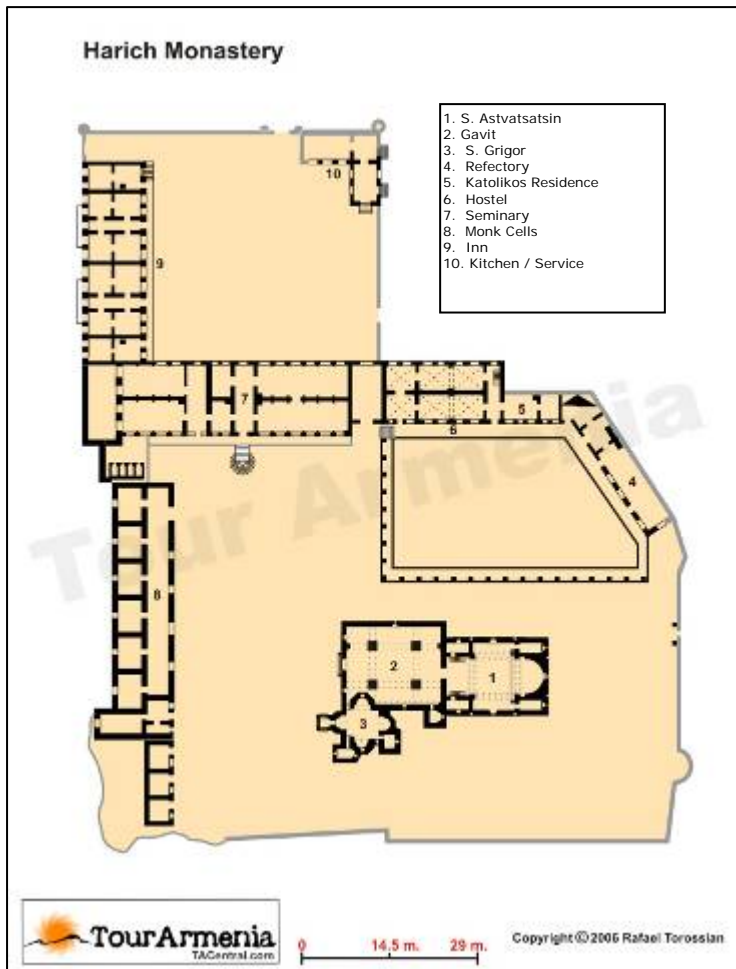
There are also ruins of a 5<sup>th</sup> c. basilica in the graveyard with buildings on both sides of the dining hall. Tombstones from here are now kept in State Museum of History (Yerevan).

☞ Backtrack to center, then take the Harich Road (ask) for about 3 km and turn right on a road that corners the prison. You will see Harich and the vank well before this road, over to the right. Take the prison road about 1 km to reach **HARICHAVANK**.



✚ **HARICHAVANK** The village has an impressive **WWII monument** to the right on the outskirts, made from red tufa with wings of khachkar-looking stones flanking the main tower. Continue into the village to see the monastery, which towers over everything else.

**Harichavank** is one of the grandest monasteries in Armenia, steeped in the history of the area and



largest cultural center of medieval Armenia. At the end of the 12th and in the beginning of the 13th centuries two magnificent chapels were built from huge rocks, the churches of S. Grigor Lusavorich and S. Astvatsatsin, with the two gavits and several chapels constructed at various times.

The first is **S. Grigor Lusavorich**, a 7th century building with a crossed dome. The apse wings of the cross are semicircular from the inside and pentahedral from outside (as in Mastara and Artik). The center is covered by original pendentives on 12 columns, which emphasize the expressiveness of the inside. Later in the 10th century one-story buildings were added in the eastern corner of the church and in the 13th century a certain Sarkis Dzon initiated the construction of two-story buildings in the south-western part.

The 4 columned bell tower with the belfry in front of its western entrance and circular roof appeared in the 19th century, when the area of the church was expanded. The church was built over a rock-cut tomb and may have originally been a martirion. The ruined basilica of S. Harutiun, located in a nearby cemetery, is dated to the 5th century.

Two inscriptions on the main church of **S. Astvatsatsin** state that it was erected in 1201 CE by the Amirspasala Prince Zakareh Zakarian, and indeed on the E façade of the church is a bas-relief of the brothers Zakareh and Ivaneh. The church is of a type popular at the time:

domed cruciform type surrounded by two-story spaces on each of the 4 corners. In the northwest and southwest corners the second floor chapels are reached by steep stone stairs and look out onto the main hall through arched openings, giving the whole interior a palace-like appearance. The lateral sides of western end, bordering with the inside of the church with stairs, are the only 3 arched buildings in the history of Armenian architecture. The only decoration inside is the ornament on the front wall (intertwined stems and leaves) carved with motives typical of the typical 13th century.



The eastern façade is decorated with a series of "belt designs" framing the bas-relief of the church patrons Zakareh and Ivaneh Zakarian, crowned by an elaborate cross. The belt design continues on the north and south facades, wrapping the narrow windows and "Armenian niches," where they again form a cross on top of the window framing. The belt details break up the façade's planes creating a deep chiaroscuro (light and shade) and adds plasticity to the otherwise austere building, especially with the other sculptural ornaments, a graphic style typical for Georgian monuments (roses, sun-clocks, siren-birds with a woman's head, crowns, pigeons and other birds). The entire edifice is crowned by the polyhedral drum for the dome, divided by pilasters and zigzag cornices and decorated with rosettes.

Later Prince Vahan Khechup had a vestry porch built at the western end of the church (before 1224), including the northern part of S. Grigor church in the construction. The porch has 4 columns with a vaulted roof and is decorated in a very elaborate "oriental" style, using a mosaic of small stones; geometrical shapes and leaves.

Similar design can be seen in vestries of Saghmosavank and D'segh, built in the middle of the 13th century. The central part of the porch is covered by tent-shaped, garret-window roofing made of jet stone while other parts are covered by mirror block.



The complex subsequently became known as one of the most famous monastic centers in Armenia and it was especially renowned for its school and manuscriptorium.



The monastery fell into disrepair in the late 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries from the invasions of the Mongols, Timur and the Ottoman Seljuks, only to revive again in 1850, when the site became the summer residence of the Katolikos, who renovated and added numerous 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings to the complex. One of these buildings houses a small museum.

✘ Across the gorge to the south of the village is a **BRONZE AGE SETTLEMENT AND FORTRESS**

favoured of princes and pretenders, progenitors of Armenia's patriarchs during the medieval period. It is certainly one of the best preserved, renovated and used by the Katoghikos as a summer residence in the 19th c. The founding date of the monastery is unknown. It is thought to have been built no later than in the 7th century, when the first church was established. At the end of the 12th century Ivaneh and Zakareh brothers bought Harich from Pahlavunis and built a church, a wall and a number of buildings. The Pahlavuni princes (related and rivals to the Bagratuni's and founders of a lineage of Katoghikos) helped the monastery to become the

- **ԲԵՐԴ** and grave field. The site lies on three terraced hills covering 12 hectares of land, first excavated in 1966. Excavation layers cover the period from the 3rd m BCE to the 10th c CE, and uncovered (Bronze Age) homes with rectangular and quadrangular foundations and stone fireplaces, and ceramics, tools and jewelry similar to that found at other excavations in the Armenian highland. The grave field covers 3 sq km with an extended row of graves from east to west. The earthen and stone graves are covered with fine tufa plates, were in different shapes: round, oval, rectangular, mostly occupied by one skeleton, but in a few cases by two. In some graves the head was severed and placed in a clay pot. Graves had traces of ash and coal, thought to have been used in the burial ritual to purify the final resting place for the deceased. Also found were the bones of sacrificial animals. Also found were clay statues of animals polished in black and decorated with color, as well as kitchen pottery.

Items from the early medieval and later period (pottery, iron and glass objects, coins, etc.) showed occupation in the fort and surrounding area continued until construction of the Harich monastery, after which the population settled in the present Harich village.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

☞ Either Go Back to Artik or Continue opposite to (**Nahapetavan**, DD 40.6 x 44.0166667) 🗺️ 🏠 🏡

SIDE TRIP: Nearby is the village of (**Nahapetavan- Նահապետավան**, elev. 2223m, pop. 3727), with its 6<sup>th</sup> century S. Gevorg church.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

☞ From Harichavank, Go Back to Artik

☞ From Artik, take the NE road about 10 km to (**Mets Mantash**, DD 40.6494444 x 44.0508333) 🗺️ 🏠 🏡

SIDE TRIP: Take the road about 10 km northeast past Saralanj (5<sup>th</sup> century basilica ruins) to (**Mets Mantash - Մետ Սուևաշ** - till

1935 Mets Arkhvali, elev. 1976m, pop. 3792), which has an old settlement with traces of early churches, and center for propagation of the medieval Tondrakian heresy. Founded by a certain Smbat, the Tondrakian sect took its name from the village of Tondrak, Armenia (c. 9<sup>th</sup> century). The Tondrakian heretics rejected the authority of the Armenian Church's form of baptism, the Eucharist and marriage. Particularly, they did not admit such Orthodox practices as fasts, the offering of sacrifice, ordination of priests and celebration of holy days. They were a huge threat to the established religion throughout the Byzantine empire, 'invading' Armenia in the 9<sup>th</sup> c.

Orthodox historians of the eighth to twelfth centuries accuse the Paulicians and their followers of armed collaboration with Moslem enemies and of detestable practices, such as devil-worship, evil nocturnal rites and pagan customs. Grigor Magistros, the Imperial governor, within whose jurisdiction Tondrak lay, called the place Shnavank, "Monastery of Dogs," "where men dressed in clerical garb lived in company with a multitude of prostitute women." Not content with such verbal and written castigation, Magistros sent a strong police force to purge this source of scandal and corruption. The ruins at Mets Mantash speak to the backlash against them.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

☞ From Mets Mantash, take a rutted road SE about 15 km to (**Lake Mantash**) 🗺️ 🏠 🏡



SIDE TRIP: (**Lake Mantash - Սուևաշ Լիճ** a.k.a. Mantash Reservoir) is one of Shirak's most beautiful places, 2600 m near the N rim of Mt. Aragats. Containing over 8 million cubic meters of water the reservoir is a favorite destination for fishermen out to catch the famed "karmrahayt" (alabalagh) trout.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

☞ From Met Mantash, take a rural road NW about 1 km to (**Arevshat**, DD 40.6486111x44.0444444) and another 1 km to (**Spandarian**, DD 40.665x 44.0188889) 🗺️ 🏠 🏡

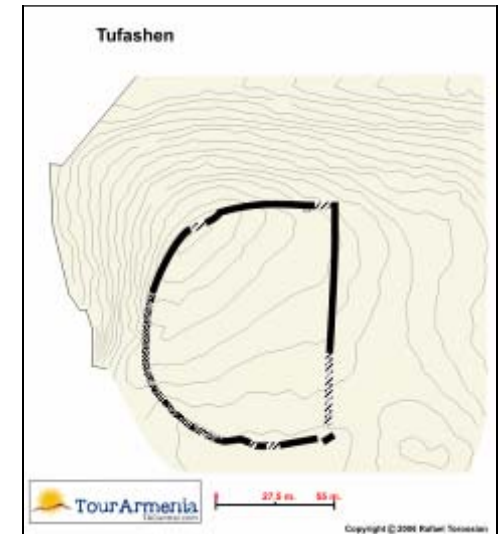
SIDE TRIP: (**Arevshat / Spandarian - Արևշատ / Սպանդարյան**) From Mets Mantash take the northwest road to (**Arevshat - Արևշատ**) (till 1948 Yekanlar, elev. 1949m, pop. 4792). The 14- 15th c. church, rebuilt in 1873, had in earlier times a fortress nearby. A few miles northwest is (**Spandarian - Սպանդարյան** - till 1946 Giulizha, elev. 1851m, pop. 3662) which was renamed for the Armenian Communist revolutionary killed leading the Bolshevik uprising in Baku. The village has a ruined church, an Iron Age fort and an Urartian cuneiform inscription attributed to Argisht'i I on a nearby cliff.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

☞ Go Back to Artik and then take the road Southwest about 2 km t the Tufashen turn off W and continue another 2.5 km to (**Tufashen**, DD 40.6000 x 43.9000) 🗺️ 🏠 🏡

SIDE TRIP: **Tufashen - Տուֆաշեն** (elev. 524m, pop. 1777) has on the southern mount of Bolorsar (1784.8 m) the excavations of a well developed settlement from the Middle Bronze Age forward. Excavations reveled especially rich finds from the 15<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> cc, 12<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> cc, and 10<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> cc BCE periods: excavated pottery with amazing decorations, Khura seals, bronze leave-shape dagger, bracelets, Sardinian beads, agate, and pasta, pike spearheads, iron knife, dagger, and domino type bead.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.



☞ Go Back to Artik Center, take a left at the bridge (bridge is under repairs), and skirt around it to the main road to the Glumri Highway and then take that road SW about 4 km to (**PEMZASHEN** (DD 40.5933333 x 43.94) 🗺️ 🏠 🏡

✂️ **PEMZASHEN - ՊԵՄՉԱՇԵՆ** ( "Of Pumice," elev. 1872m, pop. 15923). Go into the village, and on the road to **Lernakert** (S/SW to just before the electric station take the dirt road that crosses the rail road tracks), behind the old university building you will find a (uniquely) decorated 6th c. ruined church abutting the foundations of a large 5<sup>th</sup> c. hall church, made from polished tufa and on a multi-level foundation. The horseshoe apse has a pentagonal exterior. The church is divided by three pairs of wall-columns into four, almost equal sections. The entrances are from south and west. In the center a winged cross is carved inside a circle.

Butting up against the 5th c basilica is a small 6<sup>th</sup> c. single nave church made of polished red tufa with an arched dome and a semicircular apse set into the rectangular walls. The large apse is

unique for single-nave churches, and is an example of the experimentation and development of church architecture already underway in the 5th c. The sole entrance for the church is on the west. The church is set on a multi-step foundation, reminiscent of pre-Christian temples. The frame of the portal is decorated with ornamental motifs similar to those found on the portal of Avan cathedral (also 6th c) and Hripsime (7th c). Unique to this church is its *tabula ansata*, an interesting element on its southern wall, a kind of clean slate to write on, with swallowtail endings typical for Roman architecture.



Showing further experimentation is the **6th c. central dome cruciform church** set between the two basilicas, built from large red tufa blocks. The church has a rectangular exterior with the cruciform interior, the western wing elongated and squared off at the portal, the north and south wings ending in semicircular apses. The NE and SE corners have small 3-story chambers with arched vaulting and numerous niches in the walls, presumably to store manuscripts and the church treasury. The NW and SW chambers are irregularly shaped as they are made to fit into the basilicas. Wall joints have marginal grooves as well as the stone master's signature symbols. The walls also include *tabula ansatas*.

The building is wrapped with a cornice belt and has small arches spanning the walls. The window frontons (head sculptures) are typical for the 6th-7th cc, as is the dome structure; an octahedral drum and dome crown the cube-shaped building, with tromps on the dome's second row ornamentally carved. The tympanum over the

western entry is decorated with a sculpture of the Mother of God with the infant Christ in her arms, an open-armed churchwarden in front and angels above.



On the eastern end of the village is the **11th c. Arakelotz Vank - Առաքելոց Վանք** (dirt road to left) in the same design as S. Sion (the difference being the absence of niches on the west façade). The single nave has a western entrance. The other buildings of the vank are in ruins, except the lower fragment of the bell tower, which, like the church, was built from large polished red tufa stones.

In the gorge below, reached by a steep path is the **17th c. Astvatsatsin church** a single-nave arched roof building built on older foundations, and a monk's cell carved from the cliff.

West of the vank is a large carved **tomb memorial**, dedicated to Abgharib, the brother of Vahram Pahlavuni is located with a big, ornamental khachkar rising above a 3-step pedestal (built by Sarkis Archimandrite in 1036).

In the SE area of the village is an old **cemetery** with a 13th-14th c Khachkar. On top of the SE hill of Avan are traces of **medieval fort walls**.

1940 excavations in Pemzashen uncovered a rich collection of **Bronze and Iron Age** artifacts (mainly different arrows and jewelry), found together with pieces of black varnish ceramics and other materials. A valuable discovery is a stone lion-figure, much like similar artifacts from the Urartian period.



On the western end of the village, also across the rail track and up a rising hill is **MARKARAVANK - Մարգարավանք** dating to the 10-13th c, with the **S. Sion church**, constructed for Sahak (unknown) in 1001. The domed hall survives with parts of the western wall and fragments of the rest of the structure. The dome was set upon an octahedral drum and the arched roofing was covered with stone roofing. An old **cemetery** surrounds the church, with tombstones and some khachkar samples.

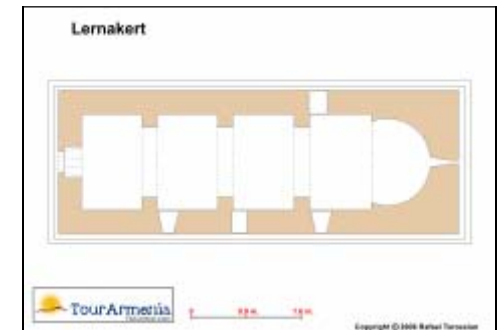
**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➡ **Either Go Back to Pemzashen, or Go on to side trip to (Lernakert, DD 40.5669444x43.9361111)**

**SIDE TRIP:** Go another 3 km on the same road S to (**Lernakert - Լեռնակերտ**, elev. 2012m, pop. 1959) This is a pretty little hamlet made of old, though ruined, traditional stone houses. The houses, like those in Tashir, remind one of the type of structure common throughout Northern Armenia, sturdy homes using traditional materials that are both practical (they stay warm in winter, cool in summer) and beautiful. Just past the square, on the left and a bit above is a simple 5th c basilica with remarkably thick walls.

The building is now used as a barn, a practical, if scandalous (to the church) use of a religious monument. South of the village is a Poghos-Petros (Ss. Paul and Peter) khachkar shrine, and two forts with cyclopean walls.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**



➡ **Go Back to Pemzashen and turn Left, going W towards (Maralik). The city lies on the other side of the Giumri-Yerevan Highway. Either take Side Trip to (Maralik, DD 40.572222x 43.8669444) or go on to Sarnaghpiur**

**SIDE TRIP:** The eastern end of (**Maralik - Սարաղիկ**, elev. 1717m, pop. 1213) has some caves inhabited from prehistory to medieval times, 11th-12th c. khachkars, and a 1903 church.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➡ **Go S on the Giumri-Yerevan Highway about 1 kilometer from Maralik to a side road on the left that angles SE then continue about 2 km to KARMIR VANK**

✦ **KARMIR VANK – ԿԱՐՄԻՐ ՎԱՆՔ** is located in a dramatic cleft of the mountains, peering over the Sarnaghpiur River and the opposite side the gorge. The 11th c. church is a cruciform type with a small central hall and four antechambers in its corners. The compact church has niches in its walls topped by fan vaulting, and is crowned with a circular drum and tent roof. The woman selling candles on weekends and holidays has been working at the site from when it was renovated, and has some interesting stories to tell, such as the time none of the construction workers would risk climbing the dome when the church was completed, so she (in her 60s mind)

scrambled up the steep roof to complete the building with its cross.



Near the church are the foundations of a series of 4th-6th and 7th c nave churches that were replaced by the vank. The foundations and layout are hallmarks of pagan temples that once dotted the landscape, and served as stopping points for pilgrims making their ways to the sacred springs in the village.

**Camping in area; Springs in the area.**

➤ Continue another 3 km (and past the Sarnaghpiur Lake) to the village of **SARNAGHPUIUR** (DD 40.5188889x 43.92) 📍 🏠

📍 **SARNAGHPUIUR – ՍԱՌՆԱԳՔՅՈՒՐ** ▲ (elev. 2039m, pop. 4722) On the way to Sarnaghpiur, about 1 kilometer on the right is Hokevank, a 13<sup>th</sup> c. monastery complex.

Beyond a dam and reservoir lies Sarnaghpiur (“Cold Spring”, till 1940 Sogutlu or Gh’zelkilisa), which has some great architectural details in a few of its houses, including one remaining **fireplace wall of an 1801 building**, replete with oriental archway and elaborate geometric designs. The wall is on the left as you take the main road up to the springs.

The name comes from a **spring** flowing from a cave in the rear of the village, the waters from which are believed to have healing powers. To get there, go through the village and turn left just before S. Tadevos church (1883), then take first paved road to right. The cave is walled over (ask for a key the house on the right—don’t worry they will see you coming), also serves as a shrine

to Grigor Lousavoritch. The springs are reputed to have been visited by St. Grigor Lousavoritch himself.

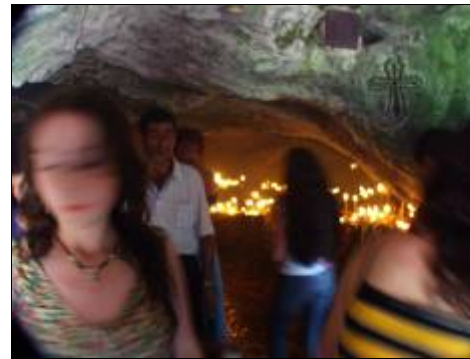


One of the best times to visit are during a holiday. We visited on Vardevar (3rd Sunday in July, when locals pour water on each other—and tourists—in a kind of “baptism” rite held over from pagan days, but now it is all fun) and found a huge celebration in progress. Each home opened its doors to anyone who wished to visit and piled on its tables local foods and delicacies. People from all the surrounding villages came to attend the service and music concert by the church and to collect water from the Lusavorich springs. And of course all around there was an orgy of water fights and splashing.

To the right (W) of the church are the ruins of **S. Hakob (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> cc.) and Karapet (1205)**, once connected by stone corridors you can still see. The churches are single nave structures, thought to have been erected over earlier pagan temples, and are decorated unlike any other church we have found in Armenia, with a rich tapestry of folk and peasant designs on a wooden screen protecting the sacristy. The design is so richly adorned and so free in its appearance, it immediately reminds one of the collage work done by the 20th c artists Sergei Parajanov. This is a must see.

On a hill 6 km east are the ruins of S. Ghazar (5-6th cc.) There are three Iron Age cyclopean forts in the vicinity. The two earlier structures are the bases of a hall church and a tetraconcha, which has trihedral apses on the outside. The surviving cornice fragment is a specimen of a cornice that was widely used in Armenian architecture in the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> c.

The region is also famous for its “tonirs,” clay ovens used to bake lavash and the tastiest khorovatz (BBQ). Say yes if they offer!



**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➤ Go back to the Yerevan Highway, and Either End Day Trip 1, or Go S on the Highway for (**Dzorakap**, DD 40.5666667x 43.8666667) and (**Lanjik**, DD 40.5094444x 43.8563889) 📍 🏠

SIDE TRIP: Continue south about 2 km to (**Dzorakap** - **Զորակապ** - till 1935 Boghazkiasan, elev. 1758, pop. 2213), which as a 1783 S. Astvatsatsin church. The point of this village though is the “Turtle Stone” that overlooks the Yerevan highway on a bend. Some people think it’s good luck to go lie on the stone, others just want a photo op. Continue south on the Yerevan Highway to (**Lanjik** - **Լանջիկ** - till 1947 Muslughlu, elev. 6328, pop. 6347). Just SW of the village is a Bronze Age cyclopean fort & grave field.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➤ END OF TRIP 1





TRIP 2: AKHURIAN VALLEY ▲

**GIUMRI** – (Getk) – (Teghenis) – (Yerazgavors) – **GUSANAGIUGH** – (Shirakavan) – (Isahakian) – (Bardzrashen) – **WALLS OF ANI** – **JRAPI** – (Sarakap) – **HAIKADZOR** – **KHARKOV (ANI)** – **ANIPEMZA / YERERUIK**

**Stay:** Overnight in Giumri, village home (rustic)  
**Eat:** Anipemza, roadside stands.

Day Trip 2 features the churches and sites in the old district Maralik, along the Akhurian Reservoir, skirting the fabled 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century capital of the Armenian Kingdom Ani and Armenia's ancient capital Yervandashat. Both are across the border, in present day Turkey.

**Notes:** the border at Ani is **not** open to the casual visitor. To See Ani, you will need a guide (from Giumri) who can make the arrangements (and pay necessary "fees" to the border guard). It is entirely possible you will not be able to arrange this on a short visit.

Between Getk and Jrapı it is **forbidden to take pictures of the border**. This is especially true along the reservoir shores. Tourists have had their cameras taken by border patrols "for security reasons". Inland from the beach you should be OK, as well as when you pass the reservoir itself.

➤ Take the Southwest Highway towards Armavir. On the way you pass the turn off for **Akhurik - Ujuniqlı** (Turkish frontier, now closed) and the Akhurian Rail Station, a massive facility built in the 1980's with special equipment to lift rail cars from one rail gauge and onto the other. This allowed rail cars from one side of the border to travel on the gauge rail of the other. It was never used, a relic of the days when perestroika seemed possible. Go about 6 km S to (Getk, DD 40.733333x 43.783333) 🏰 🌊

**NOTE ON PHOTOS:** You are traveling along the border with Turkey with numerous border posts manned by Russian and Armenian soldiers. It is forbidden to pictures at any point on the border, and tourists have had their film (and cameras) confiscated for violating this law. If you are anywhere in sight of a border tower, do not risk it. There are couple of spots where it seems OK to take pictures and we mark them along the way, but you still do it at your own risk.

**SIDE TRIP:** (Getk - **Qltung**, till 1945 Daharlu, elev. 1471m, pop. 1890) has two churches destroyed in the 1926 earthquake, but is mostly known for being at the headwaters of the **Akhurian reservoir**, a massive project completed by the Turkish and Soviet governments in 1980. The reservoir is 20 km long and 3 km at its widest point, able to irrigate 104,000 hectares on both sides of the border. The reservoir varies by season, with relatively little water from August to April, but in the spring when the snows melt and heavy rains fall it fills to capacity and forms a unique micro-climate the sustains a unique collection of wildlife and supports a large migration of **birds**, including 32 species of water birds that can be found during migration and 55 special status birds, with dense populations found along the reservoir in early spring and late fall. Migratory and resident birds include (near Bayandur and Yerazgavors) black stork, great white and kittle egrets and great white pelicans; near Jrapı and Aghin and the riparian forests Squacco herons, great bitterns and great snipes.

The Akhurian Valley is itself located in what was once a large prehistoric lake, formed by lava flows from Mt. Aragats and the Alaja volcanic range, blocking the valley near Kharkov, trapping the Paleolithic waters to form a huge lake more than 50 km long and 40 km wide. The lake lasted as long as lava flows continued to reinforce the natural dam, but as they cooled the rive gradually wore down the lava rock and emptied the great lake to its present natural form. Formed mostly during the Miocene era, there are few remaining pyroclastic materials and lava structures, near Bagratashen and Bagravan.

The Akhurian River is the largest tributary to the Arax River, which in turns feeds the Kuras and flows into the Caspian Sea. Along the way it forms the border with Turkey and Iran, then as the Arax with Azerbaijan. Springs along the river are more abundant on the Turkish side, but there are a few mineral springs on the Armenian side, especially at Aghin and Jrapı Villages.

At the right time of the year (Spring) you will find a wide variety of **flora**, including Feather grass, couch grass, fescue and a variety of legumes. Further south are absinthe, everlasting and riparian forests and 24 species



listed in the Red Book of Endangered species. Endemic Flora includes Kars Hollyhock in the northern end of the reservoir (its only natural habitat in Armenia), Hare's Ear, Tigran's elderberry, Akhurian Currant, Rose of Sharon, Caucasian Iris, Elegant Iris, Furcated Iris, Dwarf Iris, Sage, Gray Germander, Kurdish fritillary, Starflower, Miniature tulip and Oriental poppy.

**Fauna** include the Muskrat, Water vole, wild boar, Western European hedgehog, European hare, jerboa, Pine marten, Stone marten, Caucasian mole, Golden jackal, Grey wolf, Red fox, African wild cat, Jungle cat, Levantine viper, Sahara sand viper, Near East viper, Grass snake, Dice snake, Mediterranean spur-thigh tortoise, freshwater crab and re-clawed crayfish.

**Camping** near the reservoir would be nice but probably not possible, watch for border guards; **Springs** in area.

**SIDE TRIP: Teghenis Fort - Տեղենիս Բերդ**  
Between Getk and Yerazgavors, over to the right (W) you can see the outline of a large 11th c fortress on a hill. The huge (more than four stories) fortress once protected the outskirts of Ani form the northern approaches. It is now in Turkish hands. The fortress can be seen in detail using binoculars or a zoom camera.

☞ From Getk continue S on the highway about 6 km to (Yerazgavors, DD 40.7x 43.766667) 🏠 🗺️

**SIDE TRIP: (Yerazgavors - Երազգավոր**  
("Deer Hunter", till 1945 Aralikh, or Shirakavan, elev. 1471m, pop. 2938) has a church (9th c.) and a few medieval remains, including ruins of two fortresses, one in the village and one W of the river bank.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

☞ From Yerazgavors, continue south about 4 km (past Bayandur) to the 2nd large highway interchange on left (Chalalai V.), turn Left (E), and follow the potted road 4 km to **GUSANAGIUGH** (DD 40.6691667 x 43.7883333) 🏠 🗺️

🏠 **GUSANAGIUGH - ԳՈՒՍԱՆԱԳՅՈՒՂ** 🗺️ (till 1977 Ghapulu, elev. 4990, pop. 7938) The village is named after an Armenian bard ("Gusan") who was born here, Nakhshikar Sargis. In the village there are the ruins of an 11th c. church and a standing **19th c black tufa church** (square exterior with a cross form interior, four antechambers in the corners) at the point on the road you turn left to climb a small hill to reach the impressive **10th-11th c walls of a fortress/castle**.



The two walls seem to tiptoe on top of a ring of a huge cyclopean rock base, itself made from the remnants of a Bronze/Iron Age fortress. Note the pockmarked walls, the scars the results of rifle and cannon shot during battles against 400 years of attacks by Turkish and Persian armies, the last of which, in the late 18th century completely ruined the fort. But what remains is truly impressive, the walls rising well over 4 stories above the monolithic foundations. About 1-2 km W of the village on uneven terrain are the remains of a cyclopean fortress (Uratian) near Ghak and Shvaghtapa.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

☞ Backtrack to the highway, turn left (S) and continue about 1.9 km to (**Shirakavan**, DD 40.6591667x 43.7386111) 🏠 🗺️

**SIDE TRIP: (Shirakavan - Շիրակավան** till 1950 Davshanlan, elev. 1498m, pop. 2621) is newly coined, built after the original Medieval village was flooded during filling the Akhurian reservoir. The original (opposite shore, near Bash-Shoragial) was the 9th c. seat of the

Bagratuni (Bagratid) family, before they moved their capital to Ani, 25 km S.

South of the village is the excavation of Sevakn (where Sevkan stream joins the Akhurian river- partially under water), excavated in 1977. The excavation showed a large temple area (2nd c BCE - 3rd c.) with links to Rome and Persia (Parthia).

**Heracles Myth Statue** During excavations, a number of funerary items were uncovered in a shaft-grave dated ca 1300-1100 BCE, including a unique bronze sculpture among a variety of artifacts ritually intended to secure the passage of the soul from the world of the living to the realm of the dead and the afterlife. The sculpture depicts a hero- or god-archer dragging a captured monstrous dog of terrifying appearance by some kind of a leash (chain or rope that has not been preserved) attached to a massive collar. The connection of this with the entrance to the netherworld is seen as a parallel to the myth recounting the capture of Kerberos by Heracles.

In the Greek tradition Kerberos was believed to be a brother of the Nemean lion killed by Heracles. Meanwhile the solar hero of Armenian epics are reflected in The Daredevils of Sasun, namely Mher, who also kills a lion. This myth of the capture of a beast guarding the entrance to the world of the dead by a deity without weapons probably had a Proto-Indo-European origin. In fact the Armenian god Aralezk in the form of a wolf or dog, is found depicted in bronze figurines from the 4th millennium BCE forward, found at sits in Shirak, Aragatsotn and Lori.

The dog in Armenia is a sacred symbol as well as a protector. The Armenian Gampr or shepherd dog has been known to originate from the Armenian mountains, its progeny representing the ancient myths. The figurines found here simply confirms its existence.

Four principal depictions of dogs are found in Indo-European mythology: Companions of divine hunters (Orion, Wodan et al.); Serving the Lord of the Dead (Yama, Geri and Freki of Odin, Zoroastrianism, Armenian Aralezk, Hermes, etc.) oftentimes healing and resurrecting the dead; Evil dogs slain or sacrificed by warrior-gods or heroes (Kandaon, Kandaules, Cu Chulainn, Hittite, Balkans, Roman, and Celtic traditions); and Monstrous dogs, guardians of the entrance to the netherworld bound and subjugated by an

unarmed divine personage (the "Kerberian cluster").

A nearby Stone Age site with mammoth bones is also submerged, but a cyclopean fort remains on a hill above. There is or was a large church nearby.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

☞ Go S on the highway about 6 km to Side Trip (**Isahakian**, DD 40.616667x 43.7252778) 🏠 🗺️

**SIDE TRIP: (Isahakian - Իսահակյան** - till 1945 Ghazarabad-Ghazar Aga, before that Kharum, elev. 1555m, pop. 2262) is named after a hero of the Russo-Persian wars. Aga led the village in a successful defense against the Persians in 1826-28.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

☞ At Isahakian take side road SE another 4 km to (**Bardzrashen**, DD 40.0852778x 44.5786111) 🏠 🗺️

**SIDE TRIP: (Bardzrashen - Բարձրաշեն** till 1947 Baburlu, elev. 1070m, pop. 3314) has a 7th c. S. Astvatsatsin church and close by a Poghos-Petros hermit area.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

☞ Go back to Isahakian then Left (S) on the Highway about 6.8 km (past the Aguin Railroad Station) to the turnoff for Sarakap. Urn left (E) and continue another 3.3 km to (**Sarakap**, DD 40.5561111x 43.7208333) 🏠 🗺️

**SIDE TRIP: (Sarakap - Սարակապ** till 1935 Bozdoghyan, elev. 1589m, pop. 1613) has the ruins of the 6-7th c. S. Astvatsatsin church, rebuilt in 1885 and 6 km of hard trudging SE are the ruins of Karmir (Red) Vank or Ghriji (Gray) Vank (7th c).

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➤ Go back to the highway, turn left (S) and pull up to a stop for a glimpse of the **WALLS OF ANI**

✂ **WALLS OF ANI - Անիի Պարիսպները** ▲  
The walls and outline of the standing churches of Ani can be seen from the side of the road, to the SW. In clear weather they are amazingly detailed. As you approach Jrapi from the Sarakap turn off, look into the distance on your right (W) for a hill with white chalk inscriptions (Turkey), to the left is an orange roofed building and the rail line with a blue and white tower. From that point look to the left for a large tree, and between them in the far distance you will see the outlines of the city.

➤ From the Sarakap turnoff it is about 1.3 km to the **JRAPI Church and Karavanserai, on the left (E) (DD 40.5569444x 43.6827778)** 🏰 🗺 🌄

✂ **JRAPI - ՋՐԱՓԻ** ▲ (till 1947 Chirpli and Keghach, elev. 1533m, pop. 2921) is a new village replacing the two halves of old Jrapi. A medieval bridge on the Akhurian is now under water, as were most of the village's historic buildings, but a few remain, now located on hill to the left. Among them is a small but evocative black and red tuf 1874 church with wooden beams supporting the metal roof, its stones pulled up from its original location under the reservoir to its current location.



To its S is a reconstructed 11th c. caravanserai. The caravanserai is often used as stalls for local farmers and the grill of an old soviet car now makes its gate. The cows don't seem to mind,

and ironically, if you substitute camels for cows you have a pretty good idea of the way this building was used (and smelled) as does an 1874 church. To the E of the church are the foundations of an 11th c single nave church, also brought up from the old village.

One km S of Jrapi is a 1st millennium BCE grave field, hidden among the grass and not marked.

Poor **Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➤ Continue S on the highway about 3 km to the **Haikadzor turn off, then another 2 km to HAIKADZOR (DD 40.5377778x 43.6608333)** 🏰 🗺 🌄

✂ **HAIKADZOR - ՀԱՅՎԱԶՈՐ** ▲ (till 1950 Gh'zelkilisa, "Red Church," elev. 1489m, pop. 1827), named for Horomos Vank across the reservoir, is the home to the S. Grigor Lusavorich church (985 CE), restored in 13th c. The church is a fine example of the type of construction favored in the early reign of the Bagratunis, the restoration shows that favored by the Pahlavunis or Kamsarakans, during the last flowering of culture in the region before Seljuk and Mongol invasions. Note The church is right on the border, and you may not be able to take pictures (be sure to check for border guards and ask first).

Haikadzor is an alternate route to Ani, and if you have someone to take you (who is connected) and/or get permission from a border guard exactly, you may be able to get by here. But they almost always say 'nyet' and look fiercely on those trying to sneak by.

➤ Go back to the Highway then S about 6 km to **Bagravan, named for an ancient Armenian religious site on the far side of the river near the capital of the first Armenian kings, Yervandashat. Then continue about 3 km and, just past the Ani Railway station, a little dirt road leads to the border checkpoint, manned by Russian soldiers. If they let you in, proceed to a hill W of KHARKOV (DD 40.5166667x 43.6) overlooking ANI**

**Note:** the border at Ani is not open to the casual visitor. To See Ani, you will need a guide (from Giumri) who can make the arrangements (and pay the necessary "fees" to the border guard). It

is entirely possible you will not be able to arrange this on a short visit. Diehards may try.

✂ **KHARKOV (ANI) - ԽԱՐԿՈՎ / Անի** ▲

**Tours to Ani can be made by contacting Valodia Aroushian at AniTour, 28 Isahakian p. in Yerevan, tel. in Yerevan: (010) 52-78-34, 57-80-63, 52-42-79, URL: [www.anitour.am](http://www.anitour.am), e-mail: [anitour@arminco.com](mailto:anitour@arminco.com). Referrer: Stepan Ter-Margaryan.**

**Kharkov** (elev. 4698, pop. 5137) is perched on the Akhurian river, across from the 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> cc Armenian capital **Ani**. Much of it gone, still the city of 100,000 has ruins of churches, palace and walls enough to impress. The chance to see an entire city of 100,000 laid to waste by Byzantine, Turkish and Mongol invasions is rare and compelling.

## History

A stronghold of the Kamsarakan family from the 4th century, one of the first kings in the Bagratid line, King Ashot (the Meat-eater), bought Ani for Armenia in the first half of the ninth century. Strategically placed on one of the trade routes running from Persia (India/China) to the Black Sea, the city became vital in the 10th century when wars between the Arabs and the Byzantine Empire made the trade route along the Euphrates unsafe for caravans. Massively and suddenly rich, the Bagratunis were able to turn a simple fortress into a royal residence and a small village into the capital of a kingdom.

The Bagratunis enlarged their city to an area of about 4,000 acres, built a series of outer walls and spanned the Arpa-Chai River with bridges to help the caravans plodding between Trebizond and the East. The caravanserai at Jrapi is one such building, housing caravans on the outer rims of the city where they could not engage in intrigue or debase its inhabitants (deflower the farmer's daughters, so to speak). When Gagik I, who reigned from 990 to 1020, completed the Great Cathedral and established the seat of the Katolikos in Ani in 992, Armenia reached its zenith.

The chronicler Aristakes of Lastivert, who lived through and recorded the glories and fall of the Bagratuni kingdom, described the kingdom before the invasion of the Seljuks. In his own poetic, Oriental manner, he wrote that Ani was like a large garden; verdant, clothed in foliage, laden with flowers and fruit.

"Its nobles in their gorgeous costumes and glittering array of armor and equipment, held sway in their baronial seats; the people danced and sang merry songs, the sounds of the flute, cymbals and other instruments gladdened the air. Old people in their crowns of white hair,

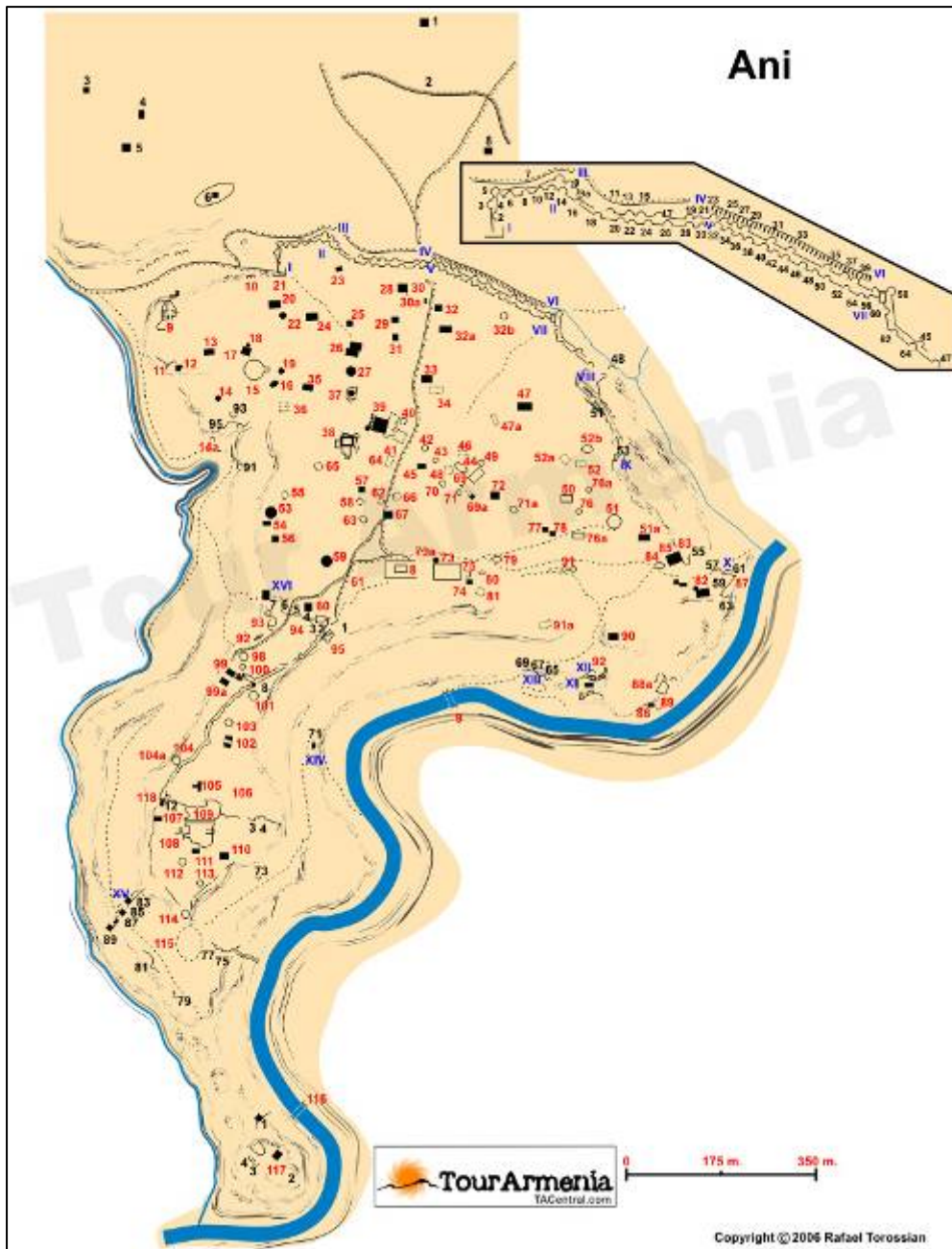
*the mothers pressing their children in their arms, the newly-wedded couple emerging from the church, all radiated happiness. . . . As for the King, when he rode out of the city in the morning in his resplendent attire and pearl-laden crown, astride his white mare with her trappings of gold glittering under the rays of the sun, dazzling every eye, he was like a bridegroom or like the day-star, which rising above the world, attracts all eyes to itself, compels everybody to gaze upon it with wonder; while the numerous troops who marched before him in compact masses, rippling over the hills, resembled the waves of the sea, rolling over one another on the beach."*

The glory days ended soon enough, with dual invasions by the Caliphate and the Albanians (Azerbaijanis) on one side and pressure from Byzantium to succumb to its control. And, in true Armenian fashion, Bagratuni princes fought amongst themselves for possession of the land. First taken by the Byzantines in 1044, Ani was then invaded by Seljuks in 1064. The city lost its power and the capital moved to Dvin. There was a short rebirth in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, under the Pahlavunis, before a last gasp with the invasion of the Mongols and Timur.

## The Site

Standing on the hill by Kharkov, you can see the outline of the great city, built in a triangle on the river and plateau. On two sides cliffs drop off to ravines and on the third the remains of a massive wall, 40 to 50 feet tall in places, cut the city off from the flat tableland.

In Ani you can see the perfection of Armenian Architecture in solving the problem of dome construction, a solution many believe became the original models for Gothic architecture. The dome developed early in Armenia, along with the basilica. Spurred by a desire to distance church buildings from their earlier Pagan forms, as well as to physically create in stone the apparition of St. Grigor for the site of Echmiadzin ("*...[A]mazing arches are intertwined on their columns, and above them I could see a cube-shaped dome*").



Armenia's domes take their roots from the wooden broach roof of Armenian dwelling houses, as Xenophon described it in his time. The use of a dwelling house borrowed for a sanctuary is not unique, and the Armenian house *ghatun*, with an *hazarashen* roof is a true example of a dome-like roof on a cube.

**ANI PLAN**  
[LARGE DETAILED MAP AT END OF CHAPTER](#)

**Outside the City:**

1. Bathhouse ruins
2. Ramparts
3. Burial mound
4. Kirakos Mausoleum
5. Chapel ruins
6. Chapel ruins
7. Stone church
- Church ruins

**Inside the City :**

8. "Baron's palace"
9. Church with a Corinthian capital
10. Stone church
11. Unknown Ruins
12. Palace ruins
13. Oil Press
- 14a. Subterranean room
14. S. Grigor of King Gagik (Gagikashen)
15. Burial mound
16. Palace of Sarkis
17. Oil Press
18. Oil Press
19. Large church ruins
20. Tunnels
21. Oil Press
22. Baths
23. Bakhtakegi church (exc. 1892)
24. Oil Press
25. "Georgian Church"
26. Refuse pit
27. Minukhir Tower
28. Oil Press
29. Oil Press
30. Oil Press
31. Ruins
- 32a. Ruins
- 32b. Oil Press
32. Church ruins
33. Church ruins
34. Church ruins (?)
35. Ruins
36. 4-columned fire temple later converted to a church
37. S. Arakelots (Holy Apostles) church
38. Hostels (exc. 1908)
39. Red church
40. Two large rooms
41. Burial mound
42. Burial mound
43. Burial mound
44. Church ruins
45. Church ruins (wooden décor)
46. Church ruins
- 47a. Oil press
47. Baths
48. Burial mounds
49. "Checkerboard Church" (alternating color stone façade)
50. S. Amnarkitch (Church of the Holy Redeemer)
- 51a. Church ruins
51. Church ruins
- 52a. Ruins
- 52b. Burial mound
52. S. Grigor Abughamir church
53. Ruins
54. Oil Press
55. Ruins of church with khachkar

56. Foundation ruins
57. Oil Press
58. Burial mounds
59. Horom Tikin (The Lady Horom) church
60. Oil Press
61. Minaret : Abu Muamran mosque
62. Burial mound
63. Ruins
64. Oil Press
65. Burial mounds
66. Church ruins

67. Prelate residence
- 68.-69a. Colonnade
69. Burial mound
70. Burial mound
71. S. Sarkis church
73. Ani Cathedral
- 73a. "Checkerboard House" (exc. 1908)
72. Cathedral baptistry
73. Queen Katranideh mausoleum
74. Oil Press
- 76a. Oil Press
75. Tower & vaulted passage
76. Tower & underground passage
- 78a. Church
77. Burial mound
78. Burial mound
79. Ruins
80. S. Grigor Honents church
81. Baths (exc. in 1893)
82. Burial mound
83. Vaulted gallery
84. Oil Press
85. Underground entry
86. Chapel
- 88a. Ruins
87. Guardhouse
88. Ruins
89. Ruins
- 91a. Ruins
90. Gusanants Vank (Monastery of the Virgins)

**Old City (Ashot's walls):**

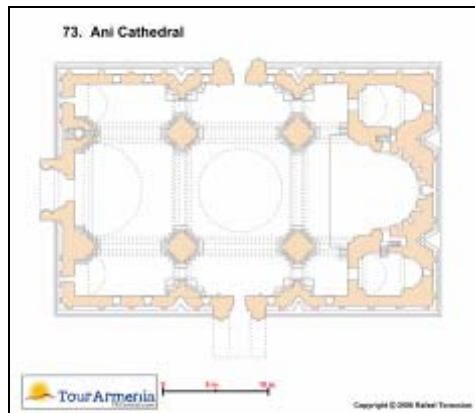
91. Secular building
92. King Ashot Wall
93. Minukhir Mosque (museum )
94. Bridge
95. House
96. Church ruins
97. Museum
- 99a. Nikoli Marr excavation residence
100. Oil press, ruins
101. Karimadin church (the red church)
102. Astvatsatsin Khambuchents
103. Burial mound
104. Abu Khatsip church
- 104a. Subterranean city entry
105. Gayjl Mausoleum
106. Church
107. 4-Columned structure ruins
108. Ruins
- The Citadel:
109. Royal palace
- 109a. Palatine church
- 109b. Palace Hall
- 109c. Palace Hall
- 109d. Palace Hall
- 109e. Palace Baths
- 109f. Palace Cistern
110. Midjnaberd Church
111. Vaulted structure
112. Tetraconch church
113. Church
114. Hexagonal church
115. Armenian Cemetery
118. Water conduit
- Kizkale Peninsula:
116. Kamsarakan tower bridge
117. S. Grigor Aljkaiberdi Convent

## Towers

- 1-95 – Outer Wall towers
- 1-7 King Ashots Wall
- 1-4 Citadel wall
- 1-4 Kizkale
- Main Gates
- I: Igadzor valley gate
- II + III: Kars gate, walls
- IV + V: Lion gate, walls.
- VI + VII: Checkerboard gate, walls
- VIII: Gayladzor postern gate
- IX: Gayladzor valley gate
- X: Aruch gate
- XI + XII: postern gates.
- XIII: Sarkis Silenkh gate
- XIV: Dvin Gate
- XV: King Ashot gate
- XVI: Tsaghkotsadzor valley gate

Map source: "Ani - a History of the City and its Excavations" by Nikolai Marr, Leningrad and Moscow, 1934.

The archeologist Joseph Strzygowski, in 1918, put forth the view that it was the Armenians who first solved the problem of putting a dome over a square space. There are two ways: first, by the use of the squinche—a triangular-shaped section of a dome which fills up the corner of the square and so transforms it into a circle; second, by the pendentive—a small arch spanning the corner of the square, and so converting it into an octagon, onto which the circular base of the dome could be conveniently fitted.



The pendentive found great favor throughout Europe and Asia. When the possibility of placing a dome over a square had been realized, a variety of alternative elaborations became possible to architects. The square, for instance, could be extended in one or more of four directions, permitting a plan of much greater interest and significance than a mere rectangle, and leading at

last to the basilica and cruciform plans, and sometimes a synthesis of all three. And the pendentive, according to Mr. Strzygowski, was developed by the Armenians.

At Ani there is ample evidence that in the **Church of Saint Gregory the Illuminator** (completed 1215) the Armenians at least used the pendentive. This church is perched on the side of a cliff over the river, its unbroken walls decorated with sculptured arches, doubled columns and stone tracery of birds and flowers. Inside, 700 year old frescoes cover the nave, apse, the ceilings and all the walls with scenes from the Bible and accompanying legends in Greek.

The apse is to the east end of the nave, a trend started by Armenians and said to be based on Pagan Sun worship. Above the nave, on four columns rests the dome, lit by a circle of windows that throws light onto the small arches spanning the corners of the square. It is a perfect example of the pendentive.

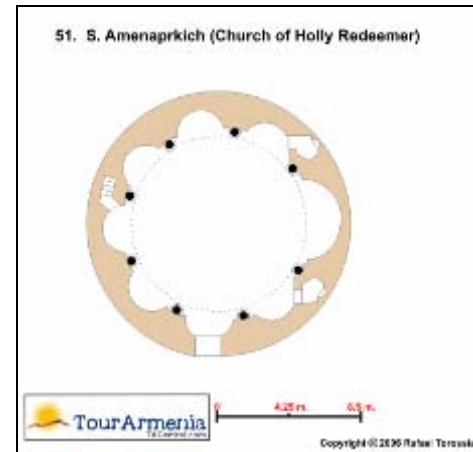
Nearby, in the **Great Cathedral**, started in the year 989 in the reign of King Smbat II (977-89) and completed in the year 1001 (or 1010) by order of Queen Katraniteh (Catherine), the wife of King Gagik Bagratuni, Smbat's successor, there is more evidence of a different kind: the presence in the cathedral of the pointed arches and clustered piers considered to be one of the hallmarks of Western Gothic architecture.

The design of the cathedral is on a cruciform plan, with a dome over the central crossing, and a triple-apse eastern end. The dome is supported by four massive piers of coupled pillars with plain capitals and spanned by bold pointed arches. At either end of the building stand four similar piers, a pair at the entrance and one on each side of the apse—all "Gothic" features designed by the Armenian architect, T'rdat (who also designed the present dome of the Santa Sophia in Istanbul) in 989-1001, more than 100 years before the style made its first appearance in Western Europe.

Another is the **Church of the Redeemer** (Amnaprkitich - completed around the year 1035) the walls covered with inscriptions showing much of its history. And it is in this church's history that the structure of the Bagratuni Armenian society can be understood. For us, much of the fascination (some might say fixation) of the ruling class and Armenian society on churches and religion, can seem obscure and remote. But in

fact, it was the cohesive unit that bound the Armenians to their culture, to their king, and ultimately, to their survival against the Arabs, Persians and Turcomans that were sweeping across their lands.

The church- both its idea as a conduit to God and its physical presence—was the embodiment of an Armenian idea; that no matter how strong the pull of the invader's culture was to Armenia, no matter how many were pulled to renounce their faith and join the cause of the Greeks (Byzantines), Arabs or Seljuks, the ultimate destination for the people who worshipped here was with their God, a distinctly Armenian one at that.



The design of the church, its decoration and symbolism, can be read as biblical lessons for an illiterate class and at the same time a glorification of the ruling power. It can also be seen as an act of defiance, distinctly Armenian, an architectural statement of independence from the opulent (decadent) design in Byzantium, which had abandoned its iconoclastic struggle and once again reveled in the representation of Christ and the saints in icons and frescos that covered their churches, something the more ascetic Armenian religious orders recoiled from.

Armenia built structures to God, their decoration was no doubt more richly endowed than the stripped down versions we see today, but they were far removed from the worship of icons the Armenians preached against. God was the word; the word was made real on earth in the vision of

Saint Grigor, in a church, a building. The church of the holy redeemer embodied his spirit. Inscriptions cover the remaining structure, showing its purpose and symbol. The Prince Abgharib Pahlavid (Pahlavuni) had inscribed on the walls:

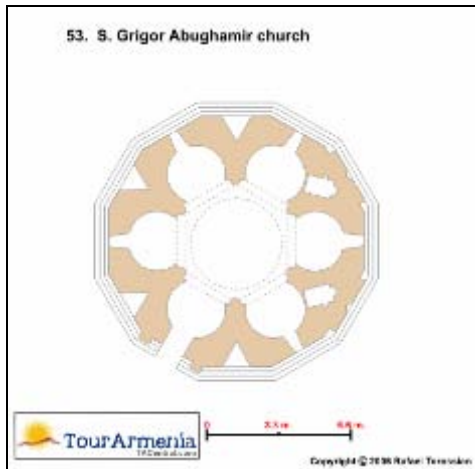
*"In the year 480 (A.D. 1035), I, Abgharib marzpan took an edict on behalf of Smbat Shah'n'Shah to Michael, Emperor of the Greeks, at Constantinople, and with great effort and expense bought a fragment of the Holy Cross, and when I returned, completed this temple..."*

The church, like the fragment of the True Cross, was the embodiment of the divine on earth. It had 8 apses, the 8th and largest apse symbolizing the day after the resurrection and end of earth, the day of reckoning, the Day of Judgment, which was to be on the 8th day in metaphysical terms. The 7 subservient apses represent the 7 days or times of life leading to the judgment, the number 7 believed to the completion of a cycle, just as it ends the days of a week.

There are three altars, the large central one and two small embedded into the walls on either side. The church is circular, the walls made into a 19 faceted polygon. The number 19 represented two sacred concepts of the time, borrowed from classical ideas: 1 for the Base, the beginning, the be all and in all of the 1 God, and 9, the most sacred of numbers a product of the multiplication of the number 3, which represented the Holy Trinity. For more details, see [TourArmenia's Sacred Geometry section](http://www.tacentral.com/architecture.asp?story_no=2) ([www.tacentral.com/architecture.asp?story\\_no=2](http://www.tacentral.com/architecture.asp?story_no=2)).

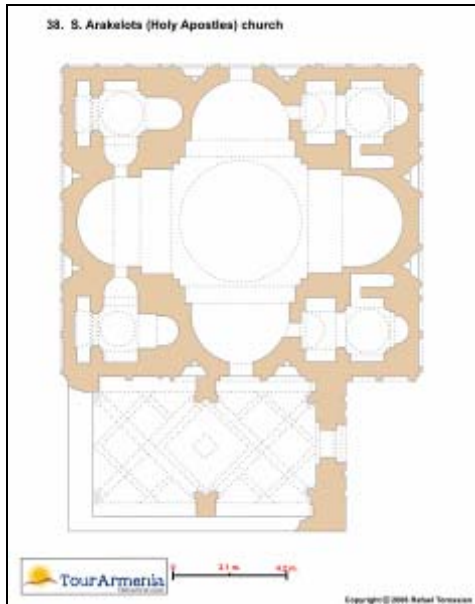
The drum of the dome is unusual for it being completely circular and not octagonal as was the custom. It is quite tall and quite wide, capped internally with a cupola. There are faint frescoes from a later age (13<sup>th</sup> c) attributed to Sarkis Parchkans, and showing a penchant for Byzantine style, betraying the structure's earlier resistance to Greek Orthodoxy. The faint paintwork is still beautiful and was later white washed, which leads some to believe the church may have been used as a mosque in its later Persian/Turkish periods.

On the west side is the **Church of Saint Gregory** (s. Grigor - 10<sup>th</sup> c), commissioned by Prince Grigor Pahlavuni as a private chapel for the Pahlavuni family.



as the Bagratuni kings, patronizing several religious orders and monasteries in Ani and Armenia. The earliest extant inscription is dated 1031, concerning the donation of land by a certain Abughamir Pahlavuni, who also commissioned (No. 53) S. Grigor Abughamir church nearby.

The church has four apses in a cross form, with four chapels in its rectangle shell. A feature of churches from the 7<sup>th</sup> c., the four-apse (inscribed quatrefoil) design in this case has details unique to the 11<sup>th</sup> c.; the entry portals (in this case north and south) have doorways with monumental lintels adorned with a sculpted frieze of acanthus leaves and rows of dentils. The dome construction used an innovative method of distributing weight and was lighted by the use of hollow clay "vessels" built into the structure. Like earlier churches its slate roof was decorated with pomegranate motifs. Also unique was the attention to detail in the four corner chapels, each with its own apse and a dome and drum, highly unusual for the time and perhaps a precursor of other structures that followed.

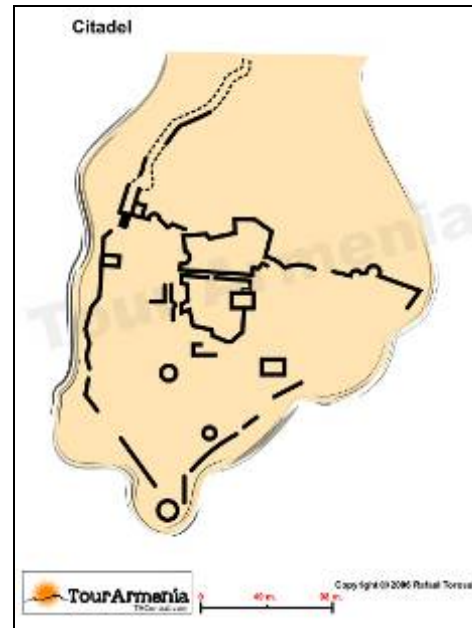
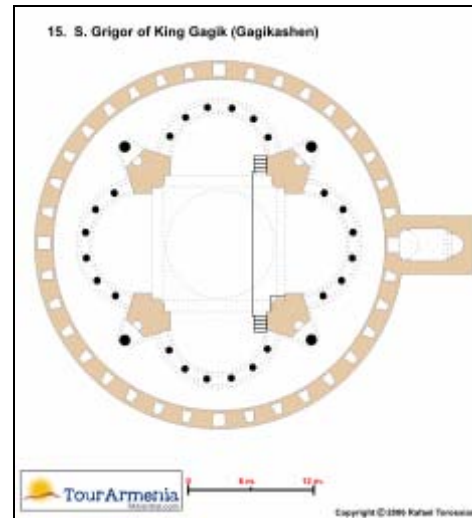


The remarkable **King Gagik's Church of St. Gregory** (S. Grigor Gagiki) is based on the great cathedral at Zvartnots, the so-called "Millennium Church of Ani, mentioned in the chronicles of Stepanos of Taron:

*"It was in this time, the end of the 1000th year of Our Lord's incarnation, in the time of Emperor Basil, when Gagik, King of Armenia, received the notion of erecting in the city of Ani a church like in size and form to the great church at Vagharshapat, dedicated to St. Gregory, then in ruins."  
- Stepanos Asoghik of Taron*

It is thought that King Gagik (r. 990 to 1020) chose the architect T'rdat (who designed the Cathedral of Ani) to build his "millennium" church, and it was probably erected between the years 1001 and 1005 (some books say between 990 and 1000). T'rdat's design for the church was a circular gallery around a four-apse central building with rounded walls, which closely resembled the fallen Zvartnots masterpiece. However, like its original, the structure was never very stable, and despite attempts to strengthen the building, it soon collapsed. Later houses were built over the structure, some using the masonry, and it was forgotten until the 1906 excavation uncovered the foundations.

The **Arakelots** (Holy Apostles) church exact history is unknown, no founding inscription having been discovered on the building. It is believed to have been built for archbishops from the Pahlavuni princely family, who commissioned its construction. The Pahlavunis, related to both the Bagratunis and the old Kamsarakan nakharar dynasty, were a powerful allies and almost as rich



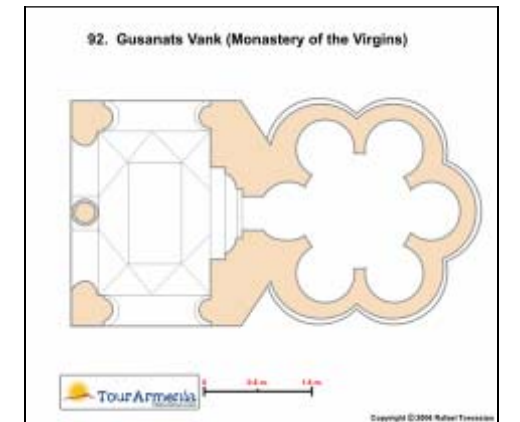
At the southern end of the city the flat top of a promontory was once a separate fortified enclosure. This part of Ani is known as the "Inner Fortress" (**Mijnaberd**), or simply the "citadel". Though protected on three sides with

steep cliffs, the citadel was encircled by a single line of ramparts. This wall had towers on its north side, and a gateway at its NW corner.

According to tradition a pagan temple dedicated to the goddess Anahit stood here, the temple destroyed by Saint Gregory the Illuminator, who then erected a church on the site. Nothing has been found to substantiate this, but it makes a good story. At the very edge of the cliff stands a ruined church, the Kizkaleh, probably built during the first 15 years of the thirteenth century.

The Citadel Church is located at the eastern edge of the palace within the citadel. Its only intact wall is the north wall, a part of a 13<sup>th</sup> century renovation that added a second story. The church is dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> c, though the specific decorative elements: capitals with acanthus leaves, fretwork patterned cornice, and other elements typical of early Christian art suggest 6<sup>th</sup> century. The hall (5.85 by 9.4 m) is divided by two pairs of wall piers and flying arches.

The southernmost tip of the city, nearly surrounded by the Arpa/Akhurian Rivers is perhaps its oldest point, a magnificent defensive perch for millennia of settlers. The fortifications and relatively well preserved buildings suggest this might be amongst the last parts of the city to be abandoned. The site is called "**Kizkale**" in Turkish or "**Gusanats**" in Armenian (Maiden's or nun's) point.

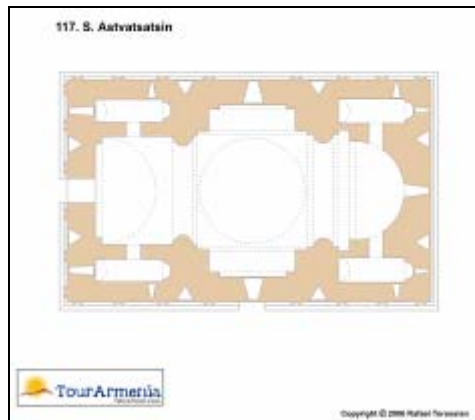


The site has never been excavated, though according to tradition a temple to the Armenian goddess Anahit once stood here, destroyed by S. Grigor Lusavorich during the Pagan Wars.

Serious excavation may prove this a myth or reality. The point is very difficult to get to now, the once carefully laid stone sacred path strewn with rubble and boulders falling from earthquakes and war.

Perched over the river are the ruins of a church, **Astvatsatsin**, part of a nunnery (S. Grigor?) from the 12-13th c. An inscription on the walls of the church (damaged in the 1988 earthquake and attributed to Shah'n'shah Zakarian, related to the Georgian Bagratid dynasty and governor of Ani 1198-1999) reads:

*"During the reign of the Queen of queens Tamar, anointed by God and devout, I, Shah'n'shah Zakarian amirspasalar (governor), her faithful servant, son of the great Sarkis M'kharg'rtseli, doing God's bidding, created this monument ... in this monastery, near the church built by our Illuminator, Saint Grigor."*



**The Menukhir Mosque** (1072?) built at the very edge of the ravine overlooking the Akhurian River is said to have been founded by the emir Menukhir, the first of the Shaddadid dynasty to rule Ani beginning ca. 1072.

➔ Go back to the Highway at Ani Station, then S about 5 km to **ANI PEMZA** (40.448611x 43.6041667) 📍 🏰

🌟 **ANI PEMZA /YERERUIK - ԱՆԻՊԵՄՁԱ** 📍 (elev. 4616, pop. 5067) Known for its pink and honey-colored Ani tuff, the area is also home to the Basilica of **Yereruik** is located just a few km from the border of Turkey. It is an important

example of the earliest form of church construction in Armenia, the three-aisle Basilica or hall church.

When King T'rdat and Gregory the Illuminator built churches on the site of Pagan temples they destroyed, They transformed the most important worship places for a thousand years into new Christian religious centers. The basilica is a direct descendant of these first conversions, most built directly on the original foundations, some using the same walls as the pre-Christian temple. This is the basilica (or Hall Church) which can have single or triple naves in Armenia. The new churches copied the form of the older temple, and the earliest still show the Hellenistic influences of patterning on the capitals, frescos and placing the altar from West to East (unique to Armenian church construction). Use of triple nave basilica is uniquely Armenian, its forebears Urartian palaces and temples more than 1000 years in use before the Christian era.

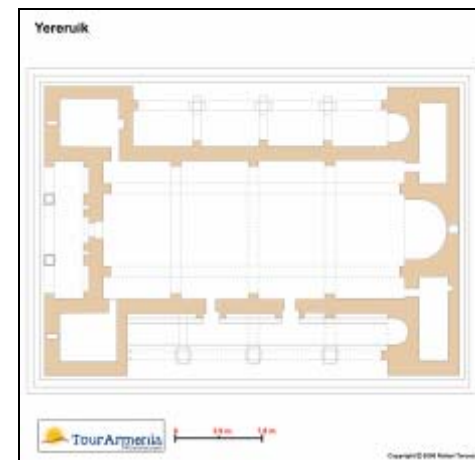


Yereruik is an example of this direct use of the Pre-Christian temple, a triple nave basilica built directly on top of the original pagan temple, on a raised stylobate, with numerous frescos, now in fragments.

Excavations (Nicholas Marr, Toros Toromanian) showed extensive renovation of the church, including 5th-6th c addition of the North and South arcades and western antechambers and 10th c renovation of the main altar, which includes an inscription stone in the lower North wall of the main apse that says it was a testimonial stone to S. Karapet.

Its form (basilica) and architectural details (geometric patterns, early fresco fragments)

suggest its construction in the 4th-5th c. The basilica was built on a six-step stylobate (raised floor, typically made with uneven steps to reach the foundation floor) with an east-west orientation. The number of steps confirm its pagan origins; pre-Christian temples were always placed on 6 or 7 step stylobates, borrowed from the Greeks (stylobates were temple foundation platforms), the number divisible by three. Three itself was considered one of the holiest numbers in sacred geometry, the three standing for the trinity deities of all western Pagan faiths, usurped by the Christians in the Holy trinity. Its long spacious hall is divided into three aisles by three pairs of cross pylons.



The church measures 11.5 x 26.6 m and the central nave is 3 times wider than the side naves, an engineering feat for its time. It rose above the side aisle roofs and seems to have had a wooden ceiling. The Apsidiales (small or secondary apses) protrude far out and are linked by arched galleries at the northern and southern façades. In what became a commonplace in later Armenian church structures, there are four chapels embedded in the corners of the building. This is in keeping with both Greek temple designs which placed antechambers in the corners and with the legend of Grigor Lusavorich's visions, which described the corners of the universe in God's plan. At Yereruik all four are two-story, with the eastern pair behind the side apses looking towards North and the western larger pair looking north and west, and south and west.

The roofing is completely destroyed and there is some debate as to what kind it was. Some say it was a massive wooden beam structure, later covered with stone or ceramic tile, the beams supported by protruding arches on the side walls. Others think that the entire church was stone covered, and point to the western rooms, much larger than the eastern, the roofs for which seem to have been paved with stones. It is probable that the church, like most old structures, was renovated and added to over time, using the latest (or most available) engineering and materials on hand, its harmonious appearance is considered an architectural feat, its complicated design and number of renovations.

The basilica is striking, its three entries (west and south) with pediments adorned with exquisitely ornamented tympanum and column capitals carved with leaf designs. The windows are surrounded by moldings that curl away from each other at their bases. The pilaster capitals and bases and entryway architraves are decorated with geometric patterns; six-petal rosettes and Greek crosses in a circle. The detailing and composition of portals became a feature of future churches. There are some fragmentary remains of frescoes, the earliest is dated 1038. The church is built in such a way that to reach the floor of the basilica, you have to descend several steps, the actual floor being lower than the top of the stylobate. Thus (using our sacred geometry) you ascend up to the temple of God, only to then descend (or bow) in his presence, a symbolic form of prostration.

About 200 m SE of the basilica 1958 excavations uncovered a 4th-5th c dam and small reservoir, which captured waters from a stream connected to the Akhurian. The dam, 120 m long and 4 m thick at its widest point, was made of stone, with support arches every 5-6 m and double-thick in the center, clapped with polished stone. Nearby is a cave dwelling complex, as are the ruins of the medieval village and a small chapel. An early Iron Age grave field lies in the valley just E of the basilica.

**Camping and food** may be had at the village, but border guards may forbid.

➔ END OF TRIP 2



## TRIP 3: ARPI LICH ▲

**GIUMRI** – [MARMASHEN](#) – (Kaps) – (Jradzor) – [HOGHMIK](#) – (Amassia) – (Berdashen) – [PAGHAKN](#) – [ARPI LICH](#) – (Ardenis) – [ZORAKERT](#) – [TSAGHKUT](#) – [SHAGHIK](#)

**Stay:** Overnight in Giumri, village home if you don't mind the rustic amenities.

**Eat:** Amassia, roadside stands on the Georgian Highway, village home.

**NOTE:** There are natural gas stations once you leave Giumri, and petrol stations may be scarce or nonexistent. Past Amassia, there is nothing, Stock up before you leave.

This day trip takes you up to Amassia, Armenia's Alpine (some say Siberia) district. Visitors are often overwhelmed with the hospitality of these remote villages, whose rough climate imparts a special goodness to the wild honey, home-churned butter, yogurt and fresh food found in every household.

☞ Take the N Highway towards Georgia and just north of town, and then turn left (NW) on Amassia highway (which skirts past the new housing blocks and quickly peters into a potted road) and continue for about 8 km (and past the village of Marmashen) into the village of **Vaghamaberd**. Continue for another 500 meters or so the left turnoff to the berd (signposted).

✂ **MARMASHEN (Vahramaberd) Սարմաշեն /Վահրամաբերդ/ ▲**

For detailed description see [NEAR GIUMRI : MARMASHEN](#) (p. 7)

☞ Backtrack to the Amassia Highway and continue N about 1 km to (Kaps DD 40.8666667 x 43.7166667) 🏠 🏠 🏠

**SIDE TRIP:** (Kaps – *Կապս*, elev. 521m, pop. 145) is a forlorn village whose best feature is its summer jambar (camp) for children, located in the river gorge to the W. When working and not full the map can accommodate visitors and can be a decent place to crash if you are stuck in the area.

**Camping in area:** Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.

☞ Continue N on the highway about 5 km (and through the Arpi Chai / Akurian River gorge) to the R (E) turnoff to Jradzor. Follow that about 1 km into the village of (Jradzor, DD 40.915x 43.7719444) 🏠 🏠 🏠

**SIDE TRIP:** (Jradzor – *Ջրածոր* (elev. 532m, pop. 1811) has a rebuilt 19th c. church, and about 2 km SE on the hills across the river are the ruins of a cyclopean fort (Iron Age - Urartu).

Jradzor is also the location of a planned hydroelectric power plant, which, if built, will destroy one of Shirak's most important archeological sites, a Bronze/Iron Age settlement on the road to Hoghmiik.

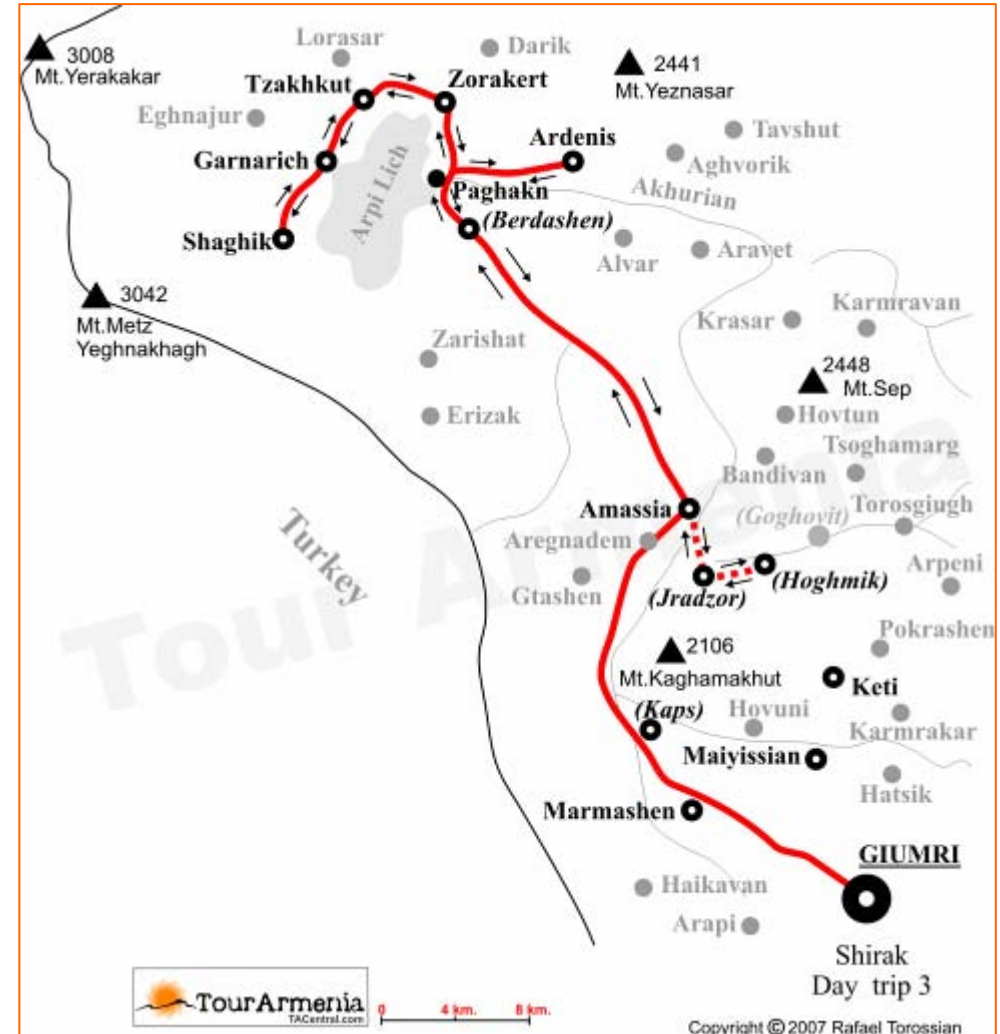
**Camping in area:** Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.

☞ Continue E on the dirt and gravel road about 3 km to a crest on road overlooking a field leading to the gorge. Look for piles of rocks on the right (S) and for a small mountain in a rocky crest into the river. This is the 3000 – 1000 BCE archeological site at **HOGHMIK** 🏠 🏠

✂ **HOGHMIK EXCAVATION – ՀՈՂՄԻԿԻ ՊԵՂՈՒՄՆԵՐ** ▲ is on a plateau on the north bank of the Chaiyr river and is found by walking (carefully) past the low piles of stones towards the rim of the gorge. Hidden by grass and wildflowers from a distance, the settlement quickly becomes apparent as you reach it, as one foundation after another unfolds itself before you.

The site consists of a large Hellenistic Settlement from the 3rd-2nd cc BE, which in turn lie over Iron and Bronze Age layers. The settlement had grown by the Hellenistic (early Arshakuni) period into a substantial settlement, as the excavated foundations show: streets, houses and public buildings are outlined in rock, stretching from just below the road to the edge of the gorge.

Remarkably the settlement's only source of water for its 500+ citizens was the river itself, which is a 100 m descent into the river gorge. As you walk around the site you can begin to detect the numerous buildings some of their functions: palaces and dining halls still have a few of the column bases, and the streets meander between



buildings as it runs to the river gorge. More importantly, the site lies over much earlier levels of settlement, stretching at least to the mid Bronze Age (3000 BCE) when the entire region was lush and humid, warmed by the still active volcanic cones surrounding the area. There are Bronze Age and medieval burial grounds as well, some of which appear as slight humps on the horizon.

**Camping in area:** Springs in the area.

☞ Backtrack to Jradzor and turn right (N) on the Amassia Highway and continue about 5.5 km to (Amassia, DD 40.9466667x 43.7813889) 🏠 🏠 🏠



**SIDE TRIP: (Amassia - ԱՄԱՍԻԱ** elev. 1864m, pop. 969) is a very sad and very poor place, stuck in on of the worst agricultural areas in Armenia, too cold to grow crops that reap better incomes and too poor to move on.

Inside the village there is a square surrounding a wilting park with hammer and sickle emblems on the gates and a modern khachkar to some veteran or cause, the old government buildings (now closed) and a **dilapidated hotel and defunct restaurant**, neither of which has worked in ages. What makes up this is friendliness of local villagers, who will bend over backwards to make your stay as comfortable as it might be, opening the closed hotel and pulling out furniture and supplies from other rooms to make one or two at least passable for an overnight. In the end it will be one step above camping out, but if you are stuck on the road, these folks will do what they can to try and make your stay at least bearable, their friendliness and warmth is endearing. Everything negotiated in this poverty-stricken area.



There is a **mterk** on the corner of the hotel building, a **post office** with **Armentel** office (phone calls) and some **commission shops/kiosks** off the S end of the Square, where an **Apoteka** and other small shops can be found. To the N of the square is the **hospital**, emergencies only.

NW of the village in the high mountains (no road) are the ruins of the "Chatin Dara" fortress.

**Camping in area: Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

➔ From Amassia take the Northern road towards Arpi Lich and continue about 16.3 km past (**Berdashen**) or, "the village of no petrol," to the Ardenis/Arpi Lich intersection. Take the left turn in front of the low lying industrial building and go another 1.8 km up hill to the dam at **PAGHAKN** (DD 41.0536111x 43.6688889) 🏠 🌿

✂ **PAGHAKN - ՊԱԿԱԿՆ** 📍 (till recently Shurabad, elev. 2010m, pop. 50), is the gateway to Arpi Lich reservoir, and Armenia's Alpine country. It has the ruins of an old church and cyclopean fort.

The small villages of Ashotsk, such as Berdashen, Paghakn, Pokr Sarian, Ghazanchi and Ghakavasar (formerly known as Kefli, or Joyous) perched on the sides of hills and surrounded by miles of wildflower meadows are some of Armenia's prettiest places. The villages are generally friendly, though they may be surprised to see someone in so remote a place. A drive around the lake shows its wild beauty from many angles.

**Camping in area: Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

➔ **ARPI (ARPA) LICH - ԱՐՓԻ (ԱՐՓԱ) ԼԻՃ** begins between Berdashen and Paghakn. The drive around the reservoir to its farthest side is about 28 km, where it dead ends 🏠 🌿

✂ **ARPI LICH - ԱՐՓԻԼԻՃ** 📍 situated at an altitude of 2023 m and is located in the very north-west of Armenia, evolved in the 1950s from the small Lake Arpi. Fed by thaws and four streams, the 3,193 hectare lake is the source of the Akhurian River. The landscape is mountain steppe with mostly grassy alpine vegetation. The site is adjacent to wetlands. In spring the reservoir floods an area of 20 sq km and two islands. By autumn, when the lake waters are used for irrigation, the shores of the two islands merge. The second wetland are in Armenia to be covered by the Ramsar Treaty on Wetlands (Resources, p. 33), the lake basin is about to become a National Park, supported by the German government.

**The Village Of "Benzine Ch'ka"**

Who woulda thunk? After leaving Amassia with high hopes of running the old border along the Arpa Chai and cruising along the high mountain meadows and rocky crevices to Armenia's Siberia, Ashot looked over and casually asked, "are there any petrol stops around here?"

A question I might well expect him to have the answer to, he was the driver. We stared blankly at each other, then broke out in laughter. Woo hoo! We were in it now! Driving blind into territory no one knew anything about (at least in our car), except a) it was cold outside, b) it was called Armenia's Siberia, and c) it was cold outside.

We cruised into Berdashen, off the spine of the Shirak mountains onto an alpine plateau, the dark churning waters of Arpi Lich off it eh distance. Ashot stopped at the first farm house to buy a couple o liters of petrol, enough to get us to civilization. Ashot had two Fanta bottles just for that purpose (good ole Fanta).

"Brother, there is no petrol here." What do you mean? A look like we should have been born under a luckier star or with a brighter set of parents, then, "What I mean is there is no petrol. None. If anyone gets any, they keep it locked up. Petrol trucks come by one every two weeks." -But we'll buy it. "Don't matter. We don't need your money; we need you to bring back the petrol!"

Went to 10 houses, everyone the same. If we would be willing to replace what we took they would gladly lend us some. Didn't want our money. Just wanted petrol! It was 35 km to the Georgian Highway and the first reliable supply of petrol. Going and coming back—not an option at sunset.

By driving the speed limit, coasting, and a lot of prayers to the oily angel in the sky, we made it to Ardenis, where the petrol truck does make an appearance, and bought our cherished two liters of gas. Petrol never smelled so good.

Advice to intrepid travelers on the road to adventure: Remember thy canister!




More than 100 species of **birds** have been observed around Lake Arpi. Among the water birds there are little grebe (Tachybaptus ruficollis), white stork (Ciconia ciconia), common teal (Anas crecca), mallard (A. platyrhynchos), common pochard (Aythya ferina), tufted duck (A. fuligula), ruddy shelduck (Tadorna ferruginea), kentish plover (Charadrius alexandrinus), common snipe (Gallinago gallinago), great snipe (G. media), Armenian gull (Larus armenicus), little tern (Sterna albifrons). Endangered waterfowl (Red Data Book) occurring "rather frequently" includes dalmatian pelean (Pelecanus crispus), black stork (Ciconia nigra), common shelduck (Tadorna tadorna) and common crane (Grus grus). Of special concern is the large breeding colony of Armenian Gull (Larus armenicus); 7,000-10,000 pairs are known to breed on the two islands, comprising 60% of the population in Armenia. The lake is one of two lakes in Armenia (the other is rarely Sevan) that hosts migrating Pelicans (Pelecanus crispus), breeding every 2-5 years, juveniles visiting annually.



**Flora** include Iris lineolata, I. Caucasica, Merendera mirzoeval, Colchicum Szoritsii, Gagea ssp., Puschkinia scilloides, Draba ssp., Lallemautia caneseus, Ranunculus ssp., Myosotis alpestris, Pedicularis ssp., Trifolium ssp., Gladiolus kotschyanus, Silene ssp. Endangered species (Red Book of Armenia) include Iris sibirica, Gladiolus imbricatus, Traunsteinera sphaerica, Seilla rosenii grow in the surroundings. A number of flower species (including yellow water lily (Nuphar luteum), bogbean (Menyanthes frifoliata) and flowering rush (Butomus umbellatus) were lost when Lake Arpi was converted into a reservoir.

**Conservation issues** The lake is over-fished and birds are seen as competition to fishermen. Like in other rural areas, farmers and villagers still feel the land is expendable, the lake will live forever. Though not as threatened as Lori or Siunik with their strip mining operations and clear cut operations, Amassia is still a fragile ecosystem that needs preserving with the support of local populations. Eco tourism is a way to demonstrate income from preserving and care taking. The bird colony is extremely vulnerable due to annual water-level fluctuations of the reservoir. Birds are sometimes subject to disturbance when fluctuating water-levels allow access to nesting areas.


**Camping** around the lake, **overnight** in village home (5000 AMD), village **food** (dairy).

➤ From Paghakn, take the side road E about 5 km to the Side Trip (**Ardenis**, DD 41.0786111x 43.7238889)   


**SIDE TRIP: (Ardenis - Արդենիս, elev. 2004m, pop. 516) (formerly Gyollu) is E of Paghakn in the foothills of Mt. Yeznasar, once inhabited by Azeris who left before the crisis with Azerbaijan flared up in 1988. As they left, many destroyed their homes, the remains of which still stand as sentinels to their existence. They were replaced with refugees from Karabakh who have built new homes in the same village. Just outside the village, on its E end is a large Azei cemetery with tombstones, some of which have been pushed down or broken, but many of which still stand. Look for the ones with pistols, rifles, knives and swords carved on them. These are memorials to soldiers from the early 20th c and WWII. The stones are inscribed using Russian script, as the Azeris were forbidden to use their own script by the soviets. Though in Russian Cyrillic, the words are still Azeri.**

The road is an alternate route to the Georgian highway and the border at Bavra. It is 24 km of bone-crunching dirt road and potted asphalt, about one hour of your life to the other side.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

➤ From Paghakn, take the road N about 4 km to **ZORAKERT** (DD 41.0927778x 43.6597222) 




**ZORAKERT - ՉՈՐԱԿԵՐՏ**  (formerly Balikhli, elev. 2101m, pop. 778) has the ruins of a fort a little NE.


On a rutted road N from Zorakert about 5 km from Zorakert, near the border with Georgia, is situated the small hamlet of Darik, with an organic farm producing some of the best dairy products in the country.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.


➤ Continue on the road W around the reservoir about 4 km to **TZAGHKUT** (DD 41.0975x 43.6163889)   

**TZAGHKUT - ԾԱՂԿՈՒՏ**  (once Gyullija, elev. 2047m, pop. 745), has a medieval fortress about 2 km E of town.

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

➤ Continue on the road S around the reservoir about 4 km to Garnarich, then another 4 km to **SHAGHIK** (DD 41.0477778x 43.5855556) 



**SHAGHIK - ՇԱՂԻԿ**  (till 1991 Karabulagh, elev. 2010m, pop. 835) is at the end of the road. Gorgeous vistas and rolling grass with hints of the riots of colors that come every spring. No monuments, nothing to study or stare at except the endless waves of water, grass and the everlasting sky. Want more?

**Camping** in area; **Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

➤ END OF TRIP 3



**TRIP 4: ASHOTSK, TO GEORGIA ▲**

**GIUMRI** - - **MAIYISSIAN** - (Keti) - **LERNANTSK PASS** - (Arpeni) - (Torosgiugh) - (Goghovit) - **TSOGHAMARK** -

**RIGHT ROUTE:** (Vardaghiur) - (Musaiyelian) - (Salut, Bashgiugh) - (Pokr Sarian) - (Kakavasar) - **DZORASHEN** -

**LEFT ROUTE:** (Ashotsk) - (Mets Sepasar) - **GHAZANCHI** - (Sizavet) - (Bavra: Akhalkalaki & Akhaltsikhe)

**Stay:** Overnight in Giumri, village home if you don't mind the rustic amenities.

**Eat:** Road side stands, Ashotsk, Bavra.

Day Trip 4 explores Northern Shirak, a land of contrasts with teeming forests, rugged mountains and dry ridges. The day trip follows the highway to Georgia, forking off on the Tashir / Stepanavan highway mid way, then returns and continues to the Georgian border, where a pitted road goes on to the impoverished Armenian districts of Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe.

☞ Take the Northern Highway out of Giumri towards Georgia for about 10 km to **MAIYISSIAN** (DD 40.8530556x 43.8294444) 🏠 🗺️



🏠 **MAIYISSIAN** - ՄԱԻՅԻՍՅԱՆ ▲ (till 1946 Ortakilisa, elev. 1635m, pop. 3849), is named for the May 1920 Bolshevik attempt to seize power in Armenia. In the village is the 7th c. S. Astvatsatsin church made from red and black tuff, with inscriptions.

**Camping in the area; Overnight** at the hamlet (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.

☞ Continue N on the Highway about 5 km to (**KETI**, DD 40.9x 43.8833333) 🏠 🗺️

**SIDE TRIP:** (Keti - **ԲԵՐԻ** "Joyous," elev. 2031m, pop. 2760) boasts two Bronze Age settlements on its nearby hills (requires hiking), one NE of town, the other, larger on the hill SE. Relics uncovered during the excavation are kept at the Shirak Regional Museum in Giumri (unfortunately closed because of lack of facilities). The village also has a shrine and a church, neither very

interesting. About 2 km NW in a crevice of some hills is another Bronze Age site.

**Camping in area; Overnight** in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs** in the area.



☞ About 3 km N on the highway, immediately past Pokrashen, is the **LERNANTSK PASS** 🏠 🗺️

🏠 **LERNANTSK PASS** - ԼԵՆՆԱՆՏՔ ▲ The pass crosses between the foothills of Mts. Chatalsar and Maralsar, with stunning views of the Giumri and Tsoghamark Valleys. Great place for a pit stop and a view.

**Camping in area; Springs** in the area.

☞ Continue N about 2.6 km to the right (E) turnout to (**Arpeni** - DD 40.9166667 x 43.8833333) 🏠 🗺️

**SIDE TRIP:** (Arpeni - **ԱՐՊԵՆԻ** elev. 593m, pop. 700) On the highway at the turn off is a Jasharan (Food joint), with cheap eats and good views.



**Camping in the area; Overnight at the hamlet (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➤ Continue N on the highway another 1 km to a bridge and the southern edge of (**Torosgiugh** DD 40.935 x 43.8775) 🏠 🌿 🌊

**SIDE TRIP: (Torosgiugh – Թորոսգյուղ** elev. 604m, pop. 1235) sits above the Chaiyir River in an idyllic spot below plunging alpine mountains. At the bridge is a restaurant (2000-3000 AMD) and **jambar** (summer camp for kids) which, when working will be glad to put up tourists in available rooms (2000-3000 AMD includes three meals).

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➤ Continue N on the Highway about 13 km to a side road and then W about 3 km to (**Goghovit**) 🏠 🌿 🌊

**SIDE TRIP: (Goghovit - Գոգհովիտ - till 603m Taknalu, pop. 377) is on the road above the Chaiyir Rive, all along which is great for camping and hiking. The village has a ruined 1860 church and some good local produce..**

**Camping in the area; Overnight at the hamlet (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➤ Backtrack to the highway and turn left (N), continuing about 2.5 km to the left turn off (then 500 m) to **TSOGHAMARK** (DD 40.95023 x 43.85722) 🏠 🌿 🌊

🏠 **TSOGHAMARG – ՅՈՂԱՍԱՐԳ** 🏔️ (elev. 2003m, pop. 1875) on first glance looks like any of a number of small villages in Armenia, set against a backdrop of some cliffs (which hold the remains of a cyclopean fortress, mostly ruined during the 1988 earthquake) and a meandering layout of village homes and well-kept gardens. The 18th-19th c church is set up above the village at the end of the right fork from the highway.

The jewels for the village begins inside this simple **black and red tufa triple-nave basilica**. The roof is tinned over at one time with its western end collapsed an exposed to the

elements. The rest of the roof protects an ethnographic dream and one of Armenia's true historical treasures: an original wooden beam ceiling with earthen roof with massive wooden support columns and carved capitals.



The massive wooden beams the support the cross beams still survive, though about 40% of the top tier beamed roof has collapsed, but enough remains to show how 16th-19th c churches were roofed, and just how closely church design was tied to domestic house construction, and in this case, how closely tied it was to much more ancient buildings that have been excavated from the Iron Age, Compare this roofing design with that at the Erebuni museum, and the similarities are remarkable. The massive wood beams were shipped in from East Armenia, from the pine forests of Sari Ghamish, a forest that still supplies wood to Eastern Turkey. Some of the beams are more than 20m long and 500 centimeters tin diameter. Sari Ghamish also supplied much of the wood used to build the houses in Old Giumri.

The effect is both haunting and enchanting, its primitive design and extraordinarily well preserved origins vying with the elements for dominance, the elements slowly winning. During WWII the church was converted into a warehouse and it has never recovered from that experience, the villagers begging their poverty for not preserving or fixing the church. Just as well, as the extraordinary finds inside require some real expertise in preserving this architectural jewel.

A **Bronze-Iron Age** fortress lies above the church on the rim of the hills, a 30m hike up rocky terrain. You can detect a few of the red rocks above the rim, and view the destruction of

the central portion which cascaded downhill during the earthquake.

The real find is in the tiny **matur** (chapel), just 100m uphill (NE) from the church, which the villagers have paid special attention to preserving without really knowing what is inside. The tiny pink stucco building, built in 1969 by a certain Andranik Seroyian protects a holy spot the villagers have worshipped at throughout their collective memories, the women of the village placing matagh (sacrifice) offerings at the site even before the chapel was erected over the site. But its real purpose as the location of early Bronze/Iron Age graves makes it one of Armenia's real treasures.



Calling the site the graves for three brothers and a sister: **Sisak, Misak, Abednak & Shoghakat** the thick stone slabs inside the tiny building cover graves of people no one in the village has any memory of, only a collective memory handed down from generation to generation. The four graves are thought to date between the 4th and 1st millennium BCE. If the earlier date is correct, the sarcophagi would predate any of its type in Armenia and be one of the oldest in the world. It shows a sophisticated relationship between people and the after world and their attempt so preserve the memory of the dead using coffin like structures. Interesting to note that the old Armenian names seem to be related from older civilizations in the region, specifically Sumeria and Egypt. Sisak, Misak and Apetnak appear to be variants of gods in the Sumerian (4th millennium BCE) mythology, appearing later as Babylonian followers of Daniel in the bible (as Shadrach (Shishak), Meshach (Mishak) and Abednego (Abednak/Apetnak):

## Sisak, Misak, Apetnak and Shoghakat

These things always begin with local legends and myths, and they are usually based in some kind of truth. Sisak, Misak & Apetnak may be derivatives of Sumerian or Egyptian mythological beings Shishak, Mishak and Apetnakh, which would put them into pretty old company (and deepen Armenia's history). The names are not Armenian in origin, and seem not to be Indo-European, making these four souls in this chapel people of foreign coinage, and important too, considering their place of honor.

The myth that we heard (from a lively village elder named Rafi, who also recounted the history of the Turkish invasion of 1920, when locals were rounded up and killed in the hills above the chapel) was one handed down to him by his mother, who said the four people were holy, and the villagers always worshipped at the site, though they did not know exactly who was underneath them.

One day, one of the villagers, in a rage, struck one of the stone covers, breaking it into four pieces, shouting, "There is nothing sacred here. If these are holy, then let God punish me!" He then went home and promptly died that night. The villagers then understood this was indeed a sacred spot (or one to fear) and ever since have venerated the site. The current chapel was built in 1969, and its concrete floor and metal roof protect the graves, both for the believers in the village and for future archeological research.



*"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. And if not, we want you to know, O king, that we will*

*not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."*

They are later appointed as administrators of Babylon by the Assyrian king. Sisak/Shishak is also listed as the biblical name for Thutmose III, the Egyptian Pharaoh who invaded Israel in 925 BCE (specifically, the Shishak Relief depicts the Egyptian pharaoh Shishak's military victory over King Rehoboam ca. 925 BCE, when Solomon's temple in Judah was plundered). Another reference is given to one of the ancestor kings (patriarchs) of the Armenians in the Ararat region, known by the Assyrians as "Tilgarimmu" - the biblical Thogarma. In the History of the Armenians by the medieval historian Movses Khorenatsi, the fifth king in succession, beginning from Haik, is King Gegham, Sisak (1908-1858 BCE)

Shoghakat is the name of a maiden allied with the story of Hripsime and Guyaneh, whose deaths precipitated King T'rdat's descent into madness and the conversion of the Armenian court to Christianity, but whose real origins are obscure. She may be tied to the Sumerian legend, or simply added to the story of the three brothers to lend Christian credence to the site.

The history of the site is even more obscure, since villagers seem to have been descended from immigrants to the area between 1828 (Russo-Turkish war) and 1874 (The Hamadin pogroms), further removing them from the original inhabitants.

You can't help but notice their age as you stumble on the huge stone covers for the sarcophagi when you enter the chapel, their layout in exact position common among Bronze Age burials.

The villagers have no idea what they are protecting, for them Sisak, Misak & Apetnak (Shishak, Mishak and Apetnakh?) were three brothers who lived in some distant time with their sister Shoghakat and their graves bring good luck to those who bring offerings to them. In one corner of the room an old stone leans against the walls, as well as a small coin. Villagers say if you wish for something and rub it had enough, it will stick to the stone and grant your wish. We tried, and alas failed to get the coin to stick, but others succeeded, no doubt in better touch with Sisak and Misak than us.

He village is also renowned (perhaps more so) for being the birthplace for a number of Giumri's police chiefs, and one hopes their power will extend to preserving both the 18th c church and to uncovering the mystery of the 4 BCE brothers and a sister.

**Camping in the area; Overnight at the hamlet** (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs in the area.**

➡ *Backtrack to the highway and continue N for about 5 km to where the highway forks N to Georgia or NE toward Tashir and Stepanavan on a bad road.*

### RIGHT ROUTE:

Take the NE fork and in another kilometer is (Vardaghpiur, DD 40.95x 43.9166667) 🏠 🗺️ 🏞️

**SIDE TRIP: (Vardaghpiur - ՎԱՐՂԱՂՔՅՈՒՐ** before Giullibulagh or "Rose spring," elev. 2024m, pop. 2373) is on a rolling set of hills, on a mountain stream feeding to the Ashotsk and Akhurian Rivers.

**Camping in the hills; Springs in the area.**

➡ *Continue NE on the Highway for about 4 km to Side Trip (Musaiyelian, DD 40.9927778x 43.9388889) or go back to Vardaghpiur* 🏠 🗺️ 🏞️

**SIDE TRIP: (Musaiyelian - ՄՍԱԻԵԼԻԱՆ** - till 1946 Boz Glugh, elev. 2081m, pop. 1716) has the S. T'rdat church(1894) with an adjoining medieval graveyard with some ram shaped tombstones. The gravestones show the influence of animal features on gravestones, shared with Pre-Christian rites and Turn N on a side road and you can take a rough scenic road via Hartashen and Zukaghpiur to Ashotsk (about 10 km). Continue NE on the highway and the road ascends to the Karakhach Pass (alt. 2272 m) over Mt. Salut (not passable until May) some 35 km to Tashir (then 15 km S to Stepanavan) through deforested mountains.

**Camping in the area; Overnight in village** (3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs in the area.**

➡ *Go back to Vardaghpiur then take the S side road for about 3 km to (Salut, DD 40.9666667x*

*43.9333333) and another 3 km to (Bashgiugh, DD 40.95x 43.9666667)* 🏠 🗺️ 🏞️

**SIDE TRIP: (Salut - ՍԱԼՄԱՆ** - once Skiut, 2179m. pop. 1716) and (Bashgiugh - ԲԱՇԳՅՈՒԳ, elev. 6784, pop. 4112) are perched on rivers, Salut on a fork of the Ashotsk and Bashgiugh on the Chichkan. Bashgiugh has a church in the village.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home** is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs in the area.**

➡ *Continue S on the road about 5 km to (Pokr Sariat, DD 40.9258333x 44.0186111) then another 2 km to (Kakavasar)* 🏠 🗺️ 🏞️

**SIDE TRIP: (Pokr Sariat - ՊՈԿՐ ՍԱՐԻԱՐ,** elev. 2014m, pop. 1154) and (Kakavasar - ԿԱԿԱՎԱՍԱՐ) lie along a twisting mountain road on the Chichkan river. It has a 19<sup>th</sup> c. church, but the views as you go up the foothills to Mt. Tsularas (2555 m) are breathtaking.

(Kakavasar - ԿԱԿԱՎԱՍԱՐ - till 1978 Kefli, pop. 153) has the ruined Karmravor church (7th c) just W of the village and the remains of cyclopean fort.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home** is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs in the area.**

➡ *Take the side road E about 4 km (and past the Sarapat turnoff) to DZORASHEN (DD 40.9313889x 44.0691667)* 🏠 🗺️ 🏞️

✳️ **DZORASHEN - ԶՈՐԱՇԵՆ** 🏠 (elev. 2091m, pop. 1526) has the ruined S. Stepanos monastery (12-13th cc), remnants of a 10th c. fortress and a church (1863). It is a difficult slog to the monastery, but worth it for the intrepid traveler. Nestled in the folds of the Gogaran Mountains, the hamlet has few amenities (and fewer people, who make the annual treks uphill in the summer to tend their flocks. S. Stepanos is a central domed cruciform type, with elaborate carvings on the remaining stones. The once walled monastery had a gavit (also 13th c) and several shrines, now missing. The fortress was likewise toppled by invading Seljuks, Mongols and Timurids. Scant remains to mark what was once a rather impressive affair, given its remote location.

**Hiking** The area has fantastic hiking and climbing possibilities, with trails following stream beds N and E. Pother than climbing the steep hills and cliffs, you can wend your way to Lori Marz by following the Chikan River to Nalband (13 km) or following the mountain road (4x4 or on foot) to Saralandj and Lori Marz in about 7 km.

**Camping in the area; Overnight at the hamlet** (3000 AMD for B&B is fair); **Springs in the area.**

(The road continues to Saralanj and Lori Marz).

➡ *Backtrack to Kakavasar, then backtrack to Vardaghpiur.*

### LEFT ROUTE:

Take the Highway N towards Georgia, about 10 km (via Karmravan) to (Ashotsk DD 41.0375x 43.8580556) 🏠 🗺️

**SIDE TRIP: (Ashotsk - ԱՇՈՏՔ** (till 1938 Ghezlghoch, elev. 1986m, pop. 1349) was renamed for the medieval name of the area ("Rose Spring"), the old name in honor of a young militant, Ghukas Ghukasian (1899-1920), founder of Armenia's Communist Youth Movement. In 1919 he represented the Armenian Bolshevik youth at the convention of the Spartacus youth organization in Tiflis. Sent to Kars in February 1920 to prepare for May uprising, he was killed in a battle with the authorities on 14 May.

Another sad little outlet in Armenia, Ashotsk is the former capital of Ghukasian region, so has a few government buildings (closed), a couple of shops, kiosks and no cafes or jasharans. They do have some rather fat and lazy gai (highway patrolmen) who try and shake anyone down who stops at the town.

Ashotsk is the headquarters for the Ashotsk Cheese Factory (stock up on Dutch, Lori, Chanakh, Suluguni etc.), the Redemptoris Mater Hospital, a gift of Pope John Paul II, operated by the Camillian Religious order.

**Food Cafes, Food shops, kiosks and BBQ stands on main road, overnight in local homes (ask around)**

➡ *From Ashotsk follow the hwy N about 1.9 km to the Mets Sepasar turnoff to the Left (W) and*

follow that another 2 km into the village of (**Mets Sepasar** DD 41.0491667 x 43.8233333) 🏠 🏠 🗺️

**SIDE TRIP:** (**Mets Sepasar – Մեծ Մեղաբեր** elev. 67m, pop. 1200) is located just below Mt. Shishtepe (Tepe being an Arabic word for mound or citadel) and recent excavations are uncovering a variety of artifacts from various periods including some Aneolithic tools. The excavations work in the summers, if you see a jeep up on the hill, make your way up there to view the work.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➡ Continue N on the highway about 6 km to **GHAZANCHI** (DD 41.0788889x 43.8216667) 🏠 🗺️

🗺️ **GHAZANCHI - Դազանչի** ▲ (elev. 2030m, pop. 1220) is to the right (E) of the highway and is not much of a village to look at, but N of the village, also to the right is an interesting Catholic Armenian graveyard, replete with a white and blue Greek style chapel inside. The graves cover the 10th c to the modern period and include three animal stones from the time of the Timur and Mongolian invasions.



Just N of this graveyard, on the left is the old **Urmî gerezmanner** ("Urmî graves") thought to have contained Greek immigrants from the middle ages or earlier. Excavations showed the foundations of a 10th-11th c nave church and Armenian khachkar pieces, leading archeologists to the conclusion the area was actually the site of

the original Ghazanchi inhabitants, destroyed by Turkish and Mongolian invaders.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➡ Continue N on the highway about 4 km to a side road, turn right and go another 2 km to (**Sizavet**, DD 41.105x 43.8411111) 🏠 🗺️

**SIDE TRIP:** (**Sizavet - Սիզավետ** till 1946 Korbulagh, then till 1967 Tasghkashen, elev. 2145m, pop. 1455) has an obsidian mine E of the village, early stone tools and a Bronze Age settlement. Obsidian was widely used by Armenian ancestors for tool making, there are even fragments of obsidian 'magnifying glasses' found at Karahundj in Siunik region, Armenia's Stonehenge. Throughout Georgia and Armenia this natural glass was found in volcanic complexes over wide areas, and obsidian tools go back 250,000 years. The obsidian outcroppings at Sizavet and 6 km west on the same road at Tavshut were major tool factories in the Stone and Bronze Ages.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➡ Go back to the highway, then N about 4 km to (**Bavra** DD 41.1275x 43.7758333) 🏠 🗺️

**SIDE TRIP:** (**Bavra - ԲԱՎՐԱ** once Titoi Kharaba, elev. 2151m, pop. 960) is best known as the customs and immigration point for the Georgian border. You can purchase a visa entering from Georgia at this point for around \$30, and Georgia grants visa to citizens bearing a US passport.

The village has a cemetery on its W edge with some old Arabic tombstones. Otherwise uninteresting (unless you are thirsty for petrol). Note that Viva Cell works up here and into Georgia.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➡ The highway continues N into the remote mostly Armenian districts of **Akhalkalaki - Մխալքալակի** (45 km) and **Akhaltsikhe - Մխալցիխ** (120 km). There are minibuses and

taxis at Akhalkalaki. A taxi from Giumri should cost about 30 dollars

➡ END OF TRIP 4



**TRIP 5: AKHURIAN** ▲

**GIUMRI - (Shirak) - (Hatsik – Topar) - KAMO - JAJUR – (Mets Sarian) – (Jajur Pass) – GIUMRI – (Akhurian) - KARNUT – KARNUT RESERVOIR - (Hovit) – MUSAIYELIAN – JRARAT**

**Stay:** Overnight in Giumri, village home if you don't mind the rustic amenities.

**Eat:** Road side stands, Shirak, Giumri.

Day Trip 5 explores the Eastern edge of Shirak, the foothills of Mt. Aragats, its villages, ravines and meadows, on the road to Spitak and Vanadzor and above Lake Karnut.

☞ Take the NE highway towards Spitak (41 km) and Vanadzor (64 km), and go about 6 km to (Shirak, DD 40.8480556x 43.9213889) 🏠 🚰

**SIDE TRIP:** (Shirak - Ծիքսկ - till 1940 Ghonaghkran or "guest killer," elev. 1661m, pop. 1616), so name for the time locals killed Persian soldiers quartered in their homes, after hearing the soldiers meant to harm them. In the village are the S. Hakob church and S. Minas shrine.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

☞ At Shirak take the W road about 4 km to (Hatsik, DD 40.1641667x 43.9408333) 🏠 🚰

**SIDE TRIP:** 4 km west of Shirak on a side road is (Hatsik - Դաղիկ, elev. 889m, pop. 1558), also called Toparli or Topar. The village has the Tsak Kar (literally hole stone), a large huge stone with a hole just big enough for a person to squeeze through, granting happiness to those who can pass through (large people not apply, and apparently, are doomed to live in woe and gnash their teeth). About 2 km away is (Tarband – Տարբան), a beautiful old mountain village with stone streets, walls and picture-pretty church.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

☞ Go back to Shirak then take the SE road about 3 km to **KAMO** (DD 40.3588889x 45.1266667) 🏠 🚰

☞ **KAMO - ԿԱՄՈ** ▲ (till 1935 Haji Nazar, elev. 1946m, pop. 1710), named for a revolutionary bank robber, has an Astvatsatsin church (1878). 2 km NW is a medieval settlement ("Chataljur ") and the "Khacher" Hellenistic site.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

☞ At Kamo take the N road past the Jajur Reservoir about 3 km to **JAJUR** (DD 40.8505556x 43.9480556) 🏠 🚰

☞ **JAJUR – ԶԱՋՈՒ** ▲ (elev. 1750m, pop. 1616) has the house-museum of the painter Minas Avetisian (1928-1975). Born there, Minas was one of Armenia's most famous painters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a modernist who developed his own style of painting within the so-called "National " style formulated by Sarian. His character was said to be like that of the rural community: strength of character, warm humor, the trustworthiness and reliability which one always feels in people bound to the soil. It was by pure chance that the artist's parents escaped the 1915 massacre. Not far from Jajur several thousands of people were killed in a ravine. The generation which saw these terrible events with their own eyes is still alive. Often on winter evenings, sitting by the hearth of his village home the artist heard the accounts of eye-witnesses. This may explain the drama he instilled in his paintings.

Avetisian studied art in Leningrad, at the Academy of Fine Arts and haunted the Hermitage to study its art. He credited his skill to his teachers Johannson, Zaitsev and Khudiakov. He traveled widely around Armenia, eagerly seeking out historical monuments; he studied the Armenian miniature and the works of the greatest Armenian artists, above all, Saryan's. Avetisian's real emergence as an artist was at the "Exhibition of Five" in Yerevan in 1962, where he revealed himself as a mature painter with a bright individuality. Influenced by miniaturists he studied throughout his life, Avetisian's paintings are renowned for their color and depth of detail, as expressionistic as they were.

On the evening of January 1, 1972, while he was visiting Jajur, Avetisian's studio burned down,

along with some of his best canvasses. Recovering from the loss of his work, he embarked on a new, late burst of creativity, painting "Meditation" (1972) and "Baking Lavash" (1972) and others.

Paleolithic tools have been found in Jajur.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

☞ At Jajur, go E on the Spitak highway about 3 km to Krashen, then N about 3 km to Side Trip (Mets Sarian, DD 40.8933333x 43.9525) 🏠 🚰

**SIDE TRIP:** (Mets Sarian - Մեծ Սարիար, elev. 1961m, pop. 752) has a 19th c. S. N'shan church, reliquary for several manuscripts now in Yerevan.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

☞ At Jajur, either go E on the Spitak highway about 7 km to (Jajur Pass - Զաղաղի լեռնալիցք - 1952 m) Or return to Giumri.

☞ From Giumri take the Akhurian Road SE of town about 6 km to (Akhurian, DD 40.7813889x 43.8963889) 🏠 🚰

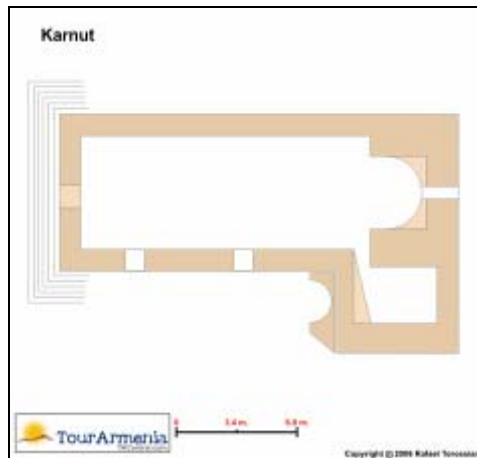
**SIDE TRIP:** (Akhurian - Սխուրյան - till 1945 Duzkent, elev. 154m, pop. 2309). Was the capital of the former Akhurian region and has a few kiosks to show for it.

**Food in villagekhoravts; Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**



➤ At Akhurian take the E road about 7 km to **KARNUT** (DD 40.7836111x 43.9541667) 🏰 🗺️

🏰 **KARNUT - ԿԱՆՈՒՏ** ▲ (till 1946 Diraklar, elev. 1629m, pop. 1852), is a farming community, specializing in wheat, sugar beets, vegetables, fruit and cattle. The area is also known for its basalt mines, and for some Early Bronze Age ruins on a nearby hill. To the NE is a ruined basilica built on the foundations of a pagan temple in the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> cc. and rebuilt in the 10<sup>th</sup> c. This small basilica stands on top of a hill overlooking the village and is of the same type as other early churches of its time, particularly the stretched hall the proportion of (1:2.36) and the horseshoe shaped apse, the same type as that at Tanahat, another early Christian hall.



The basilica stands on a multi-stepped stylobate, its southern outdoor chapel the only one for the church, has a small recessed apse in its western wall, unique in Armenia for not orienting altars to the East, feeding suspicions this remote church either participated in or at least tolerated Pre-Christian rites into the Christian era. The building connects theories of pre-Christian and Armenian architecture. The church itself was erected on a slope, which was contrary to the original flat surface that single nave churches are originally built upon. The church in all is very unusual starting with its structure. Part of its serrated cornice has survived.

Karnut has been the focus of excavations and has a dense concentration of Early Bronze Age materials, topographically quite characteristic of contemporary sites in neighboring regions, such as Anushavan, Ketii and Tsaghkahovit, in Aragatsoth. Though colder now, in its day, the area was comparatively warm, seldom freezing. Deforestation in Armenia is much of the reason the climate has so radically changed. About 1 km N are the remains of an 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> cc. BCE dam.

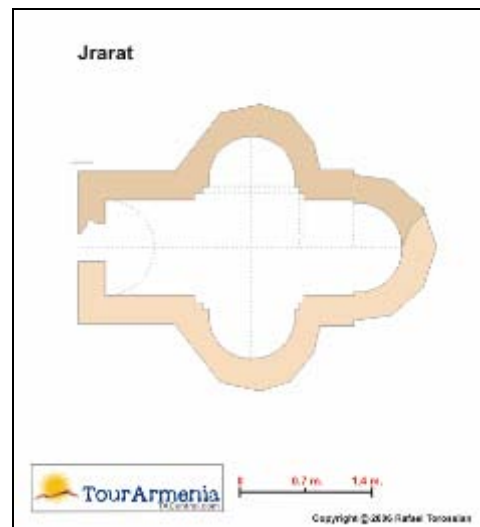
**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➤ From Karnut take the N road around the **Karnut Reservoir** about 3 km to (**Hovit**) 🏰

🏰 **KARNUT RESERVOIR - ԿԱՆՈՒՏԻ ՋՐԱՍԲԱՐ** is a pretty lake that captures the mountain waters flowing to the Jrarat River.

**SIDE TRIP: (Hovit – Դովիտ, pop. 481) has khachkars 2 km east of the village**

**Camping at the reservoir.**



➤ From Hovit continue S 2 km to **MUSAIYELIAN** (DD 40.9927778x 43.9388889)

🏰 **MUSAIYELIAN - ՄՈՒՍԱՅԵԼՅԱՆ** ▲ (till 1935 Mets Kyapanak, elev. 2081m, pop. 1716) was renamed in honor of Sargis G. Musaiyelian,

a Bolshevik captain who sent his troops in support of the May 1920 uprising against the government in Alexandropol/Gyumri. Sentenced to death when the revolt collapsed, he was nevertheless shot by Dashnaks when two of their leaders were killed in Zangezur. There is a renovated church renovated (1842).

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➤ From Musaiyelian continue S 5 km to **JRARAT** (DD 40.7461111x 44.0883333) 🏰 🗺️

🏰 **JRARAT - ՋՐԱՌԱՏ** ▲ (“Place of Water” - till 1945 Chirakhlu, elev. 2236m, pop. 1162) has the small S. Minas church (6th c.) and the remains of a cyclopean fort. The road continues (barely) another 9 km to Spandarian, for Jeeps only. Jrarat is near the headwaters of the Jrarat River, with a beautiful view of the reservoir and the Giumri valley.

**Camping in area; Overnight in village home is possible (rustic, 3000 AMD for B&B is fair); Springs in the area.**

➤ **END OF TRIP 5.**





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[www.abrilbooks.com](http://www.abrilbooks.com)

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[www.littlearmenia.com](http://www.littlearmenia.com)

[Armenian House Literature](#) [www.cac-biodiversity.org/arm/index.htm](http://www.cac-biodiversity.org/arm/index.htm)

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS ▲

**Rick Ney** (*author*) started his life in Armenia in 1992, working in education, humanitarian aid and development projects that morphed into IT development and writing about Armenia; a relationship of 14 years which has taken him to it seems every nook of his adopted country. Rick is passionate about Armenia's deep history and amazing ecology, and can be found roaming the countryside in search of new places to introduce to the world. Rick is equally passionate about making the country accessible for independent travelers, whom he believes will be the basis of Armenia's development and entry into the democratic world. Rick divides his time between Armenia and caring for a parent in Texas, both of which he considers the richest experiences of his life.

Rick wrote the first full guide to Armenia in the post Soviet era and the first multi-media guide on CD-ROM, TourArmenia. Other writings include articles about Armenia's prehistoric observatories at Metsamor and Karahundj, Armenia's Nature and hiking trails and commentary on his experiences in the country. Still others are travel articles for several publications. Rick and his small team at TourArmenia continue to add information about the country to their web site at [www.TACentral.com](http://www.TACentral.com) and [www.TourArmenia.info](http://www.TourArmenia.info).

**Rafael Torossian** (*research, maps, and graphics*) has been collaborating with Rick on TourArmenia since 1996, focusing on maps and graphics while providing some much needed reality checks and commentary along the way. In his other real life, Rafael designs flash sequences, ads, graphics and web sites for [TWRI](http://www.TWRI.com), designing for a wide variety of sites and content management projects.

In a previous life Rafi was the Assistant to the Minister for Sports, serving 6 ministers, before meeting Rick when they worked together on several humanitarian aid projects funded by USAID and managed by the Armenian Assembly of America and Fund for Democracy and Development. In a world where engineers are taxi drivers, Rafi became the Finance Manager for these projects, learning computer skills and creating the first multi-denomination accounting system for USAID projects in the Caucasus.

In an even earlier life Rafi was an athlete, competing in Light Athletics (Track) where he set the All Armenia record for the 60 meter dash, a

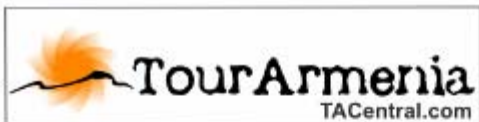
record that still stands. He was a Sports Teacher and an Honored Coach of the Republic of Armenia. He lives in Yerevan, is a proud Yerevantsi, one of the few who did not leave in the dark years of 1991-1995.

**Bella Karapetian** (*Editing, Translations, Russian Edition*) first met Rick in 1993 when she came to the American University and worked in his office as Faculty services Manager and Special Events Coordinator, where she learned patience and good humor working with American professors (God give us patience and a dose of Pantalgin). She then worked at the World Food Program in Armenia for 11 years as an administrator and Program Officer. At the same time she collaborated with Rick on articles and the first TourArmenia CD-ROM. In her previous life Bella worked with International architects at ArmStateDesign Institute as an information program assistant and translator, as well as learning the form and function of design in life, a gift she carries with her to this day. History and architecture is her true love and she has traveled to China, Thailand, Malaysia, Italy, Germany, and Lebanon and throughout the former Soviet Union. Bella tops this off by maintaining her membership in the World Esperanto Association. *Saluton!*

**Thanks to:** (*Region*): Ashot Mirzoian, Armine and the City Research Center; to Stepan Ter-Margaryan & the folks at the Institutes of History and Archeology branches of the National Academy for their help on pointing me to original sources and exhaustive original information on destinations; to Boris Gasparyan for detailed info of prehistoric material; (*General*): to Tigran Nazarian and Christine Karapetian, for their insightful comments, advice, and challenging ideas; to Gagik Gurjjan from the Ministry for Historical Preservation, who has been showing me the intricacies of Armenia's cultural monuments and their influences since 1992, leading me to some of the most amazing places and events I have been, as well as to the large vat of killer Voskevaz wine in his garden; to Sam Stepanian for his support; to Arminco, Andranik, Grisha Saghian and Vahan Yerkanian for their help in creating the first CD version and continuing support, link ups and links to culture and more and to R and L. TMB.

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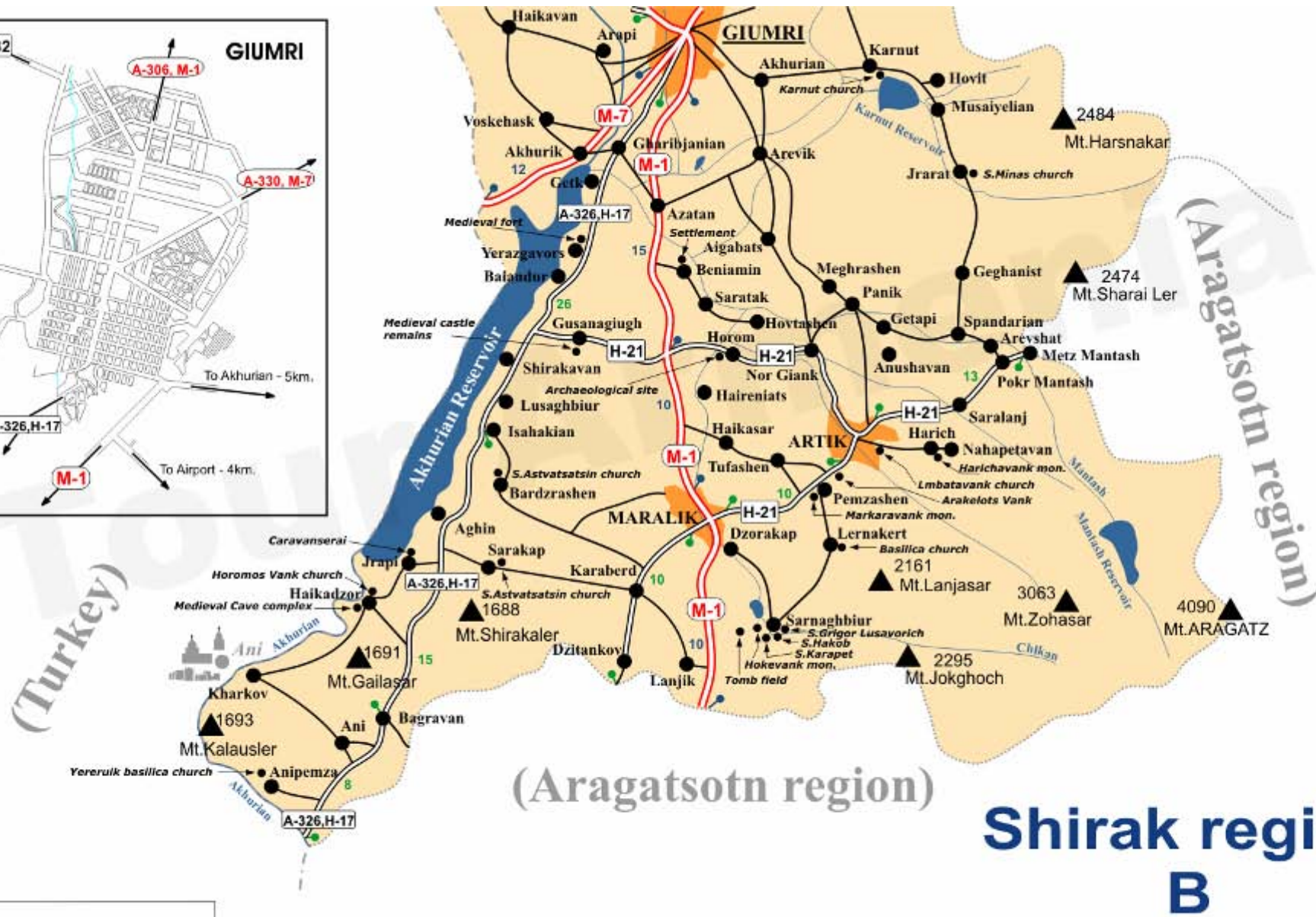
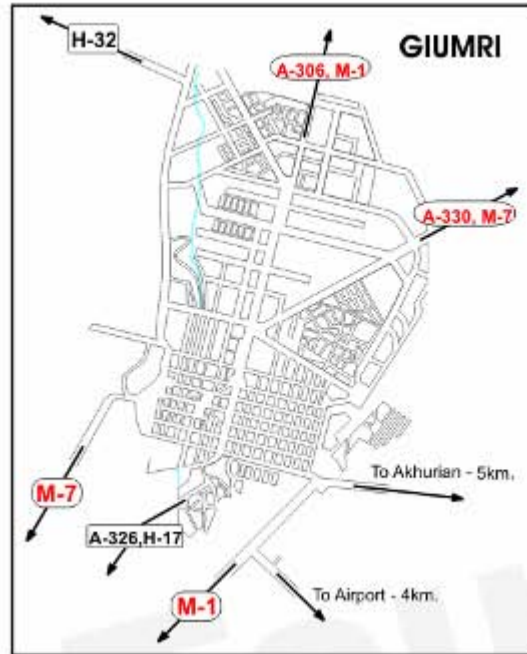


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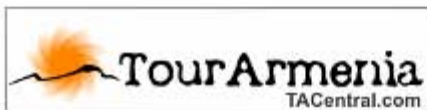
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# Shirak region A



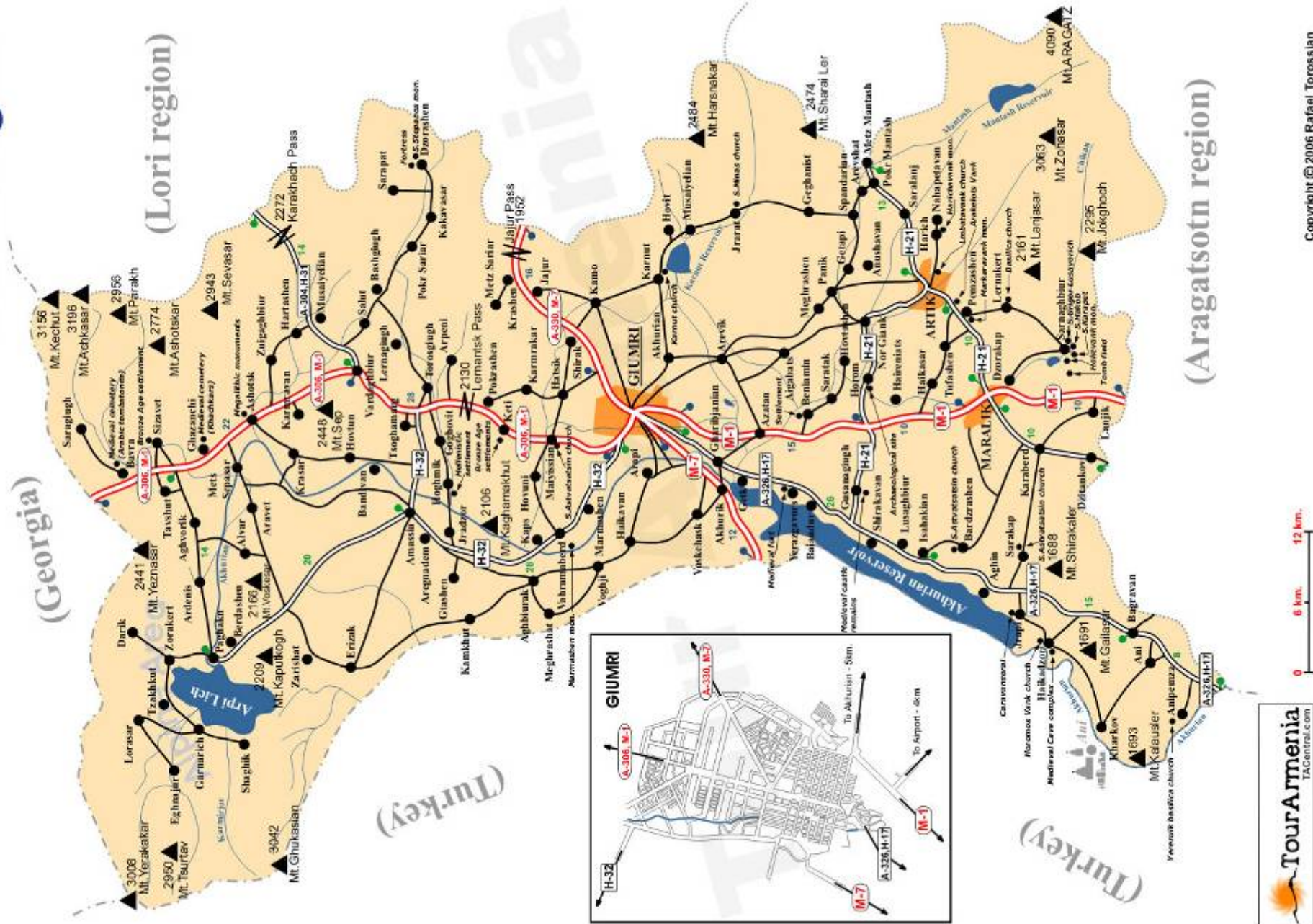


# Shirak region B

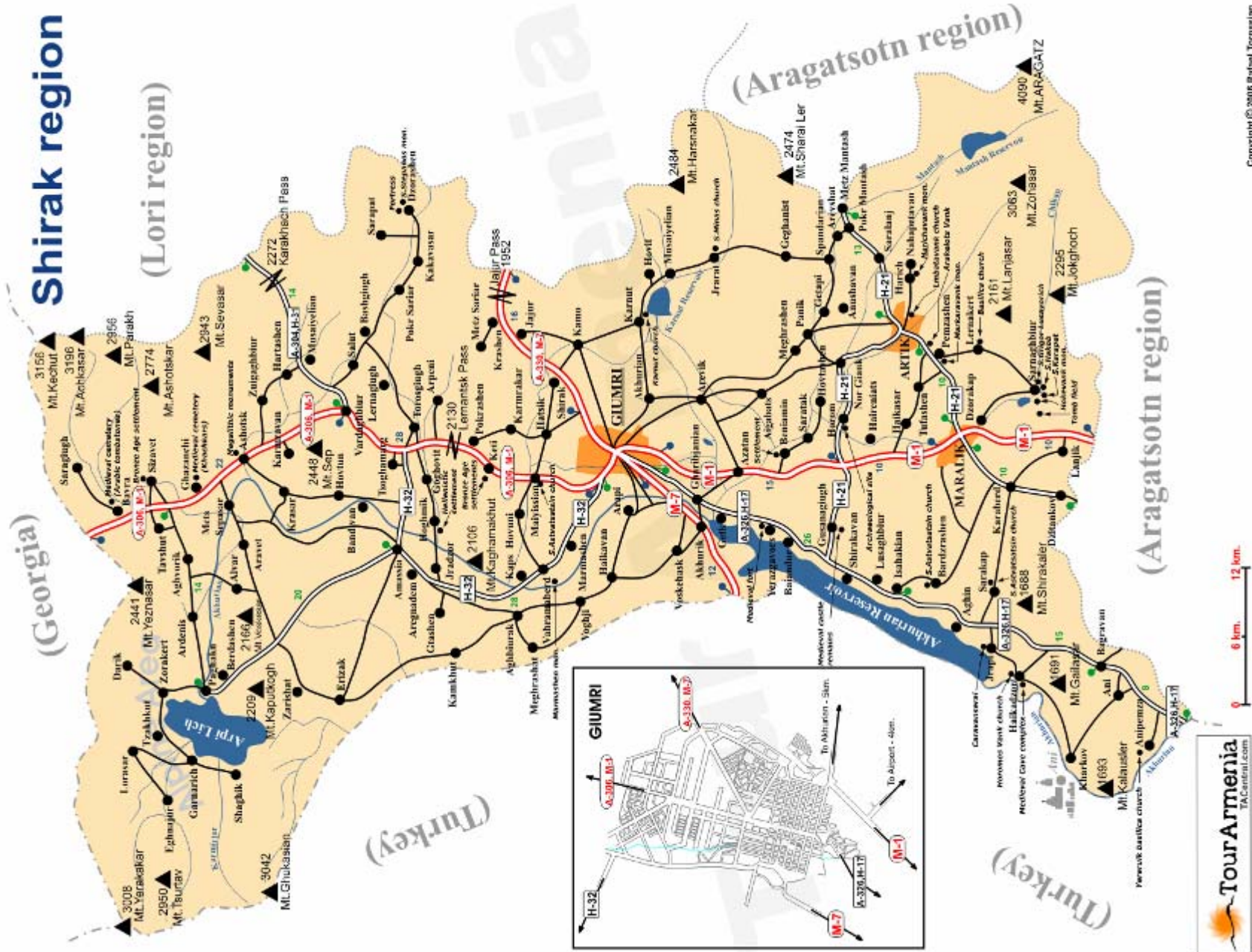


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# Shirak region



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**ANI PLAN**

**Outside the City:**

1. Bathhouse ruins
2. Ramparts
3. Burial mound
4. Kirakos Mausoleum
5. Chapel ruins
6. Chapel ruins
7. Stone church

**Inside the City :**

8. " Baron's palace"
9. Church with a corinthian capital
10. Stone church
11. Unknown Ruins
12. Palace ruins
13. Oil Press
- 14a. Subterranean room
14. S. Grigor of King Gagik (Gagikashen)
15. Burial mound
16. Palace of Sarkis
17. Oil Press
18. Oil Press
19. Large church ruins
20. Tunnels
21. Oil Press
22. Baths
23. Bakhtakegi church (exc. 1892)
24. Oil Press
25. "Georgian Church"
26. Refuse pit
27. Minukhir Tower
28. Oil Press
29. Oil Press
30. Oil Press
31. Ruins
- 32a. Ruins
- 32b. Oil Press
32. Church ruins
33. Church ruins
34. Church ruins (?)
35. Ruins

36. 4-columned fire temple later converted to a church
37. S. Arakelots (Holy Apostles) church
38. Hostels (exc. 1908)
39. Red church
40. Two large rooms
41. Burial mound
42. Burial mound
43. Burial mound
44. Church ruins
45. Church ruins (wooden décor)
46. Church ruins
- 47a. Oil press
47. Baths
48. Burial mounds
49. "Checkerboard Church" (alternating color stone façade)
50. S. Amenaprkich (Church of the Holy Redeemer)
- 51a. Church ruins
51. Church ruins
- 52a. Ruins
- 52b. Burial mound
52. S. Grigor Abughamir church
53. Ruins
54. Oil Press
55. Ruins of church with khachkar
56. Foundation ruins
57. Oil Press
58. Burial mounds
59. Horom Tikin (The Lady Horom) church
60. Oil Press
61. Minaret : Abu Muamran mosque
62. Burial mound
63. Ruins
64. Oil Press
65. Burial mounds
66. Church ruins
67. Prelate residence
68. -69a. Colonnade
69. Burial mound
70. Burial mound
71. S. Sarkis church
73. Ani Cathedral

- 73a. "Checkboard House" (exc. 1908)
  72. Cathedral baptistry
  73. Queen Katranideh mausoleum
  74. Oil Press
  - 76a. Oil Press
  75. Tower & vaulted passage
  76. Tower & underground passage
  - 78a. Church
  77. Burial mound
  78. Burial mound
  79. Ruins
  80. S. Grigor Honents shurch
  81. Baths (exc. in 1893)
  82. Burial mound
  83. Vaulted gallery
  84. Oil Press
  85. Underground entry
  86. Chapel
  - 88a. Ruins
  87. Guardhouse
  88. Ruins
  89. Ruins
  - 91a. Ruins
  90. Gusanants Vank (Monastery of the Virgins)
- Old City (Ashot's walls):**
91. Secular building
  92. King Ashot Wall
  93. Minukhir Mosque (museum )
  94. Bridge
  95. House
  96. Church ruins
  97. Museum
  - 99a. Nikoli Marr excavation residence
  100. Oil press, ruins
  101. Karimadin church (the red church)
  102. Asvatsatsin Khambuchents
  103. Burial mound
  104. Abu Khatsip church
  - 104a. Subterranean city entry
  105. Gaiyl Mausoleum
  106. Church
  107. 4-Columned structure ruins

108. Ruins

**The Citadel:**

109. Royal palace
- 109a. Palatine church
- 109b. Palace Hall
- 109c. Palace Hall
- 109d. Palace Hall
- 109e. Palace Baths
- 109f. Palace Cistern
110. Midjnaberd Church
111. Vaulted structure
112. Tetraconch church
113. Church
114. Hexagonal church
115. Armenian Cemetery
118. Water conduit

**Kizkale Peninsula:**

116. Kamsarakan tower bridge
117. S. Grigor Aljkaiberdi Convent

**Towers**

- 1-95 – Outer Wall towers
- 1-7 King Ashots Wall
- 1-4 Citadel wall
- 1-4 Kizkale

**Main Gates**

- I: Igadzor valley gate
- II + III: Kars gate, walls
- IV + V: Lion gate, walls.
- VI + VII: Chequerboard gate, walls
- VIII: Gayladzor postern gate
- IX: Gayladzor valley gate
- X: Aruch gate
- XI + XII: postern gates.
- XIII: Sarkis Silenkh gate
- XIV: Dvin Gate
- XV: King Ashot gate
- XVI: Tsaghkotsadzor valley gate

*Map source: "Ani - a History of the City and its Excavations" by Nikolai Marr, Leningrad and Moscow, 1934.*