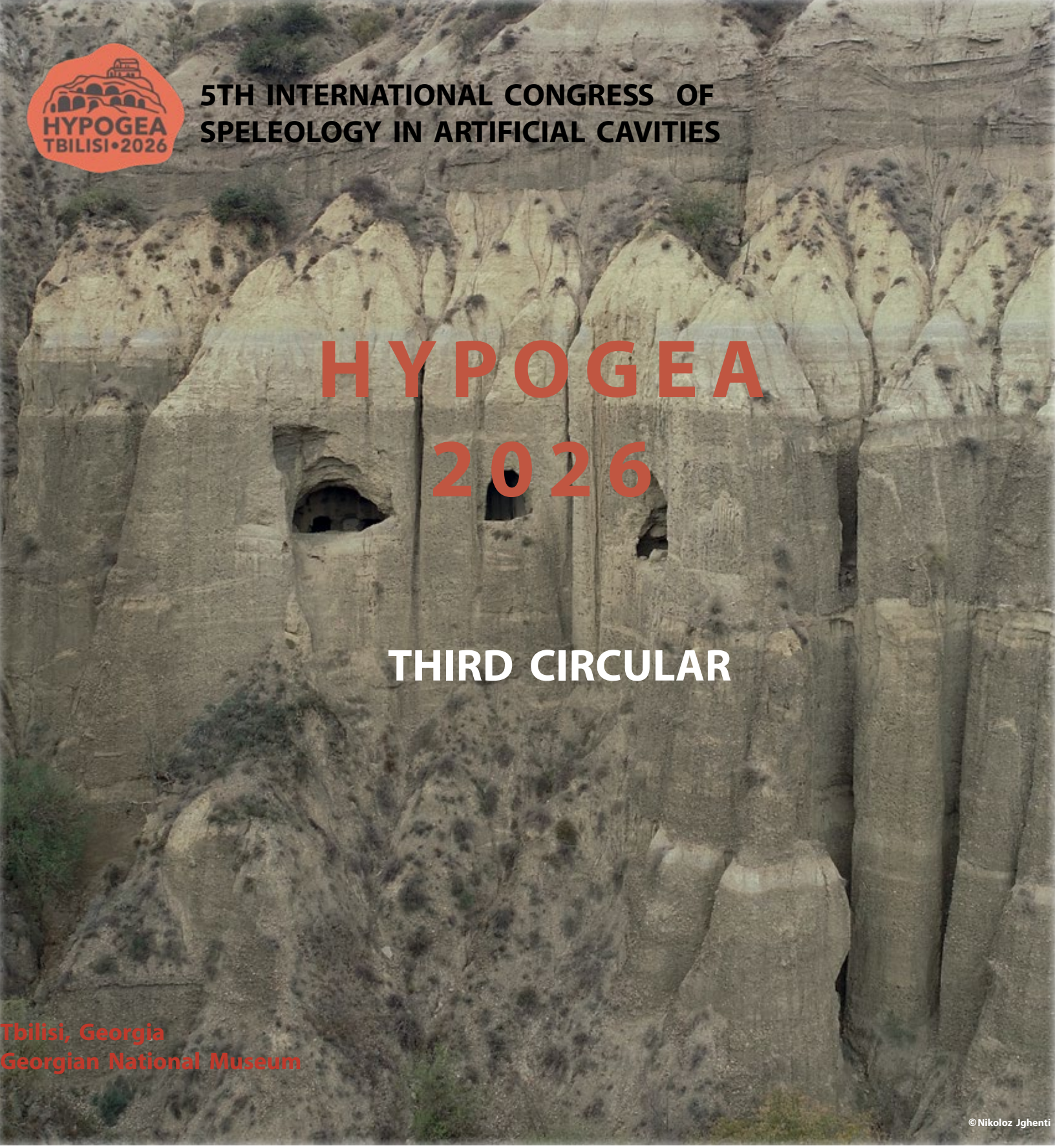
5TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF SPELEOLOGY IN ARTIFICIAL CAVITIES

HYPOGEA 2026

THIRD CIRCULAR

Tbilisi, Georgia
Georgian National Museum



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22-26 September 2026

5th INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF SPELEOLOGY IN ARTIFICIAL CAVITIES

Welcome

We are pleased to present the Third Circular for HYPOGEA 2026 — the International Congress of Speleology in Artificial Cavities, which will take place at the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi from 22 to 26 September 2026.

Building on the success of previous HYPOGEA meetings, this congress aims to bring together an international community of researchers, practitioners, and specialists working on artificial cavities, underground heritage, and related disciplines. The event will provide a dynamic platform for the exchange of new research, methodologies, and interdisciplinary perspectives, fostering collaboration across archaeology, speleology, conservation, geology, and cultural heritage studies. This Third Circular provides updated and detailed information regarding the congress, including Preliminary Scientific Programme, registration procedures and deadlines. In addition, it offers practical guidance to assist participants in planning their visit to Tbilisi, such as accommodation options, transportation, and general information about the city.

A highlight of HYPOGEA 2026 will be two field trips, designed to showcase Georgia's rich and diverse underground cultural heritage. These excursions will offer participants a unique opportunity to explore significant artificial cavities and archaeological sites, while engaging directly with local contexts and research traditions. We warmly invite you to join us in Tbilisi for what promises to be an inspiring and productive gathering.

MINISTRY OF CULTURE OF GEORGIA

Tbilisi, Georgia

A city built on rock — ancient, vivid, and alive

Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, along the banks of the Kura River, Tbilisi stands as a city shaped by a long and complex historical trajectory. As the capital and largest urban center of Georgia, it has, since its foundation in the 5th century, served as a political, economic, and cultural focal point in the South Caucasus.

Owing to its strategic geographical position and proximity to major transcontinental routes, including those associated with the historic Silk Road, Tbilisi has, throughout its history, been an arena of interaction and contestation among various regional and imperial powers. In the High Middle Ages, Tbilisi functioned as an important administrative centre of the Caucasus, further reinforcing its regional significance.

The historical development of Tbilisi is distinctly reflected in its architectural landscape, which presents a layered composition of medieval, neoclassical, Beaux-Arts, Art Nouveau, Soviet, and modern elements. This architectural diversity embodies the city's evolving cultural and political contexts, as well as its role as a meeting point of different traditions and influences.

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Georgian National Museum

3 Shota Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi 0105, Georgia

The Georgian National Museum was established in 2004 and is the largest museum association in the country. It comprises 14 museums established during the 20th century, a national gallery, 4 house-museums, and 2 scientific research institutes. The National Museum is the legal successor to the "Caucasus Museum," founded in Tbilisi in 1852, and continues the country's long museum traditions. It houses more than one and a half million exhibits reflecting the nature, life, and culture of Georgia, the Caucasus, and the Near East from ancient times to the present day.

The National Museum brings together a vast range of collections: the oldest human remains discovered in Eurasia, unique archaeological and ethnographic artefacts, natural history materials, and the rich heritage of Christian culture — repoussé and painted icons, crosses, embroideries, and cloisonné enamel; outstanding Oriental monuments, an extensive numismatic collection — including the rare gold stater of Colchian King Akes (3rd century BC) and a hoard of copper coins of King Tamar — as well as exquisite gold and silver jewellery from ancient Colchis, and remarkable works by Georgian and European painters from various periods.

The museum's permanent exhibitions span archaeological materials from the Stone Age through the 18th century, ethnographic displays presenting traditional Georgian dwellings, furniture, clothing, jewelery, and weaponry, as well as materials documenting the history of Georgia in the 19th century.

The museum actively collaborates with educational and cultural institutions at both local and international levels, and stands as one of the country's most important scientific, educational, and cultural centers.

Georgian National Museum

Georgian National Museum conference room

Georgian National Museum exhibition "Biodiversity in the South Caucasus"

Georgian National Museum exhibition "Stone Age Georgia"

HYPOGEA 2026 — 5th International Congress of Speleology in Artificial Cavities

The HYPOGEA International Congress of Speleology in Artificial Cavities is a global scientific meeting focused on the study and preservation of man-made underground spaces such as caves, tunnels, and rock-cut monuments. It was first established in 2015 in Rome under the patronage of the International Union of Speleology, following earlier international collaborations that highlighted the need for a dedicated platform on artificial cavities. Since then, it has developed into a recurring international event, bringing together archaeologists, speleologists, geologists, architects, and heritage experts to share research, promote modern technologies, and improve conservation practices. The congress has been hosted in culturally significant locations including Cappadocia, Dobrich, and Genoa, with the upcoming 2026 edition taking place in Tbilisi, reflecting the country's rich tradition of rock-cut heritage; today, HYPOGEA is considered one of the leading international platforms for advancing research and protection of underground cultural heritage worldwide.

The 5th International Congress of Speleology in Artificial Cavities — HYPOGEA 2026 — will take place in Tbilisi, Georgia, from 22 to 26 September 2026, under the patronage of the Union Internationale de Spéléologie (UIS). It is organised by the Georgian National Museum and the Ministry of Culture of Georgia, in partnership with the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia.

Georgia was chosen as host due to its extraordinary wealth of rock-cut monuments — ranging from Bronze Age artificial caves to cave sanctuaries of the Classical period and remarkable Christian monastic complexes adorned with wall paintings of outstanding artistic mastery. Georgian scholars have also accumulated nearly 150 years of experience in the scientific investigation of artificial caves in the Caucasus. The Congress will bring together researchers, heritage professionals, and specialists from across the world to share knowledge and best practices in the field of rock-cut heritage — with unique opportunities to visit Georgia's most exceptional sites firsthand.

Hypogea 2026 Organising Committee

Nodar Bakhtadze (Georgia), Bachana Gabekhadze (Georgia), Carla Galeazzi (Italy), Ketevan Gongadze (Georgia), Vazha Mamiashvili (Georgia), Mikheil Tsereteli (Georgia), Salome Markozia (Georgia), Sesili Sordia (Georgia), Inga Martkoplishvili (Georgia), Nana Rezesidze (Georgia), Giorgi Gogoladze (Georgia), Giorgi Bagrationi (Georgia) and Mikheil Shalvashvili (Georgia).

Hypogea 2026 Scientific Committee

Mario Parise (Italy), Roberto Bixio and Carla Galeazzi (Italy), Nodar Bakhtadze, David Lordkipanidze, Jimsher Chkhvimiani and Zaza Skhirtladze (Georgia), Tudor Tamas (Romania), Stefano Saj and Isabella Serena Liso (Italy), Ali Yamaç (Turkey), Alexey Zhalov (Bulgaria), Boaz Zissu (Israel).

REGISTRATION SCHEDULE AND FEES

Important Deadlines

October 2025	Abstract submissions open • **CLOSED**
1 March 2026	Abstract submission deadline • **CLOSED**
30 June 2026	Early Bird registration closes • **CLOSED**
30 July 2026	Deadline for presenting authors to finalise payment • **CLOSED**
25 August 2026	Third Circular — **Preliminary Scientific Programme**
22–26 September 2026	**HYPOGEA 2026 • Tbilisi, Georgia**

Registration Fees

Category	Regular	Accomp.	Student
Early registration (until 30 June 2026)	€ 85	€ 85	€ 50
Regular registration (from 1 July 2026)	€ 100	€ 85	€ 50
Printed congress proceedings	€ 45	€ 45	€ 45
Congress dinner — 26 September	€ 20	€ 20	€ 20
Field trip — Uplistsikhe (24 Sept)	€ 25	€ 25	€ 25
Field trip — Davit Gareji (26 Sept)	€ 30	€ 30	€ 30

Payment Information

Beneficiary Name:	Georgian National Museum
Address:	3 Rustaveli ave. 0105, Tbilisi, Georgia
Tax Identification Code:	204468664
Beneficiary bank:	NATIONAL BANK OF GEORGIA, TBILISI
SWIFT CODE:	BNLNGE22
Beneficiary:	Georgian National Museum
IBAN:	GE65NB0331100001150207

HYPOGEA
2026

5th International Congress of Speleology in Artificial Cavities

TBILISI, GEORGIA · 22–26 SEPTEMBER 2026

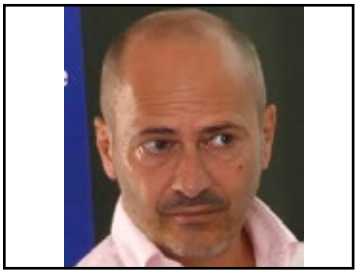
THIRD CIRCULAR

Preliminary Scientific Programme

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Dr. David Lordkipanidze
(Georgia)
General Director of the Georgian National Museum (2005–present). Full Professor at Tbilisi State University (2018–present).Academician of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences (2018–present).Head of the Dmanisi International Field School.Internationally recognized archaeologist and paleoanthropologist, renowned for his research at the Dmanisi archaeological site and his contribution to the study of early human evolution.

Dr. Nodar Bakhtadze
(Georgia)
An archaeologist and historian of architecture. Professor of Archaeology at Ilia State University. Principal Research Fellow at the Georgian National Museum. The archaeological investigation of architectural monuments from the Late Antique and Medieval periods across the Caucasus is the principal focus of his scholarly research. Nodar Bakhtadze is also an internationally recognized specialist in the archaeology and architecture of rock-cut monuments and artificial cavities.



Dr. Mario Parise
(Italy)
Mario Parise is an associate professor of engineering geology at the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Bari Aldo Moro, Italy. The main research activities are geological and geomorphological analysis of slope movements, the study of the influence of weathering in the predisposition of landslides, debris flows, and erosional processes in areas recently affected by wildfires, support to civil protection actions for monitoring of natural and man-made hazards and disaster risk management, karst hydrogeology, evaluation of natural and anthropogenic hazards in karst, analysis of sinkholes and their effect on the human environment.

Dr. Carla Galeazzi
(Italy)
President of the Egeria Underground Research Centre, Rome. Secretary of the UIS Commission on Artificial Cavities.Coordinator at the Egeria Underground Research Centre.Specialist in speleology, archaeospeleology, artificial cavities, and ancient water-supply systems.

22

SEPTEMBER 2026 · TUESDAY

08:30 – 18:20

08:30–10:00 REGISTRATION

10:00–12:00 OPENING CEREMONY

UNDERGROUND AND ROCKY CIVIL SETTLEMENT WORKS

12:00–12:20 PAPER 1
Chiaramaria Spinelli
Architecture of the Void: The Settlement Complex of the Hypogea in the Pontrelli Locality

12:20–12:40 PAPER 2
Roberta Varriale
The Rock-Cut Village of Nicosia

12:40–13:00 PAPER 3
Rosario Ruggieri, Samvel M. Shahinyan
Historical Anthropic Hypogean Caves of the Volcanic Area of Goris (Syunik Marz, Armenia)

13:00–13:20 PAPER 4
Bella G. Babayan, Samvel M. Shahinyan, Samvel A. Bagdasaryan, Tigran A. Yesayan, Garegin G. Sevoyan, Alexander H. Yesayan
A Comparative Study of Plant-Derived Food Preparation and the Food Storage in Ancient Armenian Subterranean Settlements.

13:20–13:40 PAPER 5
Constantin Canavas
Vulnerability and Heritage Issues of Loess Dwellings in North China

RELIGIOUS AND CULT WORKS

13:40–14:00 PAPER 6
Giorgi Bagrationi
Two Important Rock-Cut Monuments in Historical Tao-Klarjeti

14:00–15:00 LUNCH

15:00–15:20 PAPER 7
Nodar Bakhtadze, Bachana Gabekhadze
The Architectural Structure of the Medieval Cave Monasteries of David Gareji within the Framework of Byzantine and Eastern Christian Monasticism

15:20–15:40 PAPER 8
Ketevan Digmelashvili, Nikoloz Zhgenti
New Materials for the Study of the Gareji Monasteries

15:40–16:00 PAPER 9
Lado Mirianashvili
Utilities for Rainwater Harvesting in the Laura of St. David, and Rock-Cut Furnishings In the Udabno Monastery of Davitgareji Wilderness, Georgia

16:00–16:20 PAPER 10
Zaza Skhirtladze
Burials and their Paintings in the Gareja Monastic Association: The Tomb of Saint Dodo Garejeli

⚠ Important: **For oral presentations and posters texts accompanying images must be in English. We encourage fifteen minutes for the presentation and five minutes for questions.**

16:30–17:00 COFFEE BREAK

17:00–17:20

PAPER 11

Nino Goderdzishvili

Interpretation of Ornamental Motifs on the Stone Cross Pillar of John the Baptist from David Gareji (6th-7th Centuries)

17:20–17:40

PAPER 12

Hasmik Galstyan, Roman Hovsepyan

Caves in the Armenian Belief System: The Case of St. Gregory the Illuminator's Cave in Sarnaghbyur

17:40–18:00

PAPER 13

Smbat Davtyan, Tigran Armenyan, Tigran Simonyan, Ruzanna Safaryan

The Caves of Geghard Gorge: from a Pagan Sanctuary to a Monastic Complex

18:00–18:20

PAPER 14

Kakha Khimshiashvili

Once More on the Function of Uplistsikhe Iwan Complexes

23 SEPTEMBER 2026 · WEDNESDAY

09:00 – 18:50

09:00–10:00 REGISTRATION

10:00–10:20

PAPER 1

Miroslav Georgiev

Architectural Characteristics and Spatial Organisation of the Medieval Rock-Cut Cave Monastery of Krepcha (Bulgaria) (Archaeological research of artificial cavities)

10:20–10:40

PAPER 2

Alexey Zhalov

Rock Cut Monastery from the 10th Century in "Voden-Iri Hisar" State Hunting Area, Razgrad District, NE Bulgaria

10:40–11:00

PAPER 3

Mariagrazia Cinelli, Valentina Gaudio, Antonio Laselva, Lorenzo Orsini, Marcello Turci

Sant'Angelo in Criptis Cave (Santeramo in Colle, Bari, Italy): Cult and Nature Knowledge, conservation protocol and heritage value

11:00–11:30 COFFEE BREAK

11:30–11:50

PAPER 4

Ali Yamaç

Artificial Cavities Within the Kura River: From Turkey to Georgia

11:50-12:10

PAPER 5

Alexey Gunko, Sofia Kondrateva, Vitaly Stepkin, Alexander Gunko

Cave Complex of the Spaso-Preobrazhensky Ust-Medveditsky Monastery

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF THE ARTIFICIAL CAVITIES

12:10–12:30

PAPER 6

Dianna Mirijanyan, Arman Nalbandyan, Mher Khechoyan

Newly Discovered Medieval Rock-Cut Complex of Ohanavan (Archaeological Research of Artificial Cavities)

⚠ Important: **For oral presentations and posters texts accompanying images must be in English. We encourage fifteen minutes for the presentation and five minutes for questions.**

12:30–12:50	PAPER 7 **Ani Adigyozalyan, Artur Petrosyan, Hayk Haydosyan, Soseh Aghaian, Boris Gasparyan, Dmitri Arakelyan, Roberto Dan** Rock-Cut Funerary Complexes of Armenia: Problems of Definition, Chronology and Function
12:50–13:10	PAPER 8 **Danil Shevchenko, Alexey Ostrovsky, Vladimir Shkondin** The Unusual Tiny Grave in the Church Göreme 31 (Cappadocia)
13:10–13:30	PAPER 9 **Boaz Zissu** From Funerary Monument to Industrial Space: The "Lions' Tomb" at Horvat Burgin
13:30–13:50	PAPER 10 **Yinon Shivtiel, Uri Berger** Subterranean Hiding Complexes as a Jewish Defensive Strategy During the Three Revolts Against Rome in the Galilee
13:50–14:10	PAPER 11 **Mikheil Shalvashvili** The Cremation Urn Discovered in the Samshvilde Cave No.2 and its Similarities in Anatolia
14:10–14:30	PAPER 12 **Eliso Kvavadze, Liana Bitadze, Ketevan Digmelashvili** Details of the Natlismtsemeli Monastery in Gareji Based on the Study of a Single Burial
14:30–15:30	**LUNCH**
15:30–15:50	PAPER 13 **J. M. Toyne, Esteve Ribera-Torró, Armando Anzellini, Miquel Pans, Josep A. Ribera-Torró** Filling the Gaps on the Cliff: Constructive Strategies in the Vertical Chachapoya Necropolises of Diablo Wasi and La Petaca (Amazonas, Peru)
15:50–16:10	PAPER 14 **Davide Ricci, Giovanna Falezza, Simone Liguori, Davide Brombo** Between Archaeology and Speleology: Exploration and Survey of a Medieval Well-Cistern in Peschiera Del Garda (Verona, Italy)
16:10–16:30	PAPER 15 **David Berikashvili** Cave Monasticism in Southern Georgia: Archaeological Insights from Kazreti Ortvala Cave
16:30–16:50	PAPER 16 **Shota Tvaladze, Levan Kvakhadze** Rock Structures of Chivchavi: Based on Archaeological Survey Data (Kvemo Kartli, Georgia)
	IN MEMORIAM
16:50-17:00	PAPER 17 **Carla Galeazzi, Roberto Bixio, Vittoria Caloi, Carlo Germani, Mario Parise** Twenty Years Without Vittorio Castellani (1937-2006), one of the Fathers of Speleology in Artificial Cavities in Italy and the World (poster presentation)
17:00–17:30	**COFFEE BREAK**

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ANCIENT HYDRAULIC WORKS

17:30–17:50 PAPER 18

Francesco Faccini, Andrea Ferrando, Andrea Rimassa, Stefano Saj, Martino Terrone, Stefania Traverso
Bridging Different Technologies to Survey a Culverted Stream in a Historical Centre of Great Cultural Value (Genoa World Heritage Site, Italy)

17:50–18:10 PAPER 19

Ali Hakan Eğilmez, Ümit Günhan, Özlem Kaya, Kardelen Gülbenay Nurdoğan, Zeynep Kelpetin, Barkın İren
Discovery and Documentation of the Water Supply System of Ayvat

18:10–18:30 PAPER 20

Ani Saratikyan, Roberto Dan, Artur Petrosyan, Avetis Grigoryan, Boris Gasparyan
The Hydraulic Systems of the Hrazdan River Gorge

18:30–18:50 PAPER 21

Alexey Zhalov, Konstantin Stoichkov
Water Cisterns of Some Monastic Communities in Mount Athos, Halkidiki, Greece

24 SEPTEMBER 2026 · THURSDAY

Full-day excursion

FIELD EXCURSION

Excursion to Uplistsikhe

09:00–18:30

25 SEPTEMBER 2026 · FRIDAY

09:00 – 18:30

09:00–10:00 REGISTRATION

MINING/EXTRACTION WORKS

10:00–10:20 PAPER 1

Matteo Giordani, Eleonora Benà, Cesare Bianchi, Maria Cristina Agostini, Fabio Peruzzi
The "Sulphur" Museum of Perticara (Italy): A Paradigm Shift from Passive Industrial Repository to Active Interdisciplinary Research Hub

10:20–10:40 PAPER 2

Francesca Lagna, Francesco Ligori, Isabella Serena Liso, Mario Parise
History of Underground Quarries at Cutrofiano (Apulia, Southern Italy) and Related Hazards

10:40–11:00 PAPER 3

Igor Grek, Nataliia Moldavska
Revisiting the Dating of the Huk Mine – a Previously Unknown Mine in Odesa City

⚠ Important: **For oral presentations and posters, all text accompanying images must be in English. We encourage fifteen minutes for the presentation and five minutes for questions.**

11:00–11:30 COFFEE BREAK

11:30–11:50 PAPER 4

Giacomo Martines
The Rock-Hewn Hypogea with Vertical Bell-Shaped Excavations and Constructed Vaults, in the Area of the Eighteenth-Century Quarries of Matera (Southern Italy)

11:50–12:10 PAPER 5

Codruța Valea, Tudor Tămaș, Mădălin Erhan
Survey and Mineralogical Study of the Mine Gallery from Grădina Zmeilor (Sălaj County, Romania)

MILITARY AND DEFENSIVE ARTIFICIAL CAVITIES

12:10–12:30 PAPER 6

Ali Hakan Eğilmez, İlker Gürbüz, Gülşen Küçükali, Şengül Aydıngün, Emre Kuruçayırlı, Mark Metin Albukrek, Özlem Kaya
Underground Çakmak Defence Line from Çatalca, Istanbul

12:30–12:50 PAPER 7

Nemanja Milosavljević
Underground Military Objects in Serbia

NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR ANALYZING AND DOCUMENTING THE ARTIFICIAL CAVITIES

12:50–13:10 PAPER 8

Luisa Beltramone, Mikheil Lobjanidze, Mikheil Elashvili, Riccardo Salvini
Integrated Multi-Sensor Geomatic Approaches for the Documentation and Monitoring of Georgian Rock-Cut Heritage

13:10–13:30 PAPER 9

Luis Jorda Bordehore, Ercan Emir, Abdelmadjid Benrabah, Melih Iphar
Geomechanical Analysis and Stability Assessment of Phrygian Temples and Troglodyte Spaces, Anatolia, Turkey

13:30–13:50 PAPER 10

Giacomo Martines, Vito Basile, Loreta Calia, Mariagrazia Cinelli, Filippo Lomurno, Domenico Lorusso, Remo Pavone, Chiaramaria Spinelli
Some Examples Of Experimental Diagnostics And Conservation Assessments For Planning The Maintenance And Promotion Of Rock Art In The Hypogeal Churches Of The Apulia Murgia (Southern Italy)

13:50–14:10 PAPER 11

Valentina Santoro, Giuseppe Martino
Knowledge as the Foundation of the Restoration Project: The San Marco Ravine in Massafra (Southern Italy)

14:10–14:30 PAPER 12

Ali Yamaç
Losing the Past: Maps and Inventories of Cappadocia (Turkey)

14:30–15:30 LUNCH

CATEGORIES AND TYPES OF ARTIFICIAL CAVITIES: UPDATES

15:30–15:50 PAPER 13

Maria Assunta Fabozzi, Francesca Lagna, Isabella Serena Liso, Sandro Muscillo, Mario Parise, Piernicola Lollino, Luca Comegna, Emilia Damiano, Maria Petriccione, Giuseppina Mello, Gennaro Capasso, Vera Corbelli, Daniela Ruberti
History, Architecture and Socio-Economical Features of Artificial Cavities in the Southern Apennines Hydrographic District (Italy)

⚠ Important: **For oral presentations and posters texts accompanying images must be in English. We encourage fifteen minutes for the presentation and five minutes for questions.**

15:50–16:10 PAPER 14

Tudor Tămaș, Codruța Valea, Mădălin Erhan, Eusebiu Szekely
Cavities in the Late Oligocene - Miocene Deposits of NW Romania. First Update

16:10–16:30 PAPER 15

Isabella Serena Liso, Francesca Lagna, Sandro Muscillo, Cosimo Cagnazzo, Piernicola Lollino, Maria Assunta Fabozzi, Luca Comegna, Emilia Damiano, Maria Petriccione, Gennaro Capasso, Vera Corbelli, Daniela Ruberti, Mario Parise
Susceptibility to Sinkholes Caused by Artificial Cavities in Continental Southern Italy

16:30–16:50 PAPER 16

Luc Stevens
The Sculpture Cave of Dénezé sous-Doué (Maine-et-Loire / France): First Analysis of Sculptures Detached from the Walls

16:50–17:30 CONGRESS CONCLUDING ROUND TABLE

17:30-18:00 COFFEE BREAK

1 8:00-19:00 CLOSING CEREMONY

26

SEPTEMBER 2026 · SATURDAY

Day excursion

FIELD EXCURSION

Excursion to the David Gareji (Lavra)

09:00–15:00

Congress Dinner

19:00–23:00

Uplistsikhe

Rock-Hewn City of the Caucasus — 85 km west of Tbilisi

Carved directly into a sandstone cliff above the Kura River, Uplistsikhe is one of the oldest and most remarkable rock-hewn settlements in the entire Caucasus. Its name translates as "Lord's Fortress" in Georgian, and for good reason — this ancient cave city served as one of the most important urban and religious centers in early Georgia, dating back to the late Bronze Age, at the end of the 2nd millennium BC.

At its peak, between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD, Uplistsikhe was home to an estimated 20,000 inhabitants, with a sophisticated urban layout that included streets, squares, a water drainage system, and a remarkable variety of rock-cut structures. Wandering through its ruins today, visitors encounter cave halls with elaborately carved ceilings, a pagan temple, a theatre, a pharmacy, a prison, and even a royal hall - all hewn with extraordinary precision from the living rock.

The site reflects the deep interplay between pagan and Christian cultures in Georgian history. After the Christianisation of Georgia in the 4th century, a small three-nave basilica was built directly on top of the former pagan temple, symbolising the spiritual transformation of the city. This church, dating to the 9th-10th centuries, still stands today and remains one of the most striking features of the site.

Key Information
GPS (Main Site) 41°58'18.0"N / 44°12'05.4"E
Altitude ~700 – 800 m above sea level
Distance from Tbilisi ~85 km · approx. 1.5 hrs
Route Tbilisi → Gori → Uplistsikhe
Temperature in September ~20–30°C (can feel hotter due to full sun exposure)

Prerequisites
Participants must be in good health and physically fit for walking on uneven rocky terrain with moderate ascents and descents. The site involves open rock surfaces, carved steps, and exposed sections with limited shade. Sturdy closed shoes are essential.

Equipment For Individual Use
• Sturdy closed shoes or hiking shoes (mandatory)
• Hat and sunscreen-exposed sections can be very hot in September
• Water bottle (mandatory)

David Gareji (Lavra)

Rock-Hewn Monastery Complex — 70 km south-east of Tbilisi

Stretching across a stark and otherworldly semi-desert landscape on the border between Georgia and Azerbaijan, David Gareji is one of the most extraordinary monastic complexes in the entire Caucasus.

The complex was founded in the 6th century by David, one of the Thirteen Assyrian Fathers — a group of Syrian Christian monks who played a defining role in the spread and consolidation of Christianity across Georgia. His disciples gradually expanded the site into a thriving monastic community. At its height, the complex comprised over a dozen monasteries spread across the eroded hillsides, housing hundreds of monks and serving as a major centre of Georgian religious thought, manuscript production, and artistic creation.

The most celebrated of the monasteries is Lavra, the founding complex, which contains the cave church and tomb of Davit himself — a site of deep spiritual significance and active pilgrimage to this day. Equally remarkable is the Udabno monastery, whose cave churches are adorned with vivid frescoes dating from the 11th to the 13th centuries. These paintings, depicting scenes from the life of Christ and the saints, are considered among the finest examples of medieval Georgian fresco art, their colors remarkably preserved despite centuries of exposure.

Key Information
GPS (Main Site – Lavra) 41°26’15.6”N / 45°22’05.4”E
Altitude ~400 – 700 m above sea level
Distance from Tbilisi ~ 70 km approx. 1.5–2 hrs
Route Tbilisi → Sagarejo → Udabno → David Gareja
Temperature in September ~22–32°C (hot, dry, and very exposed)

Prerequisites
Participants must be in good health and physically fit for walking on uneven rocky terrain with significant ascents and descents. The site involves narrow cave passages, steep internal staircases, and exposed cliff ledges. Sturdy closed shoes are essential.

Equipment For Individual Use
• Sturdy closed shoes or hiking boots (mandatory)
• Hat and sunscreen-exposed sections can be hot in September
• Water bottle (mandatory)

For the Field Trips

- Wildlife awareness: Georgia is home to various wildlife. Be careful of venomous snakes (especially in lowland and semi-arid regions such as David Gareji), scorpions in eastern areas, and ticks, which may carry Lyme disease. Do not walk in tall grass without proper closed footwear.

  In many areas where field trips will be held, access to medical assistance may be limited. Please ensure you have adequate travel insurance before departure.

- Protected caves and sites: All caves designated as Cultural Heritage sites in Georgia are protected by national law. It is expressly prohibited to remove any type of sample without prior official authorisation.

  Visitors are expected not to cause any damage to caves, property, or any person in their group. Please respect all site regulations.

Before Booking Your Trip To Georgia

Visa Requirements

Georgia has a very liberal visa policy: citizens of most countries (EU, USA, UK, Canada, Australia and many others) may enter visa-free for stays of up to 365 days. Citizens of other countries may apply for an e-Visa online. You may apply up to four months prior to travel.

Links	e-Visa portal evisa.gov.ge Entry requirements geoconsul.gov.ge/en/entering-georgia Invitation letters Available on request: hypogea2026@gmail.com

⚠ Important: Delegates are strongly advised to arrange personal travel insurance covering flights, accommodation and medical care. As of January 2026, all visitors entering Georgia must hold valid travel insurance with a minimum coverage of 30,000 GEL (approx. €10,000), including emergency evacuation. Insurance must be arranged before arrival. The Organising Committee does not provide insurance for participants.

- Please check with your doctor about immunisations you may need. Some caves contain bat guano, participants with respiratory sensitivities should consult their physician before entering bat-inhabited cavities
- Alcohol. The legal drinking age in Georgia is 18 years. Georgia has strict drink-driving laws with a zero-tolerance policy for drivers.
- Electricity. The standard voltage in Georgia is 220V / 50Hz. Sockets are the European two-pin round type (Type C/F). Visitors from the UK and USA should bring an appropriate adapter.
- Weather in Tbilisi in September: Average temperature 26°C, maximum 30°C, minimum 18°C. September is one of the driest months.

Traveling to Tbilisi

Three International Airports Serve Georgia

Tbilisi International Airport (TBS) (primary)

Distance - 17 km east of the city centre — 30–40 min by taxi

Airlines - Georgian Airways, Turkish Airlines, Qatar Airways, Air Arabia, Pegasus, LOT and more

Connections - Istanbul, Frankfurt, Vienna, Paris, Warsaw, Amsterdam, Dubai, Tel Aviv and more

Airport → City - Bus 337: 1 GEL, every 15 min (runs 24 hours) — Freedom Square / Samgori metro

Bolt / Maxim: 20–30 GEL

Kutaisi International Airport (KUT) (low-cost hub)

Distance - ~230 km west of Tbilisi — 3.5 hrs by bus or private transfer

Airlines - Wizz Air (main base), Pegasus, FlyArystan

Connections - Rome, Warsaw, Athens, Berlin, Budapest, Paris, Barcelona, Madrid, Brussels, Lyon and 24 more

KUT → Tbilisi Georgian Bus: departs after each arrival, ~4 hrs, ~25 GEL — georgianbus.com

Train: 2 km shuttle bus to Kopitnari station, then ~3h–5h to Tbilisi, from 9 GEL

Private transfer: ~3.5 hrs, from 212 GEL per car — pre-book recommended

More info kutaisi.aero

Batumi International Airport (BUS) (Black Sea gateway)

Distance - ~375 km west of Tbilisi — 4.5–5 hrs by road or train

Airlines - Turkish Airlines, Pegasus, Azerbaijan Airlines, FlyDubai, Geo Sky, and more

Connections - Istanbul, Tel Aviv, Dubai, Baku, and seasonal European routes

BUS → Tbilisi Train: Georgian Railway high-speed, ~5h 20 min, 36-76 GEL — railway.ge

Bus: Metro Georgia / Citybus, departs Batumi central, ~5–6 hrs, 40 GEL

Private transfer: ~4h 45 min drive, book via Bolt or local companies

More info batumiairport.com

Other Entry Routes	
Train	Yerevan (Armenia) • Baku (Azerbaijan)
International bus	Yerevan, Istanbul, Minsk and more — Ortachala Bus Station, Tbilisi

Getting Around Tbilisi

All public transport is operated by Tbilisi Transport Company (TTC) and costs a flat fare of 1 GEL per trip, including free transfers within 90 minutes.

TTC — Tbilisi Transport Company	
Website	ttc.com.ge/en/front
Info	Real-time route planner, live bus tracker, MetroMoney card info, schedules and maps

TKT — Online Transport Tickets	
Website	tkt.ge/en/transport
Info	Buy MetroMoney top-up and transport passes online. Accepts international cards

MetroMoney Card — Your Key to Tbilisi Transport	
Cost	2 GEL deposit (refundable within 1 month). Card is not personal — can be shared.
Where to buy	Any metro station ticket office, Rike-Narikala cable car stations, Bank of Georgia branches
Where to top up	Metro stations, ExpressPay machines, Bank of Georgia self-service kiosks
Online	tkt.ge/en/transport — top up before you arrive
Payment alt.	Contactless bank card or Apple/Google Pay: 1 GEL per trip (no 90-min transfer benefit)

Metro — Fastest Option	
Lines	2 lines: Akhmeteli-Varketili (red) • Saburtalo (green) • 23 stations
Hours	06:00–24:00 daily
Nearest to venue	Liberty Square Station (red line) — 5 min walk to Georgian National Museum
Key stops	Rustaveli, Liberty Square, Avlabari (Old Town), Station Square (interchange)
Fare	1 GEL with MetroMoney. Free transfer to bus/cable car within 90 min.
Map	https://tbilisimetromap.webflow.io/

Bus & Minibus Network	
Hours	07:00 – 23:00 daily
Fare	1 GEL with MetroMoney card (same 90-min transfer applies)
Route planning	ttc.com.ge or Google Maps (both show real-time positions)
Airport bus	Bus 337: Airport ↔ Freedom Square • runs 24 hours, every 15 min • 1 GEL
Bus lanes	City centre routes have dedicated bus lanes — usually faster than taxis
City	Bus 337 departs from in front of the Freedom Square metro station

Taxi & Ride-Hailing

Bolt	Most popular app. Install before arrival. ~5–10 GEL across centre; airport: 20–30 GEL
Maxim	Good alternative to Bolt. Available city-wide.
GG Georgia	Local Georgian taxi app. ggtaxi.com / +995 32 220 0200
Note	Always use an app rather than hailing street taxis to ensure fair pricing

Cable Cars & Funicular	
Rike–Narikala	Rike Park ↔ Narikala Fortress. 2.50 GEL one-way. 10:00–24:00. Accepts MetroMoney.
Mtatsminda Funicular	Rustaveli ↔ Mtatsminda Park (restored 2024). 1 GEL one-way. Accepts MetroMoney.
Bagebi–Maglivi	University area. 08:00–20:00. 1 GEL one-way. MetroMoney.

⚠ Important: Georgia's official currency is the Georgian Lari (GEL). All purchases, services and payments within Georgia are made exclusively in Lari. Euros, US dollars and other foreign currencies are not accepted in shops, restaurants, hotels or for transport. You must exchange currency on arrival.

Currency Exchange	
Rate (approx.)	1 EUR ≈ 3.02–3.15 GEL • 1 USD ≈ 2.70 GEL • 1 GBP ≈ 3.65 GEL (rates vary - check before travel)
Where to exchange	Licensed exchange places ("savaluto") in city centre. Rates are competitive; avoid hotel exchange desks.
ATMs	Widely available throughout Tbilisi. Accept Visa, Mastercard, Maestro. Recommended method.
Card payments	Major hotels, restaurants and shops accept cards.
Airport exchange	Available 24/7 at Tbilisi Airport. Rates slightly less favourable than city centre bureaux.
Tip	Withdraw Lari from an ATM on arrival for small expenses. Keep small denominations for small markets.

Calling tips for visitors	Detail
Roaming	Check with your home operator before travelling. Roaming can be expensive — a local SIM is often more practical for stays over a few days.
SIM cards	All three operators (Magti, Silknet/Geocell, Cellfie) have official stores throughout central Tbilisi. Passport required for registration.
WhatsApp / Viber	Widely used in Georgia for messaging and calls. Many local contacts prefer these over standard SMS.
Internet calls	Wi-Fi coverage is good across Tbilisi hotels, cafés and public spaces. VoIP (WhatsApp, Zoom, Teams) works reliably.
Mobile format	All Georgian mobile numbers start with 5 and are 9 digits long (after the country code). Drop the leading 0 when dialling internationally.

Emergency numbers	Service	Notes
112	Universal Emergency	Police, fire & ambulance — English operators available

112 is the primary emergency number and works from all phones including mobiles without a SIM card.

Accommodation

Recommended Neighborhoods — Book Early	
Old Town / Abanotubani	10–15 min walk to congress venue. Charming guesthouses and boutique hotels.
Rustaveli & Mtatsminda	Closest to the Georgian National Museum. Mix of grand and mid-range hotels.
Vera & Vake	Upscale residential, 10–15 min by taxi. Quiet and green.
Saburtalo	Modern area, mid-range hotels, metro access.

Search all Tbilisi hotels and apartments: tbilisi-hotels.com/en
2,867 apartments • 881 hotels • 288 guesthouses • 113 hostels — all categories and price ranges

- **COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT TBILISI**

  Reservations:
  marriott.com/tbscy | +995 32 277 91 00
  Distance from Freedom Square: 50 m

ROOM CATEGORY	SINGLE	DOUBLE
Standard	GEL 325	GEL 380
Deluxe	GEL 415	GEL 465

- **IBIS STYLES TBILISI CENTER**

  Reservations:
  h8413@accor.com | +995 32 200 24 24
  Distance from Freedom Square: 200 m

ROOM CATEGORY	SINGLE	DOUBLE
Standard	GEL 215	GEL 250

- **TBILISI MARRIOTT HOTEL**

  Reservations:
  marriott.com/tbsmc | +995 32 277 92 00
  Distance from Freedom Square: 400 m

ROOM CATEGORY	SINGLE	DOUBLE
Standard	GEL 405	GEL 460
Deluxe	GEL 540	GEL 595

- **RADISSON BLU IVERIA**

  Reservations:
  radissonhotels.com | +995 32 240 22 00
  Distance from Freedom Square: 1.0 km

ROOM CATEGORY	SINGLE	DOUBLE
Standard	GEL 430	GEL 485
Superior	GEL 540	GEL 600

- **BROSSE GARDEN HOTEL**

  Reservations:
  https://brossegarden.ge | +995551190325
  Distance from Freedom Square: 700 m

ROOM CATEGORY	SINGLE	DOUBLE
Standard	GEL 200	GEL 221
Superior	GEL 237	GEL 307

- **SHERATON GRAND METECHI PALACE**

  Reservations:
  marriott.com/tbssi | +995 32 277 20 20
  Distance from Freedom Square: 1.5 km

ROOM CATEGORY	SINGLE	DOUBLE
Classic	GEL 486	GEL 551
Standard	GEL 562	GEL 621

- **HILTON GARDEN INN RIVERVIEW**

  Reservations:
  hilton.com/tbsrvgi | +995 32 200 99 77
  Distance from Freedom Square: 2.0 km

ROOM CATEGORY	SINGLE	DOUBLE
Standard	GEL 405	GEL 459
Superior	GEL 513	GEL 567

- **HOLIDAY INN TBILISI**

  Reservations:
  ihg.com/holidayinn/tbilisi | +995 32 230 00 99
  Distance from Freedom Square: 3.5 km

ROOM CATEGORY	SINGLE	DOUBLE
Standard	GEL 270	GEL 324
Deluxe	GEL 351	GEL 405

IMPORTANT NOTICE — RUSTAVELI AVENUE

Tbilisi City Hall began a large-scale rehabilitation of Rustaveli Avenue on 23 July 2026, with completion expected by the end of November 2026. For the duration of the works, all vehicular traffic is closed along the avenue between Tamar Chovelidze Street and Freedom Square — a section that includes the Georgian National Museum at 3 Rustaveli Avenue, the venue of HYPOGEA 2026.

Public bus and minibus routes serving the avenue have been diverted via Heroes' Square, Baratashvili Street and other detours, and several routes no longer stop at Liberty Square Metro Station. The underground metro line itself is unaffected by the surface works and continues to run as normal.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Allow extra travel time to and from the venue.
- Use the Tbilisi Metro (Liberty Square station) as the most reliable way to reach the Museum.
- When booking accommodation, favor locations near the metro or streets unaffected by the closure, rather than relying on direct drop-off on Rustaveli Avenue.
- Pedestrian access to the Museum remains open but may involve detours around the works

HYPOGEA
TBILISI • 2026
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