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19-21 Νοεμβρίου 2024

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ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ ΔΙΕΡΕΥΝΗΣΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΗΣ ΤΕΧΝΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ

NOESIS
ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΔΙΑΔΟΣΗΣ ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΩΝ & ΜΟΥΣΕΙΟ ΤΕΧΝΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ

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The papers had been subject to reviews and comments by the Scientific Committee. Additionally, further observations and comments were made during the discussion that followed their oral presentation at the Conference.

The papers are posted as submitted by the authors after the conclusion of the Conference. The authors are responsible for the content of their work, both in terms of their views and the accuracy and correctness of the data they present.

3ο ΔΙΕΘΝΕΣ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟ
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SKIVARIN – EARLY BYZANTINE FORTRESS IN THE BELBEK CANYON OF CRIMEAN MOUNTAINS

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Abstract

The report is devoted to the study and correct identification of a little-known fortification, which is located on the high cliffs of the Belbek Canyon in the Crimean Mountains. In the languages of different nations, its name sounded like “Skivarin”, “Turla”, “Syuyren”, “Altyn Isar”. This fortification, resembling an arrowhead in plan, crosses the rocky cape Kulle-Burun, which protrudes into the canyon in the form of a huge “ship”. From this place a majestic panorama of the Crimean steppes and foothills in the north and the fertile valley of the Belbek River at the foot of the cliffs opens. Due to the almost complete absence of written sources, this study is interdisciplinary. It uses data from visual architectural and construction analysis; the results of archaeological excavations inside and near the fortification are presented; certain analogies with other fortifications of the late antique (early Byzantine) era have been traced. Based on the totality of data from written sources; the results of archaeological excavations, and analysis of architectural construction, military engineering, tactical and topographical components, the authors put forward a version of the early Byzantine origin of the fortress. In their opinion, the Skivarin fortification was a border burg. This burg was built no earlier than 575 AD at a commanding height in the Belbek Canyon. The main task of the garrison was to carry out a patrol and observation service of strategic importance in the interests of the headquarters of the Byzantine dux in Kherson. This hypothesis is also supported by a large number of Byzantine artifacts from the mid-5th to 7th centuries found during the study of rural settlements in the surrounding area of the burg of Skivarin. The Goths and Alans lived here, who at that time were military allies of Byzantium in the mountainous Crimea. Probably, the invasion of the Turkuts, who defeated the imperial fortresses on the Bosporus in 576 AD, contributed to the rapid completion of the construction of the Skivarin burg.

Keywords: Byzantium, fortress, Skivarin, Crimean mountains.

Introduction

After the crushing attack of the Huns on the cities of the Bosporan kingdom in 370–375 AD, the only major urban center in Taurica remained Chersonesus (from 392 AD – Kherson).[1] The Eastern Roman administration paid great attention to strengthening the defensive walls and towers of the city. Gradually it was turned into a strong fortress and the base of a naval squadron. However, Kherson needed not only engineering protection, but also military cover on the distant approaches. Such cover for the city was provided by the tribes of the Goths and Alans who lived nearby, in the "country of Dory".[2]

Already in the second half of the 3rd century, the Goths and Alans began to actively populate the valleys of the Alma, Belbek, Kacha, Chyornaya rivers between the Inner and Main ridges of the Crimean Mountains, as well as the southern coast of Crimea. In the summer of 488 AD, the Taurian Goths refused to go with the leader Theodoric to Italy, and soon became military allies of the Romans (Procop.*Aed.* 3:7,13-14). In the first third of the 6th century, the Goths and Alans of the "country of Dory" were already in the orbit of the powerful political, economic and ideological influence of Constantinople. But the peaceful settlements of the Allies also needed reliable protection.

The outstanding ruler of Byzantium, Emperor Justinian the Great (527–565 AD) understood this well. During his reign, unprecedented work was carried out on the borders to restore the engineering *praetentura Imperii*. By the middle of the 6th century, powerful defensive units (*kleisuras*) were built in the mountains of the South-Western Crimea, the basis of which was "long walls" (Procop.*Aed.* 3:7,15-17; Vus 2013 and Sorochan 2014). As a rule, *kleisurs* were built in narrow "mountain gates" at the entrance to the gorge. The engineering practice of Justinian the Great in Taurica was continued by his successors – the emperors Justin II (565–578 AD), Tiberius II Constantine (578–582 AD) and Mauricius Tiberius (582–602 AD). Besides the "long walls" the Romans also built other fortifications, about which ancient authors refer nothing.

[1]The ruins of Tauric Chersonesos (Byzantine Kherson) are located in modern city Sevastopol' in Crimea.

[2]Modern South-Western Crimea. The center of the "country" was the "oppidum Dory". It was probably located on Mount Mangup-Kale.

Fig. 1: Panorama of the Belbek Canyon. Ahead is the mountain defile “Belbek Gate”.

Topographical description of the Skivarin fortification

One of these “mysterious” early Byzantine fortresses has been preserved in the Belbek canyon of the Inner Ridge of the Crimean Mountains (Fig. 1). The monumental ruins of the fortification rise on the rocks of the left side of the canyon, at an altitude of 360 m above sea level. Its coordinates: +44° 37' 56.68", +33° 50' 8.20". The fortress is located at the extreme northwestern tip of the rocky cape Kulle-Burun (“Cape Tower”) (Fig. 2). It is surrounded on three sides by steep rocky cliffs up to 30m high. Kulle-Burun, like the sharp prow of a huge ship, protrudes into the space of the canyon. Due to this, the fortress is also called Syuyren (or Syuyren fortification). In fact, Syuyren is an oronym. Translated from the Crimean Tatar language as “Sharp lance”.

Fig. 2: Cape Kulle-Burun. View of the Byzantine fortress Skivarin in a northwest direction.

Thanks to this, the fortress dominates the Khor-Khor and “Kizilnik” ravines, the rocky capes of Ay-Todor, “Grey forehead”, Dzheniche-Burun, Mount Тapchan-Kaya and the “Belbek Gate” mountain pass (Fig. 3). In the northern direction from Cape Kulle-Burun one can see vast expanses of the Crimean steppes and foothills, and in the southern direction – the valley of the Belbek River up to the Main Range of the Crimean Mountains. The Kizilnik” ravine was called Isar-Altyn-Dere (“Gorge of the Golden Castle”) back in the 19th century (Keppen 1837, 294). And indeed, in the rays of the setting sun, the ruins of the ancient fortress acquire a beautiful golden hue.

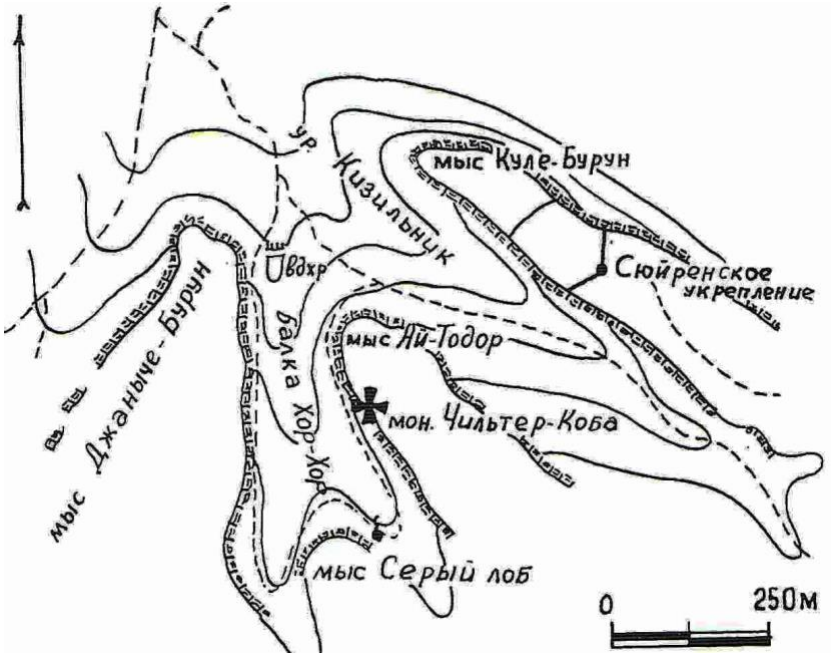

Fig. 3: Cape Kulle-Burun and Syuyren fortification. Location of Byzantine monuments on rocky capes in the Belbek Canyon. Plan-diagram Yu. Mogarichev.

Historical and etymological analysis of the oikonym Skivarin

The only reliable written source reporting on the fortress is the “Fourth Turkish Letter” by the Austrian diplomat Ogier Ghislain de Busbeck. This fortification, located among the Gothic settlements, was once called Skivarin in their language. This was reported in 1560–1562 baron de Busbeck two inhabitants of Taurica (Goth and Greek) at a meeting in Constantinople.[3] Let us note that the oikonym Skivarin (Latin *Sciuarin*) sounds very unusual. It probably comes from Proto-Germanic ****skaiwarō***. In ancient times, among the people living in Scandinavia, this word meant the magpie-bird (Kroonen 2013, 438).

Let us suggest that in an era when the ancestors of the Taurian Goths had not yet left their homeland, the word ****skaiwarō*** could mean not only a magpie,

[3]“Their main cities are called: one is Mankup, the other is Skivarin” (quote by: Ganina 2011, 93).

but any bird in general. At first glance, this decoding of the oikonym Skivarin seems strange. But everything becomes clear at the first glance at the plan of the Byzantine fortress. It is the comparison with a bird spreading its wings that can come to the mind of any person who has climbed the main tower of the fortification. We will refer at this plan later.

An interesting passage can be found in a letter from the Khazar tsar Joseph ben Aaron to the dignitary of the Cordoba Caliphate, Hasdai ibn Shaprut, which lists the fortresses that belonged to the Khazars in Taurica in the middle of the 10th century. In the same row, along with the fortresses “Kut” (Eski-Kermen) and “Mank-t” (Mangup-Kale), a certain “Burk” (or “Burg”?) is mentioned (Kokovtsov 1932, 72-103). This is not an oikonym, but rather a type of military building, and clearly not Khazar. At the same time, we know that fortifications such as burgs in the era of the late Roman Empire were built on all its land, river and even sea borders.[4] The main building of the burg was a round or square tower. Such fortifications were also erected in Taurica (Vus, Sorochan 2021, 162-198).

Let us note that the military-technical term “burg” exactly corresponds to the only reliable name of the fortress. It is preserved on an epigraphic monument from the 14th–15th centuries, found in ruins. An inscription of the Byzantine presbyter Clement was discovered on a rectangular stone slab. In this inscription the main building of the fortress is called “Turla” (IOSPE V: 201). The word may be derived from the Latin *turris* (“tower”) and the Greek *θόλος/τρούλος* (“dome/vault”). In fact, Clement's inscription records both the name and type of the building. “Turla” is precisely a “tower with a domed vault”.

We can assume that the engineers who built the fortress simply called it a “Burg”. It was precisely a burg from a tactical and technical point of view. The name “Turla“ was analogous to the term “burg“. It became widespread as the local population began to widely use the Greek language. In parallel with these names, there was the name “Skivarin”. So, due to the characteristic configuration of the fortification, it was nicknamed the Goths, from whom Roman officers recruited the local garrison. Of course, the oikonym/oronym Syuyren is a later adaptation of the word Skivarin in the Crimean Tatar language. So, what is Fortress Skivarin?

Analysis of the military-engineering and architectural-construction components of the Skivarin fortress

As we have already mentioned, Skivarin is located at the extreme northwestern tip of Cape Kulle-Burun. It is fences off part of the cape with an area of up to

[4]Burg – from Latin *burgus* (“tower”). The term was adopted by the Romans from the Germans in the 2nd century AD and was originally used on the Danube Limes in Pannonia. The word **burg*- comes from the Proto-Germanic **bergan*-, which means “to preserve, shelter, protect” (Kroonen 2013, 60 and 85).

1.7 hectares. Burg is deployed with a front to the southeast. The uneven surface of the rocky cape is blocked at an angle of 132 degrees by two curtains of defensive walls (southwestern and northeastern), which converge to a monumental tower (Fig. 4). It is located at the top of the protruding angle of the fortress front.

It is noteworthy that the walls extend from the tower, like two wings, and stretch to the very edge of the rocky cliffs. The central round tower is built on a low rocky ledge, part of which protrudes forward in the form of a kind of “beak”. Perhaps because of the characteristic configuration of the defensive line, the Goths nicknamed the fortress Skivarin (from **skaiwarō* – “magpie”).

Fig. 4: The central tower of the Byzantine fortress of Skivarin. View from the south.

The total length of the fortified perimeter is 110m. The thickness of the walls almost does not exceed the standard of five cubits generally accepted in early Byzantium (Kuchma 2007, XI). Interestingly, the engineers calculated the thickness of the wall in “samos” cubits: it is 2.5m.[5] The height of the walls (preserved) reaches 4.5m (Veimarn, Repnikov 1935, 115-116).

The southwestern curtain of the fortification is relatively well preserved (Fig. 5). Probably, in ancient times its maximum height reached at least 9m. In any case, the wall adjacent to the tower reached this height. Note that outstanding ancient Greek engineer Philo Byzantius (280–220 BC) recommended the construction of fortress walls at least 20 cubits (9.2m) high (Ph.Byz. 3:1-2). At the same time, the walls of Skivarin had a stepped facade; they were built in

[5]Samos cubit = 51.80 cm. Standard Greek cubit = 46.30 cm.

separate marches on a gentle rocky slope. Before erecting the walls, the builders cut special “beds” into the surface of the rock, into which they placed blocks of nummulitic limestone.

The wall consisted of outer and inner “shells”, and a dense mixture of mortar with rubble stone inside (Fig. 6). Both “shells” were laid in even rows: at least 14 rows of masonry in the upper part of the curtain, and 10–11 rows in the lower part. The “shells” were built from geometrically regular, rectangular limestone blocks. In Roman architecture, the use of regular masonry of rectangular blocks in horizontal rows was called the *opus quadratum/opus isodomum* technique (Vitr. 2:8.6; Wright 2009, 153, 162-163, 204-207).

Fig. 5: The outer side (front) of the southwestern wall of the fortress Skivarin.

At the first glance at the southwestern curtain, it is noticeable that the walls of Skivarin were built in two stages. Its lower part is monumental. Here, the length of the blocks ranges from 0.98, 1.00, 1.07m to 1.20m, and the width – from 0.32–0.35m to 0.43–0.44m. The height of the masonry rows is almost the same: 0.53–0.57m. This wall was up to a height of 4.5 m, up to the flat slabs of the battle route flooring. Sockets for wooden beams were cut into the flooring slabs at an angle of 45 degrees.

Above the flooring, the blocks become smaller and the height of their rows is half as high. This is a later add-on. However, the upper part of the wall was built using the same construction techniques as the lower one. At the top the wall had a parapet and battlements with a wedge-like top. Many of the components of the battlements and the blocks of the upper rows now lie at the foot of the wall.

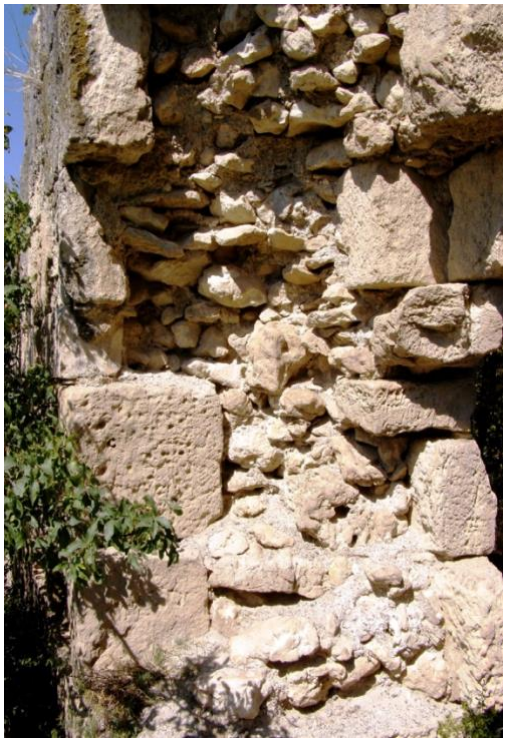

Fig. 6: Internal structure of the southwestern wall of the fortress Skivarin.

It is noteworthy that the monumental blocks of the lower part of the wall are installed in an alternating system: sometimes the wide side, sometimes the narrow side outward. This construction technique, known in ancient Greece as *ἔμπλεκτος* (or “inwoven”), was also used by the Romans. However, its Roman variety, *emplekton*, was distinguished by the use of abundant mortar (Vitr. 2:8.7). Masonry, laid in regular rows of narrow and wide blocks on lime mortar, became widespread in the Roman and early Byzantine eras (Rivoira 1925, 5 and 14, and 26). This system was widespread in Asia Minor and Syria. In Kherson, which was the center of Byzantine possessions in Crimea, such masonry reigned supreme in the 6th century (Yakobson 1959, 70-71). The masonry of the upper part of the wall is simpler. Perhaps it was built in great haste.

Near the tower, adjacent to the southwestern curtain are the remains of a staircase along which the defenders climbed to the battle path. In the same wall there is a wicket preserved – an additional exit from the fortification. It became the main one after the old road to the Skivarin gate was destroyed, probably as a result of an earthquake.

The northeastern wall of Skivarin is much worse preserved. This is due to the peculiarities of the local terrain. The surface of Cape Kulle-Burun in this place has a steep slope towards the rocky cliff. This means that during each earthquake the curtain was subjected to significant destruction. This is clearly visible from the monumental blocks of the inner “shell”. They are clearly rebuilt from an earlier structure. To the left of the wall, along the northern cliff of the

cape, wooden platforms for shooters were built. All that remains of them are traces of cuttings on the surface of the rock.

The main gate of Skivarin was located in the north-eastern wall near the main tower. Gate width – 3.2–3.4m (Voronin et al. 1979, 314) (Fig. 7). On top they had a semicircular arched vault. In terms of its width and vault structure, the Skivarin gate is almost similar to the gate of the Byzantine fortress Kyrk-Or (6th century) which was located on Mount Chufut-Kale in the Inner Range of the Crimean Mountains. Unfortunately, due to earthquakes, Skivarin's gates are completely destroyed.

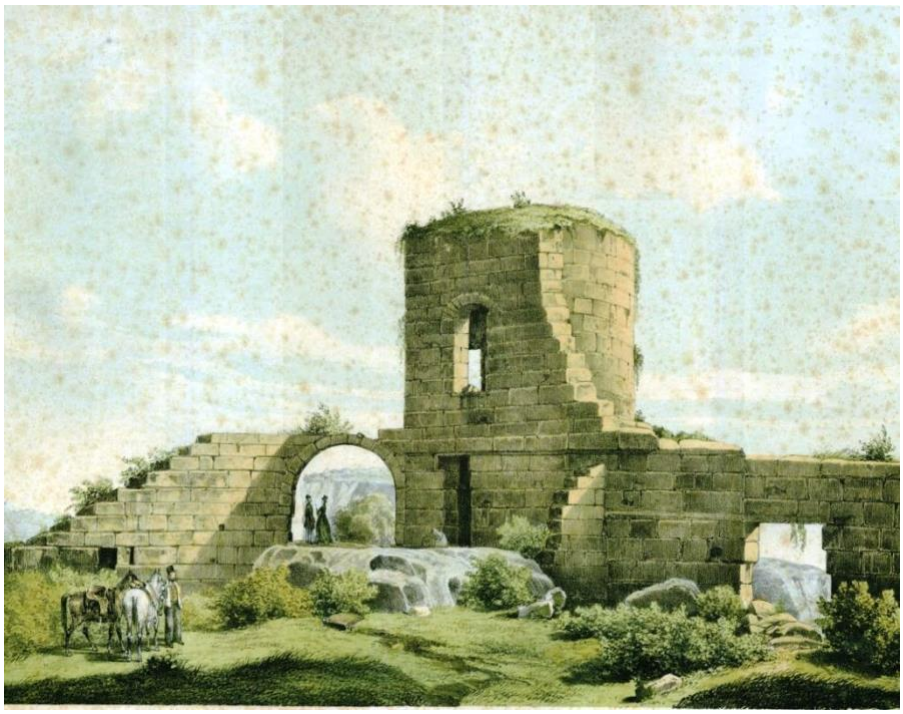

Fig. 7: Byzantine fortress on Cape Kulle-Burun in a watercolor by Moritz Vebel. Inside view (Vebel 1851–1853, Tabl. LIII).

In our opinion, the rock collapse also destroyed the ancient path to the fortification. This road passed through the area of the north-eastern cliff, and the Skivarin Gate functioned as long as people used this path. Probably, the road rose from the 5th–18th century settlement of Tash-Baskan-Syuyren, located near the modern village of Maloye Sadovoye. The enemy, who decided to climb the cape this way, was forced almost all the time to expose his unprotected right side to the defenders of the fortification.[6] The last section of the road, leading directly to the gate, was controlled by the garrison by firing from ballistas installed in the main tower of Skivarin. In addition to the two roads leading to the gate and wicket of Skivarin, a secret path was built in the northern cliff of Cape Kulle-Burun.

[6]In full accordance with the recommendations of Marcus Vitruvius Pollio on the organization of protection of the gates of Roman fortresses (Vitr. 1:5,2).

The central defensive structure of Skivarin – a three-storey round tower – has been preserved at height of up to 10m. But initially, together with the stone parapet and battlements, the height of the tower was at least 12m. The diameter of the building is 8m. But the walls of the round tower are only 1.5m thick, which causes some puzzling. In fact, there is nothing strange here. The difference of one meter in the thickness of the main walls and the walls of the tower can be explained by the following circumstance. Ancient engineers connected the northeastern and southwestern curtains of Skivarin at the highest point of Cape Kulle-Burun (Fig. 8). The tower is built on a small rocky outcrop. The dimensions of the rocky ledge determined both the diameter of the tower and, accordingly, the thickness of its walls.

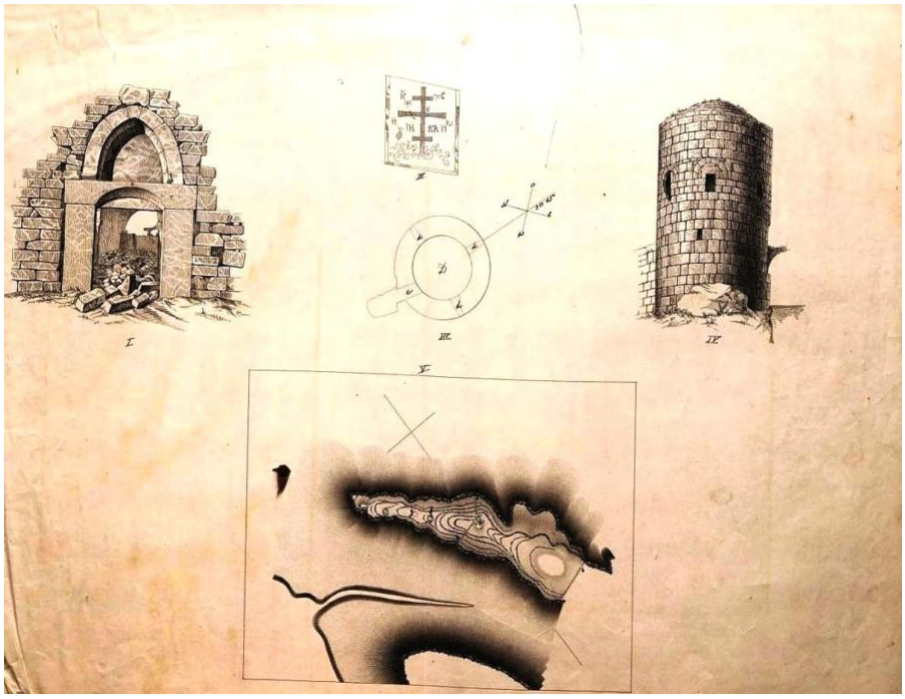

Fig. 8: Syuyren, 1853. Drawing and plan by Moritz Vebel (Vebel 1851–1853, Tabl. LIV).

The angle of inclination of the surface in front of the tower is of medium steepness, very uneven. In fact, the rock outcropping (“beak”) on which the tower was built is a natural anti-ram barrier. This did not give the enemy any chance to use a ram against the main tower of Skivarin.

The ceiling between the 1st and 2nd floors was wooden. Interfloor boards were laid on large wooden beams. The square sockets from these beams are still visible inside the tower. The upper ceiling was made of stone, in the form of a spherical vault. This ceiling was laid out in wedge-shaped blocks in 14 rows. A separate staircase led to the 2nd and 3rd floors from the outside, the base of which was partially preserved. Unfortunately, the northern third of the tower collapsed during devastating mountain earthquakes (Fig. 9).

The structure of the tower walls is similar to the structure of both curtains. But the length of the blocks in the walls of the tower is somewhat shorter (0.60,

0.70, 0.75, 0.77m), and the rows of masonry are lower. This is especially noticeable in the upper part of the tower walls.

It is noteworthy that the walls of the tower are built on lime mortar with the addition of river sand, small pebbles, and ceramics. The compound of the solution clearly indicates the early Byzantine origin of the fortress (Sorochan 2004, 186). The space between the inner and outer shells of the wall was filled with crushed stone and filled with this solution. At the same time, the Romans added one third of broken and sifted ceramics to the solution, which significantly strengthened the walls of the building (Vitr. 2:5,1). In addition to strength, this mortar gave the walls excellent waterproofing properties. The concrete, prepared with well-screened broken ceramics, was grade 30, and allowed engineers to erect buildings up to 30m high (Milonov 1966, 161).

Fig. 9: Tower of the fortress of Skivarin, view from the inside.

In the lower floor, two narrow vertical embrasures for archery and one square embrasure have been preserved. On the second floor, three battle platforms were equipped in the thickness of the wall (only one was completely preserved). Each platform had a semicircular vault and unloading arches over rectangular embrasures. The dimensions of the platforms are 1.7m high and 1.5m wide. Probably, small ballistas were installed on the sites, which directly fired at the area in front of the tower. In 1978, behind the tower, near the stairs leading to the second floor, about 500 stone “cores” (caliber from 6 to 10cm) for throwing weapons were found.

At the top of the tower there is a lookout platform, lined with well-hewn and carefully fitted rectangular slabs of limestone. This is the highest position in

Skivarin Fortress. In addition to the observation post, the upper platform could serve as a position for ballista or catapult. In the 13th–14th centuries, an Orthodox chapel was located on the second floor of the tower (Fomin 2012, 91). Even now, the remains of Byzantine frescoes remain on the white plaster of the dome. They probably depicted Christmas and the Annunciation (Fig. 10). Back in the 19th century, the remains of an altar were visible in the tower.

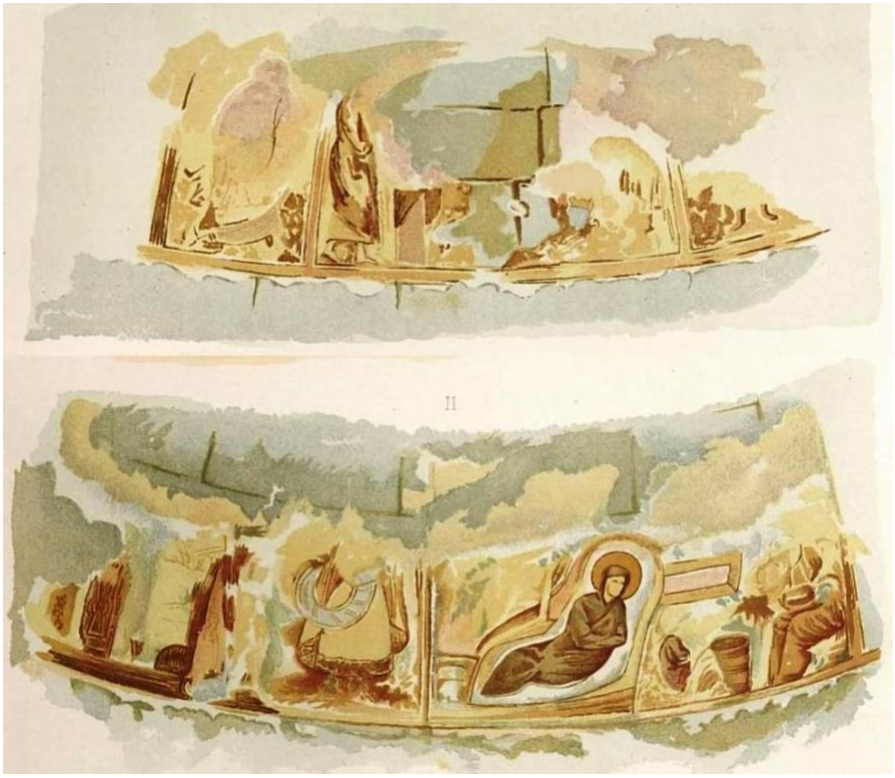

Fig. 10: Remains of frescoes in the tower of the Skivarin fortress. Watercolor by Moritz Vebel (Vebel 1851–1853, Tabl. LV (I-II).

Our description of the fortifications on Cape Kulle-Burun will be incomplete if we do not say that at a distance of 240m from the main tower there are the remains of another wall (rather, a fence) 145m long. It was probably built in the 13th–14th centuries, and it has nothing in common with the monumental architecture of Skivarin.

In general, the architectural and construction component of the Skivarin fortress testifies to the early Byzantine origin of the monument. This component includes: monumental masonry of walls using the *opus quadratum/opus isodomum* technique and their three-layer structure (ancient Greek *ἔμπλεκτος*/Roman *emplekton*); the use of Roman mortar; dimensions of building elements. The height and width of the fortress walls correspond to the standards accepted in ancient and Byzantine architecture. According to A.L. Yakobson, “The early medieval origin of the Syuyren fortification ... is beyond any doubt. ... By the nature of the square masonry, the Syuyren fortification

does not differ in any significant way from the 3rd ring (thickening) of the “Zeno Tower”,[7] 5th wall of the 20th curtain and other similar links of the fortress wall of Kherson, and even the sizes of the blocks and the height of the rows are the same” (Yakobson 1959, 120).

The outline of the defensive line of Skivarin looks interesting and unusual for other Byzantine fortresses in the mountainous Crimea. At the same time, the use of such a scheme (round tower on the tip of a protruding corner) was not something new in late antique fortification. Fortifications of a similar plan are present on the banks of the Rhine and Danube. These fortifications were Roman burghs, which were actively built in the 4th century on the borders of the Empire for protection from barbarians. This is a special type of burg which consists of a main tower, from which two walls extend in the form of two “wings” (Tomlin 2006, 301-302). At the very end, small turrets were attached to the walls, which stood on the very bank of the river.

In the situation with Skivarin, this scheme is more simplified, since thanks to the 30-meter rocky cliffs, it did not need additional turrets to protect its flanks. We can state that, in terms of its typological characteristics, the Skivarin fortification is very reminiscent of Late Roman burgs. The practice of erecting such buildings continued in the early Byzantine era – under Emperor Justinian the Great (527–565 AD) and his successors. In 535–560 AD in the Balkans alone, as part of the Danube, Balkan and Strandja defensive lines and in the Illyricum prefecture, no less than 439 fortresses and burgs were built and restored (Vus, Sorochan 2021, 179). The core of the fortifications was a monumental defensive tower. The main function of the burgs (except for border protection) was to perform patrol and observation service.

In this matter, not a single early Byzantine fortress in the mountainous Crimea can compare with Skivarin. It has no equal in this! Let us emphasize once again that from Cape Kulle-Burun there is a huge panorama of the Crimean foothills in the north and the entire space of the Belbek River canyon up to the Main Range of the Crimean Mountains in the south. On the northern site of the cape, there are cuttings in the rock for wooden pillars. Probably, a temporary structure was installed here – a wooden signal tower, or platform.

It is noteworthy that opposite Skivarin, in the rocks on the right side of the canyon, there is a man-made rectangular casemate (Altyn-Beshik cave). It can be assumed that this casemate was once an element of a kind of light “telegraph”. In the early Byzantine era (and later), such a system allowed local residents to send signals to the fortress garrison about the appearance of nomadic detachments in the Belbek River valley. Subsequently, this casemate could be rebuilt into a cave cell of an Orthodox hermit monk. In medieval Crimea, such cave cells were not uncommon.

[7]"Tower of Zeno" is the XVII tower of the defensive complex of Byzantine Kherson. It was the most powerful fortification in the city citadel. It received its name due to a slab found in it with an inscription dating back to the reign of Emperor Zeno (488 AD) (Vus 2017, 214-215).

It is still not clear how the Skivarin fortress was supplied with water. In conditions of hot, dry summers and mountainous terrain, this issue was very important. In 1978, fragments of ceramic water pipes were found near the sally-gate of the southwestern curtain (Danilenko 2016, 41). But in the event of a long siege, this option, of course, was not suitable. In the Byzantine fortresses of the mountainous Crimea, complex hydraulic systems or wells were built (Eski-Kermen, Mangup-Kale, Kyrk-Or (Chufut-Kale), Kalamita). Skivarin probably should have had the same water supply system. We can state that the fortification at Cape Kulle-Burun remains largely unexplored.

Analysis of archaeological artifacts and dating of the Skivarin fortress

Unfortunately, neither architectural features nor typology provide an answer to the exact time of construction of Skivarin. Only archaeological excavations can help with this. Inside the fortress walls, the remains of stone buildings are still visible. A barrack for the Byzantine garrison, a house for the commandant of the fortress, a blacksmith's workshop, a stable, a food warehouse, etc. were probably built here. In the last centuries of the fortress's existence, there was even a small chapel with a gable roof between the sally-gate and the tower. The contours of the chapel building are clearly marked on the surface of the inner shell of the fortress wall. Two crosses and a star were carved on the surface of one of the blocks (Danilenko 2016, 42). The thickness of the cultural layer ranges from 0.5m in the northern part of the settlement to 3m near the defensive wall.

Archaeologists explored the fortification on Cape Kulle-Burun in 1966 and 1968, then in 1978–1979 (Voronin et al. 1979, Talis 1972). The results of these studies are very contradictory. Excavations were carried out selectively: seven pits were laid out in different places, and three excavations near the southwestern curtain. In 1966 and 1968, a variety of lifting material was collected on the territory of the fortification: ceramics from the 8th–9th and 14th–15th centuries, glazed ceramics from the 11th–15th centuries and a coin from the 15th century. Unfortunately, even then, researchers recorded at least eight shapeless shallow pits. These were traces of illegal predatory "excavations" (Baranov 1971, 88-92).

The 1978 and 1979 studies were very valuable but also controversial. The earliest material was obtained during the study of a backfill of loam to level the surface of the defensive wall in excavation I. It consisted of fragments of the walls of Black Sea amphorae from the second half of the 8th – first half of the 10th centuries (Voronin, Mayko, and Kutaysov 2014, 458-479). In excavation II (area 50 sq. meters) near the sally-gate the following were found: a fragment of a vessel from the 9th–10th centuries; fragments of amphora from the 12th–13th centuries and glazed ceramics from the 15th–16th centuries and other objects (Danilenko 2016, 39-48).

The question arises: why, despite the early Byzantine (even late antique) architectural appearance of the fortress, are there completely no artifacts from the initial stage of its existence? After all, similar artifacts have long been found in other early Byzantine fortresses of the mountainous Crimea. There can be two answers to this question: 1. illegal predatory excavations; 2. a certain tradition that existed in the Byzantine mountain fortresses in Crimea. Due to the small inhabited area, residents periodically cleaned the area, throwing accumulated garbage down the cliffs. Exactly this situation is observed and in the Kyrk-Or fortress (Chufut-Kale).

It wasn't until 2011 that the answer to this question emerged. Among the ruins of the fortress, a lead seal was found, which once sealed the message of the Byzantine nobleman, hypatus Theophylact (Alekseyenko 2011, 124-125). In early Byzantium, the title of "hypatus" (honorary consul) was very high,[8] it could be received by people who had achieved a serious position in the imperial administration (Gulland 1967, 44-67). Two other seals of this official are known indicating the title "hypatus". All of them date back to 550–650 years AD (Martindale 1992, Zacos 1972).

Perhaps, Theophylact owns another seal from the second half of the 6th century. Its diameter matches the diameter of the seal found in the ruins of Skivarin (24mm) (Zacos, Veglery 1972, 475, no. 556). Finally, there is the seal of Theophylact (550–650 AD), which indicates his official position in the highest administration – this is job title of "referendarios" (Zacos, Veglery 1972, 476, no. 559). In early Byzantium, a referendarios was a courtier secretary whose duties included presenting petitions from his subjects to the emperor. The importance of referendarioses especially increased under Justinian the Great. The referendarios communicated his decisions to officials and military commanders, and also conducted other important correspondence. This function was abolished only after 600 AD (Kazhdan 1991, 1778).

The referendarios was a close associate of the emperor and could well have been awarded the honorary title "hypatus" for his faithful service. For us, these details are of great importance, since the reasons for the appearance of his seal in the Skivarin fortress become clear. There is no doubt that Theophylact from Constantinople oversaw important issues in the provinces. These could be issues of building fortifications, personnel appointments in garrisons and military units, provision of financial assistance, etc. Of course, his document with a seal could not just get into the fortress, lost in the wilderness of the Crimean mountains. But what events could have led to the appearance of Theophylact's message in the Belbek Canyon?

[8]After 541 AD, when the post of consul was abolished, this position became an honorary title granted to many members of the synclit, that is, it began to correspond to the position of senator. Until the 9th century, this was a significant rank (Sorochan 2011, 496).

Historical context of the construction of the Skivarin fortress

In the last third of the 6th century in the steppes of the North-Eastern Black Sea region, a real threat to the Byzantine possessions in Crimea appeared – the troops of the Turkic Kaganate. At that time, Byzantium was waging a difficult war with Iran, and in 575 AD it itself turned to the Turkuts for help. However, ambassador Valentin, who arrived at the headquarters of their ruler Turxanth, was humiliated; his threatened with direct aggression. Soon Turxanth sent a united army of Turkuts, Alans and Huns to the Crimea. In 576 AD they destroyed the Byzantine fortresses in the Asian and European Bosporus; then they stormed and burned the city of Bosporus (Men.Prot. 19:1-2). After this, the Turkut troops began to slowly move west, towards Kherson. In 581 AD, an army of Turkuts came to the shore of the Northern Bay near Kherson, but did not dare to storm its fortifications. In 589 AD, the Turkuts left Taurica and the Bosporus forever, and Byzantium restored its dominance here (Vus 2017, 224).

Probably, the threat of invasion worried the administration in Constantinople even before this terrible catastrophe. In the spring of 575 AD emperors Justin II and Tiberius II Constantine (co-rulers since December 7, 574 AD) took an unprecedented step. They abolished the ship duty performed by the inhabitants of Kherson and Bosporus. Probably, Novella 163, published in April-May 575 AD, did not authorize the abolition of ship duty as such, but a temporary (and urgent) redistribution of finances to intensify military engineering work in Crimea (Sorochan 2016, 510).

In this case, the discovery of a seal from the message of the hypatos Theophylact receives a logical explanation. Without knowing the contents of the document, we can assume that it was related to the allocation of funds to speed up the construction of the Skivarin fortification. Perhaps, Theophylact was instructed to control this process in view of the approaching threat of attack by the Turkuts.

There is also a logical explanation for some difference in the technique of constructing the walls and the tower of Skivarin. It is clearly noticeable that the walls above the battle path are built from smaller stone blocks. The upper parts of the curtains are less thick, although they are folded using the same regular system as the lower parts. We see the same picture in the round tower. Above the floor level of the second floor it is clearly visible how the blocks from which it is built decrease in size. This fact can only be explained by the great haste of the engineering work carried out in 575–576 AD.

This can also explain the presence of many stone blocks with nests for pyrons in the southwestern and northeastern curtains. These blocks are clearly taken from an older structure, which gives the Skivarin fortress a somewhat archaic appearance. The blocks could have been brought to the Belbek Canyon from Kherson in a hurry. Recycling of architectural details from dismantled ancient buildings was common in early Byzantium.

In addition to the seal of the hypatos Theophylact, our hypothesis about the early Byzantine origin of Skivarin is indirectly supported by the results of archaeological studies of Gothic-Alan settlements found in the surrounding area. One of the settlements of the imperial federates was discovered in the depths of the Belbek canyon, near the village of Golubinka. The chronological framework of the settlement's existence (5th–7th centuries) was determined thanks to the large amount of Byzantine container and table ceramics found during excavations (Yakobson 1970, 17). This indicates about stay of local allies in the orbit of the general imperial economic market or about persistent attempts by Constantinople to include the Goths and Alans in this market.

In 1979 and 1986, estates dating back to the 8th and 9th centuries were explored on the outskirts of the village of Maloye Sadovoye, not far from the rocky cape Kulle-Burun. During the excavations, it was established that an open (that is, unprotected) settlement existed here much earlier, back in the 5th–7th centuries (Omel'kova 1980, 316-317). It is known that until the end of the 18th century, at the foot of the rocky capes Kulle-Burun and Tapchan-Kaya, there was the village of Tash-Baskan-Syuyren, once inhabited by Orthodox Greeks (Keppen 1837, 292). They were probably descendants of the Goths and Alans. In one of the excavations, fragments of Byzantine amphoras from the 6th–7th centuries and an early medieval German fibula were found (Omel'kova 1988, 320). During further searches, a necropolis of the 7th–8th centuries was discovered on the right bank of Belbek, which also belonged to local settlers.

Repeated archaeological research in 2012 confirmed the fact that Byzantine allies lived in this area. Scientists have found that the first period of life of the settlement at the foot of Cape Tapchan-Kaya dates back to the second half of the 5th – 6th centuries. This is evidenced by many fragments of early Byzantine amphorae, a bronze fibula of the “Cicada” type, many coins from the reign of the emperors Leo I (457–474 AD), Anastasius I (491–518 AD), Justin I (518–527 AD) and Justinian the Great (527–565 AD) (Naumenko, Dushenko 2013, 35-36).

Between capes Kule-Burun and Tapchan-Kaya rises the rocky cape Ay-Todor. In the steep walls of this cape, the ancient cave temple of Chilter-Koba, or “Ay-Todor Temple”, has been preserved. Researchers have found that its earliest liturgical devices date back between 4 and 6 centuries (Shevchenko 2014, 397). However, fragments of amphorae from the 5th–7th centuries found near the temple are not the earliest finds. During the examination of the slopes near the cave monastery, fragments of Chernyakhov pottery from the 3rd–4th centuries and even Wielbark (Gothic) pottery from the 3rd century were also discovered (Shevchenko 2014, 399).

These finds indicate that the Goths appeared here long before the reign of Justinian the Great. It is likely that a small number of these people settled in the Belbek River canyon immediately after the invasion of the Crimean Peninsula in the mid – second half of the 3rd century.

Of course, the settlements of the Byzantine allies in the Belbek valley could not exist for long under the constant threat of being destroyed by nomads. Only a well-organized system of engineering defense could protect the Goths and Alans from disastrous invasions. Probably the narrowest point of the passage, the Belbek Gate (width 300 m) was protected in the era of Justinian the Great by a monumental “long wall”.

In the mid-17th, late 18th and early 19th centuries the ruins of the Byzantine “long walls” were still seen in the gorges of the Crimean Mountains by travelers and scientists. Through archaeological excavations one of the “walls” was found in 1984 in a gorge at the foot of Mount Mangup-Kale. And only by the presence of such a defensive line we can explain the existence of two settlements of Byzantine federates at the foot of Cape Kulle-Burun. Based on tactical considerations, the Belbek Gate was the most suitable place for organizing engineering defense.

Note that the version about the presence of the early Byzantine “long wall” is hypothetical. At this time, the ruins of the “wall” have not been discovered or explored. Observations show that after medieval fortifications lose their military significance, local residents gradually dismantle them for building material.

It is likely that the “long wall” at the “Belbek Gate” and the Skivarin fortress were part of a single mountain defensive complex – *kleisura*. The main task of the *kleisura* garrison was constant monitoring of the actions of nomads in the steppes and foothills, protection of peaceful Gothic-Alan settlements in the Belbek valley, as well as protection of the strategically important route leading to the fortified city of Kherson.

Conclusions

So, let's summarize our observations. In our opinion, the small sentinel fortification Skivarin (“Burg”, “Turla”, “Syuyren”) was erected no earlier than 575 AD on an extremely advantageous and high place – Cape Kulle-Burun. From here the garrison could visually monitor the situation in the Belbek River valley and in a significant area of the Crimean foothills. Erected on an almost inaccessible rock, Skivarin consisted of a main tower placed at the head of the protruding corner of the fortress front and two “wings” of walls – the southwestern and northeastern curtains. The monumental stone fortifications were complemented by wooden platforms for shooters over the cliffs, and a wooden signal tower at the extreme tip of the cape.

According to its typology, Skivarin is a border early Byzantine burg. This assumption is supported by tactical and topographical components, architectural and engineering features, a complex of archaeological artifacts, as well as certain analogies with other late antique fortifications. We can state that the burg of Skivarin was, first of all, intended for patrol and observation duty. It was from this forward point that the imperial commanders could observe

the movement of the troops of the Turkic Khaganate – a new and very dangerous enemy of Byzantium.

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ΑΙΓΙΔΑ

ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
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ΧΟΡΗΓΟΙ

ΥΠΟΣΤΗΡΙΞΗ