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Historical-archaeological investigations in Aqkerman fortress, Ukraine 2006

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c/o British Institute at Ankara and University of Toronto

One of the most remarkable monuments of the Black Sea region stands on a promontory 10km inside the estuary of the Dniester river, close to the Ukraine-Moldova border. In Ottoman times the fortress of Aqkerman was one in a chain of massive strongholds protecting the Black Sea and the sultan's territory beyond from the predations of interlopers from the north. In their heyday these strongholds stretched in an arc from the Danube to the Sea of Azov, but from the end of the 18th century, following the victory of the Russian Empire over the Ottomans, many of them were razed. Few now remain intact to any degree, and Aqkerman is probably the best preserved.

The fortress is built on top of ancient Tyras, a Greek colony of Miletus. Thereafter the location was in Roman, Byzantine, Ruthenian and Genoese hands, before being held for a century by the principality of Moldavia. In 1484, it was conquered by the sultan Bayezid II, and for more than 300 years, until the

Russians took it, Aqkerman was in Ottoman hands. The circumference of the fortress is over 2km; on its landward side it is surrounded by double walls and a ditch 13m deep. Within the fortress, there is a citadel to the north that is all but encircled by an enclosure known as the garrison yard. To the south of this is a larger enclosure called the civil yard, and to the west, along the shore of the Dniester (the Liman), there is another enclosure referred to as the port yard.

This project, supported in 2006–2007 for the first time by the British Institute at Ankara, is both international (with participants from Canada, Turkey, Ukraine, UK and US) and inter-disciplinary, combining archaeological and historical research. The former includes both excavation of sub-surface remains and a survey of the fortress's standing architecture, while the latter employs documents found primarily in the Ottoman archives in Istanbul, as well as the many maps and plans of Aqkerman that have come down to us.

The current project is the first time that due attention is being given to the long Ottoman occupation of the site. Previous studies of the fortress have ignored or deliberately destroyed remains from these centuries, and it has long been denied that there were any significant Ottoman building works at Aqkerman. For example, the excavation of Tyras,



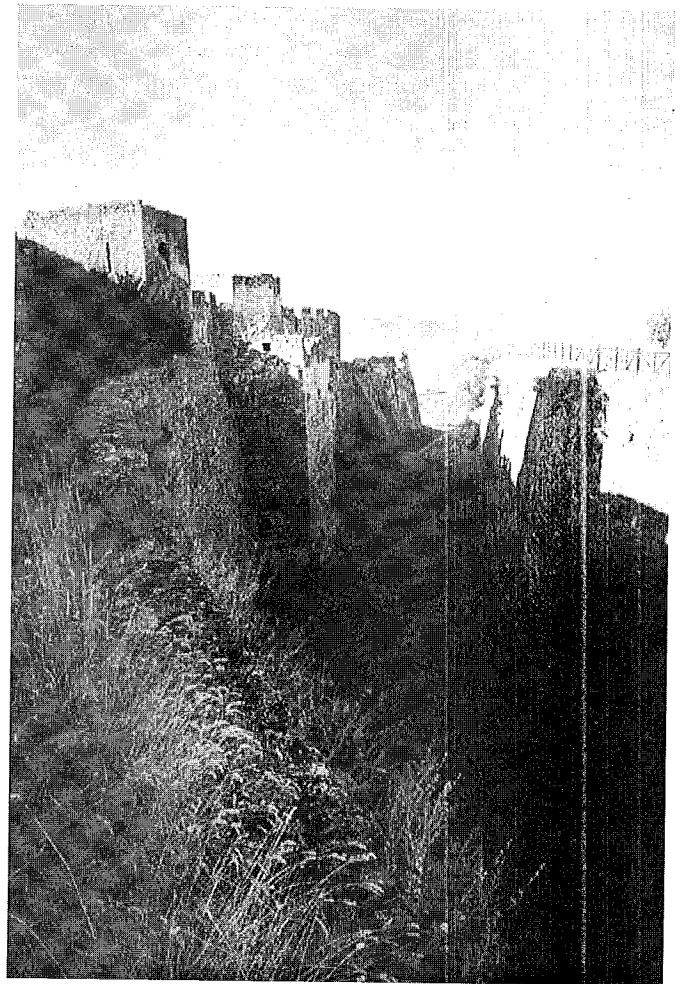
The northern Black Sea in the early 18th century



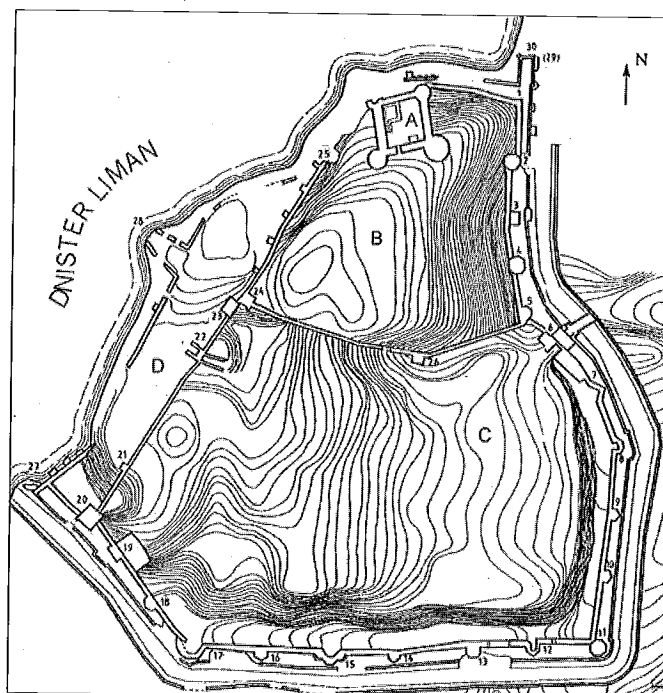
Walls of the garrison yard and citadel viewed from the liman

visible outside the main gate of the fortress, has removed the remains of later civilisations, while within the fortress, the once undulating ground surface and its wealth of archaeological material was levelled sometime after a survey in 1955. Furthermore, since then, a programme of 'restoration' has gradually been undertaken, effectively remaking many parts of the site.

Yet despite, or perhaps because of, the unsystematic nature of earlier work, much remains to be done. In particular, Ottoman documentary evidence promises to add new dimensions to our understanding of Aqkerman fortress.



The ditch viewed from the vicinity of the main gate



Plan of Aqkerman defensive complex, 1955. A = citadel; B = northern or garrison yard; C = southern or civil yard; D = port yard. 1–30 = towers of the fortress (Slapac 2001: 90)

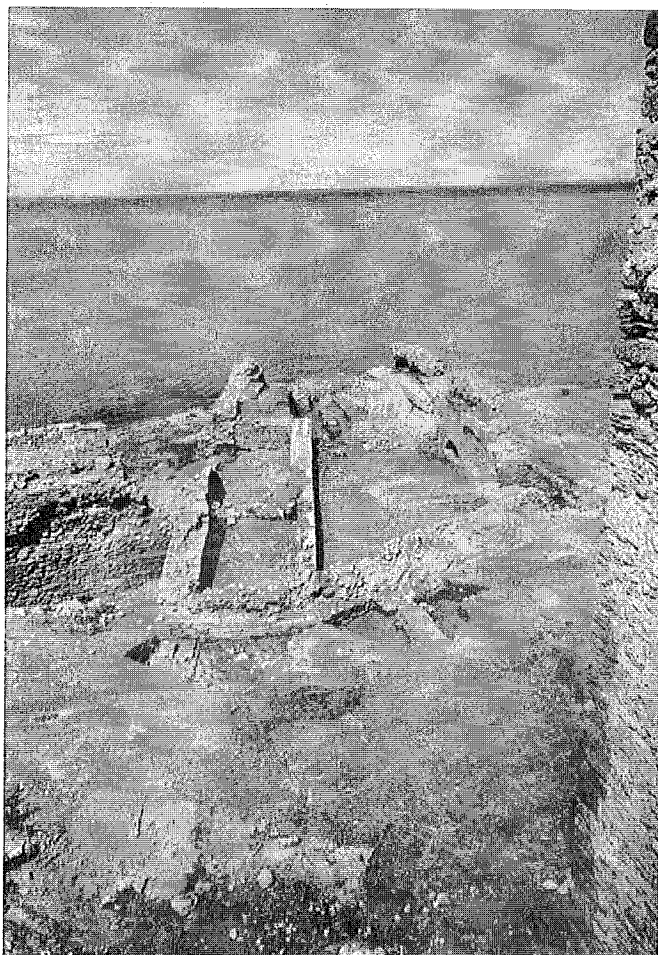
For example, these documents precisely describe successive construction and rebuilding phases in reaction to both perceived and actual military threats. Therefore, an important aspect of our investigation is to enhance our understanding of Aqkerman as a military fortification per se, and to compile a glossary of Ottoman terminology used to denote the constituent parts of such fortifications. These are very new fields of endeavour within Ottoman historical studies.

Members of our team have been working at Aqkerman, with inadequate funds, since 1999. Their excavations have concentrated in two areas of the port yard, the sector that came into being as a result of Ottoman building activity in the 16th century.

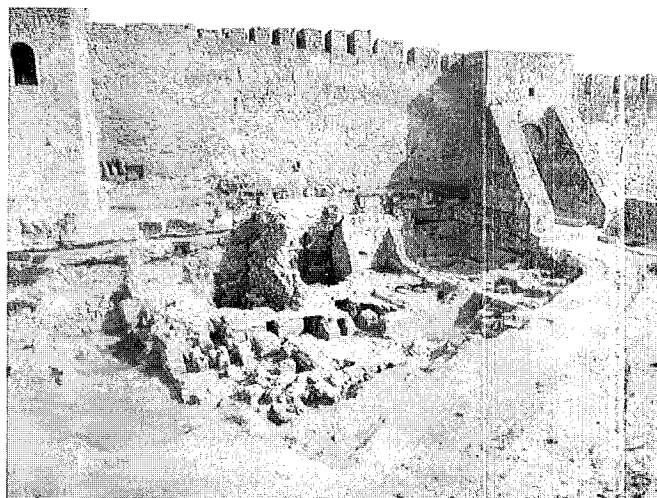
The first focus of excavation has been understanding the relationship of the 'barbican' (i.e., the projecting tower formation on the shore) and its curtain walls to the larger fortress of Aqkerman. Excavation and study of this part of the port yard is the responsibility of Svitlana Bilyayeva, who worked on site with her team for 12 weeks this season. Her labours have resulted in the revealing of the extent of the barbican and its features, and a detailed GPS survey of these was completed. Of particular note, was the identification of

an external gateway to the shoreline in the south wall of the barbican and the passageway that would have led from the shore into the port yard (hence the designation 'barbican'). For the first time the plan of the barbican is becoming clear and an analysis of its architectural remains is providing the basis for understanding its building chronology and its functional relationship to the larger fortress.

The second focus of excavation has been on the hamam, or Ottoman bathhouse, situated on the east side of the port yard, close to the gate that enters the fortress's civil yard. Since 1999 the Turkish team under the direction of Bozkurt Ersoy has been responsible for the excavation and preservation of the hamam. In 2006, they worked for a month on this building as well as the barbican. Their work has exposed the structural walls of the hamam down to the solid rock upon which the fortress stands. Some of these walls are preserved up to 2.5m above the original floor of the *caldarium* (*sıcaklık*). Unfortunately, rainwater pooling between the rear wall of the hamam and the curtain wall behind it has penetrated the hamam's structure and caused significant deterioration of its surviving fabric. To arrest further damage, priority was given this year to repairing the hamam's rear wall and building a drainage trench to divert rainwater.



The port yard barbican



The port yard hamam

The hamam's layout has now been revealed and surveyed in detail with GPS, and its constituent materials have been described. These suggest that it, and the paved drainage system through the barbican to the west, date from the 16th century. Documentary evidence adduced by the historical team (Caroline Finkel and Victor Ostapchuk), in the form of a sultanic edict from 1576, seems to confirm this date. This edict concerns facilities for the faithful to wash before the early morning prayer. It indicates that at this time there was only one hamam in the castle, situated within the port yard. This hamam had been built by Sultan Selim, though it is unclear whether this refers to Selim I (1512–1520) or Selim II (1566–1574). The stated reason for issuing the order was that garrison members and others could not reach the hamam in the early morning because the gate giving them access was not yet open (BOA [Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive, Istanbul], MD 28, no. 273). A second document, dating from 1777–1778, refers to the repair of a hamam situated on the 'left side of Aqkerman fortress on the shore of the river Turla (Dniester)' (BOA, D.BSM.BNE 16004). Although this would seem to indicate the correct location for the hamam we have excavated, the size of the bathhouse, mentioned in 1777–1778, is larger than this hamam's footprint. Therefore, further analysis is needed to determine whether this refers to the excavated hamam or another one in close proximity.

Thousands of artefacts have been found in the barbican and port yard (including the hamam) in the course of surface survey and excavation. A few of these date to the time of Tyras, while more belong to the Byzantine, Moldavian and Golden Horde periods. Most, however, are from the Ottoman period. These include clay artefacts such as pottery, ceramics and tiles (including Kütahya and Iznik ware), oil lamps and hundreds of unglazed or painted tobacco pipes. Metal items of iron, bronze, silver and lead, include coins, horseshoe

nails, moulds for bullets, buttons, belt buckles, kettles, etc. Further small finds are made of glass, stone and bone. The finds will be analyzed this winter, as will the mortar from the architectural structures.

This season also witnessed the beginning of a detailed GPS survey of the entire fortress using a Trimble R3. The excavation teams produced detailed maps of the port yard, including the barbican and hamam. The survey of the larger circuit of curtain walls was begun in the northeast corner of the garrison yard, but was limited due to time constraints. In 2007, top priority will be the complete survey of the rest of the curtain walls and the ditch beyond. To this end a full-time survey team will be assembled. In addition magnetic and resistivity surveys are being considered for next year.

To further our understanding of Aqkerman's fortifications, a specialist on fortifications, James Mathieu, joined the project this year and visited the site for a week at the end of the season. A preliminary architectural survey of the fortress was undertaken, working from the 1955 plan of the walls and ditch. Numerous observations were made concerning discrepancies between this plan and the current situation, hence the need for a detailed GPS survey. A photographic survey of the walls and ditch was completed, and over the winter a report on the fortress's architectural development and modification will be written. The goal will be to understand the phasing of the various parts of the fortress, identify likely dates for construction and/or modifications, and provide an understanding of how the fortress functioned differently over time. Next year, a follow-up visit, after the completion of the GPS survey of the fortress, will provide an opportunity to match the detailed historical information currently being gleaned from Ottoman documentary sources by the historical team with the surviving architectural remains at Aqkerman.

This season the historical team (Finkel and Ostapchuk) has been concerned with locating and photocopying archival documentation relating to both new construction and also repair and rebuilding work at Aqkerman during the Ottoman period. Thanks to this material the team has already assembled several times more documentation on the history of the fortress than was hitherto known. These documents can be descriptive or quantitative in nature; the former referring, for instance, to the fact that building works are necessary, but providing no estimate of costs or precise extent, and the latter referring to either precise appraisal of possible building works, including cost, or accounting for works completed. In both these classes of document mention is made of specific locations or features of the fortress, such as named towers and gates, while in the quantitative documents, the physical extent of the feature that is to be newly constructed or repaired or rebuilt is indicated, along with the materials to be employed, and much more. Thanks to the participation this season of Mathieu, we were able to localise some of the towers of the castle referred to in the

Ottoman documentation, and establish that there are apparently no extant traces of the features referred to in the documents as 'bastions' (*tabya*). In the coming off-season and season the historical team plans to continue its search for documents in Istanbul as well as extend the search for documents and plans to Russian archives, complete the localisation of the features mentioned in the documents and carry out further analysis of Ottoman building registers.

Acknowledgements

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