Fortification-spatial framework of the great Silk road Misimian branch

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Abstract. This article is devoted to the Great Silk Road as one of the branches fortification-spatial framework reconstruction which passed across the territory of the North Caucasus in the Mismian direction. As an initial condition for identifying the Great Silk Road Misimian branch fortification-spatial framework, the trade routes scheme having an archaeological rationale, derived by V.A. Kuznetsov. As a result of the study, a spatial-spatial pattern of resettlement in this Great Silk Road segment was revealed; the Great Silk Road strategically important sections of the Mismian direction were highlighted; the fortified settlements on the Mismian branch Great Silk Road types are identified.

Introduction

The problem of examining the fortification and spatial carcass of the Great silk way Misimian branch is linked to the restauration necessity and adjusting the objects of historical and cultural legacy in the North Caucasus as a whole, fortification architecture as the most preserved and emotionally attractive element, creating recreational and tourist territories. We need a theoretical reasoning of the region historical and cultural legacy restauration and museumification conception. A theoretical reconstruction of the fortification and spatial carcass of the Great silk way Misimian branch can be useful for the expositional and tourist route creation in the frameworks of the region legacy museumification.

We can find the information about the Great silk way Misimian branch in Byzantine written sources created after the VI c. [1]. One of the problems connected with this branch reconstruction is the location of the historical and geographical objects, mentioned in the sources, on the ground. Due to this fact nowadays, we have determined some constants helping to fix the ends of the Western-Caucasian branch. At one end – the lower reaches of the river Volga and the Khazar city of Ati, at the other end – the ports of Abkhazia: Pituı̨s (Pitsunda), Sevastopolis (Sukhumi), Phasis (Poti), which were mentioned in written sources for many times. On the other hand, several scientific hypotheses concerning the location and the route of the Misimian way exist.

The first person to raise the Great silk way Western-Caucasian part location question was A. N. Dyachkov-Tarasov. According to his hypothesis the trade route led from Khwarazm to Byzantium across the North-Caucasian range following two ways. One of the roads led across Klukhorskiy pass to Sevastopolis (Sukhumi), the second – past Marukhskiy pass to Pituı̨s (Pitsunda). In the Western-Caucasian trade route scheme he marked the main transit hubs: Madzhary hillfort on the river Kuma,
Rim-mountain hillfort on the river Podkumok and the Humarinskoye hillfort on the river Kuban. According to his hypothesis the main flow of goods passed across these cities and there the goods were loaded on baggage animals able to move in mountain territories [2].

Y. N. Voronov [3], Z. V. Anchabadze and Sh. I. Inal-Ipa [4] continued the studies. They localized the trade routes parts from the North Caucasian to the Abkhazian ports. According to Y. N. Voronov’s research the Misimian way led across the Baksan gorge to Donguz-Orun pass and then down along the river Nakra to Enguri, and the fortress of Bukhloko, mentioned in the sources, was situated in the Pakhulani modern village area on the right bank of the River Enguri. According to Z. V. Anchabadze the Misimian way led to the Kluhorskiiy pass and the gorge of Teberda and its directions coincide with the modern Military-Sukhumi road [5].

A. A. Ierusalmikaya studied the early medieval silks and the Great silk way localization question as a whole. [6] A. A. Ierusalimskaya wrote about the Western-Caucasian part of the way that since the VI c. it was a “regularly functioning trade primary road” [7], and its main routes led across the passes “to the west of the Kluhorskiiy pass”, because the territory of Georgia, situated to the east of this pass was under the Sasanian Iran influence [8].

A well-reasoned general scheme of the Great silk way Western-Caucasian part was created by V. A. Kuznetsov [9]. He shared A. A. Ierusalimskaya’s opinion on the impossibility of passing the Western-Caucasian routes to the Klukhorskiiy pass, because otherwise the Persians, who had been sieging Svaneti for a long time, could block this way to the Caucasus. [9]

We also should notice that V. A. Kuznetsov was against Y. N. Voronov’s hypothesis according to which the Misimian road led to Donguz-Orun pass across Baksan gorge and next followed the river Nakra to Enguri [9]. The main reason for this was the hard evidence absence: absence of big hillforts and fortresses, monuments of the Alan-Byzantine culture, pattern of silk concentrated in Teberdinskoye, Zelenchukskoye, and Labinskoye canyons.

Concerning the Misimian tribe location, V. A. Kuznetsov shared the opinion of the Abkhazian historians Z. V. Anchabadze and Sh. D. Inal-Ipa who located it in the upper reaches of the river Kodori [9]. According to V. A. Kuznetsov’s research the Misimian way led from Sevastopolis up to the river Kodori across the Misimian territory to Kluhorskiiy pass and next down across the ravine of the Teberda river [9].

The research goal is to reconstruct the fortification and spatial carcass of the Great silk way Misimian branch. The trade routes making the Great silk way Western-Caucasian part had been formed before the majority of medieval settlements appeared. It is proved by the fact that the first references to the Western-Caucasian routes of the Great silk way appeared in the VI c.; the lower cultural layers of the preserved hillforts are dated back to the VII-IX c. So, we can suppose that the territorial and spatial location of these hillforts depended on the mentioned trade routes location.

The research objectives are: to reveal the territorial and spatial scheme of settlement in this Great silk way part; to mark the strategically important parts of the Great silk way Misimian branch; to reveal the fortified settlements types along the Great silk way Misimian branch.

Discussion and results
As the starting condition for the fortification and spatial carcass revealing of the Great silk way Misimian branch we take the scheme of trade routes, created by V. A. Kuznetsov, because it is archaeologically reasoned. A. A. Ierusalimskaya wrote that the main route motive why one of the main trade routes led across the North-Caucasian range was the merchants desire to leave out the Sasanian Iran which tried to gain the complete control over the world sales volume and lay on high taxes [10]. As a result, the trade routes leading across the pro-Byzantine regions territory appeared.

According to V. A. Kuznetsov the background for the creation of the Great Silk way Western-Caucasian part were: first, the Turkic Khaganate creation and the fact that the North Caucasus was within its borders; second, the friendly relationship between the Turkic Khaganate and Byzantium to
join their forces in the struggle against the Sasanian Iran; third, the friendly relationship between Byzantium and Alania and their joint struggle versus Khazaria [11].

The Misimian path went from Sevastopolis across the Gerzeul fortress, the Tsebeldi highlands - the former territory of Apsilia to the Kodori gorge and the Misimians territory to the Klukhorsky pass. This section of the road is saturated with archaeological monuments of the VI – X c.

On the stretch before Gerzeul the road goes along the gorge of the river Kelasuri. It should be noted that in the mouth of the river Kelasuri begins a long chain of fortifications, a total length of which is about 100 km, which is the Kelasur wall or the Great Abkhazian wall, which covers the coastal territory between the Kelasuri and Inguri rivers in a curvilinear manner. [12]

Then the path followed across the Gerzeul fortress, located on the top of the ridge between the two left tributaries of the river Bolshaya Machara at the exit from the Pakhzir gorge and the fortification system of the Tsebelda highland [13]. Passing them, the road led to the main centre of Apsilia - the fortress Tsibilium located on two cliffs connected by an isthmus, facing the river Codor ravine [14].

Beyond the Tsibilium, the path continued along the Kodori Gorge stepping over the Klukhorsky Pass, the Misimian Way further followed across the Alanya territory. The road went across the snowfield Klukhor lake and descended along the river Honachhira in the gorge of the river Teberda. A fragment of an ancient paved road 3 m wide was fixed by P.A. Utyakov and E.P. Alekseeva on the 15th kilometer, on the right bank of the Gonachhira river [15].

On the interval between the mouth of Gonachkhir and the aul of Teberda, researchers discovered a number of monuments of Alan time. The monuments concentration indicates a significant territory population in the Alan period. Obviously, the settlements and fortresses located here were of strategic importance. First, they were in the border area between Alans, Misimians and Svans, and were primarily of defensive importance. Secondly, the Alan fortresses that existed here controlled the Klukhorsky Pass and the international trade route segment passing across it and were the first to meet with trade caravans. Since the way part across the pass was the most difficult to overcome, it was possible that the caravans made a small parking there, during which they replaced pack animals, replenished food supplies, carried out goods exchange.

The next group of settlements is located at a distance of about 15 km to the north along the gorge Teberda. The monuments are concentrated in the river Muhu ravine - left tributary of the river Teberda. Along the river Muhu ravine an ancient mountain trail across the Mukhinsky Pass in the neighboring ravine of the river Aksaut passes. The dominating one among the settlements on the river Muhu and its tributary river Azgek is the Muhu fortress, towering on a mountain facing Teberdinskoe gorge. In the immediate vicinity of the fortress one can find the burial grounds of the VII-IX c. and IX-XII c. [16]. Fragments of several more settlements are in the vicinity of the river Muhu and river Azgek. Apparently, the mentioned settlements and the fortress on the one hand guarded the entrances across the Mukhinsky Pass from the neighbouring canyons, on the other - controlled the section of the trade road that passes here.

The underlying settlements group is located at a distance of about 30 km along the river Teberda. This is an Amgatinskoe settlement, located on a mountain spur facing the river valley. Teberda and opposite is on the castle Argy-Kala right bank. These two settlements most likely had the trade value and craft centres and were also connected to the Misimian Way that passed across the Teberda Gorge.

8 km north-east of the Amgatinsky settlement, opposite the above-mentioned group of settlements, on the left bank of the Teberda, on the Burush-Syrt cliff above the village of Lower Teberda, there is the Sentinsky temple and a mausoleum of the Alan princess. V. I. Markovin studied a rich female burial site located here. Among the discoveries is a Byzantine silk fabric with golden inscription of the XI c. [17]. On the left bank of the river Kuban, above the village of Costa Khetagurov, at a distance of 18 km from the Sentinsky temple on Mount Shoana, is the Shoansky temple built in the X c. The temples have a similar location in the landscape. With their silhouettes they rise above the gorge and represent the visual reference points. The Byzantine missionaries walked along the
Misimian Way along with the trade caravans, who might have thought about where to place future temples, since the Alans Christianization effectiveness depended on this. One of the main criteria for choosing a site for temples was to provide as many visual links as possible between them and the settlements extending around. In this case, the location principle of the temple above the settlement is revealed. The “Christian universal significance concept of the Christian church for all believers, and not only for a specific patronymic community” is expressed in this principle [18]. On the left bank of the Teberda river on the mountain peaks of Dzingirik and Dardon between the Sentinsky and Shoaninsky temples there are two settlements with the same name and the burial grounds belonging to them. The manor complexes fragments have been preserved on their territory. Apparently, these sites were important craft centres meeting the needs of Christian temples and fortresses located on the neighbouring peaks.

The last settlements of this group examples with two cross-domed churches are two big fortresses, situated on different banks of the Kuban opposite each other. Humarinskaya fortress is on the right bank above the aul of Humara. Karakentskaya fortress is situated on the left bank above the village of Ordzhonikidzevsky. These fortresses appeared in the place where the river met the sub montane plane and look like the gates. Such location of the fortresses is explained by the location of a very important fork of the Misimian way. The mentioned group of settlements with Humarinskaya and Karakentskaya fortress controlled the Misimian way exit to the sub montane plane. According to V. A. Kuznetsov, Humarinskaya, the fortress, situated on the roads’ junction had the same role as the Tsibilium fortress in Abkhazia. [19]

Reaching the interfluve of the Kuban and the Teberda, the Misimian road split into two directions. One of the directions continued to go along the left bank of the Kuban across the gates formed by the fortresses of Karakent and Khumara to the place where the river Andrikot and turned to the west. Another direction passed to the right bank of the Kuban by a natural bridge near the village of Kamennomostsky and continued along the Mara river gorge.

V. A. Kuznetsov noted that the western direction linked the Misimian path with the Darin road. The eastern direction led across the Kislovodsk depression along the valleys of the river Podkumok and river Kuma to the lower reaches the river Volga and further to Central Asia [19].

Eastern direction went across the river canyon. Mara - the right tributary of the Kuban across the Gumbashi Pass in the gorge of the Podkumok. There are two flanking fortresses at the mouth of the river Mara on the opposite banks. This is the Shupshurun fortress, located on the right bank and the fortress of Kara-Syrt, located on the left bank. Probably, these fortresses controlled the Misimian Way eastern branch.

On the right bank of the river Mara A. Firkovich marked two stone slabs, installed on both sides of the road opposite each other. An image of an anchor is carved on one of the plates, and an image of a Byzantine cross on the other [20]. According to V. A. Kuznetsova, these plates are roadside signs, blessing and guiding travellers [21]. Similar signs in the form of vertical stones and statues with crosses were found in the canyons of the rivers Bolshoy Zelenchuk, Urup, Kyfar, Bizhgona, etc. [22]. It can also be assumed that such plates marked the path followed by Byzantine missionaries who preached Christianity.

Western direction according to the description by V. A. Kuznetsov began on the Kuban left bank at the confluence of the river Andrikota (Inzhurkot) and followed along the border of mountains and foothills parallel to the Rocky Range in the gorge of the Bolshoi Zelenchuk river, crossing the Kardonik, Aksaut and Marukhu rivers [23]. Acrossout this segment of the path fortified settlements are located. Having reached the Zelenchuk Gorge, the road went across the capital of Alania and the centre of the Alan Metropolitanate (the Nizgny Arkhyz site of ancient settlement) to the passes to Abkhazia.

As a result of the analysis, a territorial and spatial pattern of settlement, which is a system of stopping points formed on the Misimian branch of the Great silk way was established. The stopping points appeared on the trade roads strategically important sections and were the complexes of
settlements and fortresses united by visual-spatial and functional connections. Among them are: 1) stopping points on the border of mountains and foothills, controlling the exits to the foothill valleys; 2) stopping points that controlled the exits to the passes; 3) stopping points located at the forks of trade routes.

The stopping points that control the exits to the foothill valleys include a group of settlements headed by the Khumarian and Karakent fortresses.

In the descent places of the passage roads to the canyons of the Teberda, Aksaut, Bolshoy Zelenchuk rivers, there are significant accumulations of Alan settlements forming groups controlling the passage roads to the adjacent mountain canyons. On the one hand, these settlements had defensive significance; on the other hand, they could perform the function of a kind of customs outposts. It should be noted that the above-mentioned settlements were interconnected by mountain paths that run parallel to the North Caucasus Range and thus formed a single system of sub-regional stopping points.

**Summary**

There are also significant accumulations of Alanian fortresses, which are stopping points at the trade routes forks. These are fortresses flanking the eastern branch of the Misimian Way to the river Mary mouth and a group of fortresses located in the gorge Muhu, that controlled the Misimian Way western branch.

By fortification, all the Great Silk Road Misimian direction settlements can be divided into: outposts on the border of mountains and foothills, which controlled the trade routes exits to the foothill valleys and passes; strong fortresses at the trade routes Y-junctions; fortified settlements evenly distributed throughout the trade roads.

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