



## Summary :

Kaliakra is a fortress and a settlement located on the headland bearing the same name on the western coast of Pontos Euxeinos (the Black Sea). In the antiquity it was a fortified settlement “chorion” influenced to a very little degree by the “Hellenistic colonization” /VII c. B.C./ In 323 B.C. Kaliakra was conquered by Lysimachos the ruler of Thrace. In the 15 c. the fortress and the settlement were included in the boundaries of the Roman province of Scythia Minor and from the middle of the IV c. they were within the boundaries of Byzantium. At the time of the emperors Valens [Ουάλης] and Justinian I [527-565] the importance of Kaliakra in this part of Pontos Euxeinos increased and became stronger. The Bulgarian state founded in the second half of the VII c. was in frequent conflicts with Byzantium due to which Kaliakra changed its political allegiance several times. As a result in X-XII c. the fortress and the settlement went into decline. From the second half of the XIV c. Kaliakra again gained its economic and political prominence especially from 1336 to 1385 when it was the capital of the ruler of Dobrudzha despot Dobrotica. It grew into a transmarine port for trade in grain and other agricultural products exported predominantly by Venice and Genoa. At the end of the XIV and the beginning of the XV c. Kaliakra was conquered by the army of the sultan and included in the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. In XVI c. the settlement declined permanently and was abandoned by the local population. In relation to church affiliations Kaliakra, through the Metropolis of Varna, always belonged to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

## Other Names

Tirizis, Tirisiss, Trissa, Akrai, Akra, Cal(l)iakra

## 1. Location \*

The fortress and the settlement of Kaliakra are located on a narrow headland with the same name protruding into the sea with a length of 2 km. It has high and steep shores with a height of about 60-70 m. which form its essential natural defence. The headland is oriented to the south. These characteristics define its dominant role over most of the western coast of Pontos Euxeinos. With its location cape Kaliakra had strategic importance especially in the Middle Ages when it had navigational importance. The bay westward of the headland was a good shelter and harbour. Due to this it was always designated and marked on the maps and navigational instructions [“portolans”] for Pontos Euxeinos from the XIII – XV c. usually as “Cal[l]iakra”.

## 2. Names

A lot of caves have been formed in the limestone cliff of the headland. Some of them were inhabited and used as repository for grain and other goods. The headland, together with the fortress and the settlement, has been mentioned with different names and in various derivative forms. It is supposed that the oldest of them is of pre-Thracian origin : “Tirizis”. Strabon in his *Geographica* [Γεωγραφικά] from the I c. mentioned it with this name . Thus it was used by Flavii Arrian in his “Periplus” circa 131 while in the “Geographia” by Claudii Ptolemai from the II c. the full name Τηρίστιακρά was written . In the map guide of the Roman Empire “Tabula Peutingeriana” circa II c. only the name “Trissa” exists .

Derivative name forms only of Ακράϊ i.e. “cape” exist only in the Hieroclis “Synecdemus” compiled between 527-528, the name “Acres” is written in the Marcellini Comotis Chronicon circa VI c. while in the Ioannis Antiocheni “De insidiis” circa VII c. the name is written as Ακρίδισς. The Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in his work “De Thematibus” circa X c. designates the name again as Ακράϊ , while in the aforementioned portolans circa XIV c. and later on it is seen as “Cal[l]iakra” i.e. in the meaning and translation of “Good Cape”

## 2. History

### 2.1. Antiquity

According to the archaeological finds discovered there it is supposed that a settlement occurred on the very peninsula before IV c.



B.C. During the time of the Thracians a strong fortress was built, which served as the residence of the local rulers with a fortified wall and a moat crossing the peninsula to the mainland. Unlike the port cities fortresses founded and built by the population which settled during the time of the Hellenistic colonisation along the coast of Pontos Euxeinos /VII-Vi c. B.C./ Kaliakra had a constant population. Later on it fell under the influence of the neighbouring Hellenistic colony Krounoi – Dionysopolis, modern day Balchik. This is evident from the preserved remains of mixed construction forms reflecting the elements of socio-political and religious life which existed there. After 323 B.C. the ruler of Thrace Lysimachos [355 -281] occupied part of the settlements along the western coast of Pontos Euxeinos among which was Tirizis (Kaliakra). There he stationed a military garrison and, according to the legend, hid the treasury believing this to be a safe place.

In the year 15 the fortress and the settlement were included in the boundaries of the Roman Empire in its province of Scythia Minor and they become an important political centre and fortification. This continued during the rule of the Byzantine emperor Flavius Valens, [328-378].

## 2.2. Late Antiquity and Middle Ages

In the middle of the V century different tribes such as Huns and Proto-Bulgarians settled in Scythia Minor. In 513 and 514 they were involved in the riot of the military commander Vitalian against emperor Anastasios I [491-518] and the decisive battle took place at Kaliakra. Here the Byzantine army of the emperor was defeated.

Towards the middle of the VI c. emperor Justinian I, [527-565] started to build and to restore a number of important fortresses. Thus the internal wall of Kaliakra was fortified. From that moment on the fortress took again a strategic position as the centre of power of Byzantium in the north-western part of Pontos Euxeinos. That is why Kaliakra was noted in the aforementioned work of Hieroclis from VI c. as the third // important city in Scythia Minor after Tomi(s) (Constanța) and Dionysopolis (Balchik) . This is confirmed also by the cited work of emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus circa X c.

From the middle of VI c. the invasions of tribes such as the Goths, the Huns, the Avars, etc. intensified considerably in this part of Byzantium. In 538 the Proto-Bulgarians made several attempts to conquer Kaliakra which continued especially in the period 560-630. From the second half of the VII c. Proto-Bulgarians began to settle permanently in Scythia Minor and they create their own state. Meanwhile they conquered many Byzantine settlements and fortresses among which Kaliakra. The Proto- Bulgarians additionally fortify them.

In 971 Kaliakra was conquered by Byzantium and for 15 years it was under its rule. After that it was again included in the boundaries of the Bulgarian state. In 1001 Kaliakra remained under Byzantine rule for a longer period of time. As a result of the frequent military actions between the two states the fortress and the settlement had been already in ruins and abandoned by the second half of the X c. They lost their military and political importance for Byzantium. Thus in the course of two centuries this geographical name was not seen in historical sources. Irrespective of this the material evidence from the XI-XII c. proves that small groups of the local population continued to scrape their living there.

## 2.3. Late Middle Ages

As late as the second half of the XIII c. and the beginning of the XIV c. Kaliakra was again actively involved in the political and economic life of Bulgarian state. This importance was enhanced especially around the middle of XIV c. when an independent feudal authority was established - the Despotate of Dobrudzha. Around 1366 Kaliakra was made the capital of his despotate [circa 1385] by despot Dobrotica and he began to coin money. Meanwhile the newly gained political and economic significance of Kaliakra was also due to the development of transmarine trade and the market activity in Pontos Euxeinos conducted primarily by the medieval Italian city-states. Military conflicts occurred in relation to this such as the one of despot Dobrotica and the Genoese merchant colonies like Caffa, Pera, Kilia, etc. The actual political importance of Kaliakra was confirmed by the fact that count Amadeus VI of Savoy who had conquered a number of important settlements, fortresses and harbours along the western coast of Pontos Euxeinos was forced to enter into diplomatic relations with Despot Dobrotica. Thus after 1366 the count sent his diplomatic emissaries in the capital Kaliakra. The heir of Dobrotica, despot Ivanko [circa 1385-1393] however transferred the capital to the town of Varna after 1385.

After the defeat of the Hungarian king Sigismund [1387-1437] in the battle at the fortress of Nikopol on the Danube river in 1396 against the army of sultan Bayazid I [1389-1402] the king managed to escape with a boat through the river to Pontos Euxeinos. On his way to Constantinople he stopped at Kaliakra where he had restored the fortress. At the end of 1397 it was occupied by the



army of the sultan but the ruler of Wallachia Mircea the Elder [1387-1418] managed to include it in his lands from 1404 to 1417. After that sultan Mehmed I [1402-1421] reclaimed Kaliakra together with other fortresses. In the beginning of November 1444 for a short period of time the armies of king Wladislaw III Jagiellon [1440-1444] conquered and destroyed the fortress wall and the settlement itself. Thus in the following centuries Kaliakra finally lost its importance within the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. Gradually it was abandoned by the local population and after the XVI c. it was almost deserted.

### 3. Archaeological finds

The great amount of amphorae and anchors found in underwater archaeological searches prove the significance Kaliakra had throughout the Antiquity and the Middle Ages as an important international harbour. From there grain, furs, honey and other agricultural products coming from the adjacent mainland were exported with Byzantine, Venetian and Genoese ships. This international trade activity was made fast with treaties with the local rulers like those with Venice from 1346-7 and from 1352 and with Genoa from 27 May 1387. To facilitate trade and for his own prestige despot Dobrotica even coined money with the inscription "KALK". Here the agricultural production was very insubstantial due to the steppe-like and waterless characteristics of the area. This hindered the development of agriculture and only partial cattle breeding existed there. The found sgraffiti ceramic was entirely imported.

### 4. Monuments, buildings and fortifications

The ruins of a fortress built at the time of the Thracian rule have been found on cape Tirizis – Kaliakra. A fortification system and a main street passing around the city square were found in the late Antiquity city succeeding it. A cult complex with foundations from a solid building still existed there. A Thracian tomb and a Roman bath circa IV c. were also found there. As a whole the settlement is defined as a settlement of Thracian type with the characteristics of a chorion.

The high and steep shores of the headland provided a secure natural defence which explains why only three defence rings with buttresses facing the mainland were built. They divided the medieval town into different parts such as internal, external and suburban. They determined the place of residence of the local population according to their social status.

Of the three fortress walls the most well preserved is the third one with the length of 35 m. It protected the internal city located on the headland with an area of 2.5 km. A moat with a suspension bridge was built in front of this wall and a chapel was hewn into the rocky wall on the very tip of the headland. It was designated to serve the ruler and his family. There is also the representative church of the fortress which is of single nave type with a single apse and is comparatively small in size /16 x 19 m/. Meanwhile the foundations of three cross-roof church buildings were found. The religious tradition in Kaliakra, despite being completely transformed in its character has transpired later on with the construction of an Islamic temple "tekke" which happened soon after the final accession of the region to the Ottoman empire.

### 5. Church Affiliations

In relation to church affiliations in the Middle Ages Kaliakra was always under the rule of the Metropolis of Varna and was invariably in its diocese. This is evident from the charters and edicts issued by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the second half of the XIV century to which it was affiliated.

Although a number of religious people lived in the city and in its vicinity from the XIII and the second half of the XIV century Kaliakra never became a significant religious centre.

### 6. Population

The ethnic origin of the local population was multilayered and variable. It was of pre-Thracian and Thracian origin and later on predominantly Hellenistic and from VI-VII c. on the population was partially Turkish and after XVI c. the city was gradually depopulated.

### 7. Overall assessment and present day state



Irrespective of the undisputed role of the fortress from a strategic point of view and the relatively developed economic life for which testify archaeological monuments and finds Kaliakra's importance is not comparable to other cities, fortresses and harbours along the western coast of Pontos Euxeinus such as Varna, Anhialo, Mesemvria, Sozopol, etc.

Nowadays the ruins of the fortress and the settlement of Kaliakra are a protected historical and botanical reserve. Continuous mainland and underwater archaeological research is carried out here.

\* *The entry is still in editing process (ed.note)*



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