

# Şile and its castle: Historical topography and medieval architectural history

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## **Abstract**

Being a district of Istanbul, Şile is located towards the east of the northern end of the Bosphorus. This small city lies next to the Black Sea and it forms the northeastern section of the provincial borders of Istanbul. Şile Castle is popularly known as “Genoese Castle” but some other sources date it to the Late Byzantine period, as a typical watchtower. Following a long period of neglect, it most recently came into prominence with a restoration in 2015, which fully brought it back to the supposed original appearance. Although some assumptions were formerly made in order to describe the origins of Şile Castle, it was seen that its medieval architectural history was not elaborated despite the relevant information that were scattered around some significant primary sources as well as a number of secondary sources. Those works were not put together with the aim of exclusive objectives for Şile and its castle that the modern studies were also unaware of about which extant monument they mention of. Thus, a critical reading was done between relevant primary and secondary sources with a topographical and architectural point of view for Şile. The obtained information were chronologically considered for the topographical depiction, first construction, and usage of the castle for centuries. Major findings displayed that the origins of Şile Castle not only predate formerly supposed times but also differ than a simple watchtower in terms of initial function. Nearby castles also set an example regarding the usage of Şile Castle in later times.

## **Keywords**

Architectural history, Bithynia, Historical topography, Medieval castle, Şile.

## 1. Introduction

Modern Şile is located in the northwest of Turkey. It is a metropolitan district of Istanbul, which falls roughly 50 kilometers northeast of the city and 40 kilometers east of the Bosphorus. While the district population is approximately 40.000 inhabitants, around 15.000 of them reside in the center (TÜİK, 2019).

Lying next to the Black Sea with a large and modern harbor, the settlement center of Şile has some distinctive geographical features. It is situated above a wide and sharp-pointed cape with impassable cliffs and stony bays along its rough coastline, before a small group of rocky islands that protect the harbor.

According to archaeological surveys, surroundings of Şile were inhabited during the Epipaleolithic period, which falls roughly 20.000 – 10.000 years before present time. In this regard, around the northwestern Domalı (Sahilköy) and Doğanlı villages of Şile, the ridge of Mürselli Baba, the hill of Tekmezar and the sands of Akçalı were significant discovery sites, where various examples of small drills, retouched stone tools with geometric shapes (mainly scrapes and blades), leftover flakes, and a few obsidian glass were documented (Özdoğan, 1985; Gatsov and Özdoğan, 1994).

Speaking for Şile town center, small ceramic findings from its eastern part and the nearby Ocaklı Island have displayed that the area saw continuous inhabiting starting from the Hellenistic period (Fıratlı, 1952). A cistern was also discovered in the west of Şile town center, which supposedly remained from the Byzantine period (Bakalakis, 1978).

The renowned Şile Castle is located on Ocaklı Island in the north. The castle as well as harbor of Şile are often named after the island as “Ocaklı Castle” and “Ocaklı Harbor”. Moreover, Şile Castle is popularly known as “Genoese Castle” and some anonymous sources also attribute the old harbor of Şile to Genoese, a former Italian maritime republic (Cura and Eyüpgiller, 2019).

There were very limited researches on the architectural history of Şile Castle within the context of its medieval origins, as modern studies mostly

focused on structural surveys and later periods. Hence, through an interdisciplinary research methodology, this study aims to handle a rather ambiguous period of Şile Castle in depth, which was previously not elaborated in the light of primary sources and relevant comparisons to some nearby Bithynian examples.

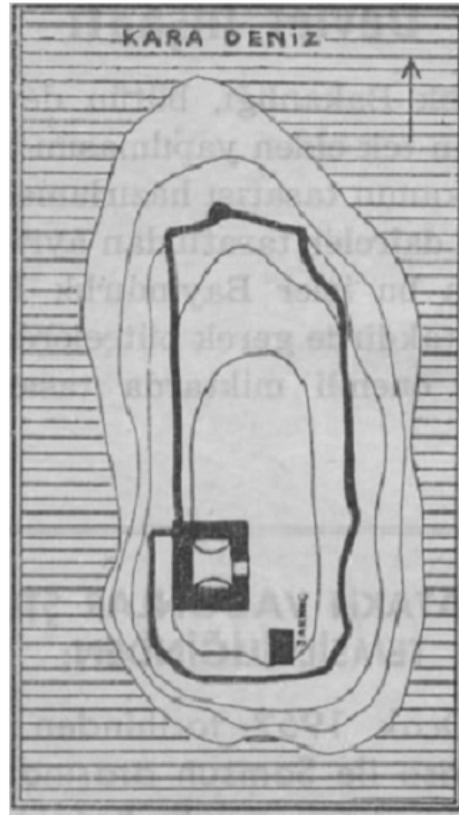
## 2. Şile Castle: An architectural literature review

The castle is located on the rocky and arid Ocaklı Island in the north of Şile coastline that the rectangular main structure is situated above its highest point (Fig. 1). Moreover, the whole upper perimeter of the island is encircled with a line of relatively low ramparts, which connect to the aforementioned keep at one corner point (Fig. 2). This fortification system is built of roughly shaped and average sized rubble masonry with very limited brick usage. The main building of the castle, actually resembling a rectangular tower has approximate floor dimensions of 10 x 12 meters and a supposed height of 15 meters. It had three floors that were separated by barrel vaults but all of them were collapsed. The top section has regular battlements. There is a cistern in the southeastern part of the island, which has dimensions of 6 x 10 meters and a depth of around 4 meters (Fıratlı, 1952).

The irregular wall circuit that surround the small island has abundant spolia, such as ancient bricks, various handles, and pointed bottoms of amphorae, which must belong to the same locality. Further ancient fragments were documented inside the walled area on the island (Bakalakis, 1978).



**Figure 1.** A view of Şile coastline from the south that Ocaklı Island with Şile Castle is located in the center (Sağlam, 2018).



**Figure 2.** A plan of Şile Castle on Ocaklı Island, where the main tower building, surrounding lower walls, and the cistern in the south are shown (Fıratlı, 1952).

On the northern façade of the main building, there used to be a balcony with supportive consoles. It was apparently for observation due to the orientation towards the open sea. Upper floors of the tower were accessed by a vertical ladder system, which was collapsed in a later time (Eyüpgiller, Dönmez & Çobanoğlu, 2013).

The tower of Şile Castle has a number of arched openings that resemble wide observation windows instead of arrow slits. The main entrance of the tower is on the southern façade. It also has a cellar below the ground level. Şile Castle was designated as a listed building on 10.07.1981 (Envanter, 2019).

After similar examples from elsewhere in the world, it has been said that Şile Castle most probably had a wooden roof on top of its battlement level with a pyramidal or hipped form, which no longer exists (Eyüpgiller, 2019). Similar examples to Şile Castle were mentioned as Güvercinada Castle in Kuşadası, Izmir and Kız Kulesi in Pazar, Rize (Eyüpgiller, Dönmez & Çobanoğlu, 2013; Eyüpgiller, 2019).

Şile Castle was described as a “fortress” by Fıratlı (1952), where Eyüpgiller (2019) defined the central building as a typical “watchtower” that such common vertical structures were reportedly erected for observation and defense purposes on islands, peninsulas and other coastal areas for detecting enemy troops approaching from the seaside, according to the same scholar. Yet, ramparts completed the layout to a castle. In addition, Bakalakis (1978) argued that it is impossible that there would have been a proper settlement within Şile Castle, as the walled area was relatively small.

There are some brief hypotheses about the origins of Şile Castle that scattered around a group of modern secondary sources, which actually have different research scopes instead of the castle itself. Those arguments are simply based on rather narrative anonymous sources of information, backed by brief first impressions, which eventually failed to elaborate the medieval period of Şile Castle. This insufficient literature was most recently quoted by later modern studies mentioned below.

Correspondingly, on one hand, some modern researchers argued that Şile Castle is a Byzantine monument from the 13th century; yet some sources on the other hand claim that it was built by the Genoese (Cura and Eyüpgiller, 2019), who were active in the Black Sea mostly during the 14th-15th centuries. Yet, there is absolutely no primary source about a Genoese presence in Şile (Sağlam, 2018). It has also been briefly questioned by further researchers that Şile Castle was actually built by an anonymous Byzantine emperor called Andronikos but then used by the Ottomans (Eyüpgiller, 2019). Another argument dates the castle to 2000 years before present time (Eyüpgiller, Dönmez & Çobanoğlu, 2013). Finally, Bakalakis (1978) misinterpreted the comment of Fıratlı (1952) about the nearby Heciz Castle at Kalealtı village and argued that Şile Castle was built by the Ottomans during their earlier domination in the area around the late 14th century. Belke (2020) superficially attributes the castle to the Ottomans as well.

The castle supposedly had repairs by the Byzantines and Ottomans; but due to its poor state prior to the restoration of 2015, any distinctive construction phase or trace of repair was not recorded especially on the tower (Eyüpgiller, 2019). Thus, it can be argued that its previous state overall displayed a single construction phase. The tower of Şile Castle eventually had a full restoration that has caused worldwide attention as well as controversy due to the final appearance (Fig. 3; Fig. 4).



**Figure 3.** A southwestern view of Şile Castle before its major restoration (Sağlam, 2007).



**Figure 4.** A southeastern view of Şile Castle before its major restoration (Sağlam, 2007).

### 3. Methodology

With the aim of displaying the medieval origins of Şile Castle and its probable changes during that period, a historical research methodology was preferred in coordination with an architectural point of view. In the meantime, a topographical perspective was considered for the wider environment to ensure the accuracy of this research, as localization has always been a challenging issue for historical settlements and buildings. In this respect, it has been intended to reach all primary sources about Şile. In fact, many of them were separately quoted by certain modern studies to some extent. However, almost all of them were unaware

of each other; also which historical settlement and its extant monument they spoke of. Hence, a thorough chronological research was carried out, which was followed by the assessment of archaeological evidences. In the meantime, nearby Byzantine castles were considered for some topographical and architectural comparisons that especially Yoros, Seyrek and also Eskihisar showed similarity in some cases.

### 4. Historical topography of North Bithynia in ancient times

Primary sources about North Bithynia during Hellenistic and Roman periods provide information with various levels of detail that some toponyms may also have slightly different versions inside those sources, which should be carefully noticed from now on. Due to the precise scope of this research within the context of historical topography, the related primary sources were quoted without any interpretation in the beginning and a detailed discussion was provided afterwards.

For instance, the anonymous Periplus of Pseudo-Scylax from the 4th century BC briefly mentions the rivers of Sagarios (Σαγάριος), Artanes (Ἀρτάνης), Rivas (Ρήβας), and the island of Thynias (Θυνιάς) along the Bithynian coastline (Müller, 1855).

In his “Periplus of the Euxine Sea” (Chapter 17) from the 2nd century CE, historian Arrian of Nicomedia first mentions the river of Rivas (Ρήβας), then the cape of Melaina (Μέλαινα ἄκρα = Black Cape), and following that the river of Artanes (Ἀρτάνης), where a bay for small boats and a nearby temple dedicated to Aphrodite were located. The next place was the river of Psilis (Ψίλις) that small boats could shelter under a projecting rock near its mouth. The distances between those four places were 150 stadia each (1 stadion = ~185 meters). The harbor of Kalpe (Κάλπη) was located with a distance of 210 stadia from the last spot. It was followed by a harbor for small boats called Rhoe (Ρόη), the small island of Apollonia (Ἀπολλωνία) with a harbor, and the coastal locality of Chelai (Χηλή) that the distances in between were 20 stadia for each of them. Finally, 180 stadia away from the latter place,

the river of Sangarios (Σαγγάριος) was located (Arrian, 1842).

According to the “Geography” (Book 5, Chapter 1) of Ptolemy, which is also from the 2nd century CE, places along the northern coasts of Bithynia were listed with their approximate coordinates as the village of Artake (Ἀρτάκη χωρίον) and the rivers of Psyllidos (Ψυλλίδος), Riva (Ρήβα), Kalpa (Κάλπα) and Sangarios (Σαγγάριος), respectively (Ptolemy, 1845). Late Medieval copies in Latin of the same source regularly mention one of those places slightly different, as “Artace castellum” (castle).

Marcian of Heraclea as a local geographer provides further details by the 4th century that 150 stadia away from the river of Riva (Ρήβα), the cape of Melaina (Μέλαιναι ἀκρα) was located. After another 150 stadia, the river and village of Artane (Ἀρτάνην ποταμὸν καὶ χωρίον) came. It also had a harbor for small boats, which was protected by an island in front of it. The river and castle of Psillion (Ψίλλιον) was located 140 stadia away from them. Then, the harbor and river of Kalpa (Κάλπα), the island of Thynias (Θυνιαίς), and the river of Sangarios (Σαγγάριος) were mentioned, respectively (Müller, 1855).

Finally, on Tabula Peutingeriana, which is a Late Roman itinerary, a linear course formed by the river of Herbas -> 16 miles -> Melena -> 19 miles -> Artane -> 19 miles -> Philium -> 27 miles -> Chelas -> 20 miles -> the river of Sagari appeared along the North Bithynian coast and from west to east, respectively (1 Roman mile = ~1481 meters) (Talbert, 2010).

## 5. A topographical discussion:

### Artane and the two Chelai

After a detailed and rational consideration of all the primary sources in the previous section, Miller (1916) and Talbert (2000) have argued that Artane(s) actually falls to modern Şile by position. Riva(s) / Herbas = namesake Riva; Melaina akra / Melena = namesake Karaburun; Psilis / Psillion / Philium = Ağva; Kalpe = namesake Kerpe; Rhoe = somewhere near Kefken; Apollonia / Thynias = Kefken Island; Chelai = somewhere near Cebeci / Çelikkaya Cape; and Sangarios / Sagari = name-

sake Sakarya River were the remaining ancient places and their modern locations that were proposed by the aforementioned scholars (Fig. 5).

In this case, it can be concluded that during the Roman period, Artane was a small, probably fortified settlement with a namesake river (modern Türknıl), which was mentioned even during the Hellenistic period. There were also a temple dedicated to Aphrodite / Venus and a harbor for small boats. This harbor was protected by an island in front of the settlement. These details well match with the current geography of modern Şile.

While the ancient settlement where modern Şile is located was called Artane / Artana, its river was accordingly called Artanes / Artanas due to the grammar of Ancient Greek. It was supposedly derived from “Arta”, meaning “river” in Luwi language, therefore the name of that ancient settlement actually meant “country of the river” (Umar, 1993).

However, it should be noted that during the antiquity, a phonetically similar place to modern Şile, namely Chelai was located nearby. The ancient Chelai in Bithynia was seemingly located 20 stadia east of Kefken Island and 180 stadia west of Sakarya River. Interestingly enough, this name certainly replaced Artane during much later centuries, as discussed in following sections, and the fate of that ancient Chelai remained unknown. Though Şile was called Chele / Chelai starting from the Middle Byzantine period, this shift apparently confused some modern scholars. According to Ramsay (1890) and Umar (1993), the place mentioned as “Chele” by later Byzantine sources of Anna Komnena and George Pachymeres supposedly indicated the ancient Bithynian locality between Kefken Island and Sakarya River in the east, but it is absolutely certain that both historians indicated the place now called Şile.

For a more accurate positioning, the ancient Chelai neither falls to somewhere near Cebeci nor Pazarbaşı Cape, as proposed by Talbert (2000) and Umar (1993), respectively. Both places are located in the immediate south of Kefken Island but the well defined loca-

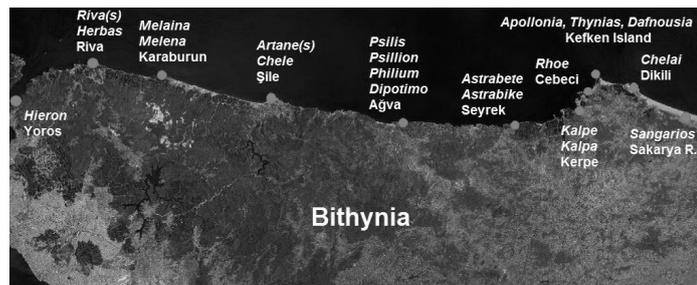
tion of the ancient Chelai certainly corresponds somewhere towards the east, therefore falls around Harmankaya Cape of Babalı in Kandıra, as proposed by Miller (1916) and Bakalakis (1978). Moreover, the latter scholar also argued that the locality of Delikkaya / Çelikkaya / Çalıkaya at Harmankaya Cape should be the exact position of the ancient Chelai, as an etymological similarity between those names also testifies. However, the renowned Dikili Cape, Dikili Rocks and Dikili Beach in the same area could also be shown as examples to this issue, instead of those rather lesser known local names (Fig. 5).

Various Late Hellenistic and Early Roman small findings, an ancient quarry with in situ massive blocks and further archaeological remnants from Roman and Early Byzantine periods were documented both at Dikili Cape and Harmankaya Cape. The only epigraphic evidence concerning Chelai appeared on a typical Hellenistic / Roman altar with a bucranium bas-relief (Bakalakis, 1978). Its inscription was initially attributed to modern Şile despite the apparent earlier date of the artifact (Miliopoulou, 1907). Hence, Bakalakis (1978) attributed that altar to the ancient Chelai in the east.

According to Umar (1993), the name Chelai probably originated from “Kala” in Luwi language, which means “coast” or “pier”. Then, Casacuberta (2018) said that the Ancient Greek term “χηλή” (chele) originally referred to the pincers of a crab but later defined a sea basin enclosed by two projecting pieces of land or artificial moles, like a bay. Moreover, a “chele” actually forms a shape similar to a hoof that the word also has this meaning. With regard to the famous Byzantine encyclopedia of Souda, the word “χηλή” (chele) kept those meanings by the mid-10th century (Gaisford, 1834). Such distinctive coastal features are still present in modern Şile as well as the region around Dikili Cape and Harmankaya Cape in the east, where the ancient Chelai supposedly located.

The exact period in which Artane (modern Şile) became Chelai / Chele is unclear together with the reason behind this change of name. With re-

spect to the oral tradition by the 19th century, elderly inhabitants of modern Şile spoke of their ancestors as immigrants from another settlement in the east that the ancient Chelai was proposed as this place (Bakalakis, 1978). After a very limited group of ancient and Late Medieval cartographic sources that omitted almost a millennium, Bakalakis (1978) then argued that the aforementioned change of name might be happened following the Fall of Constantinople in 1453. This assumption, which did not consider the Byzantine literature review for Şile by Miliopoulou (1907) and Bănescu (1928; 1932) is apparently inaccurate with regard to the sources discussed in the next section. This literature was most recently compiled by Belke (2020). In the end, sometime between the 8th and 11th centuries came forward.



**Figure 5.** Ancient and modern names of some North Bithynian places that were frequently mentioned within the context of Şile and its castle (Sağlam, 2020, after Yandex Maps).

## 6. Şile in Byzantine times: A new name and a purposeful fortification

It appears that the settlement of Artane was still present during the Early Byzantine period, as the Ravenna Cosmography from the 7th - 8th centuries lists the places of Erba, Melena, Artane / Artamen, Filium, Chel(l)as and Sagari / Saccar along the northern coastline of Bithynia, respectively (Pinder and Parthey, 1860). Their modern correspondences were listed in the previous section.

In the meantime, according to Nicephorus I of Constantinople and Theophanes the Confessor, Constantine V (r. 741-775) resettled 208.000 Slavs in 762-763 to Artana and around the river Artanas, who emigrated from the First Bulgarian Empire due to the harsh policy of Telets (r. 762-765): “... καὶ πρὸς τὸν ποταμὸν Ἀρτάνας καλεῖται

αὐτοὶ κατοικίζονται” (Nicephorus I, 1837); “... ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀρτάναν πρὸς τὸν ποταμὸν, ὃς Ἀρτάνας καλεῖται” (Theophanes, 1839; 1841; 1982). Artana / Artane then disappears in later sources. In the end, the original toponym of Artana / Artane was replaced by a rather generic geographical definition, which was very common in ancient times, especially for coastal places (Umar, 1993). In this case, the aforementioned demographical change might be a reason but it is uncertain. The successor toponym, being “Χηλή” (Chele) in Greek was used until 1922 for Şile.

It is worth noting that a second topographical debate emerged after some Byzantine primary sources that a certain toponym was interpreted as either modern Şile (Turkey) or Chilia (Romania). However, Bănescu (1928; 1932) concluded that certainly the former settlement and its castle were referred with regard to distinctive topographical details, whose detailed literature review for the Byzantine period of Şile guided the research in this section.

Thereafter, as the inner parts of Asia Minor were under constant devastation by Turkish raiders following the Battle of Manzikert (1071), Anna Komnene mentions on the eve of the First Crusade (1096-1099) that a large piece of protruding land that was delimited by Nicomedia, the coastline continuing towards the north, the village of Chile (χωρίου Χιλής) and the river of Sangarius was well secured through a long and deep ditch by Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081-1118) (Komnene, 1878; 2000).

When speaking of the fight for the throne during the time of Andronikos I Komnenos (r. 1183-1185), Niketas Choniates indicates that the emperor ordered his son-in-law Alexios Komnenos to be enchained, as the opponents intended to depose Andronikos I and replace him with Alexios. Then, he was banished to the small village / fortress (πολίχνιον) of Chele (Χηλή) next to the coast at the mouth of the Pontus, where a tower (πυργίον) was constructed for his imprisonment (Choniates, 1835; 1984). Soon afterwards, when Andronikos I was deposed in 1185, he first took shelter in Chele with the hope of escaping to Crimea. While the inhabitants of Chele were

indifferent to him at that moment, it was impossible to sail due to the strong headwind, therefore he washed ashore several times and was eventually arrested (Choniates, 1835; 1984).

George Pachymeres recalls several anecdotes concerning the Late Byzantine period of Chele. First of all, following the recapture of Constantinople from the Latins in 1261, Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1258-1282) blinded John IV Laskaris later that year, who was a heir to the throne. John IV was first imprisoned in Chele (Χηλή). Then, he was sent to the castle of Niketiaton in Dakibyze (modern Eskihisar, Gebze) (Failler, 1979; Pachymeres, 1835) that were previously recovered from the Latins by John III Vatatzes in 1241 (Akropolites, 1837; Macrides, 1978).

When Patriarch Joseph I had dissented against Michael VIII about the reunion of the Catholic and Orthodox churches in the Second Council of Lyon (1272-1274), he resigned in 1275 and retreated into the castle of Chele on an islet next to the Euxine (Black Sea): “Χηλή (φρούριων δ’ αὐτῆ ἐπινησίδιον πρὸς ταῖς ἀκροῖς τῆς Εὐξείνου θαλάσσης).” He spent one winter in Chele but then requested another place from Michael VIII due to harsh conditions there, which was fulfilled and the abdicated patriarch moved to the Monastery of Kosmidion (Le Beau, 1835; Pachymeres, 1835).

There was another conflict during the same period, which occurred due to contradicting acts of two patriarchs. When the predecessor Arsenios Autoreianos excommunicated Michael VIII due to blinding the legitimate heir John IV, it resulted with a forced deposition of the patriarch. Then, the successor Joseph I officially pardoned Michael VIII but a religious conflict grew among the opposing factions. General John Tarchaneiotēs was a leading figure of the deposed Arsenios’ followers, therefore he was sentenced and banished to the castle of Chele (Χηλῆς φρούριω) in 1289 (Leontiades, 1998; Pachymeres, 1835).

Later on, when Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282-1328) intended to campaign through Asia Minor against the Turks, he departed from Constantinople in 1296. After three days, he

arrived at the castle of Chele that was surrounded by the sea: “Χηλὴν τό ἀμφιθαλασσίδιον φρούριον”. However, he needed to retreat due to a devastating earthquake happened at that moment (Downey, 1955; Laiou, 1993; Pachymeres, 1835).

The Battle of Bapheus in 1302 was resulted with an Ottoman victory against the Byzantine Empire and they started to expand into Bithynian territories. According to George Pachymeres once again, Ottoman raids started to reach not only Chele and Astrabete (Ἀστραβητή) but also the castle of Hieron (modern Yoros Castle) by 1304 (Pachymeres, 1835; Korobeinikov, 2014).

The reign of Andronikos II Palaiologos included several political, economical and military crises. Insufficient imperial administration and continuous Ottoman raids caused the revolt of some army commanders. Accordingly, when General Kassianos was sent to Mesothynia (Kocaeli Peninsula) in 1306 to take over the lost control that was mentioned above, he decided to revolt against the emperor. Along with the battalion under his command, Chele was seized and Kassianos thought that he was in safe. However, some citizens from the town of Chele secretly allied with Andronikos II and laid a plot against Kassianos, who was eventually captured by chasing imperial troops (Pachymeres, 1835; Kyriakidis, 2014).

When the Russian pilgrim Ignatius of Smolensk had a sea journey to Constantinople in 1389, he visited all the main coastal cities of North Bithynia. After passing Dafnusiyu (Дафнусию) and Karfiyu (Карфию), he then arrived at the city of Astraviyu (Астравию), which was already under the Turkish control. He stayed there one night and passed Fili (Фили) and Rivu (Риву) the next day, respectively (Majeska, 1984; Khitrowo, 1889).

Ottoman historian Âşıkpaşazâde (1400-1484) indicates that Bayezid I (r. 1389-1402) formed a large army and intended to attack Constantinople. For this reason, he departed from Koca-ili (Nicomedia) and arrived at Yoros (Yoros Castle) around 1391. Meanwhile, he sent Yahşi Beg to Şili hisarı

(Şile Castle), who peacefully seized it with the promise of remittance (Âşıkpaşazâde, 2003). The same narration about Şile Castle was also mentioned by Neşri (1949) in the early 16th century.

## 7. Supplementary accounts about Şile until the early modern period

When the Castilian ambassador Ruy González de Clavijo had departed from Constantinople for Trebizond by late 1403, his ship first reached the Black Sea through the Bosphorus. Then, it arrived at the small castle of Sequello, which remained inside Turkish lands and situated above a rock that was almost entirely surrounded by the sea except for a small entrance. Afterwards, he continued to Finogia (Kefken), which was a small island under Genoese control (Clavijo, 1782).

Şile was regularly mentioned as a coastal reference point by portolan charts from the 14th-18th centuries that were used by European sailors for navigation. They have slightly different variations but Silli / Sili is the most common one, which first appeared on the chart of the Genoese mapmaker Pietro Vesconte dated 1311. Later cartographic works not only mention Şile by name but also indicate some of its geographical features like cape (capo), bay (cauo, golfo) and river (rio).

Portolan texts also mention Şile starting from “Lo compasso da navigare” dated 1296 (Gordeev, 2015). For instance, Rizo portolan as an Italian source from 1490 indicates that the distance between Yoros (Giro) and Şile (Sile) was 30 miles towards the east; and the distance between Şile and Ağva (Dipotimo) was 15 miles towards the same direction (Kretschmer, 1909). On the other hand, in its 113th chapter, the Greek portolan of Demetrius Tagias dated 1559 also locates Şile (σόλα) between Riva (ρύβα) and Ağva (πότιμο) as a landmark along the coastline after Kerpe (κάρπι), towards the west (Tagias, 1641; Delatte, 1947).

According to Evliya Çelebi by 1640, there was a janissary garrison under a general (pasha) in Şile (Evliya Çelebi, 1971). Russian diplomat Pyotr Andreyevich Tolstoy (1645-1729) describes Şile as a large town with an insuffi-

cient harbor for the ships of that time (Gordeev, 2015).

Ottoman archival documents and archaeological remnants show that starting from the late 18th century, Şile became a strategic position for the defense of the Bosphorus and three coastal redoubts with numerous muzzle loaded cannons were deployed against the Russians, which were abandoned in the 20th century (Eyüpgiller, 2019).

### **8. Contemporary castles from Bithynia**

While some of its major settlements like Nicaea and Nicomedia were surrounded by city walls since antiquity, an intense defensive construction phase began in Bithynia during the Komnenian period, which was carried out by Alexios I, John II and Manuel I, respectively. This building program intended to secure the region and halt the rapid Turkish advance into Asia Minor following the catastrophic Battle of Manzikert (1071).

For this reason, in addition to renewal of the aforementioned ancient fortifications, new castles were built at strategically important positions (Belke, 2013; Deluigi, 2015). Furthermore, Paşalar Castle (Metabole) as an Early Byzantine regional encampment was significantly strengthened, while Çoban Castle (Boğazkesen) was constructed at a very strategic mountain pass in the north of modern Geyve (Bahar, 2013; Yıldırım, 2003). Similarly, the supposedly Early Byzantine castle of Kefken Island was fortified with semicircular towers in the 11th-12th centuries and a castle with a similar masonry technique was built on top of a coastal rock at nearby Kerpe by the Black Sea (Fıratlı, 1952). In addition, Bayramoğlu (Philokrene), Darıca (Ritzion), Aydos (Aetios) and Çobankale (Xerigordos) in the inner parts of Bithynia appeared as probable Komnenian castles with later additions, which secured crucial land and sea routes before Constantinople (Bahar, 2013). A similar Komnenian defensive construction program was carried out also on Aegean territories through new rural castles called “Neokastra” (Deluigi, 2015).

In the meantime, a certain portion of Asia Minor was recovered with the help of the First Crusade (1096-1099) and the Turks were gradually pushed back from Bithynia into the central Asia Minor. Consequently, the Byzantines were able to fortify Bithynia during a relatively stagnant and peaceful period along the Anatolian frontier.

Generally speaking, Komnenian castles have mixed masonry that is consisted of quarried stone blocks and regular brick courses. Spolia and elaborate brickworks were often preferred in the masonry. Semicircular towers are a common feature on the layout. Moreover, there is a noteworthy difference of workmanship between visible and hidden parts of masonries (Foss and Winfield, 1986; Yıldırım, 2003).

Following the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204), the Empire of Nicaea under the Laskaris dynasty was able to maintain the Komnenian gain with minor additions. However, during the reign of Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259-1282), there were new Turkish campaigns into the western territories of Asia Minor. Hence, the aforesaid emperor carried out another defensive construction program through the end of his reign. His aim was an even better fortified eastern frontier against the Turks with a series of castles along the western banks of Sangarius (Sakarya River), such as Büyükkale (Adliye), Harmantepe and Seyfiler (Belke, 2013). Bağlarbaşı, Mekece and Mağara can be listed among further Palaiologan castles along Sakarya River (Yıldırım, 2003).

In addition, on a strategic crossroad next to the Gulf of Nicomedia, the castle of Eskihisar (Niketiaton) has an exceptional architectural feature in its central part, which is a fortified tower house with a probable Komnenian / Laskarid origin that was converted into a proper fortress through some extensive late 13th century defensive additions (Fig. 6) (Bahar, 2013; Eyice, 2001; Niewöhner, 2017a). As another exceptional case, the castle of Hereke (Charax) was dated to the Latin period in the early 13th century but it eventually became a part of the later defensive system of Bithynia (Bahar, 2013).

Palaiologan castles had a significant role in terms of territorial defense and the protection of inhabitants during the 13th-14th centuries. The use of quarried stone masonry with irregularly arranged and coarsely cut small blocks is a common practice on them, mostly without the use of bricks. Facades are usually plain and there is a lack of wide external ornaments (Belke, 2013; Foss and Winfield, 1986; Yıldırım, 2003). Nevertheless, distinctive traces of the Palaiologan civil architecture that are characterized by rich decorative brickworks can still be seen to a limited extent on some examples (Bahar, 2013).



**Figure 6.** An aerial view of Eskihişar Castle (Niketiaton) in Gebze, Kocaeli (Yandex Maps).

It was argued by Niewöhner (2017b) that Late Byzantine castles often do not correspond to ancient settlement sites and they appeared due to an urgent need of security. Yet, as they did not have an administrative unity, rural societies of those rather deurbanized lands acted separately within their castles and failed to establish a defense in coordination, likewise the successful one against the Arabs during previous centuries. According to the study of İnalçık (2012), while the Bithynian mainland was under constant Ottoman threats starting from the same period, the Byzantines could only take shelter in their peripheral strongholds, which fell apart and eventually conquered. Bakalakis (1966) argued that the sparse Christian population of Astrabete and other nearby Greek posts within Mesothynia probably needed to squeeze in Chele during the 14th century, as it was a well protected spot.

Among close settlements to Chele that were mentioned by Pachymeres and Ignatius by the 14th century, Astrabete / Astraviyu appears as the cape of Astrabike (Ἀστραβίκη) inside a

Greek portolan dated 1553, which was placed 38 miles after “Chile” (Χιλή), 14 miles after Dipotamon (Διπόταμον) and 5 miles before “Karbe” (Κάρμπε) on the Black Sea coastline (Delatte, 1958; Majeska, 1984; Atanasiu-Croitoru and Cristea, 2009). Accordingly, Belke (2007) accurately localized it as Seyrek between the aforesaid Şile, Ağva and Kerpe, which now belongs to Çalköy, Kandıra as a coastal neighborhood. Though this Late Byzantine town appears under Turkish control by 1389, a patriarchal document dated October 1393 about Konstantinos Rhamatas mentions a Greek vineyard in Astrabiki (Ἀστραβίκι), which testifies the later Byzantine legacy there (Miklosich and Müller, 1862; Ariantzi, 2017). This settlement was also mentioned in church lists of later centuries (Diovouniotios, 1958; Bakalakis, 1978).

Seyrek Castle is located on a rocky peninsula in the north of the district, which formerly protected the small port. It has an irregular layout along the rough topography. The castle seemingly had a long and single wall course with few rectangular towers in corner positions (Fig. 7). Though anonymously dated to the Byzantine period (Kocaeli İl Yıllığı, 1973), its architectural characteristics correspond to the reign of Michael VIII Palaiologos, as the masonry of curtain walls and towers have quite roughly hewn, uniform quarry stone with the usage of gray mortar and very few bricks, which are similar to the previously mentioned late 13th century examples around Sangarius (Fig. 8) (Belke, 2013).



**Figure 7.** An aerial view of Seyrek Castle, the former Astrabete / Astrabike, now in Kandıra, Kocaeli (Yandex Maps).



**Figure 8.** *The view of Seyrek Castle from the south (Şaban Ađır, 2017).*

Yoros (Hieron) as another castle near Şile and on the western end of Bithynia is located at modern Anadolu Kavađı, Beykoz. It was built on a site that was constantly inhabited since ancient times. Its irregular and longitudinal layout extends from a dominant hilltop until the Bosphorus, which has two main parts that were separated in a later time by a distinctive partition wall with four towers. The first part of the castle is on the top, which has semicircular twin towers with abundant marble spolia and a main gate in between (Fig. 9). The second part continues until the coast, which has few, irregularly arranged towers and long wall courses with rubble masonry but one certain section with rear casemates clearly resembles the first part on the top. After epigraphic evidence and certain stylistic features, the castle was dated to the 13th-14th centuries by Eyice (1976). This assumption was also strengthened by the technical study of Tekin and Kurugöl (2012). However, Foss and Winfield (1986) dated the top section and main body walls of Yoros Castle to the last decades of the Komnenian period with regard to the regular mixed masonry and a direct comparison to the walls of Blachernae in Constantinople, which were built by Manuel I Komnenos. Then, it has been argued that the partition wall as a later addition created an inner castle on the hilltop. That wall was attributed to the Palaiologan period due to its own, rather inferior masonry style with a distinctive brickwork ornament, which has a long, two-line inscription in Greek (Foss and Winfield, 1986; Yıldırım, 2003). A slab with an inscription in



**Figure 9.** *The hilltop section of Yoros Castle from the east (Sađlam, 2018).*

Latin also indicated that the repair of the castle and its extension until the sea were financed by a Genoese nobleman called Vincenzo Lercari, most probably around the 14th-15th centuries (Eyice, 1976).

Mural slabs of Yoros Castle can be mentioned as its most characteristic details that an interpretation for one of them supposedly revealed the exact construction period. Two pairs of slabs are located on the twin towers that the first group has the abbreviation of IC XC NH KA = Ἰησοῦς Χριστός νικά (Jesus Christ conquers) around Greek crosses. The second group has the abbreviations of ΦC XC ΦE ΠI and ΦC XY ΦE ΠI around more elaborate crosses, which are most probably variations of “Φώς Χριστοῦ φαίνει πάσιν” (The light of Christ enlightens all) (Eyice, 1976). The last slab originally stood above the rear of the main gate, which is now in Istanbul Archaeological Museum (Fig. 10). It has a large Greek cross with the abbreviation of A Π M Σ that the first letter might also be Δ. It was interpreted as Δ Π M Σ by Eyice (1976) and the improvised deciphering of “Δεσπότην Μιχαήλ Παλαιολόγον Σώσον” [(O cross), save Despot Michael Palaiologos] was proposed, which was then considered by the same scholar as an indication of the construction period as 1261-1282, the reign of the supposed Michael VIII. However, it is probably not the case, because “Ἄρχή Πίστεως Μυστηρίου Σταυρός” (The principle of belief, the mystery of the cross) for the abbreviation of A Π M Σ was already mentioned after certain paleographic evidence (Rhoby, 2018; Wal-

ter, 1997). This meaning seems more harmonious to previous slabs in terms of the content.

From an architectural point of view, Yoros can be considered as a Middle Byzantine castle that was significantly altered during the Late Byzantine period, likewise some other Bithynian fortresses. Yoros was mentioned together with Chele (Şile) and Astrabete (Seyrek) within the context of Turkish raids by 1304, which points a geographical relation of those three castles along a coastal route in North Bithynia.



**Figure 10.** The slab of Yoros Castle, which was once located above the rear facade of its main entrance but now kept in Istanbul Archaeological Museum (Sağlam, 2018).

To sum up, it can be argued that the functional change of Eskihisar Castle from residential to military shows similarity to Şile Castle that the emergence of nearby Seyrek Castle and the later layout of Yoros Castle well resemble its next function as a shelter with geographical advantages against the Ottomans, as discussed below.

## 9. Conclusion

Earlier accounts define the ancient settlement at modern Şile as a small and probably lightly fortified town with a harbor and a temple. Its name was apparently changed from Artane to Chele between the 8th and 11th centuries for some reason. The most remarkable incident of this period was a demographic shift that more than 200.000 Slavs were reportedly resettled in Artane. Characteristic geographical features of Şile were repeatedly mentioned by primary sources from almost all historical periods.

A structural survey of Şile Castle before the major restoration of 2015 has displayed that its architecture did not present any distinctive construction phases. Any Ottoman alteration was also not recorded. Thus, with regard

to precise topographical and architectural details that were mentioned by a certain group of primary sources, what is known as Şile Castle today was first constructed by Andronikos I Komnenos around 1183-1185 as an isolated detention post; actually a lightly fortified residential tower. It was used for this purpose from the late 12th century until the late 13th century that Alexios Komnenos, John IV Laskaris, Joseph I of Constantinople and John Tarchaneiotes were its renowned occupiers, respectively. Andronikos I himself also decided to take shelter in Chele while fleeing in 1185. His decision was probably related to the supposed initial function of the building. Though contemporary accounts mention Chele and Niketiation as “castle”, the imprisonment of the deposed John IV in both places around 1261 would not be a mere coincidence, because Eskihisar (Niketiation) in fact also had the appearance of a fortified imperial residence at that time, which was yet to be converted into a proper fortress later that century. Similarly, Joseph I was transferred from Chele to Kosmidion Monastery in Constantinople, which was a slightly equivalent spot in terms of the retirement function. Both accounts additionally imply that Chele was probably not a very pleasant place to reside in for a long time.

By the late 12th century, Şile Castle emerged as a lightly fortified residential tower or a kind of an elite prison on a geographically isolated position. Its defensive strength was considerably different and weak from typical Komnenian fortresses that some of them were built in Bithynia until Manuel I. Şile Castle initially had a special purpose and it was certainly not a part of the original Komnenian fortification program in Bithynia. In fact, it can be said that the Komnenian restoration perhaps enabled Andronikos I as the last emperor of that period to erect such a specific complex under relatively peaceful conditions in Bithynia, which well secured the region through some new castles following the short Turkish occupation after 1071.

Furthermore, as Şile Castle was formerly supposed as a watchtower by origin simply after its position and archi-

tectural appearance, it would probably not make sense by the late 12th century, because the eastern flank of the mouth of the Bosphorus from the Black Sea was absolutely not a potential enemy route for the Byzantine Empire at that time. Arched windows, balcony and the battlement level of Şile Castle must have been used for local observation but it can be argued that an operative coastal watchtower function was especially adapted by the Ottomans in later centuries to safeguard the Bosphorus against Russian fleets.

Starting from the 14th century, Şile Castle became a proper military target for the Ottomans rather than a simple prison complex. They needed to besiege and properly conquer it with the help of a small army, as initial raids remained inconclusive. Although it was formerly questioned that Şile Castle was too small to include a proper settlement, it can be argued that the inhabitants of Chele (former Artane) almost certainly took shelter in it, as a last resort in front of the Ottoman threat.

Under these circumstances, Şile Castle was possibly deployed as a proper fortress in the 14th century against landward attacks in spite of its limited defensive capability. This could also be the reason why General Kassianos chose Şile Castle during his revolt, as he initially considered it as a safe spot against the emperor. Its isolated position surely provided a strategic advantage on top of an impassable rocky island with some ramparts. The sea surrounded the island except for a small entrance, as recalled by contemporary witnesses. As the site now appears as an island, its former entrance was highly likely eroded by the sea over five centuries.

Seyrek Castle, the former Astrabete / Astrabike supposedly emerged during the Late Byzantine period with regard to primary sources. It was built perchance with a parallel concern to the later function of Şile Castle, that is to say providing shelter to nearby inhabitants against Ottoman raids. On top of a geographically similar position to Şile Castle, it was easy to defend but difficult to conquer it in case of a landward siege. The nearby Kerpe Castle lacked

such a military advantage that Seyrek Castle apparently sought. However, it was seemingly conquered sometime before 1389.

The later layout of Yoros Castle (Hieron) can also be mentioned as an example to the supposed new function of Şile Castle and the construction of Seyrek Castle during the same period. Yoros Castle did not have a clear geographical advantage like them, which actually enclosed a huge ancient settlement site. Then, its landward and relatively strong hilltop section towards the east was separated through a fortified partition wall and was designated as a smaller enclosure. This work isolated the hilltop part from the larger enceinte and made it easier to defend against oncoming Ottoman attacks. Significant epigraphic evidences were documented exclusively on this part of Yoros Castle, including elaborate marble slabs and a long, brickwork inscription on the partition wall. In this case, it can also be said that through such pious messages that were placed towards the potential threat, the residents of Yoros did not only rely on their strong castle but also sought a divine protection during a distressful period, which also affected Şile and Seyrek.

To conclude, the general appearance of the castles of Şile, Yoros and Seyrek well stress the declining political state of the Byzantine Empire against the Ottomans in North Bithynia. Şile Castle was an isolated Middle Byzantine prison tower but it then had an urgent functional change, likewise the castle of Eskihisar. It started to be considered as a proper fortress by the Late Byzantine period, which also triggered Ottoman attacks. Following the conquest of Şile Castle, as the site was no longer a potential battlefield, its tower probably had another duty as a coastal watchtower that Şile was the base of a janissary garrison by the 17th century. Finally, a defensive firepower was needed at Şile against the Russians during the early modern period but the new role of the castle is uncertain within this modern military concept. Şile Castle is currently closed to public visit despite the restoration of 2015 and Ocaklı Island is also inaccessible.

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