**THE SECRETS OF KHERSON’S CATACOMBS**

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Kherson literally stands on various secret underpasses. Every once in a while articles about subsided surface and destroyed houses in the historical centre of Kherson appear in newspapers. And every time journalists associate the mishaps with the mysterious catacombs. Sometimes it is said that the underground “streets” were created when these territories were under the Ottoman domination. However, most researchers think that the catacombs were built when the Russian Empire established the new fortress on the banks of the Dnipro River. It sounds logical that some secret passages were necessary for the potential defense against the Ottoman army. Parts of the fort have survived to the present day so the citizens can still see its buildings and ramparts; some of the constructions were built deep into the ground and connected by secret underpasses… A legend says that Elizabeth II’s gold chariot is still in one of them. Is it just a legend?

A speculative secret passage to the other side of the Dnipro River is even more interesting. Old residents insist that even in the 1930s anyone could go from Kherson to the other river bank. However, we don't know now where these underground roads might have been: all the information about the catacombs was classified as ‘*secret*’ by the KGB and has never been declassified…

Actually, there might have been another reason for the creation of the underground passages – they may not have been catacombs but just very deep cellars! At that time there did not use to be any fridges but somehow people had to keep their food in good condition… And cellars were cold and dark places which served the purpose of keeping perishable goods! As time went on, these cellars were connected to each other. Years went by and all these underground “fridges” turned into an extensive system of “catacombs”.

Thus, what might have been the real history of this “network” does not sound exciting at all: the reason for the creation of the “catacombs” might have been totally mundane. However, people have always been big romantics, and we like making up different fascinating stories. Secondary is the fact that none of these theories has been proved…

**Based on** ***the articles by Alexander Zakharov***

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