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## TĂRNOVGRAD VIEWED BY THE OTHERS: THE CASE OF NIKETAS CHONIATES

**Abstract.** The text is devoted to the analysis of the portrayal of Tărnovo, the new capital of the restored near the end of the twelfth century Bulgarian state, in the historical work and speeches by Niketas Choniates, a Byzantine historian, official and rhetorician from the latter half of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. As a direct witness of the contemporary Byzantine-Bulgarian relations, a high ranking court dignitary throughout most of the discussed period, and the author of the most important sources shedding light on the restitution of Bulgaria, he left a legacy of extraordinary importance, one which has shaped views of the subsequent generations of Byzantine historians. While examining Tărnovo's role shows it did not occupy a particularly significant place in the historian's narrative, and the remarks concerning it appear as if in passing, he nonetheless was fully conscious of the city's significance not only for the Bulgarians themselves, but also in the context of the prospective expansion of the Empire in the direction of its northern neighbours. It is therefore no accident that in his brief characterisation the city the author focused on the description of the defensive qualities of Tărnovo. Paradoxically, his arguments on this subject may play an important role in the present ongoing discussion among the archaeologists exploring the former capital on the subject of chronology and size of the fortifications surrounding the two most important hills on which the city developed, namely Tsarevets and Trapezitsa.

**Keywords:** Niketas Choniates, Tărnovgrad, Tsarevets, Trapezitsa, Veliko Tărnovo, medieval fortifications, Byzantium and Bulgaria, the Assenids, medieval Bulgaria, medieval Balkans, medieval capitals, Byzantine historiography, Byzantine rhetoric, the others in Byzantine sources, Bulgaria in Byzantine sources

The works of Niketas Choniates (ca. 1155 – ca. 1217), a Byzantine historian, rhetorician and official in the latter half of the twelfth and early thirteenth century<sup>1</sup>, are the main sources on the restored at the end of the twelfth century

<sup>1</sup> On the subject of Niketas and his literary legacy cf. J.-L. VAN DIETEN, *Niketas Choniates. Erläuterungen zu den Reden und Briefen nebst einer Biographie*, Berlin–New York 1971 [= *SupByz*, 2]; А.П. КАЖДАН, *Никита Хониат и его время*, Санкт-Петербург 2005; *Niketas Choniates. A Historian and a Writer*, ed. A. SIMPSON, S. EFTHYMIADIS, Geneva 2009; A. SIMPSON, *Niketas Choniates. A Historiographical Study*, Oxford 2013; W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, Basingstoke–New York 2013, p. 422–456.

Bulgarian state<sup>2</sup>. The significance and wealth of the information the historian provided cannot therefore be overstated, especially since that information was subsequently readily used by other historians of the empire, such as George Akropolites or Theodore Skoutariotes, and therefore to some degree his narrative shaped their opinions as well.

The Byzantine's historical work titled *Χρονική διήγησις*, which annalistically presented the history of Byzantium from 1118 to 1206, in greater detail for the 1180–1206 period, and his extant *Λόγοι*, also include information about the capital of the late mediaeval Bulgarian State, Tărnovo<sup>3</sup>. The analysis of information on its subject is going to be the subject of the below remarks. I note here that in my considerations, I am focusing primarily on the direct mentions of Tărnovo (where the city's name appears), although I am not omitting the passages in which the historian referred to the city indirectly, or where we may surmise that given information may have also related to it. The only passage I do not consider in the text, which is traditionally associated with Tărnovo, is the description of the anonymous centre where the Bulgarian rebellion was announced. I do so because it requires a separate study.

### Tărnovo – characteristics of the city

Niketas Choniates left us the following characterisation of Tărnovo:

τοῦ Τερνόβου (ὁ δὲ ἔστιν ἡ ἐρυμνοτάτη ἅμα καὶ προφερεστάτη τῶν κατὰ τὸν Αἴμιον ἀπασῶν πόλεων, τείχεσί τε ἰσχυροῖς περιβεβλημένη καὶ ῥεύματι ποταμῶ διειλημμένη καὶ ὄρουσ ἀκρωνυχία πεπολισμένη)...

Tărnovo (this is the best fortified and most excellent of all the cities located in the Haimos, encompassed by mighty walls, divided by a river stream, and built on a ridge of the mountain)...<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> On this subject cf. e.g. Г. ЦАНКОВА-ПЕТКОВА, *България при Асеневици*, София 1978, p. 21–50; П. ПЕТРОВ, *Възстановяване на българската държава 1185–1197*, София 1985; И. БОЖИЛОВ, *История на Средновековна България*, vol. II, *Християнска България*, София 2017, p. 281–304; A. MADGEARU, *The Asanids. The Political and Military History of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185–1280)*, Leiden–Boston 2017 [= ECEEMA, 41], p. 35–113.

<sup>3</sup> On this city cf. e.g. *История на Велико Търново*, vol. I, *Праистория, античност и средновековие*, ed. П. ПЕТРОВ, София 1986; П. ПАНОВА, *Столичният град в културата на средновековна България*, София 1995, p. 141–186; К. ТОТЕВ, Д. КОСЕВА, *Столичният Търнов в християнската култура на Балканския свят*, [in:] *Великите Асеневици. Сборник с доклади от конференция, посветена на 830 години от въстанието на братята Петър и Асен, началото на Второто българско царство и обявяването на Търново за столица на България и 780 години от легитимното възобновяване на Българската патриаршия*, ed. П. ПАВЛОВ, Н. КЪНЕВ, Н. ХРИСИМОВ, Велико Търново 2016, p. 364–376.

<sup>4</sup> *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, vol. I, *Praefationem et textum continens*, rec. I.A. VAN DIETEN, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 1975 [= CFHB, 11.1] (cetera: CHONIATES, *Historia*), p. 470, 75–78; Eng. trans. – *O City of Byzantium. Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. H.J. MAGOULIAS, Detroit 1984 [= BTT], p. 258

One may draw several conclusions from this relation. Firstly, that this description fully corresponds with the real layout and development of the city, and therefore it is based on a relation of someone who knew the city first-hand (e.g. a member of one of the expeditions of Isaac II in 1186 or 1190, the Byzantine envoys from the later period, Ivanko, the killer of John Assen I, who fled to Constantinople in 1196, or even Kaloyan, the youngest of the rebellious brothers, who after 1188 supposedly spent some time in the Byzantine capital as a hostage)<sup>5</sup>. Secondly, geographically, this centre was associated with the Haimos mountain massif (nowadays the Stara Planina mountain range)<sup>6</sup>, and this is where the Byzantine author had placed it. This is further confirmed by more precise data on its location included in the description, namely the fact that the city was on a hilltop. Tărnovo is indeed located in the area of the so-called Tărnovo Hills, which are one of the northernmost parts of the Stara Planina foreland (Pre-Balkan), and the hills themselves (Tsarevets and Trapezitsa, along with Momina Krepost and Holy Mountain), on which the “old town” was located are separated by the meandering around them Yantra river<sup>7</sup>. It needs to be, however strongly emphasised that the contemporary authors, following the example of the ancient authorities, first and foremost geographers such as Strabo, saw the Stara Planina foreland as an integral part of the Haimos massif, much like the range of Sredna Gora (Anti-Balkan), to the south of Stara Planina<sup>8</sup>. This fact further reinforces my proposition of the translation of the phrase

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(with my amendments – K.M.). A similar characterisation of Tărnovo is found in two lections of thirteenth-century manuscripts of Niketas' work, specifically L (Laurentianus IX 24) and O (Oxoniensis Bodleianus Roe 22) – CHONIATES, *Historia*, p. 616, ad v. 61–62: ...ἐξ Τέρνοβον (Τέρουβον according to O) τὴν προφερεστέραν πασῶν τῶν ἐν Μυσίᾳ πόλεων... – wherein it appears by the way of the description of the events related to the history of Bulgarian-Latin relations, specifically the battle of Adrianople in 1205 and the fate of the Latin Emperor Baldwin I.

<sup>5</sup> On these expeditions and deputations cf. e.g. Г. ЦАНКОВА-ПЕТКОВА, *България...*, p. 28–29, 32–33, 38–40, 41–42, 51–52; П. ПЕТРОВ, *Възстановяване...*, p. 120–129, 146, 148, 218–232, 264–268; И. БОЖИЛОВ, *Фамилията на Асеневици (1186–1460). Генеалогия и просопография*, <sup>2</sup>София 1995, p. 43–44 (по. 3); ИДЕМ, *История...*, p. 291–295, 297–298, 307; А. МАДЖЕАРУ, *The Asanids...*, p. 67–71, 80–81, 98–101, 111–112, 117–118. More on the subject of the sources used by Choniates: А. SIMPSON, *Niketas...*, p. 214–250; W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians...*, p. 437–438, 443–445.

<sup>6</sup> On the subject of these mountains cf. e.g. Е. ОВЕРХУММЕР, *Haimos*, [in:] *RE*, vol. VII.2, p. 2221–2226; P. SOUSTAL, *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*, vol. VI, *Thrakien (Thrakē, Rodorē und Haimimontos)*, Wien 1991, p. 279–280; К. ГАГОВА, *Тракия през българското Средновековие. Историческа география*, <sup>2</sup>София 2002, p. 319–322.

<sup>7</sup> Т. ОВЧАРОВ, *За топографския и архитектурния облик на средновековния Търновград (XII–XIV в.)*, [in:] *ТКШ*, vol. II, *Ученици и последователи на Евтимий Търновски. Втори международен симпозиум Велико Търново, 20–23 май 1976*, ed. П. РУСЕВ et al., София 1980, p. 464–477.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. СТРАВОН, *Géographie*, vol. IV, *Livre VII*, 5. 1, ed. R. BALADIÉ, Paris 2003, p. 114, 14–18; VII, 6. 1, p. 127, 13–16; VII, fr. 10, p. 154, 7–19; *Annae Comnenae Alexias*, XIV, 8, 6, vol. I, rec. D.R. REINSCH, А. КАМВЪЛИС, *Berolini–Novi Eboraci* 2001, p. 456, 76–87. Presently the Stara Planina foreland, along with the massif of Stara Planina itself, constitute a part of the so-called Stara Planina Region. On the subject of the modern day division of the above mentioned orographic units cf. В. НИКОЛОВ, М. ЙОРДАНОВА, *Планините в България*, <sup>2</sup>София 2002, p. 9–57.

τῶν κατὰ τὸν Αἶμον ἀπασῶν πόλεων as *all the cities located in the Haimos*, contrary to the traditional *all the cities along the Haimos*<sup>9</sup>. The same translation of the key phrase κατὰ τὸν Αἶμον, although in a somewhat different context, was accepted by Ivan Dujčev for Choniates' τὸς κατὰ τὸν Αἶμον τὸ ὄρος βαρβάρους, appearing in the initial description of the beginning of the Assenid rebellion. A somewhat further analogy, though semantically related, would be the translation by Dimitrios Gonis, appearing in Nikefor Gregoras, of the phrase περὶ τὸν Αἶμον φρούρια associating the mentioned fortifications with the interior of the mountain massif, rather than with its surroundings<sup>10</sup>. In the light of the thirteenth-century lections of the manuscripts A (Vaticanus graecus 1623) and P (Parisinus graecus 1778) and the fourteenth-fifteenth century W (Vindobonensis Historicus graecus 105), which were accepted as the original version in the older editions of Choniates's work, prepared by August Immanuel Bekker, Preslav, the old Bulgarian capital, was described by the Byzantine historian in a manner analogous to Tărnovo. He stated that it was in greater part surrounded by Haimos (καὶ πλείστην ὄσιν περὶ τὸν Αἶμον τὴν περίμετρον ἔχουσα)<sup>11</sup>, although it is known that, once again, the description pertains to Pre-Balkan. We may therefore, without much error, count Tărnovo among the fortresses, mentioned several times in Choniates' works, located on steepnesses and high hills, superbly fortified, linked to Haimos, in which Bulgarians took shelter from Byzantine armed forces<sup>12</sup>.

The remark about the city's plan on the hilltop also draws attention, as indeed the main buildings of the city were located on the relatively flat (Trapezitsa) or terraced (Tsarevets) top parts of the hills, while their steep slopes stretching towards

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed., praef. et trans. V. ТАРКОВА, [in:] *FGHB*, vol. XI, София 1983 (cetera: *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, trans. V. ТАРКОВА), p. 51; *O City of Byzantium...*, p. 258.

<sup>10</sup> *CHONIATES, Historia*, p. 368, 50–51; *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina historia*, X, 4, vol. I, ed. L. SCHÖREN, Bonn 1829 [= *CSHB*, 4], p. 488, 1; И. ДУЙЧЕВ, *Въстанието на Асеневици и култът на свети Димитрия Солунски*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Проучвания върху българското средновековие*, София 1945 (= *СББАНИ* 41.1, 1945), p. 45, fn. 3 (no. IX); ИДЕМ, *Въстанието в 1185 г. и неговата хронология*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Проучвания върху средновековната българска история и култура*, София 1981, p. 53; Д. ГОНИС, *Търново и крайбрежните митрополии и архиепископии (Варна, Месемврия, Созопол и Анхиало) през XIV век*, [in:] *ТКШ*, vol. V, *Паметници. Поетика. Историко-география. Пети международен симпозиум Велико Търново, 6–8 септември 1989*, ed. Г. ДАНЧЕВ, Велико Търново 1994, p. 469, n. 31.

<sup>11</sup> *CHONIATES, Historia*, p. 372, 43–45; *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, rec. I. BEKKER, Bonn 1835 [= *CSHB*] (cetera: *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, rec. I. BEKKER), p. 486, 18–21. This clarification that the city was in larger part surrounded by this mountain massif, although it perfectly fits with the real location of the city in relation to the Stara Planina foreland, was not included in Jan-Louis VAN DIETEN's reconstruction of the text.

<sup>12</sup> *CHONIATES, Historia*, p. 368, 53–55; p. 373, 59–63; p. 428, 67 – 429, 72; *Nicetae Choniatae Orationes et epistulae, Or. II*, rec. I.A. VAN DIETEN, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 1972 [= *CFHB*, 3], p. 8, 2–5. A broader commentary on the manner in which Haimos was utilised in the context of the restoration of the Bulgarian state at the end of the twelfth century in К. МАРИНОВ, *Бунтовният Хемус. Масивът като база за нападения и убежище по време на първите Асеневици*, Епо 23.2, 2015, p. 330–347.

the river remained undeveloped. Further buildings were located only by the riverbed itself, at the base of the hills. The author however does not mention them, which may mean that in his brief description he focused on the dominant elements, or the most important characteristics of the city plan and buildings, omitting details, or (in a different interpretation) the development along the riverbed had not been very prominent at the time. The indication that the Bulgarian capital was located exclusively on one hill is also striking and, at least at first glance, obviously does not agree with the realities of how the city was planned. Of course, one could suppose that this attests to the concentration of the settlement at the end of the twelfth or in the early thirteenth century solely on one of the Tărnovo hills, likely on Tsarevets, or to accept that it was that latter hill that was referred to as Tărnovo, which appears to be suggested by some of the native old Bulgarian sources<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, in the light of archaeological research to date, Tărnovo gained a clear urban appearance only during the times of Tsar John Asen II (Tsarevets) and his direct successors in the 1240s (Trapezitza)<sup>14</sup>. This does not, however, mean that there had been no earlier settlement in the area of Trapezitza<sup>15</sup>, and other

<sup>13</sup> Д.И. ПОЛЫВЯННЫЙ, *Търновград глазами средневекового современника*, [in:] *ТКШ*, vol. IV, *Културно развитие на българската държава. Краят на XII–XIV век. Четвърти международен симпозиум Велико Търново, 16–18 октомври 1985 г.*, ed. А. ДАВИДОВ et al., София 1985, p. 263. Cf. В. БАРАКОВ, *Градът във Второто българско царство. Раждане, типология и структура*, Велико Търново 2015, p. 124.

<sup>14</sup> Д. РАБОВЯНОВ, *Археологически проучвания в южния сектор на Трапезица*, vol. I, *Средновековният град*, Велико Търново 2015, p. 51–52, 66–70, 125–128; ИДЕМ [rec.], Венелин Бараков. *Градът във Второто българско царство. Раждане, типология и структура*. Издателство „Абагар“, Велико Търново, 2015. 424 с., 129 образа и 4 карти – ИНИМ 30, 2018, p. 337, 341, 347. Somewhat differently V. БАРАКОВ, *The Medieval City of Tarnov. Capital of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom*, [s.l., s.a.], p. 10, 11.

<sup>15</sup> General remarks, in some cases debatable – Й. АЛЕКСИЕВ, *Предстоличният Търнов*, [in:] *Сборник в чест на акад. Димитър Ангелов*, ed. В. ВЕЛКОВ, София 1994, p. 198; М. ДОЛМОВА-ЛУКАНОВСКА, *Трапезица в светлината на археологическите разкопки*, Велико Търново 2008, p. 49–51, 119–120; В. БАРАКОВ, *Градът...*, p. 119, 122–123, 130–132, 142, 313, 317–318, 332–333. Traces of settlement and a necropolis from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries have been confirmed in the South-Eastern sector of the fortress. At the end of the twelfth century, at its eastern base there had also been an active pottery workshop, while a metallurgical workshop was briefly present near the main entrance to the fortress. It is possible that the churches no. 3, 16 and 19 had been built as early as the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. The process of fortifying and permanently settling the northern part of the acclivity began during the first years of the thirteenth century. The erection of the defensive walls in the western part of the hill are also dated to this period – М. РОБОВ, *Производствени комплекси за строителна и битова керамика от предстоличния период на Търново*, [in:] *Средновековно Търново. Археологически проучвания. Юбилеен сборник по случай тридесет години от създаването на Филиала на Археологическия институт с музей при Българската академия на науките Велико Търново 1974–2004*, ed. К. ТОТЕВ, М. РОБОВ, И. АЛЕКСАНДРОВ, Велико Търново 2004, p. 93–107; ИДЕМ, *Гражданският комплекс в Югоизточния сектор на Трапезица*, [in:] *ТКШ*, vol. X, *Търновската държава на Духа. Десети юбилеен международен симпозиум Велико Търново, 17–19 октомври 2013 г.*, ed. Д. КЕНАНОВ, Велико

remarks in Byzantine texts suggest rather that the name Tǎrnovo referred to the entirety of the Bulgarian capital, and included the latter upland, which along with Tsarevets constituted the core settlement of the city<sup>16</sup>. A certain detail of the analysed passage appears to indicate that Choniates made use of the single hill according to the principle of *pars pro toto*, pointing to the general fact of erecting the city's buildings on the tops of the local hills, as well as likely having in mind the most important one, the very Tsarevets on which the Assenid seat was located. He stated that the city was erected on the hilltop, but was divided by a river. This information would not make sense if it indeed referred to buildings concentrated on one hill surrounded by the river valley. If the Byzantine wanted only to emphasise that the city was separated from the surrounding terrain, and therefore was entirely or largely surrounded by the river, one would have expected him to have used the expression *περίμετρον*, as he did in the case of Preslav, surrounded by the Haimos massif. Alternatively, he would have used the word *περιβάλλω*, which he used earlier in the same sentence referring to Tǎrnovo to emphasise that the capital was surrounded by mighty defensive walls. The use of *διαλαμβάνω* in turn makes sense if we accept that it reflects the real plan of a city located on at least two hills, separated by a river. This had indeed been the case.

The information about the fortifications, perfection or splendour of the city also deserves attention. Undoubtedly Tǎrnovo was seen as the mightiest Bulgarian fortress and to this fact, the most important to the Byzantine author, he drew the greatest attention. From this statement it indirectly follows that the Byzantines had the knowledge of other contemporary Bulgarian fortresses and cities (primarily those they associated with Haimos) and it was against their backdrop that they were able to evaluate the defensive qualities of Tǎrnovo. In the light of this description, there were three components that made up the specific characteristics of the city's defence – the mighty walls encircling it, the river obstructing access to it, and the fact that the city was located on an elevation or, as stated by the author, on the hilltop. Paradoxically it is the artificial component, the intentionally constructed city walls, that comes to the fore. These were *de facto* an additional element, reinforcing the naturally fortified, through its very location, city. It follows therefore

Търново 2015, р. 606–619; ИДЕМ, *Некрополът до църква № 3 на Трапезица*, [in:] ВТУ „Св. св. Кирил и Методий“ и българската археология, vol. II, Проф. д-р Борис Д. Борисов – ученици и приятели, ed. Б.Д. БОРИСОВ, Велико Търново 2016, р. 741–750; К. ТОТЕВ, Е. ДЕРМЕНДЖИЕВ, П. КАРАИЛИЕВ, Д. КОСЕВА, *Археологически проучвания на средновековния град Трапезица*, vol. I, Сектор Север (Северна кула, Северна порта, Военна сграда, Западна крепостна стена, Железарска работилница, Църква № 19 и Централен площад, Разкопки 2007–2009 г.), Велико Търново 2011, р. 201; К. ТОТЕВ, *Археологически проучвания на средновековния град Трапезица – северна част (2007–2010)*, [in:] *Българско средновековие: общество, власт, история. Сборник в чест на проф. д-р Милияна Каймакамова*, ed. Г.Н. НИКОЛОВ, София 2013, р. 581–582, 583–585, 587–588; К. ТОТЕВ, Д. КОСЕВА, *Столичният Търнов...*, р. 371.

<sup>16</sup> Т. ОВЧАРОВ, *За топографския и архитектурния облик...*, р. 468.

that as early as in the discussed period (the 1190s), or at least prior to our author's death (that is, ca. 1217), or even not long after 1206 (when the narrative of the final version of the work breaks off), the city, or at least some part of it, was surrounded by walls.

The above chronology may be narrowed down even further, as the work of Choniates is preserved in two basic versions, significantly differing in some respects. The first was created before the capture of Constantinople by the knights participating in the Fourth Crusade, in April 1204. Until that time the author held high positions at the imperial court, and therefore had free access to current political information, including that concerning Byzantium's neighbours. For some time he even served as an imperial governor in Thrace, specifically of the Philippopolis theme (from 1189), and so he was no stranger to the Bulgarian affairs. The second version was drafted after 1206, when he was correcting and supplementing the earlier text, adding to it a lot of information, specifically adding his own characterisation and appraisal of the state's elites which had led to the empire's downfall. At the time he was already in exile by the Asia Minor Nicaea, he lived in poverty, deprived of his position and influence. It therefore appears highly likely that he obtained the above information about Tărnovo and included it in his work prior to 1204, especially since we know that he brought his original narrative up to 1202, to subsequently supplement it during 1204–1206 with the description of events related to the fall of Constantinople and its immediate aftermath (in the manuscript version LO he brought the description of events up to ca. 1210). In addition, comparison of the shorter version of the work with the longer one does not show the author's later interference into the cited above topographical characterisation of the Bulgarian capital<sup>17</sup>.

From the archaeological examinations we know that the aforementioned defensive walls of Tărnovo stretched along the edge of the peaks of the particular hills and formed the culmination of the slopes quite steeply descending towards the Yantra valley. The information indicated in the discussed source may be of significance in considering the timeline of fortifying the Tsarevets or Trapezitsa hills (in the case of the latter, primarily in relation to the question of the development of settlement therein), which is being disputed by the specialists conducting excavations in the area of the former capital<sup>18</sup>. Regardless of the disagreements between

<sup>17</sup> On the subject of life and chronology of creation of Choniates' historical work cf. A. SIMPSON, *Niketas...*, p. 2–3, 11–124; W. TREADGOLD, *The Middle Byzantine Historians...*, p. 422–435, 441–442.

<sup>18</sup> The fullest description of the city walls surrounding Tsarevets was provided by В. ВЪЛОВ, *Царевград Търнов*, vol. V, *Археологически разкопки и проучвания на крепостните стени на хълма Царевец 1966–1969 г.*, София 1992. Cf. also Т. ОВЧАРОВ, *Археологически проучвания на терасата източно и югозападно от Патриаршията до Малката Порта и на южния склон на Царевец*, Велико Търново 2005; М. ДОЛМОВА-ЛУКАНОВСКА, *Археологически проучвания на средновековна улица по северозападния склон, квартал при трета порта на главния вход, източна*

the scholars studying this matter, there is no doubt that some span of fortifications spanning at least the Tsarevets hill was in place already at the time when the Byzantine historian was writing his work. The walls must have been at least sufficiently impressive (Choniates describes them outright as mighty) for the arrivals to have found them noteworthy, likely even from some distance. If we were to add to this the information that Tarnovo was more splendid than the other fortresses spread across Stara Planina and its foreland, then even assuming its small size, it would be difficult to interpret it as a small defensive installation of a size similar to the later architectural complex of the Bulgarian Patriarchate, which may have been present at the highest terrace of Tsarevets still during the Byzantine rule<sup>19</sup>. Clearly the description of the Byzantine historian is referring to the walls encircling the hill (hills?) already during the period following the restitution of the Bulgarian

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*крепостна стена и квартал при Френкхисарската порта на Царевец, Велико Търново* 2007. In the case of Tsarevets, nowadays the existence of settlement and some span of city fortifications during the time after the restitution of Bulgarian statehood in 1180s is not being negated, however there are diverse views on the scope of these investments – on this subject cf. the following brief considerations and cited literature in the present paper. Regarding Trapezitsa, the date of the erection of the first fortifications surrounding the hilltop, or at least the beginning of their construction, is presently thought to be between the very end of the twelfth or rather earliest years of thirteenth century (thus e.g. К. ТОТЕВ, *Археологически проучвания...*, p. 581–582, 583–585; ИДЕМ, Н. ТОДОРОВ, П. КАРАИЛИЕВ, *Към фортификацията на крепостта Трапезица. Стени, порти, комуникации и военни сгради*, [in:] *Владетел, държава и църква на Балканите през Средновековието. Сборник с доклади от международната конференция, посветена на 60-годишнината на проф. д-р Пламен Павлов*, ed. Н. КЪНЕВ, Н. ХРИСИМОВ, Велико Търново 2019, p. 400, 401, 403–404, 414, 419, 422, 424) up to 1220s or 1230s (М. ДОЛМОВА, *За укрепителната система на крепостта „Трапезица“ (предварително съобщение)*, Арх 37.3, 1995, p. 40; ЕАДЕМ, *Трапезица...*, p. 45; Д. РАБОВЯНОВ, *Фортификацията на крепостта Трапезица – втората цитадела на българската столица Търновград*, [in:] *In honorem*, vol. IV, TEMPUS FUGIT. Юбилеен сборник в чест на 70-годишнината на проф. д-р Стоян Витлянов, ed. И. ЙОРДАНОВ, Шумен 2017, p. 180–181, p. 21; ИДЕМ, *Крепостта Трапезица в развитието на Търновград като столица на Второто българско царство*, [in:] *Владетел...*, p. 381, 382). The hitherto results of archaeological examinations of the Trapezitsa fortifications are collectively discussed by Н. ТОДОРОВ, *История на проучванията на фортификацията на крепостта Трапезица*, [in:] *Великите Асеневици...*, p. 502–522; ИДЕМ, *Към въпроса за периодизацията на крепостното строителство на Трапезица*, ГИФВУКМ 1 (33), 2017, p. 471–480.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Е. ДЕРМЕНДЖИЕВ, *За патриаршиския комплекс, царския дворец и фортификацията на средновековната крепост на хълма Царевец в предстоличния Търнов*, ИРИМВТ 31, 2016, p. 40–46; Д. РАБОВЯНОВ, *Може ли археологията да се триумфи? Отзив за студията на Евгени Дерменджиев „За патриаршиския комплекс, Царския дворец и фортификацията на средновековната крепост на хълма Царевец в предстоличния Търнов“*, ИРИМВТ 32, 2017, p. 360, 364, 365; ИДЕМ, *Крепостта Трапезица...*, p. 383–384; Е. ДЕРМЕНДЖИЕВ, *Отговор на отзива на Д. Рабовянов „Може ли археологията да се триумфи?“* („Известия на Регионален исторически музей – Велико Търново” 32, 2017, 359–367) за моята студия „За патриаршиския комплекс, Царския дворец и фортификацията на средновековната крепост на хълма Царевец в предстоличния Търнов” („Известия на Регионален исторически музей – Велико Търново” 31, 2016, 39–100), ИРИМВТ 33, 2018, p. 445.

state during the mid-1180s, perhaps even to situation from the turn of the centuries (times of Kaloyan), known to the Byzantine and somewhat retrospectively transposed onto the times of Ivanko's rebellion of 1196, in the context of which the analysed description of the city appears on Choniates' pages. From the perspective of the source however one may not rule out that the aforementioned fortifications existed during the events relating to the death of Tsar Assen (1196), or even somewhat earlier (but after the restoration of Bulgarian statehood?)<sup>20</sup>. At least, that was the image of the Bulgarian city that Niketas' readers received. In addition, the Byzantine historian's text indicates that he considered the city's core to *de facto* include more than one hill (therefore at least two), which in the light of our archaeological knowledge speaks in favour of the view that it may have referred to at least Trapezitsa. Keeping that in mind, may one suppose that when writing about the span of walls encircling the city the author may have also meant a second hill, also fortified, or did he only mean that the settlement, located on both hills, was divided by a river, *ergo* the second hill was not fortified? It is difficult to say for certain although, as I have mentioned earlier, the most recent excavations show a possibility that at least some fortifications may have surrounded Trapezitsa in the early thirteenth century<sup>21</sup>, which would have corresponded to the times during which Choniates was writing his work.

The aforementioned paradox, however, relates to the fact that it was the riverbed that constituted the first obstacle to be overcome on the way to the city, excepting of course the main approach to Tsarevets, located in the south-western part of the hill and not defended by the body of water. Listing the city walls first may have been referring to those fortifications which guarded the main approach, although I personally think it was a result of the good visibility of the city walls, further enhanced by their location. We otherwise know that during the discussed period Yantra carried a greater volume of water, which made it a more robust barrier for any potential aggressors. The mountain (read: hills) itself formed the third component of the defences of the city located thereon. It is a known fact that fortresses and cities located on the peaks of hills and mountains were among the most difficult to capture and frequently the contemporary experts in the art of war recommended that these should be taken through trickery and deceit, especially if a lengthy siege intended to starve out the defenders was to be avoided. A direct assault was generally advised against, as the defenders had a natural advantage,

<sup>20</sup> This fact can be in part correlated with the presently accepted by archaeologists, albeit hesitantly, the dating of the first span of the perimeter fortifications of the Tsarevets hill – Е. ДЕРМЕНДЖИЕВ, *За патриаршеския комплекс...*, p. 61–75; Д. РАВОВЯНОВ, *Може ли археологията...*, p. 359–361, 362–365; Е. ДЕРМЕНДЖИЕВ, *Отговор...*, p. 447.

<sup>21</sup> К. ТОТЕВ, Е. ДЕРМЕНДЖИЕВ, П. КАРАИЛИЕВ, Д. КОСЕВА, *Археологически проучвания...*, p. 30, 31, 125–126; К. ТОТЕВ, *Археологически проучвания...*, p. 581–582, 583–585. Differently М. ДОЛМОВА-ЛУКАНОВСКА, *Трапезица...*, p. 31–46; В. БАРАКОВ, *Градът...*, p. 131, 247–248 (the latter scholar dates Trapezitsa's fortifications to 1180s).

occupying combat position on a higher ground, and thus fulfilling the cardinal recommendation regarding military actions in the mountains and in high-lying terrains in general<sup>22</sup>. Thus in discussing Tärnovo's defensive qualities the author emphasised three obstacles – two natural ones, the water and steepness of Tärnovo's slopes, which made approach to the city's buildings significantly more difficult, slowing down the enemy's assault and forcing him to considerable exertion in order to reach the third obstacle, namely the city walls guarded by the local garrison. It is clear that such emphasis on the question of the city's defences and their particular components stemmed from the fact that the Byzantines were forced to attack it, *ergo* struggle against the aforementioned obstacles.

The matter of particular defensibility of Tärnovo may also be associated somewhat with the used in the quote term *προφερεστάτη* (from *προφερός*), which may be translated as *most excellent*, which should be understood also as meaning *superior*, i.e. *above other [cities]*<sup>23</sup>. The city therefore stood above others because of its fortifications. On the other hand all these adjectives, including the acceptable, somewhat looser translation *most beautiful*<sup>24</sup> indicate both the aesthetic qualities of the city's location (emphasised by other mediaeval authors, and even more so by modern era travellers and contemporary authors)<sup>25</sup>, as well as its role as a capital, also in this respect elevating it above other Bulgarian cities.

The accuracy of the Byzantine description of Tärnovo may be further attested by the fifteenth-century text by a Tärnovian, Gregory Tsamblak, who in his *Tale of the transfer of Petka of Tärnovo to Vidin and Belgrade*, related to the capture of the Bulgarian capital by the Ottoman Turks in 1393, stated the following:

Иже и пришѣ, въсѣ оубѣ болгарскыя прѣдѣлы ꙗкоже гнѣздѣ сѣрѣжа. на чудныи же градѣ  
пришѣ, недооучѣваше къ прѣтѣио. мѣста оубѣ тврѣдость зрѣ ꙗкоже и ю. стрѣлицимаи  
горѣ и хълмѣ высокыи затворѣно. и стѣнами великыма оукрѣплено. ѿ вѣноуторѣ же

<sup>22</sup> К. Маринов, *Как трябва да се водят планински сражения. Препорѣки в някои византийски и антични стратегикони*, ВМд 4/5, 2013/2014, p. 368, 377–378; IDEM, *Przez wąwozy i lasy. Armia bizantyńska wobec trudno dostępnych obszarów w świetle IX konstytucji „Takyk” Leona VI Mądrego*, AUL.FH 99, 2017, p. 19–20.

<sup>23</sup> LSJ, p. 1539.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, trans. V. ТАРКОВА, p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. e.g. *Ανωνύμου Σύνοψις Χρονική*, [in:] BGM, vol. VII, rec. C. SATHAS, Parisii 1894, p. 417, 13–16; R. RÖHNICHT, *Die Jerusalemfahrt des Peter Sparnau und Ulrich von Tennstaedt (1385)*, ZGEB 26, 1891, p. 490 (Peter Sparnau); Григоріа архієпискоупа русїйскаго похвално иже въ святыхъ шѣца нашего Свѣтїи патрїарха трѣншвскаго, 50.1, [in:] П. РУСЕВ, И. ГЪЛБОВ, А. ДАВИДОВ, Г. ДАНЧЕВ, *Похвално слово за Евтимий от Григорий Цамблак*, София 1971, p. 198; *Възрожденски пѣтеписи*, ed. С. ГЮРОВА, София 1969, p. 38, 78–79, 80, 125–126; К. ИРЕЧЕК, *Пѣтувания по България*, trans. С. АРГИРОВ, ed. Е. БУЖАШКИ, В. ВЕЛКОВ, София 1974, p. 281–295; М. ЙОВКОВ, *Търново в релациите на католишките мисионери*, [in:] *Велико Търново през вековете*, ed. П. ПЕТРОВ, София 1982, p. 108–109 (Petăr Bogdan Bakšev).

прѣбныѣ мно҃гочѣстными мо́щими трѣгоубо о҃тверже́но. и ꙗ́ко во́нна непобѣ́дима сѣѣ́ по срѣ́дѣ ѿмоу́щиямъ, ѿже́ та́мо жи́телиѣ. И по си́хъ о҃убо вѣще́и вездѣ́льнь хѣтѣ́аше възврати́ти се ва́рварь. къ стѣ́намъ же ѿ чѣсти что́ ѿще́ и възмо́гъ би. къ крѣ́пости же прѣбныѣ не ѿнако о҃спѣ́а би. развѣ́ ꙗ́ко же стѣ́но къ ѿгню́. Нѣ́ слышитъ ѿ тѣ́ побно́, Моу́сѣѣ́ же ѿ ꙗ́ремаи́и. ѿво о҃убо не мо́ли се о́ люде́хъ си́хъ. ѿво же, ѿзыди́ из гра́да сѣ́го. мѣ́твы вѣ́ твѣѣ́ ꙗ́ко стѣ́на мѣ́дна соу́тъ къ възвраще́нню гнѣ́ва моегѡ́. И та́ко ѿ горѣ́кы пѡ́вѣсти грѣ́хѡу прѣ́вѣзъшѣ́ш въ роу́коу́ бѣ́ дѣѣ́, ѿже́ никогда́же сѣѣ́ полоу́чити мнѣ́шмоу́ се.

On his [Ottoman ruler Bayezid I Yıldırım – K.M.] arrival occupied the Bulgarian territories as if they were an [empty] bird's nest. Standing before **the marvelous city** [i.e. Tárnovo – K.M.], **he wondered how to seize it, for he saw that it was a tough place, surrounded by steep mountain slopes and high hills fortified with formidable ramparts** and from the inside triply strengthened with the most honorable relics of the venerable [i.e. St. Petka of Tárnovo – K.M.]. The latter stood in the midst of the people who lived there like an invincible warrior. For this reason the barbarian tsar [despaired] and wished to turn back without success. He could have breached **the walls**, but against the fortress of the venerable he would have been as successful as hay against fire. Like Moses and Jeremiah he [the invincible warrior, i.e. St. Petka – K.M.] heard “Do not pray for these people” or “Leave this city, for your prayers defend it against my wrath like a copper wall!” And yet – oh such sorrowful tale to tell! – when sin prevailed, all of a sudden [he] saw what he thought he would never have falling in his hands.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, in comparing the above quotation with the description by Choniates one has to keep in mind the temporal distance dividing the two texts and the advancements in architectural planning and development of the Bulgarian capital. Tárnovo of the late twelfth and late fourteenth centuries differed significantly from each other<sup>27</sup>. Nonetheless both the descriptions not only emphasised practically the same elements of its positioning and fortification, but also did so in almost the same words. True, a remark about the river is absent from Tsamblak's relation, and several of the mountains and hills which enclosed the city have been mentioned directly. However the remaining elements are fully compatible with each other – like in Niketas, we have a magnificent, wonderful city, an epithet undoubtedly referring both to its charming location as well as, primarily, its exceptional character, obtained thanks to the relics of St. Petka of Tárnovo resting within its walls. We have a recollection of the natural features guarding the access to the capital, such

<sup>26</sup> Пренасяне на мощите на св. Петка отъ Търново въ Видинъ и оттамъ въ Сърбия. Разказъ отъ Григория Цамблакъ, [in:] Й. ИВАНОВ, *Български старини от Македония*, ed. Б. АНГЕЛОВ, Д. АНГЕЛОВ, <sup>2</sup>София 1970, p. 434 (no. LI); Eng. trans. – К. РЕТКОВ, *The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, Seventh–Fifteenth Century. The Records of a Bygone Culture*, Leiden–Boston 2008 [= ECEEMA, 5], p. 377–378 (with my minor correction and boldface – K.M.).

<sup>27</sup> On the subject of the city's development during the two hundred years of its existence, including the substantial advancement of the Trapezitsa hill as the constituent core of the settlement centre and the appearance of subsequent residential districts cf. Д. РАБОВЯНОВ, *Крепостта Трапезица...*, p. 384–386; К. ТОТЕВ, Н. ТОДОРОВ, П. КАРАИЛИЕВ, *Към фортификацията...*, p. 396.

as the location among the steep-sloped mountains and hills, and the emphasis of its fortification with great and mighty walls. Once again, three elements comprising Tǎrnovo's defensibility have been named<sup>28</sup>, although instead of the river, Tsamblak emphasised the ultimate, spiritual protection of the city, namely the Saint's intercession. The latter can however be easily explained by the hagiographic nature of his work.

### **Tǎrnovo – the seat of the Assenids and the capital of the restored Bulgarian state**

I have mentioned earlier that the discussed quotation from the work of Niketas Choniates was included in the narrative describing the killing of Assen by one Ivanko in 1196 and the latter's attempt at seizing power in Bulgaria<sup>29</sup>. Tǎrnovo is mentioned four times in the text, and the context of these references is very important. After Assen's death Ivanko, along with his supporters, started a rebellion against supporters of Peter, Assen's brother, and took control of the city, aiming to establish his rule over Moesia (i.e. Bulgaria). As the news of the ruler's death spread not only within the city but also outside its walls (τῶν τοῦ Τερνόβου τειχέων)<sup>30</sup>, and reached Peter, who was residing in Preslav, Ivanko, fearing adverse developments, turned to Emperor Alexios III Angelos with a request for military support. He encouraged the Byzantine ruler to first capture Tǎrnovo, and to join forces to fight for the rule over the entire Moesia. At the same time the author also relates that Peter himself did not think he would easily defeat Ivanko, and deliberately delayed an attack, and only in time his supporters outside, and maybe also inside (?) of the city grew in power, as he continuously sent them new armed units. Commenting on the rebel's offer made to the Emperor, Choniates throws in a remark that had the Emperor put in the appropriate effort, then after capturing Tǎrnovo he would have easily and effortlessly conquered the entirety of Moesia. This, however, did not happen, and Ivanko did not receive sufficient support from Byzantium. Faced with an increasingly uncertain situation, he doubted his situation and position in Tǎrnovo and left it in secret, making his way to Byzantium<sup>31</sup>.

Throughout the entire narrative Tǎrnovo is found at the centre of events. Firstly, Assen, the Bulgarian Tsar resided in this city, and was murdered here. The city became the centre of the rebellion, and it was from here that the attack on and the

<sup>28</sup> More on the defensive scheme of the city: А. Попов, *Крепостната система на средновековната столица Търновград*, ВС 48.4, 1979, p. 124–143.

<sup>29</sup> On Ivanko and attempt on Assen cf. e.g. Г. ЦАНКОВА-ПЕТКОВА, *България...*, p. 41–42; П. ПЕТРОВ, *Възстановяване...*, p. 264–271; И. БОЖИЛОВ, *Българите във Византийската империя*, София 1995, p. 311–312 (no. 359); ИДЕМ, *Фамилията на Асеневици (1186–1460). Генеалогия и просопография*, <sup>2</sup>София 1995, p. 33–34 (no. 1); ИДЕМ, *История...*, p. 297–298; А. MADGEARU, *The Asanids...*, p. 111–112.

<sup>30</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, p. 470, 79.

<sup>31</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, p. 468, 24 – 472, 19.

subsequent subjugation of the other Bulgarian territories was to come. There is a notable separation in the narrative between Tărnovo and Moesia, the remaining lands subject to the Assenids. The city is the main goal of military operations, and only from there they are directed against other territories. Once the city is taken, the remaining lands will be easily captured – not the other way round. Seizing of the city by Ivanko was supposed to gain him the crown and power. Thus, entering into the city was crucial for imposing rule over the other Bulgarian. Of course, the chief obstacle on the way to a lasting and firm position within the city, but even more so beyond its walls, was Assen's brother, another Bulgarian ruler. The repeated reference to the city's walls is emblematic of the discussed description; these, along with the previously discussed characterisation of Tărnovo's defensive qualities, splendidly explain Peter's hesitation. He likely recognised both the location and the fortifications of the city, realising the difficulties inherent in attempting to capture it. Therefore a rational delay, intended to allow gathering of forces sufficient to be brought before the city, and possibly make an attempt at taking it. The latter was undoubtedly being facilitated by the fears, doubts and hesitation of the Byzantine contingents regarding the crossing of the Stara Planina massif on the way to relieving Ivanko, who remained confined to the city<sup>32</sup>. The latter, in turn, was aware that mastery of Tărnovo, the mightiest of the fortresses in Haimos, and the splendour associated with the city's dominant authority, would ensure him not only safety, but also obedience. Of course, if he had an armed force sufficient to deal with the opposition from Peter. Ivanko intended to make Tărnovo into a base of operations in his efforts to expand his rule over the entirety of Moesia. Losing Tărnovo would have meant losing any real chance for real and legitimate power. Peter was also aware of this, and he immediately took steps to not only avenge his brother, but also to regain the state's central city. Choniates' commentary, once the secretive escape from the city and Ivanko's flight to the Emperor was confirmed and Peter consolidated his forces, was unequivocal – *Thus the rule over the Mysians was fully transferred once again into the hands of Peter* (καὶ μετῆλθεν οὕτω καθαρῶς πρὸς τὸν Πέτρον πάλιν ἡ ἀρχηγία Μυσῶν)<sup>33</sup>. In other words, we clearly have here the most important centre of the restored Bulgarian state, its capital; at least, this was the case in 1196<sup>34</sup>.

The confirmation of Tărnovo's significance as the capital and the most important city of the restored state and the seat of the Bulgarian ruler is also found in the remark devoted by Niketas to the fate of Baldwin I (1204–1205), the first Emperor of the Latin Empire of Constantinople, in the context of the defeat of the Western

<sup>32</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, p. 471, 6 – 472, 15.

<sup>33</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, p. 472, 18–19; Eng. trans. – *O City of Byzantium...*, p. 25 (with my correction – K.M.).

<sup>34</sup> Д.И. ПОЛЫБЯННЫЙ, *Культурная идентичность, историческое сознание и книжное наследие средневековой Болгарии*, Москва–Санкт-Петербург 2018, p. 259.

European knights in the battle of Adrianople in 1205. According to the Byzantine historian's relation, the Emperor was to have been taken captive and taken by the Bulgarians to Tărnovo (ἐς Τέρνοβον), where he was thrown into a dungeon, tied with chains up to his neck<sup>35</sup>. In another place in his work Niketas reported Baldwin's death. Kaloyan, the then Bulgarian ruler (1197–1207), by then had kept him in captivity for a long time, and because of an anti-Bulgarian rebellion of Alexios Aspietes in Philippopolis, the Bulgarian became enraged at the Latins as well. As a result, in a murderous rage, he led the Latin Emperor from the dungeon and ordered his legs hacked off at the knees and arms at shoulders with a Tenedian axe, and to be then thrown headfirst into a ravine. The unfortunate man, left to be devoured by wild birds, was supposed to have lived for three more days after that, before finally expiring. In a similarly inhuman manner the Bulgarian Tsar put to death the remaining Byzantines he had in captivity, having no regard for their cries and pleading. Among them was also said to have the *logothetēs tou dromou* Constantine Tornikes, who reluctantly agreed to serve under the Latin ruler after the fall of the Byzantine capital. He was at first in Cuman (lit. Scythian) captivity, then fled to Kaloyan (in the text: John), hoping to be welcomed with highest honours, as had often been the case in the past when he stayed at the Bulgarian court as a Byzantine envoy. As Choniates ironically commented on his fate, he instead experienced *hospitality*, which was expressed through numerous sword wounds across his entire body, and being denied burial after the murder<sup>36</sup>.

Apart from the clear characterisation of attitude and actions of Tsar Kaloyan and his subordinates towards defenceless captives, the described events provide us with some valuable information on the subject of Tărnovo itself, or at least about the city as it was perceived by the Byzantine author. Within the city the Bulgarian ruler held high ranking Byzantine and Latin dignitaries, including Emperor Baldwin himself, after they have been captured following the defeat at the battle of Adrianople, or as a result of anti-Byzantine actions of Kaloyan in Thrace

<sup>35</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, p. 616, 60–62. The fourteenth-century demotic paraphrase of Choniates' *History* (manuscript B – Monacensis graecus 450) in turn states that Baldwin was guarded in a dungeon, with a chain on his neck and legs clasped in irons – *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, rec. I. BEKKER, p. 814, ad v. 5.

<sup>36</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, p. 642, 86 – 643, 10. Somewhat earlier (CHONIATES, *Historia*, p. 628, 7–12) the historian specified that after the capture of the rebellious Philippopolis and the killing of Aspietes the Bulgarian Tsar returned to Moesia (Bulgaria) and, as the Byzantine author phrased it, he got matters dealt with, viz. severely punished Byzantine traitors, which included killing them in imaginative ways. It cannot be ruled out that this information should be considered in conjunction with the previously mentioned information about the fate of the Byzantine captives kept at Tărnovo. In particular, as the lections of the L and O manuscripts of Niketas' work describe in this place the deaths of Baldwin and the captured Byzantines – CHONIATES, *Historia*, p. 628, ad v. 7–14. In the light of the narrative included there Kaloyan, enraged at the illustrious Byzantine prisoners he held in chains, sentenced them all to death. Emperor Baldwin was also supposed to have been among the prisoners; he was cast into a chasm and was left to be devoured by dogs and birds of prey.

in 1205. Since Constantine Tornikes, who had earlier come to the Tsar hoping for a more than a kind reception, it is evident that the aforementioned city was the seat of the Bulgarian ruler and his court. Kaloyan therefore permanently resided in Tărnovo, which was obvious to Constantine, since as a former imperial envoy he had prior knowledge and experience in this regard. He knew therefore where to go to meet the most important decision makers in Bulgaria. Already by then Tărnovo had permanently entered Byzantine consciousness as the main centre of the Bulgarian state. It is also evident that the Bulgarian Tsar wished to have the imprisoned dignitaries at hand, likely for purely political and military reasons, as Tărnovo was a sufficiently mighty (by Bulgarian standards, of course) fortress to guarantee a strong defence against attackers who might wish to free the captives. Holding them in the capital, Kaloyan thus controlled the situation, had full command over their fate, which is clearly attested to in Niketas' account. It also indicates the presence of dungeons within the city (Baldwin) or some unspecified places (Byzantines), in which the captives were being held.

Of particular interest to me is another detail of the narrative, namely the one relating to how Latin Emperor was put to death. It is the matter of the casting down the horrifically mutilated Baldwin into a chasm. This information deserves attention since once again it demonstrates at least relative familiarity of topography of the Bulgarian city. Located on hills, with built-over peaks and relatively steep slopes leading down to the river valley, with flat strips of land at the base of the hills located on both sides of the river, it made carrying out the aforementioned execution possible. The victim could therefore have been cast down from the height of the city walls surrounding the peak, or from the rocky edge of a hill, towards the river valley floor located tens of metres below. We do know of another example of a death sentence on a high ranking state dignitary carried out in this manner. In 1300 Joachim III, the then Bulgarian Patriarch, accused of working with the Tatars and betrayal, was put to death in the same way. On the orders of Tsar Theodore Svetoslav (1300–1321) the hierarch was cast into a chasm, as some scholars assume from the so-called Skull Rock (this identification has a legendary nature), that is the northernmost part of Tsarevets, a sharp mountain top, prominently extending over the precipice below<sup>37</sup>. Regardless of where specifically the aforementioned execution was carried out, this testimony adds credibility to the description of Baldwin I's death, or at least provides evidence of its location within the topographical boundaries of Tărnovo. The author's clear irony aside, in Choniates' relation also stand out the previously mentioned *highest honours* and *hospitality*, on which Constantine Tornikes was hoping for at Kaloyan's court.

<sup>37</sup> Georgii Pachymeris *Relationes historicas*, IX, 26, vol. III, ed. A. FAILLER, Parisii 1999 [= *CFHB*, 24.3], p. 291, 26 – 293, 6. Discussion of the controversy about the cause of the conflict between the Tsar and the Patriarch: К. КРЪСТЕВ, *Българското царство при династията на Тертеревци (1280–1323)*, Пловдив 2011, p. 112–114.

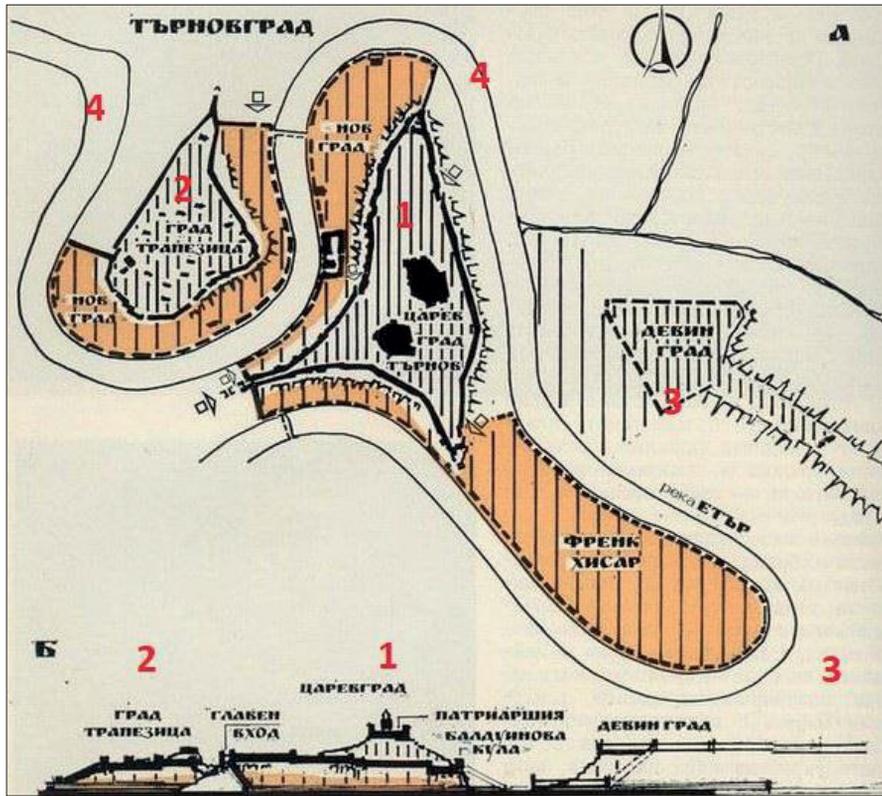


Fig 1. Main Tarnovo's hills. After: М.А. ХАРБОВА, *Отбранителни съоръжения в българското средновековие*, София 1981, p. 168 (fig. 72).

1 – Tsarevets, 2 – Trapezitsa, 3 – Momina Krepost, 4 – Yantra river

It allows us to think that high ranking guests and envoys could be received there with appropriate esteem.

### Summary

Direct remarks about Tarnovo in Niketas Choniates' text are not particularly numerous, although they are undoubtedly emblematic and bring with them a considerable amount of information. They are also surprisingly precise. The city was of no particular interest to the historian, but there is no doubt that it did not escape his attention, either in terms of its location and the main characteristics of its planning, nor regarding its political significance in the newly created state, also among other centres in the early Assenid Bulgaria.

*Translated by Michał Zytka*

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