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SUBMISSION: 3.01.2019
ACCEPTANCE: 31.01.2019

The One Hundred Year Struggle of the Bulgarian People against the Turkish Invasion (from Momchil Yunak to the Crusades of Vladislav Varnenchik)

ABSTRACT

In the 12th–14th century the Bulgarian Tsardom was one of the largest and most prosperous states in the European Southeast. The Bulgarian culture reached its climax and a showing example, that could be seen even today, is the image of sebastocrator Kaloyan and his wife Desislava in the Boyana church near Sofia. The Ottoman invasion ended the existence of the Medieval Bulgarian state—the famous Bulgarian historian Ivan Tyutyundzhiev defined it as follows: “The Ottoman invasion cut off the hand of the Boyana painter.” The article explores the struggle of the Bulgarians against the Turkish invasion from the middle of the 14th century to the middle of the 15th century. The main points related to these crucial times are marked. Different hypotheses and theories about the stages of the conquering of the Bulgarian lands are dealt upon.

KEYWORDS

Bulgaria, Turkish Invasion, Medieval Ages, 14th Century, 15th Century, Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman invasion in Europe during the 14th century turned out to be fateful to the whole Balkan Peninsula. For almost five centuries, the Balkan people lost their independence and lived in one foreign world, under foreign rule. However, they resisted against the conquerors. Bulgarians did not give up so easy in front of the new menace and fought by about one hundred years for their survival. As a beginning of the phenomenon could be considered the

burning of the Aydan ships in the Aegean Sea from the Bulgarian Yunak Momchil in the 1340s. In the end, the Crusades of Vladislav Varnenchik (1434–1444) of 1443–1444 and the death of the young king on November 10th, 1444 put an end to the Bulgarian hopes. These events marked the end of the first period of the anti-Ottoman resistance of the Bulgarian people.

After the Liberation in 1878, one of the basic topics in the Bulgarian historiography became exactly the anti-Ottoman resistance. It has been an object of many researchers. There are different hypothesis, theories, and suggestions about the processes and stages for the conquest of the Bulgarian lands by the Turks. The aim of this study is to deal with all sources and historiographic opinions about the matter. The author of the paper is sharing his point of view about this problem basing on all the data.

The development of the Bulgarian historical research after the Liberation contributed considerably to the study of the early Ottoman period. The opinion that the life of the Bulgarian people improved during the first years of the Ottoman domination was refuted with strong evidence by the Bulgarian historiography.¹ The fall of Bulgaria under the Ottoman rule revealed a new period of development of the Bulgarian people and nation, which left long-lasting, irreconcilable memories in the minds of the Bulgarians.

After the reign of Ivan Assen II (1218–1241), when the Bulgarian state reached its greatest power, followed a half-century crisis that covered all aspects of domestic and foreign policy. Focused on the northeastern lands threatened by the Tatar raids, the Bulgarians were not aware of another danger coming from the southeast—the Ottoman Turks.

However, the initial clash of the Bulgarians with Asian people was with the Aydin Turks. Umur, the emir of Aydin, was an ally of Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos in his war against Andronicus III for the Byzantine throne. In 1343 it was his hordes that cause great damage to his opponents. Initially, the Bulgarian voivode Momchil Yunak joined as an ally of John Kantakouzenos and Umur. In 1344, by taking advantage of the absence of the Aydin Emir, Momchil seceded from the alliance with the Byzantine emperor and settled in the Rhodopes and the Western Thrace. Next year Umur returned to the Balkan Peninsula, aiming at regaining the control over these territories. As a result, his

¹ Й. Митев, *Има ли временно подобрене на положението на българския народ след падането му под турско иго*, "Исторически студии" 1955, pp. 156–233; И. Снегаров, *Турското владичество пречка за културното развитие на българския народ и другите балкански народи*, София 1958; Д. Ангелов, *Борбите на българския народ против османската власт през първата половина на XV в. и походите на Владислав Варненчик*, [in:] *Варна 1444. Сборник от изследвания и документи в чест на 525 – та годишнина от битката край гр. Варна*, съст. М. Михов et al., София 1969, pp. 10–11.

ships were set on fire by Momchil at the port of Abdera. In June, in the battle of Peritheorion, the united Byzantine and Turkish forces managed to defeat the Bulgarians. Momchil Yunak was killed.²

In 1280, Osman I (1280–1324) became an independent ruler of the smallest beylik in Asia Minor. The waning Byzantine Empire had no opportunity to oppose the gathering momentum emirate. During the reign of the next ruler, Orhan (1324–1359), the Ottoman Turks succeeded in stepping on the European coast. In 1352, they helped the Byzantine emperor John V Palaiologos (1341–1391) in his confrontation with the Bulgarian and Serbian detachments. In the Battle of Didymoteichon the Ottomans succeeded in defeating the united Slavic forces. So they settled in the fortress of Çimpe, on the Gallipoli Peninsula. This was their first conquest in the Balkans. Two years later, on the March 2nd, 1354, taking advantage of the circumstances (namely the destructive earthquake), the Ottomans managed to take over the entire Gallipoli Peninsula.³ This was how their march to the conquest of the Balkans started.

The situation on the Peninsula was favourable to further military action. Bulgaria was divided into three major parts: the Vidin Tsardom, Tarnovo Tsardom and Despotate of Dobruja. In the 1360s, the fragmentation of the Bulgarian lands reached its climax. At that time Northeastern Bulgaria seceded from the central government and became autonomous despotate. Even before his death, the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331–1371) divided his territories between his two sons. The older one Ivan Sratsimir (1371–1396) got the Vidin Tsardom, located between the rivers Timok and Iskar, and the younger one Ivan Shishman (1371–1393) got the central part of the territory with the capital Tarnovo. After the death of Ivan Alexander in 1371, the Bulgarian state was finally divided into three parts. At that time a number of independent possessions were formed in the Southwestern Bulgarian lands. The situation in the rest of the Balkan countries was quite similar. Their territories were fragmented into separate small possessions.⁴ Serbia was divided after the death of Stefan Dušan in 1355. The abovementioned weakening of the Byzantine Empire further complicated the situation for the Balkan people. The lack of coor-

² И. Тютюнджиев, *История на българския народ XV–XVII в.*, Велико Търново 2017, pp. 50–51.

³ Х. Матанов, *Средновековните Балкани. Исторически очерци*, София 2002, pp. 352–353, 392.

⁴ This partition wasn't the first one of the Bulgarian and other Balkan lands in the period of 12th–14th centuries. About the question see: Г. Н. Николов, *Самостоятелни и полусамостоятелни владения във възобновеното Българско царство (края на XII – средата на XIII в.)*, София 2011; R. Radić, *Oblasni gospodari u Vizantiji krajem XII i u prvim decenjama XIII veka*, „Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta“ 1986, 24–25, pp. 151–289.

dination in the actions of the Balkan states, as well as their intolerance towards each other, led to their collapse.⁵

In 1369,⁶ Adrianopolis (Edirne) was conquered by the Turks. Then the cities of Plovdiv and Boruy (Stara Zagora) suffered the same fate, which turned out to be the first important conquests of the Ottomans in the Bulgarian lands. Adrianopolis became a capital of the Ottoman state till the capture of Constantinople in 1453.⁷

The initial victories of the Ottomans were also due to their well-organized military system, which based on the janissary corps, sipahi and timariot cavalry, Azabs, and Akindjis. The core of the Ottoman army consisted of the janissary corps. Janissaries were kidnapped as young boys from Christian families by the Ottomans, next they were educated in religious fanaticism and iron discipline. Their equipment consisted of chain mails, helmets, shields, yatagans, and bows. They were the Sultan's personal guards and the strongest unit in the Ottoman army. The sipahi and the timariot cavalry made their own living by the feudal revenue of the timars (lands granted by the Ottoman sultans), however, they committed themselves to take part in military campaigns. They were armed with spears and swords, carried small round shields, but did not use chain mails and armors. The Azabs were irregular infantrymen called in only during campaigns, armed with bows and curved swords. The Akindjis were members of the light cavalry, mercenaries, who were only recruited during military campaigns and then dismissed from service. They served as a rear-guard of the Ottoman army.⁸ The Ottoman military system was well organized and the recruitment of the army was extremely fast. The permanent inflow of settlers from the Asian areas also stimulated the invasion. All these elements led to inevitable successes.

In 1337, the 100-year war between France and England broke out in Western Europe. In the middle of the century, the plague epidemic which took mil-

⁵ About the question see also: M. Salamon, *Bizancjum i Bułgaria wobec ekspansji tureckiej w dobie bitwy na Kosowym Polu*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne” 1992, 102 (Studia Polono-Danubiana et Balcanica V), pp. 29–43.

⁶ On the base of critical analysis of the sources I. Beldiceanu-Steinherr establishes that Adrianopol fell under Ottoman rule in 1369 see: I. Beldiceanu-Steinherr, *La conquête d'Adrianopole par les Turcs: la pénétration turque en Thrace et la valeur des chroniques ottomanes*, “Travaux et mémoires” 1965, 1, pp. 439–461.

⁷ J. Hauziński, *Początki penetracji politycznej i etnicznej Turków Osmańskich na Bałkanach*, „Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et Studia” 1985, 2, pp. 199–210.

⁸ About the military organisation in the Ottoman state in details see: Б. Цветкова, Ц. Георгиева, *Държавна организация, военна и административна уредба*, [in:] *История на България*, Т. 4, ed. X. Гандев et al., София 1983, pp. 45–49; Д. Ангелов, Б. Чолпанов, *Българска военна история през Средновековието (X–XV век)*, София 1994, pp. 213–214.

lions of lives was spreading.⁹ The Balkan Peninsula was not spared by the Black Death either.¹⁰ Western Europe had its own problems and did not pay attention to the southeastern part of the Continent. The invader, who would bother the whole Europe, at that time seemed insignificant. In this way, the Balkans were left alone to face the new power that had come from Anatolia.

The problem of the periodization and the stages of the Ottoman conquest is complicated. There are different opinions on the subject. In the Bulgarian historiography, this question was described by Plamen Pavlov and Ivan Tyutyundzhiev. The authors analyzed all opinions and sources on the subject and compiled a complete chronology of the events. According to the researchers, the beginning was linked to the conquest of Adrianopolis and the subsequent offensive in the Balkans, and the end—the death of the Bulgarian emperor Constantine II in 1422.¹¹

Hristo Matanov points out three periods of the establishment of the Ottoman state considering political, military, and social factors. The first period is from the capture of the Gallipoli Peninsula to the early 1370s. In 1359, Emir Orhan (1324–1359) died, succeeded by his son Murad I (1359–1389). During this period, the Ottoman state was characterized as something between a nomadic unification and a ghazis' community. The second period begins in the early 1370s and continues until the end of the 1380s. The third period of the development of the early Ottoman state, according to Matanov, begins with the decisive battle at the Kosovo Field in 1389, aiming at the final expulsion of the Turkish invaders from the Balkan Peninsula.¹²

Which are the main forms of resistance to the Ottoman invasion at that time? The first anti-Ottoman Balkan coalition was established as a protection against the invaders. It was under the leadership of King Valkashin and his brother Despot Uglesha. Their armies were defeated in 1371 in the Battle of Chernomen. This gave an additional incentive to the Murad troops to enter further inland the Balkan Peninsula.¹³

⁹ H. Matanov, op. cit., pp. 340–341.

¹⁰ About the question see: И. Иванов, *Чумата в Европа и българските земи в края на Средновековието*, [in:] *Черно море между Изтока и Запада: Река Дунав – мост между народи и култури. Девети Понтийски четения*, Варна, 16–17 май 2003, съст. С. К. Панова et al., София 2005, pp. 267–277.

¹¹ П. Павлов, И. Тютюнджиев, *Българите и османското завоевание (краят на XIII – средата на XV в.)*, Велико Търново 1995, pp. 55–118; П. Павлов, И. Тютюнджиев, *Османските завоевания и „Държавата на духа“*, Велико Търново 2017, pp. 59–156; И. Тютюнджиев, *История на българския народ...*, op. cit., pp. 419–430.

¹² H. Matanov, op. cit., pp. 394–402.

¹³ On the Ottoman method of conquest see e.g.: H. Inalcik, *Ottoman Methods of Conquest*, "Studia Islamica" 1954, 2, pp. 103–129; K. Moutafova, *On the Problem of the Ottoman Methods*

The second major battle in the struggle against the Ottoman conquerors was the battle of Plochnik in 1387. The united forces of the Serbian Prince Lazar and Bosnian King Tvrtko I (1377–1391) managed to defeat the troops of Murad I. The Bulgarian army of Tsar Ivan Shishman did not support the Ottoman troops, although he was their ally. As a punishment for the Bulgarian absence in the Battle of Plochnik, in 1388, Murad sent a huge army led by Ali Pasha. The Ottoman troops succeeded in gradually conquering the strong Bulgarian fortresses Provadia, Venchan, Madara, and Shumen.¹⁴ Most of North-eastern Bulgaria fell under Ottoman rule.

In 1389, the third major battle, aiming at the expulsion of the Ottomans from Southeast Europe, took place in Kosovo. The core of the Christian army consisted of the army of the Serbian prince Lazar and the Bosnian units of Vlatko Vukovic. In this battle, Murad himself was killed and King Lazar was later executed. The son of Murad—Bayazid I (1389–1402), called the Lightning, ascended the Ottoman throne. He turned out to be far more ferocious than his father, and with great cruelty managed to defeat the allied Christian troops. Until recently it was believed that in this battle the Ottomans defeated their adversaries. Recent studies showed that the legendary Kosovo Field battle ended without a winner.¹⁵

In 1393, the Tarnovo Tsardom of Ivan Shishman was conquered by the Ottomans. Due to the absence of the king, the defense of the fortress was headed by Patriarch Evtimiy. Soon Nikopolis was captured, where the Bulgarian ruler resided. He was taken captive and later died in prison. The historical data about the exact year of his death is not accurate. Most likely this happened not in Tarnovo and after the Battle of Rovine on May 17th, 1395 when the Ottomans defeated Wallahian ruler Mircea the Elder (1386–1418) and forced him to return to his lands to the north of the Danube.¹⁶

of Conquest (According to Neşri and Sultan Murad's Gazavatname), "Études Balkaniques" 1995, 31, 2, pp. 64–81.

¹⁴ All of these settlements are located in Eastern direction from Varna: Provadia about 45 km, Venchan about 55 km, Madara about 75 km, Shumen about 90 km. About their conquering by the Ottomans see: Мехмед Нешири, *Огледало на света. История на османския двор*, прев. М. Калицин, София 1984, pp. 93–94. Special research about the conquest of Ovech see: В. Игнатов, *Завладяването на средновековна Провадия от турците*, „Военноисторически сборник“ 1998, 67, кн. 6, pp. 7–13.

¹⁵ A critical analysis about the Battle of Kosovo see: Х. Матанов, Р. Михнева, *От Галиполи до Лепанто*, София 1998, pp. 86–90.

¹⁶ И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *История на средновековна България VII–XIV в.*, София 1999, p. 666.

At that time the invaders reached the Hungarian border. King Sigismund of Luxemburg (1387–1437) was increasingly threatening by that fact. In response, he organized a crusade against the new conquerors. The knights from France, Poland, Hungary, Germany, England, and other countries fought under his banner. The Crusader Army managed to take hold of the fortresses of Vidin and Oryahovo. The sources are sure that the Bulgarians played an important role in the capture of the two fortresses.¹⁷ The decisive battle took place in Nikopolis on September 25th, 1396. The Ottomans defeated the allied troops and most of the knights were either killed on the battlefield, found their deaths in the Danube or were taken captives. In the battle, one of Europe's most famous knights Jean de Viein was killed, while the constable D'o and the Duke of Burgundy Jean de Never were taken captives.¹⁸ The last Bulgarian state—the Vidin Tsardom fell after the Battle of Nikopolis. Ivan Sratsimir was taken captive and sent to Bursa where he found his death.¹⁹

During the reign of Bayazid I, the Ottomans managed to take hold of almost the whole Balkan Peninsula. In 1394, the ruler officially received the title “sultan” from the caliph of Cairo. However, in 1402 the Ottomans suffered a crushing defeat by the Mongols of Timur in the Battle of Ankara on July 20th.²⁰ These were the two most powerful armies in the world at that time. Bayazid was taken captive and later died.²¹ This battle led to a crisis in the Ottoman state. There were years of disturbances and civil wars. The four heirs of Bayazid: Suleyman, Musa, Mehmed, and Isa were the key players. Initially, Suleyman settled in Rumelia, its center was Edirne. In Asia Minor, Mehmed defeated his brother Isa in several battles and became the ruler of these lands. In 1411, Musa managed to kill his brother Suleyman and remained the only ruler in Rumelia. The participation of the Bulgarians in these events was marked in a Bulgarian anonymous chronicle: “Musa came out to the Danube region and gathered a large number of Wallachians, Serbs, and Bulgarians.”²² Based on the localization of the Musa Çelebi coins from the Bulgarian lands mainly in

¹⁷ See: Д. Ангелов, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15.

¹⁸ About the popular knights, took part in this battle, see: М. Биелски, *Владислав III Варненчик на Балканите (1443–1444)*, Велико Търново 2006, p. 11; А. Атиа, *The Crusade of Nicopolis*, London 1934, p. 98–112. A significant contribution to the issue is the book published after the symposium with the same topic: *1396. Никополската битка в съдбата на България, Балканите и Европа*, съст. В. Гюзелев, София 1999.

¹⁹ И. Божилов, В. Гюзелев, *op. cit.*, p. 668.

²⁰ Timur was known in Europe as Tamerlan.

²¹ Bayazid, most probably was ashamed to pass through the whole Asia Minor in a cage.

²² И. Тютюнджиев, *Българската анонимна хроника от XV век*, Велико Търново 1992, p. 93.

Provadia region, the author of the present study has suggested that the Ovech Fortress²³ was one of the important possessions of the Ottoman ruler and probably his central city in Northeastern Bulgaria. It could be assumed that during these events some of the biggest battles took place in this geographical area.²⁴ In the decisive battle at the village of Chamurli, nearby Sofia, on July 5th, 1413, Mehmed succeeded in defeating Musa and killed him. In the 11-year civil war, Mehmed came out as a winner and was proclaimed an Ottoman sultan under the name Mehmed I (1413–1421).²⁵ The Balkan peoples benefited from the period of unrest in the Ottoman state by revolting in great numbers. First, the Byzantines took back control over the city of Thessaloniki and other towns along the coast of the Sea of Marmara.²⁶ In 1404, the Wallachian Voivode Mircea the Elder and the Bulgarian Emperor Constantine invaded Podunavije. Mircho managed to take hold of the fortress of Drastar, Constantin focused on Northwestern Bulgaria. This military campaign was mentioned in King Sigismund's letter to Prince of Burgundy Philip the Good in 1404:

And the famous Constantine himself, the glorified Emperor of Bulgaria, and Mircho, the voivode of Wallachia Transalpine, who have also returned to the bosom of our Majesty, have repeatedly boldly attacked the Greek districts and other areas there ruled by the Turks, winning triumph and a victory against our opponents and glorious feats of the same.²⁷

In 1404–1408, Stephan Lazarevich established himself as the master of the Serbian lands. He was also a participant in the anti-Ottoman Christian coalition. One of the rebellions of the Balkan peoples at that time was organized by Con-

²³ The contemporary town of Provadia is located 45 km westwards of the city of Varna. During the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages was called Ovech. See: Л. Лазаров, *Данни за монетната циркулация на Провадийската крепост (по материали от Дългополския музей)*, Велико Търново 2001.

²⁴ Н. Митев, *Монетната циркулация в средновековния български град в края на XIV–XV век (по данни от Велико Търново, Ряховец, Шумен, Червен и Овеч)*, [in:] *Градът по българските земи (по археологически данни)*, ред. П. Георгиев, Шумен 2014, pp. 515–526.

²⁵ *История на Османската империя*, ред. Р. Мантран, прев. Г. Меламед, София 2011, pp. 64–74. About the civil war in the Ottoman state see also: А. Садулов, *История на Османската империя*, Велико Търново 2000, pp. 16–18.

²⁶ G. Ostrogorski, *Istorija Vizantije*, Beograd 1969, p. 516.

²⁷ M. Dinić, *Pismo ugarskog kralja Zigmunda Burgundskom vojvodi Filipu*, „Zbornik za društvene nauke Matitse srpske” 1956, br. 13–14, pp. 96–97. The above-mentioned English translation is given after Б. Цветкова, *Паметна битка на народите (Европейският югоизток и османското завоевание – края на XIV и първата половина на XV век)*, Варна 1979, p. 67.

stantine, the son of Ivan Sratsimir, and Fruzhin, the son of John Shishman. In the scholar literature, there are many disputes about the exact date of the rebellion's outbreak. One opinion is that it happened in 1408.²⁸ According to other researches, however, the rebellion outbroke in 1404 in the region of Pirot.²⁹ Despite the disputes, there is no doubt that at the beginning of the 15th century a mass Bulgarian rebellion outbroke in the Northwest Bulgarian lands, led by the two Bulgarian princes, causing difficulties to the Ottoman authorities. In the book about the life of Stephan Lazarevich, written by Constantine of Kostenets, the wish of the Bulgarians to be free from the oppressors is very clearly conveyed: "And the Bulgarian towns rose in arms with the sons of the Bulgarian tsars."³⁰ Eventually, the rebels were defeated by Emir Suleyman at the Temska river.³¹ From a Serbian letter, we learn that on April 23rd, 1413: "[...] Musa defeated the Bulgarians and moved them to other places."³² This information was also associated with the end of the Constantine and Fruzhin rebellion. That's how one of the largest resistance movements in the Balkans at that time was put to an end.

Plamen Pavlov and Ivan Tyutyundzhiev have a different opinion about the events after the Ottoman conquest of the Vidin Tsardom. The authors have analyzed the primary and secondary sources and concluded that the name "Bulgaria" continued to exist as a state-political concept. According to them, at that time, this geographical area was free and the ruler of Bulgaria was Emperor Constantine.³³

²⁸ Б. Цветкова, *op. cit.*, pp. 68–69; X. Гандев, Б. Цветкова, Г. Нешев, *Участие на българите в общите противоосмански действия и походи*, [in:] *История на България...*, Т. 4, *op. cit.*, pp. 105–106; Д. Ангелов, Б. Чолпанов, *op. cit.*, p. 255; X. Матанов, *op. cit.*, p. 486.

²⁹ П. Петров, *Въстанието на Константин и Грузин*, „Известия на Института за история“ 1960, бр. 9, p. 208; Д. Ангелов, *op. cit.*, p. 16. About all hypothesis see: П. Павлов, И. Тютюнджиев, *Българите и османското завоевание...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–156; И. Тютюнджиев, *История на българския народ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 419–430.

³⁰ V. Jarić, *Konstantin Filozof i njegov Život Stefana Lazarevića, despota srpskoga*, „Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva“ 1875, бр. XLII, pp. 270–271; П. Петров, *Въстанието на Константин...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 187 and after.

³¹ About the uprising of Constantin and Fruzhin in details see also: А. Кузев, *Восстание Константины и Фружина*, „Bulgarian Historical Review“ 1974, No. 3, pp. 55–67; M. J. Leszka, *Kwestia tzw. Powstania Konstantyna i Frużyna w bułgarskiej literaturze naukowej*, „Balcanica Posnaniensis. Acta et Studia“ 2014, 21, pp. 5–12.

³² L. Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, Sremski Karlovitsi 1927, p. 223.

³³ П. Павлов, И. Тютюнджиев, *Българите и османското завоевание...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 114–119; П. Павлов, И. Тютюнджиев, *Османските завоевания...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–156; И. Тютюнджиев, *История на българския народ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 420–428.

In 1412, the inhabitants of Vidin rebelled again. At the same time, there was a turmoil among the population in Northeastern Bulgaria and more precisely in the once-great Bulgarian fortresses Provadia and Madara. Another region, where the Bulgarians rebelled was the Shtip and Veles region, i.e. Southwestern Bulgarian lands. According to Dimitar Angelov, these were not single riots, but mass uprisings of the Bulgarian people against the foreign conquerors.³⁴ However, the efforts of the Bulgarians remained unsuccessful. Mehmed Çelebi showed a different attitude towards the Balkan rulers. He maintained friendly ties with Byzantium and Serbia, who supported him in the war against his brother Musa. However, his attitude towards the Wallachian Voivode Mircea was the opposite. Even after the death of Musa, Mircho remained an opponent, and therefore Mehmed organized a new campaign against him. He succeeded in defeating him and forced to pay an annual tax.

The concept of equality between Muslims and Christians was gradually gaining in popularity among the ordinary population in the Ottoman state. This teaching of Mustafa Buriuklige emerged in Asia Minor. His close associate, Bedreddin Simavi (a former kadiasker of Musa), was active in the Northeastern Bulgarian lands with the centre of Deliorman,³⁵ as well as in Zagora.³⁶ He started the uprising against the Ottomans with support of Mircea the Elder. Despite its threatening proportions, the rebellion was suppressed. In the Battle of Edirne Mehmed's troops succeeded in defeating the rebels of Bedreddin. After the defeat, the teacher fell into the hands of the Sultan and was hanged. According to some sources these events happened on December 19th, 1416, according to the other—in 1417.³⁷

As a result of Mircea's support, in 1417, the Ottoman ruler carried out a new military campaign against the Wallachian voivode. Large territories were taken away for the benefit of the Ottomans, and Mircea again was obliged to pay an

³⁴ About this uprising see: Д. Ангелов, *op. cit.*, pp. 20–22; Д. Ангелов, В. Чолпанов, *op. cit.*, pp. 256–257.

³⁵ The Deliorman is a geographical area in northeast Bulgaria with its center—the present day town of Razgrad.

³⁶ Zagora is a geographical area in Central South Bulgaria, which center is today's city of Stara Zagora.

³⁷ See: Д. Ангелов, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–29; see also: А. Д. Новичев, *К истории народного восстания в Турции под руководством Шейха Бедреддина Симави*, [in:] *Общество и государство на Балканах в средние века*, ред. М. М. Фрейденберг, Калининград 1980, pp. 21–44. About the unrests during this time and the uprisings of Mustafa Buriuklige Bedredin Simavi see also: А. Садулов, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–18; Б. Цветкова, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–75. For the life and doctrine of sheikh Bedreddin see: *Трима радетели за мюсюлмано-християнско единение през XV век. Шейх Бедредин. Николай Кузански. Георги Трапезундски*, съст. В. Гюзелев, София 2012.

annual tax to the conquerors. Shortly afterwards, he died on January 31st, 1418. Mircea's name was remembered by his constant struggles against the invaders. In 1419 and 1420, as a result of the renewed hostilities of the Ottomans, the whole territory of Dobrudja was probably conquered by the Ottomans. Thus, the Ottoman rule was established in Northeastern Bulgaria.

Mehmed I managed to stabilize the Ottoman state. He coped with the political crisis and began a new stage of conquest in the Balkans. His successor, Murad II (1421–1451), finally succeeded in overcoming the crisis in the state and consolidated his position on the peninsula. However, the beginning of his rule was difficult because he had to cope with the rebellion of the Ottoman throne contenders: Düzme Mustafa and Junayd of Aydın. The ruler managed to deal with the situation. In 1421, an Ottoman army devastated Transylvania, and in 1422 Constantinople itself was besieged. In the same year, the Bulgarian Emperor Constantine died. According to Plamen Pavlov and Ivan Tyutyundzhiev, the death marks the end of the Bulgarian rule in Vidin and, in general, the existence of the medieval Bulgarian state.³⁸ The Peloponnese was ruined in 1423. After the initial successes of Murad during the early years of his rule, he suffered several defeats by the united forces of the Hungarians and Wallachians. In 1425, the Wallachian voivode Dan and the Hungarian captain Pippo Spano headed a new military campaign against the Ottomans. From an anonymous Italian report, we learn that next to them was the “ruler of Zagora.”³⁹ This was the son of Ivan Shishman—Fruzhin, who settled in Hungary after the unsuccessful uprising of 1404–1408.⁴⁰ Initially, the allied forces were quite successful thanks to the support of the Danubian Bulgarian population. Eventually, however, they suffered defeat and were forced to retreat. Gradually, Murad's troops managed to conquer much of Serbia. In May 1428, the Ottomans defeated the troops of the Hungarian King Sigismund in the Battle of Golubac.

³⁸ П. Павлов, И. Тютюнджиев, *Българите и османското завоевание...*, op. cit., p. 125; П. Павлов, И. Тютюнджиев, *Османските завоевания...*, op. cit., p. 156; И. Тютюнджиев, *История на българския народ...*, op. cit., p. 429. According to the authors, exactly the death of Constantine marks the end of the Medieval Bulgarian State. That statement is still not entirely accepted by the historians, despite the very convincing proves, shown by the researchers.

³⁹ И. Тютюнджиев, *История на българския народ...*, op. cit., p. 433.

⁴⁰ Д. Ангелов, op. cit., pp. 31–32. About Fruzhin see: П. Павлов, И. Тютюнджиев, *Българите и османското завоевание...*, op. cit., p. 126–131; П. Павлов, И. Тютюнджиев, *Османските завоевания...*, op. cit., pp. 158–159; И. Тютюнджиев, *История на българския народ...*, op. cit., pp. 429–430.

The 1420s were marked by the numerous battles between the Ottomans and the Hungarian-Wallachian troops, which ended with the peace treaties' conclusion. In 1428 an agreement was signed with Wallachia, and in 1429 with Hungary. By virtue of these treaties, the Ottoman state kept the territories that were captured as a result of the military campaigns in the 1420s. This situation was extremely unfavorable for the Bulgarian lands, which remained under the control of Murad. The date March 29th, 1430 was disastrous for the Byzantine Empire, when Thessaloniki was conquered by the Ottomans. At that time it was in the possession of the Venetians, but the city had always been considered second in importance after Constantinople. Thus, in fact, the city of Constantine remained the only one which had not been captured by the Ottomans yet.

In the 1430s, another part of the Balkan population—the Albanians—became active. The uprising in Albania began in 1432 when the rebels succeeded in defeating the Ottomans under the leadership of Andrei Topia. The movement reached its peak in 1434 when Depa Zenavis was proclaimed king of Albania. In 1435, the envoy of the Hungarian King and the Bulgarian ruler Fruzhin arrived in Ragusa and from there he moved to Albania. Most likely, his aim was to ensure the Albanians that they would not be alone in their struggle against the Ottomans and would be supported by the other Balkan peoples, headed by the Bulgarians.⁴¹ King Sigismund did his best to support the Albanian military endeavor. Eventually, he failed to do so because he died in December 1437.⁴²

The Serbian lands were systematically devastated by the Ottoman troops. It forced Serbian despot George Brankovic to send his daughter Mara to the Murad's harem. Despite this sacrifice, the Sultan was merciless and the outrage continued. In 1437, the Hungarians managed to defeat the Ottoman troops at Golubac. In response, the retreating Turkish troops devastated the Serbian regions. The Despot was forced to give the strong fortress of Branichevo to the Ottomans. In 1439, the Serbian capital Smederevo was conquered by the Ottomans.

The death of Emperor Sigismund of Luxemburg in 1437 put an end to the Hungarian offensive in the Balkans for several years. The military campaigns of the Magyars against the invaders would be renewed with new strength by

⁴¹ А. Буда, *Борьба албанского народа под водительством Скандербеге против турецких завоевателей*, [in:] *Повествы о Скандербеге*, ред. Н. Н. Розов, Н. А. Христякова, Москва-Ленинград 1957, p. 76.

⁴² Detailed information about the Ottoman invasion from 20–30s years of 15th century see: Х. Матанов, *op. cit.*, pp. 495–503; П. Павлов, И. Тютюнджиев, *Българите и османското завоевание...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 154–156.

the young Polish-Hungarian King Vladislav III and the Transylvanian voivode John Hunyadi. The Bulgarians were actively involved in the anti-Ottoman military campaigns of 1443–1444. The Polish and Hungarian sources about the “long” campaign were sure that Bulgarians and Poles got on well because they had a common background. King Vladislav was welcomed as a liberator. In a number of letters written by John Hunyadi, Enea Silvio Piccolini, and others, it was said that the Bulgarians were part of the Crusade and supported the Christian Coalition as they could. After the truce in Edirne on June 12th, 1444, and its subsequent ratification on August 1st in Szeged, Bulgaria remained under Ottoman rule. Only a few days later, on August 4th, King Vladislav announced that a new campaign was being organized, he promised to John Hunyadi that he would become the King of Bulgaria. The European chroniclers, as Jan Długosz, Callimachus, Beheim, gave us two important pieces of information about the participation of the Bulgarians in these events. On the one hand, they wrote about the joining of Bulgarians into the coalition army and on the other hand, they mentioned about violence committed by the Christian army upon the local population. Similar information was available in the Ottoman sources. Still, however, most of the sources are unconditional that the Bulgarians also took part in the second crusade of King Vladislav. The defeat at Varna and the death of the young Polish-Hungarian king put an end to the hopes of liberation. The Bulgarians, like the other Balkan peoples, remained under foreign rule for centuries. The Crusades of Vladislav Varnenchik also marked the end of the first period of anti-Ottoman resistance of the Bulgarian people.⁴³

The Nikopolis Treasure

Traces of these stormy events are the archaeological artifacts. The author would like to present one of the most significant treasures from the late Middle Ages, discovered in the Bulgarian lands in the region of Nikopolis.⁴⁴ It was

⁴³ About the participation of the Bulgarians in the Crusades of king Vladislav Varnenchik in details see: N. Mitev, *The Last Crusades in the Balkans from 1443–1444 or the Union between Central and Southeastern Europe against the Ottoman Invasion* (forthcoming). General researches about the Crusades of Vladislav Varnenchik: W. Swoboda, *Warna 1444*, Kraków 1994; *Świat chrześcijański i Turcy Osmańscy w dobie bitwy pod Warną*, red. D. Quirini-Popławska, Kraków 1995; J. Dąbrowski, *Władysław I Jagiellończyk na Węgrzech (1440–1444)*, Warszawa 1922.

⁴⁴ В. Гюзелев, *Никопол през XI–XIV в. – вжасодат на града в историята*, [in:] *История на Никопол*, ред. В. Гюзелев, Плевен 2004, pp. 59–68; А. Кузев, *Никопол и Холавник*, [in:] *Български средновековни градове и крепости*, Т. I: *Градове и крепости по Дунав и Черно*

found in several parts and gave rise to a number of different assumptions about its belonging and the reason for its hiding.

The First Nikopolis treasure was found in a metal pot in the area of the state vine nursery near Nikopol in 1915. It consists two silver plates, pieces of silver vessel, three silver spoons, pieces of belt appliqués, an earring and pieces of earrings, bracelet and coins of Ivan Alexander with Michael (1337–1371), Ivan Sratsimir (1356–1396), Bayazid I (1389–1402), and Mircea I (1386–1418).

The Second Nikopolis Treasure was found in 1971 when the Harmanlaka plot was ploughed (in the same area where the first one was found). It is considerably richer and more varied. The objects are made of gold—0.320 kg and silver—3.5 kg. The find consists of ten golden ear-tabs with a biconical, two-pyramidal, and spherical shape of the pendants; two gold bracelets—open, made of several ovals with plates at the ends—one with elongated trapezoidal shape and the other with a heart shape; one hundred and fifty seven buttons—silver or silver with gilt, a piece of glass, a necklace—gold with pendants; a silver cup; two silver bowls with bottoms bulging inwards; two silver spoons; five oval silver bars, two rod-shaped and two amorphous; a silver pendentive with pendants; four silver torcs; a silver ellipsoidal bowl; four gold and three silver coins of Isaac I Komnin (1057–1059), John III Doukas Vatatzes (1222–1254), a Venetian ducat from the fourteenth century, Manuel II Paleologus (1391–1423), Murad I (1362–1389), and a copper metal pot in which the treasure was discovered. The first researcher who wrote about the find Milko Asparuhov makes a number of parallels with artifacts found in Bulgaria and abroad. As for silver spoons, he mentions that such can be found both in Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary. The author considers that the production place of the bowls should be sought somewhere in the metal workshops in Quitaine and Montpellier in the 13th–14th centuries. But it is also possible to be a product of Sienna, Bergamo, Venice, or workshops located on the Western Balkan Coast. The presence of spoons on the Bulgarian lands, whose similar specimens originate from Man and Gotland, is explained by the author with the stronger trade relations between Central and Southeastern Europe along the Danube in the 13th and 14th centuries. Quite interesting are the inscriptions on two of the spoons and the two bowls from the second treasure where the name

море, съст. В. Гюзелев, А. Кузев, Варна 1981, pp. 125–148; Е. Манова, *Крайдунавският град Никопол в миналото*, „Военноисторически сборник“ 1980, бр. 49, pp. 69–81; М. Аспарухов, *Археологически приноси към историята на средновековния Никопол*, ч. 1, Враца 1997, pp. 87–137; idem, *Никополското съкровище*, „Известия на музеите от Северозападна България“ 1995, бр. 25, pp. 87–125; Г. Димов, *Никополското съкровище – опит за интерпретация*, „Mediaevalia“ 2012, бр. 5, pp. 33–41.

BALIN can be seen. This surname is popular in Northern Bulgaria and its most famous representative is a merchant from Nikopolis in the 17th century. The name is also a nickname for a healer.⁴⁵

Recently a find of 261 silver coins (among them 205 of Wallachian emissions), also from the area of Nikopolis, was published. The author Vladimir Penchev considers it as a part of the First Treasure.⁴⁶ Georgi Dimov calls it "The Third Nikopolis Treasure." He finds a connection between the silver bars from the Second Nikopolis Treasure with the find from 1917. Based on the vaulted pieces of the treasure, Dimov summarizes that this is one of the greatest discoveries of jewelry, vessels, and coins from the early 15th century in the Balkans.⁴⁷



Image 1: The Nikopolis Treasure,
[online] rim-pleven.com/археология/ [accessed: 1.04.2019].

⁴⁵ М. Аспарухов, *Никополското съкровище...*, op. cit.

⁴⁶ В. Пенчев, *Колективна находка със сребърни средновековни монети (XIV–XV в.) от района на град Никопол*, „Нумизматика, Сфрагистика и Епиграфика“ 2010, бр. 6, pp. 153–165.

⁴⁷ Г. Димов, op. cit.

There are different opinions about the concealment of the find in the literature. This fact is easily explained in view of the vicissitudes of the Bulgarian lands at the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century. Naturally, the main reason for the hiding of the treasure is the coin findings. These are the emissions of Mirces I and Manuel Palaiologos, which are the most recent ones. Milko Asparuhov points out three reasons for the concealment of the find: the conquest of Nikopolis by the Turks, the Battle of Nikopolis in 1396, when the troops of the Hungarian King Sigismund I were defeated, and the Crusade of Vladislav Varnenchik in the autumn of 1444. The researcher trusts to Callimachus's chronicle, who wrote that during the siege of the Nikopolis fortress in 1444 the crusaders began to plunder everything around. The author concludes that it is most likely this event to be the reason for the hiding of the Third Nikopolis treasure.⁴⁸

Georgi Dimov offers the following versions on the treasure's belonging. First, the treasure may have been the property of a healer associated with the rock complex at St. Stephen Church, or that the treasure belonged to the beg of the Nikopolis Sandjak, who had made his pile during the Ottoman military campaigns in Wallachia and some of the objects were the spoils after the Battle of Nikopolis on September 25th, 1396. Another suggestion of the author, based on the coin finds, the largest number of which are ones of Mircea I, is that the coins were sent to Cüneyt, who supported Mustafa in his struggle for the throne and was an ally of Mircea the Elder.⁴⁹ Vladimir Penchev believes that the specimens were divided into two purses and each of them was put in the respective copper vessel. In one of the vessels were put only the more functional coins, whereas the "more elite" ones were put in the second vessel.⁵⁰

According to Georgi Dimov, the most likely reasons for hiding the treasure are the following. First, Mustafa's march to the south and Cüneyt's participation in it. Second, the capture of Nikopolis in the autumn of 1426 by the Wallachian voivode Dan II (1420–1431), comitadji of Temesvár Pippo Spano from Florentia, and the ruler of Zagora Fruzhin. A third hypothesis is that the concealment may have taken place in the early 17th century and the reason, for example, akıncı's loot, acquired by means of robbery.

From the review of the research and the description of the find, the following assumptions could be made. The Nikopolis Treasure is perhaps the largest find from the late Middle Ages found in the Balkans. It is so significant due to the combination of different stylish objects, most of which made in a variety of

⁴⁸ М. Аспарухов, *Никополското съкровище...*, op. cit., pp. 110–111.

⁴⁹ Г. Димов, op. cit., pp. 38–41.

⁵⁰ В. Пенчев, op. cit.

European workshops. At the same time, there are inscriptions that undoubtedly prove that the most probable owner of the find was a man with a surname Balin, a Bulgarian of origin. As far as the hiding of this invaluable treasure is concerned, as it has been already noted, there are quite a few contradictions. The monetary findings suggest that all this happened in the first half of the 15th century. Each event from these turbulent times on the Bulgarian lands could be a well-grounded reason for that—the turmoil in the Ottoman state after the death of Bayazid, the uprising of Constantine and Fruzhin, the campaign of Dan II, Pippo Spano and Fruzhin, the Crusade of Vladislav Varnenchik in northeastern Bulgaria.

...

From the above-mentioned events, it is evident that the Bulgarians had not waited relentlessly for their conquest by the Ottomans. The Bulgarians had been at war with the invaders for hundred years. First, against the Aydan and Ottoman expansion, and then the struggle for their freedom. The Bulgarians organized uprisings and took part in various anti-Ottoman European coalitions. Most of the military action took place on the Bulgarian territory. The Crusades of Vladislav Varnenchik and John Hunyadi from 1443–1444 turned out to be a crucial moment. After these events, the Ottomans remained constantly in the Balkans, establishing their institutions here and locating their European army in these places.⁵¹ Tired of the century-long struggle taking place on their territory and accepting the new conditions of the enslaver, the Bulgarians were forced to live under an Ottoman yoke by the end of the 19th century.

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