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Τέρνοβος, ἐν ἧ τὰ βασιλεια ἦν τῶν Βουλγάρων: THE ROLE OF THE BULGARIAN CAPITAL CITY ACCORDING ΤΟ Ῥωμαϊκὴ ἱστορία BY NIKEPHOROS GREGORAS

Abstract. The paper is devoted to a detailed analysis of direct and indirect references to Tärnovo, the capital of the so-called Second Bulgarian Tsardom (12th–14th centuries) in *Roman history* of Nikephoros Gregoras, an outstanding Byzantine scholar of the first half of the fourteenth century. An analysis of the passages devoted to this city leads to a conclusion that the status of the city was fully obvious to the Byzantine historian – this was the main, capital city of the Bulgarian state, in which its rulers permanently resided, without holding which one could not be a fully legitimate tsar of the Bulgarians and exercise real power of the northern neighbours of Byzantium. Thus the conflicts over power in contemporary Bulgaria focused primarily on taking Tärnovo. The Bulgarian tsar departed with military expeditions most often from this city, having gathered in its vicinity armed forces, and to this city Byzantines and rulers of other neighbouring countries sent their envoys to meet with the Bulgarian autocrat.

Keywords: Nikephoros Gregoras, Tärnovo, Tärnovgrad, Veliko Tärnovo, Byzantium and Bulgaria, medieval Bulgaria, medieval Balkans, medieval capitals, Byzantine historiography, the others in Byzantine sources, Bulgaria in Byzantine sources

Introduction

Between the late twelfth century and until the end of the fourteenth century Tärnovo, a stronghold and an urban centre, served as the capital of the then Bulgaria. It was located in the area of the so-called Tärnovo Hills (the two main ones being Tsarevets and Trapezitsa), which formed part of the of the northern area of the Stara Planina forelands, and therefore in the area between the Lower Danube valley and the Stara Planina massif; it was there that the nucleus of the medieval Bulgarian state was located. The city was the most important centre of the state, which had been restored near the end of the twelfth century, and which for the following two hundred years played an important role in the history

of the Balkans, as a political partner of the Eastern Roman Empire¹. Insight into the history of the capital, the centre of the Bulgarians' political life, plays therefore a considerable role in understanding the so-called Second Bulgarian Tsardom. In this context it is worth reminding that the sources of Byzantine provenance, especially those of narrative nature, have a fundamental significance for recreating Bulgarian history, including the history of Tǎrnovo itself. This is a result of either a poor state of preservation of mediaeval Bulgarian historiography, or of a lack of developed tradition in this area altogether, resulting from the dependence and reliance on the relatively abundant Byzantine literary legacy. Either way, the latter sources appear to be the basis in the process of reconstructing both the late mediaeval history of Bulgaria, and of the relations with its southern neighbour.

Among the Byzantine works which provide us with information about the capital centre of the Bulgarians, an important place is occupied by the Ῥωμαϊκὴ ἱστορία of Nikephoros Gregoras (1295 – ca. 1360), an outstanding Constantinopolitan scholar of the first half of the fourteenth century, who wrote down the history of Byzantium for the years 1204–1359 in 37 books. His narrative is fundamental especially for the fourteenth century, and next to the memoirs of John Kantakouzenos it is the main historical text which allows us a glimpse into the contemporary history of the empire and its relations with its neighbouring countries. The work is most valuable for examining the events after 1320 (from book eight onwards), when its author was introduced to the imperial court as a scholar (in 1322). From that time he was describing the events as a discerning witness, able to highlight what was important and of greatest interest. Undoubtedly for the earlier period, especially for the entirety of the thirteenth century, he mainly relied on the historical works of his predecessors: of Niketas Choniates, but primarily those of George Akropolites, and of George Pachymeres, on whose style he modelled his own. It is possible that he also made use of the historical work by Theodore Skoutariotes, but even if that had been the case, it is most likely that this author's work has only been of secondary importance. It is pointed out after all that while describing the same events as the earlier authors, Nikephoros does not include their descriptions

¹ On the subject of Tǎrnovo, *vide e.g.* *История на Велико Търново*, vol. I, *Праистория, античност и средновековие*, ed. П. ПЕТРОВ, София 1986; Р. ПАНОВА, *Столичният град в културата на средновековна България*, София 1995, p. 141–186; К. МАРИНОВ, *Търново като свещен град през късното средновековие*, [in:] *ТКШ*, vol. X, *Търновската държава на Духа. Десети юбилеен международен симпозиум Велико Търново, 17–19 октомври 2013 г.*, ed. Д. КЕНАНОВ, Велико Търново 2015, p. 697–722; 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.

verbatim, but usually summarises them in his own words and expresses his own, independent opinions about the events and the persons who participated in them². Let us add that these views are not uncommonly contrary to those which he might have found in the works of the other authors, which may attest to the independence and critical approach to their texts, a tendency to expressing his own opinion and highlighting his own erudition, but also to using sources other than those by the aforementioned authors. Gregoras is therefore an important historian, even in the context of the period of which he could not have had personal recollections. He allows supplementing the data recorded by his predecessors and balancing their opinions on given subjects. His work however is invaluable as a source for learning about the Byzantines' perception of their own past³. The indicated discrepancies between his text and the descriptions by his predecessors are also apparent in the passages about the capital city of the late mediaeval Bulgarians.

The present considerations are therefore a detailed analysis of direct and indirect references to Tárnovo which were included in the historical study of this Byzantine erudite. I need to stress however that I am primarily focusing not so much on recreating the real history of the city, based on confronting the account of Nikephoros Gregoras with other sources from this epoch, but rather on the portrayal of the Bulgarian capital which emerges from the works of Gregoras. In other words, on the internal critique of the account, with the aim of analysing the author's knowledge about Tárnovo, the sources behind it, the portrayal of the centre which he wanted to convey in his work, as well as on the place the information about the Bulgarian capital had in the *Roman history*.

² I am using the edition *Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina historia*, vol. I, *Lib. I–XI*, ed. L. SCHOPEN; vol. II, *Lib. XII–XXIV/2*, ed. L. SCHOPEN; vol. III, *Lib. XXII/3–XXXVII*, ed. I. BEKKER, Bonnæ 1829, 1830, 1855 (cetera: GREGORAS, *Historia*). On the subject of Nikephoros Gregoras and his historical work vide e.g. R. GULLAND, *Essai sur Nicéphore Grégoras. L'homme et l'oeuvre*, Paris 1926; H. HUNGER, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, vol. I, *Philosophie – Rhetorik – Epistolographie – Gesschichtsschreibung – Geographie*, München 1978, p. 453–465; ΝΙΚΗΦΟΡΟΣ ΓΡΕΓΟΡΑΣ, *Rhömäische Geschichte / Historia Romaike*, vol. I, (*Kapitel I–VII*), trans. et comm. J.-L. VAN DIETEN, Stuttgart 1973, p. 1–62; J.-L. VAN DIETEN, *Entstehung und Überlieferung der Historia Rhomaike des Nikephoros Gregoras, insbesondere des ersten Teiles: Lib. I–XI*, Köln 1975; H.-V. BEYER, *Eine Chronologie des Lebensgeschichte des Nikephoros Gregoras*, JÖB 27, 1978, p. 127–155; М.Б. БИБИКОВ, С.К. КРАСАВИНА, *Некоторые особенности исторической мысли поздней Византии*, [in:] *Культура Византии (XIII – первая половина XV в.)*, ed. Г.Г. ЛИТАВРИН, Москва 1991, p. 282–286; Н. СІНОСКА, *Gregoras Nicefor*, [in:] *Encyklopedia kultury bizantyńskiej*, ed. O. JUREWICZ, Warszawa 2002, p. 190; V. VAVŘÍNEK, *Encyklopedie Byzance*, Praha 2011, p. 175–177; F. KOLOVOU, *Der gefangene Gelehrte und sein nächstlicher Gast. Geschichtskonzeption und Phantasie in Nikephoros Gregoras' „Rhomaïke Historia“*, Leipzig 2016; B. PAVLOVIĆ, *Nikephoros Gregoras und das Nikänische Reich*, [in:] *Byzanz und das Abendland IV. Studia Byzantino-Occidentalia*, ed. E. JUHÁSZ, Budapest 2016, p. 205–209, 223–224; L. NEVILLE, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing*, Cambridge 2018, p. 243–248.

³ B. PAVLOVIĆ, *Nikephoros Gregoras...*, p. 206, 215, 224.

Argument

The name of Tărnovo appears four times in Gregoras' substantial work. For the first time in relation to the conclusion of peace treaty between the rulers of Bulgaria and the Empire of Nicaea, John Assen II (1218–1241) and John III Doukas Vatatzes (1222–1254) in year 1235, which was sealed by the marriage of Helena, the daughter of the former, with Theodore, the son and heir of the latter. Gregoras adds that under the agreement the bishop of Tărnovo (ὁ τοῦ Τερνόβου ἐπίσκοπος) simultaneously received full autonomy, as until then he was subordinated to the archbishop of Justiniana Prima because of the ancient ancestral ties with the local population⁴. The proposal for an agreement was made by the Bulgarian ruler, who sent envoys to John Vatatzes, then conducting military activities on the Thracian Chersonesos. Having received a positive reply from the Emperor, met with him in person, as Nikephoros related somewhere in the vicinity of Chersonesos, to formally conclude a peace treaty with him⁵. One may suppose that for both parties, of the Bulgarian legation and the Tsar's retinue, the journey began in the Bulgarian capital and subsequently concluded there as well. From Gregoras' remark we learn that Tărnovo had its own clerical hierarch, who was the leader of the Bulgarian Church. He undoubtedly permanently resided in the capital, which is evidenced by the archaeological remains of his seat on the peak of Tsarevets⁶. His position was important enough for John Assen to have demanded that he be given full autonomy, which meant independence from other Orthodox hierarchs, in this particular case from the archbishop of Justiniana Prima (here: Ohrid), who had indeed been the highest clerical hierarch in Bulgaria since the time of the Kometopouloi, back in the day as a patriarch, and before the Byzantine conquest from the beginning of the eleventh century. The status of Ohrid, with the now diminished rank of an archbishopric, was maintained during the time of Byzantine rule in the eleventh and twelfth centuries⁷. An account by George Akropolites, the main narrative source for these events, clearly states that by an imperial and synodic decision the chief priest of Tărnovo, until now subordinated to his counterpart in Constantinople, was to be honoured with autonomy and called a patriarch⁸.

⁴ GREGORAS, *Historia*, II, 3, p. 29, 15 – 30, 6.

⁵ GREGORAS, *Historia*, II, 3, p. 29, 4 – 30, 3.

⁶ Н. АНГЕЛОВ, *Царевград Търнов*, vol. III, *Патриаршеският комплекс на Царевец през XII–XIV век*, София 1980.

⁷ И. СНЕГАРОВ, *История на Охридската архиепископия*, vol. I, *От основаването ѝ до завладяването на Балканския полуостров от турците*, София 1995, p. 16–88; Δ. Β. ΓΟΝΗΣ, *Ιστορία των Ορθοδόξων Εκκλησιών Βουλγαρίας και Σερβίας*, Αθήνα 1999, p. 48–53; Т. СЪБЕВ, *Самостояйна народностна църква в средновековна България. Християнизаторски процес, основаване и възход, автокефалия и междуцърковно положение. Църква и държава, роля и значение*, Велико Търново 2003, p. 264–275, 279–282.

⁸ *Georgii Acropolitae Historia*, 33, [in:] *Georgii Acropolitae Opera*, rec. A. HEISENBERG, corr. cura. P. WIRTH, vol. I, *Continens Historiam, Breviarium historiae, Theodori Scutariotae additamenta*,

As can be seen, Gregoras shortened the narrative, and additionally introduced a difference, the one relating to the relations and dependence of the Tǎrnovian bishop's see from the hierarch in Ohrid, rather than in Constantinople (who in 1235 was residing in Nicaea). The essence of the information however had not been changed – the spiritual head of Tǎrnovo and of the entire Bulgaria gained full independence. In this place of the narrative the most important for the Byzantine historian appears to have been the peace between Byzantium and its northern neighbour and in its context the two elements necessary for its conclusion, the marriage between the children of the two imperial couples and the status of the head of the Bulgarian church.

Of further interest in Nikephoros' account is the statement about the past ancestral ties, shared origins, between the inhabitants of the thirteenth-century Bulgarian state and the population of geographic-historic Macedonia. This indicates historic knowledge and awareness of the Byzantine author about the fact that these territories formerly belonged to the early mediaeval Bulgarian state, and about the uninterrupted presence of the Bulgarian population in these areas up to the late Byzantine period. The efforts of the Bulgarian Tsar to elevate the capital's bishop to the patriarchal dignity and obtaining for him full autonomy from the other hierarch of the Orthodox world constituted the ultimate realisation of the idea of an independent state, headed by two authorities – monarchical and clerical – independent from external entities. This also restored the situation from before the collapse of the Bulgarian statehood in 1018 and embodied the famous formula expressed by Tsar Kaloyan (1197–1207) in one of his letters to Pope Innocent III: *imperium sine patriarcha non stare*⁹. Thus Tǎrnovo, as a capital of independent Bulgaria, the place of permanent residence of the head of state and of the most important Church hierarch, as the capital of the empire, must have boasted the full autonomy of the latter. Just like the tsar, who like the Byzantine basileus was an autocrat, so did the bishop of Tǎrnovo had to have been autocephalous, and be counted among the respectable patriarchs.

In Gregoras' account the name of Tǎrnovo appears for the second time in the context of the change on the Bulgarian throne, which happened after the death of the tsar (in the text literally the *archon of the Bulgarians* – τῶν Βουλγάρων

Stutgardiae 1978 [Editio stereotypa editionis anni MCMIII correctior] (cetera: AKROPOLITES, *Historia*), p. 50, 25 – 51, 1.

⁹ *Innocentii PP. III Epistolae ad Bulgariae historiam spectantes, Ep. IX*, ed. I. ДУЖЕВ, Sofia 1942, p. 31, 24. More on the renewal of the Bulgarian Patriarchate and its relations with the Bulgarian Archbishopric in Ohrid vide Δ. Β. ΓΟΝΗΣ, *Ιστορία...*, p. 66–69; Т. СЪБЕВ, *Самостояйна народностна църква...*, p. 292–294, 304–320; И. ТЮТЮНДЖИЕВ, *Търновският епископат XII–XXI в.*, Велико Търново 2007, p. 37–38; В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, *Възобновяването на Българската патриаршия през 1235 година в светлината на историческите извори*, [in:] *Великите Асеневици...*, p. 155–169; Б. НИКОЛОВА, *Устройство и управление на Българската православна църква (IX–XIV век)*, ²София 2017, p. 220–232.

ἄρχων) Michael II Assen (1246–1256), a brother-in-law of Emperor Theodore II Laskaris (1254–1258)¹⁰. The author noted only the fact of this ruler's death, which may suggest to the readers that it had been a natural occurrence. He knew nothing about the ruler's murder by his cousin, Kaliman, which was reported by George Akropolites¹¹, a Byzantine diplomat and historian who lived during the times when the described events happened. Nikephoros, interestingly, not knowing of Kaliman, informed that because Michael did not have male offspring who could inherit power (τὴν ἀρχήν), the second method of inheritance had to be applied, specifically, it was to be handed to Mitso, the husband of the deceased Tsar's sister¹². This is important information, as the aforementioned Akropolites did not know of Mitso, which causes some confusion in attempts of reconstructing the succession of power in Bulgaria at the time. Doubts were raised about both Kaliman and Mitso, or about whether they ever exercised their power in the capital city¹³. Without going into the details of this issue, as it is not the essence of my

¹⁰ GREGORAS, *Historia*, III, 2, p. 60, 4–6.

¹¹ АКРОПОЛИТЕС, *Historia*, 73, p. 152, 1–12. Kaliman is also not known to George Pachymeres, a Byzantine scholar and historian describing history of the Empire in the second half of the thirteenth and the very beginning of the fourteenth century. In his narrative the direct successor of Michael II Assen also appears to be Mitso – GEORGES PACHYMÉRÈS, *Relations historiques*, V, 4–5, vol. II, *Livres IV–VI*, ed. et notes A. FAILLER, trans. V. LAURENT, Paris 1984 [= *CFHB*, 24.2] (cetera: PACHYMERES, *Relationes historicas*), p. 449, 12 – 451, 23.

¹² GREGORAS, *Historia*, III, 2, p. 60, 6–9. Scholars variously attribute the Bulgarian version of the name Mitso (Byz. Μιτσίης), which appears in Byzantine sources, seeing in it a diminutive version of either Dimităr (П. НИКОВ, *Българо-унгарски отношения от 1257 до 1277 г.*, СбБАН 11, 1920, p. 52–53; В.Н. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История на българската държава през средните векове*, vol. III, *Второ българско царство. България при Асеневици (1187–1280)*, София 1940, p. 471, n. 6; И. БОЖИЛОВ, *Фамилията на Асеневици (1186–1460). Генеалогия и просопография*, ²София 1994, p. 111), or Michael (possibly Miho or Milets) or even Simeon (К. ДОСЧЕВ, *Catalogue of the Bulgarian Medieval Coins of the 13th–14th Centuries. Types, Variants, Prices*, Veliko Tărnovo 2009, p. 47; В. СТАНКОВ, *Имената на българските владетели от XIII–XIV век според православната и българската именна традиция. Приносът на нумизматиката и сфрагистиката*, [in:] *България в Европейската култура, наука, образование, религия. Материали от четвъртата национална конференция по история, археология и културен туризъм „Пътуване към България”* (Шумен, 14–16.05.2014), ed. И. ЙОРДАНОВ, Шумен 2015, p. 365; A. MADGEARU, *The Asanids. The Political and Military History of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185–1280)*, Leiden–Boston 2017 [= *ECEEMA*, 41], p. 246, n. 76). Only Yordan Andreev (Й. АНДРЕЕВ, *Мицо Асен*, [in:] ИДЕМ, И. ЛАЗАРОВ, П. ПАВЛОВ, *Кой кой е в Средновековна България (Трето допълнено и основно преработено издание)*, София 2012, p. 494) assumed that since on the coins minted by this ruler (И. ЙОРДАНОВ, *Монети и монетно обръщение в Средновековна България 1081–1261*, София 1984, p. 91; К. ДОСЧЕВ, *Монети и парично обръщение в Търново XII–XIV в.*, Велико Търново 1992, p. 76–78, 226 (tabl. XXV, 2), 269 (tabl. 9, 11–12), 281 (tabl. 9, 11–12); ИДЕМ, *Catalogue...*, p. 47–58) it is possible to read, as was sometimes thought, Mitso, then undoubtedly that was simply his name. Recently however the identification of these coin issues with the person of Mitso was strongly challenged; the coins are linked instead to Tsar Michael II Assen – Т. ПОПОВ, *Студии върху българското средновековно монетосечене с изводи за историята*, София 2020, p. 30–45.

¹³ П. НИКОВ, *Българо-унгарски отношения...*, p. 51–56; В.Н. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История...*, p. 466–475, 492–495. On both of these rulers *vide* И. БОЖИЛОВ, *Фамилията...*, p. 110–112 (no. I, 20), 113–114

considerations, it needs to be said that in the light of Gregoras' account Mitso took the throne. After a remark about the necessity of handing over the power to Michael II's brother-in-law, the historian laconically stated that this had taken place (τοιγαροῦν καὶ ξυνεῖρῥύηκεν)¹⁴. Thanks to this we learn about the customary and peaceful manner of transition of power in the Tsardom. Firstly, that the throne was passed from father to son. When the ruler did not have male offspring, an appropriate candidate was sought among the closest family, or persons related to the ruling house. In other words, as the Byzantine stated quoting a well-known nautical saying: *out of necessity, as they say, the second way of sailing remained* (ὡς ἀνάγκη ἐῖναι λοιπὸν κατὰ δεύτερον, τὸ λεγόμενον, πλοῦν)¹⁵. The idiomatic expression used here meant that this was not the preferable version of events (after all this was the *second*, and therefore a somewhat worse way of *sailing*), but in this case what mattered was Mitso's connection, through his marriage with the daughter of John Assen II and sister of Michael II Assen, with the Assenid dynasty. A question arises here about who was responsible for the adoption and realisation of this solution. It cannot be ruled out that even before Michael II's death it was expected that Mitso may be one of the candidates to the throne. Kaliman likely had precedence ahead of him, but he apparently did not want to wait too long and decided to take the matter into his own hands. Undoubtedly in the case of a childless death of ruler the responsibility for ensuring the continuity of power on the Bulgarian throne rested on the highest state dignitaries who were supposed to ensure its smooth transition, preferably into the hands of someone from the Assenid dynasty, or someone connected to it. The dowager Tsarina may also have had a say in the matter. Of course while the Tsar still lived it was expected that he would sire a male heir.

Nikephoros characterised Mitso as a slothful man (another version – dull – is also possible), as well as effeminate and timid (ὁ ἀνὴρ νωθρός τις καὶ ἀνανδρός), who gradually lost respect and whose decrees had no effect whatsoever on the people (τὸ πλῆθος), that is, the subjects. In this place of Gregoras' narrative one Constantine, with the eponym of Tih (Τοῖχος), makes an appearance. He was a powerful man among the Bulgarians, who greatly surpassed others with his common sense (prudence in governance) and physical might (φρονήσεως ἐμβριθεία καὶ ῥώμη σώματος), and who seeing that the Bulgarians' rulership (τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν Βουλγάρων) was bad, moved against it. He drew to his side the common people and all of the powerful and distinguished within the nation (τε δημοτικὸν, καὶ

(no. I, 22); IDEM, *Българите във Византийската империя*, София 1995, p. 332–333 (no. 405); Й. АНДРЕЕВ, М. ЛАЛКОВ, *Българските ханове и царе. От хан Кубрат до цар Борис III. Исторически справочник*, Велико Търново 1996, p. 207–211; Й. АНДРЕЕВ, *Коломан II Асен*, [in:] IDEM, И. ЛАЗАРОВ, П. ПАВЛОВ, *Кой кой е...*, p. 377–378; IDEM, *Мицо Асен...*, p. 494–495.

¹⁴ GREGORAS, *Historia*, III, 2, p. 60, 9.

¹⁵ GREGORAS, *Historia*, III, 2, p. 60, 7–8. To say δεύτερος πλόος meant *the next best way* for those who were attempting a different course of action once the first had failed. In the naval context it refers to the use of oars, when the wind, the best option, failed – LSJ, p. 1422 (s.v. πλόος).

ὄσον ἐν ἐπισημοῖς τοῦ ἔθνους καὶ ἔκκριτον) and after he freely received the power (τοῦ κράτους) from them, he *besieged Tărnovo, in which* – as Nikephoros specified – *there was the palace complex of the Bulgarians* (ἐπολιόρκει τὴν Τέρνοβον, ἐν ἧ τὰ βασιλεία ἦν τῶν Βουλγάρων). As result of this Mitso, against his wishes, was forced to flee to Mesembria, a fortified seaside stronghold, along with his wife and children¹⁶. It is only at this point that we have reached the second of the aforementioned direct remarks about Tărnovo. The rather precise summary of Gregoras' text preceding it, however, provides very important context, without which considerations about this brief characterisation of the city would not have been complete. Thus, what do we learn from the Byzantine historian's text?

Primo, the concise description of the city is limited to the most important, namely, that within it was the palace of the Bulgarians, that is, the seat of the rulers of all of Bulgarians, at least during the mid-thirteenth century. The Greek form used

¹⁶ GREGORAS, *Historia*, III, 2, p. 60, 9–22. Interestingly, the portrayals of Mitso and Constantine Tih in George Pachymeres' account differ significantly from those presented in Gregoras. In the light of the account of the former, Mitso appears as a highly active, independent and conflict-prone character. He entered into disputes with the Emperor and conducted frequent military activities against his troops, he antagonised and was in conflict with many of the Bulgarian potentates, likely primarily with those in the capital, but also with those in the provinces, as a result of which the latter supported Constantine Tih. The latter is presented as a representative of a rebelling group of potentates, effectively working towards formally gaining the same rights to the crown as his rival, and in consequence majestically bearing a tsar's insignia. For this reason he also married into the Assenid family, and also gaining family connections with the court in Nicea. Mitso's attitude towards the Bulgarian aristocrats attests to his independence from them. Pachymeres even states that they turned against him out of envy, which could mean that they thought that since he could take power while not being a member of the ruling dynasty, so could they. It seems that this was envy over success achieved by one of their own number. It may have been this backdrop against which the discussed conflicts with some of the potentates developed; the aristocrats did not respect him and did not want to become subordinated to his rule. In either case, some of them did not want him to continue his reign. Even after capturing Tărnovo and adopting the title of tsar by Tih, Mitso retained power over the neighbouring territories and shifted his attitude between accepting the situation and moving against the new ruler, at one point even forcing him to flee and sheltering in a Byzantine stronghold in Stenimachos. It was exclusively thanks to Byzantine military aid that the new tsar was saved from a possible disaster – PACHYMERES, *Relationes historicas*, V, 5, p. 449, 19 – 451, 13. Vassil Zlatarski thought that Pachymeres mixed up the characters of the events he was describing and was poorly informed about the contemporary events in Bulgaria, and Nikephoros' account devoted to these matters was his personal reflection and has no historic value. Given this, he gave priority to the account of Akropolis – В.Н. ЗЛАТАРСКИ, *История...*, p. 473, 474, n. 3. In turn, П. НИКОВ, *Българо-унгарски отношения...*, p. 19–38, in detail argues for the general credibility of Pachymeres' account and Gregoras' dependence on the former. *Vide* also additional remarks by И. ЛАЗАРОВ, *Управлението на Михаил II Асен и Ирина Комнина (1246–1256)*, Век 13.2, 1984, p. 18–19. I do not look into the question of the credibility of the sources brought up here, as this is not the subject of my considerations, I will only note that Gregoras undoubtedly knew Pachymeres' account, and therefore he either creatively reinterpreted it, or also referred to other sources, or both, hence the discrepancies in the evaluations of Mitso's character. It is certain however that he abbreviated it to some extent, in particular where it came to Mitso's activity after he lost power in Tărnovo.

in the text τὰ βασιλεία allows us to reject the understanding of the word in the sense of *capital, seat of the empire*, and the translation of the passage as *Tǎrnovo, which was the capital of the Bulgarians* – the version adopted by me above seems to be not only the most common (a capital or seat would rather have been given in the singular – τὸ βασιλείον)¹⁷, but also the more natural one¹⁸. In addition, it includes within itself capital city semantics, as undoubtedly it refers to the permanent seat of Bulgarian rulers. The use of *pluralis neutri* for the aforementioned residence of the monarch is tempting, as it could suggest the existence of at least two residences of the tsars, or more broadly of the municipal authorities within the capital. Especially so as the existence of a tsar's palace on the Tsarevets hill during the discussed period has been unequivocally confirmed by excavations, and the results of the recent archaeological research in the area of Trapezitsa evidence the functioning, probably since the 1230s, of another representative building, which its discoverers believe to have been a palace complex¹⁹. This however would have been a deceptive temptation, for the aforementioned plural (τὰ βασιλεία) in conjunction with the predicate relating to it in singular (ἦν) clearly attest that the correct translation is the one proposed by me above; that the passage referred to a complex of buildings constituting a single palace of Bulgarian rulers²⁰. In this situation the questions should be: which of the two archaeologically attested sites Gregoras could have been thinking of? Was he at all aware that there had been representative buildings on both of the central hills of the Bulgarian capital? It is difficult to say anything certain on this matter, although by the

¹⁷ Vide LSJ, p. 309 (s.v. βασιλεία); E.A. SOPHOCLES, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (From B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)*, Cambridge 1914, p. 301 (s.v. βασιλείον); G.W.H. LAMPE, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1961, p. 292 (s.v. βασιλείος).

¹⁸ Cf. the passage from the historical work by John Kantakouzenos – *Ioannis Cantacuzeni eximperatoris historiarum libri IV*, I, 36, vol. I, ed. L. SCHOPEN, Bonn 1828, p. 175, 15–16: [... καὶ τὸν Τίρνοβον, ἐν ᾧ τὰ βασιλεία αὐτῶν ἐστὶ, παρέδοσαν καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρχήν.

¹⁹ *Царевград Търново*, vol. I, *История на проучванията, архитектура, надписи, монети, културни пластове преди изграждането на двореца*, ed. К. МИЯТЕВ, Д. АНГЕЛОВ, С. ГЕОРГИЕВА, Т. ГЕРАСИМОВ, София 1973; М. ДОЛМОВА-ЛУКАНОВСКА, *Дворецът в Търново – функции и репрезентативност*, [in:] *Великотърновският Университет „Св. св. Кирил и Методий“ и българската археология*, vol. I, ed. Б. БОРИСОВ, Велико Търново 2010, p. 599–608; 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 Каймакова*, ed. Г.Н. НИКОЛОВ, София 2013, p. 578, 585–586; Д. РАБОВЯНОВ, *Крепостта Трапезица в развитието на Търновград като столица на Второто българско царство*, [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. 384–385.

²⁰ This passage was similarly understood by Jan-Louis van Dieten – NIKERPHOROS GREGORAS, *Rhomäische Geschichte...*, p. 93. Cf. another proposal, indicating a number of palaces in the Bulgarian capital – *Nicephori Gregorae Historia byzantina*, trans. A. MILEV, comm. L. JONČEV, [in:] *FGHB*, vol. XI, ed. M. VOJNOV, V. TĀRKOVA-ZAIMOVA, L. JONČEV, Sofia 1983, p. 130.

time when Nikephoros was writing his work Tărnovo had acted as a capital for a long time, thus the knowledge about it may have been more common than we may now assume, and the historian, furthermore, as a member of the court of both Andronikos, may have had access to various state archives (including diplomatic correspondence), or to private libraries, such as the one that was left to him by his teacher, the Grand Logothete, Theodore Metochites²¹. It also cannot be ruled out that he simply obtained the knowledge about this centre from someone better versed on the subject. Of course, he drew knowledge on the topic of the Bulgarian capital from the historical works of his predecessors. It appears however that he was either unfamiliar with the details of the city's building layout, or knew that one of the palaces was the more important one and was the main residence of the tsars. One thing however is without a doubt – Gregoras' awareness that Tărnovo was the most important city in Bulgaria at the time, its seat of power. It was here that the throne of the Bulgarian rulers was located, it was this place that was referred to in the discussed above remarks about the inheritance of power after Michael II and its poor exercise by Mitso. Tărnovo was the sole appropriate place from which the legal authority over Bulgarians could be exercised. This was something that Constantine Tih was aware of – despite obtaining the support of the masses of the ordinary people as well as of the nobility, after accepting the power they offered him, he immediately began the siege of the capital, as it was there that the *palace complex of the Bulgarians* was located, without which he could not have become a truly rightful tsar. On the one hand, he had to remove from it the current ruler, and on the other, take up residence within himself. Indeed, Mitso, evidently staying in the capital with his family, was forced to abandon it and seek shelter first in Mesembria, and later with the Byzantine Emperor himself. His *career* as a tsar was over. What significance having Tărnovo had in exercising power over Bulgaria is shown by Gregoras' own conclusion who, after mentioning Mitso's escape and implied entry of Tih into the capital, related that after these events Tih became the ruler of the Bulgarian state (τῆς Βουλγαρικῆς ἀρχῆς ἐγκρατῆ)²². Thus taking control of Tărnovo was a *sine qua non* condition of ruling Bulgaria²³.

Secundo, I have mentioned earlier the customary system of inheritance of power in Bulgaria and/or of the throne in Tărnovo – its passing from father to son, or to another relative from the Assenid family²⁴. The case of transition of power

²¹ Cf. B. PAVLOVIĆ, *Nikephoros Gregoras...*, p. 224.

²² GREGORAS, *Historia*, III, 2, p. 61, 2–3; V, 3, p. 132, 6–15. On the subject of Constantine's rule *vide* И. БОЖИЛОВ, *Фамилията...*, p. 115–118 (no. I, 24); Й. АНДРЕЕВ, М. ЛАЛКОВ, *Българските ханове...*, p. 212–219; Й. АНДРЕЕВ, *Константин Тих-Асен*, [in:] ИДЕМ, И. ЛАЗАРОВ, П. ПАВЛОВ, *Кой кой е...*, p. 396–400.

²³ Cf. K. MARINOW, *Rola Tyrnowa w procesie legalizacji władzy bułgarskich uzurpatorów (XII–XIV w.)*, [in:] *Zamach stanu w dawnych społecznościach*, ed. A. SOŁTYSIAK, Warszawa 2004, p. 299–313.

²⁴ This principle is clearly confirmed by George Pachymeres – PACHYMERES, *Relationes historicas*, V, 5, p. 449, 20 – 451, 8.

into Mitso's hands was the first departure from this rule, which had been in place unchanged since the dawn of the so-called Second Bulgarian Tsardom (with the exception of an unknown, regarding a former Rus prince, and at the time the ban of Mačva, Rostislav Mikhailovich, the father-in-law of Michael II Assen, who having heard of his son-in-law's death went to the Bulgarian capital to take Anna, his daughter and Michael's widow from there; it is not known whether he may have temporarily taken power in the city)²⁵. Admittedly, the link with the ruling dynasty was preserved, as the new Tsar had married into the Assenid dynasty, however it cannot be ruled out that the discussed departure from the previous practice may have encouraged Constantine Tih, who was unrelated to the ruling house, to put forward his own candidacy to the throne. In this context Gregoras painted a truly Byzantine scenario of events, thoroughly reminiscent of the classic usurpation of power carried out by a provincial pretender (prior to the coronation Constantine was one of the more powerful magnates in the south-western Bulgaria) in the time before the fall of the Byzantine capital in 1204. Thus we have the *demos* (modelled after the people of Constantinople), the nobles, who most likely constitute his armed forces (modelled after the Byzantine army), among whom are the most eminent (similar to the Roman and Constantinopolitan senators), who together proclaim him the tsar before he actually takes the throne. Only the religious element is lacking, that is the coronation by the head of the Church in a patriarchal temple, however it may be that fulfilling this was among the goals of the expedition to the capital city. Constantine thus sets out to Tärnovo, like a Byzantine usurper would to Constantinople²⁶. Regardless of whether this vision was real or not, one thing is certain – in the light of the Byzantine's account, the Bulgarian people and nobles appear to have been the stewards of the throne in Tärnovo. Paradoxically, this would not have been the people from outside the capital, but those within, the inhabitants of Tärnovo, as Nikephoros' text does not specify whether the people and aristocracy were from the provinces (which to some extent the chronology of the events and the expedition to the capital would have suggested), or those from the capital, who came over to his side, encouraged the expedition to the capital and allowed him entry therein. It is worth stressing here that

²⁵ П. НИКОВ, *Българо-унгарски отношения...*, р. 64–81; Ъ. АНДРЕЕВ, *Ростислав Михайлович*, [in:] ИДЕМ, И. ЛАЗАРОВ, П. ПАВЛОВ, *Кой кой е...*, р. 580–582; Д. ПЕТРОВА, *Ростислав Михайлович (1229–1264): от Галички княз до „Imperator Bulgarorum”*, ВМд 9, 2018, р. 406–416.

²⁶ On the subject of usurpation in Byzantium *vide* Κ. ΜΠΟΥΡΔΑΡΑ, *Καθοσίωσις και Τυραννίς κατά τους Μέσους Βυζαντινούς χρόνους*, vol. I, *Μακεδονική δυναστεία (867–1056)*; vol. II, *1056–1081*, Αθήνα 1980–1981; W.E. ΚΑΕΓΙ, *Byzantine Military Unrest 471–843. An Interpretation*, Amsterdam 1981; J.-C. СHEΥNET, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, Paris 1990; D. OLSTER, *The Politics of Usurpation in the Seventh Century. Rhetoric and Revolution in Byzantium*, Amsterdam 1993; M.J. LESZKA, *Usurpacje w Cesarstwie Bizantyńskim w okresie od IV do połowy IX wieku*, Łódź 1999 [= BL, 4]; J. HALDON, N. PANOU, *Tyrranos basileus: Imperial Legitimacy and Usurpation in Early Byzantium*, [in:] *Evil Lords. Theories and Representations of Tyranny from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. N. PANOU, H. SCHADEE, Oxford 2018, р. 99–118.

the mention of the siege of the city evokes its naturally fortified layout on the so-called Tărnovo Hills, and evidences the existence of fortifications guarding the access to it, which during the discussed period would have been definitely encircling both of the central hills of the city, Tsarevets and Trapezitsa²⁷. To enter the capital one would therefore have to starve it out, take it by force, or be let inside by the defenders. In Tih's case, the third of these scenarios had played out. Most likely Mitso either lost the support of the capital's people and aristocracy and began fearing them, or having seen the enemy's army lost faith in the possibility of holding the throne and escaped. The outcome of either of these possibilities, and perhaps of their correlation, was most likely the opening of the city's gates and Constantine's coronation as the Bulgarian Tsar.

At that time the throne of Bulgaria was in theory elective, similarly to that of Byzantium, although the successive rulers made attempts, much like their southern counterparts, to ensure the continuity of succession within the family. In practice however, in the case of Tărnovo, there was an additional factor in the form of belonging to the famed, founding dynasty of the Assenids, whose members, by custom that was obvious to all, were recognised as *natural rulers*. Aware that due to his origins (ἀπὸ γένους) he had no right to Bulgarian rulership (τὴν Βουλγαρικὴν ἀρχήν) and not wanting to be considered and called an illegitimate ruler, Constantine turned to the Nicaean Emperor with a proposal to marry one of his daughters, which he knew was a niece of Michael II Assen (who was once again described in the text as the *archon of the Bulgarians* – ἄρχων τῶν Βουλγάρων). He desired the match for the sake of his honour (τιμῆς) and for the sake of strengthening his rule (τῆς ἀρχῆς)²⁸. In this way he was joining the ruling family, following into the footsteps of the overthrown Mitso. To accomplish this he was prepared to dissolve his existing marriage with a woman who bore him children. He also promised the Emperor that he will be his friend and ally. This was undoubtedly intended to secure him peaceful relations with Nicaea, as well as to neutralise the possible influence of his recent rival, who found shelter in the empire and gained the favour of its ruler. Apparently he also counted on possible military support from the Byzantines, should the need arise – it was no accident that he was declaring himself to be a σύμμαχος of the Nicaean ruler. The Emperor agreed to this solution, and so Constantine divorced, married Theodora, and sent his first wife to Nicaea, as a guarantee of his love for the second spouse²⁹ and of his loyalty towards her father. Significantly, Gregoras emphasised that the new Bulgarian Tsar made the Byzantine princess his companion/collaborator (κοινωνόν) in ruling (τῆς ἀρχῆς)³⁰,

²⁷ On the subject of the city's system of fortifications in general *vide* A. Попов, *Крепостната система на средновековната столица Търновград*, BC 48.4, 1979, p. 124–143, although in certain aspects this work is now somewhat obsolete.

²⁸ GREGORAS, *Historia*, III, 2, p. 61, 2–12.

²⁹ GREGORAS, *Historia*, III, 2, p. 60, 19 – 61, 17; III, 3, p. 63, 6–9; IV, 6, p. 99, 21–22; V, 3, p. 130, 20–22.

³⁰ GREGORAS, *Historia*, III, 2, p. 61, 14–15.

which may have resulted from a wish to emphasise his relationship with the Asseuids, to please Laskaris, or to point out the significance of having a Byzantine on Tärnovo's throne. He clearly considered the marriage with her to have been ennobling for him. The four remarks discussed above regarding the Bulgarian rulership which appeared in this part of Nikephoros' narrative are once again semantically linked with Tärnovo as a place from which the power was exercised.

It is also worth noting the way in which the Byzantine writer made use of the characterological comparison of Mitso and Constantine Tih, in connection with their predispositions to exercise power. Sloth, fearfulness and indecision contributed to the downfall of the former; while common sense and physical prowess advanced the latter's elevation. We thus have a confrontation of weakness and incapability with strength and decisiveness. Constantine therefore displayed two of several of the basic qualities required of a ruler – sober thinking, necessary to manage the state, and bodily fitness, which is a reference to military virtues. From Gregoras' account it follows that he was also marked by a sense of responsibility and civil courage, as having seen that Mitso's rule was bad, he acted against the ruler to overthrow him. He must have also been characterised by self-confidence and trust in his own ability to lead, since he decided to take the power for himself in order to enact changes for the better. Unlike Mitso, he was also able to bring to his side both the people, gaining support of the masses, as well as that of the Bulgarian nobles. One might say he was the right man at the right time. From the polyhistor's tale it follows that in Tärnovo attention was paid to these expected qualities of a good ruler, and possessing them ensured stable rule and support of the subject.

The discussed remark makes one realise that the Byzantines were interested in the turmoil surrounding the reigns and changes on the throne of the neighbouring countries, in this particular case, of Bulgaria. It was obvious that this event may have had a significant impact on the Byzantine-Bulgarian relations. This was especially so here, where through an appropriate marriage there was a possibility of tangibly influencing the policy of the Bulgarian court. Most importantly, the marriage was a guarantee of a peaceful co-existence of both countries.

Tärnovo appears in Gregoras' work for the third time in the context of political games of the supporters of the two conflicting Byzantine Emperors, Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282–1328) and his grandson Andronikos III (1328–1341), who started a civil war within the empire in the years 1321–1328³¹. Aware that the young Emperor's grandfather was in an alliance with the King of Serbia, Stephen

³¹ On the subject of these events cf. G. OSTROGORSKY, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Staates*, München 1963, p. 412–414; U.V. BOSCH, *Kaiser Andronikos III. Palaiologos. Versuch einer Darstellung der byzantinischen Geschichte in den Jahren 1321–1341*, Amsterdam 1965, p. 7–52; J.V.A. FINE, JR., *The Late Medieval Balkans. A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, Ann Arbor 1987, p. 250–252; D.M. NICOL, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*,²Cambridge 1993, p. 151–166.

Uroš III Dečanski (1322–1331), which was strengthened by the marriage of the latter with the daughter of Caesar John Komnenos Palaiologos, the governor of Thessalonica and a supporter of the old Emperor, and worried that the King could thwart his plans, the young Andronikos proposed an alliance to Michael III Shishman Assen (1323–1330), who was the Tsar of Bulgaria at the time³². The pretext for this move was the marriage between the latter and the sister of Andronikos III, whom he found as a widow staying in Tărnovo (ἐν τῷ Τερνέβῳ χηρεύουσαν εὐρηκῶς εἰς γάμου κοινωνίαν ἠγάγετο). This took place when, following the death of his predecessor, Tsar Theodore Svetoslav (1299/1300–1322), Michael became the lord of the rulership of Bulgarians (ἐγκρατῆ γὰρ τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν Βουλγάρων; a little earlier, the author related that he received the rulership over Bulgarians – διαδεξάμενον τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν... Βουλγάρων) and at first desired a more prestigious marriage (καὶ πρὸς εὐγενεστέρους εὐθὺς ἀποβλέψαι γάμους συνεπεπτόκει), for this reason abandoning his first wife, the sister of the king of Serbia, with whom he had children³³. It clearly follows from the text that Theodore Svetoslav and his wife, as the Tsar and his spouse, lived in the capital city of Tărnovo. Thus it was there that, after the death of the previous Tsar, she was found, most likely residing in the palace of the Bulgarian rulers, by Michael Shishman³⁴. He himself had to arrive to the city from the outside to take the power over Bulgarians, which is mentioned twice by Gregoras. The association is once again unequivocal – to rule Bulgaria one had to take dominion in the capital city and make oneself at home in the palace buildings therein. Similarly, a marriage to the dowager tsarina strengthened and legitimised the new ruler's position. It also appears that an additional impetus for the marriage was the prestige of relationship with a sister of a Byzantine Emperor, the relationship which Michael valued higher than the existing relationship with the Serbian court. It does seem that in general the contemporary candidates to the throne in Tărnovo eagerly sought associations with the court in Constantinople, as it not only legitimised their position on the international arena and boosted their prestige, but could have also secured tangible support in the event of a threat of losing the crown. As a last resort, it also made it easier to seek refuge with the emperor. Undoubtedly, it could also provide some guarantee, albeit an unreliable

³² On the subject of this ruler *vide* A. БУРМОВ, *История на България през времето на Шишимановци (1323–1396 г.)*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Избрани произведения в три тома*, vol. I, ed. Ж. НАТАН, И. УНДЖИЕВ, П. ПЕТРОВ, София 1968, p. 222–264; И. БОЖИЛОВ, *Фамилията...*, p. 119–134 (no. I, 26); Ъ. АНДРЕЕВ, М. ЛАЛКОВ, *Българските ханове...*, p. 255–265; Ъ. АНДРЕЕВ, *Михаил III Шишман*, [in:] ИДЕМ, И. ЛАЗАРОВ, П. ПАВЛОВ, *Кой кой е...*, p. 484–492.

³³ GREGORAS, *Historia*, IX, 1, p. 390, 1 – 391, 7; IX, 12, p. 454, 7–11.

³⁴ The fate of Theodora, for this was the name of Andronikos III's sister, is followed by F. DÖLGER, *Einiges über Theodora, die Griechin, die Zarin der Bulgaren (1308–1330)*, [in:] *Paraspora: 30 Aufsätze zur Geschichte, Kultur und Sprache des byzantinischen Reiches*, ed. ИДЕМ, H.-G. BECK, Ettal 1961, p. 222–230.

one, of peaceful relations between the two neighbouring states. This is the image emerging from Gregoras' narrative. It should be emphasised however that the chronology of the events in the Byzantine's work has been disturbed, as he did not know of the direct successor of Theodore Svetoslav, the latter's son, Tsar George II Terter (1322–1323)³⁵. It is also noted that as a scion of the famed Assenid dynasty Michael II did not have to *additionally* legitimise his right to the throne, especially since the marriage with Andronikos III's sister took place in 1324, and so only sometime after he took power, in connection with the reorientation in the foreign policy, he attempted to counter a possible threat from the Byzantium and entered into an agreement with the younger Byzantine Emperor. One further advantage would have been marrying someone who was hypothetically a potential heir to the Constantinopolitan throne³⁶. Regardless of the validity of these remarks, it should be noted that none of this negated the prestige of marrying a representative of the Byzantine ruling house. In addition, even though he was an Assenid, Michael had to take into account the fact of the long absence of representatives of this family on the Bulgarian throne, and first and foremost the memory of the effective rule of the last two Terters³⁷. In this situation a marriage with the dowager tsarina could have further strengthened his position in the capital, even if in his case this was not the primary or indispensable advantage. Either way, the noted lapses in Gregoras' text do not affect the image of the capital city of the Bulgarians emerging from his narrative.

As Nikephoros informed, Michael and his new wife, on the invitation of the Emperor and empress-mother, embarked on a journey to Didymoteichon³⁸. They undoubtedly departed from Tărnovo. The alliance with Byzantium became a fact – Shishman has committed to supporting Andronikos II in fighting his grandfather, and the Emperor to assisting Michael in the fight against the Serbian king (the aforementioned *συμμαχία*). After spending many days at the imperial court and discussing details of the agreement, the Tsar and his wife returned to Bulgaria. Specifically, as Gregoras phrased it, *Michael with his spouse once again returned to his dominion* (ὁ Μιχαήλολος μετὰ τῆς συζύγου ἐς τὴν οἰκείαν αὐθις ἀπήει ἀρχήν)³⁹.

³⁵ The dates of deaths of Theodore Svetoslav and George II Terter have been established by Л. ЙОНЧЕВ, *О некоторых вопросах болгарско-византийских отношений в периоде с 1322 по 1324 гг.*, ЕНІ 10, 1980, p. 127–128, 130.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 136–137; И. БОЖИЛОВ, *Фамилията...*, p. 128–129 (no. I, 26).

³⁷ A characterisation of their reigns: Й. АНДРЕЕВ, М. ЛАЛКОВ, *Българските ханове...*, p. 245–254; К. КРЪСТЕВ, *Българското царство при династията на Тертеревци (1280–1323)*, Пловдив 2011, p. 13–206 (information on them is scattered); Й. АНДРЕЕВ, *Георги II Тертер*, [in:] ИДЕМ, И. ЛАЗАРОВ, П. ПАВЛОВ, *Кой кой е...*, p. 147–148; ИДЕМ, *Теодор Светослав*, [in:] ИДЕМ, И. ЛАЗАРОВ, П. ПАВЛОВ, *Кой кой е...*, p. 646–651; И. БОЖИЛОВ, *История на Средновековна България*, vol. II, *Християнска България*, [s. l.] 2017, p. 420–437, 441–444.

³⁸ GREGORAS, *Historia*, IX, 1, p. 391, 7–22.

³⁹ GREGORAS, *Historia*, IX, 1, p. 391, 22 – 392, 4.

Undoubtedly the main place from which he exercised this dominion over his own, native country was the Bulgarian capital. The entire remark therefore portrays Tărnovo as a default place of permanent residence, inhabited by the tsar and his spouse, the most important seat of the Bulgarian rulers. The place to which envoys from other countries arrived (e.g. with an invitation to Didymoteichon), and from which the rulers departed and to which they returned after a journey.

For the fourth and final time the name of the Bulgarian capital city was mentioned in the context of the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflict regarding the strategically key strongholds located in the eastern and central part of the Haimos Mountains, or directly at their southern foreland⁴⁰. According to Nikephoros' account, when diplomacy failed, John Alexander I (1331–1371), who was at the time the Bulgarian Tsar, gathered his army of 8000 men-at-arms, to which he added 2000 mercenary Scythians (here: Tartars). He then departed from Tărnovo (ἄραç οὐὐν ἐκ Τερνόβου) and on the fifth day arrived at and set up camp in the vicinity of the Rusokastro stronghold⁴¹. In this passage the Bulgarian capital was presented as a meeting point, a place of concentration for the Bulgarian army before it set off on a military expedition. Undoubtedly this was because the city served as a permanent residence of its commander-in-chief. It appears therefore that also in other instances when a tsar departed on military expeditions, of which Gregoras makes mentions, the armed forces gathered in Tărnovo as well, even though the city's name did not explicitly appear in the Byzantine polyhistor's text⁴². It was also here that the ruler or military units he had detached for a particular purpose, returned after the campaign was over⁴³.

Indirectly, as on those occasions the city's name was also not stated, a number of other remarks on Bulgarian matters should be associated with the capital. These relate to sending of envoys by the tsars to other countries, or to the aforementioned audiences of foreign envoys at the Bulgarian court⁴⁴. There are also

⁴⁰ On this subject vide Л. ЙОНЧЕВ, *Българо-византийски отношения около средата на XIV век (1331–1344 г.)*, ИП 12.3, 1956, p. 63–66; Д. АНГЕЛОВ, *Българо-византийските отношения през периода 1331–1341 г. от царуването на Иван-Александър*, ВС 42.1, 1973, p. 37–49; Л. ЙОНЧЕВ, *Некоторые вопросы истории Болгарии и ее отношений с Сербией и Византией в XIV веке (1330–1332)*, ЕНІ 9, 1979, p. 26–33; Д. АНГЕЛОВ, Б. ЧОЛПАНОВ, *Българска военна история от втората четвърт на X до втората половина на XV в.*, София 1989, p. 139–143; И. БОЖИЛОВ, *История...*, p. 471.

⁴¹ GREGORAS, *Historia*, X, 4, p. 483, 21 – 484, 23.

⁴² GREGORAS, *Historia*, I, 2, p. 14, 23 – 15, 6; II, 2, p. 27, 20–23; II, 3, p. 28, 9–15; III, 1, p. 55, 23 – 56, 2; IV, 6, p. 100, 9–12; V, 3, p. 130, 22 – 131, 11. 14–17; V, 3, p. 132, 15–18; IX, 5, p. 415, 13 – 416, 6; IX, 5, p. 418, 4–13; IX, 8, p. 430, 4–10; IX, 12, p. 454, 14–18; IX, 12, p. 455, 25 – 456, 2; IX, 13, p. 458, 3–8.

⁴³ This most was most likely the case in regard to all of the expeditions which departed from the capital, but see specific remarks – GREGORAS, *Historia*, IX, 5, p. 419, 5–10; IX, 8, p. 431, 7–9; IX, 12, p. 455, 7–11; IX, 13, p. 458, 8–12.

⁴⁴ GREGORAS, *Historia*, II, 3, p. 29, 15–24; III, 2, p. 56, 13 – 57, 7; IV, 6, p. 99, 21 – 100, 8; IX, 1, p. 390, 8–11; IX, 5, p. 411, 15–20; IX, 12, p. 454, 11–14; X, 4, p. 484, 6–13; XII, 12, p. 616, 2–6; XV, 11, p. 787, 2–8.

mentions of marriages between members of the dynasties ruling in Tǎrnovo with representatives of other ruling families from the neighbouring countries – both of sending own daughters to foreign courts, as well as receiving representatives of other nations in the Bulgarian capital. It was similar in the case of the marriage with the dowager tsarina, a member of a dynasty, or another woman⁴⁵. Undoubtedly at least in some of these cases the marriage ceremony and nuptial festivities of the tsar and his spouse or heirs to the throne would have taken place in Tǎrnovo. Similarly these indirect references were made in regard to journeys by the Bulgarian ruler to meet the Byzantine emperor⁴⁶, escape or banishment of representatives of the ruling dynasty from the capital (including sending away of former spouses abroad or receiving members of own family sent back from a foreign court)⁴⁷, and more broadly with the internal conflicts for the Bulgarian throne⁴⁸ or expeditions of the Byzantine armies to the capital of Bulgaria⁴⁹. Tǎrnovo should also be most often associated with information about the deaths of the members of the ruling dynasty⁵⁰. Even if they met their deaths outside of the city, the funeral ceremonies and the burial itself usually took place in the capital city. Without a doubt, even though in the aforementioned cases Gregoras did not mention the Bulgarian capital by name, he must have had full knowledge that the events he was describing were directly linked with it.

In the discussed passages we find the name of the capital given three times in the version Τέρνοβος⁵¹. Only in one we find the alternate variant Τέρνεβος⁵², in which there most clearly has been a typo. To sum up the above considerations – the political games of the contemporary Bulgaria took place in the city, around the city and for the city.

Summary

Four direct mentions in the text. Is this too little? Not necessarily so. Comparisons with other cities which appear in Gregoras' narrative in the context of the Byzantine-Bulgarian relations, even those such as e.g. Mesembria (4 mentions)⁵³,

⁴⁵ GREGORAS, *Historia*, II, 3, p. 29, 15 – 30, 3; V, 3, p. 130, 16–20; V, 3, p. 131, 12–14; V, 3, p. 133, 1–7; VI, 9, p. 203, 4–11; VIII, 1, p. 283, 5–11; XI, 7, p. 546, 16–21; XXXVII, 51, p. 557, 15–19; XXXVII, 51, p. 557, 23 – 558, 4; XXXVII, 51, p. 558, 4–7.

⁴⁶ GREGORAS, *Historia*, II, 3, p. 29, 24 – 30, 3; V, 3, p. 133, 12–14; XI, 7, p. 546, 16–21.

⁴⁷ GREGORAS, *Historia*, V, 3, p. 132, 19–22; V, 3, p. 133, 12–17; VI, 9, p. 203, 4–6; IX, 1, p. 390, 8 – 391, 5; IX, 12, p. 454, 7–11; IX, 13, p. 457, 16–19; XXXVII, 51, p. 557, 19–23; XXXVII, 51, p. 558, 4–7.

⁴⁸ GREGORAS, *Historia*, V, 3, p. 130, 22 – 133, 18; IX, 13, p. 457, 16–23; IX, 13, p. 458, 3–8.

⁴⁹ GREGORAS, *Historia*, V, 3, p. 132, 6–19.

⁵⁰ GREGORAS, *Historia*, III, 2, p. 60, 4–6; III, 2, p. 61, 9–11; VIII, 6, p. 318, 18–20; IX, 1, p. 390, 8–11.

⁵¹ GREGORAS, *Historia*, II, 3, p. 30, 3–4; III, 2, p. 60, 19; X, 4, p. 484, 22.

⁵² GREGORAS, *Historia*, IX, 1, p. 391, 6.

⁵³ GREGORAS, *Historia*, III, 2, p. 60, 21. 23; IX, 13, p. 457, 24; X, 4, p. 487, 22.

Anchialos (1 mention)⁵⁴, Sozopolis (1 mention)⁵⁵ or Vize (4 mentions)⁵⁶ which lay in the immediate orbit of the imperial interests, as they had a centuries-old tradition of belonging to the empire, do not appear in the text more often. Of course, he likely was thinking about these cities when he informed collectively of Thracian strongholds and *poleis*. What is interesting, Philippopolis itself, the largest *polis* of Northern Thrace, does not appear in Gregoras' text at all. The same is true of Thracian Beroe, another important city. Obviously Adrianople (also in the version Orestias)⁵⁷ appears many times in the text, but this was a result of the strategic significance of this Byzantine city for the empire, both in the military and economic context⁵⁸. We get interesting results by comparing the number of mentions of the Bulgarian capital with the Serbian capital cities of the late thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century. Thus, in Gregoras' text Skopje appears three times⁵⁹, Serres seven times⁶⁰, while Prizren does not appear at all. Considered separately, beside Serres, these cities have not appeared more frequently than Tărnovo. Taken together, they exceed the Bulgarian capital in this regard. Undoubtedly this may, to some extent, attest to Gregoras' greater interest in Serbian affairs, which resulted not only from the intensity of the Byzantine policy in this direction, dictated by the growing since the later thirteenth century might of the Nemanjić dynasty, which reached its apogee in the mid-fourteenth century⁶¹. Additionally, Nikephoros had the opportunity to traverse part of the northern Macedonia and visit Skopje, where he participated in the delegation to the Serbian king in 1327⁶², which undoubtedly increased his interest in this area. To sum up – even against this background the number of mentions of Tărnovo in the historical work of Gregoras does not pale in comparison.

⁵⁴ GREGORAS, *Historia*, X, 4, p. 487, 21.

⁵⁵ GREGORAS, *Historia*, XXVI, 16, p. 83, 21.

⁵⁶ GREGORAS, *Historia*, VII, 10, p. 265, 16; XXIX, 38, p. 249, 8; XXXVI, 18, p. 510, 16.

⁵⁷ GREGORAS, *Historia*, I, 2, p. 15, 9; VII, 3, p. 224, 4; VIII, 4, p. 302, 8; VIII, 6, p. 315, 22–23; VIII, 6, p. 319, 22; VIII, 6, p. 320, 22; VIII, 11, p. 359, 23; IX, 8, p. 430, 7; IX, 13, p. 458, 8; XI, 7, p. 546, 16; XII, 14, p. 620, 22; XII, 14, p. 621, 4, 6; XV, 5, p. 762, 11; XVI, 1, p. 797, 9; XVI, 2, p. 798, 19; XVI, 3, p. 805, 9, 13, 15; XVI, 7, p. 839, 20; XXVI, 31, p. 99, 1; XXVII, 22, p. 141, 11; XXVII, 29, p. 150, 14; XXVII, 2, p. 152, 18; XXVII, 32, p. 153, 17; XXVIII, 2, p. 178, 9.

⁵⁸ Cf. K. MARINOW, *Armed Forces and the Defence System of Peter's State*, [in:] *The Bulgarian State in 927–969. The Epoch of Tsar Peter I*, ed. M.J. LESZKA, K. MARINOW, Łódź 2018 [= BL, 34], p. 276.

⁵⁹ GREGORAS, *Historia*, VI, 14, p. 380, 13; XIII, 2, p. 639, 5; XV, 1, p. 747, 8.

⁶⁰ GREGORAS, *Historia*, VIII, 1, p. 288, 7; VIII, 14, p. 374, 6; IX, 4, p. 410, 17; XII, 15, p. 623, 4; XIII, 3, p. 647, 9–10; XIII, 5, p. 653, 12; XV, 1, p. 746, 14.

⁶¹ On this subject vide G.Ch. SOULIS, *The Serbs and Byzantium during the Reign of Tsar Stephen Dušan (1331–1355) and his Successors*, Washington D.C. 1984, p. 1–85; J.V.A. FINE, Jr., *The Late Medieval Balkans...*, p. 217–224, 255–268, 270–275, 286–291, 296–307, 309–325, 334–337; S.M. ĆIRKOVIĆ, *The Serbs*, trans. V. Tošić, Malden–Oxford–Carlton 2004, p. 49–74.

⁶² GREGORAS, *Historia*, VIII, 14, p. 373, 14 – 381, 1; P. SCHREINER, *Die Gesandtschaftsreise des Nikephoros Gregoras nach Serbien (1326/1327)*, 3PBI 38, 1999/2000, p. 331–341; E. MALAMUT, *Le voyage en Serbie de Nicéphore Grégoras (1327)*, [in:] *Le voyage au Moyen Âge. Description du monde et quête individuelle*, ed. D. COULON, Ch. GADRAT-OUERFELLI, Aix-en-Provence 2014, p. 65–77.

It needs to be emphasised that Tărnovo is the only city in the northern Bulgaria, specifically in the area between the valley of Danube and the Haimos massif, which was directly named by the Byzantine (not appearing as might have been expected – Varna, Dristra, Cherven, Lovets, Bdin or Preslav). Against this background four direct mentions of Tărnovo and a much larger number of indirect ones (but obviously relating to it), increase the significance of the Bulgarian capital rather than diminish it. Of course the frequency with which the name of the city appeared depended on Nikephoros' interest in Bulgarian matters, and this most often occurred when they were in one way or another tied with Byzantine history, most often in military or diplomatic context. Tărnovo therefore entered into the scope of his observations when it had a direct relation to the empire's interests. An analysis of all of the remarks leads to the conclusion that the city's status was entirely obvious to the Byzantine historian – it was the main, capital city of the Bulgarian state, in which its rulers permanently resided, without which one could not be a fully legitimate tsar of the Bulgarians and exercise real power over the northern neighbours of Byzantium. It therefore played an analogous role for the Bulgarians as the capital on the Bosphorus for the Byzantines. At least from the formal point of view, as the capital city. For Gregoras himself, and likely for the Byzantine political and intellectual elites, it was simply the central city of the neighbouring country, in which its rulers resided and where the most important state decisions were made; the place in which one could as a rule, or most often, find the tsar of Bulgaria, to whom various Byzantine legations were sent.

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