



# Tirnovο (since 1965 “Veliko Tǎrnovo”) From Medieval Bulgarian capital to Turkish Islamic Cultural Centre A general overview

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## ABSTRACT

Veliko Tǎrnovo, the former historical city of Tirnovο, today is the capital of a province (Okrǎg) in N.E. Bulgaria. Tirnovο is located on the Yantra River and is famously known as the historical capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire. The subject matter research is exploring the history, art and architecture of Tirnovο through ages; and specifically during the Ottoman times (1393-1878), when became an Islamic cultural centre.

Tirnovο grew quickly, between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, to become the strongest Bulgarian fortification of the Middle Ages, and the most important political, economic, cultural and religious centre of the Second Bulgarian Empire. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as the Byzantine Empire weakened, Tirnovο claimed to be the “Third Rome”, based on its influential cultural aspect in Eastern Europe.

This paper discusses the development of population, architecture and cultural of Tirnovο in Ottoman times. It was a flourished centre of Islamic culture, with considerable examples of almost all known types of ottoman buildings.

## المخلص

مدينة تيرنوفو "فيليكو ترنوفو": من عاصمة بلغارية في العصور الوسطى إلى مركز للثقافة الإسلامية التركية

تناقش هذه الورقة البحثية تحول مدينة تيرنوفو "فيليكو ترنوفو" من عاصمة بلغارية فترة العصور الوسطى إلى مركز للثقافة الإسلامية التركية تحت الحكم العثماني (1393-1878م). مدينة تيرنوفو تقع في شمال شرق بلغاريا، على نهر يانتر، وهي اليوم عاصمة إقليم أوكراغ. كانت تيرنوفو العاصمة التاريخية للإمبراطورية البلغارية الثانية؛ مما جعلها مركزا ثقافيا ومعماريا وفنيا مهما خاصة لعامة الأديرة والكنائس وفن التصاوير الجدارية في الفترة من القرن الثاني عشر وحتى القرن الرابع عشر. وترصد هذه الورقة تحول تيرنوفو من عاصمة بلغارية لمركز ثقافي عثماني بهوية وصيغة إسلامية من خلال الوثائق والآثار. وهو ما انعكس على أعداد السكان وفناتهم، والعمائر والفنون بالمدينة. فقد ازدهرت مدينة تيرنوفو إبان العصر العثماني؛ وكانت تحوي تقريبا جميع أنماط العمائر العثمانية المعروفة مثل الجوامع والمساجد والمدارس والمكتبات والخانات والحمامات ... إلخ.

## KEYWORDS

Tirnovο – Veliko Tǎrnovo – Bulgaria – Ottoman – Turkish – Balkan – Islamic.

## الكلمات الدالة

تيرنوفو – فيليكو ترنوفو – بلغاريا – عثماني – تركي – إسلامي – البلقان

## INTRODUCTION

The city of Tirnovο of today is the capital of a province (Okrǎg) in N.E. Bulgaria which in 2011 had 68.783 inhabitants. The city is situated on the northern slopes of the Balkan Mountains on rocky terrasses formed by a double loop of the capricious river Yantra. Its spectacular setting makes Tirnovο the most romantic and picturesque towns of all Bulgaria.

Tirnovο has silk, cotton and leather industry and produces much food stuffs and electro-technical equipment. It has several institutions for higher learning, a Historical-Archaeological Museum, and since 1962 a University. In Ottoman times (1393-1878), it was the centre of a vast kadılık in the sandjak of Niğbolu, a district which population was fifty-fifty Bulgarian and Turkish. In the 17th and 18th centuries the town itself had a predominant Muslim-Turkish population. With five medreses in the year 1660 and nine in 1790, it ranked among the most prominent centers of Islamic learning in the Balkans.



Plan of the medieval city of Tärnovο, drawn by the Škorpil brothers ca. 1900

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Tirnovο was made capital of a sandjak in the Eyalet of Silistra. In the local literature about Tirnovο of the second half of the 20th century the pre-Ottoman town was on paper magnified beyond any reality, with the total exclusion of the Ottoman period, transforming it into a "holy place" for an over-exalted Bulgarian nationalism. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century scores of "medieval" buildings were erected on the historic site

of the Tsarevets Plateau, a kind of Disney land, based on sheer conjecture. It is to this quasi obliterated half of a millennium of history that will be the focus of this overview.

## TIRNOVO'S HISTORY THROUGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCES

The Roman and early Byzantine predecessor of Tirnovo disappeared at beginning of the 7th century as result of the destructive Avaro-Slavic invasions that levelled the entire Roman and Early Christian culture in Bulgaria and its architectural legacy. Early Byzantine coins, found during extensive excavations since 1946, stopped after Emperor Herakleius (610-641). In the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries a small and humble Early-Bulgarian settlement, a group of hovels, existed on the ruins of the Early Byzantine town. Full life and a monetary culture returned more than 400 years after the destructions of the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, as is testified by a large number of Byzantine coins beginning with Alexius Comnenos (1080-1118) and continuing in the period of the Second Bulgarian Empire, with coins of the Tsars Todor Svetoslav (1300-1321), Michael Šišman (1323-1330), Ivan Aleksandar (1331-1371) and Ivan Šišman (1371-1393). Next to them came many foreign coins, from the Latin Kingdom of Constantinople, the Byzantine successor states of Nicaea and of Epirus, the merchant Republics of Venice and Dubrovnik (Ragusa), and the Golden Horde in today' southern Russia, showing Tärnovo's commercial network in the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

In the Middle Ages Tirnovo was the capital of the medieval "Second Bulgarian Empire" (Tsarsvo), a great name for a micro-state with a very violent history. Tirnovo as town appeared in the 11th century as a "*Fluchtstadt*," a refuge, on all sides surrounded by steep and unassailable cliffs formed by the river Yantra. With the palace of the Bulgarian Tsars and the main seat of the Patriarch of the Bulgarian Church and the residences of the leading nobles, it was by far the largest town of Bulgaria and a leading cultural center with a flourishing literary school.<sup>2</sup> In the existing literature from before 1991 Tirnovo has been magnified to one of the largest cities of Europe. Yet, if we compare Tirnovo with other cities in medieval Europe (which was never done in Bulgaria) and take a look on maps of Cologne, Ghent, Brugge, Florence, Novgorod, Paris, Pskov, etc. or look at maps of Konya, Kayseri or Sivas in Selçuk Anatolia, it immediately shows that in fact it was by far the smallest of all. If we take together the three parts of medieval Tärnovo (Tsarevets, Trapezitsa and the New Town on a narrow strip of land along the river) it can be seen that the build-up surface measured 22-23 hectare. Using the well-known demographic formula of 120 – 150 inhabitants per hectare<sup>3</sup> this gives a total populating ranging between 2.800 – 3.400 inhabitants. On Tsarevets hill was much unused space. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century the city of Cologne within the late 12<sup>th</sup> century walls (of which large stretches remain preserved, including the proud town gates) covered 403 hectare. Fourteenth century Florence and Bologna were even bigger. Medieval Cologne or Novgorod in Northern Russia had 45.000 inhabitants, Florence and Bologna up to 60.000!). This brings medieval Tirnovo back to its real size.

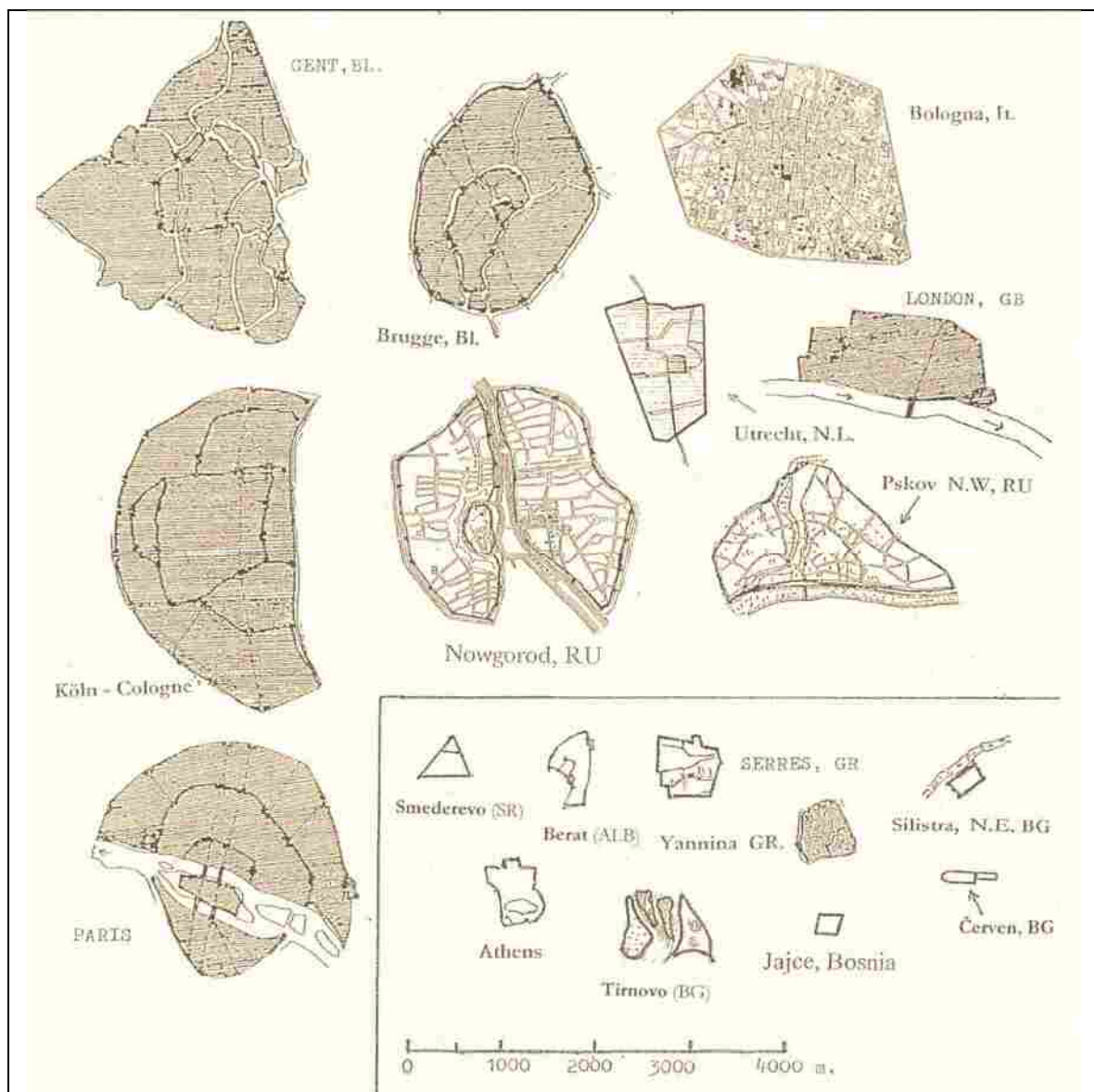
A different tool to see medieval Tirnovo in its true size is to compare a number of well-known and representative Bulgarian churches from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, foundations of the rulers, the Bulgarian Tsars and the top of the ruling class, or rich merchants from the Black Sea ports, with some 12<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> centuries village churches in the northern (traditionally backward) Dutch provinces of Groningen and Friesland the real size

<sup>1</sup> - Dočev, *Moneti i obrăștenie v Tärnovo*.

<sup>2</sup> - Bosilkov, *Tärnovo*, xxx.

<sup>3</sup> - Mols, *Introduction a la Démographie* ; Russel, "Die Bevölkerung Europas ...", pp. 9-57

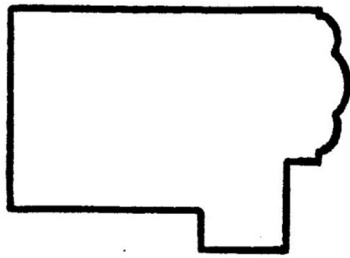
of Tirnovo becomes clear immediately. Yet this was never done. The same comparison, but with less examples can be done with comparing the size and complexity of the Ottoman provincial *hamams* with two rare examples of medieval, Bulgarian *hamams* in Tirnovo. For the churches we can give the following examples, including buildings made by the famous Tsars of the Second Empire, Kaloyan (1197-1207) and Ivan Asen II (1218-1241), as well as three Episcopal churches. Plans and descriptions of these buildings were taken of two standard works, Krăstju Mijatev 1974 and Djurdje Bošković, 1967.<sup>4</sup> The 14 medieval Bulgarian churches measured together 192,<sup>27</sup> meter in length. This gives an average length of 13,<sup>76</sup> m. The 14 village churches in Friesland and Groningen measured together 526 m. giving an average length of 37,<sup>57</sup> m. In other words the village churches in the north of the Netherlands were three times bigger than those in medieval Bulgaria.<sup>5</sup>



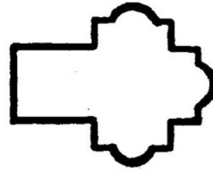
Some 14<sup>th</sup> century cities in Western and Northern Europe compared with some Byzantine-Slavic towns in the Balkans. **All in the same scale.**

<sup>4</sup> - Bošković, *Arhitektura Srednjeg Veka* ; Mijatev, *Die Mittelalterliche Baukunst*, pp. 124-144.

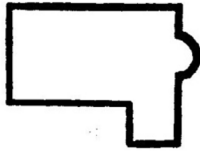
<sup>5</sup> - For plans and succinct descriptions of the village churches of the Dutch province of Groningen mentioned here see: Ozinga, *Kunstreisboek voor Nederland*, pp. 79-115. For the churches of Friesland see: Berg, "Friesland", pp. 5-78.



Tarnovo, Patriarch's cathedral of the Assumption of Christ (26.50 × 16.30 m)



Krupnik, Cathedral (16.30 × 12.75 m)



Tarnovo, Peter's and Paul's Cathedral (14.60 × 7.80 m)



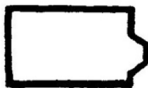
Tarnovo, Trapezitsa, the 'Double Church' (24 × 13.80 m)



Tarnovo, coronation church of St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki (15.75 × 8.20 m)



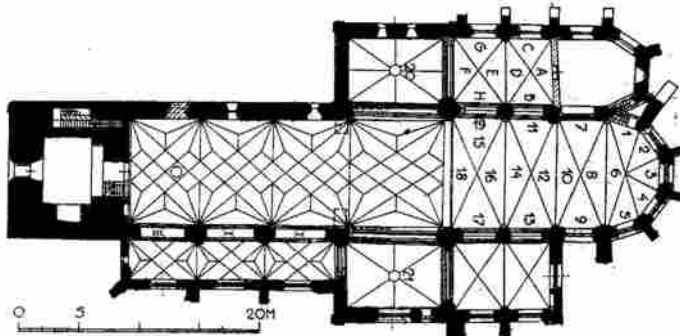
Princely church of Dolna Kamenitsa (8.60 × 6.60 m)



Nikopol, church of Peter and Paul (10.80 × 6.30 m)



Červen, Church N° 2 (18.80 × 9.80 m)



Eight representative examples of Medieval, (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> cent.), Bulgarian churches compared with the village church of Loppersum in the Dutch province of Groningen (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> cent.)

**All in the same scale.**

In medieval Serbia, with a more elaborated architecture, the situation was almost the same as in Bulgaria. The village church of Loppersum in the province of Groningen the church was 56 m. long. The church of the Episcopal residence, the monastery of žiča, by far the largest medieval church in Serbia, did not get beyond 46 m. including the tower.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> - Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans*.

For the *hamams* we have less material at hand. There are plenty of great and very great 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Ottoman *hamams* still preserved in cities like Skopje or Thessaloniki or Plovdiv/Filibe. In Tirnovo the terribly neglected *hamam* of Firuz Bey is still standing. Tirnovo is also the place where three very rare medieval hamams have been found during excavations and have been well published.<sup>7</sup> A comparison of the three medieval Bulgarian *hamams* and the Ottoman examples in Plovdiv, Skopje, Thessaloniki or Sarajevo shows that the Ottoman examples were four or five times bigger and endlessly more sophisticated than the Tirnovo examples.

In the winter of 1389 Tirnovo surrendered to the Ottoman forces under Grand Vizier Djandarlı Ali Pasha without any struggle, the inhabitants bringing the keys of the town themselves to the Ottoman camp, as they had done in almost all castles and towns of Danubian Bulgaria, as related by Mevlana Neşrî (Neşrî, Unat, Köymen). After a short occupation and after its Tsar Ivan Šišman had again sworn allegiance to ruler, Murad I, Tirnovo was given back to the Bulgarians. Ivan Šišman was a son-in-law of the Sultan, which must be one of the reasons why Murad behaved so accommodating. The Šišmanid dynasty, it should be added, was of Kuman/Qıpçak Turkish origin which made it possible that the Tsar and the Sultan could directly communicate. In 1393, however, when Tsar Šišman again (for the third time) broke his word, the new Sultan, Yıldırım Bayezid, took the town after a long and violent siege. At that occasion most buildings at Tsarevets Hill were destroyed and a part of the higher nobility was eliminated or banished. The soul of the resistance, the Head of the Bulgarian Church, Patriarch Evtimi, was treated with great honor by the Sultan and given back a church which he could use as center of the Bulgarian Church. Later, when the Sultan had returned home the Turkish commander of Tirnovo judged it safer to banish the Patriarch to a monastery in the south of the country, presumably Bačkovo, south of Philippople (today's Plovdiv) where he died a decade later. A part of the population of Tirnovo was deported and Greek, as well as Turkish settlers were colonized in the town. Yıldırım installed a small garrison in the Tsarevets castle, converted the Patriarch's church on Tsarevets hill into mosque and had a *zaviye* (later *medrese*) built in the town. Many Bulgarian artists, church leaders and writers, jobless because of the disappearance of the royal court and the nobility, left the town, fled or emigrated across the Danube and contributed greatly to the development of architecture, literature and painting of the young, Christian, principality of Walachia.<sup>8</sup>

In the existing Bulgarian historiography it is maintained that after the conquest the Ottomans pursued a ruthless and systematic policy to destroy all that remembered on the medieval glory of Bulgaria and aimed at the destruction of the "Bulgarian national identity." However, the Church of St. Demetrius, where in 1185 the Second Bulgarian Empire had been proclaimed, and the monastery Church of the Forty Martyrs on the Yantra, built in 1230 by the great Tsar Ivan Asen II to commemorate the Bulgarian victory over the Byzantines at Klokotnitsa, survive until this day, including the historically highly important 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century inscriptions on the pillars of the interior of this church, forming a kind of *res gestae* of the pagan Khan Krum (803-814), Khan Omurtag (815-831) and the Christian Tsar Asen II (1218-1241). According to generations of Bulgarian historiographers this monastery church was taken over by Yıldırım Bayezid and

<sup>7</sup> - Dermendžiev, "Dvortsovata banya ...", pp. 124-141; Dermendžiev, "Novoodkrita banya ...", pp. 77- 100.

<sup>8</sup> - Turdeanu, *La littérature bulgare*.



transformed into the Kavak Baba Tekkesi. Recent research by young and promising Bulgarian scholars proved to be wholly unfounded.<sup>9</sup>



Tirnovo, Monastery of the Forty Martyrs, symbol of the Victory of Klokodnitsa, 1230



Church of the Forty Martyrs, column with Greek inscription of Khan Omurtag, A.D. 814 – 831



Tirnovo, “Cathedral” of Peter and Paul built by Tsar Kaloyan (1197-1207) to commemorate his coronation and International recognition



Tirnovo, Church of St. Demetrius, where in 1185 the Second Bulgarian Empire was proclaimed

The church of Sts. Peter and Paul, originally built by the mighty Tsar Kaloyan (1197-1207) to commemorate his crowning and international recognition, also survived. This church had been given by Sultan to Patriarch Evtimi to serve as cathedral, as said. It remained in Christian hands until the end of the Ottoman period. This church was refurbished in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century and was painted anew with frescos of the highest quality of all Bulgarian art. All but one of the Bulgarian specialists agreed on a date in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century thus only some years after the Ottoman conquest. Yet none of them mentions the implications this has for the theory that the Ottomans tried to “destroy the Bulgarian national identity” which had become a dogma of the Party line of how Bulgarian history had to be. The church of St. Demetrius, as well as St. Georg built by Tsar Ivan Aleksandar, remained in the hands of the Christians; the church of the Forty Martyrs until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when it was abandoned. If the Ottoman campaign to exterminate Bulgarian culture

9 - Genova, “Ošte vednāž za tsārkvata ...”, pp. 451 -458 ; Pärveva, “Zaviyeto Kavak ...”, pp. 324 -408.

and identity had really existed it is little likely that these highly valuable national symbols would have survived. In the same line lies the findings of the best specialist on the art of the illuminated Bulgarian book, Aksinia Džurova (daughter of the powerful General Džurov), who saw no break in the quality and production of the illustrated book between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, of which Tirnovo was one of the main centers.<sup>10</sup>

In the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Tirnovo started to recover and took on the features of an Islamic town. This process was greatly pushed by one of the powerful governor from the time of Murad II, Firuz Bey who in 1435/36 built an elegant domed mosque, two *mescids*, an *imaret* for the poor, a *medrese*, a *mektep*, a *hamam*, a *caravansaray*, a bridge over the Yantra, and a number of shops and water mills.<sup>11</sup> A new exclusively Muslim center developed around these buildings.

The new upswing was briefly interrupted in 1444, when a part of the Crusaders army attacked Tirnovo and captured and destroyed the castles in the surroundings. Tsarevets Castle, the core of the medieval town, could not be taken. The eye witness Hans Mehrgast, mentions that King Vladislav had send a detachment of 500 men "to plunder and pillage Tirnov," but this detachment was largely destroyed by the Turkish defenders. The likewise contemporary Gazavat-i Sultan Murad Han notes that the King had given order that "the castle of Tirnovo must be besieged and conquered mercilessly," and dispatched two detachments that could not take the town.<sup>12</sup> From 1444 onward the Tirnovo lived through a period of more than a century and a half of peace and prosperity in which the town greatly developed

The Ottoman population and taxation registers of 1479, 1516, 1540 and 1580 allow us to see how the town developed. In 1540 Tirnovo had 11 Muslim *mahalles* with five mosques, six *mescids*, an *imaret*, and the *Zaviye* of Kavak Baba, the latter also having an *imaret* distributing free food to the travellers and the poor. There were 270 Muslim households and 309 households of Christians, and 18 households of the merchants of Dubrovnik.

The register, from 1579, shows that both communities of the town had grown further to a total of 714 households, of whom 41% was Muslim. In 1640 the Catholic Bishop Bakčić mentions that Tirnovo had 2000 houses of Orthodox Christians, who spoke Greek and Bulgarian and numbered 10.000 souls. They had eight churches and one monastery at their disposal. Next to them were 2000 Turkish houses with more than 10.000 inhabitants. The Turks had seven great mosques. Bakčić' numbers of people are highly exaggerated but do reflect the composition of the town's population (fifty-fifty Muslim-Christian).

In 1659, Philip Stanislavov Catholic Bishop of Nikopol, visited "Tarnovium Civitas". He noted that it was the seat of an archbishopric of the Orthodox Church, with an episcopal church and three other Orthodox churches, besides one Catholic Church. The number of houses of "Bulgarian schismatics" was 700, the Catholics had only 17 houses. They were merchants from Dubrovnik. The Turks numbered 3000 (650 households) and they had seven mosques.<sup>13</sup>

10 - Džurova, *1000 Godini Bălgarska*, p. 67, 109. When the writer of this paper asked Džurova in person, she said: "Yes, this was the situation. The rest does not interest me."

11 - Bistra A. Cvetkova – A. Razbojnikov (eds.), *Izvori za Bălgarskata Istorija*, III,

12 - İnalçık – Oğuz, *Gazavât-ı Sultân Murâd*, p. 46/47.

13 - Fermendžiu, *Acta Bulgariae Ecclesiastica*, p. 262/63



## NEW SATELLITE-TOWNS AND BOROUGHES AROUND TIRNOVO (16-19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES):

### Arbanassi

There are some indications for the cultural life of the Christian population of Tirnova (new and high-quality fresco paintings in the church of St. Georg and in the Cathedral of Sts Peter and Paul), but this is completely overshadowed by the spectacular growth of the satellite town of Arbanassi (Arnautköy for the Ottomans) on the plateau, a few km from Tirново, where Christian art flourished abundantly. In the current Bulgarian historiography this formerly rich *kasaba* was settled by Bulgarians coming from Albania, and is held to have been the summer residence of the Bulgarian Tsars. This imperial property was then taken over directly by the Sultan as his *hass*. Besides fantasy there are no sources to support this view. In fact Arnautköy was formed shortly before 1500 by a small group of settlers from Albania. The *tahrir* of 1516 mentions it as a newly founded village of 9 houses, its inhabitants having good Albanian names, not Bulgarian. After having been *mülk* property of three successive owners the village was acquired by the Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha, who brought in many new settlers from southern Albania. According to a *Mülk* and *Vakf* Defter from 1540,<sup>14</sup> Arnautköy numbered 63 households, inhabited with people with specific Albanian names: Ando, Duka, Gjin, Gjon, Leka, Lepur, Miho etc. Rüstem Pasha secured a very privileged status for the village giving it a *derbenci* status and then made it *vakf* property for his many foundations elsewhere. The effect of the changed status and the protection of the *vakf* system are reflected in the population numbers. In 1540 it had 63 *hâne*, in 1570: 271, and in 1642 408 *hâne*. In 1691, after the *Cizye* reform, it had 1.145 adult males, or about 790 households.<sup>15</sup> In 1770 it is reported to have had 1000 houses. By then it was the summer residence of the bishops of Tirново, Lofça and Rusçuk and representatives of the famous St. Catherina Monastery on Mount Sinai in Egypt. Moreover, members of some of the richest and most influential boyar families from Valachia, the the Brănkoveanu, Cantacusino and Filipescu resided in Arnautköy. The merchants of Arnautköy traded with Italy, Poland, Hungary and Russia.<sup>16</sup> In 1798, during the decade of anarchy following the Russo-Turkish War of 1788/92, Arnautköy was plundered and half destroyed by the *Kırcalı* rebels. It never recovered. In 1873 it had only 93 households. Today six churches and two monasteries, built and repeatedly enlarged between the 16th and 18th century, are still preserved; as do many rich old houses and mansions. All the churches have rich fresco paintings, made by the best artists of Bulgaria of that time. Among them was the church of St. George that in 1561 was painted by Nikolla, son of Onufri, the most famous painter of Albania born near the central Albanian town of Elbasan who left number of painted church interiors, in his native village of Shelcan, in the church of St. Venerande in Valsh in the same area, in the town of Berat, in the Monastery of Zrze in the Republic of Macedonia and in the churches of the Sts. Cosmas and Damian and the church of the twelve Apostles both in Kastoria in Northern Greece. Besides that Onufre and his son left numerous icons behind, belonging to the best of the Balkans.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> - Sofia, National Library, Oriental Department, O.A.K. 217/8.

<sup>15</sup> - Sofia, National Library, Oriental Department, O.A.K. 13/60.

<sup>16</sup> - Jireček, *Das Fürstenthum Bulgarien*, p. 458.

<sup>17</sup> - Çika –Drishti, *The Icons of Berat*, p. 86/87. It is a magnificent book of 101 pages with the best possible color plates and text of highest scientific level.



Tirnovo, suburb Arbanassi, interior of the church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary

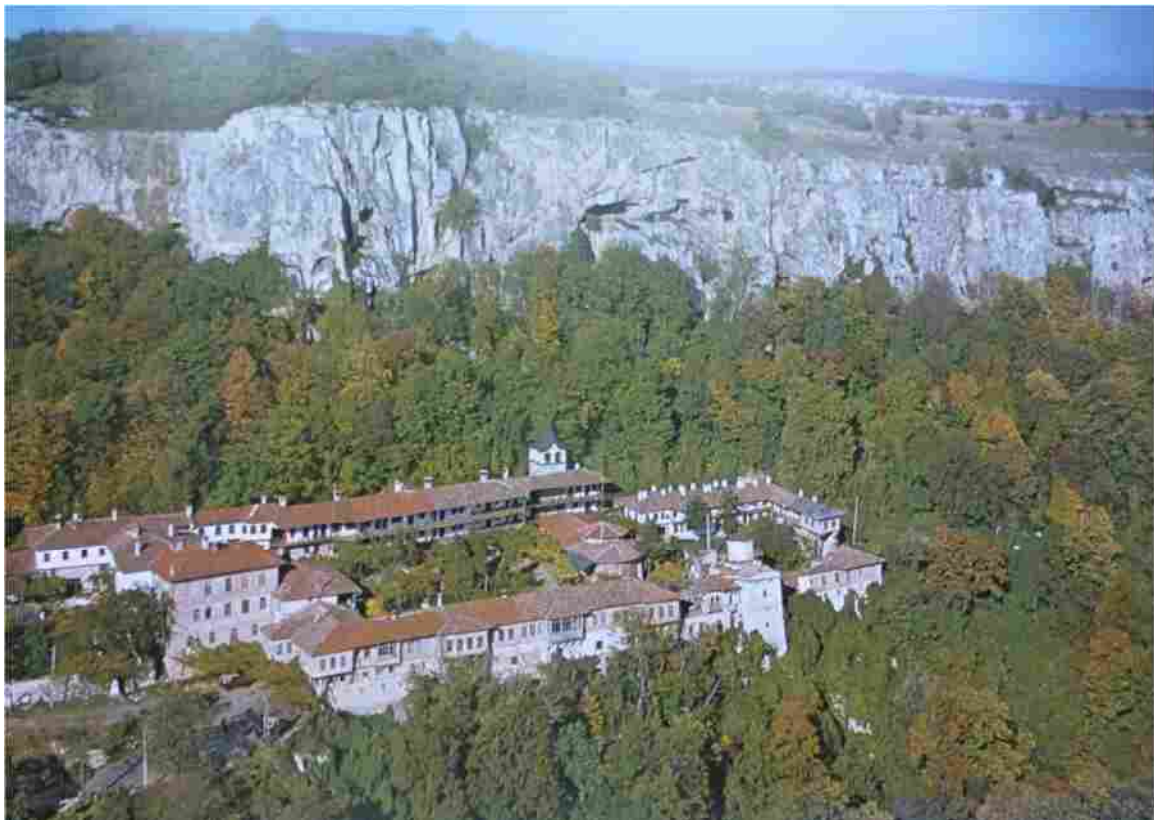


Tirnovo, Arbanassi. Nativity Church, depicting the First Council of Nicaea

## Kilifarevo

The village of Kilifarevo, just south of Tirnova, rose from 33 *hâne* in 1516 to 256 in 1642 and 918 in 1873. In the last quarter of the 16th century it became part of the rich *vakf* for the *türbe* of Sultan Selim II (later also of Murad III and Mehmed III) in Istanbul and got a privileged status.

In the immediate neighborhood of Tirnovo and Kilifarevo are three large monasteries, Kilifarevski, Preobraženski and Sveta Troitsa. They were rebuilt in the Ottoman period, constituting important centers of Bulgarian culture and literature.



Kilifarevo Monastery near Tirnovo, 14th century, restored in 1705

## Trjavna

The emergence and development of town of Trjavna is a good example of a town that rose *ex nihilo*. It was founded in April 1565 by Sultan's order after a proposal of the local authorities from the district.<sup>18</sup> Trjavna started as a *derbend* village guarding the difficult pass road over the Balkan Mountains to the plain of Thrace and further on to Edirne and Istanbul. Before its foundation it was “an empty and unguarded place.” The 1579/80 *tahrir* mentions Trjavna with 40 *hâne*. Like Kilifarevo it was included in the *Türbe*, of Sultan Selim II, *Vakf*, got a still better status, and saw a similar rapid expansion. In 1607 it had 132 households and in 1647 341. In half a century it had thus grown from 200 inhabitants to 1.700.<sup>19</sup> At the end of the Ottoman period the *Salnâme* of the *Vilayet* of the Danube from 1873 shows it with 2.420 inhabitants. It had a large church of the Archangels and many rich and well-built houses of which a number of them remains preserved. Under Bulgarian rule after 1878 Trjavna stagnated like most of the small mountain towns and in 1934 it had only 2.933 inhabitants.<sup>20</sup>

## Drjanovo

The little town of Drjanovo, 24 km S.W. of Tirnovo is a good example of a settlement that was pushed up by a change of its status by the Ottoman authorities and became a prosperous town. The place where Drjanovo developed was settled since the second millennium B.C. as revealed by archaeological finds. As a permanent settlement it is first mentioned in a large fragment of an Ottoman *tahrir* which as O.A.K. 45/29 is preserved in the Sofia National Library and was published by Nikolaj Todorov and Boris Nedkov in 1966. The fragment is dated by internal evidence either in 1479/89<sup>21</sup> or end 1480s beginning 1490s.<sup>22</sup> In our source Drjanovo is mentioned as a village with 83 Christian households and two widows, and total tax revenue of 7.345 *akçe* (small silver coin within 1481, 47 *akçe* in one Venetian gold coin). This means that the village household paid 88 *akçe* per year. The village was part of the *timar* of the *Kadı* of Tirnovo.

The next step is shown by the *tahrir* defter T.D. 167, preserved in the B.O.A. in Istanbul, written in 1530 on the basis of a register from 1521. In last mentioned year Drjanovo was the “property of the *vakf* of the late Kasım Pasha” for his foundations in Edirne/Adrianople, a mosque, dervish convent, *hamam* and soup kitchen (*imaret*) on the banks of the Tundja River, a branch of the great river of Thrace, the Maritsa (or Meriç in Turkish). Besides these buildings Kasım Pasha had built a *mesdjid* and a *mu'allim-hâne* (primary school) in the town of Tirnovo. From all these buildings only the mosque, a sturdy single domed building still stands. The Arabic building inscription above the main entrance gives the year in which it was completed, 883 (4 April 1478 – 24 March 1479 A.D.) Evliya Kasım Pasha (as he was known locally) died in the same year. The inscription on his tomb stone gives the same years as the mosque.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> - İstanbul, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (=B.O.A) Mühimme Defter No 6, p. 453.

<sup>19</sup> - Kiel, “Zur Gründung und Frühgeschichte der Stadt Trjavna in Bulgarien...”, pp. 191-218.

<sup>20</sup> - Čankov, *Geografski Rečnik*, pp. 464 -466.

<sup>21</sup> - Dimitrov, “Za datirovka na njakoj ...”, p. 244.

<sup>22</sup> - Cvetkova, “Sur le sort de Tärnovo”, p.182.

<sup>23</sup> - Bayrakal, *Edirne'deki tek kubbeli camiler*, pp. 72–76 & photographs 51–54. See also Ayverdi, Osmanlı Mimarî sinde Fatih Devri, pp. 268–269, pictures: 431-452.

Drjanovo had made a great jump forward, caused by the special status it had received when becoming part of an important mosque. It now had one Muslim household, 224 Christian households and 219 unmarried adult males (*mücerred*). The latter number is very high and points to a young population. From the 224 households 60 households got the status *Derbenci*, armed warden of the passes over the Balkan Mountains who had received a very privileged status. The other households were also privileged.

From the year 1540 we have another detailed source, a large fragment of a *mufassal* defter of the *vakfs* and *mülk* properties in Northern Bulgaria: O.A.K. 217/8 in the Sofia National Library.<sup>24</sup> There were now five Muslim households in Drjanovo, all five recent converts. The bulk of the population was made up of 243 Christian households and 193 *mücerreds*, altogether between 1.200-1300 inhabitants. The 60 *Derdendžis* were still present together with their privileged status. The register also mentioned that there were a number of *fermans* from the time of Sultan Bayezid II (1481-1512) listing the privileged status. The total revenue of the place was 52.332 *Akçe* or 211 *Akçe* per household. This does not point to increased exploitation but to a strong expansion of the village economy. The Drjanovo economy rested on a very great wine production and highly developed sheep breeding. The tax on sheep of the villages was 4.560 *Akçe*. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the standard tax was one *Akçe* per two sheep. This gives a total number of 9.120 sheep, or 37 animals per family. This is very high. From 50 á 60 sheep a family of five could live. The *kanun-nâme* of the village noted stipulated that from 50 sheep 15 *akçe* was taken as tax. The same source makes clear that the *harac* of normally 50 *akçe* per adult male was not taken. Instead of 50 *akçe* 25 was taken.. The *ispence* tax of 25 *akçe* was not taken at all. Moreover the *mücerreds* did not pay the *harac*. The other pillar of the village' economy was a very large wine production which was also taxed. The sum of 25.280 *akçe* was taken as wine tax but the mentioned sum also included the *niyabet*. The amount taken as *niyabet* is not given. All these elements made Drjanovo an interesting place to settle down, which at once explains how the population jumped up so quickly.

The *Salnâme* of the Tuna (Danube) *Vilayet* of 1873 mentions in Drjanovo 69 Muslim house-holds with 336 inhabitants (gives 4,9 inh. per household) and 543 Christian households with 2.848 inhabitants (5,2 per Housh.) and a total of 3184 inhabitants. In the first half a century of Bulgaria as an independent state Drjanovo, like most of the small mountain towns, declined or stagnated. After 1878 three quarters of the Muslims immigrated to Turkish territory. In 1887 (the first Bulgarian census) the population stood at 3.196 Bulgarians, the Turks at 101. By 1934 it had sunk from 3.300 to 2.820. In that year the geographer Žečo Čankov remarks that: "In the Turkish period the little town was the center of a lively trade and crafts but after the liberation it declined." Previously it had a highly developed production of fur coats, silk making, the production of stout woollen cloth (*abadžjstvo*) and raw silk which was exported to Tsarigrad (Constantinople), Shkoder in Albania and Italy as far as Milano.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Drjanovo started to grow again, made possible by a modest industrialization. The Bulgarian census of 2015 registered 7.968 people. In the town still are three great churches, all built in the Ottoman period. One of them, the church of St. Nikolas, is the work of famous 19<sup>th</sup> century architect Nikola Fičev, a son of Drjanovo.

<sup>24</sup> - Published by Bistra Cvetkova in 1972 in: *Turski Izvori vol. III*, pp. 437–440

All these places played an important role as cultural centers, all having a number of churches, monasteries, or fine old mansions, but none as well preserved as those in Arbanassi.

## Tirnovovo

The 1691 register is the first to show Armenian settlers in Tirnovovo, 13 *nefer*, mostly merchants. Their community grew and was soon to have its own church and cemetery.

In 1710 an entirely new *tahrir* defter was made of the property of the *vakf* of Gülnuş Ümmetullah, mother of Ahmed III. This rich *vakf* included the town of Tirnovovo, then having 506 Muslim households and 411 households of Christians. The town had about 3.200 inhabitants, 55% being Muslim.

Most of the 18th century meant a great upsurge for Tirnovovo. The *mufassal Avariz* Defter K.K. 2813 from 1164 (1751) shows this. The town now had 14 Muslim *mahalles* with 886 households and seven *mahalles* of Christians with 314 households. The number of inhabitants rose to 5.700 of whom three quarter were Muslims. The 18th century also saw the introduction of silk culture in Tirnovovo and its district. The 1710 register also shows that wine production was the pillar of the economy of the town, followed by the income from its market function (*bac-i bazar*). Shortly before 1178 (1765) Ali Efendi founded in Tirnovovo a new library, an indicator of expanding Muslim learning in the town.<sup>25</sup>

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the famous old church of the Forty Martyrs fell in disuse and was converted into a *zaviye*. A document of 1851<sup>26</sup> shows that it was then functioning as a *zaviye* for the *Halveti* dervishes.

Around the year 1800 Hadji Ali Ağa erected in the center of the Turkish part of the town a monumental domed and lead-covered mosque (the *Kurşunlu Cami*) accompanied by a *medrese* with seven fountains in its courtyard and a rich library in a separate building covered by two domes. The architectural beauty of the complex was praised by the widely travelled geographer-scholar Felix Kanitz. In the 19th century, the town expanded at an even greater speed and reached an extraordinary prosperity. In 1836 the French geographer Ami Boué estimated 12.000 inhabitants.

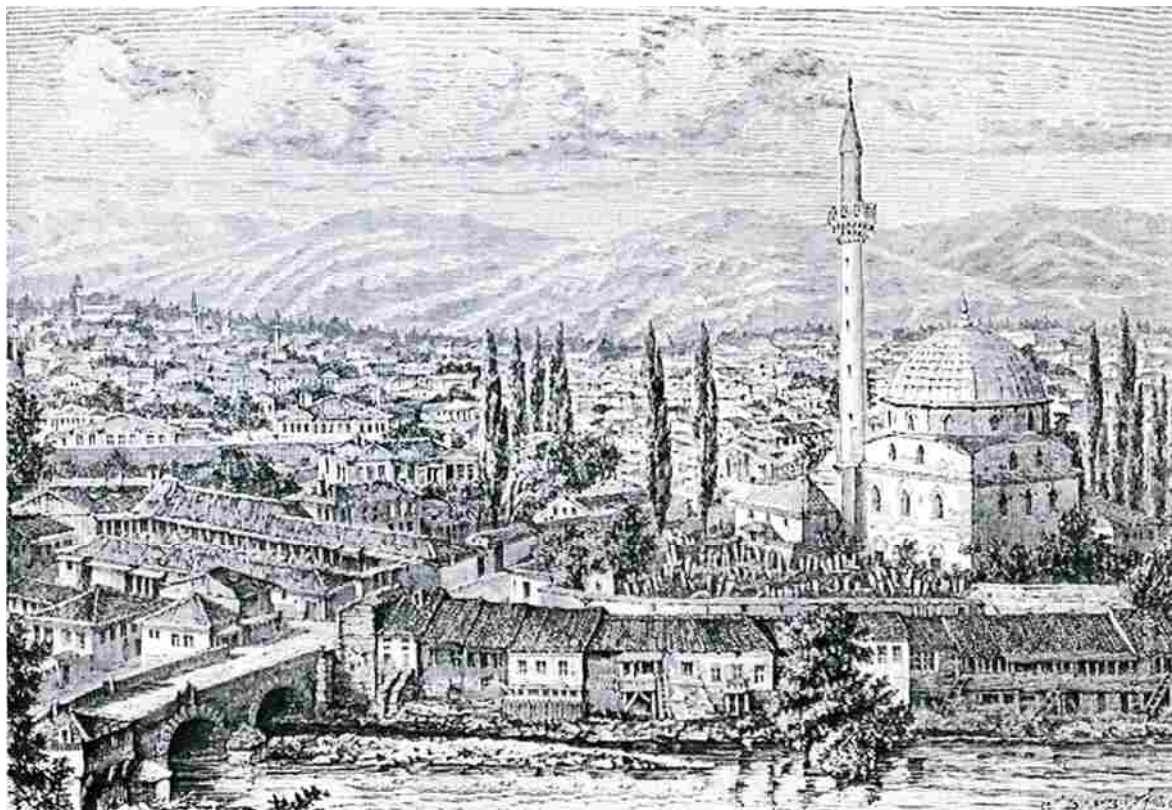
The *Salnâme* of the Tuna *Vilayet* from 1286 (1869/70) describes Tirnovovo as capital of a *sandjak* with 453 villages. The town consisted of 3.091 houses and had 21 mosques, 14 churches, nine *medreses*, four *tekkes*, three *hamams*, and 1.056 shops. The town now had a population of about 15.000, which for 45% was Muslim.

During the disastrous “*doksaniç harbî*,” on June 24 of 1877, Russian troops took Tirnovovo. The greater part of the Turkish population fled, leading to decline and stagnation in spite of the influx of many Bulgarian settlers from the mountain villages. In 1887 Tirnovovo had sunk to 11.314 inhabitants of whom only 688 were Turks. In 1895 the *Kurşunlu Cami* complex was demolished. The rich collection of books of its library disappeared without leaving a trace. It took more than half a century before the town recovered from what usually is called “liberation” (1934 13.963 inhabitants).

25 - *İstanbul B.O.A., Cevdet Maarif* No 402.

26 - *Cevdet Evkaf*.





Panorama of late-Ottoman Tirnovo.  
In the foreground the Mosque of Hadji Ali Agha,  
(also known as Kursunlu Camii, built around the year 1800)  
Drawing by Felix Kanitz in the early 1870s.



Tirnovo, the last mosque, built after the fall of the communist regime

In 1913 a terrible earthquake destroyed or badly damaged many historical buildings. Most of the damaged mosques were demolished, the medieval churches St. Demetrius and Sts. Peter and Paul, with their outstanding fresco decoration were left to rot away more than half a century before a crude kind of restoration and save-guarding began.

Especially after 1960 old Tirnovo saw vast archaeological excavations, combined with very bad quality "restoration work" or crude reconstruction of the medieval ruins, turning Tsarevets Hill into a "medieval Disney-land" and holy place of Bulgarian nationalism. The Ottoman heritage, which did not fit with the ideological nationalism of that time, was entirely neglected. Its remains were completely obliterated and also fully ignored in publications.

Only since the late 1990s young Bulgarian Orientalists published a number of important studies on the Islamic spiritual life of the town.<sup>27</sup> As late as 2007, two Arabic manuscripts of the destroyed library of Ali Ağa in Tirnovo were found in libraries in Moscow.<sup>28</sup> A humble and small mosque in the former outskirts of the town, built of wood and mud brick (*kerpiç*), survived till the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, serving Tirnovo's minor Muslim-Turkish community. In the most recent years the humble building was replaced by a much larger mosque with a high minaret visible from afar. A detailed plan of the town, drawn in 1910 by the Czech archaeologist Karel Škorpil, shows Tirnovo's complicated layout with its mosques, churches and synagogues, and the cemeteries of the four religious communities of the town, Islamic, Orthodox, Armenian and Jewish, and keeps alive the memory of the multi-cultural and multi-lingual make-up of the town and preserved the historical toponyms, now all obliterated.<sup>29</sup>

What we can see in Tirnovo today are its medieval and Ottoman time churches, the Disneyland castle of Tsarevets and the fake cathedral, but especially the spectacular setting of the town and its many 19<sup>th</sup> century houses and the churches of Arbanassi with their magnificent and elaborated 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries fresco paintings.

Tirnovo was the birth place of the late-Ottoman poet, musician and writer of 12 cultural-historical works İsmail Fenni Bey Ertogrul (1855-1946). Fenni is also the translator of the works of Hegel, Oliver Lodge, Stuard Mill and Montaigne. He is remembered as Turkey's greatest philosopher.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> - Genova, "Ošte vednáž za tsärkvata ...", pp. 451 -458 ; Mutafova, "Središte na Islamskiya ...", pp. 409 – 450 ; Pärveva, "Zaviyeto Kavak ...", pp. 324 -408.

<sup>28</sup> - Zajčev, "Dva Arapski rukopisi is Tärnovo ...", pp. 420-423.

<sup>29</sup> - Škorpil, "Plan na starata bälgarska ...", pp. 120 –146.

<sup>30</sup> - İnal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*, pp.393 –395 ; T.D.E. Ansikl., p. 81/82.

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