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*The Economic History of Byzantium:
From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*

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Tŭrnovo, Sixth–Fourteenth Centuries

Konstantin Dochev

Tŭrnovo is situated in the foothills of the Balkan mountain range (the Haemos in antiquity), bordering on the north Danube plain. The Yantra River, running through the town, forms four promontories: Tsarevets, Trapezitsa, Momina krepost (the Maiden's Fortress), and Sveta goro (the Holy Wood) (Figs. 1–3). The average altitude of the region is 180–280 m. During the Roman period (1st–4th centuries A.D.), two stone fortresses, on Tsarevets and Momina krepost, were built as part of the system of fortification that defended the important crossroads from the north through the Haemos toward the towns of Thrace and to Constantinople. More intensive habitation took place in the period from 350 to 450, when Gothic settlers arrived from the neighboring urban center of Nikopolis ad Istrum to guard the mountain passes.¹

New walls were built on Tsarevets, Momina krepost, and Trapezitsa in the time of Justinian I so as to prevent the incursions of Slavs and Avars. Three large churches, one of them the seat of a bishop, were built on Tsarevets. This large, well-fortified Byzantine town in the northern foothills of the Haemos survived until the beginning of the seventh century. About 615–620, it was destroyed by the attacks of Slavs and Avars.² Considerable numbers of coins (260 items, most of them copper) of the sixth and seventh centuries have been found, dating from the reigns of Anastasios (491–518, 40 coins), Justin I (518–519, 31), Justinian I (527–565, 55), Justin II (565–578, 35), Tiberios I (578–581, 7), Maurice (581–602, 14), Phokas (602–610, 21), and Herakleios (610–641, 15). Most of the coins were minted in Constantinople, Kyzikos, and Thessalonike.

From the eighth to the tenth century, the town declined and became an inner fortress of the first Bulgarian kingdom. During the period of Byzantine rule (1018–1186), it retained its position as a military fortress in the theme of Paristrion. There are few currency finds from the early eleventh century, though two gold histamena of Con-

¹ C. Patsch, *Beiträge zur Völkerkunde von Südosteuropa*, Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften (Vienna, 1929), 208, III.1, pp. 34–36.

² N. Angelov, "Rannovizantiiski kulturen plast v Dvoretza," *Tsarevgrad Tŭrnov* 1 (1973): 282–336, and idem, "Patriarsheski kompleks na Tsarevets," *Tsarevgrad Tŭrnov* 3 (1980): 10–15.

stantine IX (1042–55) and thirty-two anonymous copper coins have come to light.³ This is to be explained by the existence of a natural economy and by the sparse population around the military fortress. During the second half of the eleventh century, the invasions of the Pechenegs, the Cumans, and the other Turkic tribes caused the almost complete destruction and depopulation not only of Tŭrnovo but of almost all the Byzantine fortresses between the Haemos and the Danube. A small hoard of six extensively burned copper coins has been found in a building on Tsarevets that had been destroyed by fire; the latest dates from the reign of Michael VII (1071–78). The victories of Alexios I in the 1090s over the Pechenegs and Cumans led to the reconstruction of the old settlements and to the partial return to them of the Christian population, which had taken refuge in the mountains. The final defeat of the Pechenegs and the other barbarian tribes and their expulsion across the Danube took place in the time of John II, after 1123.⁴ That victory inaugurated a period of relatively rapid growth in the building, restoration, and formation of urban centers north of the Haemos, and the characteristic features of commodity production and money exchange were introduced at the same time. However, since our information about the administrative position of the theme of Paristrion is scarce, we cannot be certain as to the role of Tŭrnovo as a local administrative center. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the town was probably the center of a small theme, the headquarters of a military command, and the seat of a bishop. There is secondary evidence for this speculation, including the place-name Trapezits, from the Greek *τραπεζίτης* for a soldier who guarded an important pass, crossroads, or border region. Further corroborative data are to be found in the lead seals of the *sebastos* (Georgios) Glabas, the *protospatharios* Staurakios, John Kinnamos, and Leon (who was probably a bishop).⁵

Archaeological investigations have shown that the new building activity on the fortress wall around the hill dates from the beginning of the reign of Manuel I and is connected with some large churches, one of which was rebuilt in the thirteenth century and incorporated into the palace complex on the same hill. This increase in building activity afforded an opportunity for the growth of productive activities in the town, including the extraction and processing of iron, stone-cutting, and the manufacturing of copper and lead, building ceramics, kitchenware, and domestic ceramics.⁶ It is no coincidence that when describing the events of 1196, Niketas Choniates notes that Tŭrnovo “is the most beautiful and best fortified of all the cities in the Haemos,”⁷ thus indicating that the town was built several decades earlier than the events described.

The beginning of manufacturing activities in Tŭrnovo dates from the Byzantine pe-

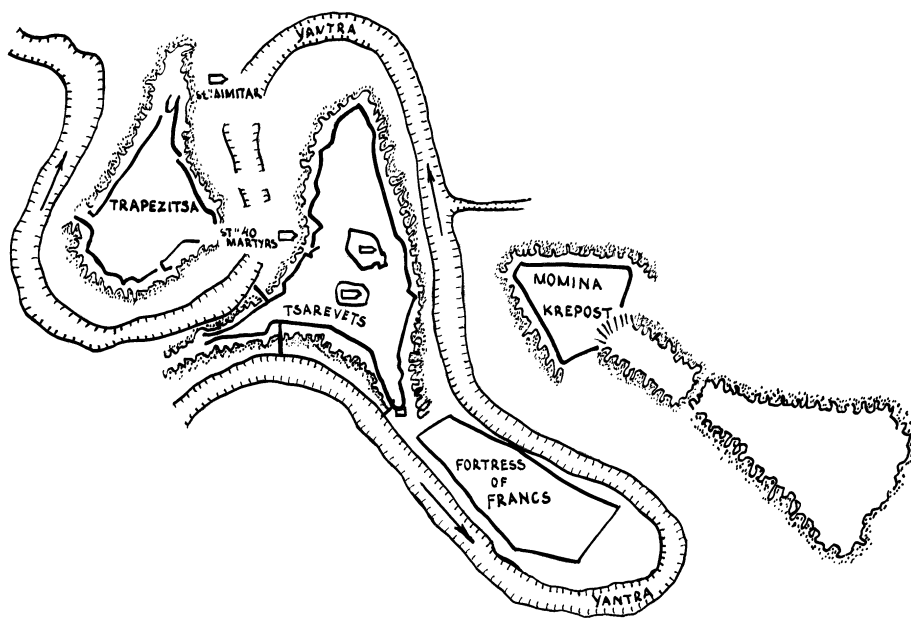
³ K. Dochev, *Moneti i parichno obrushtenie v Tŭrnovo (XII–XIV v.)* (Tŭrnovo, 1992), 11.

⁴ Michel Italikos, *Lettres et discours*, ed. P. Gautier (Paris, 1972), 83 and 285; A. Garzya, “Encomio inedito di Niceforo Basilace per Giovanni Axuch,” *RSBN* 6/7 (1969–70): 11; M. Bibikov, *Vizantiiskie istochniki po istorii Rusi (XII–XIII v.)* (Moscow, 1981), 98–109.

⁵ K. Totev, “Pechat na Sevast Georgi Glava,” *Numismatica* 4 (1982): 15–16. The other seals are unpublished.

⁶ *Istoriia na Veliko Tŭrnovo v tri toma*, ed. P. Petrov (Sofia, 1986), 70–77.

⁷ *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, ed. J. L. van Dieten (Berlin–New York, 1975), 470.



1. Topographic plan of Tŭrnovo, 13th–14th centuries



2. Tŭrnovo, the hill of Tsarevets



3. Tsarevets, northwest slope with market street

riod, that is, from the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, when there is evidence of the manufacturing of iron, copper, and glass and of the production of ceramics for everyday use. Kilns and blacksmiths' workshops, copper-smelting kilns, and units producing kitchenware, domestic ceramics, and building ceramics began to operate along the terraces beside the Yantra River on Tsarevets and Momina krepost at least twenty to thirty years before 1186. At the foot of Momina krepost was the residential district, and the buildings excavated there have yielded furnaces and fireplaces for the smelting of iron as well as kilns for ordinary earthenware, all dated to the second half of the twelfth century.⁸ The total number of Komnenian coins of the period from 1081 to 1186 (417) is evidence of the growth of Tŭrnovo as a typical urban center on the Byzantine pattern during the twelfth century.

With the restoration of the Bulgarian kingdom in 1186, Tŭrnovo was declared the capital of the state. It was the center of political, religious, and administrative power. The tsar's palace and the complex of patriarchal buildings were built as independent inner fortresses on Tsarevets. The proclamation of Tŭrnovo as the capital fostered its growth in terms of population and its emergence as a major center of production and trade. According to archaeological finds, the population of the town was 5,000–10,000 in the early thirteenth century and rose to 15,000–20,000 during the fourteenth century. Most of these people seem to have been engaged in craft production and trade. More than fifty crafts are known from written sources and have been confirmed by archaeological evidence. Some of the inhabitants, outside the castle, may have been involved in animal husbandry.

The extraction of iron ore and iron manufacturing were the most important activities during the period in question, and they provided the materials for all the other crafts. Before the construction of the monastery of the Forty Holy Martyrs (by the Yantra River) in the second half of the twelfth century, large quantities of iron ore were extracted and processed in the area. Eight furnaces with dimensions of 1 × 2 m were found dug into the ground, along with pieces of ore and charcoal. Some 3,000 kg of iron pieces mixed with slag have been gathered from around the furnaces.⁹ After 1230, this activity continued near the monastery. Several blacksmiths' workshops were built to manufacture agricultural implements, knives, nails, and other articles. Similar workshops have been found on Tsarevets and Momina krepost, where some 2,000 kg of raw iron pieces have been collected. The blacksmiths of Tŭrnovo manufactured more than one hundred types of articles, including tools (30), objects in a folk style (15), building details (10), and weapons (20).

A center for the production of large quantities of copper ore and ingots has been found in the southeast section of Tsarevets. Several workshops have come to light, containing the remains of fireplaces and furnaces, a thick layer of slag mixed with

⁸ Y. Nikolova, "De l'organisation urbaine du Tarnovgrad médiévale," *Travaux de l'université "Cyrille et Methode" de V. Tŭrnovo* 15 (1979): 95 ff.

⁹ A. Popov, "Metalurgichno proizvodstvo v Tŭrnovgrad (XII–XIV v.)," *Sbornik v pamet na Prof. Stancho Vaklinov*, ed. D. Angelov (Sofia, 1984), 204–7.

small ingots of copper, and about 40,000 sherds of clay pots to which copper was adhering. The volume of these clay pots was 100–1,600 ml.¹⁰ Numerous fragments of copper plates and concave copper plates have also been found. Copper flans were probably manufactured as well, before being struck in the town mint. This complex of copper manufacturing dates from the second half of the twelfth century or the first half of the thirteenth. Similar small pots for smelting bronze and copper have also been found in the residential districts along the Yantra River.

The production of building ceramics was highly developed because of the number of churches and imposing residential buildings constructed. Bricks were manufactured in great quantities for the construction and decoration of facades. The brick workshops were located by the Yantra River, where there is plenty of fictile clay and water. Such a workshop, with a well-preserved kiln, measuring 3 × 3 m, has been found near the church of St. Dimitar.

Ceramics have survived in great quantity and variety. They have been provisionally divided into two broad groups: kitchenware and tableware ceramics. The kitchenware ceramics consist of various pots, jugs, earthenware jugs, cups, and candlesticks. Tableware of the sgraffito type is in the tradition of Byzantine ceramics. The table utensils are decorated with complex geometrical and plant motifs, with depictions of various animals (including doves, eagles, lions, and dogs) and mythical creatures (griffins and dragons). Pottery workshops and kilns have been found on Tsarevets, Momina krepost, and, in particular, by the Yantra River.¹¹ In the manufacturing of clay utensils, the potters of Tŭrnovo created their own decorative and morphological style, producing work of high artistic value that had a considerable influence on ceramics all over the country.

The quarrying and dressing of stone was connected with the increased urban building activities. To date, fifty-one churches of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries have been found and preserved. The stone for the buildings was dressed by the masons themselves.

The items manufactured by goldsmiths met the needs of ordinary citizens as well as of the rich. Gold, silver, and alloys were used. Twenty stone molds for the casting of rings, earrings, bracelets, and appliqué items have been found. After casting, these articles were given additional treatment and decorated with complex patterns.¹² Small clay pots, with a volume of 50–100 ml, for gold and silver castings, have been found. They cannot be dated precisely, but generally belong to the period from the twelfth to the fourteenth century.

Glass was produced for everyday purposes and ornamentation. On Tsarevets, near

¹⁰ V. Valov, "Archeologicheski razkopki i prouchvania na krepostnite steni na Tsarevets," *Tsarevgrad Tŭrnov* 5 (1991): 120.

¹¹ S. Georgieva, "La céramique du palais de Carevec," *Tsarevgrad Tŭrnov* 2 (1974): 8–180.

¹² S. Georgieva, "Parures et pièce de tissus du palais de Carevec," *Tsarevgrad Tŭrnov* 2 (1974): 389–415; M. Dolmova, "Zlatastvoto na srednovekovniiia Tŭrnov," *Kulturata na srednovekovniiia Tŭrnov: Nauchna sesiia, posvetena na 800-godishnata ot vŭzstanoviavaneto na bulgarskata dŭrzhava, Veliko Tŭrnovo, oktombri 1985*, ed. A. Popov and V. Velkov (Sofia, 1985), 84ff.

the main gate, a kiln, fragments of pots, and many glass ingots have been found.¹³ Such remains have also come to light near the monastery of the Forty Holy Martyrs. Flat panes of glass, bracelets, glass bottles, and tesserae for mosaics were produced.

Archaeological investigations have revealed the extent of craft industries such as baking, leather manufacturing, the treatment of bone, and weaving. Written sources and archaeological evidence show that in Tŭrnovo the workshops of craftsmen (which in most cases were also their dwellings and probably the shops where the objects were sold) were located in specific districts differentiated by craft. For example, the ironsmiths and potters settled along the Yantra River. In the written sources, the craftsmen of Tŭrnovo are referred to as *technitars* and *chudozniki* (painters).

In the early thirteenth century, the fact that Tŭrnovo was the capital of the state fostered the development of domestic trade. There is written and archaeological evidence of the differentiation of commercial sections and trade districts. One such district, with a market street and shops, is located on the northwest slope of Tsarevets. A baker's shop, and a pottery shop with more than two hundred completely preserved sgraffito utensils, have been discovered. Each district of town had its own market; such markets lay close to the monasteries of the Forty Holy Martyrs and St. Dimitar. There would have been markets and fairs every week and on the great saints' days.

Tŭrnovo traded with Byzantium, of course, which for nearly two hundred years was the main partner of the Bulgarian state, and also with Dubrovnik, Venice, Genoa, Wallachia, Serbia, the Golden Horde, the Arabs, and others. Bulgaria had treaties with some of these states and peoples. The role of foreign tradesmen is indicated by the name of the district in which they lived, still known as the Fortress of the Franks, by the Yantra River.

As for coinage, from 1186 to 1396 the Bulgarian kingdom adopted and used the Byzantine monetary system of the Komnenoi, with the gold hyperpyron as the base unit. After the middle of the thirteenth century, the Byzantine hyperpyron was in use both as an actual means of exchange and as a currency of account. Bulgarian coinage begins to appear in Tŭrnovo in 1257, during the reign of Tsar Konstantin Asen (1257–77), who organized the intensive production of copper coins (3–4 million pieces). In the reign of Tsar Theodore Svetoslav (1300–1322), the minting of silver coins began. The value of Bulgarian silver and copper coins was calculated on the basis of the Byzantine hyperpyron. During the reign of Tsar Ivan Alexander (1331–71), the production of silver and copper coins in Tŭrnovo reached its peak. Some 5–6 million of these silver coins were minted. From the beginning of the thirteenth century until the conquest of Tŭrnovo by the Turks in July 1393, there were considerable numbers of coins in the capital. More than 14,000 coins from the twelfth to the fourteenth century,¹⁴ mostly of Byzantine and Bulgarian origin, have been found (Table 1).

¹³ V. Valov, "Production du verre dans la capitale médiévale bulgare, V. Tarnovo de la fin du XII à la fin de XIV s.," *Srednjeevokovno staklo na Balkanu (V–XV v.)* (Belgrade, 1975), 130–33.

¹⁴ Dochev, *Moneti i parichno obrastenie v Tŭrnovo (XII–XIV v.)*, 174–95.

Table 1
Coin Hoards and Single Coin Finds from Tŭrnovo,
Twelfth–Fourteenth Centuries

State, Dynasty, Type of Coin	Hoards	Single Finds	Total
Komnenoi (1143–85)	244	173	417
Angeloi (1185–1203)	4,564	255	4,819
“Bulgarian imitative” (1204–20)	324	601	925
“Latin imitative” (1204–61)	191	2,680	2,871
Laskarids (1208–58)	16	56	74
Thessalonike (1224–46)	20	302	322
Bulgarian coins (1218–56)	3	11	14
Bulgarian coins (1257–1300)	3	529	532
Palaiologoi (1258–82)	3	165	168
Palaiologoi (1282–1356)		811	811
Bulgarian coins (1300–1331)	28	77	105
Bulgarian coins (1331–93)	1,282	1,755	3,037
Epiros (1323–35)	1	120	121
Achaia and Athens (13th/14th century)		6	6
Venice (13th/14th century)		13	13
Serbia (14th century)		8	8
Wallachia (14th century)	10	8	18
Golden Horde (14th century)	6	12	18
TOTAL	6,695	7,582	14,277