



VELIKO TARNOVO Capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire

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Bulgaria is a small European country with territory about 111,000 square kilometers (42,855 sq mi) and population of 7,148,785 situated on the shores of the Black Sea (Fig.1). It shares borders with Serbia, Macedonia, Romania, Greece and Turkey. It is an ancient country with more than 1300 years history - it was established in 681. During 10th century the Cyrillic script or *Azbuka* was developed in the First Bulgarian Empire on the basis of the Glagolitic alphabet, created by Saints Cyril and Methodius. Nowadays Cyrillic alphabet is mainly used in Bulgaria, Russia and many states of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Since 1018 Bulgaria was under Byzantine invasion until 1185, when the brothers Assen and Peter organized an uprising and established the Second Bulgarian Empire with capital Tarnovo (Fig.2). In 1396 Bulgaria was invaded by the Ottoman Empire, which made it a Turkish province until the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878). Since 1878 Bulgaria is independent country.



Fig. 1 Map of Bulgaria



Fig. 2 Tarnovo – Capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire.

Based on the ancient history and the great variety of natural beauties, Bulgaria is one of the famous tourist destinations in Europe. Now I would like to introduce you my native city Veliko Tarnovo - old capital of Bulgaria and one of the 10th Bulgarian town-museums.

Veliko Tarnovo was the strongest Bulgarian fortification of the Middle Ages between the 12th and 14th century and the most important political, economic, cultural and religious centre of the empire. In the 14th century as the Byzantine Empire weakened, Tarnovo claimed to be the *Third Rome* based on its preminent cultural influence in the Balkans and the Slavic Orthodox world. All the prosperity and spiritual upsurge was discontinued on 17th July 1393, when after a 3-month siege Veliko Tarnovo, and gradually the whole of Bulgaria succumbed under Ottoman Rule... The Metropolitan town Tarnovgrad was in ashes. On 7 July 1877, Russian general Joseph Vladimirovich Gourko liberated Veliko Tarnovo, ending the 480-year-rule of the Ottoman Empire. In 1878, the Treaty of Berlin created a Principality of

Bulgaria between the Danube and the Stara Planina range, with its seat at the old Bulgarian capital of Veliko Tarnovo. On 17 April 1879, the first National Assembly convened in Veliko Turnovo to ratify the state's first constitution, known as the Tarnovo Constitution, the key result of which resulted in the transfer of Parliament from Tarnovgrad to Sofia, which today remains the Bulgarian capital.

Veliko Tarnovo, often referred to as the *City of the Tsars*, is located on the Yantra river in north central Bulgaria and attracts many tourists with its unique architecture (Fig.3). The old city is situated on three hills - Tsarevets, Trapezitsa and Sveta Gora raising amidst the meanders of the Yantra.

Tsarevets housed the palaces of the Bulgarian Emperors and the Patriarchate with the Patriarchal Cathedral, as well as a number of administrative and residential edifices surrounded by thick walls (Fig.4 and Fig.5). The fortified wall, which in combination with the natural endowments, provided safety of the institutions which were of the greatest importance for the Bulgarian state, is restored. The so-called Baldwin Tower in which Tsar Kaloyan confined the Latin Emperor Baldwin after his capture during the defeat of the Crusaders in 1205 near Odrin



Fig. 3 Architecture of Veliko Tarnovo old city.

rises in its most southern part. Tsarevets Hill finishes in its north-eastern end with a strongly protruding over the Yantra river Lobna Skala (Rock at the place of death) from which traitors were thrown down. Trapezitsa hill was known for its many churches and as the main residence of the nobility. Sveta Gora is the third hill of the Metropolis Tarnovgrad. It rises south of Tsarevets and it was a cultural and spiritual centre of the Bulgarian State in Medieval times. There were a lot of churches and monasteries here. The Tarnovo Literary School and the Tarnovo School of Painting developed a versatile and vivacious activity in the biggest of the monasteries - Holy Virgin Odigitriya.



Fig.4 Tsarevets hill in Veliko Tarnovo (G.Georgiev).



Fig.5 Sound and Light Show on Tsarevets hill.

If you should happen to visit this unusual city you will first be taken to see Tsarevets. Staying on the very top of the hill you can see the modern city far in front of you (Fig.2), Trapezitsa hill on the right with students making archeological excavations and the Sveta Gora hill on the left with the Veliko Tarnovo University - second university in Bulgaria, carrying on the old Tarnovo Literary School traditions. You can continue your walk along the Gourko Street with a lot of Revival Period



Fig. 6 Walk along Gourko Street.



Fig. 7 Sarafkin's House.

houses in it, which add romantic atmosphere to the old town (Fig.6). Built steeply above the river, it seems as if they have perched one over the other. One of the most beautiful buildings in this street is Sarafkin's House (Sarafkina kashta-1861) (Fig.7). Before realizing it, you will reach the Art Gallery and the monuments to the Assens' Dynasty in front of it, located on a picturesque peninsula Borouna, rising above the Yantra river (Fig.8 and Fig.9). After making lovely pictures of the old city, you can easily come back walking along the Samovodene Market Street (Samovodska charshia). Here you can feel the spirit of the olden times with the all skillful craftsmen fashion and sell exquisite objects in the small restored workshops. There are a lot of other interesting old houses, public buildings, squares, dozens of monuments, too.



Fig. 8 Art Gallery and the monuments to the Assens' Dynasty.

Veliko Turnovo is the town with the most glorious historical past in Bulgaria. It is a symbol of Bulgarian statehood and a source of national pride for every Bulgarian. It is difficult to describe Veliko Tarnovo, it is worth seeing with one's own eyes!



Fig.9 Panoramic view of Veliko Tarnovo.

References:

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