

DOWNFALL OF THE TWO EMPIRES – TATARS AND BULGARIANS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

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ЗАЛЕЗЪТ НА ДВЕТЕ ЦАРСТВА – ТАТАРИ И БЪЛГАРИ ПРЕЗ ВТОРАТА ПОЛОВИНА НА XIV ВЕК

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Abstract: На база на славянски, гръцки, западни и ориенталски писмени извори и археологически материал статията разглежда най-неясния период в историята на българо-татарските отношения в средновековието, покривайки времето от смъртта на хан Узбек в 1341, до превземането на Варна от татарите на Актау (Актав) през 1399 г. Подробно се анализира съдбата на татарските земи на запад от река Днестър и тяхната политическа организация в този период, ролята на татарския княз Димитрий/Темир (*Demetrius princeps Tartarorum*) и преселването на татарите на Актау на Балканите. В текста се представят допълнителни доказателства, за да се потвърди становището, съгласно което действията на татарите на Актау, не били насочени срещу останките на Добруджанското деспотство, както често се смята в българската медиевистика.

Keywords: The Golden Horde, Despotate of Dobrudja, ‘*Demetrius princeps Tartarorum*’, Aktau Tatars, Prut-Dniester interfluve.

The second half of the fourteenth century was marked by decline of the two empires – the Golden Horde and the Second Bulgarian empire. The two states had exactly a century long, turbulent history of their mutual relations before the death of Özbek (1313–1341), khan of the Golden Horde. His demise marked the end of an era of Tatar political and military influence in the Balkans, sometimes called the ‘Tatar hegemony’¹. In the following decades, the supreme position of the Golden

¹ The last Tatar military campaign in the Balkans, directed against the Byzantine empire and its possessions in Thrace, was recorded in 1342 (*Cantacuzenus*, II, 303; Павлов – Владимиров 2009, 124–125).

Horde in the lands between the Dnieper and the Danube Delta was challenged by the neighboring powers, while Bulgarian rulers lost Tatar military support they enjoyed in the previous decades. Although Bulgarian-Tatar relations went through profound changes during the second half of the fourteenth century, their mutual contacts were not brought to an end.

Before turning our attention to the main topics of the text, some remarks about the internal conditions of the Tatar domains are necessary to be put here. Lands situated to the west of Dnieper formed the ‘right wing’ of the Golden Horde. At the end of the thirteenth century, their undisputed ruler was Nogai, ‘the maker of khans’, who was a member of a side branch of the Juchid ruling lineage (**Vasary 2005**, 69–98; **Павлов – Владимиров 2009**, 79–114; **Узелац 2015**, 185–230). After Nogai was defeated by the legitimate khan, his cousin Tokhta in 1299/1300, his lands were handed over to the khan’s son Ilbasar (**СМИЗО, I**, 119, 162; **Узелац 2015**, 247–249). In the years after 1341 they were ruled by another Tatar potentate, named Atlamish, brother-in-law of Özbek’s son and successor, khan Djanibeg (1342–1357) (**Chronicon Dubnicense**, 151–152).

The reign of Atlamish proved to be short. In the beginning of 1345, an army of Transylvanian Szeklers, led by Andrew Lackfi, penetrated deep within the Tatar territories in northern Moldavia and killed Atlamish in a pitched battle (**Chronicon Dubnicense**, 151–152, 167–168; **Vásáry 2006**, 17–30; **Căprăroiu 2014**, 1–11)². The conflict between the Hungarians and the Tatars in northern Moldavia lasted for several more years. Eventually, as a consequence of the war tribulations, but also the plague that heavily hit nomadic communities (**Chronicon Dubnicense**, 148), the Tatars were pushed towards the Sea, and forced to abandon the region. This is where the Moldavian principality was established in the beginning of the second half of the fourteenth century, after the expulsion of the Tatars (**Spinei 1986**, 193–215; **Papacostea 1988**, 48–58; **Русев 1999**, 390–394; **Майоров 2013**, 44–50).

The campaign of Lackfi was an ominous sign. It showed that the Tatars in the West had to count solely on their own resources to stop the aspirations of the neighboring powers. Khan Djanibeg, occupied with affairs in the Crimea and the conflict with the Genoese, was not able, or willing, to provide support to his brother-in-law. The Tatar position became even worse after the khan’s demise in 1357, when the Golden Horde entered the era of the ‘great troubles’ and serious internal crisis that lasted for more than two decades. At the end of 1362, Lithuanians, led by their energetic leader Algir-

²The campaign is described in detail in the two contemporary Hungarian texts – Archdeacon John of Küküllő and Anonymous Hungarian Minorite; both accounts are preserved in the fifteenth century Chronicle of Dubnica. It is also reflected in the fourteenth century Serbian redaction of the Romance of Alexander (Serbian Alexandria), describing Alexander’s fictitious campaign against ‘Cumans’ and their ruler Atlamish. The motive and details of the story were obviously borrowed from the Hungarian contemporary narratives (**Узелац 2016**, 221–228; cf. **Майоров 2013**, 46–47)

das/Olgierd, inflicted another heavy blow to them. Hadjibey, Kutlubuga and Dimitry, the Tatar leaders and ‘brothers’ (as sources call them), suffered a crushing defeat in the so-called ‘Battle of Blue Waters’, or the watercourse of Sinyukha, a tributary of the Southern Bug (ПСРЛ XXXV, 66, 74; ПСРЛ XL, 130; Шабульдо 1987, 57–58, 68–69). Similarly to Lackfi’s victory over Atlamish that led to the end of the Tatar rule over northern Moldavia, the Lithuanian victory at the Battle of Blue Waters caused the disintegration of the Tatar power in the regions of Kiev, Podolia³, as well as Beloberezhye on the right bank of the middle Dnieper (Spinei 1986, 187–188; Шабульдо 1987, 71–73; Галенко 2005, 140). Nonetheless, Hadjibey, Kutlubuga and Dimitry, who were successors, and possibly descendants of Atlamish, continued to play important role in the history of the lands in the Prut-Dniester interfluve.

During this period the Tatar political domination in the Danube Delta remained undisputed. The port of Vicina came under the Tatar control at the end of the reign of Özbek (Laurent 1946, 230–231; Deletant 1984, 516–517). Depicted with the ‘flag’ of the Golden Horde on the map of Catalan geographer Angelino Dulcert (1339), Vicina gradually lost its commercial importance. The Genoese traders were still present there in 1351, when the doge requested a war contribution from the citizens of the republic residing in Cembalo (Balaklava), Maurocastro (*Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy*) and Vicina (Cinque documenti, 250; Balard 1978, 144–145), but during the same decade the hub of their trading activities was already transferred to the neighboring area of Chilia-Lycostomo.

Important notices about the neighboring Tatar populations and their traditional decimal organisation are preserved in the acts of Genoese notary Antonio da Ponzio from Chilia from 1360–1361. Among them are three documents, from February 11, February 21 and May 12, 1361 respectively, mentioning Tatars engaged in the slave trade. In the text of the acts, the three Tatar men, Thoboch, Themir and Daoch, who participated in this practice, are recorded as members of certain units of ten, hundred and thousand. At the head of these Tatar minghans, or ‘thousands’, were miliarii Coia (Khodja), Conachobei (Kochubei) and Megliabucha (Menglibuga) (Notai Genovesi, I 16, 22, 175; Рыцев 2009, 97)⁴. The first document also mentions Tatar residents

³ It seems that the Slavic population of Podolia previously participated in the Tatar war efforts against Szeklers and Hungarians. A royal charter from 1357, records that Lackfi’s campaign was directed ‘contra Tartaros et Rutenos’ (Erdelyi okmánytar, III, 324; Vásáry 2006, 22).

⁴ Possibly, Conachobei/Kochubei was the same person attested in a Genoese-Tatar peace treaty of 1380, under the name Conachbei (Trattato, 165; Гулевич 2013, 146). However, proposed identification of miliarius Coia or Khodja with Hadjibey (Khojabey?), one of the Tatar leaders who participated in the Battle of Blue Waters, is difficult to accept (cf. Гулевич 2013, 147). Namely, while the former was the leader of a ‘thousand’, the three Tatar leaders, defeated at the Battle of Blue Waters must have enjoyed higher rank in the traditional nomadic organisation, being without doubt tümen-noyons, or commanders of 10,000.

of the hitherto unknown settlement of Iavaria: men named Aruch, Oia, and Bechangur, messenger of the ‘miliarius Coia’, who acted as witnesses in the trade agreement (**Notai Genovesi, I** 16). It cannot be excluded that the men from Iavaria were Christianized. In this aspect, it is worthy of note that in 1373, certain ‘Georgius de Janua, olim Tartarius’ is recorded in the acts from the neighboring Lycostomo (**Notai Genovesi, II**, 198; **Рыцев 1997**, 159). Unfortunately, the Genoese acts from Chilia and Lycostomo do not reveal the name of the Tatar commander, or tümen-noyon that stood above the three miliarii, Coia, Conachobei and Megliabucha, in the nomadic hierarchy.

Similarly, Bulgarian-Tatar relations during the reign of Djanibeg are completely shrouded in obscurity. Some indications are provided only after the Hungarians temporarily captured the city of Vidin in 1365, after a ferocious campaign. A charter of Hungarian King Louis I of Anjou (1342–1382), issued in the same year, mentions certain Alans (‘Jazones’), originating from ‘faraway lands of pagans and infidels’, among the inhabitants of Vidin (**Oklevelek**, 359–360; cf. **Павлов 1987**, 119; **Ciociltan 2000**, 51–53). It is unknown whether these Alans in the Bulgarian Northwest were a second or third generation of the settlers from the Golden Horde⁵, or rather newcomers. Considering that their origin from ‘infidel’, i.e. Muslim lands, is specifically mentioned, the latter seems more probable. If the hypothesis is correct, it would imply that the Bulgarian emperor Ivan Alexander (1331–1371) in Tarnovo, and his son Ivan Sratsimir in Vidin continued to maintain the contacts with the lands of the Golden Horde, either directly or possibly via their allies, princes of Wallachia.

Another channel for these contacts led through the easternmost Bulgarian state – the Despotate of Karvuna or Dobrudja. It was founded in the mid-forties of the fourteenth century, exactly at the time of the death of Atlamish, by Baligh, Dobrotitsa and Theodore, the three brothers who stemmed from the ranks of the mixed local Bulgarian and Cuman aristocracy (**Cantacuzenus, II**, 584; **Стоянов 2000**, 205–206; **Атанасов 2009**, 91–92). The long reign of the middle brother Dobrotitsa (until his death in 1385) left a lasting legacy, visible in the name of the land of Dobrudja. The Despotate gradually emerged as a serious regional power, especially after Dobrotitsa established control over the cities in the Danube Delta and included Silistra (Dristra)

⁵ Alans, settled in the western lands of the Golden Horde, played prominent role in the internal dissensions among Nogai’s descendants and after the Tokhta’s victory many of them fled to the Balkans (**Ciociltan 2000**, 49–51; **Alemanu 2000**, 213–220, **Бубенок 2004**, 168–189; **Узелац 2015**, 175–178, 249–259). Some Alans may have arrived in the Principality of Vidin as early as in 1302, together with Nogai’s grandson Kara Kisek (**СМИЗО, I**, 119, 162; **Павлов 1987**, 112–120). There were other Alan groups present in Bulgaria as well; the notable example is Alan detachment, led by certain Etilis and Temiris (Temur), engaged in the defence of Plovdiv against Byzantine forces in 1323 (**Cantacuzenus, I**, 172–175; **Vasary 2005**, 123–125).

on the Lower Danube among his possessions. Although written sources are silent, some important indications about Dobrotitsa's relations with the neighboring Tatars are preserved in the archaeological material. Particularly valuable in this aspect are recently published numismatic findings that include dozen Serbian coins found in the localities north of the Danube delta, all, with one exception, from the times of Stephen Dushan (1331–1355). The coins undoubtedly entered the Tatar territories through Dobrotitsa's lands, where they circulated in large quantities, and were used as a regular currency (**Кривенко 2014**, 339–345).

These findings present an indirect, but nonetheless valuable testimony about the trading contacts between the Bulgarian Despotate and the western lands of the Golden Horde. At that time, the most prosperous Tatar center and seat of the administrative power in the Prut-Dniester interfluvium was Şehr al-Djedid or Yangi Şehr (modern Orcheul Vechi), northeast of the modern Moldovan capital of Chişinău. The remains of mosques, caravanserais, hamams, as well as numerous coins minted until 1368/69 were found there, bearing Islamic inscriptions and legends (**Янина 1977**, 193–215; **Николае 1999**, 142–146; **Постикэ 2005**, 151–155). However, despite profound islamization among the local Tatar population, the most prominent figure in the region bore a Christian name. It was Prince Dimitry, one of the three 'brothers' defeated in the Battle of Blue Waters⁶. His political authority is attested in a charter of Hungarian King Louis I from June 22, 1368, issued to the city of *Braşov and its merchants*. In this document, immunity and exemption from taxes and custom duties was granted to merchants *from the lands* of 'Demetrii principis Tartarorum', and the same privileges were confirmed to their counterparts *from Braşov, conducting their activities in the lands of Dimitry* (**DRH D**, 90, no. 49)⁷. Dimitry is also presumably mentioned by two Russian chronicles: Rogozhskaya and Nikonovskaya, who record the Lithuanian expedition against Tatars, led by certain Temer (Темерь. Темирез), in 1374 (**ПСРЛ XI**, 20; **ПСРЛ XV**, 106; **Шабульдо 1987**, 112–113). As some historians rightfully noted, the various names of the Tatar prince in the Slavic and the Latin sources are probably just variations of the Turko-Mongol personal name Temur (**Руссев 1999**, 394–395). The memory of Dimitry/Temer is also preserved in local toponymy. In 1419 the Russian monk Zosima described how he traveled from Kiev to Belgorod, traversing an area called the 'Tatar steppe', along the 'Tatar road' until arriving 'under Mitir's kishini' ('Dimitry's tents?') on the Dniester, three days from Belgorod, where the custom and the ferry were established between Litha-

⁶ Some researchers suggested that Dimitry was of Alan or Slavic origin, but purely on the basis of his Christian name (cf. **Дашкевич 2006**, 117).

⁷ '[...]quam mercatores domini Demetrii, principis Tartarorum, de suis rebus mercimonialibus in regno nostro solvere deberent, non faciemus recipi, ita, ut et vos in terra ipsius domini Demetrii secure et libere positos transire sine solutione tricesime cum rebus vestris et bonis mercimonialibus, datum in Wysegrad.'

nian and Moldavian lands (Записки, 121, 299; Галенко 2005, 142; Русцев 2014, 124–125)⁸.

While most of the researchers agree that Dimitry ruled from Şehr al-Djedid, some expressed doubts, offering different interpretations of the local numismatic findings (cf. Hiescu 1997, 168–170; Русцев 2010, 33–35). This question of Dimitry's seat of power is, however, of secondary importance. Considering the privileges granted in the *Braşov* charter and particular interests of the Transylvanian traders to gain an access to the Black sea ports, Dimitry's domains evidently extended towards the commercial centers in the Danube Delta and the mouth of the Dniester. Therefore, it was only him who could have been the successor of Atlamish and supreme Tatar lord in the western lands, exercising the overlordship over his two 'brothers' Hadjibey and Kutlubuga. At least that was the situation until around 1370, when another heavy blow befell upon the Tatars, due to the Moldavian expansion. The circumstances of the events are obscure, but it is evident that the Tatar power in the central Moldavia and Şehr al-Djedid was brought to an end at that time.

In 1386, a Genoese embassy from Crimea, led by Carollo dell'Orto and Illario Doria arrived in Maurocastro, with an aim to establish the contact with Moldavian voevodes Petru II Muşat (1375–1391) and Constantine (Papacostea 1988, 99). The Genoese and the Tatars in Crimea were engulfed in the conflict and it seems that the aim of the delegation was the formation of the anti-Tatar alliance. At the same time, the Genoese were also in the war with the Bulgarian Despotate that lasted until May 1387, when Dobrotitsa's son Ivanko concluded a peace treaty with the Ligurian Republic (Deletant 1984, 518–519; Гюзелев 1995, 127–132; Атанасов 2009, 112–113). As in the previous decades, no information about Bulgarian-Tatar contacts during this era are preserved, but considering that the Genoese were their mutual adversary, it may be supposed that their mutual relations remained cordial.

The notices about the Genoese embassy of 1386 led to conclusions that Maurocastro was already under Moldavian control at that time (cf. Deletant 1984, 525–526; Spinei 1986, 218–219), but this is far from certain⁹. It seems that the

⁸ «[...]И поидохом въ поле татарское и идохом пятьдесять миль дорогою татарское, еже зовется: на Велики Дол, и обретохом реку велику под Митиревыми Кишинами, еже зовется Нестр; туто бяше перевоз и порубежье волоское. Об ону страну Волохове перевоз емлют, а о сю страну князя великаго Витофтовы и тамгу емлють и тем ся опять делять. И оттоле три дни до Бела города ити по Волоскои стране».

⁹ In fact, it is unclear who controlled Maurocastro or Belgorod during this period. On the map of Catalan geographer Guillem Soler (1380), Maurocastro was represented with the Mongol tamgha. The city is then mentioned in the Russian 'list of Bulgarian and Wallachian cities', composed at the very end of the fourteenth, or the beginning of the fifteenth century (Список, 94, 99). However, in 1410 Genoese cleric Nicollo da Porta included 'Mocastro' among Genoese ports 'in partibus Saracenorum', together with the Crimean Caffa and Soldaia (Historia translationis, 239).

attempts of Moldavian rulers to secure access to the Black Sea became successful in the last decade of the fourteenth century. Their ambitions are reflected in the title of voevode Roman Muşat (from 1392 and 1393), who proudly stated that he ruled ‘the Moldavian land, from the mountain to the shores of the Sea’ (**Папачостеа 1988**, 100–101). Eventually, the establishment of the Moldavian control over the ‘Tatar road’ leading towards the Lower Dniester and its estuary, left the nomadic populations in the Prut-Dniester interfluvium isolated from their cousins in the east, but still independent from the neighboring powers.

The independence of the Tatars is well attested in the contemporary sources. A Papal letter from 1374, sent to the Hungarian king, mentions the Tatars on the Wallachian borderlands (‘...nationis Wlachonum, qui certas metas Regni tui versus Tartaros commorantes’) (**Vetera Monumenta II**, 152; cf. **Vasary 2005**, 141). The Tatar lands stretched from the Danubian port of Brăila, attested as the easternmost city in the Principality of Wallachia around 1390, in a privilege issued by Wallachian ruler Mircea the Elder (1386–1418) to merchants from Lwow (**Грамоти XIV ст**, 104.)¹⁰. Conspicuously, Mircea managed at the time to temporarily extend his authority over Silistra and parts of Karvuna or Dobrudja, possibly at the expense of Ivanko (**Павлов – Тютюнджиев 1995**, 109–110; **Атанасов 2009**, 153). The Tatar regions, nonetheless, remained out of his reach and in 1391, the Wallachian prince styled himself as the ruler of the lands ‘incipiendo ab alpinis usque ad confinia Tartarie’ (**DRH B**, 36, no. 15). Similar title, including the possessions ‘towards Tatar lands’ (‘къ Татарским странам’), figured prominently in the Slavic titles of Mircea and his successors between 1406 and 1421 (**DRH B**, 66, 70, 73. no. 30, 32, 34 et passim).

The ‘Tatar lands’, mentioned in the titles of the Wallachian princes, were variously interpreted in the terms of micro-geography. What can be said with certainty is that they were related to the Prut-Dniester interfluvium or the historical region of Budjak, and not to the northern Dobrudja as some researchers suggested (**Coman 2003**, 148–149; cf. **Ciociltan 1987**, 349–355). Moreover, the plural form, albeit vague, indicates the existence of more than one such land, and consequently more than one Tatar lord (**Русцев 1997**, 160; **Русцев 1999**, 393). Who were these Tatar potentates is not difficult to guess. Dimitry/Temer disappears from the sources after 1374, but his two ‘brothers’ Kutlubuga and Hadjibey were active for at least another decade and a half. According to the Ottoman chronicler Neşri (d. 1520), during the Turkish campaign against the Bulgarian capital of Tarnovo in 1388, the leader of the expedition Ali Pasha ‘sent a plenipotentiary to the beys of the borderlands, Yandj bey and Kutluboga’, with a request to join the Ottoman army in the campaign against Bulgarian Emperor Ivan Shishman (**Нешири**, 93).

¹⁰ [...]а они да сж слободни ходити по всей земли и области Г[о]с[по]д[ь]ствами, продавати и купувати по вьсѣх[ъ] трьговах[ъ][и] по вьсѣх[ъ] бродовох[ъ] подунавских[ъ], почавше от[ъ] Желѣзных[ъ] вратъ дори до самог[о] Браилова.

The appearance of Hadjibey and Kutlubuga in the history of Neşri is in accordance with the historical realities of the era, but it is highly doubtful whether they really took part in the campaign against Tarnovo. In the penultimate decade of the fourteenth century the Ottomans were not in a position to exercise their influence to the north of the Danube. Moreover, good neighborly relations between the Tatars and the Bulgarians at that time can be circumstantially confirmed by numismatic findings. Dobrotitsa's son Terter (possibly identical with Ivanko), issued coins with the monogram Terter and the representations of the man, star and the crescent moon. These coins, with symbols interpreted as a sign of the Tatar supremacy, were earlier wrongly attributed to the Bulgarian ruler George I Terter (1280–1292), but they undoubtedly belonged to the Dobrotitsa's son who ruled from Silistra (**Діасону 1978**, 188–190; **Руссев 1997**, 153–156; **Атанасов 2009**, 133–138; **Атанасов – Павлов 2011**, 23–25).

Who was the Tatar ally or protector of the Bulgarian state in Silistra: either Hadjibey or Kutlubuga, remains disputed (**Атанасов 2009**, 138; **Атанасов – Павлов 2011**, 26; cf. **Дашкевич 2006**, 116). However, these findings are important as they evidently cast doubt on Neşri's report about Tatar participation in the anti-Bulgarian campaign in 1388; and they are not the only ones. According to another Ottoman source, poet Enveri who was Neşri's contemporary, in the famous battle of Kosovo (1389), fought between the Serbs and the Ottomans, the former managed to gather a strong coalition against Ottoman ruler Murad (1362–1389), that also included Tatars from the 'Khanate of Kipchak' (**Cronici turcesti**, 38). The Tatar presence on the Serbian side in the Battle of Kosovo is probably just a fanciful invention, although some researchers allow that possibility (**Павлов – Владимиров 2009**, 128–129). Here is, however, more important to mark Enveri's words as an indication that the Tatars were not regarded as allies in the early Ottoman tradition.

Finally, cordial Bulgarian-Tatar mutual relations are reflected in yet another intriguing source – Armorial of Ulrich von Richental, created during the Council in Constance (1414–1418). Under the Bulgarian coat of arms it contains the following inscription: 'Tsar of Bulgaria, who should also have one representative from the Horde' ('*Der Kayser von Bulgarien der mus och ainen haben zu vicarien von Ordo und hett under im regem Chaldeorum*') (**Бегунов 1974**, 61; **Руссев 1997**, 162–163). The emperor of Bulgaria from the inscription was identified with Constantine, son of Ivan Sratsimir, while the Tatar 'representative' may have been an unnamed successor of Dimitry or his 'brothers' in the Prut-Dniester interfluvium (**Атанасов – Павлов 2011**, 27).

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In the previous pages, it was demonstrated how the Tatars in the West, despite the reduction of their lands, managed to keep their independence in the turbulent period of the 'Great turmoil' in the Golden Horde. In addition, obscure evidences of

the Bulgarian-Tatar contacts and their cordial relations during the second half of the fourteenth century were discussed. They would be incomplete without turning our attention to an important, albeit obscured episode, which took place at the time when Tarnovo (1393) and Vidin (1396) were already in the hands of the Ottomans, while the state of Dobrotitsa's successors was reduced to a mere enclave on the Black Sea.

Khan of the Golden Horde Tokhtamysh, who managed to bring much needed internal stability in the Juchid lands, suffered crushing defeat at the hands of the mighty armies of Tamerlane on the banks river Terek in 1395 (**Миргалеев 2003**, 130–135; **Миргалеев 2011**, 170–182). Waves of terror and destruction ensued. Many of the khan's supporters and followers were either put to the sword, forced to submit to the conqueror, or to flee. According to the two biographers of Tamerlane, Nizam al-Din Shami and Sharaf ad-Din Ali Yazdi, among the fugitives were two tümens led by Tash-Temur and Aktau, commanders who fought with Tokhtamysh at the battle of Terek (**СМИЗО, II**, 120, 176–177; **Десей 2010**, 203). They fled to the west of the river Dnieper, and found refuge in the lands of Uymatay (Harmadai, Saramdai); the last name, variously written in the manuscripts, is obviously either geographic place or personal name of the local Tatar leader (**СМИЗО, II**, 121, 179; **Зафар-наме**, 200). Yazdi, who is more detailed than his counterpart, states that the position of the Tatars of Aktau afterwards went from bad to worse. Eventually, they escaped over the Danube to the 'land of Rum' and settled on the plains of 'Israica' (Thrace?) (**СМИЗО, II**, 179; **Зафар-наме**, 200)¹¹. Their arrival and acceptance in the service of Murad's son Bayezid (1389–1402) is also recorded in the Ottoman sources. The immigrants, consisting of one tümen, or 10,000 men at most¹², represented a rather formidable strength. Their pacification was not an easy task and it was enforced only after Bayezid treacherously murdered the Tatar leader on the eve of the battle of Angora in 1402 (**Бойков 2007**, 3–18; **Десей 2010**, 206).

The migrations of the Tatars of Aktau are reflected in another source. It is the Greek Chronicle of Mesembria that contains a following entry: 'in the year of 6907

¹¹ Reflection of the migrations of the Tatars of Aktau is also preserved in the work of Syrian contemporary Ibn Arabshah. He mentions certain Tatar group that had to flee to the lands of Rus' and Rum. Their name, was according to the Arab writer, 'Khara-Bogdan' (**СМИЗО, I**, 470). There is no need to emphasize that the last name is nothing else than Turkic denomination of Moldavia.

¹² The information is provided by Yazdi. On the other hand, Ottoman historians Ruhi and Kemalpaşazâde mention 180.000 men, or 50.000 Tatars of Aktau staying in Bayezid's service as sipahis (**Десей 2010**, 207; **Бойков 2007**, 15–16). Late Byzantine historian Laonikos Chalkokondyles, who was not a contemporary of the events, recorded that innumerable multitude of the Tatars descended from 'Wallachia' after they sent the presents to Bayezid to accept them into his service (**Laonikos Chalkokondyles**, 93–94). It is possible that some other Tatar groups joined the Tatars of Aktau in their migrations, but the numbers provided by the Ottoman and Byzantine sources are overly exaggerated.

(=1399), 7th indiction, on February 2nd, on Friday, the city of Varna was captured by godless Tatars' (**Byzantinischen Kleinchroniken, III, 60; Павлов – Тютюнджиев 1995, 111–112 Гюзелев 1995, 80–83**).

The importance of the entry is duly noted in the Bulgarian historiography. However, the Tatar takeover of Varna was frequently interpreted as a final step in the liquidation of the Despotate, and it seems that this opinion is unfounded. It is worthy of note that some Bulgarian researchers rightfully pointed out that Varna was probably in the hands of the Ottomans at least a decade before the Tatar arrival (**Кузев 1981, 303–304**). Namely, the city was the seat of the state of Ivanko in the late eighties of the fourteenth century, but conspicuously enough, the records about metropolitans of the city cease after 1389, and according to the Turkish tradition recorded in the seventeenth century by traveler Evliya Çelebi, Varna fell in the Ottoman hands during the reign of Murad, slain in the battle of Kosovo in 1389 (**Пътуването, 722**). Evidently, in the last decade of the fourteenth century, the seat of the Bulgarian Despotate was transferred to Kaliakra, called by Bavarian knight Johannes Schiltberger capital of 'third Bulgaria' (**Johann Schiltberger, 39**). There, Hungarian king Sigismund of Luxembourg stayed for a short time after he was defeated at the battle of Nicopolis in 1396, and before he went to Constantinople (**Венециански документи, 165**).

The entry from the Chronicle of Mesembria does not indicate whether the Tatars of Aktau captured Varna from the Bulgarians or from the Ottomans. Nonetheless, taking into account the previous notices, the latter possibility seems more probable. Furthermore, the enmity between the Tatars and the Turks is attested in another neglected, but well-informed contemporary writer. It is Arabic scholar Badr al-Din al-'Ayni (1360–1453), according to whom, in the year of 801 AH (September 1398/August 1399) Tokhtamysh, 'ruler of the Dasht-i Kipchak and Sarai' met with the army of Ibn Osman (=Bayezid), and there were losses on both sides (**СМИЗО, I, 531; Десей 2010, 203**).

At first glance, doubts arise with respect to the veracity of the words of al-'Ayni; there is no need to emphasize that Tokhtamysh was not able to personally clash with Bayezid. In late 1397 or 1398, he lost the power in the Golden Horde, and was forced to find a refuge at the court of mighty Lithuanian prince Vytautas¹³, whose power

¹³ Soon after the disaster at Terek, Tokhtamysh lost his power in the Golden Horde, under the pressure of his adversary Temur Kutlugh, and mighty emir Edigu of Mangkyt clan (**Трепавлов 2002, 72–89**). In 1397 Tokhtamysh was in Crimea (**СМИЗО, I, 364; Миргалеев 2003, 144–145**), but in the same year, according to Russian chronicles, he was defeated by the forces of Temur Kutlugh, or rather Edigu. Consequently, he was forced to find refuge with his family in Kiev under the patronage of Vytautas. (**ПСРЛ VIII, 71; ПСРЛ XXXV, 71; Миргалеев 2003, 145**) The influence of Tokhtamysh was still strong in the western domains of the Golden Horde and Vytautas, who now acquired a powerful tool in his hand, intended to use the exiled khan to expand his sphere of interest. His hopes were soon dispersed. Invading Lithuanian army, strengthened with auxiliary troops of Russians, Teuton-

was felt even in the Bulgarian Northeast¹⁴. However, it seems that the words of the Mamluk historian should not be related to the exiled khan of the Golden Horde, but to his formal (and former) subjects – the Tatars of Aktau. Al-'Ayni also recorded that the news of the clash between the Tatars and the Ottomans arrived in Cairo during the April of 1399 (*Децей* 2010, 203), so the event evidently took place approximately a couple of months earlier. Thus, the conflict recorded by the Mamluk historian chronologically coincides with the Tatar takeover of Varna in the early February 1399, precisely recorded in the Chronicle of Mesembria. It is hardly an accident; rather, it seems that both sources, the Greek and the Arabic one, reveal from different perspectives the clashes between the Tatars and the Ottomans that took place around Varna in the early 1399.

The only plausible interpretation of the reports provided by the Chronicle of Mesembria and al-'Ayni is that the Tatars of Aktau did not descend in the Balkans as the Ottoman allies, but as an enemy force, before they were persuaded by Bayezid's diplomacy to lay down their arms and join his army. Were there any contacts, and what was their nature, between the Aktau group and the Bulgarian Despotate in Kaliakra is not recorded in the sources. Nonetheless, the previous considerations convincingly show that the negative role, attributed to the Tatars in the final demise of the Despotate, should be profoundly reconsidered.

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ic knights and Tatars loyal to Tokhtamysh, suffered a heavy defeat by the army led by Temur Kutlugh and Edigu on the banks of the River Vorskla in the summer of 1399 (*Миргалев* 2003, 146–147).

¹⁴In the years preceding the defeat at Vorskla, most probably in 1395 or 1396, a document stemmed from his chancery, in which his dependents and potential allies were enumerated. This document, incorporated in the sixteenth century Supras'lskaya chronicle, besides Russian princes and Central European rulers, also includes 'the lord of Moldavian and Bessarabian land, called voevode in Wallachian language, and also the lord of the Bulgarian land, called despot in Bulgarian language' (*ПСРЛ XXXV*, 59). It is accepted in historiography that this Bulgarian ruler could have been none other than Ivanko (*Божилев – Гюзелев* 2004, 255; *Атанасов* 2009, 197–198).

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