

A DILEMMA FROM THE AUSTRIAN CONQUEST OF NIŠ (1689): IS VOJNIK HILL ACTUALLY VINIK OR GOLA ČUKA?

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Milan Randelović

University of Niš, Innovation Center, Serbia

ORCID iD: Milan Randelović

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9215-205X>

Abstract. *The insufficient representation of certain topics in local history may cause the results of scientific research that was not thoroughly conducted to be accepted as indisputable facts. This has a disastrous effect on the discovery of new scientific truths, because compromised but entrenched opinions can mislead future researchers of a particular problem. Such is the case with the role of Vojnik hill in the Austrian conquest of Niš in 1690 and its identification with the Vinik hill represented by Radmila Tričković in the chapter “Niš u velikom ratu” (Istorija Niša I, 1983). As this research used a larger body of sources than R. Tričković used in her reconstruction of this event, we will point out the unsustainability of the Vojnik–Vinik theory, the clues that led R. Tričković to a wrong conclusion and provide a documented explanation of the theory about the identification of the toponyms Vojnik with Gola Čuka hill (Lisinać).*

Key words: *Vinik, Vojnik, Gola Čuka, Niš, 1689.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Although it is among the oldest cities in the Balkans, the historiography of Niš is insufficiently rich in capital works related to its past, either in general or with a focus on a particular era. That is why the three-volume “Istorija Niša” represents the only example of multidisciplinary editorial work on identifying and analyzing social, political, religious and cultural processes which took place in this city in the past. Over the past decades, many results achieved by renowned scientists gathered on this project have been surpassed and supplemented. That is a normal process and it should be so. However, statements of certain authors have acquired the status of historical axioms, although they do not correspond to scientific truth. Those perspectives do not drastically affect the broader picture of the problem the author dealt with, but they make it difficult to further differentiate a certain problem and may mislead future research of its segments. Such is

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Corresponding author: Milan Randelović

University of Niš, Innovation Center, Univerzitetski trg 2 18000, Niš, Serbia

E-mail: istok81@gmail.com

the case with the wrong identification of Vojnik hill as Vinik hill in “Niš u velikom ratu” written by Radmila Tričković. In earlier research we also relied on this work of Radmila Tričković, thus adopting her mistake (see Ranđelović 2022, 22). That is why by this work we correct that mistake and precisely identify Gola Čuka as Vojnik hill, the toponym which played a key role in events that led to Austrian conquest of Niš in 1689.

IDENTIFYING AND SETTING THE PROBLEM

The broader picture of this problem relates to the Austrian conquest of Niš in 1689, i.e. the battle that took place on that occasion between the Austrian and the Ottoman army near Niš. Summarizing a series of sources about it, the course of the battle in the simplest terms went as follows: the Austrian army under the command of General Ludwig von Baden approached Niš from the north on 22 September 1689. However, the Ottoman defense west of the city was too strong for a direct attack. That is why the Austrian army decided to simply bypass it from the north and hit the rear of the Ottoman formation, using its bulkiness as a handicap to quickly turn and react. For the success of such a maneuver it was crucial for the Austrians to go behind the strategically important hill which the Ottomans held at the end of this defensive line. To the east, behind this defensive sector, there was a field where the Austrians could spread their battle formation and hit the Ottomans in the flank and rear. The bypass maneuver of the Austrians began on 24 September. Their battle order was organized in such a way that the left wing from the previous Austrian formation stood at the head of the column. The commander of these Austrian front units was Colonel Count Guido von Starhemberg. The center with the supply units was behind Starhemberg, and the right wing was placed at the rear. Although the Austrians advanced according to the plan, they were continuously bombarded by Ottomans from the hill they were bypassing and hindered with their charges from there. However, Starhemberg’s units managed to bypass the hill and descend into the valley behind it, where they were almost immediately exposed to the attacks of the Ottoman cavalry. While in the process of passing this hill, the Austrian units in the rear were ordered to attack and capture the hill, which they successfully accomplished after much suffering and casualties. By conquering the hill, the Austrian rear units were in a strategic position to bomb the Ottoman positions at Niš and at the front of the Starhemberg army in the valley. The pressure from the hill forced the Ottomans to weaken their attacks and gave Starhemberg the chance to stretch his lines and reach the bank of Nišava river upstream, that is, east of Niš. This was followed by the pressure on the defenders from all the positions held by the Austrians, which by the end of the day led to their victory and the conquest of Niš (Bizozeri 1690, 391–395; Boethius 1690, 1115–1119; Feige 1694, 496–502; Merian 1698, 645–647; Rink 1713, 1028–1031; Marsigli 1732, 93–95; Veterani 1788, 53–56; Diersburg 1842, 139–145; Ranđelović 2022, 22–23). In this simplified account of the battle it is crucial to note that the Austrian army had to bypass a certain hill and move around it from west to east, and then to attack and defeat the Ottoman army from the area to the east, behind that hill.

While Radmila Tričković in her interpretation of these events reconstructed the movements of the military units accurately to some extent, it is evident that she did not have the clearest picture of the terrain where the battle took place. When she describes the defensive line of the Ottomans, she states that their defense *stretched from Nišava to*

the end of vineyards at Popova Gora, at Pantelej, but they managed to fortify only the positions from Nišava to Vinik hill (Tričković 1983, 198). Such a wrong indication, that Popova Gora (today Popova Glava) and Pantelej are right next to each other (or that Popova Glava is at Pantelej), confuses even good connoisseurs of both terrains, because the distance between them is about 5 km as the crow flies. Popova Glava is one of the heights of the Kalafat mountain and is located northwest of Niš, while Pantelej is a city district on the northeast side of Niš. Between these toponyms there is a strategically important three km long plain, Humsko polje, which connects Popova Glava, Vinik and the easternmost elevation, Pantelej.

Furthermore, Tričković does not clearly explain the place from where the Austrians started the bypassing maneuver on 24 September. She says that General Baden could see Vinik in the distance from here, indicating that the Austrians were in the Humsko polje, although she does not state that. Moreover, she does not explain how, on the way from Aleksinac to Niš, the Austrians passed the obstacle formed by the southern heights of Kalafat, Popova Glava and Gola Čuka, and descended into Humsko polje without the Ottomans hindering them. Popova Glava, and especially Gola Čuka located to the south of it (closer to Niš), are two strategic cotes that are known to have had military importance during the Ottoman times; the Ottomans had forts there. The Serbian army in 1877 could reach Niš fortress with artillery from Gola Čuka (Đorđević 1907, 334). At the foot of these hills, from the direction of Aleksinac, the Austrians would not only have problems overcoming their defenses, but also the bigger question is whether Vinik, far to the east, could even be seen.

Regardless of all the above, Tričković identifies Vinik as a hill that the Austrian army bypassed in its maneuver and, thus taking it as a key parameter, she continues to incorrectly project the location of the battle and the positions of the units on the battlefield. In her version, the place where the Austrians broke the Ottoman defense is somewhere in the area between Vinik and Pantelej in the east, and the key point is that the Arnauts under Mahmud Pasha Mahmudbeyzade from Peć, whom Tričković places at Pantelej, abandoned their positions facilitating the Austrian progress in that way (Tričković 1983, 198).

If we exclude the understandable difficulties Tričković had as a researcher to synchronize the Austrian and Ottoman sources, the main problem with her version of the Austrian conquest of Niš is how she came up with Vinik as a key parameter for visualizing this military clash?

VOJNIK–VINIK HILLS AS A WRONG THEORY

In the detailed analysis of Radmila Tričković's version of the Austrian conquest of Niš, we analyzed the sources of the western provenance she used in "Niš u velikom ratu". Also, we used the sources she did not mention, but we believe they were known to her and she might have used them to identify Vinik as the hill which, according to her, had a key role in this battle.

To describe the Austrian conquest of Niš in "Niš u velikom ratu", Tričković used the work of the Italian monk Simpliciani Bizozeri "La Sagra Lega contro la Potenza Ottomana", in which Bizozeri described the first half of the Great Turkish War (1683–1699) and the struggle of the Austrians with the Ottomans in the Balkans. In the part where he describes the Ottoman defense around Niš, Bizozeri does not mention Vinik

either by name or indirectly by description. Describing the left (western) wing of the Ottoman defense of Niš, he says that *on the right side of the wing was a mountain, very steep and full of bushes, which covered the whole half of the enemy's background* (*A loro fianco destro continua il Monte; assai erto, e ingombro da cespugli, il quale ancora loro copriua la meta del tergo*) (Bizozeri 1690, 392). Therefore, according to Bizozeri, the hill could not be in the place where Vinik is located (northeast of Niš), but northwest of the city or, as Bizozeri described it, on the right (northern) side of the left Ottoman wing located west of Niš. With such a representation of the front, it is obvious that this hill separated the left and right wings of the Ottoman defense.

Another title that Tričković used was the second volume of “Des Markgrafen Ludwig Wilhelm von Baden Feldzüge wider die Türken” by Philipp Röder von Diersburg. In two books, based on the correspondence of Margrave Ludwig of Baden, Diersburg described his warfare with the Ottomans while he was a commander-in-chief of the Austrian army during the Great Turkish War. Analyzing Diersburg’s work, we also could not find any mention of Vinik in his description of the battle at Niš. Actually, we could not even identify a hint that the area around Vinik played any role during this battle. On the contrary, when describing the Austrian bypass of the hill from west to east, and their descent into the Humsko polje north of Niš, Diersburg says that the Austrian formation was threatened by the Ottoman infantry which held the high ground to the right of it, i.e., since the Austrians had bypassed the hill and approached Niš from the north, this Ottoman position was on their western side (Diersburg 1842, 143). This confirms Bizozeri’s picture of the battlefield at Niš or, more precisely, that the mentioned hill was located in its northwestern sector, which again excludes the possibility that Vinik was that hill.

The only two sources where we found this strategical hill named are the first volume of “Donau-Bulgarien und der Balkan” by Felix Kanitz and “Reise von Belgrad nach Salonik” by Johann Georg von Hahn. Both authors are from the 19th century, so they used sources about the battle near Niš indirectly. To be more precise, in his work Hahn referred to Kanitz, so it eliminates him as the author who came up with the name of the hill using third sources. Describing the surroundings of Niš, Hahn says that north of the Niš fortress was the hill *Vojnik* (Woinik) with the vineyards on its southern slope (Hahn 1868, 41). Apart from mentioning a big battle in 1689 between the Austrians and the Ottomans there, Hahn does not specify whether this hill was northwest or northeast of Niš, i.e. whether it was Vinik or not. The slopes under vineyards do not exclusively qualify Vinik for this location (although the vineyards there are well-known), since Tričković herself mentions the slopes under vineyards near Popova Gora in the northwest of Niš when she describes the Ottoman defense (Tričković 1983, 198). Kanitz, when writing about this Austrian-Ottoman battle, mentions *Vojnik* (Vojnik), as a place which the Austrians attacked while the units under Guido Starhemberg were fighting in the plain with the Ottoman sipahis (Kanitz 1875, 160). He does not provide other information about this toponym.

If Tričković saw the connection between *Vojnik* and Vinik in the similarity of these words, then it is not clear how their etymology could have misled her, considering it is clear for both words that one indicates a military term, and the other a vineyard.

Apart from these two sources, another title that could have misled Tričković (although she did not list it in the literature about “Niš u velikom ratu”) is “L’Etat militaire de l’empire ottoman” by the Italian military engineer and geographer Luigi Marsigli. (Randelović 2013, 141). As a staff member of Lieutenant-General Federico Veterani, the commander of the Austrian rear (right wing), Marsigli was a witness and direct participant in the Austrian

conquest of Niš (1689). Aside from providing European military experts with valuable information about the Ottoman army, Marsigli enriched his title with numerous maps of the battles that Austrians led against the Ottomans during the Great Turkish War. One of those maps is the map of the battle at Niš (1689), as well as accompanying comments about the movement of units on the battlefield. Although he was very detailed with his description of the battle and the position of the units, Marsigli failed to reflect his comments precisely into the map. For example, he marked the route of the Austrian descent into Humsko polje from the west (EEEE on his map). He comments this as *the movement of the second line of the Imperial Army in the valley between two ranges of hills* (Marsigli 1732, 93). Without doubt, the mentioned valley is Humsko polje. However, the problem is that Humsko polje is presented at the right end of his map, as being geographically east of Niš, instead of north of it. What actually happened is that Marsigli did not chart the eastern part of Niš at all. He did not do that because the eastern part of the battlefield, where Vinik is located, probably had secondary importance during the battle, if it had any importance at all. If Vinik was in Marsigli's map, it would be located much further east and outside of his focus of the battlefield.

All this led to conclusions that Kanitz's *Vojnik* is not the same with Vinik and that Radmila Tričković failed to identify the right hill that the Austrians bypassed and conquered during the battle at Niš (1689).

GOLA ČUKA AS VOJNIK HILL

In the research conducted for the reconstruction of the battle at Niš (1689), we came across some information which helped us to precisely identify the hill where the Austrians performed a maneuver to bypass the Ottoman defenses and penetrate into their rear. For that we used the map of the battlefield at Niš published by Diersburg in "Des Markgrafen Ludwig Wilhelm von Baden Feldzüge wider die Türken" and the information provided by Moriz Edlen von Angeli in his study on the Austrian offensive in the Great Turkish War "Die kaiserliche Armee unter dem Ober-Commando des Markgrafen Ludwig von Baden in den Feldzügen 1689–92 gegen die Türken". The Great Turkish War is a prominent topic in European historiography and many authors dealt with it, but we put our trust in Angeli's perspective. He based his results exclusively on archival material from the Vienna Kriegsarchiv and, being a military officer himself, he focused particular attention on the details which concern movements on the ground, crucial for our work.

According to the measure ratio given by Diersburg in his map of the battlefield at Niš, the Ottoman defense line started on the right bank of Nišava 4.5 km west of the city. Then, at a distance of approximately Popovac, it stretched to the north, thus leaving this village on its left, western side. From Popovac, the Ottoman line inclined towards the northeast and extended another 6 km to the hill where it ended. According to Angeli, that hill was isolated and located 4.5–5 km west of Niš (Angeli 1877, 171). Although Angeli does not mention it by name, the only place that undeniably fits this description is the southernmost elevation of Mount Calafat, Gola Čuka. The neighboring hill north of Gola Čuka is Popova Glava, which Tričković also mentions as the cote of the Ottoman defense line. This sector represents the western, strongest part of the Ottoman defense of Niš while Gola Čuka makes its northern point which the Austrians had to bypass. The Ottoman

defense cannonaded the Austrians from Gola Čuka, but the rear of Austrians column captured the hill and bombarded the Ottoman positions north of Niš from it.

In addition to geographical factors, military circumstances also qualify Gola Čuka as a key hill for breaking the Ottoman defense of Niš. The place where General Baden and his army came to the Niš region on 22 September 1689 was somewhere approximately at the distance of Gornja Toponica. Moving from there to the east, to Paljina village, Baden would be able to bypass Popova Glava and leave it on his western side. Following the eastern edges of Popova Glava and Gola Čuka, the Austrians could descend from Paljina to the south directly to the Humsko polje, on the northern side of Niš. However, the problem with theorizing about this route is that it is more than 13 km long. Taking into account the size of the Austrian army (~17 000 men), this would give the Ottomans enough time to strengthen their positions in Humsko polje and on the eastern edge of Gola Čuka, from where they could use artillery to stop or hinder the Austrian advance towards Niš. We know from sources that the Ottomans did not fortify the eastern side of Gola Čuka (Arneth 1853, 172). The fact that the Austrians planned to use the weakness of this elevation for a relatively safe passage, and that their camp on 23 September was only two hours from the Popovac–Gola Čuka line discredits the theory that the Austrians (from the eastern side of Popova Glava and Gola Čuka) suddenly appeared in Humsko Polje, and from there, as Tričković claimed, started to bypass Vinik, which is located at the eastern end of this plain. Finally, the positioning of the Austrian units in the final phase of the battle on the Humsko polje indicates that Gola Čuka, not Vinik, was the key hill in this battle. After the frontal units under the command of Guido Starhemberg went down to Humsko polje bypassing Gola Čuka, they immediately started spreading their lines to encircle Niš from Humsko polje to the right bank of Nišava in the east. During this operation, Starhemberg's men were hindered by the attacks of the sipahi cavalry in Humsko polje. At one point, a part of the Ottoman army got into position to nail in between Gola Čuka and the western parts of Starhemberg's units in Humsko polje. This way the Ottoman formation could separate Starhemberg from the center and the rear of the Austrian army, which had just climbed Gola Čuka. After taking Gola Čuka, commander Heistler from the Austrian rear saw the danger of this Ottoman maneuver, so he ordered rapid linking of the rear units at Gola Čuka with Starhemberg's army in Humsko Polje (Diersburg 1842, 143). In this way, the penetration of the Ottomans was prevented, and the Austrian encirclement of Niš from the north and east was successfully carried out. The Austrian supply units moved to the north behind the Austrian siege ring, safe from further enemy attacks. As Vinik was behind the Austrian formation in this position, if there had been an Ottoman army at Vinik, the Austrian commanders would hardly have exposed their supply units to its attack, not to mention turning their backs on Vinik. Therefore, Heisler's maneuver was possible only if the Austrian army (Starhemberg's units) was not in danger from the direction of Vinik (and Pantelej).

Could Gola Čuka be Kanic's *Vojnik*? Without any doubt, the answer is positive. Both Kanitz and Hahn add another name, *War Hill* (Kriegsberg), next to name *Vojnik*, indicating that *Vojnik* did not necessarily have to be a proper noun (in the sense of toponyms), but a Slavic version of the Germanic common noun *Kriegsberg*, in the sense that Gola Čuka was as a military position. Was Gola Čuka during the battle really a military position? The answer is positive again. The Ottoman Nišava–Popovac–Gola Čuka defensive line was made of trenches and a palisade with numerous extensions for providing suppressive fire (*fleschen*). As this line was rising the western and northern part of Gola Čuka, the Ottomans built the

redans instead of the *fleschen*. The redans were the same as the *fleschen*, but wider and adapted to install artillery pieces. They were usually built as rampart extensions on the elevations, so that they could reach further into the valley due to a better range. In addition, it was defended by 10 000 men led by Albanian Mahmud Pasha Mahmudbeyzade (Anonim 2000, 8; Bizozeri 1690, 394). Mahmud Pasha was exposed here to prove his loyalty to the Ottoman commander of the defense of Niš, Seraskier Arab Recep Pasha, as he had previously been compromised as one of the closest associates of the famous Ottoman outlaw Yegen Osman Pasha. That is why the self-sacrifice and ferocity with which Mahmud Pasha had to defend Gola Čuka from the Austrians were factors on which the Arab Recep Pasha counted. All this proves that Gola Čuka was well fortified and manned, with motivated commander to defend it, meaning it really presented a serious challenge to the Austrians to overcome it. In other words, Gola Čuka was indeed a *War Hill*.

CONCLUSION

By synthesizing information on the geographical locations and movements of military units during the battle at Niš (1689), in the paper we pointed out the weaknesses of the interpretation of this event that Radmila Tričković put forward. Also, we provided our perspective of the battle at Niš (1689) based on a body of sources and literature that is larger than the one Tričković used in her research. The analysis of her work “Niš u velikom ratu” and the results of our research indicate that Tričković wrongly identified Vinik as a key point in this conflict between the Austrians and the Ottomans, and then incorrectly projected the entire battle between them, placing it on the direction Humsko polje–Vinik–Pantelej (north–northeast–east of Niš). Our research proved that the key hill *Vojnik* was not Vinik, but Gola Čuka, and that the battlefield at Niš stretched in the direction of Popovac–Gola Čuka–Humsko polje (west–northwest–north of Niš). Setting up this theory and casting doubt on the hitherto valid theory of Radmila Tričković will hopefully stimulate greater interest among future researchers in this topic, but also initiate archaeological endeavors that will prove the correctness, i.e. groundlessness of one of these two theories.

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JEDNA DILEMA IZ AUSTRIJSKOG OSVAJANJA NIŠA (1689): DA LI JE BRDO VOJNIK ZAPRAVO VINIK ILI GOLA ČUKA?

Nedovoljna zastupljenost određenih tema u lokalnoj istoriji može da dovede do toga da se kao neosporne činjenice usvajaju rezultati istraživanja koja nisu dovoljno temeljno sprovedena. Ovakva situacija pogubno utiče na nalaženje novih naučnih istina, jer kompromitovana, ali uvrežena mišljenja mogu da zavedu buduće istraživače određenog problema. Takav je slučaj sa ulogom brda Vojnik u austrijskom osvajanju Niša 1690. godine i njegovom identifikacijom sa brdom Vinik koju zastupa Radmila Tričković u poglavlju „Niš u velikom ratu” (Istorija Niša I, 1983). Kako je u ovom istraživanju korišćen veći opus izvora od onih koje je R. Tričković koristila u svojoj rekonstrukciji ovog događaja, ukazaćemo na neodrživost teorije Vojnik-Vinik, na tragove koji su R. Tričković na pogrešan zaključak naveli i dokumentovano obrazložiti teoriju o identifikaciji toponima Vojnik sa brdom Gola Čuka (Lisinac).

Ključne reči: *Vinik, Vojnik, Gola Čuka, Niš, 1689.*