



## Topography and narrative in the ‘Danişmendname’<sup>1</sup>

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### АННОТАЦИЯ

The *Danişmendname*, “Book of Danişmend”, is one of the oldest preserved epics in the Turkish language and the only one to provide a narrative of events around the turn of the twelfth century, the time of the First Crusade. Its protagonist, Ahmed Danişmend (“the wise”) is a historical figure, but the accounts of his battles against the Byzantines are largely fictional, replete with hyperbole and embellished with loans from other epic traditions, even Christian hagiography. The text was composed about AD 1050 and first written down at the Selçuk court around AD 1175. On this occasion, a fictitious epilogue was added, establishing a link with the Selçuk dynasty. Similarly, a prologue has been added to link the story of Danişmend to that of the epic hero Sayyid Battal. The written version was further expanded and embellished by Arif Ali, governor of Tokat in the fourteenth century, who divided the text into chapters and added verse passages of his own making. Ali’s text formed the basis of all later manuscripts of the “*Danişmendname*”. Through a detailed case-by-case study of the topographical descriptions in the “*Danişmendname*”, this study demonstrates that contrary to the opinion of Irène Mélikoff (Irène Mélikoff, 1960), these do not derive from the pen of Arif Ali but formed part of the original composition. Secondly, by applying the concept of the “storyworld” as defined by Buket Kitapçı Bayrı (2020), the study aims to identify the homeland and the mental universe of the original poet. He seems to be familiar with the upper Iris valley around Tokat and Komana as well as the area within the triangle Çorum-Amasya-Turhal. Cankırı and Niksar are also described in terms which may derive from personal observation. The author has a soldier’s eye for the landscape and probably participated

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in military campaigns on the frontier between Byzantium and Islam. Most of the other cities mentioned in the epic – Malatya, Ankara, Samsun, Osmancık, Sinop, Kastamonu, etc. – are mere names, and there is no attempt at describing their site or appearance. Outside his home region, the author has no clear idea of the geography and consistently underestimates the distance to Malatya or Bagdad. We may conclude that the originator of the “*Danişmendname*” was a native of northern Anatolia, well versed in the traditions of local storytellers and the topography of his homeland, but with little knowledge or experience of the wider world.

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### **Топография и повествование в «Данишменд-наме»**

**Аннотация.** «Данишменд-наме», «Книга Данишменда» – одна из старейших сохранившихся эпических поэм на турецком языке и единственная, повествующая о событиях на рубеже XII века, во времена Первого крестового похода. Её герой, Ахмед Данишменд («мудрец»), – историческая личность, но описания его сражений против византийцев в значительной степени вымышлены, изобилуют гиперболами и украшены заимствованиями из других эпических традиций, даже из христианской агиографии. Текст был составлен около 1050 года н.э. и впервые записан при дворе Сельджуков около 1175 года н.э. В это время был добавлен вымышленный эпилог, устанавливающий связь с династией Сельджуков. Аналогичным образом был добавлен пролог, связывающий историю Данишменда с историей эпического героя Сайида Баттала. Письменная версия была дополнительно расширена и украшена Арифом Али, правителем Токаты в XIV веке, который разделил текст на главы и добавил стихи собственного сочинения. Текст Али лег в основу всех более поздних рукописей «Данишменд-наме». На основе детального изучения топографических описаний в «Данишменд-наме» данное исследование показывает, что, вопреки мнению Ирены Меликофой (Irene Mélikoff, 1960), они не принадлежат перу Арифа Али, а являются частью первоначального произведения. Во-вторых, применяя концепцию «мира повествования», как её определил Букет Китапчи Байры (2020), исследование направлено на определение родины и ментального мира неизвестного автора оригинала. По-видимому, он был знаком с долиной верхнего течения Ириса вокруг Токата и Команы, а также с территорией, расположенной в треугольнике Чорум-Амасья-Турхал. Чанкыры и Никсар также

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описаны в терминах, которые, возможно, основаны на личных наблюдениях. Автор обладает взглядом солдата на ландшафт и, вероятно, участвовал в военных кампаниях на границе между Византией и исламом. Большинство других городов, упомянутых в эпосе, – Малатья, Анкара, Самсун, Османджик, Синоп, Кастамону и др. – являются лишь названиями, и нет попыток описать их местоположение или внешний вид. За пределами своего родного региона автор не имеет четкого представления о географии и постоянно недооценивает расстояние до Малатвии или Багдада. Мы можем заключить, что создатель «Данишменд-наме» был уроженцем этого региона, хорошо знакомым с традициями местных рассказчиков и топографией своей родины, но с небольшими знаниями о более широком мире.

**Ключевые слова:** Ахмед Данишменд, «Данишменд-наме», крестовые походы, Сельджуки, гази, эпос, 12 век, Анатолия, фольклор, устная литература, Токат, Амасья.

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### **«Данишменд-наме» шығармасындағы топография мен баяндау**

**Аннотация.** «Данишменд-наме», яғни «Данишменд кітабы» түрік тілінде сақталған ең көне эпикалық поэмалардың бірі болып табылады. XII ғасыр шегіндегі, Бірінші крест жорығы кезеңінің оқиғаларын баяндайтын жалғыз шығарма. Оның басты кейіпкері Ахмед Данишменд («дана адам») – тарихи тұлға. Алайда, оның византиялықтарға қарсы шайқастарының сипаттамалары көбінесе қиялға негізделген, әсірелеулерге толы, әрі басқа эпикалық дәстүрлерден, тіпті христиандық агиографиядан алынған элементтермен көркемделген десек артық айтқандық болмас. Мәтін шамамен б.з. 1050 жылдары құрастырылып, алғаш рет шамамен 1175 жылы Селжүктер сарайында жазылған деген болжам бар. Аталмыш шығармада Селжүк әулетімен байланыс орнату үшін жазылған ойдан шығарылған эпилог та қосылған екен. Осы сынды, Данишменд оқиғаларын эпикалық қаһарман Сайид Батталдың тарихымен байланыстыратын пролог та енгізілген. XIV ғасырда Тоқат билеушісі Ариф Әли жазбаша нұсқаны кеңейтіп, тарауларға бөліп, өз өлеңдерін қосады. Оның дәл осы нұсқасы кейінгі барлық «Данишменд-наме» қолжазбаларының ең басты түпнұсқасына айналды. Алайда, бұл зерттеу топографиялық сипаттамаларды жан-жақты талдай отырып жазған Ирен Меликоффың (Irène Mélikoff, 1960) пікіріне қарамастан, олардың Ариф Әлиге тиесілі емес, бастапқы мәтіннің ажырамас бөлігі екенін көрсетеді. Сонымен қатар, Букет Китапчы Байри (2020) анықтаған «баяндау әлемі» атты тұжырымдамасын қолдана отырып, зерттеу бастапқы автордың туған жері мен дүниетанымын айқындауды мақсат етеді. Негізінде, автор Тоқат пен Комана маңындағы Ирис өзенінің жоғарғы аңғары мен Чорум-Амасья-Турхал үшбұрышындағы аймақпен шамасы жақсы таныс болса керекті. Чанкыры және Никсармен де таныс болуы әбден мүмкін, өйткені шығармада оның барлығы автордың жеке бақылауларына негізделген түрде сипатталады. Ол жер бедерін

әскери адамның көзімен қабылдайды. Бәлкім, Византия мен ислам әлемі арасындағы шекаралық жорықтарға қатысқан болуы да ғажап емес. Ал эпоста аты аталған басқа қалалар – Малатья, Анкара, Самсун, Османджик, Синоп, Кастамону және басқалары тек атау ретінде ғана беріледі, олардың орналасуы мен келбетіне сипаттама берілмейді. Автор өз өңірінен тыс жерлердің географиясын нақты білмейтін сынды, Малатья немесе Бағдатқа дейінгі қашықтықты жиі қате бағдарлайтынын аңғардық. Осылайша, «Данишменд-наме»-ның авторы, осы аймақтың тумасы, жергілікті жыршылық дәстүрлер мен туған өлкесінің географиясын жетік білетін, бірақ, жалпы әлем туралы түсінігі аздау, шектеулі адам болған деген қорытынды жасауға болады.

**Кілт сөздер:** Ахмед Данишменд, «Данишменд-наме», Крест жорықтары, Селжүктер, фази, эпос, XII ғасыр, Анадолы, фольклор, ауыз әдебиеті, Токат, Амасия.

### Introduction

The defeat of the Byzantine army at Manzikert in 1071 and the death of the victor, Alp Arslan, in the following year left a power vacuum in central Anatolia. Arslan's half-brother Kutulmuş established himself as de facto ruler of Anatolia and obtained the recognition of the Byzantine emperor, but in 1086 he was killed and his son Kılıç Arslan taken prisoner. Taking advantage of the situation offered by Süleyman's death and the extinction of the Armenian family (the Ardzrouni) which had ruled Sivas (Mélíkoff, 1960, V.1: 71), an obscure Turkic warlord, Ahmed, seized the opportunity to carve out a territory for himself. Our knowledge of Ahmed Danişmend, “the wise”, is to a large part derived from the historians of the First Crusade, which reached Anatolia in 1096-97. By that time, Ahmed had apparently extended his dominions to include Tokat, Amasya and Çankırı and established his residence at Niksar. He waged several successful campaigns against the Crusaders and while besieging Melitene (mod. Malatya) in 1100 or 1101, his forces captured count Bohemond of Antiochia who was released in 1103 in return for a large ransom and the promise of Bohemond's support against Ahmed's Selçuk rival Kılıç Arslan I (Cahen, 1968: 86). These plans were, however, cut short by Melik's death in the summer of 1104.

Ahmed Danişmend was succeeded by his son Emir Gazi Gümüştigin b. Danişmend (ruled 1104-1134) and grandson Melik Muhammed (1134-1142) (Bosworth, 2004: 215). When Muhammed died without an heir, a struggle for the succession resulted and his lands were divided between three rulers: Muhammed's brother Yağibasan in Niksar, another Danişmendid in Kayseri and a third in Malatya. The internal discord among the Danişmendids was skilfully exploited by their Byzantine adversaries as well as by the Selçuks, who gradually absorbed the Danişmendid territories. Sivas, Tokat, Komana and Amasya were taken by Kılıç Arslan II in 1174, Niksar in 1175 after a long siege. Malatya, the last remaining Danişmendid possession, passed under Selçuk control in 1178. The memory of the dynasty's founder lived on, however, and was preserved in the *Danişmendname* or “Book of Danişmend”, one of the oldest narrative epics in the Turkish language,

When creating his narrative, the storyteller drew on other tales with which he was familiar, and despite the efforts of later editors, the composite nature of the *Danişmendname* is evident,

drawing as it does not only on the memory of Ahmed Danişmend's conquests, but also on the Old Testament, the Koran, Western chivalric romance and even Christian hagiography (Mélihoff, 1960, V.1: 161-170; Bekker-Nielsen, 2023: 65). The core narrative revolves around the biography of Ahmed, in the epic known as Melik. He is a hero of superhuman strength and fells his enemies by the hundreds while suffering no serious injuries before the last chapter, a stock figure of heroic folktale. At the same time, Melik is a clever strategist capable of taking a fort or city by a ruse and not merely by sheer force. As a follower of the true faith, he is favoured by God, communing with the Prophet in his dreams and performing miracles.

The parallel narrative of Artuhı and Efrumiyye has an altogether different character (Bekker-Nielsen, 2023: 66). Artuhı is human, not superhuman, and though his strength is comparable to Melik's, he is vulnerable (early on, his arm is lost in battle, but restored by divine intervention) and his human emotions are brought to the fore in his quest for the beloved Efrumiyye whom he wins, then loses, then regains. The long passages where Efrumiyye shows herself as a capable warrior and strategist stand in contrast to the limited, and passive, rôle played by Gülnüş, the wife of Melik.

Throughout the narrative, the narrator takes pains to emphasize the link with the east – with Malatya and with Baghdad, the residence of the Caliph. We are told that Melik's grandfather was governor of Malatya, where Artuhı's maternal grandfather was an eminent and much respected citizen. There are, however, no grounds for assuming that Ahmed Danişmend hailed from Malatya. The connection was clearly invented to connect the narrative of his exploits to the pre-existing cycle of tales (the *Battalname*) about the warrior-hero Sayyid Battal (Mélihoff, 1960, V.1: 120-121; Dedes 1996).

### Materials and research methods

Since we have no other information about the text or its author, our only source is the text itself. The *Danişmendname* that has come down to posterity is composed of seventeen chapters, *meclisler* ("sessions") of unequal length and a short postscript. The first chapter establishes the fictitious link with the story of Sayyid Battal. The last chapter is equally unhistorical. We are told how the Infidels recapture the cities conquered by Danişmend and how the Caliph, on hearing the news, entrusts a Selçuk leader, Süleyman Shah (d. 1086), with the reconquest of Anatolia. He also arranges the marriage of Süleyman's daughter to the son of Melik Danişmend, merging the two dynasties into one. The biography of the Danişmendids' founder-hero is deftly transformed into a piece of pro-Selçuk propaganda, legitimising the Selçuk hegemony over central and northern Anatolia and glossing over the conflicts between the two dynasties.

The last chapter concludes with a postscript by the editor, Ali (Arif Ali, governor of Tokat castle in the latter half of the fourteenth century), explaining how he had found an old and "confused" (*müşevveş*) manuscript which he transformed and embellished, dividing the text into *meclisler* and adding verses of his own making to embellish the prose narrative (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 289; Demir, 2020, V.1: 361-362). Seventeen manuscripts of Ali's version are

known, of which the oldest are those in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (ms. P), in Istanbul Public Library (ms. I) and in St. Petersburg, formerly Leningrad (ms. L) (Demir, 2020, V.3: 4).

The stages in the textual transmission can be dated with a fair degree of confidence (Mélikoff, 1960, V.1: 55-56; Demir, 2020, V.3:1-2; Bayrı, 2020: 26-27). Throughout, the protagonist of the epic is called *Melik* (“king”) Danişmend. This title was not borne by Ahmed during his lifetime; it was granted to his son Gümüşteğin in AH 529/AD 1134 and first used on coins by his grandsons (Cahen, 1968: 218; Oikonomides, 1983; İzmirler, 2023: 46-48). The epic will have found its definitive oral form around the middle of the twelfth century, at a time when Ahmed’s struggle against the Byzantines was still a living memory.

Tradition has it that the oral version was first written down at the Selçuk court by a certain Mevlana Ibn ‘Ala of whom nothing further is known. Presumably it was at this stage that the sequel establishing a link to the Selçuk sultans was grafted on to the core narrative, since the list of sultans ends with Rükneddin (d. AD 1265) and İzzeddin Keykâvus (d. AD 1279); at the conclusion of chapter 9, ms. I state that the text was recited in the presence of Sultan İzzeddin, then written down (Demir, 2020, V.1: 203). Chapter 11 in both manuscripts mention a recital in the presence of İzzeddin (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 181 (“sultan Galib”); Demir, 2020, V.1: 240) and this is repeated at the opening of chapter 12 (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 194; Demir, 2020, V.1: 253).

The introductory section linking Ahmed Danişmend to Seyyid Battal may have been added at this time or earlier; it was certainly present in the version that reached Arif Ali, since it misled him into thinking that the manuscript was 400 or 450 years old (Demir, 2020, V.1: 360, 362), corresponding to the distance in time between Ali himself and Seyyid Battal.

An edition based on ms. P was published, with French translation and an extensive commentary, in 1960 by Irène Mélikoff, whose exhaustive study of the *Sitz im Leben* of the *Danişmendname* remains fundamental. The epic has been translated into modern Turkish several times, most recently by Necati Demir (2002, 2020) basing himself on ms. I. In the late sixteenth century, Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali (d. AH 1008/AD 1600) produced a paraphrase of the *Danişmendname* under the title *Mirkâtî'l-Cihâd*, “Steps on the way to *jihâd*” (Akar, 2016; Fleischer, 2016: 132-133; Demir, 2020, V.3: 6). Since the paraphrase includes persons and places which are mentioned neither in P nor in I, it must be based on a third version of Ali’s text. A number of shorter summaries of the *Danişmendname* were collected and translated by Mordtmann (1876).

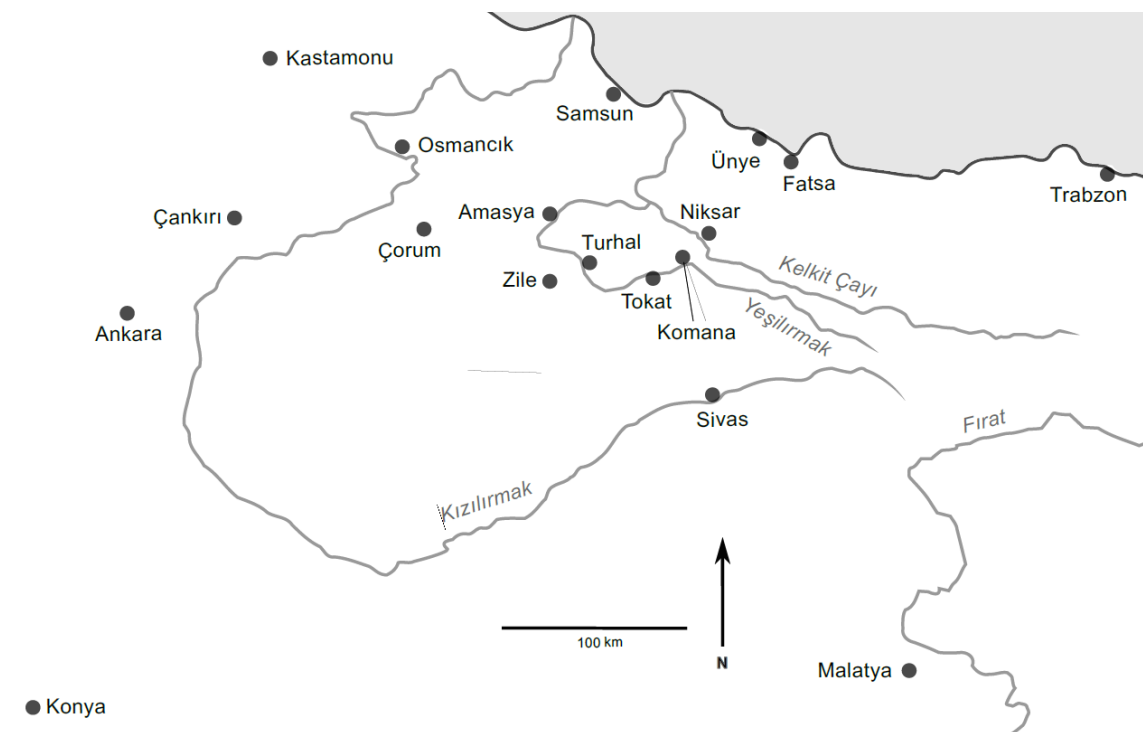


Fig 1. Map of north central Anatolia showing principal places mentioned in the text.

1-сур. Мәтінде аталған негізгі орындарды көрсететін солтүстік-орталық Анадолының картасы.

Рис. 1. Карта северо-центральной Анатолии с указанием основных мест, упомянутых в тексте.

### Research background

Since the work of Milman Parry, originator of the oral-formulaic theory, it has been generally accepted that an orally transmitted epic does not constitute a unitary text but rather a set of narrative building blocks which the storyteller combines in new ways to suit the occasion or his audience (Reichl, 2000: 133-134; Lindahl, 2012). Only when the narrative has been recorded in writing does it become fixated.

The *Danişmendname* forms an exception to this general rule in that the transformation and reformulation of the material continued *after* it had been recorded in writing. Between the three oldest manuscripts, there are significant divergences in the choice of words and in the length of the individual *meclisler*; in a few cases, verse passages have even migrated from one *meclis* to another (Bekker-Nielsen, 2023: 60-61). This phenomenon remains unexplained but is probably best understood as reflecting an intermediate phase of “mixed” transmission (Aydoğan, 2021: 409) where epics were still being recited orally by itinerant storytellers, but using written versions to memorize the contents.

A common feature of the different versions is a close attention to topography and landscape (Adak, 2022), revealing, in the words of Irène Mélikoff, “une parfaite connaissance des lieux” (Mélikoff, 1960, V.1: 155). The explanation proposed by Mélikoff was that the core narrative of the *Danişmendname* was derived from epics originating among Turkoman nomads of west central Asia (Mélikoff, 1960, V.1: 140) and that Arif Ali transposed this narrative to northern

Anatolia, locating the triumphs and defeats of Melik Danişmend in places with which he was familiar (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.1: 143).

With good reason, Buket Kitapçı Bayrı, among others, has rejected this interpretation, pointing out that Melik is no nomad, and that some of the main characters – including Melik’s close companion-in-arms Artuhı – are Byzantines, testifying to the true nature of the Danişmendname as a frontier epic at the interface between the Christian and Muslim worlds (Bayrı, 2020: 8-9, 49-50). Within the setting of the epic – its *storyworld*, to employ a useful concept formulated by Bayrı (Bayrı 2020: 17) – some minor relocations have taken place, however, e.g. the transfer of two monasteries from Sivas to Tokat (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.1: 114-115; Aydoğan, 2016: 35). It remains unclear whether this relocation must be attributed to Ali; more likely it was the work of the original author, either because Tokat was more familiar to him than Sivas, or to present the conquest of Tokat, which plays a pivotal role in the first half of the epic, as a more challenging task and consequently a more impressive achievement on Melik’s part.

Against the theory that Arif Ali transposed the narrative from the plains of the Near East to a terrain with which he was more familiar, two further arguments may be adduced. First, the verse passages in the Danişmendname – apart from the postscript, the only sections of the preserved text which can be attributed to Ali with absolute certainty – are almost entirely devoid of topographical or geographical detail (the few place-names mentioned are derived from the immediately preceding or following parts of the prose narrative) and reveal no interest on Ali’s part in the geography of northern Anatolia. Second, some extraordinary errors of distance crop up in the text, errors which might be attributed to an itinerant storyteller with little knowledge of the world outside his home region, but not to a widely travelled and widely read intellectual such as Ali.

A closer look at the landscape that presents itself to the reader of the Danişmendname (fig. 1) and a comparison with the topographical facts on the ground may help us towards a better understanding of the storyworld of the epic and the mental landscape of its author.

### Analysis

The story commences in **Malatya** during the seventh month of the year given as AH 360 in ms. P (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.2: 10: *üç yüz altmış yıl*) but AH 460 according to ms. I (Demir, 2020, V.1: 66: *dört yüz altmış yıl*), corresponding to AD 970/971 or AD 1067-1068 respectively. Since Ali, writing c. AH 762, reckons that the manuscript in his hands is “four hundred years old”, 360 must be the figure found in his original version of the text, 460 a later emendation.

In the opening sentences of the prose narrative, we are told that when Sayyid Battal and his fellow Gazis had been killed “and the people of Malatya learned the news, they were stricken with grief”. The leading men of the city gather in the mosque and deplore their dismal situation: Malatya stands to lose its claim to fame among cities, now that no “outstanding man” (*ulu kişi*) can be found who bears comparison with the great warrior hero. After some discussion, they decide to send for Battal’s grandson Sultan ʿTurasan and his comrade Melik. At birth, Melik was given the name Ahmed but being “both clever and experienced” (*‘ākil ve kāmīl*), he has come to be known as Melik *Dānişmend*, “the wise” (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.2: 9; Demir, 2020, V.1: 65).

A messenger is sent to fetch the pair but when he finds them, they have already been forewarned of his errand. In the night, the Prophet revealed himself to Melik in a dream and told him to take up the holy war (*ğazā*). Ṭurasan, too, has had a dream in which his grandfather, the great Battal, shamed him for not being engaged in the fight against the Infidels (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 10; Demir, 2020, V.1: 66). They both accompany the messenger to the city, where it is decided to send a delegation to Baghdad and request a *fermān* from the Caliph authorizing Ṭurasan and Melik to lead a holy war against the Infidels. After consulting his astrologers, the Caliph issues the requested *fermān* and gives the delegates two standards inscribed with the name of the Caliph and in addition forty Koran reciters, two hundred horses, four hundred slaves and many other splendid gifts to take home to Ṭurasan and Melik (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 13; Demir, 2020, V.1: 69). The Caliph also entrusts them with two heirlooms, the banner of Battal Gazi and the standard of another epic hero, Abū Muslim.

The narrator's choice of time and place is intended to establish a link with the story of Battal Gazi but has no relation to geographical or chronological reality. We are told that the messengers reach Baghdad after "a few days" (*bir kaç gün*), but according to the roadbooks of the Ottoman *ulak*, the journey from Malatya to Baghdad would require 243 hours of travel (Çetin, 2013: 141, 149) or a minimum of 3½ weeks, assuming ten hours' net travel time per day. The speeds attained by the *ulak* were exceptionally high since the couriers could change horses at frequent intervals. An impression of normal travelling speed can be gained from the seventeenth-century *Seyahatname* of Evliya Çelebi, where speeds typically range from 3 to 5 kilometres per hour (Bekker-Nielsen, 2021: 470). At an average speed of 4 km/h and a maximum of ten hours' travel per day, the 1381 km by road from Malatya to Baghdad would require nearly six weeks to cover.

On their arrival in Baghdad, the messengers are received by the Caliph, who laments that the *Firenk* (Franks) have seized "Antakya, Akko, Tripoli" and other cities "as far as Nablus and Jerusalem" (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 12; Demir, 2020, V.1: 68). In actual fact, these conquests took place between AH 491/AD 1098 and 503/1109, more than a century after the deliberations in Malatya which supposedly take place in AH 360.

When the messengers return to Malatya, the populace is overjoyed to learn that the Caliph has granted permission for the campaign. The standards of Abū Muslim and Battal Gazi are set up outside the city and within forty days, "forty thousand men" assemble, ready for war. The author makes no attempt at describing the topography of Malatya or its surroundings, or at adding local colour.

The army now moves out from Malatya and heads north-west to **Sivas**, c. 200 km or about a week's march, and reaches the bank of the river *Elbis* (P) or *Albis* (I), which Mélihoff and Demir both take to be a copyist's error for *Alis*, "Halys", today's Kızılırmak (Mélihoff, 1960, V.1: 197 n. 1; Demir, 2020, V.3: 4). A digression explains that the *Elbis/Albis* is a great river sprung "from hell (*duzahdan*)" and compares it to the *Fırat* (Euphrates), which according to Islamic tradition has its sources in Paradise (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 14; Demir, 2020, V.1: 70). The Kızılırmak flows within sight of Sivas and the road from Malatya (the present-day Bağdat Caddesi) crosses the river at a point less than 3 kilometres from the *kale*, where an Ottoman multi-arch structure still spans the stream.

Next morning, Melik and his warriors remount and enter Sivas, which presents a sad spectacle: "the *kale* in ruins, the Muslim garrison killed, the towers covered in corpses". The

Muslim inhabitants explain how the castle was taken: A caravan of five hundred camels, each bearing two boxes, arrived in the city and its leaders, pretending to be merchants, requested permission to bring their wares to safety within the walls of the *kale*. Once inside, the boxes sprang open and a thousand armed men leaped out (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 15; Demir, 2020, V.1: 71). Variants of the “Trojan boxes” stratagem are found in Greek, Persian, Arabic and Latin literature (Meulder, 2013; 2014); in this case, it may be a borrowing from a French *chanson de geste* of the early twelfth century and contemporary with the Danişmendname (Galmés de Fuentes, 1979; Bekker-Nielsen, 2023: 65).

A council of war is now held. Sultan ʿTurasan’s proposed strategy is simple and to the point: “march to Constantinople, kill the *Kaysar* and take his throne”. Melik Danişmend, however, advises against waging everything on one plan of action; instead, the Muslims should divide their forces and attack the Infidels on several fronts at once. His proposal carries the day and a few days later, ʿTurasan leaves for Constantinople, taking half the troops with him, and is not heard of again until chapter 13, when word arrives that ʿTurasan has captured Constantinople, seized the *Kaysar* and had him hanged (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 223; Demir, 2020, V.1: 262). For his part, Melik lays out his plan to seize the north and recites a list of the cities he intends to capture, the names of which were revealed to him by the Prophet the night before: Tokat (*Dükiyye*), Komana (*Gümenek, Sisiyye*), Niksar (*Harsânösiyye*), Amasya (*Haraşna*), Samsun (*Sâmiyye*), Sinop (*Sinobiyye*), Zile (*Ķarkariyye*) and Turhal (*Kaşan/Keşan*) (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 17; Demir, 2020, V.1: 72-73). First, however, he and his companions set about restoring the *kale*.

The present-day *kale* of Sivas is an earthen hill, not a rock, and enjoys only a moderate advantage in terms of height, rising c. 30 metres above the surrounding area. The eastern slope (facing the thirteenth-century Gök Medrese) is easily ascended. Remains of a wall of uncertain date are visible at the northeast corner (now a tea garden) and along the modern ascent along the western side, while a tower can be seen at the northern extremity. The area enclosed by the walls can be estimated at c. 12,500 square metres. What the narrator has to relate about Sivas is not inconsistent with the topography, but he gives no circumstantial detail to suggest a first-hand knowledge of the site. In any case, the focus of his narrative soon shifts, and Sivas plays only a minor role in the remainder of the Danişmendname.

While the reconstruction of the *kale* is in progress, Melik goes riding in the countryside where he encounters a Christian warrior, Artuhı, who challenges him to combat. Vanquished by Melik, the warrior converts to Islam and tells Melik the story of his life. He, too, hails from the region of Malatya:

”My father was a nomad (*göçkünci*) in the hills; he ruled over twelve thousand tents, had forty wives but no children ... At the time, Seyyid Battal was in India, and the *Kaysar* came to Malatya with an army ... When the *Kaysar* divided the captives [after taking Malatya], he gave the daughter of Abdur-rahmanı and her mother to my father” (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 22; Demir 2020, V.1: 78).

Later, Artuhı’s father fell in love with Abdurrahmanı’s daughter and made her pregnant. When the child was born, everyone was amazed at its size: “all who saw me believed that I must be two years old.” Artuhı grew up to be a young man and went hunting near Amasya,

where he encountered a beautiful young girl and immediately fell in love with her. As a sign that the feeling was reciprocal, she threw Artuhı an orange. Enquiring, he was told that the girl's name was Efrumiyye (Efromiya) and that her father was the Christian lord (*beg*) of Amasya, Şah-i-Şattat (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 23; Demir, 2020, V.1: 79).

For three months, the lovesick Artuhı roamed the countryside in the hope of another glimpse of Efrumiyye, but without success. On his return to Malatya, he learned that his father was dead, leaving Artuhı as the head of the family. Artuhı sent an ambassador to Şattat to request Efrumiyye's hand in marriage, but her father first dithered, then refused and finally betrothed her to Nastor (Nestor), the lord of Çorum.

Having heard Artuhı's story, Melik vows to help him abduct Efrumiyye. Her father is sending her to Çorum under armed escort, but Melik and Artuhı make a successful surprise attack on the caravan and abduct Efrumiyye, who follows Artuhı's example in converting to Islam. The three flee eastward and take refuge at the fortified hermitage (*ribat*) of Harkıl, a Christian ascetic recently converted to Islam. In the morning, they awake to find the place surrounded by Nastor's troops (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 36; Demir, 2020, V.1: 93).

Amasya is more than 200 km distant from Sivas by road and more than 500 from Malatya, but there is no attempt on the narrator's part to explain how a hunting expedition from Malatya would take Artuhı to the environs of Amasya. Here as elsewhere, the author has underestimated his distances or simply been unaware of the relative location of Sivas, Malatya and Amasya.

In the meantime, the troops rebuilding the *kale* at Sivas are increasingly concerned for Melik, and one of their company goes out in search of him. At Tokat, which is still held by the Byzantines, he learns that Melik and his two friends are under siege in the hermitage but holding their ground despite being vastly outnumbered by the troops of Nastor and Şattat. He makes contact with Melik, then returns to Sivas to summon the remainder of the warriors. A few days later, the Muslim army meets the forces of Nastor and Şattat on the battlefield and drives them to flight (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 60; Demir, 2020, V.1: 121).

Having defeated the Christians in the field, Melik's forces now close in on **Tokat**, whose inhabitants take refuge on the *kale* (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 67; Demir, 2020, V.1: 125). To secure the city, Melik must first reduce the fortified monasteries that surround it. One monastery is taken by means of a ruse (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 70-71; Demir, 2020, V.1: 127-128); another, Deryanos, is guarded by a dragon (*ezdeha*) whose fiery breath is extinguished when Melik reads an Islamic prayer (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 77; Demir, 2020, V.1: 132) in a manner strongly similar to the exploit of the dragon-slaying St Theodore (Bekker-Nielsen, 2023: 65). A third, the Monastery of the Cross, is fiercely defended by the monks; their leader, Papas, makes a sortie and succeeds in capturing Artuhı. Both the monastery of Deryanos (St. John) and the monastery of the Cross were in fact located near Sivas, but the narrator has transposed them to Tokat.

When Melik arrives in Tokat with his force, coming from the direction of Amasya, his army encamps by the river Yeşilırmak (Iris). The narrator provides a detailed panorama of the city seen from the north: a strong citadel perched on a summit, and on the opposite slope a large monastery with the appearance of a fortress (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 67; Demir, 2020, V.1: 125). This corresponds to the present-day view from the crossing of the Iris: to the right of the valley the steep north face of the *kale*, to the left the high ground east of the city – higher in fact than the *kale* – whose slopes offer a suitable site for a fortified monastery. In

the following chapter, we are offered a view from the other side: “a river flowing past the *kale* and close by, a suburb (*ribat*)” (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 86; Demir, 2020, V.1: 140).

In addition, we are told that there were two minor fortresses commanded by Serhayil, the *beg* of Tokat, and his brother Nikola; these fortresses are presumably fruits of the narrator’s imagination. Nikola’s forces attempt a sortie against the Muslims but are defeated in the field, their commander is killed and the fortress razed. Melik then gains access to Serhayil’s fortress by pretending to be a messenger sent by Şattat. When the Muslims attack, Melik, still in disguise, taunts the defenders into sending a party out against them. The Muslims feign a retreat and the remaining defenders are drawn out of the castle; once outside, they are encircled and cut down by Melik’s warriors.



Fig. 2. Tokat: the eastern slope of the castle rock.

2-сур. Токат: қамал жартасының шығыс беткейі.

Рис. 2. Токат: восточный склон замковой скалы.

This leaves the *kale*, commanded by a third brother, Mihayil, and occupying a formidable position (fig. 2). Fortunately, a Christian captive recently converted to Islam knows a road – a “secret” road according to I, but not P – through the mountains “directly to the castle” (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 85; Demir, 2020, V.1: 139). Melik repeats his stratagem of drawing the enemy forces out of the *kale* and into the field, where they are annihilated. Meanwhile, Mihayil’s nephew, whom he has left behind to hold the *kale*, converts to Islam and frees the Muslim prisoners, who take control of the castle.

The monks of Deryanos monastery, however, attempt to drive the Muslims off the *kale* by showering them with crossbow fire (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 80; Demir, 2020, V.1: 134;

according to Mélikoff's French translation (Mélikoff, 1960, V.1: 266), catapults are also deployed, but this finds no support in the Turkish text). While Papas and his monks are in the field, Melik gains access to the monastery. With the aid of the Muslim prisoners held there, he seizes control of the monastery which is plundered, then destroyed. Somewhat confusingly, according to ms. P Artuhı shortly afterwards finds himself "beside the Deryanos monastery" (*Deryanos deyrinden yana*); possibly the monastery's ruins are meant (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 79). This information is not found in I (Demir, 2020, V.1: 133).

The topography lends credence to the narrator's claim that the converts showed Melik a way to approach the castle. The *kale* is located at an elevation of c. 700 metres above sea level and 70-90 metres above the level of the surrounding streets. The castle rock is not a free-standing formation but marks the end of a mountain spur stretching west to east over a distance of c. 2 kilometres. A depression c. 40 metres wide divides the castle rock itself from the remainder of the spur. Under cover of darkness, it would be possible to move an attacking force along the ridge of the spur to within a short distance of the *kale* itself, and the numerous caves in the rock face would shelter attackers from missiles thrown or shot from above.

The description of Tokat seen from the south likewise fits the situation on the ground, where the medieval city nestled at the foot of the city's *kale*. The Garipler Camii north of the *kale*, erected in the eleventh century during the period of Danişmendid rule, may mark the centre of early medieval Tokat. Later, the city expanded into the area east and south of the *kale*, as evidenced by the numerous Selçuk and Ottoman structures that remain standing in present-day Tokat. The proximity of the *kale* to the built-up area would make it a convenient place of refuge during times of trouble, but the area enclosed by the present-day walls is only c. 3,500 square metres, insufficient to accommodate the entire population for an extended period of time. On a later occasion, when the Muslims of Tokat were under attack, our narrator relates that some of them fled "to Niksar or to Malatya" (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 198; Demir, 2020, V.1: 257); evidently the *kale* could not hold them all.

During the battle for control of Tokat, Melik dispatches one of his lieutenants to the Caliph in far distant Baghdad, yet according to ms. P, the trip is accomplished "in a few days", reemploying a formula from the first chapter (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 68). Ms. I give no indication as to the duration of the journey, but when the envoys return with gifts and the Caliph's gracious reply, they find the struggle for Tokat still in its early stages (Demir, 2020, V.1: 108).

With Tokat and its fortresses finally under his control or destroyed, Melik has a score to settle with the inhabitants of **Komana**, who had made a night attack on his camp during the battle. Komana (*Sisiyye*) stands on the bank of a river "flowing like the sea" (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 93; Demir, 2020, V.1: 147-148) which is spanned by a large bridge; inside the city, there are three hundred and sixty monasteries and a corresponding number of bell towers, *nakus* (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 94; Demir, 2020, V.1: 148).

The Christian forces sent to raise the siege are defeated by Melik, who takes the city by means of a ruse, massacring the leading citizens and forcing the rest to convert at the point of the sword. He then returns to his base in Tokat (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 99; Demir, 2020, V.1: 153). The fickle Komanans, however, soon renounce their new faith, and Melik is forced to intervene more than once. In chapter 15, a defeated Christian commander challenges Melik to prove the superiority of Islam by performing a miracle: if the waters cease to flow,

the Christian captives will convert. Melik does as requested and the waters disappear, then return at his bidding. As promised, the captives embrace Islam, but then word arrives that Infidel raiders are stealing horses from the Muslim army and Melik calls on God to punish the thieves. In the night, a gazi appears to Melik in a dream and advises him to move the camp from its low-lying site by the river and up into the hills. A few days later, a sudden flood surges through the valley and destroys Komana except for five hundred houses belonging to Muslims (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 252-253; Demir, 2020, V.1: 316-317).

The *kale* of Komana has been settled since pre-Roman times when it was a busy market and the centre of a temple-state (Sökmen, 2009: 282-283). Following the imposition of Christianity by Theodosius I, the temples were abandoned, but the site continued to be inhabited and was a trading centre of some importance during the Selçuk period (Erciyas, 2021; Karasu, 2021: 719-721). The walls of the medieval settlement enclosed an area of c. 6,000 square metres.

That the river on whose bank the city stands – the Yeşilirmak (Iris) – is “like the sea” is obvious hyperbole but conveys an image of a wide sheet of water. A large expanse of low-lying land, only marginally higher than the level of the river in summer, stretches to the east and southeast of Komana on either side of the ancient bridge, remains of which were discovered in 2004 during the construction of the present dam, which enables the flow of water to be controlled (fig. 3). In earlier times, the levels may well have been inundated during the spring and early summer, creating the appearance of “a sea”, at least to the eyes of an observer who had never seen the sea for himself. The advice which the *gazi* gave Melik was sound: a camp on the levels would be vulnerable to flooding if the river should rise.



Fig. 3. Komana: the present-day course of the Yeşilirmak east of the ancient site.

З-сур. Комана: ежелгі орынның шығысындағы Йешилирмактың қазіргі ағысы.

Рис. 3. Комана: современное русло реки Ешилирмак к востоку от древнего поселения.

The story of Melik halting the flow of the river is of course pure fiction (Bekker-Nielsen, 2023: 67-68), as are the 360 bell towers within the city. (The narrator is fond of using the figure 360 to express an outlandish amount: Akkaya, 1957: 434-435). Perhaps to the narrator's eyes a small settlement of horse thieves and camp-raiders was insufficiently important to merit the attention of the great Melik Danişmend and so he magnified the town and embellished it with towers. Later in the text, to preserve his credibility, the narrator (or perhaps a later editor) let the 360 monasteries be swept away by the flash flood, leaving only the small community of a few hundred houses which later observers could see at Komana.

In chapter 7 Şattat, the father of Efrumiyye, and Nastor, her fiancé, draft an ultimatum which they send to Melik: hand over Artuhı and Efrumiyye, or suffer the consequences (Mélíkoff, 1960, V.2: 101; Demir, 2020, V.1: 155). Melik refuses and both sides muster their forces for the coming confrontation. The two armies clash near **Turhal**, with the Christians holding the *kale* (Mélíkoff, 1960, V.2: 106-107; Demir, 2020, V.1: 161-162).

The *kale* of Turhal enjoys a strategic position commanding the road along the Yeşilırmak that connects Çorum and Amasya to Tokat and Sivas. It first appears in the list of cities that Melik intends to conquer and reappears in chapter 2 when Melik, Artuhı and Efrumiyye, fleeing from Amasya, pass the *kale* of Turhal and find refuge at the hermitage of Harkil. Today's Turhal is a large town spreading far to the west of the Yeşilırmak river, but in the medieval and early modern period, the centre of the settlement was on the eastern bank below the *kale*.

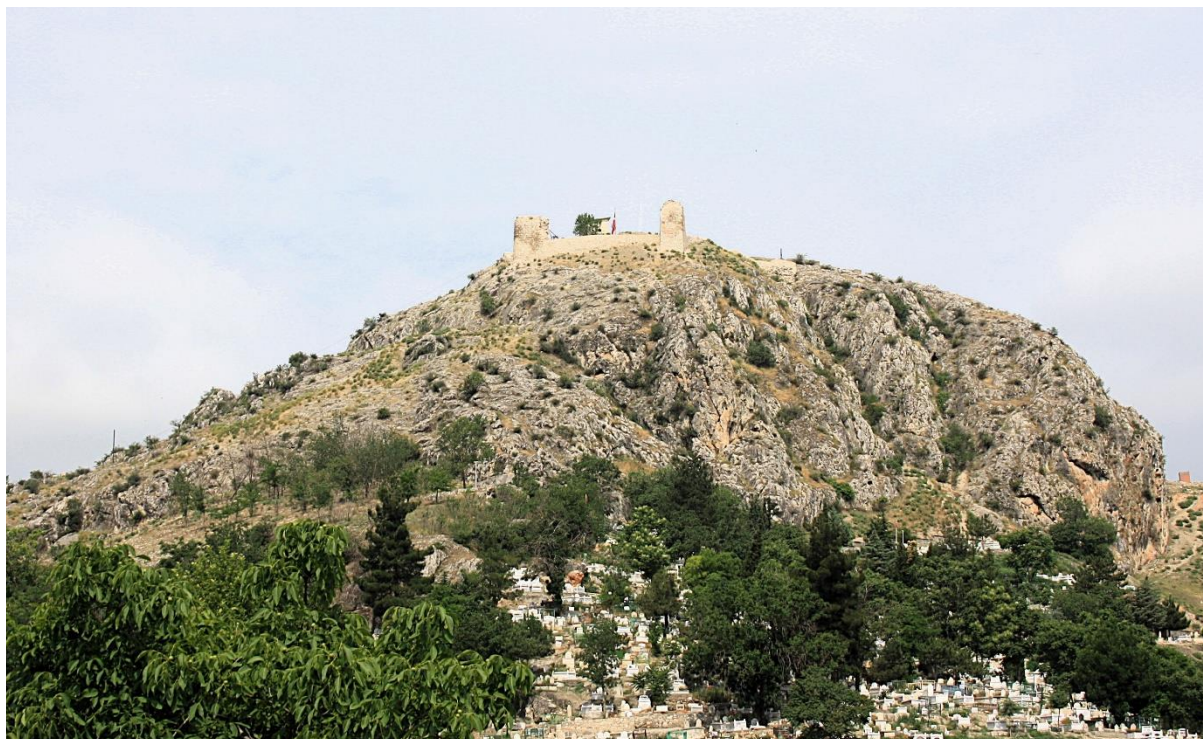


Fig. 4. Turhal: the kale viewed from the east.

4-сур. Турхал: шығыстан қарағандағы қырыққабат.

Рис. 4. Турхал: цитадель, вид с востока.

The *kale* stands almost 100 metres above the surrounding houses (fig. 4) with a steep scarp on the side facing the river and only one practicable route of ascent along its eastern, landward, slope. In common with the hilltop fortresses of Zile and Niksar (below), the *kale* of Turhal has a subterranean stairway, but this plays no role in the battle narrative. The medieval walls enclose an area of only c. 1,500 square metres, insufficient to function as a place of refuge for the townspeople, but the castle enjoys a strong defensive position and in the Danişmendname serves as a base from which the Christians repeatedly send fresh troops into battle.

To dislodge the Infidels from the *kale*, Melik employs a variant of the stratagem which he used to good effect in Tokat. The Muslim army feigns a retreat; the camp at the foot of the *kale* is abandoned and the bulk of the Muslim forces moves out, crossing the Yeşilırmak river in full view of the defenders. A smaller detachment led by Melik moves to the eastern side and takes cover, unobserved by the garrison on the *kale*. When the defenders swarm down to plunder the deserted enemy camp, the Muslim warriors storm the gate and seize the citadel.

In ms. P, we are told that “three hundred” infidels come down, of whom two hundred set off to ransack the piles of supplies and garments left behind by the Muslims. A hundred remain to guard the approach to the *kale*, but after a while they abandon their post to join in the looting. Seizing the opportunity, Melik brings his forces up to the gate to find it guarded by only five men. The Muslims kill the guards and take control of the *kale* (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 108).

According to ms. I, three hundred men descend from the *kale* and all engage in ransacking the Muslims’ baggage. Five hundred remain behind on the *kale* and when they see Melik’s men approaching assume that these are their comrades returning from the looting expedition. By the time they realize their mistake, it is too late; all are cut down and the *kale* falls into Melik’s hands (Demir, 2020, V.1: 162).

Both versions are consistent with the topography: being preoccupied with observing the Muslims below the *kale* departing across the river towards the west, the defenders’ attention would easily be distracted from the eastern flank where Melik’s men were preparing their attack.

In chapter 7, Efrumiyye and one of Melik’s lieutenants, Osman, set out to liberate four of their fellow warriors who have been taken captive by Nastor and Şattat during the struggle for control of Turhal (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 105; Demir, 2020, V.1: 159). After a day’s march, they arrive at a “hill commanding a great plain” and engage the enemy (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 108; Demir, 2020, V.1: 163). Several large hills along the present-day route from Turhal towards Zile fit the description. Efrumiyye and Osman are joined by Artuhı, Melik and the main force of the Muslim army, but the outcome of the battle remains undecided until Melik organizes a night attack on the enemy camp and drives the Infidels to flight (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 116; Demir, 2020, V.1: 171).

Having disposed of the enemy army for the time being, Melik and his companions tour the countryside and arrive at a “large and fertile plain, in the middle of which they saw a large city and before it a fort encircled by towers”. Enquiring, Melik learns that the town is called Karkariyye (Zile). It was founded by İskender Şah (Alexander the great) and both the city and its *kale* are supplied with water from a source named after Alexander (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 121; Demir, 2020, V.1: 175).



Fig. 5. Zile: the eastern slope of the castle rock, with a rock-cut theatre of Roman date.

5-сур. Зиле: Рим дәуіріндегі тасқа қашалған театры бар қамал жартасының шығыс беткейі.

Рис. 5. Зиле: восточный склон замковой скалы с высеченным в скале театром римского периода.

Seen from afar, the *kale* of Zile appears to rise high above the city, but in fact the difference in elevation is only c. 30 metres. This disadvantage is to some extent compensated by the fortifications; even in their present, heavily restored condition the walls and towers offer an impression of the strength of the medieval fortress. They enclose an area of c. 12,500 square metres (more than twice that of the *kale* at Çorum) which would accommodate much of the city's population but apparently not all, since the Danişmendname claims that the ruler of Zile allowed only the more affluent citizens into the *kale* along with their valuables, shutting the poorer citizens out (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 122; Demir, 2020, V.1: 175; Bekker-Nielsen, 2023: 63). On the orders of Melik, the lower city is torched.

According to ms. P, the *kale* of Zile is encircled by a moat (*kalenün çevresine handak kazmışlardı*, Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 122); according to ms. I, a trench has been dug “in front of the city and lined with iron stakes and spikes’ (*şehir handek kesmişlerdi. Kenarında demürden bıtrık ve dikenler dökmüşlerdi*, Demir, 2020, V.1: 175). Although the usual sense of *şehir* is “city”, in this context it must refer to the castle itself, since a few lines later we are told how the Christians launch an attack through the castle gate, “having laid a bridge across the *handek*”, presumably lowering a drawbridge (cf. Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 308). Since the rock face falls steeply away on three sides (fig. 5), surrounding the citadel with a moat – as according to ms. P – would not only be superfluous, but impossible. On the other hand, a dry moat or trench straddling the approach from the western side, fitted with stakes and spikes –

as described in ms. I – would pose a formidable obstacle to attackers trying to storm the *kale*.

From their secure base behind the walls of the *kale*, the Christians make a nocturnal sortie and capture numerous Muslims; then, to spite the attackers, some of the captives (twenty according to P, a hundred according to I) are hung from the towers of the castle, in full view of Melik and his soldiers (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 122; Demir, 2020, V.1: 176). When attempts to take the *kale* prove unsuccessful, one of his commanders advises Melik to summon stone-throwing catapults from Tokat. The catapults arrive, but before they can be deployed, the defenders make another sortie and succeed in setting the machines on fire. An enraged Melik vows to continue the attack until he has demolished the fortress and cast its stones into the sea (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 123; Demir, 2020, V.1: 177).

Since this is the only occasion on which we hear that Melik has catapults at his disposal, and a siege train would be an encumbrance to a mobile army of horsemen, it seems quite possible that the stone-throwers were introduced by the narrator in order to shift the focus of the story from Zile to Tokat and back. In the event, it is not the catapults that change the course of the battle but a renegade Christian monk who reveals a secret passage leading “from the monastery of Restos” up into the *kale* (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 126; Demir, 2020, V.1: 179-180). This story was evidently inspired by the existence of a subterranean stairway which is still visible on the *kale* today. Such stepped tunnels are by no means uncommon in central and eastern Anatolia, their purpose usually being to provide access to an underground source of water (Köroğlu & Danişmaz, 2018: 124). The nexus between Christian monks and underground passages recurs in Niksar, where a passage allegedly connects the city with Istanbul (see below).

Overall, the narrative agrees with the topography of the site. Catapults deployed on the level area immediately to the west of the main gate would be an effective weapon and from here, the besiegers would have an uncomfortably close view of the bodies of their captured comrades hanging from the towers.

Once the *kale* has been taken, Melik makes good on his promise to sink its stones “into the sea”, or rather into *Kaz Göl*, “Goose lake”, some 25 km distant from Zile along the Roman road to Tokat. According to mss. I and L, the stones are carried on the backs of Christian captives; this detail is not found in P.

On his return from Zile to Tokat, Melik retakes Komana and – acting on the advice of the Prophet, who came to him in a dream – arranges for the marriage of Artuhı and Efrumiyye (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 134; Demir 2020: 186). Once the wedding feast is over, he raises an army and prepares to march on Amasya. Nastor and Şattat likewise collect an army, summoning troops from their Christian allies (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 137; Demir, 2020, V.1: 189).

During the fighting, Efrumiyye is captured and taken to Nastor’s tent (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 145; Demir, 2020, V.1: 198-199). Rejecting his drunken and lecherous advances, she is sent to **Çankırı** and imprisoned on the *kale* (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 147; Demir, 2020, V.1: 200-201). The Prophet, however, once again appears to Melik in a dream and tells him that if he sends Artuhı in search of Efrumiyye, she will be freed (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 156; Demir, 2020, V.1: 209). En route, Artuhı is joined by a young warrior named Karatekin or Karatigin, a son of one of the minor characters in the *Battalname* (Mélihoff, 1960, V.1: 168). The two heroes travel day and night, through “plains, mountains and villages” and finally reach Çankırı.

The two heroes find the city all but deserted, most of the inhabitants having fled to the safety of the *kale*. With the aid of a local woman, Meryam, the two disguise themselves, enter

the *kale* and liberate Efrumiyye along with seven hundred Muslims who are also being held prisoners there (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 180-181; Demir, 2020, V.1: 239-240). The garrison is roused and a battle ensues, but the Christians are forced to surrender.



Fig. 6. Çankırı: The main gate of the citadel.  
 6-сур. Чанкыры: Цитадельдің негізгі қақпасы.  
 Рис. 6. Чанкыры: Главные ворота цитадели.

In the *Danişmendname*, the *kale* of Çankırı functions as a safe haven for the citizens who have fled there from the lower city, and they are not allowed outside the gate without the permission of the castle commander (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 179-180; Demir, 2020, V.1: 238). The *kale* itself is large, enclosing about 3 hectares (c. 30,000 square metres) – enough to accommodate a sizeable population. It rises more than 100 metres above the lower city, with steep slopes on most sides. Access from the city will have been through the northeast gate (fig. 6), where remains of the older wall can still be seen, more than three metres thick and rising more than 8 metres above the level of the roadway. The *kale* of Çankırı was a strong position that could not be stormed but only taken by siege or by a ruse.

We are told that on the *kale* there was a prison with “a very strong lock” (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 181) or “very strong door” (Demir, 2020, V.1: 240) where the Muslim captives were being held, but Efrumiyye was not placed there; she was held in a well whose opening was closed with a millstone. Artuhı let himself down into the well by means of a rope and brought Efrumiyye up to safety (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 180; Demir, 2020, V.1: 239). Access to water was crucial in case of a siege, and the narrator could take it for granted that the *kale* of Çankırı would possess wells or cisterns.

After the capture of the city, most of the citizens embrace Islam; those who do not wish to convert are settled in the *taşra*, “suburb”, presumably a part of the lower city. 400 of the new Muslims are settled on the *kale*, a *hafız* is assigned to teach them the Koran and one of their number appointed *imam*. The palace of the Christian *beg* Hamiran is torn down and replaced by a mosque (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 183; Demir, 2020, V.1: 242). Karatekin is installed as governor of Çankırı where he remains a local hero to this day, among other things lending his name to the city’s university. His supposed tomb can be seen on the *kale*.

On his return journey, Artuhı encounters a splendid caravan escorting a princess, Gülnuş Banu, daughter of Kaytal, the Christian lord of Ankara. In a dream, she had been foretold that she would become the wife of Melik Danişmend; when her father learned of her dream, he gave orders for Gülnuş to be brought to safety in his castle. Artuhı overpowers the escorting soldiers and brings Gülnuş to Melik, who is charmed by the young woman. As Gülnuş refuses to convert, however, Melik does not marry her but retains her under guard as a hostage (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 192; Demir, 2020, V.1: 251). Sometime later she has a change of heart, becomes a Muslim, is married to Melik and bears him a child.

With Efrumiyye liberated, Melik now prepares for the final showdown with her father Şattat. He collects a vast army and marches towards **Amasya**. At the news of his approach, Nastor and Şattat are alarmed and send calls for help to their Christian friends and allies (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 196; Demir, 2020, V.1: 255). An enormous army is assembled at Niksar under the command of the cities *beg*, Mihayil, and sets off to join Şattat. The most direct route to Amasya would pass via Erbaa and Taşova, but Mihayil’s army moves south via Komana, whose citizens once again abandon Islam. When the news reaches Tokat, the Muslim population flees to safety: some to the *kale*, some to Sivas and “some of them to Malatya” (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 198; Demir, 2020, V.1: 257). Mihayil, however, has no time to besiege Tokat, for Melik is already encamped below the *kale* of Amasya and has made Nastor and Şattat an offer: if they convert to Islam, they can retain their titles and territories. By way of response, they hang Melik’s messenger from one of the towers of the *kale* (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 195; Demir, 2020, V.1: 254).

The armies now clash and the fighting continues for days on end, the tide of battle shifting first one way, then the other. At one juncture, reinforcements arrive from Kaytal, lord of Ankara and father of Gülnuş Banu (Mélihoff, 1960, V.2: 207; Demir, 2020, V.1: 267-268). Eventually, and despite their numerical superiority, the Christian force is defeated and driven to flight. Şattat is taken prisoner on the road but later manages to escape.

Melik’s victory is not complete, however, before the *kale* is in his hands. The entrance to the castle passes through a series of gates. At night, Efrumiyye and a Christian renegade, Ahmed-Serkis, go to the *kale* with a small force and call on the guards to open the gate, pretending that Ahmed-Serkis is Şattat. The garrison, as yet unaware that their leader has been taken

captive, allows them to enter. The castle commander is seized, the guards are massacred and the procession moves on to the second and third gates, where the scene repeats itself. After some hesitation on the part of the guards, the fourth gate is likewise opened and the Muslims stream into the castle (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 214-215; Demir, 2020, V.1: 275).

The narrator does not have a great deal to say about the topography of Amasya, but what he relates is consistent with the facts on the ground. At an early stage of the battle, one of his officers points out to Melik that their position in the plain is exposed to attack by the advancing armies of Nestor's allies; on his advice, the Muslims move their camp to the land "at the foot of the mountain" (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 198-199; Demir, 2020, V.1: 258), probably in the vicinity of the present-day railway station. Here, they would be out of range of missiles from the *kale* but close enough to observe their opponents' movements and have advance warning of a Christian counterattack.



Fig. 7. Amasya: concentric walls of different dates.

7-сур. Амасия: әртүрлі даталардың концентрлік қабырғалары.

Рис. 7. Амасья: концентрические стены разного возраста.

The *kale* itself ranks among the most impressive in Anatolia (Bryer & Winfield, 1985: 13), rising more than 200 metres above the level of the Yeşilirmak river, which flows close by its base, and enclosing an area of more than 10,000 square metres. The rock falls away to all sides, with the easiest – but by no means easy – access on the north side. The castle rock at present boasts no less than three underground stairways, but these are not mentioned in the *Danişmendname*.

Since the *kale* has been almost continuously occupied from the time of the Mithradatids onwards, with numerous additions and accretions, it is difficult to envisage the appearance of the early medieval *kale* from its present state (fig. 7). Nor does the narrator of the *Danişmendname* provide much detail except for the sequence of four gates. The existence of this feature, which would not be visible to an observer standing outside the walls, is confirmed by the *Seyahatname* of Evliya Çelebi, who spent several days in Amasya on his way to Erzurum in 1646. According to Evliya, the castle has four gates arranged in “layers” or “stages” (kat: Kurşun, Kahraman & Dağlı, 1999, V.2: 95). In theory, Evliya could have derived this information from the *Danişmendname*, with which he was acquainted, but since he also offers other information about the *kale* not found in the *Danişmendname*, it is more likely to reflect his own observations.

Şattat, whom Melik had put in chains, bribes his guards to release him and makes his way to Nastor in Çorum, where they are joined by Kaytal at the head of a large army (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.2: 222; Demir, 2020, V.1: 284). A battle takes place in the plain between Amasya and Çorum, in the course of which Kaytal is killed and Şattat recaptured (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.2: 229; Demir, 2020, V.1: 292). Stubbornly refusing to convert, Şattat is put to death. Nastor, however, has not given up and dispatches a new series of letters calling on his Christian allies for help.

**Çorum** is frequently mentioned in the *Danişmendname* as the city of Nastor, the ally and onetime prospective son-in-law of Şattat, but not as a theatre of combat until chapter 14, when Melik’s army marches on the city and encircles it. The unbelievers seek refuge in the fort and Nastor observes the enemy forces from the roof of his palace according to ms. P (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.2: 235) or from one of the towers according to ms. I (Demir, 2020, V.1: 298). Ms. I adds that Nastor “had a moat (*handek*) excavated around the palace and filled with water” and “placed *mancılık*lar at the four corners”; in short, “you would think it was a castle”, not a palace. Ms. L (Leningrad) also mentions the moat and the *mancılık*lar (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.2: 235 n. 1). In a military context, *mancılık* or *mancınık* usually designates a stone-throwing catapult (Purton, 2010: 39) as at the siege of Zile, but this would hardly be effective against the tents of Melik’s encampment. According to ms. P, Nastor deployed “machines” (*çarh*) shooting arrows (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.2: 235); probably the *mancılık*lar should here be understood as arrow-shooters rather than stone-throwers.

One of the besiegers eavesdrops as the Christians receive news that first one, then another warlord is marching to Nastor’s assistance. Before long, the Muslims will be outnumbered and it is essential to seize the *kale* before the reinforcements arrive. Ahmed-Serkis devises a ruse that gains access to the *kale* for himself as well as Melik, who then kills Nastor with his own hands. With the *kale* captured and their leader dead, the surviving Christian inhabitants feign conversion to Islam, but in reality they are planning to poison Melik and his companions at a feast. The night before the banquet the Prophet appears to Melik in a dream and orders him to leave the city at once, as it will be destroyed. As soon as Melik’s faithful are outside the walls of Çorum, an earthquake causes the whole city to collapse over the heads of its insincere inhabitants (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.2: 241-242; Demir, 2020, V.1: 304-306).



Fig. 8. Çorum: re-used ancient columns and grave steles in the stonework of the walls.

8-сур. Чорум: қайта пайдаланылған ежелгі бағаналар мен қабырғалардың құлпытасы.

Рис. 8. Чорум: повторно использованные древние колонны и надгробия в каменной кладке стен.

The *kale* of Çorum is no acropolis, but situated on a low hill at 818 m above sea level, less than twenty metres higher than the surrounding city. An area of c. 5,000 square metres is enclosed by a curtain wall with towers. The ground on which the walls stand is almost level, hence the moat mentioned in mss. I and L would have been feasible, although no traces of it are now visible. The masonry of the walls incorporates numerous Roman and early Byzantine spoils, including columns, grave steles, a press-weight and one half of a stone doorsill with the threshold hacked off (fig. 8). Ancient spoils are a characteristic feature of many Selçuk caravanserais in central Anatolia, and their presence may have inspired the tradition, quoted by Evliya Çelebi, that the *kale* of Çorum was built by Kılıç Arslan (Kurşun, Kahraman & Dağlı, 1999, V.2: 213). It seems more probable that the *kale* was rebuilt by the Selçuks after the period of Danişmendid ascendancy. In that case, its destruction by earthquake could be an aetiology devised to explain the dilapidated state of the *kale* in the time of the Danişmendids, embellished with elements taken from the story of Lot as told in the Bible and in the Koran.

The Danişmendname also provides an aetiology for the name: Melik renamed Yankoniyye as *Çorumlu*, “sinful”, because its citizens had committed a sin (*çürüm*) (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 242; Demir, 2020, V.1: 306). Evliya Çelebi offers a different explanation: Yakup, the son of Kılıç Arslan, sent some hundreds of his soldiers who were wounded or ill (*cor*) to recover in the city, hence it became known as Çorum (Kurşun, Kahraman & Dağlı, 1999, V.2: 212-213). Needless to say, neither explanation has any historical value.

Leaving the ruined city of Çorum behind them, Melik’s forces move on to **Süleyman Ribat**. Though glossed as *Gümüş Şehri*, literally “silver city” in mss. P and I (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 242; Demir, 2020, V.1: 306), Süleyman Ribat does not appear to have been a city as such. It was essentially a mining community devoted, as its name reveals, to the extraction and smelting of silver ore. At one time it had possessed a *kale*, but when Evliya Çelebi visited Gümüş Şehri, the *kale* was in a sorry state, ruined and “with neither commander nor garrison” (Kurşun, Kahraman & Dağlı, 1999, V.2: 211). J.G.C. Anderson, who passed through the region in 1900, found “nothing of interest” apart from five ancient inscriptions and a monastery (Anderson, 1900: 100). A visit to the present-day village known as Gümüş confirms Anderson’s impression: no standing remains of medieval or earlier date are visible, and the general layout of the settlement conforms to the open-meshed, irregular plan often found in mining villages.

No military action takes place at Süleyman Ribat. Nonetheless, the composer of the Danişmendname found occasion to describe it in some detail. At Melik’s approach, the miners convert to Islam and assist in locating the entrances to the mines, entrances which Nastor and Şattat had attempted to conceal from the Muslims. The workings are reopened and the silver from Süleyman Ribat helps fund Melik’s army (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 242; Demir 2020, V.1: 306). Melik’s warriors then march on to Amasya.

At Amasya, Melik is reunited with Gülnuş and sees his baby son for the first time, but has little time to rest on his laurels, for news of revolts pour in from all directions: Tokat, Komana, Niksar and Çankırı. In a dream, Seyyid Battal appears to Melik and advises him to send troops to Çankırı, Kastamonu and Samsun (Mélikoff, 1960, 2: 248; Demir, 2020, V.1: 310; Bekker-Nielsen, 2023: 62). Melik dispatches three of his trusted commanders, Ahmed, Osman and Süleyman. For his operations against the region of Kastamonu, Osman seizes the *kale* called Eflonis as his base and renames it Osmancuk (Osmancık), an obvious aetiology. Süleyman returns from Samsun with the unwelcome news that a Christian army is assembling in the north and preparing to cross the Pontic mountains. To forestall it, Melik musters his forces for an attack on **Niksar**.

The story of Melik’s last conquest mirrors that of his first conquest, Tokat. Like Tokat, Niksar possesses a strong *kale* and a fortified monastery that must first be reduced before an attack on the city itself. No less than seven hundred monks inhabit the monastery and their leader, Sematourgos, possesses supernatural powers. At his bidding, demons (*cinler*) have excavated an underground passage leading from Niksar to Constantinople, enabling the monks to attend mass in Hagia Sophia (Mélikoff, 1960, 2: 259; Demir, 2020, V.1: 324). As Mélikoff notes (Mélikoff, 1960, 1: 156; 434, n. 2) the story of the tunnel connecting Niksar and Constantinople was no doubt inspired by the subterranean stairways which are frequent in northern Anatolia, and of which a particularly fine specimen is still visible on the *kale* of Niksar.

The name Sematourgos preserves the memory of Saint Gregory Thaumaturgos (“wonder-worker”), bishop of Niksar in the third century AD. Remains of medieval stonework which

Bryer and Winfield (1985, 108) observed about one kilometre from Niksar may derive from this monastery. When efforts to storm the monastery fail, Artuhı and Efrumiyye draft a letter in Greek purporting to be from Puthil, the Christian lord of Trabzon, addressed to Gavras, the castle commander at Niksar. The letter explains that Puthil is sending a priceless relic, a cross “of the Messiah”. If the Christians place the relic in the monastery of Sematourgos, it will be impregnable to all attacks. Disguised as a monk, Efrumiyye comes to the castle and delivers the letter to Gavras, who gives the order to admit the cross and its escort of armed men into the monastery. At dawn, when the gates are opened, it is not Christians who enter, but Muslim warriors who massacre the monks and take control of the monastery (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.2: 259-261; Demir, 2020, V.1: 324-326).

The Muslims now move into the lower city and attempt to force their way to the gate of the *kale*, but the Christians retreat into the houses, climb to the roofs and shower the invaders with stones and arrows from above; others retreat to the *kale*. Appalled at the scale of the casualties, Melik pulls his men back and torches the lower city. The Christian commander Gavras mounts a counterattack and a fierce battle ensues, in the course of which Gavras is killed while his sons are taken captive and convert. All resistance collapses, the citizens surrender and the gate of the *kale* is opened to Melik’s forces.

According to the version of P, the Muslims have “broken the gate of the city” (*şehrün kapusın similar*; Mélíhoff, 1960, 2: 261), implying that the lower city was walled. There is no evidence on the ground to suggest that this was the case, and a wall is not mentioned by Evliya Çelebi in his description of seventeenth-century Niksar in the *Seyahatname* (Kurşun, Kahraman & Dağlı, 1999, V.2: 100), nor by Bryer & Winfield (Bryer & Winfield, 1985: 109-110).

Niksar possesses one of the largest natural citadels of any Anatolian city. In fact, its extent posed a problem, since it was not possible to include the entire top of the hill within the walls of the *kale*, leaving a stretch of level ground on the eastern side that offered a potential encampment for besiegers and a space for deploying catapults. The early medieval layout of the fortifications is not known in its details, but the elevation of the *kale* will, together with its walls, have presented a daunting obstacle. Furthermore, to reach the base of the *kale*, an army coming from the direction of the river would need to penetrate the maze of streets winding up the slope, an environment where horsemen could not exploit their advantage over foot soldiers.

While the narrator has a good deal to say about the monastery of Sematourgos, there is little topographical detail in his description of Niksar or its *kale*. Two pieces of information may suggest autopsy on the narrator’s part. One is that the Muslim attackers have to fight their way through the town to reach the gate of the *kale*, the other the tunnel leading to İstanbul, “of which traces still exist” (Mélíhoff, 1960, V.2: 259; Demir, 2020, V.1: 324), though this last remark could derive from the pen of Arif Ali. As for the historical setting, this is pure nonsense. Niksar cannot have been under the control of the Christians or threatened by Christian forces at this time, since this is where Bohemond was imprisoned after being taken captive by Gümüştegin four years before Melik’s death (Başat, 2022: 34). Had Niksar been under threat, the Muslims would not have chosen to keep their valuable hostage here.

Niksar stands at the head of the road leading from the valley of the Kelkit into the region known as Canik (Bryer and Winfield, 1985: 41-42) and over the Pontic mountains. In chapter 1, ms. P poetically describes Niksar as “the gate of Canik” (Mélíhoff, 1960, 2: 17); perhaps this expression led the narrator to the erroneous assumption that the city possessed a gate and

walls. Some distance from Niksar, the route divides, one branch (the present D-850) leading to Ünye, another to Fatsa, which in former times served as the port of Niksar (Hamilton, 1842: 270) (fig. 9).

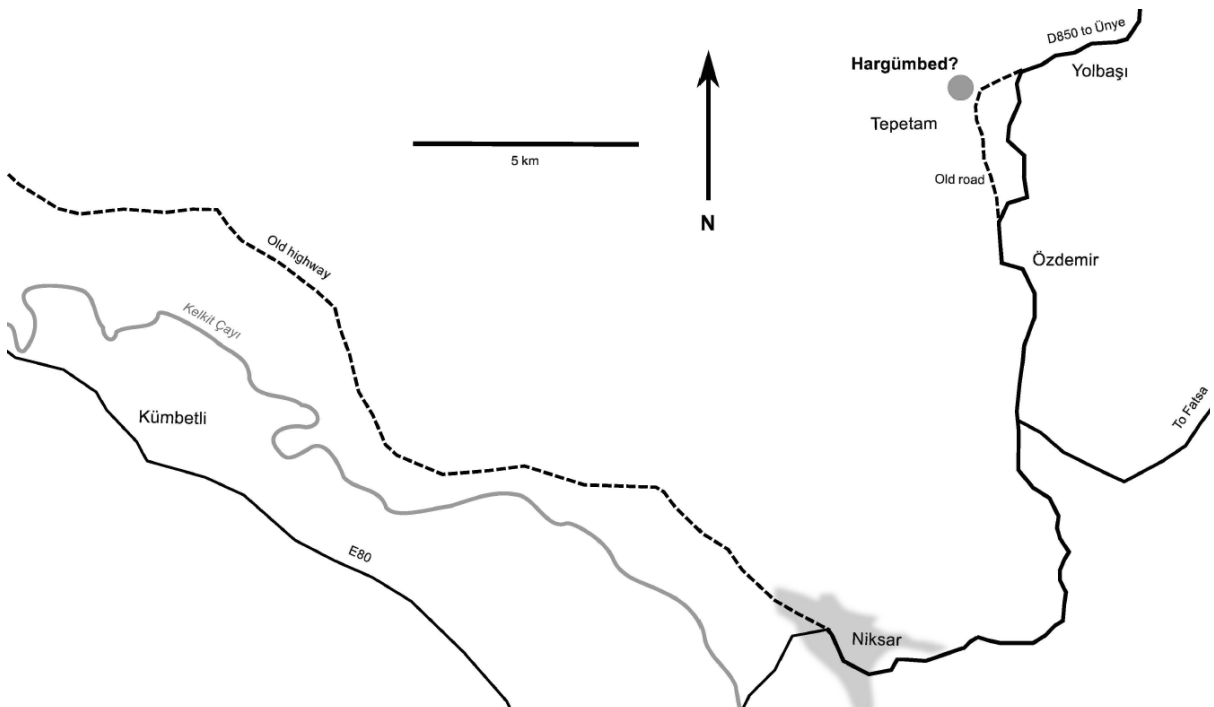


Fig. 9. Map of Niksar and surrounding region.

9-сур. Никсар мен оның айналасындағы аймақтың картасы.

Рис. 9. Карта Никсара и окрестностей.

Having captured Niksar, Melik plans a three-pronged campaign to secure its hinterland: Artuhı and Efrumiyye are dispatched westwards with an army, Abdurrahman and Süleyman to the east. The third force, commanded by Melik himself, marches up the road to Canik. After two days (*iki gündən sonra*, Demir, 2020, V.1: 332; this information is not found in P) the Muslim army reaches the fort of **Hargümbed**, where the Christians make a surprise attack on Melik's advance guard. He rallies his remaining warriors, mounts a counterattack and succeeds in forcing the Christians to retreat and seek shelter inside the fort.

Meanwhile, however, Puthil, the Christian lord of Trabzon, has received reinforcements from the lords of Armenia and Georgia. Their combined forces make a night raid on the Muslim camp and during the fighting, Melik suffers a lance wound to his thigh. Exhausted after a long battle, the Muslims retreat down the road along which they had come, but before they reach Niksar, they learn that the sons of Gavras have renounced their new faith and killed the Muslim garrison on the *kale*, forcing the Muslims to abandon the city and take refuge in the hills. Melik rallies his forces and launches a night attack on the Infidels, many of whose leaders are killed. Victorious in the field, the Muslims now direct their attention to the *kale*. Believing the approaching Muslims to be the returning Christian force, the guards allow Melik's soldiers to pass through the gate. Most of the castle's defenders are killed, a few make their escape, and the castle itself is torched.

Having secured Niksar, Melik once again turns his attention to Canik, taking the remainder of his trusted warriors with him. A day's march from Niksar they are ambushed by a Christian force. In the fighting, Melik's thigh wound breaks open and he is furthermore struck by no less than seventeen arrows and a crossbow bolt (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 274; Demir, 2020, V.1: 344). Realizing that he does not have long to live, his few surviving companions carry him back to Niksar, where he expires. They arrange for his burial and then retreat to Tokat. When the news of Melik's death reaches Amasya, Gülnuş Banu falls ill with grief and soon dies (Mélikoff, 1960, V.2: 281; Demir, 2020, V.1: 352). Artuhı and Efrumiyye travel to Malatya, then continue onwards to Baghdad to inform the Caliph that the north has been retaken by the Infidels.

Hargümbed mainly serves as a base and a refuge for the Christian forces, and there are no attempts at describing the fort itself or its appearance. The name *Hargümbed* (*Harkümbed* in ms. I, *Halkünbed* in the *Mirkâtü'l-Cihâd*), “the dome (*kümbet*) of the donkey (*har*)”, suggests a hill of roughly hemispherical shape. When J.G.C. Anderson visited the region in 1900, a village community to the west of Niksar bore the name *Herkumbet* (Anderson, 1900: 56); today, it is called Kümbetli. Mélikoff proposes to identify this village with the Hargümbed of the Danişmendname (Mélikoff, 1960, V.1: 157). However, Kümbetli does not lie on the road leading from Niksar to Canik, but on the modern highway leading west towards Erbaa (fig. 9). Nor does the hill on which the village is situated resemble a dome.



*Fig. 10.* Hargümbed? Dome-shaped hill near Tepetam village, northeast of Niksar.  
 10-сур. Харгүмбед? Никсардың солтүстік-шығысындағы Тепетам ауылының маңындағы күмбез тәрізді төбе.

*Рис. 10.* Харгюмбед? Куполообразный холм недалеко от деревни Тепетам, к северо-востоку от Никсара.

Demir (Demir, 2020, V.1: 379) places Hargümbed within the village territory of Çalca, about 30 kilometres from Niksar on the road leading towards Fatsa. Another possibility is to search for Hargümbed on the road to Ünye. Between the villages of Özdemir and Yolbaşı, an older road (possibly of Hellenistic or Roman origin) runs on a parallel, but more westerly course than the present D-850. It is unpaved, and at several places the foundation layer of the old road, composed of medium-sized stones, shows through the gravel surfacing. About midway between Özdemir and Yolbaşı this road passes to the east of a large dome-shaped hill rising to a height of c. 1350 metres above sea level (fig. 10) just north of the village named Tepetam. Today, the summit of the hill is heavily wooded, but it is possible that an intensive ground survey would reveal traces of medieval fortifications.

### Results

This study has explored the descriptions of nine cities (Sivas, Tokat, Komana, Turhal, Zile, Cankırı, Amasya, Çorum and Niksar), the mining village of Süleyman Ribat and the fort of Hargümbed in the Danişmendname, and found that in most cases, the unknown poet's description of the site and the action taking place around it correspond to its present-day topography. Exceptions are Sivas, where the low elevation of the *kale* does not seem to justify the complicated stratagem devised by the Infidels, and Niksar, where the poet assumes the existence of a city wall which has no counterpart in real space.

The narrator also describes rural locations. Many of these are plains: the plain where Melik first meets Artuhı, the plain where the two abduct Efrumiyye, the plain near Çorum where the forces of Nastor and Şattat are defeated, etc. This category also includes the lake into which the stones of Zile's *kale* are thrown and the defile where Melik's men are ambushed on their way to Canik.

Topographical descriptions are almost always found in the context of military action. The case of Amasya is typical: from the moment in chapter 2 when Melik and Artuhı meet near Amasya to the death of Şattat, the *beg* of Amasya in chapter 14, Amasya is frequently at the centre of events, yet we hear almost nothing about the castle before it is besieged by Melik in chapter 12. In the last chapters, military action takes place at Hargümbed, but the Muslims never penetrate the fort itself, which is consequently not described in any detail.

### Conclusion

The towns and landscapes described in the Danişmendname delimit its storyworld and form a concentric pattern. At its centre, more or less corresponding to the quadrilateral Çorum-Amasya-Turhal-Zile, topographical descriptions tend to be detailed and accurate. Outside lies a second zone where descriptions are equally detailed, but the narrator has allowed himself greater poetic license to adapt the topography to fit his storyline (Sivas, Tokat, Komana, Niksar). Beyond this a third zone contains places (Ankara, Samsun, Osmancık, Sinop, Kastamonu, Malatya, etc.) that are mere names, with no attempt at describing their site or appearance.

The central area was clearly the region with which the originator of the Danişmendname was most familiar, his homeland on the frontier between Christian Byzantium and the

Muslim world of the Danişmendids and the Selçuks. This is further supported by his detailed description of the mines at Süleyman Ribat and his re-use of a theme from the hagiography of saint Theodore (Bekker-Nielsen, 2023: 65), whose shrine was located at Avkat between Çorum and Amasya.

Cankırı is an outlier in terms of both narrative and geography. It lies far to the west of the Çorum-Amasya-Turhal-Zile quadrilateral and is only loosely linked to the rest of the epic by the expedition of Artuhı in chapter 11. This supports the hypothesis that the Cankırı episode originally formed a separate story (with the warrior-pair Artuhı and Karatekin as its protagonists) that the composer of the Danişmendname has incorporated into his narrative (Bekker-Nielsen, 2023: 67).

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**Conflict of Interest.**

There is no conflict of interest related to this article.

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Нет конфликта интересов, связанного со статьей.