



Summary :

The Bulgarian coast achieved considerable growth during the 19th century, resulting in the economic expansion of a series of cities, mainly Burgas (Pyrgos), Varna and Anchialos. The presence of Greek populations in these cities was important.

Date

18th – 20th century

Geographical Location

Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea

1. Anthropogeography

During the 18th and 19th century, populations from Macedonia, Epirus, the Aegean Islands, the coast of Asia Minor and from the regions of Pontus in Asia Minor [moved](#) towards Eastern Thrace and Eastern Rumelia. By 1906, the [Greek population](#) of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia had reached 100,000 persons.¹ The Grecophone population and the population of Greek origin had settled in the country and the cities along the coast of the Black Sea. Being at these locations, they were able to control the [trade](#) of the region. Several of these Greeks started emigrating to the cities of Southern Russia after the 1830's, benefiting from the commercial flourishing of the region. Cities with an exclusively Greek population were those of [Mesimvria](#) and [Sozopol](#). On the other hand, [Anchialos](#), [Pyrgos](#) and Varna had mixed populations.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, compact Greek populations lived in [Agathoupolis](#) (Ahtopol) and in a number of minor villages, like Mideia or Salmydisos and Thynias (Niada) in harmony with the Bulgarian and Aromunian populations of the region. In 1906, in Vasiliko there lived 500 families,² in Mesimvria 1,000 Greek families, the larger portion of which had emigrated there from Greece, in 1919.³ In Varna, in 1903, there lived 7,500 Greeks out of a total of 35,000 inhabitants. In Pyrgos were settled 5,322 and in Anchialos 5,089 Greeks.⁴

At the present time, the Greeks who live in Bulgaria can be divided into four categories: the first comprises the descendants of the Greeks of the 19th century, the second the Sarakatsani population, the third includes the political refugees of the Greek Civil War, and the fourth category consists of the Greek businessmen who went to Bulgaria in the 1990's. It is estimated that they live in Varna, Pyrgos, Anchialos, Sozopol, Mesimvria, Agathoupoli, Aspro and Koziaka.

Moreover, approximately 1,200-1,500 Greek enterprises operate today in Bulgaria. It is calculated that these enterprises, in the period 1992-2005, have invested amounts that surpassed 1.8 billion Euros. Of them, the Greek banks dominate, accounting for 25-30% of the Bulgarian banking market.⁵

2. History

Greek populations inhabited the hinterland of modern Bulgaria from the period of Philippos II of Macedonia. Nevertheless, the Greek presence on the coast goes further back. A series of Greek colonies were built on bays and natural harbours, in order for the settlers to exploit the sea and its resources. The Greek presence continued ceaselessly till the beginning of the 20th century, as the prior Greek populations were replenished by waves of new arrivals of Greeks, which were caused by changes in the economic or political conditions, either in the region of their origins or, mainly, in the regions of their destination. The Greek presence on the Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea was powerful, as Greek merchants, industrialists and businessmen dominated in the economic and social life of the region.



In 1856, after the Crimean War, the political and administrative [reforms](#) in the Ottoman Empire and also the new law on citizenship, which was promoted by the Greek government, were the main factors for the changes in the framework in which the Greek population of the Ottoman Empire lived. Until that time, all the Orthodox populations of Thrace were under the jurisdiction of the [Ecumenical Patriarch](#). Nevertheless, after the Crimean War, the Bulgarians started claiming their ecclesiastical and political independence.

The establishment of the [Bulgarian Exarchate](#) in 1870 and the formation of the autonomous Bulgarian state in 1878 resulted in a confrontation between the Greeks and Bulgarians, and thus, the reinforcement of nationalistic animosity. In 1906, [incidents of violence](#) occurred against the Greek communities of various coastal cities, especially of Burgas, Anchialos, Mesimvria and Sozopol. Consequently, the Greek populations of Northern Thrace began abandoning the region and returning to Greece. By 1919, the departure of the Greek populations from Bulgaria was completed in accordance with the Treaty of Neilly. After the Second World War and during the Civil War in Greece, Bulgaria received new waves of Greek refugees. It is estimated that in Bulgaria a total of 7,000 Greeks settled there, most of whom returned to Greece after 1981.⁶

Varna is the ancient town of [Odessos](#) where remains of ancient buildings still exist. The Greek journalist G. P. Paraskevopoulos, who passed through the city in the 1890's, considered it as to be the most beautiful city of Bulgaria, as it had well built roads, fine buildings with beautiful gardens, clean water and a healthy climate.⁷ The harbour of the city was leeward; this resulted in its becoming one of the main import and export centres of the country. Being the maritime gateway for the products of the hinterland, Varna evolved into a significant commercial and financial centre of the region. Its significance was strengthened by its connection with the hinterland via railroad in the 1860's. Until the formation of the Bulgarian State in 1878, Varna was mainly inhabited by Turks and Greeks, whose number had reached 10,000 people by the end of the 19th century.⁸ Afterwards, the number of Bulgarians started increasing continuously, until their domination in the early 20th century and the final exit of the Greek population.

The city of Pyrgos or Burgas is relatively new. It was established on the cove of the bay, which is surrounded by the headlands of Anchialos and Sozopol. The city was founded by Greeks who flowed there from the nearby areas, chiefly from Anchialos and Sozopol.

Greek populations lived in the coastal cities of Propontis like Kallipoli (Gellibolu), Irakleia (Marmara Ereğli), Silyvria (Silivri) and Raideostos (Tekirdağ).

3. Economy

The autonomous principality of Bulgaria was formed in 1878 and, after being united with Eastern Rumelia, it became an independent state in 1885. The Greek populations of the Black Sea coast controlled into a great extent the trade imports and exports, the food trade and the trade of colonial goods, and, moreover, they also participated in handicraft and industry.

The region of Thrace was the major supplier of the Ottoman State and it operated as its hinterland. It sent to the Ottoman capital animals, wheat, fruit and vegetables, in addition to ironware, woolen clothes and handicraft products. The trade of the Black Sea towards [Constantinople](#) (Istanbul) increased year by year.

The basic export product was wheat. In the period 1885-1895, the wheat-exports increased seven fold, and from 3% of the total export trade in 1885, they reached 7% in 1894. In 1880, 6% of the total tonnage of the ships departing from the ports of Varna and Burgas belonged to Greek owners, a proportion which increased to 25% in 1890; it was decreased at the beginning of the 20th century to 15%.⁹ Several Greek businessmen were involved in the trade of the region, especially in the wheat-trade. Along the coast, from the Bosphorus to [Constanta](#), Greek businessmen were well-known for their maritime tradition and with their sea-boats they dominated the maritime trade of the Black Sea. Many seamen worked as pilots at the harbours of the region which had considerable disadvantages because of their shallow waters and reefs.

Varna was the most significant centre of transit trade on the Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea; the Greek community was the most



prosperous in the city. The Greeks were chiefly involved in navigation and in the long-distance transportation of cargoes; they were also owners of barges for the freighting of the ships into the harbour. The import and export trade of Varna (wheat, lumber, wine, industrial products) was largely conducted by Greeks. In the city there existed two Greek banks, the 'Commercial Credit Company of Varna' (1888) and the 'Stock Company "Ermis"' (1890). Moreover, there had been established two Greek tobacco factories, three factories which produced 'tachini' (sesame jelly) (Chr. Grigoriadis, Ser. Karamanlis and Elefth. Michos were the owners), three soap-making factories established in 1885 (owned by the Fourtounas brothers, Chr. Spiropoulos and Per. Voulalas) and three flour-mills (owned by Iak. Giakoumopoulos, Ag. Agallidis, Nik. Kilindros and Georgiadis).¹⁰

Apart from the wheat of the Bulgarian hinterland, the traders of Anchialos also exported salt which was produced in the local salt-pans. In the 19th century, salt was the barter of the exchange of products. One part of salt was equivalent to two parts of another product: for instance, one *oka* (1,280 grams) of salt would be exchanged for two *oka* of wheat. From Anchialos were also exported products coming from the hinterland, in addition to livestock and agricultural products of the area. Many inhabitants were occupied in [fishery](#), as the port of Anchialos led the fishing production in the region. The fish, which was caught in the open sea of Anchialos, and also close to other ports of the region, like Mesimvria and Sozopol, was exported either fresh or salted. In the surroundings of the city existed quite a well-developed viticulture, which resulted in the cultivation of 3,000,000 vines at the beginning of the 20th century.¹¹

Sozopol was the main port of lumber and charcoal shipping; being a safe harbour, it gave refuge to ships which sailed near the dangerous coasts between the mouth of the Bosphorus and the Cape of Thynias or Iniada (today Igneada). The Greek residents of Sozopol were chiefly seamen and owners of sail-ships and steam-ships, wholesale merchants who controlled the overland and maritime export-trade of lumber, charcoal, agricultural products, textiles, and local wine. These products were conveyed to other ports of the Black Sea. Half of the population of Ahtopol (Agathoupoli) was involved in the maritime economy and shipbuilding.

Mideia or Salmydisos, on the mouth of the river of the same name, was a leeward harbour for the ships. In particular, was the seaport of Vizyi (today Vize) which was the agricultural and timber centre of the region, located 40km from the sea.

A Greek population existed in the village Thynias (Niada) until the early 20th century. Thynias had a harbour from which lumber and coal were conveyed, as well as other products from Samakovo and the hinterland to Constantinople (Istanbul).

Mesimvria, like Varna, had mineral water springs which attracted numerous tourists during summer. Greek owners of hotels, cafes and restaurants, as well as Greek merchants, were in attendance on the visitors to the mineral water spring-tourism sites, which flourished in their city at the beginning of the 20th century.

Pyrgos (Bourgas) was a safe port; nevertheless, already at the end of the 19th century, works were being conducted in order to improve the safety and the facilities of the mooring of the ships. The port was a significant export and import trade centre, which was favoured by the railway connection with Yambol and with the railway network of Central Europe in the middle of the 19th century.

4. Society

Until 1860, every area of Thrace followed the local customs regarding the administration and the organization of the communities. The local metropolitan was the main representative of the Christian populations to the state authorities. However, after 1860, the communities in Thrace, as in other regions of the Ottoman Empire, were administered by a **dimogerontia** which was comprised of ten to twelve persons and of two to three committees. The communities were charged with tax-collection, the administration of the community property, the wages of the clergy and the teachers and the financing of the repairs of public buildings. The communities also had representatives in the capital, in order to promote the communities' interests.

5. Religion

Until the early 20th century, the Greeks in Bulgarian territory kept 117 churches and 8 monasteries.¹² Many Greek dioceses were



located in coastal cities and in particular [Anchialos](#), [Varna](#), [Mesimvria](#) and [Sozopol](#).¹³

The city of Anchialos, was also named *Aholo* or *Ahelo* and the inhabitants were called *Ahelinoi*. In the city was the cathedral of the Taxiarchs, which was burned down during turbulences in 1897. Other Greek churches in the city were those of the Dormition of the Virgin, the St Theodoroi, the Saviour's Transfiguration, and the chapels of 'Charitomeni' and St Anna. All these churches, with the exception of the Transfiguration, were burned down in 1906, during the anti-Greek violent incidents.

In Varna the Greek churches were St George, St Nicholas, St Paraskevi' and the Dormition of the Virgin. The [diocese of Varna](#) comprised the city of Varna and the surrounding villages. Moreover, under the jurisdiction of the diocese were two community monasteries, those of St Dimitrios (7km outside the city) and St Constantine (10km outside the city).

The seat of a Greek diocese of the same name was Mesimvria, whose cathedral was dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin. In the city there were also 22 more churches established, resulting in the city also being called 'Small Byzantium'.

Sozopol in antiquity was named Apollonia Pontica. In the Byzantine era it was renamed 'Sozopolis' because of its safe harbour in which the ships found refuge during storms. The [cathedral of the city](#) was that of St George. In the city were also established the churches of St Zisimos, St Elias, of the Virgin Mary, and St Marina.

6. Culture

The Greek populations on the coast of modern Bulgaria had an organised community life as they financed and maintained churches, schools of all grades, libraries and press. After the [tanzimat reforms](#) of 1856, schools were established in the main urban centres, divided into parochial and community schools. Up to the Crimean War (1853-6), the main provider of [education](#) was the Orthodox Church. However, after 1861, the communities and the guilds started becoming active in the educational sector quite dynamically. The conflict between opposing nationalisms in the region of Thrace was expressed in the education of children (a development encouraged by the Greek state with respect to the Greek community), as well as in the forming of [associations](#).

The Greek community of Pyrgos (Burgas) was prosperous with affluent members: merchants and owners of small industries. In 1882 was founded the society of 'Filomousos Adelfotis'. In 1903 a six-grade communal school with 183 students and five teachers was in operation, as well as two girls' schools with 244 students and a nursery school.¹⁴ In Anchialos existed a six-grade school with 251 students, a girls' school with 291 students and two nursery schools. In Mesimvria operated a five-grade boys' school with 108 students, an elementary school which included 84 students and a girls' school.¹⁵ The first Greek school was founded in 1818 by the Greek inhabitant of [Odessa](#) Alexandros Koumbaris, who bequeathed his library to the school. The local musical and educational society 'Orpheus' had a library with 3,000 books. Nevertheless, it was destroyed during the violent episodes of 1906. Skanavis published the [newspaper](#) To Vima (The Tribune) for two years (1896-8).¹⁶

The Greek community of Varna was one of the richest and most prosperous communities. In 1907, the Greeks of the city had five elementary schools (three for boys and two for girls), a Greek gymnasium and a higher girls' school, which operated in privately-owned premises. Approximately 1,200 – 1,500 students attended the Greek schools, the operation of which was financed by the landed property of the community.¹⁷ Until 1906, in the city there existed a Greek hospital, which was founded by the bequest of Paraskevas Nikolaou. The hospital was directed by a committee elected by the community of Varna. Its chairman was the metropolitan. Moreover, the Greeks owned a club, a library and a charity foundation. There was also a reading-room with the name 'Anagnostirio ton Odissiton' ('The Reading-Room of Odessos's residents), as well as a small coin-museum. In addition, [Greek newspapers](#) were published (*Efxinos* and *Odessos*) and the monthly published philological magazine the 'Pandesia' ('The Feast'). The Greeks of Varna had also a philharmonic society.



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13. A catalogue with the number of the Greek churches and schools in every city is cited in the, Βακαλόπουλος, Κ., *Ο Ελληνισμός της Ανατολικής Ρωμυλίας* (Θεσσαλονίκη 1990), p. 401.
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Glossary :

	Bulgarian issue
	The Bulgarian struggle for ecclesiastical autonomy. Since the 1850's the Bulgarians claimed the establishment of an autonomous church (exarchate) which would retain typical relationship with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The latter opposed to this movement as its role had been undermined. After long lasting negotiations and the failure of any attempt for reconciliation, an Ottoman firman promulgated in 1870 established the Bulgarian exarchate, although the Patriarchate declared the Exarchate schismatic. Naturally, the main character of the struggle of the Bulgarians for ecclesiastical independence was not religious. It was bounded to the Bulgarian nationalism emerged at that time and had clear political dimension (Bulgarian political independence).
	dimogerontia
	Communal authority consisting of the elected community officials, known as <i>archontes</i> (potentates), <i>proestoi</i> (notables), <i>epitropoi</i> (wardens), <i>dimogerontes</i> or simply <i>gerontes</i> (elders).