



Summary :

After the Ottoman conquest of the western coast of the Black sea, the local Christian population decreased while in contrast, Muslim presence increased. Since the middle of the 19th century, the dispute between Greeks and Bulgarians gradually intensified, since the nationalist sentiment of the latter grew, although in this specific area it remained quite weak. At the same time, the Greek communities proceeded to the development of an extended network of Greek schools, supported by the existence of the four Patriarchal dioceses.

Date

15th-19th century

Geographical Location

Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea

1. Introduction

During the second half of the 15th century, all of the West coast of the Black Sea came under Ottoman control and the area became an inner sea of the Ottoman Empire for a period of about three centuries. This fact greatly reduced the political and, especially, economic significance of the area, since the liaisons of the coastal towns with Italian port cities (Venice, Genoa) were severed. Moreover, these cities underwent great ethnological and demographic changes during the following centuries because of the settlement of Muslims, but also due to the fact that some of the cities took new positions within the Ottoman administration and the empire's interior trade.

2. Ethnological and demographic development, 15th-19th centuries.

After the conquest of the western coast of the Black Sea the fortunes of the coastal cities changed. Some of them declined, such as the medieval Carbona, which one century later, under the name [Balchik](#), had exclusively Muslim residents. Others, like [Varna](#), on the other hand, and especially the settlements of the southern coast, developed economically and saw their population increase, Muslim and Christian both. [Anchialos](#) (present day Pomorie) was especially prominent and known for its wealth. Most of its inhabitants descended from [noble Byzantine families](#) who located in the city after the Fall of Constantinople. Many of them, in fact, managed to climb high in the Ottoman hierarchy.¹

During the 17th and 18th centuries, however, the composition of the population changes. The Christian element greatly degraded, as the Ottoman tax records affirm. The cause of this decrease is manifold – epidemics, attacks by the Cossacks in Varna, [Sozopolis](#) (Sozopol), [Constanța](#) and Balchik. Another factor was the attempt by the Russian Empire to attract Christian population, mainly Greeks and Bulgarians, and [locate them in the southern Russian lands](#).² At the same time an increase of the Muslim element is also observed.

It is difficult to assess the ethnological composition of the Christian population living on the coast of the Black Sea, because the Ottoman documents, which are the only sources, did not distinguish between Greeks and Bulgarians. Another kind of sources is the reports of the foreign travellers and visitors, who passed through this area; however, they also did not always mark the difference and, in general, the information they provide is not always reliable. Even though many Bulgarians lived in urban centres, it is indisputable that most of them mainly inhabited villages. In the cities, and especially South of Cape Emine, the Greeks were mostly located. [Mesimvria](#) (Nesebar), Sozopolis (Sozopol), Vassilikos (Tsarevo) and [Agathoupolis](#) (Ahtopol) were considered “purely” Greek cities. One of the few exceptions was [Burgas](#), where the Greeks were in the middle of the 19th century about as many as the Bulgarians. Let



it be noted that during the second half of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, many Greeks but also Bulgarians immigrated. It is indicative that after the great migration in 1829-1830 there were only seven families left in Mesimvria.³

The largest city on the West coast of the Black Sea was Varna, whose fortune also changed during the 19th century. During the Russo-Turkish war (1828-1829) its population dispersed; later on some came back, while many [Greeks migrated there](#) from the islands and the mainland of Greece. In the North coast of the Black sea (current Romania), Constanța was the most significant city. Until the Crimean War (1853-1856) most travellers describe it as a small and poor [Tatar](#) settlement. However, after the inauguration of the Cernavodă-Constanța railway line and the construction of the port, the city grew financially and attracted many foreigner inhabitants, most of whom were Greek: 130 households and ca. 750 people in total, mainly immigrants from Basilikos, [Constantinople](#) and the islands.⁴

3. Ecclesiastical and communal organisation

The Ottoman conquest left the spiritual guidance of the Orthodox Christians under the Patriarchate's jurisdiction; that allowed the cultural survival of the Greek-Orthodox tradition as a common one among different ethnic groups – Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Romanians.⁵

During the period of Ottoman rule, four of the cities on the Black Sea coast were sees of dioceses – [Varna](#), Sozopolis, [Mesimvria](#) and [Anchialos](#). This fact affected not only the religious life of the Christian population – Greek, Bulgarian and [Gagauz](#) – but also their educational, cultural as well as communal ones, in which the metropolitans played an assertive part. Due to complete lack of any kind of sources, there are no available data on the activity, organisation and operation of the Christian communities in the cities of western Black Sea until the middle of the 19th century. By comparing them, though, with other urban and semi-urban centres, such as Philippoupolis (Plovdiv), Adrianoupolis (Edirne) and others, it possible to assume that in the coastal cities of the Black Sea the metropolitans served as heads of the local elderships ([dimogerontia](#)) and represented the Christian population before the Ottoman authorities.⁶

Until the middle of the 19th century, the Orthodox communities were mixed, including Greeks as well as Bulgarians. However, the manifestation of Bulgarian nationalism lead to conflicts, the first outcome of which being the segregation of the Christian communities and the foundation of Bulgarian communities and Bulgarian schools, separate from the Greek ones. This became more evident during the following decades and developed in some of the cities on the coast of the Black Sea, even though with some tardiness, and brought about tension between Greek and Bulgarian population. The first manifestation of such a case happened in Balchik in 1847-1848, when for the first time the Bulgarian language was introduced in Mass.⁷ However, it was a solitary case and remained the only one in the coastal cities for the next fifteen years. Until the 1860s, the issue of Bulgarian churches and Bulgarian priests was not even mentioned. After the Crimean War (1853-1856) and especially during the 1860s the ecclesiastical question became acute, resulting in the foundation of the [Bulgarian Exarchate](#) in 1870. One of the Exarcate's prefectures was the one of Varna and Preslava and so Varna became a city with two dioceses' sees – the Greek Patriarchate one and the Bulgarian Exarchate one.⁸

In the southern coast of the Black Sea, in a rather small area, three cities were sees of dioceses (Mesimvria, Sozopolis, Anchialos). The Patriarchate tradition there was strong and it was held in high esteem by the Bulgarian population. That is the reason that the nationalistic movement and the Bulgarian ecclesiastical one developed later on and mainly in the countryside. Burgas was the only town where a Bulgarian community was founded.

4. Educational and cultural life

During the Ottoman period [the educational life on the West coast of the Black Sea](#) was mainly a result of the activity by the [Patriarchate of Constantinople](#) and local dioceses. An educational movement manifested itself in Anchialos as early as the first decades after the [Fall of Constantinople](#). Since the beginning of the 18th century there was a Greek school operating in town, which acquired its own building at the end of the century.⁹ For the period of time until the end of the 18th century only piecemeal information



is available in regard to the educational matters in the monasteries of the southern coast of the Black Sea, [mainly around Sozopolis](#).¹⁰ In most of the cities, however, the educational level did not exceed the elementary level and there was no any kind of progress in Greek education. In the largest city, Varna, the first [monitorial](#) school opened during the 1840s.¹¹ In Mesimvria, despite the attempts, this happened only in the beginning of the 1850s.¹² In Balchik and [Kavarna](#) schools opened in 1855-56.¹³ In Sozopolis the monitorial method was introduced as late as 1859. Later on Greek schools opened in Basilikos, Bourgas and Agathoupolis.¹⁴ Lastly, in 1867 the Greek monitorial school in Constanța opened its doors.

In the 1860s and 1870s in almost all of the cities all-girls schools were also founded. During the second half of the 19th century the Greek schools in the coastal cities of the Black Sea flourished and evolved into appealing educational centres, not only for local Greeks, but also for the children of the rest of the non-Muslim population – Bulgarians and, mainly, [Gagauz](#) (turkish-speaking Orthodox Christians who had not acceded to the Bulgarian Exarchate). Out of the 35 Greek schools on the western coast of the Black Sea during the second half of the 19th century, 27 were north of Varna, mainly in the Gagauz villages.¹⁵

Besides the Orthodox church, an important part was played by the several [associations](#) founded from the 1870s onwards (the exception being the “Philomousos” association, which was founded in Varna in the 1840s in order to raise money for a Greek all-girls school)¹⁶ aiming to help schools raise funds for maintenance and improvements, staff employment and the construction of buildings.

After the Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878) and the Berlin Treaty, which determined the establishment of the Bulgarian Principality and the Autonomous Province of Eastern Rumelia (1879), the western coast of the Black Sea was divided between three states. The northern cities of Constanța and [Mangalia](#) were ceded to Romania. Balchik, Kavarna and Varna remained in the Bulgarian Principality. Mesimvria, Anchialos and Sozopolis were ceded to Eastern Rumelia, and after its annexation, to Bulgaria. Basilikos and Agathoupolis remained in the Ottoman Empire until the 1912-1913 Balkan wars, when they were ceded to Bulgaria.

The Greek communities gradually declined. After the establishment of the Bulgarian Principality, the position of the Greek population radically changed. In the Ottoman Empire the Greeks were one of the most potent [millets](#). In the Bulgarian national state, however, they became an ethnic minority.¹⁷ The continuous political, financial and nationalistic pressure resulted in the derogation of the educational, religious, cultural and financial liberties of the Greek communities and the decrease of the Greek population.

1. Тонев, В., *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането* (София 1995), p. 35.

2. Тонев, В., *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането* (София 1995), p. 38.

3. Тонев, В., *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането* (София 1995), p. 49.

4. Теплов, В. (ed.), *Материалы для статистики Болгарии, Фракии и Македонии с приложением карты распределения народонаселения по вероисповеданиям* (Санкт Петербург 1877), p. 205.

5. Κοτζαγεώργη, Ξ. (ed.), *Οι Έλληνες της Βουλγαρίας. Ένα ιστορικό τμήμα του περιφερειακού ελληνισμού* (Thessaloniki 1999), p. 53.

6. For the Christian communities see Κοντογεώργης, Γ., *Κοινωνική δυναμική και πολιτική αυτοδιοίκηση. Οι ελληνικές κοινότητες της Τουρκοκρατίας* (Athens 1982).

7. Тонев, В., *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането* (София 1995), p. 206.

8. Тонев, В., *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането* (София 1995), p. 239.



9. Κοτζαγεώργη, Ξ. (ed.), *Οι Έλληνες της Βουλγαρίας. Ένα ιστορικό τμήμα του περιφερειακού ελληνισμού* (Thessaloniki 1999), pp. 256-257.
10. Тонев, В., *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането* (София 1995), p. 140.
11. Νικολάου, Ιω., *Η Οδησσός (Βάρνα) υπό αρχαιολογικήν και ιστορικήν έποψιν* (Varna 1894), p. 94.
12. Тонев, В., *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането* (София 1995), p. 161.
13. Тонев, В., *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането* (София 1995), p. 160.
14. Тонев, В., *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането* (София 1995), p. 161.
15. Тонев, В., *Българското Черноморие през Възраждането* (София 1995), p. 163.
16. Κοτζαγεώργη, Ξ. (ed.), *Οι Έλληνες της Βουλγαρίας. Ένα ιστορικό τμήμα του περιφερειακού ελληνισμού* (Thessaloniki 1999), p. 397.
17. Тодоров, В.,-Либераτος, Α. (eds), *Опис на архивните колекции и книги на гръцки език в град Варна* (София 2006).

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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).
	monitorial system Teaching method developed by Joseph Lancaster, under which the older students (in Greek: "protoscholoι") taught the smaller children some skill or activity.

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