



## Περίληψη :

On the site of present-day town of Varna existed settlements dating back to ancient times. There are remnants from a Thracian settlement, a Roman city with huge public baths, and an ancient settlement. Early Byzantine Odessos was fortified with a wall and a harbour fortress, the remains of which existed until 1830. A moat, a church and administrative buildings from the time of the Bulgarian state are preserved there. At the end of the Middle Ages, foreign merchants were prominently present in the city. Before the conquest of the Turks (1389), Varna was the boundary with the Dobruzha despotate.

## Γεωγραφική Θέση

west coast of the Black sea

## Ιστορική Περιοχή

Black Sea

## 1. Introduction \*

### 1.1. Foundation and name of the town

Odessos (renamed to Varna after 7-8 C.) is a town, a stronghold and a seaport, founded in the 6 c. B.C. by Greek settlers from [Miletus](#), in a broad bay on the western coast of the Black sea next to a sweet water lake. The first known name of the settlement was assumingly of Thracian origin, although certainly a Hellenized word. Its second name which was recorded as late as the 7-8 C. is probably of Slavic origin („vrana“ –“varna“, i.e. black) and probably referred to the nearby neighbourhood.

### 1.2. Odessos in Roman times

There are better preserved ruins from Roman times, when Odessos was included within the boundaries of Mysia. From archaeological excavations, preserved stone inscriptions and coin findings, it is known that between the 1st and the 3rd c. the town was fortified with fortress walls, there was a water supply network, big buildings, temples of Apollo and Derzelas (a Thracic chthonian god, maybe identified with [Zalmoxis](#)), etc., and especially remarkable public baths. According to one inscription from Odessos, repairs were carried out on the fortification wall at the beginning of the 1st c. B.C., during the reign of Emperor [Tiberius](#).

## 2. Odessos during the Middle Ages

### 2.1. Early Byzantine period

In the 6 c. Odessos was within the boundaries of Byzantium, where it became a significant administrative centre during the reign of [emperor Justinian](#) (in 536 A.D. it was the seat of a [quaestor](#)). After numerous Barbaric invasions from the Goths, the Huns, etc which the region south of the Danube suffered, a period of economic boom began and the town harbour flourished. The construction of new buildings and a fortification wall marked this situation. The settlement began to attract people from Asia Minor, the islands in the Aegean sea and from other places. In the 4 c. Odessos was already the centre of episcopate. The basilicas built here show that Christianity played an important role in the lives of the people there. Constant attacks, especially from the 5-6 c. onward by Slavs, Avars and subsequently of proto-Bulgarians, lead to the almost complete destruction of Odessos. For almost three centuries the ruined and burnt town was absent from the history scene and the local, predominantly Greek population was destroyed or scattered.

### 2.2. Odessos during the 7-11 c.

The Bulgarian state founded north of the Hemus mountain (681 A.D.) at the end of the 7 c. erected a defence mound with a length of about 3.5 km – the so called „Asparukh rampart“ – between the coast of the Black Sea and Varna lake. The region of Varna



became an important hub for the new propagation of Christianity at the end of the 9 c. in these lands, where together with the capital Pliska and in Ravna, monasteries and scriptoria for copying liturgical books were built.<sup>1</sup>

In 971 the Byzantine emperor Ioannes Tzimiskes, 971-976 conquered Varna and turned the renovated town into an important naval base for his fleet with the task to control the western and the north-western coast of the Black Sea and of the Istros (the Danube) delta. The town witnessed a great economic growth. This is evident from the found coins, different artefacts and signs of varied construction-building activity. According to the biography of Cyrille Phileote dating from the 11 c. even Armenians lived in Varna and the harbour was visited by a lot of ships.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.3. History of the town in 12-14 c.

After the reinstatement of the Bulgarian state as the resulting of the uprising of Asen and Peter against the Byzantine rule (1186) the town continued to be within the boundaries of Byzantium. Not until 1190 Bulgarian king Asen I (1187-1196) managed to conquer it for a short period of time. The Byzantine chronicler Nicetas Choniates reported that a military garrison was located in the town and additional fortifications were built.<sup>3</sup> Irrespective of this Bulgarian king Kaloyan (1197-1207) returned it within the boundaries of Bulgarian state after a three day siege in 1201 and destroyed the town wall and burnt several quarters. He probably conquered the harbour fortress as well, built before that. After these military actions the town could not recover economically for quite a while.

The prosperity of Varna began towards the end of 13 c., which was due to the increased sea trade on the part of Italian merchants from Genoa and Venice. The harbour turned into a main centre for export of wheat and other agricultural goods to Constantinople and the Italian cities and import of manufactured goods, especially textiles. The expanding trade relations between Bulgaria and Venice made it necessary for Ivan Alexander (1341-1371) to issue an edict in 1347 for trade privileges to Venetian merchants.<sup>4</sup> As a result of the granted rights by 1352 a Venetian trade colony with the consul Marco Leonardo had already existed in Varna. In competition with them the Genoese tried to develop trade activity in Varna, but succeeded to oust the Venetians only at the end of the 14 c.

The main reason the town to rise to the level of major trade centre and harbour of Bulgarian state during this period was the vast fertile region between Stara Planina and the Danube river, known to the western authors as Zagora. The good mainland connections also contributed to the economic boom of Varna. This was reflected in the architectural appearance of the town in the 14 c. The two main churches which were especially opulently decorated but completely destroyed by the Ottoman invaders at the end of the same century have been now excavated.

In 1366 Varna was under an unsuccessful siege by the fleet of Amadeus VI of Savoy, consisting of 20 galleys, armed forces and siege weaponry. Several years later king Ivan Alexander ceded the town and several other fortresses to the Bulgarian despot Dobrotitsa. His son Ivanko entered into a trade and peace treaty with the Genoese in 1387 and they were granted the right to establish their own colony in Varna together with warehouses, a church and a seat for the consul.<sup>5</sup> Thus Genoa managed to oust its Venetian competitors. The great significance of Varna as a trading port on the west coast of the Black Sea is evident from its indication in numerous Italian maps and portolans dating from the 13-14 c., where the name of the town was marked in red ink as "Varna" Ὑarna". In 1389 the town was conquered by the Turks and included in the boundaries of the Ottoman empire. The commercial and economic importance of Varna was preserved in the following centuries since the town remained an important centre for production and crafts.

In 1444 the famous march of European knights against the Ottoman empire led by the Polish-Hungarian king Ladislaus Jagiello (later on called Warneńczyk (1442-1443) and Janosz Humyadi ended in defeat struck by the army of sultan Murad II (1421-1451) in Varna.

### 3. Church History of Varna and the Region

From its foundation at the time of the Byzantine rule until the 11 c. Varna metropolitan bishop see was under the rule of the



archbishop see in Tomi. Then after 1054 until the second half of the 13 c. it was under the direct rule of the Constantinople patriarch. For a short period of time Varna diocese was within the boundaries of the metropolitan bishop see of Vicina (around 1285). In 14 c. very active was the metropolitan bishop Alexis (1369-1389), who was given a vast region to rule thus taking a number of fortresses and towns from the Turnovo patriarch see: to the north - Cranea, Licostomo, Cilia, Drustar and Kaliakra, and to the south – Koziak and Emona, to the boarder with Nesebar metropolitan bishop see. During the Turkish yoke Varna metropolitan bishop see was under the rule of Constantinople.

#### 4. Evaluation

Varna is one of the major towns on the western Black Sea coast. During the better part of the Middle ages the Byzantine influence was preserved there. At the time of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom the town developed within the boundaries of the Bulgarian state, but this period was short and ended with its cession to the Dobrudzha despotate and the Karvun principality of Balchik. The commercial and economic prosperity were due to the active trading of Venetians and Genoese and Raguseans during the 14-16 c.

\* *The entry is still in editing process (ed.note)*

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Γλωσσάριο :

	<b>quaestor iustinianus exercitus</b>
High ranking political and military official. The office of quaestura iustiniana exercitus was created by Justinian I ( <i>Nov. 51</i> ) with authority over the two frontier provinces of Moesia Secunda and Scythia Minor, as well as the provinces of the Islands, Caria and Cyprus. Probably the reform aims to ensure the enforcement of the frontier forces. However shortly the responsibilities of the quaestor exercitus were limited.	