



Summary :

Port-city on the west coast of the Black Sea, largely populated by Greeks. Since the end of the 18th century it developed financially and became the most significant commercial port in the area. Seat to the Ecumenical Patriarchate's local diocese, it was also the main centre of Greek education in northern Bulgaria. Greek inhabitants received a heavy blow by the 1906 purges and their number heavily decreased until the mid-war period.

Other Names

Odessos, Odyssos, Варна

Geographical Location

Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea

Historical Region

Moesia

Administrative Dependence

Varna prefecture

Other Information

1. Name – Human Geography

Varna is built in the innermost part of the gulf bearing the same name, close to the mouth of the river Provadiiska, in a valley between two lakes on the west coast of the Black Sea. It stands on the location of ancient [Odessos](#), a [Milesian](#) colony (ca. 610-575 BC). The spelling with an -e- (Greek -η-) is the dominant one, but the spelling with an -y- (Greek -υ-) is also recorded since the name derives from the name Odysseus. According to another theory, there was another city named Varna close to Odessos since the antiquity and possibly the two cities at one point merged.¹

The name “Varna”, however, is considered posterior and several opinions have been proposed about its origin and etymology. During the Byzantine period, a city called Varna “closed to Odessos” is mentioned by Theophanis. According to Ioannis Nicholaou, Odessos was renamed Varna, “var” meaning “fortress”, after the Avars conquered it (ca. AD 587), because of its size and fortifications. In a list of the prefectures and dioceses within the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople during the reign of Andronicus II Palaeologus, it is recorded as “Odyssos, prefecture of Moesia, which is also called Vare”.²

Greek presence in Varna is constant since antiquity. During the Byzantine period its population remained largely Greek, despite the location of Slavs, Avars and Bulgarians in the surrounding area. The above situation remained during Ottoman rule as well, when Ottoman Turks and Armenians inhabited the city. Towards the end of the 18th century, it is recorded that 15,000 – 16,000 Greeks, Ottoman Muslims and Armenians resided in Varna. In 1860, the city was populated by ca. 20,000 residents, 1/3 of which being Greek, 10,000 Ottoman Muslims, while about 1,000 Armenians and few Bulgarians, Jews, as well as Western Europeans also lived there.³ The Greeks of Varna remained, demographically, a strong ethnic group even during the second half of the 19th century since, according to Bulgarian statistics, the Greek population reached 8,309 residents in 1888 and 8,317 in 1900.⁴

The foundation of the Bulgarian state in 1878 initiated the systematic location of Bulgarians in town, while the emigrational waves of Greeks (1906, 1913, 1919) lead to a reversal in the contexture of the ethnic population.

2. History



After its conquest by the Ottomans in the end of the 14th century, Varna was administratively dependent on the Silistria **sancak**, which was part of the Rumelia beylerbeylik.

On September 10th 1444, a fierce **battle** took place near Varna between the Ottomans, lead by the Sultan Murad II, and unified Christian forces, lead by Ladislaus III, King of Hungary and Poland, and János Hunyadi. The crusade army was humbled and crushed, the king killed and buried near the city.⁵

During Ottoman rule, many Ottoman Muslims located in Varna; the city became a significant fort on the empire's northern border. Two destructive Cossack raids in the 17th century, specifically in 1610 and 1653, are worth mentioning, during which Varna as well as the surrounding area were pillaged.⁶

In the beginning of the 19th century, Greek expectations to throw off Ottoman rule did not leave Greeks of this specific area indifferent, as indicated by the fact that among the members of the **Filiki Etaireia** (Society of Friends) I. Eleftheriou and I. Ambrosiadis from Varna are mentioned to have contributed 100 roubles a-piece for the society's purposes, while the city's great benefactor Paraskevas Nikolaou also appears to have contributed 500 roubles. After the outbreak of the Greek War for Independence in 1821, revolutionary action was recorded in Varna, as well as other Greek communities around the Black Sea; consequently, Greek notables and members of the Friendly Society were sent to the scaffold (eg. Z. Kryophyllos, Papamanolis, Ch. Nicholaou, Tsakir Tzorbatzis, K. Pogonatos etc.). Moreover, many Greeks hailing from Varna traveled to Greece and fought there, such as M. Foundouklis and N. Karachiouseinlis.⁷

During the Russo-Ottoman war of 1828-1829, Varna was occupied by Russian forces and its fortifications were destroyed. When the Russians left, many Greeks abandoned the city, but Greek population did not diminish, as it was constantly reinforced by **Greeks migrating** there from many areas both in the Ottoman Empire and the Greek state.⁸

During the Crimean War (1853-1856), when Britain and France provided military aid to the Ottoman Empire against Russia, Varna was used as a meeting point for French and British troops, meaning that both its strategic and financial status was enforced.

The foundation of an autonomous, and essentially independent, Bulgarian principality in 1878 gradually altered the contexture of the Varna population, since a progressive arrival and permanent location of Bulgarians was recorded. Since then the Greek population started to shrink, also due to oppressive measures issued by the official state. The Bulgarian legislative measures that aimed to the assimilation of minorities included the expansion of state education and constriction of ethnic schools, the confiscation of communal property and expropriation of Greek Patriarchal churches. The refusal to legally recognize Greek communities brought about relative consequences, resulting in the confiscation of their property and nonsuit of Greek appeals in Bulgarian courts. An indicative example is the monastery of St Konstantinos, which was taken away from the Greek community of Varna.⁹

The ultimate phase of the Bulgarian state politics against the Greek minority was the 1906 **anti-Greek purges**. Specifically, in April 1906, when the new Varna port was inaugurated, Bulgarian Gymnasium students threw stones at the residents of Greek quarters; moreover, similar events took place during the celebration of the feast of Sts Cyril and Methodius. In early June, Bulgarians of Varna prohibited the disembarkation of the newly appointed Greek bishop Neophytos and rioted around town, occupying and pillaging churches (St Nicholas, St George, St Paraskevi) and the communal hospital. Greeks evaded the looting of their establishments and homes by appealing to the European diplomats, who held the prefect responsible for anything happening against the Greeks. Only then the prefect had the police forces restore order.¹⁰

In 1906, relatively few Greeks left town, because the community was against migration and tried to control the spread of panic. Of those leaving, some located in Euxeinoupolis in Thessaly and other Greek cities, and some abroad. The second emigrational wave, larger than the first one, took place after the Second Balkan War (1913) heading towards Athens and Thessaloniki. After the signing of the Neuilly Treaty (1919), almost all of the remaining Greeks of Varna came to Athens and Thessaloniki. Most of them located in the New Varna district of Thessaloniki in 1927.¹¹



3. Economy

The residents of Varna occupied themselves mostly with [commerce](#) and, on a lesser extent, agriculture. The city was surrounded by vineyards of approximately 4,000 acres and wine-making was especially developed; however, other agricultural products were not cultivated, meaning that the inhabitants' needs in farming and husbandry products were covered by mainland production. Moreover, Varna inhabitants did not involve themselves with stock farming or [fishing](#). There were only two *daliania* (fish traps), belonging to the Apostolidis and Mystakidis families, in the Galatas area close to the lighthouse of the same name.¹²

Since the late 18th century, Varna became the area's largest commercial port and its Greek inhabitants controlled the import-export trade of the mainland until the beginning of the 20th century. It is well known that on the way stations of the Varna – Ruse railway the grain merchants were Greeks. During mid-19th century, the city achieved an even greater commercial status due to the export of agricultural products. So, 347 ships in 1849 and 430 in 1850 sailed to the port of Varna, most of which Greek-owned. The total net worth of the Varna export trade in 1847 reached 15,000,000 French francs, while twenty years later the number increased to 35,600,000.¹³

Products being exported in large quantities were dry goods, mostly grain, leather, wool, cheese, wine and timber, heading mainly to [Constantinople](#) (Istanbul), but also European ports. On the other hand, colonial, industrial products, textiles etc were being imported from Western Europe, Greece and Constantinople.¹⁴ After the Crimean War and the consequent prevail of foreign shipping lines on the Black Sea trade routes, such as Lloyd of Trieste and the French "Messageries Maritimes", Greek shipping in Varna begins to decline and dry out towards the end of the 19th century.

During the 19th century, a notable industrial activity is recorded in Varna, in the soap-making, flour-making, tobacco industries etc. There were two tobacco factories operating in town – one of them was branded "Momiche" (meaning *girl* in Bulgarian) and belonged to the industrialist Ch. Avgerinidis; the other one, whose owner is unknown, was named "Petalouda" (meaning *butterfly* in Greek).

Moreover, three soap-making factories were in business, founded in 1885 by the Fourtounas brothers, Ch. Syropoulos and P. Voulalas, as well as three sesame seeds pulp factories (belonging to Ch. Grigoriadis, S. Karamanlis and E. Michou). In the Gebedje village P. Vasmatzides' glass factory operated, while three flour-mills were owned by I. Giakoumopoulos, A. Agallides, N. Kyllindros and Georgiadis; the Tzovanos brothers, as well as I. Zarokostas, G. Diveris, G. and M. Giannousis and M. Tzanis involved themselves in the distilling business.¹⁵

The city's great financial growth during the 19th century led to the foundation of two banks by Greek financiers; the Commercial Credit Company of Varna (1888) and the "Hermes" Stocks Company (1890) accommodated the city's trade.¹⁶

4. Communal organisation

The Greek community of Varna, as well as the rest of the [Greek communities in Bulgaria](#), had been awarded self-rule implemented by two administrative bodies, the [dimogerontia](#) and the [board of schools](#). The metropolitan was president of the dimogerontia and selected its twelve members. The dimogerontia had administrative responsibilities – leasing community fields, collecting ecclesiastical revenues, maintaining schools etc. The five-strong board of schools was elected during the Bulgarian municipal elections; its members had to be Greeks of Bulgarian nationality. A president was elected, the only one responsible for the community vis-à-vis the Bulgarian authorities, because the Bulgarian state did not legally recognize the dimogerontia. Essentially, however, the metropolitan was president of the board. Both bodies, the dimogerontia and the board, collaborated for all matters relevant to the community.¹⁷

5. Church – religion

The [diocese of Varna](#) (Odessos) was one the oldest of the Ecumenical Patriarchate dependencies. The apostle Amplias (1st century)



was recorded as its first bishop. The bishop's title until the foundation of the Bulgarian state was "Most Honourable and Exarch of the Black Sea and President of Ruse". The Varna diocese included the cities of Varna, [Balchik](#), [Kavarna](#), Dobrič, Galata as well as the villages Aspros, Kastritsi, Kara-Hussein, Taptiki, Kotzakos and others.¹⁸

There were five Greek churches in the city of Varna. The oldest was the one dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, constructed during the 16th century, while the most significant was the St Athanasius cathedral that the Bulgarians call "Zlatna Tsărkva" (golden church), due to its splendour. It was built in 1828, destroyed by fire in 1836 and re-constructed in 1838 during the tenure of metropolitan Iosiph. The St Athanasius cathedral, with its marvellous icons, operated as a museum until 1990, when it was reinstated for devotional purposes. Another notable church was St Nicholas, for the construction of which the Varna native but [Odessa](#) resident Paraskevas Nikolaou bequeathed 50,000 silver roubles in 1862. Finally, two smaller churches also existed: St Paraskevi (18th century) and St George, but did not operate on a regular basis.¹⁹

The Greek community of Varna kept two monasteries under its control. The most important one was the St Konstantinos monastery, which owned a significant amount of landed property. It was located 10 km outside the city, was built in the 17th century and renovated by the Greek community between the years 1865 and 1870, during the tenure of metropolitan Ioakeim. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Greek community was accused by the Bulgarian authorities of illegally possessing this grand and wealthy monastery. After a long and costly legal battle, the monastery was ceded to the Bulgarian Prefecture Council of Varna and the Greek community was sentenced to both cover the legal expenses and pay the incomings from a ten-year usufruct. The community, in order to raise the massive sum of 2,000 golden twenty-francs, had to mortgage, and later on sell to the Bulgarian Michail Filippov, its most lucrative property, the Varna Bath, the incomings of which covered most part of the expenses for the educational establishments it maintained.

The other monastery was that of St Dimitrios, located 7 km outside Varna. It was built after the Russo-Ottoman war of 1828-1829 by a sea captain from Cephalonia who profited during the war and left an endowment for its construction. The Greek community donated the monastery and its property to Bulgaria's first ruler Alexander Battenberg, who built a summer palace next to it (Sandrovo, later Euxinograd). In gratitude, the prince donated 2,500 twenty-francs to the Greek community, deposited in the National Bank of Greece. Interest warrants from this deposit were used by the community to maintain the schools and pay the teachers.²⁰

After the establishment of the [Bulgarian Exarchate](#) (1870) the communal property of patriarchal and exarchal institutions in Varna was not divided, since few Bulgarian families lived in town at the time. After the signing of the Treaty of Berlin (1878) and the foundation of the Bulgarian state, however, the Varna community, as well as 24 villages and cities in the area, were acknowledged as "patriarchal" ones. The Greek metropolitan was given the title "St of Varna", while the Bulgarian metropolitan had the title "St of Preslava", with Sumla serving him as his original see.²¹ Later on the Bulgarian metropolitan was renamed "St of Varna-Preslava". After the Second Balkan War, the Bulgarians totally deprived the Greek community of the proprietorship of all its churches.

Every year, the feast of Saints Constantine and Helen was celebrated in all solemnity in the monastery of the same name. On the feast's eve, after vespers, the assembled peasants organised several sports games and wrestling contests, repeated in the morning after Mass. They also presented the monastery with offerings such as wax, grain, lambs etc.

On the feast day of St Athanasios on May 2nd, a small festival took place in the village Kestritzi, near town. On the day of the celebration of the Holy Spirit a festival was organized in the Kokardsa area, where there was an [agiasma](#) among the grapevines. A similar festival took place every year in the St Dimitrios monastery. On Ascension Eve, as well as on the eve of the feast of St John, inhabitants of Varna used to go down to the beach and spring their heads with sea water.

6. Education

Many private schools operated in Varna since 1835. Children were taught reading and writing skills, as well as arithmetic.



[Greek education](#) was systematically organised during the 1840s, after metropolitan Iosif (1830-1849) took the initiative. In 1841 a Greek School was founded and in 1845 a [monitorial](#) school to which all students were enrolled by decree of the notables' council. The first teacher using the monitorial system was Konstantinos of Ioannina.²²

Greek schools were temporarily closed down during the Crimean War (1853-1856), but since the late 1850s and even more during the 1860s communal education greatly developed. Three more primary schools were founded: two all-boys schools (1857, 1864) and a all-girls school (1856).²³

Towards the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th, there were three all-boys and two all-girls primary schools, two communal crèches, the Greek School and the All-Girls High School operating in Varna, most in privately owned buildings.²⁴ The Greek School, which corresponded to a gymnasium, was located near the St Athanasios cathedral, and the All-Girls High School on St Marina street. All Greek schools were maintained by the revenues from the extensive landed property owned by the community and were monitored by the five-strong board. For a long period of time G. B. Soulinis, the community's great benefactor hailing from the village Makrynitsa on Mount Pelion, served as school ephor. On his personal expenses, a primary all-boys school was built, named "Soulineion School". In all of the Greek schools there were about 1,200 – 1,500 students enrolled, both girls and boys. After the foundation of the Bulgarian state, the teaching of the Bulgarian language became mandatory, by a Greek teacher though.²⁵

The gradual arrival and location of Bulgarians in town led to the opening of a Bulgarian school, promoted by state politics. According to a decree relative to the implementation of article 10 of the 1891 Act "On public education", all Bulgarian subjects were obliged to enroll their children, aged between 6 and 12, in Bulgarian elementary schools. After 1906, Greek primary schools closed down, since the buildings and the resources for their maintenance passed on to the Bulgarian state. The last Greek private schools, tolerated by the Bulgarian authorities, closed down after 1913, when the Bulgarians expropriated the rest of the churches and the community's estates.²⁶

7. Greek associations and cultural activity

Most of the [associations](#) founded in Varna during the 19th century had educational purposes. The first, founded by metropolitan Iosiph, was named "Philomousos" (friend to the Muses) and aimed at fund-raising in order to establish an all-girls school.²⁷ In 1864 the educational association "Elpis" (hope) was founded, while 1872 marked the beginning of operation for the Educational Association, which managed to found an elementary school in Varna and an all-girls school in Kavarna, as well as provide teaching staff for schools in the area. Moreover, a small archeological museum was organised, exhibiting mainly coins. In 1902, the inhabitants of Varna smuggled the coin collection to Greece by giving it to a Greek sea-captain and donated it to the Numismatic Museum of Athens.²⁸ In 1891 the Greek Philanthropic Brotherhood was founded, with both charitable and educational goals, mainly supporting poor students.²⁹

The Greek community of Varna had also founded a library, labelled "Reading Room of Odessites", which included about 2,620 volumes. Towards the end of the 19th century, at least five Greek [newspapers](#) were published in Varna, the most significant of which being *Odissos* (1891-94) and *Euxeinos* (1895-1896), as well as a monthly literary periodical called *Pandaisia* (1898-1900). A Philharmonic Group also operated under the wing of Varna Greeks, conducted by B. Gounaropoulos.³⁰ The community's benefactor P. Nikolaou bequeathed 25,000 roubles in his will for the construction of a hospital and 80,000 roubles as a trust fund for the maintenance of the place. According to the will, a board of governors elected by members of the community and presided by the Greek bishop would manage the hospital.³¹

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Glossary :

	agiasma The holy water (as well as the sacred place from where the water spurts), which the faithful drink, sprinkle or wash themselves in order to be healed.
	board of schools The board of schools (ephoreia) consisted of members either elected by the community or nominated by a commission. They were authorized to supervise the proper functioning of the educational institutions.



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 *archontes* (potentates), *proestoi* (notables), *epitropoi* (wardens), *dimogerontes* or simply *gerontes* (elders).

monitorial system

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

sancak (liva)

Medium sized unit of provincial administration of the Ottoman state, throughout its history. A subdivision of the early Ottoman eyalet (or beylerbeylik) and the later Ottoman vilayet. In the late Ottoman Period it was known also as mutasarrıflık.

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