



Summary :

A town on the Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea which during the Ottoman period was inhabited mainly by a Greek-speaking population. Agathoupolis was conquered by the Ottomans in 1453 and remained under Ottoman control until 1912, when it was annexed by Bulgaria. After that the city's Greek inhabitants gradually started abandoning it. During the Ottoman period it developed into an important naval, shipbuilding, merchant and fishing centre, whereas various Greek schools operated there too. It was one of the two seats of the metropolitan of Sozogaathoupolis.

Other Names

Ахтопол, Ahtebolu

Geographical Location

Bulgarian coast of the Black Sea

Historical Region

East Rumelia, north Thrace

Administrative Dependence

Prefecture of Pyrgos (Burgas)

1. Introduction

Agathoupolis (Αχτοпол in Bulgarian) is today the smallest city of the west coast of the Black Sea. Its historical course diversifies it from the other cities of the region, such as [Mesimvria](#) (Nesebar), [Anchialos](#) (Pomorie), [Sozopol](#). Due to its geographical position –it is situated in a small gulf between the foot of the mountain Strandja and the sea- and its ancient history, it is currently one of the tourist attractions of the Bulgarian coasts of the Black Sea.

2. History of Agathoupolis (15th-early 20th century)

For the first time Agathoupolis came under the control of the Ottomans in 1396, but twenty years later it was recaptured by the Byzantine Empire.¹ During the months after the [Fall of Constantinople](#), the sultan [Mehmed the Conqueror](#) sent Karaca Bey, who conquered the southern coasts of the Black Sea. The fort of Agathoupolis fell after a harsh resistance on 15th April 1453.² During the Ottoman period the town became the centre of the *nahiye* of Ahtebolu (as the city was called in Ottoman Turkish) and came under the administrative jurisdiction of the *kaza* of Anchialos. As many other cities of the southern coast of the Black Sea, Agathoupolis suffered from the pirate raids of the Cossacks, especially in the period from 1611 until 1623.³

During the whole period of the Ottoman rule shipbuilding and [shipping](#) were very important for the inhabitants of Agathoupolis. Two thirds of the city's men were mariners and owned ships of their own, with which they exported and imported various merchandise to the ports of the Black Sea and to the whole Mediterranean. In the shipyard of Agathoupolis (Troulos area) ships of a cargo capacity of up to 100 tons were constructed. During the Ottoman period ships for the Ottoman war fleet were built there and for this reason the city's inhabitants enjoyed certain privileges, such as the right to carry arms and to wear a *selachi*.⁴

The second most important source of income for the inhabitants of Agathoupolis was [fishing](#). In the city there were 6-7 *daliania* (netted fish traps), with 10 great *pezovola* (nets) for the fishing of *palamida* / *lakerda* fish (a fish belonging to the bonito family that is). Many fishes were sold in the markets of Constantinople (Istanbul) and the Romanian lands.⁵ Trade was also particularly developed, mainly of forest products and salted fish. Great quantities of firewood were exported to Constantinople, whereas charcoal was exported to the Romanian lands –logs of oak and traverses.⁶ Usually the voyages of the ships of Agathoupolis lasted six to nine months, but the mariners had to return to the city in time to participate to the festival of St Nicholas, on 6th December. Various coins which have been discovered in the region give further information for the thriving trade which was undertaken via the city's port,



amongst which there are some from Argentina, Mexico and Brazil .⁷

Since the middle ages Agathoupolis was the seat of a metropolitan. The most famous was Anthimos during the beginning of the 1820's who later became the metropolitan of Anchialos and eventually Ecumenical Patriarch. After the Russo-Ottoman war of 1828-1829, during which the city and the monastery of St John the Baptist were occupied by the Russians, many inhabitants of the coastal cities left the region along with the retreating Russian troops and [migrated to southern Russia](#). Amongst them was the metropolitan of Agathoupolis. The result of this migration was the merging of the dioceses of Agathoupolis and of Sozopolis under the name [diocese of Sozoagathoupolis](#), which was operating until 1906.⁸ Agathoupolis suffered damages also during the Crimean War of 1853-1856, when it was bombed by the Russian fleet.⁹

After the Russian-Ottoman war of 1877-1878 and the Berlin treaty Agathoupolis did not become a part of the independent province of Eastern Rumelia but remained under the control of the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century the city was the centre of the kaza of Agathoupolis in the [vilayet](#) of Andrianople (Edirne). The basic sources of income during this period were the same as in the previous centuries. The greatest merchants of Agathoupolis and in the same time notables of the city were Kyrgeorgis Chatzigeorgiou, Christodoulakis Saroglou, Chatzialexandros Chatzigeorgiou, the Theofanidis brothers and others.¹⁰ Also rich captains of sailing ships and steamships dwelled in the city. The cultivation of vineyards was greatly developed and the wine produced not only covered local needs but it was also exported to [Odessa](#) in Russia and to the [Crimea](#).¹¹

In the summer of 1903, when the revolt of Iliden broke out in Macedonia and Thrace (Prophet Elias's day, 20th July 1903), Bulgarian partisans entered Agathoupolis on the 6th August and occupied the offices of the Ottoman services. The city remained under their control until the 10th August.¹²

After the Second Balkan War the treaty of Constantinople was signed, according to which Agathoupolis and its periphery became part of Bulgaria. On 13th October 1913, officers of the Bulgarian and of the Ottoman army signed a protocol for the surrendering and the delivery of the city, where Bulgarian authorities were established, whereas also the city's mayor, Stylianos Makridis, was replaced by a Bulgarian one.¹³ In the next months in Agathoupolis hundreds of Bulgarians –mainly refugees from the region of Bunar Hisar and of Saranda Ekkliisies of Eastern Thrace- settled to Agathoupolis.

On 18th October 1918 a great fire broke out in the city, caused, according to certain sources, by the Bulgarian authorities; the whole city was burned to the ground, along with the cathedral of the Dormition of the Virgin.¹⁴ Only three buildings survived: a house, known today as the "Greek house", the Greek school and the church of the Ascension. The school, which is located to the southern part of the gulf of Agathoupolis, is today a listed cultural monument.

3. The Greeks of Agathoupolis

According to the information of the Ottoman tax registers, in 1498 there were 13 neighbourhoods in the city with 135 Christian families, as well as 23 Christian households led by widows.¹⁵ In 1652-1653, also in a tax register, 336 non-Muslim families were documented, most of their men being merchants, grocers, tailors and fishermen.¹⁶ Around the end of the 18th century, W. von Brognard found in Agathoupolis more than 200 households with an exclusively Greek -Orthodox population (thus the city had approximately 1,000 inhabitants).¹⁷ But also A.O. Duhamel reported that the inhabitants of the city were only Greek-Orthodox, more specifically 1,136 people living in 304 households.¹⁸ In the early 20th century, according to the census of the population of the vilayet of Adrianople on 1904, in Agathoupolis there were 400 Greek households (consequently about 2,000 people) and 10 Bulgarian ones.¹⁹ After the annexation of the city to Bulgaria, the ethnic composition of the city's population suffered changes. Many Bulgarian refugees settled there, mainly from Eastern Thrace. In July 1914 the first nine ships with Greeks left the city. With the attendance and the help of the Ecumenical Patriarchate the Greek immigrants went aboard the ship Persepolis and arrived to Thessalonica. Another group of Greeks was transported to [Constanta](#) of Romania via [Pyrgos](#) (Burgas) and from there it was sent to Greece.²⁰



The first official Bulgarian information comes from the population census right after World War I. On 31st December 1920 163 Greeks dwelled in Agathoupolis in a total of 771 inhabitants.²¹ Many of them migrated to Sozopolis, Pyrgos and Greece.²² In 1920 in Thessalonica the club of Thracians “Unredeemed Agathoupolis” was founded by the Greek refugees. Shortly after one hundred families of Agathoupolis decided to found a settlement. Thus in 1926 in the harbour of Eleftherochorio the city of Nea (New) Agathoupolis was created, located today in the prefecture of Pieria.²³

We have no information concerning the number of Greeks who remained in Agathoupolis after the exchange of population between Greece and Bulgaria. Today, according to the information supplied by the local authorities, the number of the Greeks of Agathoupolis is speculated to about 150 people.²⁴

4. Educational and cultural life

Agathoupolis had a **monitorial** elementary **school** before 1873.²⁵ In the next decade, with the sponsorship of the Educational and Philanthropic Brotherhood of Constantinople, the city acquired also a school for girls,²⁶ which was housed in a two-storey building of the diocese. The edifice of the school for boys, which was built in the beginning of the 20th century to the expenses of the club “Sons of Agathoupolis” of America, was very impressive. The school was arranged in such a way so that theatrical plays could be presented there, whereas for its decoration special red bricks were brought there from Marseilles.²⁷ The schools were maintained by the **board of schools**, which was financed from the church income, the community’s land estates, teaching fees etc. There was also a kindergarten, which was private.

In 1914 the first Bulgarian school (with three grades) was founded; it stopped operating during World War I and was re-established in 1922. Due to the lack of a privately owned building, lessons were given in the building of the former Greek school.²⁸ In 1925 the Bulgarian cultural club “Christo Botev” was founded.²⁹

We have no information of any noteworthy cultural or educational **associations** founded in Agathoupolis. There was, however, a club of people from Agathoupolis in America, which actively participated in the city’s life. The first people from Agathoupolis left for America in 1904 and founded the “Aulaias” Club. Later the same club was renamed “Club of the Agathoupolitans in New Jersey” “The Sons of Agathoupolis”. With their generous contributions the building of the school for boys was erected in Agathoupolis. In 1927 the club contributed to the foundation of the first school building, as well as of the church of St Anastasia in Nea Agathoupolis, whereas it continued offering financial aid to the local community.³⁰

In 1996, as in other cities of the Bulgarian Black Sea, a Greek-Bulgarian association was founded in Agathoupolis with the name “Association for Greek-Bulgarian friendship”. Its main aim is to enlarge and develop the relations between the two peoples and between the states of Greece and Bulgaria.³¹

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Glossary :


	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.	
	kaza
The basic grade of the Ottoman provincial administration. It included the surrounding region of a city or a town. During the late Ottoman Period it is	



identified with the kaymakamlık.

 **monitorial system**

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

 **nahiye**

A small administrative unit of the Ottoman Empire, subdivision of the kaza.

 **selachi**

Large leather belt, where weapons were placed (from the Ottoman-Arabic word *silah*, gun).

 **vilayet (valilik)**

The larger administrative unit in the Ottoman provincial administration system. The large provinces of the Ottoman Empire were previously called eyalet. The new regulation of 1864 introduced the vilayet as an equivalent of the French département - albeit of smaller size. The governor of the vilayet was called vali and had extensive authority.

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