



Summary :

Notable port on the Bulgarian coast of the Black sea. Until the Inter-War period the city was mainly populated by Greeks, who involved themselves principally with fishery and commerce. Greek education was especially cultivated in town, where several associations had also been founded.

Other Names

Созопол, Sozopolis, Sizeboli, Sizebolu, Sizebolou, Apollonia Pontica (ancient name)

Geographical Location

Bulgarian coast of the Black sea

Historical Region

Eastern Rumelia – Thrace

Administrative Dependence

Burgas (Pyrgos) Province

1. Introduction

Sozopol (Созопол in Bulgarian, Σωζόπολις in Greek) is located on a small peninsula on the Southern tip of the bay of [Burgas](#) (Pyrgos). There are three islands surrounding the city, St Ioannis on the North, St Peter on the East and St Kirikos on the West. Sozopolis (Apollonia Pontica) was [the most ancient of the Greek colonies](#) along the West coast of the Black Sea and was conquered a number of times during its long history, until Karaca Bey seized it in 1453.

2. Sozopol history until the beginning of the 20th century

2.1 Sozopol during the Ottoman period (1453 – 1878)

Information on Sozopol during the first centuries of Ottoman rule is scarce and sketchy, as was the case for most of the cities on the West coast of the Black Sea. It is known, however, that during the 1620s Sozopol and the surrounding area was extensively raided by pirates, mainly by Cossacks dominating the North-Eastern coast of the Black Sea – modern day Eastern Ukraine. Specifically, in 1623 the Cossacks barricaded themselves in the St John the Precursor monastery, tortured and captivated the monks. Because of that incident, in 1629 the Turks destroyed the monastery. Several manuscripts from the monastery's library were salvaged, however, and transported by monks to the Virgin Mary (Theotokos) monastery in [Chalki](#). Indicative of the frequency and violence of these incidents was the fact that a few years back, in 1622, Kallinikos, metropolitan of Sozopol, had resigned "because the city was devastated by the frequent Russian raids".¹

In the beginning of the 18th century and for a long period of time Sozopol became a refuge for a high official, the Grand Interpreter to the Porte [Alexandros Mavrokordatos](#). On August 1703 Mavrokordatos along with his son Nicholaos, future Prince of the Moldavian Principality, came to Sozopol for political reasons and stayed with his wife's relatives. He returned to [Constantinople](#) only when Sultan Ahmed was enthroned.²

The city's favourable geographical location and the port's strategic location protected by the islands St Petros and St Ioannis attracted foreigners, mainly military officers, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Many of them described both the port itself and the city's trade. So, Charles de Peyssonnel in the last quarter of the 18th century noted that the Sozopol port was very decent and that all kinds of ships could enter it. Through that port rice, coffee and textiles were imported from Cairo, Thessaloniki and France, while dry goods (wheat, barley etc) were exported to [Constantinople](#) (Istanbul).³ During the 1780s J.B. Leshevalier found



the port also suitable for battle ships,⁴ while A.O. Duhamel in his 1829 statistics table referred to the Sozopol port as the best one on the Western coast of the Black Sea.⁵

[Fishing](#) was another form of financially significant professional pursuit in Sozopol. The town had the largest fishery zone in comparison to all neighbouring cities; in addition, more boats were registered there than elsewhere, while 27 dalians (fishing nets) were in operation and much more equipment was used.⁶

At the outbreak of the Greek War for Independence, the city notables led by the metropolitan Paisios Prikaios gathered guns and ammunition, enforced by wealthy compatriots inhabiting Moldavia. However, they were immediately discovered by the local administration and the metropolitan was sent to Constantinople where he was sentenced to death. Some of the notables, such as Thanasis Tomoglou, were hung in [Anchialos](#); others, like Hatzi Antonakis Skouloglou, were deported.⁷

During the 1828- 1829 Russo-Ottoman war, specifically on February 15th 1829, the Russian navy seized the city, thus acquiring control of the bay. After the war ended, many Sozopol residents left town together with the Russian ships and [migrated to Russia](#). During the Crimean War (1853-1856), on the other hand, the Sozopol port was used by both the British and French fleet. Ships loaded with ammunition and heading towards the Russians sailed from there.

2.2 Sozopol between 1878 and 1914

Sozopol was captured by the Russian army on January 10th 1878. Until 1878, when it was annexed to the autonomous Bulgarian principality, it was part of the autonomous province of Eastern Rumelia and administratively belonged to Burgas. On February 1897 the Bulgarian Prince Ferdinand his wife Marie Louise visited Sozopol, welcomed by the Mayor Hatzi Kostakis Theophanidis. The couple toured the city sights and the metropolitan Parthenios sang the doxology in the town cathedral. Later on the Prince donated money to each one of the churches in the city. Furthermore, deeply impressed by the hospitality, he bequeathed a handsome sum out of his own pocket in order to flagstone the city roads.⁸

In 1906 during the [anti-Greek incidents](#) Sozopol was not affected or damaged, as was Anchialos for example. However, the "Dimitra" association ceased its operation and Greek schools ran by the community closed down. The [metropolitan of Sozopolis and Agathoupolis](#) had to flee first to Vasiliko (Tsarevo) and then to Constantinople.⁹

After the Balkan wars, on May 29th 1914, the Bulgarians seized the St Georgios cathedral as well as the neighbouring building of the diocese, where most of the library was housed, and renamed the church St Clemens. Consequently, they raided the rest of the churches in town – St Ioannis, Virgin Mary the Visitor and St Zosimos.¹⁰

3. The population of Sozopol

According to information provided by Charles de Peyssonel in the end of the 18th century, the city was almost exclusively populated by Ottoman Muslims and just a few Greeks.¹¹ This piece of information, however, collides with other available data. The same period of time W. von Brognard recorded 300 households in town (meaning about 1,500 inhabitants) and an almost exclusive Greek population.¹² A.O. Duhamel, on the other hand, mentions 1,354 residents, all Greeks, and 315 households in Sozopol during the 1828-1829 war.¹³ Furthermore, in the beginning of the 19th century the Greek consul in [Varna](#) referred to 3,000 people living in Sozopolis, 1,000 of whom were Muslim.¹⁴ More data is available since the end of the 19th century. So, in the 1893 census 2,771 Greeks and 171 Bulgarians were recorded in Sozopol,¹⁵ while in the beginning of the 20th century and the year 1900 the results came as following: with regard to the mother tongue, there were 3,073 Greeks, 86 Sarakatsans and only 238 Bulgarians.¹⁶

Just before the 1906 events in the report made by N. Foundoulis, the Greek consul in Philippoupolis (Plovdiv) on December 1903, 3,330 Greeks were recorded living in Sozopolis, 92 of whom being Greek subjects as well.¹⁷ After the 1906 anti-Greek purges,



however, around 1,045 people immigrated from Sozopol to Thessaly, specifically the Almyros area. Many of them later on re-located because of the climate, while others returned to Sozopol.¹⁸

On the other hand, after the Balkan wars, specifically around 1913, many Bulgarian refugees hailing from Eastern Thrace located in Sozopol. Moreover, after the 1917 Russian Revolution more than 160 Russian families fled there, some of which actually settled in the city.¹⁹ In the 1920 census, 2,319 Greeks and Sarakatsans were recorded, more than half of the town's total population, which numbered 4,420 residents.²⁰

During the 1920s diplomatic conventions were signed between Greece and Bulgaria for population exchange. Many Greeks applied for migration to Greece, while at the same time Bulgarian refugees followed the reverse course, originating mainly from Macedonia. This fact caused a score of problems in town because the Bulgarians settled in the houses the Greeks had left behind. This was the reason why Leonidas Hatzikyriakou, the last Greek Mayor in town, quit and for the first time in Sozopol's history a Bulgarian Mayor, Ivan Tsitakov, was elected.²¹

The first group of Sozopolitan Greeks left for Thessaloniki on August 28th 1925 and the second two months later, on October. Almost all of them located in the Topsini area and struggled under hard circumstances until they received compensation from the Greek state.²²

4. Education

Prior to the 19th century information on [Greek education](#) in Sozopol is scarce. It is known that in 1561 a school operated in the St John the Precursor monastery, where the celebrated scholar and monk Pachomios Rousanos from Zakynthos taught.²³ The next reference on a school being run in town comes from 1798.²⁴ During the first half of the 19th century, no significant developments occurred education-wise. In 1817, however, two teachers are recorded to have taught at a "common" school, which the following year became the community's first school following the **monitorial system** (the older, more advanced students taught the younger ones), with a monk serving as a teacher and an adjoined boarding house.²⁵ The name of the Vatopedian friar Theophilos is mentioned as the founder of the school. Theophilos lent 16,000 **kuruş** to the community and decided that the interest on that sum – 15% annually – would be invested in maintaining the school.

Greek education developed gradually the following decades and a school was founded in 1850. The same year friar Porphyrios, hailing from Sozopol, deposited a fund in a Moscow bank, the yearly interest of which would go to his birthplace and maintain the Greek school under the superintendence of the Patriarch of Jerusalem.²⁶ In 1859 the new building for the school was constructed with the contribution of many donors. Metropolitan Dorotheos Scholarios donated 12,000 kuruş from the revenue of the St Ioannis monastery, Panagiotis Kardamatis, a Sozopolitan located in Athens, sent 2,000 drachma and 10,000 were bequeathed by Ioannis Drakidis of Moldavia, also originating from Sozopol.²⁷ First master of the school was Eustratios Vasiadis. During the 1877-1878 war, lectures were suspended and the school re-opened on November 1879.

Earlier, specifically in 1872, an all-girls school had been established, which essentially started to fully operate during the 1880s,²⁸ while in 1881 Aglaia Visvyzi, the school's principal, organised the first philanthropical theatrical performance.²⁹

Maintaining the schools was always a difficult task. Church revenues and contributions, such as those from metropolitan Theophilos, who donated 500 kuruş per year between 1875 and 1881, and Prince Ferdinand, constituted the main sources of income.³⁰ Since 1888 the community also ran a nursery school. During the 1892-1893 school year 422 students were enrolled in Sozopol educational facilities, taught by five male and four female teachers.³¹ In the beginning of the 20th century the community maintained an all-boys school (composed of five or six classes), an all-girls school (composed of four classes) and a nursery school. During the last school year before the 1906 purges 201 students attended the Sozopol all-boys school taught by four male teachers and 296 were enlisted in the all-girls and nursery school taught by four female teachers.³²



The first Bulgarian school was established in 1883, aiming to educate only the children of Bulgarian civil servants, as well as children from neighbouring villages. According to contemporary information, in 1884 there were only 11 students attending classes at that school.³³

After the 1906 purges the Bulgarian government decided to implement the law "On public education", voted in 1891. According to the clauses of this law, children of various Christian professions should receive their primary education in the Bulgarian language; no private school could operate without a permit from the Minister of Education; the instruction on Bulgarian language was mandatory in all private schools and, finally, all the principals and teachers employed in private schools had to be Bulgarian citizens.³⁴ Moreover, the building that housed the Greek schools were seized by Bulgarians in most cities and used by them, while in Anchialos all schools were destroyed in the great 1906 fire. The Greek community in Sozopol, however, managed to keep under its control both the buildings of the all-boys and all-girls schools, although Greek students could not enroll in those communal educational facilities.³⁵ Until September 18th 1906 more than 150 students registered in the schools, but the police dismissed them and closed the schools down.³⁶

The Mayor of Sozopol Dimitrios Hatjialexiades received some letters from the province's school supervisor, which commanded him to yield the school buildings to the authorities. The Mayor, however, declined and the Sozopol community attempted to re-open the schools in 1907; they were unsuccessful, due to the intervention of local authorities and the police. On December 1908 the governor accompanied with policemen took over the buildings.³⁷ P. Skasis, the Greek consul in Philippopolis, proposed the foundation of a Greek school in town, owned by the Greek government and appealing to Greek subjects, as well as other non-Bulgarians. The project, however, was never effectuated. In addition, Greeks reluctant to register their children in Bulgarian schools were fined – some even jailed.³⁸

In 1912 the Bulgarian Ministry of education decided to allow the election of school committees after petitions submitted by [some of the Greek communities in the country](#). One of those committees was elected in Sozopol as well, comprised of the five most lettered Greeks in town, but it was never certified by the Ministry.³⁹ In October of the same year the First Balkan War broke off and the schools did not open.

In 1882, in one of the lecture halls of the all-boys school, the "Petrineios Library" was officially founded. Its founder, Georgios Petrinos was born in Sozopol in 1880, but spent most of his life in Bucharest where he ran his business, always keeping his connection to the city of his origin. He donated to churches and schools and in 1860 he sent the first books to the educational commissioner of the time Anagnostis Tselemboglou, continuing to enrich the library with books until his death in 1893. In 1906 there were almost 2,000 volumes in the library; some of them were donations from the [Greek Philological Association of Constantinople](#), the [Maraslis](#) series, the libraries of the priest Antonios Terpadros and the teacher Michail Nomikos, as well as 57 manuscripts. G. Petrinos himself wrote: "In my deathbed I leave two children, my son Iraklis in Bucharest and a daughter in Sozopol – the Petrineios Library [...]. And my daughter shall be immortal."⁴⁰

5. Cultural life

In 1903 Christos Christodoulou, the General Director of Greek schools in Sozopol, founded the Geoponic [Association](#) "Demetra". The association's main aim was to "popularise basic geoponic knowledge", to provide indigent students with free clothing and books, to establish a study room, to stage theatrical performances and to organise lectures.⁴¹ The association was active until 1906.⁴²

On February 6th 1897 the Bulgarian Educational and Philanthropic Association "Otets Paisi" (Friar Paisius) was founded. Its members met with Prince Ferdinand and his wife Marie Louise during the royal visit in town and received a donation in order to intensify their activity.

Sozopol is also the birthplace of a significant Greek painter. In 1890 Georgios Gounaropoulos, later known as Gounaro, was born in



town, but his family fled to Greece after the 1906 incidents. Sozopol was one of the main themes of his earlier work. He also illustrated K. Papaioannidis' book on Sozopol. During the following decades G. Gounaropoulos – Gounaro became one of the most well-known Greek painters of the so-called “30s generation”, with many exhibitions both in Greece and Europe, recipient of many national and international awards. Georgios Gounaropoulos never returned to Sozopol until his death in 1977, but he never forgot it either. His last wish was to exhibit his work in the city he was born in and two decades after his death the Zografou municipality of Athens and the Sozopol municipality with the collaboration of the “Georgios Gounaropoulos” museum organised an exhibition in Sozopol displaying forty of his paintings.⁴³

Nowadays Sozopol is one of the most important cultural centres in Bulgaria. Since 1984 every year on September the “Apollonia” art festivities are hosted there. For ten days the whole city transforms into a stage for theatre shows, exhibitions, movies, musical and dance performances, book presentations etc.

After the fall of real socialism and the 1989 constitutional change, in cities around the Black Sea, including Sozopol, Bulgarian-Greek associations were founded. For the enhancement of Greek and Bulgarian collaboration on cultural, financial and humanistic level, the “Coalition of Greek-Bulgarian Friendship” was established in the beginning of 1992. Among its purposes is the organisation of lectures, meetings, exhibitions and other kinds of events in order to promote the cultural achievements of both people.⁴⁴

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Glossary :

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| | kuruş Silver coin, the basic numismatic unit of the Ottoman Empire from the late 17th century until 1844, when it was replaced by the Ottoman lira, which was equivalent to 100 kuruş. |
| | monitorial system Teaching method developed by Joseph Lancaster, under which the older students (in Greek: "protoscholoi") taught the smaller children some skill or activity. |

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