

“Under the Yoke”: The Archaeology of the Ottoman Period in Bulgaria

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The aim of this article is to draw attention to the considerable potential for investigating the Ottoman archaeology of Bulgaria and also to consider what research has already been carried out. Because the modern state gained its independence from the Ottomans this period of history is generally regarded in negative terms. The physical evidence of the Ottoman era, in particular mosques and other Muslim religious buildings, were reminders of an alien past and many of them were destroyed or allowed to fall into ruin. Increasing archaeological activity in recent years combined with a more open approach to the Ottoman past have meant that there is now considerable potential for archaeological research of the Ottoman period.

Introduction

This article comprises a review of different aspects of Ottoman Bulgaria from the perspective of archaeology. The field of archaeology is construed as a methodological approach to the study of the past comprising not only archaeological excavations but also architecture and other aspects of material culture. It should also be stated that although the majority of the Bulgarian population remained Christian throughout the Ottoman period the article is primarily concerned with the evidence relating either to the Muslim population or the ruling Ottoman elite. The reason for this approach is that the Christian heritage of Bulgaria before and during Ottoman rule has already received considerable attention both in academic and popular publications (for an informed discussion of churches under the Ottomans see Gradeva 2016 and 1994).

Geography and history

Bulgaria may be divided into five geographical areas comprising the Thracian plain, the Rhodope mountains, the Balkan mountains (Stara Planina), the Danube region

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and the Rila mountains (Figure 1A). The Thracian plain runs from the Black Sea in the East to Ihtiman in the west and is historically the most developed area of the country. This region contains a number of important ancient settlements the most important of which is Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv). The Rhodope mountains to the south divide Bulgaria from Greece and because of their height and relative isolation are less densely populated than other regions. The Balkan mountains run east to west across the centre of the country dividing the Thracian plain from the Danube region to the north. This area is more developed than the Rhodope mountains and contains the Bulgarian cultural capital of Veliko Tŕrnovo. The Danube region also runs from west to east and contains a number of important cities though geographically these are isolated from the rest of the country. The fifth region comprising the Rila mountains is geographically diverse though relatively well developed through its connections to Serbia and Macedonia and because of its rich mineral resources. Communication between the different areas is difficult and generally east-west movement is easier than moving north-south between the regions. Although there are many rivers most are short and unpredictable in their flow which has meant that historically only two have been used for navigation the Maritsa and the Danube. Both rivers flow from West to East although only the Danube has functioned as a major waterway.

The first Bulgarian state was established in 681 AD by Bulgars moving south from the area north of the Black Sea. The new kingdom was led by Asparukh with a capital established at Pliska in the Balkan mountains. Over the next three and a half centuries the kingdom expanded to cover a huge area including most of the modern states of Romania, Macedonia and Serbia as well as Bulgaria (for a discussion of this period see Sophoulis 2012). In 864 influenced by contact with the Byzantine empire the Bulgarian state converted to Christianity. The process of conversion was aided by the construction of monasteries which in addition to Christian missionary work also promoted the use of the Slavic alphabet (Popkonstantinov and Kostovo, 2010, 126). Conflict with the Byzantines during the tenth century eventually led to the defeat of the first Bulgarian state in 1018 (Todorov, B. 2010). Most of modern Bulgaria remained under Byzantine rule until 1185 when a new Bulgarian state was established over most of the country with the exception of Thrace which remained under Byzantine control. During the fourteenth century there was again increasing conflict with the Byzantines as the Bulgarians sought to extend their territory into Thrace. In the 1340s the Bulgarians entered a Byzantine civil war on the side of John V Palaiologus gaining more territory in the region. However the Byzantine civil war combined with plague led to the devastation and depopulation of Thrace paving the way for the Ottoman conquests of the 1370s to 1390s (for recent discussions of this period see Murdzhev 2011 and Kiprovska 2015). Ottoman rule lasted for five hundred years during which time Bulgaria was first a frontier territory and later a central part of the empire. From the 1700s the Ottomans were increasingly on the defensive against European attacks and during the nineteenth century European powers began to demand concessions for the Ottoman empire's Christian subjects in the Balkans (Figure 1B).

Modern Bulgaria was created by the 1878 treaty of Berlin which recognized the Principality of Bulgaria as an independent state though it formally remained a vassal



Figure 1. A) Map of Bulgaria showing main physical features and regions (Ifan Edwards);
B) Map of Bulgaria showing principal sites mentioned in the text (Ifan Edwards).

of the Ottomans until 1908. In 1885 the semi-autonomous region of Eastern Rumelia centred on Plovdiv was incorporated into the new state. Between 1912 and 1913 Bulgaria was also involved in the Balkan wars which extended Bulgarian control to the remaining Ottoman held territories to the west of the Maritsa River.

Bulgaria's place within the Ottoman Empire

Bulgaria may seem peripheral to Islamic archaeologists more familiar with the Middle East and North Africa. Even archaeologists working on Turkish and Islamic material culture in Anatolia tend to look south and east for their parallels rather than west towards the Balkans which are regarded as European and therefore predominantly Christian. However a quick look at the map will show that Bulgaria not only directly borders on Turkey but that the Ottoman heartlands are adjacent to and overlap with the modern state of Bulgaria. For example Edirne, the second Ottoman capital (1369–1453), is less than fifteen kilometres from the Bulgarian border and only 300 kilometres from Sofia. Similarly Constantinople the third capital (1453–1922) is located less than 550km from Sofia in the west of Bulgaria. If we take a chronological approach the relevance of Bulgaria to the development of the Ottoman state is also evident. Most of modern day Bulgaria was incorporated into the Ottoman state by the end of the 1300s and remained part of the empire until the late nineteenth century (it remained an Ottoman vassal state until the dissolution of the empire). For comparison Egypt was conquered in the early 1500s and became independent in 1867—a period of only 350 years. Large parts of modern Turkey such as Konya, Trebizond (1461) and Adana (1516) were incorporated into the Ottoman empire a century or more later than Bulgaria and were geographically further from the imperial capital.

Thus in terms of chronology and geography Bulgaria is essential to an understanding of the Ottoman past. The documentary history Bulgaria has been studied in depth both by Bulgarian historians and by Ottoman specialists for whom there is a vast quantity of material in the Ottoman archives in Istanbul, Ankara and Sofia. Why then is the archaeology of Ottoman Bulgaria so little known and under investigated? There are two main answers to this question which can be summarized as follows;

1. In Bulgaria the Ottoman past is overwhelming regarded in negative terms derived largely from the struggle for independence in the late nineteenth century. There is a popular feeling that the period of Ottoman rule was a period of national shame when compared with the time of the medieval Bulgarian kingdoms (9th to 14th centuries) which are supposed to have been glorious (for a less positive view of this period see Vasari 2005) or the magnificent period of the Bulgarian renaissance (19th century).
2. Archaeology is regarded as a discipline concerned with the more distant past. With the exception of some architectural monuments the Ottoman past in south-east Europe has almost exclusively been investigated by historians who regard the written historical sources as sufficient and the prime means of understanding this period.

Ottoman archaeology

Before discussing the current state and potential for Ottoman archaeology in Bulgaria it is worth defining Ottoman archaeology more generally. Just as Islamic archaeology is a relatively new field of enquiry so the study of the Ottoman archaeology is even more recent developing as field of study only within the last twenty years. The first book to discuss Ottoman archaeology as a distinct field of study was *Breaking New Ground; the Historical Archaeology of the Ottoman Empire* by Uzi Baram and Lynda Carroll published in 2000 (Baram and Carroll eds 2000). This book discussed the archaeology of Ottoman remains from the perspective of Historical Archaeology with its emphasis on interpreting material culture within the context of written records. Although the book has a wide geographical scope its emphasis is firmly on the Middle East with no coverage of south-eastern Europe (with the exception of Crete). Since 2000 there have been an increasing number of studies which deal with Ottoman archaeology and in 2008 a conference on Ottoman Frontiers at the British Academy was primarily concerned with the archaeological interpretation of Ottoman material.

At this point it may be worth considering what archaeology has to contribute to a field so rich in historical documents and information. First, as we know from studies of the more recent past elsewhere archaeology provides a different perspective on a wide range of issues which are either absent from or are poorly represented in written sources. In some cases archaeology can challenge the evidence of documents providing new interpretations of supposedly well-known events. The second observation is that the documentary coverage is patchy thus for Ottoman Bulgaria there is plentiful information for the sixteenth century with declining amounts of information for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For the crucial period of the initial conquests in the fourteenth century there is very little reliable information.

Ottoman Bulgaria

Unlike much of the Middle East where the Ottomans were regarded as a remote ethnically and linguistically discrete ruling class sharing a common religion with the general population the situation in Bulgaria was more complex with Bulgarian speaking Muslims and Christians, Turkish colonists and many other linguistic and ethnic groups creating a cosmopolitan Ottoman culture. Bulgaria's intimate connection with the heart of the empire can be seen both from its proximity to the imperial capital and the fact that in the nineteenth century Constantinople was the largest Bulgarian city. The Ottoman reliance on Bulgaria is further demonstrated by the fact that in 1444 Sofia was established as capital of the Ottoman Balkans (*Rumeli*) a position that it retained until the eighteenth century. The proportion of Christians to Muslims within Bulgaria differed throughout the period of Ottoman rule although some estimates indicate a predominantly Muslim population by the late nineteenth century whilst others estimate that Muslims were only one third of the population (Gruber 2010, 4). Whilst some of the Muslim population was ethnically and linguistically Turkish a large proportion were Bulgarian speaking Muslims referred to as Pomaks. In addition there were significant numbers of ethnic Tartars and Roma who can be identified as Muslim. Also of interest are a minority of Turkish speaking

Christians or Gagauz resident in north-eastern Bulgaria who are descendants of Seljuk Turks who came to the area in the thirteenth century and converted to Christianity (Kiel 1992 [2013], 168–169; Wittek 1952).

In order to understand the negative attitude towards the Ottoman past it is worth remembering that Bulgaria's independence was chiefly championed by Russia from the start of the nineteenth century. The Russo-Turkish wars of the mid-nineteenth century followed by the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 led to the creation of an independent Bulgarian state which regarded the Ottoman period as a time of decline and stagnation. As in many former Ottoman provinces the Bulgarian population was ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse. This was true even amongst the Christian population so that the development of a national identity was predicated on an antipathy to the Ottomans in terms of politics, culture and language. The national feeling was epitomized in the work of Ivan Vazov who wrote the famous work "Under the Yoke." This term was adopted by historians and politicians as a shorthand way of describing the period of Ottoman rule in Bulgaria and continues to be used in popular accounts of the country's history (See for example Kay 2015).

In the years running up to and immediately following Bulgarian independence in 1878 much of the Muslim population fled east to Constantinople and Anatolia. Some of the first actions of the newly independent Bulgaria was the destruction of mosques and other outward symbols of Ottoman rule which were "perceived as structural ingredients of a detested external domination, the materialized memory of which had to be effaced" (Stanöeva 2013, 209). It has for example been calculated that between 1878 and 2013 more than 98% of Ottoman monuments (mosques, medresses schools bath houses, caravanserais, bedestans etc) have disappeared (Kiel 2013, 7). Since independence the attitude towards Muslims in general and Turks in particular has fluctuated between indifference and intolerance. During the 1980s a low point was reached when many Bulgarian Muslims were faced with the choice of abandoning their names and cultural identity or leaving resulting in the exodus of 300,000–600,000 Bulgarian Turks (Gruber 2010, 5). Since the year 2000 the situation has gradually improved although within popular culture the Ottoman period is still regarded in primarily negative terms.

Given the widespread destruction of Ottoman remains and the negative attitude towards Ottoman history it would seem that the archaeology of the Ottoman era has limited prospects. However there has been some notable work on Ottoman architecture and history which has attempted to redress this imbalance. Most prominent amongst the researchers of Ottoman Bulgaria is the Dutch Ottomanist and architectural historian Machiel Kiel. Through exhaustive field studies and archive research he has managed to document much of the considerable architectural legacy of the Ottomans in Bulgaria. Other researchers concerned with the Ottoman architectural legacy include the architect Stephen Lewis (2001) whose work formed the basis for a US government publication on Ottoman monuments in Bulgaria (Gruber 2010). Also a number of prominent Bulgarian researchers have addressed the Ottoman heritage notably Rossitsa Gradeva who has published several books and many articles on the subject. More recently another Ottomanist, Grigor Boykov has published a series of articles and studies relating particularly to the early Ottoman period.

When we turn from architectural studies and history to archaeological excavations the situation is more fragmentary. Like many of its neighbours Bulgaria has a rich archaeological heritage stretching deep into pre-history and including highlights such as the Thracian tombs of the 4th century BC, classical cities such as Philipopolis (Plovdiv) and Serdica (Sofia) as well as medieval Bulgarian churches, monasteries and fortifications. Within this context the remains of the Ottoman period may be regarded as less important both because they represent a more recent past and because of the negative connotations outlined above. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union archaeology in Bulgaria was isolated from the mainstream of European archaeology and dominated by “rigid ideological criteria” (Bailey 1998, 88). However the advent of multi-party politics since 1990 and increasing contact with foreign archaeologists meant that Bulgarian archaeology was able to shed much of its ideological constraints and enter into the mainstream of archaeological thought and practice. With Bulgaria’s admission into the European Union in 2007 there have been an increasing number of development projects and an enhanced economic situation which has led to large numbers of excavation and restoration projects throughout the country. Particularly in urban situations the desire to uncover classical remains has led to the excavation and removal of Ottoman era deposits which often account for a significant proportion of the remains. Whilst the Ottoman era structures and objects are fully and professionally recorded architectural features are rarely preserved in situ or fully published.

If we now turn to look at some examples of Ottoman period archaeology in the country it is obvious that some important work has been carried out and also that there is considerable potential for developing this field in the future. In this section archaeology will be divided into two types of investigation- architectural survey and archaeological excavation although in many cases there will be considerable overlap.

Ottoman architecture

Although only a small proportion of the Ottoman monuments (mosques, *zawiyas*, *tekkes*, bath houses etc) which are known to have existed up to 1878 are still standing many of those which have survived have been surveyed, documented and published. Even for those buildings which have not survived there is sometimes photographic evidence and occasionally even architectural plans. For example Henry Minetti (1923, 15–19) published photographs and plans of the Mescid of Halil Pasha in Kyustendil which was destroyed in 1950 (Kiel 1993 [2013], 211).

Probably the most important of the surviving buildings is the İmaret Cami at Ihtiman between Sofia and Plovdiv. The building was probably built by Mihaloğlu Mahmud Bey sometime between 1370 and 1402 (Figure 2). The İmaret Cami together with a recently restored bath house (*hammam*) are the only remaining early Ottoman buildings in the town (Kiprovskia 2015). Ihtiman is significant as the presumed location of one of the decisive battles between the Ottomans and the Bulgarians. The battle which took place in 1355 resulted in an Ottoman victory and the death of Prince Michail Asen (1322–1355) son of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander. However the battle did hold up the Ottoman advance towards Sofia which was not captured until 1382.



Figure 2. Imaret Cami at Ihtiman (September 2015).

The İmaret Cami has been studied by a number of authors including Semavi Eyice (1975 and 1996), Machiel Kiel (2007) and most recently Mariya Kiprovska (2015). All these scholars highlight the importance of this building as one of the oldest Ottoman monuments in the Balkans. The building started its life as an imaret and was later adapted for use as a mosque by the creation of open arches connecting the side rooms to the central hall and the addition of a minaret (destroyed sometime after 1920). The surviving structure is complex and has evidence of modifications over the years including the removal of cross walls to form a single “T” plan mosque. In terms of the evolution of “T” plan mosques this building is extremely important and yet it is in danger of collapse if no action is taken.

The Imaret Cami in Plovdiv provides a better preserved and more clear example of a “T” plan imaret later converted to a mosque (Figure 3). Built in 1444/5 for Şihabuddin Paşa—governor of Rumelia—the building is still in use as a mosque and thanks to important restoration work in the 1960s (by Nikola Mushanov) the central area has been restored to its original level 1 metre lower than the lateral iwans and southern iwan containing the mihrab (Gruber 2010, 46). The building is entered via a five arched domed portico with raised floor areas either side of the entrance. A cylindrical minaret decorated with zig-zag brickwork rises from the right (west) roof of the portico. The Imaret Cami was part of a complex containing a bath house, a medrese, communal kitchens and an octagonal domed mausoleum located next to the Lala Şahin bridge crossing the Maritsa river. The medrese, kitchens and bathhouse were in a bad state of repair by the 1920s and were destroyed soon after leaving only the Imaret Cami and the mausoleum or türbe of Şihabuddin Paşa (Boykov 2013, 78–79).

Plovdiv also contains an example of an early Ottoman congregational mosque in the form of the Muradiyye Cami or Ulu Cami which according to Boykov was built for



Figure 3. Interior of Imaret Cami in Plovdiv looking south towards mihrab. Note steps up from central domed area.

Sultan Murad II sometime between 1433 and 1436 (Boykov 2013, 74–77). The prayer hall comprises a rectangular space (40 x 30m) covered by six rectangular vaults and three domes over the qibla axis supported by four massive central piers. The design of the mosque bears comparison to the Ulu Cami in Bursa built on the orders of Sultan Bayezid between 1396 and 1399. The other surviving mosque of this form in Bulgaria is the Mahmud Paşa Mosque or Büyük Cami in Sofia built between 1456 and 1467 (Figure 4). Like the Muradiyye Cami in Plovdiv the prayer hall of the Mahmud Paşa Cami in Sofia is divided into a series of nine bays supported on four massive central piers bays. Following independence in 1878 the building was briefly used as a hospital before being designated as the National Museum in 1880 (Karadimitrova 2016).

Sofia also contains one of the best examples of the “Classical” (sixteenth century) Ottoman architecture in the form of the Mehmed Paşa Mosque (now Sedmochislenitse Church) on the eastern edge of the Ottoman city. The mosque was built in 1548 for Sofu Mehmed Paşa the Governor General of Rumeli and designed by the famous architect Sinan. The prayer hall is covered by a single dome with both a height and diameter of 22 metres making it one of the largest in the Ottoman Balkans only exceeded by the Selimiyye in Edirne. The mosque is the only remaining part of a complex comprising a medresse, caravanserai and bath house (for early photographs of the mosque and the conversion process see Koyuncu 2010 and Stanoeva 2013, 218, fig. 2).



Figure 4. Interior of Buyuk Cami (Mahmud Paşa Mosque), Sofia (September 2015).

A number of other important mosques survive in Bulgaria from the Fatih Mehmed Cami in Kyusutendil built in the mid-1400s (Kiel 1993 [2013]) to Şerif Halil Paşa mosque (1745–1745) in Shumen which forms the centre of a *küllîye* complex including the *medresse* and *mektep* (Gruber 2010, 58–59). Ottoman religious buildings in Bulgaria also include a number of important Sufi *tekkes* or shrines (for a few examples see Lewis 2001, 7–10 and figs. 12–15). The most famous complexes were built in remote locations and some have links to the Bektâşî order. The *tekkes* typically comprise a number of buildings including a meeting house (*meydan evi*) and the tomb (*türbe*) of the founder. The oldest surviving *tekke* is that of Kidemli Baba near Nova Zagora built in the mid 1500s and first published by Machiel Kiel (Kiel 1990 [1971]). The *tekke* comprises the tomb of Kidemli Baba housed within a magnificent heptagonal (seven sided) *türbe* with a square porch (Figure 5). The masonry is of exceptionally high quality polished white marble precisely cut and laid. The early date of the *türbe* is confirmed by the high tambour made of rubble and coated in plaster marking the transition from the side walls to the roof covering the internal dome. Nearby are the remains of a seven sided *meydan evi* presumably destroyed in 1828 (see also Gruber 2010, 15–17). Other important *tekkes* in Bulgaria include Demir Baba near Sveshtari in north east Bulgaria built in the eighteenth century (Gruber 2010, 77–78; Lewis 2001, 7), Otman Baba in the south-eastern Rhodope Mountains in south east built in the early sixteenth century (Lewis 2001, 8–9 and fig. 14) and Ak Yızıl Baba at Obrochishte built in the mid-sixteenth century (Gruber 2010, 40–41). Some of the *tekkes* still function as shrines (either Christian or Muslim or both) and have been studied by



Figure 5. Kidevli Baba near Nova Zagora (September 2015).

anthropologists because of their links with syncretism, nature and ancient religions (Hasluck 1929 and for more recent research see Krstic 2013).

As well as religious buildings a range of secular Ottoman structures survive including bath houses, schools, houses, clock towers and bridges. One of the best examples is the *bedesten* at Yambol in south eastern Bulgaria built in 1509 and described by Machiel Kiel as “without exaggeration the most monumental civil work preserved in Bulgaria” (Kiel 1974 [1990], 635). The *bedesten* was designated a Monument of National Culture in 1941 and restored by Nikola Mushanov in the 1970s.

Archaeological excavations

From this brief review of surviving Ottoman buildings it is evident that the territory of modern Bulgaria was significant to the Ottomans both in terms of urban and architectural development. However architecture alone does not give the full picture in particular into questions about living standards, social development, industrial and agricultural practices as well as numerous other aspects during 500 years of Ottoman rule. More information on these questions can be provided from archaeological excavations which provide a wealth of material relevant to all aspects of society. Although there are a few excavations which specifically target the Ottoman period excavations focussed on earlier periods will also recover large quantities of Ottoman era remains. The process of tracking excavations in the country is made easier by an annual report issued by the National Institute of Archaeology which gives summary reports (with English abstracts) of all excavations in Bulgaria within a calendar year

starting in 2004. In addition the website *Archaeology in Bulgaria* gives frequent updates on archaeological news from the country. Excavations can be divided into three types relevant to the Ottoman period, 1) Excavations around Ottoman era structures usually related to conservation work, 2) Excavations of earlier periods which are overlaid with Ottoman era levels and 3) Developer funded or rescue excavations where Ottoman era remains are encountered.

Excavations within and around Ottoman buildings.

There are a few significant examples of excavations within Ottoman monuments which have produced important information about the early years of Ottoman rule. One of the most interesting cases is the mosque of Ibrahim Paşa at Razgrad in north-eastern Bulgaria studied by Machiel Kiel (1991[2013]). The mosque was one of a number of surviving Ottoman monuments in this town which included the Hammam of Ibrahim Paşa (destroyed 1970s) and the mosque of Ahmed Bey (1542). According to an inscription on the mosque of Ibrahim Paşa it was built in 1616 for Ibrahim Paşa and completed by Mahmud Paşa. During renovation works to re-instate a porch that had been destroyed in the Russo-Turkish war of 1828–1829 an earlier structure was encountered beneath the standing building. Initially the earlier building was interpreted as a church and evidence for a Bulgarian origin for the town however further excavation showed that it was also a mosque built on a different alignment (Figure 6). Re-building of mosques on a different alignment was a common practice as methods for determining the *qibla* (direction to Mecca) improved over time and Machiel Kiel

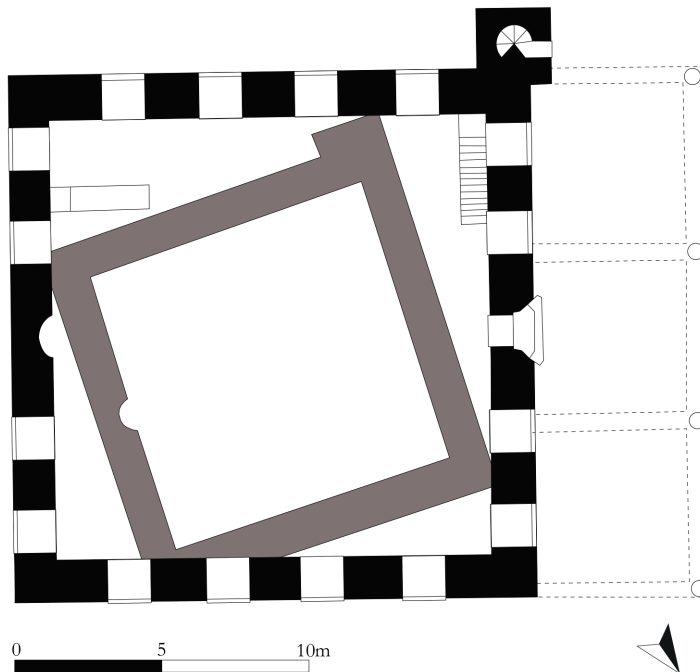


Figure 6. Plan of Ibrahim Paşa mosque Razgrad with earlier mosque discovered underneath (Ifan Edwards after Kiel).

(1991 [2013], 106–109) was able to identify this early mosque as that mentioned in Waqf documents and built in 1542.

Another example of an excavation within a mosque is provided by the Hamza Bey mosque at Stara Zagora dated to 1409 (Gruber 2010 72; Kiel 1974 [1990], 636–644). This is the only building to have survived the 1877 fire which destroyed most of Stara Zagora. The mosque is important as one of the early examples of Ottoman mosques with a single dome covering the prayer hall and as such it “marks an important stage in the development of that architecture” and provides proof that “the European provinces were vital parts of the Empire during its formation” (Kiel 1971 [1990], 641). For many years the building stood neglected and unused until 2013 when excavations beneath the floor of the prayer hall uncovered the remains of a small chapel dated 11th and 12th centuries and more than 60 Christian burials (Figures 7 and 8). Below the chapel were remains of a Thracian burial (2nd–3rd BC) and an Iron Age pit (10th to 9th century BC) suggesting the site had continued importance over thousands of years. In many cases the ownership of the mosques is still contested and archaeological excavations can help the case for making the building into a museum. This may be the motivation in the excavations recently (2015) carried out at the

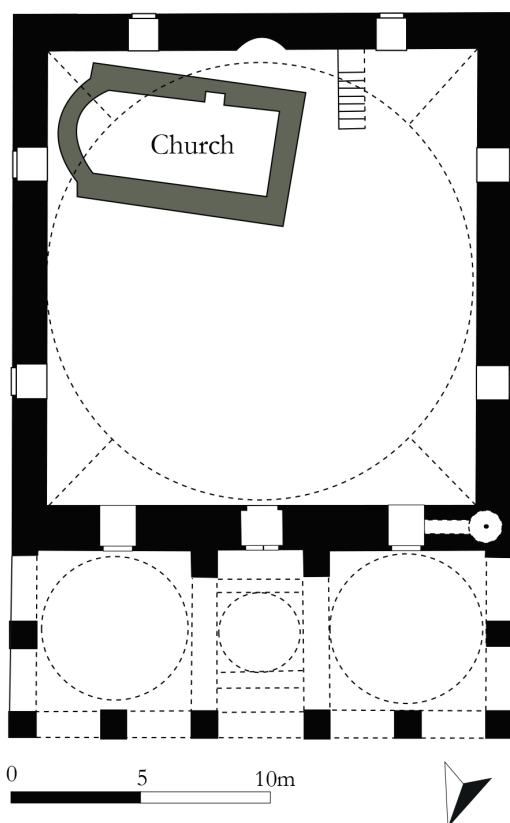


Figure 7. Plan of Hamza Bey Mosque Stara Zagora with excavated remains of medieval church (Ifan Edwards and Andrew Petersen).



Figure 8. View of Interior of Hamza Bey Mosque in Stara Zagora with remains of 10th–13th century church discovered beneath the floor (September 2015).

Kurşun Mosque at Karlovo built in 1485. According to a press release from the Bulgarian National Institute and Museum of Archaeology a series of Muslim burials were discovered within the first few days of excavations but it was hoped that further excavations would “reach the archaeological layer from the Early Christian period” (Dikov 5/6/2015). In fact the excavations revealed a fifth to fourth century BC Thracian shrine (Dikov 3.7.2015). Excavations have also taken place within and around the Büyük Cami (National Archaeological Museum) in Sofia. During 1939 parts of the interior of the mosque were excavated to reveal the corner of a structure (undated) built of fired brick on a foundation of river stones. In addition finds relating to an earlier period including a broken statue of Artemis were recovered. Further excavations were carried out in the front of the mosque in 1998 which revealed five phases of occupation. The earliest phase was associated with an Iron Age settlement (8th–7th centuries BC), followed by two Roman phases associated with ancient Serdica and a medieval phase dated to the 11th and 12th centuries AD. The excavations also revealed the presence of a large fifteenth century building contemporary with the mosque which has been interpreted as a caravanserai (Karadimitrova 2016).

Excavations of Classical and other pre-Ottoman sites

Excavations to reveal earlier periods of primarily Roman era cities have taken place throughout Bulgaria although in Plovdiv and Sofia these are on a particularly large scale. Within Plovdiv there is a long term aim to uncover large sections of the Roman and late antique city to promote tourism and economic development. Major parts of the Roman city are still visible such as the famous theatre and parts of the stadium whilst the forum is currently (2016) being excavated. However the other problem is that many Ottoman period structures have been removed to reveal the earlier remains. Examples include a series of Ottoman era kilns as well as a Christian cemetery. Whilst the removal of later features to reveal the ancient Philipopolis is necessary to the public presentation of the classical city there is often very little information about these later remains once they have been removed. Unfortunately although all of the Ottoman structures and features were recorded little has so far been published.

Within Sofia archaeological excavations are as much driven by the rapid development of the city’s infrastructure as the desire to uncover the remains of the Roman Serdica. Recent excavations in the centre of the city, adjacent to the Hotel Balkan, have uncovered extensive remains of Ottoman structures as well as recovering large quantities of ceramics, glass and other finds which have been displayed in an exhibition at the National Archaeological Museum. Excavations within the city have also uncovered the remains of a bath house (*hammam*) adjacent to the Banya Bashi Mosque which apparently functioned from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. As in Plovdiv the problem is that many of these excavations are unpublished apart from summary reports. Occasionally Ottoman finds are published in detail as is the case with an eighteenth to nineteenth century tobacco pipe excavated in the area of the second century AD Roman Thermae at Pautalia (modern Kyustendil). The pipe comprises a green stone (Chlorite schist) bell shaped bowl probably made outside Bulgaria (Stoyanova 2008, 145). Although the pipe was subject to exhaustive scientific analysis very little information is given about its archaeological context (e.g. find spot and associated finds).

Developer funded and rescue excavations

The third type of archaeological excavation to feature Ottoman remains are from developer funded and rescue excavations throughout Bulgaria. Large numbers of excavations of this type take place annually as the country modernizes its infrastructure. During 2015 two large Ottoman era cemeteries were excavated- one near Plovdiv with 200 burials and the other near Sofia with more than 800 burials. The Plovdiv cemetery only contained Christian burials whereas the Sofia cemetery contained the graves of both Muslims and Christians. As recently as February 2016 (i.e. at the time of writing this article) improvements to the Sofia-Istanbul railway uncovered “massive Ottoman Era buildings” in the south-east of the country. Until discovered the ruins lay underneath the railway and are located adjacent to the Maritsa river. The structures appear to date from the nineteenth century and have provisionally been interpreted as warehouses (Dikov 19/2/2016).

Research questions

The one category which does not appear in this brief review of archaeological excavations is those specifically focussed on research questions related to the Ottoman period. The remaining part of this article will discuss some research questions of relevance to the Ottoman period which could be used both to target future excavation projects and to inform other excavations which uncover Ottoman era material.

Urbanism

The development of towns and cities under Ottoman rule has only partially been investigated by archaeologists though historians have devoted considerable attention to this subject. This is partly because of a lack of co-ordination between Ottoman historians (“Ottomanists”) and archaeologists and also because a great deal of information has been lost through the re-development of city centres particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. However a handful of historians including Machiel Kiel (Kyustendil), Grigor Boykov (Plovdiv), Rossitsa Gradeva (Sofia) are working on issues around this theme which may provide a basis for more targeted archaeological investigation. These three examples demonstrate both the wealth of historical material and its limitations.

An archaeological study of cities may help to answer a few questions which are fundamental to understanding both general questions relating to Ottoman urbanism and also specific questions relating to the historical development of Bulgaria. The first question relates to the transition from Bulgarian Rule to Muslim Rule, the second question assesses the impact of the Ottoman conquest on the economy of the city and the third question addresses the fate of Christians and other religious minorities in the cities.

The transition from Bulgarian (or Byzantine rule) to Ottoman rule is of general interest and may be a useful comparison for the transition from the late antique cities of the Middle East to Muslim rule in the seventh century. Certainly there are similarities such as the presumed impoverished state prior to the conquest, the fact that the cities had been subject to conflict by different parties prior to the conflict and most significantly the fact that the new rulers were of a different faith. Certainly on the surface it appears that the Ottoman conquest may have re-introduced settled urban life which had been destroyed by conflict. This subject has recently been addressed by Heath Lowry in his work in northern Greece where he argues that the Ottoman conquest enabled the development of infrastructure destroyed by years of conflict (Lowry 2008). In terms of economy the construction of new buildings and institutions is likely to have had a positive impact on the economy just as an influx of people from Anatolia will have made the cities more viable. For example Grigor Boykov has shown how the Imaret Cami in Plovdiv located on the edge of the city formed a nucleus for economic activity (Boykov 2013, 78–79). Possible archaeological evidence for the development of infrastructure is provided by discoveries of terracotta water pipes in Plovdiv which have been dated to the fifteenth century suggesting renewal of the urban infrastructure at this time. The numbers and fate of different religious groups is perhaps the most contentious question given that the

modern Bulgaria was founded largely as a Christian state. Certainly some churches were turned into mosques a process which has been documented in detail for Sofia although the construction of new mosques and the continuation of some churches may suggest a shift in the proportion of adherents to each faith rather than a deliberate attempt to replace Christianity with Islam (for a discussion of this process see Gradeva 1994 and 2016). There is also the question of conversion to Islam and the presumed benefits which may lead to an increase in the number of Muslims in an urban population.

Agriculture and industry

The second area where archaeology might be able to provide useful information relates to the agricultural and industrial base of Bulgaria. Popular nationalist narratives give an impression that industrial and agricultural development stagnated in the Ottoman period only to be revived following Bulgarian independence. Discussing the Ottoman Balkans as a whole Mark Mazower wrote “...it as though the emergence of the idea of modernity in nineteenth century Europe...encouraged a view of the Balkans as a place where time stood still” (Mazower 2000, 30). Thus when the Council of Europe initiated a rehabilitation project for the region the hydro-electric plant at Kokalians built in 1900 was selected as one of 18 buildings prioritized for urgent conservation as it represented the introduction of new technology into the region (Bold 2008, 58). It is true that the Kokalians plant preceded the first hydroelectric plant in the Ottoman empire by two years (a small hydro-electric plant was built near Tarsus in 1902) however in other respects there had been considerable development of technology within the 500 years of Ottoman rule.

Despite its relatively small size Bulgaria has a complex and rich geology which means that a wide variety of metals and minerals are available and have been exploited since pre-historic times. From Ottoman records it is known that the Bulgarian mountains were an important mining resource which was exploited throughout the period of Ottoman rule. For example the area around Kyustendil was famous for gold and silver mining whilst the Samokov region was known for iron ore production and smelting. At Vratsa to the north of Sofia copper, lead, zinc, silver and gold were panned from the rivers and there was a tradition of metalworking and jewellery production in the town. To date these mines and the associated infrastructure have not been investigated archaeologically although they are represented in local museums and ethnographic collections. For example the regional museum in Samokov has a reconstruction of an iron production facility (*samakov*) including large bellows and water driven hammers to form the iron into rods. Certainly archaeological research could provide information on the development of Ottoman mining technology.

In addition to heavy industries such as mining a number of agricultural innovations took place during the Ottoman period. The most well-known of these was the cultivation of tobacco from the seventeenth century onwards (the Ottomans reversed a *fatwa* against tobacco smoking in 1648). Tobacco cultivation remained an important component of the Bulgarian economy into the twentieth century and certainly many of the eighteenth and nineteenth century Bulgarian merchants houses also served as

tobacco warehouses (pers com Ivo Topalailov Feb 2016). Different regions of Bulgaria produce different varieties of tobacco thus in the east *Djebel Basma* is cultivated whilst around Plovdiv *Ustina* is grown and in the “Macedonian” area (south west) *Nevrokp*, *Melnik* and *Dupnitsa* are produced (Kay 2015, 115). Once harvested the tobacco is dried near the field of production often within special tobacco drying buildings. In addition to the cultivation, storage and distribution of tobacco the related industry of tobacco pipe production can also be investigated. Pipe production is an extremely complex process which involves skilled workers and access to very fine clay (Gusar 2008). The process of making tobacco pipes has been compared to silver smithing by Stančeva (1976, 135) and it is known that some pipes were actually gilded. Archaeological finds indicate a number of pipe production centres in Bulgaria including Varna (Stančeva 1972), Silistra (Todorov, V.2010) and Plovdiv. In addition to clay tobacco pipes carved soft-stone pipe bowls were also produced. The only documentary evidence for tobacco pipe production in Bulgaria relates to the guild of pipe makers which was registered in Sofia as early as 1604 (Stančeva and Medarova 1968, 5). Elsewhere production is inferred from the presence of large quantities of unused specific types and no actual kilns or workshops have been investigated. In most cases only the pipe bowls have been found although the excavation of the wreck of a merchant ship near the town of Kitten on the Black Sea coast south of Burgas revealed other components of tobacco pipes including a wooden stem with amber mouth piece and a bone or ivory mouth piece (Batchvarov 2014, 15). The short wooden stem was decorated with a band of silver plated copper embossed with rosettes. Both the decorated stem and the amber mouth piece are in keeping with the high status associated with pipe production as argued by Stančeva (1976, 135).

As the most frequently encountered aspect of material culture it is surprising that Ottoman pottery has been very little studied in Bulgaria. Today the town of Berkovitsa is well known as a centre of traditional ceramic production which dates back to the Ottoman period although this has not been the subject of academic study. It is also known the pottery was produced in cities like Plovdiv where Ottoman era kilns have been excavated and are currently being researched by Vladislav Todorov. Unfortunately little is known about ceramic production in Sofia although high quality –possibly frit-ware- ceramics have been retrieved from recent excavations in the city. Questions of particular interest in relation to ceramics include the extent to which there was differentiation between social groups based on economic or religious status. It would also be interesting to investigate the degree of continuity between medieval Bulgarian ceramics character ized by under-glaze slip painting and ceramics produced under Ottoman rule (Figure 9).

Transport and infrastructure

At its greatest extent the Ottoman empire was a vast territory spanning three continents and transport links were a vital component of this supra-national entity. For most of the provinces the road network was based on that of the Romans with some modifications of the medieval period. Following the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 the road network was divided into two sections—the *Anadolu* (eastern)



Figure 9. A) Interior of shallow glazed earthenware bowl decorated with tulip design dated fifteenth to sixteenth century A.D.; B) Interior of shallow glazed earthenware bowl decorated with a bird set within star pattern; C) Earthenware polychrome glazed jug decorated with floral motifs (February 2016).

section connecting the capital to the Middle East and North Africa and the *Rumeli* (western) or European section serving south-eastern Europe. It has been assumed that whilst wheeled transport ceased to be used in most of the eastern portion of the empire it was still in use in the western (*Rumeli*) provinces throughout the period of Ottoman rule (for a discussion of the use of different modes of transport with and without wheels see Faroqhi 1982) .

Bulgaria was particularly important within the road network because of its proximity to the imperial capital from where all the roads radiated. The road from Edirne

to Sofia was one of the main arteries of the empire used both in times of expansion into south-east and central Europe as well as for diplomatic missions and trade. From Sofia roads led north towards Vidin and the Danube, Central Europe and to the west towards Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia. The Ottoman road network of Bulgaria has yet to be studied in detail and in most cases is assumed to be the unmodified Roman system. One aspect of the road network that could be studied is the *menzil* system which was used both to support trade and to facilitate official transport. For example it is known that during the wars with Austria in the late seventeenth century the road system of north-west Bulgaria was enhanced by the renovation of some stations and the construction of new *menzils* (Yilmaz 2000, 192–193). However it is not clear what these buildings looked like—were they like small forts or where they like khans—certainly this could be investigated through archaeology.

Another aspect of the road system which could be investigated are the villages and in some cases towns where the inhabitants (usually Christian) were given the status of *derbencis* by which they were free from tax and allowed to carry arms in return for protecting some particularly remote area—such as a mountain pass or deep areas of forest.

The large number of Ottoman bridges which survive give some indication of the more important routes utilized. One of the earliest and most impressive bridges is the Kadin Most at Nevestino built in 1470 on the orders of the grand vizier Isaac Paşa to connect Kyustendil to Dupnitsa and Samokov. The 100 metre long bridge over the Struma river comprises three main arches and two subsidiary arches and is still in use with a load carrying capacity of 200kn (Partov and Dinev 2014, 277). The low angle of the deck (10%) combined with the high quality of the bridge suggests that this may have been built to facilitate the transport of heavy materials or military equipment. The need for an efficient transport system into the European (*Rumeli*) provinces is also demonstrated by the Svilengrad bridge built in 1528. The bridge has a length of 286 metres supported on eighteen main spans with an additional two spans for high water (Partov and Dinev 2014, 278). The width of the deck is seven metres reflecting the need for two way travel across this entry point into Bulgarian Thrace.

In addition to roads the Ottomans also used rivers and seas as a means of transportation particularly for heavy materials. Although Bulgaria has a large number of rivers the majority of these are fairly short and are not navigable. In Ottoman times the Maritsa river was navigable although the main riverine route was of course the Danube which provided a link between central Europe and the Black Sea. By gaining control of both sides of the Danube the Ottomans secured the river for their own use. The Ottomans maintained a naval fleet on the Danube with harbours which were able to regulate the flow of trade and also transport materials to or from the conflict zones of Central Europe (Gradeva 2009, 337; Yilmaz 2000, 192–193). So far there has been no archaeological examination of the Danube as an Ottoman waterway although investigation of river ports and wreck sites seems to be a possibility. Certainly the excavation of the merchant ship off the Black Sea coast at Kitten gives some idea of the potential for the study of trade links within the empire (Batchvarov 2009 and 2014).

Fortifications and frontiers

There are few examples of fortifications from the early period (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) however it is probable that many of the medieval fortifications continued to be used by the Ottomans. It is possible that Bulgaria may also contain some early examples of *palanka* or wooden campaign forts which were known to have been used in the Balkans. There are a few examples of small fortified towers such as *Kula Pirkova* in Kyustendil (Furkov 1997) or the seventeenth century Kurtpashova (Kurt Pasha) tower at Vrata. The Kurtpashova tower is a square building (6m x 6m) eleven metres high with four stories. It is built of coursed rubble stone set in mortar with internal wooden floors. It is assumed that these were primarily residential towers built by local families although it is notable that Kyustendil and Vratsa were both important for mining precious metals.

From the eighteenth century we have the Baba Vida fortress at Vidin on the Danube. Although the fortress pre-dates the Ottomans the majority of the visible structure dates to the Ottoman period. During the fifteenth and early sixteenth century the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid II had the citadel remodelled for the deployment of artillery. In the late seventeenth century the town of Vidin was taken by the Austrians who started to remodel the fortress. Following the Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718 Vidin was handed back to the Ottomans who continued the refortification of the citadel (Gradeva 2009, 335–336). Remodelling of the citadel’s fortifications in the eighteenth century is commemorated in three inscriptions built into the walls of the fortress.

The best representatives of nineteenth century Ottoman fortifications in Bulgaria are located at Silistra also on the Danube. Along with fortresses at Shumen, Varna and Rusçuk the defences of Silistra were built to counter the threat from Russia to the north. The design of the fortifications at Silistra were made with technical assistance from the German military engineer Herman von Moltke who visited Silistra in 1837. The fortifications comprised a series of ten forts located outside the city walls facing north towards the Danube. The best preserved part of the fortifications is a small fort known as Medjidiye Tabia located on a hill to the south of Silistra. The hexagonal or “D” shaped fort has magazines on a lower level and gun emplacements at the top. Whilst other Bulgarian fortifications from the Russo Turkish war were dismantled those of Silistra survived and may be compared with those of Erzerum in eastern Turkey (Çam 1993). The Silistra fort bears eloquent testimony to the Ottoman empire’s continued efforts to modernize throughout the nineteenth century and its readiness to adopt innovation.

Conclusion

A number of preliminary conclusions can be drawn from this review of Ottoman archaeology in Bulgaria. The first and main conclusion is that there is a vast potential for archaeology of the Ottoman period in the country. Whilst some very important work has already been carried out such as in the study of tobacco pipes or the history of architecture there are still major areas where the research and fieldwork is very limited. Given the location of the country so close to the heart of the empire it is likely that any research will have implications beyond the borders of present day Bulgaria.

One of the problems is that the wealth of Ottoman archival material obscures the fact that for some periods and for some subjects there is little written information available. For example for the early period (late 1300s to early 1400s) there is remarkably little certainty about major events such as the date of conquest or the Ottoman colonization of the region. Although there is a vast amount of detail for the sixteenth century throughout the whole empire there are still important subjects about which we know very little for example the degree of acculturation between Muslims, Christians and others (e.g. Jews), methods of transportation, agricultural practices, industrial techniques and innovations and trading links. For the later periods in particular the seventeenth century the written documentation again becomes more scarce and there are major social changes for which we do not have written information. For all these subjects archaeology can provide both a different perspective, supplementary information and above all a detailed individual link with the Ottoman past.

For the future a few recommendations can be made to enhance research in this field:

1. More targeted fieldwork which directly focusses on issues relevant to the Ottoman period. Areas of particular importance include the conquest and early years of Ottoman rule, the development of cities and patterns or urban development,
2. The collection of information ("grey literature") from excavations and other fieldwork already carried out as part of developer funded rescue archaeology. The large number of excavations which have taken place throughout Bulgaria in recent times have generated many preliminary reports many of which will contain information of relevance to the Ottoman period.
3. Research should challenge and correct popular assumptions about the Ottoman era in Bulgaria. Although archaeologists and other academics may well be aware of the diversity of the Ottoman past this is not generally communicated to the public- probably through fears about funding. The problem with this situation is that it perpetuates negative stereotypes and inhibits the development of a more nuanced interpretation of the past.
4. There should be an initiative towards creating a GIS based survey of Ottoman monuments and sites in Bulgaria. Although large numbers of Ottoman buildings have been destroyed or disappeared for other reasons there are still large numbers of Ottoman buildings and sites which could be documented to produce a database of the Ottoman built heritage of Bulgaria. This will for example help when assessing the relative importance of buildings and inevitably lead to the discovery of previously overlooked structures.

The overall aim of these recommendations is to create an awareness that the Ottoman period is an integral part of Bulgarian past and not an extraneous period of history somehow detached from the flow of Bulgarian history. Similarly there should be an acknowledgment that there was considerable development during the period

and that the Ottoman empire of the fourteenth century was very different from that of the nineteenth century. Ottoman rule may have been beneficial for some people some of the time just as it caused problems for others at various points in its development. The aim is to free perceptions of the Ottoman past from nationalist ideology developed more than a century ago. For the future it is possible for Bulgaria to create its own vision of Ottoman heritage which may well be different from that of its neighbours but which is rooted in a willingness to accept that it was fully part of the multi-faith, multi-ethnic and polyglot empire.

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