

Ottoman archaeology in Bulgaria: current research and future prospects

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Previous issues of *Heritage Turkey* (2015 and 2016) have reported on the BIAA-funded initiative to investigate Bulgaria's Ottoman heritage. The recent third season of fieldwork, research and other activities, which took place in 2017, has enabled significant connections to be made with Bulgarian archaeologists and Ottoman historians, and saw continuing documentation of the Ottoman remains throughout the country. The activities of this current phase of the project can be divided into three parts: (1) a workshop on Ottoman archaeology held at the University of Sofia as part of the International Conference on Ottoman Social and Economic History (ICOSEH); (2) continuing documentation of and research into Ottoman cities in Bulgaria; and (3) preparations for the archaeological excavation of an Ottoman site in the country.

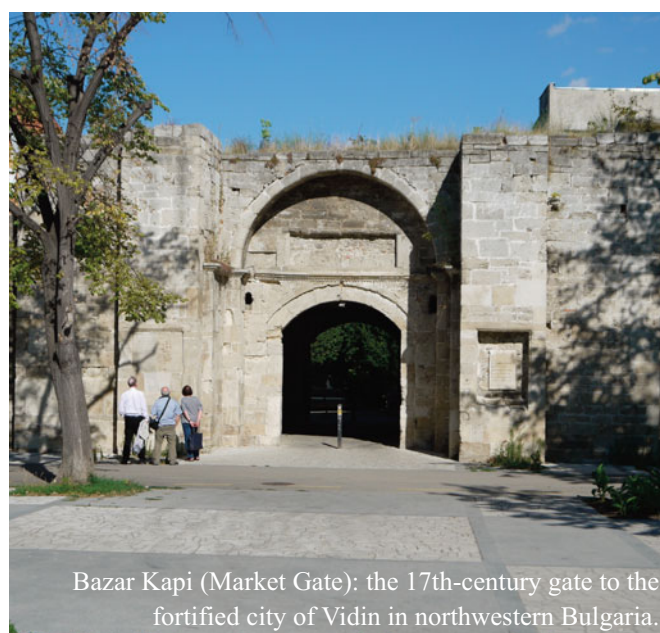
The July workshop for specialists in Ottoman archaeology was well attended both by archaeologists and Ottoman historians. The majority of the papers presented were focused on some aspect of the material culture of the Balkans, with contributions on Romania, Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Austria. Subjects discussed included inscriptions, settlement types, pottery and ceramic petrography as well as architecture and identity. We were fortunate to be able to include a paper by Machiel Kiel, the pioneering specialist of Ottoman material culture of the Balkans. In addition to attending the presentation of papers, participants in the archaeology workshop made a number of field trips to Ottoman sites, including a visit to Berkovitsa, which was until recently a prominent ceramic production centre. As a result of the workshop, the ICOSEH committee decided to incorporate archaeology as part of its activities, with another workshop scheduled for the next meeting in 2020. ICOSEH has also agreed to support the publication of the proceedings of the workshop, which will be augmented by additional papers covering Macedonia and Albania.

During this past year we have been able to visit a number of important and interesting urban sites, including the iron production centre of Samokov, the village of Uzundzhovo which contains the remains of an unsuccessful Ottoman new-town and the fortress city of Vidin on the Danube. The town of Samokov (the Slavic term for the 'giant hammer' used in iron production) is located 25km south of Sofia at an altitude of 950m in the Rila mountains. Despite some references to possible earlier settlement, it appears to have been a new-town founded by the Ottomans in the 15th century specifically to provide iron both for their weapons and other purposes. Uzundzhovo ('long field') is located on the main east-west road (Via Ignatia) 5km north of the city centre of the older settlement of Haskovo. The large mosque and

caravanserai in the village were built to form the nucleus of a new urban settlement located next to the site of a roadside market which had developed under the Ottomans. However, the lack of an adequate water supply meant that the settlement never developed beyond the size of a small village, leaving Haskovo as the main settlement in the area. Apart from its large size, the mosque is notable because it contains a graffiti by the famous Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi. Investigation of the standing remains of Vidin indicates that, although there was an important Roman and medieval settlement on the site, the majority of the urban fortifications, most of the fortress walls and many of the buildings in the old city were built by the Ottomans in the 16th and 17th centuries. The town walls are particularly important as a rare example of 17th-century Ottoman fortification, indicating increased adaptation to the use of firearms.

During the course of the fieldwork and workshop we were able to continue discussions on the prospect of initiating the excavation of an Ottoman site. The proposed excavation will be founded on a partnership between the University of Sofia 'St Kliment Ohridski' and the Balkan Heritage Foundation. The aim of the excavation will be, firstly, to investigate the origins of Ottoman towns in Bulgaria, paying particular attention to the relationship with pre-existing medieval and Byzantine urban centres. Secondly, the excavation aims to provide Bulgarian participants with a more positive and inclusive view of the Ottoman past, one that can be seen as indigenous rather than alien. Further visits will be made to Bulgaria over the coming months to make a final site selection and also to make preparations for the commencement of excavations.

For interested readers, the results of the first phase of the project have recently been published in volume 4 of the *Journal of Islamic Archaeology*.



Bazar Kapi (Market Gate): the 17th-century gate to the fortified city of Vidin in northwestern Bulgaria.