

Ethnic, Religious and Cultural Diversity on the Balkans – History, Traditions and Modern Dimensions.

The Case of Bulgaria



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“Even if the Balkans didn’t exist, they would have to be invented.”

Hermann Keyserling



“It is an intolerable affront to human and political nature that these wretched and unhappy little countries in the Balkan peninsula can, and do, have quarrels that cause world wars. Some hundred and fifty thousand young Americans died because of an event in 1914 in a mud-caked primitive village, Sarajevo. Loathsome and almost obscene snarls in Balkan politics, hardly intelligible to a Western reader, are still vital to the peace of Europe, and perhaps the world.”

John Gunther

(“Inside Europe”, New York, 1940)

The definition of the borders of the Balkan Peninsula is a mixture of geographic, historical, political and cultural understandings of what the Balkans are. The territory of the Balkans is almost the size of France.



The main “Balkan” regions are **continental Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Romania and the European parts of Turkey.**

As “peripheral” territories are considered **Slovenia, Vojvodina, Hungary, Moldova, Anatolia, Cyprus and the Greek islands in the Aegean and Ionian seas.**

Europe actually “discovered” the Balkans in the early 19th century. The term “**Balkan Peninsula**” was coined by the German geographer Johann **August Zeune** in **1808**.

The term arose from the wrong understanding that the mountain chain known as “**Balkan**” (from a Turkish word meaning "a chain of wooded mountains"), spanned all the way from the Black Sea to the Adriatic.

Balkan is actually today's *Stara Planina* **mountain** chain, which crosses all of Bulgaria and ends at the Timok River in Eastern Serbia.



I think that the best way to describe the Balkans is with different variants of the term **border**, understood in the sense used in anthropology after Frederik Barth, as ethnic, religious, cultural, and later – state borders on the Peninsula.

Throughout their millenary history, the Balkans are revealed as a border and contact area between civilizations and cultures: a place of clashes and conflicts, but also of mutual penetration, influence and synthesis.

Throughout the centuries, on this piece of land in Europe coexisted a number of ethnically, religiously and culturally different groups that learned to live together.

Historically, we can talk about a **Balkan Historical and Cultural “Habitat”**, with the Balkans being a border, a place of interaction between several civilizations:

- **Ancient** (Hellenistic-Thracian-Illyrian), which spread Hellenism around the world;
- **Christian**, both **Byzantine** and **Roman Catholic**, the border between the two also being on the Balkans;

and, after the 14th century,

- **Islamic**, which left its traces in all Balkan countries.



The ethnic, religious and cultural diversity on the Balkans was apparent ever since Antiquity – the cultural boundary between **Thracian, Illyrian, Macedonian** and **Hellenistic tribes** and spheres of cultural influence was namely in the territory of present day Bulgaria.

Later, in the age of the Roman Empire, today's Bulgaria was the border area between “**Romanism**” and “**Hellenism**”, including linguistically.

Some of the autochthonous nomadic shepherd groups in Bulgaria, which kept their millennial ethnic identity (such as the *Karakachans* and the *Wallachians*), speak even at the present day dialects that stemmed from archaic Greek in the former case and from colloquial Latin in the latter.

The Middle Ages imposed new differences and new historic cultural spaces.

Again the Balkans were the place where the new cultural boundary was drawn, this time between Eastern and Western Christianity.

In the northwestern corner of the peninsula, in the late 8th century, *Croats* and *Slovenes* became part of one kingdom, which adopted Catholicism and Latin as liturgical language.

The historic space of Orthodox Slavic peoples was marked by the acceptance of **Old Slavic** as *lingua sacra quarta* and of Slavic writing as sacred – Glagolitic among Catholics and Cyrillic among Orthodox.

A large bronze statue of the brothers Cyril and Methodius, standing in front of a building with classical architecture. The statue is mounted on a stone pedestal with inscriptions in Cyrillic. The building behind them has yellow walls, white columns, and wooden doors. The statue depicts two men in long robes, one holding a book and the other a quill. The pedestal has the text: "пресветите брѣта първоучители КИРИЛ И МЕТОДИЙ".



Thanks to Byzantium and the Old Bulgarian state, which adopted the Slavonic language and the Cyrillic alphabet as official in the Kingdom of Bulgaria in 893, **Eastern Orthodoxy** on the Balkans spread not only in *Byzantine* and *Bulgaria*, but also in *Serbia*, *Macedonia*, *Montenegro*, parts of *Albania* and present-day *Romania*.

The influence of Eastern Orthodoxy, thanks to the Cyrillic alphabet and the South-Slavic sacred Christian literature, spread far into the European Northeast – in *Ukraine*, *Russia* and *Belorussia*.

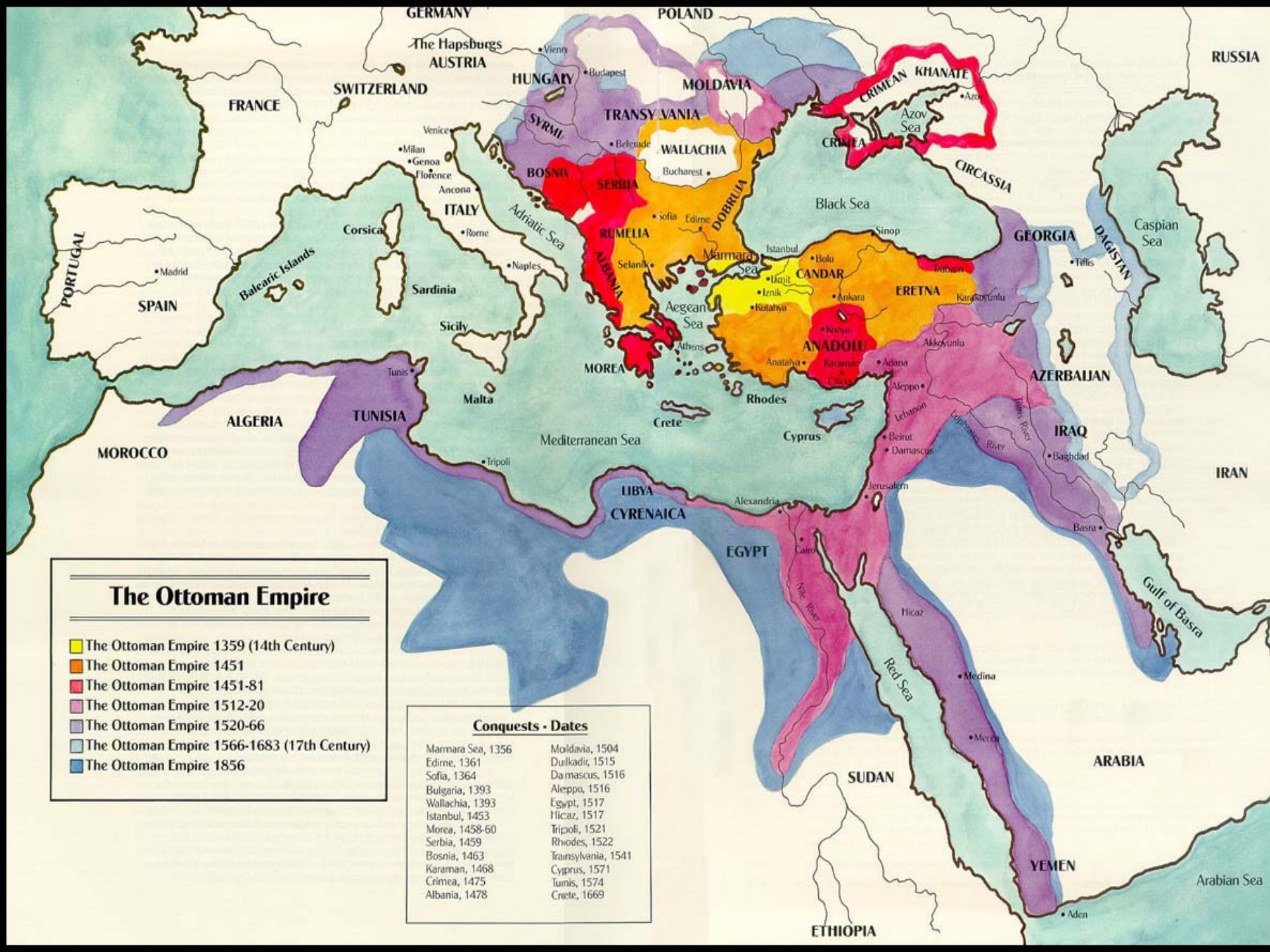
In the southern part of the Balkan peninsula, in *Greece*, the Greek historic space kept its continuity and preserved, through Byzantine, its live, natural connection with the Antique Hellenistic civilization.

After the 14th century, the *Ottoman Turks* settled on the Balkan Peninsula and, through the Ottoman Empire, established the Ottoman historic space, marked by Islam.

On the Balkans this Ottoman historic space included compact or partial territories of *European Turkey*, *Bulgaria*, *Serbia*, *Macedonia*, parts of *Greece* and *Romania*, as well as most of *Albania*.

Islam on the Balkans became a traditional religion not only for *Turks*, but also for the newly converted, willfully or forcefully: *Albanians*, Slavic-speaking *Bosnians*, Bulgarian Muslims (*Pomaks*), Macedonian Muslims (*Torbeshi*) and so on.

Throughout the centuries of Ottoman rule, the Balkans saw the genesis of various ethnic groups and communities whose religion was Islam in its two forms - Sunni and Shia: *Yuruks*, *Tatars*, *Cherkez*, *Kizilbash* and so on.



The Ottoman Empire

- The Ottoman Empire 1359 (14th Century)
- The Ottoman Empire 1451
- The Ottoman Empire 1451-81
- The Ottoman Empire 1512-20
- The Ottoman Empire 1520-66
- The Ottoman Empire 1566-1683 (17th Century)
- The Ottoman Empire 1856

Conquests • Dates

Marmara Sea, 1356	Moldavia, 1504
Edirne, 1361	Dulkadir, 1515
Sofia, 1364	Damascus, 1516
Bulgaria, 1393	Aleppo, 1516
Wallachia, 1393	Egypt, 1517
Istanbul, 1453	Hicaz, 1517
Morea, 1458-60	Tripoli, 1521
Serbia, 1459	Rhodes, 1522
Bosnia, 1463	Transylvania, 1541
Karaman, 1468	Cyprus, 1571
Crimea, 1475	Tunis, 1574
Albania, 1478	Crete, 1669

The Balkans became a **border area** of contact, related to conflicts, but also to intensive mutual cultural influence, of **Catholicism** (in Slovenia and Croatia), **Orthodox Christianity** (in Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia and Romania) and **Islam** (in Albania, Turkey, and parts of Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia).

Hence the metaphor about the Balkans as “*crossroads*” of cultures, religions and civilizations.

Historically, continuous coexistence in the framework of larger political unions such as the Byzantine Empire, Slavic Orthodox countries during the Middle Ages, the Ottoman or the Habsburg Empires, lead to deep mutual influence and interaction culturally.

We can talk about the specifics of the **Balkan city** with its diverse ethnic, religious and cultural environments: the craftsman manner of living (so called *esnafluk*), the public space of the marketplace (so called *charshiya*), the “pub culture”, the specific Balkan cuisine, or the famous Balkan music.



Plovdiv's Charshiya



Ethnic history on the Balkans includes interaction, peaceful or forced, of a number of related and similar ethnicities and ethnic groups, which left traces in South-Eastern European cultural history.

These were as follows:

- Autochthonous ethnicities from Antiquity (Greeks, Albanians, *Karakachans* and *Wallachians*, also called *Arumani*, *Kutsovlasi*, *Tsintsari*).
- Secondly autochthonous ethnicities from the early Middle Ages (Bulgarians, Slovenians, Serbs, Montenegrins and Croats).
- Settled ethnicities and groups, both dominant and marginalized over time (Jews, Gypsies, Tatars, Turks, Armenians, Russians, Ukrainians).
- Groups with altered ethnic, religious and lingual identity over time (Bosnians, Macedonians, *Gagauzians*).

Bulgaria entered the Modern Age as part of the vast Ottoman Empire.

During the early 19th century, the Empire spanned three continents and had borders on seven seas. It was a guardian of the sacred relics of the three big religions in Europe and the Middle East: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

In the Ottoman Empire religion always had priority over culture, language and race for determining identity. The Sultans's subjects were separated not on an ethnical or national, but on a confessional principle, the so-called **Millet**. The Millets united the religions that stemmed from the Old Testament: the Muslim, the Orthodox “Greek” Rum Millet and the Jewish.



Bulgarians
were part of the
vast Christian
population,
Rum Millet,
that inhabited
Rumelia.

This peculiarity in the structure of the Ottoman Empire can explain the considerable role of religion in constructing the national identities of the peoples that inhabited the Empire.

During the 19th century, the struggle for gaining independent church status, particularly among the Orthodox peoples, became an integral part of the struggle for political and national emancipation.

That's why the Sultan's decree (*ferman*) of **1870**, which gave the Bulgarians right to have their own Exarchate, was accepted as an official acknowledgement of the existence of **the Bulgarian nation.**



РУСИЯ

АВСТРО-УНГАРИЯ

РУМЪНИЯ

СЪРБИЯ

Босна и Херцеговина

ЧЕРНА ГОРА

Западен български вилает

Източен български вилает

ЛЕГЕНДА

- ИСТАНБУЛ - столица на независима държава
- БЕОГРАД - столица на зависима или автономна държава
- РУСЧУК - главен град на вилает
- Нови пазар - главен град на санджак
- Дедеагач - град
- ТЪРНОВО - проектна столица на автономен вилает

АВСТРО-УНГАРИЯ - независима държава
РУМЪНИЯ - зависима или автономна държава
Западен български вилает - проектен автономен вилает

..... граница на вилает
— граница на санджак
— граница на българското етническо землище
■ територии на автономен вилает
■ територии, присъединяващи се към Черна гора

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БЯЛО МОРЕ

МРАМОРНО МОРЕ

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Less than a decade later, in 1878, as a result of the Russo-Turkish war that Bulgarians call the “Liberation” war, Bulgaria won its political independence.

Later the same year, though, at the Berlin Congress of the Great Powers, the ethnic territory that was mainly inhabited by Bulgarians was divided into several parts: the Principality of Bulgaria (with capital Sofia), Eastern Rumelia (with capital Plovdiv), vassal to the Sultan, Northern Dobrudzha, joined to Romania, and Macedonia and Thrace, which were returned to the Ottoman Empire.

The only successful action in this direction was the unification of the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia in 1885.

- граница на Санстефанска България
- Княжество България
- Източна Румелия
- Територии, дадени на Сърбия и Румъния след Берлинския конгрес
- Македония и Одринско остават в границите на Османската империя
- Кърджалийска околия и долината на р. Вьча, върнати на Османската империя след Топханенския акт





At the time of its political liberation, Bulgaria had a diverse population, consisting of different ethnic and religious groups.

For the first time, though, at the 1900 census in the Kingdom of Bulgaria, along with “confession” and “mother tongue” was added the indicator “*nationality*”.

Ethnic/national identity was freely declared.

Here we will present the official data from the censuses at the early 20th and the early 21st centuries, in **1900** and **2011** respectively.

According to the latest 2011 census, the population inhabiting Bulgaria is **7, 364, 570** in total

Bulgarians

Both during 1900 and throughout the 20th century, the Bulgarian ethnic community was the most numerous.

In 1900 Bulgarians constituted 77% of the entire population, in 1926 – 83%, in 1946 – 84%, and in 1965 reached 88%.

At the 2011 census, it was **85 %** or **5, 664, 624** people.

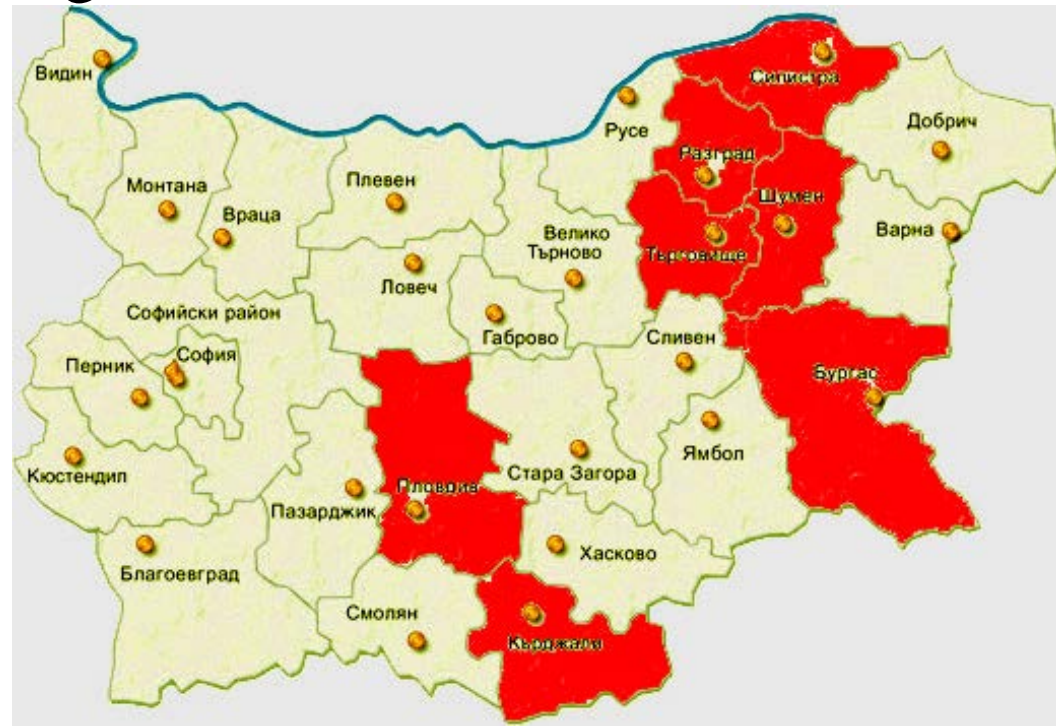
Turks

At the 2011 census there were **588 318** Turks, or **8,8 %**.

Compared to 1900, the population increase among the Turkish ethnic group is considerably weaker and very irregular: in one century it grew with 57,000 people.

Traditionally, Turkish population in Bulgaria is concentrated in the areas: Kurdzhali, Razgrad, Shumen, Bourgas, Plovdiv, Targovishte and Silistra.

About 60% of the Turks in the country lives in these 7 areas.



Gypsies, or Roma people, constitute the third most numerous ethnic community in Bulgaria during all conducted censuses.

At the 2011 census, Roma in the country were **325 343**, or **4.9%**. During the 20th century, the population increase among the Roma ethnic group was most significant – 4 times.

Traditionally Bulgaria is also inhabited by **Russians** (around **9869** in 2011), descendants mainly of White Guard refugees after the Civil War in Russia; **Armenians** (around **6360** in 2011), descendants of refugees after the persecutions in Turkey during the 1920s, **Wallachians** (so called *Vlasi*, around **3600**), **Greeks** (around **1360** in 2011), **Ukrainians** (around **1760** in 2011), **Karakachans** (around **2500** in 2011), and **Macedonians** (who identified themselves different from Bulgarians) – **1610**.

Religious affiliation

According to the **2011** census, out of 7,929,000 citizens the **Orthodox** population was most numerous among the Christians: **4, 374, 135** (or **60%**), **Catholics** were **48, 945** (or **0.7%**), **Protestants** – **64,476** (around 1%).

Muslims were **577,139** (or **7.8 %**), around 9,000 were “other”, 1, 606, 269 did not define their religion, and around 682,162 declare “irreligiosity” (around **10%**)

These religious groups are traditional for the country, while only the Protestant churches appeared relatively late in the 19th century.

Today,

according to the Constitution of Republic of Bulgaria, every citizen is free to choose and freely practice his or her religion, while persecution and discrimination based on racial, ethnic or religious affiliation is forbidden by the Law.

QUESTIONS

The Case of Sofia



Sofia is both an ancient and a very modern city.

The motto of the Bulgarian capital is “*Growing without aging*” and matches its name, which translated from archaic Greek means **God’s Wisdom**.

Sofia is, at the same time, a city of Thracians, of Alexander the Great, of Roman Caesars and Byzantine Basileuses, of Bulgarian Tsars and Ottoman Sultans.

Sofia is, at the same time, a city of the modern world. Here every person leaves something of themselves, building without destroying.

In the very center of the city, as we will see, on just a few square kilometers, is represented the entire history of Europe.

First known as Serdica, the city appeared in the depths of Antiquity.

During the 4th century B.C., Phillip's Macedonians conquered the city. Serdica was included in the Hellenistic cultural circle and became part of Alexander the Great's Empire.



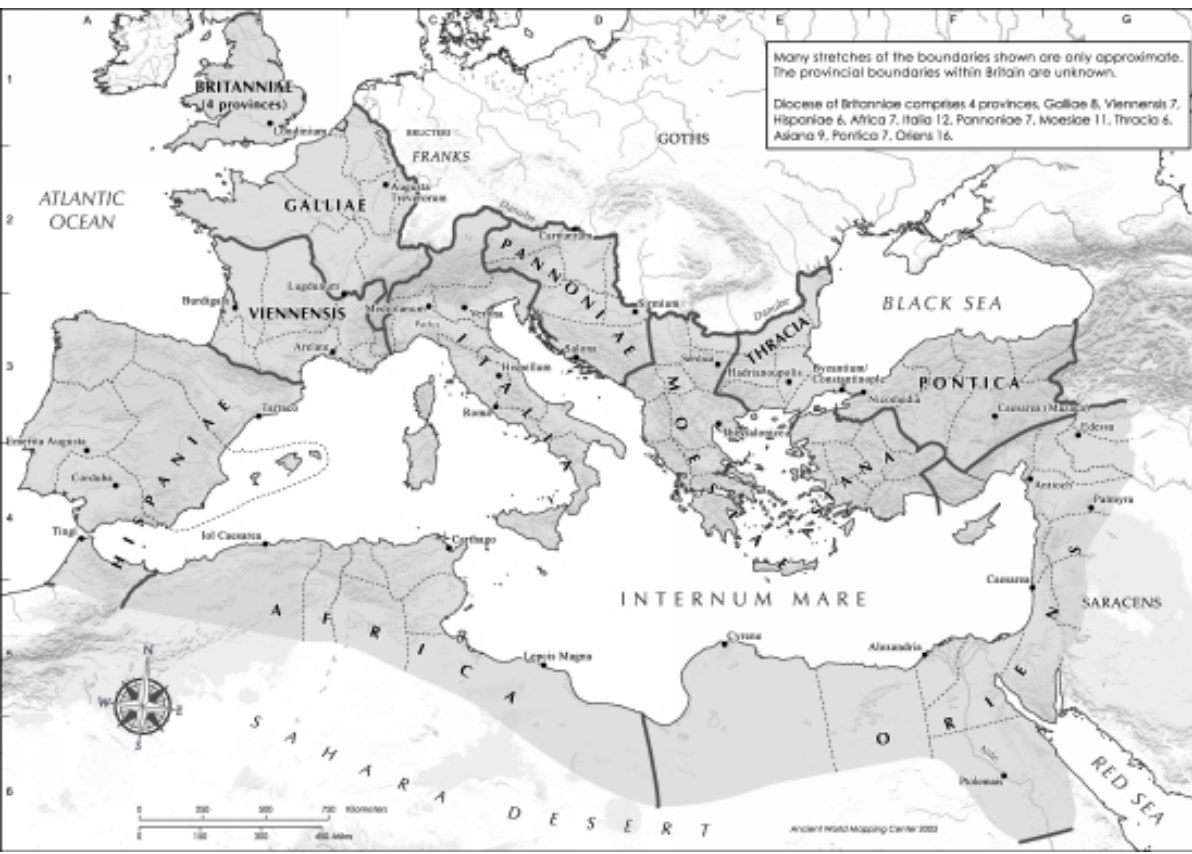
Throughout Antiquity **Serdica**, today's Sofia, was a remarkable city and a cultural center.

Serdica was mentioned in the works of the famous geographer Claudius Ptolemy as early as the 1st century A.D.



The Roman emperor **Constantine the Great** loved Serdica. Legend has it that his initial intention was to move his new capital here, not in Constantinople: he was heard exclaiming

“Serdica is my Rome!”



Serdica, the Emperor's favourite city, became the Christian bishop's residence as early as the 4th century.

At the complex known as Constantine's Palace, was built **the St. George Rotunda** – the oldest active Christian church in Europe and one of the oldest in the world.

The Rotunda already existed in 326 A.D.,
when Empress Helena discovered the Holy Cross in Jerusalem.



The St. George Rotunda



Serdica had an important role for the development of Christianity in Europe.

One of the most symbolic churches in the city, which gave the name to today's Sofia is the **St. Sofia church** from 4th century A.D.



In 343 A.D., 318 bishops from the **Serdica Christian Council** sat at the St. Sophia church. At this moment, Serdica was the spiritual capital of the world's Christians: the council of Serdica prepared the first version of *the Symbol of faith*, which was approved 20 years later in Nicaea.

The St. Sophia church itself has been expanded and restored for more than 1600 years. The main part dates

to the 6th century,
the time of
Justinian the Great,
the last Roman emperor
of all Europe.



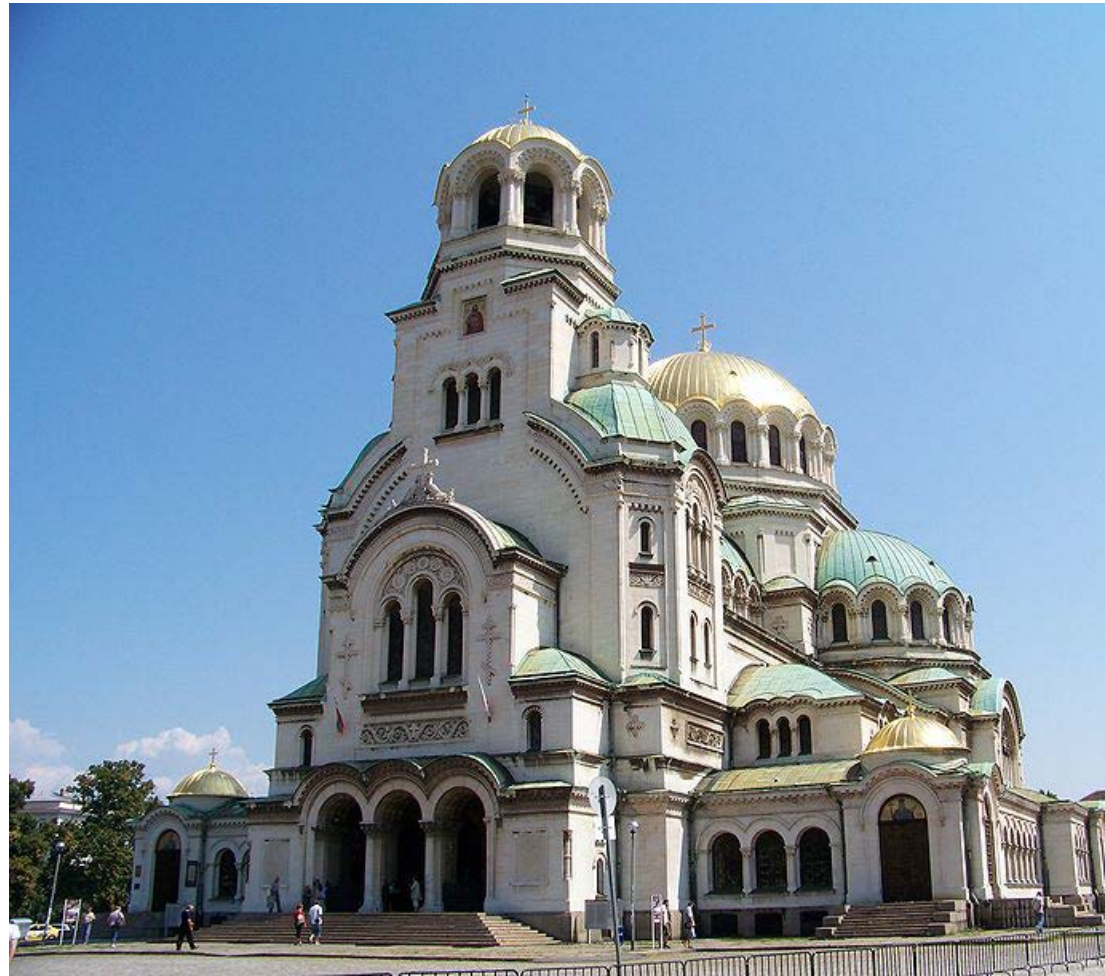
The Patriarch temple St. Alexander Nevsky,
the largest active Orthodox church on the Balkans.



The central dome (45m high) and the bell tower (53m high) are plated with tiles of pure gold.

The church has 12 bells of different sizes, made in Russia. Up to 5000 people can gather in the St. Alexander Nevsky church.

The Patriarch cathedral was built in neo-Byzantine style.



The Patriarch cathedral St. Alexander Nevsky was built by the Bulgarians as a sign of their gratitude towards the Russian people and the Russian emperor Alexander II who won the war that liberated Bulgaria in 1877-1878.

The cathedral was consecrated in 1924 and named after the patron saint of the emperor – the Russian Medieval prince Alexander Nevsky (13th century).



The Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church



The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences



The Military Club in Sofia



The Central Bath



The Market Hall (*Hali*)



In the very centre of Sofia is located the unique
“**quadrilateral of tolerance**”, as Sofia residents call
it among themselves.

The temples of the world’s four most influential
religions are located within 300 meters of each
other.

Right across the Market Hall, next to the Central Bath,
can be found the famous **Banya Bashi mosque**,
behind the Market Hall is **the Sofia synagogue**, and
not far away are **the Catholic cathedral St. Joseph**
and **the Orthodox church St. Nedelya**.

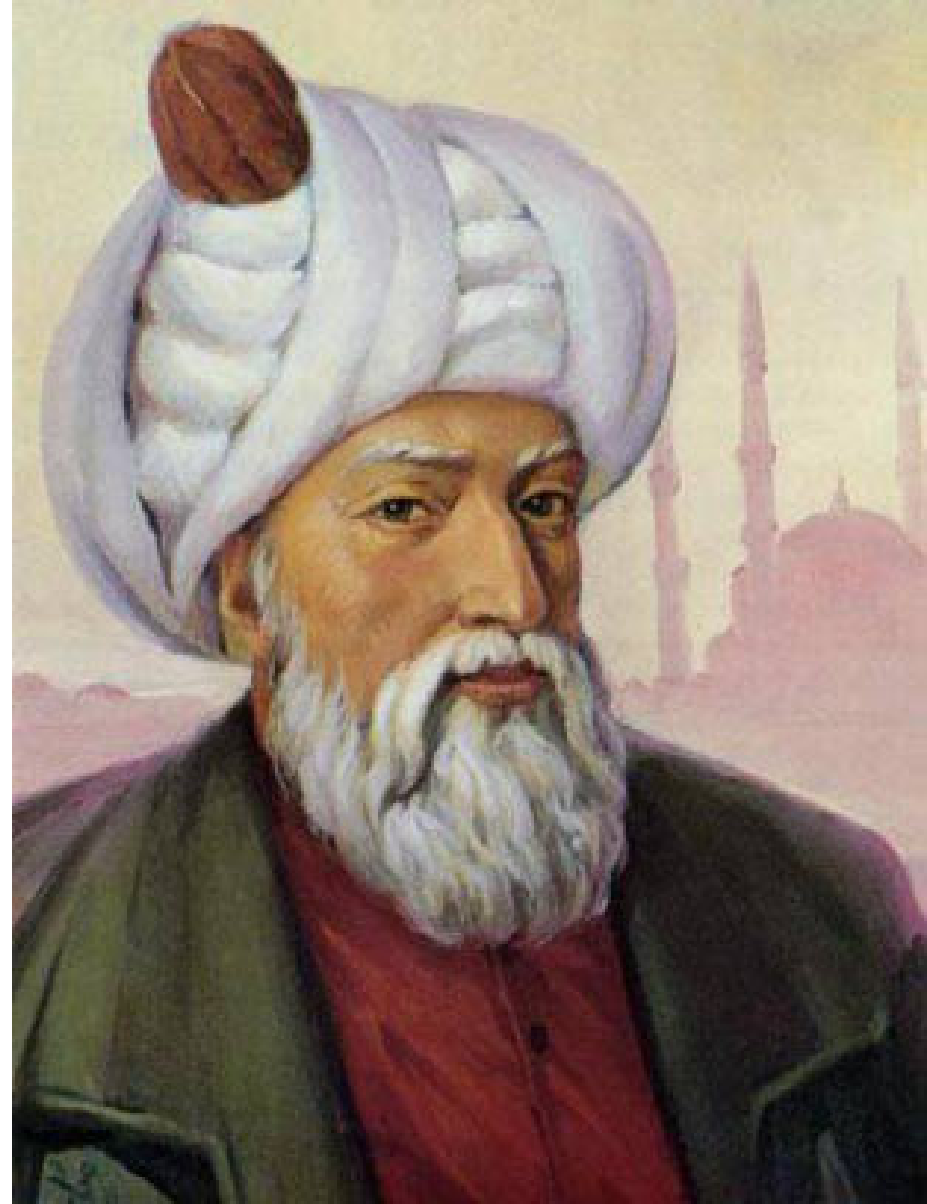
The Banya Bashi mosque



The **Banya Bashi mosque** was built in the **16th century** by the Ottoman Empire's great architect **Mimar Sinan**, who also designed the magnificent Suleimaniye Mosque in Istanbul



and the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne.



The Sofia Synagogue is the largest on the Balkans and the third largest in Europe. It was built **in 1909** and resembled the Vienna synagogue, which was later destroyed by the Nazi regime.



Thanks to the efforts of the Bulgarian people, nearly 50 thousand Jews from the country were saved from being sent to concentration camps in Nazi Germany.

An important role in this humane deed was played by the Bulgarian Orthodox church.



The Catholic cathedral St. Joseph

The first stone of the new building was personally laid in 2002 by **Pope John Paul II**.



The Orthodox church St. Nedelya to the present day keeps the remains of the sanctified Medieval Serbian king **Stefan Milutin**. His body was preserved and brought to Sofia by Serbian monks during the 15th century.



Thus, Sofia remained Roman after Rome, Byzantine after Byzantium, and Ottoman after the Ottoman Empire's collapse.

The Bulgarian capital preserves the character of the respective civilization even when its metropolis is gone.

People in Sofia are adaptive and tolerant, preserving the Antique, the Medieval Bulgarian and the Ottoman cultural legacy, incorporating it into the face of Bulgaria's modern capital, for almost 3000 years.

Thank you for your attention!