

The “Balkan city” as a Historiographical Concept

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The concept of the Balkans as a separate region is directly related to the designation of a whole range of realia, phenomena, and notions as “Balkan,” such as “Balkan nationalism,” “Balkan languages,” “Balkan cuisine,” and “Balkan habits.” In any such case, one may argue whether and to what extent the respective phenomenon is representative of the Balkans and whether it is typical only of the Balkans. As a case study, I will analyze the appearance and the usage of the concept of the “Balkan city.” Of course, this is one among many possible cases, but it is particularly useful for one reason. Unlike “Balkan music” or “Balkan cinema,” not to mention “Balkan backwardness” or “Balkan mentality,” the problem of cities and urban networks makes it possible to see the spatial dimension of the problem: the objects of study appear distinctly on the geographical map. Thus one could more easily verify whether something called “Balkan” is actually typical for “the Balkans” (or for the “Balkan peninsula”), whether it covers the whole of the region or instead also includes territories outside its conventionally accepted borders. In this way, through the prism of urban history, I will try to examine from a different angle the problem of the spatial scope of the Balkans. Instead of drawing the boundaries of the region (or the “peninsula”) and searching for its specificities, I will start from one such specificity and try to map its territorial distribution.

My goal here is not to propose new research on the cities in the Balkans but to examine how Balkan studies interprets the urban history of the region and how certain authors embraced the concept of the “Balkan city.” Urban history deals with a relatively “neutral,” “technical” problematic: it analyzes the urban network, the central place functions of its cities, the urban morphology of the individual settlements, the specific institutions of urban administration, and types of public and private constructions. It would be valuable to examine how this “neutral problematic” is interpreted in national historiographies, in Balkan studies as well as in Byzantine and Ottoman studies. Each one of these disciplines formulates its own questions, examines the urban problematic in a respective spatial framework, and ends with different conclusions.

From “cities in the Balkans” to the “Balkan city”

The concept of the “Balkan city” appeared relatively late in the development of Balkan studies and was the result of a long process. First of all, an evolution took place in the researchers’ approach in formulating their research topics. Earlier studies (especially those written in the first half of the twentieth century) usually discuss the various city types in the Balkans that appeared in different eras: they speak of “Byzantine,” “German,” “Slavic,” “Dalmatian,” or “Turkish”/“Oriental” (the terms differ from author to author) cities in the Balkans or in a certain Balkan country.¹⁵⁹ The listing of the different types of urban settlements is related to attempts to specify the area of diffusion of the respective type, but it is also entangled with the issue of the existing cities’ transformations due to foreign dominations and influences, as well as to the settlement of new urban dwellers. In practice such studies either briefly present the various urban

¹⁵⁹ Cvijić, *La Péninsule Balkanique*, 198–206 = *Balkansko poluostrvo*, 215–233; Anastas Ishirkov, “Harakterni cherti na gradovete v Tsarstvo Bălgaria,” *Godishnik na Sofiyskiya universitet—Istoriko-filologicheski fakultet* 21 (1925), 3ff, 12; Klaus-Detlev Grothusen, “Städtewesen und nationale Emanzipation in Südosteuropa,” in *Ethnogenese und Staatsbildung in Südosteuropa* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 77; etc.

types or pursue a detailed analysis of only one of them; many works present one specific city of the respective type.

Here a problem emerges: instead of studying a specific type of city, works on Balkan history present the different types of cities in the examined territory. In fact, the study of every one of these urban types must go far beyond the spatial scope of the Balkans. This descriptive approach first appeared in geography books and was later used in works on general history. Balkanists deal with the cities “on the peninsula” and omit all others: in some cases Smyrna/Izmir and even Constantinople/Istanbul are considered “external” centers for the Balkan cultures during the Ottoman period.¹⁶⁰ Still, the decision to study the cities only “in the Balkans” goes against the logic not only of urban studies or the history of the Ottoman Empire but even of some national historiographies. The problem is clearly visible in works on the general history of the Balkans that focus on cities and urban life. Thus, for instance, Georges Castellan, in his *History of the Balkans*, presents only cities in the Balkans and includes Salonica/Thessaloniki but not Smyrna/Izmir,¹⁶¹ although Smyrna otherwise appears in his study on several occasions, obviously because the city had an important place in Greek history.

Finally, a number of studies on urban history also limit their scope to the cities in the Balkans. In this way “cities in the Balkans” became a legitimate research topic in its own right—one of the leading Western scholars specializing in the region states that the history of the cities in Southeastern Europe undoubtedly constituted an important part of European urban history.¹⁶² In the long run this (self-)limitation of the research within the borders of the Balkans was a precondition for inventing a specific type of city in the region. Some scholars started out by studying a territory that was “very diverse” and, much later, ended up asserting the discovery of all kinds of “specifically Balkan” phenomena. The Balkan city is only one of many.

What is surprising at first glance is that the object of this new interpretation turned out to be the Ottoman (Turkish, Oriental, etc.) cities in the Balkans, and these cities started to be labeled “Balkan,” although it was just this urban type that was regarded as imported from outside at a relatively late stage in the history of the region. Just as the name “Balkan peninsula” replaced “European Turkey” after the 1870s, in recent decades certain studies refer to “Balkan cities” instead of “Oriental/Turkish/Islamic cities in the Balkans.”

In fact, one early example in this direction is provided by Cvijić’s work on the Balkan peninsula. In the chapter about the various types of settlements, he presents the “Turkish-Byzantine or Balkan city type proper.”¹⁶³ This category encompasses the cities in the region, otherwise labeled “Turkish” or “Oriental,” from the times before their modernization began. Still, it must be noted that Cvijić also proposes another category, which seems more prestigious in his scheme of the region’s human geography: “cities from the zone of the patriarchal regime.” These cities are considered a new phenomenon, largely shaped by recently migrated and citified (Serbian and other Slavic) peasants. This category includes towns in Serbia north of Niš, in Montenegro, and in parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as some cities in Bulgaria that Bulgarian historiography usually designates as cradles of the national revival (*vъzrozhdenski gradove*), such as Koprivshtitsa, Panagyurishte, Kalofer, and Kotel, as well as Danube ports like Rustchuk/Ruse and Svishtov.¹⁶⁴ Here some other sporadic observations should also be mentioned, like those made by Milan Budimir and Petar Skok about Oriental urbanism as an unifying factor in the development of the Balkan peoples and as something characteristic of the region.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ Josef Matl, “Die kulturelle Strahlungsfunktion der Stadt in Südosteuropa,” in *Die Stadt in Südosteuropa. Struktur und Geschichte*, ed. Walter Althammer (Munich: Südosteuropa Gesellschaft, 1968), 100 and 104.

¹⁶¹ Castellan, *Histoire des Balkans*, 132–139.

¹⁶² Grothusen, “Städtewesen und nationale Emanzipation,” 91.

¹⁶³ Cvijić, *La Péninsule Balkanique*, 201.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 203ff.

¹⁶⁵ Diana Mishkova, “What Is in Balkan History? Spaces and Scales in the Tradition of Southeast-European Studies,”

Despite these and similar observations, the concept of the “Balkan city” gained ground in specialized studies starting from the 1960s. Several academic conferences on the topic took place, the most relevant of which were those in Moscow in March 1969¹⁶⁶ and in Venice in May 1971.¹⁶⁷ An important role in developing and popularizing the concept of the “Balkan city” was played by Nikolai Todorov, the founder and longtime (1964–1989) director of the Institute of Balkan Studies in Sofia. Todorov defended his views in several articles written in the 1960s¹⁶⁸ and finally in his book *The Balkan City 1400–1900*, which appeared in Bulgarian in 1972¹⁶⁹ and was translated into Russian (1976), French (1980), English (1983), and Greek (1986). For this book Todorov was awarded the highest prize for such achievements in communist Bulgaria—the Dimitrov Prize.¹⁷⁰ Todorov writes about “a different group of Balkan cities—different typologically both from the West European and from the Muslim city.”¹⁷¹ He states, “The Balkan city possesses its own unique architectural and planning features,” but these unique features are only very briefly described: the author mentions the “destruction or absence of fortress walls,” the “absence of multistoried buildings,” and the fact that, despite all this, the cities were “well, even densely, populated.”¹⁷²

Todorov’s study does not include all cities in the Balkans, only those that were previously called “Turkish” or “Oriental” cities. Todorov sees as “Balkan cities” only cities under the Ottomans and only as long as they were under the Ottomans. Cities in Greece and Serbia after the creation of the national states are introduced only for the sake of comparative perspective, which had to show even more clearly the distinctive features of Balkan cities.¹⁷³ Todorov set aside towns in Wallachia and Moldavia, despite certain similarities of their urban structure with Oriental towns. The choice of the examined cities provoked the comment that in fact, the “Balkan city” from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century was designed simply to replace the “Ottoman city in the Balkans.”¹⁷⁴ The popularization of the concept of the “Balkan city” was paralleled by sharp critiques of earlier studies of “Turkish,” “Oriental,” or “Ottoman” cities. The main targets of these critiques were works of the Turkish historian Ömer Lütfi Barkan and, concerning Bulgarian authors, often the works of the architect Todor Zlatev.¹⁷⁵

Earlier generations of scholars did not write about a typological difference between cities in the Balkan provinces and those in the other parts of the Ottoman Empire, nor they were using a

Southeastern Europe 34 (2010): 73. Reference is made to Milan Budimir and Petar Skok, “But et signification des études balkaniques,” *Revue internationale des études balkaniques* 1 (1934): 5–6.

¹⁶⁶ Vera Katsarkova and Maria Kalitsin, “Mezhdunarodna konferentsiya vārhu balkanskiya grad prez XV-XVIII vek,” *Istoricheski pregled* 25, no. 4 (1969): 161–167. Papers from the conference in Moscow are published in *La ville balkanique, XVe-XIXe ss.* (Sofia: Éditions de l’Académie Bulgare des Sciences, 1970).

¹⁶⁷ Vasilka Tāpkova-Zaimova and Veselin Traykov, “Mezhdunaroden kolokvium vāv Venetsia,” *Istoricheski pregled* 27, no. 5 (1971): 158–160.

¹⁶⁸ Nikolai Todorov, “Po nyakoi vāprosi na balkanskiya grad prez XV-XVII v.,” *Istoricheski pregled* 18, no. 1 (1962): 32–58; Nikolai Todorov, “Balkanskiy gorod XV-XIX vv. v sostave Osmanskoy imperii,” *Etudes Balkaniques* 8, no. 4 (1971): 28–54.

¹⁶⁹ Nikolai Todorov, *Balkanskiyat grad, XV-XIX vek. Sotsialno-ikonomicheskoto i demografsko razvitie* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1972).

¹⁷⁰ Central State Archive, 1–b/66/213, f. 2: Protocol No. 213 of the Politburo, June 15, 1976.

¹⁷¹ Nikolai Todorov, *The Balkan City 1400–1900* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1983), 8.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 33–34.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, xx.

¹⁷⁴ Machiel Kiel, “Urban Development in Bulgaria in the Turkish Period,” in *The Turks of Bulgaria: The History, Culture and Political Fate of a Minority*, ed. Kemal Karpat (Istanbul: ISIS, 1990), 79–80.

¹⁷⁵ Strashimir Dimitrov, “Za priemstvenostta v razvitiето na balkanskite gradove prez XV-XVI vek,” *Balkanistika* 2 (Sofia: Institut po balkanistika, 1987): 5–6; Georgi Kozuharov, “Arhitektura i stroitelstvo prez Vāzrazhdaneto,” in *Sofia prez vekovete*, vol. 1, eds. Georgi Georgiev and Boris Mateev (Sofia: BAN, 1989), 115–117; Margarita Harbova, *Gradoustroystvo i arhitektura po bālgarskite zemi prez XV-XVIII vek* (Sofia: BAN, 1991), 9; For a recent overview, see Grigor Boykov, “The Borders of the Cities: Revisiting Early Ottoman Urban Morphology in Southeastern Europe,” in *Bordering Early Modern Europe*, eds. Maria Baramova, Grigor Boykov and Ivan Parvev (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), 243–247.

different term for the Ottoman cities in the Balkans. The same is true of Western travelers. In the past, even the leading figures of the national movements in the region did not see a difference between the cities in their own country and those in the non-European parts of the Ottoman Empire. In the Bulgarian case, Lyuben Karavelov's comments are a good example: he remarked that Sofia was like "all Turkish cities not only in Europe and in Asia but also in Africa," and he put Plovdiv on an equal footing with "all other Asian cities."¹⁷⁶ Similarly, in a travel account written well after independence was achieved, Ivan Vasov describes the small town of Peshtera (inhabited mostly by Bulgarians) as "a Turkish town like all other Turkish towns."¹⁷⁷ Monographs about individual towns and cities, written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, also speak of "Turkish cities," the "Turkish appearance of the cities," and so on. That also explains why, as mentioned above, most of those who defended the term "Balkan city" felt obliged to explain and refute the "delusions" of numerous local and foreign authors from the past.

Not only is the "Balkan city" a later "academic" invention, but it is also not always accepted. Western scholars use the expression "Balkan cities/towns" in order to outline the geographic location of the urban settlements. Yet at the same time they speak of "typical Islamic towns in the Yugoslav Balkan lands" that had a "Oriental appearance" and "Turkish houses."¹⁷⁸ Edgar Hösch points to "the typical Turkish country town" as a characteristic element of the "area of Balkan-Byzantine culture with a strong Oriental element."¹⁷⁹ Such designations as "Turkish" and "Oriental" continued to predominate in some Balkan historiographies as well, especially in the former Yugoslavia and the successor states.¹⁸⁰ Nedeljko Radosavljević, for instance, emphasizes that towns in eighteenth-century Serbia looked completely Oriental, including the Christian neighborhoods.¹⁸¹ He also mentions that towns that were under Austrian rule for some time later fully regained their Oriental features: by the end of the eighteenth century, Belgrade showed no traces of the Austrian domination from 1718 to 1739, and "the appearance of Belgrade was typically Oriental." The same was true of the small town of Valjevo, which "again became an Oriental town."¹⁸² Moreover, Božidar Jezernik uses the term "Balkan towns" as a way to name "the Turkish towns in the Balkans."¹⁸³

Furthermore, in many cases the label "Balkan" is used for regional clarification alongside, and even synonymously with, the label "Oriental." Studies on the cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina sometimes call the city "Oriental-Balkan," alongside the term "Oriental-Islamic city."¹⁸⁴ In other cases, the term "Bosnian-Oriental city" is used with practically the same meaning.¹⁸⁵ The studies

¹⁷⁶ Lyuben Karavelov, *Zapiski za Bălgariya i za bălgarete* (Sofia: MNP, 1930), 52 and 87.

¹⁷⁷ Ivan Vazov, *V nedrata na Rodopite*, chapter 31, "Iz proloma na Stara reka. Peshtera," quoted in <http://www.slovo.bg/showwork.php?AuID=14&WorkID=848&Level=2> (1st ed., 1892).

¹⁷⁸ Francis Carter, "Urban Development in the Western Balkans, 1200–1800," in *An Historical Geography of the Balkans*, 179–182.

¹⁷⁹ Hösch, *The Balkans*, 21 = Hösch, *Geschichte der Balkanländer*, 21.

¹⁸⁰ Divna Đurić-Zamolo, *Beograd kao orijentalna varoš pod Turcima, 1521–1867* (Belgrade: Muzej grada Beograda, 1977); Veljko Rogić, "The Changing Urban Pattern in Yugoslavia," in *An Historical Geography of the Balkans*, 413–414; Radovan Samardžić, "O gradskoj civilizaciji na Balkanu XV–XIX veka," in *Gradska kultura na Balkanu, XV–XIX vek* (Belgrade: SANU, 1984), 1–18.

¹⁸¹ Nedeljko Radosavljević, "Putopisna literatura o početku evropeizacije grada u Srbiji (kraj 18.—prva polovina 19. veka)," in *Yugoistočnoevropejskiyat grad i sâvremennostta na minaloto. Nauchni izsledvaniya v chest na prof. Liliya Kirova*, ed. Antoaneta Balcheva (Sofia: Faber, 2012), 123.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 124, 127.

¹⁸³ Božidar Jezernik, "Western Perceptions of Turkish Towns in the Balkans," *Urban History* 25, no. 2 (1998): 211–230.

¹⁸⁴ Iljas Hadžibegović, *Bosanskohercegovački gradovi na razmeđu 19. i 20. stoljeća* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2004), 7, 11, 259, 293.

¹⁸⁵ Rusmir Djedović and Benjamin Bajrektarević, "Tuzla od tradicionalnog orijentalnog do modernog evropskog industrijskog grada," in *Bosanskohercegovački gradovi u procesu političke modernizacije (1850–1950). Zbornik radova*, eds. Adnan Velagić and Asim Krhan (Sarajevo and Mostar: University Press / Muzej Hercegovine, 2013), 125, 127, 132, 133.

speak of “Oriental-Muslim”-type cities, which preserved their Oriental physiognomy even after their transformation based on the Western European model (after 1878).¹⁸⁶

To the best of my knowledge, in Greek, Albanian, and Macedonian historiographies the continuity or, respectively, the decline and even collapse of urban life after the Ottoman invasion is discussed without following up with the concept of the “Balkan city.” Studies usually emphasize the new Oriental and Islamic features of the cities under the Ottomans.¹⁸⁷ Comparisons with cities in the Balkans appear in some works on the history of Romanian cities. Emanuela Costantini, for instance, discovers certain similarities between the cities in the Danubian principalities and the Ottoman and post-Ottoman cities in the Balkans, but at the same time notes the differences between Bucharest and the other Balkan capitals. Other studies, such as a monograph by Simion Câlția, analyze traditional Romanian towns in the context of European urban history without discussing the possible Ottoman and/or Balkan parallels.¹⁸⁸ More interesting in the Romanian case is the clear differentiation between the cities in Wallachia and Moldavia versus those in Transylvania, usually created and largely shaped by German settlers. While national historiography traditionally tries to see the common elements and the parallels in the history of the different parts of the country and to present them in one single grand narrative, studies of urban history much more clearly underscore the differences and usually limit their scope to the towns in Wallachia and Moldavia.¹⁸⁹

Even in academic milieus in Bulgaria, where the expression “Balkan city” is well known and widely used, the term is invested with a range of meanings, some of them clearly diverging from the concept described above. Certain works do not discuss at all what the characteristics of the “Balkan city” are—studies on the cities in the Ottoman period are simply named this way. Often these works deal with only some of the cities in the region.¹⁹⁰ Often the expression “Balkan city” means just “a city in the Balkans” and in this sense might be used even for Ljubljana.¹⁹¹ Still, more attentive scholars do not label “Balkan” all the cities located within the conventionally established borders of the region. Thus, for instance, a few years ago Tamara Stoilova wrote about eighteenth-century Dubrovnik as a “European city in the Balkans.”¹⁹² In some cases the “Balkan city” is depicted as an outcome of the building traditions of the Bulgarians. A good illustration is the works of Nikolay Tuleshkov, who insists that there was a clear difference between Balkan and Anatolian (“*maloaziyska*”) architecture, and as a single exception presents the works of Bulgarian master builders in Asia Minor during the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁹³ By contrast, Elena Ivanova uses the Balkans as a research framework in order to problematize the concept of “Bulgarian Revival architecture.” In addition, while discussing the “traditional Balkan city,”

¹⁸⁶ Jasmin Branković, *Mostar 1833–1918. Upravni i politički položaj grada* (Sarajevo: University Press, Magistrat, 2009), 150, 154; Jasmin Branković, “Urbani razvitak grada Mostara za vrijeme austrougarske uprave,” in *Bosanskohercegovački gradovi u procesu političke modernizacije*, 118, 122.

¹⁸⁷ E.g., Kornelija Jurin Starčević, “Islamsko-osmanski gradovi dalmatinskog zaleđa: prilog istraživanju urbanog razvoja u 16. i 17. stoljeću,” *Radovi – Zavod za hrvatsku povijest* 38, No. 1 (2006): 113–154; Siniša Mišić, *Leksikon gradova i trgova srednjovekovnih srpskih zemalja* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2010), 13; Ferit Duka, “Ndryshime në fizionominë urbanistike dhe arkitekturore të qytetit shqiptar të periudhës osmane: dimensionimi islamiko-oriental (shek. XVI–XVII),” *Studime historike* 66, nos. 1–2 (2012): 25–46.

¹⁸⁸ Simion Câlția, *Așezări urbane sau rurale? Orașele din Țările Române de la sfârșitul secolului al 17-lea la începutul secolului al 19-lea* (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2011).

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁹⁰ E.g., Bistra Cvetkova, *Vie économique des villes et ports balkaniques au XVe et XVIe siècles* (Paris: Geuthner, 1971) = *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* 38, no. 2 (1970): 267–355.

¹⁹¹ Ivaylo Nachev, “Italian Influence in Shaping the Balkan City: Fabiani’s Ljubljana in the Beginning of the 20th Century,” *Etudes Balkaniques* 48, nos. 2–3 (2012): 112–119.

¹⁹² Tamara Stoilova, “Dubrovnik prez XVIII vek—evropeyski grad na Balkanite,” in *Yugoiztochnoevropeyskiyat grad i savremennostta na minaloto*, 81–95.

¹⁹³ Nikolay Tuleshkov, *Arhitekturnoto izkustvo na starite bălgari*, vol. 2, *Osmansko srednovekovie i vāzrazhdane* (Sofia: AI “Prof. Marin Drinov” / Arh & Art, 2006), 8–10, 228–232.

Ivanova underlines that the term is purely conventional and that during the Ottoman period “in practice there was no... substantial difference from the traditional city in Asia Minor.”¹⁹⁴

The designation “Balkan city” also appears in some studies that are not devoted to urban history and urban studies per se. Bernard Lory’s monograph about Bitola/Manastır in the late Ottoman period calls it “the Balkan city par excellence” but does not deal with the specific features of the cities in the region and examines the city of Bitola as a revealing example of Balkan society during the rise of nationalism.¹⁹⁵ This is hardly surprising: in general, Balkan studies is interested mainly in the process of building and manifestation of the national identities in the region, and all other problems are often addressed through this prism.

At the same time, Turkish national historiography and some Ottomanists speak of “Anatolian towns” and “Anatolian cities.”¹⁹⁶ These too are Ottoman cities, but the respective works are interested only in cities in Anatolia—in practice, that means the territory of present-day Turkey, which has nothing to do with the realities before 1918–1923. This “division of labor” among the historiographical schools facilitated the crystallization of a separate narrative about the cities in the Balkans and in some cases of the “Balkan city.”

Even works that do not draw a contrast between “Balkan” and Ottoman cities respect this boundary. In *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule*, Peter Sugar presents the cities in the “core regions” of the empire (the description is very similar to the Oriental/Islamic cities) and then compares them to the cities in other areas, like those in Hungary and the Aegean Islands.¹⁹⁷ In Ottoman studies the term “core regions” usually designates Rumelia and Anatolia (the territories that were closer to the imperial center and were more strictly controlled), as opposed to the more superficially controlled provinces on the periphery (especially the Arab lands), as well as temporary possessions and autonomous principalities under Ottoman suzerainty. Southeast European studies is interested only in the cities in Southeastern Europe, regardless of their close similarities with the cities in the non-European part of the core regions. Even experts in Ottoman studies were able to limit the scope of their observations to the cities in the Balkan peninsula, whose pre-modern architecture and urban structure “looks unexpectedly homogenous in a vast region between Banja Luka and Edirne.”¹⁹⁸

The connection made in historical studies between urban development and national history has also had a great impact.¹⁹⁹ National historiographies usually speak of “Bulgarian,” “Albanian,” “Greek,” “Serbian,” “Macedonian,” and other such towns and cities that, taking a larger perspective, could be called “Balkan towns/cities.” From this perspective “Bulgarian,” “Greek,” and other such cities and houses are considered variants of the “Balkan cities” and “Balkan houses” that, more generally, are seen as part of the larger “European context.”²⁰⁰ As a consequence “Balkan cities” (during the Ottoman period) are now seen as different from “Ottoman cities”; at most, scholars consider the parallels between “Balkan” and Ottoman cities, due to the Oriental

¹⁹⁴ Elena Ivanova, “Erkernata arhitektonika v traditsionniya balkanski grad: kām drug prochit na ‘vāzrozhdenskiya stil,’” *Izkustvovedski cheteniya* (2010): 236–243.

¹⁹⁵ Bernard Lory, *La ville balkanissime: Bitola, 1800–1918* (Istanbul: ISIS, 2011).

¹⁹⁶ Sevgi Aktüre, *19. yüzyıl sonunda Anadolu kenti mekansal yapı çözümlemesi* (Ankara: ÖDTÜ, 1978); Suraiya Faroqhi, *Town and Townsmen of Ottoman Anatolia: Trade, Crafts and Food Production in an Urban Setting* (Cambridge, 1984); Suraiya Faroqhi, “The Anatolian Town and Its Place within the Administrative Structure of the Ottoman State (1500–1590),” in *Making a Living in the Ottoman Lands, 1480 to 1820* (Istanbul: ISIS, 1995), 19–47; Musa Çadırcı, *Tanzimat döneminde Anadolu kentlerinin sosyal ve ekonomik yapıları* (Ankara: TTK, 1991), etc.

¹⁹⁷ Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354–1804*, 63, 74ff.

¹⁹⁸ Maximilian Hartmuth, “The Historic Fabric of Balkan Towns: Space, Power, Culture and Society,” in *Four Historic Cities in the Western Balkans: Value and Challenges*, eds. Stephan Doempke, Anduela Lulo Caca, and Sadi Petrela (Tirana: Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization, 2012), 17–22.

¹⁹⁹ Grothusen, “Städtewesen und nationale Emanzipation,” 75: “die Vorgänge der nationalen Emanzipation in Südosteuropa im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert sind untrennbar mit der städtischen Entwicklung verbunden.”

²⁰⁰ Margarita Harbova, “L’espace culturel de la ville balkanique entre l’Orient et l’Europe (D’après l’exemple de la ville de Plovdiv, XVIIIe—XIXe siècles),” *Etudes Balkaniques* 39, no. 1 (2002): 129, 137.

influences on urban life in the Balkans. For instance, Raina Gavrilova, in her book about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Bulgarian urban culture, first lists the existing studies on Bulgarian and other Balkan cities and adds that studies on the Ottoman cities were also very useful.²⁰¹ In this case “Balkan cities” is a common designation for Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian, and other such cities in the Balkans, not a subcategory of Ottoman cities.

The growing popularity of these interpretations had a decisive impact on the way the national historiographies in the Balkans evaluated the urban culture of the Ottoman period. In the past, when the cities in the Ottoman Balkans were regarded as “Turkish” and “Oriental,” they were accordingly considered a foreign body, and national historiographies (that of Bulgaria and especially of Serbia) idealized the villages.²⁰² In this new situation, national historiographies could also claim the urban heritage and even pretend that “Balkan civilization was essentially urban,”²⁰³ a cliché otherwise used for Islamic civilization. Thus once it became clear that the achievements of Ottoman urban culture could not be easily neglected, they started to be interpreted as a cultural heritage belonging to the respective nation or to all Balkan peoples.

Balkan vs. Islamic/Oriental/Ottoman/Turkish cities

Here it might be useful to clarify some terminology. Experts sometimes debated whether to speak of “Turkish,” “Oriental,” “Islamic,” or “Ottoman” cities, and their preferences were sometimes influenced by politics. The concept of the “Islamic city” is the most elaborated among them and relies on several types of criteria. First of all, it points to the specific (from the Western European point of view) institutions that fulfill the central function of the city in the Islamic world. According to the classic definition of the French Orientalist William Marçais, the Islamic city is the seat of an Islamic judge (*kadi*) and contains a great mosque, a covered market (*suq*), and a public bath (*hamam*).²⁰⁴ Following Max Weber, some scholars underline the cities’ lack of legal urban status and, respectively, of autonomous municipal institutions and urban community. The most visible characteristics of the “Islamic city” concern the urban morphology: according to the classical definition, the Islamic city is characterized by its subdivision into a market area in the center and a residential area around it. The market nucleus contains the great (Friday) mosque and the covered market (*suq*); the latter is considered by some scholars to be the most important element of the Islamic city; the residence of the ruler or, respectively, the governor was not always centrally located in the city. The residential area is subdivided into neighborhoods (*mahalle*), which are homogeneous in terms of religion (and sometimes also in terms of ethnicity and even tribe); they might even be surrounded by walls. The street network features relatively narrow and serpentine streets; only the few main ones leading to the central market area are somewhat larger, while the streets in the residential area are often cul-de-sacs.²⁰⁵ Studies on specific cities in the Islamic world note several exceptions to these characteristics: in fact, usually there are also some dwellings in the market area; many neighborhoods are of mixed religious affiliation; and so on. There are also important individual differences between the cities in the Islamic world, as well as regional variations. At the same time, it is often emphasized that most of these characteristics could be found

²⁰¹ Raïna Gavrilova, *Bulgarian Urban Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1999), 11.

²⁰² *Balkan i balkanci*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: Balkanski institut, 1937), 43–45; Petăr Mutafchiev, “Gradăt i seloto v nashiya minal i săvremenen zhivot,” *Prosveta* 5, No. 5 (1940): 519ff.

²⁰³ Gavrilova, *Bulgarian Urban Culture*, 45.

²⁰⁴ Eugen Wirth, “Zur Konzeption der islamischen Stadt. Privatheit im islamischen Orient versus Öffentlichkeit in Antike und Okzident,” *Die Welt des Islams* 31 (1991): 51.

²⁰⁵ E.g., Gustave E. von Grunebaum, “The Structure of the Muslim Town,” in *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge / Kegan Paul, 1961), 141–158; André Raymond, *Grandes villes Arabes à l’époque ottomane* (Paris: Sindbad, 1985), 168 ff, etc. Cf. Heinz Heineberg, *Stadtgeographie*, 3rd ed. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2006), 288–295.

in many other cities in various eras and regions, not only in the Islamic world. Finally, the concept of the Islamic city has been severely criticized for its Orientalist and essentialist overtones. At present, instead of referring to an ideal model of the “Islamic city,” scholars instead discuss the impact of religion on the way of life and the appearance of the cities predominantly inhabited by Muslims.²⁰⁶

The definition of the same cities as “Oriental” is also related to the often-criticized Eurocentric perspective, but there is an important difference in the temporal limits. Eugen Wirth demonstrates that most characteristics of the “Islamic cities” are the same as those of the pre-Islamic ones. He suggests using a more general designation: the term “Oriental city.”²⁰⁷ In any case, the usage of both designations—“Islamic city” and “Oriental city”—allows one to highlight the common traits of the cities in a vast area, which are otherwise labeled according to ethnic affiliation and political fragmentation as “Arabic”/“Turkish”/“Iranian”/etc. cities.

The designation “Ottoman city” is predominantly used in historical studies, but without being counterposed to the definitions “Islamic” and “Oriental.”²⁰⁸ Indeed, Ottoman cities are “Islamic” and “Oriental,” and the very concepts of “Islamic city” and “Oriental city” were elaborated on the basis of studies on specific cities that were for centuries part of the Ottoman Empire. For example, André Raymond writes about the “Islamic city” in his book devoted to “great Arab cities in the Ottoman period,” while Maurice Cerasi presented Ottoman cities and architecture in a book titled *The Levantine City*.²⁰⁹ One of the first academic works about the Ottoman city deals with the “Islamic city” in Asia Minor (“*kleinasiatische Islamstadt*”).²¹⁰ Usually historical studies on the “Ottoman city” go into much more detail about the specifics of the Ottoman domination and rely on archival documents left by this administration, especially the various types of tax registers and judicial (*kadi*) registers, but also *vakıf* deeds and other relevant sources. Such studies analyze the impact of Ottoman authorities and their policies on urban development; they often underline the benefits of living in a vast empire for the development of trade and as a consequence of cities, as well as the fact that under Pax Ottomana, the cities in the interior of the empire were not fortified, which allowed for a much lower density of construction.

The choice of which term to use has political connotations in Turkey as well. In the early years of the Kemalist republic, as a result of the critical attitude towards the sultanic past as well as the interest in the purely Turkic roots, studies speak of “Turkish cities” and also point to the ancient building traditions of the Turks.²¹¹ Starting from the 1940s, in parallel with the positive re-evaluation of the Ottoman heritage, it was the term “Ottoman city” that gained a dominant position in Turkish historiography. In recent decades, as the role of religion in public and political life has increased, Turkish works increasingly speak of the “Islamic city.” Of course, the term is stripped of all pejorative and Orientalist overtones, and the “Islamic” traits of the Ottoman cities are presented in a positive light.²¹² Moreover, in the case of Turkish historiography, the usage of the different

²⁰⁶ Janet Abu-Lughod, “The Islamic City: Historic Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987): 155–176.

²⁰⁷ Eugen Wirth, “Villes islamiques, villes arabes, villes orientales? Une problématique face au changement,” in *La ville Arabe dans l’Islam*, eds. D. Chevalier and A. Boudhiba (Tunis: Université de Tunis & CNRS-Paris, 1982): 198; Eugen Wirth, “Zur Konzeption der islamischen Stadt,” 57.

²⁰⁸ Gilles Veinstein, “The Ottoman Town (Fifteenth-Eighteenth Centuries),” in *The City in the Islamic World*, vol. 1, eds. Renata Holod, Attilio Petruccioli, and André Raymond (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 205–217.

²⁰⁹ Raymond, *Grandes villes Arabes à l’époque ottomane*; Maurice Cerasi, *La città del Levante. Civiltà urbana e architettura sotto gli Ottomani nei secoli XVIII-XIX* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1986).

²¹⁰ Richard Busch-Zantner, “Zur Kenntniss der osmanischen Stadt,” *Geographische Zeitschrift* 38, no. 1 (1932): 1–13.

²¹¹ Osman Nuri Ergin, *Türkiyede Şehirciliğin Tarihi İnkişafı* (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet Gazete ve Matbaası, 1936); Osman Nuri Ergin, *Türk Şehirlerinde İmaret Sistemi* (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet Matbaası, 1939).

²¹² Halil İnalçık, “İstanbul: An Islamic City,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 (1990): 1–23; Yılmaz Can, *İslam şehirlerini fiziki yapısı (H. I-III / M. VII-IX yüzyıl)* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1995).

terms is not mutually exclusive—Islamic religious buildings are the most important monuments in “Turkish cities.”

More traditionalist national historiographies in the non-Muslim Balkan countries do not take into account the differences between the terms “Islamic,” “Oriental,” “Ottoman,” or “Turkish” city and, in many cases, are not interested in these nuances. Such studies examine the impact of one foreign and allegedly alien power over their own cities. Studies that present the “Balkan city” try to differentiate this category from all those mentioned above, which are considered imprecise as well as unprestigious.

While the terms “Ottoman,” “Islamic,” “Oriental,” and even “Turkish city” do have a similar meaning, surprisingly, the same applies to the term “Balkan city,” which was coined to replace these other terms concerning this region. Though the concept of the “Balkan city” has been around for a long time, when scholars try to characterize it, they usually list the features of the Islamic city concept. Studies published in Bulgaria and Albania even attribute to the “Bulgarian/Albanian/Balkan city of the Revival period” the traits that are usually considered main characteristics of the Islamic cities. Some authors insist on the central role of the market nucleus, the *çarşı*;²¹³ other works repeat the description at length, pointing to the strict division between the market nucleus and the residential areas, the latter subdivided into ethnically segregated neighborhoods, organized around the local mosque or church.²¹⁴ Those Balkan intellectuals who spoke of the specifics of the Balkan city vis-à-vis the (Central) European city actually listed its well-known “Oriental” characteristics.²¹⁵ In some cases, the perception of the same characteristics changed. For example, narrow and serpentine streets, considered one of the main handicaps of Oriental/Turkish cities, are simply “picturesque” in the case of Balkan cities. Balkan cities are not “sparsely populated”—their houses simply have “big yards” and are “surrounded by greenery.”

Although Jovan Cvijić wrote on this subject before the concepts of the Islamic city crystallized, his description lists similar characteristics for what he called the “Turko-Byzantine or Balkan city.” It has short, serpentine, and dirty streets, and covered markets (“*des marchés couverts, les bezisten, et de grands bazars*”) play a central role in it; the yards of the houses are surrounded by walls.²¹⁶ In the Serbian edition of the book, Cvijić adds that in larger cities the market area itself was subdivided into sections according to the various crafts (*podeljena na delove raznih zanata*).²¹⁷

Interestingly enough, historians use many Turkish, Arabic, and Persian loanwords in order to describe not only the “Balkan city” but even the Bulgarian or Albanian city during the “national revival.” This is true of the market nucleus of the city (market is *pazar*, covered market is *bezistan/bedesten*, market street is *çarşı*, workshop is *dükkan*, warehouse is *mağaza*), for the residential area (neighborhood is *mahalle*, street is often *sokak*, square is *meydan*), for a number of elements of the traditional house,²¹⁸ and for most traditional crafts (*sanaat/zanaat*), as well as for various realia of everyday life in the cities. Even clock towers—an innovation coming from “Christian Europe”—are referred to in most Balkan languages with a Turkish word coming from Arabic (Turkish *kule* for “tower”). In some cases the whole expression comes from the Ottoman Turkish *saat kule(si)*: *saat kula* in Macedonian; *sa(ha)t kula* in Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian; *kulla e sahatit* in Albanian. Turkish loanwords also appear in the description of the “Byzantine” heritage. Jovan Cvijić presented the Greek *hanji* (innkeeper, Turkish from the Persian *han*) and

²¹³ Todor Zlatev, *Bălgarskata natsionalna arhitektura. V. I. Bălgarskiyat grad prez epohata na Văzrazhdaneto* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1955), 141; Gavrilova, *Bulgarian Urban Culture*, 27: “I adopted as *differentia specifica* of the Balkan town economics the presence of a *çarsi*, i.e. the Arab *suq*, bazaar, marketplace.”

²¹⁴ Tzveta Todorova, “Ot stariya Rustchuk kăm noviya Russe,” *Almanah za istoriyata na Russe*, vol. 2 (Russe: Dărzhaven arhiv—Russe, 1997): 370.

²¹⁵ Plešu, “Pourquoi doit-on sauver les Balkans?”

²¹⁶ Cvijić, *La Péninsule Balkanique*, 201.

²¹⁷ Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo*, 230.

²¹⁸ See Tchavdar Marinov’s contribution to the present volume.

bakals (greengrocer, Turkish from the Arabic *bakkaal*) as agents of the Byzantine urban culture.²¹⁹ The ultimate irony is that, as a euphemism for designations as “Turkish,” “Ottoman,” and “Islamic,” another Turkish word is used—“Balkan”—which literally means “thickly wooded mountain range.” The concept of the “Balkan city” is elaborated in opposition to the “Islamic” and, more specifically, the “Turkish/Ottoman city,” yet the vocabulary used to describe this “Balkan city” testifies that it is literally plagiarized from them.

Another feature of the “Balkan cities” that is regularly highlighted is their ethnic and religious diversity.²²⁰ Although this fits nicely with the other clichés about the cultural diversity of the Balkans in general, it is at the same time considered a basic characteristic of the Islamic city (the aforementioned religious and ethnic segregation of the neighborhoods). It is employed in order to underline that this diversity is largely due to Ottoman rule—only then could one speak of not only “ethnic” but also genuine religious diversity and mostly peaceful cohabitation in the “Balkan” cities.

Certainly, studies of Balkan cities were able to point out certain differences between Balkan cities and the ideal type of Islamic cities. This is because the concept is based mostly on the detailed study of several cities in the Arab lands, and as a consequence, all other “Islamic cities” differ to some degree from the ideal model—this is due not only to the important regional differences in the vast world of Islam but also to the individuality of every city. This allowed some scholars to claim that “Balkan cities differ from Muslim cities,” neglecting the simple fact that, to some degree, all cities in the Islamic world differ from one another. They prefer to discuss the differences between “Balkan Muslim cities” and Muslim cities in general, without comparing them to any particular Muslim cities. Actually, some Western scholars also accept the view that most of the Balkan cities under the Ottomans differed from the ideal type of “Muslim city.”²²¹

The difference between the cities in the Balkans and the ideal type of “Islamic city” could be better understood if we take into account the regional differences between cities in the Ottoman Empire. The analysis of vernacular architecture and urban morphology allowed scholars to differentiate between two main groups of cities—those in northwestern Anatolia and in the Balkan provinces versus those in the Arab lands and southeastern Anatolia. According to Pierre Pinon, the boundary between the two types follows the line Antalya-Muğla-Afyon-Ankara-Amasya-Tokat. Cities northwest of this line had a less irregular street network and fewer blind alleys than those in the Arab provinces. Dwelling houses were also different, with premises surrounding a small courtyard in the Arab provinces and a central hall (*sofa* or *hayat*) in the Balkans and northwest Anatolia.²²² The different type of dwelling houses additionally reflects on the city morphology—houses in the Arab provinces often face the street, cities are usually more densely built, and less space is left for greenery. There are also visible differences in the style of the public buildings, including the religious ones.²²³ Given that the boundary between the two types does not coincide with the border between “Europe” and “Asia,” or that between the Balkans and Anatolia, Pierre

²¹⁹ Cvijić, “The Zones of Civilization,” 473.

²²⁰ Gavrilova, *Bulgarian Urban Culture*, 56: “Balkan towns, in their majority, were populated by diverse ethnic groups, several among them non-Muslim.”

²²¹ Hösch, *Geschichte der Balkanländer*, 99: “Nur in Ausnahmefällen bildete sich ein rein muslimischen Stadttyp heraus (so das 1462 gegründete Sarajevo).”

²²² Pierre Pinon, “Les tissus urbains ottomans entre Orient et Occident,” in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Meeting on Modern Ottoman Studies and the Turkish Republic* (Leyden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1989), 17; Pierre Pinon, “Essai de définition morphologique de le ville ottomane des XVIIIe-XIXe siècles,” in *La culture urbaine des Balkans (XVe-XIXe siècle)*, ed. Nikola Tasić (Belgrade: SANU, 1991), 146.

²²³ Pinon, “Essai de définition morphologique de le ville ottomane,” 148.

Pinon proposed the term “Turko-Balkan city” as more appropriate for the urban settlements in the Balkans and in northwestern Anatolia.²²⁴

Not all cities in the Balkans fall into the category “Balkan city” as a specific urban type. It was already mentioned that cities outside the Ottoman Empire are not included in this category, despite being formally located in the peninsula. At a later stage, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a number of cities on the Greek and Adriatic shores and on the islands that were built and fortified in a very different manner (mostly under Venetian rule, some under Genoese rule) fell to the Ottomans but largely preserved their built environment, urban morphology, and appearance. The present-day appearance of the cities in the region also affected the process of outlining the area of distribution of the “Balkan cities.” Of crucial importance here is precisely when the policy of “de-Ottomanization” of the cities started and how radical it was: Ottoman urban culture was almost eradicated in the territories that were first included in the new Greek kingdom (Peloponnese, Central Greece, and many islands) and is most visible in some cities from the territories that remained part of the Ottoman Empire until the Balkan Wars (in the Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Northern Greece, etc., and obviously in Turkey), also because most of the preserved buildings, especially the dwelling houses, date from the nineteenth century. Given the well-known “diversity” of the Balkans, the existence of other city types does not seem to pose a problem for speaking of the “Balkan city” as a specific city type. The real challenge comes from the fact that during the Ottoman period, the cities in the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire shared similarities not only to one another but also with the cities in the Near East, especially those in northwestern Anatolia.

At the same time, cities in Southeastern Anatolia, although inhabited by a mostly Turkish-speaking population, were much closer to what is usually called “Arab(-Islamic) cities” in terms of urban morphology and house types. Concerning the city types not only the Balkans but also Anatolia turn out to be diverse. Therefore it might be misleading to conceive of the Balkans on the one hand, and the Orient or even only Anatolia on the other, as clearly fixed regional units. If we consider among the “Balkan cities” those in Slovenia and Croatia, and among the “Anatolian cities” those in Kurdistan, we easily discover fundamental differences between the two groups. But if we set aside “Balkan cities” like Zagreb and Dubrovnik and “Anatolian cities” like Diyarbakır and Adana and instead compare, for instance, Edirne and Bursa, Salonica and İzmir, or Sofia and Ankara, we can easily discover similarities between them. In some cases the point of observation also plays a role—experts on the Orient and the Ottoman history discover “Islamic,” “Oriental,” “Ottoman” or “Turkish” cities in the Balkans. By contrast, when viewed from the Balkans, then Bursa, for instance, might look like a “city that has typical Balkan characteristics.”²²⁵

In sum, despite certain differences from other “Islamic cities” (especially those in the Arab provinces), the cities in the Balkans during the Ottoman period had much more in common with the other cities in the empire or, more generally, with those in the “Orient.” Indeed, they are also described in a very similar way, although under different names. In referring to “Balkan-Oriental cities,” Bosnian historiography is much closer to the historical reality than those Bulgarian historians who overemphasize the differences between these two types. A source of confusion might be the wider and seemingly neutral usage of the expression “Balkan city” in the sense of “city/-ies in the Balkans.” It does not exclude the presence of different types of cities in the region, but the real danger is that urban studies and studies on urban history become limited within the rigid spatial framework of the “region.” Certain works on Balkan / Southeast European urban history

²²⁴ Pierre Pinon, “The Ottoman Cities of the Balkans,” in *The City in the Islamic World*, vol. 1, eds. Renata Holod, Attilio Petruccioli, and André Raymond (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 146–147; Karl Kaser, “The Urban Space of the Turko-Balkan City,” *Balkanistic Forum* 14, no. 3 (2011): 63–69.

²²⁵ Hüseyin Mevsim, “Bursa—‘Balkanskiyat grad’ v Mala Aziya,” *Balkanistic Forum* 14, no. 3 (2011): 97–104. To explain the similarities, the author points to the large number of settlers from the Balkans.

complain that general works on the urban history of Europe omit the region.²²⁶ It is true that many works on the cities in Europe simply ignore this part of the continent, but the omission is justified—to present the cities in the Balkans would also mean including the whole debate about Oriental/Islamic/Ottoman cities.

Concerning the notion of the “Southeast European city,” it might designate two different things, closely following the two main usages of the term “Southeastern Europe” vis-à-vis the term “Balkans.” In Bulgarian historiography, for instance, the designation “Southeast European city” is a euphonic and more prestigious synonym for the “Balkan city.”²²⁷ For German-speaking academic milieus, the term “Southeast European city” is a way to designate the cities in this region but not a city type. According to Wolfgang Höpken, only in part of the region could one speak of a specific urban type; he refers to the concept of “Balkan city” as such a specific type.²²⁸ From this perspective the “Southeast European city” is not identical to the “Balkan city.” It should be noted that some of the earliest works on “the city in Southeastern Europe” in German are devoted to cities created by German settlers mostly in the lands of the Hungarian crown,²²⁹ that is, to cities of a completely different type located outside the Balkans proper.

The urban network and its center

Cities are not only similar to or different from one another—they are interconnected, they form urban networks, and in order to identify such networks, one needs above all to identify their centers. The task here is rather easy, because from late antiquity until the present day, the biggest center in the Balkans has undoubtedly been Constantinople/Istanbul. It was “the City” not only for Byzantium but also for neighboring medieval states. This domination became even more powerful in the Ottoman period, when the whole peninsula was included in one single empire and the city became its capital. All other urban settlements were small local centers overshadowed by this megacenter. Until the nineteenth century, even towns in otherwise autonomous Wallachia and Moldavia were politically, culturally, and commercially oriented toward Constantinople.²³⁰ Likewise, for all these centuries, Constantinople has been and still is the biggest center for Anatolia. The very location of the megapolis is one of the reasons for examining the Balkan and Anatolian urban settlements together as part of a common “Balkan-Anatolian urban network.”²³¹

For the Byzantines, Constantinople was more than a capital city—to a large extent, the state was identified with it. Foreign observers and later historians shared the same view, and the old name of the city even started to be used in historiography to refer to the empire as a whole. Later, the Ottomans inherited the perception of Constantinople as a unique and unrivaled center, and from this point of view, the “European” provinces were not considered superior to the “Asian” ones. Let us take just one example: exiles. Convicted leaders of the Bulgarian national movement from

²²⁶ Grothusen, “Städtewesen und nationale Emanzipation,” 73; Klaus Roth, “Bürgertum und bürgerliche Kultur in Südosteuropa. Ein Beitrag zur Modernisierungsdiskussion,” in *Soll und Haben. Alltag und Lebensformen bürgerlicher Kultur*, ed. Ueli Gyr (Zürich: Officin, 1995), 245.

²²⁷ See, for instance, the above-quoted volume *Yugoiztochnoevropeyskiyat grad i sãvremennostta na minaloto*; the first part of the book is called “The Cultural Context of the Balkan City.”

²²⁸ Wolfgang Höpken, “Die ‘südosteuropäische Stadt,’” in *Urbanisierung und Stadtentwicklung in Südosteuropa vom 19. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert (Südosteuropa-Jahrbuch*, vol. 37), eds. Thomas M. Bohn and Marie-Janine Calic (Munich and Berlin: Otto Sagner, 2010), 67.

²²⁹ Konrad Schünemann, *Die Entstehung des Städtewesens in Südosteuropa* (Breslau u. Oppeln: Priebatsch [1929]); Walter Hildebrandt, “Die Stadt in Südosteuropa,” *Leipziger Vierteljahrsschrift für Südosteuropa* 3 (1939): 153–177; Klaus-Detlev Grothusen, *Entstehung und Geschichte Zagrebs bis zum Ausgang des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967).

²³⁰ Simion Câlția, “Fenomenul urban în Țara Românească și Moldova în secolele 16–18,” *Studii și articole de istorie* 68 (2003): 69.

²³¹ Maurice Cerasi, “Il sistema urbano diffuso: la rete urbana anatolico-balcanica nei secoli XVIII-XIX,” *Storia urbana* 30 (1985): 19–61.

the second half of the nineteenth century were usually exiled to the city of Diyarbekir/Diyarbakır in Southeastern Anatolia. Thus Bulgarian historiography started to perceive Diyarbekir as a kind of “Ottoman Siberia.” At the same time, Ottoman archives provide evidence that many people were exiled into cities in the “European provinces.” Researching the city of Sofia, I found dozens of such cases from the first half of the nineteenth century.²³² Another interesting case was the story of a graduate of the Military Medical High School named Dimitraki, who in 1862 refused to comply with his appointment as pharmacist in Sofia and preferred to stay in the capital.²³³ At first glance, this reaction might seem hard to explain—Dimitraki was appointed in the “European” part of the empire, while some of his colleagues were sent to places as remote as Yemen. Still, seen from Constantinople, the interior of the Balkans was a faraway province hardly better than many others.

In addition, until the nineteenth century, when the capitals of the new Balkan states were established, there were no big cities in the Balkans and Anatolia that could be regarded as centers of a separate and relatively independent urban network. The biggest cities until the nineteenth century—Adrianople/Edirne and Bursa, the former capitals of the Ottoman state—were both too closely located to Constantinople and thus could not play a role on their own in a larger area. In the nineteenth century they were surpassed by Salonica and Izmir, both of which were port cities benefiting from commercial growth due to steam navigation and the liberalization of foreign trade. Neither the former capitals of the medieval Balkan states (such as Târnovo, Skopje, and Vidin) nor Konya, the capital of the Sultanate of Rum in Anatolia, were anything more than local centers in the Ottoman period. By contrast, in the Arab provinces there were important cities such as Damascus (together with Aleppo) and Cairo, which could be regarded as metropolises of the respective areas. Thus we can outline the zone of direct domination of Constantinople not only as a political capital of the empire but also as the main urban center in economic and social terms for the Balkans and Anatolia.

There is an established tradition of presenting Constantinople/Istanbul as city “between East and West,” as a “crossroads” or “intersection” of different cultures and civilizations.²³⁴ These widely used clichés reveal the perception that there were two separate types of cultures—Christian and European on one side (and Balkan as part of it), Islamic and Oriental on the other. The question is how these cultures remained separate for centuries and only “intersected” in the imperial capital. This perspective makes it seem as if the biggest city in the region was not a center in its own right, even for the territories it directly dominated. Even more unsound are the otherwise pleasant-sounding comments about Istanbul as a “city on two continents”—this is as formally true and practically meaningless as the statement that London straddles both of the earth’s hemispheres.

Similarly, Stevan K. Pavlowitch wrote that “the Balkans have had three great eccentric capitals: Constantinople, Vienna and Paris.... Constantinople on the very edge of the Balkans was the seat of the Ottoman Porte.”²³⁵ Leaving aside Vienna and Paris, what does it mean for an urban network to have its center “on the very edge”? And if we do examine Vienna, is it not more productive to try to analyze two separate networks—one centered on Istanbul and another one on Vienna (plus Budapest since the nineteenth century)? Istanbul was not “on the very edge” of the Balkans but in the very center of the Balkan-Anatolian urban network. There are no urban networks with several “eccentric” capitals nor urban cultures without their own big centers. Similarly, in an article mentioned above, Wendy Bracewell and Alexander Drace-Francis mention that “...for the most of the last two thousand years it [Southeastern Europe] has been ruled from outside or from its

²³² Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), C.ZB, 39/1926; BOA, HAT, 516/25221; BOA, C.ZB, 67/3317; BOA, HAT, 416/21517; BOA, C.ZB, 32/1580, etc.

²³³ BOA, A.MKT.NZD, 283/23.

²³⁴ *Istanbul à la jonction des cultures balkaniques, méditerranéennes, slaves et orientales aux XVI-XIXe s.* (Bucharest: AIESEE, 1977).

²³⁵ Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans*, 332.

margin...”²³⁶ Obviously, rule “from its margin” here refers to the administration of the Byzantine emperors and Ottoman sultans in Constantinople. What is problematic here is the vantage point—both politically and culturally, the Balkans were part of the vast periphery of the capital, not the other way round.

It is also disputable to what extent cities in Anatolia and in the Balkans can be perceived as part of two different urban networks “separated by water.” In physical geography water “separates” continents and islands, but this is not necessarily true of human geography. Connections by sea were very important not only in ancient times but also later for Byzantine cities, as most of the major ones were port cities, while connections by land remained rather poor.²³⁷ Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, steam navigation gave port cities unprecedented advantages. Works on the Balkans usually focus on land routes, often underlining how difficult they were due to the rugged terrain; they mention boating on the Danube but often ignore sea routes.²³⁸ This is understandable—Balkan studies is interested in roads “in the Balkans,” while sea routes not only do not leave recognizable physical traces but are formally located outside the Balkan peninsula. Ignoring sea routes means also ignoring the most important connections for the Balkans both with the West and the Near East, as well as between the port cities in the region.

It could be argued that Constantinople was built, and its center still located, on the “European” side of the Bosphorus, but this has nothing to do with the continental division between “Europe” and “Asia.” The city of Byzantium was sited (around 660 BCE) on this particular side in order to benefit from the convenient natural harbor of the Golden Horn. The city was located not so much with regard to the landmass as with regard to the sea.

Present-day Istanbul is effectively divided by the Bosphorus into “European” and “Asian” parts. For city life the strait of the Bosphorus is an important divide and has major practical implications—the construction of the bridges over it (completed in 1973, 1988, and 2016) and then of a tunnel under it (completed in 2013) are among the most important infrastructural projects not only for the city but for all of Turkey. Still, at the level of the urban network of Turkey as a whole, the Bosphorus has not made transport connections with Anatolia substantially more difficult than those with the Balkans. As a result, Istanbul remained by far the largest city in the Republic of Turkey despite being cut from almost all of its Balkan hinterland.

At the level of the city itself, the question about its “European part” is expressed differently. In the late Middle Ages the city had a “European” neighborhood: Galata, where the Genoese, and later other settlers from Western Europe, lived from the last centuries of Byzantium onwards. Later, this part started to be considered “European,” in contrast to the rest of the city where the local people (Moslems/Turks, Orthodox/Greeks, Armenians, and Jews) lived, independently of the fact that in all cases, the neighborhoods were on the “European” side of the Bosphorus.

The debate over the pre-Ottoman heritage

A key argument for presenting cities in the Balkans from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century as different from other “Islamic”/“Oriental”/“Ottoman” cities is their long pre-Ottoman history, starting in ancient times with the ancient Greek cities (some add the Thracian and Illyrian “cities”), later the Roman and finally the Byzantine and other medieval cities. Various Balkan scholars insist on the continuity of this rich heritage, which formed the basis of urban life under the Ottomans. It is claimed that the Ottomans inherited “a fully developed urban network” and that

²³⁶ Bracewell and Drace-Francis, “South-Eastern Europe: History, Concepts, Boundaries,” 61.

²³⁷ Charalambos Bouras, “Aspects of the Byzantine City: Eighth–Fifteenth Centuries,” in *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 504; Cf. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, 4: “For territories near the water, communications by sea were more important than by land... most of the largest Balkan cities in the Middle Ages were seaports.”

²³⁸ Kaser, *Südosteuropäische Geschichte*, 2nd ed. (2002), 36–39.

there were no profound changes in the urban structure of the existing cities. Everything valuable built under the Ottomans is now attributed to the local people. Even for the few mosques that were preserved and recognized as “historical” and/or “architectural” monuments, it is claimed that the local Christians constructed them for their Muslim masters.²³⁹ In other cases it is claimed that the mosques were built in a specific original style different from the Ottoman one: an Albanian book from the late communist period insists that the Great Mosque in Tirana did not have a typical Ottoman appearance.²⁴⁰ Official historiography in communist countries had one more argument, which some later works repeated: both pre-Ottoman and Ottoman cities were “feudal,” and therefore there could not be any profound change from one urban type to another.²⁴¹ On the whole, Balkan cities from the fifteenth century onwards were Byzantine cities modified by Oriental influences.²⁴²

The first major problem is that this picture has almost nothing to do with the conclusions of the studies on late Byzantine cities, which highlight (and often exaggerate) not only the destruction following the Ottoman invasion but also the agony of urban life in Byzantium during the preceding centuries. As a consequence, in one collection of essays, the articles on the medieval period asserted that Byzantine cities declined long before Ottoman rule, while in the same volume the contributions on the cities under the Ottomans stated that the traditions of Byzantine urban life were particularly viable and survived the Ottoman conquest.²⁴³

One must take into account the conflicting interpretations about the consequences of the Ottoman conquest itself. In Balkan historiographies the effects of the conquest are presented according to two main explanatory models. The first one, which appeared earlier and is much more common, insists on the catastrophic consequences of the Ottoman invasion, which led to a collapse of the whole medieval civilization in the area and largely to the physical destruction of the medieval cities and the extermination or flight of the urban population, especially of the local elites. From this perspective the medieval urban heritage survived only in rare cases and is represented by some more solid buildings, mainly churches, as well as certain fortresses; some of its remnants are rediscovered during archaeological excavations. The second explanatory model appeared more recently and is actually an attempt to explain why the Ottoman Empire featured a prosperous and relatively sophisticated urban life. Turkish historiography explained this phenomenon as a result of the settlement of new urban dwellers and the beneficial policies of the Ottoman state and its elite. In response, some Balkan historians started to stress the continuity of urban life from the Middle Ages into the Ottoman period, thus leaving little room to import a new “Oriental” urban culture. In summary, the two explanatory models often coexist in contemporary Balkan historiographies: the catastrophic theory explains why the remnants of pre-Ottoman cities are usually unimpressive and few in number, while the continuity theory makes it possible to appropriate the achievements of Ottoman urban culture as part of the respective national (or in some cases “common Balkan”) heritage.

Sources on Byzantine cities are not only much more scanty but also of a different nature, and that makes comparisons very difficult and their conclusions uncertain. While Ottoman studies

²³⁹ Harbova, *Gradoustroystvo i arhitektura po bălgarskite zemi prez XV-XVIII vek*, 52 and 102.

²⁴⁰ Koço Miho, *Trajta të profilit urbanistik të qytetit të Tiranës* (Tirana: 8 Nentori, 1987), 108.

²⁴¹ Todorov, *The Balkan City*, 79ff; Dimitrov, “Za priemstvenostta v razvitiето na balkanskite gradove,” 7–8, 16; Maria Todorova, “The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans,” in *The Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, ed. Carl L. Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 60: “Although urban life in the Balkans had an uninterrupted tradition, it never acquired the autonomous role it had in the West, with a strong independent commercial and industrial class. The Balkan city was incorporated in the Ottoman system as a completely constructed feudal category and was entirely subordinated to the state”; see also Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 173.

²⁴² Gavrilova, *Bulgarian Urban Culture*, 24: “Balkan cities, molded by the Byzantinism and retaining many features of Byzantine cities... now faced new and no less strong or influential oriental tradition.”

²⁴³ *Die Stadt in Südosteuropa—Struktur und Geschichte*, ed. Walter Althammer (Munich: Südosteuropa Gesellschaft, 1968). Compare p. 33 and especially p. 41 to p. 102 and p. 129.

rely mainly on various tax and population registers, court proceedings, and city plans (for later periods), the Byzantine cities are studied mostly on the basis of archaeological excavations and the careful analysis of scattered notes in hagiography, chronicles, and other narrative sources.²⁴⁴ In some cases, Ottoman archival sources are even used in the attempts to reconstruct the administrative organization and urban life in medieval pre-Ottoman cities,²⁴⁵ implicitly assuming that these did not change substantially with the Ottoman conquest.

Those referring to the Byzantine heritage of the Ottoman cities in the Balkans actually take as their starting point the Ottoman city and “discover” the Byzantine roots of its traits. Thus some scholars insist that the Byzantine city was divided into residential neighborhoods just like the Ottoman city was divided into *mahalles*, that there were guild organizations just like the later *esnafs*, and so on.²⁴⁶ At the same time, works that constantly speak of “continuity” simply ignore other problems that take center stage in studies on late Byzantine cities, like the general transformation of the urban network into a network of fortified places in the sixth and seventh centuries (they were even called by a different name—*kastron*, from the Latin *castrum*—thus underlining their primarily military functions),²⁴⁷ the nature and extent of the urban revival in the tenth and eleventh centuries and the stagnation that followed,²⁴⁸ or the spatial separation in many cases of the town from the administrative and military stronghold.²⁴⁹ It is forgotten that, unlike in Islamic and Ottoman cities, in Byzantine cities the market did not play a central role.²⁵⁰ Even features of Byzantine cities like narrow and irregular streets or the burials within the cities²⁵¹ that could serve as evidence of continuity are not mentioned, because they contradict the myth of the illustrious Byzantino-Slavic medieval urban civilization. Instead, there are more general comments about continuities in “building techniques,” “architectural style,” and “urban layout.”

At least one of the elements of the “continuity” actually upends the whole argument: it is often stressed that both Byzantine and Ottoman cities were not independent bodies but were fully subordinated to the central power.²⁵² This statement could also be regarded as an implicit reaction to the widely known comment that Islamic/Oriental cities lacked municipal traditions—it turns out that this feature of the cities in the region was not something introduced by the Ottoman invasions but was a pre-existing reality in the Balkans. The problem in this case is that one would expect a full-scale transformation of urban life following political change on the macro level.

While the first question is to what extent one could speak of the continuity of urban development from the pre-Ottoman to the Ottoman period, the second and even more important problem is the spatial distribution of the medieval heritage. Works in the field of Balkan studies invariably limit their focus to the Balkans, and continuity from Byzantine times is sought and “discovered” only in the cities in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire, that is, in the Balkan cities. For example, at one of the conferences about the Balkan cities (Venice, 1971), the sole Turkish participant (Gönül Tankut), who made a presentation on the urban structure of the

²⁴⁴ Bouras, “Aspects of the Byzantine City,” 498–500.

²⁴⁵ Dmitriy I. Polivyanni, *Srednovekovniyat bălgarski grad prez XIII-XIV vek. Ochertsi* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1989), 18. In this case the term “medieval Balkan city” is a collective noun designating Byzantine, Bulgarian, and Serbian cities in the region (*ibid.*, 164ff.).

²⁴⁶ Dimitrov, “Za priemstvenostta v razvitiето na balkanskite gradove,” 8 ff.

²⁴⁷ Wolfram Brandes, *Die Städte Kleinasien im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989).

²⁴⁸ Klaus-Peter Matschke, “Grundzüge des byzantinischen Städtewesens vom 11. bis 15. Jahrhundert,” in *Die byzantinische Stadt im Rahmen der allgemeinen Stadtentwicklung*, ed. Klaus-Peter Matschke (Leipzig: Leipziger Univ.-Verl., 1995), 34–35, 60.

²⁴⁹ Hans-Wilhelm Haussig, “Die byzantinische Stadt,” In *Die Stadt in Südosteuropa*, 37: “Trennung von Stadt und administrativem und militärischem Stützpunkt”; Matschke, “Grundzüge des byzantinischen Städtewesens,” 30.

²⁵⁰ Matschke, “Grundzüge des byzantinischen Städtewesens,” 39–40.

²⁵¹ Bouras, “Aspects of the Byzantine City,” 508 (“streets were narrow, seldom straight, and of variable width; sometimes they were blind alleys”), 527 (“Little by little, burial grounds came to be inside the walls of cities, in a departure from the practices of antiquity”).

²⁵² See footnote 241.

Ottoman cities, was criticized on the grounds that, concerning the Balkan territories, “she paid almost no attention to the foundations on which they [the Ottoman cities] arose; that is, she forgot the Byzantine, the Bulgarian, and so on medieval city.”²⁵³ It is easy to imagine a Turkish scholar forgetting or at least minimizing the Byzantine heritage when talking about Ottoman cities. No less problematic is the reaction of her critics who see this heritage only in the Balkan territories. Similarly, urban heritage from ancient times is often seen only within the limits of “Europe.”²⁵⁴

Pierre Pinon holds that precisely the Byzantine heritage was the basis of the differences dividing the Ottoman cities in the Balkans and northwestern Anatolia from those in the Arab provinces. In his opinion, all these cities (aside from the newly created ones) were not “Ottoman” but “Ottomanized.”²⁵⁵ In other cases, the continuity from late Byzantine to Ottoman cities was also demonstrated in the case of cities in Eastern Anatolia like Trebizond/Trabzon.²⁵⁶ Many Balkanists have argued that the most important cities in the Balkans already existed before Ottoman rule, but the same is also widely accepted for cities in Anatolia.²⁵⁷ More generally, urban development always shows continuity, and all “Islamic” cities had a great deal in common with pre-Islamic ones, which, as mentioned, led Eugen Wirth (who was not discussing the Balkans specifically) to defend the use of the more general term “Oriental cities.”

At the same time, in both the Balkans and Anatolia, many new towns were founded or emerged during the Ottoman period—often near the main roads, on the basis of rich religious foundations (*vakıf*), but also as administrative and market centers. These newly founded cities were usually smaller, but there were many of them. According to Guncho Gunchev, a specialist in human geography who worked in the late interwar period, among the cities in Bulgaria whose creation could be dated, twenty-nine existed before the Ottoman conquest, and fifty-three arose under Ottoman rule.²⁵⁸ It should be added that the existing cities underwent varying degrees of reconstruction, which often completely transformed their appearance.²⁵⁹ For instance, in Sofia the relics of ancient and medieval times were rediscovered by scholars only during the nineteenth and especially the twentieth century, but Paul Ricaut, who passed through the city in the seventeenth century, described it as “a place so wholly Turkish, that there is nothing in it that appears more antique than the Turks themselves.”²⁶⁰ Still, when writing about Sofia during the Ottoman period, Bulgarian historians emphasized the continuity from the medieval period.²⁶¹

In addition, it must be stressed that there were considerable differences from one place to another, and even within a relatively small territory, one could find cities with very different urban structures and appearances.²⁶² The profile of the individual cities does not always correspond to the

²⁵³ Tăpkova-Zaimova and Traikov, “Mezhdunaroden colloquium vāv Venetzia,” 160.

²⁵⁴ See the comment of Bogdan Bogdanov in “Table ronde: Les Balkans—traditions et changements. Crise des identités et communications interculturelles,” 208: “Il y a des siècles, quand les Romains dispersaient la civilisation romane, ils avaient parsemé l’Europe de villes étonnamment pareilles.”

²⁵⁵ Pinon, “Essai de définition,” 144, 147.

²⁵⁶ Anthony Bryer, “The Structure of the Late Byzantine Town: *Dioikismos* and the *Mesoi*,” in *Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society*, eds. Anthony Bryer and Heath Lowry (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1986), 263–279.

²⁵⁷ Friedrich-Karl Kienitz, *Städte unter dem Halbmond. Geschichte und Kultur der Städte in Anatolien und auf dem Balkanhalbinsel im Zeitalter der Sultanen 1071–1922* (Munich: Beck, 1972), 223. Concerning the cities under the Seldjuks, see “Aber diese Städte Anatoliens waren nur in seltenen Ausnahmefällen türkische Neugründungen.”

²⁵⁸ Guncho Gunchev, “Bălgarskite selishta,” *Arhiv za poselishtni prouchvaniya* 2, nos. 3–4 (1941): 273.

²⁵⁹ Kiel, “Urban Development in Bulgaria in the Turkish Period,” 83ff.

²⁶⁰ Paul Ricaut, *The History of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire*, 3rd ed. (London: Charles Brome, 1686), 397.

²⁶¹ Kozhuharov, “Arhitectura i stroitelstvo prez Văzrazhdaneto,” 121 ff.; Svetlana Ivanova, “Sofia,” in *Encyclopédie de l’Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 732.

²⁶² Grigor Boykov, “Balkan City or Ottoman City? A Study on the Models of Urban Development in Ottoman Upper Thrace, from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century,” in *Proceedings of the Third International Congress on the Islamic Civilisation in the Balkans 1–5 November 2006, Bucharest, Romania* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 2010), 69–85; Phokion Kotzageorgis, “New Towns and Old Towns in the Ottoman Balkans: Two Case Studies from Northern

general trends at the macro-regional level—just as there are cities with visible traces from the Byzantine period in Eastern Anatolia (Trebizond), there are also cities founded by the Ottomans in the Western Balkans (Sarajevo). From this perspective it is equally problematic that in Balkan studies, the Byzantine legacy is usually regarded as characteristic for all cities in the Balkans.

The cities in the age of reforms in the Ottoman Empire

National historiographies in the Balkan countries present the urban modernization of the nineteenth and early twentieth century as a re-Europeanization after “centuries of foreign rule.” Two explanatory models are used. First, urban modernization is presented as a result of the establishment of the respective national state and its policy of modernization and Europeanization of the cities. The largest number of works deal with the capitals of the newly established states, where the changes were most substantial. This approach is clearly visible in all historiographies in the region, and even in the Bosnian case, most scholars insist that urban modernization took place under Habsburg administration (1878–1918), although they are usually very critical of Habsburg rule.

In addition, some historiographies present urban modernization in the late Ottoman period as a result of the “national revival” (Bulgaria, Albania), that is, during the last decades or even the last century under Ottoman rule. This is regarded as a process that developed within the respective national community and not as an outcome of the policies of the Ottoman state. Ziya Shkodra even insists that the renewal of Albanian cities happened despite the resistance of the authorities.²⁶³ In the study quoted above, Raina Gavrilova seconded the opinion that Oriental urban life was “slow to change” but added: “Of course, that was not exactly the case in the Balkans, especially in the post-eighteenth century period.”²⁶⁴ This remark illustrates, in at least two respects, the way the urban history of the country and region is usually interpreted in Bulgarian historiography. First, “changes” are seen only in the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Second, it is believed that the process started in the eighteenth century, because the modernization of “Bulgarian cities” is regarded as a result of the “Bulgarian Revival,” and the widely accepted (although debatable) view that it started at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

In both cases (during the “national revival” and after the “liberation”), the process of urban modernization is perceived as a transformation from “Ottoman” to “national/European” cities.²⁶⁵ In both cases, national historiographies in the Balkans examine nineteenth-century urban modernization in connection with the modernization processes in their own community. This is contrasted with the image of an “unchanging Orient” where cities, like everything else, remained frozen in time. Balkan historians focus on the impact of the newly established national state and the innovative trends in their own community but most often neglect the policy of urban modernization launched by the Ottoman authorities during the Tanzimat in the nineteenth century.²⁶⁶

First of all, reform policies in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire were first and most distinctly felt in the cities, due to their role as administrative centers. At that time new institutions of

Greece,” in *Festschrift in Honor of Ioannis P. Theodorides*, vol. 2, *Studies on the Ottoman Empire and Turkey*, eds. Evangelia Balta, Georgios Salakidis, and Theoharis Stavrides (Istanbul: ISIS [2014]), 273–291.

²⁶³ Ziya Shkodra, *Qyteti shqiptar gjatë Rilindjes Kombëtare* (Tirana: Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, 1984), 350.

²⁶⁴ Gavrilova, *Bulgarian Urban Culture*, 75.

²⁶⁵ Georges Castellan, “Les fonctions culturelles de la ville du Sud-Est européen XVIIIe-XXe siècle,” *Etudes balkaniques* 17, no. 4 (1980): 39: “L’évolution des fonctions culturelles de la ville balkanique s’inscrit dans une dialectique ville ottomane—ville nationale, mais avec une connotation spécifique de ‘ville nationale européenne.’ Car la pénétration des techniques, des marchandises et des idées de l’Occident a sculpté sa physionomie à l’époque récente.”

²⁶⁶ Paul Dumont and François Georgeon, eds. *Villes ottomanes à la fin de l’Empire* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992); Jean-Luc Arnaud, “Tradition and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century: Modernization of the Cities of the Ottoman Empire (1800–1920),” in *The City in the Islamic World*, vol. 2, 953–975.

local and urban administration were created based on a standardized model. Moreover, within the reformed administration, new city councils (*belediye*) were created to deal with urban affairs and public utilities.²⁶⁷ The modernized administration launched a new type of urban policy. What was recommended and, in part, implemented included the enlargement and pavement of the existing main streets, the creation of a street grid when possible (usually after fires), new buildings of brick and stone instead of flammable and non-durable materials, the construction of modern infrastructure (primarily street lighting), and the construction of large and imposing public buildings (town halls, military barracks, schools, hospitals, post offices, prisons) and big public spaces (parks, squares).²⁶⁸ Obviously these policies could not produce immediate results everywhere—the measures for modernizing the provincial cities started mainly in the 1860s and achieved more visible results at the time of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876–1909). In the long term, urban modernization under the late Ottoman administration was overshadowed by the more radical measures implemented in subsequent decades in the new national states, including Turkey. Still, compared with other cases, Ottoman cities' appearance and urban structure changed very rapidly, due to the limited number of solid constructions. The geographer Anastas Ishirkov noted the paradox that cities of “Oriental type” were much more readily transformed into modern cities than the cities of “Mediterranean type.”²⁶⁹ Thus one of the main disadvantages of the Ottoman cities—the poorly built houses—in practice facilitated the implementation of modernizing projects. Again, it must be emphasized that in the end, this full-scale modernization deprived the cities of most of their legacy in terms of the built environment.

Most of the historians in the Balkan countries underestimated or ignored the policy of urban modernization launched by the Ottoman authorities during the nineteenth-century reforms.²⁷⁰ Even studies that take this policy into account could still present everything in a “Balkan” context. For instance, in her book *Urban Transformation in the Balkans (1820–1920)*, Alexandra Yerolympos first presents the plan for modernization of the new Balkan states and only then presents urban modernization in the Ottoman Empire. To a certain extent this approach is justified, because political measures for urban modernization in Greece and the Danubian principalities preceded those in the Ottoman Empire; they were also more radical and more widely implemented. But Alexandra Yerolympos presents the plan for the modernization of Skopje and the policy of urban modernization in Bulgaria, and only after that the same process in the Ottoman Empire, even if in the cases of Bulgaria, Macedonia, and even Northern Greece, urban modernization started under Ottoman rule.²⁷¹ The book considers only cities in the Balkans: it pays special attention to Salonica/Thessaloniki and Adrianople/Edirne but not to Smyrna/Izmir or Trebizond/Trabzon.

In fact, the nineteenth-century reforms led to a further unification of the institutions in Ottoman provinces, and for this reason, most changes went in parallel for all Ottoman cities. This is especially true of the measures to modernize local administration (including the construction of the most important public buildings) and the security measures (telegraph, street lighting, public sanitation), which were implemented roughly at the same time in all administrative centers. Given the crucial role that enterprising provincial governors played in city modernization,²⁷² it must be emphasized that most of these governors served at various places in both the “European” and “non-

²⁶⁷ İlber Ortaylı, *Tanzimattan sonra mahalli idareler (1840–1878)* (Ankara: TTK, 2000; 1st ed., 1974), 119 ff. Citations are to the 2000 edition.

²⁶⁸ Stéphane Yerasimos, “A propos des réformes urbaines des Tanzimat,” in *Villes ottomanes à la fin de l'Empire*, 17–32.

²⁶⁹ Ishirkov, “Harakterni cherti na gradovete v Tsarstvo Bălgaria,” 13.

²⁷⁰ E.g., Höpken, “Die ‘südosteuropäische Stadt,’” 70; Dobrinka Parusheva, “Balkanski granitsi: prostanstvo za istoriyata,” in *Dvuvkovniyat път na edno ponyatie. “Balkanskiyat poluostrov” (1808–2008)*, 125.

²⁷¹ Alexandra Yerolympos, *Urban Transformation in the Balkans (1820–1920): Aspects of Balkan Town Planning and the Remaking of Thessaloniki* (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 1996), 44, 45, and 50.

²⁷² François Georgeon, “Du poil de chèvre au kalpak: l'évolution d'Ankara au dernier siècle de l'Empire ottoman,” in *Villes ottomanes à la fin de l'Empire*, 125.

European” provinces of the Empire. For example, Midhat Pasha, the first governor of the Danube Vilayet (1864–1868), who is often praised for modernizing its center, Rustchuk/Ruse, as well as, to a lesser extent, many other towns in the province, subsequently implemented similar reforms in Baghdad, later in Damascus, and also, for a shorter time, in Izmir.²⁷³ Moreover, eight out of twelve governors of the Danube Vilayet were also governors in Izmir (the center of the vilayet of Aydın).²⁷⁴ Literally all changes in nineteenth-century “Balkan cities” are also well attested in cities in Anatolia and the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire.²⁷⁵

Concerning the modernization of urban life within the Ottoman Empire, official historiography under the communist regime presented “the development of capitalist relations” before the creation of the respective national state as an achievement of their own bourgeoisie. Indeed, in some cases it was explicitly pointed out that there were no such developments among Muslims.²⁷⁶ Still, it is a legitimate question to what extent the religious and ethnic composition of a city had an impact on its modernization. It is often believed that a Christian majority in a city’s population was a factor encouraging urban changes, but even in this case, not all of these cities were necessarily located in the European provinces of the empire: during the late Ottoman period Beirut (whose population was predominantly Christian) was visibly more Europeanized than Salonica, which looked rather like a “typical Turkish town.”²⁷⁷ The image of the “conquering Balkan Orthodox merchant” (to use Traian Stoianovich’s expression), at the same time, downplays evidence of the involvement of Moslems in trade, as well as, to a certain extent, the presence of Christians in Anatolia and the Near East. In fact, the most important role was played by the presence of large colonies of foreigners, which was visible in big port cities like Izmir as well as in the Ottoman capital, Constantinople.

Certainly there were considerable differences among the individual cities in the modernization and Europeanization process. The capital and the major and fastest-growing cities developed the most; main administrative centers were certainly privileged. In some cases innovative measures were applied only to parts of the cities, such as the city center (in some case a new administrative center emerged) and more dynamic areas inhabited by foreigners and Levantines, such as Beyoğlu and Galata (the “Sixth District”) in Constantinople. In some regards, cities in Anatolia and the Arab provinces lagged behind cities of similar size and importance in the Balkans, but it was not a general rule, and there was no considerable gap between the “cities in the European provinces” and those in the other provinces. Concerning the settlement network, the European provinces on the whole had a higher percentage of urban population (and were also more densely populated on average), but there were also considerable regional differences.²⁷⁸ For instance, Serbia, one of the first provinces in the European part of the empire to secede and become a separate state, had a very low level of urbanization, which grew rather slowly and remained below the average for the Ottoman Empire as a whole, as well as the other Balkan countries, with the

²⁷³ *Uluslararası Midhat Paşa Semineri: bildiriler ve tartışmalar, Edirne, 8–10 Mayıs 1984* (Ankara: TTK, 1986).

²⁷⁴ Hans-Jürgen Kornrumpf, *Die Territorialverwaltung im ostlichen teil der europäischen Türkei vom Erlass der Vilayetsordnung (1864) bis zum Berliner Kongress (1878)* (Freiburg: Schwarz, 1976).

²⁷⁵ Aktüre, *19. yüzyıl sonunda Anadolu kenti*; Çadırcı, *Tanzimat döneminde Anadolu kentlerinin sosyal ve ekonomik yapıları*; Béatrice Saint-Laurent, “Un amateur de théâtre: Ahmed Vefik Pacha et le remodelage de Bursa dans le dernier tiers du XIX siècle,” in *Villes ottomanes à la fin de l’Empire*, 95–114; Mahmoud Yazbak, *Haifa in the Late Ottoman Period, 1864–1914: A Muslim Town in Transition* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005); Sibel Zandi-Sayek, *Ottoman Izmir: The Rise of a Cosmopolitan Port, 1840–1880* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

²⁷⁶ Nikolai Todorov, “Social Structures in the Balkans during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Etudes balkaniques* 22, no. 4 (1985): 57–58.

²⁷⁷ Paul Dumont, “Salonica and Beirut: The Reshaping of Two Ottoman Cities of the Eastern Mediterranean,” in *Ottoman Legacies in the Contemporary Mediterranean: The Balkans and the Middle East Compared*, 195.

²⁷⁸ Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 781.

exception of Montenegro.²⁷⁹ In practical terms, it was not the cities in the Balkan provinces but port cities that were “closer” to Europe,²⁸⁰ because steam navigation in the nineteenth century made transport by water faster and more convenient than ever before; only by the end of the century did railways appear as an alternative. On the macro level, the geography of urban modernization in the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century does not coincide with the divide between cities in the “European” and the “non-European” provinces but mostly between port cities and cities in the interior.

Cities in the national states

The creation of the individual national states in the region had a considerable impact on urban development in many regards. Before briefly addressing them, it must be emphasized that the national framework also profoundly shaped studies on the topic, which, despite all attempts to outline general trends and similar characteristics, usually examine the process on a national scale in one specific country. That also results in part from the nature of the available statistical data, which is collected and processed by statistical authorities on a national level and is not always comparable with data from neighboring countries.²⁸¹ It must be added that the attempts to present a general overview of urban and regional processes in the region often ignore Turkey. Just as the general works on Balkan history do not include Turkey after World War I, books devoted to the capitals in the region do not cover Ankara.²⁸²

In the newly established Balkan states, the process of “de-Ottomanization” increased speed in several regards. The intentional destruction of mosques and other buildings typical of “Turkish” rule was the most visible phenomenon.²⁸³ More generally, urban modernization and Europeanization were directly related to a brutal transformation of the existing urban fabric, which, intentionally or unintentionally, also turned into a process of de-Ottomanization; this massive destruction of the Ottoman urban legacy was a general trend that also took place in Turkey. The phenomenon was most pronounced in rapidly developing cities, especially in the new capitals. Even in Sarajevo—a city founded by the Ottomans and inhabited predominantly by Muslims, where the Ottoman legacy is consciously preserved—the architectural heritage of four decades of Habsburg administration is no less visible than the heritage left after four centuries of Ottoman rule.²⁸⁴ The exodus of the majority of the Muslims and especially of their elites led to a collapse of Ottoman urban culture in most of the newly established states. By contrast, the proportion of people from the

²⁷⁹ The urban population in Serbia was only 6.5 percent in 1834, 8 percent in 1859, 9.5 percent in 1866, 10.2 percent in 1874, and 12 percent in 1884. It reached 14 percent in 1900 and did not change significantly until the Balkan Wars. Lampe and Jackson, *Balkan Economic History*, 117–118, 240; Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo*, 224.

²⁸⁰ *Port-Cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, 1800–1914*, eds. Ç. Keyder, Y.E. Özveren, and D. Quataert, *Review* 16, no. 4 (1993).

²⁸¹ In more detail: Alexander Vezhenkov, “Urbanizarea și rețeaua urbană în Sud-Estul Europei,” in *Exerciții în cunoaștere. Societate și mentalități în noi abordări istoriografice*, eds. Mirela-Luminița Murgescu and Simion Câlția (Iași: Dominor, 2003), 111–131.

²⁸² Harald Heppner, ed., *Hauptstädte in Südosteuropa: Geschichte, Funktion, nationale Symbolkraft* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1994); Harald Heppner, ed., *Hauptstädte zwischen Save, Bosporus und Dnjepr: Geschichte—Funktion—nationale Symbolkraft* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1998); Marco Dogo and Armando Pitassio, eds., *Città dei Balcani, città d'Europa. Studi sullo sviluppo urbano delle capitali post-ottomane, 1830–1923* (Lecce: Argo 2008).

²⁸³ Bernard Lory, *Le sort de l'héritage ottoman en Bulgarie. L'exemple des villes bulgares 1878–1900* (Istanbul: ISIS, 1985); Yorgos Koumaridis, “Urban Transformation and De-Ottomanisation in Greece,” *East Central Europe / L'Europe du Centre-Est* 33, nos. 1–2 (2006): 213–241; Maximilian Hartmuth, “Negotiating Tradition and Ambition: Comparative Perspective on the ‘De-Ottomanization’ of the Balkan Cityscapes,” *Ethnologia Balkanica* 10 (2006): 15–34, etc.

²⁸⁴ The Bosnian case is, in fact, more complex, given the fact that the Austro-Hungarian administration opted for an Orientalizing architectural style for the newly designed public buildings. More about the invention of these national styles in the other Balkan states appears in Ada Hajdu’s contribution to this volume.

ethnic majority of the country in the urban population increased, especially at the expense of emigrating Turks/Muslims. The creation of the national states led to the gradual crystallization of separate urban networks dominated by the respective new capital. In all cases there is a clear trend towards faster modernization and monocentric growth of the capital city, despite the fact that, aside from Bucharest, these were initially rather small towns. Some of them were chosen as capitals for historical reasons (Athens). Others were chosen because they were centrally located within the state's newly established borders (Tirana, Ankara), or even because the new capital would be centrally located after a hoped-for expansion of national territory (Sofia). Actually, the establishment of new capitals in the Balkans (something that did not occur in Anatolia before World War I) helped to create the impression of faster urban modernization in the former European Turkey compared to the rest of the Ottoman Empire.

Still, some established centers preserved their role. This is true primarily of Istanbul, which remained the biggest city in the region by far, but also of Thessaloniki and Izmir, which continue to be very important port and regional centers, surpassed in population only by the new capitals, Athens and Ankara, respectively. In parallel, there was a visible stagnation and even decline of cities located near the newly established land borders. The best example is Edirne, which was once one of the biggest cities in the region but which stagnated for most of the twentieth century. A comparison with Bursa is revealing in this regard. The two cities were of similar size until the nineteenth century, and both benefited from the prestige of being former capitals of the Ottoman state before the capture of Constantinople. By the year 2000, Bursa had more than one million inhabitants, while Edirne had only a tenth as many, slightly more than 100,000.

The urbanization process accelerated after World War II and was deeply influenced by the political systems in the respective countries. Therefore studies differentiate primarily between countries with communist regimes and a planned economy and those with a more or less free-market economy. Urban transformations in the socialist countries in the region are often presented separately, or together with other socialist countries in Eastern Europe, and this is also the case for the post-communist period.²⁸⁵ In some cases the urbanization and regional processes in communist and non-communist countries in the region are studied in comparative perspective.²⁸⁶ Thus the debates about cities and urban development in the region during the postwar period have almost nothing to do with the problematic related to the Balkan city, which is overshadowed by completely different questions.

At the same time, in many regards the Ottoman legacy could be still discerned independently of the newly established political borders and the political conditions in the respective states. At first glance the Ottoman urban legacy is most clearly visible in cities where de-Ottomanization was not pushed to the limit—in some smaller towns as well as in the old parts of a few larger cities. In these cases even a few buildings have symbolic value. But the traces of deliberate de-Ottomanization are equally important—most cities in the former Ottoman provinces have a very limited pre-nineteenth-century urban legacy. The distinctive features of the post-Ottoman space could also be seen from other criteria. In principle, a higher percentage of urban population is regarded as a sign of more advanced economic and social development. In Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Albania, more developed regions are also more urbanized, but this is not always the case in Romania and the former Yugoslavia, the two countries that include territories from the former Habsburg Empire. Data from the last census in Yugoslavia (1991) actually show a low level of urbanization in some less-developed parts of the federation. Least urbanized was

²⁸⁵ Jiří Musil, *Urbanization in Socialist Countries* (White Plains, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1980); Richard Antony French and F.E. Ian Hamilton, eds., *The Socialist City: Spatial Structure and Urban Policy* (Chichester: John Wiley, 1979); *Cities after Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, eds. G. Andrusz, M. Harloe, and I. Szelenyi (Oxford, United Kingdom, and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), etc.

²⁸⁶ Wilfried Heller, *Regionale Disparitäten und Urbanisierung in Griechenland und Rumänien* (Göttingen: Goltze, 1979).

Bosnia and Herzegovina (39.6 percent). The urbanization level in Serbia as a whole was 50.8 percent, which ranged from 55.7 percent in the more developed autonomous region of Vojvodina, and 53.65 percent in Serbia proper, to 37.7 percent in Kosovo (the lowest level in the former federation).²⁸⁷ The rest of the results might seem surprising: among the individual republics, the fastest growth and the highest proportion of urban population is recorded in the less developed republics of Montenegro (58.2 percent while it was only 8.3 percent in 1948) and Macedonia (58.1 percent), while the proportion was lower in Slovenia, the most developed part of the federation (50.5 percent), as well as in Croatia (54.3 percent).²⁸⁸ The same paradox appears in an inter-regional comparison of urbanization trends in Romania: by the end of the communist period, Dobrudja had the highest percentage of urban population (67 percent), while in Transylvania the percentage was much lower.²⁸⁹ Despite the rapid urban growth, such regions continued to lag behind in technical and social infrastructure, and thus in quality of urban life.

As a whole, in the post-Ottoman space the growth of urban population was faster than in the former Habsburg provinces. Like most less-developed countries, the urbanization in the post-Ottoman space developed primarily through massive rural-urban migration and the fast growth of big cities. By contrast, in Slovenia, for instance, the urbanization process was much more decentralized, and a considerable part of the non-rural population lived in villages. Concerning urban and regional processes, the border between the post-Ottoman and post-Habsburg space remains visible in disparities among former Yugoslav republics, as well as within Romania.

In addition, the Ottoman territories featured a relatively dense network of administrative centers (centers of *kaza*, juridical districts that also became administrative districts with the nineteenth-century reforms), which are usually treated as towns. As a consequence, statistics show a relatively high level of urbanization, while at the same time, much of the “urban” population was employed in agriculture.²⁹⁰ This problem is aptly illustrated by the situation in Northern Dobrudja after 1878: there were seven localities formally recognized as urban communities in each of the two counties in the region (Constanța and Tulcea), while in the rest of the kingdom, only the county of Prahova (Ploiești) had as many cities.²⁹¹ At the same time, all the “cities” in the Romanian part of Dobrudja were very small, and their technical and social infrastructure lagged behind that of the cities in Romania’s Old Kingdom. The final result is a relatively dense network of settlements formally recognized as urban (which artificially increases the proportion of urban population in official statistics), while rural-urban migration is directed mostly towards big cities that have more pronounced urban characteristics and offer real advantages in terms of quality of life.

Despite the development of the railway network and more generally of overland transport, the nineteenth-century trend for faster development of port cities has continued to the present day. Only one capital in the region is a port city—Athens (and only if Piraeus is included)—so this trend is visible when comparing the growth of the other big cities in the settlement hierarchy. In Romania the phenomenon is clearly visible in the case of Constanța, which was transformed into a key port after the mid-nineteenth century, both for international traffic and on the national level after 1878. As a result, the previously small town of Köstence/Constanța became one of the largest provincial

²⁸⁷ *United Nations: Demographic Yearbook 1996*, 48th ed. (New York: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1998), 173–175; *Yugoslav Survey* 37, no. 1 (1996): 7; Jakov Sirotković, *Ekonomski razvoj Jugoslavije—od prosperiteta do krize* (Zagreb: Narodne novine, 1990), 234. Slightly different data appear in *United Nations: World Urbanization Prospects; The 1994 Revision* (New York: United Nations, Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, Population Division, 1995), 76 and 82–83.

²⁸⁸ *Demografskiot razvoj i negovoto vlijanje vrz opshtestveno-ekonomski razvoj vo SR Makedonija*, ed. Elka Dimitrieva (Skopje: Ekonomski institut, 1990), 165; Sirotković, *Ekonomski razvoj Jugoslavije*, 224 and 231.

²⁸⁹ Dobrudja had the largest proportion of urban population in Romania for the whole post-World War II period: Vladimir Trebici and Ilie Hristache, *Demografia teritorială a României* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1986), 29.

²⁹⁰ The same is valid for earlier periods: Suraiya Faroqhi, *Towns and Townsmen of Ottoman Anatolia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 216.

²⁹¹ *Buletin statistic general al României (1892)* (Bucharest: Ministerul Agriculturii și Domeniilor, 1893), 69 and 71.

centers in the country. Varna and Burgas, the main port cities for Northern and Southern Bulgaria, respectively, grew in a similar, though less spectacular way. In Albania the fastest-growing port cities are Durrës and Vlora; Durrës has traditionally been the country's second-largest city, and Vlora recently became the third-largest. The second- and third-largest cities in Croatia—Split and Rijeka—are also port cities. Water transport had a crucial role in redirecting urban growth in Greece—the largest cities in the country are on the sea, with the exception of Larissa and Ioannina; coastal areas (including some of the islands) are more developed than the interior, thanks to tourism and cheaper transport. In Turkey, Izmir remained the third-largest city after Istanbul and the capital, Ankara; on the whole, coastal regions in Turkey are more developed, and the “periphery” in terms of economic and social development consists largely of territories in the interior of Anatolia, especially in the east and southeast. Following a relatively short boom, after the late nineteenth century the Lower Danube lost its importance as a transportation route and consequently also as a factor for the faster modernization and growth of its port cities, many of which simply declined. At present the largest port cities on the Danube are capital cities (Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, and Belgrade), and therefore it would be difficult to determine the impact of this otherwise large river on their growth.

Questions related to what some scholars called the “Balkan city” regained a certain relevance due to the growing interest in urban heritage, including that from the Ottoman period. Certainly this was the case in varying degrees for individual countries in the region—in many cases the medieval heritage also received special attention (Veliko Tŕrnovo, Skopje), while in other cases the remnants from ancient times were put at the forefront (especially in Greece, but partly in Sofia, Plovdiv, etc.). Many port cities in the Balkans have an “Italian” heritage, especially in Dalmatia, where some cities never experienced direct Ottoman rule (Split, Zadar) or experienced it only for short periods (Kotor). The latter is also valid for parts of the Peloponnesus (Nafplio, Monemvasia), as well as some of the islands (Rhodes, Crete, Corfu). With few exceptions this heritage was better preserved, and that makes it even more visible. Relatively little has remained from the Ottoman presence. The Ottoman legacy was rediscovered in smaller towns that preserved their traditional appearance (Berat and Gjirokastër in Albania, Koprivshtitsa and Kalofer in Bulgaria, etc.) or in specific zones in larger cities (the market areas in Sarajevo, Skopje, and Ioannina; “the old town of Plovdiv”).

Still, in a number of cases the positive re-evaluation of the local urban traditions consciously brought to the forefront the urban heritage from the Ottoman period. The process developed in a different way in the individual countries and also depended on the attitude towards the Ottoman Empire and its heritage in every one of them. It is understandable that direct references to the Ottoman urban tradition are most visible in present-day Turkey and, to a certain extent, in Bosnia. Certainly the emphasis even in these cases is different: concerning Bosnian cities, local authors refer to Islamic, Oriental, and Ottoman but not to “Turkish” urban culture. The legacy from the Ottoman period might be recognized as an echo of the medieval (Byzantine, Slavic, etc.) civilization—in Greece there is an institution in charge of preserving “Byzantine and post-Byzantine monuments.”²⁹² In most other cases the positive re-evaluation of the Ottoman urban heritage is related to a recognition of the Ottoman city as the “traditional” city before Europeanization and modernization (meaning that these were somehow “our cities” before being influenced by the West), which, in addition, inherited at least some characteristics of the pre-Ottoman medieval city. In fact, the very concept of the “Balkan city” is part of this effort to convert the Ottoman urban civilization into an element of one's own cultural heritage.

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²⁹² <http://www.ekbmm.gr/english.php>, accessed October 6, 2013.

As this case study shows, Balkan studies, with the decisive contribution of the national historiographies in the region, developed its own interpretation of the urban history of the region during the Ottoman period. The cities in the Ottoman Balkans are presented as substantially different from the cities in the rest of the Empire, from “Islamic” and “Oriental” cities. Balkan cities have a long and rich history starting in ancient times and the Byzantino-Slavic Middle Ages; at a later stage they were subjected to important Oriental influences but modernized according to the European pattern in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This interpretation is questionable in both spatial and chronological terms. First of all, the concept of the Balkan city deals with only one of the urban types in the region; it analyzes the diversity of the Ottoman urban life in the Balkans but does not deal with the other urban cultures in the region. More importantly, this approach pays tribute to the imaginary border that “separates” Europe from Asia, as well as separating the Balkans from Anatolia and the Middle East. The problem is that even if this border is “purely conventional” and even if it is accepted “for practical purposes,” it leads to a substantially distorted image of the past. Even a glimpse at the cities in the neighboring “non-European” provinces obliges us to re-examine the concept of the “Balkan city.”

In chronological terms the historiographical concept of the “Balkan city” is too narrowly focused on the Ottoman period, which is certainly the most problematic period for presenting the history of the Balkans as an integral part of European history. In the end, the ambition was to prove that the “Ottoman city in the Balkans” was in fact the “Balkan city under the Ottomans.” Through the prism of this ambition, scholars reinterpreted the Byzantine urban heritage and, more generally, the medieval urban heritage, as well as the modernization process from the nineteenth century onwards. Just as Balkan studies is interested primarily in the history of the region during the Ottoman and the immediate post-Ottoman period, the concept of the “Balkan city” is relevant for the same Ottoman period and partly also for the heritage it left. Although this study took an interest in the spatial boundaries of the region, the question of the temporal boundaries turned out to be of crucial importance as well.

This overview of the urban history of the region demonstrates that the realia and phenomena considered essentially “Balkan” are in fact “Ottoman” and “Oriental” and largely “Turkish” and “Islamic,” while their Byzantino-Slavic basis is usually overestimated and might even be fictional. This is even more true when it comes to discovering the roots of Balkanness in ancient Thrace, Illyria, and so on. In fact, this preoccupation with the pre-Ottoman legacy is part of the ambition to emancipate the Balkans and the Balkan culture from the “Orient” and its influences.

The above historiographical overview of the “Balkan city” was interested not in the urban history of the region per se but in the conflicting interpretations of it. In the end, it must be recognized that analysis of the “Balkan city” reveals more about the discipline of Balkan studies (especially from the 1960s to the 1980s) than about the cities in the region. Still, the historiographical analysis supports one “Constantinople-centric” vision of the Balkans, and in this case the region likewise includes Anatolia. At the same time, the domination and the impact of Constantinople was not evenly spread over the whole territory covered by Balkan/Southeast European studies. Obviously, a number of cities in the northwest of the “peninsula” under Venetian and Habsburg domination were in the orbit of a completely different urban culture.

The “Balkan city” had its counterpart in Anatolia and, to a certain extent, in the Middle East. Precisely from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, the period about which the “Balkan city” concept was elaborated, all these cities were included in the same state, the Ottoman Empire, and thus they developed for centuries under the same legal and political conditions and had similar institutions. They also shared a similar pre-Ottoman heritage and together entered the modernization and Europeanization processes during the nineteenth century. Most of the cities in the Balkans had similar traits and were part of the same urban network as cities in northwestern Anatolia, and all gravitated around Constantinople/Istanbul. This certainly provides insight into the human geography of the region in general. Of course, the analysis of other “Balkan” realia would

give us a wider range of results; it would bring additional clarifications and corrections and could thus make the picture more precise.

Concerning the diversity within the Ottoman territories, the port cities were the most different from the others, due to their much easier commercial exchange with the outside world, the presence of communities of foreigners, and foreign political domination in some of the cities. Of course, the Mediterranean of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries differed from the world described by Fernand Braudel. Although it certainly bore the heritage of previous eras, it was dominated by great naval powers at the time of steam navigation and occupied only a peripheral place in their global plans. The Black Sea region (although often discussed in recent years) does not appear to have had an impact on its coastal cities in the way the Adriatic did. And again, the most important of the port cities is the imperial capital, Constantinople.

This essay has underlined that modern states had a considerable impact on urban development. At the same time, national states also influenced the way urban history is written. It is usually written in a national framework, including for periods when the respective national state did not exist. The above study has focused on the “Balkan city,” but the historiographies in the region wrote far more about the “Albanian,” “Bosnian,” “Bulgarian,” and other cities than about the “Balkan cities.” Such categorization of cities according to national criteria is problematic with regard to their individual characteristics, downplays all other factors in their development, and (concerning the distant past) is anachronistic. National historiographies have their own way of interpreting some general trends, like the modernization and Europeanization of the cities, which started before the secession of some Balkan states from the Ottoman Empire.

Thus the analysis of the concept of the “Balkan city” once again pointed up the discord among the individual national schools dealing with “Balkan studies.” The term “Balkan city” is widely used in Bulgarian historiography, but in different ways by different scholars. In other Balkan historiographies, the same designation most often means nothing more than spatial localization (“city/-ies in the Balkans”), and in some cases it is used in a completely different way, as a synonym or regional variation of the “Oriental” and “Islamic” city, not as its alternative. In such cases, even when the studies on the “Balkan city” are quoted, the concept in question is not adopted. At the same time, most works present urban history in a national framework, only rarely referring to the Balkan context. Works on urban history demonstrate once again that the academic studies on the Balkans are no less “Balkanized” than the region itself.

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