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The Old Bar. Architectural and Archaeological Complex of the Ottoman Period

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to present systematic recent investigations of the significant archaeological site of Old Bar and different types of material culture from the period of Ottoman administration. Previous publications have explored urban development of the town that reveals an urban accent of architectural elements and units during Turkish rule. Recent archaeological research with the introduction of a contemporary archaeological methodological approach allows more precise analysis of historical events and allows us to make a partial reconstruction of the precise chronological data for the analysis of metallic and ceramic finds.

The town of Old Bar lies under the mountain massif of Rumija in the hinterland of the vast Bar plain, approximately 5 km from the coast (Fig. 1). It has been inhabited since pre-historic times. The area was protected on the east and the south-east by a gorge with steep cliffs cut by the river, while on the west it required additional fortifications (Fig. 2). The town was known as Antebareos as early as the 10th century. In the Middle Ages, it shared a similar destiny with the other coastal towns ruled by a succession of Montenegrin aristocratic families and later coming under Venetian rule¹.

The period of Ottoman administration in the town of Old Bar in

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¹ Zagarčanin 2005, 15-18; 2008, 23-34

Montenegro on the passage between the Adriatic and Skadar Lake covers the period 1571 to 1878. The engraving from the year 1571 (Fig. 3) clearly shows the general picture of the town at the beginning of Ottoman rule.² Although greatly idealized, the panoramic depiction well illustrates the size of the town fortifications and the strong influence of Venetian architecture.

In Balkan scholarly literature appropriate attention has not been given to the Ottoman period, and correlated topics are insufficiently explored. Therefore, the complex study of Old Bar constitutes a reference work for research on the development of the structure of the cities, the social and economic processes and the political relations and influence of many different aspects of everyday life along the Adriatic coast and the Balkans.

The project *Old Bar*

Life in Old Bar ceased in 1878. Almost one hundred years later the town was revived thanks to the research and restoration projects of Đurđe Bošković who led a large systematic work of architectural research.³ In addition, he published the results in a comprehensive monograph in 1962.⁴ His work has opened up the possibility for a scientific introduction to the past of Old Bar, but also for the inclusion of this extraordinary monument in the touristic attractions of the Montenegrin coast. The state of preservation of the architectural remains was affected by the earthquake in the year 1973. Pictures of the town documented by Đurđe Bošković have changed to a great extent. Some of the structures have been completely destroyed and remain unrecognisable.

After the earthquake all efforts were focused on the conservation of particular architectural units with, according to the local professionals, greater significance and potential, while most of the town was abandoned to its fate. The focus of the conservation and restoration work was oriented towards a wider audience and to securing revenue based mainly on tourism.

2 Camutio 1571.

3 Bošković 1931; 1952; 1955; 1956.

4 Bošković 1962.

Due to the lack of finances many of these projects have remained unfinished or without a market-oriented strategy or, indeed, without any strategy at all.

In the year 2004, on the initiative of the Heritage Museum in Bar, a group of researchers led by university professors from Venice (Sauro Gelichi), Innsbruck (Konrad Spindler) and Kopër (Mitja Guštin) joined the project, which included research on Old Bar. That is how, with the aid of the European project *The Heritage of Serenissima*, the first joint research of the town was initiated in autumn 2004, together with the revision of its cultural- historical material and architectural heritage.⁵

The project activities comprised archaeological excavation, the topography, the archaeology of the masonry and the revision of previously obtained archaeological material.⁶ It also focused on the conservation of the finds. The project continued during the following years, and the information was published after every campaign, resulting in the fact that today there is a sequence of new publications about Old Bar: *Pottery of the Venetian Period*;⁷ *Old Bar, The Archaeological Project; Preliminary Report*;⁸ *The Archaeology of an abandoned town, The project 2005 in Stari Bar*;⁹ *A town through the ages, The 2006-2007 Archaeological Project in Stari Bar*.¹⁰ New monographs are in the process of publication, which confirms that, in spite of the previous copious works and numerous publications, Old Bar will continue to be of great scientific and cultural potential in the future.

Almost all the publications were oriented towards the research of the period when the town was under Venetian administration. Thus, the heritage presented in the publications was the heritage of the Venetian republic or the heritage under strong Venetian influence while part of the material heritage belonging to the period of Ottoman administration of the town or influenced by the Ottoman cultural sphere was not included in any research or publication.

5 Guštin, Gelichi 2005; Guštin, Gelichi, Spindler 2006.

6 Baudo 2006, 181-186; Calaon 2006, 186-191; Calaon, D'Amico, Fresia 2006, 55-82.

7 Zagarčani 2004.

8 Gelichi, Guštin 2005.

9 Gelichi 2006.

10 Gelichi 2008.

Research of the Ottoman heritage – first steps

The Ottoman Era, which succeeded a long medieval period and a period of Venetian dominion, left many recognizable buildings, like the hammam, the Sahat Tower and a characteristic graveyard, as well as a recognisable town centre, all quite impressive and proof of Old Bar's administrative and cultural involvement in the Ottoman Empire. Everyday urban life between 1571 and 1878 is reflected in the large quantity of movable building material and small finds.

The book *Ottoman Times, The Story of Stari Bar*¹¹ was the product of a comprehensive revision of the archaeological inventory of Old Bar. The publication has opened up a series of questions concerning urban life during a long period of Ottoman administration. The questions are based on the research of the archaeological material collected during the reconstruction and rebuilding, therefore the data usually acquired by archaeological methods is missing. Considering the fact that there are no published, well-documented layers, units and closed areas in a wider Balkan context which would offer a more precise dating of some finds, the material from Old Bar was systematized so that it could be useful for further research on that locality as well as for other locations of a similar nature.

The research questions cover a great span of topics ranging from urban structure, architecture, epigraphic monuments to the analysis of pottery and metal objects. It is impossible on the basis of the available data to shed light on all the various details and to reconstruct all the aspects of everyday life. However, the data collected and processed so far has raised many questions regarding the history of Old Bar and offer a clear general picture of urban life and its population throughout three centuries.

Topics dealing with the town of Old Bar present the starting point for the research on Balkan communities during the Ottoman period. The intention has been to use the example of this town to show the lifestyle in one particular period, which has been poorly researched in the Balkan area. It gives an insight into the many and various finds which the great Ottoman Empire introduced to the town.

11 Guštin, Bikić, Mileusnić 2008.

Ottoman heritage of Old Bar – first results

The first important topic is the establishment of Ottoman rule in the town, since every new power, and especially one of a different character, has triggered a number of social, religious and economic changes. We can therefore assume that the town's surrender without resistance to Ottoman power triggered many processes.

After the arrival of the Ottomans, the greatest changes is to be observed in the city architecture of that period. In that sense, all the construction work can be divided into three groups.

1. The peaceful surrender of the town in 1571 accorded the townspeople certain privileges in the form of a document – contract – *ahd-name*, issued by Sultan Murad III in 1575 and registered in the 1582 *defter*.¹² Bar was registered as a *kale* (fort), *varoš* (suburbs) and *şehir* (town settlement). It was provided with military units, bodies of local government and a *kadija* (judge). The town had two *mahalas* – lower town and upper town.

Evliya Chalabi, the well-informed travel writer who visited these areas in the 17th century, reported that the fortress, carefully built of stone, included houses for the soldiers covered in tiles and stone slabs without a garden; it also included a mosque of Sultan Ahmed, a *mekteb*, a *medresa*, a *mesjid*, a granary, an ammunition warehouse, cisterns, impressive cannons, a town gate, a town orchestra and a moat.¹³

The biggest changes in the appearance of the town occurred with the construction of new buildings, built independent of the older architecture from which they differed in the method of construction and in function (Fig. 4). Those buildings include a *sahat kula* (clock tower), an aqueduct, fountains, a Turkish bath (*hammam*) and a powder magazine. Their construction indicates the needs of the newly-arrived population, as well as some civilization standards in Ottoman town planning. The Muslim population carried out burials even inside the town walls, so there are some parcels of land with characteristic graves.

¹² Boškov 1979, 279-285.

¹³ Evliya Chelebi, *The travelogues*, 338.

2. From 1630 onwards, when the privileges began to be questioned, the properties of the Roman Catholic Church were confiscated, the residence of the Bishop was pulled down, Christian places of worship were destroyed and churches transformed into mosques. The demographic structure changed significantly after the Venetian attack in 1646, so that Bar rapidly became not only a Muslim community but also a religious centre with a vast number of educated people. Immigrants were coming to Bar from local villages and tribes as well as from other parts of the Balkans– even from Anatolia. This was all reflected in changes in the composition and structure of the Bar population. It influenced the changes in the urban appearance, in the general urban civilization standards and in the material culture as well.

The second type of building activity that took place in the town involved a complete change in the function of some of the existing buildings. It is most evident in the religious buildings of the Venetian phase, of which some were adjusted to the demands of the religious practices of the newly arrived population. Churches were converted into mosques and the convent of the Franciscan monastery complex was converted into dwelling houses.

3. The third type of construction work consisted of small modifications in the interior of residential houses – windows and doors were replaced and rooms partitioned, hearths and chimneys added, thus changing the appearance of the facades. In many of the residential houses the windows looking onto the street were sealed up and new ones opened up on the inside of the buildings. Given the details that are evident in the photos many houses had additional parts built of wood. In addition, toilets and bathrooms were built inside many houses when water was brought to the town and a sewage system constructed.

All the above-mentioned building activities brought a change to the appearance of the town, giving it an Eastern Mediterranean character, which can be seen in photos from the late 19th century when the city was still inhabited.¹⁴ Some buildings constructed in the Ottoman period, like the Clock Tower and the so-called Turkish graveyard, have been preserved and maintained by the local population, while the Turkish bath – hammam

14 Fig. 5.

- was reconstructed in order to revitalize some parts of the town.

As for changes in the ethnic and religious structure of the urban population, these can be learned from the various censuses in the government registers, the so-called *deftera*. Immediately after the Ottoman conquest of the town, the structure of the population did not change a great deal. According to Marino Bizzi's report (dating from 1610), until 1597 there was not a single Ottoman family living in the town apart from the Ottoman military garrison.¹⁵ It is worth mentioning here that all the Ottoman censuses list as the main characteristic of the inhabitants their religion, not their ethnicity, because there is no mention of the origin of the newly-arrived population.

In the first period after the conquest 77 Muslim soldiers were registered in the town (Bošković 1962, 218, nap. 2, 3). The soldiers belonged to a social group with a characteristic lifestyle, i.e. certain military standards. That is why it can be assumed that this also had an influence on the surrounding material culture, so we should be able to recognize their presence among the present remains. Evlija Chalabi gives some interesting information about the military houses. Unfortunately, we cannot know from this piece of information whether those houses were newly-built or whether the military corps settled into existing buildings.

If they were newly-built houses, they would have stood out from the others by their different architectural material, manner of construction and appearance. As such, they would have formed a distinctive and specific urban unit, which would have been very easy to recognize among present remains. However, it was impossible to determine this on the basis of the extant remains. Therefore, it seems more probable that the Ottoman corps settled in already existing buildings. It can be concluded that the new garrison settled into the houses the Venetians had previously occupied, i.e., there was a change of tenants from the same social but different cultural background. According to Đ. Bošković the commanding personnel were living in the houses inside the town, which demanded stronger defence in states of emergency, and many soldiers were settled there as well¹⁶.

¹⁵ Bošković 1962, 271.

¹⁶ Bošković 1962, 218.

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15 Bošković 1962, 271.

16 Bošković 1962, 218.

It is necessary to consider a question concerning the reconstruction of the material culture and its remains. This concerns the ethnic provenance and background of the military garrison in the Ottoman period. During the reign of Murat III (1546-1595) volunteers started to be enrolled in the janissary corps. At the same time, the population from the other parts of the Balkans which had accepted Islam, were joining the Ottoman military corps in large numbers. For this reason, it is difficult to determine the origin and ethnic background of the soldiers. In any case, it can be assumed that the new soldiers brought with them new ways of life, which distinguished them from the professional army, but because of which they were closer to the Balkan population.

It is assumed that part of the Muslim population was brought from the East, from the European part of Turkey and Asia Minor.¹⁷ They brought with them a number of new customs, so they exerted a great influence on the changes introduced and the gradual adoption of the latest innovations taking place in everyday life as well as in the material culture. Many inhabitants came to Bar from the previously conquered Balkan areas. Most of them probably came from Bosnia, but it can be assumed that there was also migration from nearby Albania.

The architecture of the tombstones preserved in the graveyards, as well as their inscriptions, offer a certain amount of information about the social structure of the Muslim population, mainly of the more prominent or wealthy members.¹⁸

In the course of time a certain number of the indigenous inhabitants of Bar and their families accepted Islam, which certainly influenced a change in the ratio of the Christian and Muslim population in the censuses, but most probably did not have a very great influence on the material culture. In such groups there was probably little change in everyday life.

They acquired the habits of tobacco-smoking and coffee-drinking. Among the many tobacco pipes and *fildzans* it was reasonable to expect some examples of more expensive objects from Iznik and Kutahija. However, a characteristic feature of the finds from the Ottoman period of

¹⁷ Bošković 1962, 271.

¹⁸ Fig. 6; Marinković 2008, 89-94.

Old Bar is, actually, the absence of such types of finer vessels. Also, in the context of religious customs, which require ritual washings, the regular inventory items consisted of metal vessels.

It seems that there was no reason for change in the other habits, mainly those connected with food. By all accounts in the context of cooking and storing groceries the traditional methods they had already become accustomed to remained in use, which is why greater changes and innovations cannot be expected in their domestic customs.

An examination of the material culture as found in the ruins of Old Bar, especially the characteristics of pottery ware, shows that the year 1571, in which the Turks took over the control of the town, should not be considered as a sudden and radical turning-point that could have caused the disappearance of a whole tradition and a rapid and obvious adoption of certain new customs. That is why we must expect to find earlier forms among the pottery finds.

When we speak of coarse pottery for cooking or somewhat finer pottery for storage etc., we must assume that there was a local production that was probably under foreign influence. Many factors have, certainly, had an effect on the vessels – on the choice of material they were made of and the forms, surface finishing and size of the vessels. Still, with the arrival of the new power, and with it the arrival of a new population with different eating habits, it could be expected that they knew how to adapt to the existing state of affairs, so they did not make radical changes in the “marginal” parts of the house, like the kitchen and its inventory.

Speaking of tableware, we can assume a similar development, at least when the continuation of pottery use is concerned. Insight into the contents of houses reveals numerous sherds which certainly had not been produced locally. In addition to the many sherds, which undoubtedly show a rich trading activity prior to Ottoman rule, we find a large number of more recent forms and decorative styles, which confirms the fact that even during the new Ottoman rule, trade with western, mainly Italian areas continued.

One of the incredibly significant characteristics of this material is the total absence of Ottoman vessels with the so-called sgraffito decoration. An interesting fact is that in the period during which the town was under Ottoman dominion, fine and expensive pottery tableware of a *de luxe* kind

was imported from Italy, while the typical fine pottery production from the Ottoman workshops was present in very small quantities. A similar trend can be observed in the other towns along the Mediterranean coast.¹⁹

In pottery production, unlike the production of metal wares, which was more or less fully developed in the period before the Ottoman conquests and arrived as such in the Balkan region, there are common characteristics as well as regional ones.²⁰ Reasons for this occurrence can be observed in the organization of pottery production, which was not centralized, but established in a range of regional workshops. The pottery style is closely related to the post-medieval tradition. So the material from each region has some specific characteristics, in the vessel types and also in the style of ornament. In that sense, the pottery of Old Bar is infused with the different continental styles from the hinterland and from the Italian workshops. This was characteristic of earlier, medieval pottery, as well as of Ottoman pottery in its developed form.

Research of the Ottoman heritage – further steps

The material from Old Bar presents an extraordinarily rich basis for research into the Ottoman period. The set of changes determined in the period of Ottoman rule, together with the data from documents and old photographs, are telling enough to serve as a guide, maybe even as encouragement for publishing the materials from other excavations in the region.

Pottery ware from the Ottoman era consists of very impressive finds, important for a grasp not only of the character of the pottery production of that time but also of the food culture in general. Based on the material that has been published so far, which derives primarily from the region of South Hungary, Serbia, and Bulgaria, it is possible to speak of the regional characteristics of the material as well as of certain common elements that can be considered, in one sense, as patterns for the entire pottery production within the Ottoman cultural circle.

¹⁹ D'Amico 2005, 74 with bibliography.

²⁰ Fig. 7, 8.

Considering the fact that the sites on the Montenegrin coast and its direct hinterland have not been sufficiently researched, pottery ware from Old Bar can be looked upon as the basis and the pattern for future detailed research of the pottery production in that region.

A further step was already reached in Old Bar by the excavation of the Ottoman house during the research campaigns from the year 2005 to 2007.²¹ With the aid of the contemporary methodological approach thorough research was carried out into the architectural structure used in the period prior to the introduction of Ottoman administration as well as in the Ottoman period itself. The results of the research were published in the form of a report that offers an insight into changes in the structure of a particular town throughout the ages and an attempt to place its development into the broader range of the development of the town as a whole. At the same time, the analysis of small finds with well documented stratigraphy and well interpreted sequence offers the first scientific basis for the interpretation of pottery use, production and trade as well as a correction tool for the previously performed research into finds from non-stratified or undocumented contexts.²² The archaeological research was accompanied by the analysis of olive oil production, an important segment of the urban economy under the Ottoman administration, which presents a further step in the research of the urban economy and potential economic activities in interaction with the surrounding territories.²³

These new approaches and results are extremely welcome in presenting the utilisation of a contemporary research methodology in the scientific research into the Ottoman heritage in the Balkans.

21 Gelichi 2006; 2008.

22 Baudo, Calaon, D'Amico 2006, 83-96; Bagato, Falla, Gasparin 2008, 33-40; Calaon, Cadamurro 2008, 16-32.

23 Zanichelli 2008, 93-100.

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Figure 1
Geographical map of Montenegro

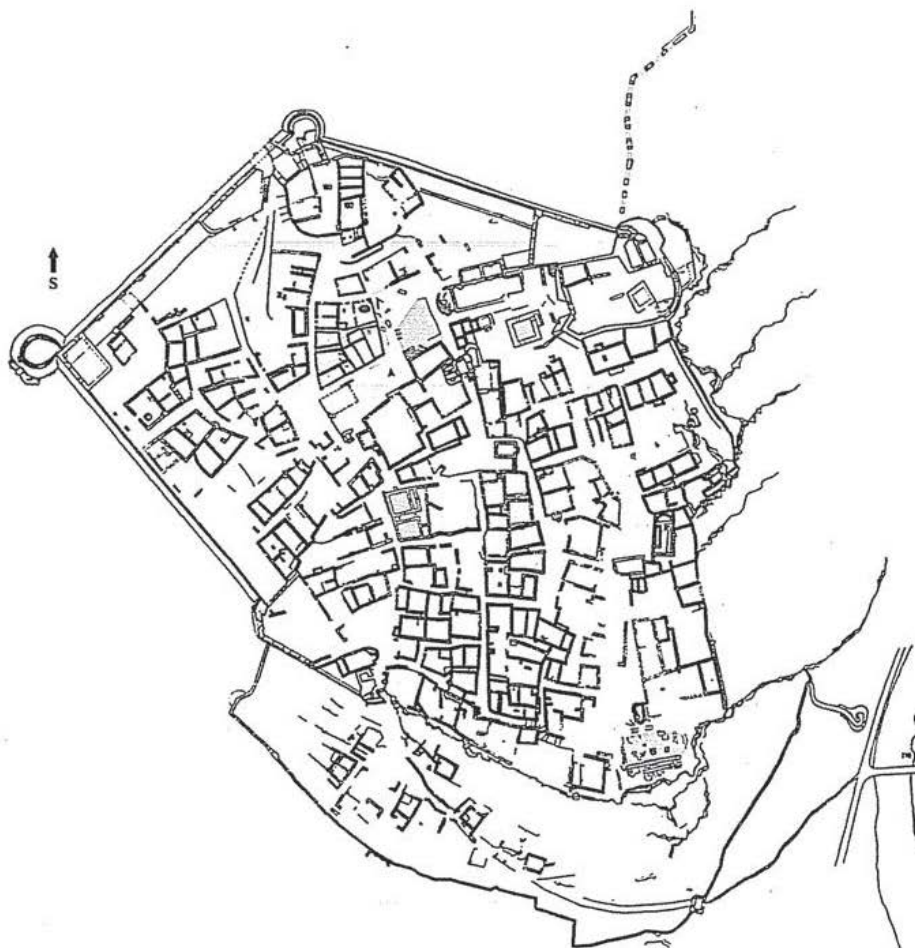


Figure 4
Public buildings erected during the Ottoman rule

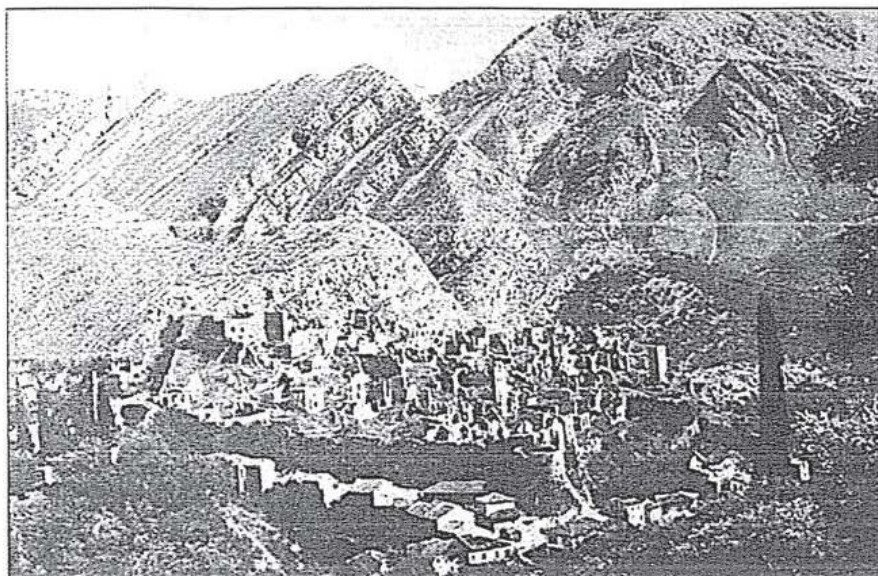


Figure 5
Old Bar before 1878

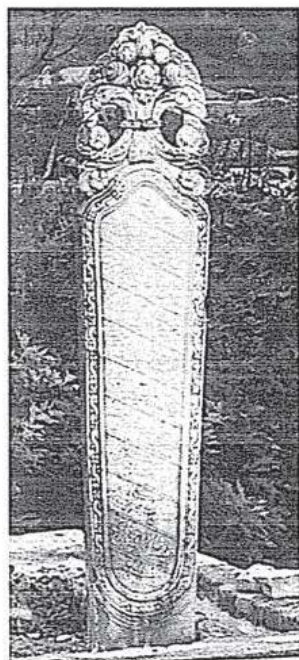


Figure 6
Cemetery in the suburbs. Tombstone from the 19th century, probably imported from Istanbul

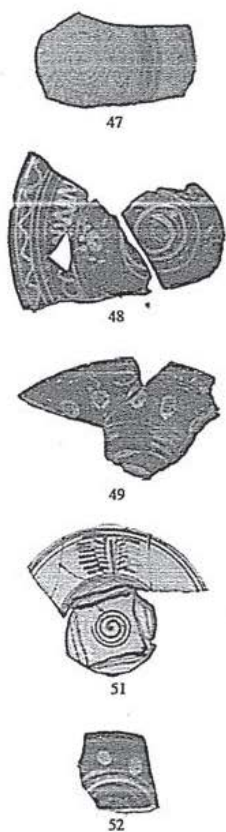


Figure 7

Bar, C. F. Overview of pottery from the Ottoman period

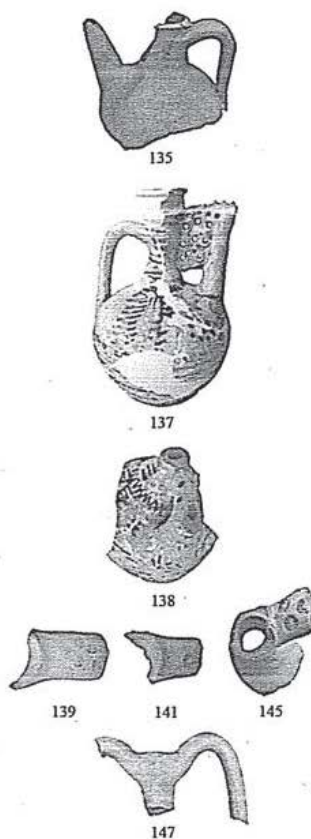


Figure 8

Bar, C. F. Overview of pottery from the Ottoman period