

〈記録〉

## **PLOVDIV AND THE BLACK SEA**

Continuing adventures out of Sasashima in parts of  
what used to be the Ottoman Empire.  
(March 16 - August 16, 2020)

**John HAMILTON**

Thank you to various special people for their help with this article.

First, again DAPHNE BIRCH, my neighbour in England, who lent me three useful books during the Coronavirus lockdown in England. These were:

Pankaj Mishra: From the Ruins of Empire. The revolt against the West and the remaking of Asia published 2012

Neal Ascherson: The Black Sea published in 1997

and Lin Yutang: The Importance of Living first published May 1938

For me the Coronavirus lockdown in England in 2020 was rather like being back at Oxford in 1966.....University College...Politics, Philosophy and Economics .....with an exam to force me to read books I would not have otherwise read .....so Daphne was for me a kind of Maurice Shock ( my Politics tutor) .....and Rishi Sunak, now Chancellor of the Exchequer in England...(Was he born in 1966 ?!).. was doing exactly what my economics tutor Douglas Stout at Univ would have said he should be doing in these circumstances..... printing money..... which is rather fun.....more fun than raising taxes..... it still remains to be seen whether it will work....the Pandemic still has a long way to run.

Second, I would like to thank the Reverend THOMAS ADAMS, an American, whom I first met in Tokyo in 1969. I attended his ordination. He was living at that time in a hut built by Antonin Raymond in the

grounds of Rikkyo High School, under the wing of a Reverend Mark Furuki who I think was a great nephew of Fukuzawa Yukichi 福沢諭吉. And I think that Tom is descended from the second President of the United States...so there you go. At the time I had no idea who these great people were. Pankaj Mishra has a lot to say about Fukuzawa Yukichi.

Third, thank you to FATHER OSHIDA, founder of Takamori Soan 高森草庵, the Dominican community on the slopes of Yatsugadake in Naganoken. At Takamori we met Babu from Chittagong in Bangladesh. From Babu or his brother we received two cassette tapes of Tagore's songs which we still have. At the moment Babu who is a doctor ( thanks to Oshida ) works for the World Health Organisation and he must be quite senior there and very busy with Coronavirus work now.

Fourth, I want to thank three people with whom I am in almost daily contact on Facebook. First there is IRFAN AHMED SOOMRO, originally from Karachi but now at Nanjing University putting together his PhD. Irfan helped me a lot to get into the library there to research the Chinese/ Manchurian signatories of the 1842 Treaty of Nanjing. I like to have someone like Irfan to look over my shoulder whenever I write about Palestine ( which was Ottoman) and Pakistan. Then there is a Dutch father and son ( RIK and URI SCHOLTEN ) who I met in the hostel in Nanjing. They are back in Holland now. They have a boat and may sail over and visit me one day in the south of England. Bosham is our port ! Meanwhile it is very good to have their posts in Dutch on the Facebook and hear what is happening over there. Google translate gives me a good idea of what they are saying. And the third facebooker I would like to thank is ASAL AL NOOR, the Druze beekeeper in Galilee. He was posting swarms of bees every other day during May, June and July, which gives me a view of Israel quite different from what you read in the newspapers.

## PLOVDIV UNDER LOCKDOWN

This was a rather short expedition because of the Coronavirus. I had to return to England after only a few days, but it was nevertheless worth going. I have been to Bulgaria before. I went to Ruse and Tutrakan in the north early in 2019. Ruse is a city beside the Danube, a stopping point between Vienna and Istanbul and there are substantial Roman ruins at Tutrakan and also battlefields. There is a statue of the Russian General Suvorov in the centre of town. ( I like Suvorov. Before the battle I read, he would go out in front of his men, strip off all his clothes, and charge the enemy. I don't know if he did this more than once!) Silistra I didn't see much of. The Danube was much wider there. I caught a ferry over to Călărași in România. .... This time I made Plovdiv my destination.

I flew by Turkish Airlines from London Heathrow to Istanbul and on to Sofia. There were prayers on the plane. The five daily obligatory prayers offered by Muslims ( The Salah ) are at Mahrib (sunset), Isha (dusk to dawn), Fajr (dawn to sunrise), Dhuhur ( the noon prayer), and Asr ( during the afternoon ).....On the plane we had Fajr. There are also prayers on Pakistan Airlines. I like prayers on aeroplanes. All the people in my row on the plane were wearing face masks, but I wasn't. In the row in front there was a family passing a child from one member to the next. The child was about 4 and very active, coughing and sneezing and spluttering and jumping about....it seemed to have a fever...I thought then that if it had the CORONAVIRUS then I would catch it, and indeed about five days later I had a curious cough ....but that was all. I haven't yet been tested to know if I have the antibodies. I am not sure I can be tested. But I think that I caught it then and recovered quickly. In England we had the Prince Charles version and the Boris Johnson version. I think I had the Prince Charles version.

I had been told there would be no quarantine in Bulgaria except for

arrivals from China and this proved to be the case. If you are returning from China, 14 days quarantine....said the paper at the airport. It was early days. There was another English family driving to a second home.... I caught the underground from the airport to central Sofia and changed trains at Serdica. In the station I noticed some photographs of a Roman mosaic and a hypocaust system ( underfloor heating ). In Roman times Sofia was called Ulpia Serdica. From Serdica underground station it was two stops to the train station. There was a train to Plovdiv leaving within the hour.....ten carriages and altogether about ten people on board.....so we were well spaced out.....it took about 3 hours. In PLOVDIV I caught a bus to the old town where I knew I could find a hostel, but the hostel was closed. And all the hotels were closed. Cafés were closed. Museums were closed. Churches were open. Corner shops were open ( one at a time ). Takeaways were open. Police were patrolling. Some kind people with an Air B&B were able to put me up. The fortunate thing was that Plovdiv had been European City of Culture in 2019 and there were signs everywhere explaining the history of the different buildings in English. So with an iPad I could begin to work it all out.

When I was in hospital in England at least two of the nurses were from Bulgaria. I remember them saying 'You must go and climb Rila Mountain and visit the monastery there. I thought then that Rila mountain was right down in the south western corner of Bulgaria, but in fact it is just south of Sofia. On this trip I wanted to work out Bulgarian geography. The northern frontier with the Danube is fairly clear. The people on the other side of the river speak Romanian and for the most part look north towards Bucharest. Beside the Black Sea is SOUTH DOBRUJA which is now a part of Bulgaria. The western frontier is with MACEDONIA which some claim should be part of Bulgaria. It was a part of Yugoslavia. And to the south there is THRACE or EAST RUMELIA. I think it is

better if I draw a map.



It is possible to write a short history of Bulgaria based on this map. The two big countries in this part of the world are Russia and Turkey. Today Russia's population is about 150 million and Ukraine 50 million, Turkey has 83 million people. Just to the north of Bulgaria is Romania with 20 million people who speak a language very similar to Latin. Did the people here use Latin before the Romans? The Romanians don't bother to learn Bulgarian. "We talk to them in English" the students say. South of Bulgaria is Greece with 11 million people today, but there are Greeks everywhere. There are 7 million people in Bulgaria and they speak a language similar to Russian written in Cyrillic. In 1878 the Russians came and helped the Bulgarians to be independent of Turkey. More than 200,000 Russians were killed. By the Treaty of San Stefano the frontiers of present day Bulgaria were fixed to include East Rumelia ( Northern Thrace ) which includes Plovdiv, but it was quickly taken away from them in the Treaty of Berlin by Britain and France and given back to the Ottomans. Britain and France didn't wish to see Russia expand its sphere so close to Istanbul. But in 1885 East Rumelia was given back to the

Bulgarians. To the west of Bulgaria is Macedonia where a lot of people speak Bulgarian.....It was a part of Yugoslavia and now is independent.

I was tempted after Plovdiv to go to the Bachkova monastery in the Rodopi Mountains and sit out the Corona there, but the travel agent in England reckoned it would be best to catch ' the last plane out ' and that is what I did. For five centuries Bulgaria was a part of the Ottoman Empire. And the Ottoman Empire was Turkish and Greek. The Bulgarians spoke something very similar to Russian ( as I said ) but they were not Russian.....and even though the church was Greek Orthodox, they were not Greek.....and because they were Christians, they were not Turks.....so they were and are Bulgarians!



I wandered about in Plovdiv and found a few curious things. In Tsar Simeon's Garden there were various statues. One was of Lucien Schevalas ( 1840-1921 ) who had designed the garden and was called the Minister of Flowers, he was Swiss and had been the Court Gardener of Napoleon III.. Another was a statue of Momotaro from Okayama 岡

山], which is a sister city of Plovdiv. Somebody from Japan must have noticed that Plovdiv was a special place. Alongside the garden is Gladstone Street. The British Prime Minister Gladstone wrote a pamphlet "Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East". He supported the Christian Bulgarians during the suppression of the April Uprising in 1876. I walked along Gladstone Street to the Ruski Boulevard and then climbed up Liberation Hill to the Alyosha Monument. This had been built to express the gratitude of the Bulgarian people to the Russians. Over 200,000 Russians died in the War of Liberation 1877-78. The Battle of Shipka Pass took place in the mountains to the north of Plovdiv. Down below the Alyosha Monument there was a stall selling honey пчелен мел ( bee honey ) многоцветен ( many flowers ) from кацара ( Katsara ) south of Plovdiv. I went through an underpass where there was a busking Bouzouki player and then into Kapana, a part of Plovdiv which looks just like a provincial French town, then up into the Old Town where my lodgings were.....

It came in on my iPad that there was a last plane out of Bulgaria. I went early to the station not sure that there would be a train. The day before I had met some Indian medical students from England who had booked a long distance taxi to Sofia.....but I wanted to go by train if I could. Somehow to go by taxi is to cut yourself off from the place you are in. And actually I was rewarded. I met some gypsies in the station and paid for their coffee and they told me there was a train at 7.00 am. At 6.50 I was able to buy a ticket. There was only one other passenger on the train, a girl in a red beret with spindly legs ( Villy Shopova ) She was going to visit a friend in Sofia. She spoke English so the journey was interesting for me. She had been working long hours on the till in a supermarket in Plovdiv wearing a mask and gloves, living with her parents, and this was her day off. Her father had been a shoe designer but the factory had closed due to Chinese competition. Villy had worked

outside Bulgaria since 2001 , in Tartous in Syria and in Abu Dhabi and the Lebanon. She had a brother, a chemical engineer, who lived in Aylesbury in England and was taxi driving. Thanks to her I didn't have to go into Sofia but was able to take a short cut to the airport from Iskarsko Shose. She helped me to open the train door which wasn't as straightforward as one might expect. There were very few people at the airport. I went through the revolving door and immediately found myself being sprayed with disinfectant. I had difficulty buying myself a sandwich but managed to accomplish that. It was a first time for me to travel by Bulgarian Airlines. The best thing about this journey was the music....Pasha Hristova singing Моя Страна ( My Country ?).....which reminded me of a gypsy piece from the Russian steppe played by my son-in-law....very beautiful it was.( The Văcărescus are by way of being musical archaeologists.)

## THE BLACK SEA





This is a view from England, from Lordington near Chichester where I live, because I had to return early from Bulgaria due to the Coronavirus. It is really about the places I want to visit next time.

I have only seen the Black Sea once and that was from Constanța in Romania. I went there to meet Ion Codrescu again after his exhibition of Haiga 俳画 and Haiku 俳句 at Aichi University, Toyohashi Campus. The Haiku poet was called Vasile Spinei and he lived in Moldova. The haiku were very nice. I read them through with a Romanian graduate student ( Andreea Ifrim ) in a Toyohashi coffee shop. The haiku are in Romanian and they have Codrescu's English translations on the opposite page. There were also the nice Haiga illustrations by Codrescu. We both enjoyed them very much and it was a good way for me to study Romanian with Japanese. Both languages are good for poetry, better than English ! Many people attended this exhibition thanks to Tanabe in the Research Support Office 研究支援課. After meeting with Codrescu and his wife in Constanța I went to the Archaeological Museum. In Roman times Constanța was called Tomis, and Ovid the poet was exiled there. Shakespeare used Ovid a great deal as source material for his plays. A long time ago Professor Chiba of Aichi University had asked me to bring back a copy of Shakespeare's Ovid published by Jon Wynne Tyson who lives not far from Chichester. I was able to get a last copy. Jon Wynne Tyson is still alive, about a hundred. After meeting Codrescu I went up to Moldova to meet Spinei and spent a long weekend in Chisinau. Thanks to Japanese friends I was looked after by Dimitry Buzzanu who met me at the Airport, acted as interpreter, put me up in a nice flat, and showed me round. I have already written about my time there. The last visit before my departure on Air Moldova for England was to the Central Market in Chisinau to buy Brînza cheese to take back. There was a fish section to the market. All the fish had come from Odessa. I remember the laughter of the Jewish granny in the cellar of the Muzeul Național de Etnografie in Chisinau the day before..... She

had come from Odessa. Many of the Jews from there got away to Israel and America....and England, but a lot didn't, but she was still in Chisinau. They are a resilient people, especially the women, considering what happened to them around here during the war.....and still laughing.

I have also been to the door to the Black Sea. I went to the Bosphorus University which used to be Robert College, an American university in Istanbul, and had lunch there with the Economics Faculty teachers overlooking the Bosphorus. I went there by chance with Emin Saatci who for a long time had worked for the British Council. Emin was Greek and had been introduced to me by Colin and Renata Baillieu who now live in Chichester. Actually I was quite taken by surprise. It was almost as though I was looking for a job. What a wonderful follow up to Aichi University it would have been , to join the Economics Faculty of the Bosphorus University, and follow in the footsteps of John Freely....!..... but I was too slow to realise that I could change the direction of my life. ....After that Emin took me to the Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Fener to see the wonderful icons there. Again I was taken by surprise. In the Ottoman Empire the Greeks did all the work for the Turks. I had visited the Phanariot palaces in Bucharest, Palatul Șuțu is an example. The Phanariots came from Fener, the Greek district of Istanbul. They were the Hospodars in Wallachia ( part of Romania now ). And this connects to me because my daughter has married the great Romanian violinist Bogdan Văcărescu who, because of the pandemic, is now living in the attic here at Lordington. Văcărescu is a Phanariot name. There are portraits of Văcărescu Ienachița and Văcărescu Alecu in the National Gallery in Bucharest. And there was a Văcărescu Monastery in Bucharest destroyed by Ceaucescu and many churches built by Văcărescus around the city, and ruins of a castle in Turgoviste....Văcărescu Ienachița, the boyar diplomat between Istanbul and Vienna wrote a famous grammar of the Romanian language. He was also a poet. In 1918, after the First World War, Romania was created out of Transylvania ( formerly part of

the Austro- Hungarian Empire) and Wallachia and Moldavia ( formerly two Ottoman provinces ) on the basis of language! So in a sense Ienachița is one of the founders, and my granddaughters are his descendants.

The next 'exhibit' at Lordington is an ornament made of gunmetal half way up the stairs. It was given to my mother Lavinia Ponsonby in January 1945.

Лавиния Понсонби Уралмашзавод Свердловск январь 1945  
is written on the back.



It shows Cossacks on horseback firing rifles. There is another ornament from the same factory showing a stag with a hind ....the antlers have broken off. This was given to my grandfather Charles Ponsonby at the same time. The River Don flows into the Black Sea and the Don Cossacks were Russia's greatest soldiers. They fought the Tatars and they fought the Turks. In the 16th century they led Russia's advance into Siberia. In the 17th century with Peter the Great they fought their way round the Black Sea. In the 18th century they beat Napoleon at Borodino and reached Paris. So how come my mother and grandfather were given

these ornaments?

During the war, in March 1944, my mother, then aged 23, travelled by Arctic convoy to Archangel, and from there by train to Moscow where she worked in the British Embassy. Because UK was an ally of the Soviet Union, she was able to move about and enjoy Russian life. She was actually arrested five times by mistake by OGPU, but released each time. On one occasion according to her diary she went to have tea with Ivy Litvinov, the wife of Maxim Litvinov, formerly Stalin's Foreign Minister and the man whose charm and sense of humour was partly responsible for keeping the Soviet-American alliance going from 1941 to 1945. Ivy Litvinov was British....Ivy Loewe before she married Maxim Litvinov.

My mother was there at the Moscow Conference in November 1944 when Churchill met Stalin. It was at this conference that the famous Percentages Agreement was come to between Churchill and Stalin. In January 1945 my grandfather Colonel Sir Charles Ponsonby, the Member of Parliament for Sevenoaks, joined the Parliamentary Delegation to the Soviet Union. After Moscow the delegation travelled out to Sverdlovsk ( now again Ekaterinburg ) in the Urals. My mother went along as an interpreter. ....This is why we have these ornaments on the windowsill half way up the stairs at Lordington.

In the drawing room here there is a portrait of my other grandfather who was Eric Hamilton, Dean of Windsor. It is painted by Sir Gerald Kelly. As a child I used to go and stay at the Deanery in Windsor Castle. Below is not a picture of the portrait but a photograph of him at Oxford in 1910. He is seated in the front row second from the left.



My Hamilton great grandfather, my grandfather, my father, and I all went to University College Oxford. But my grandfather was the famous one because during his first year, that was 1910, he was a friend of Prince Felix Yusupov, and during the summer vacation of 1910 he travelled with Felix around Russia to St Petersburg ( the Moyka Palace ) and Moscow ( Archangelskoe ) and to the Crimea ( Cooze ) and kept a diary which we still have. Felix was young, royal, and very charming and good looking.....In 1916 he was the leader of the conspirators who killed Rasputin. A lot has been written about this. ....he tried to poison Rasputin and then shoot him but eventually Rasputin drowned under the ice in the River Neva. ....Remarkably there is a mention of Rasputin, but not by name in my grandfather's diary in 1910..... Felix Yusupov was evacuated from Yalta in the Crimea on April 7th, 1919 on a British ship HMS Marlborough. He spent most of the rest of his life in Paris. But he came several times to visit my grandfather at Windsor. The last

time he arrived on a Greenline Bus. I think I met him in about 1961 because I used to go up there with friends for tea from Eton. There was an old couple Charles and Mable who put a wonderful tea on the table over which my grandmother presided. But I was only 13 and I didn't know who he was. Actually I think I got into Oxford thanks to Felix Yusupov ( ..that is another story!)

I have been to St Petersburg and wish to go again, and a year or two ago I went with my sister to Moscow at Christmas time. It was -25 degrees which was perfect, because there were not many people about outside. We explored the places connected to my Grandfather like the Mary and Martha Convent which was founded by the Grand Duchess Elizabeth who is mentioned in his diary. Also we went to Archangelskoe the 'hunting lodge' out in the suburbs. It is actually a small palace. And we went to visit the British Embassy where my mother had worked and various other places connected with her stay there. So the next journey of enquiry must be to Cooze in the Crimea. Apparently it is a most beautiful place. According to my grandfather it was used by Stalin at the time of the Yalta Conference. I got close to the Crimea about ten years ago when I went to visit my son Oliver who was interning in the Cameron McKenna law office in Kiev. He took a break and we went out by train to Poltava ( famous for Gustavus Adolphus and Gogol ) and Kharkiv. In the art gallery in Kharkiv there were many fine oil paintings including quite a number of Crimean landscapes.....So I am very much looking forward to going there. Just at the moment with the problems in the Ukraine and the Coronavirus it is rather difficult. What does this have to do with Lordington in faraway England. This summer during the pandemic we had a campsite in the field outside the garden wall. There were two fine tents. We were not sure there was any flat ground to put up a tent but that was not a problem. My job was to wheelbarrow out firewood for the camp fires. This field, called Pigeon Green , used to be a medieval village. It is terraced and full of HUMPS AND BUMPS and

patches of nettles going down to the river Ems. Apparently there was a church or chapel but it has gone. There are quite a lot of villages like this around here. A church stands in the middle of a field. The villages have gone. We call them Black Death villages. The Bubonic Plague came to Europe from the Crimea around 1349. Actually most of the research suggests that it originated on the Yunnan Burmese border and was carried by fleas on Mongol horses up to North China, then on camels along the Silk Road to the Crimea, and later on rats on Genoese ships. It was really much more serious than the present pandemic, though now bubonic plague can be cured by penicillin. The Silk Road so called was not really about silk and jewels . It was about disease and the main commodity on the Silk Road was slaves. For example the Mamlukes in Egypt were originally slave children from the Steppes of the Ukraine shipped through the Crimea. Of course, a lot of people were killed by Black Death which meant that a lot more slaves were needed to do the work. But that is another story, or many stories.

The next connection between England and the Black Sea was the Crimean War 1853-1856. Yesterday I borrowed a book from a neighbour Betty Andrews Leving: Florence Nightingale by Cecil Woodham Smith, published in 1950, and this is the next book I am going to read. She never went to the Crimea but set up her hospital in the Selimiye Barracks in Scutari ( Uskudar) in Istanbul. And the wounded were brought to the hospital 300 miles by ship across the Black Sea, thousands of them.....I am looking forward to reading this book and following up what actually happened on the shores of the Black Sea.

I am attracted to the Ottoman civilisation. Only this morning I was putting out Kilims, Turkish rugs, here in the attic at Lordington. I have very fond memories of the youth hostels in Palestine, now Israel.....the one in Jaffa beside the flea market which was an old Turkish customs house, and the beautiful one ... Fauzi Azar Inn in Nazareth. These are really nice places to stay ( and inexpensive.) And in the Ottoman domain

there are Roman ruins everywhere. Here in England, during the lockdown, I went for a walk around Fishbourne Creek and visited the Roman Palace there. It is only four miles from our house. I have never been much interested by Roman ruins because they did not seem to be relevant to our life these days....But actually they ARE relevant. The founder of Chichester and to a certain extent the builder of Fishbourne was Vespasian, later to be Emperor Vespasian, and father of Titus. It was these two Romans who campaigned in Palestine, Vespasian crushing the Jewish revolt in the north and Titus destroying Jerusalem in 70 AD, and scattering the Jews all over the world. So Vespasian, who came to Chichester in 40 AD, is relevant in the modern world. The Jews had to be scattered before they could want to go back, and that is what they have been doing since the Balfour Declaration. It is quite extraordinary! During the lockdown in England I have been digging at Lordington at least two hours a day to uncover the foundations of the 1623 South Wing of this house. But before I was allowed to start digging, a qualified archaeologist had to come and check the site to see if there was a Roman villa there. There wasn't, but it is quite right that there was this condition. Ruins are relevant. The Roman Empire stretched all the way from Chichester to Constanța on the shores of the Black Sea. As I said, Shakespeare uses Ovid's stories a lot, and Ovid lived in Constanța on the other side of Europe. Vespasian campaigned in Thrace too .....