

The Black Sea in the Light of New Archaeological Data and Theoretical Approaches. Proceedings of the 2nd International Workshop on the Black Sea in Antiquity Held in Thessaloniki, 18–20 September 2015.
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The Black Sea and its coastline have traditionally been the poor relation of Anglophone archaeological studies: constraints of language, politics and sheer vastness of the region have frequently rendered it a side note in wider studies of the ancient world. Nevertheless, the sea and its hinterland continue to be at the forefront of local archaeological investigation, as evidenced in the volume under review. These proceedings of a conference held at the International Hellenic University in Thessaloniki are a timely contribution to scholarship on the Black Sea in antiquity, providing a welcome synthesis of recent archaeological work allied with historical, epigraphic and numismatic evidence. The inclusion of nearly 150 full colour images is especially commendable, particularly in those papers focusing on large-scale excavations, where they provide a useful visual guide for the reader. The volume is divided into five sections, focusing on the north, south, east and west coasts, with an additional section deliberating on relations with the wider ancient world. This layout ensures equal coverage across the area in its entirety and allows the reader to envision parallels and divergences between neighbouring regions, as well as the role of the sea in connecting them. Due to contingencies of space, this review will concentrate on those contributions which the reviewer believes best encapsulate the aims of the volume.

Recent investigations of Black Sea Greek communities, some better

known than others, represent just over half the chapters. These include Berezan (pages 7–28), Tyritake (pages 29–39), Pistiros (pages 89–98), Apollonia Pontica (pages 119–179) and Tios (pages 207–216). The exploration of these sites has much to offer our understanding of the processes of Greek ‘colonisation’ in practice and can provide new models and paradigms for exploring the foundation of new communities, not just in the Black Sea, but also throughout the wider Mediterranean world. Dmitri Chistov presents an overview of the development of dwellings at the Berezan settlement (ancient Borysthenes), addressing the long-standing debate over the presence of dugout type dwellings in the earliest layers (page 13). He views this architectural form as primarily dictated by pragmatic considerations of time, effort and resources, consciously rejecting theories of climatic determination (Tsetskhladze 1998: 20).

Chistov’s paper, along with that of Jan Bouzek on Pistiros (pages 89–98), also discusses the development of urban grid planning. At Berezan, the street system seems to have developed in the mid- to late sixth century BCE, around half a century after the settlements establishment (page 23), while at Pistiros an orthogonal layout is evident from the settlement’s foundation (page 89). This mode of spatial organisation persisted at both sites throughout their occupation. Bouzek’s other discoveries are equally significant, providing evidence for the existence of a planned commercial settlement in the mid-fifth century BCE (page 97). It is hoped that the data from Pistiros will provide archaeologists with a window through which to refashion long-standing debates over the nature of emporia as a class of settlement, which has often become bogged down in an overwrought quagmire of competing literary and philological interpretation (Hansen 1997).

The papers concentrating on Apollonia Pontica take a variety of different viewpoints, from the identification of a sanctuary of Demeter through ceramic deposits by Margarit Damayanov (pages 119–137) to the cataloguing of finds from children’s graves by Mila Chacheva (pages 139–151). The datasets employed by these scholars are derived from the long-term Franco-Bulgarian mission, a summary of whose work is also presented by Alexandre Baralis and colleagues (pages 153–179). This multi-disciplinary team present their findings from both the urban area

and hinterland, crucially highlighting the importance of the discovery of extensive metallurgical industrial installations (page 159). Ores were obtained from the mines of nearby Medni Rid under the control of the local Thracians, demonstrating the existence of relatively peaceful trading relations between native tribes and Greek settlers (page 175).

The multi-disciplinary Russo-German investigations in the Asiatic Bosphorus is another major archaeological project that forms the subject of the paper written by the renowned Pontic scholar Gocha Tsetsckhladze. The discovery of defensive installations in rural communities predating the fifth century BCE causes Tsetsckhladze to speculate threats from Achaemenid Persia, rather than the local Scythians, with whom the Greek inhabitants seemed to be on relatively good terms. In general, exploration of rural settlements offers an opportunity to understand processes of Greek 'colonisation' beyond the main centres like those discussed in the previous paragraphs while simultaneously raising new questions on the nature of early settlement and the relationship between small marginal communities and larger urban conurbations.

Nevertheless, the volume does not merely restrict its focus to Greek 'colonisation'. Archaeological work on the Black Sea shore has long recognised the importance of native communities and non-Greek peoples and the relative marginalisation of the Greek settlements hugging the coast. Owen Doonan's excavations at Sinope, constrained by the presence of the modern city, have uncovered evidence of Early Iron Age interactions that prove "native populations... were sailing across the central crossing before the arrival of the Greeks" (page 217). While Doonan's discoveries are made in the context of the excavation of a nominally 'Greek' city, Adela Sobotkova attempts to assess the organisation and subsistence strategies of a definitively indigenous set of communities (pages 77–87). Data gathered by the Tundzha Regional Archaeological Project are used to speculate on the role of pastoral nomadism in ancient Thrace. It is refreshing to see such approaches and interpretations treating the native inhabitants of the region as autonomous groupings, capable of utilising regional geography to their own advantages, rather than as mere ciphers through whom Greek cultural forms could be adapted.

Contributions are not limited to Greek and native cultures alone; interactions with the Achaemenid Persian and Roman empires are also addressed. Miroslav Vasilev takes up the historiographical issues surrounding the identification of the alleged Persian city of Boryza (pages 99–118). The Scythian campaign of Darius I around 513 BCE is postulated as the possible historical context for the existence of this Persian settlement (probably more garrison than town) (pages 112–113). Vasilev's contribution has a rather antiquated feel, with a long digression on previous scholarship (some over a century old) that seems to belie the 'new' approaches suggested by the book's title. Deniz Erciyas and Mustafa Tatbul take a more contemporary angle in their account of the excavation of the Roman city of Komana (pages 239–247). Imperial cult worship and evidence for 'cultural and social integrations' render this discussion valuable in assessing Romano-Anatolian interactions (page 245). Ceramic data also suggest the city was an important part of the maritime trade routes of the era.

Rescue excavation of the Hacilarobası tumulus in northern Turkey, which incidentally provides the image for the volume's front cover, forms the subject of the paper by Şahin Yıdırım and Nimet Bal (pages 225–238). This tomb had been damaged in the early 1960s, and witness testimony from an individual who entered it at that time is used to gain an idea of its original contents. With at least two different periods of use, the Hacilarobası tumulus stands in a line of development stretching geographically from Thrace to Paphlagonia and was a form particularly popular in the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. The authors see the adoption of the circular wall surrounding the mound as an attempt to combine Roman and local cultural displays (page 236). The technique and importance of rescue excavation at such monuments is instructive, and, even when contextual information is lost, the authors are able to open up potential avenues for the reconstruction of the original state of sites that have suffered illegal excavations.

In sum, this volume represents an important contribution to the study of the Black Sea in antiquity. Its primary utility lies in the coverage of a vast range of material that would normally cause serious difficulties for the researcher to assemble independently. Projects are presented in the totality of their conception and execution, allowing the reader to gain a better understanding of the nature of modern interdisciplinary archaeological

excavation and the contextual situation of discoveries at the individual sites. Attempts to provide historical context for discoveries are generally sensible and well-reasoned, rarely crossing the line into outright positivism. While theoretical approaches are undoubtedly important here, as per the title, they are generally utilised only in so far as they can illuminate the data. Explicit discussion of methodology is limited to its application and engagement, with wider theoretical debates largely absent. The rapidity of the release of these proceedings, only one year after the workshop, lends the volume an air of immediacy that is often missing from publications of this type and ensures the presented information is unlikely to be superseded by new discoveries in the near future. Fortunately, the hurried turnaround has not resulted in any significant errors. Overall, the proceedings are a commendable effort to present the work of Black Sea scholars to new audiences and those familiar with the area alike. They will serve as an important addition to scholarly and personal libraries and should become an indispensable go-to for those researching the Black Sea in antiquity.

References

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