



The Black Sea in Antiquity: Regional and Interregional Economic Exchanges. Black Sea Studies 6. Edited by Vincent Gabrielsen and John Lund (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2007)

By Tim Murphy

Only incomplete information is available to us about the nature, intensity and volume of the economic exchanges in which the Black Sea region was involved in Antiquity. This volume includes eighteen papers presented at a conference held in 2004 at the University of Aarhus that sought to shed light on Black Sea trading patterns from the seventh century BC to the fourth century AD. Organized on behalf of the Danish National Research Foundation's Centre for Black Sea Studies, the conference sought to explore in particular the economic interplay between the various areas within the region itself and also between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Trade, and especially maritime trade in goods such as fish products, timber, wine, pottery, grain and olive oil, was allotted a privileged position. Production – understood in the broad sense to allow the inclusion of all kinds of commodities (including coins) as well as production facilities and manpower – was also given due attention.

Given the enormity and difficulty of the task, and given the hope of achieving a reasonable degree of thematic and chronological coverage, the editors asked the historians and archaeologists who participated in the conference to address explicitly a range of interrelated issues, including research methodology; the types of sources used; patterns of regional and interregional exchanges; transport technology and trade infrastructure; public and private institutional settings; and the relationship between commercial actors and politics. In their "Introduction" the editors admit that the priorities and preferences of contributing authors meant that the thematic focus was maintained less rigorously than was originally envisaged but they suggest that what was gained "is a greater variety of approaches to our overall theme and a much richer ensemble of issues that receive thorough treatment" (p.8). This suggestion is indeed borne out by the diverse range of scholarly and highly informative contributions that follow.

The opening chapter, by Alan Greaves, discusses the Archaic Greek, particularly the Milesian, "colonial" movement – this English word, the author observes, although it may be used in this context, "is loaded with unhelpful meaning and connotations, when what we are actually referring to are Greek emporia or apoikiai (p.10). Miletos, Greaves notes, "was, without doubt, the single most important polis involved in the Greek colonisation of the Black Sea" (p.7); Pliny the Elder tells us that Miletos had ninety such colonies and the paper argues that the role played by trade in their



foundation needs to be understood within the broader context of the diachronic socio-economic and environmental history of the polis and its chora. The motivations for Archaic Greek colonialism included multifarious factors but it was stenochoria (“lack of land”), prompted by the loss of land to the Lydians and then the Persians, which primarily motivated the otherwise home-loving Milesians to relocate. Because of our limited knowledge of ancient trading patterns, Greaves urges caution in making assumptions about which commodities were being traded and in what quantities. It is assumed, for example, that timber (including charcoal), fish, metals and grain were among the traded commodities but these are effectively archaeologically “invisible”: “Only pottery survives in sufficient quantity for studies to be made of its distribution pattern, and even this picture is incomplete” (p.20).

The caution urged by Greaves is evident in Marina Ju. Vachtina’s discussion of Greek Archaic pottery from the 7th and 6th century BC that has been excavated from barbarian sites belonging to the local population of the forest-steppe zone of the Black sea coastal region. Vachtina argues that this pottery is important evidence for how the local people of that region entered into an economical relationship with the well-developed civilization of Ionian Greece that helped to transform the “whole territory” into “one vast contact zone” (p.23).

David Bruand and Alfonso Moreno each contribute papers on the trade in grain between Greece and the Pontic, a subject addressed by Demosthenes in his speech Against Leptines, which they both discuss. Bruand’s analyses of the 5th and 4th century BC supply of Pontic grain to Athens argue that the variations in grain-supply, which may have been considerable, were driven by forces in addition to Athens’ need to feed its population, such as issues of grain-price, market demand in the broadest sense (far beyond the needs of basic sustenance), and the political strategies of Athenians and the rulers of the Bosphorous. Moreno’s study emphasises the political element and suggests “a very different way of understanding this trade: an oligarchic grain supply sustaining a professedly democratic state” (p.82). Moreno argues that the most important factor enabling Athenian grain imports from the Black Sea was the transformation, in the early 4th century BC, of a local tyranny at Pantikapaion into a powerful Graeco-Scythian monarchy. This transformation, he suggests, took place in the context of a specific intellectual and social nexus comprising a Bosphoran and Athenian elite: “These men were instrumental in the process of ideologizing, and thus of perpetuating, a royal economy that could generate large and stable surpluses of grain, and thus supply large quantities annually to Athens” (p.82).

The intensive Black Sea fish trade in antiquity is discussed in two chapters. In the first Andrei Opaïț notes that salted fish products of the Pontos Euxeinos were among the most well known goods of this region during Hellenistic and Roman times. Ancient literary and archaeological sources provide us with a variety of information regarding trade in fish but little is known about how this important constituent of the ancients’ diet was transported and traded. Transport amphorae are generally regarded as a prime archaeological source for ancient trade and exchange mechanisms because they provide direct evidence of the movement of agricultural



products such as wine, olive oil or fish products. Opaiť's paper examines some Hellenistic and Roman transport amphorae and shows how they confirm the reports in ancient literary sources of the existence of Pontic fish production and trade since Classical and Hellenistic times. In the second paper on the ancient fish trade Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen reassesses the fragmentary agoranomos inscription from Chersonesos in its geographical and chronological context. For Bekker-Nielsen, the inscription confirms the existence of a Crimean fish processing industry operating on a massive scale.

The 4th and early 3rd centuries BC was a time of prosperity for the ancient Greek colonies and temporary settlements of nomadic tribes. Alexander V. Karjaka discusses how the Dnieper Valley, despite the fact that a great number of potentially important and intriguing archaeological remains are now inaccessible to us, undoubtedly played an important role in the economics and trade of the different tribes that dwelt in and around the northern Black Sea Littoral; Yvon Garlan's brief French language contribution surveys the exchange of wooden or timber amphorae between Sinope and the Mediterranean during the classical and Hellenistic periods; and Vladimir F. Stolba's study of local patterns of trade in wine emphasises the often disregarded significance of painted inscriptions, or *dipinti*, on the amphorae. In other papers Lise Hannestand provides an overview of the timber resources of the southern and northern Black Sea coasts and the trade to the Mediterranean in this commodity, particularly for shipbuilding and house building purposes, and Alexandru Avram's paper argues that the available evidence supports the view that the Black Sea region was an important source of slaves for the Aegean market.

Krzysztof Domaźalski's chapter discusses the chronological sequence of imports of best quality table pottery to the Black Sea basin from their main production centres in workshops located in the Mediterranean, primarily around the Aegean Sea. His overview is based on the data yielded by archaeological material excavated in the region of the Kimmerian Bosphorus, as well as published materials from other sites. This paper marks the beginning of the author's new project, a thorough analysis of a class of ware connected with the activity of the Rhodian trade centre. In his chapter, John Lund, one of the volume's co-editors, notes that some scholars have gathered evidence for the occurrence in the Mediterranean of specific wares made in the Black Sea region. His contribution discusses trade relations between the two areas from the 4th century BC until about AD 200, based on the finds of Pontic transport amphorae and ceramic fine wares in the Mediterranean. Lund observes that he may be the first to focus on the overall pattern of such finds and suggests that it is "reasonable to assume that more or less the same number of merchant ships sailed into the Black Sea as those heading in the opposite direction"; but he emphasises that, at the end, any study of this period "[reminds us] of the limits of our knowledge" (p.190).

Lund remarks that he is unaware of large-scale ceramic imports from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea region in the Roman Imperial period in contrast to the situation in the late Classical and Hellenistic period, which could suggest that commercial relations between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean were at a



considerably lower level in Roman times than in preceding periods. Roman legionaries intervened in the Black Sea region in 89 BC to curb the ambitions of Mithridates VI of Pontos. Sergei Ju. Saprykin's paper focuses on the pre-Roman unification of Pontos: Mithridates sought to create a strong Pan-Pontic state on the Euxine in order to counteract the Roman threat as well as the power of the neighbouring Hellenistic kingdoms, and he also wished to bring the greater part of Asia Minor under his rule as the traditional domain of his predecessors. He linked his kingdom's administrative units with each other and with Pontos, and Saprykin's paper studies the bronze coins that were in use in the Euxine during the creation of this new economic landscape.

Clay lamps have been found in great quantities at the excavations of all Greek and Roman sites but there is incomplete publication of the archaeological material. Denis V. Žuravlev's paper is a detailed study of the imports and local production of lighting equipment of the Northern Pontic area in the Roman and late Roman periods. His chapter serves to introduce the special international research program, now underway, involving the co-ordinated cataloguing of collections by Russian and Ukrainian curators and researchers.

Zofia Halina Archibald explores contacts between the Ptolemaic kingdom and the Black Sea in the early Hellenistic Age. The Pontic regions were linked to the Levant and Egypt by a series of economic networks, based on the demand for commodities and minerals that were not available in the north. Gary Reger's paper on the relationship between travel and trade notes how trade between Ptolemaic Egypt and the Black Sea region has been invoked frequently as an explanation for the presence of persons from Egypt in the Pontic region and persons from Pontic cities in Egypt. There is no doubt about the close, long-standing trade relations between the two kingdoms but, Reger argues, increased freedom of movement was a hallmark of the Hellenistic world generally and (taking up a theme adverted to by Alan Greaves in the volume's opening paper, that the two most important agents in the Archaic Greek colonisation movement were the individual colonist and the oracle),

“our evidence for human movement need not always call forth a commercial explanation. Motivations of ideology, self-representation, politics, religion, ‘career’ (for men serving as mercenaries), may all have played their part in determining where people went, when, why, and what kind of traces they left of their passage.” (p.282)

In the final paper of this volume, Vincent Gabrielsen, the second co-editor, discusses the role of Byzantium in merchant trade between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. In the third quarter of the 3rd century BC, after it had armed itself with an assortment of local, “limited-range” monopolies, Byzantium was making a serious effort to cost-protect the merchants trading between the Mediterranean and the Pontos. Gabrielsen charts the impact of the relationship between the political economy and the free market economy on Byzantium's efforts.

The contributions to this volume are of a uniformly high quality and together they



provide a good overview of the available evidence on Black Sea regional and interregional trading patterns. Overall, the book is a worthwhile and fascinating contribution to this excellent series of studies of the Black Sea region in Antiquity. But a more detailed editorial introduction, including a historical overview and separate brief discussions of each paper, would have been apposite. Instead, the “Introduction” informs us merely that the book “assembles into clusters papers dealing with the same (or similar) kind of commodity or commodities... [I]n between these clusters [are] papers that focus on such general issues as tribute and taxes, traders and travellers, coin circulation and relations between the Black Sea region and Ptolemaic world” (p.8). Importantly, on the other hand, the editors do remark that there are divergences of opinion among some of the contributions but that this is in no sense surprising: “The issues involved are far too complex for simplified solutions, and the time has not yet come for drawing definite conclusions. But at least – and that may indeed be salutary – the discussion has begun” (p.8).

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