THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CAUCASUS

In *The Archaeology of the Caucasus*, Antonio Sagona provides the first comprehensive survey of a key area in the Eurasian land mass, from the earliest settlement to the end of the early Iron Age. Examining the bewildering array of cultural complexes found in the region, he draws on both Soviet and post-Soviet investigations and synthesises the vast quantity of diverse and often fragmented evidence across the region's frontiers. Written in an engaging manner that balances material culture and theory, the volume focuses on the most significant sites and cultural traditions. Sagona also highlights the accomplishments of the Caucasian communities and situates them within the broader setting of their neighbours in Anatolia, Iran, and Russia. Sprinkled with new data, much of it published here for the first time, *The Archaeology of the Caucasus* contains many new photographs, drawings, and plans, a considerable number of which have not been accessible to Western researchers.

Antonio Sagona, who died shortly after completing this volume in 2017, was an archaeologist of the ancient Near East, with expertise in Anatolia and the Caucasus. He wrote a number of books on the subject, including *Ancient Turkey* (2009). An elected Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities and of the Society of Antiquaries of London, Tony was editor of *Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, and taught at the University of Melbourne for more than three decades.

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The Cambridge World Archaeology series is addressed to students and professional archaeologists, and to academics in related disciplines. Most volumes present a survey of the archaeology of a region of the world, providing an up-to-date account of research and integrating recent findings with new concerns of interpretation. While the focus is on a specific region, broader cultural trends are discussed and the implications of regional findings for cross-cultural interpretations considered. The authors also bring anthropological and historical expertise to bear on archaeological problems and show how both new data and changing intellectual trends in archaeology shape inferences about the past. More recently, the series has expanded to include thematic volumes.

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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CAUCASUS

From Earliest Settlements to the Iron Age

ANTONIO SAGONA

University of Melbourne

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PREFACE

The primary aim of this book is to serve as a conspectus on the ancient Caucasus up to the end of the early Iron Age (ca. 800 BC). In some cases, I have extended beyond this chronological limit to round off the narrative, but whenever possible I have refrained from venturing too far into the second half of the first millennium BC. This study does not set out to be a comprehensive overview of every period, but offers a springboard to those who have had difficulty in accessing the rich heritage of the Caucasus. For those who have made the inevitable discovery that the region has much to add to our understanding of both the ancient Near East and the Eurasian steppes, it may serve as a means to delve further still. The Caucasus has always been viewed as a region of significance by researchers working in its surrounding lands. Yet for a variety of reasons, this rugged area remains bewildering for many researchers – a dizzying array of cultures that form an ill-fitting and patchy mosaic. Consequently, I have focused on what I regard as the most significant sites and cultural traditions, and I have tried to situate the accomplishments of the Caucasian communities within the broader setting of their neighbours in Anatolia, Iran, and Russia. Sprinkled throughout the book are some new data, published here for the first time.

Much of the information contained in this book derives from the staggering number of investigations carried out during the Soviet period, reflected to a certain extent by the voluminous amount of literature that resulted.[1] That flow of information has not abated in recent times, with each year producing a bountiful harvest of publications. During the Cold War, we must remember, Soviet researchers worked under considerable duress. Their academic isolation from their Western counterparts prompted some to refer to the archaeological potential of the Soviet Union in general, and Russia in particular, as the 'Great

[1] See, for example, the ten volumes (so far) of *Sovetskaia Arkheologicheskaia Literatura: Bibliografiia Ukazatel'*, and Zadnieprovskaia 2003 on the pre-revolution publications, which divide bibliographical references into regional listings.

Unknown'.[2] Even now, a quarter of a century after perestroika, most Western researchers still have only a vague understanding of the considerable work carried out by Soviet archaeologists. Language barriers, results published in small print runs not widely held in Western libraries, and vast quantities of material culture (mostly still unpublished in detail) render the information gathered during the Soviet period difficult to access and digest.

Although the upsurge of collaborative projects in recent years has ensured that the antiquity of the Caucasus is no longer a *great* unknown, it nevertheless remains out of reach for many archaeologists. Given this history of research, I thought it best to convey the archaeology of the Caucasus through a double helix. First, I present a synthesis of the complicated material remains, focusing on the main cultural sequences that are divided chronologically. While I have avoided presenting a purely descriptive account (I do not adhere to the notion of positivism), I do believe that close study of empirical evidence is necessary to interpret social behaviour. Then, secondly, I have assigned each chapter themes relevant to the period, which seek to explain aspects of cultural change within a broadly social approach.

Readers who feel a deeper interest in the subject for its own sake, or those who are stimulated by these pages to probe the topic further, will find directional points in the footnotes (a resource for which a knowledge of languages other than English is often demanded for full understanding). The references contain both additional accessible works and also studies often found only in the research libraries of the Caucasus, Moscow, or Saint Petersburg. Even a quick survey of Caucasian archaeology will highlight that the field, especially before the demise of the Iron Curtain, is characterised by studies that focus on regional matters and are self-referential in approach. As much as possible, I have attempted to transcend modern borders and regional academic traditions in the belief that, only then, will a coherent and holistic picture of the ancient Caucasus emerge. Now that the book is written, I am chiefly conscious of its omissions. The limited focus some issues receive was inevitable if the double purposes were to be achieved – producing a single book of not too an alarming size and, at the same time, giving it unity and readability. In many instances, though, the evidence is simply not there. Even so, I hope that both beginners and grizzled researchers will find some value in the words that follow.

This book has taken three decades or four years depending on what you count. My first visit to the Caucasus was by rail, in the early 1980s, when I crossed the former Turco-Soviet border with lashings of temerity that young postgraduate students often have. At the frontier town of Kars, I got on board a train pulled by a vintage Turkish locomotive (a German steam engine, if I recall), which chugged and belched its way to the border. Shortly after, I was 'abandoned' in no-man's land on the bridge overlooking

[2] Struve 1955: 12; Klejn 2012: 3–12.

the Arpaçay River. Waiting in a train carriage that had been uncoupled from the locomotive was a surreal experience. My wife, Claudia, the only other passenger in the carriage, and I looked expectantly through the foggy windows for several hours, wondering whether we had been forgotten. Then, in the late afternoon, as the winter clouds rolled in, we were attached to a Soviet-built engine and whisked to Leninakan (now Gyumri), and thence to Tbilisi. My first impression of the Caucasus was the inside of that train – sleeping berths with neatly folded moist sheets (it was winter), the sound of clinking glasses and laughter coming from the dining car, and the heady smell of unfiltered cigarettes that mingled with the pungent scent of salted fish. Merriment and camaraderie still mark my experiences in the Caucasus, a region for which I have a deep affection. This book is dedicated to the peoples of the Caucasus.

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I would be lacking courtesy if I did not expressly say what should be obvious to many readers – namely, that this book could not have been written without the assistance of many colleagues, especially my friends who work or live in the Caucasus. They know the archaeology of their lands far better than I ever will. A complete list of those whose help I have drawn upon in one way or another while writing this book would be a long one. To all of them I express my gratitude. Certain names call for special attention.

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My grateful thanks are due to Claudia Sagona, Abby Robinson, Simon Connor, and Giorgi Bedianashvili, who found the time to read the text in manuscript form, either in whole or in part, and to Giulio Palumbi, Mitchell Rothman, Geoffrey Summers, and Catherine Marro who indulged me in many extended discussions on matters Caucasian. To them I owe a number of corrections, much helpful advice, many additional references, and in several places a salutary change of emphasis, or the necessary qualification of an unduly dogmatic statement. I have also had the advantage throughout of the criticism and advice of Claudia Sagona and Abby Robinson, and the work owes more than I can well express to their clear sense of form and their immediate unfavourable reaction to obscurity or clumsiness of expression.

The illustrations have been planned as an integral part of the book, and Claudia is also to be credited for the formatting of the figures, and the re-drawing or adaptation of many published early illustrations. In some cases, the illustrations are her creations. To further emphasise the visual aspects, I took many of the photographs myself and I also drew a number of objects first hand.

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance provided by Giorgi Bedianashvili and Tina Kobakhidze, former librarians at the Otar Lordkipanidze Centre for Archaeological Studies, Tbilisi, in tracking down studies in relatively obscure publications that seldom reach Western libraries. In this regard, too, the Inter-Library Loan staff at the University of Melbourne library played an invaluable role in locating other publications and filling in many gaps. To Richard Serle, in Collection Management, at the University of Melbourne Library, I am especially thankful for the speed with which he was able to acquire for our library many publications, both hot off the press and long since out of print. Chandra Jayasuriya created the maps in this book. I am deeply grateful for her exactitude and patience.

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