

## INTRODUCTION: "PONTIC NETWORKS"

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Heinz Heinen, who was writing on the Roman Imperial period in the Northern Black Sea region for this volume, planned to call his chapter "The Long Way to Pontic Unity." He originally decided on this title because, in a very concise way, it described the situation on the northern shore of the Black Sea both before and during the period in question. Later, at any rate, he admitted that the term "unity" did not seem adequate to him: "Pontic Networks," he said, would be "more realistic." The piece was never written – Professor Heinen died in July 2013 – but his deliberation on his chapter's title reflects, in many respects, the ideas that permeate the entire book.

The volume opens with Askold Ivantchik's exploration of the early perception of the Pontus Euxinus by the Greeks prior to the period when the first colonies were founded on its shores (Chapter 1). The author argues that before the Greeks discovered and investigated the northern and eastern coasts of the Black Sea, they may have identified this whole body of water with the "Ocean" (which, in his opinion, accounts for the relatively late colonization of the region). But once it had been established that the Black Sea is a closed basin (which happened probably no later than the last third of the seventh century BCE), the Greeks began to perceive it as a geographic unity with a specific outline.

By introducing this notion of "unity," Ivantchik establishes a point of departure for the discussion within and amongst the chapters in this volume. The rest of the chapters focus primarily on the archaeological material and, in most cases, present the results of the contributors' life-long research, rather than a one-off exploration written specifically for this book. Each chapter could stand alone and each part of the volume treats a specific topic or theme (such as trade and economy, political culture, art and architecture, and the non-Greek populations of the region), often focusing on a certain category of the archaeological material (including amphorae, epigraphical material, burial complexes and funerary monuments, and architectural structures). Chronologically, the volume covers the period from the foundations of the first Greek colonies on the North Pontic shores at the end of the seventh and in the sixth centuries BCE to the Roman period, i.e.,

the early centuries CE; geographically, it encompasses the coastal territories of modern Russia and Ukraine, to which today we refer as the Northern Black Sea region.

Modern scholarship maintains that in antiquity the latter was formed by three major sub-regions: the Northwestern (with Olbia, Nikonion, Tyras, Histria, Kallatis, and Tomis);<sup>1</sup> Tauris (i.e., the larger part of the Crimea, with Chersonesos as its main center); and the Northeastern, including the Bosphorus (from Theodosia to Gorgippeia) and the Azov Sea coast (with the settlements of Elizavetovskoe and – later – Tanais).<sup>2</sup> Even from this brief description it is obvious that these sub-regions can be further broken down into more specific zones: thus, for example, the Northeastern sub-region comprised the European Bosphorus (the eastern part of the Crimea, or the Kerch Peninsula), the Asiatic Bosphorus (a part of the Taman Peninsula), and the Azov Sea area in the northeast. The exact division into the sub-regions differs from scholar to scholar, but the key areas remain the same, although it is clear that their boundaries must have fluctuated over time. The same refers to the entire Black Sea region in antiquity, although it must be said that the emerging picture does not necessarily correspond to our present-day conventional (and convenient) division of the region into the Eastern, Southern, Western, and Northern Black Sea coasts.<sup>3</sup>

The irregular line of Greek *apoikiai* founded on the Black Sea shores established a network – or, rather, networks – of economic relations, leading, over time, to the formation of the pan-Pontic market, which maintained close ties with the Mediterranean and ultimately became part of the Roman imperial market. In a maritime context, the points that are most closely associated with the notion of networks are harbors, and my own contribution to this book is devoted to this particular subject (Chapter 2). It provides an overview of the Greek harbors along the North Pontic coast, while specifically focusing on the Northwestern Black Sea harbor networks, examining them in the framework of the socio-political development of this region and within the larger “pan-Pontic” maritime community.

This essay is complimented by Ilya Buynevich’s introduction to the regional geological context (Chapter 3), which aims to facilitate our understanding of ancient settlement and navigation patterns in the area in question. When using geological data in archaeology, we rely on accurate reconstructions of coastal landforms and sea-level history, which are meant to reveal the former shoreline positions, locations and dimensions of ancient river mouths and inlets, and the extent of coastal bays and harbors. To date, the nature and magnitude of relative sea-level changes along the North Pontic coast in antiquity are still a point of contention. In his attempt to clarify this issue, Buynevich focuses, in particular, on the coastal evolution of the Northwestern Black Sea. His chapter also underlines certain pitfalls that one is likely to encounter when working on this

subject – from misinterpretation of the local geological context to oversimplification of its historical reconstruction.

From the topic of harbors the discussion naturally moves on to overseas trade in Part II, dedicated to the amphora trade in the North Pontic region from the Archaic period to the third century CE: the chapter by Sergey Monakhov and Elena Kuznetsova (Chapter 4) handles the finds up to the Hellenistic period, while Sergey Vnukov takes over for the introduction of the material from the first century BCE onwards (Chapter 5). No other category of archaeological evidence has such significance for the study of trade and economy of the Greco-Roman world as amphorae, for the reason that “they are not so much a commodity in themselves as a trace element reflecting the movement of the various commodities which they contained.”<sup>4</sup> The general potential of this type of evidence, “at once a dream and nightmare,” has been outlined elsewhere,<sup>5</sup> but this volume’s contributors present the most recent and most detailed chronological and typological classifications of amphorae that were both imported by the North Pontic region and locally produced. The authors start their account from the establishment of stable economic contacts between the Northern Black Sea and the Mediterranean after the foundation of the Greek colonies on the North Pontic coast, followed by the emergence of the South Pontic centers and the intensification of the inter-Pontic trade. They then proceed to the development of local wine production in the North Pontic centers and the involvement of the Western and Eastern Black Sea regions in regional and interregional trade, and conclude with the question of the formation of the pan-Pontic market and its evolution within the Roman imperial market. The analysis of the distribution patterns of various amphora types and of the changes in the dynamics of their production and import take a considerable part of both chapters, but the most important conclusions based on this analysis concern, in a more general way, the overall economic history of this region in antiquity.

The intensive connections between all the macro- and micro-regions must have generated not only a notion of “the Pontus as a region whose economy and society were largely self-contained,”<sup>6</sup> but also some sense of regional identity. In Chapter 6, which focuses on the political culture of the Northern Black Sea cities in antiquity, Angelos Chaniotis discusses, among other topics, the case of “Pontic” identity, along with other identities that may or may not have been assumed by the inhabitants of these cities. Greek and Roman historians and geographers, who contributed to the creation in the minds of their audiences of the image of the Pontus as a world apart,<sup>7</sup> wrote about the people who dwelled around that sea,<sup>8</sup> sometimes referring to them collectively as “Pontici/Pontikoi.”<sup>9</sup> We also know that the terms “Pontikos/Pontios/Ponticus,” when used in relation to the identity of an individual or a group of people, could have had an array of meanings.<sup>10</sup> Based on the morphological

analysis of the forms “Pontikos” and “Pontios,” it has been demonstrated that the former must have been coined by Greeks from outside the Black Sea region and was originally associated with goods rather than people, while the latter applied only to those who literally dwelled in the Pontus Euxinus, i.e., the divinities rather than human beings, and that either form could denote someone’s *ethnika* only because of this person’s association with the sea.<sup>11</sup>

In his chapter, Chaniotis presents, among various other pieces of epigraphic evidence, a translation of the honorific decree for Orontas of Olbia issued by the people of Byzantion in the early first century CE (*IOSPE I*² 79). This document directly mentions the *Pontic ethnos* (τὸ Ποντικὸν ἔθνος),<sup>12</sup> which is particularly significant in view of the location of Byzantion on the Thracian Bosphorus (the Propontis), near the entrance to the Pontus, “somewhat outside the parts of the world ordinarily visited,” as Polybius put it (4.38).<sup>13</sup> We do not necessarily know whether the population of Byzantion associated themselves with the *Pontic ethnos*, but if they did, this would be the only instance of such self-identification, since in all the other examples available to us it was always the outsiders who referred to the people living on the shores of the Black Sea as “Pontici/Pontikoi.”

In general, the epigraphic evidence from the North Pontic coast demonstrates that the inhabitants of this region must have felt stronger about their other identities than about being a part of the Pontic community. Chaniotis suggests that this may be explained with the specifics of the region, where the often difficult balance between the Greeks and their neighbors, the constant tension between cooperation and conflict, and the pressures from other inner and outer forces all had a strong impact on one’s self-identification – especially in the cases when one’s loyalty was concerned. Thus, while Hellenic identity probably had more meaning to these people than Pontic identity did, the loyalty to their respective *poleis* must have been even more important, so that the most prominently manifested identity throughout the entire period of the existence of Greek cities on the northern coast of the Black Sea seems to have been the civic one.

The notion of cultural identity and the interactions between the Greeks and various non-Greek populations of the North Pontic region, both sedentary and nomadic, is further explored in the chapter by Maya Muratov on Bosporan art (Chapter 7). The subject of art is not frequently treated in publications on the Northern Black Sea in antiquity, and even when it is, the predominant approach is the stylistic one. Muratov, on the contrary, examines specific groups of art objects, such as grave stelai and commemorative slabs, in their social context, which allows her to offer innovative and insightful interpretations of some well-known artifacts. She demonstrates how the recurrent visual formulas, although undeniably associated with the Greek pictorial tradition, reflect the developments that took place within

Bosporan society and manifest the emergence of the new – Bosporan – cultural identity.

Characteristically local features are also detectable in the architecture of the ancient cities in the Northern Black Sea region, although their presence is less conspicuous in the case of the structures built in a specific architectural order. This may have to do with the fact that such structures were, to a great extent, public buildings and, therefore, were bound to follow in their style the standards of Greek architecture. In general, it is considered that the architecture of the Ionian colonies in the North Pontic region developed in accordance with the architectural traditions of their Greek mother-cities. Alla Buřkikh's chapter in the present volume (Chapter 8) revisits this argument and meticulously analyzes the available evidence, concluding that the beginning of the formation of the local North Pontic architectural style may be traced back to the Late Archaic period, although the evidence is still rather sporadic and does not necessarily testify to the existence of a local architectural school during that period. However, according to Buřkikh, there is enough evidence to demonstrate that at least two regional architectural schools – northeastern and northwestern – already existed during the Classical period. Moreover, the Hellenistic period witnessed not only the formation, but also the evolution of three regional architectural styles, associated with the three major centers of the North Pontic region – Olbia, Chersonesos, and the Bosporus.

Beyond these centers, the hinterlands of the Northern Black Sea coast were inhabited by various peoples, with whom the Greek *apoikiai* had rather unstable relations. The two major powers among them, which played a key role in the history of the North Pontic region in antiquity, were the Scythians and the Sarmatians. Both names are known to us from ancient historians, and the presence of these peoples in the Northern Black Sea region is well documented archaeologically, yet the correlations between the remains of their respective material cultures and the evidence provided by the ancient written sources are anything but straightforward. In relation to the Scythians, this question has been addressed more than once within the last few decades,<sup>14</sup> and it is clear that the term “Scythians” has been used in reference to different entities, depending on the context: thus, the “Scythians” described by Herodotus and the “Scythians” of the Archaic period known from archaeological material are different from those of the fourth century BCE. One also needs to take into consideration that both the Classical literary tradition and modern scholarship tend to mythologize Scythian history and that such views may still dominate our perception of this people and their culture.<sup>15</sup>

In the case of the Sarmatians, on the other hand, the discourse on how their constructed ethnic identity interferes with our interpretation of archaeological evidence has been initiated only recently. The Sarmatians,

too, were a nomadic people described by ancient writers and studied by modern scholars. Various theories of migrations have been generated seeking to explain the diffusion of the “Sarmatian” material culture across large territories. According to the currently prevailing scholarly opinion, the Northern Black Sea region witnessed a steadily increasing accumulation of the “Sarmatian” features by the inhabitants of the Greek cities from the third century BCE to the middle of the third century CE, as well as a gradual extension of the “Sarmatian” culture westward. In her contribution to this volume, Valentina Mordvintseva (Chapter 9) discusses the complex historiography of the question and presents her conclusions concerning the Sarmatians, both as a historical people and as an entity created by modern scholarship. Based on her study of the archaeological material from numerous burial complexes, Mordvintseva argues that the people who populated the region between the Volga-Don basin and the Ural steppes (known as the “Sarmatian Motherland”) and left behind the kurgan burial-grounds that were characteristic of that region were not the “Sarmatians” who inhabited the Northern Black Sea region prior to the first century BCE.

The question of identity is one of many addressed in several chapters of this book. Together, the nine chapters comprising the volume cover a broad variety of topics, but by no means offer an exhaustive study of the region – a task that is not necessarily impossible to complete, but certainly not in a single volume. In my experience, the study of this particular part of the Greco-Roman world requires, most of all, perseverance, and for me, working on this book was yet another reiteration of this experience. Although the past, recent, and ongoing events in Russia and Ukraine, the two states that share the Northern Black Sea coast today, have been drawing attention to this region, to the scholars of antiquity it still very much remains a “world apart.” This is why I, as the editor, find great satisfaction in the fact that this volume, incomplete as it may be, brings this world closer to those who wish to study it and have the necessary perseverance to do so.