THE NORTHERN BLACK SEA COAST: A TEST CASE FOR THE STUDY OF GREEK REPRESENTATIONS OF THE EAST AND EAST-WEST IMPACT[*]

by

JOANNA PORUCZNIK

The thesis examines Greek perceptions of the North Pontic area with special focus being placed on intercultural relationships in the region and the development of local identities. By taking a multidisciplinary approach, the study uses various materials available for researching ancient societies. These include literary, epigraphic, numismatic and archaeological sources. Also, certain concepts of cultural anthropology have been used to discuss problems regarding ethnicity and collective identity in ancient society. The chronological scope of the thesis encompasses over a millennium of Greek–Barbarian (i.e. non-Greek) interrelations in the northern Black Sea region. The starting point of the work has been defined by the time when the Greeks first came into contact with local populations and Greek settlements were set up along the northern Black Sea shore, which can be traced to the 7th and 6th centuries BC, during the Archaic period. The following Classical and Hellenistic periods have come into special focus in the thesis due to the fact that the literary *topoi* and the imaginary view of the northern Black Sea region and its population, which deeply influenced later (especially Roman) writers, were developing over these periods.

The thesis investigates the way in which mutual interrelations in the region were perceived by the Greeks themselves and how the Greek *apoikiai* created their own distinctive local identities. The test cases that were analysed in the thesis illustrate how the cultural identity of the Black Sea cities was established through conscious self-representation of Black Sea society and its local elite. Apart from a local North Pontic perspective, the thesis also demonstrates the way in which the Greeks built up the image of their *Oikoumene* on a wider Panhellenic level. This is closely observed in the way nomadic societies and other local indigenous peoples (i.e. the main Black Sea *Others*) were perceived in Greek tradition. The thesis also discusses the economic and political relationships that existed between the North Pontic region and the rest of the Greco-Roman world which appear to have had an impact on a broader Greek literary tradition.

The discussion on Greek–Barbarian relationships in the North Pontic region begins with an overview of Eastern and Western approaches to the study of ethnicity and cultural identity. As demonstrated in the thesis, the North Pontic region appears to be a meeting place of Eastern and Western methodologies. Importantly, in the 20th century the western and northern Black Sea area was included into the conceptual framework of a homogeneous "Eastern Europe" which emerged (especially in its political sense) during the communist period[1]. Although after 1990 the term "Eastern Europe" lost its political (and ideological) connotations, the effects of such a division between Eastern and Western Europe is still noticeable today. For many years the Black Sea region remained beyond the main focus of interest of Western scholarship. This was probably caused not only by the geographical remoteness of the Black Sea region from the Mediterranean World with which classical studies are mainly associated, but also by the political situation that resulted in the split in the way in which archaeological and anthropological thought developed. The language barrier is another important aspect which still impedes the flow of information between the Black Sea region and Anglophone scholars. Therefore, the thesis particularly emphasises the fact that East–West co-operation with regards to the study of the Black Sea area is crucial for a better understanding of multicultural encounters in this region.

It has been demonstrated that the growing interest in the study of ethnicity in the second half of the 20th century created an impetus to re-examine the question of Greek identity (Hellenicity)[2]. The main change that occurred at that time in the perception of ethnicity in Western anthropology was the fact that ethnicity

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[1]   See Ch. KING, *The Black Sea. A History*, Oxford 2004, pp. 4 f. with n. 4.

[2]   See especially J.M. HALL, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, Cambridge 1997; IDEM, *Hellenicity: between ethnicity and culture*, Chicago 2002; for an overview, see J. SKINNER, *The Invention of Greek Ethnography: From Homer to Herodotus*, Oxford 2012.

was no longer treated as a historically or biologically constructed social unit, but rather as a subjective self-categorisation of a group of people, which is in a constant process of "becoming". Consequently, ethnicity is today regarded more as a situational and instrumental phenomenon than a passive and monolithic one[3]. Such a perception of ethnicity stands in opposition to Eastern-European approaches, which have long been influenced by the culture-history theory rooted in Marxism. As a consequence, an ethnos in Eastern anthropology is defined in terms of its long history, enduring attachment to the territory and material culture[4]. Such an approach however does not take into consideration the existence of collective identities that were established, for example, through a common experience of migration and a new self-definition.

A similar conceptual change in Western anthropology can be observed in the perception of culture. As a result, culture is no longer perceived as monolithic and fully coherent, since such an assumption, based on an illusory image of culture as a clearly defined and static unity, does not take into consideration the existence of other subgroups and subcultures that continuously negotiate their flexible sense of identity. Culture should instead be understood as changeable and dynamic, and based on receptivity and interaction with other cultures. Culture is what defines and organises social life and thus it needs a certain degree of integrity and a set of practices (Sewell's "thin cultural coherence") which allow culture to function. However, this necessary minimal degree of coherence can be weakened by various trans-societal processes, such as migration and the creation of diasporas[5]. An important role in the constant process of negotiation and maintenance of cultural coherence is played by power and politics that define cultural boundaries and norms through state institutions and resistance to oppositional groups[6].

Important focus has been placed on the fact that the North Pontic region has been conceptualised not only in antiquity but also in modern times when the region was included into the conceptual framework of Eurasia. This can be found in Rostovtzeff's concept of the Greco-Iranian world of the south Russian steppe, according to which the south Russian steppe was a meeting place of the

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[3]   See F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organisation of Culture Difference*, Bergen–London 1969; C.P. Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity. Constructing Identities in the Past and Present*, London–New York 1997; J. Hutchinson, A.D. Smith (eds.), *Ethnicity*, Oxford–New York 1996.

[4]   S.J. Shennan, *Some Current Issues in the Archaeological Identification for Past Peoples*, Archaeologia Polona XXIX 1991, pp. 29–37.

[5]   W. Sewell, *The Concept(s) of Culture*, in: V.E. Bonnel, L. Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, Berkeley 1999, pp. 35–61.

[6]   See J. Ober, *Postscript: Culture, Thin Coherence, and the Persistence of Politics*, in: C. Dougherty, L. Kurke (eds.), *The Cultures within Ancient Greek Culture: Contact, Conflict, Collaboration*, Cambridge 2003, pp. 237–255.

Western and Eastern worlds[7]. Such a concept was connected with the idea of the Eurasian Steppe as a Pan-Eurasian culturalß, economically and politically unified region. However, it appears that this concept is a modern idea that was non-existent in antiquity. The evidence of a strong cultural link between various groups of peoples inhabiting the steppes and the Iranian plateau has in fact never been found[8].

Therefore, it has been pointed out that an Iranian cultural impact on the northern Black Sea region may have had a different source, which is to be found in the Achaemenid Empire rather than in the Scythian steppes[9]. There are known objects that were inspired by Achaemenid art or that originated from the Achaemenid state that have been found in the North Pontic region, particularly in the necropoleis of the Bosporan Kingdom, among which the most usual finds are cylindrical seals and carved stones (scaraboids) dated to the 5th–early 4th centuries BC[10].

The analysis of Greek written, iconographic and archaeological sources carried out in the thesis has shown the nature of intercultural relationships in the North Pontic region and the way in which they were perceived in antiquity and also in modern study. For that reason, special focus has been placed on postcolonial studies, which offer a new methodology and a fresh insight into cross-cultural relationships in antiquity[11]. This is particularly important in the case of the Black Sea region which has for many years been beyond the main focus of the study of ethnicity in Western scholarship. The northern Black Sea region in antiquity was a place of constant reciprocal contacts between the Greeks, local indigenous peoples (such as the Taurians and Maeotians) and the Steppe nomads (known as the Scythians and Sarmatians). For many years the North Pontic region was artificially divided between the Greek and "barbarian" civilisations, however, the clear-cut division between "civilised" Greeks (colonisers) and "barbarian"

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[7] M.I. Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia*, Oxford 1922.

[8] See C. Meyer, *Rostovtzeff and the Classical Origins of Eurasianism*, Anabases IX 2009, pp. 185–198; idem, *Iranians and Greeks after 90 Years: A Religious History of Southern Russia in Ancient Times*, Ancient West & East X 2011, pp. 75–159.

[9] See J. Nieling, H. Rehm (eds.), *Achaemenid Impact in the Black Sea: Communication of Powers*, Aarhus 2010.

[10] N.F. Fedoseev, *Zum achämenidischen Einfluß auf die historische Entwicklung der nordpontischen griechischen Staaten*, Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan XXIX 1997, pp. 309–319; M. Treister, *Achaemenid and Achaemenid-Inspired Goldware and Silverware, Jewellery and Arms and their Imitations to the North of the Achaemenid Empire*, in: Nieling, Rehm (eds.), *op. cit.* (n. 9), pp. 223–280.

[11] See e.g. Ch. Gosden, *Archaeology and Colonialism. Cultural Contact from 5000 BC to the Present*, Cambridge 2004; P. van Dommelen, *Colonial Constructs: Colonialism and Archaeology in the Mediterranean*, World Archaeology XXVIII 1997, pp. 305–323; idem, *Colonial Interactions and Hybrid Practices: Phoenician and Carthaginian Settlement in Ancient Mediterranean*, in: G.J. Stein (ed.), *Archaeology of Colonial Encounters: Comparative Perspectives*, Santa Fe–Oxford 2005, pp. 109–142.

non-Greeks (i.e. colonised) does not explain the complex nature of the inter-relationships that existed in the Black Sea area. The thesis shows a conceptual change that has been introduced in the study of "colonial" societies in antiquity, a change which has occurred as a result of the development of postcolonial and postmodernist thought and the recent effects of globalisation.

As a consequence, such ideas as acculturation (i.e. the Hellenisation of non-Greeks) have been questioned by scholars, since the concept of acculturation does not take into consideration such phenomena as mutual interactions, hybridi-sation, exchange and cultural reciprocity. It has been demonstrated that the process of developing local identities in the Greek *apoikiai* was a result of a common experience of migration and a new self-definition of a group of people who needed to establish a new collective identity[12]. At the same time, a feasible middle ground for relations between Greeks and non-Greeks needed to be established, which does not appear to have been based on a structuralist system of opposition "us" (i.e. Greek) versus "them" (the imaginary *Other*), a system that gained popularity in classical studies especially due to the influential works by F. HARTOG and E. HALL[13].

The thesis points out that the aforementioned dichotomy between Greeks and non-Greeks appears to have been artificially constructed in Greek thought for particular reasons which did not play an important role in the Black Sea "colonial" context. It has been argued that the boundaries of an ethnic group do not have to be based on a sharp opposition to other groups. On the contrary, ethnic boundaries such as norms, beliefs and values that are constructed and maintained in order to preserve a group's identity and define social relations with a neighbouring and familiar *Other* are based on common understanding and mutual interest rather than "us–them" polarisation and conflict. Such a situation is characteristic of so-called plural societies, namely societies composed of different ethnic groups or cultural traditions, which seems to correspond closely to the societies in the North Pontic region. In such plural societies ethnic relations and boundary constructions are less sharp and they more often try to describe the way in which "we" are distinct from "them", instead of creating a one-sided view of the *Other*[14].

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[12]   I. MALKIN, *Networks and the Emergence of Greek Identity*, Mediterranean Historical Review XVIII 2003, pp. 56–74; see also IDEM, *Myth and Territory in the Spartan Mediterranean*, Cambridge 1994.

[13]   F. HARTOG, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, transl. by J. LLOYD, Berkeley 1988; E. HALL 1989, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, Oxford 1989.

[14]   F. BARTH, *Enduring and Emerging Issues in the Analysis of Ethnicity*, in: H. VERMEULEN, C. GOVERS (eds.), *The Anthropology of Ethnicity. Beyond "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries"*, Amsterdam 1994, p. 13.

It has to be taken into consideration that non-Greeks were incorporated into the Greek *apoikiai* from the onset. Moreover, apart from non-Greeks, the population of Greek cities undoubtedly included a number of Greeks who did not come from the mother city and thus, their sense of ethnic identity may have been different than the identity applied to a particular *apoikia*. A city's cultural identity was established through the social, religious and political order reflected in the city's *nomima* (i.e. "customary institutions" established shortly after the foundation of an *apoikia*)[15]. This, however, did not have to exclude the existence of other groups that may have expressed their self-awareness so long as it did not affect the city's cultural coherence, which was maintained through the city institutions. Therefore, it does not seem appropriate to try to categorise a multicultural society by looking for clear ethnic markers in the archaeological material. It has been demonstrated that any attempt to find such clear ethnic markers in the archaeological material (especially in a "colonial" environment) fails due to the fact that a particular archaeological artefact or material form may remain the same, but their meaning will differ in every context[16]. Moreover, artefacts may have circulated among different groups of people and consequently such objects could easily cross cultural boundaries, as in the case of Greco-Scythian metalwork and burial assemblages from the North Pontic region[17]. It should also be taken into consideration that the expression of ethnic identity may have been different from that of modern times. The strong emphasis that is placed on biological affinity today may not have played such a crucial role in antiquity[18].

It has been argued that the self-image of the North Pontic Greek *apoikiai* and their display of Greekness were crucial for the maintenance of cultural identity. The acceptance of a Greek cultural identity by other groups did not have to lead to acculturation; on the contrary, a sense of collective identity, which requires a certain (but not full) degree of integration, may have been successfully established in situations in which access to political and cultural participation in the city's life resulted in mutual benefits among the members of the "collective", as

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[15]   I. MALKIN, *Foundations*, in: K.A. RAAFLAUB, H. VAN WEES (eds.), *A Companion to Archaic Greece*, Chichester 2009, pp. 386–390.

[16]   JONES, *op. cit.* (n. 3), p. 126.

[17]   See C. MEYER, *Greco-Scythian Art and the Birth of Eurasia. From Classical Antiquity to Russian Modernity*, Oxford 2013; F. FLESS, A. LORENZ, *Griechen, Skythien, Bosporaner? Zu den Problemen "ethnischer Etikettierungen" von Gräbern in den Nekropolen Pantikapaions*, Eurasia Antiqua XI 2005, pp. 57–77.

[18]   See S. LUCY, *Ethnic and Cultural Identities*, in: M. DÍAZ-ANDREU et al., *The Archaeology of Identity: Approaches to Gender, Age, Status, Ethnicity and Religion*, London–New York 2005, pp. 86–109; E. GRUEN, *Did Ancient Identity Depend on Ethnicity? A Preliminary Probe*, Phoenix LXVII 2013, pp. 1–22.

in the case of the Sarmatian influx into the city of Olbia after the Getic attack[19]. The case studies discussed in this thesis with regards to Olbia, Chersonesus and the Bosporan Kingdom have demonstrated that multiculturalism appears to have existed in Greek *poleis*, even though a certain degree of cultural coherence was necessary in order to maintain the Greek cultural identity of the *poleis*. The intentional display of Greekness was possible through such means as city institutions, local cults, local historiography, the creation of a common genealogy, and the expression of elite power. The importance of Greek genealogy among the Bosporan rulers (who were of non-Greek origin) is worth pointing out, since it appears to have been an ideological construct which was creatively used in order to express a sense of Greek identity, which was a crucial element of self-representation among the Bosporan elite. In turn, the existence of mixed genealogical traditions is likely to have reflected the multicultural character of Black Sea society, which is visible in Herodotus' story concerning the origin of the Scythians[20]. Such a story need not be perceived only as an *interpretatio Graeca* of a Scythian tale, since such an approach does not take into consideration the importance of a mixed genealogical tradition for North Pontic society. Such a story may have had multiple meanings and interpretations depending on whether the tale was told among families that maintained a more Greek or Scythian identity.

Therefore, the thesis looks for other kinds of oppositions that may have played a more important role in the process of expressing and maintaining cultural identities in the North Pontic area. One such opposition may have been expressed both in the physical and psychological borders of a *polis* (where Greek cultural identity was intentionally maintained) and the rural and steppe territories (where multicultural encounters were not controlled by the city institutions). The importance of such an opposition between the city and the rural or/ and steppe territory in the nature of cultural interrelationships in the North Pontic region is clearly visible in local cults and religion. In the case of Chersonesus, the cult of Heracles appears to have held a special importance in the rural territory, especially during the times of the high prosperity of the city's *chora* (the late 4th–early 3rd centuries BC) where the hero was mainly worshipped as a protector and patron. What is important is that the worship of Heracles in the rural territories appears to have stood in contrast to Parthenos who was most likely the goddess and guardian of the city itself[21]. Similarly, the cults of Apollo (with

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[19]   For the idea of collective identity, see A. MELUCCI, *The Process of Collective Identity*, in: H. JOHNSTON, B. KLANDERMANS (eds.), *Social Movements and Culture*, Minneapolis 1995, pp. 41–63; F. POLETTA, J.M. JASPER, *Collective Identity and Social Movements*, Annual Review of Sociology XXVII 2001, pp. 283–305.

[20]   Hdt. IV 8–10.

[21]   V.F. STOLBA, *Guderne i Chersones: Parthenos og Herakles*, in: J. HØJTE, P. GULDAGER BILDE (eds.), *Mennesker og guder ved Sortehavets kyster*, Aarhus 2004, pp. 53–64.

the epithets "Ietros" and "Delphinios"), Zeus, Athena and other gods from the Olympic pantheon that were worshipped in Olbia are almost absent outside the city, where in turn the cult of Achilles appears to have been very prominent[22]. A similar opposition is visible between the urban and steppe zones that are associated with different traditions and a different lifestyle. The Orphic-Dionysiac cult in Olbia appears to have played an important role in expressing the city's unity through the establishment of a close relationship between the territory and the citizens of the *polis*[23]. Moreover, the cults of Demeter and Dionysus that are attested in Olbia had a distinctive chthonic nature that was related to agriculture which stayed in opposition to the nomadic traditions of the Scythians[24]. This is likely to have been reflected in Herodotus' stories about Scyles and Anacharsis in which such a juxtaposition of the rural and urban environments and their way of life is expressed[25].

Apart from the local Black Sea perspective, the thesis also investigates the image of the region on a wider Panhellenic level. The Black Sea region belonged to a wider Greek cultural zone in which a set of representations, such as literary motifs, stereotypes and clichés, functioned and created an imaginary view of the North Pontic area and its non-Greek population. The thesis stresses the fact that Greek representations of the North Pontic *Others* (i.e. non-Greeks) were part of a large and complex Barbarian repertoire that existed on a broader Panhellenic level. The image(s) of the *Other* functioned as literary *topoi* that were consciously used in different contexts in order to create a desirable effect on the recipient. These contexts included Greek art, poetry and Athenian tragedy in which the barbarian *Other* played an important role[26]. An essential element of Greek perception of the North Pontic region was ancient imaginary geography, according to which Scythia was the northern limit of the known world. This idea in turn resulted in the association of this region with common *topoi* regarding the edges of the world. However, in certain instances the influence of Panhellenic tradition on the North Pontic region seems to be present. An example of this is the iconog-

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[22]   D. BRAUND, *Greater Olbia: Ethnic Religious, Economic, and Political Interactions in the Region of Olbia, c. 600–100 BC*, in: D. BRAUND, S.D. KRYZHITSKIY (eds.), *Classical Olbia and the Scythian World*, Oxford 2007, pp. 37–77.

[23]   P. GULDAGER BILDE, *Some Reflections on Eschatological Currents, Diasporic Experience, and Group Identity in the Northwestern Black Sea Region*, in: P. GULDAGER BILDE, J. HJARL PETERSEN (eds.), *Meetings of Cultures in the Black Sea Region: Between Conflict and Coexistence*, Aarhus 2008, pp. 29–45.

[24]   G. HINGE, *Dionysos and Herakles in Scythia – the Eschatological String of Herodotos' book 4*, in: GULDAGER BILDE, HJARL PETERSEN (eds.), *op. cit.* (n. 23), pp. 369–397.

[25]   Hdt. IV 76–80.

[26]   Particularly in the so-called "escaping tragedies", see HALL, *op. cit.* (n. 13), pp. 122 f.; EADEM, *The Theatrical Cast of Athens: Interactions between Ancient Greek Drama and Society*, Oxford 2006, p. 241; EADEM, *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun*, Oxford 2010, pp. 272 f.

raphy of Parthenos (the main deity of Chersonesus), especially as *Elaphoktonos* (deer-killing), which may have been introduced to the North Pontic area due to the Euripidean tragedy[27]. Also, the Panhellenic motifs of Amazonomachy and Gryphomachy depicted on Kerch vases and other North Pontic objects may have reflected a local taste for myths that were familiar in the northern Black Sea milieu[28].

To conclude, the main arguments of this thesis are to demonstrate that first, East–West co-operation with regards to the study of the Black Sea area is crucial for a better understanding of multicultural encounters in the region in question; second, cultural identity of North Pontic poleis was based not on the opposition to the imaginary *Other* but on co-operation with non-Greeks and an intentional display of Greekness through such means as city institutions, local cults, local historiography and elite power. Therefore, the nature of cultural interrelationships in the northern Black Sea region was more likely based on the opposition between the city (where Greek cultural identity was intentionally maintained) and the rural and steppe territories (where multicultural encounters were not controlled by the city institutions). Lastly, it is argued that Greek representations of the North Pontic *Others* were a part of a large and complex "barbarian repertoire" which was consciously used in antiquity in various contexts such as art, poetry and Athenian tragedy in which the barbarian *Other* appear to have played a different and more important role.

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[27] P. GULDAGER BILDE, *Wandering Images: From Taurian (and Chersonesean) Parthenos to (Artemis) Tauropolos and (Artemis) Persike*, in: P. GULDAGER BILDE, J.M. HØJTE, V.F. STOLBA (eds.), *The Cauldron of Ariantas: Studies Presented to A.N. Ščeglov on the Occasion of his 70ᵗʰ Birthday*, Aarhus 2003, pp. 165–183.

[28] F. FLESS, *Taste at the Periphery of the Greek World: The Iberian Peninsula and the Black Sea*, in: K. LAPATIN (ed.), *Papers on Special Techniques in Athenian Vases*, Los Angeles 2008, pp. 225–234.