

Around and across the Pontos Euxeinos: Recent Research in Ancient Black Sea Studies

From the Neolithic to the present day, the Black Sea was a true potter's wheel of tribes, nations and kingdoms, and was quite fittingly dubbed *Pontos Euxeinos* ('Hospitable Sea') by the Greeks. It was part of the ancient economy long before Greek colonization on its shores started. The Crimean peninsula in particular produced a surplus of grain, and Iranian tribes traded slaves and gold, while olive oil, wine and luxury goods were imported from the Mediterranean. The Northern coast was settled by Iranians from the steppes since the 2nd millennium, long before they were joined by Greek colonists, mostly from Western Asia Minor under Milesian leadership. These were the founders of Istria (Histria) and Borysthenes (Berezan) on the north-western littoral, of Taganrog in the North, and Sinope in the South as early as the 7th century; further Milesian foundations followed in the 6th century: in the North-West, Apollonia (Sozopol), Odessos (Varna), Tomis (Constanta), Tyras (Belgorod-Dnestrovskij) on the mouth of the homonymous river (now Dniester) and Olbia (besides Parutino) on the Hypanis (now Bug); Dioskurias in the East; in the North, on either side of the Kimmerian Bosphoros (Strait of Kerch), Pantikapaion, which would become the main royal residence of the Bosporan Kingdom, and Gorgippia. To these, Tanaïs was added on the mouth of the homonymous river (now Don) in the 3rd century. Phanagoria opposite Pantikapaion was a foundation by Teos (6th century). The city of Megara also founded colonies, including Mesambria (Nesebar) on the Western coast and Herakleia Pontika in Asia Minor (6th century). The latter, in turn, settled Kallatis (Mangalia) in the West and Chersonesos (Sevastopol) on the Crimea (4th and 5th centuries BCE respectively); Chersonesos would become one of the economic centers of the Bosporan Kingdom.

Thracians did not only control much of the eastern coast, but also infiltrated the north-western parts of Asia Minor. Three centuries of Persian rule (6th-4th century) did not fail to leave

their imprint on the Anatolian peninsula either, the most lasting being the long-lived House of the Mithradatids: this family began to rule over Pontos in North-Eastern Asia Minor soon after 300, before incorporating the Kimmerian Bosporos into their kingdom in 111. The Romans showed some interest in the region in the 2nd century before establishing firmer control in the 1st century BCE, to last – with some disruptions caused by the Goths and Huns (3rd to 5th centuries CE) – well into the Byzantine period.

The whole area thus happened to be an integral part of the Classical world for over a millennium. And yet the Classics Community in North America has paid comparatively little attention to it. Severe political divisions made the archaeological sites barely accessible for most of the 20th century, and recent political conflicts do all but improve the situation. In addition, most publications of inscriptions, coins, artifacts and synthetic scholarship are in languages not read by Westerners, especially in Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Georgian, and Turkish. At the same time, many scholars in the East have been eager to establish international research collaborations, and a growing number of researchers who grew up on the Black Sea Littoral are now established at West-European and North-American institutions of higher education.

The present panel reflects a most recent Canadian initiative to bring together scholars from all over the Northern Hemisphere to share their expertise and work towards an accessible, up-to-date and comprehensive account of Black Sea History. Five papers have been chosen to convey some impressions of the geographical extensions, chronological scope, cultural diversity and panoply of skills required for critical research.

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