

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications, Department of History

History, Department of

June 2000

Review of *The Greek Colonisation of the Black Sea Area: Historical Interpretation of Archaeology*, ed.
Gocha R. Tsetskhladze

Vanessa B. Gorman

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, vgorman1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Gorman, Vanessa B., "Review of *The Greek Colonisation of the Black Sea Area: Historical Interpretation of Archaeology*, ed. Gocha R. Tsetskhladze" (2000). *Faculty Publications, Department of History*. 23.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historyfacpub/23>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, Department of History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

the concept 'Hellenization' are contested.¹ Lerner does not engage explicitly with this debate; which is surprising, as it seems highly relevant to his theme. He mentions with approval W. W. Tarn's characterization of Bactria as the 'fifth Hellenistic state'² (p. 11), and concludes that Sogdiana under Euthydemus constitutes a 'Graeco-Sogdian kingdom within the composition of the Hellenistic world proper' (p. 84); these cultural labels require elucidation. We might also ask whether Parthia should be described as a 'Hellenistic state', too; and if not, why not.

Perhaps the most valuable portion of the book is the discussion of Euthydemus' Sogdian coinage. Here again, however, methodological problems are only partly explored. Lerner sometimes seems to assume a simple equation between minting coins and independence. This may be questioned.³ Likewise, some of Lerner's assertions on the 'ideological' significance of coins are perhaps too blunt. In what sense, one wonders, might selection of coin-types 'curry the favour' of a population (p. 63)? Again, can one really say that alternation of Greek and Aramaic legends on Euthydemus' Sogdian coinage is certain evidence for a population 'whose official language was Greek, but whose local language was Aramaic' (p. 82)? Reflection on (for example) the use of Latin on British coins might prompt caution here.

In general, Lerner gives a scholarly treatment of a complex topic. The argumentation is often dense (a map might have helped), and not all his reconstructions convince (his dating of Euthydemus' accession, for example). In some areas, he could have taken more account of current scholarly debates over methodology. Nevertheless, Lerner's treatments in particular of Euthydemus and his Sogdian coinage are valuable. These at least should stimulate further work relating Parthian and Bactrian numismatics to history, for coins are likely to remain our best sources for these mysterious empires from the steppes of Central Asia.

Oriel College, Oxford

RICHARD FOWLER

GOCHA R. TSETSKHLADZE, ed. *The Greek Colonisation of the Black Sea Area: Historical Interpretation of Archaeology*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998. Pp. 336. DM 148.00.

THE BLACK SEA region is arguably the least understood in Greek history, chiefly because most of the Hellenic cities on the Pontos are located in modern states that lay for so long behind the Iron Curtain. For much of the second half of the twentieth century, these states could ill afford to spend resources uncovering the distant

¹ See, e.g., *Hellenism in the East*, ed. A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White (London, 1987).

² W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1951).

³ Compare the coinage struck by satraps of the Persian empire, or the Seleucid Antiochus VII's grant of the right to mint to the Jewish High Priest Simon (*I Maccabees* 15.6), both examples of subordinates minting in some sense 'under licence' from higher authorities. On coins and ideology, see, e.g., C. Howgego, *Ancient History from Coins* (London, 1995), chs. 3-4.

past, and what scholarship did result was kept within the Soviet realm, unknown in Europe and the Americas. (The exceptions, the cities on the south littoral, are under Turkish control, but that country also has limited resources available for archaeology.) In the last decade, the breakdown of the Soviet Union has opened up new scholarly horizons and allowed those of us in the West to profit from the outpouring of archaeological reports from the Black Sea.

The Greeks extensively colonized the Black Sea from at least the seventh century BC, and it has been Gocha R. Tsetskhladze's recent mission to publicize both archaeological finds and historical conclusions in languages accessible to non-Russian speakers. This volume offers sixteen essays in English and German, twelve of which are written by Eastern scholars. It concentrates on the Archaic and Classical periods (pre-323 BC); only three essays deal primarily with matters Hellenistic and Roman. In addition, the evidence is heavily weighted towards the north and west coasts (ten essays in all).

The most useful article in the collection is written by Tsetskhladze himself. He offers a long 'overview of the development of the Greek colonies and their relationship with the local population in the Archaic and Classical periods, identifying, as far as the evidence allows, general and specific features for each region of the Black Sea area' (p. 9). Such an essay has long been wanting, and Tsetskhladze executes his mandate clearly and even-handedly. His conclusions, which closely mirror the findings in many of the other essays, are that the Greeks first settled the region in the last third of the seventh century BC and that the colonies were built upon the economic foundation of fishing, agriculture, and craft production (p. 68): trade was secondary (*contra* S. Solovev, who argues that trade and craft production were the basis of the economy of Berezan, p. 221), and no grain was exported to Greece before the general expansion of the settlements into their neighbouring *chorai* in the middle of the sixth century (pp. 36-42, 66).

A few papers concentrate on economic issues (four), later perceptions of the Pontic area (two), and more specific topics such as the cult of Sabazios or a necropolis at Apollonia Pontica, but it is fitting that fully half of the essays are concerned with the controversial subject of ascertaining the earliest date for Greek settlement in the Black Sea. Without exception they all agree on c. 630 BC, thus rejecting the earlier literary dates for Sinope, Trapezos, Istros/Historia, and Berezan/Olbia. Of these articles, I mention three. M. Lazarov offers a general account of the dating of the western Pontic colonies, concluding that there the literary and archaeological dates are in close agreement. Similarly, G. A. Koshel'enko and V. D. Kuznetsov explore the settlement patterns in the Tauric Chersonesos, arguing for waves of settlement beginning in the early sixth century. Solovev's analysis of the situation at Berezan is spatially limited, but nonetheless useful, as Berezan is one of the best excavated, and so most informative, cities in the region.

The book is a necessary and valuable addition to modern scholarship on the

Black Sea region, and every historian of Greek colonization will be pleased to have so much information readily available at last. Yet, as historical interpretation, one would like to see more balance between literary and archaeological evidence or, at the very least, admissions like Lazarov's (p. 86) about the limits to the archaeological results, especially negative conclusions about dating: just because no remains from before *c.* 630 have yet been found, one cannot definitively state that the Greeks were not there earlier. Too many of the Archaic colonies are unexplored, under modern construction, or underwater. In addition, a problem inherent in the book is that the reader cannot check the references for accuracy and credibility without a working knowledge of Russian and access to obscure records. Thus, the greatest shortcoming of this work is also its chief value: now Western scholars can finally access specific information about the Greek colonization of the Black Sea littoral.

University of Nebraska

VANESSA B. GORMAN

DANIEL POWER and NAOMI STANDEN, eds. *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700-1700*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1999. Pp. xxiv, 293. \$59.95 (US).

THE WORD 'FRONTIER' evokes contrary meanings on different sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Americans, influenced by Frederick Jackson Turner, think of it as a zone of confrontation between freedom-loving pioneers and savage wilderness, while Europeans think of militarized, policed, sharply drawn dividing lines between homogeneous national communities. Neither of these stereotypes suits today's world, where national boundaries dissolve and 'wastelands' turn out to be inhabited by other peoples with distinct cultures. In this important volume examining frontiers across Eurasia in the medieval and early modern age, edited by Daniel Power and Naomi Standen, the authors successfully undermine received wisdom and highlight remarkably similar phenomena in disparate places. Comparative frontier studies have come of age.

The two brief introductions do not spell out an elaborate theory of frontiers, but they highlight important themes: frontiers are human constructions, not 'natural' or 'scientific' boundaries; social identities in border regions are defined by co-operative interactions as much as by sharp divisions; local magnates bargain with central authorities to set terms for controlling the border; there is no simple evolution from ambiguous zones to sharp lines, but a much more complex process of negotiation.

Nine case studies covering western Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, and China spell out these themes in fascinating, if sometimes excessive, detail. All the authors reject the outdated notions of linear boundaries created by nineteenth-century nation builders and historians. Mixing a little bit of the American concept into Europe blurs these lines, turning rigid borders into more ambiguous zones of settlement and multicultural interaction. In these studies, 'internal' frontiers within