

Pia Guldager and Jane Hjar Petersen (eds.), *Meetings of cultures in the Black Sea region. Between conflict and coexistence*, (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2008)

The cultures at issue are the native Scythian tribes, including Sarmatian ones, and the ancient Greek settlers in the Pontic Region, i.e. the vast steppe-land located in the northern and north-eastern regions of the Black Sea. This area was called *Euxeinos Pontos* for most part of the Graeco-Roman age, meaning literally 'hospitable sea', but it was really a euphemism replacing an earlier name introduced by Pindar, *Pontos Axenios*, i.e. 'inhospitable sea'. The studies contained in the volume focus upon Pre-Roman Times, particularly from the 7th century BC, when the first Greek settlements were established, to 63 BC, i.e. the year of Mithridates the Great's death, which marks as well the beginning of the Roman predominance. The disciplines involved in this survey are historiography, archaeology, numismatic, epigraphy and ceramography.

The book contains five chapters: "Setting the scene", "Spaces of identity", "Claiming the land", "The dynamics of cultural exchange" and "Mind the gap". The five chapters comprise nineteen articles written by eighteen different authors. Five of the published contributions were not presented at the conference: the article by P. G. Bilde in the first chapter and the articles by A. V. Karjaka, A. V. Gavrilov and T. N. Smekalova in the third chapter.

It is unavoidable for us studying something like *the very concept of culture* as a pragmatic category, i.e. as a truth that is such because it produces practical results that satisfy *us*, and not vice versa, i.e. as a truth that is such before the production of any satisfying practical result. Thus, it is important to understand that the things we can say about other cultures - whether Greek or non-Greek, sedentary or nomadic - will necessarily be a product of *our* culture, which establishes the criteria for practical satisfaction in the first place, that is to say, *our* own complex system of *expectations*. Hence we should note that, for instance, writing 'settler' instead of 'colonist' is a choice that is not inherent to those peoples that we write about, but to ourselves. These considerations certainly act on the background of the articles contained in the book, but they are not theoretically themed and discussed.

In the book, the contents develop around the main aspect stated in the title of the chapter in which they appear. The three articles that form the first chapter are written by J. A. Vinogradov, P. G. Bilde and V. Mordvintseva, and they describe the historical context. In particular, Bilde's paper introduces and analyzes two very significant terms: *diaspora* and *hybridization*. The second chapter also includes three articles, the authors of which are P. Attema, A. Baralis, M. Vickers and A. Kakhidze, and it shows the way Greek and non-Greek groups established themselves in neighbouring areas. In Vickers' and Kakhidze's opinion this fact can be determined by the careful study of the collocation of burial sites. The five papers in the third chapter, written by J. M. Højte, A. V. Karjaka, A. V. Gavrilov and T. N. Smekalova, explain how to look at the ancient management of land division so as to identify how far the two different cultures had been able to collaborate. The four articles that

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constitute the fourth chapter, authored by J. H. Petersen, N. A. Gavriljuk, L. Summerer, N. G. Novi?enkova and E. Kakhidze, examine the way differences of status and power overcame and replaced differences of ethnicity. The fifth and last chapter is composed of three papers, written by R. Osborne, D. Braund and G. Hinge, and it explains how *Self* and *Other* are substantially the same, since: (a) everyone can see him/herself in the self of the other, and (b) the self needs the other's recognition to be formed. On this theoretical matter, the authors refer here in particular to Herodotus' fourth book of his *Histories*.

The topic of this book - i.e. the way in which the *meeting of cultures* took place in antiquity - is relevant not only to classical scholars, but also to us, who live in a historical contingency certainly no longer modern, but also no longer postmodern: the dichotomy between *Us* and *Them*, or between *Other* and *Self*. This dichotomy is today even more problematic than it was only few generations ago, because it is *the very concept of dichotomy* that is being questioned. In fact, if the truth is today considered to be *becoming*, i.e. *walking with us*, correlatively to the practices of knowing that are embodied in our life's occasion, then every dichotomy is 'only' transiently true. In other words, thinking the difference between *Them* and *Us* becomes a practice that is theoretical, ethical, but also historical.

Meeting of cultures in the Black Sea region is recommended not only to those who just want to increase their knowledge about specific Greek communities settling in the Pontic region, but also to everyone interested in themes like the *frontier*, the *periphery*, the tension between *wilderness* and *civility*, and even in retrieving the material traces of the dynamic development of concepts like *Self* and *Other*, i.e. theoretical issues that are highly relevant in the age of globalization.

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