

S.L. Solovyov, *Ancient Berezan. The Architecture, History and Culture of the First Greek Colony in the Northern Black Sea*, Brill, Leiden/Boston/Köln 1999 (*Colloquia Pontica* 4), xvi + 148 pp., 118 figs. ISBN 90 04 11569 2, ISSN 1389-8477, € 66,-.

As is well known, the opening up of the iron curtain has brought a substantial part of the Ancient World much closer to Western Europe. 'Western' archaeologists went East, 'Eastern' archaeologists and archaeologies came West. Texts became more widely available through translations, cooperations and exchange programs, scholars met in conferences and group publications, including the previous issue of this journal. The book reviewed here is another example of this lively exchange, as it was written in Russian, translated and prepared in the UK by an international team and finally published in the Netherlands. Moreover, it contains a synthesis of more than 100 years of Russian and Ukrainian scholarship.

As the subtitle indicates, however, it has to offer more than just that. It is a thorough study of the cultural history of a small settlement in the northern Black Sea, in which the raw archaeological data provided by that century of excavations form just the starting point. Solovyov manages very well to place this cultural history in the context of not only regional developments in the Greek colonies and the indigenous inlands of the Northern Black Sea area, but also of the social, political and economic history of the Greek colonial world more generally.

As to its methods, this book could be a welcome example of a kind of colonial archaeology which could revitalize the traditional 'Western' approach, which focuses so much on art, chronology and evenemential history. In practice, however, the differences between 'East' and 'West' are less marked than they seem at first sight. There appears to be a hidden agenda in Solovyov's work, which in the end places it in a tradition which is much older than the 20th century political division between East and West: most of the book is implicitly devoted to the argument that Borysthene (the ancient name of Berezan), and not nearby Olbia, the usual candidate, really is the oldest Greek colony of the Northern Black Sea. As a consequence, the chapters on the historical geography, the history of archaeological research at the site and on the Hellenistic and Roman periods are short, and about three quarters of the text are dedicated to the Archaic and Classical periods, which admittedly are the most interesting

and best documented of the excavations (leaving out the post-antique period). In order to make his point, Solovyov has to prove that Archaic Borysthene was indeed Greek, and that it was a colony, in the sense of a politically independent settlement. Neither is in fact self-evident, but Solovyov does not discuss these problems openly. His argumentation is hidden in his overview and interpretation of the built remains of Borysthene in the Archaic and Classical periods. An elaborate analysis of the remains of the so-called (semi) dugouts leads Solovyov to the conclusion that Archaic Borysthene was a Greek trading post (with also a large indigenous population) from the end of the seventh century till about 525, when it became a more formally planned colony, which thrived until the 470s and was then mostly replaced by a smaller indigenous settlement, around a Greek core. According to Solovyov, in the first period both Greeks and natives lived in dugouts, whereas from the late sixth century onwards, when stone houses in Greek style were built, the dugouts were pushed out by the colonists to a presumably indigenous periphery.

The development of Borysthene as sketched by Solovyov is highly problematic. It is far from certain that the dugouts, which Solovyov and many others regard as mostly (but not always) domestic, were houses at all. As Kuznetsov has recently (after Solovyov's text was written) argued, most, if not all, were in fact stables, storage rooms, working places or even garbage pits, and evidence for actual habitation is limited.¹ 'Hearths' as those noted by Solovyov may not be decisive, and 'benches' certainly are not. Moreover, it is very difficult to envisage Greeks living in these holes in the ground, which are alien to their way of building houses. In all Greek colonies we can trace with certainty, the earliest colonists followed the building traditions of their motherland, as in fact may have happened in late-Archaic Borysthene. The assemblages of artifacts found inside the dugouts and their spatial and stratigraphical distribution could help to decide the matter, but unfortunately the available evidence seems limited in quality and quantity.

Solovyov uses the abundance of Greek pottery to support the presence of Greeks, but offers no clear statistics. He does say however, that almost all Greek sherds from the dugouts belong to transport amphorae and that 10-36% of the assemblages from individual dugouts consists of 'local-style' hand-made pots. The findspots of the Greek fine wares illustrated and mentioned by Solovyov are not always clear, but most if not all seem to come from the cemeteries. Such a distribution of the pottery certainly does not indicate the presence of Greek colonists, who normally brought their own potters and their own kinds of household pottery, which fitted their ways of life. The many transport amphorae, of course, were primarily containers of imported wine and other goods and (leaving aside some reuse as domestic storage vessels)

¹ V.D. Kuznetsov, *Early Types of Greek Dwelling Houses in the North Black Sea*, 531-564. In G.R. Tsetskhladze, ed., *Ancient Greeks West and East*, Leiden, Boston, Köln 1999 (*Mnemosyne* Supplement 196).

did not belong to the household properly. In sum, if Berezan was a trading post, as its topography and the amphora finds indeed suggest, it seems to have been inhabited mainly by the indigenous, with all or most Greeks coming there perhaps visiting occasionally, possibly seasonally, for most of the sixth century.

This leaves the late-Archaic city, which according to Solovyov consisted of Greek houses in a regular grid plan. A closer look at the new excavation plans as published by Solovyov, however, indicates that the preserved blocks form quite irregular rectangles and street widths vary considerably. Furthermore, much of the supposed grid is rather hypothetical, as only small bits of this city have been excavated. Even though some planning must have taken place, Borysthene is far from the typical orthogonal well-designed Greek city. Since it is also fairly small, and no traces have been found of characteristic features like public buildings, more or less monumental sanctuaries and a formal city center (agora), one may doubt whether Borysthene has ever been a fully independent Greek colony, rather than an outpost of Olbia.

Even the 'greekness' of the late-Archaic city, finally, may need some qualification. The late-Archaic houses treated in detail by Solovyov surely look Greek, with their rectangular rooms around courtyards. Solovyov's interpretations of the details of their plans are odd, however. Especially his 'house 2', with a court and a room which could be entered only through a long and narrow alley around another room, is functionally impossible. Furthermore, the explanation of two walls (of room 2) 40 cm apart as a heating device is equally unconvincing, and not just because supposed parallels from Olynthos are both architecturally and functionally quite different. Without clear stratigraphical information little can be concluded about these obvious oddities, but perhaps this house and its neighbors were less regularly Greek than they seem at first sight. The question whether 'hellenized' indigenous people had a more important role in late-Archaic Borysthene than the general lay-out of the site suggests obviously needs to be asked. Once again, a detailed study of find assemblages could have been useful; unfortunately the finds were apparently not available at the time of writing.

As a final note it must be said that Solovyov's descriptions of architectural features and details are not always clear. Much seems to have been lost in translation, and in a few cases the translator has clearly misunderstood phrases. More in general, even though the translator of this book is apparently a native speaker, the English of the book as printed is far from flawless. The text also has a certain rhetoric heaviness which is probably common in Russian archaeological writing, but strange in English. A little more editing would have been welcome, and would moreover have filtered out a few inconsistencies in the text. Thus, in 'part 1' Solovyov seems to argue that Berezan became an island only in the 3rd or 4th century AD (p. 13), whereas in 'part 5' epigraphical evidence is provided that indicates the town was already an island in the first century AD (p. 117).

All in all one may conclude that Solovyov's book is more interesting for its methodology in approaching colonial archaeology than for the actual results of this approach, which seem flawed by scholarly prejudices of a surprisingly traditional kind and problems in quality and interpretation of the excavated evidence. Nevertheless, Solovyov's book has also the significant merit of offering a clear synthesis of 100 years of research and its results at an important site in an area relatively unknown to the English speaking public. It is only to be welcomed that, in doing so, Solovyov has also given us some fuel for an interesting debate on the fringes of Greek colonization in practice.

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