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IDENTIFYING THE TRIBES OF THE EASTERN BLACK SEA REGION

Sujatha Chandrasekaran

Abstract: *The tribes of the Eastern Black Sea region played a crucial role in the political and economic affairs of the ancient kingdoms of the Bosphorus and Colchis, i.e., at the edge of the Greek oikoumene. While ancient Greek and Latin sources refer to a number of these tribes by name, descriptions of them tend to be brief and biased. In order to understand the true nature of these peoples, and place them geographically, it is essential to examine both linguistic and archaeological evidence. Linguistic analysis of the tribal names and epigraphic evidence clearly attest to the distinct identities of these tribes. Archaeological evidence, however, plainly demonstrates a shared material culture of the Maeotians. Variations in the burial culture, together with the linguistic distinctions, allow us to classify the ancient tribes of the region as different sub-groups of the Maeotians, while also serving to establish their individual territories within the Eastern Black Sea region.*

Keywords: *Caucasus, Eastern Black Sea, Maeotians, burial, ritual complex, fortifications, markets, slaves, indigenous tribes, identity*

Introduction*

This paper is aimed towards scholars of both Archaeology and Ancient History working on the ancient peoples and cultures of the Eastern Black Sea region from the onset of Greek contacts in the region. It addresses a question that frequently arises in this area – the identity and identification of the indigenous tribes. Written information is not extensive, often somewhat vague, complex and contradictory. Archaeological information, while much more abundant, is more homogenous and carries a clear material-based bias of the indigenous population. The objective of this paper is therefore twofold: first, to examine the manner in which ancient written sources – historians and epigraphy – approached the indigenous tribes, and second, to provide an overview of the archaeological material from this area that is currently at our disposal. This is necessary in order to exploit all written and archaeological information at hand to its fullest and produce an accurate picture of the native tribes and their role in this area.¹

In the first section, I will address the written evidence from the archaeologist's point of view – asking the questions an archaeologist would ask in view of the available archaeological material. In the second section, I will give an overview of the archaeological evidence at hand. In the Conclusion, I will sum up the correlating evidence from both sides in order to address the question of tribal identity.

* I would like to thank Dr Manolis Manoledakis and his colleagues for inviting me to present my work on this topic at the Black Sea Workshop in September 2012, and to the workshop participants for their feedback and discussions of the material – these were very useful for the final paper. I especially wish to express my gratitude to Dr Manoledakis for the support he has shown me throughout the process of writing this paper.

¹ Not to be disregarded is also the fact that the bulk of archaeological literature on this region is in Russian, which often poses a problem to Western scholars.

I. Ancient sources on the Eastern Black Sea tribes

The classically-trained scholar² studying the indigenous landscape of the Eastern Black Sea region will often do so with a view to understand the relations between the Greeks and/or the Bosphorans with the indigenous tribes of the coast and Caucasus hinterland. The scholar's classical background automatically leads to a one-sided or biased approach to this investigation, focusing on the Greek and/or Roman aspects of the situation, which is intensified by the fact that practically all known written sources on the region are of a Greek or Roman background.

The archaeologist specializing in this region,³ however, looks to written sources for confirmation of the indigenous material culture in this region. What he/she finds, however, is a barrage of tribal names, and little useful information on their precise geographic location or the specific topography of the Eastern Black Sea region and the interior.

The written sources consist of various accounts by ancient historians and travelers and a corpus of inscriptions, mainly from the Bosphoran Kingdom. The earliest mentions of indigenous peoples of this region (in following the 'eastern tribes') or Maeotians in particular are from the Classical period, e.g. from Hecataeus of Miletus⁴ and Herodotus,⁵ later Demosthenes and Xenophon during the 4th century BC. Interestingly, relatively little attention was paid in writing to the region during the 3rd-2nd centuries BC,⁶ but interest picks up again towards the end of the 2nd

² I.e. scholar of Classical Archaeology or Ancient History.

³ Usually with a background in Prehistory or World Archaeology.

⁴ Lost, preserved in the writings of Stephanus of Byzantium.

⁵ See Gardiner-Garden (1986, 198, 203-212) for a detailed look at Herodotus' accounts of the eastern tribes in particular.

⁶ Olbrycht 2001, 427. Olbrycht does mention other authors of this period – Agatharcides, Demetrios and Diophantos – whose works, unfortunately, have not survived.

century BC (e.g. by Pseudo-Skymnos, Artemidoros)⁷ and carries on into the 2nd century AD with authors such as Pomponius Mela, Strabo, Diodorus, Pliny, Ptolemy and Polyaeus.⁸ This constantly changing interest in the region over time is a direct reflection of the constantly changing significance of the region itself for the politics and economy of the Greek and Roman world: as the grain basket for Greece, the Eastern Black Sea region - particularly the interior - was invaluable for the Greek economy during the Classical period;⁹ in the Late Hellenistic period, however, internal strife and economic hardship within the region itself reduced its trade contacts with Greeks to a minimum¹⁰ and subsequently shifted it away from the Greek sphere of interest; it was the activities of Mithridates VI in the region during the 2nd-1st centuries BC, and the ensuing military campaigns of the Romans, that drew the region back into the limelight with new zest, while providing contemporary historians and ethnographers with new, more accurate information.¹¹

Not to forget are the other sources of ancient writing at our disposal – inscriptions. Particularly significant are the official Bosphoran inscriptions, which contain much information – sometimes quite specific – about the political situation of the day.¹² Another set of inscriptions to be considered are the so-called ‘nonsensical’ inscriptions on Classical vases. These contain particularly valuable linguistic information on eastern tribes and will be discussed in a separate section.

Ancient historians

Scholars often debate on the accuracy of authors, and indeed, this is a point not to be taken for granted. However, for purposes of this discussion, I will focus on analyzing the following: what are these authors trying to tell us about the eastern tribes? What audience were they catering to? What are the perceptions of the day being rendered by these authors?

⁷ Olbrycht 2001, 427.

⁸ Kamenetsky (2011, 155-176), for example, provides a detailed analysis of accounts on the Maeotians by Strabo, Mela, Pliny, Dionysius Periegetus and Ptolemy. For a discourse on Polyaneus and his ‘Tirgatao story’ see Gardiner-Garden (1986, 194-207), see him also for Diodorus (215-225).

⁹ Hind 1994, 488-495; Gardiner-Garden (1986, 193-194) remarks on the character of Greek dependency on the Bosphorans for grain. The Bosphorans, in turn, were forced to communicate closely with the indigenous tribes along the eastern coast and in the interior, along the Kuban. The intensification of contacts between Bosphorans and indigenous tribes is visible in form of increased mentions of the latter in ancient sources as well as in epigraphic material, e.g. coins and grave inscriptions of the period. Gardiner-Garden also notes the increased emphasis placed by the literary record on this period in particular.

¹⁰ See Hind (1994, 502-506) on the political and economic situation in the region during this period.

¹¹ Olbrycht 2001, 426-430. Olbrycht notes that even Strabo remarks on the new wealth of information gained through Pompey’s campaigns.

¹² These were most recently re-published in 2004 in A. Gavrillov, N. Pavlichenko, D. Keyer, A. Karlin (eds.) *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosphorani: Album Imaginum*. St Petersburg: Biblioteca Classica Petropolitana and the St. Petersburg Institute of History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. (The album re-produces the inscriptions originally published in 1965).

When looking at the many tribal names mentioned (mainly) in Bosphoran context, three stand out by the frequency of usage. These are the umbrella terms Maeotians, Scythians and Sarmatians, used in reference to *groups* of tribes. Most authors are clear on the general location of the Scythians in the northwestern steppes of the Black Sea, between the modern Don and Dnepr Rivers.¹³ Maeotians and Sarmatians, however, are generically localized somewhere in the Eastern Black Sea region. Archaeology, however, has clearly demonstrated that the Sarmatians entered the Northern Caucasus steppes from the Volga River area.¹⁴ For this reason, and in order not to go beyond the scope of this paper and the Eastern Black Sea region, I will concentrate on the third relevant tribal group – the Maeotians.

The full extent of written sources on and inscriptions from this region goes far beyond the scope of this paper, and their compilation and categorization have been carried out successfully elsewhere. Instead of addressing the abundance of sources, I will focus on what is probably the most informative account on the Eastern Black Sea region, Strabo’s *Geography*,¹⁵ as a basis by which to examine the following questions:

1. What were the various tribes of this region and the Kuban interior, and what information do the names give us about them?
2. How do Strabo and other sources define the territory of these tribes?
3. How do Strabo and others perceive and characterize the tribal lifestyle?

Strabo and the Maeotians (*Figure 1*)

Strabo’s accounts on the tribes of the Eastern Black Sea region (in following ‘eastern tribes’) are found in Book 11 of his *Geographica*. Thus we have:

(11.2.1): ‘About Lake Maeotis live the Maeotae. And on the sea lies the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus, or the Sindi territory. After this latter, one comes to the Achaei and the Zygi and the Heniochi, and also the Cercetae and the Macropogones. [...] But since I have taken the Tanais River as the boundary between Europe and Asia, I shall begin my detailed description therewith.’

(11.2.3): ‘...Tanais; it was founded by the Greeks who held the Bosphorus. Recently, however, it was sacked by King Polemon because it would not obey him. It was a common emporium, partly of the Asiatic and the European nomads, and partly of those who navigated the lake from the Bosphorus, the former bringing slaves, hides, and such other things as nomads possess, and the latter giving in exchange clothing, wine, and the other things that belong to civilized life.’

¹³ Hind 1994, 477, 496, 501, Map 15.

¹⁴ Gardiner-Garden 1986, 222. The Sarmatians are also called Sirakoi by Diodorus, Strabo and Tacitus.

¹⁵ Olbrycht 2001, 429.



Figure 1. The Eastern Black Sea region according to Strabo. (After Kamenetsky 2011, Fig. 150)

(11.2.4): ‘... but the people who carry on the business at the Lesser Rhombites are the Maeotae themselves, for the Maeotae live along the whole of this coast; and though farmers, they are no less warlike than the nomads. They are divided into several tribes, those who live near the Tanaïs being rather ferocious, but those whose territory borders on the Bosphorus being more tractable.’

(11.2.11): ‘Among the Maeotae are the Sindi themselves, Dandarii, Toreatae, Agri, and Arrechi, and also the Tarpetes, Obidiaceni, Sittaceni, Dosci, and several others. Among these belong also the Aspurgiani, who live between Phanagoreia and Gorgipia, within a stretch of five hundred stadia; ... As for the Asiatic Maeotae in general, some of them were subjects of those who possessed the emporium on the Tanaïs, and the others of the Bosphorians; but in those days different peoples at different times were wont to revolt.’

(11.2.12): ‘After the Sindi territory and Gorgipia, on the sea, one comes to the coast of the Achaei and the Zygi and the Heniochi, which for the most part is harborless and mountainous, being a part of the Caucasus. ... They say that the Phthiotic Achaei in Jason’s crew settled in this Achaea, but the Laconians in Heniochia, the leaders of the

latter being Rhecas and Amphistratus, the “heniochi” of the Dioscuri, and that in all probability the Heniochi were named after these.’

(11.2.14): ‘... After Bata Artemidorus mentions the coast of the Cercetae, with its mooring places and villages, extending thence about eight hundred and fifty stadia; and then the coast of the Achaei, five hundred stadia; and then that of the Heniochi, one thousand; and then Greater Pityus, extending three hundred and sixty stadia to Dioscurias. The more trustworthy historians of the Mithridatic wars name the Achaei first, then the Zygi, then the Heniochi, and then the Cercetae and [...]’.

Strabo’s approach is quite clear: he begins with an overall description of the region in question, the area of Lake Maeotis (11.2.1), and the tribes he names are qualified simply by living around the Maeotis. He then goes into some specifics – the history of the region, politics and trade, and adds a number of specific tribal names (11.2.11). After this, he moves further down the coastline, i.e. past the territory of the Sindians, and begins again with an overall description (11.2.12) and historical information (11.2.14).¹⁶

¹⁶ Note that I have not reproduced all of Strabo’s mentions of Eastern Black Sea tribes here.

Maeotian tribal names

The first thing to catch the reader's attention is the quantity of tribal designations. The term 'Maeotae' is immediately recognizable as one of the three umbrella designations for tribes in this region mentioned above. The remaining names clearly designate individual tribes and appear to be simple ethnonyms, e.g. the Sindi, Dandarii, Agri, Arecchi, Tarpets, Obidiaceni, Sittaceni and Dosci.¹⁷ These may be direct or slightly varied renderings of tribal endonyms. While the term *Sindi* and the territorial designation of *Sindike* are respectively understood by various ancient writers as qualifiers for each other, the other tribal designations do not appear to provide any information on the tribes' concrete geographical location.¹⁸

Hellenic exonyms: Particularly interesting is Strabo's mentions of the tribe of the Achaeans (*Achaei*), are not quite as surprising as they might appear upon first glance to the non-historian. Nonetheless, such Greek exonyms immediately raise questions as to the identity of the tribe and therefore deserve closer examination. The name is clearly meant to recall the Achaeans of Greece, and Strabo goes on to explain them through the myth of the Argonauts.¹⁹ Nonetheless, this is not reason enough to assume that a tribe of Greek origin nestled in this remote region, among a mass of indigenous, perhaps savage, tribes, so far away from the Hellenized centers in Colchis and the Bosporan Kingdom, let alone from Greece itself. D. Asheri examines the use of Hellenic ethnonyms in Greek rhetoric and notes that they would hardly have been used by historians for supposedly savage natives had these not demonstrated at least *some* minor Hellenic quality.²⁰ As he points out, this may have been as simple as the fact that the tribes maintained regular contacts with the Greeks, as attested to by literary sources and archaeology. The reasons for imbuing them with a semblance of 'Greek-ness' may lie in the didactic advantage for the Greek or Roman author – who could then exploit either the Greek or ethnic component as fitting for their writings. As Asheri notes, this 'had always been the practice of Greek colonists overseas in their changing relations with the native populations'.²¹ In view of these arguments, it is easy to accept a Hellenic ethnonym to designate a tribe of the Caucasus region, and it was probably used as a simple reflection of regular trade contacts which could reflect – in Greek eyes – the degree of Hellenization necessary to warrant a Greek name.

Toponymic designations: A number of tribal designations bear clear reference to a geographical area or feature. Thus, Maeotians are clearly assigned to the area of the Maeotian Lake (Asov Sea), while the Toretai are logically based in the

vicinity of the ancient city of Torikos. Strabo also includes an intentional toponym, Heniochi (Greek 'charioteers').²² He goes on to define this as a reference to the 'heniochi' of the Dioscuri, from which the tribal name was taken. This, of course, places the tribe in the region of the coastal city of ancient Dioscurias (modern Sukhum), in the Southern Caucasus foothills.

Ethnographic names: Of Strabo's tribal designations, Macropogones (long-beards) is clearly a Greek exonym evoking a visual image of the people it refers to. In another section, Strabo refers to the tribes in the Northern Caucasus foothills as Troglodytae, Chamaecoetae ('people who sleep on the ground') and Polyphagi ('heavy eaters').²³ Such designations are used simply to give the reader an idea of the (supposed) ethnic lifestyle.²⁴

Names with linguistic information: Some names provide information on the tribes' linguistic background. Thus, we see that the language of Strabo's Aspurgiani was Iranian (Iranian root *asp* = horse).²⁵ Equally interesting is the Caucasian origin of tribal designation Psestoi (or *Psesti*, Caucasian prefix *pse* = water)²⁶ mentioned by Pliny and on various Bosporan inscriptions.²⁷

What can we gather from Strabo's lists of tribes? More often than not, he keeps to tribes that were already familiar to the ancient audience and enjoyed mentions in other works (11.2.1, 11.2.14).²⁸ A number of the tribes listed in *Geo.* 11.2.11, however, are not found elsewhere in Strabo's work or in other ancient writings.²⁹ This discrepancy is explained by the fact that Strabo, like other ancient historians, reproduced information from different sources of different periods. Thus the brief tribal lists probably reflect a source of the Classical period and the level of common knowledge on the Maeotis region during this period.³⁰ The longer list in section 11.2.11, in turn, reflects a source of a later period, perhaps even of the 1st century BC, as indicated by the mention of Polemon I in the same section. As described earlier, this was a period of greater exposure and familiarity with the Eastern Black Sea interior. Strabo's mention of the Maeotian tribe Dosci, in particular, demonstrates that his source was familiar with the Bosporan politics of the

²² *Geo.* 11.2.12.

²³ *Geo.* 11.5.7.

²⁴ Olbrycht 2001, 433-434.

²⁵ Mayor, Carusso and Saunders 2012, 6; Note the same root is found in the name of Bosporan ruler Aspurgus, known from coin inscriptions. See Abramzon, Frolova and Gorlov 2001.

²⁶ Compare also with the ancient tribe of the Psenachai named on an inscription from Kerch. See Bowersock-Jones 2006, also the short mention in Vinogradov 1994, 74; Compare also modern names of the rivers Psou and Psekups, or the (now extinct) river Psenafa – site of a Maeotian settlement and burial grounds near Maykop excavated in 2012 – all in the Northern Caucasus.

²⁷ A recently published inscription is Theopropides dedication from Nymphaion, which reads: '... Leukon, archon of the Bosporus, Theodosia, the whole of Sindike, the Toretai, Dandarioi and Psestoi'. See Tokhtasev 2006, 22-49.

²⁸ Tribes such as Zygi, Achaei, Heniochi, Dandarii are mentioned by other ancient historians and in a number of inscriptions. Only the Macropogones (*Geo.* 11.2.1) do not occur elsewhere.

²⁹ See Gardiner-Garden 1986, 207.

³⁰ Gardiner-Garden 1986, 206.

¹⁷ It is possible that the names bear reference to a territorial designation that is now lost.

¹⁸ Of course, it is possible that the names originally did bear reference to some geographic area or feature that remains unknown to scholars.

¹⁹ *Geo.* 11.2.12.

²⁰ Asheri 1998, 283.

²¹ Asheri 1998, 283, also n. 51, in which he remarks on the similar behavior of Roman authors.

2nd half of the 4th century BC and the significance of Pairisades' victory over the latest group of Maeotian tribes, including the Dosci.

In this respect, it is worth looking at the Bosphoran royal inscriptions of the period, in particular those of Leukon I and Pairisades I. One of the later of Leukon's inscriptions shows him to have added to his indigenous conquests the Sindi, Toreti, Dandarii and Psessi.³¹ A later inscription of Pairisades shows Pairisades to have added the Thatoi and Dosci. Neither Psessi nor Thatoi are named by Strabo. Gardiner-Garden points out that Strabo's omission of these was not meant to suggest that they were not Maeotian, but simply to keep an already long list (11.2.11) short.³² And in this we see the main difference between Strabo and inscriptions: Strabo is presenting the reader with a 'general picture' of the Maeotians with information gathered over time, interspersed occasionally with details that carried some significance at a particular time.³³ Bosphoran inscriptions, on the other hand, have a representative function and are geared towards proclaiming the significant details of their time, such as the conquest of new peoples. They also, by necessity of the Bosphorans' direct involvement in local affairs, reflect a far greater awareness of local ethnicities than found in the works of ancient historians.³⁴

Territory

As noted by D. Braund,³⁵ identifying the geographic features and tribal territories in the Eastern Black Sea region is rather problematic, mainly because ancient writers provide little and often questionable information. Braund points out that much of it appears to have been disputed even in antiquity. In most cases, the definitions are generalized or rather vague, such as in the case of Strabo, perhaps surprising in view of his origins in the southern Black Sea region (Trapezus), which could presuppose more familiarity of the eastern littoral on his part. At any rate, the modern scholar is often caught questioning the ancients' knowledge of the area and the sources they used. However, instead of condemning ancient authors for their lack or vague use of knowledge, it is worth considering that full geographic accuracy and detail – things the modern scholar looks for – were not *their* prime objective. Therefore, we must ask what Strabo and others felt was important for their audiences to know?

Let us turn again to Strabo's abovementioned passages. His territorial descriptions qualify tribes as Maeotian by the sole virtue of their proximity to the Maeotian Lake. This we observe in his opening description of 11.2.1, where he defines the Maeotians very simply as any peoples living

around the Lake Maeotis.³⁶ The same holds true of many ancient authors.³⁷ Strabo then gives their relative placement on the map by listing tribes from north to south (11.2.1, 11.2.14).³⁸ Even the elaborate list in 11.2.11 is nothing more than 'Maeotian tribes', i.e. those around the Lake.

In very few cases we do find some form of territorial precision. In 11.2.1, Strabo elaborates that the Asian Bosphorus and the territory of the Sindi are located about Lake Maeotis. In 11.2.11, he defines Aspurgiani territory as the land between Phanagoreia and Gorgippia. A significant point is Strabo's definition of the Tanais River (Don) as the boundary between Europe and Asia (11.2.1). This is later used to territorially separate the Asiatic Maeotians (11.2.11) from their European counterparts.

Only once do we find an example of territorial elaboration through tribal characterization. This is found in 11.2.4, where Strabo emphasizes that Maeotians lived 'along the whole of this coast'. However, in this case he adds further information about their character – they are warriors 'no less warlike than the nomads'. This adds new meaning to the Maeotians, qualifying them no longer solely on grounds of their proximity to Lake Maeotis, but through the fact that they are not (the) nomads, who – we may surmise – therefore did not occupy any of this coast.

Thus, it is clear that Strabo is not interested in defining Maeotian or related territories in any great geographic detail. Instead, as with the tribal names, he is simply setting the background for his narrative by naming certain key features – Lake Maeotis and the Tanais River³⁹ – which were probably already familiar to a Greek audience in connection with the Bosphoran Kingdom. In this, he is again following sources of the Classical period,⁴⁰ when little was known of the regional geography and 'Maeotian' was simply used as a territorial – not ethnic – reference.⁴¹

Character and lifestyle

Strabo's narrative in 11.2.4 shows the Maeotians to be business-oriented, settled farmers (i.e. not nomads, as explained earlier), as well as warlike – some being ferocious, others more subdued. In terms of appearance, some apparently wear long beards (the Macropogones in 11.2.1). He does also tell us, in generalized terms, that they

³¹ CIRB 6, 1037-8. See Hind 1994, 496.

³² Gardiner-Garden 1986, 208.

³³ As Gardiner-Garden (1986, 224) notes, he is not interested in giving us a comprehensive catalog of Maeotians, ending his list in 11.2.11 with '...and several others.'

³⁴ Gardiner-Garden 1986, 208.

³⁵ Braund 1996, 1201.

³⁶ Compare with the more detailed list of tribes give by Strabo in 11.2.11. According to Gardiner-Garden (1986, 206), the 'periplous nature' of this description indicates yet again that Maeotians simply defines tribes around the Maeotian coast.

³⁷ For example Herodotus 4.123.3; Mela 1.114. See Gardiner-Garden 1986, 206; Kamenetsky 2011, 164.

³⁸ Particularly interesting is Strabo's elaboration that the order of the tribes in 11.2.14 is in accordance with 'more accurate' Mithridatic sources.

³⁹ Or in other sections the Caucasus Mountains, the Caspian Sea.

⁴⁰ E.g. Herodotus and Hekataios.

⁴¹ As Braund (1996, 1201) states, 'the Maiotai were very much the people of the Maeotis'. See also Gardiner-Garden (1986, 206, 211), who notes the same observation made by the Russian scholar L. A. Elinitsky (1961. *Znaniya drevnikh o severnykh stranakh*. 1961, p. 94); In this respect, it is interesting to note that Strabo and other authors of his time do not go out of their way to reproduce the newly won Roman knowledge of regional topography in their works.



Figure 2. Detail from the New York Goose Play Vase. Tarporely Painter. New York, Metropolitan Museum, Inv. no. 24.97.104. (After Marshall 2001, Fig. 1)

(the Asiatic Maeotae, 11.2.11) were sometimes subject to Bosphoran control and often prone to insurgency. All this Strabo tells us with giving specific examples or going into detail. However, he says nothing different from those authors who do give details or site specific incidents.⁴²

Nonsensical names – a new set of evidence

Another set of names for eastern tribes do not come from historical accounts or inscriptions, but from the Athenian vases. I am referring to vases from the Classical period that display so-called ‘nonsense inscriptions’ – strange-sounding, seemingly unintelligible words strung together from a garble of consonantal sounds – together with depictions of ‘Scythians’ and ‘Amazons’. An innovative 2012 study by Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders examines this phenomenon within the Classical Greek tradition of

reproducing foreign names in Greek or non-Greek form.⁴³ The authors have analyzed the linguistics of a number of these inscriptions and identified them to be proper words or phrases of ancient Iranian or Caucasian (Circassian) origin, i.e. renderings of foreign speech.

An example of this is found on the well-known New York Goose Play Vase. Amongst the figures is a man dressed as a Scythian policeman about to flog an older man (Figure 2).⁴⁴ The policeman is shown to be uttering the nonsensical word *NOPAPETTEBAO*. Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders, however, clearly demonstrate through linguistic analysis that this is a form of Circassian and translates roughly as ‘This sneak thief steals from them over there’.

Further examples of nonsensical vase inscriptions that translate into Caucasian/Circassian names include:

⁴² Compare, for example, the story of Maeotian princess Tirtatao given by Polyaeus. See Gardiner-Garden 1986, 194-207.

⁴³ Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders 2012.

⁴⁴ Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders 2012, 14-15.



North Caucasian language key:

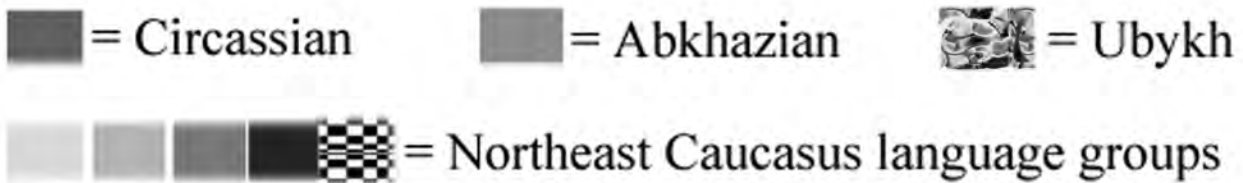


Figure 3. North-Caucasian languages (modern). (After Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders 2012, Map 2)

XYXOΣIII ('Enthusiastic Shouter' or 'Battle-Cry'),⁴⁵ an inscription shown next to a Scythian archer, ΠΚΠΥΠΠΗΣ ('Worthy of Armor'),⁴⁶ inscribed next to some Amazons, ΣΕΡΑΓΥΕ ('Wearing (Armed with) Dagger or Sword'), next to an Amazon/Scythian (unclear),⁴⁷ and ΧΕΧΤΙΟΧΕΧΟΓΕ ('the one (chosen) from among the brave'),⁴⁸ written along a Greek warrior's back.⁴⁹ It is worth noting that most of inscriptions studied by Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders have

turned out to be Northwest Caucasian languages – i.e. of the Eastern Black Sea region, Kuban hinterland and northern foothills, the territory of the Maeotians (Figure 3),⁵⁰ and that they all denote the 'barbarians' depicted in the sense of warriors deserving consideration.

The significance of such inscriptions for our study cannot go unnoticed. Not only may these pose the earliest known examples of Caucasian and other 'barbaric' languages in writing, as noted by Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders, but they demonstrate Greek contacts specifically with *Maeotians, outside Maeotian territory*.⁵¹ Just how the

⁴⁵ Red-figure Euthymides vase from Vulci. Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders 2012, 16.

⁴⁶ A red-figure cup attributed to Olto. Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders 2012, 16-17.

⁴⁷ A red figure amphora from Vulci. Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders 2012, 17-18.

⁴⁸ A red-figure amphore from Vulci. Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders 2012, 20-21.

⁴⁹ In this context the authors also note some 'nonsense' words of ancient Iranian origin, for example on a vase of the Sotades Workshop. They further point out that this workshop frequently produced vases with various exotic barbarian and Persian themes, and were often found at far-away sites such as Kerch and Egypt, suggesting their specific production for a foreign market. Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders 2012, 22.

⁵⁰ From the 16 inscriptions studied by Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders (2012), the majority were appear to be of northwest Circassian origin, 3-5 examples of western or southern Caucasian languages (Ubykh, Abkhaz, Georgian), and four of an Iranian background.

⁵¹ These inscriptions – particularly those in a Caucasian language – also force us to reconsider the Scythian identity (as seen by Greeks) of Athenian policemen, and the use of the term by Greeks as a generalization for indigenous peoples from the Eastern Black Sea area.

Maeotians ended up *outside* their territory and collaborating with vase painters to produce linguistically authentic vase inscriptions – through marriage, mercenary work, as slaves, or even as members of the ‘Scythian’ police force in Athens, remains a matter for future investigation.⁵²

II. Archaeological evidence on the Maeotians

Unlike the picture of ethnic diversity presented by written sources, archaeology demonstrates a homogenous Maeotian material culture spread over a wide territory. In order to understand the full nature of the Maeotians, then, it is necessary to examine the archaeological picture. Russian scholarship has produced two extremely useful and comprehensive studies on Maeotian material culture: a 2007 monograph by V. R. Erlikh and the more recent work by Kamenetsky in 2011. In the following, I will use these to provide a general overview of the current knowledge of Maeotian material culture, the types of Maeotian sites and their finds.

The archaeological sites of the region east and south of the Asov (ancient Lake Maeotis) Sea, as well as further into the hinterland – along the Kuban River and its tributaries – are (not uniformly) numerous and date from the 7th century BC well into the Roman period. A look at these sites reveals a *shared* material culture which is classified as the Maeotian culture. Not only did this culture exist over an extensive period of approximately 1000 years,⁵³ but it can be defined as ‘conservative’,⁵⁴ i.e. demonstrating little significant change throughout its existence. This material culture has been identified and studied by Russian scholars over the last decades mainly on the basis of burial sites – kurgans and flat-grave complexes. Additional information is gathered from settlement sites, which, however, are not as well studied. Nonetheless, the available archaeological material provides more than enough evidence that the tribes of these areas were closely related in terms of their material culture.

Archaeological evidence demonstrates two main areas of Maeotian habitation (**Figure 4**): the main area being the Trans-Kuban region (along its left bank and its many tributaries), and the mouth of the Don River (near ancient Tanais).⁵⁵ These areas of site distribution are further characterized by their chronological distinction: while the Maeotian sites of the Kuban date anywhere from the 8th-7th BC (the so-called ‘Proto-Maeotian’ period as specified by V. Erlikh)⁵⁶ into the early centuries of the New Era, the Maeotian sites near the Don delta date only from the turn of the eras on.⁵⁷ All Maeotian sites appear to have come to an end in the 3rd century AD.⁵⁸

The bulk of the currently known Maeotian sites belongs to

the period between the 7th and 4th centuries BC, extending from the transitional stage of the Proto-Maeotian period and into the following ‘Maeoto-Scythian’ period.⁵⁹ V. Erlikh defines the sites of this period as the ‘Proto-Maeotian group’. In following, I will use the term ‘Proto-Maeotian’ to refer to the chronological frame specified by Erlikh for this group.

Maeotian sites consist of burial complexes as well as settlements, whereby the burial complexes clearly dominate. The burial complexes manifest themselves as individual kurgans, kurgan groups or necropoleis, or as flat-grave necropoleis.⁶⁰ Flat-grave burials dominate amongst the Maeotian burial complexes and have yielded a wealth of material.⁶¹ Further Maeotian material also comes from Maeotian kurgans – burial mounds containing a number of primary and often secondary burials. In most cases, the necropoleis are located in the vicinity of settlement sites,⁶² and in many cases, they are found near or within the constraints of a fortified settlement – especially the kurgan groups.⁶³

A significant feature of the Maeotian culture is the masses of ritual complexes found within the burial grounds or structures. In contrast, settlement sites are known with far less frequency. The reasons for this are manifold and will be discussed in the respective section of this paper.

Chronological development of Maeotian sites – burial and habitation – is based mainly on the actual finds, but also on small changes in construction of architectural features and burial structures, and variations in the basic burial rite.

Burial sites

V. Erlikh notes that the development of the Maeotian burial rite throughout the centuries is markedly conservative, with very little change over the 1000 years of its existence.⁶⁴ Because of this, it is possible to use the sites of the Proto-Maeotian period – which make up the bulk of investigated sites – as a gauge for the rite as a whole.

The Maeotians set up their burial grounds at around the same time as and in close vicinity to the relevant settlement.⁶⁵ The typical Maeotian burial consisted of a single interment. The orientation of the deceased often varied within a single site. The individual was fitted with burial offerings: the poorer burials containing nothing more than a simple piece of local pottery and perhaps some crude jewelry or tools, the more elite burials outfitted with jewelry of precious metal, weapons, sacrificed horses

⁵² Mayor, Colarusso and Saunders 2012, 3, 27.

⁵³ Erlikh 2011a, 82.

⁵⁴ Erlikh 2007, 11.

⁵⁵ Kamenetsky 2011, 7.

⁵⁶ Erlikh 2007, 12.

⁵⁷ Kamenetsky 2011, 7.

⁵⁸ Kamenetsky 2011, 7.

⁵⁹ Erlikh 2007, 12-13.

⁶⁰ Erlikh 2007, 11; Kamenetsky (2011, 201) notes that over 150 flat-grave necropoleis are currently known, with a total of at least 9600 excavated burials, if not more. He also lists a total of 172 kurgan necropoleis with a minimum of 795 excavated kurgans.

⁶¹ Kamenetsky 2011, 236.

⁶² Kamenetsky 2011, 237; Note that the settlements have often only been identified on the basis of survey and not excavation.

⁶³ Kamenetsky 2011, 237.

⁶⁴ Erlikh 2011a, 82. I am grateful to Dr. Erlikh for sharing his insights on Maeotian burial rites based on his extensive fieldwork in the relevant region.

⁶⁵ Kamenetsky 2011, 236.

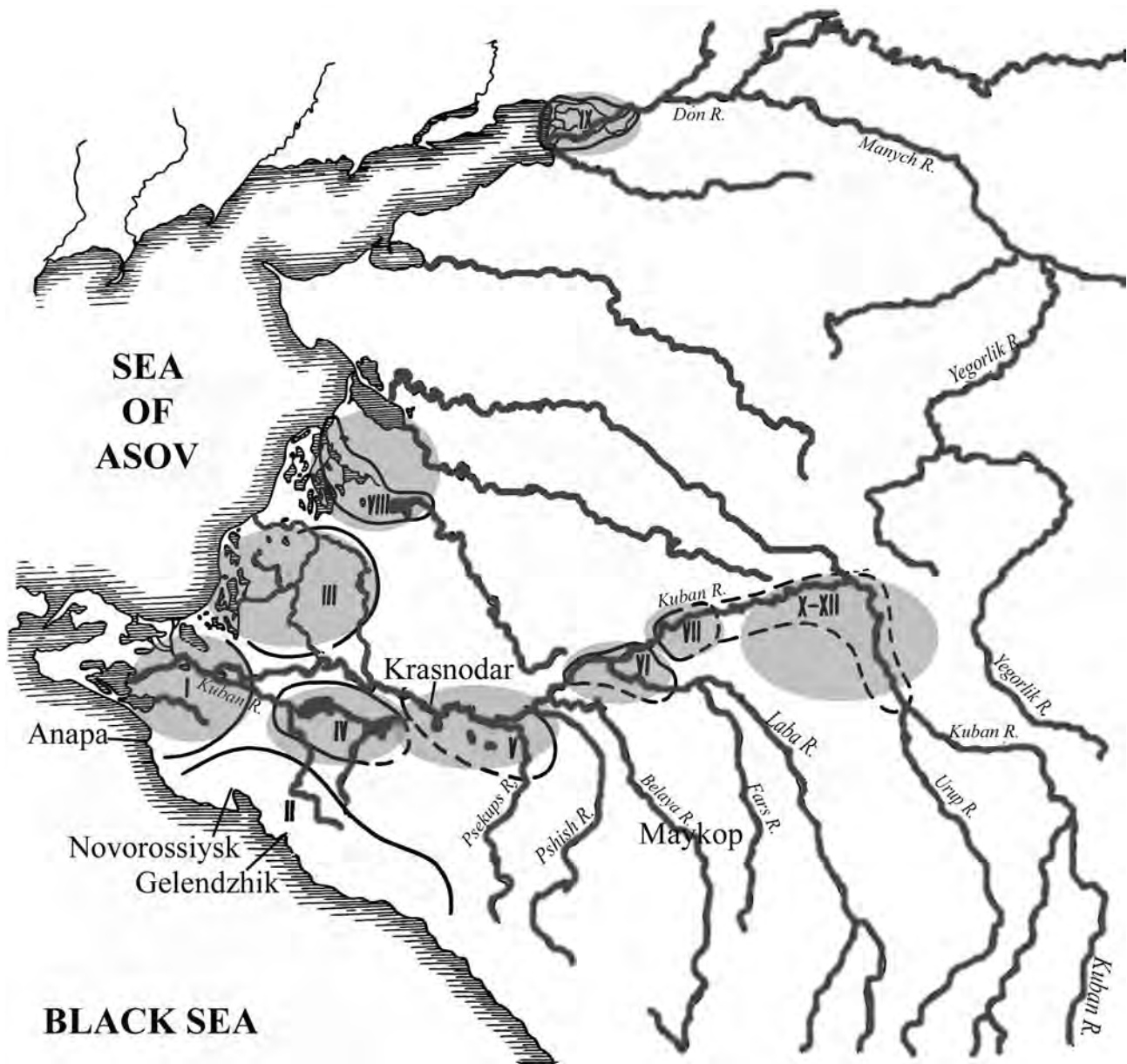


Figure 4. Areas of Maeotian habitation. (After Kamenetsky 2011, Map 17)

and other animals, elaborate examples of local and even imported pottery. Particularly wealthy examples sometimes even contain carriage remains. The overall composition of the assemblages varied frequently within a single site or complex.⁶⁶ This, together with the varying orientation of the deceased, may be explained as a reference to the deceased's status, clan affiliation or even religious conventions.⁶⁷ In some cases, burials within a site or kurgan can be identified as belonging to a 'family group'.⁶⁸ Note that there were no grave markers of stone.⁶⁹

V. Erlikh focuses solely on sites of the Proto-Maeotian period, analyzing the excavated material of ca. 30 burial complexes (over 400 burials) and ten sites of habitation. By analyzing details of the burial rite (burial structure, orientation of the deceased, position, burial assemblage), he is able to distinguish regional variations and subdivides these sites into three variants (**Figure 5**): those of the Black Sea coastal region just southeast of the Bosphoran Kingdom (the 'coastal/Abinsk' variant), those located further inland, along the mid-reaches of the Kuban River (the central variant) and, finally, the sites in and around the Northern Caucasus foothills (the 'foothill' variant).⁷⁰

⁶⁶ A good overview of the full scope of burial possibilities is to be had by studying the figures in Erlikh's 2007 monograph, which reproduce a number of the burial plans and assemblages.

⁶⁷ Kamenetsky 2011, 236; Erlikh 2007, 42.

⁶⁸ Kamenetsky 2011, 237.

⁶⁹ Kamenetsky 2011, 237; Of course, one should not exclude the possibility of grave markers of other materials that have not survived.

⁷⁰ See Erlikh 2007, 36-55; These geographic variants correspond to Kamenetsky's groupings (Kamenetsky 2011, 201): coastal-Abinsk (Erlikh) = the western group, central and foothill variants (Erlikh) = the eastern group; See also Dmitriyev and Malyshev (2009, 61, n. 1), who also attribute the coastal-Abinsk sites to the Maeotian archaeological culture.

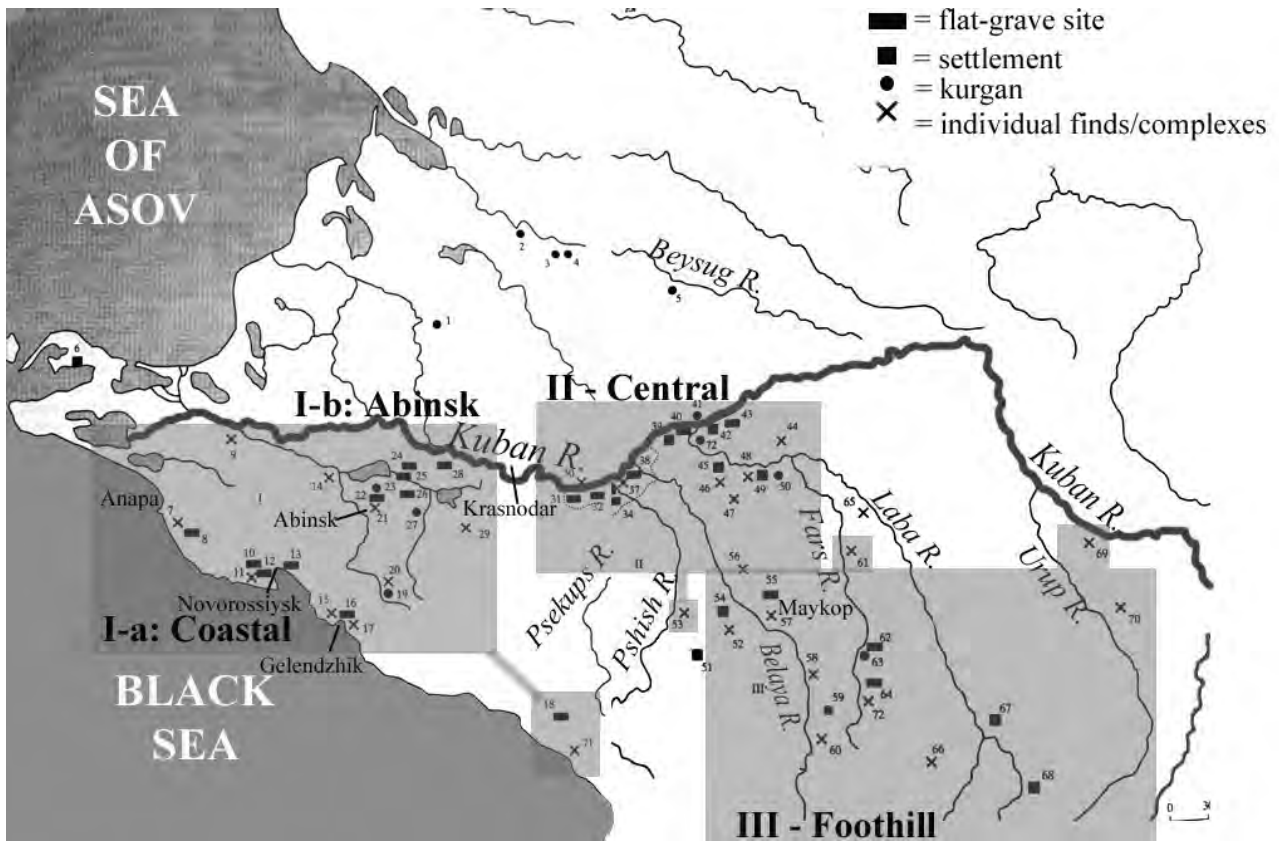


Figure 5. Distribution of Proto-Maeotian burial sites and their variants. (After Erlikh 2007, Fig. 12)



Figure 6. Coastal-Abinsk sites of the 6th-4th centuries BC on the Abrau Peninsula. (After Dmitriyev/Malyshev 2009, Fig. 1)

The coastal/Abinsk variant

The coastal/Abinsk variant (*'primorsko-abinsky'*) presently consists of a number of burial sites and two ritual complexes in and around the Abrau Peninsula,⁷¹ just south of the Bosporan border at Gorgippia (modern Anapa) and up towards the Kuban River near the modern town of Abinsk (**Figures 5, 6**).⁷² Note that no settlement sites have been identified with any certainty in this region.⁷³

A number of burial elements distinguish this variant from the others. These include the occurrence of paired and collective burials (**Figure 7**) in addition to individual ones, as well as a general lack of bridle gear amongst the burial goods.⁷⁴ As seen in **Figure 5**, the coastal-Abinsk variant can be further subdivided according to geography, which in turn seems to have resulted in some differences in burial construction. The coastal sites are found in and around coves and washes of the coastal mountains, near the ancient cities of Torikos and Bata (modern Novorossiysk and Gelendzhik)⁷⁵ and consist of burials which use existing dolmens as well as stone cist tombs (**Figure 8**).⁷⁶ The latter are particularly characteristic for this area and represent a distinct variation on Maeotian burials as a whole that appears to have grown under the influence of Greek-style tombs in the Bosporan Kingdom.⁷⁷ The more easterly Abinsk sites are located in the lowland valley of the Kuban River left bank (**Figure 5**) and distinguished by burials using existing kurgans or burials tunneled into natural elevations.⁷⁸

The overall burial assemblage in the coastal-Abinsk complexes is quite similar to that found in central and foothill burials, and only minor details of the burial goods serve to them from those of other regions.⁷⁹

Overall analyses of certain well-studied sites have revealed certain historical realities of the region. Particularly interesting is the Tsemdolinsky necropolis (1st century BC – 5th century AD) near ancient Bata (modern Novorossiysk, see **Figure 6**), where a strikingly high proportion of the overall burial goods (30%) were weapons. Based on this and the overall assemblages, it is possible to associate Tsemdolinsky with a military detachment in this area controlling a road that lead to the coastal settlements.⁸⁰ A further site of significance is the Raevsky necropolis

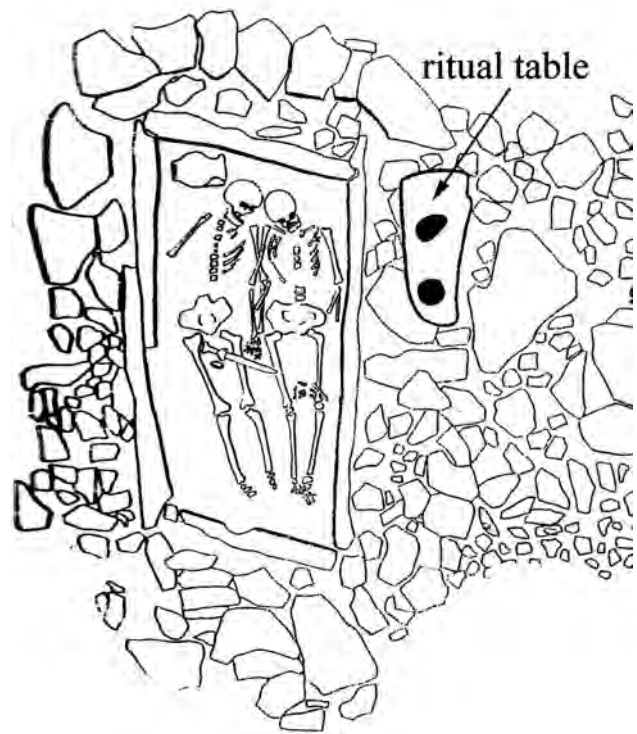


Figure 7. The pair-burial from the Voskresensky burial site. (After Dmitriyev and Malyshev 2009, Fig. 3.II)



Figure 8. Cist tomb of the Hellenistic period – the Rassvet hamlet burial site. (After Dmitriyev and Malyshev 2009, Fig. 5.III)

⁷¹ The bulk of the sites on the Abrau Peninsula date from the 6th-4th centuries BC. Dmitriyev and Malyshev 2009, 56.

⁷² See Erlikh 2007, 36.

⁷³ Erlikh (2007, 36, n. 36) notes possible settlement remains of this type some distance from the main area of concentration, at ancient Patreus in the Bosporan Kingdom (modern Taman Peninsula).

⁷⁴ Erlikh 2007, 37.

⁷⁵ Erlikh 2007, 36.

⁷⁶ Erlikh 2007, 37; See also Kamenetsky 2011, 238; Dmitriyev and Malyshev 2009, 62.

⁷⁷ Kamenetsky 1989, 227; Dmitriyev and Malyshev 2009, 56.

⁷⁸ Erlikh 2007, 37.

⁷⁹ Erlikh 2007, 37.

⁸⁰ Malyshev 2008b, 283. The excavators attribute the site to the Aspurgiani mentioned by Strabo (Geo. 11.2.11) and Ptolemy (5.19.17) based on the large number of elite military burials with saddled horses. See Malyshev 2008b, 280-281.

(3rd-1st centuries BC), where a comprehensive analysis has revealed the *complete* disappearance of the local burial culture in the 3rd century BC, clearly demonstrating the southeast expansion of the Bosporan Kingdom in this period.⁸¹

Central variant

The central variant (*'tsentralny'*) refers to sites along the left bank of the Kuban River from modern Krasnodar to the confluence of the Kuban and Laba Rivers (**Figure 5**). Far more sites of this variant have been studied than of the previous one. The central variant is distinguished by individual flat-grave burials or in some cases elite burials using existing kurgans.⁸² The burial structure consisted of a pit without any fill. In most burial cases, approximately half the bodies are extended, the other half crouched. This has been explained by some as indicative of status and especially gender.⁸³ Food remains indicate the practice of provisions for the journey after life.⁸⁴ Elite burials are accompanied by the remains of horses, which occur almost exclusively as skulls and extremities only – this may be taken to indicate some kind of 'stuffed horse', where the horse extremities are retained and the remaining body prepared and stuffed with straw.⁸⁵ The burial rite of this variant also includes pebbles, 'cultic' bones⁸⁶ and flint chips.⁸⁷

As with the coastal-Abinsk variant, the burial assemblages here conform to those of the Proto-Maeotian group as a whole, with some small variations.

Foothill variant

The foothill (*'predgorny'*) variant (**Figure 5**) is characterized by burial complexes *without* tumuli structures – these only begin to appear in the latest periods. Instead, they consist of stone constructions or stone-sided walls, stone fills and facing of the ensuing mound-like 'bulge'.⁸⁸ All burials are individual ones. Like the central variant, we have here the same combination of extended and crouched burials.⁸⁹

Particularly interesting is the Fars necropolis. The markedly high proportion of elite burials here characterize it as an aristocratic necropolis, and the large number of horsemen

and other warriors suggest participation in military campaigns. Note that the horses were usually laid down as complete skeletons.⁹⁰

Ritual complexes

A defining characteristic of the Maeotian archaeological/material culture are the masses of individual find complexes within kurgans or flat-grave necropoleis that contain no human interment. These ritual complexes are referred to by V. Erlikh as 'shrines' or 'sanctuaries' (*svyatilishcha*).⁹¹ Such complexes occur in sites from the 8th century BC up to the 2nd century BC,⁹² and range from sacrificial hearths, horse sacrifices, even possible shrines or hoards of items. These cult complexes contain various ritual elements – fire, remains of horse and even human sacrifice, symbolic ritual items – in some cases suggesting a sacred space for dedications to the divine.⁹³

Horse sacrifices were carried out with system. The carcasses were laid out in a circle or half-circle around an altar-area (**Figure 9 A**). In some cases, the sacrificial area was covered by a tent-like structure: a roofing of thatch/reeds set atop long wooden posts (**Figure 9 B**).⁹⁴

Especially striking are examples of human sacrifice in burial and ritual complexes. These are distinguished from regular human interment by the fact that the skeletons of the former are dismembered and often incomplete: a skeleton without hands or legs, the skulls only of three persons, or even two skulls together with the remaining bones dismembered.⁹⁵ In some cases, the skeleton is found in an unnaturally cramped or strangulated pose that is not due to the forces of nature, sometimes with the hands placed behind the back (**Figure 10**).⁹⁶ Significant is the fact that the sacrificed persons often clearly belonged to the Maeotian culture.⁹⁷

Ritual complexes with human sacrifice appear with notable frequency in the Tenginskaya and Ulyap sites.⁹⁸

Maeotians abroad: It is interesting to note that two Maeotian ritual complexes have been found in the southern Caucasus – on the territory of ancient Colchis, far from the usual habitat of the Maeotians. Both complexes are

⁸¹ Malyshev 2007, 243-244.

⁸² Erlikh 2007, 42.

⁸³ As described by Kamenetsky (2011, 238), the extended persons were male, the crouched were female; Erlikh (2007, 60-61) has observed that the burial poses are at best indicative of tendencies and cannot be viewed as absolute fact.

⁸⁴ Erlikh 2007, 62.

⁸⁵ Erlikh (2007, 42, 62) notes that the appearance of such 'stuffed horses' coincides with the transitional period into the Iron Age in this region; See also Malyshev 2008a, 133.

⁸⁶ 'Cultic' bones, i.e. the kneecaps of cows. Erlikh 2007, 46.

⁸⁷ Erlikh 2007, 62.

⁸⁸ Erlikh 2007, 49. Note that in some cases the burials are actually secondary burials in existing Bronze Age kurgans.

⁸⁹ As with the central variant, these poses do not clearly indicate gender. Erlikh 2007, 64.

⁹⁰ Erlikh 2007, 64-65.

⁹¹ See Erlikh (2011a, 82-94) for the chronological development of such 'shrines' and ritual complexes and the four categories he distinguishes for their overall period of existence; Such complexes could be used only once or over a longer period of time. Erlikh 2011a, 94; Kamenetsky 2011, 244.

⁹² Erlikh 2011a, 84.

⁹³ See an overview in Erlikh 2011a, 93-94; Noteworthy is Ulyap kurgan 5, which Leskov (1985, 38) interprets as a divine dedication, probably a local version of Ares.

⁹⁴ Erlikh 2011a, 93.

⁹⁵ See Erlikh (2011a, 85-88) for various examples of human sacrifice in ritual complexes; The Tenginskaya burial no. 140 also contains such examples. See Beglova 2002.

⁹⁶ Beglova 2002, 298-299.

⁹⁷ Beglova 2002, 303.

⁹⁸ Details on the sacrifices from the Tenginskaya site are found in Beglova 2002. See also the other complexes with human sacrifice listed by Erlikh (2011a, 87-91).



Thatch/reed roofing (whitish-grey)
of the ritual area

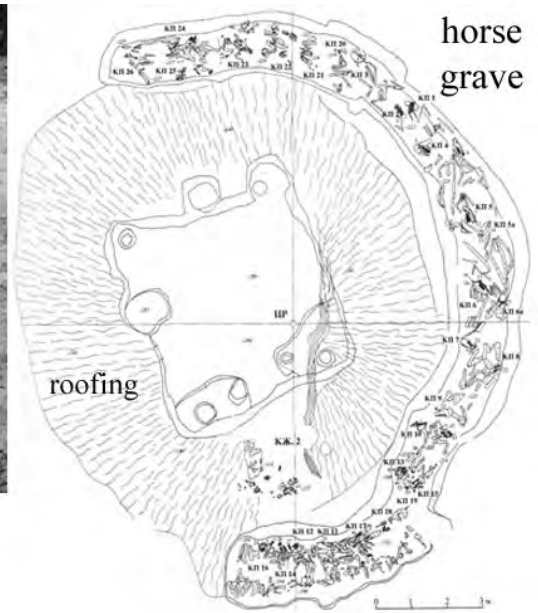


Figure 9. The horse grave in Tenginskaya kurgan B. Roofing of the sacrificial area. (After Erlikh 2011a, Fig. 41, Pl. 5.2)

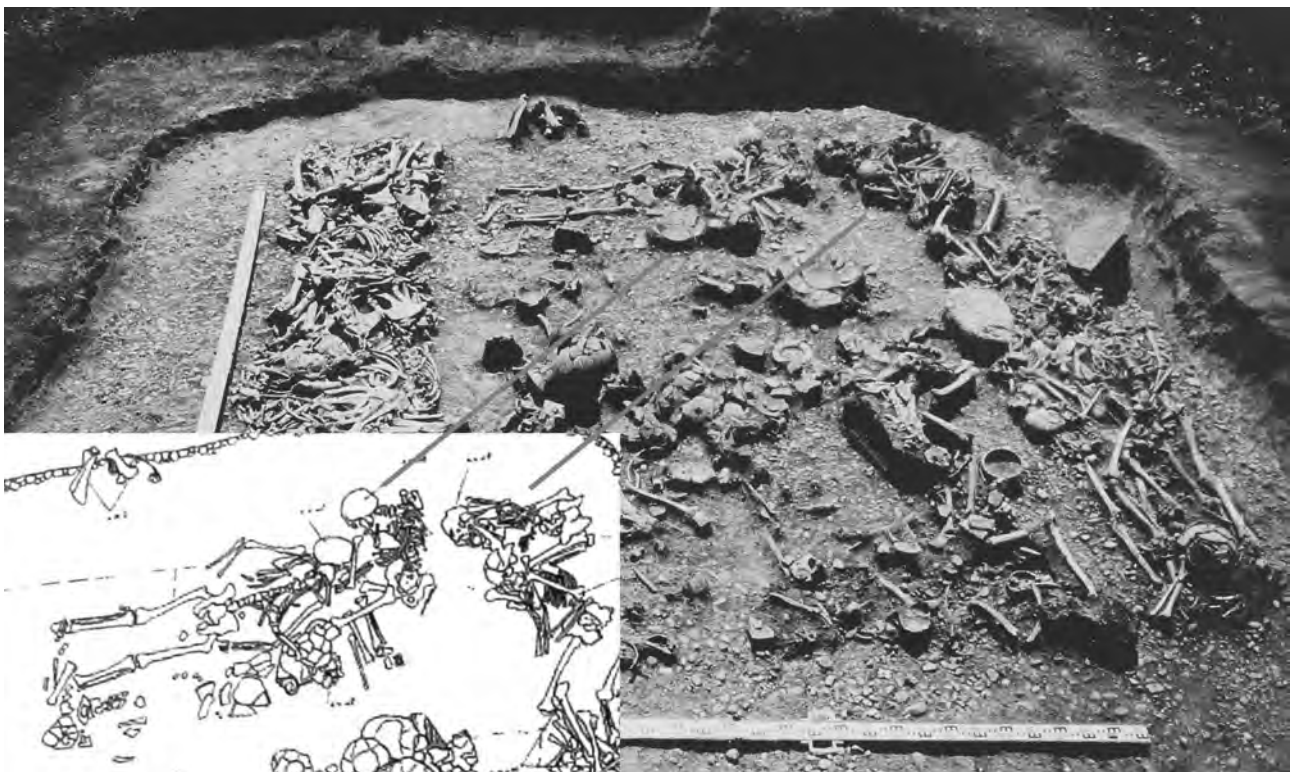


Figure 10. Human sacrifice in the Tenginskaya ritual complex (burial 140). (After Beglova 2002, Fig. 3)

of the 4th century BC and were located within the sites of two ancient Colchian towns – Gyenos (present-day Ochamchire) and Dioscurias (present-day Sukhum).⁹⁹ Their presence on Colchian territory do suggest the movement of Maeotians into the southern Caucasus, and V. Erlikh suggests the possible existence of even more such Maeotian ritual complexes on Colchian territory that remain to be discovered.¹⁰⁰

Settlements and fortifications

The settlements and fortifications of the Maeotians have not been studied with the same intensity and frequency as the burial complexes.¹⁰¹ Even though a significant number of settlements and fortifications have been identified through field survey, the results of such survey often remain unpublished.¹⁰² Additionally, only a few of the many known sites have actually been subject to methodical excavation.¹⁰³ The most comprehensive information of Maeotian settlements and fortifications is found in two recent publications by S. Kamenetsky and P. Romanova,¹⁰⁴ in which the respective authors define their major characteristics and offer a number of interpretations as to their development.

Regional concentrations

Maeotian settlements are known mainly in the Transkuban region. However, it is important to keep in mind that this distribution does not necessarily mirror in full the complete areal of Maeotian settlement sites, but does partially reflect the preference for fieldwork in a certain region. The largest known concentration of settlement sites is observed in the Ust-Labinsk region (the ‘Ust-Labinsk group’) along the Kuban and Laba Rivers near their confluence (**Figures 11A, 11B**).¹⁰⁵ Other areas of notable concentration (**Figure 11B**) are the so-called ‘Krasnodar group’ along the southern bank of the modern Krasnodar Reservoir and the ‘Ladozhskaya group’ with sites along the right Kuban bank.¹⁰⁶

Almost all known settlements were located along a waterway – the Kuban or its tributaries – either along the high terraces or the actual river bank.¹⁰⁷ It is worth considering that regional groupings of settlements may correspond to individual Maeotian tribes. The lack of known settlement sites between certain areas, such as between the Krasnodar and Ust-Labinsk groups (**Figure 11B**), may indicate a ‘neutral or border-area’ between what were two tribal zones.¹⁰⁸ Not to be disregarded, however, are the effects Krasnodar Reservoir, which may have simply washed away existing sites along this stretch, or other sites that may have belonged to the ‘Krasnodar group’.¹⁰⁹

Fortified settlements

The majority of the known Maeotian settlements are of the fortified type, with ditches and walls and a marked ‘citadel’ area¹¹⁰ upon an elevation.¹¹¹ Fortified settlements were often located in visible proximity of each other – Kamenetsky and Romanova note that the visibility from any given settlement could extend as far as the neighboring two settlements in a given direction, if not further.¹¹²

Fortified settlements vary greatly in size, up to 13ha (the Tenginskoye II settlement). Kamenetsky notes the defining characteristics of a Maeotian fortified settlement to be ditches separating the individual sections and citadel.¹¹³ The ditches were probably strengthened by walls which have since diminished over time and are barely visible. In many cases, remains of further settled plots without ditches are visible just outside the existing fortifications – Kamenetsky suggests that the new inhabitants simply had not managed to set up the necessary ditches.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that all settlements along the east bank of the Kuban were fortified. This indicates an increased need for defense along this bank – not surprising considering the Sarmatian encroachment from the north during the Hellenistic period.¹¹⁴

Non-fortified settlements

As Kamenetsky notes, material on non-fortified settlements

these settlements have undergone proper excavation, for example the Tenginskoye II settlement of the 5th-4th centuries BC (Erlikh 2011a; Beglova and Erlikh forthcoming).

⁹⁹ Kamenetsky 2011, 222.

¹⁰⁰ Kamenetsky and Romanova 2011, 43. The authors note, however, that much material in this region has been washed away by the Krasnodar Reservoir, and the possibility of Maeotian settlements along this stretch cannot be fully ruled out.

¹⁰¹ Kamenetsky and Romanova 2011, 43. Survey and emergency excavation carried out over the last decade during periods of low tide along the Krasnodar Reservoir has revealed a number of new sites.

¹⁰² Kamenetsky and Romanova 2011, 41.

¹⁰³ Kamenetsky 2011, 222.

¹⁰⁴ Kamenetsky and Romanova 2011, 41; Kamenetsky 2011, 222-224. The author also notes that settlement size was influenced by the natural growth of the settlement, which could spread beyond the boundaries of the original fortifications, which with time would require further strengthening. This growth rarely preserved the original concentric placement of the original fortifications.

¹⁰⁵ Kamenetsky 2011, 221.

¹⁰⁶ See Gardiner-Garden 1986, 222.

⁹⁹ Erlikh 2011a, 91-92. Both sites are in present-day Abkhazia. The ‘Dioscurias’ complex was found in Akhul-abaa, a district of modern Sukhum; See also Erlikh 2004.

¹⁰⁰ Erlikh 2011a, 92.

¹⁰¹ There are a number of reasons for this. Often the main topographic features such as walls, citadels and building structures have worn away over time, making their immediate identification difficult (unlike tumuli, which are immediately visible). Construction and agricultural projects have also damaged or completely destroyed a number of sites before they could be identified. This is particularly true of the last few decades, which has seen an explosion of such projects.

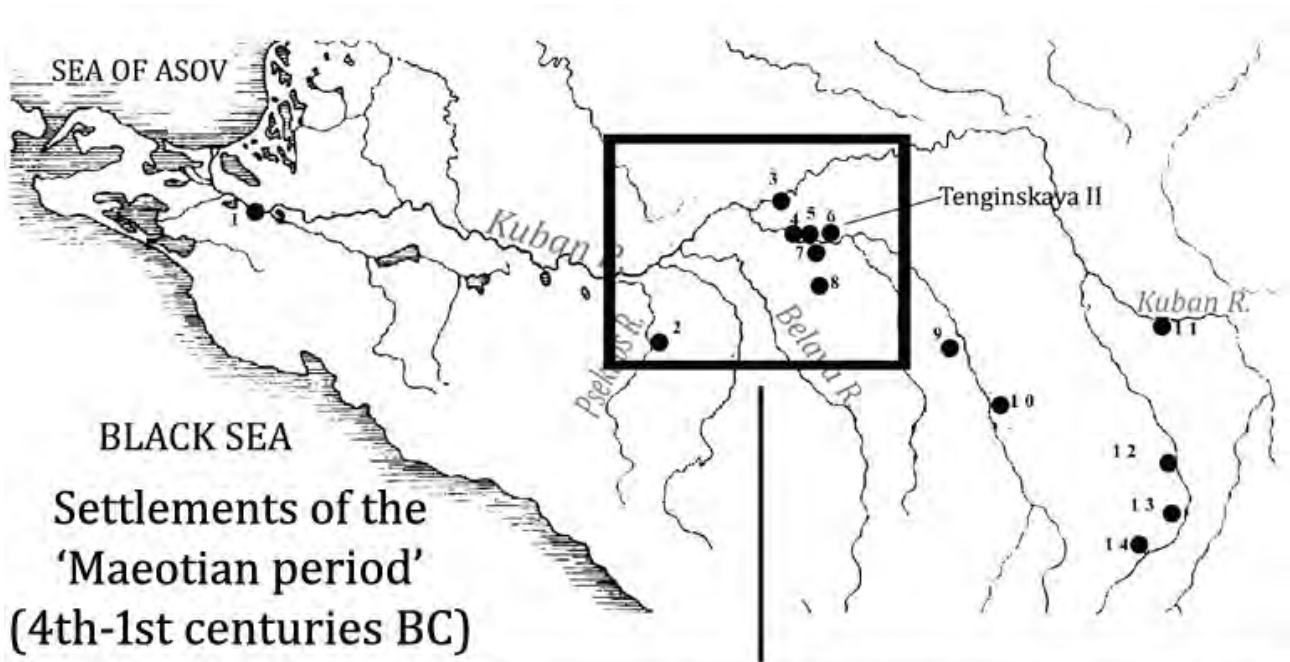
¹⁰² Kamenetsky (2011, 201) notes over 300 known fortified settlements and 170 of the non-fortified type; See also Erlikh 2007, 67; Kamenetsky and Romanova (2011, 40) note that systematic field survey of the Kuban region only began in the 1980s.

¹⁰³ Kamenetsky 2011, 201. The reasons for this are many: unlike burials, the excavation of fortifications and settlements is a tedious and drawn-out process, seldom to be completed within one season and thus requiring more funding, and with finds that are often considered less ‘spectacular’ than those in burials.

¹⁰⁴ See Kamenetsky 2011, 221-229; Kamenetsky and Romanova 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Kamenetsky and Romanova 2011, 40-41. The authors note a total of c. 59 known settlements in this group.

¹⁰⁶ See Kamenetsky and Romanova (2011, 41-43) for the ‘Ust-Labinsk’ and ‘Krasnodar’ groups, Kamenetsky (2011, 221). Only a few of



Currently known Maeotian settlements of the Ust-Labinsk region

Figure 11. Settlement distribution in the Trans-Kuban region. (A. After Beglova and Erlikh forthcoming; B. After Kamenetsky and Romanova 2011, Fig. 6)

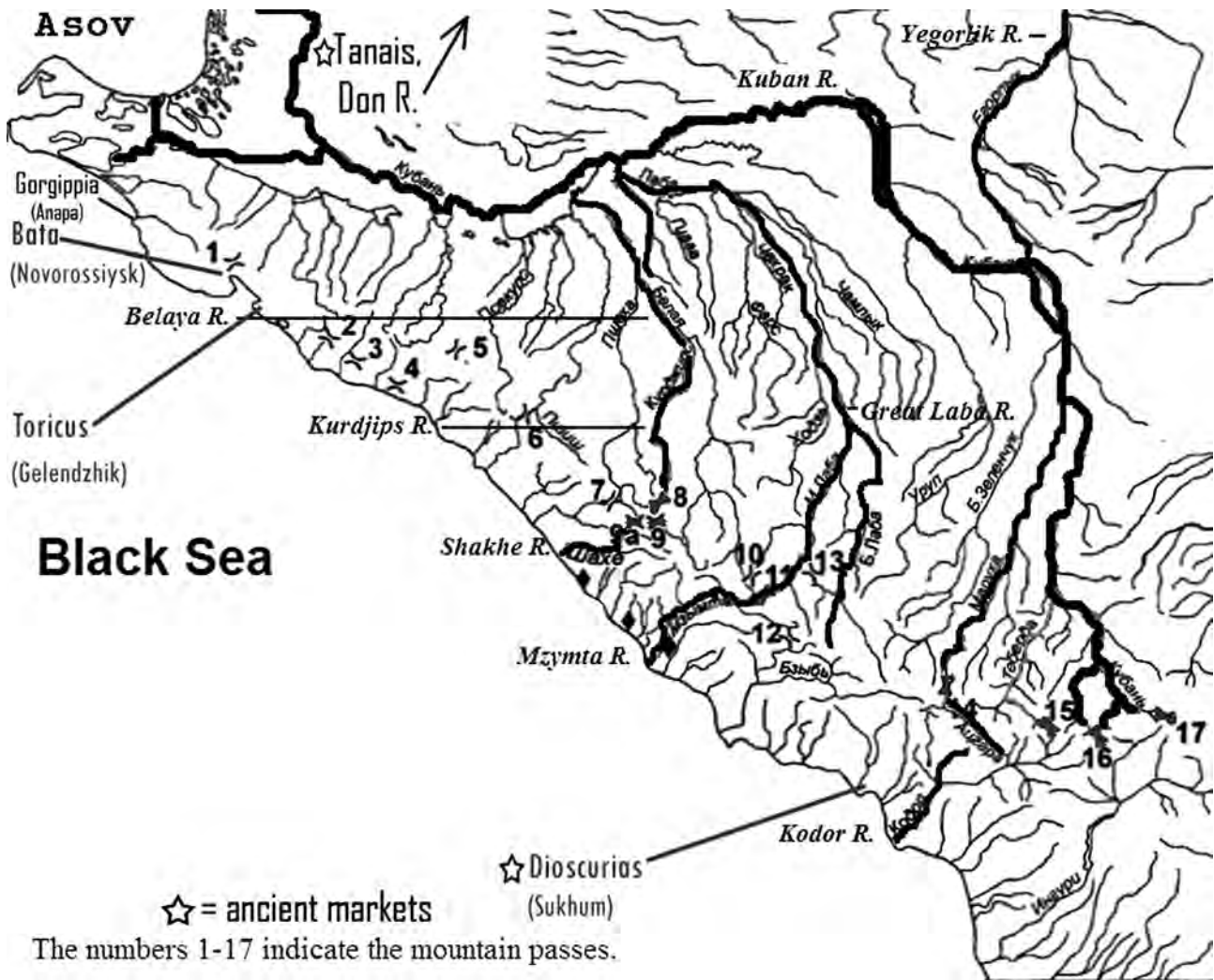


Figure 12. Mountain passes and river routes through the Caucasus. (After Raev 2006, Fig. 1)

is quite scarce and generally based on surface finds only.¹¹⁵ All known non-fortified settlements were located along the left bank of the Kuban or further south, along the Laba River and other tributaries (Figure 11).¹¹⁶ This may suggest a more secure environment in the left bank interior of the Kuban – more collaboration amongst neighbors and a shared culture.

Settlement distribution

As already mentioned, the majority of the settlements are situated along rivers (Figure 11). While this placement may indicate the preference and/or use of rivers as natural borders separating ethnic groups or barriers (to attack), it also demonstrates the importance of rivers as trade routes for the Kuban interior and Caucasus mountains. In his 2006 article, Boris Raev has convincingly described the river routes and mountain passes used in antiquity to travel between the Northern and Southern Caucasus, i.e. between the major markets in Colchis (Dioscurias) in the southern

Caucasus foothills and those up north serving the Bosphoran Kingdom (Tanais). (Figure 12) From the Colchian coastline, the major routes followed rivers flowing through the Caucasus mountain valleys and ultimately leading to the mid-reaches of the Kuban River, which one could then follow upstream to reach the mouth of the Don and the Asov Sea. Such routes have been in use since ancient times up to the present-day.¹¹⁷ They were likely preferable to sea travel along the Eastern Black Sea,¹¹⁸ perhaps with regard to avoiding confrontations with pirates, but equally, if not more likely, because of the numerous trade opportunities posed to merchants by the numerous settlements along the rivers. Certainly, the mountain and river routes presented a more viable option to land-marches along the rugged and difficult stretches of coastline.¹¹⁹

Finally, one cannot but notice the lack of information on Maeotian settlements along the eastern Black Sea

¹¹⁵ Kamenetsky 2011, 221. Kamenetsky notes that in some cases it is possible to examine the cultural layer in some detail.

¹¹⁶ Kamenetsky 2011, 221.

¹¹⁷ Skakov 2006.

¹¹⁸ Raev 2006, 305.

¹¹⁹ Raev 2006, 305; See also Chandrasekaran 2011, 67. D. Braund (2003, 189) also notes the relative lack of difficulty when traversing the seemingly formidable Caucasus Mountains.

The main cultural determinant is the typical Maeotian grey-ware pottery, which occurs in great amounts in burials.¹²⁸ While the Maeotians appear to have been molding their pottery up until the end of the 5th century BC, it seems that the pottery wheel was already being implemented with great force by the mid-fourth century BC.¹²⁹ Note that imported pottery also occurs with great frequency at Maeotian sites from the end of the 6th century BC into the 4th century BC.¹³⁰

High-quality imports from the Greek and Roman world were frequent in Maeotian elite burials and speak for intense diplomatic contacts with the ‘outside’. These ranged from Panathenaic amphorae to Greek golden objects and Phoenician and Roman glassware (**Figure 14**).

Additionally, the finds of the Hellenistic period show a pronounced affinity amongst Maeotian craftsmen for certain Greek elements or goods, as well as the know-how to produce their own version of these. The former is demonstrated by the Maeotian pottery of this period, which produces clean copies of known Greek forms in the local grey clay (**Figure 15 A**).¹³¹ A good example of the latter are the gilded terracotta medallions of the Maeotians, made to imitate the golden versions of the Greeks at a lower cost (**Figure 15 B**).¹³²

The finds from Maeotian sites clearly demonstrate close ties with neighboring states, especially the Bosphoran Kingdom, as well as with Athens during the Classical period and the overall trade circuit of the Hellenistic and Roman world. The latter is demonstrated by finds of glass *kantharoi* from Syria and Asia Minor, which were probably diplomatic gifts attesting to the politics of Mithridates VI Eupator and the battles of the 1st century BC.¹³³

The assemblages in ‘warrior burials’ of the 4th century BC can be used to understand the overall composition of the Maeotian armies. Foot-soldiers were armed with spears, while horseback warriors were armed with long Maeotian swords and spears. An overall analysis of the known assemblages of this type leads E. Beglova and V. Erlikh to suggest a proportion of one horseback warrior to every two foot-soldiers.¹³⁴ The pronounced frequency of warrior assemblages in burials of this period suggest the direct involvement of Maeotians in the political events of their neighbors, such as the battle between Aripharnes and his brothers in 310/309 BC.



A. Panathenaic amphora, Ulyap kurgan 4.
B. Silver rhyton with gilding, Ulyap kurgan 4.
C. Phoenician-style head beads, Ulyap kurgan 5.

Figure 14. Greek and Phoenician-style imports from the Ulyap kurgans. (After *Cat. Moscow*, Fig. p. 11, Fig. p. 19, Fig. p. 27)



Figure 15. A. Maeotian kantharos-shaped cup; B. Gilded terracotta medallion. (A. After *Cat. Moscow*, Fig. 67; B. After Erlikh 2011a, Pl. 21.1)

¹²⁸ Beglova and Erlikh forthcoming; Kamenetsky (2011, 298) notes that in addition to private use, local pottery was produced in great masses for selling on the market.

¹²⁹ Beglova attributes this speedy assimilation of the wheel to direct contacts between local potters and the more skilled traditions of the nearby Bosphorans. Beglova and Erlikh forthcoming.

¹³⁰ Beglova and Erlikh forthcoming.

¹³¹ Beglova and Erlikh forthcoming.

¹³² Erlikh 2011b; Erlikh 2011a, 66-68.

¹³³ Beglova and Erlikh forthcoming.

¹³⁴ Beglova and Erlikh forthcoming.

III. Conclusion

What correlation do we find between the written and archaeological evidence? Archaeology indeed confirms much in Strabo's narrative – that the Maeotians were settled around Strabo's Maeotian Lake and neighbored the Scythians and Sarmatian tribes.¹³⁵ Site distribution and significant amounts of imported goods validate their business sense as diplomats and traders. Weapon finds and distribution of fortified sites attest to their warlike character.

The Maeotian warrior lifestyle is archaeologically evidenced on many levels. Self-defense against neighboring territories is demonstrated by the fortified settlements lining the Kuban right bank, indicating defense against aggression from the north, i.e. the aforementioned Sarmatian attacks. The large quantities of weapons finds speak for the Maeotians' prowess as warriors to be feared. Elite burial sites with high percentages of warrior graves attest to Maeotian military campaigns – frequent uprisings against the Bosporans or mercenary collaboration with the Hellenized armies of the Bosporans or their enemies. The latter is evidenced to by the increase of Greek-style armor throughout the region in the 4th century BC.

How involved were the Maeotians in the slave trade with the large regional markets mentioned by Strabo and others? As finds and site distribution clearly demonstrate, the Maeotians were not merely 'involved' in regional trade, but actually *controlled* the major transportation routes between the great regional markets of the Bosporan Kingdom (e.g. Tanais) and the Southern Caucasus (Dioscurias). Dioscurias, in particular, was heralded by Strabo and others as a major market for many goods, including great quantities of the best slaves.¹³⁶ The presence of Maeotian sites nearby confirms their activities in this area, which were likely trade-related. In this respect, it is worth recalling Strabo's accounts of Maeotians involved in kidnapping by land and sea.¹³⁷ As discussed earlier, archaeology has shown Maeotians to have practiced human sacrifice on other Maeotians, who were probably either taken in battle or simply kidnapped. Could not other captured or specially kidnapped Maeotians have been led or transported along the river routes and through the mountain passes to the markets at Tanais or Dioscurias? It would appear that the Maeotians were both slavers as well as the enslaved. When one adds to this the clear evidence of Maeotians abroad – servants or slaves who helped vase painters compose their 'nonsensical' vase inscriptions in the languages of the Northern Caucasus – the significant role of the Maeotians in the slave trade with the Greek world cannot be underestimated.

How Hellenized were the Maeotians themselves? As discussed earlier, Strabo's tribal designation of the Achaeans along the eastern coast may imply a degree of Hellenization greater than that of surrounding tribes. The Greek-style

stone Maeotian cist tombs along the Abrau Peninsula (**Figure 8**) may be an example of this 'advanced' degree of Hellenization. On the other hand, finds of valuable imported (Greek) goods are not restricted to the coastal area, but occur far into the interior. This distribution of imports, combined with the overall Maeotian control of the regional trade circuit, confirm that elite Maeotians everywhere – not only in the coastal regions – actively sustained contacts with the Greek world and enjoyed the profits and gifts of the Greeks.

In terms of Maeotian identity, it is clear that ancient sources, for the most part, classified the various Maeotian tribes as barbarians. Just how did Maeotians view themselves? The level of self-representation in elite burials and ritual complexes demonstrates a great degree of self-pride. The numerous weapons finds validate the deceased as warriors. Armor finds of Greek type also illustrate the importance of their role as favored mercenaries.

Most importantly, however, the Maeotians clearly understood their value as controllers of the trade in the region, as demonstrated by the distribution of various goods and imports throughout the region. In this respect, they particularly valued trade and contacts with Greeks, together with the valuable gifts which they received from them and other outsiders and took to their graves. Local imitations of imported wares also evidence a certain affinity for Hellenistic production while simultaneously taking pride in local manufacture. At the same time, manufacture of imitations clearly demonstrates the main emphasis of Maeotian trade to have been *regional* and not easily affected by the decline in trade with the Greek world outside the Bosporus during the later Hellenistic period.

Finally, the burial construction, burial rite and burial assemblage remained fundamentally Maeotian, clearly demonstrating a conscious indigenous identity.

The high self-esteem of the Maeotians, who took obvious pride in their warrior qualities, but also their diplomacy, business and manufacturing skills, shows no great endeavors on their part towards identifying themselves with the Greeks (or Romans, for that matter). Yet, as neighbors of the Bosporans, they made some effort to be indispensable to them and the Greek trade circuit as a whole.

Lack of correlation

In certain cases, it is difficult to correlate the archaeological to the written evidence. For example, it is impossible to archaeologically verify whether any of the Maeotian tribes had a preference for long beards (Macropogones). Likewise, there is no evidence in written sources to indicate that Maeotian territory stretched from the Maeotian Lake far into the interior, as unmistakably demonstrated by archaeological material.

Even more difficult is the attempt to attribute the individual

¹³⁵ Geo. 11.2.

¹³⁶ Geo. 11.2.16; 11.5.6.

¹³⁷ Geo. 11.2.12.

Maeotian tribes of ancient sources to a specific region of what is archaeologically known as Maeotian territory.¹³⁸ The varied designations and language backgrounds of the names given by ancient writings simply find no corresponding factor in archaeology. Perhaps the lesson to learn is not to look for points of tally, but take these sets of evidence as supplementing each other. They simply provide two sides of a picture which was probably correct – the Maeotians consisted of various tribes with varying language backgrounds, but all shared an overall material culture. As such, this image harmonizes with the picture of the Northern Caucasus and Kuban basin we see today – the modern peoples of the Northern Caucasus are many, their languages varied and of Caucasian or Iranian background, yet they share a similar culture and customs that are foreign to their non-Caucasian neighbors.

To conclude: The scope of this paper has allowed me to look at *only some* aspects of written and archaeological evidence on the tribes of the Eastern Black Sea region. As demonstrated by the above, even a limited amount of information is sufficient to produce a constructive overview on these tribes, their cultural background, their function within the region and their identity, all of which is essential for scholars studying the contacts between the Greeks/Romans and indigenous populations of this region.

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¹³⁸ A possible exception is that of the Achaeans mentioned above.

¹³⁹ Russian titles have been rendered using the BGN/PCGN system, i.e. British Standard 2979 without diacritics.

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Abbreviations

- Cat. Moscow = Leskov, A. M. and Lapushnyan, V. L. (eds.) 1987. *Shedevry drevnego iskusstva Kubani*. Moskva, Min. kultury SSSR -Vneshtorgizdat.
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Discussion

Manolis Manoledakis: I am very interested in all these geographical issues and the important thing here is to see how credible all these geographical sources are. You mentioned for example Strabo and Ptolemy. As for Pomponius Mela, I am very sceptical; a lot of data in his work is wrong. Strabo may be a bit more credible as he lived in the Black Sea, as you said, but he lived in the

southern Black Sea and who knows whether he travelled to all these remote places. This applies also to Ptolemy, who mentions 8000 place names but of course didn't go to most of them. So, the interesting thing is that we look at some tribal names that are Greek, like Makropogones (long bearded), Heniochoi (the supposed charioteers of the Dioskouroi) and the Acheans (name of a very important Greek tribe). How did the Greeks give names to such people? We know this also from the southern Black Sea, for example, the Makrokephaloi or the Chalybes. Was it a wish to show that Greeks were everywhere? How were these names given and who were they, actually? Were they Maeotians, were they Sarmatians, do we know?

Sujatha Chandrasekaran: You would not believe it but this is pretty up to date. Actually, let's start with the Greek names. For the Acheans, one suggestion is that Strabo was probably trying to use other information he gathered from elsewhere, or authors tried to give local tribes some sort of Greek-ness through the name, thus showing that they were more grecified than other tribes. They would have behaved in a more Greek fashion and more civilized in order to facilitate 'better trade, better connections'. That is one suggestion. It could also be that they are former Greek settlers who are now so wild that they are no longer officially considered Greeks but still have Greek tribal names. That is the other suggestion. So people are now looking at these Greek names trying to find how they got onto the list.

Manolis Manoledakis: If the latter is the case, how long ago could they have arrived there?

Sujatha Chandrasekaran: Something like 6th-5th c. BC is what ancient sources are saying, and these sources are mainly from the turn of the era, that is the 1st c. BC-1st c. AD. This is the chronological frame for their becoming assimilated with the local tribes. This is the discussion going on now. As far as the other tribal names are concerned, another thing people are trying to do is to identify their linguistic origins (such as Caucasian or Iranian origin). Some of the names do point to a Caucasian or Iranian origin (based on prefixes, such as -ps, etc.). Whether these were Iranian or not, it is very hard to see how Greek authors decided that someone was Iranian or not. Either authors got the tribal names from the tribes themselves and made them more Greek-like for their works or they simply made them up. In the case of Strabo, he mentions so many names but he doesn't give much of a description and there is no distinguishing element amongst the different tribes that would ultimately match with the archaeological material, which presents very few distinctions. Nonetheless, there are some variations, e.g. geographical distinctions. But this matches up with the picture of the tribes in the Caucasus today. As we can see from the Caucasian tribes today, they all share a similar culture, yet they are multilingual.

Anca Dan: I would like to make three remarks, the first concerning Strabo and the geographical tradition concerning

the Maeotic tribes, the second on the archaeological problem of the distribution of the barbarian settlements in the Taman region and the last on the ethnography of the Achaeans.

The beginning of Strabo's Book 11 could seem a bit complicated but, in fact, if one compares it with other books of the *Geography*, one understands Strabo's method: he begins with the geographical frames offered by the major natural limits (*Geography*: 11.1-2.1); he continues with the description of the Pontic coast (*periplous*: 11.2.4-9, 14), and then he goes on with the details about the deltaic and continental regions, described from west to east (*chorography*: 11.2.10-13, 15-19). In order to understand better which tribes lived on the coast and which were inland in this North-Eastern part of Pontus, we may compare Strabo's evidence with three types of sources: the first one is represented by the *Periploi* of the Pseudo-Skylax and of Arrian. To the second belongs to Diodorus, who gives some interesting data on the tribes and major settlements of the Hellenistic period and about their relationships with the kingdom of Bosphorus (e.g. 20.22-25); finally, a very interesting documentation about the Maeotic tribes comes from the inscriptions of the Bosphorus (e.g., *CIRB* 40), lately studied by Sergei Tokhstas'ev.

Given the absence of indigenous settlements on the coast, one should think that it is probable that our littoral of the Taman peninsula does not correspond to the ancient coast. For the northern part of Caucasus, where Maeotic tribes are supposed to have lived, in the delta of the Hypanis / Kuban, the maritime coast must have been further inland (c.f., the recent articles of Udo Schlotzhauer and Denis Žuravlev).

Concerning the Achaeans, as Manolis already mentioned, it is true that the texts report traditions about their Greek origin. But they must have been Caucasian and had nothing to do with Greece, except maybe for some sensibility or some resemblance with the Greek civilization. We know a similar case of a so-called Greek people in the region north from Olbia: the Budinoi appeared to Herodotus (4.108-109) and to his sources as being of Greek origin, but they were very far inland, and it is sure that no Greek group of immigrants ever went there. This means that these people had a sedentary way of life, more similar to that of the Greeks than to the other Nomads.

Sujatha Chandrasekaran: I completely agree with your last point. As to the level of the Black Sea coast then and today, that could play a role, but not necessarily, because whether we look at the material culture inland or on the coast, or whether you go a few more meters into the sea and excavate underwater, I do not think that you will find too many differences.

Adela Sobotkova: I am also interested in a bit more information on the actual settlements. Specifically, you have mentioned that a large number of Kurgans and finds in the area don't indicate a large population and, while we do not

have so much evidence of settlements from excavations, you mentioned that there are a lot of surveys done in the region and possibly these surveys have identified patterns in settlements, some sizes of settlements or their outlines or even settlement hierarchies. Do you have any information of that kind? Is there any evidence of a large sedentary population from these surveys?

Sujatha Chandrasekaran: Yes and no. Good information from surveys for settlements is found for the Crimea. For the Eastern Black Sea region there is very little. I know that there are actually not many large settlements. This is a problem we have throughout the whole Kouban region. Sizes and structures of settlements are not always known. This would require more, proper excavation.

Eleni Mentessidou: Herodotus in Book 4 gives us information on ethnographical characteristics of the Scythians and Sarmatians and also about their rituals. Maybe we can get some information also from there. About the size, can the lack of finds lead you to the conclusion that maybe there were nomadic tribes, who were constantly moving from one place to another, and that's why you only find tumuli or tombs? And another question: can you distinguish the products of one tribe from the products of another tribe, or

can you trace influences from Scythian art or from Greek art in those local Maeotian products?

Sujatha Chandrasekaran: When it comes to the Maeotian settlement material that we know of, I should say again that surveys have shown that there are quite a few Maeotian settlements; there are proper necropoleis and there are settlements usually surrounded by flat graves and tumuli. This indicates settled people, not nomads. That as regards your first question. Second, as to the artistic influences, or, actually, cultural influences: there is so much that influenced the Maeotians, as I already indicated. The general makeup of these burials is pretty much the same (types of items, pottery, weaponry, mirrors, etc.). Their style, of course, is always different; you can't identify groups based on the style of items they are carrying. As for stylistic influences from the Scythians or Greeks, of course we do have this. In fact the Maeotians are known for not having depicted human figures before the Hellenistic period and the early depictions (ca. 4th c. BC) look like the typical barbarian as perceived by Greeks. This is probably the Maeotians accepting the Greek form of depicting the Maeotians and not necessarily how the Maeotians would have depicted themselves. It is just an example of production carried out for the Maeotian market.