

A Book on the Medieval Archaeology of Crimea

Review: Türk A. (2023). *A Krím-félsziget régészete a késő antikvitástól a késő középkorig* (Kr. u. 6-11. század) / *The Archaeology of the Crimean Peninsula from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (6-11th centuries AD). (*Studia ad Archaeologiam Pazmaniensia* 29 – Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Magyar Őstörténeti Kutatócsoport Kiadványok 7). Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem Bölcsész- és Társadalomtudományi Kar Régészettudományi Intézet, Martin Opitz Kiadó & Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Magyar Őstörténeti Kutatócsoport.

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This review is about Dr Attila Türk's monograph entitled *A Krím-félsziget régészete a késő antikvitástól a késő középkorig* (*The Archaeology of the Crimean Peninsula from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages*), published in 2023. In this book, Attila Türk, who has made numerous research trips to Eastern Europe, examines the late antique and medieval archaeology of the Crimean Peninsula. The author's scholarly interests include Eastern European history and the general archaeology of the Early Middle Ages, particularly the period of the Hungarian conquest. Therefore, the publication of such a work contributes significantly to the author's research profile.

The publication of this work is extremely important for Hungarian archaeology because the majority of Hungarian archaeologists do not speak Russian. In turn, there is already a considerable corpus of scholarly literature on the Crimean Peninsula in Russian,¹ as the history of its study is very long.² It is well known that the archaeology of Crimea, like that of the Carpathian Basin, is situated in the general context of the Eurasian steppes. The archaeology of the Eurasian steppes as a whole is of great interest to Hungarian archaeology, which studies the various ancient ethnic groups that migrated to the Carpathian Basin, among which the Sarmatians, Alans, Huns, Avars, early Hungarians proper, as well as the Pechenegs, Kumans and Caucasian Alans have their place. As mentioned above, due to Hungarian researchers' lack of knowledge of the Russian language, many issues of steppe archaeology remain largely unexplored for them. This Hungarian monograph on Crimea helps fill this gap by introducing specialists to the archaeology of this territory.

The monograph consists of three chapters, further subchapters, as well as an introduction, conclusion and plates of illustrations. As usual, the introduction provides a general overview of the topic of interest and its relevance. In its turn, the first chapter ("A Krím-félsziget") deals with the geography and history of the Crimean Peninsula in

¹ See, for example, Makarova & Pletnyova (2003).

² See, for example, Bronevsky (1822) and Gennadi (1867).

antiquity and the Middle Ages, up to its annexation to Russia at the end of the 18th century, i.e. this geographical and historical region is given a general characterisation. As in many studies focused on specific regions, the chapters with general information about the region are placed at the beginning and necessarily contain geographical information. This helps to better understand the history and archaeology of the territory of interest because geography has always played a major role in historical processes.³ This monograph is no exception.

Let us consider the historical and geographical background given by the author. In the southern part of the peninsula, the Crimean Mountains are relatively low in altitude. Most of the Greek colonies were founded here, i.e. between the Black Sea coast and the mountain slopes approaching it. Due to its geographical position, the southern coast of Crimea had the most stable connections with the Mediterranean, so the choice of colonists who came here during the “Great Greek Colonisation” is quite understandable. The eastern part of Crimea itself is a smaller peninsula, surrounded by the Sea of Azov to the north and the Black Sea to the south. This peninsula is called the Kerch Peninsula and is a kind of bridge linking Crimea with the Taman Peninsula, the steppes of the North-Eastern Black Sea region and the Caucasus. In antiquity, the Bosphoran Kingdom was founded here and played a significant role in the history of the steppe and Caucasus regions. Finally, the northern part of Crimea is part of the steppe natural zone and was mainly occupied by nomadic tribes.

As mentioned above, the Crimean Peninsula occupied an important place in the history of the Eurasian steppes. Since the time of the “Great Greek colonisation”, Crimea has been one of the main points of interaction between the peoples of Eastern Europe and the civilisations of the south. The Greek presence, interestingly enough, still existed in the Early Middle Ages, when the southern part of Crimea was under Byzantine control. Thus, there was a collision, interaction and interpenetration of two major cultural types: the late antique and the Byzantine culture that replaced it, and the cultures of various steppe nomads. Interpenetration, in particular, was expressed in the fact that nomads, for example, could adopt a sedentary way of life and, in the medieval period, also the Christian religion. In addition, Crimea had extensive contacts with other areas of the Black Sea region: intensive trade continued with Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, as well as with other cities in Anatolia and the Balkans. It is also known from written sources that Crimean cities had trade contacts with the north.

Speaking about the history and archaeology of Crimea, it is impossible not to highlight the issue of the early Hungarian presence here. The early Hungarians were indeed associated with Crimea. Today, it is well known that the territory of Etelköz, known from written sources, was also located in the Middle Dnieper and Middle

³ One of the professors at the Department of Historical Regional Studies at St. Petersburg State University characterised the relationship between geography and history extremely accurately and aptly as follows: “Geography is history in space, and history is geography in time.”.

Dniester, in fact, on the Northern Black Sea coast. Hungarians inhabited Etelköz in the second and last thirds of the 9th century (Türk, 2023, 246–252), and Etelköz is also identified with the Subotsy archaeological horizon of the archaeological sites of the same period (Komar, 2018, 239–256). From Arabic written sources, according to Ibn Rust and Gardizi, it is known, for example, that the early Hungarians of Etelköz had trade contacts with Byzantium, precisely in Crimea. While presenting the general history of Crimea, the author also pays special attention to the early Bulgarians and Khazars of the time of the Saltiv-Mayaki culture, as this community played an important role in the early history of the Hungarians.

In the second chapter (“A Krím-félsziget fontosabb lelőhelyei a közép-bizánci korban”), the author discusses in detail the most significant sites of urban archaeology of Crimea of the Middle Byzantine period (each of them in a separate subchapter). As already mentioned above in the corresponding chapter, the southern, mountainous part of the Crimean Peninsula was the main location of the Greek colonies due to its convenient geographical position. The situation was similar in Byzantine times when this part of Crimea was part of the Byzantine Empire. Among the listed cities, a special place is occupied by Chersonesus, located on the territory of modern Sevastopol. The city was founded by the Greeks in the 6th century BC. At the end of the 2nd century BC, it fell under the rule of the Pontic and, later, the Bosporan Kingdom. Then, in late antique times, it belonged to the Roman Empire, and in the Early Middle Ages, it became part of Byzantium. Chersonesus was considered one of the most important cities of the Northern Black Sea region and remained so until the 13th century when Italian (mainly Genoese and Venetian) traders—who, at that time, were monopolists on the Black Sea—founded new settlements such as Sudak, Feodosia and a number of others. Another significant centre was the city of Bosporus (in ancient times, Panticapaeum), located on the territory of modern Kerch and founded by Greek colonists from Miletus. This city became the capital of the Bosporan Kingdom, and later, one of the important centres of Byzantium on the territory of Crimea. Due to its location, it maintained close connections with the Taman Peninsula. After the creation of the Khazar Khaganate, Bosporus fell under the rule of the Khazars. In the archaeological materials on the territory of modern Kerch, the Khazar period is well traced: there are known remains of fortifications typical of the Khazar Khaganate. In the 10th century, the city returned to the Byzantine Empire.

In addition to the above-mentioned cities located on the seashore, the history and archaeology of Crimea includes the so-called cave cities in the mountainous part of the peninsula. They comprise inhabited cave cities as well as cave temples, monasteries and a number of other structures—Chelter-Koba, Chufut-Kale, Eski-Kermen, Kachi-Kalon, Kyz-Kermen, Mangup, Tepe-Kermen. These cities are the results of the desire of the Byzantine Empire to strengthen its northern border and thus Byzantine influence in the mountainous part of Crimea. However, their inhabitants were not only Byzantines.

It is not difficult to guess, knowing the various interactions in Crimea, that the ethnic composition of its population in the Middle Ages was quite diverse. Many of the towns described in this chapter were inhabited by non-Greek allies or subjects of Byzantium (Alans and Goths), and some of these towns were founded by these groups.

The second chapter deals not only with settlement monuments. Separate subchapters are also devoted to burial sites, among which Suuk-Su and Uzen-Bash can be singled out.

The third chapter ("A szaltovói kultúrkör krími variánsának kérdése a bizánci peremkultúrák tükrében") is devoted to the interactions of the Saltivo-Mayaki culture with Crimea and, similarly to the previous chapter, it includes several subchapters. In the first of them, the author elaborates on the problem of identifying the Crimean variant of the Saltivo-Mayaki culture, distinguishing in this regard several groups of archaeological sites: Eastern Crimean, Bosporan (on the Kerch Peninsula), south-eastern and central, South Crimean, south-western and north-eastern. In the second subchapter, special attention is directed towards the presence of the early Bulgarians in this territory. In this regard, the author singles out the Tau-Kipchak group of sites and concludes that the early Bulgarian materials in Crimea can be dated to the middle of the 8th century. The third subchapter uncovers the interaction of the Khazar Khaganate with the North-Eastern Black Sea region. Although the monograph focuses on Crimea, the inclusion of archaeological data from the Taman Peninsula, particularly of the cities of Phanagoria and Tmutarakan, broadens the contextual understanding.

The fourth subchapter describes the Abrau-Dyurso-II burial ground, a reference archaeological site of the North-Eastern Black Sea region, located near modern Novorossiysk. Archaeological materials from the burial ground indicate that the population that abandoned it interacted with Crimea (for example, there are finds of Bosporan staters). For Hungarian researchers, Abrau-Dyurso-II is of special interest because the fourth and final stage of its functioning (8th–9th centuries) is characterised by cremation burials. Some authors associate these cremation burials with groups of the Ugrian population that arrived here in the 8th century.⁴

The fifth subchapter is devoted to Byzantine provincial culture in light of the interaction with the Saltiv-Mayaki culture on the Crimean Peninsula. Finally, we have the sixth and seventh subchapters, which are not directly related to Crimea but provide a broader Eastern European context: on early Saltiv belt buckles with Byzantine features, many of which were also made in Crimea, and on Saltiv-Mayaki fortifications in the Don region during the 8th–10th centuries. The Saltiv-Mayaki fortresses in the Don region are also known to have Byzantine architectural features, which are most likely explained by the Byzantine influence on Crimea.

⁴ P. S. Uspensky's dissertation (2015) is devoted to the problems of cremation burials in the North-West Caucasus.

At the end of each chapter, there is a list of scientific literature, which can be used to delve deeper into the context of the issues addressed in each chapter. The 180-page-long monograph concludes with the plates of 100 illustrations, which constitute the major part of the book.

To summarise the results of our review, we would like to reiterate that this work is extremely important for Hungarian archaeology. And, realising that the Crimean Peninsula is nothing but an integral part of the general context of the Eurasian steppes, it is especially valuable that the author, despite the stated theme of Crimean archaeology, also considers the archaeology of the adjacent territories: the Taman Peninsula, the North-West Caucasus and even the Don region. Thus, Crimea is elegantly placed in this very context, which is very important for understanding the historical and archaeological situation in general. The monograph will be of interest to researchers with a historical and archaeological profile, students of relevant specialities and all Hungarian readers interested in the history and origin of their people, especially as it dives into issues tied to the early Hungarians.

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