

of social systems within a single geographical zone, but also how dispersed multi-family houses were autonomous political and economic actors that gradually formed village communities in which they maintained a strong house identity. By the 12th c. AD, however, stronger collective identities developed through interdependency at the local level, retaining a decentralised political system.

We then return to Europe with a paper by Julio Escalona who investigates two early medieval secondary state formations in Mercia and Castile (259-279). He too stresses the inadequacy of linear evolutionary theories in state formation, and argues that, besides their different historical and environmental contexts, the two regions share certain similarities and comply with similar socio-political processes. This is especially true for the coalescence processes of land acquisition or strongholds by elite members, on the one hand, and upscaling on the other. The final paper is on the 'sea people' by Bérénice Bellina's, but not those of the Mediterranean but of Southeast Asia (280-301). She shows how 'ahistorical' highly mobile groups played a prominent role, both in economics and politics, and were highly interconnected with land-based trading polities between the 15th and 19th c. AD. She argues for the inappropriateness of the Western model of the state for Southeast Asia, where power was not based on territorial control but on the creation and maintenance of interdependent networks. Instead, two political models are prioritised. The Mandala model entails a confederation of political entities subordinated to a dominant centre, while the hierarchic upstream-downstream Dendritic river model implies the existence of a central place, located downstream, that controlled the flux of goods entering a river basin system with ties to upstream centres of less order. It is especially (but not only) in this second model that sea nomadism is considered, long-distance sailing groups on the one hand, and estuarine and riverine groups, on the other. These sea-nomads maintained trade networks, essential for the proper functioning of land-based communities. Although concerned with Southeast Asia, I could not help making connections with the Bronze Age Aegean where similar conditions may have prevailed.

All by all, a very instructive volume. An index, however, would have been welcome and perhaps some kind of summarising ideas since despite the great variety of cultures treated, certain constancies in agency are clearly recognisable.

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Michael. L. Galaty, Lorenc Bejko (eds)
Archaeological investigations in a northern Albanian province. Results of the Projekti Arkeologjik i Shkodrës
(Memoirs of the Museum of Anthropology 64). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023. Volume 1: Survey and excavations results. pp. 309, 160 col. ill. 33 tab. ISBN 978-1-951538-73-6, hardcover \$85.00; ISBN 978-1-951538-68-2, ebook \$85.00; Volume 2: Artifacts and Artifact analysis. pp. 457, 67 plates, 132 col. ill. 100 tab. ISBN 978-1-951538-69-9, harcover \$85.00, ISBN 978-1-951538-67-5, ebook \$85.00.

This two-volume monograph presents the results of a multidisciplinary regional archaeological project in the Upper Shkodër Basin, in North Albania. Importantly, PASH, the Albanian acronym for this project, continues the series of regional archaeological projects in Albania, initiated over two decades ago with the Albanian-American collaboration in the hinterlands of Apollonia and Dyrrhachium, the Mallakastra Regional Archaeological Project, or MRAP and the Durrës Regional Archaeological Project, or DRAP. It is all the more pleasing to see the integral results of PASH published in a single, richly illustrated edition and the project data made freely accessible at the Deep Blue data repository. This is entirely in tune with recent calls for data transparency and the need to publish, curate and preserve archaeological datasets. Wittingly or not, PASH also complements the earlier regional projects in Albania, both of which were focused on the hinterlands of the two Corinthian-Corcyran colonies on the Albanian coast, whereas PASH studies the developments in the territory of an autochthonous, Illyrian centre, in a little-known corner of the Balkan Peninsula. Shkodër, ancient Scodra, was the last seat of the Illyrian kings prior to the Roman conquest and, until the early 20th century, it kept its role as a major regional centre, on par with Prizren, Sarajevo, Skopje or Niš. In view of the principal goals of this research project, the study of the causes and mechanisms of emergent social inequality and complexity, the Shkodër Basin is a well-chosen setting.

The sheer size of this monograph and the numerous highly-specialized contributions are prohibitive of a detailed, chapter-by-chapter review. Therefore, the brief overview of the contents of these two volumes will be followed by a series of critical observations and a summary of the most important findings of

the PASH. The goal is to highlight both the strong and weak points of this publication.

As usual, the contributions are organized into two volumes. Volume One introduces the theoretical rationale, the methodology and the historical context of this project, and reports on the integral results of the survey and excavations. Volume Two is devoted to the study of the various categories of artefacts and ecofacts collected. Helpfully, the chapters in both volumes are numbered consecutively.

The project's background and goals, the theoretical concerns and the research design and methods applied are all presented by the principal investigators and volume editors in Chapter One, (pp. 1-25) together with a basic summary of the project's achievements in terms of coverage and the volume of analyzed finds. This is followed by a chapter by Stan Galicki, (Chapter Two, pp. 26-44) in which the geologic and hydrologic framework of the study-area are introduced, alongside the results of the geomorphological studies and coring program in the Shtoj Plain and on the eastern coast of Lake Shkodër. In Chapter Three (pp. 45-67), the volume editors, Galaty and Bejko, provide a useful overview of the history of archaeological research in the Shkodër Basin. This is not only a welcome introduction for non-Albanian speakers, but it also contextualizes the research goals and contributions of the PASH. The historical background of the study-area, likewise little known to non-Albanian scholars, is discussed in Chapter Four (pp. 68-88), authored by Zamir Tafilica and Ermal Baze in Albanian and translated by the third author Ols Lefe into English.

The results of the systematic onsite and offsite surveys are presented by the volume editors together with Kailey Rocker in Chapter Five. (pp. 89-165) Readers will be disappointed to discover that most of this chapter consists of the bare field reports and summaries of the individual survey teams. These reports are then summarized again by survey zones or sectors, which contributes to a difficult and repetitive read. The authors then continue to report on the results of the onsite surveys and the surveys of the tumuli fields, which was a separate subcomponent of the systematic survey program. In the last section of this long chapter, the authors finally attempt to synthesize the results of the survey, by looking at the changes in the amount and the overall distribution of surface material.

Chapter Six (pp. 166-189), authored by several project members, looks at the possible role of internal and external conflicts in the rise of complex societies. It is a hybrid contribution, which first

considers the evidence for organized warfare in the study-area and then presents the results of the GIS analysis, viewshed and Least Cost Path, of hillforts and tumuli. Chapter Seven (pp. 190-233), by Galaty, Bejko and James B. Harris echoes Chapter Five and is little more than a preliminary report of the test-pits excavations at three settlement sites in the survey-area. Interestingly, two of these sites have been excavated previously by Albanian archaeologists. The closing chapter of volume One, Chapter Eight (pp. 234-302) is a report of the geophysical surveys and excavations at four mounds in the tumuli fields near Shkrel and Shtoj. This long chapter also includes an overly detailed description of the earlier excavations at these tumuli fields by Albanian scholars and their views on the chronology of the burial mounds and the cultural affiliations of the mound builders.

Volume Two, opens with Chapter Nine, (pp. 1-43) by Rudenc Ruka, who analyzes the lithic assemblage from the survey-area. Indeed, the PASH can be proud of the large volume of lithics brought back to base, a clear indication of the loads of valuable evidence potentially missed by surveys focused exclusively on ceramics. Intriguingly, with a handful of possible exceptions, most of these finds are pre-Holocene. The collections of ceramic finds, both from surveys and excavations are studied in the next four chapters. Chapter Ten by Lorenc Bejko, Zhaneta Gjyshja and Anisa Mara (pp. 44-111) deals with the prehistoric pottery, Late Neolithic to Iron Age, Chapter 11 by Eduard Shehi (pp. 112-212) with the pottery dated to the centuries between the Late Archaic period and the reign of Augustus, Chapter 12 by Brikena Shkodra-Rrugia (pp. 213-231) with the pottery dated to the Roman imperial and Late Roman periods and Chapter 13, by Joanita Vroom and Mink. W. van Ijzendoorn (pp. 232-264) with the medieval and post-medieval material. With the exception of the chapter on prehistoric pottery, the other three chapters are almost entirely limited to widely recognizable wares and types, like Corinthian and Italic amphorae or glazed pottery. No attempts have been made to identify local types or fabrics, although the results of the compositional (Chapter 14, pp. 265-282) and petrographic analysis (Chapter 15, pp. 284-303) of the ceramic material indicate that the vast majority of these finds were locally produced, possibly even by individual households.

Interestingly, a separate chapter is dedicated to the grinding stones collected by this project (Chapter 16, pp. 304-314, by Zhaneta Gjyshja), an artefact category rarely associated with regional projects. The rest of the small finds, ranging from coins and loom weights to Early Modern house utensils and

plastics are presented in Chapter 17 (pp. 315-367), with separate sections on textile production tools, loom weights and spindle whorls by Rovenka Kurti. The attention dedicated to these categories of finds is surely praiseworthy, although the small number of finds can hardly be used as evidence of specialized economies like textile production or metallurgy.

The archaeobotanical and faunal evidence produced by the excavations at settlement sites and burial mounds are studied in chapters 18 (pp. 368-383) and 19 (pp. 384-392), by Susan E. Allen and Martha M. Wendel, and Richard W. Yerkes. These studies do offer the first glimpses into the character of the local farming economy and its vegetational context, though admittedly the value of the evidence is greatly undermined by the disturbed stratigraphy at most of the excavated sites. The high percentage of remains from intrusive species in the faunal assemblages from the burial mounds is indeed remarkable.

The human teeth and bones retrieved from the survey and excavations of burial mounds were subjected to strontium isotope and aDNA analysis, the results of which are presented in Chapter 20. (pp. 393-415) The authors point out the relevance of these analyses for the principal research goal of this project, in this case, the possible role of migrations in the emergence of social inequality, but the sample size is obviously far from adequate. In Chapter 21, (pp. 416-422) Sylvia Deskaj discusses the results of the ethnographic study of the interactions between contemporary communities in the wider study area. Admittedly, this reads more like a short comment on the recent history of the area than a proper ethnographic report.

The difficult task of pulling together the numerous threads of this research project is taken up by the principal investigators, Michael L. Galaty and Lorenc Bejko in the concluding chapter. (Chapter 22, pp. 423-447). Whereas they do arrive at a final conclusion regarding the possible causes of the growth of complex society in the study-area, the reader will get the impression that the bulk of their arguments are based on the rereading of previous studies and published material from the survey-area and beyond, rather than on the findings of the PASH. Of course, there is nothing wrong in reconsidering the body of existing knowledge in the light of new data, but the expectations of a regional project of such scale and ambition are usually much higher than this.

There are many reasons why PASH fails to live up to these expectations. These are partly related to

the quality of the final publication. The speckless formatting and the large number of high-quality illustrations cannot hide the poor editing for content. What is the use of including dry field-reports in such a well-illustrated publication and with the raw data freely available online? The detailed accounts of the distribution of individual sherds across field tracts or stratigraphic units can hardly be of any help even to the most sympathetic and patient readers. An introduction to the work done by previous generations of scholars is certainly important and this is duly done in Chapter Three. What is the point then of providing detailed accounts of earlier field work and pottery analyses in many other chapters of this book, especially when most of these observations can neither be confirmed nor rejected?

Errors of judgement or sloppy scholarship also slip through too often. I will only point out the analysis summarized in Table 1.3 and Figure 1.7, in Chapter One, in which the authors discuss the fluctuations in the volume of pottery collected in the survey area over time. In order to neutralize the factor of uneven period duration, they normalized the pottery counts by dividing the period duration by the size of the collections and then multiplied the results by 100, when in fact, it should have been the other way around. They should have divided the size of the collections by the period duration! Obviously, this mistake leads to the absurd Figure 1.7, in which the periods least represented in the collections, (e.g. the Neolithic) become the most dominant. Unsurprisingly, this is not commented on in the text, but it should have alarmed the authors that something is wrong with their analysis. It is equally difficult to understand the purpose of the hot-spot and kernel density analysis of the tumuli fields in Chapter Five, bearing in mind that the authors were well-aware that these are multiperiod necropoleis, even before the start of the project, and by the time the publication was ready, they would have known that a large fraction of these mounds are actually modern heaps from field clearance. Instead of removing this section from the already oversized book, individual contributors did not refrain from making speculative reconstructions of the structure of local societies by referring to the supposed tumuli clusters!

But far more disruptive than these oversights and omissions are the problems ingrained in the research design. Systematic surveys ought to be the centerpiece of regional archaeological projects. This component is of key importance for the reconstruction of settlement patterns and demographic fluctuations and, by inference,

the levels of social and economic integration. In view of the time and efforts invested in surveying both onsite and offsite, PASH is no exception. Unfortunately, in the case of this project, it seems as if the primary purpose of these surveys was simply the collection of surface material. It is stunning to see that not a single attempt has been made at analytical site-definition! As a result, the number of newly discovered sites by the PASH is only about a dozen. For an area of over 16 sq. km. this figure is unconvincingly low. Even in the early days, systematic and intensive surveys normally multiplied the number of known sites in any given survey-area. The PASH surveys on the other hand, resulted in an increase of less than 30-40%. This is to a large extent predetermined by the choice to survey the hinterlands of known sites, mostly prehistoric hillforts and tumuli fields, but it is equally caused by the reluctance to define the presence and limits of sites by means of quantitative analysis. The prime victim of this approach are the open, small settlements, which are arguably the most dominant settlement category in any historic and geographic setting. Personally, I am fully confident that the PASH dataset contains evidence of many open rural settlements, especially from later periods, which are either subsumed under the nebulous category of “places of special interest” or “activity areas”, or are simply ignored. The claim that all scatters of Classical-Hellenistic or Roman pottery discovered in the tumuli fields are the result of cultic activities at the prehistoric burial mounds is simply unconvincing, notwithstanding the well-grounded arguments for the cultic function of mound 088. Who were the people that carried out these cultic activities, if there were no nearby settlements in these periods?

There are also notable technical deficiencies in the way the survey was carried out. For example, because the size of the field units ranges from as little as 0.1 ha to several ha, on the maps showing the density of surface material, most of the field units with high artefact density are smaller than one ha. This bias has either passed unnoticed or was simply ignored. The samples collected from some of the onsite surveys are far too small, often less than 10% of the recorded assemblage, to be representative of the sites’ chronology and function. However, in the absence of quantitative analysis, these and similar problems become irrelevant.

Because the PASH is entirely focused on known and visible sites (hillforts, mounds and caves), it can add relatively little to the existing corpus of known archaeological sites and, consequently, their reconstructions of the local settlement patterns

are almost entirely dependent on the findings of earlier, extensive surveys. They rely on this corpus of knowledge even when it goes against their own findings. To give just one example, in the conclusions, the volume editors argue convincingly that the earliest indisputable evidence of social complexity and inequality in the study-area dates to the Developed Iron Age (8th-7th century BC), not the Eneolithic or the Early Bronze Age. This is linked to the growing number of hillforts, mound burials and the differential distribution of burial goods, which really translates into demographic pressure and internal competition. No matter the fact that the Iron Age is among the least represented periods in their surface collections! Of course, this scarcity need not be necessarily taken as evidence to the contrary, but going quietly over it is surely not the best solution. If the authors are ready to give precedence to the existent body of knowledge over their own data, then why bother to do a systematic survey in the first place?

Although the PASH claims that it is not a period-focused project, their starting assumption is that the chief symptoms of a nascent social inequality are the burial mounds and hilltop settlements, which had made their first appearance in the study area in the Eneolithic or most certainly, by the Early Bronze Age. Consequently, most of their fieldwork is directed towards surveying and excavating sites from these periods, in particular the Early Bronze Age. No wonder this is the best represented period in their surface collections, even if none of their radiocarbon dates falls within this time-frame. Although individual finds from later historic periods are collected and studied, the reader cannot escape the feeling that these periods, especially the last two millennia are neglected in the final analysis. What happened to the survey results and the material collected from the medieval market town of Drivasto, near modern Drisht? These are neither discussed in the site descriptions nor in the chapter on medieval and post-medieval pottery. In the end, the authors amply disprove their starting assumption that the Early Bronze Age hilltop settlements and mound burials are the heralds of a rising social complexity, only to conclude that evidence of these processes need to be sought in the material from later periods, which was woefully neglected in this study.

In spite of all these deficiencies, the PASH monograph still has much to offer to all future students of this part of the western Balkans and the wider Adriatic region. In addition to the vast collection of archaeological material and data, there a number of important findings that deserve

a wider recognition. There is room to mention only the most significant.

Probably most readers will agree that by far the most successful component of this research project was the radiocarbon dating program. Many segments of the local relative chronology will need to be reconsidered in the light of these data, especially the beginning of the Eneolithic and the time-frame and duration of the Early Bronze Age. That the only radiocarbon dated sample from a supposed Early Bronze Age mound dates to circa 1800 BC, which in this area is the Middle Bronze Age, would be too much of a coincidence. This could also explain the sudden contraction of the number of known sites in the Middle Bronze Age. The onsite surveys and excavations will likely rewrite the history of a number of known settlements. New chapters were revealed in the history of Gajtan and Zagorë, which count among the best researched sites in this part of Albania. It is yet another demonstration of the efficiency of intensive onsite surveys, even at systematically excavated sites. Of no lesser importance are certain aspects of the long-term history in the study-area, newly discovered or confirmed by the PASH. The absence of Early and Middle Neolithic finds in the Upper Shkodër Basin is almost certain now, and, as pointed out by the authors, leads to the question of the Neolithization of this area. The absence of finds from the Early and even the High Middle Age in the countryside is surely intriguing, but this could be already related to sampling and collection strategies. Finally, PASH did excellent work in sketching the changing connections of the study-area with the outer world on the basis of the imports discovered in the sample collections. Those familiar with the history and geography of modern Albania will likely know about the cultural and religious divide between the northern and southern parts of the country. The PASH has demonstrated that this divide goes much further back in time than suspected. Whereas the south had maintained close relations with Greece and the Aegean, ever since the Neolithic, the north had started to gravitate towards the eastern Adriatic coast by the end of the Eneolithic or the Early Bronze Age at the latest. Even in the Late Bronze Age, when some speculate direct Mycenaean presence in the south, the few imports in the north had arrived not from Greece, but from Italy. This trend continued in Antiquity, with very little evidence of Attic imports or Eastern Sigillata, and persisted throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods, with most imports still coming from Italy instead of the Aegean. The colony of Epidamnos, modern Durrës was probably the key mediator between the study-area and the outside

world. This has been anticipated by earlier scholars on the basis of the numismatic evidence, and now it has been confirmed through the study of ceramics, with a number of fabrics showing great similarities with the clays sourced from the vicinity of modern Durrës (the important contribution by Eduard Shehi, Chapter 12). Regrettably, this fact did not receive the attention it deserves, especially because the founding of the colony is roughly synchronous with the first clear signs of social inequality in the study area.

This limited selection of important discoveries outweighs the weaknesses of the monograph under review. The PASH is bound to become an important milestone in the history of research of this understudied area and, if read critically, it is an important sourcebook for future studies.

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