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THE CHORA OF CHERSONESOS SITE 151-THE FINDS (1994-1996)

My colleague Galina Nikolaenko has dealt with the architecture and overall interpretation of the site in the context of the settlement of the Heraklean Peninsula. Our contribution to this joint presentation of the results of three years of collaborative archaeological research will be a discussion of the finds and of the site conservation efforts. First, though, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Galina and her team, the colleagues in the Museum and the Director, Leonid Marchenko, for their constant and active support. These last four years have results in productive, exciting archaeology and have been rich in human experience. That we view our collaboration as positive is, of course, satisfying, but that we can also now take it for granted, as a normal working relationship, testifies to the open-mindedness, patience, and generosity of spirit of all involved. As Leonid Marchenko has said on more than one occasion, this collaboration is an event of historic importance. He more than any other individual has been responsible for its success. We look forward to many more years of fruitful collaboration with you all. In dealing with the finds from the site, we have practiced total recovery. All the materials, all sherds of pottery, whether diagnostic for date or not, all roof tiles, metal and stone objects, animal bones as well as frequent samples of soil, mud brick and plaster have been conserved since the first day, for study-after which Leonid and Galina will be relieved to know the vast bulk of body sherds of courseware fabrics can safely be disposed of. The results of this very considerable effort, we believe, have justified the energy expanded.

Only by considering the full ceramic evidence is it possible to discover the full range of activities requiring ceramic containers, and to form an idea of where these activities may have taken place on the site.

Our goal, in analyzing over 16,000 pieces of pottery during the summer of 1996 was to create a database for future statistical studies.

The basic criterion in the division of the material was fabric. Among the undecorated pottery, alone, a study collection of approximately a hundred fabrics was made for comparison with the rest of the material. The defining characteristics of a fabric are its clay, its inclusions, and its thickness. As the pottery from each of the 290 archaeological contexts are examined sherd by sherd, a single computer record was generated for fragments in context which could be said to have belonged to a single vessel. Possible joins to fragments in other contexts were noted. In theory, the sum of the 3,000 plus recorded thus generated «a minimum numbers» count of all the vessels on the site. And within generous limits, it is safe to say that at least 3,000 vessels were used on Site 151 in the roughly 150 years of its existence.

The statistical analysis of these records provides the actual proportions, as Ruth Hargus's study has shown, of the various imported and locally made amphorae on the site. Among them, those from Sinope (39%) slightly outnumber the Chersonesan (38%). Very much in the minority are vessels from Thasos (5%), Heraclea (3%), Kos (3%), and Rhodes (1%).[1] While these are of the Hellenistic period, there are also several amphorae handles of the 2nd century AD. Eleven percent of the amphorae could not be identified as to provenience. Amphorae were found in proportionately higher numbers in Room 5 along with roof tiles. This room can reasonably be identified as a covered shed either for storing wine or empty containers to be used in transporting it. (Clearly Room 1, with five pithoi imbedded in its floor in Phase I of the tower with an estimated capacity of about 4,000 liters was the major storage area.)

Twelve basic fabrics of cooking ware and a half a dozen standard shapes were identified in Rachel Feit's study. Most frequent were the lopas (or casserole), the chytra, and the pan. Significantly, there were no frying pans, braziers, or grills. This is in contrast to many other Greek sites such as Athens, Corinth, Locri in southern Italy where such studies have been carried out and where these items are everywhere in evidence.[2] It says something about a major culturally determined activity, food preparation, that begs for further investigation.

Fine wares (black, red, and brown gloss) diagnostic for date are numerically insignificant (4% of the total) compared with the undecorated wares but absolutely essential for an understanding of the relative and absolute chronology of the site. When these wares have been spread out and labeled according to stratigraphic context, it is possible (1) to establish a relative chronology across the site based on form, and (2) to make joins among pieces of the same vessel, not only within contexts, but also between parts of the same vessel from different contexts and different parts of the site. This is valuable in determining the contemporaneity of the occupation levels across the site and of fills within individual rooms which, despite their different soil characteristics (resulting in designation as a separate context) could nonetheless have been deposited at the same time.

Here are some provisional chronological conclusions.

The site was occupied in the second half of the 4th century BC, probably not much before the end. (The evidence is, besides a discrete number of black gloss vessels, an amphora stamp and a coin.)

Unfortunately, the 4th century BC material is regularly mixed with later material in the fills. One seemingly undisturbed early context is the drain connecting a box cut in the floor in Room 1 before it was paved with flagstone. It contained a moulded head of an "African» from a black gloss vessel that has good parallels in the mid 4th century BC in the Athenian Agora (although similar types of heads continued to be produced as late as the mid 2nd century BC).[3] If the earlier date is correct, then the terminus ante quem for the construction of the tower lies in the late quarter of the 4th century BC.

Third century BC ceramics were found in abundance all over the site. Some were deposited directly over the above-mentioned flagstone floor in the tower. This fill, we believe, represents the end of a second occupation-after a hiatus in the early 3rd century BC-which was prolonged throughout the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. Besides the pottery, fragments of a single terracotta altar, of a type studied and catalogued by Shevchenko, were found on the flagstone floor.[4] Others from the same altar also occurred about a meter higher in the fill (in a different context in Room 1, and still others near the earliest pavement in Room 2. It seems clear from this and other evidence that the end of this second occupational phase was sudden and violent.

The terracotta altar, however, is informative in other ways. I would like to digress briefly on the religious practices of the occupants of the Site 151 farmhouse. The altar represents Dionysos (the central figure) with Ariadne gesturing with outstretched arm (on the left) and Eros? (on the right) urging on the bridegroom. This is the Heiros gamos of Dionysos, who was clearly venerated here. The other evidence of Dionysos worship includes the numerous black gloss kantharoi in Room 1 of the tower, and the very large terracotta image of a satyr recovered from Room 2 (from the trampled floor surface of the poor, final occupation of the site).

This hairy figure wearing a skirt resembles more the representations of actors impersonating satyrs than the smooth skinned satyrs from the other areas of the Greek world.[5] (Examples of hairy as well as smooth skinned satyrs have been found elsewhere at Chersonesos. One was discovered at the farmhouse known as Grinevitch by Galina Nikolaenko.) Besides the image there are actual remains of sacrifices. Goat bones were found in a burned area near the altar stone in the East Courtyard. The goat, as is well know, was the preferred animal in sacrifices to Dionysos. This building and its inhabitants were clearly under the protection of the god. A goat horn core was found deposited below the courtyard pavement directly in front of the entrance to the tower. This has all the appearance of having been a foundation deposit, a consecration of the building to the god.

The goat sacrifice in the courtyard, too, belonged to the first phase of occupation of the site, but sacrifice clearly continued to be practiced there until the final abandonment of the site. The altar stone, in fact, is bedded on the last occupational surface of the East Courtyard.

To this period must belong also the objects found inside the niche above the altar stone-the terracotta club of Hearacles and a second one of stone, together with the black gloss chalice (or is it a thymiaterion?) which seems to be a religious record.[6] The vessel's form has its closest parallels in the early 5th century BC. Could this cult object have been brought from the mother city, Heraclea, by the settlers of the chora?

More likely, it is a contemporary 3rd century BC local product which reproduces a thymiaterion form.

Let us return now briefly to the question of the chronological development of the site. The courtyard belongs to a later building period than the tower, but when should it be dated? A coin lying near the surface of the first plaster covered pavement of the southwest corner of the courtyard, in the area where Room 6 was later built, can be dated to the mid 3rd century BC. Could the whole courtyard have been as much as 50 years later than the tower? I doubt this since the walls of Room 5 in the southeast corner of the courtyard rest directly in the first plaster pavement, too. Room 5 should have preceded in date Room 4, which in its construction technique is close to the tower. The courtyard pavement in Rooms 4 and 5 clearly postdate the tower, but it should not have been by much. Nevertheless, the problem remains of what to do with evidence of the coin. I prefaced these remarks by saying that the conclusion would be provisional and so they must remain, at least for the present.

The great majority of the ceramic material from the site dates to the 3rd century BC, and in particular to the second half of the 3rd century BC-the mid to late second half for most of the coins and amphora stamps, too. Pergamene and Asia Minor red and brown gloss wares are relatively numerous in Room 3, which appears, from the constructional evidence, to have been the latest addition to the building.[7] There are a few amphora fragments of Roman date, perhaps to be associated a late transitory occupation of the outlying building.

My concluding remarks today focus not on what the site can tell us about the past life, but rather on what it can mean for the future. As many of you know, for the past two years Site 151 has been the object of a site conservation project. The project, funded in part by the World Monuments Fund, the Samuel Kress Foundation and the schools of architecture of Columbia University and the University of Texas, aims to preserve this site, as part of a projected archaeological park of the ancient territory, but also to train American, Ukrainian, and Russian students in the most advanced techniques for preserving ancient structures. The effort is being directed by Professors Pamela Jerome and Norman Weiss of Columbia University.

The farmhouse structure was built by stones held in place of mud mortar. The unexcavated mound preserved the structure well, but with exposure of the elements, deterioration by natural elements and human activity began immediately. There are numerous examples in the chora of what the agents can do if unchecked.

In 1996, pilot project tests were made to determine the appropriate mortars and grouts to replace the deteriorated mud mortars and stabilize the walls. The replacement mortar and grout are both lime-based rather than cement-based for two fundamentally important reason. The lime-based mortars are not so strong that they cannot be removed without damage to the structure. They are reversible. Second, cement will outlast the stone elements it binds, with the result that what may be left of the monument may be more modern cement and less original stone. The mortars and grouts are «sacrificial» They take the impact of the forces of decay, and, of course, require periodic maintenance, which will, hopefully, be provided by the young indigenous students of the art-by Vera, Roman, Genya, and their associates.

The materials employed are relatively expensive and not readily available locally-yet. The group, for instance, has been made using a silica fume which allows it to solidify without being exposed to air. The group itself is composed of lime and uniformly extremely tiny beads of silica which are light and do not sink (as does sand) and which create a mixture viscous enough to penetrate the smallest pores in the stone.

Further, the work is extremely labor intensive. During the June 1997 campaign, the team consisted of a dozen students, half of whom were constantly engaged in mixing new batches of mortar and grout. And the result is never final. This site and others will require constant monitoring.

All of this illustrates how demanding the responsibility for an excavated site can be, if it is taken seriously. It does not stop when the last room has been excavated, or when bedrock is reached.

Of course, one simple way of avoiding this responsibility is by backfilling. This was not the course taken with Site 151 because we felt strongly that this site and others like it have much to offer the community of Sevastopol and the wider world. Here as nowhere else, the life of those who tilled the soil and provided the economic basis for Greek civilization can be experienced. The dream of an archaeological park, which will offer many opportunities of economic development in harmony with the environmental and cultural heritage of the area, is inseparable from the dream of a renascent Sevastopol.

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