

## CHAPTER TWELVE

*BETWEEN THE STEPPE AND THE SOWN: PREHISTORIC SINOP AND INTER-REGIONAL INTERACTION ALONG THE BLACK SEA COAST*

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*Introduction: The Black Sea as a Periphery*

This paper is neither about the steppe nor the sown. Rather its focus is on one of the areas that lies between these two landscapes: this is the large body of water known as the Black Sea, a region largely considered marginal to those surrounding it. The reasons for this ‘marginality’ are numerous, the first being the fact that, following the boundary conventions between modern states, archaeological boundaries assigned to past inland cultures are often assumed to extend to the coast, with bodies of water such as the Black Sea then acting as dividing lines. When the cultures of peoples located along these coasts differ from that of their inland counterparts, as they often do, these differences are usually explained as ‘peripheral variants.’ A second reason for the marginal treatment of the Black Sea is due to its geopolitical situation: throughout almost the entire history of archaeology as a discipline, a series of political standoffs has made the Black Sea a physical and intellectual boundary line between the regions surrounding it. A third reason may be attributed to the biases of scholarship: there is a tendency for archaeologists and historians to regard the Black Sea as a backwater of the Mediterranean, whether it is said explicitly (for example, by Braudel 1972 [1949]), or implicitly by analyses that focus on influences external to the region (Hiller 1991; Tsatskheladze 1994).

These and perhaps other reasons have prevented the Black Sea from being treated as a unit of analysis in its own right (Özveren 2001). But identities in the past as well as now do not always follow the lines drawn by modern states (Anderson 1983; see also Curtin 1984). Water may be considered a natural boundary, but more often than not it facilitates, rather than inhibits, interaction. This perspective suggests then that we shift our understanding of maritime regions, and consider water as *connecting* rather than dividing.

There are historical reasons, too, to regard the Black Sea as a 'world' unto itself. The north-south divide between the Russian and Ottoman empires (and the Soviet Union and NATO-aligned Turkey in the 20th century) often masked underlying processes of coherence across the region, that did nevertheless emerge from time to time as power shifted between the two powers (see Özveren 1997). And although in the earlier, classical periods, the region's structure was controlled by Mediterranean powers, we cannot forget that it was maritime access that enabled them to infiltrate the region, and the area under control traced the Black Sea littoral.

In spite of these indications that there may be some coherence to the Black Sea world as a whole, the region has nevertheless been neglected in archaeological analyses. The important studies that have been done almost all begin with the period of Greek colonisation (for instance, Tsetskhladze 1996), a time when the region is generally regarded 'peripheral' to and acted upon by dominating influences from the south. Comparatively little research has focused on the earlier periods in the Black Sea, and those areas that have been studied are often defined in terms of their inland counterparts: their inhabitants are thus, unsurprisingly, regarded as 'cultural variants'. In the period I am focusing on in this paper, the Early Bronze Age, the 'variants' that appear in Ukraine are the Usatovo and Kemi-Oba groups (Manzura 1994; Zbenovich 1973), while in the Caucasus, the Dolmen culture may be awarded that distinction (Markovin 1997; Trifonov 1994). In the Balkans, the sites of the Varna lakes region to the north and Burgas bay to the south are considered to display traits distinguishing them from inland 'type' sites (Nikolova 1995; Tončeva 1981). And at İkitzepe on the Turkish coast, much of the material is called 'early Hittite', and the site itself has been identified as Zalpa, the capital of the Kashka, named in the Hittite textual sources as an unusual tribe located in these northern regions (Alkim *et al.* 1988; Gurney 1992; Macqueen 1980).

The neglect of the prehistoric periods is particularly acute along the Black Sea coast of Turkey, where İkitzepe represents the only systematic excavation to have taken place (Alkim *et al.* 1988; Bilgi 1994; 1998). Ceramic typologies for the Turkish Black Sea region reflect this situation and divide the pottery phases into Chalcolithic, Early Bronze, Archaic (colonisation period), etc. (Burney 1956; French 1991). The pre-Greek hand-made coarse wares ubiquitous in the region are all conventionally labelled 'Early Bronze' presumably based on its very general similarity with EB pottery from elsewhere in north-western and central Anatolia (see Yakar 1975). What this has resulted in is a typological

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'gap' of about 2000 years, leading some scholars to suggest that the region was uninhabited during this time (Burney 1956, 181–2; Işın 1998).<sup>1</sup> Such a scenario seems highly unlikely, however, as the regional environment is extremely hospitable: it easily supports a diverse economy and may be dry-farmed. Moreover, the region is rich in natural resources, such as timber (Doonan 2002).

Even at İviztepe, the establishment of a chronology has been difficult (see Thissen 1993; Yakar 1975), and most of the pre-Classical material is dated to the Early Bronze Age. And while this site has produced some very important information regarding the Black Sea region in prehistory, its location at the mouth of the Kizilirmak, the main river running from the central plateau through the Pontic mountain chain into the Black Sea, connects it to the inland regions more readily than sites in more isolated areas along the coast. Being thus uniquely situated, not to mention its being the only site investigated in the region, it cannot by itself satisfactorily explain the history of settlement in the Black Sea region as a whole.

Recent research in the vicinity of Sinop, just west of İviztepe, has ameliorated the situation somewhat. In 1996 the Black Sea Trade Project began research in that region to investigate patterns of maritime exchange in the Black Sea and the economic relationships of its ports and hinterlands (Hiebert *et al.* 1997a; 1998). It is also aimed at developing a systematic and integrated multi-component research program across terrestrial, shallow and deep-water environments (Ballard *et al.* 2001; Hiebert *et al.* 1997b). One of these components is the Sinop Province Regional Survey, which over four seasons from 1996 to 1999 was focused on documenting the settlement history of the Sinop region from the inland valleys and mountains to the sea, by employing both extensive reconnaissance of its numerous ecological zones and intensive techniques of systematic survey in selected zones (Doonan *et al.* 2001; Doonan 2004).

Through these investigations, some 74 pre-Classical sites were documented. A preliminary study of the ceramics from these sites was aimed at developing a typology based on ware and technology, in addition to macroscopic features such as form and decorative style (Bauer 2001). Results of this work suggests

<sup>1</sup> Even Işın (1998, 110), who acknowledges the presence of a Middle Bronze Age in the Sinop region, following the discoveries of such at İviztepe, nonetheless continues to postulate a gap from the 18th to the 8th century BC.

that the prehistoric Sinop material is for the most part conservative and local in character, and is quite distinct from contemporary material from inland on the Anatolian plateau. Interestingly, its closest parallels may be found in the İkiztepe assemblage, as well as in pottery traditions across the Black Sea.

How are we to interpret this unusual situation? Are we dealing with simple trade, the movements of peoples, or something harder to define? As our knowledge of the prehistoric Black Sea is limited, to begin answering these questions requires a more careful analysis of the material that we do have. Naturally, any conclusions that can be drawn must be seen as provisional and requiring further investigation.

This paper, then, has two parts. First, I will enumerate the prehistoric pottery types found in the Sinop region, offering comparisons to other Black Sea material where appropriate. Following this, I will discuss the general picture that emerges, and consider whether the current state of trade studies in archaeology can provide an adequate framework for interpreting the prehistoric situation in the Black Sea.

### *Sinop Pottery in Prehistory*

The northernmost point of Anatolia, the Sinop promontory is a region of rolling hills and agricultural plains that juts out into the Black Sea halfway along its southern shores (Fig. 1). Rainfall is plentiful and the climate is moderate – more like the eastern European shores of the Black Sea than the dry, steppe environment of the central Anatolian plateau. The region is thus densely vegetated, home to deciduous oak and pine forests that have been famed since antiquity (Doonan 2002). This region, rich in agricultural and timber resources, is effectively cut-off from the central Anatolian landmass and from points east along the Black Sea coast by the rugged Pontic mountain chain. While the mountains reach heights of 4000 m only in the far south-eastern part of the coast, the steep edge of the plateau is cut by few natural river valleys and intermontaine passes, thus making movement difficult. An ethnographer working in the region noted that villagers living on the northern slopes practically live in a different world from those on the southern side, and ‘[i]n some areas a complete change occurs within a few miles in the design and materials used in house building, the style of peasant dress, agricultural techniques and field usage, village settlement patterns, accents, kinship terms, and many other details of peasant life’

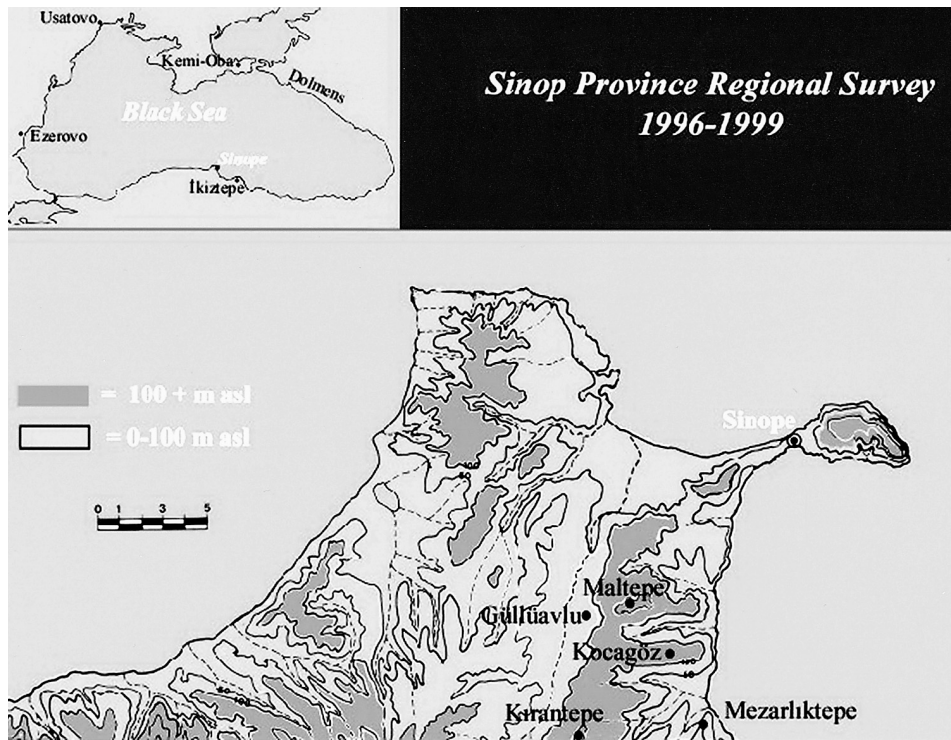


Fig. 1. Map of Sinop region and Black Sea sites mentioned in the text (after Doonan *et al.* 2001; base map by A. Gantos).

(Meeker 1971, 319). Moreover, the Pontic mountains often extend right up to the coastline, restricting movement east and west along the shore. This situation makes communities located along the southern shoreline like Sinop effectively islands along the Black Sea coast, most accessible by sea. This situation undoubtedly had a significant effect on the region's historical and cultural identity, as M.I. Maksimova (1951) noted over 50 years ago.

In a preliminary study, all of the ceramics from the Sinop Province Regional Survey that could be identified as pre-Classical were analysed. Due to the typological problems discussed earlier, this meant that they could be dated somewhere within the five millennia between the Ceramic Neolithic and the Iron Age. One of the primary aims of the ware study thus was to discern any chronologically relevant groupings among the assemblages. Of course, an absolute chronology for this material will not be possible without the results of more comprehensive stratigraphic investigations. Aside from chronology, factors determining assemblage

variation may include any combination of economic, environmental and social processes (Arnold 1985; Rice 1984; Skeates 1998; van der Leeuw 1991; Yentsch 1991).

Through macroscopic examination it was possible to define eleven distinct wares, which may be grouped into four more general types: chaff and mineral-tempered wares, which appear across all sites and phases; dark-burnished wares, which seem to characterise earlier parts of the sequence; buff wares, which seem to occur during later phases; and shell-tempered wares. Ongoing study is aimed at confirming the uniformity of these types and more fully understanding the techniques employed in their manufacture.

The pre-eminent feature of the ceramic assemblage of the Sinop region is its distinctly local character. While some broader connections can be made to the traditions of elsewhere in Anatolia and the Black Sea, the pottery generally seems to be conservative in both ware and vessel form. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons that a clear chronological sequence has been so difficult to establish. Common forms include holemouth pots, shallow bowls and large, flaring-rim jars. Such shapes are not very distinctive, and variation in these forms seems to be as great within sites as among them. This may indicate that ceramic production is not only regional, but local from site to site, although the presence of a large quantity of kiln debris at one site (Mezarlıktepe) may suggest that specialised production was occurring there. Decoration is rare, usually limited to surface treatments such as slip and burnish. While clear chronological indicators are lacking in the assemblage due to this regionalism, the appearance of a variety of horizontal handles places the majority of these sites chronologically in the Bronze Age.

The earliest period represented in the Sinop regional ceramic sequence appears to be the Chalcolithic, as exemplified by dark burnished ceramics similar to wares elsewhere in Anatolia (see also Thissen 1993). At one of the surveyed sites, Mezarlıktepe, incised sherds similar to pottery from Ilıpınar VA in the Marmara region (see Roodenberg 1999) and Yarımburgas Cave (level 3) in Turkish Thrace (see Özdoğan *et al.* 1991) may indicate an early Chalcolithic (late 6th millennium BC) date for some material (Fig. 2, B). The later Chalcolithic (late 5th/early 4th millennium) is better attested to at sites like Maltepe (Fig. 2, C) where there appeared an abundance of an unusual oyster-grey burnished ware (also noted by Burney 1956, 183), which bears some similarities with the so-called 'Büyükkaya Ware' of this period (Parzinger 1993). Here and at the site of Kiran Tepe (Fig. 2, A) some of the forms also show

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affinities with types from Chalcolithic İköztepe and Büyük Güllücek, most notably a variety of 'Karanovo type' horn handle.

While it is difficult at this point to clearly define a Chalcolithic phase in the Sinop region, preliminary indications such as these do seem to place Sinop within a broader tradition that, as at İköztepe, looks west to Turkish Thrace and the Balkans, possibly resulting from coastal contact (Makkay 1993; Özdoğan 1993; Thissen 1993). Interestingly, the white painted ceramics noted in the Samsun region by Thissen (1993) and others have not yet been discovered in our survey of Sinop, although this could be a product of the weathered nature of surveyed ceramics.<sup>2</sup>

The Early Bronze Age seems much better represented in the Sinop region, with horizontal handles and slipped and burnished wares appearing in abundance. The one excavated prehistoric site in the region, Kocagöz Höyük, which had been investigated briefly by Akurgal and Budde in the 1950s (Erzen 1956, 71–2), produced a distinctive highly polished black pottery, sometimes decorated with incised lines, filled with white paint (Fig. 3). While parallels for some of these techniques can be found at İköztepe, it is unusual on black-polished sherds and suggests contacts with Troy I–II in north-west Anatolia (Erzen 1956, 72), Karanovo VI–VII and Sitagroi IV–V (Bailey 2000, 251–3), rather than central Anatolia. In fact, parallels in manufacture and forms can be drawn with Troy II pottery at the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, particularly the pieces that were found with the Troy II treasure hoards (F. Hiebert, personal communication). Similar ceramics, with white paint over incised decoration, can be found elsewhere in the Black Sea region as far north as Usatovo on the Ukrainian coast (Lazarov 1984, 65–6; Nikolova 1995; Rassamakin 1994, 47; Zbenovich 1973, 516), suggesting that seaborne contacts were widespread by this time (see also Anthony 1986, 299). This conclusion is strengthened by the appearance of askos-type juglets at Kocagöz, a type common at the Bulgarian site of Ezerovo, a settlement submerged in the Varna lakes on the Black Sea coast (Tončeva 1981). These pots also bear some similarity to the Yortan 'beak-spouted' jugs that are found in western Anatolia at this time (see Kâmil 1982), and which may be considered part of a Balkan-influenced assemblage.

<sup>2</sup> Alkım *et al.* (1988, 174) mention the fact that the white paint is almost invisible, perhaps due to the passage of time. Thissen (1993, 222–5) further discusses this and similar observations in an appendix, arguing that in fact the decoration was made that way. Whether we are just missing this type in Sinop or the lines have just weathered away still cannot be determined with any certainty.

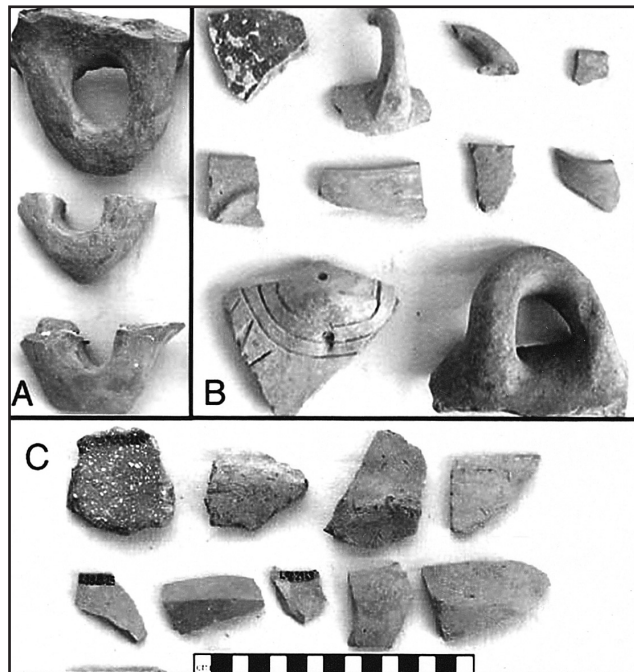


Fig. 2. Chalcolithic pottery from the Sinop region. A: Kiran Tepe; B: Mezarliktepe; C: Maltepe (photographs by A. Bauer and O. Doonan).

Both the Early and Middle Bronze Ages are represented at the site of Güllüavlu overlooking the central Karasu valley (Fig. 4). This small mound, recently cut by bulldozers widening the Sinop-Erfelek road, produced similar polished, incised wares, as well as inverted-rim bowls similar to those of Troy I. Some more unusual pieces were found as well, including relief decoration similar to that on Trojan ‘face pots’, an impressed cylindrical piece that bears some resemblance to figurines from Usatovo (Zbenovich 1973, 515, fig. 1), and the foot of a larger anthropomorphic figurine. The appearance of finer Middle Bronze Age red-slipped wares, including a ‘teapot spout’ similar to those at Kültepe (Özgüç 1959, 61 and pl. XXXVIII), provide the first indication of contact between the Sinop region and central Anatolia.<sup>3</sup> The fact that these items were

<sup>3</sup> Although it should be noted that MBA wares have also been found in the Sinop region at the coastal site of Köşk Höyük in Gerze. While our survey found this site to contain buff wares common to the period, Işin (1998, pl. 10.12–13) also recorded teapots of central Anatolian type similar to the one we recorded at Güllüavlu.





Fig. 3. EBA pottery from Kocagöz Höyük, Sinop region (photograph by O. Doonan).



Fig. 4. EBA and MBA pottery from Güllüavlu, Sinop region (photograph by A. Bauer).

clustered at the top of the scarp left by the bulldozing activity may suggest, however, that they come from a single pit and do not necessarily indicate the presence of a Middle Bronze Age, central-Anatolian-related settlement.

The best evidence for the Late Bronze and perhaps early Iron Ages, which are very difficult to define for this region, interestingly comes from two sites located closest to the coast. The first, Köşk Höyük, comprises the mound of eroding earth located beneath the lighthouse in the town of Gerze, south of Sinop. In a strikingly parallel situation, the second site was identified as an erosional scarp with several identifiable strata located on the kale of Sinop town itself, just below the bus station, and barely 50 m from the water. As previous studies have failed to identify a Late Bronze Age phase in the region, the situation of these two sites may support Özdoğan's (2003) hypothesis that tectonic or sea level changes may have submerged or destroyed many of the settlements of this period. Moreover, since these disappearing sites are potentially very important, the Sinop bus station site was the subject of a short rescue operation in the summer of 2000 (see Hiebert *et al.* in preparation). Surveyed ceramics from the site included numerous hand-made sherds with an unusual rope-like decoration applied to the vessel exterior. Similar rope decoration frequently appears during the Middle Bronze to Iron Ages of the north Pontic steppe (Sava 1994, 153, fig. 6, 12–16), and might indicate continuing overseas contact in the period just prior to Greek colonisation.

To summarise, then, the prehistoric material from the Sinop region is for the most part hand made, conservative and local in character. In all periods, however, it can be seen as part of a broader tradition connected to the Balkans and elsewhere around the Black Sea. During the earliest phases of Sinop's ceramic sequence, connections look toward the Marmara region and Thrace, perhaps suggesting contact westward along the Turkish Black Sea coast. In subsequent periods contacts are more widespread – down the coast to Troy and Thrace, but also across the sea to points northward along the Balkan coast and the Pontic steppe. Only rarely are there clear parallels to central Anatolian types. This situation is presumably due to the location of this peninsula on the Black Sea coast, isolated from the Anatolian plateau by steep mountains. Interestingly, overall comparison of the Sinop material to that from İkištepe in the neighbouring Samsun province reveals more differences than one might expect. For while they both display obvious Balkan features, the İkištepe Early Bronze Age material maintains closer connections to central Anatolian assemblages (see

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Alkım *et al.* 1988, 196) than the Sinop pottery does.<sup>4</sup> This may be the result of that site's location at the mouth of the Kizilirmak (ancient Halys river), which provides the best north-south route through the Pontic mountains. It should be noted that there is no natural coastal road between Sinop and that region, so that the easiest connection between them would have been by sea.

The most interesting development occurs during the Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Ages, when the region's orientation shifts from being more internally directed to one focused towards broader Black Sea cultural traditions. Both the assemblages from Sinop as well as from İkiştepe generally look different from contemporary material from inland on the Anatolian plateau, and instead take as their closest parallels artefact types from coastal Bulgarian sites, such as Ezerovo II in the Varna lakes region (Tončeva 1981). Connections can also be made with material of the Usatovo group in the north-west Pontic steppe (Zbenovich 1973). While the details of chronology have yet to be satisfactorily worked out for the many cultural 'variants' along the Black Sea coast, similar trends may be observed across the region. Scholars working in Bulgaria have noted that strong links begin to develop between coastal sites in the western Black Sea at this time (Leshtakov 1995). And evidence for connections along the northern Black Sea coast, between Usatovo and Maikop in the Late Eneolithic, and the Kemi-Oba and Dolmen cultures in the Early Bronze Age, is continually growing (Rassamakin forthcoming).

*Inter-Regional Interaction and the Prehistoric Black Sea World*

The picture that emerges from this study is that the Black Sea may not always be best understood as a 'periphery', but in fact may have been a conduit for cultural interaction in different periods and at different scales. What are the

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<sup>4</sup> The early chronology of İkiştepe has been reassessed by Thissen (1993), who raises the dates of the material from mound II originally dated 'EBA I' at least two thousand years earlier (to the end of the 6th millennium BC [all dates calibrated], making it 'early Chalcolithic'. He agrees that İkiştepe I, sounding A may properly be dated to the EBA (early 3rd millennium BC), as assumed by the excavators, but he also suggests that soundings C and F should be ascribed to the 'late Chalcolithic' or late 4th millennium BC. While I do not agree with all of his specific criticisms, his general reasoning for these revised dates seems sound, and I am accepting them for the present analysis.

implications of this for our understanding of the Black Sea during prehistoric and other periods? Following recent conceptualisations of culture as locatable within contexts of social interaction and discourse, I want to consider how trade, as a social activity, may itself engender new cultural forms. The idea is that increasing maritime trade and communication may have promoted the development of a distinctive 'Black Sea culture' (Hiebert 2001). To a certain extent, this intersects with some of the conclusions drawn by Chernykh (1992), although the correspondence is yet to be fully explored. To investigate this problem, however, requires not only a systematic analysis of Black Sea prehistory, but necessitates some rethinking about trade studies and the interpretation of material culture more broadly.

Trade studies have a long history in archaeology, but few new archaeological perspectives on trade have developed since the 1980s. This is presumably due to trade's close association with the classic 'ecological' models of positivist approaches: neighbouring cultures could be seen as one part of the 'environment' with which a given cultural system interacted in a measurable way (Chang 1975) and producing tangible results (Renfrew 1975). In the changing academic atmosphere, trade studies are passé, seeming to be a macroscopic and 'static' topic, unrelated to issues of contemporary interest such as agency and identity (Meskell 2002).

But before we write it off as a topic that is no longer relevant to, or cannot be improved by, contemporary theorising, depending on one's perspective, there are clearly social aspects to the practice of trade that have been overlooked – for one, it is fundamentally a social act (Bauer and Doonan 2002). And if we accept that trade is a social phenomenon, then its study can be enriched by recent approaches that focus on the contexts within which social action, such as trade, is played out.

While any given trade interaction occurs within a unique context, each interaction is only one part of a longer chain of meaning. When we choose to interpret material remains as 'imported' or 'trade items', we are choosing to highlight or focus on certain moments or kinds of meanings at the expense of others (Bauer 2002). But this 'contextual embeddedness' is not limited to our academic enterprises but is what allows for all meaning to be interpreted and communicated (Preucel and Bauer 2001). Transformations in material culture meanings result when conflicting value systems are brought into harmony through the negotiation of value between two or more contexts. But, as Appadurai (1986a) and others (Fotiadis 1999; Kopytoff 1986; Bloch and Parry 1989; etc.) have

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pointed out, we must not simply oppose 'utilitarian' and 'symbolic' – meanings that do not neatly fall into such categories (see also Baiburin 1997). Objects convey multiple meanings, and these meanings pattern and are patterned by our ongoing engagements with them. Thus we must develop an approach to material culture meaning that recognises this variability while at the same time can be successfully applied to the study of past economic and spatial relationships among communities (Preucel and Bauer 2001).

Classic studies of trade focus on questions regarding the presence of imported materials across a site or region. For the most part, these kinds of studies focus on indexical meanings by attempting to document inter-regional trade and interaction by interpreting some artefacts in an assemblage as 'foreign'. Studying trade like this is certainly one way to investigate the development of broader Black Sea maritime interconnections. When we look at the material, however, it is clear that evidence for such trade is slight. In the prehistoric pottery assemblage from the Sinop region, there is nothing yet to suggest the presence of wares actually imported from elsewhere in the Black Sea. On the contrary, the presence of kiln debris and wasters in the Bronze Age forms and clay fabrics provides some evidence for local ceramic production. While more thorough analytical work is yet to be done, preliminary indications point to a local origin for most if not all of this pottery.

There are, however, many kinds of indexicality, all of which can reveal something about social relations. Thus a second way to investigate inter-regional connections would be to look at material culture features that are shared among neighbouring groups. This type of diffusionist analysis focuses on the distribution of specific cultural traits across a region and takes style instead as signalling allegiance to a community or group (see Childe 1925; Dixon 1928). But the utility of this approach for the study of cultural interaction and trade is obviously limited. It can only be used to suggest the most general linkages among regions, lest we fall into the trap of making equations between pots and people like those of the 'Bell-Beaker' culture and, perhaps more pertinent to this context, the 'Pit-Grave' culture. What this kind of interpretation may address, however, is the lesser claim of signalling cultural orientation. And it is this sort of meaning that guided my thoughts about the development of a Black Sea 'culture' (and I use that term advisedly) in the introduction. For in the Early Bronze Age of Sinop, it is clear that the material is much more closely aligned with other Black Sea traditions and is distinctly separate from those of central Anatolia.

But is there a way to investigate cultural connections without making simplistic linkages? One way might be to shift our focus to 'communication' rather than 'trade' as the proper object of inquiry in studies of inter-regional relationships. Anthropologists examining the importance of discourse to community building point out that the exchange of objects may be secondary to the circulation of the idea of trade, the idea that social relations exist, and actual trade may need to occur only occasionally to maintain the circulation of discourse about it (Urban 1996, 162). The movement of less tangible commodities, such as information and technological knowledge (Kohl 1987; Wobst 1977), may be as important here. And we must consider that the interaction itself may produce its own culture and cultural traditions (Artzy 1997; 1998; Sherratt 1998). In short, the movement of objects is only phenomena, and does not necessarily reflect the reality of the underlying situation. Thus we must consider ways to investigate connections such as information exchange that do not leave the archaeological patterns that the trade in tangible commodities does.

In this regard, a fruitful way forward may be to investigate the process of pottery manufacture. Ceramic studies based on manufacturing techniques, in addition to form and decoration, enable us to go beyond the one-dimensional classifications commonly used for the region, and which over-emphasise differences among assemblages (see Vandiver 1988). Analysis of these stages of production, tempering, forming, firing and also methods of decoration, allows us to get at the 'habitual' action of the manufacturing process, the steps of decision-making and motor movements (see Arnold 1981; 1985, 233 ff.; Reina and Hill 1978; Spier 1967), which may be considered socially-learned and habitual practices of an individual (see Daniel 1984; Singer 1984; see also Dietler and Herbich 1998). Similarities in these 'habits' as well as in any idiosyncratic aspects of the manufacture between Sinop and other Black Sea regions (and *not* with other regions) may suggest that even if pots themselves are not being traded, information is being exchanged and broader community bonds are forming on some level. Analyses along these lines may thus provide an alternative way to assess similarities among Black Sea ceramics and investigate the movement of information, ideas and behaviour, which may be considered the 'value added' meanings of objects (see Appadurai 1986b; Kopytoff 1986; Orser 1992): in other words, such objects may become 'valuable' for the social meanings embedded within them, and because of the social relations that they help facilitate among communities. While style is typically taken as the prime indicator

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of these social values in pottery studies (Weissner 1989) an approach that draws on multiple kinds of evidence, including technology, provides for a more holistic perspective.

Some preliminary observations along these lines may be made, although systematic work needs to be done. The prehistoric Sinop ceramics are hand made, and were probably constructed using a coil-building technique. The extensive use of shell temper, burnish, and painted, incised decoration in the Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age assemblages relates to its situation in the Black Sea region, and connects it to a broader tradition of dark-burnished and incised shell-tempered wares found in coastal Bulgaria (Draganov 1995; Leshtakov 1995; Tončeva 1981), at Usatovo and Kemi-Oba sites in coastal Ukraine (Rassamakin 1999; Zbenovich 1973), and in parts of the Caucasus (Markovin 1997; Trifonov 1994). While firing temperature and atmosphere have yet to be determined, it is clear that some of the pottery was fired in distinctive ways as well. In his argument for Balkan-Anatolian connections across the Black Sea, Thissen (1993, 214) dwelled at length about the firing technology that produced a distinctive red and black burnished pottery which he considered 'local' to the western and southern Black Sea coasts. While I have no doubt that the production itself was local, the technique's connection to the characteristic pottery of the Kura-Araxes region to the east is unmistakable (Kushnareva 1997; Sagona 1984), and seems to indicate the presence of broader connections along the Black Sea coast to the southern Caucasus.

*Conclusions*

Situated as it is between the well-studied regions of the Near East and Europe, the Mediterranean and the steppe, the Black Sea has been surprisingly understudied. This is particularly the case when it comes to the prehistoric periods, when for many of the coastal areas, barely a ceramic chronology has been established. Recent work in the vicinity of Sinop, Turkey has been aimed at remedying this situation in some small way, and the picture that is emerging from these studies is an interesting one. The pottery traditions are quite distinct from those of neighbouring regions, and at least during some periods, they are closer in many respects to traditions across the sea. Yet at the same time, evidence for the existence of imported materials, usually the hallmark of inter-regional

trade, is lacking. Should we thus conclude that there was no such interaction, or might there indeed be connections, but just not the sort determined by traditional analyses?

Thus it is here suggested that a broader understanding of trade as a social process might help us to understand better these connections and the shifting maritime orientation of Black Sea communities, such as that of the Sinop region at the very beginning of the Bronze Age. After all, trade in its various forms has long been recognised as an important factor in establishing and maintaining social relationships among groups and individuals (Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1947]; Malinowski 1922; Mauss 1990 [1950]; Weiner 1992). And in one of the few recent discussions of trade, Renfrew (1993, 9) remarks that '[i]f we seek to gain an insight into the range of interactions, it is more important to do so under the rubric of "interaction" than of "trade," since the underlying motivation and functional role may not primarily be the acquisition of goods.' Indeed, for the Black Sea, one productive avenue of future research would be to consider the role of fishing communities and the knowledge sharing such communities facilitate (see Knudson 1995; McGlade and McGlade 1989). Future work on the Black Sea coast of Turkey is aimed at sharpening our understanding of both the prehistoric Black Sea and of the varied nature of its inter-regional relationships.

Between the steppe and the sown lies the sea. And it is only through more careful study that we may come to understand the potentially important role it played in the interactions between the Eurasian steppe and the settled lands of the greater Near East.

#### *Acknowledgments*

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