

Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen

Introduction

Silent and imperturbable, Herakles stands guard on the tower of Koldinghus Castle. His weather-beaten sandstone face is turned to the wind, his left hand rests on an emblazoned shield while his right fist is firmly curled around the bronze shaft of his spear. Far below his feet lies the castle courtyard; below the castle lies the city of Kolding; beyond the city centre, the river. Each one of these can be described in objective terms as topographical features: an enclosed space (the courtyard), a built-up area (the city), a linear path (the river). The precise location of each can be established with the aid of GPS and expressed as a series of coordinates. Physical mapping can describe the relation of these spaces to each other and geography can explain the geomorphological processes that have created the landscape; but what about Herakles on the tower?

To understand the hero's presence, one will need to study the deeper levels of meaning enshrined in the spaces at his feet. A semiotician might say that the focus shifts from *denotation* to *connotation*, a geographer would say that it will move from *space* to *place*.¹ The castle and the city of Kolding are rich in connotations, many associated with the river which once marked the boundary between the kingdom of Denmark on its north bank and the duchy of Schleswig to the south. The castle was well positioned to guard the border; the statue of Herakles was placed on its tower as a token of royal self-assertion against would-be aggressors. By virtue of their location at the interface between two macro-spaces (the kingdom and the duchy), the citizens of Kolding developed a sense of collective identity as a frontier city where the two entities traded, exchanged ideas and, on occasion, clashed (in the 19th century, the city and castle were ravaged by war three times within a span of 60 years). Today, the river is no longer a frontier and the citizens of Kolding live at peace with their southern neighbours,² yet they retain the perception of their city as more than just a *space* on the bank of a river: it is a *place* with a distinctive character and history.

Against this background, the Kolding campus of the University of Southern Denmark seemed an appropriate venue for a conference on space, place and identity, sponsored by the Danish Council for Independent Research as part of the research project *Where East meets West*. Sixteen papers were presented over a period of three days, exploring the processes by which the regions and cities of the Roman empire, but especially northern Anatolia, acquired and developed their distinctive identities, and how these identities found ex-

¹ On *space* versus *place*, see TUAN 1977; CASEY 1993: 22–33, 317–23, 352; AGNEW 2011: 316–22.

² While Herakles' raised spear is no longer needed to intimidate the king's enemies, it continues to serve a useful purpose as the tower's lightning conductor.

pression in myths, cults, coinage and architecture. Twelve of the papers have been collected in this volume.³

1. Regional spaces

In the opening chapter, BRIAN MCGING examines the Mithradatic kingdom in its wider context at the interface between three macro-spaces: Persia, Anatolia and Greece, each of which contributed to the composite identity of the regime. Our sources tend to focus on the members of the royal dynasty and above all on the colourful and tragic figure of Mithradates VI. In their self-representation, the Pontic kings combined elements of several identities: while Mithradates VI could pose as a champion of Greece (as opposed to Rome) when occasion required, he consistently projected an image of himself as successor to the Achaemenid kings, most conspicuously through his spectacular hilltop sacrifices to Zeus Stratiotes in 82 and 73 BC (p. 176–7).

With the second chapter we move to the regional, meso-spatial scale, where ECKART OLSHAUSEN provides a geographical and historical sketch of ancient Pontos.⁴ No landscape ever serves merely as a backdrop to historical events: its physical environment contributes to the shaping of destinies and identities, especially so in the case of Pontos, where high mountains, great rivers and rocky, exposed shorelines co-exist with pleasant valleys, plateaus of fertile farmland and lush upland pastures. Thus the Pontos of the Mithradatids was one landscape, composed of many elements, each of which is described in some detail by Strabo, our latest and most detailed source for the history as well as the cultural geography and ethnic diversity of the Pontic region.

Where OLSHAUSEN starts from an overview of the Pontic space as a whole, then works down through the many different sub-spaces of which the kingdom of Pontos was composed, the point of departure for MARCO VITALE is local: the identity of the individual *polis*. Which cities considered themselves ‘Pontic’ under Roman rule, and why? This deceptively simple question is far from easy to answer, both because our sources often seem to contradict one another and because by the time of Augustus, the province of Pontus created by Pompey in 63 BC had disintegrated into numerous spatial units with varying levels of ‘Ponticness’ which were united, or dis-united, into various forms of spatial organisation: eparchies, governors’ provinces, *koina*.

2. City identities

In the next chapter, TØNNES BEKKER-NIELSEN asks a similar question, but concerning a single *polis* only: Neapolis, modern-day Vezirköprü. Was Neapolis a Pontic or a Paphlagonian city? Since the time of FRANZ CUMONT, scholars have considered the city and its de-

³ Not included are the contributions by DEBORAH SIMONTON on gender, space and commerce in the 18th-century town (SIMONTON 2014); RAINER CZICHON on the Bronze Age site at Nerik-Oymağaç; EMİNE SÖKMEN on the defence system of the Mithradatids; ANCA DAN on Pontic identities. BRIAN MCGING was unable to attend the conference in person, but we are happy to be able to include his paper as the first of this volume.

⁴ In the following, the Greek ‘Pontos’ will be used when discussing the geographical region and the Mithradatic kingdom, and the Latin ‘Pontus’ for administrative units (districts, eparchies, provinces) of the Roman period; similarly ‘Kappadokia’ and ‘Cappadocia’.

pendent territory – the Phazemonitis – to have been located within the borders of the landscape known as Paphlagonia. Yet Strabo clearly and repeatedly states that Paphlagonia extended no further eastwards than the Halys (Kızılırmak) river. If so, Neapolis and its territory must have formed part of ‘Pontos’ – whatever the precise meaning of that term.

Strabo remains centre stage throughout the following paper by JESPER MAJBOM MADSEN, who examines the problem of city identities from another angle. How did a contemporary observer perceive the Pontic cities created by Pompey: as Roman or Greek? From the structuralist perspective of most modern researchers, the new communities were organised on a Greek pattern; and were therefore Greek. Strabo, on the other hand, devotes little attention to political structures and even less to cultural institutions such as the *gymnasion*: to him, identity is inbred rather than acquired, a question of history and heritage – and, on that reckoning, the five Pontic cities founded by Pompey do not count as Greek, but rather as Roman.

In the contributions by LOUISE REVELL and ARJAN ZUIDERHOEK, the city is set in its wider imperial context. REVELL draws our attention to the multi-layered meanings embedded in the urban cityscape and the changing nature of civic identities which were continuously being reformulated and reasserted. She also stresses the need for a yardstick that is relative, not absolute. Instead of judging the level of sophistication of a community and its citizens against an abstract vision of ‘the Roman city’, we need to compare a city to the other cities of its region and its public buildings to the private dwellings of its citizens.

For the individual citizen, identity and social position, even wealth, were defined in terms relative to other citizens, not on an absolute scale. Social status was reasserted and reinforced by visible, symbolic actions in the public view. In the cities of the empire, these actions typically took the form of euergetism, private expenditure undertaken for the public benefit.

This brings us back to the question raised by MAJBOM MADSEN: were the *poleis* of the eastern provinces quasi-democratic polities perpetuating a classical Hellenic tradition or should they be interpreted as timocratic, elite-dominated communities on a Roman model? ZUIDERHOEK highlights the apparent paradox that in the cities of Asia Minor, *individual* elite expenditure was often directed to projects embodying a *collective* ideology – or, if you will, identity. This again raises important question such as to what extent urban monuments reflect the political and social realities of civic life, and at what point in time.

3. Cities, coinages, cults

The work of REVELL and ZUIDERHOEK takes the preserved fabric of the city and the texts describing its components, for example, inscriptions and speeches, as their points of departure. VERA SAUER examines the city as *image*. Most cities discussed in this volume struck their own coins, if only intermittently, from the first to the third century AD. Which images of itself – its appearance, its environment, its monuments, its myths – did the city project on its coinage? Since the small space on the coin flan does not permit a detailed depiction of the wide urban space, images cannot provide the same degree of detail as, for example, excavation of a monument would. On the other hand, because the design process had to be selective, the images of cityscapes or landscapes inform us about which element(s) of the city’s fabric or identity those in charge of minting – members of the city’s elite – wished to highlight.

The theme of city coinage is continued in the next chapter by JULIE DALAISON. The iconography of coinage relates to space at several levels of interpretation: at the denotational level, the coins can present an image of the city site (Amaseia, also discussed by SAUER); at the connotational level, they can mark the city's position within the larger spaces defined by province, eparchy and *koinon* (for example Neokaisareia) – or, more precisely, in relation to the other cities within those spaces. For here, too, the yardstick of success was relative, not absolute: the cities competed with each other for coveted titles such as *neokoros*, *metropolis* or 'first city' which they proudly displayed on their coinage. Coins thus provide important evidence for regional organisation at the level of province or eparchy, evidence that is not always easy to reconcile with that of inscriptions or literary sources (as we see in the contribution by VITALE).

In the three chapters that follow, a less tangible element is introduced into the discussion of place and identity: myth. In the polytheistic environment of the ancient world, cults and myths were ubiquitous. We have already encountered the cult of the emperor in the contributions of VITALE, SAUER and DALAISON among others, and seen how a god (Hermes, p. 131) or a hero (Herakles, p. 149) could be invoked as the mythical founder of a city. The citizens of Kelainai went a far step further by appropriating not only a pagan myth (Marsyas) but also a Judaeo-Christian narrative (Noah's Ark) as a part of their civic identity. In her contribution, NICOLA ZWINGMANN traces the stages in this 'invention of identity'. The protagonists of the myths were depicted on the city's coinage while key events (the death of Marsyas, the stranding of the Ark) were sited at specific places within its territory; thus the myth came to be embedded in the landscape.

In the next chapter, CHRISTINA WILLIAMSON takes us up to the mountain shrine at Yassıçal a few kilometres east of Amaseia. Once more, the city's coinage provides important information, depicting as it does a shrine with a pyre similar, if not in fact identical, to the one where Mithradates VI celebrated his victories. WILLIAMSON emphasises the role of vision in the perception and delimitation of space: features that can be seen in one view are perceived as belonging together. Through a detailed analysis of the the landscape and its visual relationship to the mountain, she demonstrates how the shrine, its flames or its column of smoke rising high into the air will have served as a unifying point of visual reference for the territory of Amaseia.

The theme of cult and landscape is continued by LÂTIFE SUMMERER, who in her contribution enumerates no less than 13 known – but not all systematically studied – shrines or sanctuaries. These range from temples in the Greek tradition located in or near cities to rural cult places sited at spectacular points in the landscape – the most spectacular case being, of course, the shrine at Yassıçal discussed by WILLIAMSON – which exploit its natural features, for example rock-cut shrines. The isolated location of some rural cult places required a considerable effort on the part of visiting worshippers. Here, we can see how cult relates to space in various ways: a shrine can be located at the centre of a space (for example Yassıçal and the temples on the cities' *acropoleis*) or at its periphery, as in the case of 'suburban' shrines which may represent 'common ground' for the Greek settlers of the colonies and the indigenous population of the countryside. The hilltop location of many shrines is easily understood in the context of indigenous as well as Greek religious traditions which see high places as liminal spaces between the human and the divine spheres.

Komana Pontike, the topic of the final chapter by DENİZ BURCU ERCİYAS, was one of the leading and best documented sanctuaries of the Mithradatic kingdom, a temple-state possessing – according to Strabo – thousands of slaves who cultivated the lands around the temple. Later, the advent of Christianity and the suppression of pagan cult led to the decline of the sanctuary. Traditionally the middle Byzantine period has been seen as a period of changing spatial priorities when lowland settlements were abandoned in favour of more easily defensible hillside locations: in the case of Komana, in favour of Dazimon (Tokat). The recent excavations by ERCİYAS and her team have, however, revealed evidence of occupation and industrial activity well into the 11th century, when the settlement first appears in Turkish sources. Thus what we see at Komana appears to be transformation rather than abandonment, a change of function and identity.

4. Landscapes and identities

Though this short summary of the contributions to the volume cannot do justice to the wealth of content within the individual chapters, it may serve to demonstrate the wide range of methodological approaches to the central theme of the conference and to highlight some of the shared topics and concerns of the authors as well as some of the points on which they disagree.⁵

While not wishing to revive the environmental determinism of past generations of scholars, several contributions have shown how the physical environment played a role in the lives and/or self-perception of the region. ‘Pontos’ means the sea, but while the name is popular among modern scholars, it is not documented in ‘Pontos’ before the last century BC. The distant sea is unlikely to have defined the identity of ‘Pontos’. It was more probably defined by the mountains: whether close at hand in the confines of a river gorge or faintly visible as a line of distant blue shadows where the plain met the sky, the mountains were always there. It is not surprising that myths and shrines are often associated with mountains (see WILLIAMSON, SUMMERER, ZWINGMANN).

OLSHAUSEN points out how the mountain ranges divided and compartmentalised the Pontic territory into regions that acquired names and identities, just as their passes and river gorges defined the route of the traveller. Planning a journey beyond the confines of one’s home territory meant selecting a route through the mountains, and the range of choices was not wide. Hittites, Romans and Ottomans traced routes and built highways, but all were forced to follow the same valleys and cross the ridges by the same passes. Thus the impact of road-building on spatial organisation was far less marked in Pontos than, for instance, that of the *via Aemilia* on the organisation of Cisalpine Gaul.

The cities were a different matter. Even where it had to adapt itself to the topography of the site – most conspicuously in the case of Amaseia – the townscape was man-made and dominated, mentally and visually, by monuments in the Graeco-Roman tradition. In the preserved texts and on coin images, it is the city’s monuments – above all, its temples – that are singled out for attention. At the risk of over-simplification, it might be said that at the

⁵ There has been no attempt on the part of the editor to reconcile conflicting views or impose a *communis opinio* on the authors: the present publication is a conference volume, not a handbook.

regional scale, the physical environment (primarily the mountains) shaped identity, while at the local scale, identity shaped the physical (i. e. built) environment.

Another shared topic is the importance of *vision*. Vision unifies spaces, it locates places.⁶ In Xenophon's *Anabasis* we are told how the advance guard of the Ten Thousand are overjoyed to see the sea for the first time after weeks of marching through the vastness of eastern Anatolia.⁷ Their glimpse of the sea in the far distance does not tell the soldiers where they are, not even which sea it is, but at least they know that they are no longer *lost in space*; the presence of the sea creates a sensation of being *somewhere*. If they follow the coast long enough, they will eventually reach their home.⁸

We do not know what thoughts passed through the mind of an ancient observer standing by the sanctuary of Zeus Stratios at Yassiçal, looking out over the 'petrified sea' – but here, too, as WILLIAMSON argues, the view will have served to unify the territory in the mind of the observer. In a similar manner, Strabo notes that from one point at the central intersection of Nikaia, it is possible to see all four gates (=boundaries) of the city.⁹ Paradoxically, this unifying quality of vision is brought out especially clearly by *imagined* landscapes combining objects and features that it was not possible to see in one view: the coin image of Amasya with the altar of Zeus Stratios above the city (p. 117); Appian's claim that the pyre at Yassiçal was visible from the Black Sea.¹⁰ In both cases, the designer or author has defied visual reality – the altar of Zeus Stratios was not visible from Amaseia, nor Yassiçal from the Black Sea – to link two places visually disconnected in real *space*, but connected as *places* by a shared urban (Amaseia) or regional (Pontos) identity.

5. Time, space and identity

Places are located in time as well as space; according to the geographer TORSTEN HÄGERSTRAND, the world is a 'space-time environment'.¹¹ For those of us who have been raised in the tradition of the nation-state and spend our professional lives studying the past, it is natural to think of history – past time – as a key component of the identity that individual places create for themselves. Its warlike past, not the peaceful present, provides the city of Kolding with a strong sense of identity.

One must, however, be wary of projecting modern conceptions into the minds of those who lived two millennia ago. Reading through the contributions to this volume, history – time – is far from always an element of the self-perception that Pontic communities attempted to project. To Strabo, a shared heritage was an important component of 'Greekness' (p. 85–6), but, as the author of a lost work on history, Strabo no doubt took a deeper interest in Pontic history than the majority of his fellow Pontians.

⁶ For a discussion of visibility and place, see TUAN 1977: 161–6.

⁷ Xenophon, *Anabasis* 4.7.

⁸ Cf. the *periplus* structure followed by ancient geographical writers, for instance Pomponius Mela, the Elder Pliny or Arrian, where the description follows the coast.

⁹ Strabo 12.4.7.

¹⁰ Appian, *Mithradatic Wars* 66, discussed by WILLIAMSON, this volume, 179.

¹¹ HÄGERSTRAND 1975. CASEY (1993: 349–52) argues that the concepts of time and space are incomparable because space is multidimensional, whereas time is not. While this may hold true for the present and future, it does not apply to the *past*: the student of history can move backwards or sideways in historical time. See also TUAN 1977: 126, 129–30.

Apart from Sebastopolis and Amaseia (which claimed Herakles and Hermes, respectively, as their founders), there are conspicuously few references to the historical past in the coin images of the Pontic cities.¹² Instead, interest appears to have been focused on recent achievements and contemporary titles – *neokoros*, *metropolis*, etc. (p. 56; 132; 152) – and on the monuments to be seen at the time. Likewise, in so far as the Pontic *koina* possessed what could be described as a regional identity (p. 21–2; 61) this was not by virtue of their shared past, but rather due to their belonging to the same spatial unit in the present.

6. Invisible spaces, invisible places

If the contributions to this volume share many topics, they also – explicitly or implicitly – share some problems and concerns. A key issue is the paucity of literary sources. Although we have a large number of texts that touch on Pontic history or geography, the vast majority – with Strabo and Memnon of Herakleia as the most conspicuous exceptions – reflect an outsider's view.

This is to some degree compensated for by a rich and growing body of epigraphic evidence (though, in some cases, lack of publication is an issue). Inscriptions provide evidence for onomastics, cult, political organisation and many other aspects of life in the cities as well as invaluable pointers to the nature and purpose of rural sanctuaries. Coins offer information on these topics as well, in some cases even images of the cities or the shrines in question.

The physical fabric of the cities themselves, on the other hand, continues to elude the modern researcher. Most Pontic cities were situated at key points in relation to valleys and passes, and with a good water supply; hence most of them have continued to thrive until the present day. Neapolis-Neoklaudiopolis, Sinope, Amisos, Amaseia and Neokaisareia are all overlain by modern cities, rendering systematic excavation difficult and large-scale survey impossible. Instead, researchers must rely on chance finds and rescue excavations to provide tantalisingly brief glimpses of what lies underneath these modern towns.

The exception to this rule is Pompeiopolis, the site of which has never been built over and is now being systematically studied and analysed by LÂTIFE SUMMERER and her team. As one of Pompey's foundations, it holds out the promise of providing rich information on life in the 'new cities' of Pontos. Most of the finds from Pompeiopolis so far date to the second century AD or later; it remains to be seen whether the site will yield information on the city's earlier history as well.

To supplement the meagre evidence from northern Anatolia, we may draw on analogy from cities elsewhere in the Roman empire (as in the papers of ZWINGMANN, ZUIDERHOEK and REVELL). This approach also serves to raise the perspective from that of local history to more general issues such as culture transfer and structures of exploitation.

Even so, many questions remain unanswered and large groups within the general population remain invisible. As the opening keynote paper by DEBORAH SIMONTON demonstrated, gender is an important factor for understanding spatial relationships in early modern Aberdeen. No doubt gender played a comparable role in ancient Neokaisareia or Pompeiopolis, but women are almost entirely invisible in our sources. The same goes for the ur-

¹² Leaving aside the case of Kelainai-Apameia Kibotos, which is located outside Pontos.

ban proletariat, perhaps illiterate and certainly not in the 'epigraphic habit' of setting inscriptions on stone to themselves; and for the slaves, of whom we hear next to nothing apart from the somewhat cynical, offhand remark by Strabo that the quarries sometimes had to remain idle for extended periods because all the slaves had been 'used up'.¹³

Herakles scanning the horizon from the tower of Koldinghus Castle and FRANZ CUMONT gazing out over the 'petrified sea' from Yassıçal (p. 179) saw only the crests of the hills, the peaks of the mountains. The papers in this volume attempt to provide a deeper (in more than one sense of the word) understanding of a landscape, of the ways in which time and space intermesh in human life, defining places and creating identities.

¹³ Strabo 12.2.10.