

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF PISTIROS: VENTURING TO CHANGE THE TRADITIONAL PARADIGM IN BULGARIAN ARCHAEOLOGY*

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Abstract

This paper presents the archaeological site of Pistiros in Bulgaria as a case study, supposing to contribute to the debate of the nature of archaeological thinking and practice in contemporary archaeology. It does not intend to evaluate the archaeology of the site *per se* but rather to focus on the processes of producing knowledge about it in the institutional framework of the academic research culture in Bulgaria. The site is seen as a venture challenging the outdated culture-historical approaches through the immense contribution of Mieczysław Domaradzki, unfolding space for new research resources and collaborative strategies within the Mediterranean.

The question of ‘archaeology for whom?’, asked by Mexican archaeologists about 40 years ago, was and remains still a radical one for archaeology; it is not a selfless search for knowledge but serves the interests of specific social groups.¹ This question has opened up the area of reflexive perspectives provoking new research questions on processes of formation of interpretation and meaning in archaeology. The reflexivity in many disciplines related to the study of the past revealed different faces of dependence on nation-state formation. This critical trend emphasises the social, cultural and political contexts in which the disciplines are conducted. Since 1986, when the first World Archaeological Congress was held in Southampton (UK), an agenda in archaeological research started to focus on critical awareness of the treatment of the past in the present considering related political and theoretically linked matters.

In many countries, including Bulgaria, archaeologists and their practices remained unaffected by the new critically oriented trends. The ways in which archaeological

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¹ Hamilakis and Duke 2009.

knowledge is constructed by its practitioners are in close association with nationalist representations with the key concept, ethnicity. Their interpretations are based on an unquestioned culture-history methodology focused exclusively on historical 'continuity' of the ethno-nation in the territory of the modern state. Culture-historical archaeology produced the concept of 'archaeological culture' which is supposed to manifest organic entities and their claims over land determination. Scholars are concerned with striking similarities between representation of culture in nationalist discourses and the concept of 'culture' and 'society' in academic theory and practice. They are considered as well-integrated, bounded, continuous entities, occupying definite spatio-temporal areas.²

The culture-history approach in Bulgarian archaeology generates predominantly a heritage discourse whose nature becomes to be clarified recently in a relatively new area of academic activity known as 'heritage studies'. They view the idea of heritage as a constitutive cultural process subjected to management of 'authorised heritage discourse'.³ This process includes production of archaeological narratives expected to construct national identity and embedding it in popular culture. The emotional power of heritage helps its successful marketing, gaining the attention of tourists.⁴

The site of Pistiros in Bulgaria came on the archaeological scene as a result of systematic multidimensional research with analytical potential, venturing to produce a different type of identification process requiring new questions and expecting new answers. Through the immense contribution of Mieczysław Domaradzki (1949–1998) this site began opening the borders of new research resources and collaborative strategies. Domaradzki's approach gradually implanted the site of Pistiros in the vast area of contemporary research trends concerning the multicultural space of the Mediterranean. Thus the Pistiros excavations, with their archaeological data and systematically produced visibility, are today in a position to provide space for debate, with internationally practised archaeological language reassessing the traditionally constructed and still operative disciplinary system in Bulgaria. The case study presented here raises questions about whether the professional and ethical responsibilities of its practitioners are able to overcome the marginality and non-communicative character of Bulgarian archaeology in the contemporary epistemological debates. Or will Bulgarian archaeologists remain capable of being only centralised 'custodians and arbiters' of a past framed by 'authorised heritage discourse'.⁵

² Jones 1997, 137.

³ Smith 2006.

⁴ Lazova 2018b.

⁵ Smith 2006.

Contextualising the Nature of Archaeological Research in Bulgaria

The growing interest in the history of archaeology has produced a number of studies which examine archaeologies practised at specific times in specific places from a variety of analytical perspectives. This focus on archaeology as a discipline has transformed its history into a kind of sub-discipline with its own international bulletin, symposia, encyclopaedias, textbooks and publication series. The study of archaeological thought surveys the contemporary theoretical developments, recognising social, political, economic and institutional factors viewing also the perspectives of the development of archaeological practice.⁶

Studies of the development of archaeological thought help to contextualise the nature of Bulgarian archaeology and to outline guidelines which ventured to change it. As in most European countries, especially in South East Europe, archaeology in Bulgaria is an historical science. Bulgarian historiography, following a development along the lines of European academies, was born in the age of nationalism and it has evolved exclusively according to the precepts of its duty – to shape the national consciousness and thus to fulfil its important social function to produce national identity. A ‘national(ist) continuum of the 19th and 20th centuries’ was permanently revitalised by a range of intellectuals – protectors and promoters of the ‘national interest’. As a result of the political setting in which the Bulgarian historical discipline was nourished and developed it was recently recognised that there exists a large degree of theoretical isolation and therefore methodological insufficiency.⁷ Archaeology as an integral part of Bulgarian historical scholarship was developing in the same setting as active ideological and political factors. Still more, being for a long time an auxiliary field, archaeology presented itself as a collection of expert knowledge and technologies which enabled historians to construct their narrative.⁸

In Bulgaria, pre-national concerns about antiquity and its materiality as a powerful resource for activating the processes of national identity-building were far from recognised. The Bulgarian national activists, succeeding in the battle for Church independence about the 1870s, faced a new dilemma, asking the basic question ‘Who are the Bulgarians?’. The development of a culture-historical orthodoxy in Western Europe, including archaeology, was accompanied by a growing ethnic nationalism designed to shape national histories. The growing interest in the concept of archaeological culture gained speed and later was fully realised by Gustav Kossinna (1858–1931) in Germany. He developed the theory that a regionally determined

⁶ Trigger 2008, xv–xx.

⁷ Todorova 1992.

⁸ Niculescu 2002.

ethnicity can be defined by material culture excavated from an archaeological site. Kossinna, as the leading icon of National Socialist ethnic and racial prehistory, casts a long shadow over modern German and indeed Balkan archaeology. In Bulgaria, this early academic impetus was launched at first by academic figures such as Konstantin Jirecek (1854–1918), a Czech scholar, whose methodology had been shaped by the research agenda in Central and Eastern Europe. His *History of the Bulgarians*, published in Bulgarian in 1886, provided its subjects with visibility. He included antiquity in the ‘national(ist) continuum’, stimulating strongly the feeling of national belonging. Coming from ‘outside’ and armed with his contemporary methodology, he dictated also the structures of the main scholarly institutions which were supposed to create the new national policies in the production of knowledge about the Bulgarian ancient past.⁹ In a *longue durée* perspective archaeological research reveals different intensities in saturating the national space with material (archaeological) and non-material (ancient imagery) artefacts, supplying the academic research agendas with different policies. The symbiosis between history and archaeology is allegedly based on ‘interdisciplinary methodology’, which is in fact a seamless combination of fieldwork, archaeological competences and ‘historical thinking’. The ‘archaeological thinking’ is very limited and even blamed by the historians.¹⁰

In Bulgaria, as in Romania, culture-historical archaeology is an undisputed paradigm. Both countries are comparable in the context of the shared, connected and entangled history of the Balkans produced by Bulgarian and Romanian scholars.¹¹ Very few articles in Bulgarian specialist journals concern methodological issues, and they are written by foreign scholars.¹² In the reflexive perspective of analysis revealing the ideological and political character of archaeological practice in South East Europe or in the eastern Mediterranean, Bulgarian archaeology is presented by foreign archaeologists.¹³ Bulgarian archaeology never defines itself as the tools offered by the critical social sciences are never used. The criticism in a theoretical debate involves defining terms, boundaries, setting up oppositions which make the meaning always referential and confrontational to other theories.¹⁴ Culture-historical archaeology and its key concept, ethnicity, does not need complicated procedures to produce ethnic identity, which is the only goal that really matters.¹⁵

⁹ Lazova 2016, 144–50.

¹⁰ Niculescu 2002.

¹¹ Marinov 2015, 19–48; Lazova 2018a.

¹² Demul 2002; Babesh 2003.

¹³ Kaiser 1995; Bailey 1998.

¹⁴ Hodder 1991.

¹⁵ Lazova 2018c; 2020.

This never-questioned approach expresses itself mainly in searching and finding distinctions and specificities of ‘our’ past confronted with ‘theirs’. Professional archaeologists nourished in this setting see their task in combination of fieldwork, archaeological analyses and ‘historical thinking’, mobilising even esoteric knowledge of facts – mysterious and ambiguous – in order to illustrate the ‘true’ scientific story of the origins of the nation, otherwise difficult or impossible to document.

The interwar period, considered in Bulgarian historiography as unsuccessful in national integration, activated the debate about ancient Thracian heritage under the banner of ‘resurrection’ of ‘our’ antiquity, flagging ‘the general interests of the nation’. From one side, Bulgarian *Altertumswissenschaft* was beginning to professionalise and institutionalise the scholarly research, recognising archaeology as a valuable resource in differentiating Thracian-ness from Greek-ness. Thus an institutionalised ‘Thracian archaeology’ was shaped by the principal figure in archaeological scholarship, Bogdan Filov.¹⁶ On the other side, an influential trend following a willingness to identify ‘specific national traits’ occurred in Bulgaria known as *narodopsichologia*. It developed in the intersection of psychology of peoples and national ontology, shaping the Bulgarian *Volksgeist*. Its prominent representative was Naiden Sheytanov (1890–1970) who appealed to be created *Trakistika* as an institution of a supposed cultural renewal of Bulgarian ‘spirituality’.¹⁷ The aim was not only to construct the ‘national essence’ of the Bulgarians but to make them appreciate their great past as *the bread and salt of everyone* in their everyday life.

After the Soviet takeover in September 1944 a ‘new’ methodology with ‘objective’ criteria in tracing the historical ‘truth’ was proclaimed. The end of the 1940s and the 1950s saw a strong modernising impulse of the Communist national(ist) ideological project, revitalising the ancient Thracian legacy that was supposed to supply the nation with a ‘prestigious’ past. The advent of Soviet ethnogenesis re-animating and achieved a steady return to themes traditionally developed in pre-war Bulgarian scholarship of antiquity. The explicit primordialism in Russian and Soviet scholarship of ethnicity revitalised Herder’s neo-romantic concept of *Volk* as a unity of blood-and-soil, turning it into a programme for scholarly research sanctioned by Bromley’s works.¹⁸

The Soviet notion of ethnogenesis evolved the quest for prestigious ancestors and gave a start to the canonisation of the Thracians as the third component of

¹⁶ Filov (1883–1945) was a Bulgarian archaeologist, art historian and politician. He was Prime Minister (1940–43) and Co-Regent (1943–44) of German-allied Bulgaria. He was executed on February 2nd 1945.

¹⁷ Marinov 2015, 17–18; Lazova 2018a.

¹⁸ Kohl 1998.

Bulgarian nation (alongside with the traditionally acknowledged Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians). An important institutionalisation in Soviet scholarship has to be mentioned. In 1968, the Institute for Slavic Studies was transformed into the Institute for Slavic and Balkan Studies, which produced histories of many Balkan countries spanning the period from antiquity to modern times. Thus the production of origins and continuities was institutionalised and, in accordance with this imperative framework, the writing a multi-volume history of Bulgaria was embarked upon. In this context, in 1972 a 'Centre for Science and Personnel Training History' was created. The 1970s and 1980s saw numerous anniversary activities associated with the celebration of historical events the most spectacular of which was the celebration of the 1300th anniversary of the establishment of the Bulgarian state. This typical nationalist ritualism activated an extremely powerful ideological image, producing Bulgarian culture as an 'unbroken continuum', reusing the arsenal of the interwar 'bourgeois nationalism' and turning it into a usable past.

Reintroducing the Thracians into the national genealogy, the Institute of Thracology was created in 1972 as a coordinating unit. The research programmes, richly funded by the Communist state and carried out by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, activated the old practices in the regions in Dobrudja (named now Getica programme), Strandzha-Sakar and the Rhodope Mountains.¹⁹ The institute was headed by the 'founding father' of the Bulgarian Thracology, Alexander Fol.²⁰ His institutional power fabricated Thracian-ness as an important ingredient of the Bulgarian spirituality. The body of national disciplines was enlarged by a separate Institute of Folklore (1973) and a specialised section of Thracian archaeology in the Archaeological Institute with Museum organised in 1983. Thus the research approaches announced as 'complex studies' and practised in the 1970s and 1980s might be defined as the *floruit* of the Bulgarian culture-historical methodology. The philological pattern of archaeology typical of it was fully established. The popularity of Graeco-Roman heritage was discounted at the expense of the ideologically constructed national(ist) discourse of the Thracian component in the ethnic genealogy of the Bulgarians.²¹ Thus Thracian antiquity was beginning to achieve high social status in the public sphere.

Following influential Soviet philologists and archaeologists, Bulgarian scholars continued the pre-war traditions of developing the distinctive character of Thracian

¹⁹ Lazova 2016, 208–38.

²⁰ Alexander Fol (1933–2006) was the founder of the Institute of Thracology (and its Director till 1992) and of Bulgarian Thracology. He was Deputy Minister of Culture and Minister of Education (1980–86), university lecturer, the creator of many educational and research institutions and projects, the author of the main body of works on the Thracians and Thracian-ness.

²¹ Slavova 2017.

culture on a much greater scale, realised by lavishly sponsored national programmes. They promised a prestigious image of a remarkable historical contribution to European antiquity. The concept of the royal-ness of the Thracian culture as its distinctive characteristics was gaining momentum after the rescue excavations of the Thracian city of Seuthopolis (1948–54) in south central Bulgaria. It was identified as the capital of the Thracian king Seuthes III, launching an interpretation of the so-called citadel as a Hellenistic version of a residential tower which accorded with the literary evidence. Contemporary researchers, however, see Thracian society outlined as an abstract model based predominantly on literary sources and less on the logic of archaeological data.²² Constantly reaffirmed over the years, the fabricated centralised monarchy induced an active quest for royal residential centres, palaces and kings, ‘golden treasures’ proving the distinctive character of Thracian culture from the culture of the *polis*-based Greek society. The royal-ness requires a visible ideology of the royal elite. The Orpheus imagery, contested over the years in Romanian and Bulgarian academic space, enforced now a configuration of a doctrine corresponding to the royal specificity of Thracian culture. A seductive and confusing intellectual forgery named ‘Thracian Orphism’²³ gradually occupied central position, turning it into a trademark of Bulgarian Thracology.²⁴ Imagined as a centralised territorial monarchy, an aristocratic ‘ideology’ allegedly dating from the 2nd millennium BC was developed and was orally transmitted. This society had the chance to remain non-literary and accordingly the initiated aristocratic elite was able to transmit the values of the community. The early Orphism preceded the Greek one by centuries, as it was the ideology of the ‘Thracio-Pelasgian community’ dated before the Trojan War. This aristocratic ideology was ‘coded’ and can be ‘deciphered’ in a variety of data – megaliths, art, settlements, religious practices, tombs and folklore (for instance, fire-walking rituals).

These developments in Bulgaria stand aside from the debates in archaeological theory after the 1950s that witnessed a growing dissatisfaction with the 19th-century culture-historical orientations, attacking the incapacity of ‘reading’ ancient artefacts outside their national(ist) interpretation. After the 1960s these verities were questioned by a strong polemic attack under the banner of the so called ‘new’ or processual archaeology, to use the Anglo-American classification. Archaeologists operating within this paradigm sought to provide explanations for the social processes that lay behind the descriptive accounts of the culture-historical approach and reacted strongly against their historical interpretations, questioning ‘the innocence of

²² Nankov 2015, 400; Archibald 2015, 389–90.

²³ Fol 1986.

²⁴ Marinov 2015, 103–12; Lazova 2018a.

archaeology'.²⁵ After the 1960s these postulates were confronted in Western scholarship by newly developing approaches conceptualising ethnicity among many other identities.²⁶ Social and cultural anthropology contributed greatly to the study of ancient ethnicity, which today is unexceptional.²⁷ These developments remained, however, totally unrecognised in the agenda of the Bulgarian Communist ideological project.

After the changes in 1989 there were expectations of transformations in Bulgarian historiography supposed to banish the ideological burden of Communism and overcoming the methodological insufficiency and uncommunicative nature of the research.²⁸ Bulgarian Thracology remained however untouchable in the realm of a cultural nationalism whose constructs nourished the popular national imagination in 'proper' way. Most of the results of the national projects from the 1980s were published after the 1990s, yielding fruits in branding and marketing the ideological narrative. They produced enormous amounts of publications during the final period of 'socialism' and later continued to receive preferential funding.²⁹ New urgent archaeological research was conducted to produce the 'Valley of the Thracian Kings' near Kazanluk. Media thrillers 'discovering Thracian treasures' generated 'media archaeology'. Old mediaeval sites such as Perperikon were 'resurrected' by furnishing them with ancient imagery. Thanks to the Indiana Jones stereotypes they gained publicity and popularity, entering the tourist industry.³⁰

The Bulgarian 'new' approaches to Thracian studies, loudly announced after the 1970s, failed to notice the growing criticism of the nature of archaeological knowledge. A serious debate was opened up about archaeological epistemology and theory. It was beginning to become clear that a number of social patterns could not be understood without including data on agents, asking who was involved in the social action. Agency was considered to offer an alternative to the passive role assigned to material culture within traditional culture-historical archaeology. The explosion of interest towards the Mediterranean area, part of which is the Balkans, saw this region as a laboratory which mirrored the various epistemological difficulties with which such disciplines as history, archaeology, anthropology and many others were confronted.³¹

²⁵ Clarke 1973.

²⁶ Barth 1969.

²⁷ Hall 1997; Jones 1997; Derks and Roymans 2009.

²⁸ Todorova 1992.

²⁹ Nikolova and Gergova 2017, 190.

³⁰ Lazova 2018b.

³¹ Demetriou 2012.

Placing the Site of Pistiros: Relations between Part and the Whole

The processes of the production of archaeological knowledge in Bulgaria contextualised above allow us to trace new trends in practising national archaeology. These are associated with the immense contribution of Domaradzki, who shaped not only the direction of this project but also a course of some kind of 'new' archaeology as a methodological programme within the traditionally practised culture-historical framework. In 1973 he won a fellowship to the then newly established Institute of Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He began his academic work in Bulgaria in the context of the still widely accepted method of field-walking, following traditional practices which did not correspond closely to the idea of contemporary systematic land survey. The well-established German School followed by Bulgarian scholarship had already perfected its method by organising a well-trained network of informants and collaborators whose archaeological fieldwork was limited to verifications of already-known data. This method, still not completely denied, is considered to be able to register a small number of surviving archaeological sites. The greatest contribution to the perfection of the land survey as a systematic scientific method was developed by the English archaeological School. These new methodological developments triggered the idea of urgent improvement to the archaeological picture in Bulgaria.³²

The field survey in the Sandanski-Petrich Valley, initiated in 1978 with a Polish-Bulgarian team of scholars, systematically registered archaeological data over four seasons (to 1982). Applying the already standardised extensive field survey, all geomorphologic forms that might have been exploited by past societies were investigated. Various factors, however, such as geographical peculiarities, the capacity of the researchers, the quality of the verbal information from local people, etc., needed to be verified, pointing to an uneven level of precision in obtaining the information. The work of the Polish-Bulgarian joint project was suspended and the results published in Cracow.³³

This project had a sequel: the formation of a working group at the Institute of Archaeology on the 'Archaeological Map of Bulgaria', seeking to compile a map of every known archaeological site in Bulgaria at a great scale. Thus Domaradzki contributed a lot to the creation of a model for outlining the picture of the *whole* through the Archaeological Map.³⁴ An approach was suggested to improve studies of the settlement system, minimising the possibility of subjective assessments and increasing the opportunity for more precise location of archaeological sites in terms

³² Domaradzki 1980; 2005.

³³ Śliwa and Domaradzki 1983.

³⁴ Domaradzki 2005.

of specialised study of settlement patterns. This type of processual approach expected the past structures to be released from abstract ideological archaeological constructions. Domaradzki was concerned with the behavioural implications of surviving archaeological material, examining the ways in which different activities concentrated and expanded across landscapes.³⁵

Pistiros: Processes of Identifications in the Documented Methodology

The Sandanski-Petrich field survey conducted by Domaradzki resulted also in revealing a new and unexpected element in Bulgarian geomorphologic studies – material traces characteristic of the Late Iron Age (5th–1st centuries BC) were found. In the 1980s a similar phenomenon was discovered in the upper valley of the Maritsa near the town of Septemvri. Until then the studied region was known as abundant in particularly rich funerary materials of the 5th–3rd century BC. On this basis some inferences about flourishing local communities in the region were already drawn. They were, however, contextualised by Domaradzki in a large-scale archaeological research project that included not only field surveys and excavations, but also publications examining various phenomena in Thrace such as fortifications, settlements, cult places, pottery and rich burials.³⁶

In 1988 the programme of systematic archaeological research brought to the surface an archaeological site at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa near Vetren, in the municipality of Septemvri in central Bulgaria. The earliest excavation seasons made clear that the site was of an unknown category in the settlement system in ancient Thrace. Therefore Domaradzki, who acknowledged how difficult the interpretation of the site would be, offered three possible suggestions: it could have been a Greek settlement, a *tyrsis*, a fortified residence of the kind prompted by Xenophon concerning Seuthes in south-eastern Thrace, or a commercial centre with mixed Greek and Thracian population.³⁷ Through the intensive research conducted by Domaradzki, based entirely on the logic of his analytical abilities to ‘read’ the archaeological evidence, the site was identified rather as commercial centre, placing it in an increasingly expanding local context. He clarified his ideas by studying other sites in a regional context which displayed a distinctive commercial profile. Domaradzki’s research revealed that the study of this archaeological site was not a matter of simple identifications – direct or indirect – but it had to be viewed as part of the whole. A great number of features, however, turned out to be difficult to identify in terms

³⁵ Archibald 2011, 126.

³⁶ See full bibliography in Domaradzki *et al.* 2000, 11–24.

³⁷ Domaradzki 1995.

of the traditionally current paradigms of relations between Greeks and Thracians in Classical Antiquity.³⁸ One of the issues that came up in discussion related to how we study historical communities. The culture-historical approach, based on terminology used in ancient narrative sources, does not fully realise that mention of places depends on the circumstances of survival of specific names in the ancient texts. The ancient identifiers might be various and limited by different reasons. If we use predominantly this kind of identification a number of ancient entities recognised by Domaradzki as centres identified as ‘economic nodes’ would remain nameless (Kalugerovo and Kocherinovo). This method of research suggested an examination of ancient communities through intensive fieldwork as long-term study.³⁹ Artefactual evidence showed that the *emporion* was well connected and served by commercial trade routes.⁴⁰ The approach of Domaradzki’s studies was supplemented with ideas for wider comparisons with sites of similar type, for instance Naukratis in Egypt.

The stone stele inscribed in ancient Greek letters, accidentally discovered in 1990 at Assar Dere near the village of Vetren, very strongly influenced the discussion and complicated the parameters of the debate. The inscription, considered by all scholars to be a unique document, contains the names ‘Pistiros’ and the *emporitai* resident there. Based on the traditional framework of the Bulgarian interpretative practices the centrality of the place Pistiros in the inscription was coupled with the archaeologically attested settlement, thus it was assumed that the archaeological site at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa was in fact Pistiros. Domaradzki, accepting the arguments of the publishers of the inscription, set out in full the possibilities for this identification in a Warsaw-based archaeological periodical.⁴¹ By thus turning it into an internationally accessible document he envisaged new ideas for its identification, interpretation and its function in a broader documentary system. The subsequent *editio princeps* opened up the study of the inscription to a number of critical remarks which induced later a critical re-edition of the inscription.⁴² The openness to discussions provided access to new interpretive capabilities, which in turn unfolded perspectives to more productive questions to be asked and more reasonable answers to be obtained.

Scholars are becoming more and more aware that the correspondence between Pistiros referred to in the text and the site at Adzhiyska Vodenitsa near Vetren is a difficult task to ‘sell’ only on the basis of written documents. In Paris between

³⁸ Archibald 2011, 140.

³⁹ Archibald 2011, 125–26.

⁴⁰ Domaradzki 2000; Archibald 2002a; 2002b.

⁴¹ Domaradzki 1993.

⁴² Velkov and Domaradzka 1994; Chankovski and Domaradzka 1999.

1989 and 1991 six seminars were held on the phenomenon known as the *emporion* in antiquity. A series of papers fundamentally re-assessing the concept of *emporion* was published.⁴³ The work of the Copenhagen Polis Centre, active between 1993 and 2003, resulted in the compilation of all available information on Archaic and Classical settlements and led to an inventory of all attested and identifiable Hellenic *poleis* of the period. A set of criteria was elaborated and systematically applied to the great bulk of collected available information.⁴⁴ This great amount of work helped to clarify the nature of civic institutions, re-assessing the use and meaning of the terms *polis* and *emporion* in the Archaic and Classical periods.⁴⁵

These new perspectives on more comprehensive research of the nature of the *polis* and the initial internationalising of the project revealed a picture pointing to a scarcity of specialists in Bulgaria able to deal with this unknown urban type and its context. Much of what was being discovered was unknown because of the scantiness of excavated settlement evidence and absence of productive methodological insights. This prompted an indication that international collaboration was necessary to realise the methodology of the forthcoming research.⁴⁶

The period 1992–95 was considered to be a transitional phase in the site's excavation process as, from a small-scale project conducted by one archaeologist within the parameters of very limited resources – scholarly and technical, it developed into a complex project which had no precedent in this area of study. The international team developed a joint field strategy with a common recording system, setting up unified procedures for the processing and selection of finds and their storage (Septemvri Museum). The site documentation of the British team was converted systematically to electronic form, so that it could be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service in York, and thus be widely accessible via that service's web site.⁴⁷ Domaradzki was actually structuring a complex threefold methodology of a large-scale context through the Archaeological Map of Bulgaria, of a regional context of settlement patterns in central Bulgaria, and of a detailed picture of an *emporion* identified with *Pistiros* from the inscription. These analytical instruments were applied towards examining the behavioural implications of the surviving archaeological material, challenging the culture-historical methodology of binding archaeological sites directly to ancient written sources or of looking for archaeological reality through the names of settlements mentioned in texts. This indiscriminate use of mentions from Greek texts, associating them with archaeological reality (Dausdava-

⁴³ Bresson 1993.

⁴⁴ Hansen and Nielsen 2004.

⁴⁵ Hansen 1997; 2006.

⁴⁶ Archibald 2002, 310–17.

⁴⁷ Archibald 2002, 322.

Helis identification for Sboryanovo), is typical of philological archaeology used to accepting such easy identifications. What is worrying, however, is that in the archaeological literature this type of naming is not disputed or questioned. This shows ignorance of the progress made in understanding the interpretative instruments concerning so-called indirect ancient textual evidence, which differs from direct epigraphic material. The archaeological patterns could never be directly related to 'indirect textual' models, having recorded material remains as a past reality. Only under certain circumstances can they coincide.

The Pistiros publications began to provide visibility to the documented archaeological research, becoming thus a meeting place of international scholarship and an arena for discussions. The first fruits of the collaboration of the international team were published in 1996 in the first volume (of six) in the monograph series *Pistiros: Excavation and Studies*,⁴⁸ followed by a great number of articles. The first volume, with a forward by Fol, uncovered the expected results 'owing to three of its salient features: the quality of the fieldwork, the interdisciplinary approach (archaeological data and literary sources) and the views of the Odrysian settlement system'. The recommended identification was expected to be realised as the 'old concept of the settlement system of the Thracian "royal city" could be complemented by really new characteristics of the regions of the Rhodope Mountains and the Upper Hebros valley'.⁴⁹ The expected identification was contested in the same volume by the first interim field report (pp. 13–34) and the publication of the 'Pistiros Inscription' in the same volume (pp. 205–16). The most acceptable identification, based on Xenophon's narrative, was challenged by *emporion* identification, which asks much more difficult questions that Bulgarian archaeology was hardly ready to answer. In the processes of identification hesitating answers are possible. The procedures of the so-called hermeneutic circle – knowledge dependent on the relation between part and the whole, on the process of question and answer – might give adequate answers about 'past' others.⁵⁰

The archaeological research at Vetren challenged considerably the traditional picture of Bulgarian archaeology as it developed in an international setting demanding a new research methodology based on new documentation style. In the search for identifications behavioural approaches in archaeology were preferred – how different activities concentrated and expanded across landscapes; how different patterns extracted from the data reflect economic behaviour.

⁴⁸ Bouzek, Domaradzki and Archibald 1996.

⁴⁹ Fol 1996.

⁵⁰ Hodder 1991, 11.

The following volumes, as well as the many articles published over the years, consolidated the methodology of documenting the archaeological research. The visibility thus acquired opened up a number of issues to international discussion. The international colloquium held in Septemvri in April 1998 to celebrate the first decade (1988–98) of the systematic research programme produced an important collection of essays that situated Pistiros within a broader framework of discussion, bringing the interpretations out of the indigenous models of research. They were framed by the economic structures in the North Aegean and eastern Balkans during the 1st millennium BC.⁵¹ The excavated place near Vetren and its association with Pistiros from the inscription raised an important methodological question of how and whether archaeological data can be linked to a ‘direct written document’. The answer can never be obvious. One of the important steps was to question this direct association, placing the research in the broad context of Pontic *emporion*, and giving a start to discussion of other possible identifications.⁵²

The intensity of research is visible in the deployment of a wide range of topics, discussed in the publication dedicated to 20 years of study on ‘The Emporion of Pistiros and its environs’ by the international team.⁵³ The competing views about the site’s identification – ‘emporion or royal residence’ – continued, but they still remained framed in parallel discourses. One of them works with increasingly detailed analyses,⁵⁴ the other notes them only in the rubric that ‘several scientists still claim that this is a royal residence’.⁵⁵ This is due to problems inherent in the non-communicative nature of the research culture of the culture-historical methodology in which Bulgarian archaeology is nourished. Domaradzki was venturing to change it. The debate, however, is needed as it might be expanded with questions requiring more precise definitions of royal residence, local ruler, sub-king, etc. It might clarify the nature of the royal institution in ancient Thrace, which is considered to be ideologically charged because of the intrusive inclinations for ‘royal’ and ‘aristocratic’ cults and the ideologies of the ‘elite’ in Bulgarian Thracology.⁵⁶ Such a debate might expand the analyses related to the Macedonian agency in the development of settlement structures in Thrace and the nature of their population entering the ‘Hellenistic situation’.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Domaradzki *at al.* 2000.

⁵² Tsetsckhladze 2000; Demetriou 2010.

⁵³ Bouzek, Domaradzka and Archibald 2007.

⁵⁴ Tsetsckhladze 2011; 2019.

⁵⁵ Bouzek, Domaradzka and Archibald 2007, 7; Bouzek and Domaradzka 2007, 86.

⁵⁶ Marinov 2015, 102–03.

⁵⁷ Tacheva 2007; Nankov 2015, 403–04.

Re-examination of the rhetorical structure of the inscription deepens the perception of the nature of royal power itself and its potential to be transformed in a changing context, displayed by the inscription. A new light was thrown on the identity of the issuing authority for the inscription, which may not necessarily be linked with an Odrussian ruler, as traditionally assumed.⁵⁸

The situation described in the Pistiros Inscription opens up a path to the studies of ancient communities, particularly of *emporía*, which remained more obscure to scholars than the *poleis* evidenced from the work of Copenhagen Polis Centre. The comparison of five different Greek *emporía* – one in Iberia, Gravisca in Etruria, Naukratis in Egypt, Pistiros in Thrace and Peiraios in Attica – situated in geographically diverse locations provided an opportunity to understand more fully this phenomenon. The proposed new avenues of research moved beyond examination of the ancient economy and the political nature of *emporía* and treated their social context. These studies outlined a working definition of ancient *emporía*, revealing the fact of their multi-ethnicity. This definition opened up the way to study connectedness among different ethnic groups rather than treating them in isolation. The multi-ethnic environment redirected attention to the social reality that tends to create new common practices giving cohesion to the people of these settlements. The Pistiros Inscription reveals how non-Greek authorities regulated interactions between Thracians and Greeks from different *poleis* living in their territories. It even includes details about arbitrating legal disputes among Greeks from different *poleis* which had different laws. These observations lead to the assumptions that *emporía* as multi-ethnic polities may facilitate cross-cultural trade and provided more flexibility in religious and juridical practices.⁵⁹

Thus, Pistiros enters the broad area of Mediterranean research resources with a great variety of linguistic, religious, social and ethnic groups. The controversy about the identification from the inscription of the archaeological site as Pistiros may continue to be clarified by new arguments situated in this very broad context. This type of study challenges the traditional predominance of ethnic identities, revealing new aspects of identity-construction – civic, linguistic, religious and social.⁶⁰

Recent studies of the Mediterranean region saw it as a cosmopolitan landscape because of the permanent and extensive interactions among groups inhabiting it. They suggest structural similarities among Mediterranean populations. The challenge is to study ethnic identity among many others identities (civic, religious and linguistic). Identity is part of social reality, whether it be self-representation or is

⁵⁸ Graninger 2012, 109.

⁵⁹ Demetriou 2010; 2011; 2012.

⁶⁰ Archibald 2005; Demetriou 2012.

imposed by others. Groups and individuals experience various kinds of identities which condition some of their decisions. The Thracian case, as in many others, shows that Thracians used not to have a name to describe themselves. They are described from outside in a monolithic perspective typical of past scholarship that ignored the dynamic nature of cultural exchange. The processes of urbanisation in Thrace suggest a notion of civic identity construction.⁶¹ A new and important question appears: how did these groups use their common Mediterranean background – politics, religion and material culture – to define themselves and to create new identities? For the purpose of this kind of study the period from the end of the 7th to the middle of the 4th century BC is formative because the movements made the region, increasingly creating the most intense stages of connectivity. In other words, the self and society are always in process of production. This type of study opposes static approaches, replacing them with more dynamic positions. The material culture is seen as an active dimension of social practice whose meanings vary through time depending on an artefact's history, the position of the social agents who used it, and the immediate context of its use.

Conclusion

Pistiros paved the way. It became visible internationally and its importance recognised through a documented methodology that entered the vast research area of the Mediterranean. It opened up also the possibility to write reflexively about Bulgarian archaeology, questioning the ideologically constructed Thracological production whose main purpose was to brand and market 'imagined' national identities.⁶² Pistiros and its archaeological study are in a position to enable reassessment of the values of the culture-historical paradigm in Bulgarian historiography, transforming Bulgarian archaeology into a partner in the contemporary epistemological debate about the place of ancient Thrace in the multicultural space of the Mediterranean. The innovative research perspectives pose also questions of ethics and the responsibility of practising archaeologists promising to bring ancient Thrace out of its marginality in Western scholarship.⁶³ If the archaeological discipline in Bulgaria, however, is going to walk the path of creating only the 'authorised heritage discourse' through culture-historical interpretations of archaeological artefacts, it will remain a centralised 'custodian and arbiter' of the past.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Archibald 2005.

⁶² Lazova 2018b.

⁶³ Valeva *et al.* 2015, ix.

⁶⁴ Bailey 1998; Nikolova and Gergova 2017.

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