РЕЦЕНЗИИ/REVIEWS

TOWARDS A NEW BULGARIAN ARCHAEOLOGY OF POWER:

REFLECTIONS OVER АРХЕОЛОГИЯ НА ВЛАСТТА. ИНТЕРДИСЦИПЛИНАРНИ ДИАЛОЗИ. Б. АТАНАСОВ, И. БОЯНОВ, И. ДИМИТРОВА, Б. ДУМАНОВ, П. НЕДЕЛЧЕВА, Ж. УЗУНОВ (РЕД.). СОФИЯ, НОВ БЪЛГАРСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ, 2020. [ARCHAEOLOGY OF POWER. INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUES. B. ATANASSOV, I. BOYANOV, I. DIMITROVA, B. DUMANOV, P. NEDELCHEVA, ZH. UZUNOV (EDS.). SOFIA, NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY, 2020]

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This edited volume celebrates the 25th anniversary of the Department of Archaeology at New Bulgarian University and is more importantly a welcome addition to scholarship in how it opens the contributions derived from Bulgarian archaeology to the wider interpretative framework of social sciences in a matter consistent with the Liberal Arts nature of this institution. The book consists of an introduction and sixteen multidisciplinary chapters informally organized around the common theme of power into two principal groups. Contributions from the first group come from philosophy, sociology, and political science. At least in a Bulgarian academic milieu, these fields rarely involve discussion beyond the contemporary past. The second group of chapters are devoted to the history and archaeology of the Mediterranean world and share a pronounced interest in more reflective reconstruction of deep social processes.

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Reading the volume's collection of chapters offers a refreshing perspective on the individual case studies they present as well as the opportunity to connect the dots (sometimes quite literally), between ideas from different sources or intellectual traditions. Another highly positive feature of this book is the unspoken challenge to artificial chronological restrictions on archaeological thinking. This review tries to follow suit by bringing up additional observations that can further the discussion on power offered by the contributors.

In the editor's introduction to the volume, Bogdan Atanassov shares his initial reluctance about returning to a once trendy topic like "power" as peripheral academic communities might do. To his credit, Atanassov does not let his concerns overshadow the applicability of continued discussion of power and particularly the need for the concept's constant reexamination. True to the Greek meaning of archaeology, in which the field is not just the study of antiquity but of beginnings as well, his overview starts with the Copper Age necropolis at Varna. This is hardly accidental since this site is an ideal example for the viability of "power". Homeric representations and ancient political philosophy set up the work of key modern thinkers such as Weber, Arendt, and Foucault.

Boyan Znepolski's and Dimitar Vatsov's chapters critically discuss finer details about notions of power. The former extracts several binary distinctions from Kastoriadis' social theory that have the potential to diagnose the state of democracy in different societies, including our own. The latter argues for clearer definitions between various forms of power, which in turn challenges the paradox of power being perceived as a contradiction to the existence of freedom.

Although Atanassov's introduction is thorough, the reader might recall the critique that archaeology fails to build its own authentic contribution to social theory (Yoffee, Sherratt 1993, 8; Flannery, Marcus 2011). In practice, this situation is somewhat balanced by the personalized combinations of preferred methods and theories available to archaeologists at this day and age (Bintliff, Pearce 2011). Thus, Atanassov's chapter on social organization in the Eastern Balkans during the Late Bronze Age presents a critical synthesis of particularly compelling available theories in an attempt to define localized forms of complexity through metal-working traditions.

Power, it seems, cannot lose its appeal or be overlooked as an explanatory concept. As the cited prehistoric examples show, the introduction of a Bulgarian or, even better, a Balkan perspective can enhance many theories previously developed without access or sometimes even interest in cross-cultural evidence. Indeed, this volume helps to remind its readers that archaeology does not exist in a vacuum but reflects contemporary political, social, and economic circumstances (Shanks, Tilley 1987). For a long time, archaeology in Bulgaria, not unlike elsewhere in post-communist Europe (Laszlovszky, Siklódi 1991, 272 – 275), maintained an atheoretical attitude to avoid the dangers of political propaganda. This attempt, however, was neither effective (Bailey 1998, 95 – 98) nor fundamentally true (McGuire 2008). Thus, the first group of chapters in the volume simultaneously offers insight into the nature of power and an understanding of archaeology (and of this book) as a product of its time.

Rumen Petrov, for instance, uses archaeological discourse to explore how photos and poems vividly capture the social trauma people experienced through the coercive power of the authoritarian and totalitarian Bulgarian communist state experience. His examples refer to the mnemonic qualities of certain artifacts and how oppression is internalized and reproduced on individual and communal levels. Similarly, Mihail Nedelchev describes the heterotopic counter-cultures hidden in plain sight from the Communist regime through the mechanism of soft power, in personal memories in particular. In another take, Elena Alexandrova uses the complicated history of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization at the turn of the last century to outline the formation of alternatives to state power and to call attention to the legitimacy that arises from the political

organization of marginalized communities. Reminiscent of this stance is the claim by historical archaeologies to cut through source biases and to make visible the invisible people of the past (Tarlow 1998, 263).

These points correspond very well to the approach taken by Boyan Dumanov, who examines hoarding in Late Antiquity as a form of political repression. For him, the widespread deposition of fine metal wares associated with problematic emperors, most notably Licinius, was prompted by double damnatio memoriae. On one side, Constantine the Great oppressed the memory of his rival while on the other, textual sources favorable to the emperor erased this less flattering side of his new policies.

In other words, Dumanov reaches a conclusion similar to that of Dessislava Boshnakova, that communication is power. She stresses that unprecedented access to information (not necessarily fact nor truth) in today's world will very much influence the politics and the research of tomorrow. Her point that a good communication strategy is necessary for successful public action (and I am inclined to count archaeology as a form of public action) is as much self-evident as poorly applied at the moment. I raise the underlying matter of public interaction again below.

Despite the many positives of this interdisciplinary exchange, the compilation could have been an even more effective dialogue through a greater focus on the materiality of social phenomena. A notable exception in this respect is Kiril Avramov's chapter. His excellent discussion is grounded in the understanding that the architectural layout of urban public space is closely tied to ideological and political decisions.

Following destruction caused during the Second World War, the establishment of a new Communist regime, and expanding population pressure, Sofia experienced dramatic changes in its urban landscape. Avramov delineates three urban circles in the capital while paying special attention to the historical center. This inner sacred space of power is the arena where Bulgarian history and identity continue to be monumentalized and promoted. As time revealed, his take on the Monument of the Soviet Army (MSA) in Sofia is perhaps the most relevant in the entire collection to public discourse on power. In support of his observations, I would like to emphasize that power is performed through the structured impression on audiences of certain narratives about the past. Not unlike the tokens of traumatic memory to which Petrov refers, buildings, objects, and places can become vehicles for active interaction with power.

Now the Monument of the Soviet Army in Sofia is a focal point for the repeated negotiation of communal identity and memory between freely-expressed competing political and cultural narratives. The continuous public discourse surrounding this monument shapes at least two well-defined mnemonic communities (Cappelletto 2005, 6 – 7) to a greater extent than the removal of the statue of Lenin or the destruction of Georgi Dimitrov's mausoleum did in the 1990s. As these groups enact their narratives in the city's cultural landscape, they modify its entire urban fabric. The dynamics of these participatory encounters and their successful provocations through artistic reimagining tracked by Avramov are in fact instinctively creating a counter-monument, i.e. a self-conscious memorial space conceived to challenge the very premise of its existence (Young 1992, 271). Following Osborne's distinctions (Osborne 2017, 167), this counter-monument project still finds its way between "unremembering" an existing monument (Starzmann 2016, 5) and hosting performative action that problematizes the subject of power. Ultimately, maintaining the episodic conversion of the monument will depend on the ongoing matter of its administrative status and possible relocation.

To this end, the solutions to analogous situations in Europe can provide instructive parallels. Liberty square in Budapest, one of the local *lieux de mémoire*, is a place where the difficult past of

Hungary's successive pro-Nazi and Communist regimes is both commemorated and reinterpreted (Erőss 2016; Krzyżanowska 2022). For instance, the Soviet Army monument there cannot be removed because it is also a military grave site. Its original meaning, however, was reversed by the installation of nearby statues of Ronald Reagan in 2011 and George Bush in 2020, both of which visually interact with the central monument by recalling the end of the Cold war.[1]

Evgeny Dainov's contribution operates in a similar situational framework that has emerged from strategies employed by contemporary Bulgarians in relation to collective identities and political action. Although absent from Dainov's discussion, archaeology has a rather prominent role in processing a wide range of social processes like those he covers. The rapid advancement of contract archaeology in service to various infrastructural redevelopments should be considered in this respect. Related are the issues of the public perception of archaeology (Marx et al. 2017) and the roles given to heritage professionals by the bureaucratic nation-state (Brück, Nilsson Stutz 2016; cf. Diachenco 2016; Popa 2016), particularly with the intent to shape public opinion (Tarlow, Nilsson Stutz 2013). Prospective case studies could be derived from virtually any area of archaeological inquiry, from the media hype surrounding Medieval "vampire" burials around Europe to the tensions that arose during rescue excavations along the Struma motorway several years ago.

Another thematic subgroup in the volume sees Maya Vassileva and Zhivko Uzunov searching for the visibility of power in the funerary display and residential structures of mostly Thracian elites, respectively. Similarly, Peter Delev traces the history of the Thracian aristocracy's development in the time before the formalization of Roman rule over Thrace. Although these authors choose slightly different perspectives, they all promote a more versatile reconstruction of elite identity and hint at far greater fluctuations in elite power than have been traditionally accepted.

In the volume's next entry, Dragomir Garbov discusses administrative landscapes in the Middle Struma in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine periods. His approach is primarily based on site catchment analysis of the study region. The author himself admits that his comprehensive landscape study is far from complete and considers this more of a pilot study for the applicability of the method. Still, his remains an intriguing contribution. Garbov is clearly aware of the potential for expanding beyond the geographical limit of his regional survey, but I would argue that a temporal extension would be even more exciting. Landscapes are often called palimpsests of human activity, and studies of Medieval administrative and funerary landscapes repeatedly demonstrate that pre-existing features played a prominent role in the organization of space. At the same time, tracking diachronic changes in landscapes could potentially identify changing power centers and new entanglements.

The latter point finds some support in the work of Iliyan Boyanov, whose contribution examines the interrelation between emporium and imperium in Roman empire-building. For Boyanov, provincial urbanization is the key outcome of this symbiosis, and he emphasizes the blurred line between economic penetration and conquest in the Roman provinces. His chapter thus reinforces that Rome offers the classical template for cases in which a consolidating force allows for the cultivation of new social groups. Instead of tracking these ideas in later imitations of the Roman political formula, Boyanov chooses to consult 20th c. Italian futurist thinking for theoretical inspiration.

The final chapter is devoted to the adaptation of Byzantine literature in anthologies produced in the Bulgarian court, especially during the rule of Symeon (893 – 927). In this chapter, Yavor Miltenov points out that Bulgarian elites endeavored to absorb the Christian knowledge that had

[1] A similar attempt at amending communal memory associated with the Monument of the Soviet Army was made in Sofia by adding a minimalist commemorative plate about the so-called Goryani movement from the late 1940s. However, this gesture remained rather marginal to the monument and surrounding discourse.

accumulated by that time and did not consider the Christian textual tradition foreign to their own culture. While this conclusion is certainly valid, it remains unclear how these textual artifacts produced and reproduced structures of power throughout the long 10th c. and beyond. Further elaboration on the selectivity of royally-sanctioned adaptation could clarify its effects on diffusionist model that sees significant social and political influence coming from Byzantium.

Unfortunately, this chapter is the only one that covers the Medieval period. In many ways, Medieval archaeology in Bulgaria has been preoccupied with the material demonstration of power, including but not only through special attention to the capital sites Pliska, Veliki Preslav, and Tarnovo. Including additional Medieval and Early Modern-driven concepts or cases in the volume could have strengthened the links between its two interdisciplinary groups of chapters.

Another significant field of analysis left virtually untouched by the volume is biopower and the body politics. Considering the traumatic circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic, adding some reflections on the matter could have proven timely. Archaeology is also capable of addressing such issues, despite the objectification of human remains uncovered during fieldwork. Rather than highlighting a deficit of the book, however, this critique instead points toward a way by which future studies can build on its strengths.

To conclude, the edited volume *Archaeology of Power, Interdisciplinary Dialogues* is an important contribution to Bulgarian scholarship with the potential to stimulate future theoretically-informed studies. Its chapters rather succesfully bridge alternative and complimentary readings of the past and the present. They can be particularly useful starting points for a diverse audience tempted by the social sciences and especially for those looking to familiarize themselves with more theoretical perspectives on archaeology and its place in today's world.

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