

# Reviews

**Victor Cojocaru, *Instituția proxeniei în spațiul pontic / Die Proxenie im Schwarzmeerraum [Pontica et Mediterranea V], Cluj-Napoca, Editura Mega, 338 p., ISBN 978-606-543-717-3.***

The opening of the Black Sea area towards international historical and archaeological research more than a quarter of a century ago, after the fall of Communism has engendered a surge of scientific work undertaken with the enthusiasm of those who have come upon (almost) virgin soil. Unhampered contact between the inhabitants of different scholarly traditions has stimulated a scientific output that, impressive as it is, still has to fill the gaps generated by half a century (or three quarters) of mutual isolation.

The author of this book is in the fortunate position of having the best of both these worlds, which he inhabits with the ease born of long familiarity. His intimate knowledge of Soviet, then Russian literature and scientific methods blends most beneficially with the accuracy and exactingness acquired during his professional formation. He is thus best placed to undertake the task of examining issues connected to the Black Sea in antiquity, transcending cultural and linguistic barriers which have for so long been nigh insurmountable and which still pose difficulties to many researchers. His work over recent years has been directed towards this double aim: treating the Black Sea in antiquity as a unit, not subdivided by the borders of modern nations or by language<sup>1</sup>; and connecting the area to the most recent achievements of the study of antiquity<sup>2</sup>.

The book here discussed belongs to both these categories. It is concerned with proxeny decrees issued by Greek cities around the entire Black Sea, although the main focus lies on the northern ones. This is due in part to the state of research: The cities on the southern shore (such as Sinope and Heraclea), although among the largest and most important Black Sea poleis in antiquity, have been little researched and have thus yielded less epigraphic material than would fit their significance. On the other hand, the cities north of the Black Sea have generated a huge amount of literature, of unequal value, which is painstakingly discussed here insofar it pertains to the subject matter of proxeny. The utility of being aware of previous contributions to one's field of research notwithstanding, the amount of time and energy invested in criticizing arguments and refuting lines of thought best consigned to oblivion sometimes appear as too much of a good thing.

The book does not attempt to provide another general discussion on the meaning and functioning of this institution, as it confines itself to the Black sea area. However, in discussing the institution of the *proxenia*, a topic that has been repeatedly dealt with over the better part of two centuries, has occasionally been declared exhausted but can still yield new insights, references to generalities are inevitable – such as the author sharing the opinion – repeatedly upheld in the past, but still matter for contention – that the institution of proxenia did not become entirely void of its original

<sup>1</sup> COJOCARU/COȘKUN/DANA 2014; COJOCARU/SCHULER 2014; COJOCARU/RUBEL 2016.

<sup>2</sup> COJOCARU 2014.

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significance and did not, in the final stages of its evolution, end up as an empty honorary title, a mere decoration.

The book begins with an Introduction discussing issues of concepts, methodology and research history. The Catalogue of testimonies (chapter II) includes a total of 174 documents, divided between Pontic Ionian and Pontic Dorian, including the Greek text, the author's translation into Romanian and often copious commentaries of previous publication(s) of a text. This is followed by an ample commentary (chapter III) concerned with statistic data, the evolution of the decrees' form, the issuers and the recipients of proxeny decrees and the rights and privileges the latter received, the places of exposure of such documents and the geographical distribution of the honoured persons. Some subchapters (such as III2 to III5) had been published previously in various journals, but had been originally intended as part of this larger whole. This would no doubt explain the occurrence of copious quotations from the inscriptions discussed in these subchapters, although the texts are already included in the comprehensive catalogue in chapter II. Also, one of the author's foibles, easily recognized throughout his entire body of work, is giving copious verbatim quotations from modern authors, those he agrees with as well as those he does not. It is no doubt useful, when reading a discussion of literature, to have under one's eyes the exact words of the author under discussion, especially when he is being argued against. A brief chapter IV regards persons from the Black Sea honoured as *proxenoi* outside this area. A chapter of final conclusions, an appendix (co-authored by Marta Oller Guzmán), a useful glossary of specific terms and an ample German abstract conclude the book. I would question the utility of the appendix (not included in the German abstract), which, while bearing the somewhat vague title "Remarks on some particular traits of the citizen body in the northern Pontic cities", attempts to show that some of these poleis, especially Olbia, were influenced in their institutional development by external factors, some of them non-Hellenic, which prevented the exact reproduction here of the institutional model of the metropolis or of other Milesian colonies in the Black Sea area. While it is unquestionable that Greek *poleis* everywhere do evolve their own particular traits which set them apart even from their closest neighbours, and while the Greek cities of the northern Black sea specifically show in many respects the signs of reciprocal cultural influences with the non-Greek human and cultural milieu surrounding them, it is unfortunate that the authors' main argument is the lack of any mention of *phylai* in these poleis, interpreted as a sign of the influence over these cities of their cultural environment.

The documents collected and discussed here allow the author to complete and nuance the existing

record of attestations of proxenia, which, concerned with vaster spaces, may omit some of the Pontic evidence. The peripheral position and historical features of these cities notwithstanding, the evolution of the proxenic institution as such in this area appears to present no major peculiarities as against the rest of the Greek world. The most striking trait is the survival of the institution long after it had become obsolete in the rest of the Greek world, with the establishment of Roman rule. Even this does not fundamentally contradict the general evolution of proxeny, since the cities where it is still attested well into the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD – Chersonesus and Olbia – remained at that time formally outside the borders of the Empire. Some of the particularities are shown to refer to the evolution of the form, the issuers of the decrees and the conferred privileges: The passage from the 'abbreviated decree' to the evolved form occurred in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, while Olbia seems to have influenced several of the other Black Sea cities in this respect, and in the late Hellenistic period the influence of the magistrates as reflected in the form of the decrees increased. While the Council and People predominate as such, there are particularities, especially in Dorian cities, concerning the sanction formula and the dating by various magistrates or deities. In contrast to many parts of the Greek world, most notably Athens, *proxenia* is in the Black sea area often linked with the citizenship, most interestingly in Chersonesus, where the combination lasts into the Roman Imperial period, whereas the otherwise often conferred right of *enktesis*, the right to acquire real estate, occurs very seldom in the Black Sea area.

Formally, the book is an accomplished achievement. There are very few technical errors that I could see (the spelling Klisthenes on p. 170, n. 465; in n. 173, it is unclear which of Saprykin's papers the author refers to).

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