Reviewer evaluation for the M.A. Thesis

Environmental changes and human land-use interactions in ancient Thrace during the Iron Age
The impact of Greek colonisation
by Lenka Parveničcová

After the introduction the first chapter is devoted to the topography of Thrace, the second to climate, its complexity, variability in the Holocene, and to climatic zones of Bulgaria.

Important is that large parts of Thrace are the mountains, with valleys and plains, the largest Thracian Plain formed by the Maritsa/Hebros and Tundza rivers. The western boundary of Thrace is formed by Axius/Vardar and the big lakes. Strymon river was in its upper part very difficult for boats, and the Rhodopes passes only for porters and pack animals. Dobrodgea is mainly steppe, Black Sea coast has maritime moist climate.

The climatic zones were not stable: they changed several times. The Holocene in most parts of Bulgaria was nearer to Central Europe than to the Mediterranean. The author concentrated in detailed description in SW Bulgaria with the well documented sites of Koprivlen and Pistoiros, but the general lines of development is followed since Early Neolithic and later, while the Early Bronze Age ca 3000 BC was marked by decrease of humidity and less intense settlement pattern. The collapse in Egypt and the Near East ca 2200 also affected Bulgaria, but less so with the exception of Dobrodgea. The next main change was in the 9th century BC, in its first half, but the situation later improved and some crops were used for export from Thrace to Greece. The forests decreased with the Greeks, who needed more wood for ships, timber house constructions and notably fortifications.

Good fertile soils were in large parts of the valleys, in the higher altitudes pasture land prevailed. Trade with the Greeks was for benefit of both, but gold was on the op, followed by copper and iron, there is much less known on silver. On rivers in Roman times the old Conče is useful. For Pistoiros inscription the original publication and the BCH discussion should be considered.

Archaeobotany took much evidence from the pits, which only in Bulgaria are considered to be ritual generally; only slowly they begin to be silos as elsewhere. The most popular cereals of the Iron Age were Triticum aestivum/durum, but earlier wheat sorts, emmer, barley and millet were also common. Of the leguminous plants, lentil, pea and bitter vetch were common.

Figs and olives might also grow in some places in Central Thrace like nowadays, not all must have been imports in warmer periods.

Bovides and sheep, goats prevailed, pigs were also kept; the diet with cheese and bacon similar to nowadays (Beck-Stout). As Sue Salibra has shown, in Pistoiros and elsewhere long bones were split against the Greek custom and marrow consumed. In most of Thrace pasture land prevailed over fields. Vertical transhumance between the Rhodopes and the coastland was common already in antiquity. For agriculture in the mountains ethnographic studies of the Pomaks are still useful.

The woodland clearance was mainly man-made, but also affected by periods of dryness, and was followed by landslides, erosion and extensive fluvial deposits along the rivers.
The frequent use of toilet oils – even jasmine and rose oil – in the barbarian country deserves to be noted.

Ezero and Durankulak are important as parallels, but the links with the archaeological situation in East Bulgaria discussed in several volumes edited by Henrieta Todorova should also be followed for parallels, as well as those of the Lichardus (Sarre) expedition.

Of the two main sites discussed, Koprivlen and Pitiros, both yielded the most complex evidence and the second, excavated by the Charles University, deserves to be in the centre of interest in the frame of the current project.

Although rather marginal subject to the usual field of Classical archaeology, and not based on author’s own material study, it is a useful compilation with acceptable conclusions, written in clear and understandable way with only few mistakes or misprints. If successfully defended, it may be classified with grade A.

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Prof. Jan Bouzek, DrSc