

The aim of my research proposal is to investigate cultural and ethnic factors that had an impact on how North Pontic societies in antiquity (7th-6th c. BC- 4th c. AD) that inhabited the Greek cities and rural territories defined their own cultural identity. Both Greek cities (that were founded in this territory by Greek settlers from ca. 7th-6th c. BC, e.g. Berezan and Olbia, until 3rd c. BC, e.g. Tanais) and rural territories that belonged to the agrarian zone of the city (the so-called *chorai*) as well as steppe territories were the areas where cultures mixed. In these areas communities that had Greek traditions and Greek religion and spoke Greek interacted with local non-Greek and nomadic societies that inhabited a vast region of the Eurasian Steppe.

What is important is that rural territories are particularly important for the study of ethnicity and intercultural relationships due to the fact that, unlike the city (in which cultural identity of the citizens was controlled by a city's institutions), rural territories remained beyond the control of a city's institutions. Due to this, it seems, multiculturalism among rural society was able to 'express itself' more clearly than in the city, where 'Greekness' (or Greek cultural identity) of the citizens was intentionally maintained and defined by a city's self-image. Such a self-definition of the citizens of a given Greek *polis* was based on local cults that had an urban character, local historical tradition and the intentional display of status by the local elite that created its self-image through referring to old Greek traditions. An example of this is the way in which the Bosphoran rulers who were of non-Greek origin created a common Greek genealogy which derived from Greek mythology. In the territories lying outside the city, control over the self-definition of the inhabitants does not seem to have existed; therefore cultural identity is likely to have been created through other phenomena that I will investigate in my project.

It is particularly important to research the ethnicity and intercultural relationships in the North Pontic region due to the fact that for many years this area remained beyond the main research interests of Western scholars. This was certainly caused by the difficult political situation and the separation of Eastern and Western scholarship. As a result, there was a split in the development of anthropological and archaeological thought. Therefore, methodological differences and the language barrier is noticeable between Eastern and Western European scholarship. My project aims to introduce a multidisciplinary approach in the study of Black Sea society, overcome the methodological and language barrier problems and introduce new approaches and interpretations in the study of ethnicity and cultural identity. A traditional approach is still present today, according to which there is a sharp opposition (dichotomy) between the Greeks inhabiting Greek cities (i.e. centres of Greek culture and civilisation) and non-Greeks, the so-called barbarians who drew from Greek culture but did not have anything to offer to the Greeks. According to a modern approach to the problem of intercultural relations, the opposite is taken into consideration – cultural influences were reciprocal. In my opinion, the aforementioned opposition may have been based on the place of living – the city and the countryside – where local cultural identities were created differently.