

## Sinop Kale Excavations 2017: Hellenistic fortifications and handmade pottery

Jane Rempel & Sue Sherratt | University of Sheffield

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In the summer of 2017 the third season of the Sinop Kale Excavations Project took place, with continued excavations in the heart of ancient Sinope, on the Black Sea coast of Turkey. Fieldwork also included a programme of environmental sampling, analysis of the handmade pottery and survey of our study area. This project, directed by Owen Doonan (California State University Northridge), builds on more than a decade of survey and environmental research conducted by the Sinop Regional Archaeological Project. Its aim is to investigate the nature of pre-Greek settlement as well as the early Greek settlement and its later development.

The University of Sheffield contingent is supported by funding from the British Institute at Ankara. In 2017 it included Jane Rempel and Sue Sherratt from the Department of Archaeology, as well as colleague Colin Merrony and recent graduate Nick Groat, who worked alongside an international team including Associate Director Alexander Bauer (Queens University New York), Assistant Director Emine Sökmen (Hitit University), Field Director Andrew Goldman (Gonzaga University) and staff and students from both American and Turkish universities. Project funding, in addition to that provided by the BIAA, comes from the National Geographic Society, the National Endowment for the Humanities, CSU Northridge, Queens College and Gonzaga University. An overview of the results of the 2015 and 2016 seasons can be found in Doonan et al. 2017.

The 2017 field season included continued excavation in the northwestern area of the Sinop Kale in order to clarify and resolve the stratigraphic sequence, which provides evidence for a series of occupation events from at least the Iron Age through to the late Hellenistic period, as well as at the Byzantine curtain wall that was constructed along the western face of the main Kale fortifications. In addition, specialist recording and studies of the environmental, faunal and ceramic materials from all three seasons of excavation were undertaken. In particular, the Sheffield team continued the studies of the Hellenistic fortification wall and the handmade pottery assemblages that were begun in 2016 (see last year's *Heritage Turkey*).

The Hellenistic fortifications are the earliest part of the monumental stone walls that form the Sinop Kale, or fortress, and represent the best-surviving fortifications in northern Asia Minor and the Black Sea region from this period (Crow 2014: 38–39). This early wall was fundamental in defining the urban space of the ancient Greek settlement of Sinope and linking the community to broader Black Sea and Anatolian networks of emerging polities. Nonetheless, this wall is understudied and its relationship to specific historical events and the ancient topography of the city are unclear.

Strabo, around the beginning of the common era, called ancient Sinope 'the beautifully walled city' (12.3.11). The Hellenistic wall that he describes ran as a curtain wall northwest to southeast across the neck of the Boztepe peninsula: over 300m of stone masonry with up to six towers. This line of wall still survives today, albeit with later Roman, Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman additions which make up the Sinop Kale.

The Hellenistic section of the Kale's fortifications is not only the best-preserved example in the region from this period but it also represents a key avenue for understanding the topography and political relationships of Sinope during the Hellenistic period. Two key areas of understanding about the fortifications of ancient Sinope are lacking, however: (1) the chronology of its earliest fortifications, which informs Sinope's role in, and relationship to, Black Sea and Anatolian networks in the politically volatile Hellenistic period and (2) the ways in which the original stone-built walls both defended and framed the early settlement of Sinope, which lies at the very heart of the definition of urban space in the early settlement.

Although the earliest section of Sinop Kale broadly conforms to expectations of ancient Greek fortifications from the Hellenistic period, with its isodomic masonry and square towers, the earliest surviving wall has been traditionally associated with the period when Sinope was capital of the Pontic Kingdom (a state that emerged in Anatolia in the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great), and specifically with the reigns of one of two kings: Pharnakes I (second century BC) or Mithridates VI (first century BC) (Bryer, Winfield 1985: 70, 76–77; Doonan 2004, 76; Crow 2014: 39).

During the 2017 field season, Jane Rempel conducted a preliminary study of the excavated material from the foundation trench of this wall, with a focus on diagnostic imported pottery. This study suggests that the foundation trench contained no material later than the third century BC and the wall is likely to have been constructed earlier than had previously been assumed. In this case, the formidable statement made by the fortification wall was part of the definition of Sinope and those who controlled it during an earlier, formative period of the Pontic Kingdom when Sinope maintained its independence. This early fortification wall may well be better understood in the context of the broader investment in larger-scale stone fortifications that can be seen in other Greek cities on the western and northern coasts of the Black Sea in the late fourth and third centuries BC.

Further study of the material from the foundation trench, as well as a detailed study of the stratigraphic sequence and architectural morphology of the wall, will be needed in order to verify and nuance these conclusions. A valuable first step towards the latter was also accomplished in 2017, with a topographic survey of the study area of the Sinop Kale Excavations Project – including the section of the Hellenistic wall within it – conducted by Colin Merrony.



The study area of the Sinop Kale Excavations Project, with the line of the Hellenistic fortification wall (photo J. Rempel).

Also this year, Sue Sherratt continued her study of the handmade pottery assemblages excavated in Operations 1 and 4 in the 2015 and 2016 seasons. Her study has centred around the material from Locus 29 (2015) and Loci 29 and 23 (2016): material associated with a long (terrace?) wall constructed of flattish stones (see last year's *Heritage Turkey* for more extensive description of this locus). The pottery from these loci includes a large amount of handmade pottery of varied appearance and with various types of decoration. Although much of this pottery bears a resemblance to Bronze and Early Iron Age material, Sherratt's study has documented the presence of wheelmade sherds in the assemblages of all these loci, suggesting that at least some of the handmade pottery is contemporary with the Greek settlement at Sinope in the first millennium BC. This suggestion is reinforced by study of other pottery assemblages from the site, including clearly Hellenistic contexts, which also document significant amounts of handmade pottery along with wheelmade table wares, storage vessels and imported fine wares.

Understanding the production, typology and chronology of the handmade pottery at Sinop is of particular importance. Prehistoric ceramic chronologies of this part of the Black Sea coast are poorly understood and handmade pottery traditions from the first millennium BC even less so. The apparent continuity of handmade production at Sinope should not be surprising, though. The continued production and use of handmade pottery at ancient Greek settlements is well documented in other parts of the Black Sea region. At sites, such as Berezan and Olbia, on the northern coast of the Black Sea, handmade pottery co-exists with imported Greek pottery from the late seventh century down to the fifth century and later (Solovyov 1999; Gavriljuk 2010).

Sherratt's study has enabled significant steps to be taken towards understanding the handmade pottery excavated by the Sinop Kale Excavations Project. Specific features of the fabrics – tempering, surface finishes and decorations, as well as firing – have been identified, although the very fragmentary nature of the sherd material makes these difficult

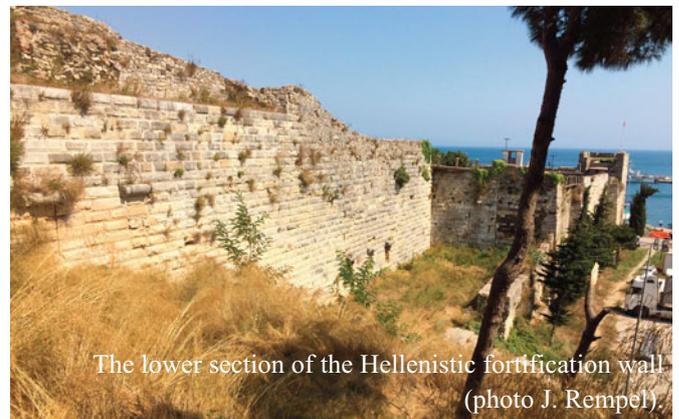
to correlate with specific shapes. Nonetheless, handmade shapes are dominated by rounded and occasionally carinated bowls or cups and jars of various sorts, some of which are probably kitchen items. Rims tend to be rounded or pointed and sometimes slightly squared; bases can be flat or raised, handles vertical or horizontal. Decorations include applied or pulled-up ridges with finger-impressions or diagonal slashing, knobs or lugs, neatly impressed holes and incised lines.

Further analysis of the handmade pottery from the site in relation to Sherratt's emerging typology will help to refine the sequence. In addition, the results of the ongoing portable x-ray fluorescence analysis combined with microscopic studies of technological processes, carried out by other members of the Sinop Kale Excavations team, should help to establish groups of wares based on different clay sources and give some idea of the variety and possibly varied sources of this pottery.

For further information, please visit the project homepage at <https://www.sinopexcavations.org/>

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The lower section of the Hellenistic fortification wall (photo J. Rempel).