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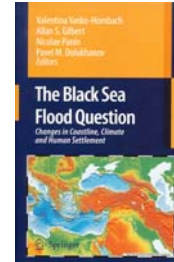
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The Black Sea Flood Question—Changes in Coastline, Climate and Human Settlement, edited by Valentina Yanko-Hombach, Allan S. Gilbert, Nicolae Panin & Pavel M. Dolukhanov, 2007. Springer, P.O. Box 17, 3300 AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands. Hardcover, xxvii + 971 pages, 246 figs. Price EUR 199.95; USD 259.00; GBP154.00. ISBN 978-1-4020-4774-9.



Was the Black Sea flooded suddenly, and - if so - was this flooding the event that gave rise to the numerous legends about a worldwide catastrophic flooding (like the Biblical Flood)? These questions have raised much interest among both scientists and the general public, after it had been found that this sea with its exceptional characteristics had once fallen dry. Ever since, hypotheses pro and con have been put forward. Three fundamental scenarios have drawn attention; they all date the sea-level rise of the Black Sea as Late Pleistocene to Holocene, but they differ in the nature of this rise. The respective scenarios suggest a catastrophic, a gradual, and an oscillating sea-level rise, respectively.

So much is known about the post-glacial sea-level rise in general, and so much experience in dating Late Pleistocene and Holocene sediments exist, that it sounds strange that there is still so much controversy about the velocity of the sea-level rise in the Black Sea. I had hoped that, after reading this ~1000-page book, I would know the answers to the questions. Unfortunately, I did not. The many contributions, from a wide spectrum of authors in East and West, do not allow a conclusion, so that the Black Sea has kept some of its secrets.

On the other hand, the numerous researchers that contributed to this volume also have brought much light in the darkness. This is partly thanks to the editors (who have managed to attract researchers who turn out - in majority - to contribute interesting material), partly in spite of the editors. The book starts with a first part on general topics (the oxic, suboxic, and anoxic conditions of the Black Sea; Molluscan palaeoecology in the reconstruction of coastal changes; Climate modeling results for the Circum-Pontic Region from the late Pleistocene to the mid-Holocene) and with a second part on Principal Flood Scenarios. That approach is fine. The next contributions are grouped, however, in five sections according to region (Northern, Western, Southern, Eastern Sectors, and Research in the Mediterranean). This is less fortunate. I am aware that field data form the basis for each geological interpretation, but the relationship between the various contributions is now small, if present at all. Moreover, an epilogue in which the most important conclusions from the huge amount of data are drawn, is dearly missing. A missed chance for the editors!

The fact that there is little coherence between most of the contributions is not surprising. Index 3 is a 10-page program of a 2003 NATO Advanced Research Workshop that was the main source for this book. I do not see what advantage for the reader the inclusion of this appendix has. The first 2 appendices (both with C-14 dates) seem not very useful either, because the data provided are too general to be applicable in new research; of course, one can contact the compilers, but if that was the purpose the appendices could have been left out all together, and be replaced by a simple remark.

There are many more aspects in the book that give the impression that the editors were not really qualified for such a big task. It is stated explicitly that editing the texts has taken much time (resulting in a publication date that was postponed for two years), and the result is, as a rule,

good. I know from experience how difficult and time-consuming it commonly is to edit texts from authors whose native language is a Slavic one. Allen Gilbert should, in this respect, be praised for his perseverance. He has managed, indeed, to deliver manuscripts that are well readable. It is therefore even more unfortunate that so many inconsistencies and mistakes are present in terminology and standardized features such as symbols. Examples are the term 'period' (which has a well defined geological meaning), but which is used also for other time intervals (such as part of the Weichselian, p. 284), and the symbol used for 'years': this is sometimes 'y' (even 'ky' is used, p. xii!), sometimes 'yrs' (whereas the international standard is 'a' - the Latin word for 'year'). Chronostratigraphic terms are also used in an uncommon way that is often not really clear. Russian chronostratigraphic terms as 'Euxinian' and 'Neoeuxinian' (1938!) are used without clear correlation with western terms, and the terms 'Mindel', 'Riss' and 'Würm' (which should be restricted for the Alpine region, and which should even there preferably be replaced by 'Elsterian', 'Saalian', and 'Weichselian', respectively). The book is full of this type of inaccuracies, which could have easily been avoided if the texts that had been edited by Alan Gilbert (who works in a department of Sociology and Anthropology!) had afterwards been carefully checked by a geologist. That this has not been done with texts that are primarily aimed at "scientists, researchers and students in geology" is one more missed chance!

The above remarks might give the impression that the book is disappointing. And it is disappointing, indeed, at least in the aspects mentioned above (and in some more). This does, however, not apply to the individual contributions. Most of them are truly interesting, the science seems sound as a rule, and the authors provide a wealth of data and sometimes intriguing points of view. Of course, there are some contributions of lesser quality. The most disappointing one is in my opinion, surprisingly, that of the principal editor, Valentina Yanko-Hombach. Her contribution largely duplicates the preface, her - in many respects - divergent views are not discussed and compared with other views, she uses an scale bar with uncommon length (Fig. 1), includes an unreadable table (Table 6) with extremely small but nevertheless bold letters in italics that are, moreover, printed top down, and she seems unaware that a small sea-level rise in flat coastal areas can easily result in the flooding of areas that extend far landinward. Did the editors not review the contributions of their fellow-editors?

As I am used to, Springer has produced a technically good book. It is well bound, and the typography makes reading easy. It is a pity that numerous figures, particularly from contributors in East Europe, have apparently been submitted in colour, but have been printed in black and white, which makes them somewhat vague. Considering the fact that 56 pages are devoted to appendices that serve no clear objective, that - in addition to the reference lists of the various chapters - a 34-page author index is included that is of no use whatsoever, and that a 49-page subject index is present that is fairly inconsistent, money seems not to have played an important role. Then, why not publish some figures in colour (or ask the authors for b/w figures)?

Altogether, the book leaves the reader with many questions. They regard both the presentation of the book and the core question. Yet, I think that the many interesting contributions are worth the price of the book, which is high, but not exceptionally high for a volume of this size. I take the numerous shortcomings for granted.

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