Dariali: The “Caspian Gates” in the Caucasus from Antiquity to the Age of the Huns and the Middle Ages, The Joint Georgian-British Dariali Gorge Excavations and Surveys, 2013–2016, edited by E. W. Sauer. 2 volumes. British Institute of Persian Studies Archaeological Monograph Series, volume 6. Oxbow Books, 2020. 1088pp., 700 black and white and colour images. Hb. 75.00. ISBN-13: 9781789251920.

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These two large volumes describe the results of archaeological fieldwork completed in the Dariali Gorge, 120 km directly north of Tbilisi in Georgia, between 2013 and 2016 under the auspices of the ERC funded *Persia and its Neighbours* project. Because of the geographical association, the publication forms part of the British Institute of Persian Studies Archaeological Monographs Series VI, volumes 1 and 2. The volumes run to 1051 pages and are well-produced. Illustrations are somewhat variable ranging from the stunning cover photography that almost transport the reader to the location (important in the limited world of the COVID-19 pandemic) through to some quite basic artifact drawings that could have done with re-drafting, such as in the chapter on vessel glass (chapter 13). Other illustrations would have merited both re-sizing and/or redrafting, (figures 15:5, 15:27, 15:39, for example), as they are too small or poorly rendered to be of much use. More positively, the inclusion of standard tables across all the artifact analyses is very helpful for cross-referencing materials, quantities, contexts, and dates.

For readers of the *Journal of Islamic Archaeology* who may be unfamiliar with the region, as Sauer relates in the introduction, Dariali Gorge was a frontier location in the Caucasus of significant strategic importance, known in antiquity as the “Caspian” or “Alan Gates,” as it provided one of the few viable routes from the Eurasian steppes through the Caucasus mountains to the Near East. The Gorge was occupied since the eighth century BC, and a fort was constructed there in the late fourth to early fifth centuries and linked with the Sasanian Empire. In relation to a Muslim presence, Mas’ūdī recorded that c. AD 727 an Arab garrison was established in the fort and varied archaeological evidence appears to attest this. In the Islamic period the strategic role of Dariali remained, but the polities controlling the gorge changed so that in the Abbasid era it formed the frontier with the Khazar Khaganate. In the Mongol period it separated the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanid Empire.

Particularly significant for considering connections with the Islamic world was Trench F as it encompassed the remains of a building and an adjacent rubbish dump that were in use between the eighth to tenth/eleventh centuries. This had been potentially formed through rubbish being dumped out of the windows of the building, some of which had southern origins. The multi-period excavation results are presented in detail and each of the categories of material exhaustively considered by numerous specialists including Seth Priestman and St John Simpson. Amongst the contents of this midden was a ray or shark vertebra of probable Arabian/Persian Gulf origin, and which had been worn as a pendant. Isotopic analyses also appeared to attest the import of some foodstuffs from southern regions, possibly to supply the Arab garri-

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son. Two bone composite bow tips, one carved from a rib and the other from a femur, two iron arrowheads, and a sword with a watered steel blade of Transoxiana origin were linked with the military role of the occupants. Whilst more mundane items such as drawn monochrome glass beads, glass bangles, a nearly complete tanged iron razor blade, six fragments from a circular chlorite vessel, an iron comb, and three glass finger rings were also testimony to the past occupants of the fort. Glazed ceramics were relatively uncommon, with 50 sherds found in Trench F, that included monochrome turquoise, yellow, and green glazed, and sgraffiato wares of tenth to thirteenth century date and imported from areas such as southern Iraq. Glass vessel fragments were also recovered from various locations in Dariali. These were of varied provenance, with 28 of 212 glass fragments analysed by XRF made of plant ash glass and one of lead silicate glass imported from the Islamic world. The evidence indicates rich networks of connections that are competently reconstructed by the contributors.

Another location investigated at Dariali was the cemetery where burials were C14 dated to between the eighth and late tenth centuries. This appeared to have been used for members of the garrison and their dependants. Whether these were Muslims was unclear, though, as the same orientation, west east, with head to the west, was also used by medieval Christians in Georgia, and both groups appeared to have employed collective burial. Osteological evidence, such as prominent cheekbones and round orbits, was used to suggest that one young woman in a collective burial (E2) who seemed to have died between AD 671 and 770 was a recent Arab immigrant, and probably a Muslim. However, DNA analysis was not included, but which might have made this identification more secure. Overall, it appears that Dariali was never exclusively Muslim even after Mas'ūdī's reference to the establishment of the Arab garrison there.

In summary, this is an important work on a region little investigated and inaccessible in the literature without knowledge of Georgian (or Russian). It could have been edited for repetition and the absence of a stronger editorial hand is likely a consequence of the remarkable speed with which the results have been brought to publication, considering the wealth of data recovered, four years from the end of the fieldwork to being in print. It is hoped that further work will be completed at Dariali, as the volume indicates the many research possibilities that exist in exploring these frontier regions, with particular gaps remaining in relation to DNA research and connecting the Dariali results more fully into the archaeology of the Islamic Caucasus.