

ANCIENT SEA ROUTES IN THE BLACK SEA

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ABSTRACT. This contribution assesses how sea routes in the Black Sea developed as arteries of commerce, integrating the coastal communities and the peoples of their hinterlands with other parts of the Classical world and making its maritime trade a key element of the economy of Classical Antiquity. It also considers measures undertaken to safeguard these routes from the depredations of pirates.

RÉSUMÉ. Cette contribution analyse comment les routes maritimes en mer Noire se sont développées en artères commerciales, intégrant les communautés côtières et les populations de leurs arrière-pays aux autres parties du monde classique, ce qui a permis à son commerce maritime de devenir un élément clé de l'économie de l'Antiquité classique. Elle étudie également les mesures prises pour protéger ces routes des déprédations causées par les pirates.



The aim of this contribution is to examine sea routes in the Black Sea (*Pontos Euxinos* in Greek, and in Latin *Pontus Euxinus*) in Classical Antiquity and assess how they developed as arteries of commerce, integrating the coastal communities of the Black Sea and the peoples of their hinterlands with other parts of the Classical world, making the Black Sea and its maritime trade a key element of the economy of Classical Antiquity.¹ It also considers measures undertaken by various political powers to safeguard these routes from the depredations of pirates.

The evidence from the Archaic period of Greek history (c. 800–500 BC) is sparse, but if we bear in mind the foundation of the earliest Greek colonies in the western and the northern coasts of the Black Sea (Apollonia Pontica – late 7th century BC; Istria – around 657 BC; Borysthenis/Olbia – late 7th century BC), we can see that the western seaway with its continuation to the west and south-west coasts of Taurica was already used in the 7th century BC.

¹ See the studies collected in *The Black Sea in Antiquity: regional and interregional economic exchanges*, ed. V. GABRIELSEN and J. LUND, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press (2007).



Fig. 1 Map of the Black Sea in Antiquity, showing some of the principal places mentioned in the text.

In articles published in 1999 and 2014 on the basis of evidence provided by inscribed decrees concerning individuals who were appointed as *proxenoi* (formal representatives of other cities) by the Greek cities on the Black Sea, I estimated the intensity of navigation in the Euxine in different epochs.² These epigraphical sources help to reveal three main routes which allowed the Greeks to reach the northern coast of the Euxine. The most popular and the longest way stretched along the Thracian coast to Olbia and then extended to the north-western Crimea, Tauric Chersonesus, the southern Crimea and on via Theodosia and Panticapaeum. To make it shorter sailors could turn from Istros directly to the north-western Crimea, or from the eastern end of Achilles Dromos (modern Tendra) to the Bakalskaya Spit in the north-west Crimea.³ Another route lay along the Southern Black Sea coast, from where seamen usually turned to Sindica and Bosphorus, either to sail across the open sea from Themiskyra or the River Thermodon, or to go closer to the Caucasian shore. Both ways (except probably the ‘shortest’ way, directly across the open sea) were well known since the period of the Greek colonization of the Euxine. The third way, in scientific literature usually called the ‘shortest’ one, extended from the Cape of Carambis in Paphlagonia to the Cape of Krioumetopon (The Ram’s Head) in the southern

² SAPRYKIN S., ‘Proxenic Decrees of Tauric Chersonesus and the Sea-Routes in Pontos Euxeinus’, in *Orbis Terrarum* 5 (1999), 31–41; SAPRYKIN S., ‘The Pontic Proxeny and the Sea Routes of the Ancient Greeks in the Euxine’, *International Journal of Maritime History* 26.2 (2014), 353–363.

³ AGBUNOV M., *Ancient Sailing Directions of the Black Sea*, Moscow: Nauka (1987), p. 120 (in Russian).

Crimea (modern Aju-Dag). It allowed ships to get quickly to Tauric Chersonesus and to the north-western Crimea as well as to the Bosphorus. A part of this route passed along the southern and the eastern Crimean coasts. Scholars argue whether the Greeks could sail across the open sea, and when they started to use this seaway. A common opinion now is that this route could hardly have been used before the Greeks settled Tauric Chersonesus in the second half of the 5th century BC.⁴ It is worth saying that the currents near the western Black Sea coast, and in the central part of the Euxine in ancient times, corresponded to the main sea routes and were convenient for the Greeks when they sailed to the north. The more so as the eastern and the north-eastern winds near the south-west coast of the Crimea were rather favourable for those who were setting off for Tauric Chersonesus from the Cape of Krioumetopon.⁵

Hecataeus of Miletus, writing in the late 6th–early 5th centuries BC, mentions Cercinitis (modern Eupatoria), as a Milesian foundation of the late 6th century BC. This means that the route to the Crimean coast and further on to Bosphorus was already in frequent use by the 6th century BC. An example of its operation is the case of a slave from Borysthenes on the Lower Bug river, who was exported for sale to the Taman peninsula in the 530s to 510s BC, about whom we know from an inscription on lead plaque, discovered in Phanagoreia.⁶ A slave-trader (or any other commercial agent) from this region could reach the Asiatic Bosphorus by sea along the western, south-western, southern and eastern coasts of the Crimea. After the foundation of Tauric Chersonesus in the second and third quarters of the 5th century BC, seafaring from Olbia to Taurica became more regular. This is confirmed by a very interesting graffito of the 5th century BC on a black-glazed sherd from Cercinitis (fig. 2): it is a picture of a ship with what might be the figure of a man lying on its bows and waving his hands, possibly in time with oarsmen, or in a gesture of farewell. It is followed by a fragmentary text that may be a letter to a woman, Gykeia, characterized by its author as ‘charming’. It is probable that the figure on ship and the author of this message were one and the same person – a captain or *kybernetes*. Gykeia could be his girl-friend.⁷

⁴ MAXIMOVA M., *Ancient Cities of the South-Eastern Black Sea Coast*, Moscow and Leningrad: Academy of Sciences Publishing (1956), p. 145; GAJDUKEVICH V., ‘On the Ways of Ships’ Passing in Pontos Euxeinos’, *Kratkiye soobshcheniya Instituta arkhologii akademii nauk SSSR* 116 (1969), 16–19 (in Russian); BLAWATSKIJ V., *Nature and the Ancient Society*, Moscow: Nauka (1976), p. 48 (in Russian).

⁵ ZOLOTAREV M., ‘New Data on Ancient Sea Routes in Pontos Euxeinos’, in *Problems of Greek Colonisation of the North and East Black Sea Littoral*. ed. O. LORDKIPANIDZE, Tbilisi: Mezniereba (1979), pp. 94–100; ZOLOTAREV M., ‘The Influence of Wind Factors on the Organisation of the Chora in some Greek Poleis’, *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 1 (1981), 144–150 (both in Russian).

⁶ VINOGRADOV J. ‘The Greek Colonisation of The Black Sea Region in the Light of Private Lead Letters’, in *The Greek Colonisation of the Black Sea Area*, ed. G. TSETSKHLADZE, ‘Historia Einzelschriften’ 121, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag (1998), pp. 160–163.

⁷ SAPRYKIN S., ‘Greek Sailors in the North-Western Crimea’, in *Scripta Antiqua Volume IV. Ancient History, Philology, Arts and Material Culture. The Almanac*. ed. M. BUKHARIN, Moscow: Sobranie (2015), pp. 127–150 (in Russian), p. 139, fig. 7.



Fig. 2 A fifth-century BC ceramic sherd from Cercinitis, with a fragmentary inscription and a graffito depicting the prow of a ship.

The sea route from West Pontus to the Crimea and Bosphorus could be used by the Athenian fleet under the command of Pericles on a way back during the expedition to the Black Sea in 437 BC.⁸ Pericles, having sailed first along the southern coast of the Euxine, chose the already known direct seaway to Bosphorus, from Themiskyra to Sindica, in order to miss the dangerous Caucasian coast.⁹ After that he decided to follow the popular way along the south coast of Taurica where the Athenians presumably founded a town called Athenion.¹⁰ Their onward route was to Olbia, and the Athenian fleet could hardly avoid sailing along the coast of the north-west Crimea. The last part of the voyage passed by the western coast down to the Thracian Bosphorus. After this Olbia, Tyras, Nikonion, Istria, Apollonia and Callatis probably joined the Athenian Empire as tribute-paying allies, while Heraclea Pontica, Sinope, Amisus fell under direct Athenian hegemony.¹¹ Cercinitis and Tamyra (a city in the northern part of the West Crimea) also paid tribute to the Athenians.¹²

The waters around the north-western Crimea, as well as being a local sea route used by sailors since a very early period, became a zone of intensive navigation from the second half of the 5th century BC. We can even say that this seaway became an important constituent part of the whole seafaring route along the north-western Black Sea littoral, especially after the emergence of the Greek settlement at Tauric Chersonesus and its *chora* (rural territory). Local sea routes were intensively used in the 4th–2nd centuries BC because the city delivered grain from its *chora* in the

⁸ Plutarch of Chaeronea, *Life of Perikles*, 20.

⁹ The short way from south of the Black Sea to Sindica and Bosphorus was already accessible for Greek ships in the middle of the 5th century BC, see GAJDUKEVICH V., 'On the Ways of Ships' Passing in Pontos Euxeinos', *op. cit.*, pp. 16–19.

¹⁰ Arrian of Nicomedia, *Periplus of the Black Sea*, 76 (50), 78(52), 82(56).

¹¹ KARYSCHKOWSKI P. and KLEIMAN I., *The Ancient City of Tyras*, Kiev: Naukova Dumka (1985), p. 45; VINOGRADOV J., *Political History of the Olbian Polis in VII-I BC.*, Moscow: Nauka (1989), pp. 126–134; for the discussion see BRASCHINSKI I., *Athens and the North Black Sea Coast in VI-I BC.*, Moscow: Academy of Sciences (1963), pp. 56–89.

¹² KUTAISOV V., *Ancient Polis of Cercinitis*. Simpheropol: Phoenix (2013), p. 178.

north-western Crimea. For this reason Chersonesus and its commercial partners were interested in this zone of navigation being free of pirates for a long period of time.¹³ Ancient sources refer to the Satarchi and particularly the Tauri, as being actively involved in piracy in the 5th century BC and later.¹⁴ From time to time their activities were suppressed by the Olbians and the Chersonesians. In the late 4th and early 3rd century BC an Olbian citizen expelled ‘the barbarians’ (the Satarchi, and Tauri?) from Leuca – a sacral island of Achilleus Pontarchus, patron of sailors.¹⁵ In the 2nd century BC the Olbians and the Crimean Scythians cleared this part of sea of pirates – the Satarchi – by using a squadron of Olbian ships under the command of Posideus, the Olbian admiral.¹⁶ The dedications in the north-western Crimea to Achilleus Pontarchus belonged to seamen of non-Chersonesian origin (fig. 3).

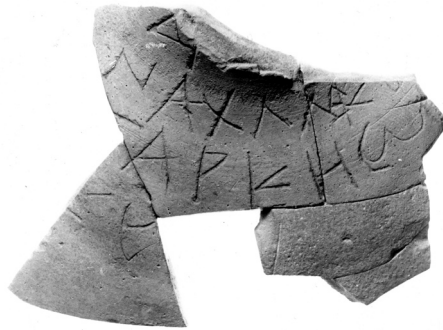


Fig. 3 A fragmentary second-century BC dedication to Achilleus Soter from the Shrine of the Goddess Tarka in the North-Western Taurica.

They could be from Olbia, from any other city on the western Pontic sea route, or even from the Mediterranean, but by no means from Tauric Chersonesus, where Achilleus could hardly be a defender and rescuer of sailors because of his lack of popularity. His sanctuaries on Leuca and on the Achilleus Dromos were often visited by sailors to make gifts there, because these sacred places created an impression of this hero as a real patron of the north-western part of the Black Sea.¹⁷

¹³ SAPRYKIN S., ‘The Pontic proxenies and the sea routes of the Ancient Greeks in the Euxine’, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

¹⁴ Herodotus of Halicarnassus, *Histories*, 4.103; Strabo of Amaseia, *Geography*, 7.4.2; Pomponius Mela, *Geography*, 2.11; Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, 3.43.5; Ammianus Marcellinus, *History*, 22.8.33.

¹⁵ *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae*, vol. 1, 2nd edition, no. 325.

¹⁶ *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 2nd edition, no. 672.

¹⁷ SAPRYKIN, ‘Greek Sailors in the North-Western Crimea’, *op. cit.*; see also HUPE J., (ed.), *Der Achilleus-Kult im nördlichen Schwarzmeerraum vom Beginn der griechischen Kolonisation bis in die römische Kaiserzeit*, Rahden: Verlag Marie Leidorf GmbH (2006), pp. 49–110.

The western seaway, along with its continuation to the north-western coast of Taurica, was considered the safest in comparison with the other ones. In the 4th century BC the Aegean traders and captains preferred to reach the kingdom of Bosphorus by this way, though the routes along the southern and eastern coasts of the Euxine were much shorter. A speech from the Demosthenic corpus describes how a trading ship from Mendê sailed to the Bosphoran city of Panticapaeum and visited many other ports.¹⁸ On the return voyage it sailed towards Theodosia but was allegedly wrecked somewhere near the southern coast of East Taurica, although another section of the speech implies that the ship did get back safely to Athens. Its captain probably took the same route as had enabled him to reach Bosphorus – along the southern coast of Taurica, then the north-western and western Black Sea coasts. In the same speech the plaintiff, Androcles, says that he and his partner Nausicrates lent money to the merchants Artemo and Apollodorus, brothers of the defendant Lacritus, ‘for a voyage from Athens to Mendê or Scionê, and thence to Bosphorus – or if they so choose, for a voyage to the left parts of the Pontus as far as Borysthènes, and thence back to Athens’.¹⁹ This shows that Greek traders preferred to organize voyages to Bosphorus and back along the western sea route, rather than the ‘shortest’ way across the open sea. The western route could have been used more actively when the pirates started regular attacks on trading ships in the South and the East Black Sea Coast. In the last decade of the 4th century BC the Bosphoran ruler Eumeles waged war against the barbarians, mostly the pirates – the Heniochi, Tauri and the Achaeans, and claimed to have cleared them from the seas. For that he was greatly honoured, chiefly by traders and seafarers.²⁰ Eumeles was primarily thinking of how to protect those sailing to Bosphorus along the south-east route and the Caucasian coast. This was necessary for Bosphoran trade, as in the last decade of the 4th century BC the western sector of the Euxine became a place of struggle between the successors of Alexander the Great. In 313–311 BC Antigonus the One-Eyed sent his fleet there to give support to the city of Callatis, besieged by his rival Lysimachus. Eumeles, being afraid of the Macedonian activity on the Black Sea, also assisted the Callatians. In order to save them from hunger he settled 1,000 citizens in his kingdom, which was possible only because his navigators could sail there and back by the north-western sea route.²¹ We can assume that during these military actions near the western Black Sea coast many mariners sailed along the north-western part of the Black Sea and along the so-called ‘shortest’ way.

In 301 BC Lysimachus became a ruler of vast territories on both sides of the Thracian Bosphorus, Thrace, Macedonia, the West and the South Black Sea Littoral up to Paphlagonia and Sinope. Having improved relations with the Greek cities on the west coast of the Black Sea, he evidently put under control the greater part

¹⁸ Pseudo-Demosthenes, *Against Lacritus*, 35.28–34.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰ Diodorus Siculus, 20.25; DE SOUZA P., *Piracy in the Graeco-Roman World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1999), pp. 54–5.

²¹ Diodorus Siculus, 19.73, 20.25.

of the sea near the Thracian coast, around Byzantium, Heraclea and Sinope. This will have intensified communications between the Greek cities on the straits, and the southern and western Black Sea littoral. After Lysimachus' death in 281 BC the southern seaway was the responsibility of Heraclea Pontica, which had a large fleet, and her allies – members of the so-called 'Northern League'. They were active on the sea until the mid 3rd century BC.²² It seems probable that at that time seafaring along the south coast as well as by the direct route across the open sea to the northern coast was rather active. Even Ptolemaic Egypt, patron and ally of the 'Northern League', sent a ship called *Isis* to Bosphorus²³ and in its turn received envoys from Bosphorus.²⁴ These contacts were maintained by the 'shortest' way, directly across the Black Sea which was surely under the control of Heraclea Pontica, or through the seaway from Themiskyra or Thermodon to Sindica and Bosphorus which was the responsibility of Sinope, Amisus and Trapezus. In the second half of the 3rd century BC Heraclea Pontica lost her naval power. From around 220 BC Sinope, threatened by the kings of Pontus, began to lose control over the sea routes in the south-eastern part of the Euxine, keeping only the immediate approaches to her harbour, which allowed her allies, the Rhodians and the Coans, to assist the city with essential supplies.²⁵ The Pontic king Pharnaces I captured Sinope in 183 BC. Being well situated for commerce and having access to abundant fish resources, as well as being easily defensible, it became the capital of the Kingdom of Pontus, the seaway along the south coast coming under the control of the Pontic kingdom. The loss of power of these cities and a temporary weakness of the Pontic kingdom, as a result of the great contribution to be paid after the war of 183–179 BC between Pharnaces and king Eumenes II of Pergamum, seems to have revived the activity of pirates in this part of the Black Sea. It induced the Greeks to intensify their use of the western sea routes. In 175 BC a trader from Piraeus brought olive oil to Pontus in exchange for the grain to be imported to Athens. The oil was transported only to the cities on the western and northern Black Sea coast, which indicates that trading ships preferred this itinerary.²⁶

Greek cities and local rulers on the western coast got large profits from navigation in local waters as it enlarged commercial links. However, rivalries between them sparked a series of small-scale military conflicts. For example, sometime in the late 3rd or early 2nd century BC, Mesembria fitted out a fleet against Apollonia Pontica with the goal of capturing the small city of Anchialus and a part of its surrounding rural territory. Istria, which had a treaty of mutual assistance with Apollonia, gave her help, having sent her own fleet under the command of Hegesagoras. The Istrians freed Anchialus, exterminated the Mesembrian

²² Memnon of Heraclea, *History*, fragment 1.8.5–6, 15.

²³ GRAČ N., 'Ein neu entdecktes Fresco aus hellenistischer Zeit in Nymphaion bei Kertsch', in *Skythika* (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Abhandlungen N.F. 98), München (1987), p. 87.

²⁴ Evidence for this is an official document preserved on a papyrus: *P. Lond.* 7.1973.

²⁵ Polybius, *Histories* 4.56.

²⁶ *Inscriptiones Graecae*, vol. II, 2nd edition, no. 903.

garrison and captured a military ship with its crew.²⁷ This victory expanded the control of Istria over the seaway along the Thracian coast and gave her additional profits from commerce. Political and military activity around the western seaway confirms its great strategic importance in the Hellenistic period.

The foundation of Tauric Chersonesus around the middle of the 5th century BC surely encouraged the Greeks to increase the frequency of their voyages across the Black Sea. To our mind the main stimulus for that could be a war between Heraclea Pontica and Bosphorus in the early 4th century BC. It was caused by their struggle for control over Theodosia, a major harbour for grain exports from the fertile lands of Eastern Taurica. At first the Heraclioties sent a small flotilla to Theodosia to raise the Bosphorans' siege, using a trick which is preserved in a 2nd century AD collection of stratagems.²⁸ But the conflict was still going on until the 360s BC and Heraclea sent a much larger fleet of 40 ships against Bosphorus.²⁹ Eventually Heraclea lost the war, yielding Theodosia to the Bosphoran tyrants, and had to search for other grain-trading centres to bring under her control.³⁰ Being forced out of the Eastern Taurica and deprived of grain-trading markets at Bosphorus, Heraclea Pontica promoted the colonization of the north-western Crimea by Tauric Chersonesus. Very soon it became a main grain producing region for the Heraclioties. During the lengthy war with Bosphorus, naval attacks on Theodosia and on Bosphoran territories could be effective only when the Heracliotie fleet was able to sail to the northern littoral by the 'shortest' seaway, directly across the Black Sea. Trade with Tauric Chersonesus and the north-western Crimea could be successful as well only on condition that this route was used. The latter is evidenced by several inscriptions, dated to not earlier than the first half of the 4th century BC. Good chronological markers here are two Athenian decrees of 360 and 330 BC which show that the Heraclian tyrants Clearchus and Dionysius were stopping and detaining ships laden with grain from the northern Black Sea coast when they were passing by Heraclea en route to Athens.³¹ These vessels, scholars believe, could take the 'shortest' sea route on the way to the Aegean.³²

In the 3rd to 1st centuries BC this direct sea route achieved great popularity, particularly during the long reign of Mithridates VI Eupator, king of Pontus (120–63 BC) whose ambitious wars of expansion began with the conquest of the Crimea and adjacent areas, until eventually he controlled almost the entire

²⁷ *Inscriptiile din Scythia Minor Grecesti si Latine*, vol. I, no. 64.

²⁸ Polyaeus, *Stratagems of War* 5.23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.44, 6.9.3–4; Pseudo-Aristotle, *Economics*, 2.2.8.

³⁰ BURSTEIN S., 'The War between Heraclea Pontica and Leucon I of Bosphorus', in *Historia* 23.4 (1974), 406–411.

³¹ *Inscriptiones Graecae*, vol. II, 2nd edition, no. 117; *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd edition, no. 304.

³² MAXIMOVA M., *Ancient Cities of the South-Eastern Black Sea Coast*, *op. cit.*, p. 167; BURSTEIN S., *Outpost of Hellenism: the Emergence of Heraclea on the Black Sea*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press (1976), pp. 56–58; SAPRYKIN S., *Heracleia Pontica and Tauric Chersonesus before Roman Domination*, Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert (1997), p. 137.

Black Sea littoral.³³ It was always a risky option, however, because it necessitated sailing through potentially stormy waters and often out of sight of land, although a prevailing northerly wind would have helped voyages in the summertime, and experienced navigators could also have made use of the prevailing south-to-north surface current which would be of some assistance to ships sailing from Heraclea towards the Crimea.³⁴ For example, a decree of the city Olbia, on the northern the Black Sea coast, honours a *kybernetes* (steersman) from the city of Amisus on the southern coast as *proxenos* (a sort of honorary consul). He had delivered Olbian envoys to Sinope, but on the return journey with some provisions for the Mithridatic garrison, his ship lost the way because of fierce storm, and spent some time roaming the open sea until he finally navigated a safe return to Olbia.³⁵ It could happen so only if the captain sailed out of Sinope across the Black Sea directly to the Crimea and then to Olbia along the Western Taurica. The same route was presumably taken by Diophantus, general of Mithridates Eupator, when in 110–109 BC, in late autumn and early winter, he arrived at Chersonesus with his fleet and army to attack the Scythians who were besieging the city.³⁶ This treacherous, but fast, sea route helped Mithridates VI to maintain close relations with Chersonesus, the north-west Crimea and Olbia.

Most of the surviving ancient inscriptions that refer to seafaring within the Black Sea come from the north-western Crimea and Chersonesus. A votive fragmentary graffito of the 3rd century BC from the settlement of Tchaika, part of the territory of Chersonesus in the north-western Crimea, refers to *naukleroi* (maritime merchants) and other seafarers who made a dedication to, 'The God... for pleasant sailing and safe arrival'.³⁷ A group of dedicatory inscriptions of the 2nd century BC to the first century AD, left by *kybernetai* and sailors probably on the site Kara-Tobe in the north-western Crimea, or nearby, includes one installed by a group of sailors, headed by Parthenopaios and Aristonikos, evidently the captain and the *kybernetes*³⁸ (fig. 4).

³³ BALLESTEROS PASTOR L., *Mitridates Eupátor, rey del Ponto*, Granada: Universidad de Granada (1996); MCGING B., *The Foreign Policy of Mithridates VI Eupator King of Pontus*, Leiden: Brill (1986).

³⁴ On the relative risks of coastal and open sea sailing see MORTON J., *The Role of the Physical Environment in Ancient Greek Seafaring*, Leiden: Brill (2001), pp. 143–254. For important corrections to the assumption that winter sailing was very rare in Classical Antiquity see BERESFORD J., *The Ancient Sailing Season*, Leiden: Brill (2013).

³⁵ *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae*, op. cit., vol. I, 2nd edition, no. 35.

³⁶ *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae*, op. cit., vol. I, 2nd edition, no. 352.

³⁷ SAPRYKIN S. and POPOVA E., 'The Dedication of Sailors From Tchaika Settlement in the North-Western Taurica', in *Lanterna nostra. Festschrift I.L.Mayak*, ed. S. SAPRYKIN and N. BUGAEVA, Saint-Petersbourg: Aliteia (2014), p. 53 (in Russian).

³⁸ This inscription was restored and commented on incorrectly by J. Vinogradov and S. Vnukov as a trophy of Diophantus' commander Aristonikos and Pontic soldiers; VINOGRADOV J., *Pontische Studien*, Mainz: Verlag Philip von Zabern (1997), pp. 493–500. For the correct reading see SAPRYKIN, 'Greek Sailors in the North-Western Crimea', op. cit. (in Russian).



Fig. 4 Fragment of an inscribed dedication by sailors led by Parthenopaios and Aristonikos from Kara-Tobe, 2nd century BC–1st century AD.

A second one was dedicated by the *kybernetes* Theotimos who initiated the donation.³⁹ A graffito on an amphora of the 1st century BC or 1st century AD, from the site of South-Donuzlav, mentions 'Konon – one of the sailors'.⁴⁰ Among the *proxenoi* of the 2nd century AD in Chersonesus we come across the *naukleroi* Gaius Eutichianus from Sinope, Diophantos, son of Herakos, and Satyros, son of Herakos, probably his brother, possibly from Tyras,⁴¹ alongside another one dedicated by an unnamed person.⁴² These inscriptions testify to frequent voyages to Chersonesus and along the coast of Western Taurica in the late Hellenistic and early Imperial periods (c. 200 BC to AD 100). They prove that Chersonesus and other sites in its territory provided important ports and harbours on the route from the western Pontic coast and Olbia to the Crimea. The use of this route intensified as more Greek sailors acquired experience in seafaring between the southern and the northern Black Sea littorals, and resulted in Tauric Chersonesus becoming the focus of a network of seaways between the western, northern and southern Euxine regions. Since the foundation of Callatis in the beginning of the

³⁹ SAPRYKIN S. and VNUKOV S., 'Greek Inscriptions from Kara-Tobe (The North-West Crimea)', *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 2 (2015).

⁴⁰ DASHEWSKAYA O., 'Two Graffiti on Amphoras from the Site South-Donuzlav', *Kratkiye Soobshcheniya Instituta Arkheologii* 124 (1970), 52.

⁴¹ *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 2nd edition, nos. 364–6; SAPRYKIN S., 'Music and Public Life in Tauric Chersonesus in the Imperial Period', *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 2 (2002), 74 (in Russian).

⁴² *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 2nd edition, no. 298.

4th century BC by Heraclea as well as the creation of her colony in Chersonesus, the Greeks had sailed across the open sea on a triangular route between Heraclea – Chersonesus – Callatis.⁴³ A concentration of decrees in Chersonesus in honour of mariners points to the intensification of seafaring in the region. This intensification eventually prompted the creation of specialized professional associations of captains and ship-owners (*naukleroi*) who were well acquainted with the local seaways. We know about them thanks to inscriptions dating to the Roman period from Tomis, where the *naukleroi* had their own building.⁴⁴ In the 3rd century BC a board of *naukleroi* was elected in Olbia.⁴⁵ Members of these associations and boards performed a variety of services, as, for instance, did Diophantos, son of Herakos, who brought to Chersonesus on board his ship a well-known Roman lyre-player.⁴⁶

The western way along the Thracian coast remained popular throughout the whole period of Antiquity. Its advantage lay in the access to numerous safe, spacious harbours where the ships could shelter during bad weather. By the early 3rd century BC the local Thracian tribes stopped plundering ships, because the Greeks concluded treaties with some of their rulers, who agreed to return the captured cargo and sailors as well as those whom they saved from shipwrecks. We know of one such agreement between Mesembria and the Thracian king Sadalas I.⁴⁷ The real safety of the western seaway was one of the reasons why official ambassadors that had been sent to consult the Delphic oracle preferred to use it in order to get from Chersonesus and Bosphorus in the early 3rd century BC.⁴⁸

There were two eastern seaways in the Black Sea. One was a coastal route through Dioscurias and Phasis and the other was a direct route across the sea from Themiskyra or Thermodon to Sindica. Both were essential for the peoples of Bosphorus and Maeotis (the Sea of Azov), and their hinterlands, in order to maintain trading links that date back to the early period of the Greek presence in the Black Sea. As modern research on the Taman peninsula shows, in ancient times (at any rate until the 2nd century BC) in the place of modern delta of the river Kuban there was a small strait which led from the Black Sea out to the Maeotis. It stretched between one big and two small islands, formed by the river delta. Modern scholars tentatively called it ‘The Sindian’ or ‘The Kuban Bosphorus’.⁴⁹ This sea passage allowed the establishment of commercial links with the tribes

⁴³ AGBUNOV, *Ancient Sailing Directions of the Black Sea*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁴⁴ *Inscriptiile din Scythia Minor Grecesti si Latine*, *op. cit.*, vol. II, no. 60.

⁴⁵ SHEBALIN N., ‘To the Olbian State Antiquities’ in *Ancient History and Culture of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea Littoral*, ed. V.F. GAJDUKEVICH, Leningrad: Nauka (1968), pp. 296–299.

⁴⁶ SAPRYKIN S., ‘Music and Public Life in Tauric Chersonesus in the Imperial Period: A New Look at Inscription IosPE I². 365’, *op.cit.*, p. 74.

⁴⁷ *Inscriptiones graecae in Bulgaria repertae*, 2nd edition, vol. I, no. 307.

⁴⁸ *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd edition, nos. 584, 604; *Bulletin de Correspondence Hellénique* 52 (1928), p. 189.

⁴⁹ ŽURAVLEV D. and SCHLOTZHAUER U., ‘Some Results of Research, achieved by the Bosphoran Archaeological Expedition on the Peninsula of Taman in 2006–2013’, in *The State Historical Museum and the Domestic Archaeology*, ed. D. ŽURAVLEV and N. SHISHLINA, Moscow: The Historical Museum (2014), pp. 151–153 (in Russian).

around Maeotis and the Lower Don. Pliny the Elder says: ‘there is also a town at the mouth of the Don. The neighbouring districts were first occupied by the Carians, then by the Clazomenii and Maeones, and afterwards by the Panticapaeans’.⁵⁰ So, before the foundation of Panticapaeum in the early 6th century BC, seamen from the Aegean were already sailing into the Sea of Azov through the Cimmerian Bosphorus. This route would have been mostly used by those ships which sailed along the eastern coast of the Black Sea.

Strabo informs us that the south-eastern coastline of the Black Sea, beyond Sindica and Gorgippia (modern Anapa) was occupied by the Achaeans, Zygi and Heniochi who were pirates. Using special boats that could hold 30 men, they attacked passing ships. The Bosphoran rulers assisted them in these raids, gave them harbours and buying booty.⁵¹ This made what was otherwise a convenient route to the Bosphoran straits from the south rather dangerous and induced sailors to take either the western route or the direct one across the open sea. Temporary suppression of piracy, like that which occurred during the reign of Eumeles, could not definitely solve the problem. The eastern seaways became more effective for communications only during the Mithridatic period in the late 2nd and first half of the 1st century BC. They linked the ancestral domains of Mithridates VI Eupator in Bosphorus, Colchis and Pontus, and helped to spread Pontic power around Maeotis. The Pontic king managed to suppress piracy around the Cimmerian Bosphorus and Sindica. The task of fighting with the barbarians and their ships was taken on by his admiral Neoptolemos who, at some point between 110 and 85 BC, fought a naval battle in the Strait of Kerč and defeated the naval forces of the barbarians.⁵² These would be probably the piratical Heniochi, Zygi and Achaeans, who were at that time allied to the Sarmatians – a real threat to the Kingdom of Pontus and Bosphorus.⁵³ After this naval battle the seaway to Bosphorus and Maeotis from the south was for some time free from piratical attacks. The Kingdom of Pontus was then able to receive supplies of food and raw materials from Bosphorus, Colchis and Sindica without any trouble.

Sea routes to and from the south Black Sea littoral were in constant use by the Pontic and Roman fleets during the last phase of the Third Mithridatic War. We hear that in 72 BC Mithridates Eupator himself was sailing from Cyzicus to Sinope at the head of his fleet and lost approximately 60 ships in a heavy storm. His own ship was foundering and he had to transfer to another, lighter vessel belonging to some of his allies, whom the hostile ancient sources refer to as ‘pirates’, but were probably mercenary Cilicians; they brought him safely to Heraclea Pontica and then Sinope, from where he sailed off for Amisus and sent envoys to Machares his son, who was the subordinate ruler in Bosphorus.⁵⁴ The southern seaway from the Thracian Bosphorus to Sinope was also used by the Roman fleet which, on 15 ships,

⁵⁰ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 6.7.20.

⁵¹ Strabo, *Geography*, 11.2.12; DE SOUZA, *Piracy in the Graeco-Roman World*, *op. cit.*, 200–4.

⁵² Strabo, *Geography*, 2.1.16, 7.3.18; BALLESTEROS PASTOR, *Mitridates Eupátor, rey del Ponto*, *op. cit.*, p. 43–53.

⁵³ SAPRYKIN S., *The Kingdom of Pontus*, Moscow: Nauka (1996), p. 148.

⁵⁴ Appian of Alexandria, *Mithridatic Wars*, 78; Plutarch, *Life of Lucullus*, 13.

brought grain for the Roman camp in the vicinity of Sinope and moored not far from the city. But the Sinopeans led their fleet out and defeated the Romans, having seized their ships loaded with grain. In 70 BC, when Sinope, the capital of Pontus, was besieged by the Romans, Machares was about to send supplies by sea to his father's Pontic army. Instead he changed sides and diverted the ships to the Roman general Lucullus.⁵⁵ Machares had probably also been transporting some supplies to Sinope and to Heraclea Pontica before it was captured.⁵⁶ In 70 BC when the situation around Sinope, completely besieged by the Roman army, became too perilous, the Mithridatic commanders in the city put all their property on ships and conveyed it across the sea to Machares who was at that time in Colchis.⁵⁷ During the Roman siege of Amisus in 72 BC Mithridates VI gave support to this city by sea through Pharnaceia, having without doubt used the southern seaway along the northern coast of Anatolia.⁵⁸ These facts demonstrate that the Mithridatic officials were not deeply concerned with the safety of their deliveries, because the sea routes to Pontus were still secure.

These sources testify to a very great importance of the southern and eastern seaways along with presumably the direct route across the open sea both for the Pontians and the Romans during the wars with Mithridates VI Eupator. Doubtless the general safety of these routes was secured by the Pontic fleet, which mostly consisted of ships from the Greek cities like Heraclea, Sinope and Amisus, the more so as these besieged cities managed to keep their naval forces and did not allow the Romans to blockade them from the sea. In such a situation the security of seaways from the southern Black Sea coast chiefly to the Crimea and Bosphorus was strategically important.

After the fall of Mithridates Eupator, the burden of ensuring safety there was placed on the Romans since their activity in the Black Sea greatly increased. In 47 BC Julius Caesar, having defeated King Pharnaces II, allowed him to return to Bosphorus with the rest of his army from Sinope by sea. The king disembarked in Theodosia for a land campaign against Asander who, from the Romans' point of view, had illegally usurped power in the Bosporan kingdom.⁵⁹ This was possible only if the overthrown king took the 'shortest' seaway, directly to the southern Crimea and then sailed east to Theodosia. The Romans themselves were planning to use this way, or a sea route from Themiskyra to Sindica in 14 BC, when Agrippa's fleet lay at anchor in Sinope, ready to give immediate help to king Polemo I who was fighting in Bosphorus against pro-Mithridatic rebels.⁶⁰ In

⁵⁵ Memnon, *History*, 1.37.5–6; Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, 78; Plutarch, *Lucullus*, 24; Livy, *History of Rome, Epitome*, 98.

⁵⁶ Memnon, *History*, 1.32.2.

⁵⁷ Memnon, *History*, 1.37.4.

⁵⁸ Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, 78.

⁵⁹ Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, 120.

⁶⁰ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 54.24.4; RODDAZ J.-M., *Marcus Agrippa*, Rome: École française de Rome (1984), pp. 463–468; PARFENOV V., 'Dynamis, Agrippa und der Friedensaltar: zur militärischen und politischen Geschichte des Bosporanischen Reiches nach Asandros', *Historia* 46 (1996), 99–101.

general the sea routes from the south and east Black Sea Coast to Sindica and Bosporus were again dangerous for the Bosporan rulers from the late 1st century BC to the mid-1st century AD. But the danger came not so much from the pirates, although they could begin their activities again, as from the Romans. In 47–46 BC Caesar, who did not give up on his plans to overthrow Asander, sent against him his friend and ally Mithridates of Pergamum. The latter undertook some punitive actions in Colchis and after that moved to Bosporus. It is highly probable that he took the eastern seaway in order to launch a seaborne attack on Bosporus.⁶¹ Asander met him in a naval battle somewhere on the approaches to the Kingdom of Bosporus and defeated him. As a result he put on his coins symbols of victory and ships' prows to signify his triumph at sea.⁶² Thereafter Asander kept an eye on the situation around the seaways to the Cimmerian Bosporus. A votive inscription of a *nauarchos* (admiral) named Pantaleon, dedicated during the reign of Asander and queen Dynamis to Aphrodite Nauarchida and Poseidon Sosineos, indicates another naval clash, presumably against 'pirates'.⁶³

The organization of Roman provinces in Bithynia, Pontus, Thrace and Lower Moesia encouraged seafaring in the north-western sector of the Black Sea as well as in its south-eastern part and across the open sea. In the 1st century AD the Romans kept a fleet of 40 ships in the Black Sea against the piratical Heniochi, Tauri and other barbarians who lived on the coasts.⁶⁴ This evidence shows that the Roman Empire was concerned with the security of seaways along the southern coast of Taurica, where the Tauri were engaged in piracy since very early times, and near the Northern Caucasus which was the pirate zone of the Heniochi.⁶⁵ It means that the Romans were trying to defend sailors on their way to Bosporus both from the west and from the south. An indication of the problems they faced is an incident that occurred in AD 49, when a Roman army was returning by sea to Moesia from Bosporus, where it had been fighting the rebellious king Mithridates VIII and the Sarmatian tribe of Syraki, and some of the vessels were shipwrecked near the southern Crimea and plundered by local Tauri. Soon after the Romans used the seaway along the south coast of the Black Sea to take Mithridates, whom they captured in the Northern Caucasus, to Amastris in Northern Paphlagonia.⁶⁶ Unfortunately Tacitus does not indicate which way they sailed – across the sea from the Crimean coast or from Sindica to Themiskyra. To our mind the Roman military commanders will have chosen the route from Sindica directly across to the Black Sea's southern shore, because if they used the coastal route from Krioumetopon in Taurica to the Cape of Carambis in Paphlagonia, they would

⁶¹ Strabo, 11.2.17; Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, 120, 121; Pseudo-Caesar, *Alexandrian War*, 78; Cassius Dio, 42.9.46.

⁶² FROLOVA N. and IRELAND S., *The Coinage of the Bosporan Kingdom*, 'BAR International Series' 1102, Oxford: Archeopress (2002), pp. 34–46.

⁶³ *Corpus inscriptionum regni Bosporani*, St. Petersburg: Bibliotheca classica Petropolitana (2004) no. 30.

⁶⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.16.4, 366–7.

⁶⁵ Strabo, 7.4.2, 11.2.12–13.

⁶⁶ Cornelius Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.17, 19–21.

have had to follow the earlier Roman squadron which suffered great losses near the Crimean coast. So, given that the imprisoned king was happily brought to Amastris and then to Rome, the Romans evidently took the way from Sindica.

Initially the defence of sea routes in the east of the Black Sea was left by the Romans to the fleet of the Polemonid kings of Pontus, which was based in Trapezus.⁶⁷ But in AD 64, when the kingdom of Pontus was turned into a Roman province, the Romans created two zones of naval responsibility in the Euxine. The western and north-western part of the sea, along with the southern Crimea was initially secured by a detachment of ships from the Praetorian fleet of Ravenna, based at Cyzicus, and, from the middle of the first century AD, by the fleet of the Moesian provinces (*classis Moesica*), which was based on Noviodunum the Lower Danube river, and in the 70s AD was favoured with the name of the imperial family, the Flavii.⁶⁸ Its main task was to safeguard the sea routes from the western Black Sea coast to Taurica and the southern coast of the Crimea, i.e. chiefly the ways which led to Tauric Chersonesus, where vessels from the fleet were regularly to be found, as is shown by Latin inscriptions from this city giving the names of fleet personnel.⁶⁹ The southern and eastern parts of the Black Sea, along with coastal seaways which led to the kingdom of Bosphorus were under the control of the newly formed *classis Pontica*, which was created from the ships and at least some of the personnel of the former Polemonid fleet in AD 64.⁷⁰ Like its predecessor, it had its bases in Sinope and Trapezus,⁷¹ and sometimes visited Bosphorus.⁷² A Roman governor of Cappadocia, the historian Flavius Arrianus, describes using this fleet to carry out a tour of inspection along the northern borders of his province in the 130s AD.⁷³ At that time Bosphorus was a client state of the Roman Empire and when Roman troops appeared in Taurica, around the middle of the 2nd century AD, having brought all the territory down to the Cape of Krioumetopon under their control, the rest of the peninsula was given over to the patronage of the Bosporan kings, who were in charge of defending the seaways along the south and east Crimea. But the *classis Pontica* and the fleet of the kingdom of Bosphorus were also responsible for the security of the direct route across the Euxine. In 193 AD king Sauromates II, as one of his inscriptions informs us, 'made the sea free for sailing in Pontus and Bithynia', which suggests

⁶⁷ Tacitus, *Histories*, 3.47.

⁶⁸ BOUNEGRU O. and ZAHARIADE M., *Les forces navales du Bas Danube et de la Mer Noire aux I^{er} - VI^e siècles*. Oxford: Oxbow Books (1996); SARNOWSKI T., 'Ti. Plautius Silvanus, Tauric Chersonesos and Classis Moesica', *Dacia* 50 (2006), 85–92.

⁶⁹ *L'Année Épigraphique* (1967), nos. 428, 429, 431; *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 2nd edition, no. 417; SOLOMONIK, E., 'On the Roman Fleet in the Crimea', *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 2 (1966), 165–171; SPEIDEL M., 'Captains and Centurions in Chersonesus Taurica', *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 3 (1988), 119–123.

⁷⁰ Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2.16.4 (366–7); Tacitus, *Histories*, 3.47.

⁷¹ SPEIDEL M. and FRENCH D., 'Bithynian Troops in the Kingdom of Bosphorus', *Epigraphica Anatolica* 6 (1985), 97–102.

⁷² SAPRYKIN S. and ERMOLIN S., 'Roman Fleet at Bosphorus: New Latin Inscription from Panticapaeum', *Vestnik Drevnej Istorii* 3 (2010), 73.

⁷³ Arrian of Nicomedia, *Circumnavigation of the Black Sea*, 4.4.

that he cleared pirates from the seaways along the southern Black Sea coast and towards the Crimea.⁷⁴ But it was a temporary action and in AD 222 the first archon of Prusiada on Hypius, while sailing to Bosphorus, was imprisoned by the Tauri not far from Theodosia, and would have been lost were it not for the king of Bosphorus, whom his inscription names as his 'saviour and benefactor'.⁷⁵ This allows us to assume that the archon was presumably liberated from captivity on payment of a ransom. If this is so, then it seems that the piratical Tauri still continued their raids on ships near the Crimean coast, because the captains of ships were continuing to make their voyages there, being convinced that the Romans and the Kingdom of Bosphorus would defend them and bring help when required. One sailor from Bosphorus made a sacred gift to Achilles in his shrine at Achilleus Dromos, which confirms the use of the western sea route by Bosporan navigators during the Roman period.⁷⁶

Nevertheless measures against piracy taken by the Roman and Bosporan authorities, encouraged intensive seafaring along most of the ancient sea routes. A great number of proxeny decrees and other inscriptions of the 2nd century AD from Tauric Chersonesus, which mention in particular *naukleroi*, sailors, traders and envoys from the Greek cities of the southern coast, prove that there were regular contacts between the northern and southern coasts of the Euxine. Frequent use of the relatively safe seaways in the Roman period brought to life a number of associations of *naukleroi* in the cities of the South Black Sea Coast like Amastris, Heraclea and Sinope.⁷⁷ An association of *naukleroi* was created in Gorgippia under the supervision of Sauromates II, whose members were engaged in grain export, probably to the southern coast of the Black Sea, by sailing along the eastern routes from Sindica to Themiskyra and near the Caucasian coastline.⁷⁸ At the same time the *naukleroi* from the cities of northern Asia Minor, who were very experienced in sailing the eastern and central parts of the Euxine, made voyages to Chersonesus and the kingdom of Bosphorus. For example, in the first half of the 3rd century AD a certain Tertius, son of Rufus, *nauclos* from Tieum in north-eastern Bithynia, settled in Panticapaeum and died there.⁷⁹ We can say with certainty that the protection of seaways by the Romans and the Bosporan kings stimulated commercial, military and political links between different parts of the Black Sea coast. The steady attention which the Romans and the Bosporans paid to the eastern seaways was due to Roman material support of Bosphorus and the reciprocal Bosporan tribute, shipped by the kings to the administration of Roman provinces of northern Asia Minor. In order to keep up regular relations in all spheres of life – to bring necessary goods and money, to send envoys and even

⁷⁴ *Corpus inscriptionum regni Bosporani*, *op. cit.*, no. 1237.

⁷⁵ *Corpus inscriptionum regni Bosporani*, *op. cit.*, no. 953.

⁷⁶ *Inscriptiones antiquae orae septentrionalis Ponti Euxini Graecae et Latinae*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 2nd edition, no. 332.

⁷⁷ VELISSAROPOULOS J., *Les naucleres grecs. Recherches sur les institutions maritimes en Grèce et dans l'Orient hellénisé* Geneva and Paris: Droz and Minard (1980), p. 104.

⁷⁸ *Corpus inscriptionum regni Bosporani*, *op. cit.*, no. 1134.

⁷⁹ *Corpus inscriptionum regni Bosporani*, *op. cit.*, no. 732.

military forces – the sea routes in the eastern sector of the Black Sea had to be kept safe and free, as the vast majority of this traffic was by sea.

In conclusion, we have seen that navigators on the Black Sea during the Hellenistic and Roman periods made regular use of ancient routes which had been developed by Greek seafarers during the time of overseas settlement in the Archaic period, and developed further through the acquisition of new skills for sailing across the open sea in the late 5th century BC. But the intensity of direct sailings across the Black Sea and its eastern routes became much greater than it had been in the early period. Although the western way was still popular, we can suppose that the voyages along the western coast of Taurica would have been seriously reduced because of the often dangerous situation in Crimean Scythia. The sailors took the routes which led from Chersonesus directly to the western coast, because, unlike earlier Greek navigators, they were skilled in sailing across the open seas.