

CONNECTING THE ANCIENT WEST AND EAST

STUDIES PRESENTED TO PROF. GOCHA R. TSETSKHLADZE

VOLUME I

edited by

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ACAMPSIS, BOAS, APSARUS, PETRA, SEBASTOPOLIS: RIVERS AND FORTS ON THE SOUTHERN LITTORAL OF COLCHIS*

Altay COŞKUN

ABSTRACT

In his *Periplus Ponti Euxini* (ca. AD 132), Arrian describes the Roman fortresses on the estuaries of the Acampsis (Tchorokhi) and the Phasis (Rioni). There are various hints that Fort Apsarus (Gonio) by the Apsarus/Acampsis had been used as a stronghold by other rulers before, such as Mithridates VI Eupator (ca. 100 BC). Arrian mentions no other garrison or settlement along the southern Colchian coast. Ps.-Skylax, Strabo, Pliny, Ptolemy and Procopius convey a similar impression, with two exceptions. Ptolemy attests a Sebastopolis just north of the Apsorros/Apsarus/Acampsis, which scholars tend to ignore. More likely, however, Polemo I (37–9/8 BC) founded it there, before relocating it further north, about 50 km north-west from Dioscurias. Petra figures as the most important stronghold in Colchis/Lazika during Justinian's Persian War (AD 540s). Common opinion identifies it with Tsikhisdziri, but this is barely compatible with the details provided by Procopius. Although he occasionally confuses the Phasis with the Boas/Acampsis, his narrative suggests locating Petra on the southern bank of the Phasis estuary. It can thus be seen as a successor to the 2nd-century Roman fortress. At some point, it was extended to receive the population of the submerged city of Phasis. The study is preceded by a discussion of the names and identities of the rivers in the area, especially the Acampsis/Boas/Lycus, Apsarus/Apsorros/Glaucus as well as the Leiston and Rhis.

The 1990s were the Golden Age of ancient Colchian studies: the three most distinguished researchers in the field synthesised the work of generations of Georgian archaeologists and historians, and critically integrated the results of their own investigations into the picture. Their endeavours yielded, among other things, two German and two English monographs, which opened up an exciting new world to the international Classical Studies community.¹ These books have served me as invaluable introductions when extending my own research from Asia Minor and the Bosphoran kingdom to the eastern Black Sea littoral. My initial concern was the imperial rule and warfare of the Mithridatids and Romans in the region, which still allowed me to avoid a closer engagement with the difficult-to-handle topography of western Georgia. Eventually,

* I have prepared this study in the context of my project 'Ethnic Identities and Diplomatic Affiliations along the Black Sea Littoral'. I am grateful to the Social Science and Humanities Research Council for financial support (2017–22), and to Jess Russell for editorial support. I am also grateful to Chen Stone for co-producing a set of maps with me; these are now accessible on my web site: <http://www.altaycoskun.com/materials>.

¹ Braund 1994; Lordkipanidze 1996; Tsetskhladze 1998; 1999.

however, my search for the sanctuary of Leukothea drew me ever deeper into this fascinating landscape,² whose physical appearance has been modelled constantly by the endless amounts of water running down from the Caucasian Mountains and the alluvium they carry with them. No less dynamic has been the country's shaping and reshaping in human imagination through a long and complex tradition of mythography, historiography and geography. I would like to dedicate the first of my explorations into the historical geography of Colchis to my most energetic colleague and dear friend Gocha Tsetskhladze.

1. COLCHIS SOUTH OF THE PHASIS: AN AREA OF NEGLECT

Despite its remote location, the land of Colchis was of significant interest to Greek merchants, scholars and poets from the Archaic period on. The Phasis (Rioni) as its largest river, together with its various settlements, stood at the centre of attention, but various sites north of it are repeatedly addressed in Graeco-Roman literature as well, especially Dioscurias/Sebastopolis. Since I (elsewhere) argue for new identifications of Gyenos, Dioscurias, Sebastopolis and Pityus as well as for the rivers near those cities, readers may appreciate a map of the Colchian coastline showing traditional locations besides my alternative suggestions (Fig. 1). A second map focuses on the riverscape of Colchis, including the major cities situated along the Phasis river (Fig. 2).³

Writers have been far less concerned with the area south of the Phasis. This imbalance is most apparent in the *Geography* of Strabo of Amasia, whose account roughly dates to the monarchy of Augustus (31/27 BC–AD 14). He devotes only a few quite general comments to the economy of the South Colchian plain, without even naming its navigable rivers (Strabo 11. 2. 17 [498C]).⁴ A similar limitation of interest is reflected in Ptolemy's *Geography* (mid-2nd century AD): while he treats the northern coast of Asia Minor in some detail, especially the stretch from Trapezus to the *Apsorros* river (i.e. the Apsarus, see below), he confines his treatment of the Colchian littoral to its northern half. His district (*thesis*) of Colchis ranges from Phasis city over Dioscurias/Sebastopolis to the Korax river, the border to Sarmatia (Ptolemy *Geography* 5. 6. 7; 5. 10. 1–6; 8. 17–19).⁵ Strabo's and Ptolemy's focus of attention is mirrored in Procopius' *Wars of Justinian* (6th century AD), which locate all noteworthy settlements of the Lazoi north of the Phasis, admitting the Roman city of Petra as the sole exception (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 29. 3. 18–20; 8. 2. 4. 29).⁶

² See Fig. 1 for the result and Coşkun 2021a for the argument.

³ Coşkun 2020a; 2020b.

⁴ As general introductions into the work of Strabo, see, for example, Engels 1999; Roller 2014; 2018a. For the Greek text and English translation (in adaptation), see H.C. Hamilton and W. Falconer (London 1903–06), drawn from the Perseus Database. Cf. Radt 2002–11; Roller 2014. For a description of the Colchian river-landscape and related problems, see, for example, Lordkipanidze 1996, 97–110; Dan 2016; Coşkun 2019b.

⁵ Ed. by Stückelberger and Graßhoff 2006 II, with German translation. For his maps of Asia 1–3, see the illustrations by Stückelberger and Graßhoff 2006 II, 846–57. See below for discussion.

⁶ Greek text quoted after H.B. Dewing (London 1914–28), drawn from the Perseus Database; English translations have been adapted from Dewing 2014. See below for discussion.

Our best ancient witness at least for the rivers of ancient Colchis is Arrian. As Hadrian's governor of Cappadocia, he travelled much of the Euxine coast in person, so that his *Periplus Ponti Euxini* (ca. AD 132) is based on autopsy at least in part. He lists the major streams merging into the Black Sea, besides several major settlements and other landmarks.⁷ Particularly detailed is his account of the littoral between Trapezus and the Phasis, though we shall concentrate on the otherwise neglected part of this coastline from Apsarus to the Phasis. Arrian specifies the distance from the fortress of Apsarus to the estuary of the Acampsis as 15 stades. Next, it took him another 75 stades to the Bathys, a further 90 to the Akinases, moreover 90 to the Isis, once more 90 to the Mogros, which merges into the Euxine yet another 90 stades before the Phasis (Arrian *Periplus* 7.4–8.1).⁸

A stade is normally measured at 600 feet or 177.42 m respectively, but Arrian applies lower standards of around 150 m on average, with significant variation depending on the section of his *Periplus*. It is further obvious that he rounded his numbers to multiples of 15, if not 30, stades. Another reason for uncertainty is the well-known fact that many river beds or their accessibility from the open sea changed over the centuries due to the effects of erosion and sedimentation. In particular, sanding up was (and still is) a vexing problem for Colchian harbours. This is manifest through the satellite images of the littoral, nowadays only a few mouse-clicks away from every desk thanks to Google Maps. The most famous example is Lake Paleostomi, the 'Old Mouth' of the Phasis. The sandbar gradually cut off the river from the sea, which ultimately found its new estuary some 10 km to the north, above the industrial zone of modern Poti.⁹

At any rate, there is precious complementary evidence provided by Ps.-Skylax in the 4th century BC. Most of his information may in fact go back to his main source, the 6th-century BC geographer Skylax of Karyanda: 'There [south of the Phasis] are the Rhis river, Isis river, Leiston river and Apsarus river.'¹⁰ The discrepancies between Arrian's and Ps.-Skylax's accounts are substantial. Some of them may result from the fact that names had changed over time. Alternatively, we need to be mindful that in most cases it was owing to settlements that the names of adjacent rivers became known: new colonies had been founded and old cities had vanished by the time of Arrian.

A useful starting point for our investigation is the partly confusing Colchian river-landscape.

⁷ See Rémy 1989, 213–17, who presents the most detailed discussion of Arrian's full career, based on a very extensive bibliography; he dates Arrian's tenure as governor of Cappadocia to AD 131/2–136/7. Cf. Silberman 1995 VII (AD 131 or 132); Liddle 2003, 5–12 (AD 131/138); Rood 2011 (AD 130s); also Braund 1994, 178 (AD 132); Tssetskhladze 1998, 15; cf. 49–50 (AD 134). My impression is that the *Periplus* reports Arrian's first inspection of the Pontic coast, thus around 132 BC.

⁸ Greek text and (adapted) English translations have been quoted from Liddle 2003; cf. Silberman 1995.

⁹ Arrian's use of the stade varies in accordance with his literary sources; for the journey from Phasis to Sebastopolis, his stade seems to average 123 m, for the subsequent stretch to Herakleion, it averages 167 m; see Coşkun 2020b, also with discussion of Poti/Phasis and Lake Paleostomi. Besides, see Tssetskhladze 1998, 7–9 for Poti/Phasis (cf. Liddle 2003, 99); 1999, especially 114, for Pichvnari.

¹⁰ Ps.-Skylax, *Asia* 81: ... ἐνταῦθα ἔστι Πίς ποταμός, Ἰσις ποταμός, Ληιστῶν ποταμός, Ἀψαρος ποταμός. Greek text drawn from https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Periplus_of_Pseudo-Scylax. Whether the Rhis belongs to this list is uncertain, see below.

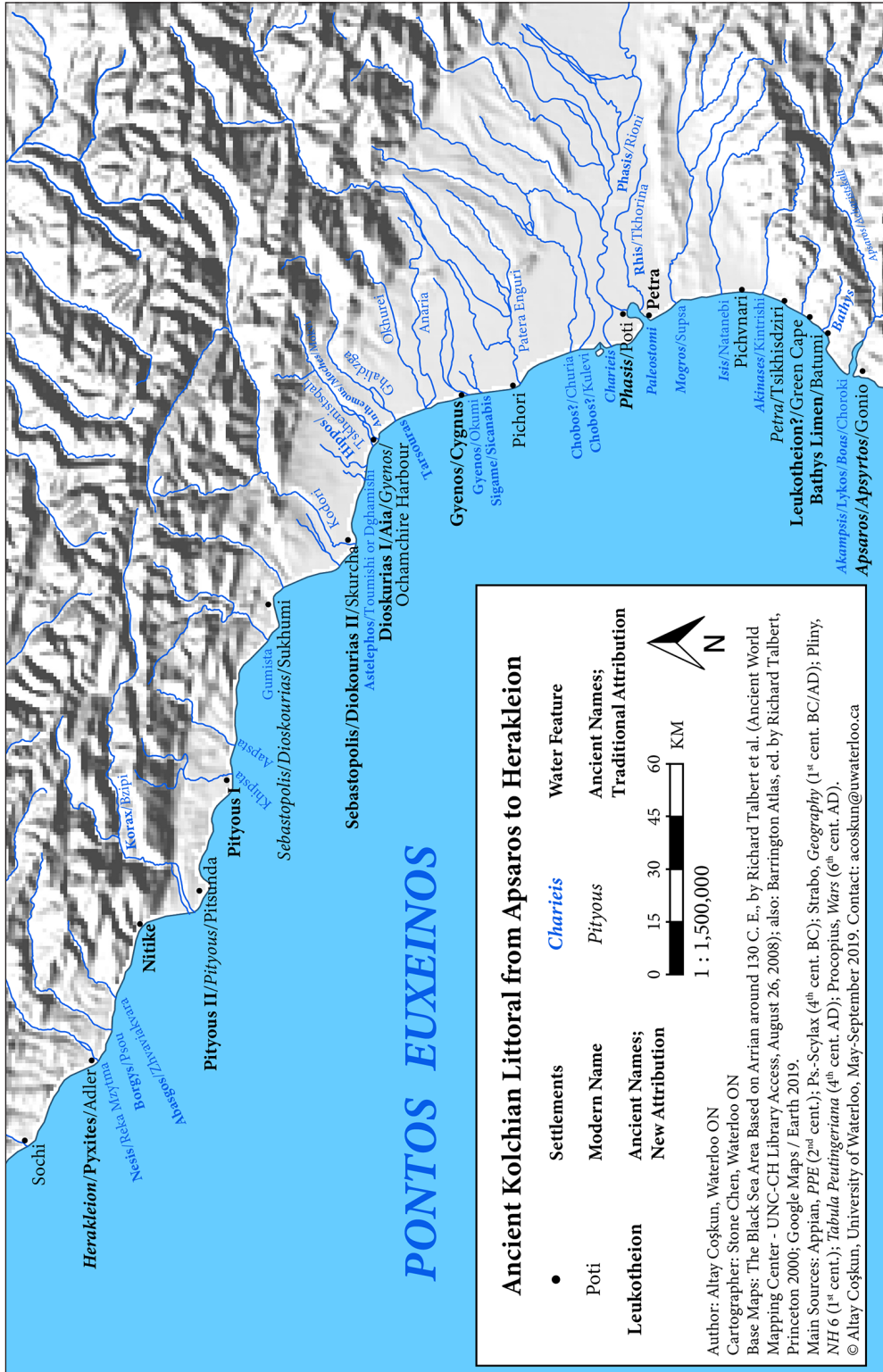


Fig. 1. Ancient Colchian littoral from Apsarus to Herakleion (A. Coşkun [author]; S. Chen [cartographer]: <http://www.altaycoskun.com/materials-2> [Map 7]).

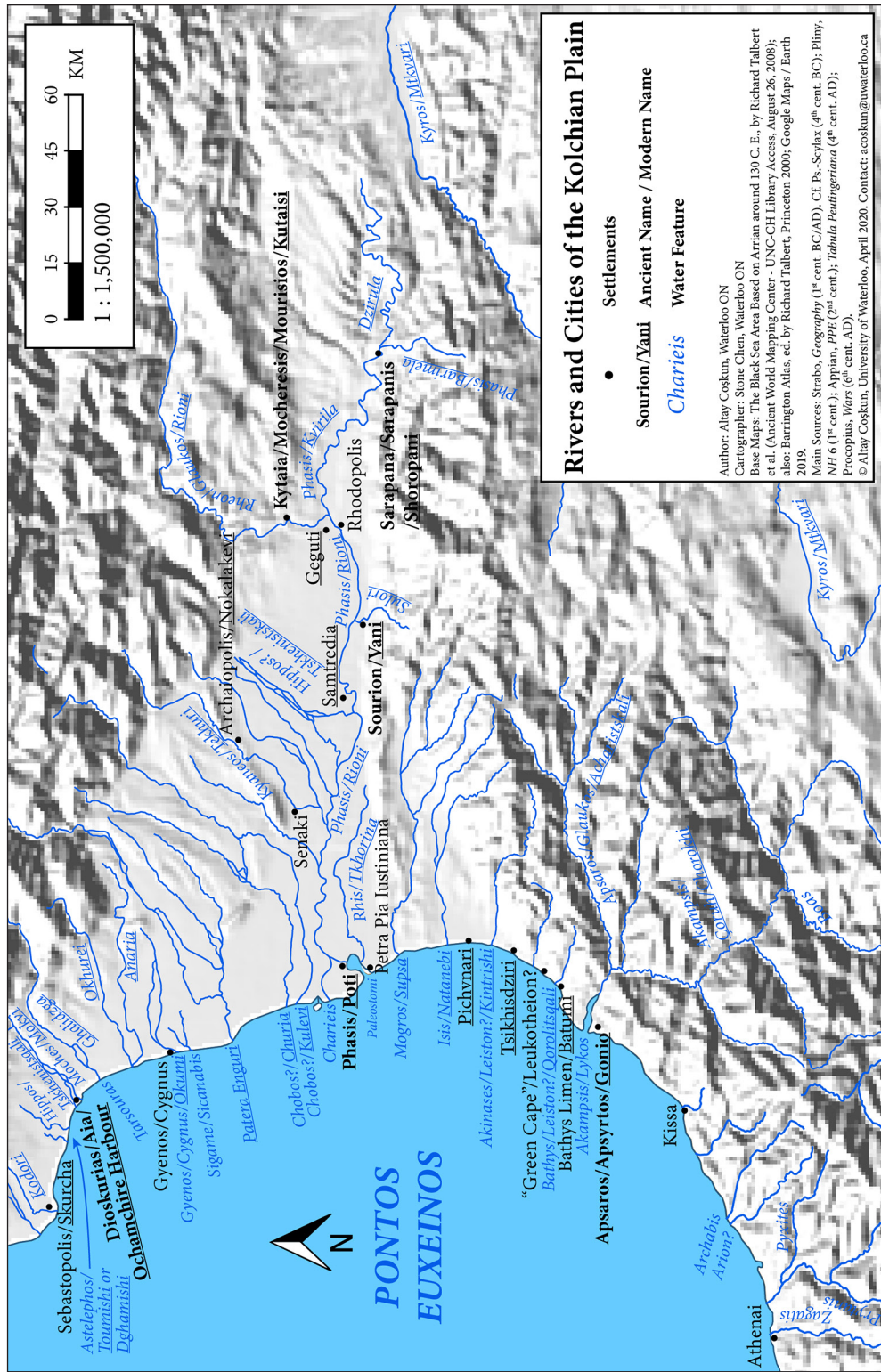


Fig. 2. Rivers and cities of the Colchian plain (A. Coşkun [author]; S. Chen [cartographer]: <http://www.altaycoskun.com/materials-2> [Map 8]).

2. ACAMPSIS/APSARUS/BOAS

Ps.-Skylax still called the first navigable river on the eastern littoral *Apsarus* instead of Acampsis. The equation of the Apsarus river with the upper and middle course of the Acharistsqali in the north-west of the Lesser Caucasus is now nearly common opinion.¹¹ Likewise accepted is the identity of the Acampsis with most of the Tchorokhi (in Georgian) or Çoruh Nehri (in Turkish) respectively. The Acampsis comes from the south-west of the eastern Pontic mountain range, the Skydises. The two rivers merge some 20 km inland, to yield the southernmost navigable river on the east coast of the Black Sea.¹² The name Acampsis seems to have been established for the river's lower course by the time of Arrian. In the 6th century, Procopius attests that the same originates in the 'Tzianian Mountains' (Skydises) under the name Boas, but merges into the Black Sea as Acampsis, after touching Lazian territory (Arrian *Periplus* 7. 5; Procopius *Bell.* 8. 2. 1. 7–9).¹³ Less certain, but widely admitted, is that the Harpasos river, which Xenophon encountered on his way from the Phasis-Araxes to Trapezus (401 BC), is to be identified with the Boas-Acampsis as well. Since Harpasos is a *hapax legomenon*, we can simply leave the question open.¹⁴

There is a scholarly tradition claiming that various ancient authors mistook the Apsarus for the Acampsis.¹⁵ I think that at least part of the confusion is modern and can be disentangled. First of all, alternate naming traditions for rivers or parts thereof are widespread phenomena, and the synchronic use of two or more different name forms may well be the result of plurilinguality or shifting geographical perspectives, as the Acampsis/Apsarus/Boas exemplifies. Ps.-Skylax, who lists the rivers and cities on the eastern littoral from north to south, may well be applying the lens of the Colchians, extending the name of 'their' river Apsarus to the estuary. The name Acampsis, in turn, could have been the choice from a Pontic-Armenian perspective, gaining currency under Pontic, Galatian, Polemonid or Roman rule, without immediately obliterating the alternative form Apsarus.

About a generation after the composition of Arrian's *Periplus*, Ptolemy still follows the older tradition when calling the river by the somewhat disfigured name form *Apsorros*. He further details that it combines the waters of its two main tributaries, the Lycus and Glaucus. Until recently, the latter has been interpreted as the Oltu Çayı, which merges into the Acampsis/Çoruh at Yusufeli, whereas the Lycus has been explained as a confused

¹¹ *Pace* Silberman (1995, 27, n. 29, and 29, n. 50), who denies its identity with the Tchorokhi, which he equates with the Apsarus. See also Dan 2016, 259: 'the southernmost of the two arms through which the Çoruh Ne<hr>i flowed into the sea was called Apsorros/Apsaros/Absyrtos' – a mere confusion?

¹² *Cf.* Braund 1994, 88, 184.

¹³ Note that Procopius had erroneously conflated the Boas with the Phasis in 2. 29. 3. 14, 16, but (*pace* Veh 1978, 1272; Dan 2016, 259) his account of the rivers is correct and consistent in 8. 2 (*cf.* Dewing 2014, 138, n. 272, and 464, n. 740), see below. For further variants of the names Acampsis or Çoruh, see Miller 1916, 650.

¹⁴ Xenophon *Anabasis* 4. 7. 18 on the Harpasos. For its equation with the Boas/Acampsis, see, for example, Baumgartner 1912; Kießling 1912, 2086; Janssen and Cobet 1944 (map); Masqueray 1961, 180–81, 203; Janssens 1969, 36; Lendle 1995, 270–72; *cf.* Plontke-Lüning 2004, 1060. Mather and Hewitt 1962, map and p. 420, remain uncommitted.

¹⁵ For example, Magie 1950 II, 1225 and Braund 1994, 158, referencing Appian *Mithr.* 101. 465; Pliny *NH* 6. 4. 12–13. Also Dan 2016, 255–60.

extension of the Kelkit Çayı. This river also springs in the Pontic Mountains south-west of Trapezus, but runs into the opposite direction, to merge into the Iris river (Yeşil Irmak), which empties into the Black Sea east of Amisos (Samsun). The Çoruh's confusion with the Kelkit seems unlikely to me. Glaucus probably stood for the upper and middle course of the Apsarus (Acharistsqali), whereas Lycus was simply meant to denote the Boas-Acampsis/Çoruh. Such a view would be supported by the coordinates provided by Ptolemy. There are further indications that Ptolemy was drawing at least in part on older literary sources.¹⁶ At any rate, the combination of Glaucus and Lycus appear to hint at yet another variation of an (extended) Argonautic landscape, just like the various Aiai, each of which seems to have been surrounded by a Hippos and Kyaneos river.¹⁷

Next, Pliny's *Natural History* first mentions the river *Absarrum* along with the namesake castle, before listing *flumina Acampseon, Isis, Mogrus, Bathys*. The sequence is troubled, which reveals that Pliny drew on at least two different sources and conflated them inaccurately. The same is betrayed more clearly by the fact that he regards both the *Absarrum* and *Acampseon* as different rivers merging separately into the Euxine.¹⁸ I only see it as a theoretical possibility that he was using recent information on Neronian engagement in the area. Since no reference to the emperor or his governor Cn. Domitius Corbulo is made, and Roman military presence in Colchis is not even alluded to in these paragraphs, it is more likely that he found the names of the river and castle in a much older source.¹⁹

Moreover, Appian has been reproached unduly of confusing the two rivers in his narrative of Mithridates' flight from Pompey in the autumn of 66 BC. After the king of Pontus had been defeated in Armenia Minor, he marched for four days before reaching the springs of the Euphrates (probably the Karaçay, north of Erzurum/Theodosiupolis). We are not told how long it took him to get to the Apsarus river, but Appian specifies

¹⁶ Besides the outdated choice of *Apsorros*, also note the mysterious Aia between Phasis and Dioscurias (Ptolemy *Geography* 5. 10. 2). See also below on the distinction of Dioscurias/Sebastopolis (Ptolemy *Geography* 5. 10. 2) and Sebastopolis (in Cappadocia; Ptolemy *Geography* 5. 6. 7).

¹⁷ Ps.-Skylax *Asia* 81 does not name Aia, but locates the hometown of Medea 180 stades up the Phasis; Strabo 1. 2. 39 (45C) puts it on the Phasis; Strabo 11. 2. 17 (498C) mentions the Glaucus and Hippos as tributaries of the Phasis; Pliny *NH* 6. 4. 13 positions Aia 24 km up the Phasis, in the neighbourhood of the Hippos and Kyaneos (also see below, with n. 24); Ptolemy *Geography* 5. 10. 2 knows of a Hippos and Kyaneos between Dioscurias/Sebastopolis and Aia; Stephanus of Byzantium *s.v.* Aia (A 86) mentions the Hippos and Kyaneos, though not the Phasis, locating the city 300 stades (*ca.* 53 km inland); and *s.v.* Dioscurias (Δ 93) says that Dioscurias had formerly been Aia and later became Sebastopolis. Scholars (for example Kießling 1913; Lordkipanidze 1996, 244–46; Dan 2016, 259; *cf.* Roller 2018a, 38) are inclined to conflate the evidence to yield one or perhaps two Aiai; but I suspect many more, see Coşkun 2019b (on Aiai on the Phasis, also considering Kytaion in 'Aia' on the Rheon/Glaucus: Apollonius 2. 399–407, 415; Procopius *Bell.* 8. 14. 6. 47–48 speaks of Kōtaïs on the Rheon) and in Coşkun 2020a (on Aia/Dioscurias). For different views, see Braund and Sinclair 2000 and Braund 2000; *cf.* Dan 2016, 256, 262. See also Kießling 1913 and Honigmann 1922 (Hippos and Kyaneos) as well as Büchner *et al.* 1927 (Lycus) and Büchner and Ruge 1910 (Glaucus).

¹⁸ Pliny *NH* 6. 4. 12 (ed. H. Rackham [Cambridge, MA 1961]): *in ora ante Trapezunta flumen est Pyxites, ultra vero gens Sannorum Heniochorum, flumen Absarrum cum castello cognomini in faucibus, a Trapezunte cxi. eius loci a tergo montium Hiberia est, in ora vero Heniochi, Ampreutae, Lazi, flumina Acampseon, Isis, Mogrus, Bathys, gentes Colchorum, oppidum Matium, flumen Heraclaeum et promunturium eodem nomine, clarissimusque Ponti Phasis. Cf. 6. 10. 29: flumen Absarrum.*

¹⁹ The same impression is due to the fact that Pliny *NH* 6. 4. 14–5. 16 distinguishes between Sebastopolis *castellum* and Dioscurias, see below.

that he had to break military resistance of the Chotenians and Iberians, before reaching Colchis by crossing the aforesaid river (Appian *Mithr.* 101. 463–468). It is surprising that this itinerary has been interpreted as implying Mithridates' arrival at the estuary of the Acampsis or Apsarus. Instead, the report clearly delineates a flight through the Armenian mountains.²⁰ The king was deliberately avoiding the coast out of fear of the Romans. It remains open how the river that merges into the Euxine was called in the days of this king, and where he reached the Black Sea coast before arriving in Dioscurias.

3. LEISTON, RHIS AND A LIST OF SOUTH COLCHIAN RIVERS

A few notes on the remainder of Ps.-Skylax's list can be added. The *Barrington Atlas* (map 87 by Braund and Sinclair) identifies the Acampsis/Çoruh/Tchorokhi with the Leiston. This is assumed to have been yet another name for the lower course of the Acampsis, possibly an unofficial one ('River of Bandits'). But since Ps.-Skylax, our only source for this name, mentions it after the Isis and before the Apsarus, the attribution in the *Barrington Atlas* is counterintuitive, and the Leiston's identity with either the Akinases or Bathys is more likely.²¹

Other controversies relate to the Rhis river. The telegram-style of Ps.-Skylax leaves two options open. Either it was located by Medea's unnamed non-Greek home town, mentioned in the sub-clause that digresses on the Phasis, or it was the next noteworthy river that empties into the Black Sea south of the Phasis estuary.²² The similarity to Rheon/Rioni, which meanders by one of the most famous royal cities of Colchis, might seem to speak for the former interpretation at a first glance. But Kytaion/Kotais/Kutaisi is located about 90 km inland (as the crow flies), hence much further to the east than the 180 stades (*ca.* 32 km, if a conversion rate of 177.42 m is applied) indicated by Ps.-Skylax. He more likely had the same Aia in mind as Pliny, which was probably to be

²⁰ For the mouth of the Acampsis, see Magie 1950 II, 1225 and Braund 1994, 158 (as above, n. 16); for the Çoruh without further specification, see Goukowsky 2003, 236. But see Braund 1994, 185 (in a different context); *cf.* p. 158 for the possibility of an inland route 'to avoid the Roman fleet'. Matyszak (2008, 153–54) does not address the Apsarus river, but clearly assumes an 'inland' route, while Pompey supposedly kept 'watch' over the harbours. I assume that Mithridates followed the valley of the Tortum Çayı north-east, turned west to march along the lower course of the Oltu, then passed through the Acampsis Valley in a north-eastern direction, either continuing until reaching the Apsarus at the confluence with the Acampsis or, perhaps more likely, choosing the courses of the Berta Suyu and Ilica Deresi towards the upper Apsarus. Ballesteros Pastor (1996, 269) leaves the itinerary to Dioscurias open.

²¹ Ps.-Skylax *Asia* 81. *Cf.* Braund and Sinclair 2000 with Directory p. 1228: 'the ancient Acampsis ... might evidently be known as "River of Bandits" (Scylax, GGM I.62, Ληιστῶν ποταμός), a name which would help to account further for the location of a fort close to the settlement.' But on p. 1229, they name the 'Tchorokhi estuary' after the Apsarus river. At any rate, all three rivers seem to be the same in Braund 1994, 44, 88, 184–85, 349.

²² Ps.-Skylax *Asia* 81: ΚΟΛΧΟΙ. Μετὰ δὲ τούτους Κόλχοι ἔθνος καὶ Διοσκουρίδης πόλις καὶ Γυηγὸς πόλις Ἑλληνίδης καὶ Γυηγὸς ποταμὸς καὶ Χερόβιος ποταμὸς, Χόρσος ποταμὸς, Ἄριος ποταμὸς, Φᾶσις ποταμὸς Φᾶσις Ἑλληνίδης πόλις, καὶ ἀνάπλους ἀπὸ τὸν ποταμὸν σταδίων ρπ', εἰς πόλιν (μάλην) μεγάλην βάρβαρον, ὅθεν ἢ Μήδεα ἦν· ἐνταῦθα ἔστι Ῥίς ποταμὸς· Ἴσις ποταμὸς, Ληιστῶν ποταμὸς, Ἄψαρος ποταμὸς. Braund and Sinclair 2000, with Directory p. 1240, list the Rhis as unlocated 'below Phasis', whereas Dan (2016, 256) takes its identity with the Rheon for granted. Dan (2018, 62, n. 117) does not specify which tributary of the Phasis the Rhis is, but rejects the view (with further bibliography) that this is the Homeric Rhesos in the Troad or Bithynia.

found in the plain of Senaki.²³ We should therefore understand that the adverb ἐνταῦθα resumes the list of the rivers merging into the Euxine. The Rhis hence had its estuary between the Phasis and the Mogros.

The list of Strabo's unnamed rivers south of the Phasis/Rioni and north of the Apsarus/Glaucus/Acharitskhali or Acampsis/Boas/Lycus/?Harpasos/Çoruh/Tchorokhi respectively can thus be completed as follows: the Rhis should be equated either with today's Pichori, which flows into Lake Paleostomi, or perhaps more likely the Kaparcha. Both of them now merge into the Maltavka (the outlet of Lake Paleostomi) to empty into the Euxine. Next, the Mogros is to be identified with the Supsa, the Isis with the Natanebi, the Akinases with the Kintrishi and the Bathys with the Qorolitsqali. The latter's estuary bordered on Bathys Limen or Portus Altus respectively, which developed into the modern city of Batumi.²⁴

4. THE FORTRESS APSARUS (GONIO)

The above-mentioned fortress Apsarus became famous as one of the largest Roman garrisons on the eastern *limes*. It was established under Nero during Domitius Corbulo's Parthian War and housed five cohorts by the time of Hadrian, when his governor Arrian inspected it. The place developed into a substantial city (modern Gonio), although its best days were said to be over by Procopius in the 6th century.²⁵ Arrian believed that the history of Apsarus long predated the Roman occupation, since he derived its name from Absyrτος, the son of king Aeetes, who was killed and mutilated by his sister Medea in order to halt their father's persecution of the Argonauts.²⁶ While this pseudo-etymology is of course of limited value for our historical concern, the names Apsyrτος/Apsarus may still be indicators for its age. The least we can assume is that the fortress or probably its predecessor received its name at a time when the river's lower course was still called Apsarus rather than Acampsis.

In a different context, Tsetsckhladze has observed traces of a pre-Roman fort, albeit without specifying its age.²⁷ I leave it to further archaeological research to decide on the date of these earlier layers. A plausible historical background might be the intensive fortification under Mithridates Eupator, when he was extending his rule from Pontus to the east and north around 100 BC. Alternatives would be the Galatian king Deiotarus, who is also known to have built or refurbished castles as the successor of Eupator in eastern

²³ Pliny (*NH* 6. 4. 13) locates Aia 24 km from the sea. See above, n. 18 for more details and alternative traditions.

²⁴ Cf. Silberman 1995, 6 (though identifying Isis as 'Chinos Čay') and 29; Braund and Sinclair 2000; Liddle 2003, 98; thus also Miller 1916, 649–52, though some of the names are oddly conflated, in part following the later itinerary tradition. Qorolitsqali is rendered Korilistskali in Google Maps (2018).

²⁵ Arrian *Periplus* 6; Procopius *Bell.* 8. 2. 2. 11–14, 8. 2. 4. 1. Cf. Pliny *NH.* 6. 4. 12 (as below) and *CIL* 10. 1. 1202 = *ILS* 2660; and Bryer and Winfield 1985, 350–51; Braund 1994, 181–87; Silberman 1995, 27–28; Tsetsckhladze 1998, 117–24; Liddle 2003, 5–12, 95–96; Kakhidze 2008; Dewing 2014, 465.

²⁶ Arrian *Periplus* 6. 3–4; cf. Procopius *Bell.* 8. 2. 2. 12, 14; Stephanus of Byzantium *s.v.* Apsyrtydes (A 579). See Gantz 1993, 361–64 on the many variations of the myth; also Silberman 1995, 27; Liddle 2003, 96; Root 2011, 143–44; Root 2011, 150 on Arrian's version; Billerbeck 2006, 319, n. 734 on Stephanus' source (Polybius or Artemidoros of Ephesus).

²⁷ Tsetsckhladze 1998, 122.

Pontus (*ca.* 64 to 41 BC), or the Polemonids (Polemo I, Pythodoris, Polemo II), who ruled Pontus until *ca.* AD 64. But even Athenian or Sinopean hegemony in the area during the 5th and 4th centuries BC could provide potential contexts.²⁸

5. SOUTHERN LAZIKA AND PETRA

We have literary evidence for further Roman forts or military settlements along the Colchian coast. In the 6th century AD, Procopius states that there were no towns or forts south of the river, with the exception of the Roman city of Petra, which Justinian later renamed *Petra Pia Iustiniana* (Procopius *Bell.* 8. 2. 4. 29; Justinian *Novellae* 28 *praef.*). David Braund first hesitated to commit to any specific location, but later accepted the suggestion of Nino Inaishvili to identify it with Tsikhisdziri, the site of a less known ancient Greek settlement, about 15 km south of Pichvnari, between the Kintrishi/Akinases and Chakvistskali rivers.²⁹ This has now become the standard identification. Visitors will find ruins of a Late Antique fortress on a shallow mount near the coast, together with the traces of a Byzantine basilica. Google Map's satellite image presents the site as Petra Fortress. Tssetskhladze summarises the material remains of previous centuries of settlement. This seems to confirm the equation further, since Procopius mentions that, before its fortification by Justinian, the place had housed a less significant community.³⁰

Regardless of the seeming certainty, no epigraphic or numismatic evidence has so far come to light to corroborate the identification. And there are many more unresolved questions that should caution us not yet to end the search for Petra. As far as our main witness Procopius is concerned, his account is quite at odds with Tsikhisdziri. To start with his topographic description: he says that Petra was secured on one side by the sea and on both of its flanks by 'the sheer cliffs that rise there everywhere'. The former is true for Tsikhisdziri only with some generosity, whereas the latter cannot be substantiated at all. Of course, one may suggest that the Byzantine author was not writing based on autopsy and perhaps simply extrapolated from the name's etymology. Procopius, indeed, adduces the original meaning of Petra to confirm his topographical account (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 17. 3. 18).³¹ Admittedly, while composing his first two books of his

²⁸ Mithridates: Appian *Mithr.* 101. 463–468; *cf.* Strabo. 11. 2. 13 (496C); for scholarship, see above, n. 21. Deiotarus: Coşkun 2013; 2021b. Polemo I and Pythodoris: Braund 2005; Heinen 2011; see below, n. 62. Deiotarus and Polemonids: Strabo 12. 3. 13 (547C). All of them: Hoben 1969; Sullivan 1990; Marek 1993; Coşkun, *APR s.vv.* Athens and Sinope: Plutarch *Pericles* 20. 1–2; Meiggs 1972, 197–99; Tssetskhladze 1994, 87–89; 1998, 104–08, 178–80, 193; 1999, 103–08; Nollé 1997, 162–63; Welwei 1999, 135; Coşkun 2019c.

²⁹ Braund 1991 (223, n. 10) cites Russian and Georgian scholarship without comment. Braund 1994 (276, n. 31) only insists on a location north of Apsarus; 117 with n. 190 refers to Inaishvili 1991, followed by a description of Tsikhisdziri on pp. 290–95. Braund and Sinclair 2000 (with Directory p. 1237), also accept this identification, only referencing Braund 1994 (index).

³⁰ Procopius *Bell.* 2. 17. 2. 3. And Tssetskhladze 1999, 74–81, especially 75, n. 12 on earlier disputes; also 78 on pottery similar to that from the Roman fort of Pityus (on which see below, n. 39) and Sebastopolis (identified as Sukhumi, but see below, n. 52). *Cf.* Tssetskhladze 2013, 294, n. 5 (with further bibliography); Gramkrelidze *et al.* 2013, 588–91; Dewing 2014, xxiv. Janssens (1967, 51–52) retells Procopius but withholds from locating Petra.

³¹ According to Procopius *Bell.* 2. 15. 2. 9–13, John Tzibos was the first governor whom Justinian sent to Lazika; he encouraged the emperor to build the fortress, but to use it for his own enrichment by exploiting the country; this way, he ushered in the Lazoi into revolt in AD 540 or 541. In AD 535, Justinian

war narrative, he did not yet know to distinguish the Boas/Acampsis from the Phasis. As a result, he construed a counterfactual Boas/Phasis, connected through an imagined Armenian middle course somewhere between Yusufeli or Artvin on the one side and Sarapana on the other. This explains why Petra sometimes appears to be located closer to the Acampsis than to the Phasis in his account.³² But, on balance, most of his comments require us to look for Petra's whereabouts by the Phasis.

At its first mention, Petra is said to have been used to control the long-distance trade with Lazika, especially the importation of salt (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 15. 2. 9–13). But it is difficult to picture Tsikhisdziri in this role. To my knowledge, no harbour has been attested there; the lack of a navigable estuary or at least of a bay that shelters the harboured ships from the northern winds and currents would have posed a challenge, as much as the sedimentation, which satellite images show to be particularly strong off the shores of Tsikhisdziri. Likewise, there are no traces of a trade route cutting eastwards through the Colchian plain.³³ This is not yet all. Trade roads did not simply exist, but needed to be maintained as well as to offer safe stations for travellers and attractive markets for salesmen. This was the case with the two known west–east connexions of Colchis/Lazika, the one that leads through its centre along the Phasis and the other in the north, extending from Dioscurias/Sebastopolis to Sarapana underneath the southern foothills of the Great Caucasus. I do not see how southern Lazika should have met these conditions.³⁴ In a different context, Braund has tried to reject this negative assessment. While he aptly demonstrates that the historiographer applies distorting stereotypes to the Lazoi, he does not substantiate the existence of other major Lazian settlements in the days of Procopius.³⁵

One might perhaps think that the negative assessment of southern Lazika could be due to the conflation of the Acampsis and Phasis in Procopius' skewed perspective, in that he simply fades out what this territory had to offer. But this would not do justice to his detailed account.³⁶ All the Colchian towns that he lists are either situated along the Phasis (Rhodopolis, Mocheresis, Sarapanis) or north of it (Archaeopolis, Sebastopolis,

(*Novellae* 28 *pr.*) only names himself as refounder and name-giver of Petra Pia Iustiniana. There is no other evidence for John's governorship in Lazika before AD 540/1 (see *PLRE* 3.1, 638–39 *s.v.* Ioannes 20). I therefore wonder whether the real founder of the fortress was not rather his predecessor *Petros*, who had first served Justinian as secretary, before being charged with stationing soldiers in the autonomous kingdom of the Lazoi in AD 526 (1. 12. 1. 9–1. 12. 2. 19, 1. 15. 1. 1–8; *PLRE* 2, 870–71 *s.v.* Petros 27).

³² For discussion, see below, with n. 37, with further references.

³³ Though accepting Tsikhisdziri as the site of Petra, Braund (1994, 294–95) is at pains to talk around these circumstances.

³⁴ See especially Procopius *Bell.* 2. 29. 3. 18, 8. 2. 4. 29, besides section 1 above. Also note that various rivers were used to transport natural products from Colchis (linen, honey, pitch, lumber) to the coast according to Strabo 11. 2. 17 (498C).

³⁵ Braund (1994, 276) vaguely draws on some 'material evidence', for which he references Braund 1991. This is a fine study on the economy of Lazika, rejecting Procopius' polemic claim that they were barbarous and not self-sufficient (*Bell.* 2. 15. 5). The latter argument is convincing, but largely building on literary sources and not focusing on any specific area in the Colchian plain. And to be fair to the Byzantine historiographer, he does not deny the existence of any settlements in southern Lazika, but only of significant towns or forts other than Petra.

³⁶ In part, this conflation explains Procopius *Bell.* 2. 29. 3. 19: 'But to the left of the river, the limit of Lazika is one day's journey for an active traveler, and the land is devoid of people. Adjoining that land is the home of the Romans who are called Pontians.' See also Procopius *Bell.* 2. 29. 3. 23–25, quoted below. For further discussion, see below, with nn. 43 and 46.

Pityus, Skanda) (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 29. 3. 18–20). As a Roman fortress and town, Petra is omitted here, but mentioned in the description of Lazika:

It happens that all the habitations of the Lazoi are on the European side [i.e. north of the Phasis], while on the opposite site there is neither a fortress nor stronghold nor any village of consequence held by the Lazoi, except indeed the city of Petra, which the Romans built formerly (Procopius *Bell.* 8. 2. 2. 29).

Procopius' pessimistic view aligns with the descriptions by Strabo, Pliny and Arrian, who do not report any settlements or noteworthy harbours on the southern coastal strip.³⁷ It is also compatible with the near-contemporary account that Justinian provides in the *Novella* of AD 535. In his preface, he first lists the five noteworthy towns of Pontus Polemoniacus, but adds to them the two Roman fortresses Pityus and Sebastopolis in northern Colchis. They had apparently not been part of autonomous Lazika and remained under the control of the Roman governor of Pontus Polemoniacus as external bridgeheads. In a similar way, the garrison of Sebastopolis and possibly the harbour of Pityus had been under the command of Arrian as governor of larger Cappadocia in the days of Hadrian (Arrian *Periplus* 10. 3–4, 17. 1–18. 1).³⁸ Among the cities of Lazika, Petra (Pia Iustiniana) is the first Justinian mentions, followed by Archaeopolis and Rhodopolis as strong forts, complemented by Skandis (Skanda) and Sarapanis (Sarapana), though further adding Mourisios and Lysiris. The latter two do not receive any qualification, but are indirectly characterised by the closure of the list: 'and whatever other works we have performed among the Lazoi'.³⁹ Mourisios is normally equated with Mocheresis, which Procopius attests as the largest city in Colchis elsewhere and is thus unlikely to have been omitted by Justinian. Less certain is Lysiris, which Procopius either did not know or found too insignificant to mention. Whichever identification one would like to propose for it, Lysiris will barely change our picture of a desolate southern Lazika.⁴⁰

There is another implication of Procopius' and Justinian's lists: unless we locate Petra close to the southern estuary of the Phasis, there would be no city or fort left at this location, despite the fact that this river maintained its strategic importance in the

³⁷ See especially Strabo 11. 2. 17 (498C); Pliny *NH* 6. 10. 29: *Colchicae solitudines*; Arrian *Periplus* 7–11, and see above, section 1, for further references. The situation still differed in the 6th–2nd centuries BC (see Tsatskhladze 1999 on Pichvnari and environs).

³⁸ Pityus was not yet known as a Roman fort to Arrian or to Strabo 11. 2. 14 (496C); Pliny *NH* 6. 5. 16; Ptolemy *Geography* 5. 6. 6. The Greek city is believed to have received a garrison in the course of the 2nd century AD. Mainly due to homonymy, it is identified with modern Pitzunda/Bitchvinta: see, for example, Ehrhardt 1988, 84; Braund 1994, 198–200; Silberman 1995, 50, n. 184; Lordkipanidze 1996, 241–43; Liddle 2003, 120; Roller 2018a, 639. I remain sceptical, since this view seems hard to align with the distances given by Strabo and Arrian (Coşkun 2020b). Instead, I assume that Pityus/Pitzunda was refounded further to the north-west of the first Roman garrison, Pityus (possibly on the site of the Milesian colony); the latter had been abandoned, when Chosroes occupied Colchis (Procopius *Bell.* 8. 4. 1. 4; Coşkun 2020a). See also below, section 6, on Sebastopolis.

³⁹ Justinian *Novellae* 28 pr., translation by Braund 1994, 290–91.

⁴⁰ Braund (1994, 291) identifies Mourisios with Mocheresis (also Braund 2000 with Directory p. 1261), the successor of Kotais/Kytaion, whose name was continued for the city's decayed fortress (Procopius *Bell.* 8. 14. 6. 46–48, 54), and further Lysiris with Losorium, which he suggests equating with Batumistsikhe (more hesitantly, also Braund and Sinclair 2000 with Directory p. 1239). In my opinion, we should remain open-minded and also consider Tsikhisdziri or Pichori for Lysiris.

Byzantine period. I would even go as far as to claim that the two lists require us to position Petra by the mouth of the Phasis.

There is more to commend this place. In AD 541, the Sasanid king Chosroes led his army from Iberia into Colchis, marching along the Phasis. Given the slowness of the progress with the full royal army, he sent an advance guard to lay siege to Petra. He maintained constant communication with those who led the operations, and Procopius' account suggests that they were undertaken not far from the Phasis (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 17. 1. 1–2 17. 2. 13). Petra surrendered to Chosroes not much later and received a garrison, so that he could return to Persia with his main throng. Still in the same war, the king is said to have sent lumber into Colchis (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 29. 1. 1), allegedly to build ships, though actually with the intention to enhance the fortifications of Petra. It need not concern us here that the delivery never reached its destination (it went up in flames on the way). What matters is that one would expect a ship-building industry around the mouth of the Phasis rather than in or by an isolated fortress in Tsikhisdziri (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 17. 3. 19–28, 2. 19. 6. 47–48 on the siege of Petra).

Several passages in Procopius' account comment on army movements along the Phasis (or assumed Boas), which further buttress my case. Of particular interest is the description of Chosroes' aforementioned campaign, when he was still in alliance with the Lazoi:

Now when the Lazoi brought in Chosroes, they crossed the Boas river and came to Petra keeping the Phasis on the right, claiming that they would thus not have to spend much time and trouble ferrying the men across the Phasis river, but in reality they did not wish to display their own homes to the Persians. Yet Lazika is difficult to traverse everywhere, both to the right and the left of the Phasis river. For there are on both sides extremely high and ragged mountains, and as a result the passes are narrow and very long (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 29. 3. 23–25).

Procopius' confusion regarding the Boas has to be taken into account when mapping out this itinerary. Since Chosroes approached through Iberia, the Boas mentioned here is supposed to denote one of the first tributaries of the Phasis. The Barimela, which is in most parts fordable, is a likely candidate, whereas the Phasis as of Sarapana is not. The historiographer's explanations of surmised intentions need not be taken seriously: these are in part meant to illustrate the cunning of the Lazoi, and in part issue from a conflation of the Phasis with the Acampsis. The Acampsis or Boas or Apsarus indeed cut through steep mountain valleys for most of their way to the sea. The Phasis, in contrast, largely flows through the Colchian plain as of Sarapana, whence nearly all strong tributaries come from the north (especially the Rheon, also the Glaucus, Hippos and Kyaneos).⁴¹ Procopius appears to follow a more reliable source later on, when describing the Phasis as unfordable and strongly fortified by Lazian bulwarks on its northern bank (Procopius *Bell. Just.* 2. 30. 4. 24, 27).⁴² As a result, Persian invasions of Colchis regularly meant campaigning along the southern bank of the Phasis. This was the course that the new Persian commander-in-chief Mihr-Mihroe took into Colchis. The same is said to have

⁴¹ See Strabo 11. 2. 17 (498C); cf. Braund 2000; Braund and Sinclair 2000. See above, n. 18, for further references.

⁴² Also 8. 14. 6. 54 (Mocheresis).

chosen a different route for his return, hoping to find better opportunities for foraging (further away from the Phasis in southern Lazika) – hopes that were seriously disappointed (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 30. 1. 1 and 2. 30. 3. 15, 22).⁴³

Moreover, there are further details in Procopius' war narrative that could barely be explained if Petra were located closer to the Acampsis than to the Phasis. When the Roman commander Dagisthaios heard that the Persian army under Mihr-Mihroe was approaching, he immediately abandoned the siege of Petra, even leaving the tents in the camp behind and quickly moved his troops to the Phasis. He did not intend to confront the Persians, who were more than twice as strong as the Roman, Tzanian and Lazian troops combined, but he was rather looking for shelter on the other side of the Phasis. As an ally of the Lazoi, he could expect his soldiers to be shipped over and also be given quarters. He seems to have been afraid that his troops could be intercepted by Persian cavalry, if he had marched south, since there would be no sufficient shelter before reaching Apsarus (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 30. 2. 11).⁴⁴

Last, but not least, Procopius says that 'from the city of Apsarus to the city of Petra and the borders of Lazike, where the Black Sea ends [where it recesses the most to the east], is a journey of one day' (Procopius *Bell.* 8. 2. 4. 21).⁴⁵ This would be a surprisingly ambitious demand on a traveller, certainly too much for an armed unit. The modern road from **Gonio to Poti is about 84 km** long, probably only slightly longer than the ancient route. What matters is that Procopius supposes about the same distance to Petra as to the land beyond the Phasis. He makes the same assumption in Book 2: 'But to the left of the river [Phasis], the limit of Lazike is one day's journey for an active traveller, and the land is devoid of people.'⁴⁶ We see that Procopius was still unaware of the existence of the Acampsis, when composing this account, and that his conception of the Colchian coast was very insufficient. What is clear from these lines, however, is that he pictured Petra by the Phasis.

The ancient city of Phasis no longer existed at the time, and its site was probably largely submerged in the water of the river delta or Lake Paleostomi.⁴⁷ But I see a good

⁴³ Also consider Procopius *Bell.* 2. 29. 4. 27: during the siege of Petra, the king of Colchis, Goubazes, ordered Dagisthaios to send men to defend the pass ἐκτὸς Φάσιδος. Dewing (2014, 139) translates this as 'below the Phasis', possibly thinking of a location around the Acampsis. But Procopius is pointing towards the eastern extension of the Phasis past Sarapana, towards Iberia, which could be crossed on foot. Also the final engagements of the war followed this pattern: the additional 5000 troops that Mihr-Mihroe left in southern Lazika in support of the garrison in Petra (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 30. 5. 30–33) campaigned along the Phasis with the aim of pillaging the northern bank, obviously after fording it in the area of Sarapana. The Romans followed them on the southern side, while the Lazoi flanked the northern side, where they could easily organise ships to cross the rivers. The Persians were finally driven out and defeated in Iberia (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 30. 6. 34–40).

⁴⁴ The Persian army still comprised 30,000 men when Mihr-Mihroe returned (2. 30. 5. 31), after leaving 3000 in Petra and losing 1000 at the pass into Colchis), whereas Romans and Lazoi combined had some 14,000 (Procopius *Bell.* 2. 30. 6. 40).

⁴⁵ On the recession of the Black Sea and its ideological implications, see Coşkun 2020a.

⁴⁶ Procopius *Bell. Just.* 2. 29. 3.1 9: '... Adjoining that land is the home of the Romans who are called Pontians'. While this is still largely correct, the subsequent indication is more confused, though understandable with regard to the river conflation. 2. 29. 3. 22: 'As one leaves the city of Petra going south, Roman territory commences immediately and there are populous towns there, the once called Rizaion, also Athens, and certain others as far as Trebizond.'

⁴⁷ Braund and Sinclair 2000 (with Directory, p. 1227) recommend the results of underwater archaeology by Gamkrelidze 1992 for identifying the site largely in Lake Paleostomi. Tsetsckhladze (1998, 7–11; 2013, 293–94) does not find them worth mentioning and continues regarding Phasis as unlocated. See Coşkun 2020b for further discussion.

chance that those who survived the flooding and had a chance to relocate chose Petra as their refuge. I further suppose that this was at or close to the place where Arrian reported the garrison of 400 Roman auxiliary troops. He emphasised its ideal strategic position, though without detailing the natural advantages. Wishful thinking might produce something like a table rock, to provide a solid foundation amidst the sandy estuary, but I am not aware of anything like this in the area, and no material traces of the fortress have yet been identified, not even the bricks it was built with.⁴⁸ Arrian neither tells us when the Romans decided to establish the garrison. Any emperor, such as Nero who deposed Polemo II, could have given the order in theory. Braund may be right with his observation that the garrison was still of recent date in the AD 130s, when Arrian enhanced its fortifications.⁴⁹ Support for this view can be drawn from Procopius, who names Trajan as the first Roman emperor to have garrisoned Lazika. One may easily explain this decision in the broader context of his eastern campaigns, reflecting the intention to keep a northern supply line protected.⁵⁰

Braund further suggests that the garrison was abandoned in the 3rd century due to problems with malaria. There is currently not enough evidence to argue for or against this view. At any rate, I would concur with his assessment that ‘the fort at the estuary of the Phasis was of the first importance to Roman control in the region’, given its position at a crucial juncture of land and sea routes.⁵¹ It is therefore a most plausible expectation that the emperor Justin, when re-occupying Lazika in AD 526, sought to gain a stronghold in the same place to which Trajan and Hadrian had dedicated their attention centuries before and which would become the most contested Colchian stronghold during Justinian’s Persian War.

6. ‘CAPPADOCIAN’ SEBASTOPOLIS, SEBASTOPOLIS CASTELLUM AND SEBASTOPOLIS/DIOSCURIAS

Does Ptolemy contradict Procopius by mentioning another settlement in southern Lazika? The geographer locates a certain Sebastopolis just north of the *Apsorros* river, leaving it without classification (as a *polis* or *phourion*). Since he regards it as part of the province of Cappadocia, he seems to distinguish it from Dioscurias/Sebastopolis, which he mentions in the context of the north-western coast of Colchis.⁵²

Stückelberger and Graßhoff identify Ptolemy’s Sebastopolis with Sulusaray (Tokat Province, Turkey), adding that it was first called Karama, then Herakleopolis.⁵³ This is the result of multiple confusions. Ptolemy’s Sebastopolis has apparently been mistaken for Karana/Sebastopolis south of Zela in Pontus Galaticus. Although this had become

⁴⁸ Arrian *Periplus* 9. 4–5; cf. Braund 1994, 191–93; Silberman 1995, 7–8 (pointing out in n. 63 that no traces of the fortress have so far been identified) and 30–31 (discussing the status of the soldiers). For comments, though not for this identification, see Liddle 2003, 101–02.

⁴⁹ Braund 1994, 190–92, with Arrian *Periplus* 9. 3–5. Alternatively, the detailed attention that the garrison enjoys in the *Periplus* would be explained sufficiently by the simple fact that the author was eager to document his own agency.

⁵⁰ Procopius *Bell.* 8. 2. 3. 16. See also Braund 1994, 230–32 on how Trajan’s campaign affected Iberia.

⁵¹ Braund 1994, 190–92, with Arrian *Periplus* 9. 3–5.

⁵² Ptolemy *Geography* 5. 6. 7; 5. 6. 8, map 1 (Stückelberger and Graßhoff 2006 II, 847). Dioscurias/Sebastopolis is now generally identified with Sukhumi, probably incorrectly; see Coşkun 2020a; 2020b.

⁵³ Stückelberger and Graßhoff 2006 II, 516–17 with n. 99, without further reference, but cf. map 1 on p. 847.

part of the Roman province of Cappadocia by the 2nd century AD, it continued to be treated as a special administrative district. Among this in-land unit, Ptolemy indeed lists ‘another Sebastopolis’, which should be Karana, not Sebasteia/Sivas as assumed by Stückelberger and Graßhoff. The latter was located in Pontus Polemoniacus, where it is duly listed by Ptolemy. Sulusaray/Karanitis thus has to be excluded from our discussion.⁵⁴

Braund chooses the path of maximum economy by confining the name Sebastopolis on the eastern-Euxine coast to Dioscurias/Sebastopolis alone.⁵⁵ He does not explain, however, why Ptolemy would have duplicated and further seriously misplaced Sebastopolis. In theory, this negative assessment might draw on the silence of Strabo, Pliny and Arrian. But the first is not aware of the fort Sebastopolis near Dioscurias, Pliny is known for his uneven treatments and, by the time of Arrian, ‘Cappadocian’ Sebastopolis had probably ceased to exist.⁵⁶ Justinian and Procopius confirm that there was only one Sebastopolis left in the 530s, which was abandoned in the 540s.⁵⁷

I am thus willing to accept that Ptolemy found evidence for a Sebastopolis in his heterogeneous sources and that his coordinates do not lead us terribly astray. We should concede the existence of a Sebastopolis located somewhere on the northern bank of the Acampsis/Apsarus, perhaps Batumistsikhe, or possibly going as far north as Tsikhisdziri. The name *Sebastopolis* points to a foundation under Augustus (27 BC–AD 14) or, more specifically, under Polemo I, who was established over Pontus by Mark Antony in *ca.* 37 BC, perhaps not much later also over Colchis, and further over the Cimmerian Bosporus in 14 BC by the emperor’s deputy Marcus Agrippa. Polemo extended his territory along the eastern coast of Lake Maeotis by conquest. He is known to have destroyed Tanais before being killed in combat by the Aspurgiani in 9 or 8 BC. He also fostered the renaming of Panticapaeum to Caesarea and of Phanagoria to Agrippia,⁵⁸ so that a fortress called Sebastopolis on the eastern littoral of the Euxine would be in line with his expansionist pro-Roman politics.

Since Pliny, Arrian and Procopius no longer mention any garrison or settlement in the area (except for Petra), Ptolemy’s Sebastopolis was likely moved elsewhere. A first option would be that it was relocated to the site of Apsarus, whether this had been garrisoned simultaneously as Sebastopolis or was established (or re-established) as a fort only when Sebastopolis was dissolved. That both are mentioned by Ptolemy (without classification) does not require us to accept that Apsarus and Sebastopolis (near the Acampsis) served as garrisons synchronically, let alone that the two places were still settled when he composed his *Geography*. A second possibility would be that the soldiers were moved to the left bank of the Phasis, as a new outpost (one cohort) of the stronger forces (five cohorts) then stationed at Apsarus.⁵⁹ But I would prefer yet another alternative, namely

⁵⁴ Ptolemy *Geography* 5. 6. 9 (Σεβαστόπολις ἑτέρα) and 5. 6. 10 (Σεβάστεια), with map Asia 1, as represented by Stückelberger and Graßhoff 2006, II, 847. On Karana/Herakleopolis/Sebastopolis/Sulusaray, see, for example, Olshausen and Biller 1984, 139–40; Marek 1993, 54–57; Coşkun 2008, 137; cf. Kaletsch and Olshausen 2006; Kohl 2013. Note, however, that Braund and Sinclair (2000, 1231) adduce *Karanitis* as a variant for Dioskourias/Sebastopolis (without evidence), which is yet another confusion.

⁵⁵ Ptolemy’s ‘Cappadocian’ Sebastopolis is addressed neither by Braund 1994 nor Braund and Sinclair 2000 (with Directory).

⁵⁶ See Strabo 11. 2. 14, 16 (496–498C). And see above, n. 19 for Pliny.

⁵⁷ Justinian *Novellae* 28 pr.; Procopius *Bell.* 2. 29. 3. 18–20; 8. 4. 1. 4; see above, section 5.

⁵⁸ See especially Heinen 2011; see also the references in n. 29 above.

⁵⁹ Without considering Pliny’s implication for the whereabouts of Sebastopolis, Miller (1916, 651) suggests its identity with the Roman garrison on the Phasis.

that the garrison and its *canabae* were directed much further up to the north. The new military settlement maintained its name Sebastopolis and (later on) also became the successor of Dioscurias. This way, there would be no need to posit more than one Sebastopolis *castellum* in the Polemonian kingdom at any one time.⁶⁰

Given so many unknown variables in our equation, any historical context for the move of Sebastopolis cannot be but hypothetical. Since we do not know when Colchis was added to Polemo's kingdom, he might have garrisoned the area north of the Acampsis/Apsarus sometime in the mid-30s BC. Perhaps he added or moved north his strongholds in the 20s BC, as he was gradually incorporating Colchis into his kingdom, unless he received all of it peacefully. 27 BC is the *terminus a quo* not for the fortification of south-western Colchis by Polemo, but for naming his most distinguished castle in the area after Augustus/Sebastos. Its relocation seems to date to a time when his interests in the Black Sea region extended to the north, thus most likely while he was preparing for his conquest of the Bosphorus in 15/4 BC or at the latest when planning his campaigns on the eastern littoral of the Maeotis. Alternatively, his successor in Pontus and Colchis, Pythodoris, might have wished to strengthen the northern boundaries of Colchis, when she could no longer rely on the forces of a united Bosporan-Pontic kingdom, since the Bosphorus had fallen to Dynamis.⁶¹ Even later dates remain possible, but I would be hesitant to go beyond the death of Augustus in AD 14, because the then ruling monarch of Pontus-Colchis might have preferred to honour the then living Roman emperor by naming the new settlement after him.

7. CONCLUSIONS: FORTRESSES ALONG THE COAST OF (SOUTHERN) COLCHIS

Although many uncertainties remain, there are a couple of probable and some even certain conclusions to draw. We can be certain that Mithridates Eupator included Colchis into his network of strongholds throughout his kingdom. Apsarus, Phasis, Dioscurias, Surium/Vani⁶² and Kytaion/Mocheresis/Kutaisi are all likely candidates for minor or larger fortresses. His immediate successors in Pontus (Deiotarus, with Apsarus) and Colchis (Aristarchus) would have made efforts to maintain them as well as they could, but we are barely in a position to substantiate this assumption.⁶³ We can be more confident about Polemo I's active fortification of the area. The first Sebastopolis *castellum* was probably a bridgehead beyond the Apsarus, either as a defence against a potentially hostile Colchis or as a base for the conquest of the country. Soon thereafter, Polemo moved the same soldiers or at least the name of their garrison to the outer limits of his Colchian domain, 50 km north-west past Dioscurias. It is likely that he and his successors maintained garrisons at Apsarus and somewhere at the Phasis estuary as well.

⁶⁰ That there were effectively two (and only seemingly three) Sebastopoleis in the extended province of Cappadocia as reflected in Ptolemy's work is the result of Roman administrative geography.

⁶¹ Besides the references above at n. 29, see Braund 2005; Ivantchik and Tokhtas'ev 2011; Roller 2018b; Coşkun 2019a.

⁶² See Braund 1994, 146–49; Lordkipanidze 1991; 1996, 251–69; Tsatskheladze 1998, 114–64; also Coşkun 2021a with modifications.

⁶³ Deiotarus: above, n. 29. Aristarchus: Braund 1994, 169; Lordkipanidze 1996, 293–94; Coşkun 2007–18; 2021b; Biffi 2010, 54–55 and 72.

Nero should have been interested in holding a grip on these strategic places during Corbulo's Parthian campaigns, but we have no positive evidence to confirm this – other than the fact that he dissolved the Polemonid kingdom. We are on more certain ground for the time of Hadrian, thanks to Arrian's *Periplus*: Apsarus stands out as the strongest Roman fortress on the eastern Euxine coast, and its urbanisation was probably underway by then, perhaps since the Flavian period. Many open questions still pertain to the Roman positions in the north. We cannot be sure when Sebastopolis presented itself as successor of Dioscurias, but I assume that this resulted from a migration of the latter's citizens to the site of Sebastopolis. Also open is when the Greek city of Pityus received a Roman garrison.⁶⁴ The post on the Phasis estuary, whose (new) beginning Procopius allows us to date to the time of Trajan's Parthian War, was also developing under Hadrian, and perhaps continued doing so in the subsequent generations. In the 3rd century, its *canabae* may have absorbed the population of Phasis city. When the name Petra became used instead of Phasis remains open to speculation. It is quite possible that it was introduced as late as the AD 520s.⁶⁵ The name was augmented to *Petra Pia Iustiniana* in the first half of the 530s, reflecting its growing importance as city and fortress, to emerge as the key to imperial rule over Colchis in the 540s.

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⁶⁴ See above, n. 39, on Pityus.

⁶⁵ See above, n. 32, on Petros.

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