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Sinop Landscapes: Towards an Archaeology of Community in the Hinterland of a Black Sea Port

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Abstract

This paper discusses the evidence for economic and community integration on the Sinop promontory from the early first millennium BC through the middle of the first millennium AD based on the results of the Sinop Regional Archaeological Project. Results suggest that settlement and economy on the Sinop promontory were strongly affected by the broader condition of the Black Sea economy. Contrary to the sudden appearance of colonial sites dispersed over a relatively extensive territory seen in other important Pontic colonies (*e.g.* Olbia), evidence from Sinop suggests several centuries of disengagement followed by a progressive engagement between Greek and non-Greek communities following the extension of Persian influence in the eastern Pontus in the early fourth century. Infrastructural improvements under early Roman administration may not have been followed immediately by economic expansion, which seems to have taken off after the establishment of Constantinople.

Keywords

Sinope, Community, Trade, Economy

Introduction

The port of Sinope, its *chora* and hinterland offer an illuminating example of adaptation to shifting political and economic conditions among Greek colonies around the Black Sea. Greek Sinope appears to have been founded primarily in order to function as a strategic staging point in a complex trade network controlled by Milesians. Neither a classic *emporium* nor an agricultural *apoikia*, Sinope was initially a staging ground for the founding and control of colonies strung along the south Pontic coast from Kytorus to Trapezus and beyond (fig. 1). The city flourished in this role for several centuries. Sinope maintained close ties to its colonies at a distance, but appears to have had little involvement with its own hinterland on the Sinop promontory.¹ This changed in the early fourth century after the renegade satrap Datames intruded

¹ Doonan 2004a; 2006.

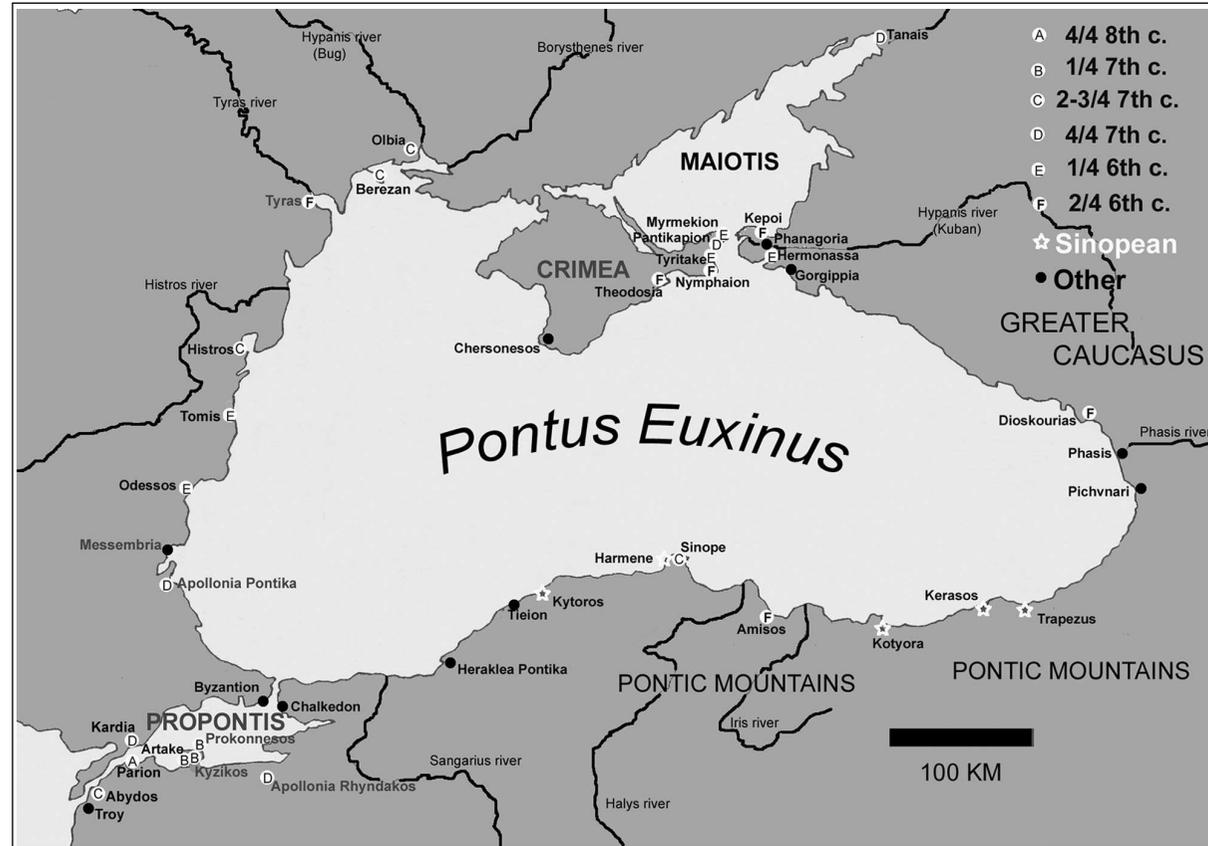


Fig. 1. Greek colonies in the Black Sea region. White circles indicate the locations of Milesian colonies and approximate date (A-F) of foundation. Black circles indicate non-Milesian colonies. Starred locations are early Sinopean colonies.

forcefully into Sinope's colonial network and besieged the city itself. The port's economy was reoriented towards production of goods in the hinterland and export to primarily Black Sea trading partners. The new arrangement encouraged increasing hinterland settlement, specialization of hinterland economic production, and interdependence between different parts of the promontory. The economic organization of the promontory appears to have been in delicate balance with the larger regional economic systems into which it was integrated: Black Sea, Anatolia and the greater Mediterranean. Changing ecological, political and economic factors on regional scales appear to have strongly affected the demographic and economic organization of the Sinop promontory in all periods.²

This model is based on a decade of field research and related studies by the Sinop Regional Archaeological Project (SRAP), an interdisciplinary investigation of the Sinop hinterland grounded primarily in a systematic survey of the promontory. To date we have conducted six field seasons of survey,³ a scarp excavation near the entrance to the city,⁴ geomorphological survey of the Akliman valley, and physical and luminescence studies of ceramic finds.⁵ Since the area is extensive and ground conditions very uneven we record data in survey tracts (individual fields) within sample quadrats of 1-2 km².⁶ We intend to continue research in 2010-2012 that will clarify the colonial settlement and integration of the area ranging from the secondary port of Carusa (mod. Gerze) into the mountains (see detail, fig. 4). Although the present paper summarizes many ideas explored elsewhere,⁷ it is hoped that it can help to tie in disparate themes that have emerged in the many rich discussions presented at this symposium.

Sampling Sinope

Our program of surveying sampling areas on the Sinop promontory is driven by several interlocking goals. Our sampling program is discussed at length elsewhere,⁸ so a brief overview will suffice here. We aim to obtain sufficient survey coverage of different parts of the promontory to make assessments of

² Domzalski & Doonan, in preparation.

³ Doonan 2004a; Doonan & Bauer 2005; Doonan, Casson & Gantos 2008.

⁴ Doonan 2007.

⁵ Bauer 2006; Doonan, Casson & Gantos 2008; Doonan & Bauer 2005.

⁶ See Doonan 2004a for discussion; also see fig. 2 in this article.

⁷ See especially Doonan 2002; 2004a; 2004b; 2007 and 2010a.

⁸ Doonan 2004b; 2006.

demography, production and consumption in all major physical and ecological zones of the promontory. At the start of the project 11 primary sampling zones were identified including the headland of Boztepe, the suburbs of the port, the coastal valleys on either side of the promontory, the rolling hills of the central Karasu river valley, and various highland areas.⁹ At present we have surveyed most extensively on Boztepe and the immediate suburbs (fig. 2, nos. 1-2), the Karasu valley including the delta area (fig. 2 nos. 3-7), the Demirci valley (fig. 2, nos. 8-13), and the Abdaloğlu, Karli, Sarnıç and Sorkum areas on the coast and in the mountains behind Gerze (fig. 2, nos. 14-17 and fig. 3). Although a systematic intensive survey cannot identify all or even most of the places of archaeological interest in an area as large as the Sinop promontory, it can address a number of important questions based on field survey, geomorphological and paleoclimatic research, and laboratory analyses.

- 1) What proportion of surveyed fields show evidence of human activity in the form of presence/absence, background scatter, or locus (similar to a 'site' in many other surveys) identification based on surveyed archaeological data?
- 2) To what extent did manufactured goods circulate around the promontory in different periods? Is there evidence of wealth or prestige goods accumulating in different areas? Are imported goods present?
- 3) What functions did secondary centers serve?
- 4) Can hypotheses about roads and routes into the highlands be proposed based on demographic patterns in middle elevations and highlands?
- 5) Can specialization and intensification of economic activities be inferred based on environmental and archaeological data?

Our field walking program can be illustrated using the example of the Demirci valley. The team surveyed approximately 170 tracts from 1997-1999 in this coastal valley 15 km south of the port and identified a handful of prehistoric loci, more than 40 Hellenistic and late Roman loci, and a handful of Medieval and Ottoman loci. Nearly all tracts contained at least a background scatter of late Roman ceramics and/or tile. The dramatic expansion of settlement in Hellenistic and late Roman periods was a result of the development of an industrial-level agricultural exploitation of the east coast of Sinop promontory. It was during these periods that a complex economy integrated many parts of Sinop promontory.¹⁰

⁹ Doonan 2004b.

¹⁰ Doonan 2006.

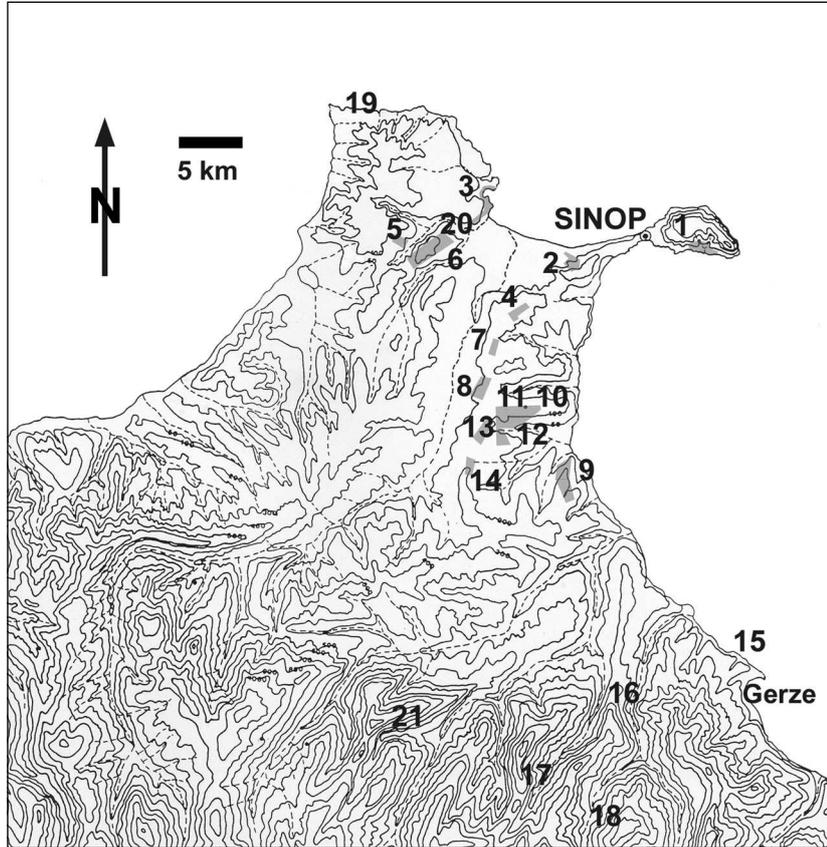


Fig. 2. Sinop promontory: survey quadrats (1-18) and other locations (19-21) mentioned in the text. (1) Boz tepe, (2) Bostancili, (3) Akliman, (4) Osmaniye, (5) Sarsi, (6) Dibekli, (7) Kiliçli, (8) Nohutluk/Karapınar, (9) Keçiöğlü, (10) Demirci, (11) Eldevuz, (12) Kumes, (13) Uzungurgen north, (14) Uzungurgen south, (15) Abdaloğlu, (16) Karli, (17) Sarnıç, (18) Sorkum, (19) Gerna, (20) Mağara, (21) Tingiroğlu.

Model of Community

The concept of community that Knapp has successfully applied to the multi-scalar economic and social entanglements of the mining installation of Phorades in Bronze Age Cyprus can serve as a jumping-off point for the investigation of

the community of Sinop promontory.¹¹ Knapp situates the specialized industrial site in a changing network of political and economic structures that at times link this tiny place in the mountains to island-wide political structures, coastal ports and overseas consumers. Knapp's application of the community model emphasizes the importance of exchange in the creation and maintenance of a sense of community. This concept can be usefully adapted to assist us in understanding the relationships between settlements, special purpose sites and sub-regions within the Sinop hinterland.

A brief summary of the evolution of community in the Sinop promontory can be offered here and explored more fully elsewhere.¹² The Bronze Age (mid 3rd-late 2nd millennium BC) was characterized by extensive subsistence settlement and ceramics suggesting a widely dispersed network of connections. From the Early Bronze Age onward it is apparent that the inhabitants of Sinop promontory were in contact with others from the western half of the Black Sea in spite of the fact that there is to date no evidence suggesting overseas trade or intensive seafaring. It does not appear that permanent coastal settlements were established at this time. Wide ranging fishing may have promoted the contacts that are evident in the material record. The seasonal migrations of economically significant species could have encouraged fishermen to venture far from home along the coasts and in the central Black Sea, creating opportunities for contact, cooperation and competition that could in turn lead to gift exchange and other relationship-building strategies.

The coastal settlement pattern appears to have changed significantly during the early first millennium BC. A settlement was established just beneath the later city walls that showed significant parallels in ceramics and architecture to the pre-Greek settlements of the North Pontic region.¹³ This may have been a colony or a fishing camp, but seems to have been accompanied by an increasing density of coastal settlements around the promontory suggesting a new coastal-oriented settlement pattern.¹⁴ Coastal sites significantly reduce the agricultural catchment area of settlements and thus require that the inhabitants derive sufficient economic resources from the sea through fishing, trade or some other means to make up for the loss. It is likely that pre-Greek coastal sites were part-time camps situated to take advantage of seasonal fish migrations.

The earliest evidence for the Milesian colony at Sinope dates to the later seventh century BC.¹⁵ According to the well-established historical tradition

¹¹ Knapp 2003.

¹² Doonan 2004a; 2006.

¹³ Doonan 2004a; 2007.

¹⁴ Doonan 2007.

¹⁵ Boysal 1959; Ivantchik 1998.

Sinope established a chain of colonies extending to the metal-rich eastern Pontus shortly after its own foundation. These colonies maintained close economic and political ties with the mother city that is clear as late as Xenophon's expedition of 400 BC (*An.* 5.5.10). At the same time there is very little evidence to support the idea of Greek engagement with the hinterland on the Sinop promontory before the fourth century BC.

Sinope's relationship with its colonies may have been severed following the intensification of Persian influence in the eastern Pontus during the early fourth century BC. At the same time a series of amphora production installations was established on Boztepe just outside the town.¹⁶ A small percentage of fourth century columnar grave monuments with non-Greek names were recorded in the Kumkapı cemetery on the mainland just outside the town wall.¹⁷ These monuments suggest some mixing between Greeks and non-Greeks in the city. One monument is particularly interesting in this regard, that of Manes *elaiopoles*, an oil seller of Paphlagonian origin.¹⁸ This monument, together with evidence of significant expansion of Hellenized settlements in the hinterland during the third century, may reflect the development of the olive industry for which Sinope was known in later Hellenistic and Roman times. Further evidence of this industry may be traced through the extensive production and distribution of Sinopean amphorae starting in the fourth-third centuries BC.¹⁹ At this time the survey has documented a significant increase in settlement density along the coasts of the promontory, the establishment of contacts between inland, coastal and overseas communities and the establishment of Greek-related sanctuaries in the highlands.²⁰ There must have been a significant non-Greek component to the populations settling in these places with their newly visible Greek connections, since several large and important loci in the highlands seem to be dominated by non-Greek ceramic assemblages with a limited number of imports (*e.g.* Nohutluk/Karapınar²¹ or Tıngiroğlu).²² This is the first time in which we can speak of an integrated community on the Sinop promontory.

In late Roman and early Byzantine periods the integrated economy of the Sinop promontory expanded, following an apparent contraction of hinterland settlement in Roman imperial times.²³ Settlement density in the hinterland

¹⁶ Garlan & Tatlıcan 1997; 1998.

¹⁷ French 2004.

¹⁸ French 2004.

¹⁹ Avram 1999; Fedoseev 1999; de Boer 2001.

²⁰ Doonan 2004a, ch. 4; Doonan & Bauer 2005; Doonan 2010b.

²¹ See Doonan *et al.* 2001.

²² See Doonan, Casson & Gantos 2008.

²³ Domzaski & Doonan in preparation.

reached its highest pre-modern levels during these periods, a variety of special purpose sites can be observed including industrial, maritime, agricultural and other specialties.²⁴ A major secondary port and amphora production facility was established at Demirci plaj, about 15 km south of the main port.²⁵ This port served the expanding agricultural sector in the Demirci valley which in the density of settlement and distribution of industrial evidence resembles the regions of the Mediterranean that were subject to intensive olive production, for example the hinterland of Leptiminos.²⁶ The characteristic pyroxene tempered amphorae of Sinope are found by the hundreds in the north and west Black Sea and have been documented in a late Roman wreck off the coast of Ayancik west of Sinop.²⁷ Settlement appears to have expanded even in the highlands where a number of large settlements with ceramics imported from the coast or overseas have been recorded in our initial general surveys.²⁸ Although it is necessary to conduct further investigations it is clear that an integrated economic community existed on Sinop promontory during late Roman and early Byzantine times.

Late Roman Infrastructural Development and Economy

The late Roman settlement system in Sinop promontory shows a high level of integration in terms of demography, infrastructure and economy. Nearly all fields walked in the intensively occupied Demirci valley show traces of late Roman activity with some kind of off-site “background scatter” of ceramics and tile. Furthermore, the density of archaeological loci per hectare is very high in Demirci valley at this time as well (fig. 3). Areas that do not appear to have been attractive for settlement in other periods like Gerna, pounded by the relentless waves and currents at the extreme north-west tip of the promontory, were developed and maintained during this period.²⁹ This particular town was located on a sandy site with almost no agricultural potential but well situated to take advantage of the trade and fishing industry of the period.

Several specialized industries appear to have played more important role in the integrated economy of late Roman Sinop. Agriculture and fishing appear to have not only supported settlement in difficult locations like Gerna but in

²⁴ Doonan & Smart 2000-2001; Kassab Tezgör & Tatlıcan 1998; Doonan 2004a.

²⁵ Kassab Tezgör & Tatlıcan 1998; Kassab Tezgör 2010.

²⁶ Stone *et al.* 1998; Doonan 2004a, 101-108.

²⁷ Ballard *et al.* 2001.

²⁸ Domzalski & Doonan in preparation.

²⁹ Doonan & Smart 2000-2001; Doonan 2004b.

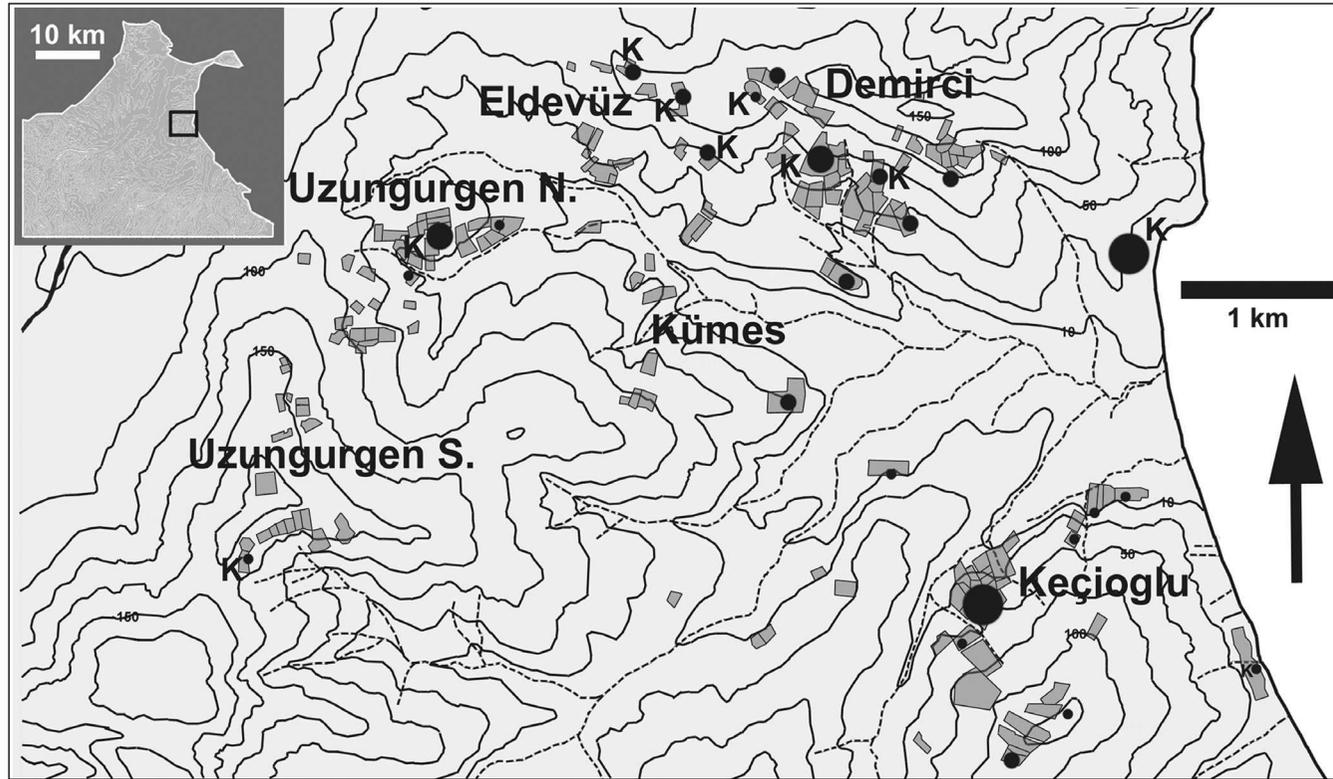


Fig. 3. Demirci valley settlement during Roman times. The size of dots represents locus area: small (<1 ha), medium (1 ha-5 ha) and large (>5 ha). Small shaded polygons represent surveyed fields. K indicates the location of kiln-related debris (wasters, kiln wall fragments, and whole kilns). The large site on the coast marked “K” indicates the location of the industrial Demirci plaj site excavated by Prof. D. Kassab-Tezgör in collaboration with the Sinop Museum.

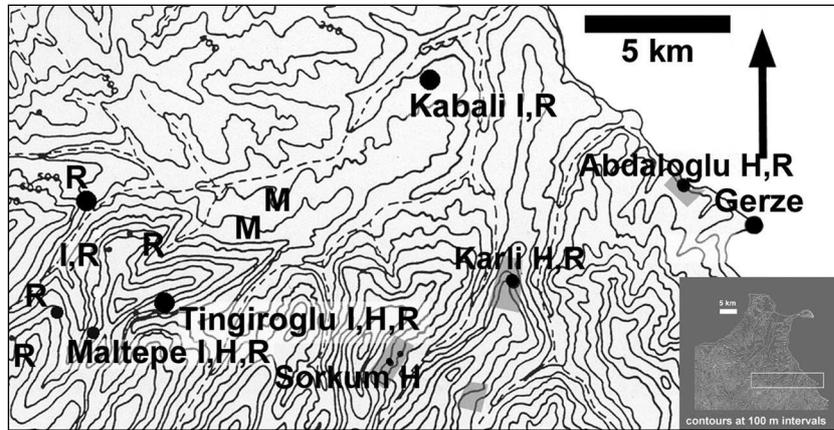


Fig. 4. Settlement in the hinterland of Gerze (anc. Carusa). Small dots indicate sites less than 1 ha, medium-size dots indicate loci 1-5 ha, and large dots indicate loci > 5ha. Gray shaded areas indicate the systematic survey quadrats, while other locations have been identified in the course of opportunistic preliminary surveys. I=Iron Age, H=Hellenistic, R=Roman and late Roman, M= Roman milestone finds.

many cases appear to have encouraged the circulation of imported trade goods to these more remote locations. From the fourth to the sixth centuries imported table wares can be found spread through the Demirci valley and into parts of the promontory sparsely settled in other pre-modern periods (*e.g.* Sarsi, Karli).³⁰ The consumption of goods from outside the promontory sharpens the general settlement pattern that implies more extensive and deeper economic integration.

Some evidence is also available that points towards the economic integration of the promontory during Roman and late Roman periods. French's study of the milestones from Sinop region documents an expansion of roads into the mountains and along the North Anatolian rift valley during Flavian times with widespread second- and early fourth-century phases of repair.³¹ The earlier phases of road building and repair do not appear to have promoted an aggressive expansion into the hinterland although the fourth century may have some relation to the late Roman expansion discussed above. Another infrastructural project dated to the early second century may never have been carried out. Elsewhere I have explored the possibility that cuttings into a spring bearing limestone outcrop at the site of Magara may have been made as

³⁰ Domzalski & Doonan in preparation.

³¹ French 1981; 1988.

part of a feasibility study for a sixteen-mile aqueduct mentioned in Pliny's correspondence with Trajan (*Ep.* 10.90-91) during his term as governor.³² Although there is certainly no evidence that an aqueduct was ever built at this location the episode suggests the level of investment the Romans considered appropriate for the development of this strategic port city and its hinterland.

Concluding Remarks

Many features of this history of community are not unique. Certainly Roman infrastructural and economic improvements are to be observed across the greater Mediterranean region. In fact, the level of Roman investment and settlement expansion around Sinope at the height of the empire (esp. 2nd century AD) seems rather meager in contrast to much of Asia Minor.³³ The two peaks of hinterland settlement (Hellenistic and late Roman/early Byzantine) may well be local responses to broader trends in settlement and economy in the greater Black Sea region. The expansion of hinterland settlement in each case appears to have coincided with important shifts in regional power and economy. The Hellenistic engagement between port and hinterland was most likely brought about when the port of Sinope was cut off from its colonial holdings in the east. The late Roman settlement expansion appears to have been more intensive, including settlement in new areas previously not occupied, infrastructural improvements and the development of a complex specialized economic system. We need further coordinated international research collaborations like this conference³⁴ in order to consider challenging questions such as the nature of Sinopean and Black Sea trade and the multiple scales of community that emerged and subsided over the long history of the "Hospitable Sea."

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³² Doonan 2004a; Doonan & Besonen in preparation.

³³ Compare examples in Mitchell 1993.

³⁴ Also see Opaiç 2010; Doonan 2010b.

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Abbreviations

- BAR IS *British Archaeological Reports. International Series (Oxford).*
TÜBA-AR *Turkish Academy of Sciences Journal of Archaeology (Ankara).*

