
BLACK SEA TRADE: SOME FURTHER GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is once again to make some general observations, concentrating mainly on recent debates and trends in the study of the Black Sea, evaluating the evidence available, and demonstrating the interpretations that can be placed on it. In many studies, Greek colonization is linked to trade. Indeed, trade or the pursuit of trading possibilities is considered by some the main reason for Greek colonization. Although we have made progress in our understanding of the Black Sea trade and are accumulating new evidence with every passing year, there is still a long way to go: interpretation of the evidence is difficult, and imposing modern concepts on the ancient economy may hinder rather than help us.

The aim of this paper is once again to make some general observations, concentrating mainly on recent debates and trends in the study of Black Sea trade, evaluating the evidence available, and demonstrating the different interpretations that can be placed on it. Publications continue to appear that contain a very simplistic approach: for example, that finds of Greek pottery in

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native contexts always indicate trade links and, of course, that they were brought here by Greeks¹; furthermore, that local societies could offer endless human resources and that slaves were one of the major commodities traded²; or that the steppes of the northern Black Sea produced huge amounts of grain, and that ships loaded with it were always in transit to the Mediterranean³.

In many interpretations, ancient Greek colonization is linked to trade. Indeed, trade or the pursuit of trading possibilities is considered by some the main reason for Greek colonization⁴. Others, correctly, view trade as partly a consequence of Greek colonization rather than a cause⁵. I shall look once more at evidence from the Black Sea in the Archaic period to shed some light on the relationship between colonization and trade.

The Archaic period saw not just the foundation of Greek colonies around the Black Sea; it was then that they put down roots, grew into viable settlements, and became a permanent feature of the landscape⁶. The consequence was that in Classical period small Archaic settlements developed into large and flourishing *poleis* (Tsetskhladze 2003:131-141). Trade with the Mediterranean played an important role in this, but the emphasis placed upon it has been at the expense of studying trade between the Pontic Greek cities and of individual cities with their hinterland.

For the Archaic period the focus is upon finding examples of East Greek fine pottery in the Black Sea colonies; and such finds are usually interpreted as evidence of a trade relationship between a particular colony and Ionia (Tsetskhladze 1998a: 51-55; 2007b). Of course, this is one possibility. But it is very difficult to establish how extensive the trade links with Ionia were. Colonization was not just a single event. It happened in waves (Tsetskhladze 1994); and the different waves of colonists could bring with them new pottery, not exclusively for trade. For the Black Sea, comprehensive quantitative studies

¹ I shall not list them here. Some bibliography can be found in Tsetskhladze 2007b.

² See examples and bibliography in Tsetskhladze 2008a.

³ See examples and references in Tsetskhladze 1998b; 2008b.

⁴ See Tsetskhladze 2006a; xxviii-xxx, with references; 2007b: 51-53, with references. See also Greaves 2007.

⁵ See, for example, Kolb 2004; Tsetskhladze 1998a: 9-10.

⁶ On Greek colonization of the Black Sea, see Tsetskhladze 1994; Avram/Hind/Tsetskhladze 2004.

have not been attempted for either fine pottery or amphorae, but pottery in neither category is large in number⁷. As we know, statistics are open to many, sometimes conflicting, interpretations. One should not expect large quantities when the first Greek settlements were themselves very small, more reminiscent of villages than what we would now regard as fully developed cities – to judge from their domestic architecture and the physical appearance (Tsetsckhladze 2004). In any case, to ground a study of trade simply on pottery finds is misleading. There are many other reasons for pottery to be there. Moreover, trade in pottery alone would provide little ‘profit’ to traders, particularly as a private venture – which is what trade was in the Archaic period. And the trader would not necessarily acquire pottery in its original place of manufacture, as shipwrecks very ably demonstrate (Parker 1992: *passim*; Carlson 2003; Delgado 2008). The price of pottery, the time taken to manufacture it, the wages of the potters and others; these are all important but have been examined mainly for the Classical period, not for the Archaic⁸.

Two fundamental aspects of Ionian colonization must always be borne in mind: its size and nature – overall, nearly 90 Ionian colonies were established around the Black Sea⁹. This requires some explanation. The number of colonies was initially far fewer, about 15; others were founded in the Classical or later periods or were sub-colonies of those already established in the Archaic period (Avram/Hind/Tsetsckhladze 2004; Tsetsckhladze 2009). Thanks to the written evidence left by the ancient Greeks themselves, there is no doubt that Ionian colonization was a result of forced migration, as the Ionians fled first the Lydians and later the Achaemenids. The Ionians were fleeing enslavement and death. By the beginning of the 5th century their homeland had suffered extensive destruction by the Achaemenids¹⁰. In these circumstances, it is misguided to concentrate on trading opportunities as a cause. People in the position in which the Ionians found themselves have other priorities.

⁷ For the most recent statistics on red-figure pottery in the north-west Black Sea littoral, see Banaru 2007. See also Tsetsckhladze 1998a: 51-65; 2007b.

⁸ On our changing perception of trade, especially for the Archaic period, and for our evaluation of pottery in native contexts, see Tsetsckhladze 2006a: iii-iv, with bibliography; 2007b: *passim*.

⁹ Seneca (*Helv.* 7.2) gives 75; Pliny (*NH* 5.112) gives 90.

¹⁰ On the reasons for Ionian colonisation, especially around the Black Sea, see Tsetsckhladze 1994. See also Tsetsckhladze 2002.

Recent studies of the earliest East Greek pottery discovered in native sites in the northern Black Sea hinterland demonstrate that it does not predate the establishment of Greek colonies thereabouts, which is the opposite of what had been thought (Tsetskhladze 2007b). It is true that some new chronologies favour higher dating, but these are, to some degree, still works in progress (Kerschner/Schlotzhauer 2005; Kerschner 2006). It is very important to ask ourselves why this pottery is found so far inland? Why not in the near hinterland of the earliest Greek settlements? The obvious answer is that there was probably no local population close to the settlements, and this is an interpretation gaining more and more adherents (Melyukova 2001: 30). We thought initially that this situation obtained only for the northern Black Sea; nowadays we have mounting evidence that the same is the case for the Central Black Sea region of Turkey¹¹. Examples are the bird-bowl in Amasya Museum, Milesian and Corinthian pottery of the mid-7th century from Boğazköy itself, another fragment of a Milesian vase from Alişar. A few more could be added, the most important of which is Kaman-Kalehöyük, where a Protogeometric fragment was found. It is true that we do not know much about the Archaic colonies of Amisos and Sinope; the pottery we have so far dates from the end of the 7th-6th centuries BC (Tsetskhladze 2007a: 165-173). Or perhaps the pottery in the hinterland has nothing to do with the Greek colonies and was brought here from the inland regions via the Halys river. After all, how can one interpret a small quantity of pottery, especially when there is little if any evidence from the 'nearby' Greek colonies? Or how can one be certain that all of this pottery resulted from trading activities and was not in the nature of diplomatic or other gifts? In a native context, Greek pottery, like many other objects in this early period, can and should be considered as prestige items (Tsetskhladze 2007b: 46-47).

For the Archaic period we generally lack evidence of trade between the Black Sea colonies. The only significant evidence of which I am aware is an inscribed lead plaque of the 530s-510s BC from Phanagoria on the Taman Peninsula, which demonstrates the existence of a trade in slaves between Olbia and Phanagoria (Vinogradov 1998: 160-163).

¹¹ See Summerer 2007, with reference. We have long known about East Greek pottery from Akalan as well as Archaic Greek-type architectural terracottas. The same type of architectural terracottas is now known from another five local settlement situated along the Halys river. These settlements have been interpreted as residence of local chiefs who controlled the trade route (Summerer 2007).

The geographical location of the colonies in large measure dictated what kind of trade could develop, be it with the local peoples of the hinterland or with Greek colonies around the Black Sea. From this perspective, the southern Black Sea yields material to stimulate discussions. Heracleia Pontica had no easy access to the hinterland or to trade routes leading to Central Anatolia (Tssetskhladze 2007a: 164-165); later, in the Classical period, it developed close trade links with other parts of the Black Sea, witnessed by numerous finds of Heracleian amphorae (Monakhov 2003: 123-144), thanks to its well-sited harbour. Of course, founding its own colonies at Chersonesus in the Crimea and Callatis on the western Black Sea coast helped this. The same situation can be seen at Sinope, which also had little access to trade links with Central Anatolia: not only have Sinopean amphorae and amphora-stamps been found widely around the Black Sea but also other examples of Sinopean pottery and coins (Monakhov 2003: 145-160; Tssetskhladze 2009)¹².

In ancient times, extensive use was made of the shortest north-south crossing of the Black Sea (from Cape Carambis to the Crimea). Scholars have asked: when did it start to be used? The usual answer is the last quarter of the 5th century BC, the time of Chersonesus establishing Heracleia Pontica. But there is material to show that a possibly Milesian Chersonesus had existed from the second half of the 6th century, before Dorian Chersonesus, so the question requires further attention, and the possibility arises that the route was in operation from this earlier date¹³.

Interestingly, Chersonesus itself developed very extensive amphora production but we do not find any examples along the southern Black Sea or, for that matter along the eastern Black Sea; and only a few along the western¹⁴. This begs for an explanation. Chersonesian amphorae are found mainly in the *chora* of Chersonesus, in a few other northern Black Sea colonies and on sites belonging to the local population of the north and to the Getae¹⁵. At the same time, Hellenistic Colchian amphorae are found only in the northern Black Sea

¹² On Sinopean amphora-stamps in the Mediterranean, see Garlan 2007; Finkielsztejn 2007.

¹³ On the shortest crossing and related problems, see Tssetskhladze 2007a: 168.

¹⁴ For the latest about Chersonesian amphorae and amphora-stamps, see now Kats 2007: 294-325, 442-447.

¹⁵ On the discovery of a Chersonesian amphora-stamp in the southern Levant, see Finkielsztejn 2007.

(Tsetskhladze/Vnukov 1992). Does this indicate that there was a particular formalized trading pattern? I would suggest so.

In contrast, Amisos, for instance, never developed a large-scale Pontic trade, if any, but it had intensive links with Central Anatolia by a trade route through Akalan, Amasya, Zela and Caesarea to Tarsus. The Halys river was navigable as far as Çeltik, so İkiztepe should also have played an important role in trade with the Anatolian hinterland¹⁶.

Sometimes new finds oblige us to revisit and revise our interpretations. A few years ago in the Eshera settlement, in the hinterland not far from Dioscuria, three pieces of Late Wild Goat pottery were discovered. Until then, this kind of pottery was not known in Colchis. The pieces date from the beginning of the 6th century. The establishment of the Greek colony of Dioscuria dates only from the middle of the 6th century. How should we interpret these new finds? They are insufficient to cause us either to revise the date of establishment of Dioscuria or to speak about some pre-colonial links¹⁷. One should be very careful when interpreting Greek pottery found in local contexts. We have several examples of Greek pottery found in contexts considerably at variance from its date¹⁸.

It is obvious that Greek imports to the modern-day Ukrainian steppes reached local settlement by river, although overland routes also existed. Hard evidence comes from the Classical period. Near the village of Peshchannoe in the Ukraine, about 500 km from any Greek city, a boat was discovered. It is large and simple, made from the trunk of a single oak tree. It contained the skeleton of the boatman as well as 15 Greek gold-plated bronze vessels. In the River Dnieper a fragment of a boat was found containing amphorae¹⁹.

Greek colonies were established along the Thracian Black Sea coast from the end of the 7th century BC. Despite this, Greek pottery and metalwork started

¹⁶ On the Central Black Sea coastal region of Turkey, see Tsetskhladze 2007a: 173, 186-191, with bibliography.

¹⁷ On the Greek pottery from Dioscuria and other sites, see Tsetskhladze 2006b; 2007b: 53-54.

¹⁸ For instance, an Ionian vessel of the second half-late 7th century BC from one of the Scythian tombs of the 6th-beginning of the 5th century BC in northern Dobrudja (Simion 2003 [1992]; Melyukova 2001); or black-figure eye-cups found in the same context as an Attic red-figure amphora stylistically close to the Berlin Painter in a house on Monte Iato (I am most grateful to E. Kistler for this information).

¹⁹ On Peshchannoe and the fragment of a boat in the River Dnieper, see Tsetskhladze 1998a: 65, with bibliography.

to appear in the hinterland only from the second quarter of the 5th century BC. It is difficult to explain why we have no Greek material until the Classical period. It is most likely a simple lack of evidence: Thracian settlements have not been studied in depth and what we do know are dozens of royal and princely tombs of the Classical period²⁰.

In general, we know the Classical and Hellenistic periods much better than the Archaic. From the end of the 5th century BC an interesting phenomenon may be observed around the western, northern and eastern Black Sea: step by step, Greeks penetrated into the hinterland and established *emporía* or craft centers in local settlements. To give just a few examples: Pistiros in Thrace, Tanais and Elizavetovskoe in the northern Black Sea, and Sakanchia in Colchis (Tsetsckhladze 2000). Maybe the situation was the same along the southern Black Sea, but we have no evidence. The Elizavetovskoe settlement provides some very useful statistics²¹: for the Classical period, fragments of about 23,500 amphorae have been found, indicating that every year some 1750-1900 amphorae were brought there. In Getic lands fragments of amphorae and amphorae-stamps have been found at 197 sites – amphorae from Thasos at 63 locations, from Rhodes at 78, from Heracleia Pontica at 36, Sinope at 29, Cos at 14, Cnidos at 12, Chios at 11 and Chersonesus at 4²². But we need to consider what proportion amphorae formed of the overall pottery find at native sites. The 18 years of excavation at the Scythian centre at Belsk have yielded over 10,000 fragments of Greek pottery, the vast majority from the middle of the 6th-5th centuries BC. Breaking down this figure by origin and type, we have: Ionian 16%; Chian (including amphorae) 12.6%; Thasian amphorae 7.8%; Attic 3.7% (little painted, mostly black-glaze); Lesbian amphorae 1.7%; amphorae of unidentified origin 38.1%²³. At the Motroninskoe settlement, along with 65,000 fragments of local handmade pottery, there are more than 7500 fragments of Greek pottery, the vast majority of it dating to the last third of the 6th-first

²⁰ On Greek colonization of the Thracian Black Sea coast and the relationship between Thracians and Greeks, see Tsetsckhladze 1994; 1998a: 58-60; Lazarov 1998.

²¹ On the Elizavetovskoe settlement, see Tsetsckhladze 1998a: 57, 65, with bibliography.

²² Tsetsckhladze 1998a: 65, with bibliography.

²³ Shramko 1987: 121-126, 174-179.

quarter of the 5th century BC; this is about 11% of all pottery found here, and some 96% of it comes from amphorae²⁴.

These statistics lead us on to another important matter: how to interpret amphorae in a local context? We have always assumed that they were used to transport wine and oil. Many publications go further and presume that the presence of amphorae from a given place in a local settlement indicates a firm direct relationship between the two, whereas it is much more likely that the amphorae had been used in trade between one Greek centre and a Greek colony and had reached the local settlement from that colony. We cannot be at all sure that what was in an amphora when it was delivered to a local settlement was the same substance it contained initially. It is not only olive oil and wine that were transported in amphorae, so too, as evidence, especially that from shipwrecks, demonstrates, were fish and other commodities²⁵. For example, fish was not just exported from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, it formed quite an important part of the Scythians' diet (Gavriljuk 2005). We have always assumed that the amphorae found in Scythian tombs and settlements had contained wine. But why just wine?

We have examples of the reuse of amphorae (Slane 2004). So that, once emptied of its initial contents on arrival in a Greek colony, an amphora could be refilled with something more appropriate to the requirements of the local population or situation before being despatched onward²⁶. Herodotus (3.6) gives a very explicit instance of this:

I will now tell of a thing that but few of those who sail to Egypt have perceived. Earthen jars full of wine are brought into Egypt twice a year from all Greece and Phoenicia besides; yet one might safely say there is not a single empty wine jar anywhere in the country. What then (one may ask) becomes of them?... Each governor ...must gather in all the earthen

²⁴ Bessonova/Skoryi 1999: 37. The complete and archaeologically complete examples are in roughly similar proportion.

²⁵ A shipwreck at Varna yielded some 20-30 amphorae, although only one of them, probably Sinopean, was recovered. It contained fish bones, olive pips and resin. Such a combination suggests that the amphora had been reused (Lund/Gabrielsen 2005: 164). The painted markings on some amphorae demonstrate that grain was also shipped in them. Furthermore, scientific analysis of organic residues in amphorae has added commodities such as fruit and vegetables to the standard list of contents such as wine and oil (Lawall 2007). See also Garland 2000: 90-91; Dupont 1998: 182, 218 note 257.

²⁶ For examples of amphorae refilled and re-exported, see Parker 1992: 347, 631, 1239.

pots from his own township and take them to Memphis, and the people of Memphis must fill them with water and carry them to the waterless lands of Syria; so the earthen pottery that is brought to Egypt and unloaded or emptied there is carried to Syria to join the stock that has already been taken there.

In another example, Xenophon writes: "They also found slices of dolphin salted away in amphorae, and in other vessels dolphin blubber, which the Mossynoecians used in the same way as the Greeks use olive oil" (*Anab.* 5.4.28); whilst a room has been found in the Panskoye settlement containing amphorae reused to store oil and grain (Ščeglov 2002: 53-54). In a Hellenistic cellar in Olbia an amphora was discovered in which there were remains of bones and fish-scales together with grains of wheat, barley and millet and lentil seeds (Pashkevich 2001: 515-516). Furthermore, amphorae might be used as gifts or tribute or taxes, not just in trade (Lawall 2005: 194). And the empty amphorae were themselves traded – at public auction in Classical Athens (Lund 2004: 211). The foregoing confutes simple notions about the uses of amphorae, and recent publications have underlined the over-emphasis placed on amphorae as evidence of trade, especially with local societies²⁷. In any case, it is always necessary to distinguish international, regional and local trade. They do not always go together, varying according to demand and circumstance (*cf.* Hannestad 2005; Stolba 2007)²⁸.

There has been much discussion of the Black Sea imports and export, usually in terms of trade between Black Sea colonies and the Mediterranean (Tsetschladze 1998a: 51-67; 1998b); that about the slave and grain trades continues vigorously (Tsetschladze 1998b; 2008a; 2008b; Avram 2007; Moreno 2007). It seems to me that it is more important to know what the local populations exported to the Pontic Greek cities: in the main, metals, as far as we can tell. The origin of the iron ore used by the Greek cities, especially those of the northern Black Sea, has long been debated. Were the ores imported from Asia Minor, Thracia and Scythia, as some suggest, or was local ore from Kerch

²⁷ See, for example, Eiring/Finkielisztejn/Lawall/Lund 2004; Lawall 1998; 2004; 2005; 2007; Lund 2004; 2007; Opait 2007.

²⁸ Another important point is that several Black Sea colonies had quite extensive viticulture of their own. Amphorae bringing wines from the Mediterranean might well be emptied there and refilled with the local product for onward transit – new wine in old amphorae! For the latest on the viticulture of the Greek colonies of the northern Black Sea, see Vinokurov 2007.

used? A specialist study has revealed that metalworking was based on neither local nor imported ore but on ingots, a major production centre for which was the wooded steppe zone inhabited by the Scythians (Tsetskhladze 1998a: 66-67). This is one explanation for Greek dependence on the Scythians and the prevalence of Greek luxury objects in Scythian elite and royal tombs. Such Scythian production centres as Belsk and Kamenskoe, where much Greek pottery was found (see above), leading to a presumption of a Greek presence, could have produced ingots. A similar situation may have existed along the western Black Sea: here the Greeks set up *emporía* in the hinterland in an area rich in iron (Tsetskhladze 2000).

Whilst in the eastern Black Sea, the Caucasian Mountains were a potential source of iron ore or ingots.

We can presume the same situation for the southern Black Sea. According to written sources, the Chalybes were the inventors of ironworking (Xen. *Anab.* 5.5.1.). How true this is we do not know. No archaeological investigation of the territory where they are supposed to have lived has been undertaken. A recent book on iron technology and iron-making communities in north-eastern Anatolia (Bayburt and Erzurum provinces) has demonstrated that post-Urartian iron production was on a small scale, just for the immediate needs of the community (to generate local trade and exchange) (McConchie 2004: 104-165).

Although we have made progress in our understanding of Black Sea trade and are accumulating new evidence with every passing year, there is still a long way to go – interpretation of the evidence is difficult, and imposing modern concepts on the ancient economy may hinder rather than help us.

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