

THE GREEKS AND THE BLACK SEA
from the Bronze Age to the early twentieth century

Marianna Koromila



Contributions by

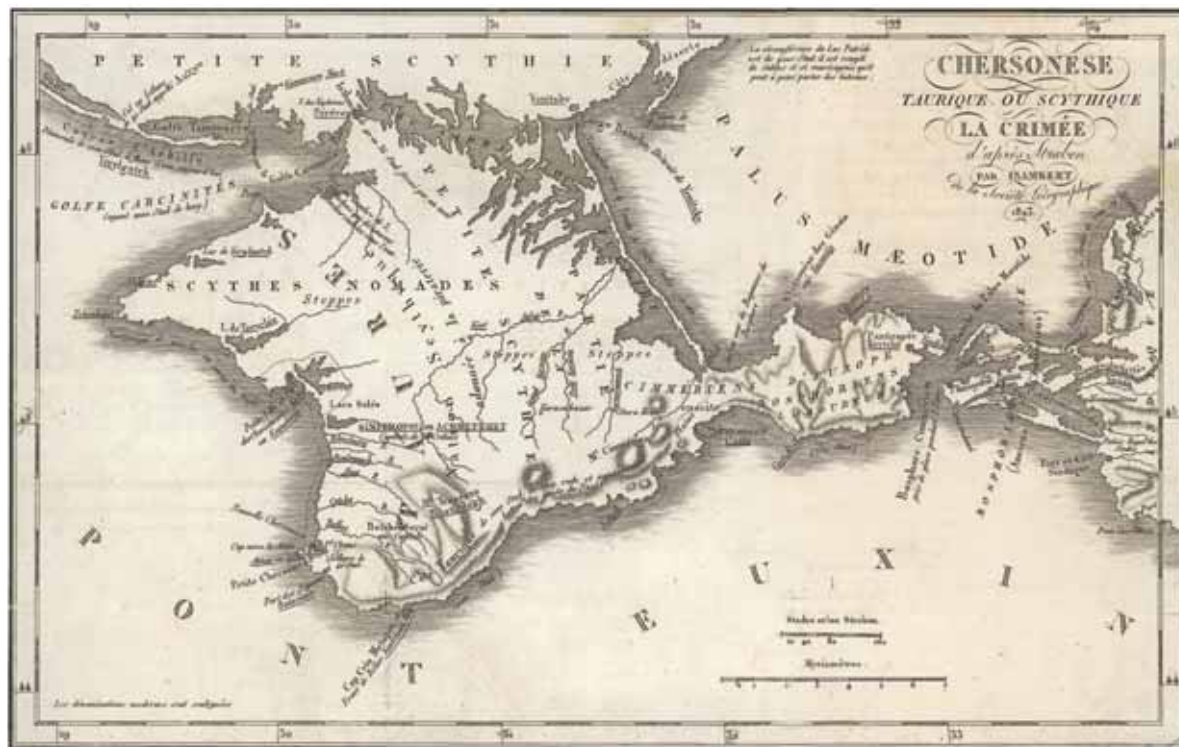
Alexander Alexidze ~ Otar Lordkipanidze
Anna Ballian ~ Louisa Polychronidou-Loukopoulou
Petros N. Protonotarios

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Map 29. The Crimea. Publication of Strabo's *Geography* by the French Geographical Service, Paris 1824.

The Crimean Peninsula

**The land of the Taurians and the Scythians: the Tauric or Scythian Peninsula of the ancient Greeks
The land of the Goths: Gothia of the Byzantines and its south shore: the Perateia of Trebizond**

In the northwest Crimea, the fenland formed between the central Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula, was known as Achilles' Racecourse ('a peninsula that lies flat on the sea ... It is sandy, and water may be had by digging', says Strabo, in Book VII.3.19). It terminates at the Karkinites Gulf ('a very large gulf reaching up towards the north as far as one thousand stadia'). In the northeast, the extensive swamp of Sivash, separating the peninsula from the shallow Sea of Azov and the Ukrainian steppe, was known as Lake Saprà, the 'Putrid Sea' ('extremely marshy and scarcely navigable for sewn boats, for the winds readily uncover the shallow places and then cover them with water again, making the marshes impassable for the larger boats', VII.4.1). Thus a very narrow isthmus, 18 km. long and just 10 km. wide, is formed. This spit joins the Crimea, which is virtually an island, to the mainland.

The peninsula covers an area of 25,500 sq. km., its greatest length is around 300 km. The plain, which is a continuation of the North steppe, accounts for approximately 80% of its surface. In the south, the mountains separating the plain from the littoral rise up like a wall – the highest peak, Roman Kosh, is 1,545 m. a.s.l. Thanks to this natural barrier, the entire Greek coastal zone was completely protected from invasion by the peoples who came down across the steppe, as well as from the Russian winter and the icy north winds. Even today, this shore, from the site of the ancient Greek colony of Chersonesos (one of the largest and best organized Euxine city-states) in the southwest, to that of ancient Theodosia in the southeast, is the most 'Mediterranean' region of the North.

In 1784, at the southernmost edge of the western Crimea, on a rocky peninsula that forms an excellent harbour, the Tsarina Catherine the Great (1762-1796) built a naval base for the imperial Black Sea fleet and founded beside it the port-town of Sebastopol (Sevastopol), a town for the dockyard. Implementation of the ‘Greek Plan’ for Russian dominance in the Black Sea basin and the continuation of the Byzantine Empire under Muscovite auspices had begun.

The Ottoman Empire, the ‘sick man of the Bosphoros’, had begun to lose control of the seas when the Russian navy defeated the Ottomans in the East Aegean, in the strait between Chios and Asia Minor, at the Battle of Çeşme, in June 1770. But for the Russians to reach the Aegean, they had to sail their Baltic fleet through Gibraltar! The Black Sea had been an ‘Ottoman lake’ since the fifteenth century. As this phase of the endless Russo-Turkish War drew to a close, the two empires met in a Turkish village on the Don to sign the Russo-Turkish Treaty that was to change the face of the Black Sea: in 1774 at Küçük Kaynarci (or Kutchuk-Kainardji) the defeated sultan granted to the Russians strategic positions of the North Black Sea (Ottoman fortresses at the mouth of the Dniester and on the Straits of Kerch), he relinquished the Sea of Azov and the surrounding steppe, acknowledged Russian interests in the Tatar Khanate of the Crimea, which was under Ottoman suzerainty (the Russians finally annexed the territory in 1783), and recognized the tsars as the spiritual patrons of Orthodox Christians in Ottoman territories. In this way the administrative region of New Russia was created – seen as either southern Russia, or Russia of the North Black Sea, a more or less empty zone, utterly undeveloped, inhospitable and even hostile, with only a handful of inhabitants.*

The exploitation of New Russia began with the building of the Black Sea fleet, the constructing of the dockyard in the Crimean harbour (where the Black Sea fleet of the Soviet Union was also moored until August 1991), and the founding of towns along the Black Sea coast, most of which were given Greek names, such as Kher-son, Sevastopol, Sympheropol, Theodosia, Eupatoria and Odessa in 1794, names that recalled the ‘Ionian lake’ of mighty Miletos or the ‘Byzantine lake’ of powerful Constantinople. Unfortunately, the tsarina and her favourite Potemkin were in a hurry. Having only a hazy picture of the glorious Greek past, their name-giving was hopelessly haphazard. Theodosia alone (Medieval Kaffa or Kefe) was rebaptized with its ancient name, while Sevastopolis was suddenly transferred from the Caucasus to the Crimea. And what is more, in order to lend prestige and historical weight to the new foundations, the Academy of St Petersburg organized the first enthusiastic missions to the South. In this context, antiquities were discovered at the entrance to the Bug and identified with the city of Olbia. In addition, every army officer who oversaw construction was ordered to alert the Hermitage of all antiquities that came to light during the course of digging the foundations for both military and other public buildings. In most cases orders were issued from on high, to conduct ‘excavations’ before carrying on with the construction work. Thus, the first impressive discoveries were due to the archaeological fervour and patriotism of the military personnel of 1800.

The ‘archaeology of the generals’ (initiated in 1769 at the start of the Russo-Turkish War of 1769-1774, with the discovery of a rich Scythian burial mound near the Sea of Azov) was focused primarily on the Scythian areas of New Russia and yielded luxurious and highly-prized works of Hellenic art that were discovered in



Fig. 165. Grave stele from Chersonesos, 3rd c. BC. Historical-Archaeological Museum, Sevastopol.

For ancient Chersonesos-Byzantine Cherson, see also pp. 231-237 and Map 33.

* For the tight-knit Greek population of the Tatar (or Tartar) Crimea and their mass exodus toward the desolate Sea of Azov at this time, see Chapter V.



Fig. 166. The goddess Aphrodite, 4th c. BC. An exquisite painted work of the Hellenistic era; detail from a scene decorating an ivory sarcophagus. Found in 1830 in a Scythian barrow near Kerch. Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

* The small allotments (*cleruchies*) were approximately 11 hectares, while the larger ones could reach up to 33. Those of 26.5 ha. (= 420 × 630 m.) were the commonest. There were public and private estates, as well as those belonging to sanctuaries.

the monumental tombs of the Scythians. The Greek antiquities fortunately caught the attention of certain important art connoisseurs, who endeavoured to preserve whatever came their way, either by collecting material scattered in the old Ottoman fortresses, such as that at Kerch, or by drawing the visible remains of what had survived until 1820-1840. And it was a good thing too, because before systematic excavations were conducted where the Milesians had founded dozens of colonies, in order to surround the entrance to the Maiotis Lake (the Sea of Azov), the furious rebuilding of the nineteenth century had begun. Nothing was left untouched. In 1850, ancient Pantikapaion (Panticapaeum) was dismantled stone by stone, effectively becoming a quarry for the construction of Kerch, an important harbour town at one of the Black Sea's most strategic points.

Thenceforth scholars were locked in confrontation with governors' plans for development and the aspirations of communities that had no concern for the natural and historical environment of their locality. We must not forget, however, that despite the political, social and economic hostility archaeologists have had to face (familiar to a certain degree across the developing East), and despite the existence for years of strictly guarded military zones along the former Soviet coastline, the Euxine North boasts an archaeological tradition that is already a century and a half old. This tradition provides the background against which research has developed in recent years with such giddy impetus and in pioneering sectors of archaeological method. Among these sectors are the study of the rural setting of ancient cities, the investigation of the organization of the *chora* and its modes of dependence on the *polis*, study of land distribution, property ownership, the techniques of cultivation and the kinds of crops, and finally the reconstruction of the natural environment over time and man's intervention in it.

The results of scholarly research conducted along the southwest coast of the Crimea, in the region of Dorian Chersonesos, appear to have opened a new chapter in the study of ancient Greek history. Nowhere else has the hinterland of a city-state been investigated so systematically as in the environs of modern Sevastopol, where the citizens of Chersonesos had their farms and estates. The reconstruction of land divisions in Chersonesian territory allows us to set foot again in the ancient fields with their low fences separating the vineyard, the vegetable garden and the pasture of each property; and to see afresh a well-organized society based on the fundamental democratic values of equal rights and fair land distribution. During the heyday of Chersonesos in the fourth century BC, the cultivated land was divided into some four hundred small and medium-sized allotments (*cleruchies*), with most farms amounting to 26.5 hectares.*

Viticulture was dominant in most of the agricultural region around the city and surplus wine was sent for sale in Olbia and the other Euxine markets. During the last decades of the fourth century BC, when the *chora* stretched far northwestwards, up to the boundaries of the Olbian territory, these new estates were producing mainly wheat. This was the period when immigrants from the opposite shores streamed into Chersonesos. These newcomers had left their homes in the cities of Thrace, in order to escape the absolutism of King Lysimachos, or, in the case of the Kallatians, had been driven out from their homeland for having instigated the uprising against the Macedonian monarch. The Chersonesians honoured their common origin with the Kallatians – Chersonesos and Kallatis were both colonies of Pontic Herakleia – and

shared among the refugees the northern wheatfields of their territory. But easy days never last forever. Scythian expansion toward the Greek coast of the Crimea during the early decades of the third century BC (as well as the appearance of Celtic conquerors on the opposite shores), stirred up political and social unrest and altered perceptions. Landowners both small and large began to sell their property and take up a more secure position behind the city walls. The concentration of property in the hands of a few powerful landowners resulted in the overthrow of the democratic regime: a handful of oligarchs instituted aristocratic rule, around 250 BC.

The social instability in the face of Scythian expansion and the creeping barbarization of the countryside left their mark also on the religious beliefs of the Chersonesians. The terrified inhabitants of the Euxine North, were reassured on receiving the news that at Delphi the god Apollo had miraculously saved his oracle-shrine from the Celts, by blocking their approach with an avalanche of boulders unleashed from the heights of Mount Parnassos. The barbarians scrambled helter-skelter along the footpaths when they saw 'the heavens fall onto their heads'. And so, thanks to the landslide triggered most likely by an earth tremor, the pillaging incursion of the Celts and Gauls was averted. That was in 278 BC.

The relieving Apollonian message from Greece had reached the remotest reaches of the Hellenistic world. Henceforth, the cult of the holy trinity, Leto, Apollo and Artemis, acquired a more focused and essential meaning. In the region where the great virgin goddess Artemis held sway, the Chersonesians converted their cellars and other basement spaces in their houses into domestic shrines, in order to draw Leto and her children closer to them, and to pray to the divine triad for protection against the Scythians and whatever other forces threatened both personal and family tranquility.

Public life, a corporate feeling among the citizens, and communal worship of the city-state's patron deities had already begun to wane when King Skylouros built Neapolis, the first Scythian fortress in the Crimean interior.

The achievement of long-term excavation in the southwest Crimea is that it has restored for us the model of a Dorian city-state and brought back to life the moribund relics of the past. In this arid, almost barren, rocky terrain, a waterless area cut by many ravines, we are able to picture the newcomers clearing the earth, making terraces to retain the soil, planting vines and harvesting drop by drop the bountiful morning dew in order to solve the irrigation problems of their landholdings. Household needs for water were met by collecting in cisterns the little rainfall that blessed the land.

Indeed; the colonists from Pontoherakleia, of Megarian descent, who had come to the untamed haunts of the goddess Parthenos in 422 BC, transformed the rocky earth into cultivable soil and built a wealthy city at the site where the Milesians had once founded a settlement. But the Milesian colony had not survived, either because the mythical ferocity of the Taurians, a proto-Scythian race, or the stony ground repelled the band of settlers in the sixth century BC. They directed their steps instead to the eastern part of the south Crimean coast. Theodosia, Byzantine Theodosiopolis, later Kaffa, on the site where Tsarina Catherine would found modern Theodosia-Feodosiya, was a colony established by the Milesians who had abandoned the rugged place where the Taurians worshipped the wild Parthenos.

Fig. 167 (right page). Artemis. Handle of a Late Archaic bronze mirror (early 5th c.), from the recent excavations at Chersonesos. Parthenos, virgin goddess of nature and the animal kingdom, *Potnia Theron* and *Tauropolos*, had her refuge at the southwest edge of the Taurian Peninsula (Crimea). The cult of Artemis Orthia was popular in Sparta, while the Athenians promised their girls at the very ancient Attic sanctuary of Brauron, where Artemis was worshipped together with Iphigeneia in a cave. Later, a sanctuary of Bendis (the goddess's Thracian avatar) was founded in Piraeus.

Fig. 168. Bronze weight with the initials ΔΗ, 1st-3rd c. AD. Found in a wine-making installation of a farm at Gorgippia (Rus. Anapa). Wherever the vine would take root, all country houses had grape-pressing floors for making the household wine. In major wine-producing areas there were larger installations for the commercial production of wine. Gorgippia is located on the east side of the Cimmerian Bosphoros, south-east of the Straits (District of Krasnodar, Russian Federation). See also Map 32 on p. 222.





About one hundred years later, the Dorians sailed from Herakleia. Chersonesos was the last Megarian colony in the Euxine. The circumstances in 422 BC were certainly much more favourable. The Taurians had retreated to the interior of the peninsula that retained their name – the Taurian Peninsula. Nonetheless, the primordial cult of the pre-Hellenic Parthenos-Artemis lived on: the goddess Parthenos held sway over the North-South geographical axis of the Crimea - Bithynia - Paphlagonia; the River Parthenios (Turk. Bartın), where the goddess had bathed, was the maritime boundary of Bithynia and Paphlagonia in Euxine Asia Minor (Black Sea Turkey). From Herakleia in Bithynia, colonists embarked for the Crimea. Perhaps they were the only people who were able to communicate with the Taurians. Perhaps the religious parameter in the historical process is still the major lacuna in our knowledge, impeding our perception of history.

According to Herodotos, the Taurians ‘lived by plundering and war’. ‘...all shipwrecked men, and any Greeks whom they take in their sea-raiding, they sacrifice to the Virgin goddess... they smite the victim on the head with a club; they then throw down the body from the cliff whereon their temple stands, and place the head on a pole; ... This deity to whom they sacrifice is said by the Taurians themselves to be Agamemnon’s daughter Iphigeneia’ (*Histories* IV.103). Myth relates that it was to this sanctuary that Orestes, Iphigeneia’s brother, came, sent thither by the Delphic oracle, in order to escape the Furies who were pursuing him for the murder of his mother, Klytaimnestra. The shepherds who found him led the captive to the sanctuary and it was there that the two children of Agamemnon recognized one another. In his play *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, Euripides tells us that at the very last moment the goddess Athena appeared and ordered the King of the Taurians to let the two siblings leave his realm, taking with them the *xoanon*, the wooden effigy of the goddess Parthenos. ‘They shall henceforth worship her as Artemis and they shall call her Tauropolos – the huntress of bulls’, Athena pronounced.

All these stories, in their way, explain why the Milesians abandoned the fine harbour in the southwest Crimea and ventured further east, to the shore protected by the high cliffs, where they founded Theodosia.

Fig. 169. Granary-pit (5 m. deep), found near the wine-making installations of a 4th-c. BC farm on the Crimean shore of the Sea of Azov, where there were dozens of small agricultural settlements belonging to Pantikapaion (Ukr. Kerch). The three buildings that make up the complex at the village known today as Generalskoe were protected by a circuit wall. Here the region’s grain was collected, to be transported by ship to the Bosphorians capital. Barbarian settlements – one stage in the Hellenization of some Scythian and Maiotian groups – were also found near the Greek villages.





Fig. 184. Funerary stele of a citizen of Chersonesos, member of a Hellenized Scythian family. 'Skythas, son of Theagenes who lived for 35 years' (2nd c. BC).

Byzantine Cherson (ancient Greek Chersonesos)

At the southwest edge of the Crimea, where the head-hunting Taurians once made their home, Megarians from Herakleia Pontike founded the city of Chersonesos (modern Sevastopol') in 422 BC. Her exceptional harbour and strategic position at the centre of the Euxine basin ensured her place as an important mercantile and maritime node in the ancient network of Greek cities. When the wave of invasions broke, first the Romans and later the Byzantines fortified Cherson with strongholds in the surrounding countryside and strengthened the ancient walls of the city in order to keep her safe and under their exclusive control.

Until the end of the thirteenth century, Cherson remained a Byzantine frontier city in the northern reaches of the Black Sea: a watch-tower for Constantinople, 298 nautical miles from the Byzantine capital and 360 from that other great city of the Euxine Pontus, Trebizond. She was a well-organized but lone city at the southernmost end of the North; opposite the three mouths of the Danube. Located at the point where North and South almost seem to meet – a mere three days away –, she commands the sea lane for shipping from Constantinople to the Caucasus and the Sea of Azov. Cherson stood at the furthest extremity of the route followed by migrant-invaders from the East and the North as they advanced resolutely westwards.

A city with two personae and two sides. The sea before her linked Cherson with the entire empire – from the sea the city drew her power and livelihood. The sea determined Cherson's prosperity not only because most of the income derived from fishing, salting fish, selling salt, and all the nautical tasks associated with the commercial port, the imperial dockyard, the shipbuilders' and repairers' yards, but also because the Paphlagonian and Pontic cities of nearby Asia Minor sent wheat, wine and olive oil, so essential for the sustenance of the Crimean city's 5,000-7,000 inhabitants. If grain does not pass across from the Asia Minor coast 'the Chersonites cannot live', wrote Constantine Porphyrogennetos in the tenth century. The sea succoured solitary Cherson. Thanks to the sea she survived when the Late Roman-Early Byzantine world of the steppe and the Danube crumbled. Yet, throughout the Byzantine Age she owed her *raison d'être* largely to her other, landward side. Cherson was located within the barbarian North. Those Scythians and Sarmatians who had not been Hellenized were assimilated in the state of the Ostrogoths, who took the Crimea in the third century AD. After them came the Huns, in AD 370. The Goths, now Christians, withdrew to the Crimean interior, and being Orthodox – and not adherents to the Arian heresy like the Goths who settled in Western Europe – they allied themselves with the Byzantines in order to survive and withstand the constant attacks of the barbarian newcomers, who were crossing the steppe north of the Crimea.



Map 33.

Ancient Chersonesos-Byzantine Cherson: 5th century BC–14th century AD

- A = The fortified acropolis of the ancient and the Byzantine city
 B = The commercial harbour and the Middle Byzantine (11th-c.) walls
 N = The naval dockyard
 I to XXIV = 24 towers of the wall's Byzantine phase (5th-11th c.); many of these were founded on top of the Hellenistic walls (3rd-2nd c. BC)
 1-4 = The gates of the landward fortification
 5 = The ancient tower guarding the central gate
 6 = The ancient mint (in the centre of the city)
 7 = 4th-century BC building
 8 = Houses of the Hellenistic period
 9 = The ruins of Byzantine churches (inside and outside the walls)
 10 = The cemetery of Classical times and ancient neighbourhoods (north side, overlooking the sea), and area of Early Christian churches
 11 = The main thoroughfare of the city
 12 = The hill with the sanctuary of Parthenos (cult of Artemis and Iphigenia)
 The archaeological site lies 3 km. south of modern Sebastopol (Sevastopol'), at the southwest edge of the Crimean Peninsula.
 For ancient Chersonesos and particularly Herakleia (as the city's well-organized *chora* was known), see pp. 212-215. See also the map of the Crimea, on p. 211.



Fig. 185. In AD 488, when Emperor Zeno ordered the repair of the ancient walls, an arched entrance was built on top of the gate of the Hellenistic walls (dated in the 3rd-2nd c. BC).



Fig. 186. 'Theotokos, help your servant Sabbas, *hypatos* [and] *archon* of Cherson.' Seal of the 8th c. (wt 30.75 g.) Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D.C. In the sigillography of Cherson (the seals of ecclesiastical and state officials), the entire Byzantine nobility officiates: *protospatharios* and *strategos*, *archon* and *pateras tes poleos* (governors, generals and magistrates), *spatharokandidatos* and *kommerkiarios* (responsible for economic and commercial activity, tariffs and customs at this frontier crossroads on the Euxine).

The conversion of the populations of the Crimea to Christianity began from Chersonesos-Cherson in the second century. During the persecutions under Emperor Trajan (AD 98-117), the banished Bishop of Rome, Saint Clement, was martyred here. In 325, at the First Ecumenical Council (held at Nicaea in Bithynia, Asia Minor), two bishops from the Crimea took part: Theophilus, Bishop of Gothia (as the ancient realm of the Taurians was known after the mass settlement there by Goths) and Kadmos, Bishop of the Cimmerian Bosporos. The Episcopal See of Chersonesos-Cherson was founded in 381, during the reign of Theodosios I.

Throughout the Early Byzantine period, this far-flung city was used as a place of exile for eminent persons: in 460 the Bishop of Gangra, Timotheos; in 654 the Pope (later Saint) Martin; in 695 the Emperor Justinian II.

On account of her strategic position in the defensive system of the North and her control of the major sea routes, and thanks to her marvellous harbour, Cherson was always of the utmost interest to the emperor and representatives of the central Byzantine administration. As a result, between the fifth and the late tenth century, some thirty churches were built here, including four basilicas with lavish marble decoration.

Fig. 187. On a hillock beside the water stand the columns of one of the largest basilicas of Early Christian Cherson (first building phase 5th c., rebuilt in the 6th c.). L. 32.50 m., w. 18.50 m. Columns and capitals are of white marble brought from Prokonnesos (the island of Marmara, in the west Propontis – Sea of Marmara). Incorporated in its foundations were remains of Hellenistic houses from the 3rd-2nd c. BC.



The sturdily built Hellenistic walls were repaired at the end of the fifth century, after the descent of the Huns into the Crimea. They were reinforced with towers and bastions in the reign of Justinian, and again in the seventh and eighth centuries. Prokopios (*Buildings* III.7.10-11), when discussing the two Crimean cities at the empire's fringe (Bosporos and Cherson, which 'exist at the extremity of Roman territory'), relates that Justinian found the walls in ruins and rebuilt them, making the fortification 'remarkably beautiful and thoroughly safe'. (See towers I-XXIV on Map 33.)

The number of water cisterns was considerably increased and new tanks for seawater were constructed, for the salting of fish. The pottery workshops in the city produced domestic wares, amphoras for transporting goods, bricks and roof tiles for buildings.

In 833, Emperor Theophilus reorganized the administrative province of Byzantine Crimea and incorporated the *klimata*, that is the strongholds on the shore as far as the Straits of Kerch, in the *thema* of Cherson. The time of peace with the Khazars of the Don-Volga steppeland during the ninth and tenth centuries, is known as the '*Pax Khazarica*'. In 834, at the request of the Khazars, Theophilus sent artisans and masons, under the supervision of the *spatharokandidatos* Petronas, to build the fortress of Sarkel on the left bank of the lower Don. Petronas, escorted by a squadron of the imperial navy, went to Khazaria by way of Cherson.

In 860, Patriarch Photios sent Cyril and Methodios to the Don to convert the Khazar allies to Christianity. All these missions relied on the outpost of Cherson, whence clerics and also teams of builders were sent to all the satellite states in the Kuban and the north Caucasus. Similarities between the cruciform churches of Cherson and five churches of the same type built in Alania (modern Karachayevo Cherkesskaya, Autonomous Republic, Russian Federation) in the tenth century confirm the existence of close relations between Byzantine Cherson and the Christianized Caucasian friends and allies of Constantinople.

Would-be invaders were deterred from crossing the isthmus and entering the peninsula by the string of forts built by the Emperor Justinian along the south Crimean coast, from Cherson (where the strongly fortified walls had been twice repaired and strengthened in the course of fifty years, at the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century) to Bosphoros on the Straits of Kerch. Many potential incursions across the isthmus that divides the Ukrainian mainland from the Crimea, thereby penetrating the Crimean peninsula, were averted thanks to the squadron of the imperial navy moored in the harbour of Cherson and the reinforcements that could be dispatched swiftly from Constantinople. Thus it was in the Goths' best interest to support the Byzantine possessions. The Goths, who had been settled in the Crimea since the third century, guarded the Crimean interior and the mountains to the south, warding off potential invaders. The fortunes of the two Orthodox allies were closely linked; the Chersonites were the political and ecclesiastical representatives of Constantinople in Gothia – as the Byzantines called the ancient Tauric or Scythian peninsula, in particular the southern coastal strip.*

In addition to this geographically limited role, Cherson was the centre of wider imperial, diplomatic, ecclesiastical and military activity towards the Huns, Avars and Proto-Bulgars, the Slavs, Rus and Scandinavians, the Khazars, Pechenegs, Magyars and Kumans, who, at various times, settled in the 'Scythian wilderness' between the Don and the Danube. Of these neighbours, those who had been there longest were the Turkic Pechenegs of the steppe, the Slavic and northern peoples who settled in the forest zone beyond the steppe and sailed down the Dnieper in their dug-out canoes (*monoxyla*), and the Turkic bands of Proto-Bulgars and Khazars who lived in the region of the Don and Volga. These last were in closer contact with the Byzantines of Bosphoros on the Azov and the allied states of the regions of Kuban and North Caucasus. But Cherson assumed ultimate responsibility even for them. Cherson was the base of the imperial 'command' of the North and it was here that all intelligence regarding the peoples of the steppes was collected.

Whoever held Cherson controlled the northwest section of the Euxine: the Danube Delta opposite (169 n.m. as far as the central mouth, Soulinas-Sulina), and the entrance to the great Ukrainian gulf which receives the waters of the Dniester, Bug and Dnieper (here the distances do not exceed 168 n.m.).

Between the Dnieper and Cherson, on the northwest coast of the Crimea, 'are marshes and harbours, in which the Chersonites work the salt', Constantine Porphyrogenetos records in the mid-tenth century.

This region and the greater part of the Ukrainian steppe were inhabited by the Pechenegs. One of the main tasks of the diplomatic missions of Cherson was to cultivate friendly relations and trading contacts with the pastoral peoples of the steppe. Other times their efforts were aimed at persuading those who controlled the rivers to turn against the Bulgarians. The aristocrat Ioannes Bogas, military governor of Cherson, led one such mission in September 914. But the Bulgarian Tsar Symeon, who had been educated in Constantinople, had the same idea. In 917, Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos wrote in vain to call a halt to the tsar's connivances with the Pechenegs and others against the Byzantines (*Letters* 9). Nevertheless, commercial exchange and especially the exploitation of (cheap?) labour continued throughout the tenth century. The Pechenegs traded with the Chersonites and, according to Porphyrogenetos, were accustomed to 'perform services for them'. For these they were remunerated in kind, proportionate to their labour and trouble, 'in the form of pieces of purple cloth, ribbons, loosely woven cloths, gold brocade, pepper, scarlet or "Parthian" leather' (*De Administrando Imperio*, 6.6-9).

* Again Prokopios in his *Buildings* is a helpful guide, in this case to the southern Crimea, an area controlled by Christianized barbarians, namely Goths (who retired to the mountains after the Huns destroyed the Ostrogothic state in 370) and Alans. Justinian fortified the area in order to protect his allies, who campaigned with the Byzantines 'whenever the emperor saw fit'. The fortresses, such as Dorys, were built in the countryside and guarded the mountain approaches – 'the Goths lived contentedly in the rural parts and could not bear to be shut up inside walls'. Thus, Dorys or Doros was probably a fort and a fertile upland pocket (on the site of the later fortress Mankup Kale, Mangoup, c. 20 km. east of Cherson). The land was cultivated by those excellent soldiers and farmers, the Goths. In the area controlled by the Alans, fortresses were built at Aloustou (modern Alouchta) and 'among the Gorzoubitae' (Gourzouf). This littoral zone was incorporated into the *klimata*, 'the regions', the Byzantine coastal zone of southern Crimea, an invaluable observation post surveying the fringe of the barbarian world of 'Scythia'.

It was from Cherson that all those bearing gifts and proposals for concessions departed to meet the chieftains of the pastoralist or warrior peoples who had reached the mouths of the Dnieper and the Bug (156 miles north of Cherson), or even the estuary of the Dniester (163 miles northwest of Cherson), and posed a direct threat to the Danube frontier, the Thracian plain and Constantinople herself. It was from Cherson that the fleet departed on many occasions, to back up Byzantine military campaigns on the Danube and in northern Bulgaria.

It was in Cherson that the missionary monks Cyril and Methodios spent the winter of 860/1, before setting out for the Khazar Khanate of the Volga-Don, in order to preach the Gospel. The information they gathered from the Chersonites proved invaluable to these representatives of Patriarch Photios. The success of their most difficult mission depended on their being as fully and reliably briefed as possible. Lastly, it was here, at the southwest edge of the Crimea, that in 989, on behalf of the Patriarch of Constantinople, the Metropolitan of Cherson baptized Prince Vladimir of Kiev, later to be ranked by tradition as ‘equal to the Apostles’. At the same time he joined him in holy matrimony to the *porphyrogeneta* Anna. The imperial bride was indeed ‘born in the purple’; she was the great great-granddaughter of Basil I, founder of the ‘Macedonian’ dynasty, great granddaughter of Leo the Wise, granddaughter of the prolific author Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos,* daughter of Romanos II (959-963) and sister of Basil II (976-1025). From 989/90, Russo-Byzantine relations acquired new form and new content.

Fig. 188. *Epirachelion* of Photios, detail: 2 of the 88 saintly figures that adorn the vertical bands of the stole (l. 1.53 cm.). An outstanding example of Constantinopolitan embroidery, worked in gold and silver thread, silk and pearls. This precious ecclesiastical vestment belonged to Photios, special envoy of the Ecumenical Patriarch, who was appointed Metropolitan of Moscow in 1408. Patriarchal Vestry, Kremlin Museum, Moscow.



* Perhaps the characterization ‘man of letters’ rather than ‘prolific author’ is more appropriate for Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (905-959), for although he did not write down himself the works ascribed to him by Byzantine tradition, he did create the intellectual court circle that was responsible for important literary works. We have frequently referred to the handbook known, after the learned Johannes van Meurs (1579-1639), as the *De Administrando Imperio*, which gives invaluable information about the conditions prevailing in the Euxine in the tenth century. The work, written and compiled between 948-952, is a manual of kingcraft addressed to the young Romanos, the emperor’s son.

Cherson enjoyed a sustained zenith during the ninth and tenth centuries when this frontier outpost in the North directed affairs of foreign policy pertaining to the steppe and the territory reaching some 1,000 kilometres further north, as far as Kiev. So vital was the role of Cherson to the military expeditions on the Danube in an era of endless wars, that the emperor paid special attention to the Chersonites' well-being, and to their faith and fidelity towards Constantinople.

The geographical position of the lone city in command of the strongholds on the shore was favourable to any kind of move to set up an autonomous state or principality, such as that of Kiev on the Dnieper or of Zichia on the east coast of the Euxine and of Tmutorokan on the Sea of Azov (mentioned in lists of Byzantine bishops of Khazaria as Tamartarcha, from as early as the eighth century). The neighbours with whom the Chersonites were in continual contact, whether the Orthodox of Tmutorokan, the numerous Orthodox Caucasian and Georgian principalities and fiefs, or even heathen Kiev, were models of satellite and independent states of this kind. Not that they could have existed without the holy alliance with the Emperor of the *Oikoumene*, at least until the eleventh century, but the idea – the panacea – of self-government has always been an attractive prospect, not only for ethnic groups but also for local ones, defined by geographical factors and the particular *genius loci*.

The emperor had drawn up contingency plans to be implemented in the event of any nascent Chersonite mutiny or decision to 'act contrary to the imperial mandates'. In his *De Administrando Imperio*, written to counsel his son, the young Romanos, Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos lays down the way in which the central administration should act. All the Byzantine ports along the south shore of the Euxine (i.e. the harbours of northern Asia Minor) were to forbid ships from sailing, impound all cargoes and throw merchants and crew in jail. Any Chersonite vessels which chanced to be in Constantinople should be treated likewise, while no ship 'with grain or wine or any other needful commodity or merchandise' should be allowed to pass from Pontos and Paphlagonia towards the city in revolt. At the same time, the military governor of the theme, stationed in Cherson, should 'sequester the ten pounds granted by the treasury to the city... and also the two pounds of tribute ... and then ... withdraw and go to another city'.

As far as we know, Cherson made no attempt to disengage itself from the centre during the reigns of Romanos II, Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes. On the contrary, when mutiny broke out against Constantinople, in early 988, its focus was Cappadocia in central Asia Minor. In order to deal with the military governors of the East, who had a great part of the Byzantine army on their side, Basil II sought the help of the Prince of Kiev. Vladimir promptly sent a corps of 6,000 Varangians to fight in favour of Basil, whose throne was in grave peril. But when, in spring 989, order was restored and the time came for the grandson of Constantine



Fig. 189 (left page). Detail of the hieratic *sakkos* of Peter, first Metropolitan of Moscow (1308-1326): on the dark blue satin ground, vertical bands woven in gold with a pattern of double roundels enclosing 'Greek' crosses. A Russian work of 1322, with later additions. Patriarchal Vestry, Kremlin Museum, Moscow.

Porphyrogenetos to pay the high price Vladimir had exacted, namely, to send his own sister, Anna 'born in the purple', to be the wife of the pagan prince of the Dnieper, the emperor reneged on his promise. In the summer of the same year Vladimir and his army besieged Cherson, and sent the Kievan ultimatum from the captured city.

When Basil II sent Anna to meet her fate, and the heathen Vladimir was officially baptized and then married, the prince's gift to his brother-in-law, the emperor, was the return of Cherson. The prelates of the Metropolitanate of Cherson who accompanied the princely couple to Kiev were to lay the foundations of the organization of the Russian Church, which was placed under the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.*

* *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, the earliest native historical source, compiled in the late 11th and early 12th c., is the principal source of our knowledge of the Crimean drama, the 'sacrifice' of Anna and the final conversion of Russia to 'the Greek religion'.

Fig. 190. Novgorod. Saints Constantine and Helen (1045-1050), wall-painting from the church of Saint Sophia. Byzantine masons, painters and mosaicists built and decorated the metropolitan church of this remote city in the distant North. Novgorod controlled the eastern waterways from the Gulf of Finland and the Russian forests 'toward the Greeks'. Saint Sophia was the first stone structure in this trading post, where timber was the traditional building material. Some three hundred years later, the great master Theophanes the Greek painted the church of the Transfiguration (1378) in 'hyperborean' Novgorod, before travelling to Nizhny-Novgorod on the Volga, and from there to the Muscovite Kremlin. The Constantinopolitan emigrant died in Moscow between 1405 and 1415.





Fig. 191. *Sakkos* (1408-1431) of the Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia, Photios: scenes from the Dodecaorton (The Twelve Feasts of the Church) surround the scene of the Ascension (centre) and of the Transfiguration (below cross). Represented among the many subjects embroidered in gold and embellished with pearls are Basil, Grand Duke of Moscow, with his wife Sophia Vitovtovna (with Russian inscriptions); Emperor John VIII Palaiologos with his wife Anna Vasilyevna, daughter of the Moscovite duke. Inscription: ἸΩ ΕΝ ΧΩ ΠΙΣΤΟΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ Ο ΠΑΛΕΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΑΝΑ Η ΕΥΣΕΒΕΣΤΑΤΗ ΑΥΤΟΥΣΤΑ Η ΠΑΛΕΟΛΟΓΙΝΑ (John Palaiologos, Emperor faithful in Christ, Anna Palaiologina, most pious Augusta) and Ὁ ΠΑΝΙΕΡΟΤΑΤΟΣ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ ΚΥΒΕΑ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΣΗΣ ΡΩΣΙΑΣ ΦΩΤΙΟΣ (the Most Holy Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia, Photios). The inscriptions accompanying the scenes from the Dodecaorton are also in Greek. Probably a Constantinopolitan work (dated between 1414 and 1417) with more recent Russian additions. Patriarchal Vestry, Kremlin Museum, Moscow.

Instrumental factors in the diffusion of Byzantine civilization in Medieval Russia were the long-standing Byzantine-Russian trading relations inaugurated in 867 and the existence of a small Christian community in Kiev from the middle of the tenth century. The primitive Russian people were in need of development and it was Vladimir's fervent desire to bequeath to the fledgling state a code of superior cultural and political values consonant with Russian virtues, primarily the maritime-mercantile tradition and the assimilative propensities of the ruling class, which was of Scandinavian origin. Bearers of the new ideals were the Russians themselves. Drawing from the fount of Constantinopolitan Orthodoxy all that accorded with the Russian mentality (the dualist Slav idolaters and the open-minded mobile 'hyperborean' Norsemen), and using the Slavonic alphabet and the elaborate language of Old Church Slavonic, which by then had a literary-ecclesiastical tradition of some 130 years, the Russians created their own ethnic culture.

For modern man in the Western world, attuned to the western way of thinking, it is perhaps difficult to comprehend the Russians' relationship of dependence on the Byzantines, as perceived by the leaders of the independent Russian principalities and their subjects. This dependence was neither political nor economic. It does not conform to the familiar patterns of great powers and satellite states, or imperialist patrons and colonial clients. It belongs explicitly to a shared spiritual and religious cosmos of thought, which transcends national boundaries and moves in an ecumenical orbit.

For all participant peoples and nations in the 'Byzantine Commonwealth', acceptance of the Orthodox faith signified acceptance of the superior spiritual authority which had its seat in Constantinople. The emperor was monarch, all other potentates were simply heads of their states. This is expressed unequivocally in Russian Medieval chronicles, as well as in Byzantine ecclesiastical hymns which stress the sole authority of God's representative on earth. For the millions of believers, Constantinople was not New Rome but New Jerusalem. The city of the Holy Mother of God and of the Divine Wisdom.

Even when the Byzantine metropolitans in Kiev treated non-Greeks with Greek arrogance and Constantinople made excessive demands on its allies, or sought through 'Byzantine' intrigue and subterfuge to impose its own people in key posts, the spiritual dependence of the Orthodox congregation lost nothing of its mystical strength. Thus, when the empire was abolished in 1453, only its political basis was lost, it was New Rome that died. Its other dimension, its spiritual essence, was to remain there forever. For the glorious state of New Jerusalem was never abolished.

Cherson after the marriage: Trapezuntines in the Crimean Perateia, Tataromongolians in the Black Sea North

After Cherson was destroyed by Vladimir, Constantinople sped to her assistance, in a concerted effort to rebuild the Crimean city. But despite the eminence Cherson had acquired through the events of 989 and its relations with Kiev, life never returned to its old rhythm. Cherson became a provincial city which had lost its old strategic importance in the defensive system of the North, for the Byzantines had already repossessed the territory of the Danube and had incorporated the state of Bulgaria in the empire (after a long and savage war which ended in 1018).

The Seljuk Turks, sovereigns of the greater part of Asia Minor from 1071, had reached the south shore of the Black Sea and in 1081 they struck Sinope, 170 nautical miles away from Cherson.

The Emperor Alexios I Komnenos recaptured the important Paphlagonian port of Sinope and his successors managed to hold a part of Paphlagonia, where the Komnenoi had their estates, until the end of the twelfth century. But nearby Amisos (Samsun) in West Pontos was taken in 1194 and Sinope was finally incorporated in the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum in 1214.

In the meantime, the empire had been conquered by the Franks and the Venetians, who entered Constantinople on 13 April 1204, while in Pontos a branch of the Komnenos family had founded the self-governing state known as the Empire of the Grand Komnenoi of Trebizond. Its territory extended east of Samsun, as far as the Georgian state of Guria, today on the border between Georgia and Turkey.



Fig. 192. Early Byzantine Sinope. Tombstone of 'Ioulita', built into the large tower at the northwest corner of the city walls. Ioulita was the wife of Anastasios, *meizoteros* of the Episcopal See of Cherson, as we learn from the inscription. A *meizoteros* was a lay official, the supervisor (and perhaps also auditor) of ecclesiastical property. The presence of this Chersonite *meizoteros* suggests that Cherson had real estate and other types of property in the area of Sinope. The See of Cherson was the closest to that of Sinope; the legend of the Apostle Andrew links the two cities.

Fig. 193. The northeast corner of the walls of Sinope with 3 of the 35 remaining towers that reinforced the outer defensive wall. View from the sea.



Without the support of Constantinople and the supply of wheat from Sinope opposite, Cherson was doomed. The mighty state of the Komnenoi of Trebizond was the only organized power in control of the region. Thus, the Pontic Perateia came into being as a network of Byzantine strongholds and villages on the Crimean shore, which was administered by Trebizond and became part of that state. As a consequence, the Grand Komnenoi assumed the additional title of ‘Emperor of all the East, Iberia [part of Georgia] and the Perateia’.

A few years later, between 1237 and 1240, the Golden Horde swept onto the steppe and the ‘Devil’s horsemen’ did not stop even before the forests. They attacked Kiev, subjugated the Russian cities of the North, conquered the Crimea and reached as far as the Danube, the Carpathians and the Hungarian plain.

When the terror of the ferocious onslaught had subsided and the initial fear had passed, the Russian vassals began reorganizing their semi-independent principalities. Trading activities returned to normal and new and promising markets opened up, now that the Mongols had formed the largest empire in the world.

When Michael VIII Palaiologos won back Constantinople in 1261, Byzantine-Russian relations were rekindled and along with the Russian pilgrims who ventured down the riverine route of the Volga-Don to visit Constantinople came dozens of Church emissaries. And the products of Muscovy followed this same route to the Tataro-Byzantine and the Veneto-Genoese Black Sea. It was about this time that the Genoese created the great commercial colony at Kaffa (Byzantine Theodosiupolis – ancient Theodosia) on the southeast tip of the Crimea, and the Venetians made Crimean Soldaia (Byzantine Sougdaia) and Tana (ancient Tanais) on the Sea of Azov the centres of their mercantile activities. Cherson had lapsed into obscurity. In 1299 the city was razed to the ground by the Tatars and Mongols. That its recovery was rudimentary is evident from the small size of the churches and other buildings erected upon the ruins. The last mention of the city in the Byzantine sources was in 1396. Cherson was finally abandoned a few decades later.

In 1475, the Ottomans became masters of the semi-autonomous Tatar Khanate of the Crimea, which *status quo* prevailed until the Russian descent to the Black Sea at end of the eighteenth century.

Fig. 194 a, b. Lead seal of the Empire of Trebizond (under Alexios I, 1204-1222, founder of the Trapezuntine dynasty, or under David, 1458-1461).

Is the enthroned David, represented on the obverse, the prophet and psalmist-king of the Old Testament (in which case the seal dates to the 13th c.); or is he David the Grand Komnenos, last Emperor of Trebizond?

On the reverse, the damaged inscription reads: ‘May the decrees of David Komnenos, descended from the royal line, ever stand inviolate’.

Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.