

The Black Sea Area in the Trade System of the Roman Empire

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses, with epigraphic and archaeological references, the features of trade and shipping on the western coast of the Black Sea during the ancient period. It starts with the political and military context of Rome's involvement in the area since the late second century BC, before dealing with the Mithridatic crisis, when the focus of Roman policy moved to the Aegean and the Black Sea. This tense political constellation triggered the development of regional trade, analysed on the basis of relevant sources, with a special attention devoted to Tomis, the largest outlet in the area of the mouths of the Danube. The author contends that excellent relations existed with the commercial centres of Asia Minor, more precisely Bithynia. A veritable maritime line from Nicomedia to Tomis acted as a major route between Asia Minor and the Black Sea – Danubian region. During the Roman age, the commercial and transport patterns established from Hellenistic times were preserved, and they continued to co-exist with those specific to the Roman world.

The Black Sea area is rarely (if ever) mentioned in scientific papers devoted to the ancient economy. Even in a recent book concerning the Roman economic system¹ the contribution of the Black Sea in the ensemble of the Empire's trade relations is practically neglected. This issue is only partially analysed in an older monograph, which is valuable for its ideas, but obsolete in terms of epigraphic² and archaeological references.³ An extensive historical documentation that insists upon the local elements of trade in the larger context of the Roman world's economic system is thus ignored. If the Roman economy and administration appear in a different light when regarded from a provincial perspective, as it has been already proven,⁴ it may be reasonably argued

that the western district of the Black Sea represents an interesting case study.

In terms of economic history, the Black Sea should be analysed as a complex organism functioning in close connection with its adjacent areas. Located at the junction of the Eastern and European worlds, it seems to be a closed space. However, it opens into two directions towards the Mediterranean basin: through Dalmatia towards the central Mediterranean Sea, and through the Aegean Sea towards the Eastern Mediterranean. In this geographical ensemble, the Propontis played an essential role by securing a land connection between the Balkans and Anatolia (thus between East and West).⁵ Such remarks are confirmed by the configuration of the land, fluvial and maritime routes which allowed the linkage of the Black Sea to the Greek-Roman world.

Three sections can be distinguished on the commercial axis between Asia and the Italian Peninsula: the Black Sea section, the Anterior Asia section (which expanded to the cities on the western coast of Anatolia), and the Asia Minor section (together with Cyprus); on this

romain, Paris, 1988, p. X.

⁵ M. Cary, *The Geographic Background of Greek and Roman History*, Oxford, 1950, p. 204.

¹ H. Wolf, V. Velkov, *Moesia Inferior und Trakien*, in Fr. Vittinghoff (ed.), *Handbuch der europäischen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte 1. Europäische Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Stuttgart, 1990, pp. 608–610.

² Epigraphy refers to the study of epigraphs or inscriptions, especially to those dating from the ancient period.

³ E. Gren, *Kleinasien und der Ostbalkan in der Wirtschafts- und Entwicklung der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Uppsala, 1941.

⁴ J. Andreau, Introduction, in M. I. Rostovtzeff, *Histoire économique et social de l'Empire*

last segment, the junction was made through Rhodes, the “plaque tournante” of trade in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁶ The western Black Sea coast was thus included in the system of maritime trading in the Greek-Roman world.

The rivers that were navigable in the ancient period, such as the Danube (Istros), Maritsa (Hebrus) and Vardar (Axios), were also significant commercial routes for the distribution of goods in their areas. Equally important were the Balkan terrestrial commercial routes, generally oriented from the north to south or from the north-east to south-west: Histria – Odessos – Byzantium, Viminacium – Naissus – Thessaloniki, Novae – Philippopolis – Byzantium, Singidunum – Naissus – Hadrianopolis – Byzantium. It is interesting to note that these routes (in fact northern ramifications of the famous *Via Egnatia*⁷) suggest the direction of commercial routes from the Balkans and the mouths of the Danube towards the ports of the Thracian Sea and especially towards the *Via Egnatia*, which secured, via Byzantium, the linkage with Asia Minor and farther with the Syrian-Palestinian region.

The western, eastern and southern extremities of this area were marked by commercial centres that facilitated the distribution of goods to the mainland, towards the Balkans and the Danubian basin: Aquileia, Tomis and Thessaloniki. Whilst we have only limited knowledge regarding the last mentioned centre, available data concerning the commercial role of Aquileia are highly relevant. Described

as the “plaque tournante” of the trade between Italy and the Danubian areas, Aquileia connected the central Mediterranean basin with that of the Lower Danube and the western Black Sea coast⁸ through the commercial routes that followed the courses of the rivers Sava and Drava. Aquileia had consistent commercial exchanges with important centres such as Corinth,⁹ Alexandria¹⁰ or Nicomedia.¹¹ Numerous epigraphic sources referring to merchants and ship-owners grouped in veritable commercial “houses” (in fact professional associations whose juridical status cannot be clearly defined¹²) confirm Aquileia’s role as a commercial hub securing the distribution of goods towards the Balkans and the Danubian area.¹³

Rome’s early interest in the western Black Sea coast was motivated, to a great extent, by these geographical factors. The beginnings of the process of integrating the Balkans and the western Black Sea area into the Roman administrative system, which had serious consequences for the regional trade, are concurrent with several events that shaped the economic history of the Mediterranean: firstly, the demolition of Carthage, which brought Rome

⁸ S. Panciera, *Vita economica di Aquileia in età romana*, Aquileia, 1957.

⁹ J. B. Brusin, *Inscriptiones Aquileia*, vol. I, Udine, 1991, p. 604.

¹⁰ S. Panciera, op. cit., pp. 88–89.

¹¹ J. B. Brusin, op. cit., p. 879; cf. G. Brusin, *Orientali in Aquileia romana*, “*Aquileia Nostra*”, 24–25, 1953–1954, col. 56.

¹² F. M. Robertis, *Storia delle corporazioni e del regime associativo nel mondo Romano*, Bari, 1972, pp. 103–105; L. de Salvo, *Economia privata e pubblici servizi nell’Impero romano I Corpora naviculariorum*, Messina, 1992, 238 ff; O Schlippschuh, *Die Händler in römischen Kaiserreich in Gallien, Germanien und der Donauprovinzen Rätien, Noricum und Pannonien*, Amsterdam, 1987, 107 et seq.

¹³ J. B. Brusin, op. cit., p. 14; CIL (Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum) V 1598.

⁶ J. Rougé, *Recherches sur l’organisation du commerce maritime en Méditerranée sous l’Empire romain*, Paris, 1966, p. 86.

⁷ The *Via Egnatia* was a road constructed by the Romans in the 2nd century BC, crossing the Roman provinces of Illyricum, Macedonia, and Thrace. It started at Dyrrachium (Durrës) on the Adriatic Sea, reached the Aegean Sea at Thessalonica and then continued to Byzantium.

great economic advantages by the re-routing of the Syrian commercial roads, and secondly the suppression of the most important emporion in the Aegean Sea (Corinth) and the foundation of the province of Asia, which revived commercial exchanges in this area.¹⁴ From this perspective and against the background of the increasing competition between the East and the western part of the Empire,¹⁵ several stages in the integration of the western Black Sea area into the Roman trade system can be distinguished. These phases roughly correspond to the stages of Rome's Eastern policy.

The first military actions which also involved the western Black Sea coast took place in the last years of the second century BC. According to a vague note of Jordanes and an inscription in Cnidus,¹⁶ a military expedition was led by T. Didius around 101 BC with the probable aim of establishing Roman control in the Thracian Chersoneses.¹⁷ Unfortunately, no further information reveals to what extent the western Black Sea coast was militarily affected in this given historical context. According to a recent hypothesis, the famous treaty (*foedus*) between Rome and Callatis could have been concluded following a possible prolongation of Didius' expedition towards the shores of the Black Sea. A Latin version has been preserved on a well-known and frequently commented inscription found in Callatis.¹⁸

¹⁴ J. Hatzfeld, *Les trafiquants Italiens dans l'Orient hellénistique*, Paris, 1919, pp. 30–32.

¹⁵ A. Grummerus, *Industrie und Handel*, in *RE (Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft)* IX, col. 1472–1475.

¹⁶ W. Blümel, *Die Inschriften von Knidos (=IK 41)*, Bonn, 1992, p. 33.

¹⁷ L. D. Locopulou, *Provinciae Macedoniae finis orientalis: The Establishment of the Eastern Frontier*, in *Two Establishments of the Ancient Macedonian Topograph*, Athens, 1987, pp. 75–78.

¹⁸ Al. Avram, *Der Vertrag zwischen und Kallatis (CIL I.2, 276)*, in B. Funk (ed.), *Hellenismus*.

The Mithridatic crisis represents the decisive historical moment in the orientation of Roman policy towards the Black Sea basin, a process with great political and economic consequences. It is well-known that after Mithridates VI Eupator's conquest of the Crimea, which provided him with an important supply base,¹⁹ the king of the Pontus established a vast system of alliances with the port-cities on the western Black Sea coast starting in the early first century BC. These alliances were concluded individually, as reflected in the texts of two inscriptions found in Apollonia²⁰ and Histria, both attesting the presence of troops in these cities, who were sent by Mithridates to maintaining their support. During the Mithridatic Wars, as well as on their eve, the Greek cities on the western Black Sea coast were successively allied either with the Romans or with Mithridates, and this fluctuation in their political relations also had marked economic effects.

Between the first two Mithridatic Wars (more precisely between 84 and 74 BC), the focus of Rome's foreign policy moved to the Aegean and western Black Sea areas. The Mithridatic crisis, far from impeding trade in the Black Sea basin, actually triggered a revival of commerce in the Straits area, a fact that can be explained by the increasing demand for Eastern goods.²¹ The development of trade in the Aegean and Black Sea is evidenced by

Beiträge zur Erforschung von Akkulturation und politischer Ordnung in den Staaten des hellenistischen Zeitalters, Tübingen, 1996, pp. 491–511.

¹⁹ B. M. McGing, *The Foreign Policy of Mithridates VI Eupator King of Pontus*, Leiden, 1985, p. 43; Y. Vinogradov, *Der Pontos Euxeinos als politische, ökonomische und kulturelle Einheit und Epigraphic*, in *Acta Centri Historiae Terra antiqua Balcanica*, 2, 1987, p. 65.

²⁰ IGB (*Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae*), I 2 392.

²¹ J. Hatzfeld, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–53.

the contents of a customs regulation of the province of Asia (*nomos télous Asias*), which was preserved on an inscription found in Ephesus;²² this regulation, issued right before the outbreak of the second Mithridatic War in 74 BC, clearly defines the fiscal provisions of this commercial traffic. Not accidentally, the headquarters of Asia's customs district were located in Chalcedon. To illustrate Rome's interest in the Black Sea area, it should be mentioned that one of the first paragraphs of this customs regulation²³ imposed additional taxes for the re-exportation and re-importation of goods coming from or going to the Black Sea, which shows that the Romans were tightening their control over the trade of Black Sea commodities in the context of the predictable conflict against Mithridates. These fiscal measures demonstrate Rome's attempts to neutralise Mithridates' supplies through a customs policy aiming to suffocate the Pontic cities allied with the king and to economically isolate the Kingdom of Pontus.

These economic impositions were followed by the military expedition led by M. Terentius Varro Lucullus on the western Black Sea coast in 72–71 BC, which resulted in the conquest of the Greek cities.²⁴ In some of them, such as in Messambria, the Romans garrisoned their troops. However, despite such military efforts, the area was hardly controlled by the Roman administration for a while. Only after

²² H. Engelmann, D. Knibbe, *Das Zollgesetz der Provinz Asia. Eine neue Inschrift aus Ephesos*, EA, 14, 1989; cf. C. Nicolet, *Le Monumentum Ephesenum et la délimitation du portorium d'Asie*, "Mélanges d'École Française de Rome. Antiquité", 105, 1993, pp. 929–959; M. Dreher, *Die lex portorii Asiae und der Zollbezirk Asia*, "Epigraphica Anatolica", 26, 1996, pp. 11–127; idem, *Das Monumentum Ephesenum und das römische Zollwesen*, "Münstersche Beiträge zur antiken Handelsgeschichte", XVI/2, 1997, pp. 79–98.

²³ H. Engelmann, D. Knibbe, op. cit., pp. 46–47.

²⁴ Appian, *Illyr.* 30, 85.

M. Licinius Crassus' expedition in the Balkans (29–28 BC) did the western Black Sea area effectively come under Roman dependence.²⁵

The events that took place after Tiberius's reign are closely connected with Rome's Black Sea policy during the middle of the first century AD. After the Bosphoran kingdom had entered the Roman sphere of influence during the reign of Augustus,²⁶ which allowed Claudius to intervene in the succession conflict between Cotys and Mithridates (44–45 AD),²⁷ Nero's reign marked an important stage during Rome's expansion towards the northern Black Sea area.²⁸ Nero's main objective was to impose Roman control in the entire Black Sea area and the Darial pass in the Caucasus (*Caspiae portae*)²⁹, which constituted the most important commercial route connecting the Black Sea to India and China.³⁰ This project was only accomplished with great efforts by Vespasian.³¹ In all these activities the Black Sea component of Rome's Eastern policy is clearly recognisable.

An analysis of epigraphic sources is important for identifying the main components of trade in the western Black Sea basin. Among local cities, Tomis has the richest collection of such evidence regarding the activity of merchants and ship-owners. A first category of inscriptions mentions local merchants and seafarers. Two ship-owners from Tomis be-

²⁵ A. v. Premerstein, *Die Anfänge der Provinz Moesien*, "Jahreshefte des österreichischen archäologischen Institutes", 1898, col 192.

²⁶ V. T. Gajdukevic, *Das Bosphoranische Reich*, Berlin, 1971, p. 331.

²⁷ Tacitus, *Ann.*, 12, 15; cf. V. M. Scramuzza, *The Emperor Claudius*, London, 1940, pp. 149–180.

²⁸ W. Schurr, *Die Orientpolitik des Kaisers Nero*, *Klio Beih.*, 1923, pp. 85–89.

²⁹ Suet., *Nero.*, 19, 2; Tacit., *Hist.*, 1, 6.

³⁰ E. Gren, op. cit., p. 86.

³¹ H. Halfmann, *Die Alanen und die römische Ostpolitik unter Vespasian*, "Epigraphica Anatolica", 8, 1986, pp. 39–50.

long to this category, one whose name remains unknown³² and another one, Theokrites, son of Theokritos,³³ whose profession as naukleros (ship-owner and captain in the same time) is also suggested by the representation on his tombstone of a commercial ship common for the entire Eastern Mediterranean.³⁴ The trading of goods carried by ship-owners from these centres was organised according to a pattern specific to the western Black Sea area and the Aegean Sea, namely the existence of associations of Tomitan ship-owners. There are two relevant epigraphic sources regarding this matter, one association named *Oikos ton naukleron* which is mentioned in two inscriptions.³⁵ This system of association of the great Tomitan ship-owners in the form of *Oikos*, which is only attested in a few cities in the western Black Sea and in Bithynia, indicates the existence of a common commercial space that included these two geographical areas. The great local merchants are represented at Tomis by Herakleidos of Asclepiades³⁶ and by another *emporos* (merchant) whose name is unknown.³⁷

The second category of sources is that of epigraphic evidence referring to foreign merchants and ship-owners in Tomis. The profitable commercial exchanges between Tomis and Alexandria are evidenced both by the “house of Alexandrines”³⁸ which was built in

Tomis as a temple dedicated to Serapis, and by reference to an Alexandrine wine merchant³⁹ who seems to have been the representative at Tomis of a wine merchants association from Alexandria. Another interesting case is that of Hermogenes, a great ship-owner⁴⁰ whose intense trading activity in the western Black Sea and in Asia Minor brought him the double citizenship of Tomis and of Fabia Ankyria. There is also mention of two *emporoi* (merchants) in Tomis, one named Stratokles, and the other Metrodos of Gaius,⁴¹ both from the Bithynian city of Prusias ad Hypium.⁴² Trade between the western Black Sea ports and large economic centres in Bithynia are also confirmed by the presence at Histria of a great family of Bithynian merchants.⁴³

Available sources generally point to a particular orientation of western Black Sea ports towards the commercial centres of Asia Minor, more precisely of Bithynia. This specificity of regional mercantile dynamics deserves special consideration. Firstly, the inscriptions mentioning Bithynian merchants and ship-owners in the western Black Sea ports are not the only sources attesting the presence of Bithynians in this area. The list of foreigners – in this case Bithynians – historically attested at Tomis⁴⁴, Histria⁴⁵, Callatis⁴⁶, Odessos⁴⁷, but also in other cities of the mainland, like Nicop-

³² ISM (Inscriptiones Schythiae Minor: graecae et latinae) II 291.

³³ ISM II 186.

³⁴ L. Foucher, Quelques remarques sur la navigation antique: interprétations de documents figurés provenant de la région de Sousse (Tunisie), in *Atti del III Congresso di Archeologia Sottomarina, Barcelona*, 1961, 20, fig. 10–11; T. Gerasimov, *Antičini sarkofahi ot Odessos*, “*Izvestija Varna*”, 5, 1969, p. 66; I. Pekáry, *Cheniskus. Zu einem Tongefäß mit Schiffsdarstellung*, “*Boreas*”, 5, 1982, 273 et seq.

³⁵ ISM II 132; ISM II 60.

³⁶ ISM II 403.

³⁷ ISM II 320.

³⁸ ISM II 153.

³⁹ ISM II 463.

⁴⁰ ISM II 375.

⁴¹ ISM II 248.

⁴² L. Robert, *A travers l'Asie Mineure. Poètes et prosateurs, monnaies grecques, voyages et géographie, Paris*, 1980, pp. 76–80.

⁴³ ISM I 82.

⁴⁴ ISM II 281, 369.

⁴⁵ ISM I 310.

⁴⁶ ISM III 177.

⁴⁷ IGB I 112, 139.

olis ad Istrum⁴⁸, Philippopolis⁴⁹, and Serdica⁵⁰, suggests the continuous presence in this area of the agents of Bithynian commercial centres.

At times, the commonality of interests of Bithynian merchants required their grouping in ethnic-professional associations, as it seems to have been the case with a community mentioned on a Tomitan inscription. It comprises a list of foreigners settled there originating from Bithynian cities such as Tius, Nicomedia, Heraclea and Caesarea, but also from cities in the close proximity of that province, as was the case with Abounoteichos from Galatia, or Tiana and Mazaca from Cappadocia.⁵¹ Although the purpose of their association was religious (they devoted a stele to the Thracian Knight), one can also see in the list links to Asian Minor merchants, who settled in Tomis for business and probably organised according to the associational pattern known as *consistentes*.

This information shows the bi-univocal character of the trade established between the western Black Sea port-cities, especially Tomis, and their Bithynian associates. Their main trade partners were Prusias ad Hypium, Nicaea and Nicomedia. The first one, located near the mouths of Sakarya River with the important harbour Dia⁵², carried out intense commercial activity in the Aegean Sea⁵³ and mainly in the Pontus.⁵⁴

Nicaea was an important commercial centre with tight connections both with the west-

⁴⁸ IGB II 638, 674, 668; cf. L. Robert, *Documents d'Asie Mineure*, Paris, 1987, pp. 112–113.

⁴⁹ IGB III.1 998, 1008.

⁵⁰ IGB IV 1952, 1958.

⁵¹ ISM II 129.

⁵² W. Ameling, *Die Inschriften von Prusias ad Hypium (= IK 27)*, Bonn, 1985, pp. 8–9.

⁵³ J. G. Vinogradov, Olbia und Prusias ad Hypios zur Severerzeit, in *Sodalitas. Scritti in onore di Antonio Guarino*, Genova, 1984, 460 et seq.

⁵⁴ R. Robert, op. cit., p. 112; T. R. S. Broughton, Roman Asia, in T. Frank (ed.), *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome IV*, New York, 1975, p. 773.

ern Black Sea coast and the great cities of Thrace, such as Philippopolis and Serdica. As for Nicomedia, whose importance for the economy of the Roman world has been repeatedly emphasised⁵⁵, one may assert that this centre represented the relay of the trade between Asia Minor and the western Black Sea outlets. Epigraphic sources attest a surprising mobility of Nicomedian merchants and ship-owners to Tomis. Such evidence points to what may be termed the Nicomedia – Tomis maritime line, which undoubtedly was the main commercial route between Asia Minor and the Black Sea – Danubian area. According to an interpretation⁵⁶, this maritime route seems to have been actually mentioned in Diocletian's Edict.

A new hypothesis has been recently formulated with regard to the character of the economic relations in the Black Sea basin, which equally stresses the centrifuge and the centripetal tendencies of the Euxine trade.⁵⁷ The commercial relations between the western Black Sea cities and Bithynia, so suggestively depicted by available sources, represent a good example for these tendencies. This observation may be further pursued starting from the analysis of the factors specific to the organisational structures of trade in this area. Thus, it is not accidental that the local ship-owners had an associational pattern, *Oikos ton naukleron*, which did not exist in other areas. This *Oikos* is epigraphically mentioned only at Tomis, Nicomedia and Amastris. This associational system determined by the large amplitude of the ship-owners' activity could be eventually assimilated to those *corpora navicu-*

⁵⁵ L. Robert, op. cit., p. 120.

⁵⁶ *Edictum Diocletiani et collegarum de pretiis rerum venalium*, ed. M. Giaccherio, Genova, 1974, 35, 1, p. 48.

⁵⁷ J. G. Vinogradov, *Pontische Studien. Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte und Epigraphik des Schwarzmeerraumes*, Mainz, 1997, 4 ff.

lariorum attested in the Western Mediterranean area. The presence of several *presbyteroi* and one *prostates* of these associations on the inscriptions from Nicomedia⁵⁸ and Amastris⁵⁹ mentioning *Oikos ton naukleron* is yet additional proof of the internal organisation of these associations according to the corporate system specific to the Hellenistic world.



Map of the Black Sea and environs from the 1624 Latin edition of the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of Abraham Ortelius

The preservation of these associations during Roman times may indicate their assimilation in the Roman associative system; this confirms the interest of the Roman administration for protecting and encouraging maritime transportation enterprises in the eastern provinces of the empire. Inasmuch as these *Oikos ton naukleron* were assimilated with the *corpora naviculariorum*, it can be assumed that they might have also benefited from the fiscal immunity of the latter⁶⁰, as was the case with the ship-owners associations in Egypt.⁶¹

⁵⁸ TAM (Tituli Asiae Minoris) IV.1 22.

⁵⁹ L. Robert, *Inscriptions d'Athènes et de la Grèce centrale*, Aeph, 18, 1969, 9.

⁶⁰ J. Rougé, op. cit., p. 324.

⁶¹ M. I. Rostovtzeff, *A Large Estate in Egypt in the Third Century B.C.*, Madison, 1922, p. 123; Cl. Preaux, *L'économie royale des Lagides*, Bruxelles, 1937,

However, it is certain that the associations attested in Tomis, Nicomedia and Amastris represented a characteristic feature of the trade relations in the western Black Sea area and in Bithynia.⁶²

The commonality of commercial interests of the outlets on the western Black Sea coast and in Bithynia should be analysed from a broader perspective, that of the Black Sea trade in general. The centripetal tendency of Pontic trade is obvious from historical sources which reveal a veritable commercial *koiné* in this area. In this respect, particularly significant is the text of a decree issued in honour of a certain Theokles of Olbia by the *parepidhmoûntesf cénoi* from several cities, most of them from the Black Sea area: Panticapaeum, Chersoneses, Tyras, Istros, Tomis, Callatis, Odessos, Byzantium, Heraclea, Tium, Amastris, Sinope, Prusias ad Hypium, Nicomedia, Nicaea, Apamea, Prusias-Olympia, Cyzicus and Miletus. These *parepidhmoûntesf cénoi* listed as dedicators of this decree represent a community of merchants from the most important Pontic and Propontis cities, which were founded in unclear circumstances, but with the obvious aim of protecting their mutual commercial interests.

The internal structure of the ship-owners associations on the western Black Sea coast and the north-western area of Asia Minor and the mechanism of the regional maritime trade point to both the aforesaid centripetal tendencies and to a certain centrifugal trend of Black Sea trade, which should be construed as an extension of the commercial routes towards the

⁶² J. Vélissaropoulos, *Les nauklères grecs. Recherches sur les institutions maritimes en Grèce et dans l'Orient hellénisé*, Paris, 1980, 104 et seq.

mainland, within the Balkan and the Danubian provinces, as well as towards the eastern provinces. This must have been the role of the maritime routes established between Nicomedia or Prusias ad Hypium and Tomis, routes that shaped trade between the eastern areas and the western Black Sea and Danubian cities. Tomis was the main commercial regional entrepot which, through its direct connections with the great commercial centres in Bithynia, secured the transit trade from Asia Minor and the Near East to the mouths of the Danube and even to inner Moesia.

Although the Hellenistic commercial structures present in the western Black Sea area prevailed, they functioned concurrently with the *cives Romani consistentes* merchants associations. Their role in the transit of goods is more significant in civil settlements near the military centres on the limes, and also in rural settlements inside the province⁶³, but they are also present on the western coast of the Black Sea. Such is the case with the *cives Romani consistentes Callatis* community attested since the age of Trajan⁶⁴ and which must have been an important element of the maritime trade of Callatis. This is yet another argument which supports the hypothesis that the Hellenistic commercial structures functioned concurrently with the Roman ones.

In this respect, it is also worth mentioning that the Roman age represented for the western Black Sea area an extension of the Hellenistic economic pattern, which presupposes the co-existence of the two commercial structures (Hellenistic and Roman). It is necessary to emphasise the significance of the text

⁶³ F. Bérard, *Vikani, kanabenses, consistentes: Remarques sur l'organisation des agglomérations militaires romaines*, in *L'epigrafia del Villagio*, Faenza, 1993, pp. 66–67.

⁶⁴ A. Rădulescu, *Inscripție de la Callatis*, "Studii Clasice", 4, 1962, p. 275.

of an inscription from Sardica, which mentions an association of small manufacturers and merchants, part of the so-called category of *Produzentenhändler* (producers–dealers).⁶⁵ It is easy to recognise the Hellenistic economic tradition in this association which gathered small manufacturers and food suppliers. This economic tradition had the same component parts and functioned according to the same rules from Roman Egypt to Thrace.

A fundamental question which is difficult to answer at the present stage of research is that of the way in which the western Black Sea regions were connected to the economic system of the Roman world. In fact, the question to be answered is to what extent the western Black Sea can be regarded as a peripheral space or as a transit area of Roman trade. In the previously mentioned case, it seems that the western Black Sea trade actually had a bivalent character, gathering components specific to both the peripheral and transit commercial relations.

The western Black Sea trade may be described as peripheral inasmuch as this area sooner represented a district of goods consumption, when compared with the western and eastern Roman world as well as with other goods production areas. This is to say that most of the western Black Sea trade was directed towards supplying the local population with necessary goods, and only to a lesser extent towards exporting them. This fact could possibly be explained by the belated political and administrative integration of the area into the Roman Empire, in a period when the main characteristics of the two large economic areas (East and West) had already been completed.

Contrarily, the situation of the western Black Sea area at the crossroads between

⁶⁵ IGB IV 1922.

Rome's provinces and the Greek-Eastern world determined its status as a transit trade area. The maritime lines going from Tomis and perhaps other outlets towards the commercial centres in Bithynia provided the permanent commercial connection with the Greek-Oriental provinces. Thus it may be easily noticed that although the western Black Sea area was peripheral for Roman trade, it was, nonetheless, connected with the entire economic system of the Roman world through its commercial relations with Asia Minor and, farther, with the eastern provinces of the empire. In this system, Tomis had a central position, as the main actor of the transit trade and was, just like Aquileia in the western quarter of the Balkan Peninsula, the relay for the transportation of goods towards the inland provinces of Moesia and Thrace.

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