ROMAN FLEETS IN THE BLACK SEA: MYSTERIES OF THE CLASSIS PONTICA

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ABSTRACT

The paper sketches what is known of the classis Pontica from its establishment in 64 with the annexation of Pontus until its disappearance in the 3rd century, when a Roman naval presence in the eastern Euxine vanishes. Trajan probably transferred the fleet’s base from Trabzun to Sinope in conjunction with preparations for his Parthian war (114-17). The classis Pontica became the only praetorian fleet stationed in the Euxine. Its title Severiana may reflect distinguished service against Pescennius Niger in 193-194. As Josephus (BJ 2.366-67) erroneously transferred Euxine piracy of the Augustan era into a late Neronian context, changes in the defensive arrangements for eastern Anatolia, not piracy, motivated the fleet’s creation. Josephus’ 3000 hoplites pacifying the Euxine are a misinterpretation of a legionary vexillation that suppressed Anicetus’ revolt in 69.

One of Professor Saddington’s last papers, a note on the classes Perinthia and Pontica, returned to the theme of Roman fleets, on which he had often labored as an offshoot of his life-long interest in early imperial auxilia units. 1 A paper continuing his discussion befits a memorial volume. The poorly documented and shadowy classis Pontica affords an opportunity to reassess Roman naval policy in the Black Sea in terms of its command structure, purpose, and postings. Not least, Roman deployments on the southern and eastern Euxine and Roman relations with the Bosporan Kingdom come into consideration. A fresh approach can pinpoint overlooked problems, correct misconceptions, and expose unjustified speculations, even if the current state of the evidence defies real solutions.

Prehistory

Some background to the maritime world of the Black Sea and the various categories of Roman fleets would be beneficial. The Euxine rim’s vibrant commercial and cultural network connected communities, some Greek colonies from the late 6th century BC, on all its shores. Commerce, including the famous Bosporan grain, flowed through the Hellespont to the Aegean area and beyond. During the Hellenistic period ties intensified, even before Mithridates VI Eupator (r. 120-63 BC) politically united the Euxine coasts. Sinope and later Amastris afforded ports for the shortest direct voyage to the Crimea, a route functioning from the late 5th century BC. The Roman era, through the early 3rd century at least, continued the Hellenistic connections of northern Anatolian cities with the Bosporan Kingdom, Crimean Chersonesus and other sites. A Danube-Euphrates nexus, initiated with Nero’s Armenian war (55-63) and well attested by later troop movements across Asia Minor, included the Euxine. In the Notitia Dignitatum the comites commerciorum of Moesia, Scythia and Pontus form a unit (Or. 13.7), which parallels the position of the dux Armeniae (Or. 38), the earlier Cappadocian governor, as the link between eastern and Balkan commands.

Sinope, the leading city for Euxine trade and communications since c. 600 BC, had particular prominence as a naval base both for Mithridates VI Eupator and later in 14 BC for Agrippa’s potential intervention in the Bosporan Kingdom. Julius Caesar (probably 46/45 BC) founded a colony here (eventually with the ius Italicum), where a cult of Augustus flourished already during his lifetime. Further, just as Sinope’s proximity to the Crimea favored its maritime prosperity within the Euxine, currents promoted the sites of Cyzicus and Perinthos. For those sailing into the Propontis from the west, Cyzicus, on a peninsula of the northwestern Anatolian coast, became a natural port with two harbors and 200 shipsheds in Strabo’s day, whereas ships from the Euxine, headed west, favored the Thracian coast to the north and Perinthos. Both of these ports,

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3 Wheeler 2012:630.

4 Doonan 2003; colonia Iulia Felix Sinopensis: Strabo 12.3.11; Dig. 50.15.1.10; Jones 1937:167, 426 n. 38; Magie 1950:182-84 with nn. 20-22; 414 n. 33; 470-71; Kienast 1966:106; Speidel & French 1985:100; Reddé 1986:258; Kissel 1995:69 n. 81; Agrippa: see infra, p. 122 note 12.
tied to the major road networks, became transit points for Roman troops. To the naval potential of individual cities can be added the Bosporan Kingdom’s naval forces, notable for targeting pirates from the late 4th century BC into the late 2nd century AD.

Roman naval presence in the Black Sea, a relatively late development, must be assessed according to the variety of Roman naval forces: standing fleets, provincial fleets and occasional fleets for invasions. Neglect of the Roman navy, roughly between the end of the Third Macedonian War (167 BC) and the First Mithridatic War (88-85 BC), led in the Late Republic to reliance, especially in the East, on ad hoc levies of ships and sailors from maritime peoples although placed under Roman officers. It also encouraged piracy, such as the crisis spurring Pompey’s imperium maius under the lex Gabinia (67 BC). Augustus’ creation of the Misene and Ravennate fleets aimed to provide a permanent Roman naval presence in the Mediterranean, just as the army now became a professional standing force.

Nevertheless, Vegetius’ neat discernment (4.31.6) of precise spheres of operations for these fleets, whereby the Propontis and Euxine belonged to the Ravennate’s sphere, cannot withstand epigraphical reality. Contingents of the Misene fleet dot eastern waters, including a probable base at Cyzicus, where an early imperial trierarch’s wife was buried. If a firm date for the base’s establishment is elusive, in the early 3rd century Cyzicus still harbored an unspecified fleet (Misene?), which a private citizen tried to arouse against Elagabalus, wintering at Nicomedia (218-19). Curiously, no reference to a fleet at Cyzicus occurs in 193, when the site became a base of Septimius Severus’ forces against Pescennius Niger, despite the obvious necessity of ferrying the Severan army across the Propontis. In contrast, for both the Propontis and the Euxine only a late first-century centurion’s tombstone at Chalcedon attests the Ravennate fleet in northeastern waters.

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6 Byzantium, for example, could assemble a fleet of 500 ships in 194: Dio 74.11.3; Bosporan navy: Eumelus (310/309-304/303 BC): Diod. 20.25.2-3; Asander (47-17 BC): IGR 1.874 (IPE 2.25); Cotys I (45/46-62/63 or 68): IPE 2.37; Cotys II (123/4-132/3): IPE 2.27; Sauromates II (173/4-210/11): IPE 2.423.
Significantly, a supposed long-term base of the Ravennate fleet at Crimean Charax (Cape Ai-Todor), is now shown to be a phantom.\(^9\)

Despite conjectures,\(^10\) permanent bases of a praetorian fleet (Misenian or Ravennate) in the Propontis before the second half of the 1st century cannot be confirmed and a base of neither within the Black Sea rim at any time is on record. Rather, Rome continued to rely on socii for naval support.\(^11\) When Agrippa moved to Sinope in 14 BC for operations to replace the Bosporan pretender Scribonius with Polemo I, Herod the Great and his fleet accompanied him.\(^12\) Scribonius’ murder alleviated the need for Roman intervention. Agrippa’s expeditionary forces, except for Herod’s fleet, are unclear. The tombstone of a nauarch, C. Numisius Primus, may show that local resources and expertise were available, but Numisius need not have been the commander of a Roman fleet based there.\(^13\)

In contrast to the imperial fleets of Misenum and Ravenna, directly under the emperor, intended for larger strategic functions, and composed of larger-sized ships, provincial fleets (chiefly liburnians) appended the armies under provincial governors and responded to occasional or permanent local needs (mainly coastal or riverine watches and patrols). Tacitus suggests (Ann. 4.5.4) that the number and size of provincial fleets were still not fixed in 23 AD.\(^14\) Invasion fleets, ad hoc and often raised from scratch, had no connection with provincial fleets.\(^15\) Romans could build fleets quickly, as in the case of Virdius Geminus, whom Vespasian in fall 69, dispatched with legionary vexillarii to suppress the Vitellian Anicius’ raiding in the eastern Euxine (Tac. Hist. 3.48). For the Propontis, the

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\(^{9}\) Chalcedon: CIL 3.322; Starr 1993:25. A tile (CIL 3.14215\(^5\)) stamped VEX|G RAV SP and often interpreted as vex(illatio) | c(lassis) Rav(enatia) s(umptu) p(ublico) vel sim. has now been dated to the 130s at earliest; it has nothing to do with the Ravennate fleet, although the text’s precise interpretation remains uncertain. See Sarnowski 2006a.

\(^{10}\) Cumont 1923:112; Reddé 1986:507-508.


\(^{14}\) Kienast 1966:120; Saddington 1991:397 with n. 1.

mysterious \textit{classis Perinthia}, a provincial fleet, probably antedates the presence of praetorian contingents. Explicitly attested only by a trierarch's tombstone of 88 AD, it may date to Claudius, if it succeeded a supposed royal Thracian fleet after the annexation of Thrace (46 AD). Vespasian perhaps reorganized it.\footnote{IGR 1.781; an unpublished military diploma from Thrace, dated 88 AD, may also belong to a member of the \textit{classis Perinthia}; Saddington 2010:239-40. But if the Perinthian fleet began with Claudius, it would more likely be called, as Saddington notes, a \textit{classis Thracica} in parallel to other Claudian provincial fleets (\textit{classis Germanica}, \textit{classis Britannica}); cf. Starr 1993:127.} For the Euxine, as just noted, Misene and Ravennate elements are unattested. A Moesian fleet, perhaps active from 15 BC, the first provincial fleet known within the Black Sea rim, also owed to Vespasian its strengthening into the \textit{classis Flavia Moesica}.\footnote{Kienast 1966:110; Bounegru & Zahariade 1996:7-17.}

Nomenclature of fleets can also be deceptive. A \textit{classis Perinthia} (technically) would have been a provincial fleet under the governor of Thrace, but modern historians can assume that any fleet operating in the Propontis was a Perinthian fleet or any fleet in the southern Euxine a \textit{classis Pontica}.\footnote{Saddington 2010:240 seems to amalgamate the Perinthian and Pontic fleets. A Thracian governor in the time of Commodus, Ti. Claudius Attalus Paterculianus, may have had a fleet (the Perinthian?), if that is the meaning of \textit{ἐς τοὺς τριηρίτας} at Dio 79.3.5.} The adjective \textit{Ponticus} could occasionally designate Moesian forces in the western and northwestern Euxine: Ti. Plautius Felix Ferruntianus, tribune of the I Italica (a legion of Moesia Inferior), was also \textit{praepositus vexillationibus Ponticis apud Scythia et Taurican} – a command with no connection to the \textit{classis Pontica}.\footnote{ILS 2747; Saxer 1967:91.}

The need for a ‘Pontic fleet’ was increasingly apparent, as Rome became more directly active in Euxine affairs in the 40s. Naval forces were involved in the annexation of Thrace (46 AD) and even more in the so-called \textit{bellum Mithridaticum} (ILS 9197) or \textit{bellum Bosporanum} (Tac. Ann. 12.63.3) of 44-49, when the Moesian governor (?) A. Didius Gallus (cos. 39), succeeded in command by the equestrian C. Iulius Aquila, a Bithynian \textit{procurator}, replaced Mithridates VIII with Cotys I on the Bosporan throne.\footnote{Didius Gallus may have had a special command for the Crimean crisis rather than being the Moesian governor: see Birley 2005:31-37 on his career; Aquila: Rostovtzeff 1916-18:16-18; Rémy 1989:58; \textit{PIR}² 1.166.} Troops from Moesia and Bithynia could not march to the Crimea. But Gallus’ use of Ravennate ships and Aquila’s of Misene vessels are unsupported speculations. Again, local maritime communities accoun-
ted for at least some naval support: Byzantium claimed impoverishment for its contributions to the annexation of Thrace and the Borporan war.\textsuperscript{21} Anatolian events would spur the creation of a new fleet in the Euxine.

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{map}
\caption{Map of the Euxine Sea and surrounding regions.}
\end{figure}

Defining the \textit{classis Pontica}

The \textit{classis Pontica}'s history begins with Roman annexation of Iulius Polemo II's kingdom of Pontus in 64, the year after Domitius Corbulo's armistice with the Parthians at Rhandeia established the framework for Nero's crowning the Arsacid Tigranes the Armenian king in 66. Pontus, initially attached to Galatia, eventually became part of the Flavian Galatia-Cappadocia complex and later the Hadrianic Cappadocia, whose eastern and northeastern borders lasted into the 3rd century. Annexation of Pontus in 64, Armenia Minor in 72,\textsuperscript{22} and the Flavian militarization of eastern Anatolia in the Galatia-Cappadocia complex were in response to the new Parthian Armenia and demanded an increased Roman presence in

\textsuperscript{21} Tac. \textit{Ann.} 12.63.3; Kienast 1966:108-10, who undervalues this passage of Tacitus.
\textsuperscript{22} Misdated 70-71 at Bennett 2002:309, following Mitford 1980:1180; see Magie 1950:1435; Mitchell 1993:2.154.
the eastern Black Sea. Polemo II’s royal fleet and army were amalgamated at some point into Roman units. Two years later Josephus has Agrippa II plead against a Jewish revolt in a speech detailing Rome’s military might: a fleet of forty warships had pacified an unnavigable and wild sea, where once the hostile coastal tribes marauded. As generally assumed, these forty ships were the classis Pontica. In 69 Licinius Mucianus ordered the bulk of the Pontic army and the best of the Pontic liburnians to Byzantium, in anticipation of a potential naval expedition of Vespasian’s forces against Vitellius in Italy. Later the same year, Anicetus, Polemo II’s libertus and former prefect of his fleet, raised the standard of Vitellius, burned the fleet’s remaining ships at Trapezus, and began raiding the Euxine coasts. At Vespasian’s command Virdius Geminus, with a legionary vexillatio, hastily constructed new liburnians and cornered Anicetus at the Chobus (mod.

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24 Tac. Hist. 3.47.1-2. Unlike some client-kings’ forces, transformed into auxilia units (cf. Graf 1994 on the Nabatean army), no trace of Polemo II’s army survives after a cohort at Trapezus was mangled during Anicetus’ revolt in 69. Sherwin-White’s conjecture (1966:589) that Polemo’s army became part of the garrison of Bithynia-Pontus is unfounded; it more probably would have become part of the Galatian-Cappadocian forces, for which, see now Speidel 2007 with critiques at Wheeler 2012 and in press-a. For the topos of lax discipline among eastern forces in Tacitus’ account of Anicetus’ capture of Trapezus, see Woods 2006a:648-49; cf. Wheeler 1996.

Inguri) River (halfway between Phasis and Dioscurias). Thereafter, in literary sources the \textit{classis Pontica} resurfaces only when Flavius Arrianus, the Cappadocian governor c. 131-137, presumably employed it to inspect Roman military installations along the Colchian coast between Trapezus and Dioscurias/Sebastopolis in c. 131.\footnote{Tac. \textit{Hist.} 2.83.2, 3.47.3-48; Wheeler 2000:277 with n. 105; 2012:639 with n. 71; Saxer 1967:21 speculates on the legions in Virdius' \textit{vexillatio}. The otherwise unknown Virdius (\textit{PIR V} 473), perhaps a centurion or a \textit{primipiliaris}, could be the father of a Trajanic \textit{procurator} in Bithynia, Virdius Gemellus (Plin. \textit{Ep.} 10.27, 28, 84): Rostovtzeff 1916-18:20, followed by Sherwin-White 1966:597; Birley 2000:101. In any case, Vespasian ordered the vexillation (Tac. \textit{Hist.} 3.48.1), notLicinius Mucianus, as Paltiel (1991:248) thinks. Virdius' command is omitted in Tully 2004, who bases much of his argument (esp. 142-44) on vexillations commanded by centurions on a false notion of continuous Roman garrisons in Armenia from Claudius to Marcus Aurelius; cf. Wheeler 2000:299-301 (unknown to Tully).\footnote{Arr. \textit{Peripl.} 1-17. Arrian's Second Sophistic \textit{retractatio} of an earlier \textit{periplus}, disguised as a letter to Hadrian and adorned with Hadrianic themes, offers no proof that Arrian circumnavigated the Euxine, as some seem to think (e.g. Reddé 1986:258 with n. 37, 264) – an act that would have taken him far beyond his \textit{provincia}'s terminus at Dioscurias (\textit{Peripl.} 17.2). Revision of an old treatise would hardly tell Hadrian anything unknown about the Euxine (cf. \textit{Peripl.} 12.2; \textit{contra}, Bowersock & Jones 2006:127). Arrian, copying his source for the northern Anatolian coast, omits attention to sites of potential relevance to contemporary postings of the \textit{classis Pontica} (if Kienast be followed: note 30 \textit{infra}), such as Amasirus, Caesarea Germanica, Sinope, Amisus and Cerasus (Reddé 1986:258 with n. 37, 260 n. 43; see further \textit{infra} on some of these sites). Any new information for Hadrian lay in Arrian's cryptic references to official reports in Latin (\textit{Peripl.} 6.2, 10.1). A date of publication for Arrian's \textit{Periplus}, as opposed to its dramatic date of c. 131, based on a reference to the death of Cotys II of Bosporus (17.3), cannot be determined, in contrast to Hadrian's \textit{vicennalia} of 136 celebrated in Arrian's \textit{Tactica}: Wheeler 1978. Stadter (1980:206 n. 25; cf. 203 n. 2 on Arrian's possible sources) accepts equation of the dramatic date and the date of publication; cf. Birley 1997:155-56, 263-64, who puts Arrian's letter in winter 131-132, when Hadrian was in Athens. Cotys II's coins overlapped with his successor's in 132/133; see Nadel 1982:191-92. Silberman's historical and archaeological commentary on the \textit{Periplus} (1993) is not to be followed in detail on many points; see Wheeler 2012:630-59.}}
had been unable to stop.  

28 L. Iulius Vehilius Gratus Iulianus, later Commodus’ Praetorian Prefect, became *procurator Augusti* and *praefectus classis Ponticae* about this time. One of his several special commands during the Marcomannic wars had been against the Costoboci. At Cyzicus a third-century metrical epitaph of Crispinus, a *stolarch* of the Pontic fleet, would seem to confirm the fleet’s presence.  

29 Kienast later rejected the view of a complete transfer of the *classis Pontica* to Cyzicus and argued from naval motifs on local issues of civic coins (of various dates) for other stations of the Pontic fleet in the Propontis and on the northern Anatolian coast. Besides, the so-called ‘painted shield’ from Dura-Europos apparently attested a soldier’s itinerary, when transferred from the lower Danube to the eastern front via Trapezus, and Diocletian’s placement of the legion I Pontica at Trapezus confirmed the continued presence of a fleet there. Reddé, however, also an advocate of a Late Roman fleet in the eastern Euxine and Trapezus as a node for supplies and troop transfers, questioned Kienast’s scattered numismatic evidence as proof for the fleet’s postings. French could produce inscriptions suggesting that Sinope was the Pontic fleet’s base in the 3rd century and argued for a division of authority between the Moesian fleet, responsible for the western, northwestern Euxine coasts and the Crimea down to Chersonesus and Charax (Cape Ai-Todor), and the Pontic fleet, surveying the Propontis, the northern Anatolian coast and Colchis. Kissel, likewise, rejected the fleet’s total abandonment of the Euxine for Cyzicus, in arguing for the continuing importance of Trapezus in supplying the Cappadocian army on the upper Euphrates.  

30 A better understanding of the *classis Pontica*’s history can be derived from analysis (however provisional in the current state of the evidence) of its placement(s) and the function of its prefects. Was it a provincial fleet under a governor or a praetorian squadron with trans-provincial responsi-

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28 For the date of 171, see Scheidel 1990, followed by Birley 2010:37 n. 3.
29 Sic Starr 1993:129, essentially followed by Mitchell 1993:1235; see also Kienast 1966:104 and 118, who notes that contingents of the Pontic fleet at Cyzicus would have mixed with those of the Misene, a similar situation to that of the Misene and the provincial *classis Syriaca* at Seleuceia in Pieria during Trajan’s reign; Iulius Vehilius: ILS 1327; Saxer 1967:35-37 with further references; Crispinus: IGR 4.150 (I. Kyzikos I 513); Merkelbach & Stauber 2001:49: the third-century date of Crispinus’ text is based on the orthography.
bilities? A case can be made for the latter: the *classis Pontica* as the sole praetorian fleet in the Euxine.

Command structures of the imperial and provincial fleets seem not to have differed. From Augustus on, a *praefectus classis* could be a *libertus* or an *eques*, but after Vespasian *liberti* were excluded, when naval prefectures became a post in the equestrian *militia*, the equivalent of a *praefectus cohortis*. As Saddington demonstrated, the post of *praefectus classis et orae maritimae* has a long history, beginning with Sex. Pompeius in 43-39 BC. Subsequently, but at a much lower level than Sex. Pompeius’ position, the post of *praefectus maritima* / *ripae* evolved from the rank of *praefectus equitum et classis* in the Augustan era, thus a command involving both terrestrial and maritime forces. From this perspective, the command of M. Gavius Bassus, *praefectus orae Ponticae maritimae* when Pliny was governor of Bithynia-Pontus, certainly included ships. From another perspective, as posts like *praefectus orae maritimae* and *praepositus orae gentium Ponti Polemoniani* do not explicitly mention naval contingents, Bassus may have had only terrestrial forces, which Pliny meagerly reinforced. Possession of the shore could control a coast without naval support, as pirates and other naval forces, dependent on a terrestrial base, rarely stayed long at sea. Hence inclusion of a coastal strip fifty miles

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31 Saddington 2007:210; Reddé 1986:417-22. Spaul 2002 attempts to compile a complete list of officers and sailors in the fleets, but *AE* 1912:213 does not attest (sic Spaul 52-53, who seems to confuse this text with *AE* 1912:120; cf. Starr, 1993:49 n. 61, 122 n. 28; *IGR* 3.1006) a connection with the *classis Pontica*. This dedication at Byzantium of Artemidorus Synistorus, a nauarch of King Rhoemetalces (of Bosporus?) celebrates the *Ploiaresia*, a feast of Isis (5 March) that marked the opening of the sailing season. On fleet prefects, note also Zyromski 2001: *non vidi*.

32 Vell. Pat. 2.73.2; App. BC 4.353; Dio 46.40.3; 47.12.2, 17.1; 48.36.5-6; *MRR* 2.348; Saddington 1988:299; Reddé 1986:417.

33 Saddington 1988:301-305.


36 Pliny (*Ep.* 10.21) assigned him from the Bithynian garrison, which consisted of at least two cohorts (Speidel 1983:13 with n. 27; cf. Speidel & French 1985:100), ten *beneficiarii*, two *equites* and a centurion, but Bassus surely had other forces.
inland in the *lex Gabinia* of 67 BC for Pompey’s command against the pirates.\(^{37}\) Besides, naval forces were more expensive than cohorts.\(^{38}\)

Similarly, despite extensive restorations, the contemporary Trajanic *ignotus* post as *praef. orae maritimae* | [*Amastr et clas[s Ponticae* (found at Sinope) evokes questions.\(^{39}\) If a *praefectus orae* normally had naval forces, then the addition of *classis Pontica* is superfluous, unless a special distinction. Yet, if the restorations are valid, did this *ignotus* command the whole *classis Pontica* or only the detachment at Amastris? Reddé sees the *ignotus* post as the first known instance of a coastal prefect with a simultaneous naval command, although this view discounts Saddington’s reconstruction of the evolution of the *praefecti orae maritimae* from the Augustan *praefectus equitum et classis*. M. Valerius Maximianus, *praepositus orae gentium Ponti Polemoniani* during the Parthian war of 161-166, is also not explicitly credited with a naval command, but his assignment more likely concerned logistics and supply than controlling the natives. No *limes* in the sense of a coastal road existed in Colchis or in the area west of Trapezus; communications went by sea, as in Arrian’s tour of inspection c. 131.\(^{40}\)

Certainly Maximianus’ command was naval to some extent. For Sarnowski, sorting out various riverine and coastal commands in Moesia Inferior, the Sinopean *ignotus*’ combined prefecture of the coast and the fleet would indicate a special command.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{37}\) Strabo 11.2.12; *lex Gabinia*: Vell. Pat. 2.31.2; Plut. *Pomp.* 25.2.

\(^{38}\) Reddé 1986:423.

\(^{39}\) I. Sinope 126: [col]r mur[al *praef. orae maritimae*] | [*Amastr et clas[s Ponticae* proc*] | [Im[p Nersea (leaf)] *Traiani*] | [Caes Aug Ger*[man Dacic provinc*] | [Galatiae et Paph*[lagoniae . . . ]; PME Inc. 31.


\(^{41}\) Sarnowski 2006b:90-92. Sarnowski’s belief that a *praefectus ripae* controlled both banks of a river – the parallel of the middle Euphrates after 166 escaped his notice – in no way compels that Ti. Plautius Silvanus Aelianus, the Moesian governor, launched a major expedition across the Danube at some point 62-66, in the crisis involving Transdanuvians, Bastarnae, Rhoxolani, Dacians and probably the Sarmatian Aorsi. Plautius asserts (*ILS* 986) only that he guarded the riverbank (*in ripam quam tuaebatur*). If he had crossed the Danube, he would have explicitly boasted about it, as others did; see Wheeler 2011:203-205, esp. 203 n. 139. An error at Wheeler 2011:204 n. 140 may now be corrected: the fragmentary Greek
In any case, Euxine commands could involve ships without explicit reference to the *classis Pontica*, and whether all such ships in Roman service on the northern and eastern coasts of Anatolia belonged to the *classis Pontica* must remain an open question meriting further comment. Yet Gavius Bassus as *praefectus orae Ponticae maritimae* is not Pliny’s subordinate: he has direct access to Trajan (Plin. *Ep.* 10.22) – an act of insubordination, if Bassus’ command lay within the purview of Pliny as proconsul/corrector. Pliny’s grant of troops to Bassus represented collegiality of independent officers. Bithynia-Pontus was a strategically important province for communications and logistics with the Euphrates frontier. Indeed the sudden onset of the Parthian war of 161-166 led to its conversion from a senatorial province under a proconsul to an imperial province – probably in 162 at the height of the crisis after Roman defeats in Armenia and Syria.42 Further, as Rostovtzeff recognized long ago, Roman relations with the Bosporan Kingdom passed through Bithynia-Pontus but via a special *procurator*, not the senatorial proconsul. Thus Iunius Clio, a *procurator Ponti*, received *consularia insignia* for conducting the deposed Mithridates VIII back to Rome from the hinterland of Lake Maeotis in 49 and his subordinate, C. Iulius Aquila, Didius Gallus’ successor in the military operations, was awarded *insignia praetoria*. Virdius Gemellus was also an independent *procurator* in Bithynia during Pliny’s governorship.43

Gavius Bassus’ post, independent of the Bithynian governor, suggests a promotion, especially as he had already performed his *tertiaria militia equestris as praefectus alae* with the *ala Claudia nova* in probably Trajan’s First Dacian War (101-102) and he had a staff, which erected his statue with a bilingual dedication at Ephesus before his death.44 As Gavius received the *corona muralis* for his Dacian service, it is tempting to suggest that he may be the Trajanic *ignotus*, also awarded a *corona muralis*, honored at Sinope (if the restorations be accepted) as *praefectus orae* inscription, found at Crimean Mangup (nine miles east of Sebastopol/Chersonesus) in 1984, and there reported as unpublished, in fact appeared at *AE* 1996.1357, although the *AE* commentator’s views are disputable, especially the fanciful connection of the text with Olbia, absent on the stone.

maritimae] [Am]astr(ensis) et clas[s(is) Ponticae. If so, Gavius was probably praefectus classis Ponticae and the prominence given to Amastris in the inscription is misleading, unless a recent addition to the Pontic fleet’s stations. L. Iulius Vehilius, praefectus classis Ponticae under Marcus Aurelius, went on to a procuratorship of Lusitania and Vettonia after repelling the Mauri from Spain, just as the Sinopean ignotus (Gavius?) became procurator of the adjacent Galatia and Paphlagonia. Thus Gavius’ text at Ephesus antedated his procuratorship. Iulius Vehilius, however, had been prefect of the Pontic fleet as procurator Augusti. Hence it becomes hazardous to generalize from his career. Given the classis Pontica’s origo in Polemo II’s fleet based at Trapezus, the obvious assumption would make the Pontic fleet essentially a classis Cappadocica under the command of the Cappadocian governor, the top commander in eastern Anatolia, but other evidence suggests that the classis Pontica’s sphere of operations was trans-provincial and thus not part of a single governor’s charge. Not every praefectus classis Ponticae can be shown to have been a procurator Augusti. But if conflicting lines of authority were to be avoided, the praefectus classis Ponticae must have become at some point, like that of the Misene and Ravennate fleets, an independent imperial rank, if at a much lower level. Attention to the situation in the Euxine, the supposed stations of the fleet, and the needs for this command will clarify the case.

Josephus and the classis Pontica

Josephus’ Euxine (BJ 2.366-67), an un navigable and uncivilized (ἀπλωτὸν καὶ ἀγρίαν) sea, was dominated by the piracy of the Heniochi, Colchians, Tauri, and Bosporans until the classis Pontica pacified these waters and 3000 ‘hoplites’ manned the coasts. This view has influenced all discussions of the Pontic fleet, besides Roman motivation for the annexation of Polemo II’s Pontus and Roman deployments in the area. The long simmering debate, however, (initially Von Domaszewski vs. Ritterling) over whether Josephus’ account reflects the year 66, the Neronian

45 Another parallel might be found in the career of a Severan-era prefect of the Pontic fleet Antonius Proculus [Cumont & Cumont 1910:107 no. 92; SEG 29 [1979] 1366], if he is to be identified with L. Antonius Proclus (PME A 142), praefectus cohortis I Batavorum in Britain under Caracalla and subsequently at some point epistrategus Thebaidis, as Speidel (1983:13-14 with n. 28) suggests, although the chronology of the later career is uncertain. French 1983:54 does not endorse Speidel’s view; Proclus escaped Spaul’s notice (2002).
dramatic date of Agrippa II’s speech, or the early Flavian era, perhaps 75, when *Bellum Iudaicum* Book 2’s appearance possibly coincided with dedication of the temple of Pax in Rome, matters only if Josephus presented accurate information. His rhetorical exaggerations about the Euxine have generally been ignored and his details – some erroneous, others unconfirmed by other evidence – may be questioned.

The Euxine was hardly unnavigable or un navigated, as the network of commercial and cultural relations (already noted) demonstrates. Josephus, however, raises the specter of piracy – a perpetual maritime phenomenon like death and taxes – naming the Heniochi, Colchians, Tauri, Bosporans and the peoples around Lake Maeotis. All these resided in the eastern Euxine, except the Tauri, tribes of the mountainous Crimean interior and bothersome until overwhelmed by Sarmatian Alans and Goths in the 3rd century. The Tauri should be distinguished from the often more civilized Crimean Scythians, for example, inhabitants of Neapolis. Eastern Euxine pirates, famous for their highly maneuverable skiffs called *camarae*, attracted attention. The *camara*, the craft of choice in 59, when Anicetus, Nero’s Misene prefect, tried to murder Agrippina, also found employment with that other Anicetus, the Pontic rebel in 69. But Josephus’ list of pirates recalls Strabo’s account of eastern Euxine pirates, the Achaei, Zygi and Heniochi of the Augustan era, whose depredations had even scared Ovid at Tomis – a serious threat provoking a double reference in Strabo, who complained that Roman governors (of Bithynia-Pontus?) ignored the problem. The dedication of the Bosporan

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49 See supra, pp. 119-20 with notes 2-3.
50 Neapolis: Zaytsev 2004. The Tauri murdered a *praefectus cohortis* and numerous Roman auxiliaries in 49, as they returned by sea along the Crimean coast from the campaign against Mithridates VIII (Tac. *Ann.* 12.17.3), and beset Olbia during Antoninus Pius’ reign (*HA, Pius* 9.9). The Bosporan king Asander (47-17 BC) walled off Bosporan territory against them: Strabo 7.4.6 with MacDonald’s corrections (1999:148-49) to several misconceptions of Conole & Milns 1983; two *liberti* killed by the Tauri near Chersonesus (*IPE* 12.562) date to the 2nd century: *AE* 2000.1280; Sarnowski 2006b:87.
51 Suet. *Nero* 34.2; Strabo 11.2.12; Tac. *Hist.* 3.47.3; Ferone 2004; cf. Woods 2006a.
nauarch Pateleon at Panticapaeum during Asander's reign (47-17 BC) could reflect an earlier wave of the piratical tide.53

Yet Josephus' list of pirates muddles any geographical order. 'Colchians' is a geographical term, not an ethnic, and similarly his 'Bosporans' may also be a geographical reference, echoing Strabo's further complaint that Bosporans (not the Bosporan kings, who often combated them)54 provided anchorages and markets for the pirates. None of these tribes inhabited Colchis. Rather, the Achaei, Heniochi and Zygi probably migrated from the morass of different peoples around Lake Maeotis into the coastal strip of the northeastern Euxine and its mountainous interior in the area south of Gorgippia down to the northern edge of Colchis at Pityus.55 The Achaei and Heniochi had been allies of Mithridates VI Eupator, although the Achaei had also destroyed two-thirds of a Pontic army c. 80 BC.56 Cotys I (45-63 or 68) campaigned against the Achaei at some point in his southward extension of the Bosporan Kingdom and they subsequently vanish from the sources – except for Jos. BJ 2.366.57

The Heniochi illustrate Josephus' anachronistic information even better. Eumelus of Bosporus (310/309-304/303 BC) once suppressed their piracy and they destroyed Hellenistic Pityus (not identical with Roman Pityus) at some undetermined date. By Josephus' time they had migrated south into the mountainous interior between southeast of Trapezus and southwest of Apsarus in the mountainous Iberian-Armenian-Pontic borderlands. Their piracy from this location is unknown. Indeed they were allies in Corbulo's Armenian offensive of 58. In 114 their king Anchialus, still ruling c. 131, attended Trajan's conference of client-kings at Satala or Elegeia. Piracy once had flourished on the southeastern Euxine coast, as Ps.-Scylax (4th century BC) knew a River of Pirates in the area of Apsarus, but that probably long antedated the Heniochi's migration.58

53 IGR 1.874 (IPE 2.25); Gajdukevic 1971:326.
54 See supra, note 6.
55 Cf. Plin. HN 6.15-17, 30; the best discussion of the literary sources for these peoples is still Kiesling 1913, although unsatisfying in terms of source criticism. I forego discussion of the Zygī, whose piracy is essentially limited to Strabo's inclusion of them with their neighbors, the Achaei and the Heniochi.
57 IPE 2.37 (CIR 958); Gajdukevic 1971:343; MacDonald 1999:143.
58 Diod. 20.25.2-3; Pityus: Plin. HN 6.16; Wheeler 2012:635 with n. 54; Corbulo: Tac. Ann. 12.37.4 with Magie 1950:1413 n. 44; Bennett’s suppositions (2006:84) on the ‘Moschi’ (an archaic term for one of the ethnic groups, from which the Caucasian Iberians developed), rather than Heniochi, and his conjectures about Roman praesidia toward the Darial Pass in 58 merit no credence. Anchialus: Dio
The prospect of piracy, however, cannot be dismissed summarily. Ilium honored T. Valerius Proclus, φροντιστής (procurator?) of Drusus Caesar, for his efforts against pirates (probably Thracians) perhaps early under Tiberius. Tryphon, a Bosporan nauarch of Cotys II, celebrated a victory over the Scythians in 123 and later in 193 Sauromates II of Bosporus (173/4-210/11) defeated the Sarmatian Siraci and Scythians somewhere east of the Strait of Kerch and brought the Crimean Tauri into a treaty, thus (as he claimed) rendering the sea free for voyages to Pontus and Bithynia. Unless Sauromates II has exaggerated, where is the classis Pontica? Has Rome abandoned the sea lanes to the Crimea to the Bosporan navy? In any case, Josephus at BJ 2.366-67 has transferred Euxine piracy of the Augustan era into the late Neronian-early Flavian period, especially as no other sources, literary or epigraphical, attest Euxine piracy as a problem at this time. Polemo II’s alleged inability to control Euxine piracy, especially after Corbulo had turned Trapezus into an important supply base for Roman forces on the upper Euphrates, can be safely dismissed as a motive for the annexation of Pontus.

But what can be said about the 3000 ‘hoplites’ also maintaining peace in the Black Sea? In Agrippa II’s survey of Roman might (BJ 2.365-87) Josephus seems to draw on an official source: an update of Augustus’
breviarium totius imperii? material collected from the censorship of Vespasian and Titus in 73-74?62 Josephus strangely omits Syria from Agrippa’s survey and confines Thrace with Moesia, Illyria with Pannonia (proof of an earlier Augustan source?). The reference to Dacian raids is idle rhetoric for the period 15-69, but perhaps valid for an earlier period.63 A curious force of 2000 *phrouroi* in Thrace twenty years after its annexation (too few, if the Moesian army is meant), unconfirmed and inadequately explained, parallels the 3000 ‘hoplites’ in the Euxine.64 Two possibilities could account for the 3000 ‘hoplites’ in 66: Plautius Silvanus’ relief of a ‘Scythian’ siege of Chersonesus or Nero’s planned Caucasian expedition.

At some point in 62-66 Plautius somehow raised (or at least claimed credit for raising) a ‘Scythian’ siege of Chersonesus (*ILS* 986: *Scytharum quoque regem a Cherronensi quae est ultra Borustenen opsidione summoto*). The vague reference does not suggest a Scythian naval blockade. Problems on the lower Danube and in the Crimea at this time reflect the continued westward push of Sarmatian tribes, non-seafaring peoples, and the relatively new ascendancy of the Sarmatian Aorsi north and northwest of the Black Sea.65 Chersonesus, a protectorate of the Bosporan Kingdom since the time of Augustus, was Cotys I’s responsibility to defend.66 Peculiarities in Bosporan coinage complicate the situation: on gold staters of 62/63 Nero’s monogram replaces that of Cotys and no further staters appear until 69, now with a monogram of Rhescuporis, Cotys I’s son, and images of Vespasian and Titus. Bronze issues from 62/63 also show only Nero’s name and portrait. As Pontus was annexed in 64, speculation runs rampant about a planned Neronian take-over of the Bosporan Kingdom. However the coinage is to be explained, Cotys seems to have survived

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64 *BJ* 2.368; Von Domaszewski 1892:213; Kienast 1966:110 argues unconvincingly that the 2000 are *classici* from the *classis Perinthia*; for terrestrial use of *classici*, see Saddington 2007:215; the 2000 could also be unspecified auxilia: Saxer 1967:91 n. 497.
65 For the ethnic situation on the lower Danube, see Wheeler 2010:1211-13, 2011:199-208 with bibliography and much criticism of Batty (2007); exaggerations of Plautius’ accomplishments in *ILS* 986: Wheeler 2011:204 with n. 142; some readings and grammar in *ILS* 986 are problematic: Sarmowski 2006b:85-86; Wheeler 2010: n. 82, 86; for various analyses of Plautius and *ILS* 986, see Haensch 1934; Conole & Milns 1983.
until 68 and no Roman troops can be shown to have occupied Bosporan sites.  

Similarly, no evidence (despite many scholars’ valiant efforts) suggests that Plautius himself or troops under his authority went to the Crimea in the 60s. A recent explanation of the 3000 ‘hoplites’ as vexillations from the Moesian legions V Macedonica, VII Claudia, and VIII Augusta hardly convinces. Where were they stationed? Certainly not in the Crimea or the Bosporan Kingdom. Alternatively, the 3000 might involve confusion about V Macedonica (Moesia) and XV Apollinaris (Pannonia), sent to the Armenian front in 62 and 63 respectively. But Plautius complained that he was short-handed after V Macedonica’s departure. In both cases whole legions were sent, not vexillations, and both returned to the Danube in summer 71 after the capture of Jerusalem. Despite the Jewish War, III Gallica had to be dispatched from Syria to the lower Danube after the Rhoxolani raided in the winter of 67-68. More problematic is legion VIII’s cognomen as bis Augusta, known only from the career inscription of P. Tullius Varro, later legate of the XIII Gemina and proconsul of Macedonia – a text dated post 79 (divi Vespasiani) but recounting largely a Neronian career and celebrating an apparent Neronian honor.


68 See esp. Sarnowski 2006b:85-89; contra and with desperation, e.g. Treister 2000-2001:111; Zubar 2005 (naval expedition only) and 2007:734-36. The hostilities recounted in the fragmentary IPE 12.369 (Chersonesus), which Zubar 2005:178 attributes to the time of Plautius, could also belong to the time of Sauromates II 150 years later: see Nadel 1977:95; Sarnowski 1991:141. Nothing about Plautius can be argued from IPE 12.370-71 (Chersonesus), references to a Flavian governor of Moesia, Sex. Vettulenus Cerialis (contra, Nadel 1982:210 n. 113), or the decree at IPE 12.355.


70 Tac. Ann. 15.6.3, 25.7; Sarnowski 2006b:88 with n. 22.


72 ILS 1002; Oldenstein-Pferdehirt 1984:400.
Neronian honor must remain enigmatic. Distinction against the Rhoxolani in 67-68 or 68-69, however, rather than Crimean service, could explain the award. Moesian forces cannot account for Josephus’ 3000 ‘hoplites’. Plautius’ threats or diplomacy must have sufficed to save Chersonesus from the ‘Scythians’. Nor for the western Euxine as a whole were Roman forces stationed at Tyras or Olbia before Trajan or in the Crimea at Chersonesus and Charax before the 120s under Hadrian.

Elimination of Crimean events and the supposed (if false) threat from Euxine pirates leads to Pontus and Colchis for the stations of these 3000 ‘hoplites’. Could Josephus have had in mind dispositions associated with Nero’s proposed Caucasian campaign? The plans were real, although now enshrouded in the anti-Neronian Tendenz of surviving sources. Troop movements and a new legion, I Italica, attest reality. Restoration of the Albani, the kingdom east of Iberia and adjacent to the Caspian Sea, to the Roman clientele provided the strategic objective. The Albani, socii (in theory) since the Caucasian campaigns of Pompey (66-65 BC) and absent from Roman forces in the war of 55-63, seem to have implicitly supported the Parthian Tiridates. Partial encirclement of the new Parthian Armenia with Roman troops on the upper Euphrates and client kingdoms in the Caucasus would compensate for Roman loss of that kingdom.

73 Cf. Franke 1991:232, who argues the bis Augusta came from Otho; Crimean service with Plautius: Von Domaszewski 1892:211-13; Reddé 2000:121 n. 44.
75 Tac. Hist. 1.6.2; Dio 63.8.1; I Italica: Suet. Nero 19.2; Dio 55.24.2; cf. Woods 2006b:148 n. 53, 150 for a supposed (and unconvincing) confusion of V Macedonica and I Italica in the sources.
Nevertheless, a postwar disposition of Corbulo’s *la grande armée* of the 63 Armenian campaign (III Gallica, VI Ferrata, V Macedonica, XV Apollinaris) remains unclear until 66. A concentration of these legions at Cappadocian Melitene 64-66 is unlikely for logistical reasons. The III Gallica remained at Kharput (mod. Elazig) in Armenian Sophene until October 65 at the latest, before returning to its base in Syria. Sixth Ferrata was also again in Syria by 66 and XV Apollinaris moved to Egyptian Alexandria in summer 66. By 67 V Macedonica, X Fretensis and XV Apollinaris were assigned to Vespasian for the Jewish war, while Licinius Mucianus retained III Gallica, IV Scythica, VI Ferrata and XII Fulminata in Syria. Where in this picture (unless vexillations be assumed) can one find 3000 legionaries on the Euxine, especially as some assert Josephus’ ‘hoplites’ must be legionaries? Tacitus complicates the problem: in 69 some troops were still encamped opposite Armenia, but they were not legions.

Further, how was a Roman army to reach Albania without crossing Armenian territory? Obtaining Tigranes I’s permission for right of transit to attack his former Albanian supporters would have been rather

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77 Sic Heil 1997:192 n. 48; *contra*, Wheeler 2000:275 n. 93: XV Apollinaris may have been at Corbulo’s old camp at Satala. No evidence attests that IV Scythica camped at Melitene in 63, as Bennett (2006:84) conjectures.


79 Heil 1997:190 with n. 37.

awkward. The only alternative route lay via the portage of the Phasis and Cyrus Rivers from Colchis into Iberia – a difficult passage but once used by Pompey in 65 BC. It led in the direction of (Latin ad) the Darial Pass, as sources for Nero’s plans report. Iberia, a client-kingdom and active in the war of 55-63, must have been the projected base for operations against the Albani.81

The Phasis-Cyrus portage returns this discussion to the Euxine and the annexation of Pontus. Polemo II’s Pontus extended east along the coast from the Halys River, west of Amisus, up to Dioscurias/Sebastopolis. It included the Phasis River. A view that Polemo’s Pontus excluded Colchis ignores valid evidence. Queen Pythodoris of Pontus (r. 8 BC-AD 33) certainly ruled Colchis and she, rather than her grandson Polemo II (r. 38-64), most likely renamed Dioscurias (mod. Suchumi) Sebastopolis, a Greek colony from at least the 5th century BC and a major emporium for trade with Caucasian tribes in the Hellenistic era. She had renamed her capital, the former Cabeira/Diospolis, Sebaste (after 64 Neocaesarea). Strabo did not know Dioscurias as Sebastopolis.82 Augustus had structured the defense of eastern Anatolia on client-kings in Armenia, Commagene and Cappadocia, which after its annexation as a procuratorial province in 17, remained inermis.83 Thus when Corbulo assumed command of the Armenian war in 55, an infrastructure (roads, bridges, camps etc.) for support of a large army did not yet exist in eastern Anatolia.84 Opening a supply line from Trapezus, through the Pontic Alps into Armenia Minor became one of his first priorities. Trapezus, an old Sinopean colony and an oppidum librum in the Flavian era (Plin. HN 6.11), at this point was also

81 On access to the Caucasian kingdoms from Roman territory, see Wheeler 2012: 655-57; Pompey: Plut. Pomp. 34.5-35.1; Dio 37.3.1-7; Darial Pass: Tac. Hist. 1.6.2 (ad claustra Caspiarum), Suet. Nero 19.2 (ad Caspias portas); Dio 63.8.1 (τὰς πύλας τὰς Κασπίας); cf. Plin. HN 6.40 and Wheeler, supra note 76.


83 Both Bennett (2006:81) and Speidel (2008:60) exaggerate, citing Tac. Ann. 12.49.1 (auxilia provincialibus contractis) on the Julius Paelignus’ forces in 51, that regular auxilia units were available to a Cappadocian procurator. The phrase need indicate only the provincial militia [Heil 1997:208 n. 33]; cf. Ann. 13.8.2 (additis cohortibus alisque, quae Cappadocia <in provincia> hiemabant), where hiemabant seems unlikely for units regularly stationed in the province.84

84 The logistics supporting earlier Roman expeditions into Armenia, e.g. Gaius Caesar (2-4 AD) and Germanicus (18 AD), are not clear. Germanicus did not have Syrian forces or support: Wheeler 1996:263 with n. 67.
the base of Polemo’s fleet and the Pontic king must have been extensively involved in logistic operations.85 He was assigned in 59 a protectorate of part of Armenia after Corbulo’s installation of Tigranes VI at Tigranocerta.86

Thus one can hardly claim that Pontus became a ‘military district’ in 57 or that V Macedonica was stationed there in 61-63.87 Summoned from the Moesia in 62 to reinforce the army of Caesennius Paetus (cos. 61), now assigned to the Armenian war, V Macedonica, a victim of Asia Minor’s poor road network, could not arrive for Paetus’ operations, but was on hand for Corbulo’s campaign of 63.88 An inscription from Amasia, a part of Galatia Pontica, if dated to the 60s, would attest its overland travails.89 In any case, nothing supports the conjecture that V Macedonica had a special assignment in Polemo II’s Pontus, perhaps controlling eastern Euxine tribes.90 Certain, however, is that at some point under Vespasian Roman troops occupied former Polemonid forts at Dioscurias/Sebastopolis and Apsarus (Plin. NH 6.12). Polemo’s forces, converted into

85 Tac. Ann. 13.39.1; Bennett (2006:84, 86) dates this to 57 and erroneously puts Corbulo’s camp at Erzincan, but ignores the chronology of the first half of the Armenian war established at Wheeler 1997; on Erzincan, see Wheeler 2012:627 with n. 21 and in press-a. Starr (1993:126) erroneously thinks Trapezus was Polemo’s capital.
86 Tac. Ann. 14.26.2; Barrett’s attempt (1979) to remove Pharasmanes I of Iberia and Polemo II from active roles in the war is flawed, but rebuttal must be pursued elsewhere. For the year as 59 and not 60, see Wheeler 1997:393-97.
87 Bennett 2006:86.
89 AE 1990.893, but the text could also date to Trajan’s Parthian war or that of Verus: Mitchell 1993:1.94, 135, who collects other connections of V Macedonica with Pontus (e.g. AE 1990.896; cf. Mitford 1988:176-78; Strobel 1989:39-42), where it may have recruited in later times. Sarnowski (2006b:89) thinks V Macedonica came by sea to Trapezus. If XV Apollinaris from Pannonia used the faster maritime route (a lesson from the V Macedonica’s experience?) the next year, it would firmly eliminate Heil’s argument (1997:119-20) for re-dating Corbulo’s 63 campaign to 64, based on the estimated time required for a march from Carnuntum to the Euphrates.
90 Bosworth 1976:70-72, but assuming that piracy was an issue in the annexation of Pontus and citing unnamed ‘Euxine tribes’; Heil 1997:111 n. 50. Cf. Paltiel (1991:248), who would have Anicetus’ revolt begin in 64; Mattern (1999:101) exaggerates Anicetus’ revolt into an uprising of the entire province against the annexation.

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Roman auxilia (Tac. *Hist.* 3.47.2), probably continued their duties there until Licinius Mucianus moved them to Byzantium with the bulk of the Pontic fleet. An absence of Roman (or Pontic) forces from the eastern Euxine in 69 would explain Anicetus’ successful raiding. Even in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries, when vexillations of XV Apollinaris or XII Fulminata manned (never simultaneously) Trapezus, a vexillation of XV Apollinaris garrisoned Pityus, another legionary *vexillatio* of unknown origin was (at least during Hadrian’s reign) at Phasis, and auxilia unit(s) inhabited Apsarus, Roman forces in the eastern Euxine probably never numbered 3000. Perhaps the best scenario for Josephus’ 3000 ‘hoplites’ would be Virdius Geminus’ legionary *vexillatio*, which Vespasian sent against Anicetus in fall 69 – a temporary unit misinterpreted as a permanent force.

**Stations of the classica Pontica**

Corbulo had established the significance of Trapezus perhaps as early as 55 and Polemo II had based his fleet there. The new Armenian situation after 63, a Parthian Arsacid as the Armenian king but crowned by Rome, would require Roman troops on the upper Euphrates as a permanent fixture. Rather than Euxine piracy, the need for direct control of the lines of communication and supply to the upper Euphrates called for the annexation of Pontus. Besides, Polemo II, ruling since 38, was no doubt past his prime, as was eastern Anatolia’s system of defense based on client-kings, whose claim to legitimacy derived from appointments by Marcus Antonius or Augustus. The failure in 62 of V Macedonica to march from Moesia in time for Paetus’ Armenian campaign emphasized the inadequate infrastructure in eastern Anatolia, just as the revolt of Anicetus highlighted...

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91 Bennett (2002:302) would have (without supporting evidence) Corbulo garrisoning these sites and perhaps also Phasis with Roman troops. The character of the Flavian garrisons (legionaries? auxilia?) is unknown. Mucianus: Tac. *Hist.* 2.83.2; 3.47.3.

92 For the evidence on these sites and their Roman garrisons, see Wheeler 2012: 635-41, 649-51. The second-century stone fort at Pityus (post-Hadrianic) could house c. 500; the mounted unit at Dioscurias (Arr. *Peripl.* 10.3) was probably quingenary: 400 *epilektoi* at Phasis (Arr. *Peripl.* 9.3), and likewise a quingenary auxilia unit at Apsarus; the *taxis* (not cohort) at Hyssi Portus was perhaps only 100-200 (Arr. *Peripl.* 3.1); thus, excluding Trapezus, far less than 2000 men are attested at the time of Arrian’s governorship (c. 131-137); on the error of five cohorts at Apsarus (Arr. *Peripl.* 6.1), see Wheeler 2012:657-60.
just how precarious maritime connections in the area could be. Both these factors stimulated the later Flavian road building.93

Trapezus, however, the classis Pontica's initial base, was hardly ideal, offering an anchorage but not a real harbor, until Hadrian had one built in the 120s. Connections with the upper Euphrates passed through the treacherous Zigana Pass, before an easier route farther east at the Pontic Gates was discovered, although snow closed both for half the year. Parthian wars under Trajan and Lucius Verus renewed Trapezus' significance and in 258 it was a transit point for troops heading south for Valerian's Persian war.94 The so-called 'painted shield' from Dura-Europos, however, can no longer be adduced as evidence of such transit, as the shield's itinerary shows only a coastal route in the northwestern Euxine from Odessos (mod. Varna) past Crimean Mt. Trapezus (mod. Krimskie Glory) to the Straits of Kerch.95 Nor should it be assumed that the Cappadocian army relied exclusively on grain from the Bosporan Kingdom and elsewhere via Trapezus, as the fertile plains around Nicopolis, a _colonia_ founded by Pompey in 66 BC in Armenia Minor, were no doubt exploited.96 Amisus, like Trapezus a free city, had a direct highway connection to the legionary base at Satala and offers another potential port for supplies and a station for the classis Pontica.97

Trapezus not only connected the Cappadocian army on the upper Euphrates with the Euxine but also served the various garrisons on the Colchian coast. By the 2nd century its mint produced bronze coinage to pay the garrisons at Pityus and presumably elsewhere in Colchis.98 As communications with the Colchian garrisons at Hyssi Portus, Apsarus, Phasis, Dioscurias/Sebastopolis and Pityus depended on ships, naval facilities at these sites are to be expected, especially as Dioscurias and

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93 Cumont 1923:110, 123.
Phasis were major trading stations. Pityus, Phasis and Apsarus were also inland with a canal connecting the Roman fort to a river or the coast. Yet no trace of the classis Pontica survives from these sites.

Hyssi Portus (mod. Kara Dere), c. 30 km. east of Trapezus, is a different situation. Its cape and wide beach offered better protection for ships than Trapezus besides an easier trek into the interior to the legionary base at Satala. But that route through Armenian territory remained unusable before the partition of Armenia in 387. Only in the early 7th century, when Heraclius renamed Hyssi Portus Herakleia, did Hyssi Portus surpass Trapezus' significance as a port and military base. A station of the classis Pontica here is unlikely.

A classis Pontica, based at Trapezus and operating from Amasus in the west to Dioscurias or Pityus in the northeast would essentially be a classis Cappadocica, a typical provincial fleet, the naval extension of an imperial provincial governor's military command. Perhaps that was the situation from Vespasian to Trajan. But under Trajan, as noted earlier, Gavius Bassus as praefectus orae Ponticae maritimae held a post independent of the governor of Bithynia-Pontus and the ignotus of I. Sinope 126, praefectus orae maritimae [Amastr(ensis) et clas(sis) Ponticae (perhaps Gavius Bassus, as argued supra) emphasizes Amastris (if properly restored) in a text from Sinope. It would appear that the classis Pontica, removed from the Cappadocian governor's command and elevated to direct imperial control, has moved its base west. Improving logistical support for Trajan’s Parthian war could be the cause. Perhaps Gavius Bassus’ command

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99 Wheeler 2012:640-41 with n. 78, 650-51 with bibliography; note also Reddè (1986:442-43) on the naval character of the eastern Euxine forts.

100 See Wheeler 2012:646-49 for more details and bibliography. Similarly the anchorages at Rhizaem and Athenae on the coast between Hyssi Portus and Apsarus have significance only in the Late Empire; they were not Roman forts earlier, as some contend; see Wheeler 2012:648 n. 112, where Reddè (1986:260) should be added. MacMullen’s curious inclusion (2006:128) of Hyssi Portus in his list of ‘cities’ housing Roman troops cannot be taken seriously, as no evidence exists that Hyssi Portus was a city or of any note at all before Roman troops were stationed there. The same would also be true for the legionary base at Satala. His placement of Cappadocian Melitene, base of the XII Fulminata, in the ‘Levant’ and ‘Mesopotamia’ (2006:129) is also erroneous.

101 Saddington’s hints (2010) at Vespasian’s reorganization of a classis Perinthia in the Propontis in 70 would seem to include the classis Pontica. Although Mucianus had sent the bulk of the old Polemonic fleet to Byzantium in 69, one doubts that it remained there.

anticipated that of Valerius Maximianus as praepositus orae gentium Ponti Polemoniani, although Valerius’ post is provincially limited. Amastris, a major transit site for trade with the Crimea and Colchis, although not unlikely as a possible statio of the Pontic fleet, is connected to it only by the restoration to I. Sinope 126 and occasional naval themes on its coinage.103

A better case can be made for Sinope, long a major Euxine commercial center and a Roman colonia, whose centralized location on the northern Anatolian coast and its short access to the Crimea, made it an ideal naval base.104 Speculation renders Sinope the location of the procurator Augusti who handled affairs with the Bosporan Kingdom.105 As corollaries, supposed permanent Roman forces in the Bosporan Kingdom came from Bithynia-Pontus, Sinope’s initial provincia; the classis Pontica offered the means of a ‘rapid deployment force’ to the Crimea; and Sinope must have been the Pontic fleet’s base.106

If the naval heritage of Sinope bespeaks ships, the presence of an imperial fleet other than an ad hoc flotilla does not follow. The Augustan (?) nauarch C. Numisius Primus’ retirement to the Latin colony at Sinope does not prove he served in a Roman fleet at Sinope.107 Bithynian auxilia under the procurator Iulius Aquila participated in the bellum Bosporanum of 44-49 and occasional auxilia (apparently Bithynian) at the Bosporan capital of Panticapaeum are on record, although their purpose is unclear. A permanent Roman military presence there is unproved and unlikely.108

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103 Kissel 1995:69 n. 80 with bibliography; Kienast 1966:116-17 with n. 142.
104 See supra, pp. 119-20 with note 4.
107 I. Sinope 100; cf. supra note 13 for various views of his date; Starr 1993:40; Kienast (1966:106) assumes the permanent presence of a Roman fleet at Sinope from Augustus on. For veterans retired at Sinope, see infra, p. 146 with note 112.
108 Aquila: supra note 20. The arguments of Speidel & French 1985 for a permanent garrison cite three texts from Panticapaeum: two of a cohortes Cypria (IGR 1.895 [ILS 8874, IPE 2.293, CIRB 726]; IGR 1.896 [ILS 9161, CIRB 691]), which they identify with a cohortes Cypria known from M. Blossius’ tombstone (1st/2nd c.) at Sinope (I. Sinope 122), and one of an unnumbered cohortes Thracum (IGR 1.894 [IPE 2.290, CIRB 666]). Yet a cohortes III Cypric c.R. in Dacia and Moesia Superior, known from diplomas of 109 and 110 besides a tile (ILS 2004; RMD 148; AE 1896.67) would account for the Panticapaeum unit in Bekker-Nielsen’s view (2002:317, 319-20), although unaware of the Sinope text and Speidel & French 1985. If Blossius of I. Sinope 122 died at Sinope as a retiree (see infra, p. 146 with note 112), Speidel & French’s argument evaporates. IGR 1.895
Arrian's literary pretense of wanting to intervene in the Bosporan succession makes no sense, if Roman auxilia permanently resided at Panticapaeum. 109 Awkward, too, for a continued connection of Bithynia-Pontus with the Bosporan Kingdom via Sinope is the transfer of Sinope to Galatia Pontica under Hadrian (ILLS 1449).

Yet two texts of fleet prefects in the general area of Sinope suggest it was the fleet's base from Trajan to the Severan era. Besides the possible text of Gavius Bassus as prefect of the Pontic fleet (I. Sinope 126), an early third-century Greek text on a fountain at Karkucak near Neoclaudiopolis (Phazimon, in the area between Sinope and Amasia) attests Antonius Proclus as prefect of the Pontic fleet: ἔπαρχος τοῦ Κ(ολωνίου) Α(ουριανοῦ)

(not a tombstone) is undatable (but late 2nd/early 3rd c. pace Bekker-Nielsen 320). The dead soldier of the bilingual IGR 1.896 belonged to the centuria of an Aelius (?) Secundus, although the supposed 'Ael.' of the Latin text is illegible (see photo of CIRB 691: Gavrilov et al. 2004) and absent in the Greek version. Lettering might date it to the mid-2nd c. (Bekker-Nielsen 320). A cohors I Thraciae appears in a dedication to Sarapis and Isis at Kestamonu, west of Sinope (AE 1951.254), but identification (Speidel & French 1985:100 n. 15) of the Panticapaeum cohort with this unit is problematic, as is the much restored tombstone from near Charax of a member of a cohors I Thraciae (Speidel 1989, followed by Zahariade 2009:139). The latter is probably the Lower Moesian cohors I Thraciae Syriaca eq. present in the second half of the 2nd c. (Zubar 2007:749-50); Charax was never part of the Bosporan Kingdom. The apparently Roman content of the Panticapaeum tombstone (IGR 1.894; late 2nd/early 3rd c.: Bekker-Nielsen 320) of Diza, a centurion and princeps of the unnumbered Thracian cohort could be deceptive. Princeps may indicate only a detachment of the cohort (Speidel & French 1985 with n. 16; Speidel 1981), but the Bosporan forces copied Roman military organization and used Roman equipment: units called 'Thracian' are known, as is the rank of princeps (CIRB 744, dated 343-353; Nadel 1976;97); see also Heinen 1996:89-90 on IPE 2.41 (CIRB 53); Bowersock & Jones 2006:125-26; Treister 1995:177-80, largely recycled from Treister 1994; besides, Thracian names are frequent in the Bosporan Kingdom; for what little is known of the Bosporan army, see Mielczarek 1999. The Valerius at Tanais (IPE 2.442 [CIRB 1264], dated 189: Gavrilov et al. 2004:391) is probably a retired veteran.

109 Arr. Peripl. 17.3; no Roman troops in the Bosporan Kingdom in the 2nd and 3rd centuries: Gajdukevic 1971:352; similarly, Nadel 1982:192 for the reign of Hadrian, although he tries hard (191-208) to devise Arrian's intervention in 131/132 from CIRB 47; cf. Braund 2003:186-87 (unaware of Nadel 1982); a brief rebuttal at Wheeler 2012:635 n. 55. Speidel (2005:89) believes stationing auxilia in client-kings was normal practice; Haensch (2009) argues that liberti Augusti were regularly at the courts of client-kings as spies and financial supervisors, although the evidence and argument are not decisive.

145
Π(οντικοῦ). The title Severiana, once a problem, can now be paralleled in diplomas of 225 and 229 under Severus Alexander for the Misene and Ravennate fleets – and may indicate exceptional service.110 More problematic is interpretation of an unparalleled abbreviation in a dedication (dated 143-160) to T. Veturius Campesstris, once the city’s ambassador to Hadrian and three times to Antoninus Pius, by a vicus COPDVE, which some expand to C(lasis) O(rae) P(onticae) D(? Ve(teranorum), although an earlier view of the ‘D’ as D(omitianae), given Domitian’s damnatio memoriae, has now been abandoned. A series of late second-century inscriptions from Halmyris at the Danube’s mouth provide a parallel in a vicus classicum no doubt of the Moesian fleet.111 As a Roman colony, Sinope attracted retired veterans with no previous connection of service in or near Sinope.112 A vicus veteranorum at Sinope from the classis Pontica is not inconceivable, but this ingenious expansion of COPDVE remains debatable, especially as the ‘D’ can no longer be explained.

A possible move of the entire classis Pontica to a base at Cyzicus c. 175, as argued by Starr, rests on a rather thin foundation and the arguments against it need not be rehearsed: Iulius Vehilus’ prefecture of the fleet following his terrestrial command against the Costoboci and a single third-century tombstone of a Pontic fleet nauarch at Cyzicus.113 Perhaps Crispinus, the nauarch, retired to Cyzicus rather than having served there. Since the end of the 1st century a detachment of the Misene fleet had been at Cyzicus.114 Unnamed fleets were active in the Propontis during the Severan era and not least during the Severan siege of Byzantium (193-195). In Asia Minor only Bithynia supported Pescennius Niger against Septimius Severus in 193-194; the Cappadocian legions supported Severus.115 One wonders if the classis Pontica, like the Misene and Ravennate fleets an imperial and not a provincial organ, received its title Severiana for distinguished service against Niger. A fleet that had supported Niger, as some believe,116 would hardly have received that title.

110 Cumont & Cumont 1910:107 no. 92; SEG 29 (1979) 1366; RMD 133, 194 (311, 312); French 1983:53, 58, 60; on Proclus’ possible career, see supra n. 45.
113 See supra, pp. 126-27 with notes 28-29.
114 Supra, p. 121 with note 8, pp. 126-27 with note 29.
115 Wheeler 2000:268-70; on the siege of Byzantium, see Birley 1991.
Any trace of the *classis Pontica* vanishes after the Severan era. Arrian's flotilla *c.* 131 was probably a provincial *classis Cappadocica*, not the praetorian *classis Pontica*, and this local fleet continued to serve outposts on the Colchian coast through the middle of the 3rd and again in the 4th century. Rome had abandoned central Colchis to the Lazi by the middle of the 3rd century and the Borani in 258 and later the Heruli in 275-276 faced no naval or military opposition in their eastern Euxine raids. A similar lack of evidence indicates a Roman abandonment of the Crimea perhaps between the time of Maximinus Thrax (235-238) and the late 3rd century, with only a temporary re-occupation of Chersonesus *c.* 250. Had struggles for the purple caused a recall of Roman naval forces from the Euxine, or had the sea-borne raids of Goths and others devastated them? If Sauromates II’s text of 193 is accurate (*IPE* 2.423, *CIRB* 1237), connections with the eastern Crimea may have already been surrendered to the Bosporan navy in the late 2nd century. In any event, the *classis Pontica*, the only praetorian fleet in the Black Sea, disappears in the fog of the mid-third century.

**Bibliography**


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117 Zos. 2.33.1 offers no proof of a Late Roman *classis Pontica* or Roman control of Phasis in the 4th century, as Reddé (1986:261-62) believes; see Wheeler 2012: 629, 634-35, 641, 643. A Roman fleet there in 555 for operations against the Sasanid Persians (Agath. 3.20) is also meaningless.


120 On the lack of standing imperial fleets in the Late Empire, see Charles 2005; cf. Starr 1993:197-98 on the end of the Roman navy as established by Augustus.


151


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