

## WRECKAGE AT SALMYDESSOS\*

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The Pontus had a sinister reputation in antiquity. Its initial name, given by the Greeks, Πόντος Ἄξεινος, may serve as a clear indication.<sup>1</sup> Later on, the Black Sea got a somewhat more positive denomination in Greek, Πόντος Εὐξεινος.<sup>1a</sup> The reputation did not change very much, especially not for the southwestern shore. Two main reasons can be brought forward for this reputation. The first reason relates to problems in the field of navigation. The second reason touches the behaviour of the indigenous population. Both the first and the second reason figured in the prominent reputation of Salmydessos as a dangerous spot.

The most frequently quoted passage in classical literature concerning this location comes from Xenophon: "Here many vessels sailing to the Pontus run aground and are wrecked; for there are shoals that extend far and wide. And the Thracians who dwell on this coast have boundary stones set up and each group of them plunders the ships that are wrecked within their own limits; but in earlier days, before they fixed the boundaries, it was said that in the course of their plundering many of them used to be killed

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I am indebted to Drs F.L. Diel for giving additional informations concerning the passage of Archilochus.

1. The adjective ἄξεινος (Ion. ἄξεινος) possibly preserves the oldpersian adjective *axšaēna*, meaning "dark". Cf. Danov, Christo M., *Pontos Euxeinos*, RE, Suppl. IX, 866-1175, c. 953 with literature.

1a. Anonymi Periplus Ponti Euxini, 82 sqq. in *Geographi Graeci Minores*, ed. Müller, Karl, Paris, 1855 (repr. Hildesheim, 1965), Vol. I, p. cxv, p. 421.

by one another. Here there were found great numbers of beds and boxes, quantities of written books, and an abundance of all the other articles that shipowners carry in wooden chests".<sup>2</sup>

In this paper I would like to focus on four issues:

1. The geographical meaning of the name of Salmydessos,
2. the reasons for sailing to these parts of the Pontus,
3. the problems which the Greeks experienced near Salmydessos,
4. the situation in more recent times.

1. The name of Salmydessos is possibly related (though other etymologies exist) to the Greek word ἄλς or, in my opinion more preferably, ἄλυρος, salt.<sup>3</sup> The ending -essos/-assos might be connected with Hittite or, historically more likely, Luwian, though the ending -dessos/-dessa should, perhaps be left out: it appears to be concentrated in Thrace.<sup>4</sup>

We meet the name of Salmydessos in two connotations. For one thing it indicates the name of a town, situated near modern Midia (Turkey). For another, it is used for a coastal territory of about 700 stades.<sup>5</sup> If we accept the view of Dimitrov and Nicolov that "the shore from Anchialos on the north to Cape Ineada (ancient Tineada, now in Turkey) belonged to the Apollonian polis, a politically independent Greek state, ...",<sup>6</sup> the territory of Salmydessos must have begun at Cape Ineada (in classical literature Thynias). We know from Strabo that Salmydessos' territory tended to the Κυάνεαι, the two islands near the entrance of the Bosphorus, coming out of the Pontus.<sup>7</sup> The distance between these islands and Ineada is about 700 stades, indeed.

Mostly, however, the classical authors seem to mean by Salmydessos the town and closely adjacent area. This town is, different from e.g. Apollonia Pontica and Mesembria, clearly recognised as a Thracian town.<sup>8</sup> The tribe that the Thracians of

2. Xenophon, *Anabasis* VII, v, 12-13.

3. Cf. Büchner, *RE*, IA, c. 1992; v. et Detschew, D., *Die thrakischen Sprachreste*, Wien, 1976<sup>2</sup>, p. 414-5, s.v. Σαλμυδησ(σ)ός; also p. 13, s.v. Ἀλυδησσοσ/Halmydessus.

4. Woudhuizen, F.C., "Thracians, Luwians and Greeks in Bronze Age Central Greece", in: *Thracians and Mycenaeans — Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress of Thracology, Rotterdam 1984* (Leiden, New York, København, Köln 1988) n. 10, 11 and comments.

5. Büchner, *loc. cit.*; Strabo VII, 6, 1; Diodorus Siculus XIV, 37, 2-3.

6. Dimitrov, B. and Nicolov, C., *Stone Anchors from Sozopol*, IJNA 5(1976), p. 81-82.

7. Strabo, *ibid.*

8. Most clearly by Herodotus IV, 93; also Sophocles, *Antigone*, 966 sqq.; Schol. Apoll. Rhod. II, 177; Apollodorus I, 9, 21.

Salmydessos belonged to, at least from the 5th century B.C. onwards, was the tribe of the Astae.<sup>9</sup> A temple dedicated to Ares, one of the most important Thracian gods,<sup>10</sup> must have been close to the city, according to a passage in Sophocles' *Antigone*.<sup>11</sup> Of course, Ares is the name given to this god by the Greeks: his Thracian name is (still) unknown.<sup>12</sup>

2. If we take the grim reputation of Salmydessos for the moment for granted we may wonder why the Greeks took the risk of sailing along these coasts. The simplest answer is, of course, that they had no alternative. This is perfectly true. However, it leaves the question "Why?" open. What unique material lures were able to match against the hazards of Salmydessos?

Traditionally Greek colonization in the Pontus is related to over-population, the nature of the land system in Greece, and the want of food, namely grains from Scythia and Thracia.<sup>13</sup> Danov reports the good relationship between the Greek (Megarean) colony Mesembria and the Astae.<sup>14</sup> We know that Salmydessos was in Asteian territory. The Astae disposed — still according to Danov — of rich mineral deposits, timber, grains, skins and hides, honey, wax, slaves and other goods. I would like to draw the attention to the mineral deposits. Danov<sup>15</sup> names as one of the explanations for the Greek colonization that Thrace became increasingly the territory that met the needs for copper, semi-manufactured copper articles, and lead — used in the fabrication of bronze. Especially in the Strandža region seem to have been some very important mines, like at Karabajir and Rosenbajir (south of the city of Burgas). These sites have been explored by Davies in 1936. Davies concluded that: "... the ore may have been exported by sea. Though the sherds found were Thracian,

9. Cf. Strabo, *ibid.*; Plinius *NH*, iv, 45; cf. also Danov, Christo M., *Pontos Euxeinos*, RE, Suppl. IX, 866-1175, c. 1013 and Seure, George, *Inscriptions grecques du pays des Astiens*, REA 31(1929), pp. 297-313; p. 297 and note 1.

10. Herodotus V, 7.

11. Sophocles, *ibid.*: "Ἄρης ἀρχιπολις.

12. Cf. Kazarow, G., *Thrake*, RE, VIA, c. 393 sqq., c. 522, no. 11 (Ares).

13. Cf. e.g. Bury, J.B., *A History of Greece*, London and Basingstoke, 1970<sup>2</sup>, p. 86-7; Danov, *op. cit.*, c. 1056.

14. Danov, C.M., *The Penetration of the Thracians into the Greek Colonies on the Western Shore of the Black Sea*, *Klio* 38(1960), pp. 75-81.

15. Danov, *Pontos Euxeinos*, c. 1047. Much to my regret I am not able to consult Danov's source: Jessen, A.A., *Grečeskaja kolonizacija sewernogo Pricernomorija*, Leningrad, 1947, p. 28.

the localities, a few kilometres from the Greek cities of Apollonia and Anchialus, suggest strongly that the copper was shipped to the south, and formed another article in the long list of products which Greece obtained from the Euxine".<sup>16</sup> Adding to this grains and minerals, timber and perhaps also charcoal — a product of the Strandža region down to the 19th century A.D. — we have, I think, sufficient reasons for the Greeks to wage their ships, and their lives. The Thracians themselves did not go out at sea, at least not in historical times.<sup>17</sup>

3. The Greeks took the risks in the bargain, for they needed the Thracian products. However, they did not come to like the Thracians.<sup>18</sup> Especially those Thracians around Salmydessos won themselves an unfriendly reputation at an early stage. This is beautifully shown in a fragment, attributed to Archilochus.<sup>19</sup>

"Lurched there and back by the waves.  
May with pleasure in Salmydessos  
the Thracians with hair on the crown  
clutch him, naked. There he will suffer many hardships  
eating slave's bread  
grown numb with cold. May from the foam  
be attached to him many sea-weeds  
and may he chatter his teeth like a dog  
lying down powerless  
on the verge of the breakers.....  
That I would like to see  
him who wronged me and trampled upon the oath  
though he used to be my friend."

Thracians with hair on the crown we already meet in the *Ilias*.<sup>20</sup> Ornamental mountings from the treasure of Letnitsa suggest as correct explanation of ἀκρόκομοι: "who tied up their hair in a

16. Davies, O., *Prehistoric Copper Mines near Burgas*, *Man* 36(1936), nr. 119, p. 92-3. Based on Davies: Gaul, J.H., *Possibilities of Prehistoric Metallurgy in the East Balkan Peninsula*, *AJA* 46(1942), pp. 400-409; p. 403-4.

17. Dimitrov and Nicolov, *op. cit.*, p. 81; Diodorus Siculus VII, 11, 1, transmitted by Eusebius (*Chron.* I, p. 255), mentions that after the Trojan War several peoples ruled the seas and among these peoples the Thracians for 79 years.

18. Cf. also Hoddinott, R.F., *Bulgaria in Antiquity*, London, 1975, p. 26-7.

19. Archilochus, *Epoidioi*, frg. 79. The text is written on a papyrus bought in Cairo and published by P. Reitzenstein in *Sitzungsbericht der Akademie*, Berlin, 1899, p. 857 sqq. Because of the metrum used this poem is sometimes attributed to Hipponax.

20. Homer, *Ilias* IV, 533.

top-knot" (Fig. 1).<sup>21</sup>

If the ascription to Archilochus is correct, this would mean that already in the middle of the 7th century B.C. Salmydessos was not quite the place one choose for one's friends.

The reputation did not improve. Aeschylus named Salmydessos:

"the rugged jaw, evil host of mariners, step-mother of ships".<sup>22</sup>

Also Xenophon's description, which we have already recorded in full, is not inviting: shoals far and wide and plunder of the wrecks by the Thracians. The same story is told by the anonymous author of a *Periplus Ponti Euxini*.<sup>23</sup>

The pseudo-Scymnus of Chios calls the coast of Salmydessos "a place most hostile to ships",<sup>24</sup> though he does not mention the fate of the shipwrecked persons. Strabo does so. And again, he has to use terms like "plunder by the Astae, a Thracian tribe who are situated above the shore".<sup>25</sup>

Apollodorus does not mention shipwreck nor plunder. He tells a story of a safe landing at Salmydessos of the Argonauts, followed by a visit to Phineus, the seer who dwelt there.<sup>26</sup> It would read like a peaceful story, but for the presence of the Harpies who afflicted Phineus.

On his voyage to Tomis Ovidius passed along Salmydessos. He expressed his hope that his ship "...may steer her way along the Thynnian bays; and thence impelled past the city of Apollo, may she pass on her course the walls of Anchialus...".<sup>27</sup> Hoddinott<sup>28</sup> connects this passage, rightly in my opinion, with Salmydessos and concludes that this coast had not entirely lost its evil reputation.

Diodorus of Sicily brings back to memory the story of Xenophon.<sup>29</sup> He relates how Xenophon gathered an army, invaded the territory of the Thracians "who made it their practice to

21. Cf. Liddell, H.G., and Scott, R., *A Greek-English Lexicon, Rev. and Augmented by H. Stuart Jones and R. McKenzie, With a Supplement*, Oxford, 1968, s.v. ἀκρόκομος.

22. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 724 sqq.

23. Cf. note 1 *supra*.

24. Ps.-Scymnus of Chios, 723 sqq.

25. Strabo, *loc. cit.*

26. Apollodorus I, 9, 21 sqq.

27. Ovidius, *Tristia* I, x.

28. Hoddinott, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

29. Diodorus Siculus, *loc. cit.*

lie in wait in those parts and seize the merchants who were cast ashore as prisoners", defeated those Thracians and burned most of their villages. Using different wording, Flavius Arrianus also tells the story of Xenophon, the wrecking and the deeds of the Thracians.<sup>30</sup>

Thereupon, apart from the mentioning of its name by Pomponius Mela, Pliny the elder, Ptolemy, Stephanus of Byzantium and in the *Etymologicum Magnum*, Salmydessos fades away from the classical sources.<sup>31</sup>

4. Of course, we know that Salmydessos did disappear. We may, I think, assume two major reasons to explain this disappearance. The first is the constant decline of the coast at the rate of about 4 mm a year.<sup>32</sup> The second reason is given by Strabo,<sup>33</sup> mentioning the silting-up of the Euxine by the inpourings of mud from the rivers — especially at Salmydessos "where other violent streams also contribute to this result".

Up to my knowledge no finds, as described by Xenophon, have so far been found in Turkey or Bulgaria, at least not in a context in which they could be considered as coming from a wrecked ship. Without too much hope that thorough research could be done in the not too distant future I would, nevertheless, like to point out where, in my opinion, favourable results might be obtained along the long coastline of Salmydessos' territory, provided that the investigators have the use of strong penetrating sonar and magnetometers (Fig. 2).

The footing of my presumptions lies in mariners' manuals, the so-called sea-pilots. These books contain the information about all kinds of problems that a sailor may expect to meet somewhere. Sea-pilots for the Black Sea have, since antiquity, not been written before July 21st 1774. That day, the treaty of Kainardgy ended the Ottoman monopoly for sailing from the Black Sea to Constantinople. Until that time the knowledge of the geography of the Black Sea was very black indeed, as may be shown from a

30. Fl. Arrianus, *Per. p.Eux.*, 25.

31. Pomponius Mela II, 23; Plinius, *loc. cit.*; Ptolemaeus, *Geographia* III, 11, 4; Stephanus of Byzantium 106, 1; 483, 12; 551, 21; *Etymologicum Magnum*, s.v. σαλμυδησσός.

32. Dimitrov and Nicolov, *op. cit.*, p. 81; I have not been able to consult their source: Kanev, D., *Morphology of the Copper Ridge Littoral*, Ann. Sofia University, Geographical Faculty, 3: 103, 107, 115; cf. also Hind, J.G.F., *Greek and Barbarian Peoples on the Shores of the Black Sea*, *Archaeological Reports* 30(1983-4), pp. 71-97; p. 72 with recent literature.

33. Strabo I, 3, 7; I, 3, 4.

map after the *Atlas Maritimus et Commercialis* (Fig. 3).<sup>34</sup>

Naturally, we have a description by Cornelis Cruys, a Dutchman who accompanied Czar Peter the Great to Russia and as his vice-admiral also explored the Pontus.<sup>35</sup> On a map in his report, map 94, he indicated that there are several shoals near the coast between the mouth of the Danube and Constantinopel, but specified none of them exactly.

In 1834 appeared a Sailing directory by John Purdy, including the Black Sea.<sup>36</sup> Its general advice for the European coasts of the Pontus was "to keep well out at sea", especially during the winter, as there are few safe harbours. He mentions two spots which might be of interest: at the north of the territory of Salmydessos Cape Ineada, sometimes a safe harbour but potentially dangerous by "swell" and counter currents (Fig. 4),<sup>37</sup> to the south the so-called "False Canal" (Fig. 5). The False Canal is situated near Kara Burnu and owes its name to the resemblance of the land hereabout to the land near the Bosphorus, especially in "thick weather". "The mistaking of one for the other has caused several wrecks".<sup>38</sup>

The "Zeeman's Wegwijzer" (Seaman's Directory) by J. Swart mentions at 6½ miles north of Kara Burnu Kara Malatra, a protruding rocky point. Midia, the town situated near the ancient town of Salmydessos, is, according to Swart, protected to the north by cape Serveh, a rocky point, surrounded by rocks and reefs (Fig. 6).<sup>39</sup>

The southern parts of the territory of ancient Salmydessos are more precisely described in the *Black Sea Pilot*. "Westward of Kilios a long sandy beach commences, .... The beach is only broken at Hissar Kaiasi and Kara Burnu, otherwise it is quite straight, tending NW by W for 37 miles; it is faced by a sand-bank, with a depth only of 5 feet, at 2 cables from the shore,

34. *Atlas Maritimus et Commercialis*....., London, 1728, Chart XXVI.

35. Cruys, Corn., *Nieuw Paskaart Boek, Beheersende de Groote Rivier Don of Tanais... de Azofsche Zee... en Pontos Euxinus*, Amsterdam, n.d. (after 1703); text in Dutch and Russian.

36. Purdy, John, *The New Sailing Directory for the Gulf of Venice and the Eastern or Levantine Division of the Mediterranean Sea; Together with the Sea of Marmora and the Euxine or Black Sea*,....., London, 1834.

37. Purdy, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

38. Purdy, *op. cit.*, p. 189-90.

39. Swart, J., *Zeemans Wegwijzer in het Oostelijk Gedeelte der Middellandsche Zee, de Golf van Venetië, den Griekschen Archipel, de Zwarte Zee en de Zee van Azof*, Amsterdam, 1861, p. 97.

upon which vessels disabled, and desirous to beach, are stranded and lost, if not carried over by the waves".<sup>40</sup> About Serveh Burnu the "Pilot" informs us that "(it) projects considerably to the eastward, and would shelter from northerly winds, if the bottom were not bad and rocky .... A pyramidal rock is situated at the extremity of the cape, and a reef extends 1½ cables in a south-easterly direction".<sup>41</sup> "At 2 miles to the southward of Serveh Burnu is a steep cliff between the mouths of two small rivers, above which is built the small town of Midiah. ... A little creek about 100 yards in breadth is formed on its southern side which serves as a shelter, against northerly winds, to small vessels that can anchor in from 1½ to 2 fathoms, over a sandy bottom".<sup>42</sup>

The description is illustrated by a panorama view in the Black Sea Pilot of 1920 (Fig. 7). It rather clarifies the passage in Strabo, who wrote about ὑπερκείμενοι Ἄσται, the Astae, who are situated above it.<sup>43</sup> If we call into our memories that one of the reasons for the Greeks to sail these coasts was their desire for Scythian and Thracian grains, a remark in the Black Sea Pilot of 1920 is rather remarkable: "Small supplies of mutton and flour of poor quality are obtainable".<sup>44</sup>

We must conclude that at least in this respect something had changed between antiquity, when the people around Salmydessos were known as the millet-eating Thracians,<sup>45</sup> and the beginning of this century. However, not everything had changed.

When G. Seure, a French graecist, visited these districts about the beginning of this century he learned that quite a number of criminals lived in the Strandža Planina, protected by the difficult accessibility of the region. The government sought to control them by violent means and sometimes the heads of executed criminals were — like trophies — suspended to the windows of the City hall of Burgas.<sup>46</sup> Evidently, they had too much lived according to the reputation of their ancestors of antiquity.

40. *The Black Sea Pilot, Comprising the Dardanelles, Sea of Marmora, Bosphorus, Black Sea, and Sea of Azov*, ed. Brooke-Webb, E.V., R.N., London, 1908, p. 129.

41. *Black Sea Pilot 1908*, p. 131-2.

42. *Black Sea Pilot 1908*, p. 132.

43. Strabo VII, 6, 1.

44. *Black Sea Pilot, Comprising etc. ...* Ed. Langdon, C.H.C., C.B.E., R.N., Brooke-Webb, E.V., R.N., and Smith, C.V., C.B.E., R.N., London, 1920', p. 169.

45. Xenophon, *Anabasis* VII, v, 12.

46. Seure, *op. cit.*, p. 297, note 2.





Fig. 1 Ornamental mounting from the treasure of Letnitsa, c. 400-350 B.C. Gilded silver, Height 4.5 cm. The bow behind the horseman indicates royal power.

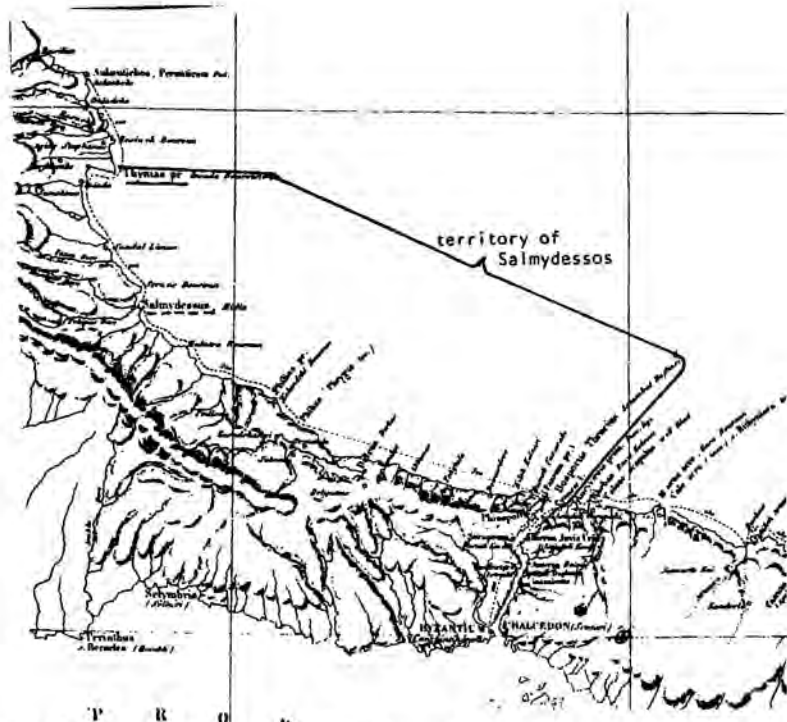


Fig. 2 The territory of Salmydessos, after Geographi Graeci Minores, ed. K. Müller, vol. III, Map XVII.

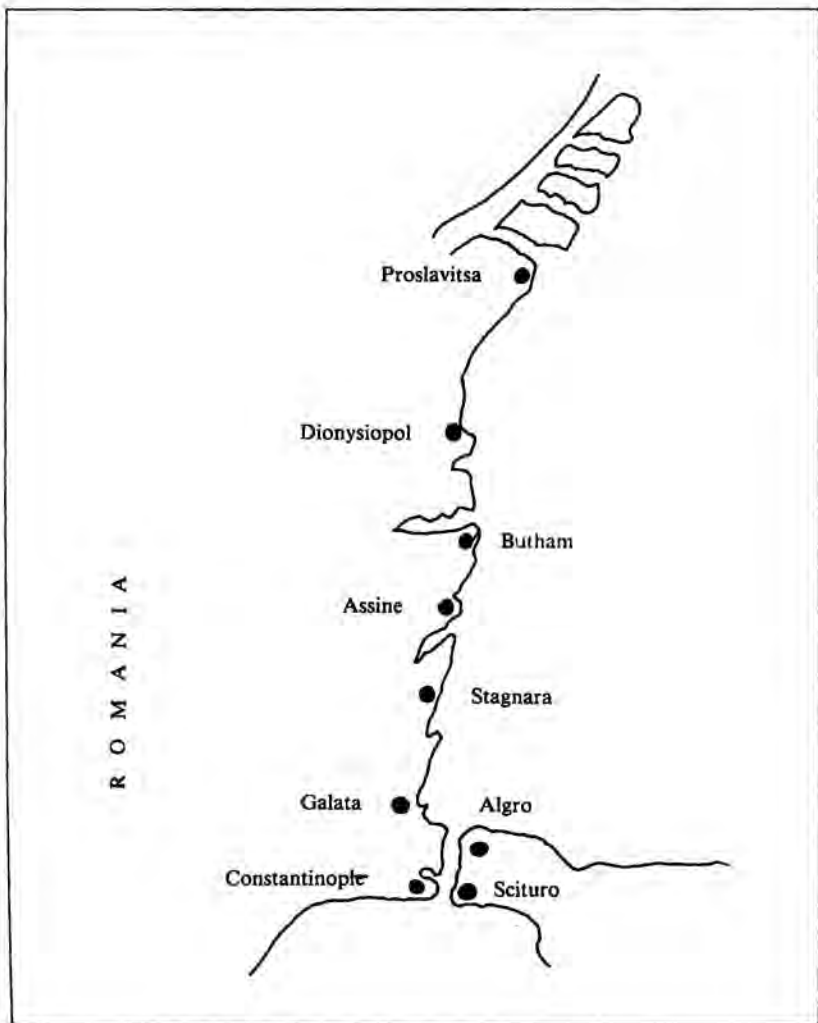


Fig. 3 Western coast of the Black Sea. After: *Atlas Maritimus et Commercialis*, Chart XXVI.

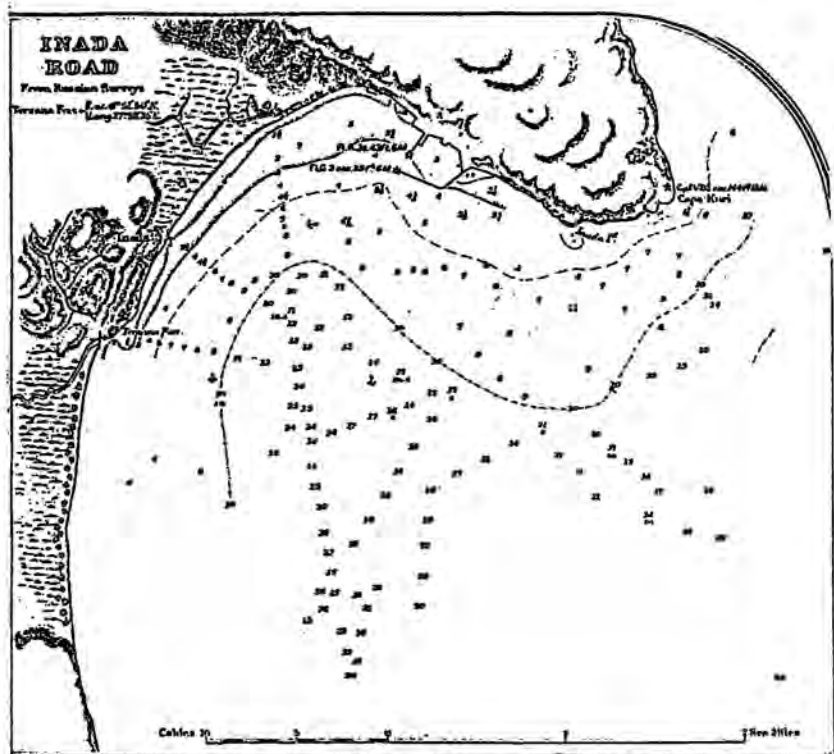


Fig. 4 The Roads of Cape Ineada, British Admiralty Chart 2230.

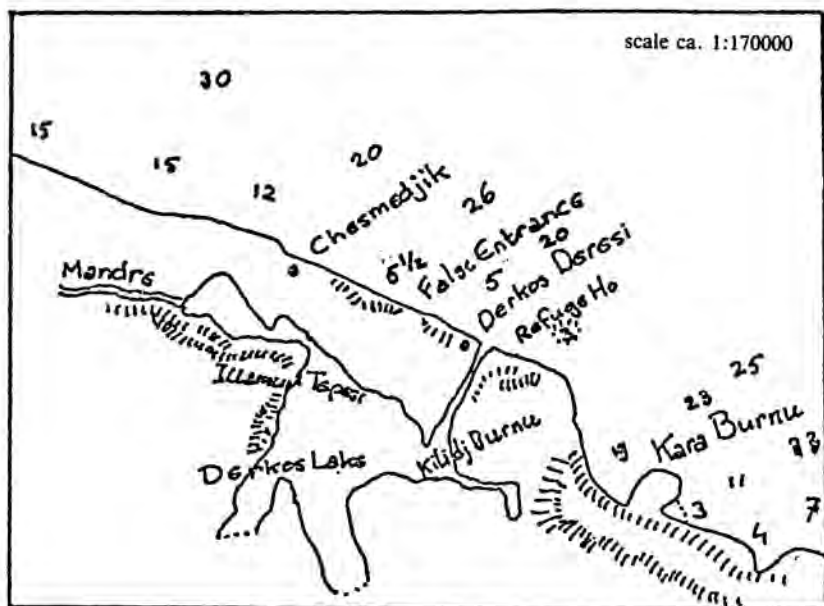


Fig. 5 The so-called False Entrance near Kara Burnu; after: British Admiralty Chart 2230.

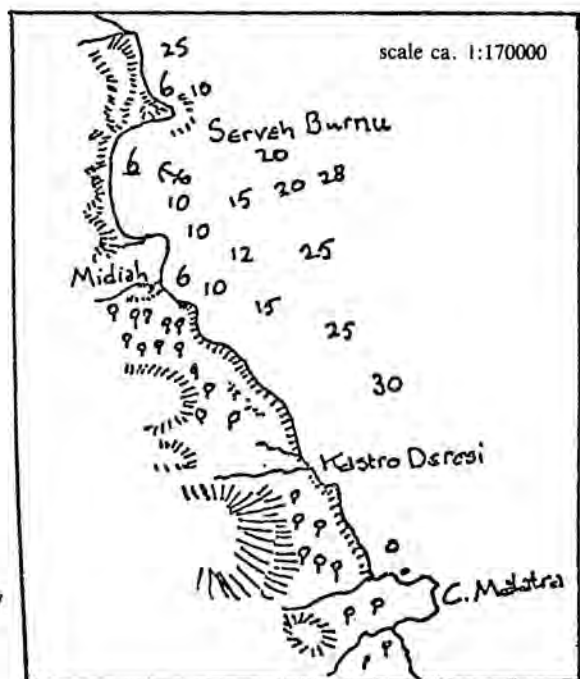


Fig. 6 From Serveh Burnu to C. Malatra; after: British Admiralty Chart 2230.

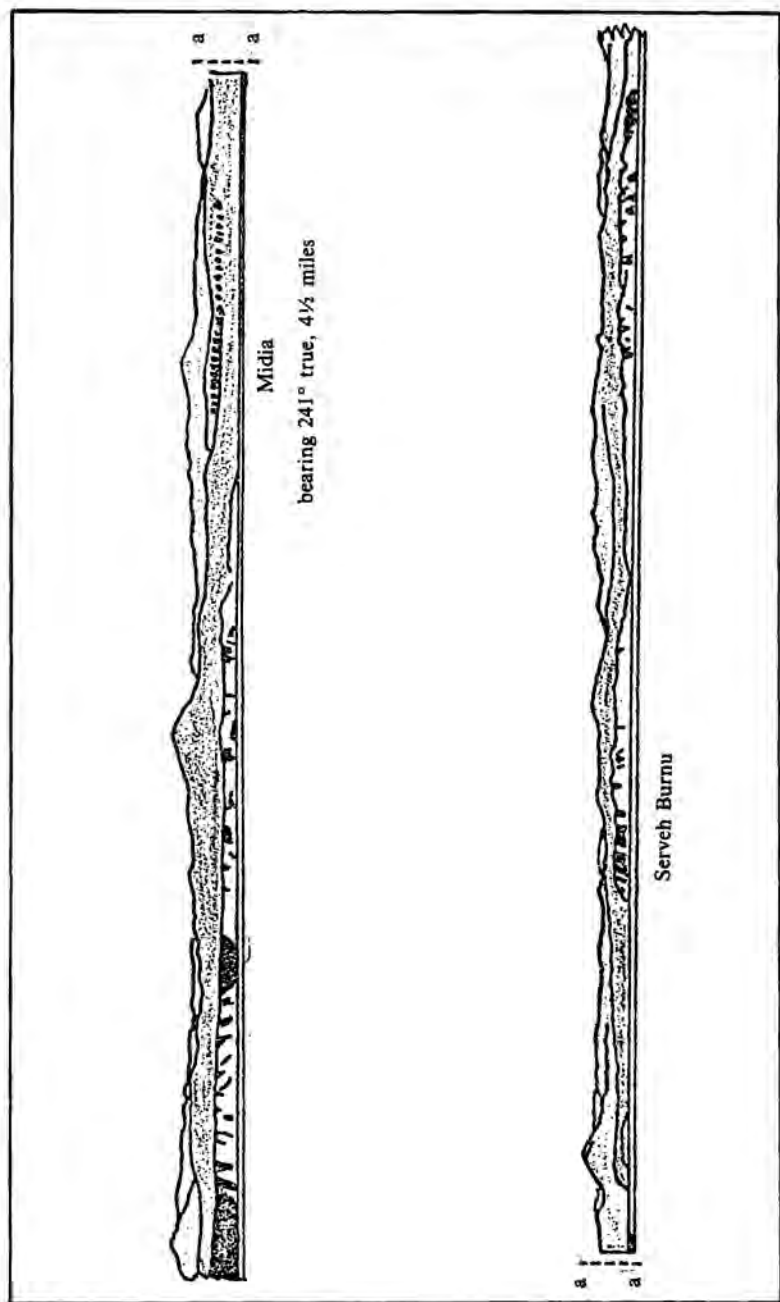


Fig. 7 Midia and adjacent coast; after Black Sea Pilot, 1920'.