

## BLACK SEA PIRACY

Gocha R. Tsetskhladze

“From the time when men first went down to sea in ships, piracy and robbery have been regarded only as one of the means of livelihood that the sea offered” (Ormerod 1924, flyleaf)<sup>1</sup>. It is difficult to gainsay this (see, for example, de Souza 1995). Voyages of discovery and trade have always co-existed with piracy, as ancient written sources show. Indeed, in the age Homer described in the *Odyssey*, piracy was a profession that men entered as a recognised way of making a living (Casson 1991, 177). The most remarkable words are those which Cyclops asks of Odysseus and his crew: “Strangers, who are you? Are you here for trade? Or have you wandered recklessly over the sea like pirates who go about risking their necks to bring trouble on others?” (Homer, *Od.* 9. 252-4). Piracy was so widespread, its consequences so disastrous, that people often removed their settlements from the coast to points further inland to escape it, and surrounded them with protective walls (Thuc. 1. 7). At the same time, war and piracy had much in common. The acquisition of booty was a vital aspect of ancient Greek warfare: it is often very hard to distinguish warfare from piracy in written sources until the end of the Archaic period, when organised states with mercenary armies arose (Garlan 1987; Pritchett 1991).

The Black Sea had not been prone to piracy from the time that the Greeks had founded colonies there and trade had developed<sup>2</sup>.

The Caucasian coast of the Pontus (northern Colchis) was the most troubled part of the Black Sea where local tribes – the Achaei, the Zygi and the Heniochi – lived (Asheri 1998). “These peoples lived by robbery at sea. Their boats are slender, narrow, and light, holding only about twenty-five people, though in rare cases they can hold thirty in all; the Greeks call them *kamarai*” (Strabo 11. 2. 12). Their most horrible practice was to “wander on foot night and day for the sake of kidnapping people. But they readily offer to release

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<sup>1</sup> This is an updated version of a paper submitted for publication in *Thracia Pontica* seven years ago.

<sup>2</sup> For the latest on Greek colonisation of the Black Sea and trade, see (with literature) Tsetskhladze 1994a; 1998a; 1998b; 1999; Cook/Dupont 1998, 142-91; Garlan 1999; Kuznetsov 2000.

their captives for ransom, informing their relatives after they have put out to sea” (Strabo 11. 2. 12. Cf. Tacitus, *Hist.* 3. 47; Aristotle, *Polit.* 8. 1338b; Diod. 20. 25).

The Heniochi and probably the Soanes (Strabo 11. 2. 19) gave the Greeks living in the city of Dioscurias and its *chora* a very rough time. Excavation of this part of Colchis has yielded an exceptionally high number of weapons (of both Greek and local production), evidence of the hostile relationship between the Greeks and the Heniochi (Voronov 1975; 1991). These tribes used even to attack coastal cities (Plin., *NH* 6. 15. 16). An important indication comes from the bronze inscription (beginning of the 3rd century BC) from Eshera (part of the *chora* of Dioscurias) (Shamba 1980, 55; Kaukhchishvili 1985; Vinogradov 1997, 596-601). The inscription is highly fragmented, which makes it impossible to form any clear idea of its content, but the several surviving words are sufficient to show that this is some particularly important document, such as a decree or historical chronicle, concerned with some military events (Vinogradov 1997, 596-601). It is very difficult to gain a firm impression of the events described but, if we take M.P. Inadze’s speculation (based on the surviving words: “military force or troops”; “*Polis*”; “Kingdom or queen”; and the general historical situation in that part of the Black Sea) as one possible theory, it may be concluded, with our present state of knowledge, that “the Eshera inscription is an official ... agreement concluded on the one hand by Dioscurias (Eshera) and on the other by cities of the Southern Black Sea (Herakleia) and the Pontic Kingdom. The reason for the people of Eshera concluding such an agreement would have been to safeguard the city [Dioscurias] against further raids by pirate tribes with the military help of the above-mentioned authorities ...” (Inadze 1988, 158). In other words, the Greeks of Dioscurias and its *chora* (Eshera) were obliged to seek military help from outside Colchis itself against the pirates (Heniochi and Soanes). Moreover, in this part of Pontus the control of piracy is usually considered to have been a prime function of the Roman garrisons established along the eastern coast of the Black Sea under the Principate (Braund 1994, 171-7).

Other parts of the Black Sea were unsafe too. Piracy posed a considerable threat to merchants, but, as a means of accumulating wealth, piracy and trade actually had a considerable amount in common. The Taurian tribes in the Crimea and the Thracians developed an organised system of wrecking ships for plunder (Diod. 20. 25; Xen., *Anab.* 7. 5. 12). So widespread did this become that the Romans were obliged to establish penalties against wreckers (Ormerod 1924, 70-1). Illyrian pirates were another source of trouble in the Black Sea (Ormerod 1924, 22, 144, 149, 178, 187). Polybius states that “... the Illyrians had always been in the habit of pillaging, because, owing to the extent of their sea-board and owing to the principal cities being in the interior, help against their raids was distant and slow in arriving; so that they could always overrun and plunder those countries unmolested” (2. 5). The island of Leuce at the mouth of the Danube was occupied by pirates (Ormerod 1924, 23).

From the first centuries AD piracy in the Black Sea increased. In the middle of the 3rd century AD large bands of Pontic marauders moved into the Aegean, plundering both shores, penetrating as far south as the coasts of Lycia and Pamphylia, and forcing their way inland as far as Cappadocia (Zos. 1. 28; Ammian Marc. 31. 5. 15). There was widespread plundering of temples, as earlier there had been in the Black Sea, where the temple of Apollo in Phasis had been raided by the local population of the northern Caucasus, for example (Tssetskhladze 1994b, 211-2).

The authorities in the Black Sea states tried to suppress piracy and make the Pontus safe for travellers and trade. Although the surviving fragment of an Aristotelian *Constitution of Phasis* is in many ways problematic, it shows that Milesian colonists 'civilised' the local Heniochi to the extent that they began to ransom the shipwrecked where once they had flayed them. This fragment (*FGrHist* 2, 218) demonstrates that shipwrecking used to take place on the eastern coast of the Black Sea (Braund/Tssetskhladze 1989, 117). Further evidence comes from northern Colchis, where the discovery in 1953/4 of 15 complete amphorae of the late Hellenistic period was made, 6-7 km off shore at a depth of 150 m. Most probably they came from a shipwreck (Voronov 1969, 48). The Bosphoran king Eumelus "In order to protect those sailing through Pontus Euxinus ... waged war against the Heniochi, Tauri and Achaei who were engaging in piracy and cleansed the sea of such pirates, for which he was praised not only in his own kingdom, but also throughout the universe, for traders everywhere spread the word about his determination" (Diod. 20. 25). An inscription of 228-225 BC (*Syll.*<sup>3</sup>, 502) gives us some details of Egyptian methods of dealing with the problem in Samothrace, where the *Strategos* of the Hellespont and Thrace is thanked for the precautions taken to safeguard the island of Samothrace against the marauders who regularly threatened the temple treasures: a detachment of horse-, foot- and catapult men had been despatched to the island. Because the Hellespont and Thrace are mentioned it is likely that the pirates came from there.

It appears that from the 3rd-2nd centuries BC the local rulers in the Pontus were no longer concerned about piracy. On the contrary, they were giving the pirates help. As Strabo tells us: "[Achaei, Zygi and Heniochi]... sailing sometimes against merchant-vessels and sometimes against a country or even a city, they hold the mastery of the sea. And they are sometimes assisted even by those who hold the Bosphorus, the latter supplying them with mooring-places, with a market place, and with means of disposing of their booty" (11. 2. 12). One of the major market places mentioned by Strabo was Tanais, which, at this time, became a large and well-known market in the Bosphorus, where people "... bringing slaves, hides, and such other things as nomads possess, and the latter giving in exchange clothing, wine, and other things that belong to civilised life" (Strabo 11. 2. 3: see also, for example, Koshelenko/Marinovitch 2000, 172-4). What was the reason for this change of policy by local rulers? In the Archaic and Classical periods the aim of Pontic pirates

had been seeking to satisfy their own needs through plunder; this the rulers had resisted. In the Hellenistic period the nature of piracy gradually changed; it became more concerned with supplying the Mediterranean demand for slaves, and rulers started making arrangements with the pirates through which the slave trade became one of their sources of income. It is also essential to remember that kings and generals often used piratical activity to help finance their wars. This practice started in the 5th century BC and continued into the Hellenistic period. For example, Philip II of Macedon used the proceeds of piracy to finance the building of his navy. Another way in which piracy was encouraged lay in the custom of reprisals against an enemy (de Souza 1995). One principal motive for piracy had always been to take captives for sale into slavery (Garlan 1987; 1988). However, it is unlikely that the numbers captured by the local people and tribes of Pontus would have had a large impact upon the slave-trading system of the Greek world in general. The largest centres of piracy were Crete and Cilicia. The number of slaves from the Black Sea was small. Thus Pontus was not a major source of slaves in the ancient world (Finley 1962; Blavatskii 1954; Braund/Tsetschladze 1989; Cecchladze 1990; Isaac 1986, 145-6; etc.).

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Gocha R. Tsetskhladze, Department of Classics, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, University of London, Egham, Surrey TW20 OEX, UK.

GERNA DERE, ROMAN AND BYZANTINE SETTLEMENT  
IN SINOP PROVINCE, TURKEY<sup>1</sup>

Owen Doonan and David Smart

Gerna Dere is a tiny cove, scarcely 100 m across, several km east of Inceburun, the northernmost point in Anatolia (Fig. 1). This shallow pebbly cove was cut out of the barren basalt cliffs west of Sinope by a seasonal stream. The northerly storms of the Black Sea pound the shore in winter, scouring the black cliffs. Sandy soils on the landward side of the cove offer little potential for agriculture, and today boars and goats alone inhabit the dense undergrowth. Despite this unpromising location, the Sinop Regional Archaeological Survey has documented a significant Roman and early Byzantine site at Gerna Dere (Fig. 2; Doonan 1998, 178-9, Doonan *et al.* 1999, 359-71, Hiebert *et al.* 1997, 93-108, Hiebert *et al.*, in press). This site raises important questions about settlement of the countryside around Sinope in this period. What might Gerna have offered to make it a viable settlement? What conditions of settlement might the choice of a site like Gerna imply in Roman and Byzantine times? What purpose might this site have served in the broader regional picture? This paper does not address all of these questions fully, but it offers some preliminary ideas about settlement along the rugged northern coast of Anatolia in antiquity. Gerna Dere is a difficult site, covered in dense vegetation and spreading up

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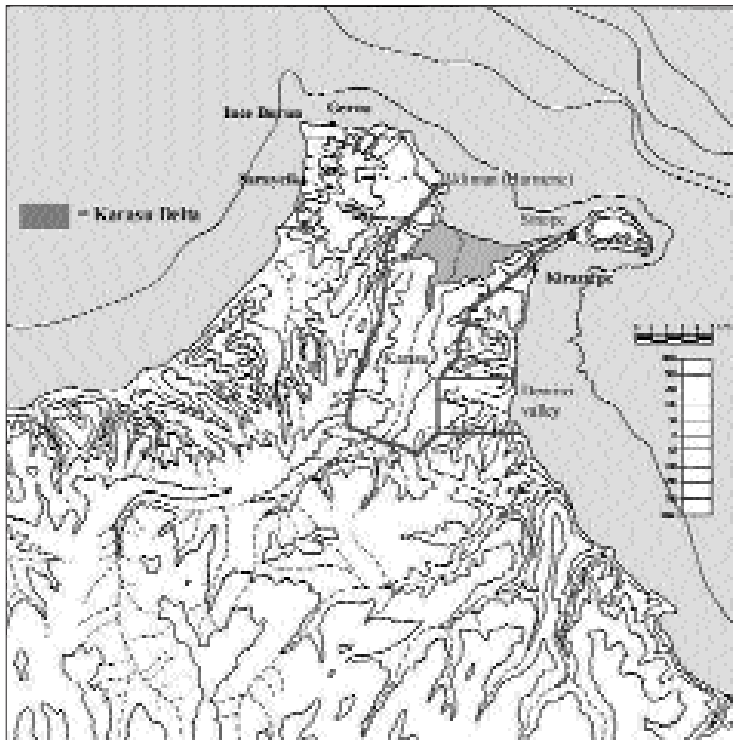


Fig. 1. Map of Sinop Promontory, showing the locations of Sinop, Gerna, Kiraztepe, Saraycik and the Karasu and Demirci valley surveys.

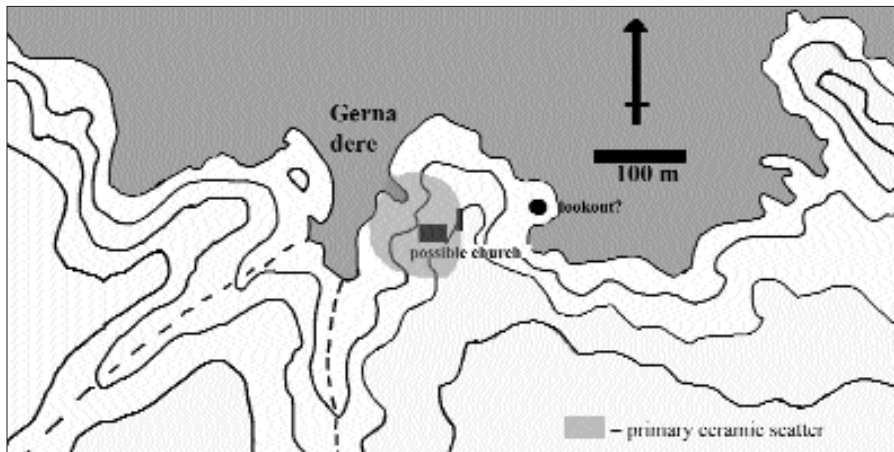


Fig. 2. Plan of the settlement at Gerna.

a steep rocky slope. The record of the site is necessarily patchy, given the difficult conditions for survey. The site was investigated as part of the general survey of Sinop Promontory in 1996, following a tip from a local fisherman. The disturbance of the site was obvious, since a large fragment of a monolithic marble column had been dislodged and was lying on the pebble beach below (Fig. 3). Further investigations revealed at least half a dozen large pits dug into the undergrowth. A large stone and brick structure, very likely the source of the column, had been dug into in at least five places. The structure measured approximately 17 m in length, and was oriented strictly East to West. The western end of the structure was exposed by three large pits. The masonry is composed of banded brick and stone over a rubble core, comparable to a number of structures in and around Sinope (Fig. 4). The so-called Balatlar Kilise complex on the Boz Tepe headland overlooking Sinope, shows comparable masonry<sup>2</sup>. It is clear that at least part of this complex functioned as a church at one time, although its original purpose remains obscure (Bryer/Winfield 1985, 79-87). Bryer and Winfield assign the complex to the sixth century AD. A comparable structure survives at the edge of the ancient town, as well as other more fragmentary examples. The well-cut facing stones and corner stones of the Gerna building suggest a late-Roman or early-Byzantine date. The church at Çiftlik is roughly contemporary to the Gerna building. The Çiftlik church is comparable in scale to the Gerna structure, although there are no mosaics at Gerna as seen in Çiftlik, Kiraztepe and other coastal sites near Sinope (Hill 1998, 219-32, Hill 1999, 285-300). The marble column from the beach may also imply a similar plan to these nearby buildings, although closer study and perhaps excavation are needed to determine the true nature of the building plan. The orientation, construction technique and scale of the structure suggest that it was a church. About 25 m NE of this building a masonry wall was exposed for about 25 m. The wall runs N-S, perpendicular to the axis of the church. This may have been some kind of precinct wall surrounding the church, comparable to the example at Çiftlik (Hill 1998, fig. 23.2).

Evidence of other structures is spread sporadically over a wide area, including an imposing stone wall more than 1 m across that was observed in heavily overgrown vegetation more than 1 km inland. The wall was visible over several meters, consisting of uncut stones set without masonry. Another feature of interest several hundred meters inland from the church was a pool apparently cut back from the stream bed into the basalt bedrock. The pool measures approximately 15 m across and several meters deep. A rough wall, now almost completely dismantled, closed off the pool, while patches of cement still adhere to un-worked stones nearby. This feature may have been

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<sup>2</sup> The complex takes its nickname from the local tradition associating it with the palace of Mithradates VI ("Balat") and the later church ("kilise") that some of the structure was converted to Bryer/Winfield 1985, 79-82 and pls. 12-7.



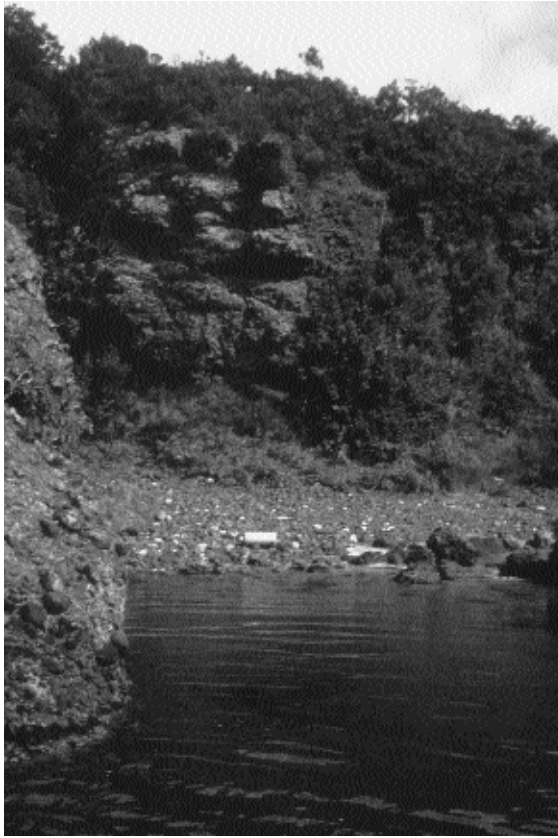


Fig. 3. The beach at Gerna, showing the marble column fragment.

constructed to conserve water all through the rather dry summer months, and perhaps to control the heavy runoff from the springtime rains.

The poor visibility made it impossible to define any kind of ceramic scatter at Gerna Dere, although some low-fired ceramics and roof tiles were found in the debris produced by the illegal excavations. No closely datable ceramic evidence was associated with the site, the ceramics belong for the most part to the early Byzantine period (Fig. 5). A bronze *foliis* was found in an erosion gully near the church. Although corroded and worn, the coin may be assigned to the tenth-eleventh century AD<sup>3</sup>.

An inscribed marble altar, a common type dated to the second century AD,

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<sup>3</sup> The coin is in very poor condition, but it appears to show the obverse type of a frontal Christ with his hair swept back over his right neck and flowing out and in



Fig. 4. Banded brick and cut limestone masonry from Gerna.

was found at the church site, although broken and obviously out of its original context (Fig. 5). Although the altar was not found in its original context, there is little reason to doubt an association with this site. It was not found with any other materials from elsewhere, and does not seem to be part of a

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shoulder. His face is obliterated by corrosion. The folds of a cloak cover the left shoulder and arm. A rectangular shape above the forearm suggests Christ supports the Gospel Book with his left hand against his chest. His left arm may hold his cloak open, as seen on other coins, compare Grierson 1982, 36, pl. 791. A nimbate cross is expected and suggested behind the head. The reverse inscription is not legible, but probably reads *ISUS XPISTUS BASILEU BASILE*, on three or four lines. The coin is ca. 30 mm across. The coin probably belongs to the *Rex Regnantium* or so-called “Anonymous Folles” classes A-F, Grierson 1982, 204-10, pls. 56-7. The state of the coin makes a precise identification difficult, but it likely falls within the 10-11th c. AD.

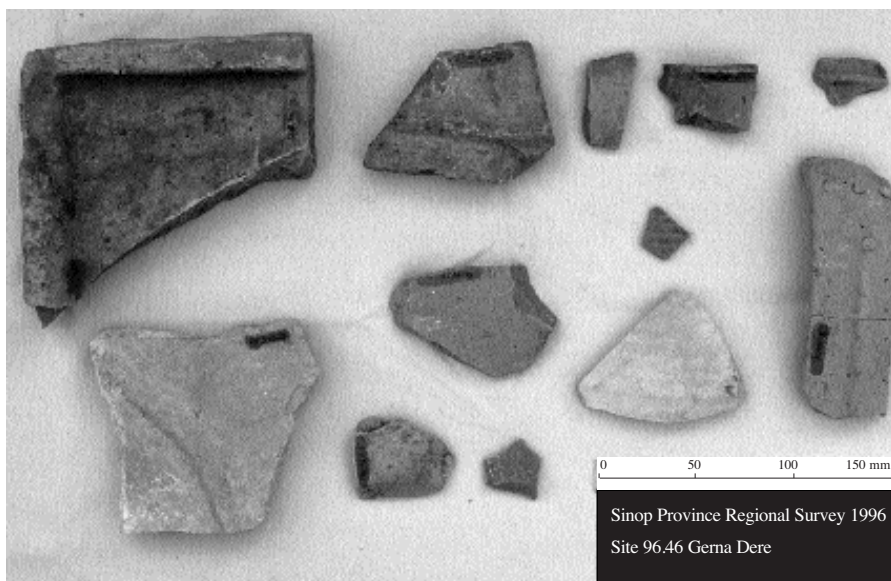


Fig. 5. Ceramics from Gerna Dere.

hoard of illegally excavated items. The site was not occupied in modern times and so the altar was not re-used in a modern structure. The altar does seem somewhat earlier than the other datable material from the site, although there is no reason to suppose that the foundation of the settlement could not be first or second century AD. This altar measures 0.24 x 0.16 x 0.48 m, and is made of good quality marble. The simple moulded form dates to the second century AD. The inscription is lightly incised, but the lettering is uniform (about 2.2 cm high) and evenly spaced, with the exception of an exaggerated central stroke on the  $\Psi$  (about 4 cm). The inscription reads:  $\Theta\text{ΕΟ}\ \Upsilon\text{Ψ}\text{Ι}\text{Σ}\text{Τ}\text{Ο}\Upsilon\ \text{Α}\text{Λ}\text{Ε}\text{Π}\text{ΙΑ}\ \text{Μ}\text{Α}\text{Ρ}\text{Κ}\text{Ι}\text{Α}\text{Ν}\text{Η}$  (Fig. 6). French recently discussed three inscriptions to  $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omicron\varsigma\ \upsilon\psi\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$  as part of his survey of evidence for the divinities worshipped in Sinope (French 1994, 104-5). Although this unnamed deity is often associated with the god of the Jews, or less commonly with the Christians (Ustinova 1998, 203-39), this inscription provides no indication of such an association. The possible association with a church and the prominence of Marcion the Gnostic in the second century AD might support such an interpretation. Two dedications to  $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omicron\varsigma\ \upsilon\psi\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$  published by Robinson do not provide clues to the possible identity of this deity to whom this altar was dedicated, although both findspots of each (Emreli near Ayancik and Gerze) were also in small coastal towns away from the main port of Sinope. The dedication to the Great highest god ( $\theta\epsilon\acute{\omega}\ \mu\epsilon\gamma\alpha\lambda\acute{\omega}\ \upsilon\psi\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ ) from Emreli (Robinson 1905, 294-333, see no. 26) and the dedi-



Fig. 6. Inscribed marble altar from Gerna Dere.

cation to ἀγαθὴ τύχῃ θεῶ ὑψίστῳ published by French (French 1994, 104-5) both suggest pagan rather than Jewish or Christian contexts. If this is the case, then we might see Gerna as a settlement spanning pre-Christian and Christian periods. The dedicator, ΑΛΕΠΙΑ ΜΑΡΚΙΑΝΗ may be recognized in another inscription built into the East wall of Sinope itself (Hamilton 1842). The original location of the Sinope inscription cannot be seen as secure, however, and there is no evidence to link it to Sinope, Gerna or any other specific site.

The site of Gerna raises intriguing problems for the history of settlement around Sinope. No material other than Roman and early Byzantine has been found at Gerna, which would make the site contemporary with an expansion in settlement throughout the region. This expansion has been documented in two systematic surveys carried out in the Demirci valley (Doonan *et al.* 1999, n. 2; Doonan *et al.* in press) and in the Karasu valley. (Doonan/Gantos in press). In the Demirci valley, Roman times witnessed a dramatic expansion of coastal settlement, most clearly seen in the large industrial site cur-

rently under investigation by the Sinop Museum in collaboration with D. Kassab-Tezgör (Kassab-Tezgör 1997, 423-42). In both the Karasu and Demirci valleys settlement spread inland during Imperial Roman times. The inner Karasu valley and the Demirci valley were densely populated by imperial times, a trend which was reversed towards the end of the first millennium AD. In later Byzantine and Seljuk periods the countryside once again became depopulated and the forest returned.

The general survey carried out by the Sinop Regional Survey in 1996 recorded a similar pattern. The coast to the south of Sinope was full of Roman sites, perhaps a mix of villas and small communities. The church at Çiftlik, under investigation by the Sinop Regional Museum in collaboration with Warwick University is one example among many of monumental buildings with mosaics and impressive masonry strung along the coast (Hill 1995, 1998). The Sinop Regional Survey recorded a similar structure at the site of Kiraztepe in the village of Korucuk in 1996. At Kiraztepe an extensive scatter of mosaic fragments, column fragments, storage vessels and medium-fine wares demonstrated the presence of a major fifth-century AD monumental structure (Fig. 5). Other nearby evidence along the coast confirmed that this structure was not alone. Strabo's (2. 1. 15; 12. 3. 12) observation that the whole coast near Sinope was planted with olive, together with the dense settlement concentration, suggest that this coast was very heavily populated, completely saturated with agricultural and other settlements.

General survey in other parts of the province supports the reconstruction of a densely settled coast. Several small valleys along the western side of Sinop promontory were investigated, and each of them showed evidence of Roman presence. The small valley at Saraycik offers a typical example. A seasonal river has cut a small valley in the western coast, the outlet no more than 300 m across. A sandy beach is flanked by high sandy cliffs, and a small Roman site (ca. 1 ha) was tucked behind the southern bluff. Survey of the valley behind (about 2 km<sup>2</sup>) revealed three scatters, each less than 1 ha, one of which may have been a cemetery, based on the predominance of fine wares and beads. The settlement in this small valley could have been supported by a mixed economy including fishing and farming. Aelian's descriptions of fishing practices along the south coast of the Black Sea suggest that a minimum of ten adult males made up a unit of fishermen, implying a minimum community size of about fifty people<sup>4</sup>. In Saraycik and the other small settlements of the western shore of the Sinop promontory, land was available for cultivation, presumably supplemented by seasonal fishing.

Gerna Dere offers much less potential for agriculture. The morphology of the valley is more rugged, and the soils considerably thinner and poorer than along the East and West coasts. It is hard to imagine any significant agri-

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<sup>4</sup> Aelian, *On the Characteristics of Animals* XV. 3, XV. 10. Doonan/Gantos in press.

culture supporting a settlement here. This difficult site was chosen in part because of the density of settlement in more appealing coastal areas. Gerna may also be reflective of another Roman phenomenon, the potential for a community to play a specialized role in the highly integrated economy. Fish from the Black Sea, particularly Sinopean, were prized in Rome and commanded high prices (Diod. Sic. 37. 3. 5). It may be that a small fishing community could flourish within the context of the highly integrated Roman economy, a community which at other times would not have been economically viable. The continued occupation of Gerna into the middle Byzantine period (tenth or eleventh century AD) may have been possible because of the great demands in Constantinople for fish<sup>5</sup>. It is also possible that the inevitable shipwrecks along the shore may have provided the residents of Gerna with the occasional windfall, which could supplement the fishing economy<sup>6</sup>. Thus the settlement at Gerna represents the confluence of several trends in the regional economy. The site was first occupied as part of the spread of settlement in an under-populated landscape. The expansion of opportunities for specialized production in the commodity-oriented Roman and early Byzantine economy made the impoverished site a viable settlement. And finally, the isolation of Gerna may have provided opportunities for wrecking or more aggressive piratical activities that supplemented other kinds of trade in the middle Byzantine period. It does not seem, however, that Gerna survived the tumultuous twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when Sinope became a prize in the broader power struggles between Constantinople, Trebizond and the Seljuks of Kastamonu.

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<sup>5</sup> For discussion of this important topic see Dragon 1995, 57-73.

<sup>6</sup> Fred Hiebert has suggested this in a personal communication, 2/2/00.

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Owen P. Doonan, Near Eastern Section, University of Pennsylvania Museum, 33rd and Spruce Sts., Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA.  
 David Smart, Department of Ancient and Islamic Art, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, OH 44106, USA.