Black Sea Grain for Athens? From Herodotus to Demosthenes*

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Introduction

How are we to estimate the extent of grain-imports to Athens from the Black Sea region? Relevant statistics are few and so contentious as to be of marginal relevance at best, as we shall see. Accordingly, the question must be approached in a more discursive manner. The broad scholarly view is roughly as follows. Very few would now argue that grain came to Athens from the region before the 5th century. Some insist that much did come there from the Black Sea in the 5th century. The great majority believe that a lot came in the fourth, though with very different emphases. Beyond that broad characterisation, the debate on this question has become rather confused and even a little over-heated, despite Garnsey's careful and lucid analysis, to which the debt of the present discussion will be very obvious.[1] A series of observations may help to maintain our focus sharply on the question itself.

First, the issue is not whether grain came from the region to Athens *at all*. It is, rather, whether such grain as did come was brought in significant quantities and on a more-or-less regular basis. Accordingly, there is in fact no reason to deny that even in the 6th century (if not rather earlier) grain may well have reached Athens and the Aegean world more generally from the Black Sea. There were already Greek settlements in the region with mother-cities in Miletus or Megara, for example, which may well have encouraged traders to venture there in search of grain.[2] The point, however, is that this was not – as far as we can tell – any kind of regular or substantial export of Pontic grain. *A fortiori* there is no reason to suppose a complete absence of grain brought to Athens from the region in the 5th century either, nor of course in the 4th.

Secondly, the demand for imported foodstuffs in Athens and Attica has a clear bearing on this entire issue, but its bearing is only tangential. For the present discussion it is unnecessary (and probably unwise anyway) to plump for a particular projection of the extent or chronology of that demand, beyond the very simple point that the development of the city of Athens presumably increased the demand for food-imports to supplement the produce of Attica itself. For, whatever level of demand we may suppose, the demand itself

tells us nothing specific about the sources from which that demand was met. Meanwhile, we must also recognise that the shipping of grain from the Black Sea – or any of the many other sources from which it might be brought – need not be a response to food-shortage within Athens or any particular need, beyond the existence of a market there for exchange: price, quality and possibly even fashion could make imported grain attractive, while even at times of surplus it is hard to imagine that grain would not find a buyer.[3] It is not always acknowledged sufficiently in modern studies that demand encompasses not only our notion of need or even the participants' (especially the Athenians') notions of their needs: we must reckon also with desires, with the effect of heavy supply in lowering price and with the advantages possibly to be gained by re-export back out of Athens. However, even with all that taken into account, the fact remains that broad studies of demand for food in Athens address a set of questions which are distinct from the matter in hand, namely whether much imported grain came from the Black Sea.

Thirdly, the central issue of evidence. What kind of evidence could establish the existence of a regular and substantial importation of grain from the Black Sea region? An explicit statement of its existence or some description in a historical narrative might well suffice, but that is not available. An inscribed public record might also be dreamt of, that of the *sitophylakes* perhaps.[4] The nearest we have to such *desiderata* is the always-slippery rhetoric of Demosthenes and linkable public honours involving Bosporan kings in the 4th century, which will be discussed in some detail below. That is significant, of course, but also fraught with problems of interpretation, which will be addressed more closely in what follows. Most desirable of all would be a range of different kinds of evidence which simply assume, applaud, mock or complain about the importation of Black Sea grain. Unfortunately, even in the 4th century, we do not really have that.

Fourthly, we must bear very much in mind the extent of the Black Sea region and the busy exchange there between its various micro-economies. It is all too easy to suppose that the whole region was orientated upon exchange with the Aegean world, or even with the city of Athens. But that was certainly not the case, as can be seen in the extensive exchange-patterns within the region, revealed by archaeology, epigraphy and a range of literary evidence. At the same time, the sheer size of the region demands to be considered. The Bosporan Kingdom, which has often been at the centre of modern debates on the grain-trade, was of course very important in the Black Sea, but there were extensive areas with grain-producing capacity elsewhere there, whether, for example, in the western Crimea around Chersonesus, on the large west coast of the Pontus (modern Bulgaria and Romania) or indeed on the rather-neglected south-coast. The Black Sea was far more than the Bosporan Kingdom, one of its farther places from an Aegean perspective. In addition, it can often be difficult to disentangle the Hellespont from the Black Sea: grain could be grown in quantity there too, including (neighbours

permitting) the hinterland of Byzantium, which was more than a market for exchange and transhipment.[5]

Fifthly, the notion of a "bread-basket". Much of the modern debate is driven by a notion that the region always enjoyed a grain-surplus, whether the lands around the Black Sea are taken as a whole or imagined separately. This is demonstrably false. Unfortunately, by virtue of the Cold War, the nature of modern food-shortages has been transposed into a debate on economic and political systems. Be that as it may, with regard to antiquity we have significant direct and indirect evidence of grain-shortage there. Garnsey has drawn attention to the realities of precipitation in the north-west Black Sea, where grain-production is historically unreliable.[6] Strabon, although he waxes lyrical about the fertility of the soil of the eastern Crimea, does nothing to suggest that there too food-shortage was alien. On the contrary, it is only for a small sector of the south coast of Black Sea that he observes the absence of food-shortage. That he attributes to the well-watered Thermodon plain there: the eastern Crimea has no such rivers and was therefore vulnerable to drought. We may readily understand why the Bosporan Kingdom suffered grain-shortage around 400. And further why Polybius explicitly identifies grain as a commodity which is sometimes exported and sometimes imported into the region past Byzantium (Pol. 4.38). Meanwhile, recurrent political and military problems with Scythians and the like no doubt also led to occasional shortage in agricultural production. There was much potential for the production of grain in the Black Sea region, but the actual production was far from secure and any surplus irregular.

Sixthly, the "burden of proof". The notion of regular and substantial grain-imports from the Black Sea through the 5th and 4th centuries has become so embedded, at least in some academic traditions, that some may take the view that the burden lies upon those who deny it.[7] However, that is an inversion of normal practice. The burden must lie instead upon those who claim that these regular and substantial imports did in fact occur. And here lies much of the problem, for that case has often been asserted but proves very difficult to argue.

Finally, there are corollaries, principal among which is the so-called "grain-route" across the Aegean leading from the Hellespont to Athens, taking in notably Lemnos, Imbros and Scyros. That "grain-route" is taken by some to be a key factor in Athenian imperial strategy. Be that as it may, we have no real knowledge that much grain moved that way, or that any of it originated in the Black Sea. Only on the basis of such knowledge might we proceed to examine the nature of any "route", whether for grain or some larger purpose. The recent publication of the so-called Grain-Tax Law of Agyrrhius, passed in 374/3 BC, is a particularly salutary warning. It says nothing of grain from the Black Sea to Athens, but it does draw sharp attention to the fact that Lemnos, Imbros and Scyros were not only settled by Athenians, but also well able to produce substantial amounts of grain in their own right for Athens.

The modern notion of a "grain-route" has obscured the productive capacities not only of these islands but also of Byzantium and the Hellespont, on which more below.[8]

With those seven, interrelated points in mind, we may proceed to a close examination of the evidence and "evidence" which has been brought to bear on our central question, the extent of grain-imports from the Black Sea to Athens. In addition, I shall also offer some further ancient testimony of relevance which has been neglected or omitted from the debate. Diachronic distinctions are of major importance throughout: conventionally, a line is drawn between the 5th and 4th centuries. For reasons which will become apparent, I shall not make so much of changes around 400 as of changes through the Peloponnesian War, among which particular significance will be accorded to the events of 413, including the establishment of the permanent Spartan presence at Decelea. In consequence, my 5th century is foreshortened and my 4th extended.

The 5th century to 413

The silence on Pontic grain at Athens in the 5th century is so heavy as to crush any hypothesis of significant or regular importation of grain from that source until at least the closing decades of that century. The broad historical context tends to explain the absence of such imports well enough. After all, Athens spent much of the 5th century as the dominant head of an extensive empire. Thucydides' analysis of the massive resources of Athens in 431 is sufficient to show the material benefits of the city's imperialism. Athens was too rich and also too powerful to fear grain-shortages: if and when needed, grain could be obtained from very many different sources. Meanwhile and in consequence, we may be sure enough that the Piraeus held major attractions for traders in all goods, from all areas and of whatever state or ethnicity. Athens and its port were the great focus of power, wealth and exchange.

This broad situation has prompted the ingenious argument that in the 5th century Athens' regular and substantial imports of Pontic grain are "masked":[9] they came in so effortlessly, it is claimed, that our sources simply do not have reason to mention them. But that will hardly suffice. The fact remains that we have a large amount and a great variety of information about the society and economy of 5th century Athens, not only from the historians, but also, for example, from playwrights and a range of documents which happen to have survived. If Pontic grain imports were regular and substantial, we might reasonably expect to hear at least a little about them here and there. As we shall see, there is nothing for almost all the century, whereas we do indeed hear about the significance of Euboea, for example, which clearly was a major source of Athens' food-supply, both in historical narrative and in drama. By the same token, the very reasonable observation that we have little oratory for the 5th century (while much of our 4th century evidence comes from orators) is less compelling an explanation than it might seem to be at first glance. The

4th century grain-supply is attested by other kinds of evidence too, whether historical narrative (e.g. Xenophon and Philochorus) or honorific documents, on which more below. And, of course, for most of the 4th century we lack the politically-engaged plays of Aristophanes and his rivals, which might be expected to make up for the lack of oratory in the 5th century. Accordingly, while those who insist on a regular and substantial 5th century grain supply from the Black Sea to Athens are naturally driven to seek to explain the lack of any evidence for their position, they have yet to find an explanation or set of explanations to relieve our sources' silence.

Meanwhile, from a perspective in Athens, the Black Sea was distant, famously dangerous and in many ways of little attraction, though we may wonder about the availability of under-priced goods there. Through the first half of the 5th century it was a Persian possession, as was acknowledged in the terms of the Peace of Callias in 450. While that Peace banned from the Pontus Athenian warships only, there was hardly much encouragement in that for Athenian merchantmen or indeed for others seeking to bring goods to Athens. Moreover, while it is important to acknowledge the existence of Greek cities in the region, we must also be aware that the Bosporan Kingdom was at a fledgling stage of its development, while Olbia seems also to have experienced substantial difficulties in the course of these years. The story that Aristides met his death in the Black Sea on public business (whether or not strictly historical) seems to encapsulate the gulf between Athens and the region through the first half of the 5th century.

The story of Aristides is preserved by Plutarch (*Arist.* 26.1), who has some interesting passages on the Black Sea. In particular, it is Plutarch who provides our main narrative of the expedition of Pericles to the region in the 430s.[10] However, Plutarch says nothing of Pontic grain, either with regard to Aristides or in connection with the expedition of Pericles, whose rationale is presented in a completely different fashion. The silence is all the louder because Plutarch does, by contrast, mention a large gift of grain brought to Athens from Egypt, whence it had been sent by a certain Psammetichus. Indeed, Plutarch mentions the Egyptian gift in the very *Life* (of Pericles), where he might have mentioned grain in the context of the Pontic expedition. While ancient authors often show a disappointing lack of concern with economic matters, to be sure, the contrast here is striking even so.[11]

Silences abound. However, to fill the vacuum, a selection of passages is usually deployed as if to support a case for regular and substantial grain-imports from the Black Sea: of course, different scholars stress or omit particular passages. Each instance (familiar or neglected) demands close attention, but neither individually or collectively do they amount to very much.

1. The first is Herodotus' vignette of Xerxes, watching ships carrying grain from the Black Sea through the Hellespont towards Greece (Hdt. 7.147). However, the passage is hardly crucial, for this is grain for the Peloponnese and

Aegina, not Athens. Immediately there must be a doubt about its historicity, although there is no reason to doubt that Peloponnesians and Aeginetans were active in the Black Sea (let alone others engaged in trade in their direction). Aegina needed imports, it is judged.[12] And, as for the Peloponnese, an epitaph from Gorgippia in the eastern Bosporan Kingdom, shows that a certain Philoxenus was buried there at around the time of Xerxes' invasion, described as "from the Peloponnese, from Helice".[13] Rather, doubt may be sparked by the fact that Xerxes' sighting allows Herodotus to develop ideas about the king's mix of wisdom and over-confidence: conceivably, Athens has been suppressed from the story for the very reason that Xerxes did indeed seize Athens, whereas Aegina medized and the Peloponnese remained broadly free. If the ships had been Athens-bound, Xerxes would have been proved right, which meant a very different role for the story. Meanwhile we may wonder how the ships' destinations were known to Xerxes' army: while that remains unexplained doubts about the historicity of the story abide. We may also observe that the completion of Herodotus' work was roughly contemporary with so much of our other evidence on grain-supply, indeed it is often placed in 426, the date of Athens' decree of grain-privileges for Methone (discussed below). We may suspect that the vignette, which is outside the main narrative and in that sense superfluous to the story of Xerxes' invasion, may owe something to the concerns of Herodotus' time of writing. In any event, as we must recall, this is not grain for Athens but for Aegina and the Peloponnese, an excellent reminder that other states too might want (or be thought to want) grain from the north-east. And finally, this is only a single instance: on its own, it can tell us nothing about regular movements of grain from the Black Sea into the Aegean.

2. Hardly more cogent is the passage often adduced from the Old Oligarch, who of course may well be young and who is rather broad-minded in his complex oligarchy. In this passage and elsewhere, despite a clear interest in economic matters, the Old Oligarch says nothing about grain from the Black Sea to Athens or anywhere else. Nor should he be taken to imply it either. For he mentions the Black Sea at all as part of a swift tour of the points of the compass which spirals into mainland Greece:

> If smaller matters are also to be considered, through rule of the sea first of all the Athenians have mixed with various peoples in different areas and devised a range of festive practices, so that whatever is sweet in Sicily or in Italy or in Cyprus or in Egypt or in Lydia or in the Pontus or in the Peloponnese or anywhere else has all been collected together in one place through the rule of the sea. ([Xen.], *Ath. Pol.* 2.7).

Where is Pontic grain in this passage? Grain is not excluded explicitly, but neither is it included and it hardly fits the context very well. For our author introduces his list as a series of items serving the relatively trivial end of inventive celebrations: grain would be rather peculiar in those terms, whereas high-quality preserved fish, for example, would suit rather better. For the notion of "whatever is sweet" tends to suggest some form of delicacy, not a bulk staple like grain. Very possibly our author had in mind the nuts brought to Athens from Paphlagonia, "the ornaments of a feast", as we shall see. Finally, of course the list is designed to illustrate the sheer range of places from which different things can be brought together and mixed up: it has been well observed that oligarchs in particular did not tend to approve that kind of mixture of the different for the creation of the new, whether in such matters as these or in language on which the author proceeds to dilate.[14] Accordingly, we may be sure enough that our author disapproves of the use of imperial sea-power to develop a multi-sourced smorgasbord, but it is extremely difficult to suppose that he has in mind imported grain from the Black Sea.

As our author indicates, all this is relatively trivial. The really important feature of the Old Oligarch's analysis is his silence about grain imports not merely in this passage but altogether, and despite his urgent concern to explain the importance of control of the sea to the Athenian democracy. If it were not for the quirkiness (but by no means the stupidity) of the author, it would be tempting to infer from this silence alone that the residents of imperial Athens were, at least, far from concerned about their grain-supply in general or Pontic grain in particular at the time of writing, around 424 BC.

3. At much the same time, Pericles' funeral speech of 430 BC (in the version offered by Thucydides) shows a champion of the imperial democracy making a related point:

> on account of the greatness of the city everything comes in from all the world and for us it is as natural to enjoy the goods of others as it is to enjoy our own local produce. (Thuc. 2.38).

Here too no explicit mention of grain-supply, but no implied exclusion of it either. For Pericles expresses a confidence in imports in all goods because of Athenian imperial power, especially at sea. For him here, the flourishing of imports made Athenian ports and markets all the more attractive to those who wished to trade, since a fine choice of goods and deals were available.[15] However, for the very reason that it embraces all imported goods, the passage tells us nothing specifically about grain from the Black Sea, about which the historical Pericles will have known as much as any Athenian after his expedition there a few years before.

4. A contemporary fragment of the comic poet Hermippus' *Basket-bearers* is sometimes brought to bear on these matters, for (comically) it sets out a range of items which are brought into the city by sea-going Dionysus:

> Now tell me, Muses, dwellers on Olympus,
> which goods Dionysus brought here for men on his black ship,
> from the time when he traded over the wine-dark sea.
> From Cyrene, the silphium-stalk and ox-hide,
> from Hellespont mackerel and every salted fish,
> from Thessaly[16] fine flour and ribs of beef,
> and from Sitalces the itch for the Spartans,
> and from Perdiccas lies by the ship-load.
> And the Syracusans furnish pigs and cheese,
> and the Corcyraeans – may Poseidon destroy
> in their hollow ships, for they are eager for both sides.
> Then these things. From Egypt rigged
> sails and books. And from Syria, further, frankincense.
> And fine Crete provides cypress for the gods,
> and Libya ivory in plenty for sale;
> Rhodes raisins and sweet-dream figs.
> Moreover, from Euboea, pears and apples.
> Slaves from Phrygia and from Arcadia mercenaries.
> Pagasae provides slaves and slave-marks.
> Paphlagonians provide the acorns of Zeus and shining
> almonds. For they are the ornaments of a feast.
> Phoenicia, further, palm-fruit and fine grain-flour.
> Carthage, carpets and cushions of many colours.
> (Hermippus, *apud* Athenaeus, 1.27e-28a = Kassel – Austin, *PCG* fr. 63).

This is not the place to explore the very many questions raised by this passage.[17] The orthodox view that it is a parody of some other text (speech? play?) seems very plausible, for the very reason that the list chimes with the notion that we have already seen in the Old Oligarch and Thucydides' version of Pericles' funeral speech (a speech itself parodied in Plato's *Menexenus* and conceivably at issue here too). It seems clear enough that the democratic ideology of "luxury for the many" was repeatedly asserted in the opening years of the war.[18] It was a powerful strategy in that it foregrounded the material benefits (including food) that might be ascribed to naval empire at the very time when the Peloponnesian War, the consequence of that empire, was bringing material devastation to the land of Attica itself. Imperialism had brought great material benefits too, it is suggested, and shows the way to resist invasion and destruction on land through naval strategy and seaborne goods.

For the present discussion, however, the key observation to be made about Hermippus' list is the minimal presence of the Pontus: we hear only of splendid Paphlagonian nuts. There is no mention of Black Sea grain. True, the Hellespont finds a place, but only for fish, not grain. By contrast, where grain occurs at all it is in the form of special fine flour, imported not from Pontus nor from Egypt, but from Thessaly/Italy[19] (*chondros*) and Phoenicia (*semidalis*).[20] The detail reinforces the general fact, which cannot be stressed too much, that grain might be exported (and indeed imported) anywhere and everywhere in the ancient world where surplus or shortage happened to occur, and/or where special grains were required. The fact that certain places (Egypt stands out, thanks to the Nile floods) tended to enjoy surplus rather than shortage does not affect that key observation. All the more so in view of the fifth point set out above: the Black Sea region could not be relied on for surplus. Meanwhile, in Hermippus' designedly ramshackle journey around the sources of goods brought to Athens, much of the point must surely be the extent of the region covered: the absence of most of the Pontus is therefore all the more striking perhaps, especially within a decade or so of Pericles' expedition there and while the cities of the region were assessed for tribute in 425.[21] Nevertheless, the comic text (and lack of context) is such that we can hardly build much on its contents (or upon absences from it), except to note that here again we have the idea of Athens being the single place to which a rich variety of goods (and mock-goods) are brought together from different places at all points of the compass.

5. Also from the 420s, Aristophanes' *Merchant-ships* looks like a very promising source of information about imports from the Black Sea region. Curiously, however, it does not usually find a place in discussions of the matter, perhaps in part because we have only fragments. The play was most probably staged first in 423 at the Lenaea: the ships of the title (*holkades*) formed the Chorus. We do not know much about the plot, but it seems that the Chorus of ships recounted (indeed, listed) the goods which they were carrying to Athens. Various grains and legumes are listed in one fragment (fr. 428 in Kassel – Austin, *PCG*), while another lists fish (fr. 430), not to mention birds (fr. 434 for a partridge-aviary) and wine (fr. 435). The Black Sea is not mentioned until we reach a fragment mentioning "Mossynoecian barley-cake boards" (fr. 431). The Mossynoeci lived in the south-east corner of the Black Sea, where, for example, Xenophon later encountered them. The play seems to have included mention of a voyage in the Black Sea, though it is completely unclear how important that may have been to the drama as a whole. For another fragment seems to mention a person from Colchian Phasis (fr. 443), on the east coast along from the Mossynoeci, and there was also mention of Euathlus, with an allusion to his supposed Scythianness, such as is found elsewhere in Aristophanes also (fr. 424). Taken together, Mossynoecian boards, a Phasian and Euathlus look like a Pontic trio. But there is not much sign of Pontic grain.

In principle, the Mossynoecian barley-cake boards could suggest grain, but there is no other indication of barley (raw or processed) brought to Athens from there. Conceivably, imported wood might be meant. Rather more likely is an explanation in terms of the particular feature of the Mossynoeci, their towers (their name literally means "tower-dwellers"), so that the point might be especially that the boards are piled high with cake. However, the easiest explanation would seem to be that the action (reported?) simply involved the Mossynoeci. Of course, the fragmentary nature of the play foils analysis, but we may at least note a certain Pontic theme in the extant fragments and the lack of anything clearly about Pontic grain for Athens. Accordingly, the play deserves inclusion in this debate, but does not really take us any further. For the extant fragments tell us quite a lot about cargoes, but hardly anything about their sources. Moreover, these are imagined cargoes which may very well echo the utopianism which pervades both Old Comedy and the ideology of "luxury for the many".

However, it is to be noted that the food supply turns up as a theme of the *Clouds* too, performed later in the same year: Bdelycleon complains about the grain which politicians promise to bestow from Euboea. The scholiast explains that, according to Philochorus, the Athenians had launched a campaign in Euboea in 424/3. Jacoby suggests that Athenian failure at Delium had sparked unrest on Euboea which needed to be quelled. Given the importance of the island for Athens' food supply, the concern with that issue in plays of 423 seems quite understandable. Whatever we make of Pontic grain-imports, there is no doubt at all that grain and other foodstuffs brought from Euboea really were of prime importance for the Athenian food supply.[22] There is every indication that Athenian control of the sea encouraged a certain insouciance about the grain supply and even a self-congratulation about the attraction of traders and goods to Athenian markets. But Euboea was clearly special to Athens: any threat to the supply of food from there was a matter of enormous concern. Accordingly, the loss of Euboea in 411 was to place Athens' food supply under significant further pressure. There must be a strong *a priori* case that from 411 the loss of Euboea, in disrupting Athens' food supply, gave a new significance to grain from elsewhere, including the Black Sea.

6. Also in the 420s, or a fraction earlier, the Athenians passed a set of decrees which conferred privileges on the small city of Methone in the north-west corner of the Aegean. Of prime importance to the issue in hand is a decree passed in 426 in which the Athenians granted the Methonians the right annually to import up to a fixed maximum of grain from Byzantium, a shipload, as it seems (probably 3,000 measures), without loss, e.g. from piratical depredations.[23] The city of Aphytis, in nearby Chalcidice, seems to have enjoyed a similar privilege.[24] However, it is the larger implication of Athenian control of grain-supply that requires particular consideration. All the more so, because the Athenians call upon a group named the *Hellespontophylakes* to ensure the

free passage of the Methonian vessel. The identity of this group is admirably discussed elsewhere in this volume (Gabrielsen). Here it suffices to note that they are evidently Athenian, accountable to review of their period in public office. There is nothing in the decree strictly to suggest that they controlled the grain-market in Byzantium or any other accumulation of grain there, though they may have done so. Certainly, they controlled the passage of shipping, whether that may be regarded as a benign protection against pirates and the like (cf. Hdt. 6.26), a more sinister control of free movement or some element of both. At the same time, we cannot infer much from the requirement that the Methonian ship should advise the *Hellespontophylakes* of their activities: on a benign view of the implied control, these guards could not guarantee to protect the Methonian ship if they did not know it was coming,[25] Accordingly, with all that in view, it is easy enough to see why the privileges decreed for Methone have been taken to show Athenian control of the grain supply from the Black Sea. Insofar as the *Hellespontophylakes* exerted control over all traffic, that was evidently part of their function, though it is most unclear whether they ranged north from the Hellespont. After all, the Old Oligarch wrote at much this time of the advantages of the control of the sea. Athens could give or deny safe conduct through the straits: the privilege was of itself a major weapon in its imperial armoury.

But how much does the decree for Methone tell us about a regular and substantial supply of Pontic grain for Athens? Athenian control of the sea-way off Byzantium was important, clearly, but the decree does not mention grain going to Athens. Nor does it mention grain from the Black Sea. While it is reasonable enough to suppose that Pontic grain was on the market at Byzantium, what of that city's own grain? and Hellespontine grain more generally? Of course, the point of the decree was to award privileges to Methone, especially so as to ensure its support and viability against the mistrusted Perdiccas of Macedon. Tempting as it may be to make further inferences (e.g. about Athens' use of the *Hellespontophylakes* to orchestrate a regular and substantial supply of grain for itself, and from the Black Sea not the Hellespont), those inferences go far beyond the evidence of the decree itself. The most we can say is that the existence of this corps would have made passage safer for shipping (including vessels carrying grain) which was deemed friendly to Athenian interests. Presumably the crew of any vessel taking Pontic grain to Athens will have been pleased to see them. And (for the point deserves repeating) there is no real dispute that some vessels did that in the 5th century.[26]

Yet there is a puzzle inherent in the privileges for Methone: why Byzantium? In principle there is nothing particularly surprising about an economic linkage between the north-west Aegean and the Hellespont, or even the Black Sea itself. The passage of the wine of Mende, for example, into the Pontus illustrates the scope for exchange between the two regions, while Acanthus' and (further east) Maronea's occasional importations of Pontic grain confirm that grain might well form part of that exchange.[27] Yet that does not really

explain the role of Byzantium: there were many other places, even in the Hellespontine region where the Methonians might have obtained their grain in the 420s, especially with Athenian support. Conceivably, Byzantium was an especially reliable source of grain, but that would hardly solve the problem. It remains to understand why Athens' privilege required of the Methonians a voyage as far as Byzantium, at the very end of the Hellespont. While access to grain was immensely important, the demands of the journey might seem to take something away from the privilege.[28] Accordingly, it is tempting to accept the suggestion[29] that the privilege was not so much an innovation as an Athenian statement of support and assistance in the maintenance of a relationship between Methone and Byzantium which had been established already, under circumstances beyond our knowledge. That in turn would account for the emphasis in the inscription upon the role of the *Hellespontophylakes* in ensuring the unobstructed passage of the Methonian carrier, apparently a single vessel able to carry up to the specified limit: the Athenians take no responsibility for any further shipping. The real possibility that this is confirmation, not innovation, serves further to illustrate just how bare is our understanding of these arrangements: they can hardly be used as evidence for regular and substantial Athenian imports from the Pontus at this time.

7. The city of Mytilene's preparations for revolt in 428/7 BC add further to our cluster of evidence in the 420s. The city had set about strengthening its defences and building ships, but it was also waiting for the arrival "of the things it needed from the Pontus, both archers and grain, and the goods it had sent for" (Thuc. 3.2). Not, it seems, from Byzantium. Nor are we told that the *Hellespontophylakes* might have obstructed the imports of this privileged Athenian ally.[30] The island of Lesbos had long-established trading links with the Black Sea region.[31] And in the 4th century it had goods from the Bosporan Kingdom, courtesy of "Leucon and his sons".[32] Preparing for revolt, the Mytilenians evidently expected that their purchases would not raise suspicion. In fact, Thucydides (in Athens for some of this time, at least) makes it very plain that Athens was very slow to accept and respond to the notion that Mytilene was set on revolt, even when it received word from its friends in and around the city: Athens did not want a new enemy on the back of the plague.[33] More difficult to explain is why Mytilene's archers, grain and other supplies from the Pontus were so slow to come: there is no indication that the *Hellespontophylakes* delayed them and no reason to suspect as much, as we have seen. We should perhaps reflect on our assumption that finding goods to bring out of the region and then shipping them was straightforward enough. At the same time, we must also remember that we do not know where in the Pontus Mytilene's mission had gone. And how committed to the cause were these (presumably) private merchants, perhaps not even Mytilenians themselves? Be that as it may, while this case shows the import of Pontic grain into the Aegean (at least under these special circumstances and without the

desired despatch). It tells us nothing about any regular and substantial imports from the Black Sea to Athens. Meanwhile, the case also serves to show that even Mytilene did not rely on grain imported from the Black Sea. For the city might hope to stage a successful revolt, but it could not expect soon to dislodge Athens' *Hellespontophylakes*. Evidently, under normal circumstances, especially without its obligations to Athens perhaps, Mytilene could manage without Pontic grain.

That is the sum of the evidence for Pontic grain to Athens in the 5th century BC, down to the final stage of the Peloponnesian War from about 413, when much changed. While grain sometimes went through or from the Hellespont to Greeks of the Mediterranean, there is scant sign of it going to the city about which we know the most and the city at issue here, *viz.* Athens. It went, we are told, to Aegina, the Peloponnese, the north-west Aegean (Methone, Aphytis) and Lesbos. Meanwhile, many other goods are found going to Athens, including some Paphlagonian nuts, but the grain comes, we are told, from Egypt and Euboea. Of course, full allowance must be made for the adventitiousness of the evidence we have, so that it would be rash indeed to suppose that no Pontic grain found its way to Athens: some surely did, perhaps even a lot. But the fact remains that there is no sign of it in the substantial spread of evidence, while we have a considerable amount of kindred evidence pointing in other directions, like Herodotus' grain-ships heading to Aegina and the Peloponnese.

It follows that if we know nothing of Pontic grain to Athens, we cannot make much of a case for a grain-route in the 5th century, along which that grain was supposedly conveyed: in those terms the notion is at best an unsupported hypothesis, however embedded it may have become in classic studies and in some minds still. However, the notion can be re-contextualised so that it is much more persuasive. First, rather than imagine a "grain-route" we should do better to think in terms of a route by which goods and people in general might travel to and fro between mainland Greece, in particular, and the Hellespont and often no doubt also the Pontus beyond. Not a grain-route then, but simply a route. Secondly, rather than imagine "the route" between these areas, we should surely envisage a far more varied set of journeys and routes. We may compare the 4th century trader who left Piraeus for Chalcidice, where he picked up wine and then took it to the Bosporus, as well as the carriage of Pontic grain to the very coast of Attica and thence off to Chios.[34] After all, the great advantage of the Aegean was its numerous islands and ports: all kinds of routes offered themselves and merchants, we are told, were very responsive to the latest word about where best profits could be made.[35]

From Decelea to the Bosporans: the long 4th century

The establishment of a permanent Spartan presence at Decelea in 413, following Athens' catastrophic losses on Sicily, brought the Athenian grain-supply

under considerable pressure. Thucydides (7.28.1) notes in particular that the importation of grain and other goods from Euboea was obstructed and had to take a long marine route around the coast of Attica. The Athenian ports of the north coast of Attica acquired a new significance, whether as crossing-points from Euboea or simply staging-points for the coastal voyage, allowing potential transhipment by land, south and east of Decelea.

8. It seems more than coincidence that Euripides in ca. 412 BC staged his *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, which culminates in the foundation of the cult of Artemis Tauropolos at Halae Araphenides and takes Iphigenia also to Brauron. The central conceit of the play makes a connection between the Tauri of the Crimea and the north coast of Attica, especially coastal Halae and its crossing from southern Euboea. The idea that Euripides invented the tradition in this play, apparently inspired by the writings of Herodotus, does not bear even casual examination. For the details of the Taurian cult in the play are very different from those mentioned by Herodotus, as is much else, while the links we have observed between Athens and the Black Sea region (not least the expedition of Pericles) make the notion of Euripides' reliance on Herodotus' (different) description even more unlikely. Meanwhile, it is less clear whether Euripides invented the story, for the cult title Tauropolos could be explained as well (indeed, better) in other ways. And yet since the cult seems to have been active and important to Athens since about the beginning of the 5th century and since there is no good reason to think the Athenians ignorant of the Taurians (rather the contrary) from that date, it seems unwise to assert that Euripides invented the link. Indeed, it remains unclear also how such an invention could have been made without some kind of roots in the established myth behind the ritual at Halae.[36]

However, the issue of invention is less important here than the fact of use. It is tempting to associate the myth of the play not only with the new prominence of Halae, but also with a new concern with the north coast of the Black Sea. In that context it is worth observing the implicit optimism of the play's conclusion. The Taurians show themselves well-ordered under a king with strong (albeit rather misguided) moral and religious scruples. Moreover, Euripides' Taurians seem to have no ill-will towards Greeks as such. Rather they have sacrificed Greeks through a misunderstanding of the desires of their goddess. Here is no sign that the practice remains once the goddess' image (with her priestess) has left.

Are we to take the play as speaking to the new concern at Athens with imports from the Black Sea (as well as universalizing issues, such as friendship and forms of redemption)? One of the terrors of the region (the Taurians) are shown to be manageable at least, and indeed things of the mythical past. It is true that the Taurians did not export grain, but their immediate neighbour, the city of Chersonesus, presided over lands whose extent at this period is unclear but which could certainly produce a good crop of grain when pre-

cipitation was favourable. For Herodotus at least, this was the land of the Taurians (4.99-100). Moreover, although we hear nothing of Athenian grain imports from Chersonesus, it is worth observing the prominence of men of Heraclea Pontica among the wealthy foreigners active in Athens in the late 5th century: the city of Chersonesus was the northern settlement of Heraclea, with which it seems to have maintained close ties. While we depend on inference alone, there is some reason to suspect that the grain of Chersonesus may have found its way to Athens after 413, if not before.[37]

After all, various cities of the Black Sea coast were members of the Athenian Empire as a result of Pericles' Pontic expedition. Furthermore, the Athenians had sent settlers to Sinope and possibly further afield to Amisus also: the links between Sinope and the northern coast of the Black Sea were already well established in the 5th century BC, for inscriptions indicate Sinopian traders at Olbia and in the Bosporan Kingdom in particular.[38] Moreover, it is probable enough that Athens played some part in the emergence of the Spartocid dynasty in the Bosporan Kingdom in the 430s. Indeed, the Taurians were not only closely relevant to Chersonesus: they were also deeply engaged with the Bosporan Kingdom, centred immediately to the east of their lands.[39]

9. Certainly a 5th century Spartocid king, Satyrus, was said (albeit some decades later) to have a history of generosity towards Athens, specifically by permitting the loading of cargoes of grain for export when other merchants were sent away with their ships empty because the Bosporus itself was suffering a shortage.[40] Satyrus clearly had subjects based in Athens at least by the late 390s BC, when Isocrates' *Trapeziticus* was delivered there. An indication of Satyrus' contacts is provided by the case of Mantitheus, a young cavalry-commander, who based his defence against charges of involvement with the Thirty on his claim to have been absent from Athens at the time in the Bosporus. The claim must have been plausible enough, encouraging the belief that Satyrus' favours for Athens occurred before the end of the Peloponnesian War.[41] However, there is an unfortunate ambiguity in the statement of the *Trapeziticus*: we might have expected the argument to be that Satyrus showed favour to those bringing grain to Athens, but that is not the claim. Instead we are told that he showed favour to Athenian merchants, who of course should have brought grain to their city but may not have done so, while other merchants were denied the opportunity to ship grain to Athens or elsewhere, it is said. In other words, Satyrus' favour was bestowed on certain Athenians and only through them upon Athens as a city. However, be that as it may, the claims of Mantitheus and those in the so-called *Trapeziticus* are more than enough to show that the modern notion that Satyrus fell out with Athens is without foundation.[42] Nor is there any reason to suppose that a significant development in that relationship occurred at the very end of his reign, as has also been suggested.[43] It was very much in the interests of Athens and the Bosporans alike to find a way of cooperating in the Black Sea region in the

aftermath of Pericles' expedition when, in addition to Athenian settlers on the south coast, states of the north coast (Olbia and Nymphaeum happen to be best-attested) are known to have belonged to the Athenian Empire.[44]

10. It is striking that much of the war after 413 BC was fought out around the Hellespont. Of course, there were various reasons for that, but it can hardly have been irrelevant that control of these waters meant control of Pontic exchange with the Aegean, including Athens and (as we saw with Herodotus) also the Peloponnese amongst other states and regions. It was the final Spartan victory there, at Aegospotami opposite Lampsacus, which ensured Athenian defeat by destroying Athens' navy.

However, while Pontic grain seems to have become more important to Athens after 413 BC, it is very easy to overstate its significance: the loss of Pontic grain has been claimed as decisive in Athens' surrender in 404 and again in her capitulation to the Peace of Antalcidas in 387,[45] but that is rather more than may be said with any confidence. For the defeat at Aegospotami did not of itself deprive Athens of imported food. Neither did the Spartans' subsequent intervention at Chalcedon and Byzantium, where the Athenians had a garrison (*Hellespontophylakes*?), though it is easy to think as much.[46] In fact, Xenophon, who provides our narrative is explicit that the Spartans then came and blocked off access to Piraeus to exclude shipping.[47] The point is more than a quibble, for Xenophon's account serves to illustrate the fact that Athens could receive supplies from a range of sources. Of course, Spartan control of the Hellespont was a major blow because it forestalled Pontic supplies and of course Hellespontine supplies to boot, but it was the blockade of Piraeus in addition that was deadly to Athens' supply-lines.

11. It is in that context that we must understand the Spartan plan to seize the neck of the Hellespont at Byzantium and Chalcedon, said by Xenophon to have been hatched by King Agis at Decelea in 410 BC.[48] Even if we accept the historicity of Agis' reported rumination, the attempt was rather half-hearted. For the resourceful Clearchus was sent to do the job with minimal forces: he had only fifteen slow troop-ships, of which three were soon sunk and the rest put to flight by the nine Athenian vessels which guarded the passage of shipping through the straits (again, *Hellespontophylakes*?). The whole affair looks very much less than a determined effort to seize victory by closing off Pontic supply-lines to Athens. The point rather in Xenophon's account is to draw the contrast between the blockade by land, managed by Agis at Decelea, and the remaining access to Athens for supplies coming by sea. That allows Xenophon to link Clearchus' adventure to his narrative. The fact remained that even if the Hellespont had been closed off, supplies could still have come in from the rest of the Mediterranean world. In the event, the aftermath of Aegospotami showed that: only a blockade of Athens' ports could prevent imports.[49]

12. So too in 387 BC, when the Spartan control of imports from Pontus (which were brought in for Sparta's allies) was certainly an important factor in putting pressure upon the Athenians, but the greater pressure came closer at hand, from depredations off Aegina.[50] Of course, both developments were aspects of the same fundamental difficulty for Athens: the city needed grain (and no doubt other goods), but did not have the control of the sea (even close to Attica) which was needed to satisfy that need. The arrangements which had worked so well through the 5th century had become much more difficult to sustain after 413 and again after 404 BC: that provides some context for the evident fractures also in the taxation-procedures by which the wealthy were made to finance and lead the fleet, which are observable from 411 onwards. It was not unattractive perhaps to support a fleet which ruled the waves, and doubtless gave all kinds of dubious financial benefits as well as prestige, but to be asked to support a fleet that was at risk and at times impotent was a much less appealing prospect.[51] Meanwhile, both Spartan blockades (in 405/4 and 387/6) serve to illustrate not only the import of grain into the Aegean and on to Athens, amongst other places, but also – and the point is easily overlooked – the fact that Athens could look elsewhere also for grain, so that Athenian imports (and the revenues of the Piraeus more generally) could only be stopped by pressure applied close to Attica itself. It seems to follow that, while Athens would welcome Pontic grain, the city could manage (at least when it had to) without it. When Xenophon relates the causes of Athenian capitulation in 387 BC, he certainly mentions Antalcidas' control of Pontic grain, but only as part (albeit certainly a noteworthy part, together with depredations from Aegina) of a larger problem for Athens, which is the centre of his explanation, namely the fact that Antalcidas had amassed an enormous fleet which gave him control of the sea in general (Xen. *Hell*. 5.1.28-29).

13. Some fifty years later, after Chaeronea, the problem of ensuring grain supply was again grave for Athens: not only was the naval power of the city emasculated, but there followed years which seem to have entailed more widespread severe crisis than yet known.[52] The Athenian response, however, is helpful for the modern student of the grain supply, for the Athenians adopted the habit of inscribing honours awarded to foreign traders who brought grain to them, thereby providing also some information on the sources of that grain. Arguably the earliest inscription of this sort records honours for a man of Salamis on Cyprus who had shipped grain to Athens from Egypt.[53]

But where is Pontic grain in these records? In the Hellespont a man of Cyzicus (probably) helped with the shipment of grain, possibly from Asia.[54] In the Black Sea itself, we find Heracleote traders being honoured, perhaps having brought Pontic grain (from Chersonesus?).[55] Certainly traders from Sinope brought grain.[56] And from the Bosporus itself we have one fragmentary text bestowing honours for services by leading Bosporans (officials of the regime, perhaps, but hardly ruling Spartocids) rendered to those arriving in

the Bosporus, that is, men presumably engaged usually in the export of grain from there to Athens.[57] The extant inscriptions are hardly a full record, nor a completely clear one on the provenance of goods, but they seem to show Pontic grain (possibly from various parts of the region) as one resource among others. It is salutary to recall Xenophon's sketch of grain-merchants, the nearest we have to a general account of the activities of such men:

> You are saying, Ischomachus, that your father is really by nature a lover of farming no less than merchants are lovers of grain. For merchants on account of their excessive love for grain set sail for it to wherever they hear that most is available, crossing the Aegean, the Euxine and the Sicilian sea. Then, having taken as much as they can, they carry it across the sea, even placing it in the ship in which they themselves are sailing. And when they need money, they tend not to unload the grain where they happen to be, but take it and exchange it wherever they hear that it is especially valued and people think the most of it. Your father seems to be a lover of farming in that kind of way. (Xen. *Oec.* 20.27-28).

The completion of the work resists close dating, but may reasonably be placed a decade or so before the middle of the 4th century, if not a little earlier still, that is roughly at the supposed height of Athenian grain imports from the Black Sea.[58] The setting is Athenian and the dramatic date of the dialogue must be before the death of Socrates in 399 BC, though that is hardly significant. The remarks which Xenophon puts in Socrates' mouth on the behaviour of grain-merchants seem to be cast in such a way as to embrace their type in the Greek world in general, even if we suppose that Athens is to the forefront, and across a broad expanse of time. Be that as it may, the passage seems entirely to bear out the main lines of the discussion here. The Black Sea occurs as one area from which grain may be brought, but only one among several (plus Egypt and Cyrene, unless these are included with the Aegean here). Much of the point of the passage, in fact, seems to be that grain-merchants search about all over the Greek world, wherever the greatest supply (and therefore lowest buying-price) and greatest demand (and therefore highest selling-price) may take them. That is a strong reason to distrust any notion of fixed sources and outlets (whether the Pontus and Athens or any others), even though we may accept that certain places tended to function as one or the other. Xenophon's Socrates is quite explicit that the grain-merchant responds to what he happens to hear about supply and demand: his remarks only make sense in a world where grain-merchants were understood to vary their destinations for purchase and sale in response to reported market-conditions. And why should they not?

Further, it is worth noting that Xenophon is quite explicit that these are merchants engaged in trading *grain*. The specific identification of the cargo

demands attention: he could have made much the same observation in the more general terms of merchants and cargoes, or he could have chosen another cargo (slaves perhaps, or wine). Conceivably, one might suppose that he chose grain-merchants because grain was so important an item of trade, but that will hardly suffice. The reason for his choice is rather more coherent. All scholars seem now to accept that the supply of grain (and therefore also the demand for grain) was particularly variable from year to year and place to place as crops flourished or failed from city to city and region to region. Xenophon has chosen the grain-merchants specifically because they had to be especially aware of and responsive to reported glut and shortage: they followed the former to buy and the latter to sell. It was unwise for the grain-merchant always or even usually to expect to buy at the best price by going to the same source, or to sell at the best price by choosing the same regular market. In that sense, Xenophon's Socrates here illustrates very nicely the variability of grain-production in the Greek world, including in the Black Sea, a place to be sought out in some years but not in others, very much as Polybius later says.

Demosthenes and the Bosporans

There is no need here to review all the evidence for Pontic grain reaching Athens in the 4th century. From the end of the Peloponnesian War or so, it is generally agreed that substantial amounts of grain came from the Black Sea region into the port of Piraeus.[59] Not that we can or should suppose that this was a steady flow: political and economic circumstances certainly disrupted the import of grain from the region from time to time. Accordingly, the issue for the 4th century is the quantity of supply, especially with regard to Bosporan grain imported to Athens.

Central to that issue is the rhetoric of Demosthenes. His evidence bears on the despatch of grain to Athens by the Bosporan kings, for whom we also have important epigraphic evidence. However, he is by no means a disinterested observer or reporter. First, it is to be stressed that he maintained a close personal link with the Bosporan rulers. The jibes of his detractors indicate that he had inherited a significant family link with the Spartocid dynasty, established by his grandfather Gylon, who seems (after the manner of Mantitheus, perhaps) to have found a place of refuge in the Bosporan Kingdom around the end of the Peloponnesian War. He had held a position of major responsibility, possibly by virtue of his military skills, and had taken a wife who may even have belonged to the Spartocid dynasty herself. Demosthenes' detractor Aeschines tried absurdly to characterise him as a Scythian, but he might reasonably have argued that Demosthenes was part Bosporan. Furthermore, Demosthenes evidently deployed his Bosporan links to the benefit of his political power and influence at Athens. Another detractor claimed that Demosthenes received payments from the Bosporans in the form of shipped

grain: there may be some substance to the charge. In any event, Demosthenes' alignment with Bosporan interests was very strong and very clear. That provides an important context against which Demosthenes' statements with regard to the Bosporans must be understood.[60]

Meanwhile, we must be clear that we have in this cluster of evidence not so much a Black Sea phenomenon as a Bosporan one. Demosthenes and the epigraphic evidence show the extended relationship between Athens and the Bosporans, not Athens and the Black Sea as a whole. The distinction may be of some importance in the interpretation of Demosthenes' rhetoric. At the same time, it is clear enough that the Bosporans sought to use their ability to export grain to further their own ends. For it is easy to forget that the Bosporans had an agenda of their own, which included not only diplomatic friendship and honours for their own sake, but also the material benefits to be gained by connections with other states. Athens, in particular, had naval experts and expertise which could be of immense use to the Bosporans, whose realm was located around sea and waterways. Rather as Gelon's Syracuse in the earlier 5th century, so the Bosporans too tried to use their grain to further imperial ends (Hdt. 7.158). When the Bosporus itself suffered its own problems of supply, whether from drought or marauding neighbours, there remained even so the possibility of grain-export, for the rulers might well decide that the needs of their subjects might be subordinated to the larger imperial game in which grain-export was a major strategy. We have already noted the claim in Isocrates' *Trapeziticus* that the Bosporans allowed Athenians to export grain when it was short and other carriers were turned away.

15. It is clear from Athens' public honours for the Bosporans that they did supply Athens with grain and that they provided privileges for Athens' merchants.[61] However, the notion of a regular and substantial supply of Pontic grain to Athens rests not on these honours, but on a section of Demosthenes' speech *Against Leptines*. That is a speech designed to stop a measure to increase the pool of men who could be required to provide liturgies, notably by revoking most exemptions bestowed in the past. Demosthenes seeks to make his case against the measure by bringing (one might say, dragging) in the Bosporans. His claim is that the new measure would sour relations with the Bosporans by making them liable for liturgies. That in turn, he argues, would violate the reciprocity demanded by Bosporan beneficence. Understandably, Demosthenes lost and the measure was enacted, with no discernible impact on the Bosporans. For of course there was never any intention or significant prospect that they would have been expected to provide liturgies in Athens in the first place. Nor did they, as far as we know, despite being honoured with citizenship.[62] In short, Demosthenes' use of the Bosporans is outrageously misleading even by the slippery standards of Athenian rhetoric. Perhaps he was too eager to show himself (both to Athenians and to the Bosporans themselves) as the champion of Bosporan interests.

It is in the course of that argument that Demosthenes expands upon Athenian grain-imports from the Bosporus. Of course, the fact that his whole case is fundamentally deceptive (and duly failed) does not in itself mean that his statements on the import of grain are similarly inaccurate. However, those statements are at least to be approached with caution. Clearly, Demosthenes imagined that his claims would be plausible and convincing for his Athenian audience, but the failure of his case must place that judgment in some doubt. The key portion of *Against Leptines* must be quoted:

> For by birth Leucon is a foreigner, while by your enactment he is a citizen. But under this law he cannot have tax-exemption on either ground. And yet while other benefactors have proved useful at a particular time, he – if you examine the matter – will be shown to have done well by you continually, and in a matter where this city has an especial need. For you must realise that of all peoples we make the most use of imported grain. However, the grain coming in from the Pontus corresponds to all that reaches us from other markets. Understandably: for this occurs not only because that place has a very great deal of grain, but because Leucon, its master, has given tax-exemption to those bringing grain to Athens, and proclaims that those sailing to you load their ships first. For Leucon, having tax-exemption for himself and his sons, has given it to all of you. Consider how much this is. He takes one-thirtieth in tax from those exporting grain from him. However, about 400,000 measures from him are brought here. And one can see that from the record of the grain-wardens (*sitophylakes*).[63] So from the first 300,000 measures he gives you 10,000 free, and from the residual 100,000 about 30,000. Moreover, so far is he from depriving our city of this gift that, having established a market at Theodosia, which sailors say is as good as the market of the Bosporus, he has given you tax-exemption there too. I shall not mention the many other benefactions I could list which this man – himself and his offspring – has conferred upon you. Only that the year before last, when all mankind was suffering from grain-shortage, he sent you not merely sufficient grain but so much that you had a surplus worth fifteen silver talents, which Callisthenes administered. (Dem. 20.30-33).

Demosthenes combines morality and utility. His purpose here is to show how Leucon deserves better treatment from Athens than would follow (as he claims) from the legislation of Leptines, and also to warn of the loss of Athenian privileges in the Bosporus which would result from the loss of Bosporan privileges in Athens, a point which he proceeds to develop explicitly. However, if we overlook the specious claim that the Bosporans would certainly

be affected by Leptines' legislation, Demosthenes' figures look very impressive. Particularly so, because he suggests that the record of the *sitophylakes* bears them out.[64] Accordingly, they continue often to be taken as the basis for discussion not only of imports from the Bosporus but of Athens' imports *in toto*.[65] However, closer consideration raises some serious questions.

Having made the most of Athens' use of imported grain,[66] Demosthenes seeks to give the impression that the figure of 400,000 measures is a recurrent annual amount supplied from the Bosporan Kingdom. However, he does not actually say so: his decision not to do so is an immediate concern.[67] Moreover, it is hard to accept that there was a recurrent amount. We have seen that the Bosporus too could suffer grain-shortage: the very fact that loading first was a significant privilege indicates that the supply might well not meet the demand for export.[68] He wisely omits any mention of other Greek states which may have had similar favours from the Bosporans too.[69] At the same time, Demosthenes himself proceeds to suggest that a particularly large amount was brought to Athens two years earlier, and at a time of general shortage. How much was that? Is this large amount in fact the source of the figure of 400,000 measures which Demosthenes gives and claims to be recorded by the *sitophylakes*? Does that explain why he avoids the simple statement that this was a recurrent annual amount, as he prefers only to imply? Meanwhile, what is meant by the term "Pontus" here? It contains an inherent ambiguity which Demosthenes may be trying to exploit, since it can denote the Bosporan Kingdom alone or the Black Sea region as a whole. Clearly he indicates that the 400,000 comes from Leucon, who is claimed to be master of Pontus. And it seems to be Pontus that occurs in the record of the *sitophylakes*. But it is entirely possible that the Pontus of the official record is the Black Sea as a whole, not the Bosporan Kingdom. And while Leucon could indeed claim to be the dominant individual in the Black Sea as a whole, he was ruler only of a portion (albeit a significant portion) of the region. Of course, that would make Demosthenes' calculations of remitted tax entirely bogus, but that too is not impossible. In short, there is nothing in Demosthenes' specific statements inconsistent with a reality wherein two years earlier the Bosporan Kingdom (or perhaps the Black Sea region as a whole) had sent 400,000 measures of grain to Athens at a time when there was a general shortage. In that year, at least, the amount from the Bosporus (or the region as a whole) amounted to as much as the other sources put together. That was likely enough in a time of general shortage in the Mediterranean. We may compare Cyrene, for which we have an inscription specifying the amounts of grain distributed to various Greek cities (including 100,000 measures to Athens) at a time of shortage in the 4th century, apparently ca. 330 BC.[70] As we saw with the events related in the *Trapeziticus*, the ability to bestow grain in time of shortage was still more effective than the provision of large quantities under more normal circumstances.

At the same time, there is quite a different sort of reason to have doubts about the suggestions of Demosthenes. The most plausible assessment of

potential Bosporan grain-production gives every reason to doubt whether the region had the productive capacity regularly to export so much grain.[71] It is worth observing that Strabo states that the Bosporan Kingdom (together with the rest of the Crimea it seems) paid a regular tribute of 180,000 measures of grain (plus 200 silver talents) to Mithridates VI, that is less than half the amount which the Bosporans are imagined to have supplied to Athens alone (Strab. 7.4.6). As ever, Strabo is affected by two very different kinds of knowledge. On the one hand, there is the knowledge of broadly contemporary informants, among which may be included his family, highly-placed in Mithridates' regime. On the other, a motley literary tradition (dominated by his beloved Homer), which offered information of very variable quality. Strabo can be expected to know about the goods and sums paid to Mithridates. However, his wider remarks about grain-production and the like are to be treated with substantial caution. That is important if we are to consider his report that "they say that Leucon sent from Theodosia to the Athenians 2,100,000 measures of grain" (Strab. 7.4.6). We do not know who "they" may be, but, although the figure is beguilingly precise, the key observation here must be that Strabo maintains a distance from the information: he does not claim to know that this was a fact. At the same time, the figure is not very helpful even if taken at face value, for (although translators and interpreters tend to imagine a one-off and even free despatch) Strabo does not explain the period or circumstances in which this grain was sent, if sent it was.

Meanwhile, it remains to explain why the Bosporan rulers might have shown such remarkable generosity towards the Athenians. For if we were to accept Demosthenes' suggestions as he would wish, we should have to suppose that the Bosporans in effect gave some 13,000 measures of grain to Athens each year for much of the 4th century. How might we account for such generosity? What did the Bosporans get in return? Honours, certainly, whether in status and privileges or in statues, crowns and inscriptions visible at Athens and Piraeus, as well as in the Bosporus itself and at Hieron on the threshold of the Black Sea (e.g. Dem. 20.35-36). Very possibly the distant Bosporans valued their links with the historical heartland of Greek culture.[72] In addition, there were more solid benefits too. The *Trapeziticus* shows the Bosporan king able to exert significant political influence at Athens even towards the beginning of the 4th century, with evident control over a resident community of Bosporans there (Isocr. 17.5). There was also a financial benefit, for Bosporan grain was exported at a price. The Athenian connection gave the Bosporans an important market, useful too in times of glut. In that context it may be that the Athenian grant of *ateleia* was especially valuable for the Bosporans. Further, a decree of 346 BC honouring Leucon's sons,[73] almost a decade after the *Against Leptines*, enjoins the *proedroi* to see to it that monies owed to the Bosporans are paid, presumably by the Athenian state. It would be good to know how those debts were incurred and whether grain was involved.[74] The same inscription also makes arrangements for the despatch of naval officers

to the Bosporus, evidently skilled Athenians.[75] Leucon's sons had asked for them, we are told, presumably to strengthen and develop the Bosporan navy.[76] Taken together these were significant reciprocation for Bosporan favours, but, even so, we may still wonder whether the Bosporan rulers would have needed or desired to give a recurrent gift of 13,000 measures of grain, in addition (as Demosthenes would have us believe) to sporadic large bestowals of grain. After all, the one-off supply of grain (at a price or free?) to feed Athens and enable the Athenians to realise fifteen talents profit in addition to its needs, was surely enough in itself to win privileges (including *ateleia*) and bring influence and reciprocal benefits from Athens. And from time to time one-off benefactions might be repeated, even into the 3rd century.[77]

Inscribed honours for the Spartocids show the Bosporan favours in a rather different light than do the suggestions of Demosthenes, although they do not flatly contradict what Demosthenes says. In 346 BC the sons of Leucon are praised "because they are good men and declare to the demos of the Athenians that they will take care of the despatch of grain as their father used to do and will supply with enthusiasm whatever the demos may require". The inscription proceeds to announce for Leucon's sons the privileges which the Athenians had previously bestowed upon their father Leucon and grandfather Satyrus,[78] since they had announced that the Athenians would retain the privileges awarded by Satyrus and Leucon. Tax-exemption was certainly among those privileges: the reciprocity is also explicit, as observed by Demosthenes. However, there is a significant difference. Of course, the language of honorary inscriptions has its own kind of rhetoric. Yet these honours lay a strong emphasis not on matters of taxation, but on market-access and Bosporan favour in the obtaining of goods and services for Athens. That is a useful corrective to Demosthenes, for it shows that his focus on tax-exemption may have suited the direction of his argument against Leptines' legislation on the matter, but is very misleading for our understanding of Athens' dealings with the Bosporans over grain. In fact, we find that the *Trapeziticus* is nearer to the mark: the key benefit bestowed on Athens by the Bosporans was not so much tax-benefits (reciprocal anyway) as the facilitation of the acquisition of goods (among which grain is singled out) and the promise of unspecified services. Meanwhile, although the absence may be explicable, it is to be noted that there is no indication in the inscribed honours of any specific or usual amount of grain. There is, however, some implication that the despatch of grain was regular enough.

Conclusions

Through the 5th century and probably earlier grain and other goods (slaves, hides and so on) reached Athens from the Black Sea region. Grain-merchants had a reputation for particular enterprise and flexibility, so that we need have no doubts on the matter, even without the occasional mention of Pontic grain

coming into the Aegean. From the 430s BC Pericles' Pontic expedition and the Peloponnesian War may have given Black Sea grain a larger significance, but there is no sign of Athens' regular and substantial use of it, let alone concern about it, until some slight indications late in the war. The Sicilian disaster (doubtless with its own consequences for grain from that region), the hostile garrisoning of Decelea and the loss of Euboea in 411 were a series of blows which presumably made Pontic grain more important to Athens than it had been earlier. However, even that is a large inference. For our sources do not say as much. And the Spartan failure to launch a significant attempt at control of the Hellespont in these years encourages the thought that grain from the north-east was not considered crucial to Athens even then.

Meanwhile, we should not suppose that all initiatives came from Athens. There is every sign that the Bosporan Kingdom played a substantial role in making its grain available in the Aegean, whether to Athens or to others: we may reasonably wonder how far the very initiative came from the Bosporans. At the same time, we can only guess at the level of Bosporan (or other Pontic) harvests in the closing decades of the 5th century: were these regions awash with grain or in shortage? Did production fluctuate violently, moderately or not at all? To know that would be of some help in assessing the development of grain-exports from the region to Athens, but we do not have such knowledge. It is clear enough, at least, that through the later 5th and 4th centuries, the Bosporan rulers exploited their ability to supply grain within the larger context of a well-founded and long-term relationship with Athens, besides their relationships with other states too (notably with Mytilene, with whom a treaty was renewed on the very same day as honours were decreed for the Bosporans in 346 BC).[79] The Bosporans had not only the fertile-but-dry lands of the eastern Crimea, but also the control of a range of other sub-regions, among which the Taman peninsula and lower reaches of the Kuban (Hypanis) were of particular importance to grain-production.[80] In principle, crop-failure in the Aegean was quite compatible with over-production in the Bosporan Kingdom (and vice versa, it should be noted), so that the Bosporans could have a special angle on Aegean markets. Accordingly, the 4th century supply of Pontic grain was driven not only by Athenian demand and desire, but also by the power-politics and economic advantages of the Bosporan rulers, who would continue to use their grain in foreign relations well into the Roman period, both within the Black Sea region and elsewhere.[81]

However, while all that is clear enough, there is reason to doubt the figures presented by Demosthenes. It would be rash to suppose that, from *Against Leptines* or from Strabon, we have much idea about any annual amount of grain usually shipped from the Bosporan Kingdom to Athens in the 4th century. Of course, that is not to doubt that a substantial amount of grain did in fact come to Athens from the Bosporus at that time, or that (at least for more years than not in the middle of the 4th century) there was a regularity about this source of supply. But we must conclude that while there is no reason at

all to imagine regular and substantial Athenian grain-imports from the Black Sea in the 5th century, even in the 4th century the variation in grain-supply (and probably also in the direction of supply) between the Black Sea and Athens may well have been considerable. The main forces entailed in that supply were much more than Athens' need to feed its population: they were also issues of grain-price (for Athens, Bosporans and merchants alike) and market-demand in the broadest sense (far beyond the needs of basic sustenance) as well as the political strategies of Athenians (not least Demosthenes himself) and the rulers of the Bosporus, whose beneficence – as we have seen – was very far from disinterested.

Notes

* This paper has benefited greatly from discussion with colleagues at the colloquium from which this volume arose. I am especially grateful to Alfonso Moreno for constructive and courteous disagreements and to Vincent Gabrielsen for enlightening me on nautical matters. I have also gained much from epigraphical conversations in Athens with David Blackman and Stephen Lambert. All responsibility is, as usual, my own.

1 Garnsey 1988; cf. 1985; Scheidel, 1998. For recent critique of Garnsey's case, see especially Keen 2000 and the literature he cites. Inferred statistics (or "statistics") are central to many discussions (including those of Garnsey; cf. Scheidel 1998 and the counter-case of Whitby 1998). The divergences are such that they allow scant confidence, in whole or in part. Meanwhile, claims about the importance of grain in the economy of the North Black Sea are becoming much more restricted and cautious in the specialist literature: Shcheglov 1987 and 1990; Gavriljuk 1999 and 2003.

2 Note Hdt. 6.26, where grain-cargoes are presumably included; Keen 2000, 66, though the notion of significant imported grain to Colchis (where the staple was millet, but wheat was also grown) is fantasy, while grain-trade on the west coast of the Black Sea was a complex affair, entailing exports as well as imports. Lead letters show us trade in action in the north-west Black Sea around the late sixth century BC, though it is quite unclear where the traders came from: they might be very local. See, conveniently, Wilson 1997-1998 and the literature he cites. On Archaic grain-trade, see Bravo 1983, who properly includes the Black Sea, especially the region of Olbia.

3 See, for example, Harris 2002, 75-76 for the recurrent impacts of changes in supply upon the fluctuating grain-price in fourth century Athens.

4 Bresson 2000, 133-134 (and the literature he cites) makes a good case that they and their associates may well have recorded the provenance of imported grain (or at least the provenance stated by the merchant), but his comparisons also show that in some states they seem not to have recorded provenance.

5 The idea of Sestos as the "meal-table" of the Piraeus need not be interpreted only in terms of Pontic grain, as de Ste. Croix 1972, 48 seems to suggest.

6 Garnsey 1988.

7 de Ste. Croix 1972, especially 46-49 has been especially influential. However, while insisting that the "sea-route" along which Black Sea grain travelled was "Athens' principal lifeline, and throughout most of the 5th and 4th centuries she made certain that the passage across the Aegean would be secure, by holding

Imbros, Lemnos and Scyros" (p. 48), he properly notes the lack of fifth century evidence.

8 Stroud 1998 brings to bear further evidence on grain-production on these islands; cf. Rosivach 2000, 39, and Keen 2000, 67-68 (albeit supposing a grain-route). See further Moreno 2003, who stresses their production and suggests that the arrangement now known for these islands should be supposed also elsewhere, notably on Euboea. The attempt to bring in the "grain-route", even so, is untenable: see Moreno 2003, 97, n. 7 *contra* Harris 1999, who over-states the geographical dominance of these islands for shipping in the Aegean. On Lemnos, see also Scheidel 1998, 196. On the general underestimate of island economies, see Brun 1993.

9 de Ste. Croix 1972, 49, ignoring conflicts in and around the Hellespont before 405. He must explain why the revolt of Byzantium in 440 does not appear in our sources as a matter of the utmost importance, as it should be on his view. And what of Athenian loss of control in the region between the Sicilian disaster and the Battle of Cyzicus in 410? On orators, see Keen 2000, ignoring comedy.

10 Garnsey 1988, 129 rightly doubts that grain caused Pericles' expedition though this was not the last Athenian fleet in the Pontus: see Braund 2005b.

11 Plut. *Per*. 37.4 (*FGrH* 328: Philochoros F119). Of course, the grain of Egypt was a large issue in Plutarch's day, but Black Sea grain too was topical enough. On the Psammetichus gift, see Garnsey 1988, 124-127 for excellent discussion.

12 Figueira 1981, 43-46.

13 *SEG* 36.718: this is Helice in the bay of Corinth. Cf. Kuznecov 2000, 108-109 on Corinthian pottery in the region. Note also *CIRB* 37, recording fourth-century Arcadian honours for Leucon.

14 Kalinka 1913, especially 198 on various Pontic products.

15 Therein of course lies much of the pain in Athenian measures against Megara. The Athenians' interest in stopping Sicilian grain export to the Peloponnese in 427 seems not to have entailed its diversion to Athens, confirming Athenian confidence in supply even at the time when much of Attica was being ravaged (Thuc. 3.115, though see Keen 2000, 65, arguing that any supply-source was worth controlling).

16 Or perhaps Italy: Gilula 2000, 85, n. 14.

17 See Gilula 2000, with good bibliography.

18 On that ideology, Braund 1994.

19 See n. 16.

20 On *semidalis* in particular, see Aristophanes, fr. 428 in Kassel & Austin 2001 with commentary.

21 Braund 2005b.

22 *FGrH* 328: Philochoros F130; cf. Ar. *Vesp.* 715-718.

23 *IG* I^3, 61. For average cargo-capacity as 3,000 measures per ship and the various calculations that may follow, see Bresson 2000, 278, n. 66 and the debate he cites. The Methone decree (taken literally, at least) envisages a single vessel: the specified number of measures has only survived in part and could easily be 3,000. Methone was not a large community: such a quantity would be significant for it. On depredations of passing shipping by cities, see de Ste. Croix 1972, especially 47; cf. 314.

24 *IG* I^3, 58. There is no explicit statement of tax-exemption, as assumed by Pébarthe 2000, 62-63.

25 *Pace* Pébarthe 2000, 63.

26 *IG* I^3, 61-62, with Garnsey 1988, 120-123 on the range of issues entailed, including these cities' special situations in the early 420s.
27 [Dem.] 50.20-21 (Maronea); Dem. 36.36 (Acanthus, allegedly). For Mende's wine, see Isager and Hansen 1975, 35 on [Dem.] 35.10-13.
28 On the use of more local supply-sources, compare Bresson 2000, 279-281.
29 Gallant 1991, 181-182, who seems to envisage a pre-existing arrangement.
30 Garnsey 1988, 121 seems to imagine the Mytilenians being anxious about the intervention of the *Hellespontophylakes*; Thucydides gives no hint of that specific concern, though they were doubtless anxious to have the goods.
31 The Lesbian pottery that is found in the archaic Black Sea region is at least consonant with that assumption, if it does not quite demonstrate its truth. However, we should refrain from the notion of a "Mytilenian monopoly" in passage through the Hellespont at any date, *pace* Keen 2000, 64 and the works he cites. Also Bresson 2000, 106.
32 Tod, *GHI* II, 163 (not in Rhodes & Osborne (eds.) 2003): the fragmentary text is very problematic.
33 Thuc. 3.2: no word about the *Hellespontophylakes*, apparently: their absence from this whole account (and from the literary tradition in general) strongly encourages the view that their activities were of minimal importance from a viewpoint in Athens, though appointments and taxes must have been recorded.
34 [Dem.] 35.10-13 and 51-52 with Isager and Hansen 1975, 172.
35 See below on the grain-merchants of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*.
36 On all these issues, see Wright 2004.
37 On Heraclea and Chersonesus, see Saprykin 1986.
38 Plut. *Per*. 20 with Braund 2005b.
39 Braund 2005b.
40 Isocr. 17.57. See below on his honours from Athens.
41 Lys. 16.4. Note that Lysias seems at least to have written a speech regarding the dispute of the *Trapeziticus*: Trevett 1990. Of course, despite the protestations in the *Trapeziticus*, Satyrus may well have found it wise to show generosity to others too. Meanwhile, we may wonder where the pro-Athenian Byzantines went, who fled from Lysander to the Pontus: conceivably they made the long journey to the Bosporan kingdom (Xen. *Hell*. 2.2.1).
42 See Braund 2003, for a fuller discussion of this and a later supposed breach with the Bosporan rulers.
43 Tuplin 1982, on which see n. 79 below.
44 From Olbia a fragment of the Standards (or Coinage) Decree found its way into Odessa Museum; it seems since to have been lost, *IG* I^3, 1453 = Dubois no. 6 (I am very grateful to David Blackman for showing me his yet-to-be-published paper on the inscription). As for Nymphaeum, see Braund 2003. Note also the tradition that Delians settled at Chersonesus, perhaps after Athens cleared the island in 422. In general, Braund 2005b.
45 de Ste. Croix 1972, 48.
46 Xen. *Hell*. 2.1.21-22, 24 for the narrative.
47 Xen. *Hell*. 2.2.9.
48 Xen. *Hell*. 1.1.35-36, the strongest part of the revisionist case offered by Keen 2000, especially 66-67.
49 Cf. MacDowell 2004 on Epikerdes, as well as the Dem. 20 (*In Leptinem*), with note 62 below.

50 Xen. *Hell*. 5.1.28-29 is very clear on this, though modern scholars may take the Hellespont to have been the key issue despite that: e.g. Keen 2000, 67; cf. Garnsey 1988, 143, more circumspect.
51 On changes from 411 and especially in the fourth century, see Gabrielsen 1994, especially 173-183.
52 See Tracy 1995, 30-35 for the inscriptions.
53 Lambert 2002, especially 79 and the literature he cites. I am most grateful to the author for discussion of the matter.
54 *IG* II², 401 (321/0 BC), but note that only the first two letters of his ethnic survive, while Asia is entirely restored. *IG* II², 398a would also suit a Hellespontine: cf. Tracy 1995, 33, especially n. 16.
55 *IG* II², 408 with Tracy 1995, 34, approving the unimpeachable restoration needed and listing another Heracleote.
56 *IG* II², 409 with Tracy 1995, 34.
57 Lambert 2001; cf. Tracy 1995, 32. The date is consequently uncertain among 335, ca. 330-326, 323-320.
58 Pomeroy 1994, 1-8.
59 See, for example, de Ste. Croix 1972, 48-49 for a selection of passages.
60 Braund 2003.
61 *IG* II², 212 (Rhodes & Osborne (eds.) 2003, no. 64, with much valuable discussion of the gold crowns involved); cf. 653 with Heinen 1996.
62 See further MacDowell 2004, alive to Demosthenes' slippery rhetoric.
63 On their role, see Rosivach 2000, 46. Disturbingly, this passage is the key evidence for their records.
64 Whether the records would have shown much has been disputed: see above, note 4.
65 Notably e.g. Rosivach 2000, 39-40 (for "southern Russia", read "southern Russia and Ukraine").
66 Rosivach (2000, 37-38) stresses also the continued importance of Attica's own grain-production for Athens' supply.
67 Garnsey 1988, 97. Cf. Kuznecov 2000, 111, collecting views.
68 Kuznecov (2000) makes the observation as part of a larger case for seeing the limits of Bosporan production even in the 4th century.
69 Mytilene had grain-privileges, perhaps late in Leucon's reign and around the time of Demosthenes' speech: Tod, *GHI* II, 163, problematically fragmentary. Note also the much-debated Arcadian honours for Leucon, attested on a stele from Panticapaeum: Tod, *GHI* II, 115 (*CIRB* 37), with substantial commentary: these may be explained in terms of Peloponnesian desire for grain (cf. Hdt. 7.147), but may also result from a shared concern between the Arcadians and the ruler of Panticapaeum for the cult of Pan.
70 On the various problems of date and content, see Rhodes & Osborne (eds.) 2003, no. 96 and the literature cited, including Brun 1993b, who stresses that, for all the language of beneficence here, this was the sale of grain, possibly at below the current market-price.
71 Kuznecov 2000, especially 114-116.
72 Rosivach 2000, 41-42 suspects that the Bosporans were led to favour Athens principally by non-economic considerations. Note the attitude to Athens claimed (albeit self-servingly) by the speaker of *Trapeziticus* in its opening sections.

73 Two of the three sons involved are given prior and greater honours, indicating their seniority: Heinen 1996, 362.
74 Vélissaropoulos (1980, 179-183) thinks so, while revealing Demosthenes' sleight-of-tongue with talk of *sunthekai* between Athens and the Bosporans.
75 Rhodes & Osborne (eds.) 2003, 324.
76 I am grateful to Vincent Gabrielsen for advice on this matter.
77 See Heinen 1996 on *IG* II², 653.
78 His omission earlier cannot be pressed, especially in the light of the reciprocal relationship which he is here said to have enjoyed and also of the evidence of the *Trapeziticus*. The great influence he is said to have had upon the Athenian state in Isocrates' speech undermines the arguments of Tuplin 1982, whose case rests on the uncertain ground of the speech's silence about a stele of Satyrus.
79 Tod, *GHI* II, 168 (not in Rhodes & Osborne (eds.) 2003) observes that the two measures were passed on the same day: whether the two were taken to be connected in any way remains obscure, but the fact of Leucon's privileges for both does nothing to discourage the thought.
80 See especially Vinogradov 1996.
81 Braund 2005a.