Arrian and Procopius on the ancient village named Athens in Colchis

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Abstract: An ancient village in the southeastern Black Sea region was named Athenai (Athens) from the Hellenistic period, and probably earlier. It kept the name, in the form of Atina, down to modern times, though it is now named Pazar in Turkish. It lies between Trapezus and Apsarus on the Turkish coast.
This article discusses ancient sources on it, esp. Arrian and Procopius. These accounts seem different, but can be reconciled, while each shows its own approach and attitudes in ways that have a wider relevance to their works. Suggestions that Athenians were involved there are unpersuasive, though possible local traditions are considered here, including the local tradition of a woman named Athenaea.

Keywords: Black Sea, Caucasus, Atina, Athens, Arrian, Procopius, Athenaea, Pseudo-Scylax

Rezumat: Un sat antic din regiunea de sud-est a Mării Negre a fost numit Athenai (Atena) din perioada elenistică, poate chiar mai devreme. Satul a păstrat acest nume, sub forma Atina, până în timpurile moderne, deși acum poartă numele turcesc de Pazar. Se află între Trapezus și Apsarus, pe litoralul turcesc.
Articolul discută sursele antice despre localitate, mai cu seamă pe Arrian și Procopius. Relatările acestora par diferite, dar pot fi reconciliate, în timp ce fiecare dintre ele reflectă propria abordare și atitudine, în moduri care au o relevanță mai largă pentru operele lor. Sugestiile conform cărora atenienii ar fi fost implicați în întemeierea satului sunt neconvingătoare, deși posibilele tradiții locale sunt luate în considerare, inclusiv tradiția locală despre o femeie numită Athenaea.

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Cuvinte-cheie: Marea Neagră, Caucaz, Atina, Atena, Arrian, Procopius, Athenaea, Pseudo-Scylax

Throughout antiquity there was a general tendency to neglect the coastal stretch between the southwestern extremity of the Colchian lowland, around modern Gonio (ancient Apsarus)[1] and the short string of locations that include modern Rize (ancient Rhizaeum) and modern Trabzon (ancient Trapezus). The masters of the Black Sea and Mediterranean had fewer mor obscure regions to consider, while links to the broader world of Asia were awkward and more challenging than other possible passages. Only the broad inclusiveness of myth (Argonautic, mostly) and very occasional nearby events might attract authorial attention. As a result, the region had little of grandeur to attract the interest of historians, while geographers found only a few small places that might seem worthy of mention. Here the main exception was a small settlement at a rocky anchorage-estuary which bore the extraordinary name of Athens, *Athenai* or Athenae, a name it shared with (amongst some others) the great city of mainland Greece, resplendent in its grand imperial history and abiding cultural achievements. In what follows we shall examine the traditions that have come down to us about this little Athens, which retained its name into modern times as Atina (now Pazar). In so doing, we shall engage in a case-study of various authorial attitudes. At the same time, we shall consider what we can know and plausibly infer about this Pontic Athens.[2]

Among the greatest events of this region occurred at the very beginning of the fourth century BC, when Xenophon and his Greek mercenaries finally reached the sea at Trapezus, after their famous odyssey from defeat at the battle of Cunaxa in Mesopotamia. Xenophon embodied his version of the story in his *Anabasis*.[3] Among the many lessons in Xenophon's classic for students of our broad region is shifting balance of difficulty and possibility in movement through the complex human and demanding physical geography of this struggle through the mountains to the sea. For, while Xenophon's account and experience were exceptional, and the work of

[1] Archaeology progresses there, e.g. Mamuladze et al. 2016.

[2] Pontic Athenaion (gen. pl.) in the Crimea might have assisted us, if only our data there were not still more restricted than what we have for Pontic Athens: see Kacharava, Kvirkvelia 1991, 35; cf. 36, on Athenae.

[3] For discussion and bibliography, see Braund 2021.

outsiders to the region in force, there is nevertheless a powerful evocation here of movement and its issues around all the Caucasus and Pontic Alps.

From the coast, at the proudly-Greek city of Trapezus, the high mountains of the Pontic Alps reached west, towards Sinope and the Hellespont beyond. The east offered options that may well have seemed a road to nowhere – or at least nowhere very appealing to the mercenaries. Westwards lay clearer prospects in more familiar regions. Xenophon relates that the notion of proceeding eastwards to Colchis caused uproar in the army.[4] Legendary gold there, and suggestions of easy victory, seem to have attracted few of the men who had already fought their way through mountains long enough. The harsh realities of passage eastwards to Colchis will soon have become clear to any who asked local informants around Trapezus, where they were at last among Greeks, whether or not some may have begun to reconnoitre east of Rize. Even today, after considerable recent investment in roadways here, the coastal strip is extremely narrow. It is relieved only by small settlements that cluster around the outlets of streams from the mountains, most of which have still not succumbed to significant habitation. In Xenophon's day the considerable size of his so-called Ten Thousand would not have saved the Greeks from sustained assaults from on high. Already at Trapezus, Xenophon's experienced soldiers had not much enjoyed a taste of fighting the peoples of the heights. For Xenophon makes clear that those above Trapezus were tough opponents in a testing landscape. He calls them Drillae, while these seem also to be the warlike Sanni (later Tzani and the like) of Roman and Byzantine times.[5]

The only option eastwards that was at all plausible was to travel by sea (a land-and-sea project had no advantages). While some of the army were at home enough with sea-travel, we may infer that there was also significant reluctance. All the more so, given the uncertainties and simple ignorance that prevailed about how to move such a force along this little-known coast. There was at least substantial doubt about where a harbour might be found, and whether locals there would receive them with hospitality or violence. We may note, for example, the river of the region that Greeks then seemed to know (if at all) as "Bandits' River."[6] While encouragement might be gained (as Xenophon indicates) from the movement of shipping to and fro off

[4] Xen. *Anab*.5.6, where the name Aeetes in itself evoked dangers enough.

[5] Xen. *Anab*. 5.2.

[6] See Braund, Kakhidze 2022; Braund, Inaishvili, Kassab –Tezgör 2022.

Trapezus, with some also stopping there presumably, that was not enough to dispel the dangerous uncertainties of such a voyage, especially in view of the Black Sea's reputation for violent storms and other hazards.

The extraordinary Mithridates VI Eupator had managed to make his way eastward onto the Colchian plain to Dioscurias (modern Sukhumi) and beyond. His journey figures among the considerable achievements with which he was credited, and reasonably so, but his case was different. As the king passed that way (details are obscure) in the 60s BC, his was a tiny band, and we hear of substantial local welcome for him, even at this time of troubles for him.[7] This was the dawn of the Roman period in the Black Sea, but still ancient geography had offered very little on the region in general or the village named Athens more specifically. Even Strabo would be neglectful of this humble corner of his world. We can only speculate about the possible existence of lost accounts which might have helped by the first century AD – lost lines of Pseudo Scymnus perhaps, or something in the very fragmentary disquisition on the geography of the Black Sea that we know in the *Histories* of Sallust. It is not until the second century AD and Hadrian's reign that the last finds solid ground of some sort.

Around AD 132 Arrian made a seaborne journey such as Xenophon had not attempted. Arrian's sustained fascination with Xenophon made the comparison significant and inescapable. Since Arrian was governor of Cappadocia, there was some obligation upon him to tackle the task, but his commitment to the memory of Xenophon will also have played with him. After all, this challenging mission seems not to have been tried by others in his post, which may help to account for the air of abandonment that hangs over his account of the eastern Black Sea.

His emperor had laid crucial groundwork, too. For his imperial visit to Trapezus had drawn to him a flock of local rulers and kinglets from near and far. Arrian knew much more about the geography of the region than Xenophon could have known. Corbulo's energetic mapping of Caucasian parts under Nero may well have embraced this obscure coast, especially in view of the growing military importance of Roman supply by way of Trapezus.[8] Arrian could also be reasonably confident of good enough

[7] Set in reliable context by McGing 1986.

[8] See Pliny, *NH* 6.40; cf. Tac. *Ann*, 13.39 on Trapezus. The wars of AD 69 had also brought some focus to obscure parts of this coast, as Tac. *Hist*. 3.47-8 indicates. Presumably the

receptions as he followed the coast towards Colchis. In fact, he writes a little about that in his *Periplus*, which I have discussed at some length in this regard elsewhere.[9] However, there was still a significant concern about banditry, as well as the inescapable risks of bad weather and shipwreck. Clearly, sea-travel was most attractive in this region, while roads were poor and minimal, though we should not overstate the ability of locals, in particular, to find ways around their terrain.[10] And, of course, the sea retained many of its horrors even for a Roman governor. Arrian's inclusion of a trireme in his flotilla of cargo vessels may result from abiding anxiety about pirates, too.[11]

It is in this context that we have our first reliable indications about Pontic Athens, a tiny settlement in the central part of this coastal stretch. Its name is striking: thanks to Arrian, it was not overlooked by Stephanus of Byzantium, whose Byzantine compendium of cities and peoples listed the little place, last, at the end of his short mention of locations named Athens, nine in total. The name mattered to Arrian, as he conveys to his philhellene emperor. As Arrian tells his story, it was a grave storm that caused Arrian's flotilla to seek shelter at Pontic Athens and stop there for two days, but he could hardly have simply passed by a place that bore the name of Greece's renowned cultural capital. Of course Arrian was sensitive to his emperor's massive concern with the great city of Athens, where he had done so much to stamp his name on the city and bring it up to a new physical standard, for example by finally completing its great temple of Olympian Zeus, whose construction had begun as long ago as the time of Pisistratus in the sixth century BC, only a few centuries short of a millennium before.[12] As throughout the *Periplus*, we see the author's interweaving of the practicalities of government and his own activities with a much wider cultural sensibility, which was no doubt welcome to this notably philhellenic emperor. It would be no great surprise if that mixture of concerns featured to some extent also in the Latin letter which Arrian also sent his emperor, apparently not for

formation of the enlarged province of Cappadocia under Vespasian, as well as later concerns of Domitian and Trajan, kept returning Roman imperial minds to the eastern Euxine.

[9] See Braund, Kakhidze 2022.

[10] Further, Manoledakis 2022, 395, stressing the difficulties; cf. Bryer, Winfield 1985, *passim*.

[11] Arr. *Per*. 4 writes of *the* trireme, implying only one, which might also be taken to indicate that the anxiety was not great, for the governor could have called upon more to accompany him.

[12] Suet. *Aug*. 60 indicates concern with the history of this project under Hadrian. Further, Boatwright 2000.

public viewing.[13] We should also bear in mind Arrian's roots in Bithynian Nicomedia, located on the brink of the Black Sea and with its own strong literary traditions, which included Pontic geography, as best illustrated by the author we call Pseudo-Scymnus, who wrote for a Bithyian king around 100 BC.[14]

Arrian's extended storm dramatises the hazards of sea-travel along this coast, around the Black Sea, and as a feature of classical culture more generally. The tiny Athens offered some shelter, which meant that his flotilla suffered limited damage. The small harbour there offered some protection from some winds, as also did the offshore outcrop he mentions, which is presumably the rock which now bears the remains of an Ottoman-period fortress (see Figs. 1 and 2). However, Arrian is clear that there was only limited shelter for his vessels at the coast here. Some ships, perhaps the majority, had to be pulled up onto land. Arrian quietly demonstrates the general success of his response to the storm, from which his party suffered much less damage than might have occurred without his leadership and decision-making, as he implies, rather as Xenophon had had the habit of doing to claim credit. Meanwhile, he largely resists the temptation to expand on the nature of the two-day storm, though that was a favourite literary theme that he might have exploited. Curiously, he says little about Pontic Athens itself. We are told that good timber was available, as usual on this coast, so that repairs could be made after the storm. He is entirely silent about the local population of the town, though his account finds space for mention of local authorities elsewhere on this coast.[15] At our Athens, their advice was no doubt key to his successful response to the storm, and he presumably also benefited from local assistance in the process of timber-gathering and repairs. At the very least, the locals were acquiescent. He suggests that the place was inhabited, as we should expect in view of its relative attractions by the standards of local geography here. The modern name of the town, Pazar, is anodyne, but the name means "Market" in Turkish, which may encourage us to infer that this was a likely focus of exchange and economic activity in ancient times, at however humble a level. We may be sure enough that pastoralist movements through the seasons took flocks, people, and goods up and down between the mountain pastures and the coast in a regular

[13] *Per*. 13.

[14] See Braund 2019a; see also Bowie 2022.

[15] Further, Braund, Kakhidze 2022.

rhythm of transhumance, while (as also elsewhere in the Caucasian area) upland populations tend to exploit passages that run both across and transversely through such ranges, here potentially to the motley valley of the river Acampsis-Boas, as it was variously named in antiquity.[16]

As to the civic fabric of Pontic Athens, Arrian comments only on as sanctuary (*hieron)* that clearly stood out in this little place (a *khorion*, as he calls it). For him, it was Greek, though he does not explain further, except to state that it was the sanctuary of Athena. We may imagine a temple in this sanctuary, but Arrian does not mention one. Indeed, the modern tendency to translate *hieron* here as "temple" does not assist clarity. While there may have been a temple of some kind, and while Arian may have considered that structure Greek, we are not really told as much. It may have been enough for Arrian that the sanctuary belonged to Athena, as he understood the matter: that was Greek enough, perhaps, without any Greek-style structure, or Hellenic rituals there. No word of a statue or inscriptions, such as had attracted his attention at Trapezus, where the emperor himself was involved, of course.[17]. At least, this apparently Greek sanctuary set Pontic Athens apart from the other small places he found between Rize and Apsarus. This was at least a hint of Greekness there, even a tiny reflection[18] of the cityscape of its famous namesake – complete with the goddess Athena herself. A welcome discovery for Arrian, no doubt, which makes his brevity all the more striking. However, Arrian suggests no grandeur in Pontic Athens. Wood was the obvious building material here, and wooden structures might be considered Greek enough, as Herodotus had declared of Gelonus.[19] Remarkably, while Herodotus had spoken of festivals and Greek cult in regard to his timber temples in Scythia, Arrian is strikingly brief. If he had not explicitly indicated that the settlement at Pontic Athens was inhabited, we might well have inferred that it had been deserted. But he tells us that it had not. Otherwise, he specifies, with the limited harbour-mooring (*ormos*), only a stronghold, which he considers neglected. He does not say that it was abandoned or useless, and we should note his recurrent tendency to comment critically on such installations in the region, as at Apsarus and Phasis, where he took the

[16] On this river and its valley, see Braund, Inaishvili, Kassab –Tezgör 2022.

[17] *Periplus* 1, where we may note his contempt for local culture, as it seems. See Hodkinson 2005; Rood 2011.

[18] Hodkinson points out the playful (or condescending?) tone of Arrian's treatment of Pontic Athens.

[19] Compare Herodotus' claims of Greekness among wooden structures in the Scythian interior: Hdt. 4.108-9.

matter in hand. From the very beginning at Trapezus, Arrian, the governor of a great province and associate of the emperor himself, treats Pontic Athens and the rest of the region with an open disdain. This was, after all, an obscure corner of the Roman empire, made interesting by its very obscurity and by its links to great myth and epic tales, most obviously the Argonautic poems. The locals may be mentioned as informants on current practice and interpretation, but they are unreliable even in those limited ways – awful sculpture at Trapezus, barbarous Greek, and a bungled attempt to identify a relic of the great days of the Argonauts at Phasis – here the great governor is quick to offer a better view, evidently confident in his superiority to the locals in all matters.[20] Arrian's remarks on Pontic Athens maintain and express these attitudes clearly enough. For there is a strong note of irony in his closing words on this version of Athens – not an abandoned and anonymous place, he seems to say, while clearly viewing the name as ludicrously inappropriate and the small place as all but abandoned, for it appears in his account wholly devoid of locals. While suggesting that the storm had caused him to do the right thing and see this Athens, his gratitude is hollow, however welcome the shelter had been in his time of need. Any port is good in a storm but this was no Athens.

It is the name, the storm and Arrian's claim to good leadership that dominate his account of Pontic Athens. At the same time, his silence on locals there surely speaks volumes. If they had seemed to him to be significantly Greek, he would surely have said as much, but it is only Athena's sanctuary that raised the issue of Greekness for him, with no indication of what currently did or did not happen there. The sanctuary answered for him (albeit without great insistence) the more general and perhaps more interesting question as to how this obscure little place came to be called Athens. It was probably a derivation from the name of Athena herself, he suggests. But he does not attempt to explain how the goddess came to be in this rather unlikely spot. In particular, he says nothing of former Greek settlement there, nor of any explanation that local informants may have offered. For we may be sure that the arrival of the mighty governor of Cappadocia in some force had prompted immediate and intense interest among the leaders of the isolated little town, more used to traders and fishermen – including the vessels which Xenophon had seen sailing off Trapezus. What had the local elite of little Athens had to say about the name

[20] *Per*. 9-10.

of their town and its history, we may wonder. Arrian shows no interest and says nothing of them or their words.

Perhaps they had gone so far as to indulge in fantasies of foundation by Athenians. Certainly, some modern writers have been attracted by the notion,[21] which a local elite might have favoured in principle – though we are nowhere told that here it did in fact. For the very idea was profoundly implausible, while Athena may have gained a presence in many a way. It is true, of course, that Athenians had settled on the north coast of Turkey, but on lush lands to the west, at Sinope and Amisus nearby, where the name Piraeus figured briefly. It is true also that Pericles' pioneering voyage into the Black Sea around 437 was said to have covered a substantial area. Crucially, however, there was no good reason for Athenians to settle at woebegone Pontic Athens, isolated, poor and dangerous. Even a shipwrecked band of Athenians there would have done their very best (rather as Xenophon's comrades) to get out oft his area as fast as they might, while imperial Athens can have had no ambition to create a viable outpost here, even at the brief acme of its power. The idea of an Athenian settlement as the reason for the little town's name is wholly unsustainable in the face of these practical concerns, while no extant authority actually claims the truth of such a notion. These observations on Arrian's account are especially important, if we seek to gauge its reliability and precision on Pontic Athens. He had not intended to stop there at all, it seems, until the storm required that he must. The locals were of minimal interest to him there, unlike the various rulers that he mentions or meets elsewhere on this journey. There seems to be no significant military installation there, and no sign of a military force, however small, that might have required his inspection or payment. His presence there was a matter of chance, and his remarks are cursory. We may even doubt that he personally visited the neglected stronghold he mentions, or the Greek sanctuary of Athena. There was important work to be done in overseeing the repairs needed by his flotilla, while the weather remained challenging until his departure. Possibly he did no more than send an adjutant to look around the place and report back to him. His only interest there, beyond shelter and repairs, was the name of this little Athens in a far corner of his world, somehow absurd in the parallel with the great Athens of his emperor and his hero, Xenophon the Athenian, insofar as its name implied such a comparison of complete unequals. Accordingly, Arrian offers an explanation of the name, which does little to connect the great city and the tiny village. He suggests that both derive their

[21] See Çoşkun 2019, valuably gathering texts, previous scholarship, and opinions.

name from Athena, but without reference to any local view or tradition in Pontic Athens. At least he is clear that his suggestion is no more than speculation ("*it seems to me*": *Per*. 4.1). In so doing, he gives no reason at all to suspect that the village had been settled by Athenians at some stage.[22] And rightly so. For, while Athenians did settle in the Black Sea region at times, notably in the aftermath of Pericles' expedition there around 437 BC, the very thought of Athenian settlers at this wild outpost is surely unsustainable – here was no Sinope or Amisus, no major city, with fine lands and connections to a wider world.

Procopius claims that some in antiquity too think that Athenian colonists (*apoikoi*) founded Pontic Athens. It is unfortunate that he does not identify them, or even make it clear whether he has in mind authors or general opinion, nor how strongly the idea was held. We may compare traditions on the piratical Achaeans, on the northern coast opposite Pontic Athens, who were sometimes held to be descended from Achaeans from mainland Greece who had been separated from the main body of the expedition to Troy (usually by a storm) and had been abandoned to their uncertain fate, so that they even held a grudge against Greeks thereafter – a neat context for their piracy.[23] However, the origin-story of the Achaeans was still more flimsy than the rest of the nest of traditions around the Trojan War, while we are left to wonder whether some claimed that the Athenians who settled Pontic Athens were similarly castaways from the expedition to Troy, the compatriots of those Athenians who did make it to the great siege of Troy. For we need not limit our sense of ancient imagining on Athenian settlement to the historical centuries.[24] Of course, Procopius mentions such notions of Athenian settlement only to dismiss them as invalid. Instead, he offers an origin for the name that has not been mentioned in any previous ancient text that we know. Procopius does not identify his source, or even indicate whether it was written, oral, or both. Arrian had certainly given a rather different account of Pontic Athens, and with a rather different attitude. But it should be stressed that Procopius' version is far more reconcilable with Arrian's than seems generally to have been realised among modern scholars.

There is no need, and scant basis, to give priority either to Arrian or to Procopius in the matter of Pontic Athens. Arrian's autopsy is important, but we cannot be sure how much he had actually examined the place and

[22] See Braund 2005 in detail.

[23] They themselves had evolved into barbarians, according to the story: see e.g. Gabbert 1986.

[24] Further, Erskine 2001.

how far his disdain for this poor Athens has coloured his perception and account, addressed to a similarly disdainful emperor in all likelihood. As for Procopius, our author is unlikely to have visited the place, but he may well have been drawing on the words of sources who had been there, and conceivably even some governmental record at Byzantium. For the eastern Black Sea had acquired a significance and proximity to power in Procopius' sixth century that had been lacking in the days of Arrian and Hadrian, some 400 years before, and in a quite different world order and political geography. However, we may gain benefit from considering our two principal authorities together, as might have been done by earlier scholars, who have had little to say about Procopius in particular in this matter.

Procopius writes, in the fuller of his two passages in regard to Pontic Athens:

> καὶ κώμη τις, Ἀθῆναι ὄνομα, ἐνταῦθα οἰκεῖται, οὐχ ὅτι Ἀθηναίων ἄποικοι, ὥσπερ τινὲς οἴονται, τῇδε ἱδρύσαντο, ἀλλὰ γυνή τις Ἀθηναία ὄνομα ἐν τοῖς ἄνω χρόνοις κυρία ἐγεγόνει τῆς χώρας, ἥσπερ ὁ τάφος ἐνταῦθα καὶ εἰς ἐμέ ἐστι.
>
> *A certain village named Athens is settled there,*[25] *not because Athenian settlers established it there, as some think, but because a certain woman named Athenaea in former times became mistress of this land, whose tomb is there down to my day.*[26]

Like Arrian, Procopius makes clear that this Athens is a village, but he shows none of the governor's condescension. He names no sources, but claims up-to-date knowledge, insofar as he states that the tomb of Athenaea is still there. Arrian had said nothing of this, but he had mentioned a Greek-style sanctuary, so that we may well suspect that Procopius is referring to the sanctuary that Arrian had taken to belong to Athena. For there was an easy slippage between the names of Athena and Athenaea, and there was so little to note in Pontic Athens (as it seems) that two different religious centres there with such similar names seem hard to imagine. Moreover, no author mentions the two together. Meanwhile, Athena herself appears nowhere in Procopius' brief

[25] That is, between the Romans and the Lazi.
[26] Procopius, *Wars* 8.2.10-11

sketch of the little place, nor does the stronghold that held more interest for the governor, as we have seen, than the Byzantine historian. Both authors are attracted by the name of Athens, shared with the great city of Greece proper. Where Arrian sees Athena and absurdity, Procopius offers a local history, centred on a certain Athenaea, a past ruler of the place. Possibly her name and story were part of broader notions of Amazons in and around the region, though Procopius does not make that connection, while he also tends to rationalise Amazon myth.[27] Alternatively, we might compare the story of Athenaea here with the remarkable females who occasionally appear in key roles in the early history of Greek colonial settlements elsewhere. A Black Sea instance would be Hermonassa, who had (it was said) emerged as the mistress of a new colonial settlement of the northern Pontus, on the Taman peninsula of south Russia. For among the local traditions of Hermonassa we hear of her leadership in the aftermath of the death of her husband, a certain Semandros, an oikist from Mytilene, whose name means "Tomb of the Husband". The complexities of tradition around Hermonassa are considerable, but her case serves to illustrate how a female leader might emerge after the death of her husband, as well as the role of a tomb, as better known for Heraclea Pontica, Abdera in Aegean Thrace and elsewhere.[28] We should observe too the importance of the tomb of Apsyrtus and its claimed link to the name of Apsarus, along the Black Sea coast from Pontic Athens, as both Arrian and Procopius mention. These two proximate cases may suggest a local taste for traditions concerning naming, tombs, and early settlement-history on this coast.

No firm conclusions are available, but Procopius' Athenaia is sufficiently unusual to raise suspicion that Arrian's Athena was an error, brought on by his general disrespect for Pontic Athens and its people. All the more so, if we accept the hint of local knowledge that seems to be implied by Procopius' assertion that Athenaia's tomb was still to be seen there in his own day, albeit most probably not seen by Procopius himself. However, there is also a disquieting surprise in Procopius' account of the region, which has been neglected, too. For in another section of his *Wars* his narrative simply asserts in passing that Rize (Rhizaeum), located on the coast between Athens and Trapezus, "is also called Athens". It is hard to avoid the explanation that Procopius was confused at this juncture, though that need not mean that he

[27] See *Wars* 2.3.3-7; 8.2-3.

[28] On Hermonassa, see Braund 2019b, esp. on Arrian, *Bithynica* fr.55. On Heraclea and much else, see Malkin 1987, esp. 204-40. For Abdera, see also Graham 2001; Adak, Thonemann 2022.

was confused or in error about Athenaea and her tomb. We may also wonder whether any confusion arises from scribal error, where a copyist's note may have been brought into the body of the text, as if the work of Procopius himself.

Finally, we have seen how attempts to link the name of Pontic Athens to a real settlement do not persuade, so that we are dealing here with traditions, variously local and more widespread. The lack of access to brute reality is inevitably frustrating, but it must be stressed that what was believed was at least as important as any simple truth that we might hope to find with regard to the origins of any name. In this instance, our source material for hard etymology is weak, though we maybe tempted to speculate about how Athenai might have emerged from the various earlier names that we have for places in this area, perhaps as local non-Greek names evolved into toponyms that sounded easier or somehow preferable to Greek ears, and so entered our Greek sources.[29] Both Arrian and Procopius indicate in their different terms how the name Athens seemed both familiar and peculiar to the few who took an interest in this obscure corner of their world. Their responses to the name, as well as Stephanus of Byzantium's inclusion of this little place, show how a name may be significant, however it may have come into being, and even when (perhaps especially when) its origins were in profound dispute, as in the case of this Black Sea village of Athens.

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[29] Agreement on earlier names for Pontic Athens has proved difficult among modern scholars, and such it is: e.g. Manoledakis 2022, 384; Shipley 2024, 1.216 on Pseudo-Scylax 83.

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Illustrations

1. The offshore rock today, viewed from the mainland.
Photo: E. Kakhidze

2. The offshore rock in the 1930s, viewed from the sea.
From Rickmer Rickmers 1934.