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***Black Sea or Sea of Trebizond:
Significance of Trebizond Port in Persians' Knowledge of
Black Sea in the Middle Ages***

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Abstract

Like other bodies of water, the Black Sea has been given a number of names. It was known as the Sea of Trebizond during the early Islamic centuries due to the popularity of the Trebizond Port in the south coast of the sea. Muslims in general and Iranian and Azeri merchants in particular contributed to the boom of trade in this port. Thus, the sea was named after its most important port because of its commercial significance for Iranians, considering that they had been acquainted with the sea through this port. We know such naming for other seas and ports; however, for some reasons, it is considered as an exonym for Asian Minor, which has been part of the Byzantine Empire for a long time. These reasons can be explored and discussed within the context of the ties between Muslims and the Byzantine Empire in the years before and even after the Battle of Manzikert. This study examines the continuity and changes made in the names given to the Black Sea, the reasons behind it, and the continuation of the two folk and formal names given to it.

Keywords: Trebizond, Iran, the Black Sea, Tabriz, Maritime Trade.

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Introduction

The oldest references to the links between the Iranians and the Black Sea date back to the reign of the Achaemenids and the cosmology of the Zoroastrians. The Achaemenids had military campaigns against the Scythians dwelling in the plains to the north of the sea. These Scythians were known as the *Saka Paradraya* (i.e., Scythians of beyond the sea). After the reign of the Achaemenid empires, Persian governments ceased to access the Black Sea through the Asia Minor. The Romans seized the body of water after the rule of the Achaemenids, as it was the exclusive trading path of the Greeks before the rise of the Achaemenids. From this point on, Persians had access to the sea merely through the east coasts, namely Caucasus Mountains. However, the mountainous area caused very limited access to the sea. In the oldest Persian geography book known as *Hudūd al-Ālam min al-Mashriq ila l-Maghrib* (i.e., *The Boundaries of The World from The East to the West*), the sea is referred to as the Georgian (Gurziyan) Sea even though there was no port comparable to the Trebizond Port on the eastern coast of the Black Sea where the Georgians lived. Thus, the names given to the sea have been used in accordance with the sequences of Greek and Roman periods. The rise of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire) with Byzantium (Constantinople) as its capital was a major development in the history of the sea being discussed. At this point, a strong government had established its capital city at the embouchure of the sea, which was in fact a gulf. Likewise, the Persians had their own way of naming the sea based on the Avesta cosmology or the geographical culture of the Achaemenid to Sassanid eras. However, the name Trebizond was gradually used to refer to this body of water at the dawn of the Islamic Caliphate, because Muslims had access to the sea merely through this port.

Muslims and on top of them Iranians from Azerbaijan had access to the Black Sea and used it for trading through the Port of Trebizond. The port is located to the north coast of Anatolia and the south of the Black Sea. A mountain range separates the coastal area from the inner regions of Anatolia with mountain passes, creating access to the sea. The port and its surrounding areas were interchangeably ruled by the Muslims and the Christians; however, the commercial interests did not prevent either

party from having access to the port. Therefore, the port has always been deemed important as a trading and communication hub for the Black Sea, Anatolia, Asia, and Europe. There were also economic ties between this port and Azerbaijan whose capital city, Tabriz, replaced Maraqeh and Ardabil from the 10th century, establishing a strong connection with its surrounding areas. Nevertheless, this has not been given proper attention by the scholars and researchers of history in Iran. This is while the trading economics of Azerbaijan depended on the Black Sea through Dvin and Port of Trebizond just as much as it was connected to the inner and northern areas of Iran. In fact, what makes it possible to study the developing, continuous growth of urban and economic centrality of Tabriz is the knowledge of the history of this port. This is the reason why the sea under question was referred to as the Sea of Trebizond along with the Black Sea and other names in the Persian resources. The present study mainly focuses on the course of developments in the name of this sea, particularly in the period during which it was known as the Sea of Trebizond. The study draws upon the significance of Trebizond Port in the knowledge of the Persians of the Black Sea in the Middle Ages.

Regarding the background of this research, it should be said that so far no article has been published with this approach. Previously, the authors of this article have written two articles about Trebizond and its historical and commercial role in relation to Iran and East-West relations in the late Middle Ages. The first article deals with the commercial position of the Trebizond in the foreign policy of the Ilkhans in Iran (Fazlinejad and Kheirandish, 2020: 71-93) and the second article deals with the role of the Trebizond as a bridge between East and West in the trade relations of the late Middle Ages (Fazlinejad and Kheirandish, 2019- 2020:79-102). Research has been published outside Iran on the Black Sea, but in those studies no reference has been made to the historical relation between Trebizond and so naming. Blois examines historical name of Black Sea. Blois also discusses the role of the Trebizond in the medieval world trade system (Blois, 2007).

Geographical location and historical significance of Trebizond

Trebizond is located on the coast of the Black Sea to the northeast of the present-day Turkey. In the past, the city was the capital of a province with the same name and was of great historical and geographical

importance. It was a destination along the Silk Road on the trade routes connecting the east, west, north, and south and was thus of great significance for the local and international governments. The Greek geographer, Strabo, refers to it as Trapezus in the 1st century (Strabo, 1854, vol 1, p.476), which was in turn derived from the Greek word Trapeze meaning flat, and this is assumed to exist because of the wide and flat heights of the surrounding mountains (Grinevetsky et al. 2015, p.760-761). Eusebius, the Christian historian of the 3rd and 4th centuries, puts the establishment date of Trebizond at 756 BC (Graham, 2006, vol 3.3 p. 123), showing the natural potentials of the location for the establishment of a port.

Trebizond is located in the region called Pontus in the Antiquity. It is a Greek name given to the southeast coasts of the Black Sea and the mountainous lands overlooking them, derived from a Greek term to refer to the Black Sea (Pontus Euxeinos), meaning the hospitable sea. However, another theory is as follows:

“The Greeks, in their earliest age, styled it Axenus or 'inhospitable'. It owed this name probably to the stormy weather common in certain times of the year, formidable and perilous to timid and unskillful mariners as well as to the barbarity of the nations on its shores, some of the northern Scythian hordes being reputed cannibals.” At a subsequent date, when the Greeks had established colonies upon the coast, they substituted the more auspicious title of Euxeinus, “hospitable”, “friendly to strangers” out of compliment to their own civilized habits, and as an inducement to emigration.” (Milner, 1855, p.12).

In his book, *Anabasis*, Xenophon refers to Trebizond as an inhabited Greek city on the Euxine sea (Xenophon, 1980, p. 341). Under the rule of the Achaemenids, the region was officially included in the Persia, and its rulers paid annual duties to the Achaemenids (Herodotus, 1928, p.121). During the reign of Alexander and his successors, the city was a part of the territories ruled by Eumenes of Cardia (Plutarch, 1813, vol 4, p.41).

The most renowned Persian ruler of Pontus in the southern coasts of the Black Sea was Mithridates VI or Mithridates the Great, who propagated the Persian traditions in his court (See Munk Hojte, 2009;

Mc Ging, Brian, 2004). He had several military campaigns against the Romans but was eventually defeated, and Pontus was turned into a Greek province. Trebizond was also considered an important city and province in Anatolia. As an important region in Asia Minor, Anatolia was the link between Western Asia and Central Europe (Taschner, 1986, vol 1, p.461) and reached the peaks of its growth under the rule of Romans.

The geographical location of Trebizond guaranteed its security. Natural borders of the Black Sea to the north and the Pontus Mountains to the south would protect the city against invasion. Yet at times, these conditions rendered it isolated from the rest of Anatolia. Therefore, scholars wonder whether to study Trebizond under the Byzantine history or as a part of Anatolia and the Black Sea (Eastmond, 2004, preface: [xx]). Despite the commercial boom and the large number of Muslim merchants, Trebizond lost its economic luster during the Byzantine Empire. However, after the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, the royal Byzantine family of Komnenos fled to Trebizond, which turned the city into the capital of the empire in exile.

The Trebizond to the East trade route which crossed Iran was one of the most significant international trade routes in the Middle Ages. The city was the terminal of the north caravan roads, which connected the inner regions of the Iranian Plateau to Europe. Heyd referred to it as the "corridor of Central Asia", which provided access to the area for the Westerners during the reign of the Ilkhanids (Heyd, 1991, Second Chapter: p.329; Breyer, 1980, p.370).

From the Sea of Pontus to the Sea of Trebizond

As noted earlier, the Greeks called the Black Sea Pontus Euxeinus or the hospitable sea. The name Pontus continued to be used for this body of water and was borrowed from Greek by other languages. Muslim geographers and historians also referred to it as the Sea of Bontus (Pontus). In his *Kitab al-Tanbih wa-l-Ishraf* (Book of Admonition and Revision), al-Masudi calls it the Sea of Bontus and lists the *Bahr al-Burgar* (the Sea of Bulgar) and *Bahr al-Rus* (the Sea of Russia) as other names given to the sea (Masudi, 1893, p.66). The names 'Bulgar' and 'Russian' mentioned in Islamic books refer to the Bulgarian and Russian

nations, living around the sea. However, the people actually meant by the term 'Russians' at this time are in fact the Vikings, who are the ancestors of the people of modern-day Scandinavia, entering the Black Sea in their rowboats through Don and Dnieper rivers. The name Bontus is recorded as Nitos in al-Masudi's another book, *Muruj al-Zahab* (Meadows of Gold), due to misplacement of the dot in the first letter of the Arabic and Persian title and so was the case in other geographical and historical sources of Muslims. Al-Masudi provides a list of other names used for the Black Sea. He writes, "... As astronomers and other scholars of antiquity have mentioned, the Sea of Bulgar, Sea of Russia, Bjni, Bajnak, and Boqord (the last three are the names of 3 Turk tribes) are all the same as Nitos (Masudi, 1991, vol 1, p.118). Muttahar bin Tahir Muqaddasi (who died after 966) names the five largest seas of the world, listing the Sea of Bontus as the fourth largest (Muqddasi, 1995, p.591). In *Hudud al-'Alam*, the sea is given another name: the Georgian Sea, which is recognized by the unknown author of the book as the original name of the sea, stating at one point that the Sea of Gurziyan is also called the Sea of Bontus (Hudūd al-Ālam min al-Mashriq ilá l-Maghrib, 1983, p.13). It has also referred to this body of water as the Sea of Gorz or Gurziyan in other places (ibid, pp.14, 50, 180, 184, 189-191).

One of the earliest mentions of the name "Sea of Trebizond" for the Black Sea is in the book *Futuh al-Buldan* by Baladhuri. Pointing to Anushirvan's works in Caucasus and Anatolia in urban development and construction of palaces, he states, "In a part of the land of Georgia which is located near Rome, he built a palace called the Firuz Qobad Gate, and one called the Lazika gate [Bab-i Ladhiqa], and another one called the Bariqa Gate [Bab-i Bariqa] at the Sea of Trebizond" (Baladhuri, 1987, p.280-281).

In his book named *Kitab al-tafhim li-awa'il sina'at al-tanjim* (Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology) written in 1029, al-Biruni also refers to the Black Sea as the Sea of Trebizond. The port being discussed has a long history and is considered an important sailing port, but there are other significant ports along the Black Sea, and the fact that such a great scholar as al-Biruni named the body of water after this port is noteworthy. He is known for his studies, books, and his expertise in several disciplines. He is particularly prominent in

astronomy, which calls for preciseness and prudence in calculation and measuring. His works such as *al-Tafhim*, *Asar-ul Baqiya anil Qorun al-Khaliya*, *Qanun-i Masudi*, and *Tahdid-in Nihayat al-Amakin Litas'hih-i Masafat al-Masakin* were all among the reference books of the Middle Ages. The latter is a proof of his prudence in geography. Therefore, his brief reference to the Sea of Trebizond as quoted from "our people" communicates a fraction of the history of trading economy at this port. Yet, it does not mean that al-Biruni had used the aforesaid name as an influence of other scientific and geographical textbooks. Rather, it is indicative of the fact that the name "Trebizond" was commonly used by the traders and merchants of the far-away regions, including the people of Khwarazm at the time of al-Biruni, since there is no such a reference in *Tahdid-in Nihayat al-Amakin*. Al-Biruni's account of the sea of Trebizond in *al-Tafhim* is as follows:

"And in the built and occupied areas of the planet, there is sea called Bontus in the land of Slavs and Russians. And our People call it the Sea of Trebizond as there is port in it. A gulf projects from the sea and turns narrower and it crosses Constantinople, and continuous to be narrower until it falls into the Mediterranean..." (al-Biruni, 1988, p.168).

What can be inferred from al-Biruni's account is that he not only knew well of the inhabited quarter of the planet, but was also aware of the name "Bontus", which was widely used to refer to the sea. However, he emphasizes the name used by the people of Khorasan, Transoxiana, and Khwarazm, who are collectively called *our people* by him and goes on to highlight the situation of the Trebizond Port and its commercial importance. All the facts are indicative of significant trading ties between Khorasan and Trebizond at the time of al-Biruni. In his book *Tahdid-in Nihayat al-Amakin*, he states that seas are named after the land over them (Biruni, 1973, p.116).

Accounts of Masudi and Ibn Hawqal from around a century ahead of *al-Tafhim* are also indicative of such economic ties. In his report, Masudi states, "... And it is a city located on the coast with annual markets. A lot of Muslim tribes or people from Rome, Armenia, etc. frequent the port for business... (Masudi, 1991, vol 1, p.174).

Elsewhere, Muhammad Abūl-Qāsim Ibn Hawqal al-Baghdadi, who

began his journey in 941, gave an account of mule breeding in Armenia for the purpose of exports to various regions, including Khorasan (Ibn Hawqal, 1987, p.94). In addition, dyer's madder was among the goods exported from Armenia to Khorasan (ibid, p.94). Ibn Hawqal also points out the quality and diversity of the goods made in Armenia (ibid, pp. 95-99) and underlines the business boom in that region (ibid, pp. 99-100). In an account of the economic significance of Trebizond or Trebizond, Ibn Hawqal asserts, "Most goods consumed in the Muslim territories, such as silk, brocade fabric, Roman cotton, woolen fabric, and Roman garments are supplied through Trebizond" (ibid, p.91). Unfortunately, Ibn Hawqal does not note Trebizond in his account of distances, while he reports on the tributes paid by the inner Armenia, which was ruled by Bani Sonbat and was in the vicinity of Trebizond (ibid, p.100).

In order to understand Abu Reyhan's account of the Trebizond Sea by the people of Khorasan, a reference must be made to Ibn Hawqal's chapter on Dvin, the capital of Armenia, which was Dabil in Muslim sources. In the 10th century, Dvin was ruled by the Sonbat dynasty. A very wide variety of commodities, including fine fabrics and mattresses called Mahfuri were exported from this city (ibid, pp.90-92). Textile produced in this region was very popular in Khorasan, and Mahfuri mattresses were among the royal presents. There is a mention of these goods in Beyhaqi's *Masudi History* on the Ghaznavid Empire. He lists the presents offered to the Ghaznavid Sultan by the ruler of Khorasan, including various garments, camphor, jujube, pearl, Mahfuri, and rugs (Beyhaqi, 2014, p.390). The author also notes Yahya Barmaki's offerings for Harun al-Rashid, which included an assortment of rugs and Mahfuri from Iraq and Khorasan, indicating that the Mahfuri mattresses from Armenia were very popular (ibid, p.396). Additionally, in his book, *Masalik wa Mamalik*, Istakhri refers to the significance of Dvin in Armenia, stating that exquisite cover floors and rugs are produced there, as well as very pleasant red colors and a kind of delicate silk called boziyon (Istakhri, 1961, p.158). Of Trebizond, he states that merchants gather there, and Roman garments and boziyon silk are traded there (ibid, p.158).

In *Nozhat al-Mushtaq*, Sharif Idrisi (died 1165) writes about the trips of Muslim merchants to the lands surrounding the Caspian, Arran, Gil,

Tabarestan, Bulgaria, and the Sea of Bontus (Sharif Idrisi, 2002, p.833). All these are indicative of the years-long business relations between Khorasan and Armenia, using the significant Port of Trebizond. Apparently, Sultan Mahmood, in whose court al-Biruni resided, envisaged the conquest of Rome, having seen the commercial boom of Armenia. Drawing upon historical and literary texts from that era and the propaganda of Sultan Mahmood's court, Foruzani refers to this ambition as a shattered aspiration. (Foruzani, 2015, pp.298-306). It is easy to understand that the Port of Trebizond was an important location when the people of Khorasan named the Black Sea after the port, as Ibn Hawqal goes on to add that "the traders from the Islamic territories traveled to Trebizond and reached Constanipole through that port" (Ibn Hawqal, 1987, p.91).

Therefore, the trade between various regions and this important port in the south of the Black Sea was an ongoing trend prior to the rise of the Ilkhans to power and expansion of business ties between Iran and Anatolia. One of the more recent reports on this is that of Hamawi's in *Mujam al-Buldan*, where he also describes al-Biruni's account of how the seas were as the best of all (Yaqut Hamawi, 2001, vol 1, p.18). Similar to Abu Reyhan, he calls the Black Sea as the Sea of Trebizond. This 13th century scholar living at the time of the Mongols invasion states, "In the inhabited quarter of the planet in the lands of Slavs and Russians is a sea called Bontus by the Greeks, and Trebizond by us, after the name of port located at the sea..." (ibid, p.18).

Name of the Black Sea during the Rule of the Ilkhans

With the establishment of the Ilkhans' government and their ruling over Anatolia, Trebizond turned into one of the most significant centers in the territory. The Ilkhanid capital of Tabriz was linked to Trebizond, and goods and commodities were exchanged between the two cities (see: Bryer, 1980, p.339 for more details on the business ties between Tabriz and Trebizond).

The turmoil and unrest following the marauding and plunders of the rulers of Ulus Chagatay in Transoxiana and the territorial disputes between the Ilkhanids and the Golden Horde were an occasional obstacle to the commercial route from the Black Sea and the Central Asia. Thus,

the Ilkhanids improved the trade route from Tabriz to the south of Iran and established a connection between their capital and the Persian Gulf in order to create a boom in the international trading. Being on a constant track of financial development, Tabriz turned into the business capital of Azerbaijan and was linked to Trebizond through the old capital or Armenia, Dvin. It was located to the northwest of Tabriz, and the caravans could reach it after crossing Aras River. To the north, there were mountain ranges which separated Trebizond and the inner regions of Anatolia. Until the battle of Manzikert (1071), this Anatolian region was an unstable border between Byzantium and the territory of the Abbasids Caliphate. Therefore, the Tabriz-Dvin-Trebizond route was safer. This indicates how the Trebizond-Tabriz route connected the central cities of Iran to Hormoz Island in the Persian Gulf, and numerous European merchants and ambassadors used the route to travel to China and India during the rule of the Ilkhanids. The Fourth Crusade (1204) and the conquest of Constantinople allowed the Venetian traders to have greater access to the Black Sea. Establishment of the Trebizond Empire in the same year and following the battle furthered the significance of the port. Another factor that contributed to the development of the Port of Trebizond was the establishment of the Mongol Empire's territory from the Pacific to the Eastern Europe, which entailed the Mongolians' efforts to transport their goods from China to Europe (Akisik-Karakullukcu, 2013, pp.324-325). In *Nozhat al-Qolub*, Mostofi considered Trebizond as one of the great regions of Armenia inside Iran and referred to the great amount of tax they pay (Mostofi Qazvini, 2002, p.153), showing that Trebizond Port developed and gained global fame under the rule of the Ilkhanids.

Historical and geographical sources of the period have used the name Sea of Trebizond for the Black Sea, indicating the continuation of its commercial significance and the influence of use of the name from the 9th century in the works of authors and merchants of the Ilkhanid reign.

One of the earliest sources referred to the name of the Sea of Trebizond in the 13th century and in the early years of the Ilkhanids' rule was a book called *Ajayeab al-Makhlūqat wa Gharayeb al-Mowjudat* by Zakariya bin Muhammad bin Mahmood al-Kufi Qazvini (died 1283) in two instances. At one point, he quotes Abu Reyhan as saying that the

Greeks call it the Sea of Bontus and others name it as the Sea of Trebizond (Kufi Qazvini, 2000, p.100). Elsewhere, he lists the Persian Gulf, Sea of China, and Sea of India along with the Sea of Trebizond (ibid, p.108).

In his notes on *the Travels of Marco Polo*, Henry Yule describes that the story has it that the name *Black Sea* began to be used in the early 10th century as the Dark Sea. He adds that the title was first recorded in the notes of Constantine VII (913-959), the Emperor of Byzantium. However, Yule believes that Constantine was referring to Baltic Sea, not the Black Sea (Polo, 1903, vol 1, p.3). Also, William Rubruck used the name "Pontus" for the Black Sea in 1253, but stated that Bulgars called the Great Sea (Rubruck, 1937, p.54).

In Henry. A. Johnson's view, "The Black Sea (*Kara Deniz*) is said to have received its present name from the Turks, who, being accustomed to the waters of the Archipelago, with its numerous harbours and islands, expressed their fear of the great open expanse of the Euxine by the epithet 'black' " (Johnson, 1913, p. 808)

The name Black Sea was used officially for the first time after the Antiquity in 1265 in a contract between the Venetians and the Byzantine Empire. The Greek version of this bilingual contract refers to certain fortifications at the Black Sea (Blois, 2007, pp.3-4). Nevertheless, many historians consider this title to have a longer history. Among the Muslim authors, Abu al-Fida mentions the Black Sea in his book in 1321, adding that at their time, the Sea of Bontus was called Qirm Sea [Crimea] and *Bahr al-Aswad* [the Black Sea] (Abu al-Fida, 1970, pp. 42, 46).

At the same point in time, Dameshqi (died 1327) lists various names of the sea and also mentions the Trebizond Sea (Dameshqi, 1865, p.127), using the phrase "the Sea of Russia also known as the Trebizond Sea" (ibid, p.127). In general, the name Trebizond is used several times in this book. Abu al-Fida states that there is a mountain range to the south of Trebizond, which is called Alsen [languages], since there are many different languages spoken in that area (Abul Fida, 1970, p.253). This is also important as it is indicative of the economic boom of the area.

Elsewhere in his book, Dameshqi refers to *Bahr al-Aswad al-Shumali* [the Northern Black Sea] (Dameshqi, 1865, p.133), which is also

noteworthy. There are various theories on the origins of the names used for this sea. Vasmer argues that the Greek name “Pontus Axinus” is in fact derived from the Avestan term axsaena, meaning black. In his opinion, this sea has always been known with the same name; however, as the Greeks did not know the actual meaning of Avestan Axsaena and it had the same pronunciation as Axinus, they mistakenly translated it into “unfriendly” (Blois, 2007, p.1-2). *Bondahish* mentions the Siah Bon Sea, which is located in Rome and seems to correspond to the Black Sea (Bondahish, 2018, pp.83-84).

Some scholars argue that the naming is not due to any color or climate specification; rather it is as a system of color correspondence to four main directions. That is, black stands for the North, red for the South, white for the West, and green or light blue for the East. This was a common practice as the name “Red Sea” was used to refer to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Thus, the term “Black Sea” was an appellation method for a sea located to the north and was supposedly used by people who lived between the Black Sea in the north and the Red Sea in the south. That corresponds to the ancient Orient and most probably to the Achaemenids (Shmittm, 1985, pp.411-412, in: *Iranica Black Sea*). Currently what is to be noted in Dameshqi's book is that along with other names he states, he also includes *Bahr al-Aswad al-Shumali* described as *aswad wa muzlima* [black and dark] (Dameshqi, 1865, p.133). However, the name “Sea of Trebizond” is always present, and he highlights that it has been a thriving place in the earlier years of the Islamic period with a great population of Roman and Muslim merchants (*ibid*, p.146). Elsewhere, he asserts that in their era, the Bontus Sea is called the Sea of Trebizond (*ibid*, p.259).

Azari Esfarayeni (1382-1462), the composer of *Ajayeb wa Qarayeb*, writes in the chapter on the seas about the Black Sea that the first sea is called “Sea of Trebizond” by the people (Azari Esfarayeni, 2014, p.122). It also calls to mind Biruni's account of the name of the sea. Both Abu al-Fida and Hafiz Abru also refer to the name 'Armenian Sea' (Abu al-Fida, 1970, p.19; Hafiz Abru, 1996, vol 1, p.122). This is also indicative of the vastness and significance of this sea and its boom in the 10th and 11th centuries.

Finally, it must be noted that there was an issue involved in the

appellation of the Black Sea. Due to the location of the Crimean Peninsula, an inner sea had been formed in it which was called Azof or Qrim (Crimea). Old sources referred to it as Maytes or Maytesh. Muslim historians and geographers did not have sufficient knowledge of that part of the sea and thus were confused about how to differentiate it from the Black Sea.

Conclusion

A study of the name “Trebizond”, which is a port located along the south coast of the Black Sea, is an interesting instance of the simultaneous use of a commonly used technical name. Greeks started calling it the Sea of Pontus in the Antiquity. The name was then recorded in their geography textbooks, which in turn formed the bases of a vaster knowledge of geography, including that of Muslims'. This is how it was considered to be the formal name of the body of water, especially by the scholars of the Middle Ages. However, the more commonly used Trebizond name was propagated by the Muslim merchants due to the commercial significance of the port. It continued to exist and used by the Islamic East even more popular name than the formal name. The main reason contributing to the prevalence of this name was the trade boom at this port. It is a common practice to name a body of water after a certain port along its coast; however, introduction and acceptance of the name by the people of far-away lands and wide application of the name by them for several centuries were indicative of the booming trade, which Port of Trebizond featured. The considerable number and business genius of the merchants, variety of their ethnicity and religions, and the considerably large volumes and variety of the goods traded along with favorable business conditions made this port an appealing one across Asia, whose ports did not feature a long history.

Therefore, the vast trading exchanges between Armenia and the Port of Trebizond with the eastern parts of Iran from ninth century on introduced the Black Sea as the Sea of Trebizond to the lands beyond Khorasan and to the traders and people of Khwarazm and its immediate surroundings. For the same reason, the same name was used to refer to the sea by such a great scholar as al-Biruni. Formation of the Trebizond Empire following the fall of the Constantinople by the Crusaders on one hand, and the rise of the Mongol Empire on the other contributed to the

peak of the importance and fame for the Port of Trebizond in the 13th and 14th centuries. Hence, “Sea of Trebizond” was the name used in historical and geographical books and was also applied by Iranians and other Muslim nations along with the names of the Sea of Bontus, Bahr al-Aswad (the Black Sea), Georgian (Gurziyan) Sea, Bahr al-Burgar (the Sea of Bulgar) and Bahr al-Rus (the Sea of Russia) as other names given to the sea.



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