

The Naming of the Black Sea in Arabic-Islamic and Christian Sources

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Abstract The paper deals with the naming of the Black Sea in Arabic-Islamic and Christian sources. Based on a purview of major designations of the Black Sea in the Arabic-Islamic and Christian geographical traditions, the author questions the geo-chromatic explanation of the name of the Black Sea. Instead, the author outlines a multi-layered naming structure in the system of the designations of the Black Sea. Historical names of the Black Sea in both Arabic-Islamic and Christian geographical traditions demonstrate independent trends in the naming of this sea which went through a convoluted process of semantic transformations as reflected in the extant records.

Keywords The Black Sea. The Arabic-Islamic geographical tradition. The Christian geographical tradition. The descriptive geography. The geo-chromatic designation.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Contextualizing the Greek Tradition. – 3 Diversification: From Constantinople to Georgia. – 4 Reducing the Scope. – 5 The Geo-Chromatic Impasse. – 6 From Scandinavia to Ruthenia. – 7 Conclusions.

1 Introduction

The proposed study is primarily historiographic. It deals with the naming of the Black Sea in both Arabic-Islamic and Christian, primarily Latin-Christian, sources viewed in the light of the cultural and sociopolitical dominance of the Greeks, Arabs, and the Turks in the Pontic region. I pursue a modest objective in this study. Based on a survey of available attestations, I intend to explore major designa-

tions (transcriptions) of the Black Sea in Arabic records in comparison with their Turkic and Latin-Christian equivalents. While assessing the geo-chromatic explanation of the name of the Black Sea as reflected in the Turkish descriptive geographical tradition, I take into consideration a parallel Latin-Christian way of the naming of the Black Sea which indicates an independent trend influenced by the Greek (Byzantine) geographical tradition.

The proposed study is structured in the following way. First, I discuss the oldest layers of Arabic-Islamic attestations (section 2 through section 4). In section 5, I home in on the geo-chromatic etymology of the name of the Black Sea, commonly accepted in Slavic and Turkic studies. To assess possible shortcomings in the traditional etymology, I compare various (parallel) names of the Black Sea in different geographical traditions (section 6), which allows me to posit parallelism in the naming of the Black Sea as reflected in Arabic-Islamic and Latin-Christian records (section 7).

2 Contextualizing the Greek Tradition

The Arabic-Islamic authors began describing the Black and Azov Seas comparatively late (Bejlis 1962, 22). Leaving aside the very dubious designation *Baħr al-Khazar* in Ibn Khurdādhbih (١٠٥, ١٠٤, ١٠٣), the available source material suggests that they knew practically nothing about the above seas. Under Greek influence (Gk Πόντος from IE **pent*; see Pokorny 1959-69, 3: 808-9), the early Arab-Muslim geographers called the Black Sea *Baħr Buntus* (بحر بنطس) as attested, for instance, in Ibn Rusteh (٨٥); the latter author relied on al-Battānī (d. 929) who improved Ptolemy's astronomical calculations and used his geographical information in regard to the Black and the Azov Seas (Kračkovskij 2004, 100-3; Bejlis 1962, 24). Ibn Rusteh, Qudāmah Ibn Ja'far al-Kātib (d. between 922 and 948), al-Mas'ūdī and other geographers just followed in his steps.¹

A separate position is taken by al-Mas'ūdī who in his *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa-al-ishrāf* (Liber commonitionis et recognitionis, ca. 956) identified *Baħr Buntus* as the Sea of the *Burghar* (Bulghār), the Rus' and other peoples living at the side of the town of Lāziqah right behind Constantinople; he wrote in particular that this sea is connected with the lake (or sea) of *Māyuṭis* (*Baħr Māyuṭis*); among the rivers which flow into it are the *Ṭanāis* (Don) and the Danube; from *Baħr Buntus* issues *Khalīj al-Qusṭantīniyyah* (Strait of Constantinople), i.e. Bos-

¹ Abbreviations: Ar (Arabic), Av (Avestan), ESl (East Slavic), Fr (French), Gk (Greek), IE (Indo-European), It (Italian), OPe (Old Persian), OUk (Old Ukrainian), Tk (Turkish), Tu (Turkic).

porus, Sea of Marmora and Dardanelles which issues in the Mediterranean Sea (*Baḥr al-Rūm*) (al-Mas'ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh*, ٦٧-٦٦; see al-Mas'ūdī-Tanbīh, 98; Dunlop, “Baḥr Buntus”). As Bejlis (1962) noted, this description was heavily influenced by the respective attestation in al-Battānī and Ibn Rusteh (see Kračkovskij 2004, 103; Kalinina 1988, 144).

In his *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jauhar* (Venae auri et fodinae gemmarum, ca. 947), al-Mas'ūdī mentions *Baḥr Nīṭas* in reference to the Black Sea in the following passage:

In the upper reaches of the Khazar river [i.e. the Volga] there is an outflow which joins a gulf of the Pontos Sea [بحر نيطس], which is the *Rūs* Sea, for no one except them [i.e. the *Rūs*] navigates it, and they are established on some of its coasts. (al-Mas'ūdī ii, 15; al-Mas'ūdī-Pellat 1, ٢١٦-٢١٥)²

The designation *Baḥr Nīṭas* (بحر نيطس) is commonly treated today as a stereotyped error (same *ductus* of letters with different pointing and vocalization; see Dunlop, “Baḥr Buntus”) of the original name *Baḥr Buntus* (see al-Mas'ūdī-Pellat 1, ٢١٦). Keeping in mind al-Mas'ūdī's description of the Russian people living allegedly in the Pontic region, one can cite here a striking parallel in the Russian Primary Chronicle (mid-12th century):

[But] the Dnieper flows through various mouths into the Pontus [*Ponet'skoe more*]. This sea, beside which taught St. Andrew, Peter's brother, is called the Rus[s]ian Sea [*more Ruskoje*]. (Cross, Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1973, 53; PVL, 7)

Yet despite this parallel, such transcriptions as *Nīṭas*, *Nīṭaš* are attested by other Arab-Muslim geographers (Nedkov 1960, 144; Konovalova 2006, 129-30). For example, the form *Nīṭas* is used consistently in most of the codices of al-Idrīsī's *Kitāb Rujār* (al-Idrīsī), while its editors left this form only in the introduction of al-Idrīsī's *Kitāb Rujār* (al-Idrīsī 1, 12). In all other cases, the editors introduced the conjecture البحر النيطسي (*Baḥr Buntus*) as, for instance, at the very beginning of Section 6 of Climate 6 (al-Idrīsī 8, 914; see Konovalova 2013, 236-7).

According to some Arab-Muslim authors, the above passage refers to the Azov Sea inasmuch as in another place al-Mas'ūdī says that the Black Sea and the Azov Sea (*Baḥr Māyūṭis*) are one and the same (al-Mas'ūdī-Pellat, ١٤٦; al-Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, 164; see Marquart 1903, 335). According to Minorsky (see *Hudūd*, 181-2), this is confirmed by al-Idrīsī who makes the *Nahr al-Rūsiyyah*, as he calls

² If not otherwise stated, all translations from Arabic are by the Author.

the *Ṭanāis* (Don), flow into the *Baḥr Rūsiyyah*, i.e. the Azov Sea (al-Idrīsī 8, 910-11; see Tuulio(-Tallgren) 1936, 171).

Among those geographers who used the Greek borrowing *Baḥr Bunṭus*, the description offered by the Persian polymath Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī/Bērōnī (973-1048) and recorded by Yāqūt al-Hamawī (d. 1229) in his *Muʿjam al-buldān* (Lexicon geographicum), seems to be the most concise, though rather brief (see Bejlis 1962, 28):

And right in the middle of this part, in the land of the Slavs (*al-Ṣa-qālibah*) and the Rus' (*al-Rūs*) there is a sea known as *Bunṭus* among the Greeks and *Baḥr Ṭarābazundah* among us. (Yāqūt 1, ٥٠٠-٤٩٩)

3 Diversification: From Constantinople to Georgia

In addition to *Baḥr Bunṭus* influenced clearly by the respective Greek (Byzantine) designation, the Arab-Muslim authors also used parallel forms derived from the names of the adjacent peoples or countries. Among those forms, which nevertheless can have multiple referential meanings, we can name the following:

Baḥr al-Khazar (Sea of the Khazars)

Baḥr al-Rūs (Rusian Sea)

Baḥr al-Rūm (Sea of Byzantium)

Baḥr al-Burghar / Baḥr al-Burghaz (Sea of the Bulghārs)

Baḥr Ṭarābazundah (Sea of Trebizond)

Baḥr Nīṭash al-Armanī (Armenian Pontus)

Baḥr al-Qusṭantīniyyah (Sea of Constantinople)

Daryā-yi Gurziyān (Sea of the Georgians)

Several comments are in order here.

First of all, we concur with Bejlis (1962, 22) that the original Arabic designation of the Black Sea was *Baḥr al-Khazar* going back to the lost work authored by al-Jarmī (9th century). Unlike some early medieval Arab-Muslim geographers, such as al-Iṣṭakhri and Ibn Ḥawqal, belonging to the Balkhī tradition, who called the Caspian Sea *Baḥr al-Khazar* (بحرالخزر) 'Sea of the Khazars' (see Ibn Ḥawqal-Kramers 1, ٧; Ibn Ḥawqal-Kramers, Wiet 388), Ibn Khurdādhbih (١٠٣١٠٤١٠٥) transferred this form to the Black Sea because allegedly the Khazars held in their possession the eastern and southeastern parts of the Crimea. The reading of *Baḥr al-Khazar* as the Sea of the Khazars in Ibn Khurdādhbih, who nevertheless was not sure of the exact location of the Black Sea and its connection with the Caspian Sea (Bejlis 1962, 22), is supported by the anonymous author of the *Ḥudūd al-Ālam* (Regionis mundi, 982-3, see *Ḥudūd*, 420).

Second, the name *Baḥr al-Rūs* was used later, from the 10th to the 14th century, as attested, for instance, in al-Dimashqī's *Kitāb nukhbat al-dahr fī 'ajā'ib al-barr wa-al-ba'ôr* (Delectus temporis de rebus mirandis terrae marisque, early 14th century). According to Soloviev (1959), this designation was commonly used in the Latin West, Byzantium, and the Islamic World. Soloviev counted 11 records containing the name "Rusian Sea". Soloviev (1959, 6-7, 9-11) counted 11 records containing the name "Rusian Sea": *Mare Rusciae* in *Historia Hierosolymitana* and *Annalista Saxo* (ca. 1139); *Rucenum mare* in Helmold of Bosau's *Chronica Slavorum* (*Chronicle of the Slavs*, mid-12th century; see Helmold, 13 and Helmold-Tschan, 46); *la mer de Rosie* in Geofroy de Villehardouin's *Conquête de Constantinople*, an eyewitness account of the Fourth Crusade (1199-1204); *more Ruskoe* as attested under the year 1093 in the *Rusian Primarily Chronicle* (Cross, Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1973, 53; PVL, 7) and other similar forms, recorded in particular by al-Mas'ūdī and al-Dimashqī.

Third, the author of the Persian treatise *Ḥudūd al-Ālam* identifies the Sea of the Georgians (*Gurziyān*) as the Black Sea (*Bontos*) (*Ḥudūd*, 53). Minorsky argues that the alternative name of the Pontos, *Daryā-yi Gurziyān* (or *Gurz* 'Georgians'), was passed on to the latter precisely from the Azov Sea which the author omitted to describe; the designation of the Black Sea as *Daryā-yi Gurziyān* is entirely without a parallel, and it is astonishing to see the Pontos baptized after a people never known as navigators (*Ḥudūd*, 182). This part of information may be due to a confusion of *ورنك* **Warank* (the Varangian Rus') and *كرز* **Gurz*, not impossible in Arabic script (*Ḥudūd*, 422), especially if the position of some of the letters is changed. It is worth mentioning that the form *Warank* was attested in Muslim sources relatively late. Since Frāhn (1823, 177-8), it has been generally accepted (see Kunik 1875, 250) that al-Bīrūnī/Bērōnī (973-1048) was the first author to mention in his *Kitāb al-tafhīm* (*Liber de elementis astronomicae artis*, ca. 1030) *ba'ôr warank* (بحر ورنك), the Varangian Sea, together with the people living on its coast (Yāqūt 1, ٢٤, ٢٠). Remarkably, al-Dimashqī called the people *warank* 'the most true *Ṣaqālibah* (هم و صقلاب الصقالبة); these people lived in its farthest limits of Rus', that is, near the Ladoga lake which is close to the Sea of the *Warank* and *Ṣaqālibah* (بحر ورنك والصقالبة) (al-Dimashqī, ١٣٣, see also ١٤٦, ٢٣, ٢٢; Mišin 2002, 98; Danylenko 2004, 190-1).

4 Reducing the Scope

A new period in the naming of the Black Sea is marked by new designations based on a smaller number of new ethnic and place names (see Dunlop, “Baḥr Buntus”) such as:

- Baḥr Sūdāq* (Sea of *Sūdāq*)
- Baḥr Sinūb* (Sea of Sinope)
- Baḥr al-Qirim* (Sea of *Qirim*)
- Al-Baḥr al-Armanī* (The Armenian Sea)

The first two designations are found in Ibn Sa‘īd al-Maghribī’s *Baṣṭ al-arḍ fī al-ṭūl wa-al-‘arḍ* (*Extensio terrae per longitudinem suam et latitudinem*, late 13th century). Derived after the name of the town of *Sūdāq* (Gk Σουγδαία) in the northern part of the Pontic region, the form *Baḥr Sūdāq* (سوداق بحر) clearly refers to the Black Sea (Ibn Sa‘īd al-Maghribī, ۱۳۹). The designation *Baḥr Sinūb* (Ibn Sa‘īd al-Maghribī, ۱۲۸) can be associated with the name of the former Greek town, *Sinūb* (سنوب; Gk Σινώπιη), located exactly across the town of *Sūdāq*, that is, on the southern coast of the Black Sea. Konovalova (2013, 257) treats these two designations as commonly used names of the Black Sea at the time of Ibn Sa‘īd al-Maghribī’.

In Abū al-Fidā’s *Taqwīm al-buldān* (*Ratio terrarum*, early 14th c.), one comes across two more forms, *Baḥr al-Qirim* and *al-Baḥr al-‘Aswad*, which seemed to be in use in the Arabic descriptive geography as early as the very beginning of the 14th century. These two forms are attested in the following excerpt (together with its French translation) dealing with *Baḥr Nīṭash* (the Black Sea):

And *Buḥairat Mānīṭash* [بحيرة مانيطش] (Azov Sea) is connected with *Baḥr Nīṭash* [بحر نيطش] (Black Sea) and is known today as *Baḥr al-Azaq* [بحر الازق] (Azov Sea) [named] after the town which is situated on its northern coast and is a trade harbor. *Baḥr Nīṭash* is known in our days also as *Baḥr al-Qirim* [بحر القرم] and *al-Baḥr al-‘Aswad* [البحر الاسود]. (Abū al-Fidā’, ۳۱)

Le Palus-Méotide (Bohayré-Matytesch or lac Matytesch) est une suite du Pont-Euxin. Le Palus-Méotide porte aujourd’hui le nom de mer d’Azof (Bahr-Alazof), du nom d’une ville situé sur le côte septentrionale, et où affluent les marchands. Quant au Pont-Euxin, on le nomme à présent mer de Crimée (Bahr-alkirim) et mer Noire (Albahr-alasouad). (Abū al-Fidā’-Reinaud 2, pt. 1, 38)

Unlike other places in this work replete with citations from other sources, Abū al-Fidā’ relied in this case most likely on reports of different informants. This is why, perhaps, Abū al-Fidā’'s description of

the northern coast of the Black Sea is more detailed than its southern part, not to mention scanty evidence about the eastern and western coasts of the Black Sea (Konovalova 2009, 131). Furthermore, the author treats the above two forms as contemporaneous, though obviously prefers the older one – *Baḥr Nīṭash* (see Konovalova 2009, 130). Leaving the ‘geo-chromatic’ designation for a moment aside, the name *Baḥr al-Qirim* is based on the name of the administrative center of the Golden Horde in the Crimea, known also as *Şulghāt* (Abū al-Fidā’, ٢٠٠, ٢١٤; Abū al-Fidā’-Reinaud 1, 320). The translation of this name as the Sea of the Crimea suggested by Mordtmann (Mordtmann, “*Ḳara Deniz*”, 730) is, in fact, misleading.

In the same chapter, dealing with *Baḥr Nīṭash* (Black Sea), Abū al-Fidā’ introduces another designation, *al-Baḥr al-Armanī* (Abū al-Fidā’, ٢٤; Abū al-Fidā’-Reinaud 1, 41). Quite obviously, this term was excerpted by the geographer from some older sources. By adding in his narrative the common phrase *Allahu ‘alam*, literally ‘Allah knew’, Abū al-Fidā’ shows that he is not sure in the reliability of this name which might seem to him obsolete (see Konovalova 2003, 53):

And *Nīṭash* (Black Sea) [...] is the name of this sea [found] in old books and it is also called *al-Baḥr al-Armanī* [البحر الارمني], however, Allah knows this better. (Abū al-Fidā’, ٢٤, Abū al-Fidā’-Reinaud 1, 41)

5 The Geo-Chromatic Impasse

What is remarkable is that Abū al-Fidā’ uses for the first time in the descriptive Arabic geography (Kračkovskij 2004, 18-19) the color name *al-Baḥr al-‘Aswad*, purportedly under the influence of the Turkish designation *Karadeniz/Ḳara Deniz* (see Konovalova 2003, 52; Mordtmann, “*Ḳara Deniz*”, 730). Incidentally, al-Dimashqī also resorts to the term *al-Baḥr al-‘Aswad* in his description of the Strait of Istanbul in Section 4 of Chapter 5 of his work, where we also come across the designations *Baḥr Ṭarābazundah* (Sea of Trebizond) and *Baḥr al-Rūs* (the Russian Sea) which belong to the older layer in the naming of the Black Sea (al-Dimashqī, ١٤٢).

The introduction of the designation *al-Baḥr al-‘Aswad* into the descriptive Arabic geography raises many questions. Stachowski (2010, 541, fn. 10) recently called this form a result of the “European-Asiatic semantic interweavement”, thus reviving the old “geo-chromatic” theory of this form. According to the commonly accepted theory, the old Greek name of the Black Sea is Πόντος ἄξεινος ‘inhospitable sea’ (secondarily changed into Πόντος εὔξει(ν)ος ‘hospitable sea’), where the second element reflects allegedly the Iranian stem **axšaina-* ‘dark colored’ (Vasmer 1921), also Av *axšaēna* ‘dark colored,’ OPe *axšaina-* ‘color of turquoise’ (Schmitt 1996; also 1990, 310). The primary color-

based model seems to have survived with its original meaning in the Near East, until the Turks borrowed and propagated it anew. The Persian term was allegedly translated into Turkish as *Ḳara Deniz*, which could have been understood as ‘black sea’ or ‘dangerous sea.’ Following this trend, the Europeans must have taken over the literal meaning of the Turkish name and thus the semantic variant ‘black sea’ became usual in Europe (Stachowski 2010, 541 fn. 10). One can hypothesize here that the Arab-Muslim authors also appropriated this semantic model as demonstrated by al-Dimashqī (al-Dimashqī, ١٤٣) in his description of the Black Sea and the coasts of the Crimea, including the town name *al-Maṣṭikī* (< *Maṭṭakhā*) / ESI *Тѣмutoroканѣ*.

Aware of some shortcomings in the geo-chromatic explanation, Dan (2008) argued that the ancient name of the Black Sea (Πόντος ἄξεινος / Πόντος εὔξει(ι)νος) could be explained by the Greek word Πόντος denoting the sea as seen by far-off mariners unlike πέλαγος meaning the sea as seen by the inhabitants of its shores (see Soloviev 1959, 10). As the Hellespontos and the Propontis, the εὔξει(ι)νος kept its name of ‘difficult passage’ and even became the “Pontos” in the 5th century. The qualifier ἄξεινος, according to Dan (2008, 177-8, 180), probably changed by antiphrasis or euphemism into εὔξει(ι)νος, is a phonetic calque from the Indo-Iranian name of a northern, ‘black’ sea, opposed to a southern, ‘red’ sea (used by the Phoenicians, Egyptians, Cypriots, and Greeks). Even if the Black Sea became ‘black’ again only through Turkish dialects, several ‘black’ hydronyms and toponyms of the Thracio-Sythian region as well as the association, since the 6th century BC, of the Black Sea with the internal world, probably encouraged the preservation of these adjectives, unusual in maritime designations.

Although the color-inspired explication might satisfy some authors, we are not ready to argue the case from slender evidence. Yet, when discussing the appearance of *al-Baḥr al-ʿAswad* in the Arabic geographical tradition, some authors pinpoint very substantial shortcomings in the color-based model purportedly borrowed from the Turks. Suffice it to mention here Constantine Pophyrogenitus who, when describing two Croatias, that is, the Dalmatian or ‘baptized’ Croatia, as opposed to the ‘unbaptized’ (Great or White) Croatia together with the Serbs, wrote about a ‘sea’ to which the latter ‘come down after the 30 days’ and which is called ‘dark’ (θάλασσα σκοτεινή) (DAI, 152-3; see Abū al-Fidāʾ-Reinaud 2, pt. 1, 41; Planhol, “Ḳarā Deniz”; Karatay 2009, 66-7).³ The geo-chromatic interpretation of Tu *ḳara* appears less con-

³ Although speaking mutually intelligible languages (or variants of a single language), Croats and Serbs were divided by religion and borders. This fact, according to Wexler (2021, 158-9), may reflect the confederative Irano-Slavic origins of the White Croats in southeastern Poland, where ‘Iranian White Croat’ speech was replaced by ‘Slavic Croat’ shortly before the emigration of some of the speakers to the northern Balkans.

vincing if one recalls a wide array of other (mostly, metaphoric) meanings of this stem such as 'ordinary [people]' (as opposed to aristocracy), 'common [people],' even 'slave' (see Laude-Cirtautas 1961, 32), 'vegetable poison' and some others (Clouston 1972, 643-4; see Nadeljaev et al. 1969, 422-4); cf. *kara baš* referring to the Armenian Bishop, later any Christian priest (Radloff 2: 133; see Laude-Cirtautas 1961, 20). By comparing the meanings of Tu *ķara* and Gk ἄξεινος, Buxarin (2013, 465) recently concluded that the Turkic designation of the Black Sea had nothing to do with "color-coding", while the western European color terms might have been based on the secondary chromatic interpretation of the Turkic stem *ķara* (see also Laude-Cirtautas 1961, 33-4). It is not coincidental that the stem *ķara* in many personal, ethnic, and dynastic names demonstrates the meaning 'great, powerful' such as (in Pritsak's notation) the title *qara chaqan* 'chief, upper ruler,' *qara ordu* 'black (< 'main, great') army,' *Qara qum*, today the name of a desert in Central Asia, primarily meaning 'the northern abode, habitation' and other expressions (see Pritsak 1954, 377). In this respect, deserving of attention is a similar distinction between the 'black' and 'white' Khazars in al-Iṣṭakhri's *Kitāb masālik al-mamālik* (Viae regnorum, ca. 951) (*al-Iṣṭakhri*, ١٣٣).

However, the larger concerns of the common color-based hypothesis of the origin of the Arabic term *al-Baḥr al-'Aswad* (and *Ḷara Deniz*), next to the respective Greek and Latin forms in the European tradition, can be missed if we come at this puzzle from the 'geo-chromatic' end. In this respect, one should bear in mind both historiographic (Schmitt 1996) and linguistic counter arguments, advanced, for instance, by Moorhouse (1940). According to this author, there is no direct evidence of the Avestan adjective ever being applied to the naming of the Black Sea; also, in historical times, Avestan is a long way from Greek and in prehistorical times it is doubtful whether the speakers of Avestan had any close connection with the Black Sea; assuming Πόντος to denote 'way', 'the dark way' would be a fantastic name for any sea (see Allen 1947).

The earliest Greek 'geo-chromatic' designation of the Black Sea is recorded in the treaty concluded in 1265 between Michael VIII Palaeologus and the Venetian doge Raynerio Geno (dominus Raynerius Geno). In the above treaty, the Greek Μαύρη Θάλασσα is rendered in the Latin-language version of the treaty as *Mauritalassae videlicet Mare Nigro* (Tafel, Thomas 1857, 70, 66-77, 82). According to Buxarin (2013, 469), the use of these forms proves a 'geo-chromatic' adaptation of the name of the Black Sea in Byzantium. However, since the vocabulary of this treaty largely reflected the local vernacular standard, we can assume that the form Μαύρη Θάλασσα had been part of the plain vocabulary long before it was employed in this treaty.

Examples of the 'geo-chromatic' naming of the Black Sea are also found in the anonymous *Gesta Hungarorum*, most probably com-

posed in the early 13th century. The chronicle purports to be an account of the background, circumstances and immediate aftermath of the Hungarian conquest of Pannonia in the late 9th century (Rady 2009, 681). The first ‘geo-chromatic’ attestation is recorded in Chapter 1, entitled “De Scythia”:

Scythia igitur maxima terra est que dentumoger dicitur; uersus orientem finis cuius ab aquilonali parte extenditur usque ad nigrum pontum. (*Gesta Hungarorum*, 2)

Scythia then is a very great land, called Dentumoger, over towards the east, the end of which reaches westwards to the Black Sea [nigrum pontum]. (Rady 2009, 686)

The second ‘geo-chromatic’ form is recorded in Chapter 44, entitled “De insula danubii”:

[...] et insuper legatos suos miserunt, ut eis licentiam daret in greciam eundi, ut totam macedoniam sibi subiugarent, a Danubio usque ad nigrum mare. (*Gesta Hungarorum*, 38)

And they sent [...] their envoys to him so that he might give them leave to go to Greece that they might conquer the whole of Macedonia from the Danube to the Black Sea [nigrum mare]. (Rady 2009, 716)

The identity of the author of this chronicle, King Béla III’s notary, is uncertain. His style is of a French school, probably Paris (La Sorbonne?) or Orleans. He has some knowledge of Hungarian that he uses to support his etymologies. What is more important, though, is that he is possibly the first European writer to call the Black Sea as such, which (along with several other indicators) may suggest, according to Rady (2009, 684), an understanding of a Turkic language. I believe, however, that the anonymous’s designation of the Black Sea as such proves that the ‘geo-chromatic’ interpretation of the Black Sea was quite common in West Europe in the early 13th century (see Bukharin 2013, 470).

Karatay (2011) recently rejected the colour-based origin of *Tk Karadeniz*. He argued that Turkish or Turkic has no clear usage of colors for geographical directions, and, moreover, the Turks were among the last to use the name ‘Black Sea’ – this name had been firmly established in the north among the Khazars, Magyars, and the Norsemen well before the Ottomans, who had been able to extend their power much farther around the sea than had their Byzantine predecessors, came to use it. Second, the source of the puzzle seems to be hidden in the semantic connection between the words ‘great’ and

'black' (Karatay 2011, 10-11). One of the proofs of the northern origin of the term 'great' (> 'black') is found, for example, in the anonymous Khazarian letter extant from the 10th century:

[Our country, Khazar] is to the right of the sea which comes from [yo]ur land, by which came your messengers to Constantinople. It appears to me the Great Sea does it extend [הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל]. Our city is distant from the sea by two thousand one hundred and sixty *rīs*. (Golb, Pritsak 1982, 118-19)

By mere calculations and other textual evidence, Karatay (2011, 4) concluded that it is the Black Sea that is being referred to here. It is not surprising that to a new influx of sailors and traders coming from the city-states of medieval Italy, who found small remnants of the Khazars, or perhaps Jewish communities associated with the Khazars, especially in *T̄mutorokan̄* (see Danylenko 2022), it was simply *il mare Maggiore* 'the Great Sea' (King 2004, 82; see Karatay 2011, 5). William of Rubruck writes in his 13th-century account of Mongols that entered:

Pontus seu Pontus Euxinus seu Mare Maius seu Maurum pro mari Nigro apud antiquos inveniuntur (*Sinica Franciscana*, 164)

Sea of Pontus which is commonly called [by the ancients] Mare Maius, or the Greater Sea, [for the Black Sea] [...] (Rubruck, 41)

It is tempting, therefore, to assume that the Khazar tradition, including some lexical nomenclature, was alive in those days, notwithstanding the process of Cumanization and the subsequent Mongol invasions (see Karatay 2011, 6). To support this line of argumentation, one can also mention here that the initial meaning of *karā* in *Ḳarā Deniz / Ḳara Deniz / Karadeniz* frequently has the meaning of 'great, powerful, terrible' in Turkish, particularly in personal names. According to Planhol ("Ḳarā Deniz"), the contamination of the two meanings seems probable, but the explanation appears inadequate: the existence of the double *Ḳarā Deniz - Aḳ Deniz* (the 'White Sea,' or the Mediterranean) does not plead in its favor (Abū al-Fidā'-Reinaud 2, pt. 1, 38 fn. 3; Mordtmann, "Ḳara Deniz", 730).

In fact, as Schmitt (1990, 310) reiterated, the name 'Black Sea' could hardly be derived from the color of the water or from any climatic particulars. It must be viewed in the context of a cosmographic system in which colour names indicated the cardinal points (e.g., black [or dark] for north, red for south, white for west, and green or light blue for east): the name 'Red Sea' (known since Herodotus) thus designated the Indian Ocean, together with the adjoining Red Sea and Persian Gulf (see Saussure 1924, 25; Pritsak 1954, 377).

Black would then be a natural designation for the northern antipodal sea, although Schmitt (1990, 310) believes that the name 'Black Sea' cannot have been given to it by the Scythians - the name must come from a people that knew both the northern Black and the southern Red Seas.

We are not ready, however, to state definitely that this people were Achaemenids, as Schmitt (1990, 310) assumed, or some Turkic people(s) who adopted the cosmographic conceptions of Far East (Saussure 1924; see Mordtmann, "Kara Deniz", 730). Nevertheless, full coverage of the relationship between the meaning 'great, powerful, terrible' and 'black' becomes possible if compared with parallel semantic shifts in other languages. Thus, It/Fr *Mare Maggiore / Mer Majeur*, used down to the first half of the 17th century, could have sprung up in parallel with the 'geo-chromatic' designation already in the antiquity. Henceforth, as was noted by Mordtmann (Mordtmann, "Kara Deniz", 730), we find the name 'Black Sea' throughout geographical literature; the older reproduction of *Ḳarā Deniz* (in another notation, *Ḳara Deniz*) by 'Great Sea' shows that *Ḳarā* in this connection does not refer to the color but means, as often in proper names, 'great, powerful, terrible,' in keeping with the dangers of the voyage, particularly in bad weather, upon the sea so liable to storms of such extent.

A similar meaning is reconstructed for the adjective 'aswad' 'black' in the Arabic name of the Black Sea. Thus, 'aswad' could be employed as an epithet describing a particularly powerful wind; also, under the 'Abbāsids, one of their governors (or his military commanders) was called *musayyidah* (see Dozy, 1: 700). Considering the parallelism between Ar 'aswad and Tu *ḳarā*, Saussure (1924, 31) concluded that both forms have a "double meaning" of (1) 'great, powerful, terrible' and (2) 'black.' To be sure, this parallelism is remarkable. Yet it is not clear whether we are dealing here with the independent development in each of these languages or with what is called in areal-typtological linguistics 'polysemy copying'. In the latter case we speak about replication of a polysemy pattern (see the 'double meaning' above) and not of mere calquing or loan translation (Heine, Kuteva 2005, 100). What is clear, however, is that the 'geo-chromatic' interpretation of this term was secondary and, for an extended period of time, local (Buxarin 2013, 472).

Operating within the limits of historical geography, it is easy to notice shortcomings in the argumentation of Karatay (2009; 2011), especially in what regards the process of the borrowing of the Khazarian semantic model 'great' > 'black' by the Turks (and the Arabs). Leaving certain details aside, the Turkish designation *Ḳarā Deniz* (*Ḳara Deniz / Karadeniz*) can be treated as an intermediate term synthesizing (channeling) several independent developmental clines in the naming of the Black Sea. The term *Ḳarā* could hardly trigger the 'geo-chromatic' interpretation of the designation of the Black Sea. We

rather deal here, to use Stachowski's expression, with the "Europe-an-Asiatic semantic interweavement" of different geographical traditions overlapping in the Pontic region. Hence it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a donor and a true receptor tradition. Moreover, the list of such local traditions can be expanded, for instance, by the Old Scandinavian and East Slavic (Ruthenian or, Ukrainian) geographical traditions (Saussure 1924, 33; see Buxarin 2013, 470-5).

6 From Scandinavia to Ruthenia

It is worth mentioning here data on *Svíþjóð in mikla eða kalda*, or "Sweden the Great or Cold," found in *Heimskringla, Yinliga saga*, the best-known saga (early 13th century) of the Old Norse kings' sagas. According to the author of this saga, Sweden the Great or Cold was located to the north of the *Svartahaf*, or the Black Sea. It was a large territory, comparable in size to *Serkland in mikla* (Saracen land) or *Bláland in mikla* (Africa); its northern part was peopled with giants and dwarfs and was uncultivated because of frost and cold; through its southern part ran the river Tanais (the Don River), which was called *Tana- (Vana-) kvísl* ('Tana / Vana Fork') by the Norsemen, and which had its mouth at *Svartahaf*. The land was divided from other countries by a great mountain chain which ran north-east and then south-west. To the west of the river *Tana-* was Europe; to its east was Asia (see Pritsak 1981, 244, 662, 671).

Remarkably, *Svartahaf* does not just mean the Black Sea; the term also covers the Sea of Azov, an overlap also found in some Arabic-Islamic sources, for instance, in al-Mas'ūdī (al-Mas'ūdī-Pellat, ١٤٦) and al-Idrīsī (8, 910-1). The use of the 'geo-chromatic' term *Svartahaf* in the Old Scandinavian geographical tradition is quite revealing. Tentatively, due to the long-standing relations between Byzantium and the Old Scandinavians (Varangians), the form *Svartahaf* might reflect the Byzantine and Latin-Christian tradition(s) rather than the Turkish one (see Buxarin 2013, 472).

To give an example of the later confusion of different geographical traditions in the Latin West, it is worth mentioning Johannes Schiltberger's *Hie vahet an d'Schildberger der vil wunders erfahren hatt in der heydenschafft und in d'türckey*, published for the first time in 1476 in Augsburg by Anton Sorg (Planhol, "Ḳarā Deniz", 575).⁴ Having been taken prisoner and subsequently enslaved by the Turks and, later,

⁴ This work produces a portrayal of the East in order to inform a German-speaking and Christian audience, refracting the ideas, customs, values and interest of this culture in narrating the encounter with another world (Wolpert 2016, 266, 271). One can expect, therefore, that, being aware of the *Türkenfurcht*, Schiltberger would be precise in citing names, dates, and other facts related to his 30-year captivity.

the Mongols, from 1396 to 1427, this German nobleman kept a travel book (*Reisebuch*), describing his journeys within the Pontic region, including the southern coast of Crime (Schiltberger). Of particular interest is Chapter 57, dealing with the description of Constantinople; Schiltberger uses in one page side by side two designations of the Black Sea which seem to reflect different geographical traditions:

The great Alexander [...] caused two seas to flow into each other; and that which flows is called and is the Great Sea, and it is also called the Black Sea. (Schiltberger, 79)

Es hat auch der groß Alexander XV [...] und hat zwai mer in ainander lassen; und das do fleust das ist das groß mere, man hayst es auch das schwartz mere. (*Reisebuch*, 46)

The name *groß mere* 'Great Sea' seems to reflect the older Western European geographical tradition. In the case of the term *schwartz mere* 'Black Sea,' one can only guess whether the German traveler made use of a Greek or Turkish term since the travel book was completed upon return to Germany in 1427 after a long journey through southern Rus', in fact Ruthenia (modern Ukraine). There is also a possibility that the designation *schwartz mere*, although covering the events witnessed by Schiltberger in Turkey, including Crimea, can reflect in fact not the Russian but rather the Ruthenian (Ukrainian) local tradition. At any rate, this 'geo-chromatic' term became known in Germany as late as the second part of the 15th century.

7 Conclusions

The foregoing survey of Arabic-Islamic and Christian (Western European) designations of the Black Sea allows to safely deduce the following.

When describing the Black Sea, the bulk of early Arab-Muslim authors were largely influenced by the Greek (Byzantine) geographical tradition (section 2). Yet some of them used parallel designations based on the names of the adjacent peoples and cities (section 3). By the end of the 13th century the naming of the Black Sea became more oriented toward the local ethnic and geographical names. Thus, at the time of the compilation of their geographical works, Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī and especially Abū al-Fidā' and al-Dimashqī, the two Syrian authors who were active in the early 14th century, demonstrated a transition to a new stage in the descriptive perception of the Black Sea and its major coastal cities, including Ar *Maṭrakhā* (مطرخا) / Gk τὸ Ταμάταρχα (τὰ Μάταρχα) / ESl / OUK *Тьmutorokань* (see Marquart 1903, 163; Mošin 1925; Abū al-Fidā'-Reinaud 2, pt. 1, 289).

Abū al-Fidā' and al-Dimashqī began using new (or corrupted) transcriptions. Moreover, since these Arab-Muslim authors belonged to the same Arabic-Islamic sphere as the Turko-Tatar inhabitants of the medieval Pontic region, they could borrow the respective 'geo-chromatic' term from their Turkish neighbors rather than from Latin-Christian geographical literature. What, unfortunately, is impossible to determine right now is whether (and when) the Turkish neighbors would have borrowed the respective 'geo-chromatic' term or its semantic variation 'northern'; at any rate, all this does not refute the fact that the Arab-Muslim authors might have loaned the term from them rather than from the Christians.

One should also be recalled that by that time the world of Arabic-Islamic scholarship, including the descriptive geography, largely failed to invest much intellectual energy into the acquisition of Latin-Christian knowledge (see König 2015, 80-1); all this can partially explain why Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī, Abū al-Fidā' and al-Dimashqī switched at the turn of the 14th century to the Turkish-Islamic scholarly paradigm, instead.

At the same time, largely based on the Greek tradition, the Latin-Christian designations demonstrate a striking parallelism in the 'geo-chromatic' designation(s) of the Black Sea, a fact which tentatively testify to the independent, though extremely 'interwoven' with the Arabic-Islamic tradition, naming of the Black Sea in the Latin West.

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