

*Stavros Christodoulou**

**Cereal Trade between Black Sea and Greece:
From the Archaic until the Early Hellenistic Period**

Introduction

August 5, 2010: Russia reaches the end of what had turned out to be a disastrous summer of drought and fires. The fertile fields of southern Russia, especially in the area of the Black Sea, normally help feed the world; the crops grown in these areas produce millions of tons of wheat, barley, and other grains for export. But not that year. The earth is parched and many of the crops have wilted. The result: 20% of the national grain crop has vanished. Vladimir Putin decides that no grain should be exported from Russia, until the end of the summer: a politically wise decision, as the Russians were already facing sharp rise in bread price. Turning the clock twenty-four centuries back, we find a public prosecutor –using Lysias’ speech capabilities– arguing that the death penalty should be the punishment of the wholesalers persecuted under the charge of forming a “cartel” and technically rising grain price in Athens. The famous case “Kata Sitopolon,” a speech of the notorious Greek orator Lysias against grain merchants in Athens of the 4th century BC, is considered the first ever trial against a cartel. And it is surprisingly, even amazingly, similar with the arguments the Greek government used in August 2010 to stop grain price rise.

Factors Affecting Cereals and Trade

Agriculture was the basis of economy of the ancient communities. Greece and the Euxine Sea were agricultural economies and their main products were cereals: wheat, oat, barley, and millet.¹ Grain was the main staple food of the majority of the population.

* Lecturer in Ancient History, Neapolis University Paphos.

¹ Aleksandre A. Maslennikov, *Οι αρχαίοι Έλληνες στο βόρειο Εύξεινο Πόντο* (The Ancient Greeks at the North Black Sea) (Athens: Afoi Kyriakidi), 23.

It is important to examine some factors that have an impact on the production and the trade of grain. First it is the climate. The cultivation conditions in the Mediterranean are diverse from region to region but in general the climate is characterized by a large variability of rainfall. The numerous mountains and stretches of sea add further complications² and as Aristotle had noticed in *Meteorologica*, particularly for Greece:

“some years are rainy and wet, others windy and dry. Sometimes there is much drought or rain, and it prevails over a great and continuous stretch of country. At other times it is local; the surrounding country often getting seasonable or even excessive rains while there is drought in a certain part; or, contrariwise, all the surrounding country gets little or even no rain while a certain part gets rain in abundance.”³

All these cause crop yields to fluctuate widely from year to year and may even lead to crop failures. Cereal crops, especially wheat, are very vulnerable to rainfall changes and climatic variability, which can lead to a shortage from time to time and to an increased need for grain import.⁴ On the other hand, barley is a more drought-resistant grain; therefore, it yields well in light soil and dry climates.⁵ Consequently, some areas could be grain exporters or importers, depending on conditions.

Athens, the most important centre of the Greek world at that time, is usually regarded as an importer of cereals, though Thessaly, Epirus, and the Northern Black Sea region are normally regarded as exporters. Samos was probably more typical of Greek cities having either surplus or shortfall.⁶

² Michael Hamilton Jameson, “Famine in the Greek World,” in *Trade and Famine in Classical Antiquity*, ed. P. Garnsey–C.R. Whittaker (Cambridge: Cambridge Philol. Soc., 1983), 8.

³ Aristotle, *Meteorologica*, 2.4.

⁴ Errietta Bissa, *Governmental Intervention in Foreign Trade in Archaic and Classical Greece* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), 153-4.

⁵ Peter Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 96.

⁶ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 10.

A second factor that affects the production of grain is the fertility of the soil and the surface of the cultivable land. Particularly in Attica, Garnsey⁷ estimates, since there are no data from that period, that a reasonable cultivable portion could be 35-40% of the land. The soil of Attica has been commented by Thucydides, Strabo, and Plutarch in a not positive way:

“Accordingly, Attica, from the poverty of its soil enjoying from a very remote period freedom from faction, never changed its inhabitants.⁸ Megaris, like Attica, is very sterile, and the greater part of it is occupied by what are called the Oneii Mountains.⁹ Observing that the city was getting full of people who were constantly streaming into Attica from all quarters for greater security of living, and that most of the country was unfruitful and worthless.”¹⁰

On the contrary, Theophrastus in *Historia Plantarum* writes:

“In Athens the barley produces more meal than anywhere else, since it is an excellent land for that crop.¹¹ Attic soil was infertile, due to lack of technical means and the ability for systemic cultivation. Just 1/3 of the Attic land was cultivated. Thus grain production was poor, covering just 1/4 of the population needs.”

The fertility of the soil of the Black Sea region, especially the northern part, has been commented by Strabo’s *Geography*¹² and by Herodotus, who writes for the river Dnieper (“Borysthenes”), that “along its banks crops are produced better than elsewhere.”¹³

⁷ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 92.

⁸ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.2.5.

⁹ Strabo, *Geography*, 9.1.8.

¹⁰ Plutarch, *Solon*, 22.1.

¹¹ Theophrastus, *Historia Plantarum*, 8.8.2.

¹² David Braund, “Black Sea Grain for Athens? From Herodotus to Demosthenes,” in *The Black Sea in Antiquity: Regional and Interregional Economic Exchanges*, ed. Vincent Gabrielsen–John Lund (Aarhus University Press, 2007), 41.

¹³ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.53.

These two factors, the climate and the fertility of the land, together with the other geographical characteristics of each region (rivers, plains, mountains, and the social, political, and economic issues of each historical period, such as the population growth, the governing, the wars, the alliances, etc. determined the extent of the cereal trade between Greece and the Black Sea in antiquity.

Greece and the Black Sea Cereal Trade in the Archaic Period

There is no direct evidence such as an explicit statement, a historical description, or some public record for import of poetic grain in Greece in the Archaic period. As a matter of fact, Greece was still an exporter of grain until the end of the 7th century BC. This derives from the interpretation of Hesiod's *Works and Days*, according to some scholars.¹⁴ The poem was written around 700 BC and talks about Demeter's grain,¹⁵ sailing, and seaborne cereal trade:

“If ever you turn your misguided heart to trading and wish to escape from debt and joyless hunger, I will show you the measures of the loud-roaring sea, though I have no skill in sea-faring nor in ships.”¹⁶

Hesiod implies that trade of agricultural products for profit was something common for the 7th century society. The risks taken were only sea-risks due to bad weather conditions¹⁷ and not commercial ones; therefore, the markets overseas were considered stable. The volume of trade is indicated by Hesiod's suggestion to use a large ship¹⁸ and also by the introduction of new ships, the construction of Diolkos near Corinth and of piers and other docking facilities in that period in Greece.¹⁹ Other information given by Hesiod is that cereal trade was

¹⁴ Hahn, I. 1983. “Foreign Trade and Foreign Policy in Archaic Greece.” In Garnsey and Whittaker, *Trade and Famine in Classical Antiquity*. Cambridge: 31-3; Jameson, *op.cit.*, 8; Bissa, *op.cit.*, 155.

¹⁵ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 31.

¹⁶ *Op.cit.*, 645-9.

¹⁷ *Op.cit.*, 664-95.

¹⁸ *Op.cit.*, 641-5.

¹⁹ Hahn, *Foreign Trade*, 32.

in private hands, in the hands of landowners with yield-surplus and of sailors or men who owned ships. Cities neither owned merchant ships nor employed people who sailed in them.²⁰ In Hesiod's text though, there is no direct reference to the Black Sea.

The areas that exported grain in the archaic and classical period are all around Greece: The Black Sea, Egypt, Italy, and Sicily. In most of these areas the Greeks had established their colonies from the 8th century BC. The reasons and aims that made the Greeks settle abroad and how far settlement in the Black Sea was influenced by the needs of the city-states in Greece and Asia Minor for imported grain are impossible to estimate. It is said that the fact that most of the colonies were established in areas suited for agriculture maybe is relative to food and land shortages of their mother-cities.²¹ The kinship, religious, and political bonds that the colonies had with their founding cities could have also made them dependable suppliers of staples.²² Trade can be considered probable if a surplus of grain and a corresponding need for import existed due to reasons of bad weather or war, even if it was not part of the original decision of settlement.²³ Therefore, the corn trade from the Euxine in the 7th and 6th centuries, if it existed at all, must have been in the hands of the Milesians and the Megarians, who had settled their colonies there.²⁴ Since they imported items from their homelands, they may have supplied in return basic staples, such as grain.²⁵ Greek vase fragments that have been found near the Olbia/Berezan area in the Black Sea and are dated back to the 6th century could have been left there probably in exchange for grain, since it was one of the main products of the area.²⁶ Also, Attic black-figured pottery, dated to the same period, has been found in Histria and Apollonia. But if grain had really started to reach mainland Greece from the Black Sea, this must have happened after the second half of the 6th century BC, be-

²⁰ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 70.

²¹ Hahn, *Foreign Trade*, 33.

²² *Op.cit.*, 35.

²³ Bissa, *op.cit.*, 167.

²⁴ Robert John Hopper, *Trade and Industry in Classical Greece* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 73.

²⁵ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 72.

²⁶ Hahn, *op.cit.*, 34; Bissa, *op.cit.*, 159.

cause then was the time when the first Greek colonies developed in city-states and their chorai became massive and able to produce large amounts of grain.²⁷ The foundation of emporia, maritime trade posts at the Black Sea,²⁸ is also a sign for the existence of trade from this area and for the economic expectations of the mother-cities, which financed and organised them.²⁹

Athens and Black Sea Cereal Trade in the Archaic Period

At the end of the 7th century BC, Athens captured the former Mytilenian colony, Sigeion,³⁰ which was near the entrance to the Hellespont and also established the Athenian family of Philidae in the Thracian Chersonese.³¹ These actions indicate possible relations with the North Aegean and the Black Sea region through control of the straits of the Hellespont. It is also supported that this could have been an intention of the Athenians to stake a claim on the corn route from the Euxine, which was later to be the main source of Athens' supplies. Therefore, it is possible that this was a first step towards the cereal imports from the Black Sea and an indication of the beginning of the Athenian dependence on imported corn.³² Sigeion was conquered by the Persians and Darius, in the end of the 6th century, at the beginning of the Persian invasion in 513 BC in Eastern Thrace and Getae, complicating furthermore the situation of the Attic trade.

There is no reason to deny that grain from the Black Sea travelled to the Aegean and to Athens, though in small quantities and not regularly, even from the 6th century, since there were already Greek settlements there.³³ On the other hand, according to Garnsey, for Athens

²⁷ Gocha R. Tsetschladze, *Trade on the Black Sea in the Archaic and Classical Periods* (Routledge, 1998), 54.

²⁸ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.17.1, 4.24.1.

²⁹ Hahn, *op.cit.*, 31.

³⁰ Michalis Tiverios, "Greek Colonisation of the Northern Aegean," in *Greek Colonisation. An Account of Greek Colonies and Other Settlements Overseas II*, ed. Gocha R. Tsetschladze (Brill, 2008), 122.

³¹ Hopper, *op.cit.*, 72.

³² John Bagnell Bury–Russell Meiggs, *A History Of Greece* (Red Globe Press, 1977), 122.

³³ Braund, *op.cit.*, 39.

of the archaic period, even if it needed grain-imports from time to time, there was no reason for importing them from such long-distance suppliers, such as the Black Sea, since Euboea, Boeotia, and Thessaly were also grain suppliers and were within the region.³⁴

Greece, Athens, and Black Sea in the 5th Century

At the end of the 6th and the beginning of the 5th century BC, the Persian conquest of the Hellespont (513-480 BC) made the exchanges between Greece and the Black Sea difficult. In 479/8 BC the Persian garrison was expelled from Sestos and Byzantium, reopening the trade-route from the north.

A very important alliance was founded in 478/9 BC and lasted until the end of the Peloponnesian War. This was the Delian League, which would provide security from Persia and from piracy to its members;³⁵ more than 170 city-states of Greece and Asia Minor entered, under the leadership of Athens. The Delian League made Athens a very strong sea-power and placed it in the position to control the long-distance movement of grain, including the route from the Black Sea.³⁶ Other cities, not subjects to Athens, were not allowed to trade as it is said by the Old Oligarch (an anonymous critic of the third quarter of the 5th century):

“Of the Athenians’ subject cities on the mainland, some which are large are ruled because of fear, and some small are ruled because of actual need; for there is no city which does not have to import or export, and these activities will be impossible for a city unless it is subject to the rulers of the sea.”³⁷

The 5th century ends with the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) in Greece, which finds the Athenian Empire weakened and declined after twenty-seven years of war. Thucydides in *History of the Peloponnesian War* underlines the magnitude and the effects of this war on Greece:

³⁴ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 112.

³⁵ Simon Hornblower, *The Greek World 479-323 BC* (Routledge, 2011), 5.

³⁶ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 120.

³⁷ Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of the Athenians*, 2.3.

“there were earthquakes of unparalleled extent and violence; eclipses of the sun occurred with a frequency unrecorded in previous history; there were great droughts in sundry places and consequent famines, and that most calamitous and awfully fatal visitation, the plague. All this came upon them with the late war, which was begun by the Athenians and Peloponnesians.”³⁸

As for the Black Sea region, through the first half of the 5th century, the Bosporan Kingdom in Crimea, which later in the 4th century is the only known exporter in the Black Sea, was still at the first steps of its development under the Archaianaktid dynasty. The change over to the Spartocid dynasty was maybe a period of uncertainty and political disturbance and Crimea is considered to have been a precarious source for grain.³⁹ Olbia also seems to have experienced difficulties at that time.⁴⁰

Athens and Black Sea Cereal Trade in the 5th Century

Attica’s food needs in the 5th century BC could not be met from the agricultural production of Attica’s territory, because of the constantly growing population. The truth is that there is lack of information related to land cultivation and demographic data and thus the extent of dependence on grain imports is difficult to calculate. Garnsey has made an estimation of the population of Attica in the 5th century, which was “around 120-150,000 in 480 to a high point of around 250,000 just before the Peloponnesian War.”⁴¹ A corn shortage in Athens is attested by an Athenian inscription⁴² of c. 445 BC which, although very fragmentary, seems to thank someone “in the corn shortage.”⁴³

Athens, during the time of the Delian League, was very rich and powerful and had a very attractive port for traders in all goods, Pirae-

³⁸ Thucydides, *History*, 1.23.3.

³⁹ Hornblower, *op.cit.*, 31; Hopper, *op.cit.*, 72.

⁴⁰ Braund, *op.cit.*, 43.

⁴¹ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 90.

⁴² IG 1³ 30.

⁴³ Hornblower, *op.cit.*, 32.

us. At the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, the Long Walls had already been built, securing the communications between Athens and Piraeus.⁴⁴ A fragment of the comic poet of Hermippus' *Basket-bearers*, a parody maybe of some other text, foregrounds the material benefits of the sea power and gives us the idea that Piraeus was an international port, where a big variety of goods were brought to from all the points of the compass:

“Now tell me, Muses, dwellers on Olympus, which goods Dionysus brought here for men on his black ship, from the time when he traded over the wine-dark sea. From Cyrene, the silphium-stalk and ox-hide, from Hellespont mackerel and every salted fish, from Thessaly fine flour and ribs of beef, and from Sitalces the itch for the Spartans, and from Perdiccas lies by the ship-load. And the Syracusans furnish pigs and cheese, and the Corcyraeans – may Poseidon destroying their hollow ships, for they are eager for both sides. Then these things. From Egypt rigged sails and books. And from Syria, further, frankincense. And fine Crete provides cypress for the gods, and Libya ivory in plenty for sale; Rhodes raisins and sweet-dream figs. Moreover, from Euboea, pears and apples. Slaves from Phrygia and from Arcadia mercenaries. Pagasae provides slaves and slave-marks. Paphlagonians provide the acorns of Zeus and shining almonds. For they are the ornaments of a feast. Phoenicia, further, palm-fruit and fine grain-flour. Carthage, carpets and cushions of many colours.”⁴⁵

In this poem there is no mention of grain from Pontus, but only from Thessaly and Phoenicia. The only mention of Pontus is the Paphlagonian nuts (acorns of Zeus) and almonds. This poem, though, may not be a very reliable source.⁴⁶

The characteristic feature of the Athenian naval imperialism of the 5th century was the settling of citizens abroad in colonies and cleru-

⁴⁴ Hornblower, *op.cit.*, 33.

⁴⁵ Hermippus, apud Athenaeus, 1.27e-28a- Rudolf Kassel–Colin Austin, *Poetae Comici Graeci* fr. 63.

⁴⁶ Braund, *op.cit.*, 47.

chies. This policy, according to Croix, was also an answer to the problem of overpopulation and to the fact that Athens needed grain imports to feed its citizens, metics, and slaves. In exchange it exported silver, olive oil, pottery, and other goods.⁴⁷ He also asserts that “Athens’ dependence on corn imports from the Pontus and elsewhere was quite as great, but is (so to speak) masked by the overwhelming predominance of Athens at sea.”⁴⁸ Braund does not agree with this point of view, sustaining that if there were substantial grain imports from Pontus, it would have been mentioned somewhere, as Euboea is mentioned to have been a major corn supplier, since there is a large amount of information about the society and the economy of Athens in the 5th century.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the Peace of Callias in c. 450 BC, which ended the Persian Wars, banned the Athenian warships from Pontus and this must have not encouraged traders to travel to the distant Black Sea.⁵⁰ This hypothesis does not mean, though, that there was no connection between the Black Sea and Athens. As Plutarch narrates, Aristides may have died on an expedition in the Black Sea:

“As touching the death of Aristides, some say he died in Pontus, on an expedition in the public service; others at Athens, of old age, honored and admired by his countrymen.”⁵¹

Pericles’ expedition to Sinope in 437 BC, as it is described by Plutarch’s *Pericles*, had the aim to include Black Sea cities to the Delian League and find a way of cooperating with them, in addition to the settlement of Athenian colonists there. Sinope, Olbia, and Nymphaion are known to have belonged to the Athenian Empire. In Plutarch’s text though, there is nothing about pontic grain in Pericles’ expedition, while a large gift of grain brought to Athens from Egypt⁵² is mentioned. Pericles’ expedition is the only known occasion of Athens taking a fleet beyond Byzantium and Plutarch is the only source of that

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Ernest Maurice de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (Bristol Classical Press, 1989), 46-7.

⁴⁸ Croix, *op.cit.*, 49.

⁴⁹ Braund, *op.cit.*, 42.

⁵⁰ Braund, *op.cit.*, 42.

⁵¹ Plutarch, *Aristides*, 26.1.

⁵² Plutarch, *Pericles*, 37.

information; therefore, there is a possibility that it did not happen at all.⁵³

It would be expected also from Pericles' funeral speech of 430 BC (in the version of Thucydides) to say something about pontic grain, since he had been there on his expedition. Instead, he does not mention it explicitly:

“while the magnitude of our city draws the produce of the world into our harbor, so that to the Athenian the fruits of other countries are as familiar a luxury as those of his own.”⁵⁴

The outbreak of the Peloponnesian War is considered to be a crucial turning point, because thereafter the Athenians were not in control of their territory. As they were probably becoming more dependent on grain imports, they had to find ways to secure it.⁵⁵ An Athenian inscription of 428 BC mentions for the first time the “Wardens of the Hellespont” (“Hellespontophylakes”), who controlled and supervised the passage of corn from the Euxine and presumably exacted customs duties on grain and everything else.⁵⁶

During this period though, the silence of the sources for Athens' grain continues as far as the Black Sea is concerned. In the text of *Old Oligarch*, which was written around 424 BC, although he tries to emphasize on the importance of the control of the sea for the Athenians, he does not include, neither excludes explicitly, Black Sea grain.⁵⁷ He only talks about delicacies, which gives the notion to the reader of something sweet and luxurious:

“If there should be mention also of slighter matters, first, by virtue of their naval power, the Athenians have mingled with various peoples and discovered types of luxury. Whatever the delicacy in Sicily, Italy, Cyprus, Egypt, Lydia, Pontus, the

⁵³ Tsetschladze, *op.cit.*, 55.

⁵⁴ Thucydides, *History*, 2.38.2.

⁵⁵ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 132.

⁵⁶ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 122.

⁵⁷ Braund, *op.cit.*, 45.

Peloponnesese, or anywhere else, all these have been brought together into one place by virtue of naval power.”⁵⁸

The playwright of Aristophanes’ *Merchant ships* in the 420s may be a hint of information about imports from the Black Sea. The problem is that there are only fragments of it that tell us a lot about various grains and legumes carried to Athens⁵⁹ but almost nothing about their sources. In another fragment, the “Mossynoecian barley-cake boards” and somebody from Colchian Phasis⁶⁰ are mentioned. The Mossynoecians lived in the southeast Black Sea and barley-cakes could suggest grain.⁶¹

The first explicit statement in the sources of regular grain imports comes from Thucydides’ *History*, where Nicias, in a speech in 415 BC seems to worry about Athenian dependence on imported grain:

“they have also money, partly in the hands of private persons, partly in the temples at Selinus, and at Syracuse first-fruits from some of the barbarians as well. But their chief advantage over us lies in the number of their horses, and in the fact that they grow their corn at home instead of importing it.”⁶²

This is a dangerous situation for a city in war time because the enemy is likely to interrupt its supply and place the city at his mercy.⁶³ This was one of the results of the Spartan occupation of Decelea from 413 BC; the blockade of the grain supply by land from Euboea. Due to this fact, grain from the Black Sea became more important and the Spartan King Agis from his fort at Decelea realized that he had to intervene to Calchedon and Byzantium and cut off the grain route from there:

“Meanwhile Agis, who could see from Decelea great numbers of grain-ships sailing in to Piraeus, said that it was use-

⁵⁸ Pseudo-Xenophon, *op.cit.*, 2.7.

⁵⁹ Kastel–Austin, *op.cit.*, fr. 428.

⁶⁰ Kastel–Austin, *op.cit.*, fr. 431, 443.

⁶¹ Braund, *op.cit.*, 47-8.

⁶² Thucydides, *History*, 6.20.4.

⁶³ Croix, *op.cit.*, 47.

less for his troops to be trying all this long time to shut off the Athenians from access to their land, unless one should occupy also the country from which the grain was coming in by sea; and that it was best to send to Calchedon and Byzantium Clearchus, the son of Rhamphias, who was diplomatic agent for the Byzantines at Sparta.”⁶⁴

This plan was finally achieved by the Spartan Lysander at the battle of Aigospotamoi in 405 BC in the straits of the Hellespont, where the Athenian fleet was destroyed and the Spartans took control of the pontic waters; therefore, one year later, in 404 BC, Athens was starved out and had to surrender to Sparta.⁶⁵

Athens and the Black Sea Cereal Trade in the 4th Century

The issue of the 4th century BC is the quantity of the imported grain to Athens, as there is evidence that shows this activity. On the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War and the complete defeat of Athens, its consequent diminution of the naval power and the significant losses in Sicily, the grain supply became a major problem. A new city in the Black Sea emerges in the cereal trade, the city of Chersonesus, which is the land of Taurians according to Herodotus. In Euripides play *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, which was staged in 412 BC, there is a straight connection between the Tauri of Crimea and Attica. It seems that in the 4th century Chersonesus produced and exported grain and, probably, as we cannot say for sure, Athens imported this commodity mainly after 413. Athenians created trade relations with this city as the Scythians tried to gain profits from the grain trade.⁶⁶

The problem of ensuring grain for Athens became again serious few years later, after the Peloponnesian War, as a new war in the Greek mainland broke out. Many cities, such as Athens, Sparta, Argos, and Corinth, were engaged in the Corinthian war, which ended with the Peace of Antalcidas in 387 BC. The power of Athens was once more emasculated by the successful operations of the Spartan

⁶⁴ Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 1.1.35.

⁶⁵ Croix, *op.cit.*, 48.

⁶⁶ Braund, *op.cit.*, 53.

Antalcidas in Hellespont, who managed to gain control of the region and cut off the supply lines from the Black Sea to Athens.⁶⁷ The pressure that imposes the Spartan control of Pontic grain and the fear of the blockade actually made the Athenians to negotiate and finally capitulate in 387 BC as Xenophon mentions:

“then Antalcidas, the whole number of his ships amounting to more than eighty, was master of the sea, so that he also prevented the ships from the Pontus from sailing to Athens, and compelled them to sail to the ports of his people’s allies. The Athenians, therefore, seeing that the enemy’s ships were many, fearing that they might be completely subdued, as they had been before, now that the King had become an ally of the Lacedaemonians, and being beset by the raiding parties from Aegina, for these reasons were exceedingly desirous of peace.”⁶⁸

The following years, the situation in Athens seems to have gotten worse as the power of the city diminishes. Consequently, Athenians tried to overcome this crisis by offering incentives to private foreign traders in order to bring grain to Athens and also to exporters to export to Athens. There are many inscriptions of honors to private traders, especially after the last quarter of the century. Furthermore, the “dikai emporikai” were also a measure of incentives, as Athens offered equality of judgment to all foreign traders. More specifically, many traders from the Black Sea brought grain to Athens. There is a fragment from Bosphorus that gives honors for services to leading Bosphorans. This fact shows the Pontic grain trade from various parts of the region. Xenophon illustrates the activity of these grain traders:

“You are saying, Ischomachus, that your father is really by nature a lover of farming no less than merchants are lovers of grain. For merchants on account of their excessive love for grain set sail for it to wherever they hear that most is available, crossing the Aegean, the Euxine and the Sicilian Sea.

⁶⁷ R. J. Buck, *Boiotia and the Boiotian League, 432-371 B.C.* (Edmonton, Alberta: The University of Alberta Press, 1994), 58.

⁶⁸ Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 5.1.28-29.

Then having taken as much as they can, they carry it across the sea, even placing it in the ship in which they themselves are sailing. And when they need money, they tend not to unload the grain where they happen to be, but take it and exchange it wherever they hear that it is especially valued and people think the most of it. Your father seems to be a lover of farming in that kind of way.”⁶⁹

This extract shows undoubtedly the importance of grain as a trade commodity, the fact that Black Sea was one of the most important grain suppliers for Greece and, finally, depicts the portrait of the grain traders who were sailing all over Greece in order to sell their product and get the highest profit. It is obvious that they were seeking for the best market conditions. Furthermore, we can deduce that the grain production in the Greek world was variable from year to year and differed from city to city.

A well-known passage in Demosthenes’ speech *Against Leptines* (354 BC) shows the Athenian grain supply from the Black Sea. In this speech, the orator is trying to underline the vital role of the Bosporan Kingdom to the grain supply of Athens, as he speaks for 400,000 medimnoi of grain (1 medimnos of wheat: 32.96kg, 1 medimnos of barley: 27.47kg) from Bosphorus to Athens, a figure that could be checked in the records of the sitophylakes:

“For you are aware that we consume more imported corn than any other nation. Now the corn that comes to our ports from the Black Sea is equal to the whole amount from all other places of export. And this is not surprising; for not only is that district most productive of corn, but also Leucon, who controls the trade, has granted exemption from dues to merchants conveying corn to Athens, and he proclaims that those bound for your port shall have priority of lading. For Leucon, enjoying exemption for himself and his children, has granted exemption to every one of you. See what this amounts to. He exacts a toll of one-thirtieth from exporters of corn from his country. Now from the Bosphorus there come to Athens about

⁶⁹ Xenophon, *Economics*, 20.27-28.

four hundred thousand bushels; the figures can be checked by the books of the grain commissioners. So, for each three hundred thousand bushels he makes us a present of ten thousand bushels, and for the remaining hundred thousand a present of roughly three thousand.”⁷⁰

The purpose of the writer is to stress the role of Leucon as a benefactor for the Athenians and also to attack a new law proposed by someone called Leptines that cancelled all the immunities from public services (liturgies). The context of the passage speaks for constant and annual quantities. Demosthenes' claim surely underestimates the non Pontic imports of grain and we cannot safely assume that this was the real amount.⁷¹ Generally, Demosthenes is using the example of Bosporans objectively, as he maintained close relations with the Bosporan rulers. According to Demosthenes, the legislation of Leptines would also affect the Bosporans, and he clearly says that this amount of grain comes from Leukon, the ruler of the Bosporan Kingdom, who showed great generosity towards Athens and consequently deserves better treatment from them. The city of Athens was definitely an important market for the Bosporans, as the honors and the privilege of *ateleia* show. Thus, the economic advantages of the Bosporan rulers are important, as they seek to expand their trade in the whole Aegean world. In 346 BC, the decree of the politician Androtion honors Leukon's sons Spartokos and Pairisades, almost ten years after the *Against Leptines*.⁷² These inscribed honors for the Spartocid dynasty of the Bosporan Kingdom describe the connection between Athens and Bosphorus as a reciprocal relationship. On the one hand, Athens gets the grain supply and Bosporans retain their economic privileges.

Another evidence of this close relation is the movement of the Athenian elite to Bosphorus and its safe harbors. In the 390s there was a voyage of that kind from the son of a Bosporan noble called Sopai-

⁷⁰ Demosthenes, *Against Leptines*, 20.31-32.

⁷¹ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 97.

⁷² IG II², 212.

os.⁷³ The trips had both educational and commercial character and were frequent during the rule of Leukon. Isocrates refers to his aristocratic students from Pontus who were studying with famous Athenians like the historian Ephorus, the general Timotheus and the politician Androtion.⁷⁴ His students were proponents of the expansion and the control of the Athenians in Hellespont:

“I should like to ask those who disapprove of me what they think about the students who cross the sea from Sicily, from the Pontus, and from other parts of the world in order to enjoy my instruction. Do they think that they voyage to Athens because of the dearth of evil-minded men at home? But anywhere on earth anyone can find no lack of men willing to aid him in depravity and crime.”⁷⁵

This important relation of Athens and Bosphorus is also obvious in art as there are many masterpieces from the 4th century kurgans of Bosphorus and Scythia made by Greeks who lived or worked there, especially at Panticapaeum. Finally, we can say that this was an interaction between the democratic state of Athens and an oligarchic kingdom that was its grain supply.⁷⁶

From the well-known First Fruits inscription from Eleusis⁷⁷ we know that in 329/8 the total production figures in Attica for barley and wheat were 339,925 medimnoi and 27,062 medimnoi respectively. The sums show that the harvest of 329/8 was not adequate to feed the population. However, it is difficult to say whether this harvest was normal or not, as there is not any other data in order to compare⁷⁸.

⁷³ Alfonso Moreno, “Athenian Wheat-Tsars: Black Sea Grain and Elite Culture,” in *The Black Sea in Antiquity: Regional and Interregional Economic Exchanges*, Vincent Gabrielsen–John Lund eds. (Aarhus University Press, 2007), 73.

⁷⁴ Moreno, *op.cit.*, 73-4.

⁷⁵ Isocrates, *Speeches*, 15.224.

⁷⁶ Moreno, *op.cit.*, 81.

⁷⁷ IG I³ 78.

⁷⁸ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 99.

Cereal Trade between other City-states and Black Sea

Athens was the largest city-state in the Greek world and the basic importer of grain in large quantities mainly from Egypt, Sicily, and the Black Sea.⁷⁹ More information on the imports of Athens has survived than on of all the other city-states together.

In mainland Greece, Thessaly, Epirus, and Euboea are mentioned as exporters of grain. Unlike Euboea, Thessaly and Epirus are considered as minor exporters.⁸⁰ Xenophon in his work *Hellenica* writes about Thessaly:

“And who are likely to be better able to maintain the sailors, we, who on account of our abundance even have corn to export to other lands, or the Athenians, who have not even enough for themselves unless they buy it?”⁸¹

Lycurgus gives information about Epirus in his work *Against Leocrates*:

“Living at Megara and using as capital the money which he had withdrawn from Athens he shipped corn, bought from Cleopatra, from Epirus to Leucas and from there to Corinth.”⁸²

Information concerning Euboea is given by Thucydides. It is easily understood that its grain was very important to Athens, at least during the Peloponnesian War. In the passage that follows, Thucydides speaks about the effects of Decelea’s capture in 413:

“Besides, the transport of provisions from Euboea, which had before been carried on so much more quickly over land by Decelea from Oropus, was now effected at great cost by sea round Sunium.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Bissa, *op.cit.*, 191.

⁸⁰ Bissa, *op.cit.*, 167.

⁸¹ Xenophon, *Economics*, 6.1.11.

⁸² Lycurgus, *Speeches*, 1.26.

⁸³ Thucydides, *History*, 7.28.

Aristophanes in his play *Wasps* also mentions Euboea when Bdelycleon complains about wheat:

“When they are afraid, they promise to divide Euboea among you and to give each fifty bushels of wheat, but what have they given you? Nothing excepting, quite recently, five bushels of barley, and even these you have only obtained with great difficulty, on proving you were not aliens, and then choenix by choenix.”⁸⁴

Euboea rebelled in 411 BC and left the Athenian League. Thereafter it is believed that Athens turned to its long-distance suppliers of grain, such as the Black Sea, more regularly.

The Peloponnese cultivated its own grain but it also imported it from the Black Sea, from Egypt and Sicily.⁸⁵ There is no other evidence for the Pontus’ imports apart from Herodotus who mentions ships carrying grain from the Black Sea to Aegina and the Peloponnese:

“This was like that other saying of Xerxes when he was at Abydos and saw ships laden with corn sailing out of the Pontus through the Hellespont on their way to Aegina and the Peloponnese.”⁸⁶

Methone was a small city, member of the Delian League, situated at the west coast of the Thermaic gulf. The Athenians in 426 BC passed a decree that gave the right to the Methonians to import a specified amount of grain from Byzantium every year:

“The Methonians shall be permitted to import from Byzantium up to the amount of [...] thousand medimnoi each year. The Wardens of the Hellespont shall not themselves prevent them from exporting it or allow anyone else to prevent them, and if they do, they are to be liable to a fine of 10,000 drachmas each. After giving notice to the Wardens of the Hellespont, they shall export up to the permitted amount. There

⁸⁴ Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 715-8.

⁸⁵ Diodoros 14.79; Thucydides, *History*, 3.86.4.

⁸⁶ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7.147.2.

shall also be exemption from payment for the ship carrying it.”⁸⁷

The city of Aphytis in Chalcidice seems that it was enjoying the same privilege with Methone at about the same period, as it was permitted to import up to 10,000 medimnoi from Byzantium.⁸⁸ According to Demosthenes, both Akanthos and Maroneia in Chalcidice also imported pontic grain:

“For when Paerisades had published a decree in Bosphorus that whoever wished to transport grain to Athens for the Athenian market might export it free of duty, Lampis, who was at the time in Bosphorus, obtained permission to export grain and the exemption from duty in the name of the state; and having loaded a large vessel with grain, carried it to Acanthus and there disposed of it –he, who had made himself the partner of Phormio here with our money.”⁸⁹

The general, Timomachus, however, for an embassy from the Maronites had come to him, begging him to convoy their grain ships –ordered us trierarchs to make cables fast to the ships and tow them to Maroneia– a long voyage across the open sea.”⁹⁰

Akanthos is located in Chalcidice and there is evidence of imported grain from Pontus as the area is not suitable for grain crops. The reference for grain supplies from the Black Sea is probably better understood if we take into consideration the strained relations between Akanthos and Macedon or Thrace. This political situation caused the need for the Pontic grain.⁹¹

Delos, the powerful island of Cyclades, rarely needed to address to foreign exporters of grain, as its local production covered its needs. However, a single decree was found specifically honoring a dealer in

⁸⁷ IG I³ 61, 32-41.

⁸⁸ IG I³ 62.

⁸⁹ Demosthenes, *Against Phormio*, 36.

⁹⁰ Demosthenes, *Against Polyycles*, 20.

⁹¹ Bissa, *op.cit.*, 204.

grain, Dionysius of Byzantium, who in the first half of the third century sold 500 medimnoi of wheat to the city at a price the city requested.

Finally, another evidence of grain imports from the Black Sea concerns the city of Mytilene. Thucydides speaks about the preparations of the city for revolt against Athens (428/7 BC) and the waiting for the supplies from Pontus; archers and grain:

“Immediately after the invasion of the Peloponnesians all Lesbos, except Methymna, revolted from the Athenians. The Lesbians had wished to revolt even before the war, but the Lacedaemonians would not receive them; and yet now when they did revolt, they were compelled to do so sooner than they had intended. While they were waiting until the moles for their harbors and the ships and walls that they had in building should be finished, and for the arrival of archers and corn and other things that they were engaged in fetching from the Pontus.”⁹²

It is understood from all this evidence above that Athens until the end of the 5th century BC had almost total control of the imports of pontic grain, thanks to the control of the Hellespont. It was up to its decision to permit or not the imports of grain to its allies and to define the quantity and the frequency of them, or to deny and block them in case of an enemy or a rebellious ally.

Laws and taxes

Cereal trade was too important for flourishing Greek cities, such as Athens; important enough to send counterparts to frequent meetings at the courtroom [monumental proof of which is the speech of Lysias “Against the Sitopolon (*Grain Merchants*)”] and to grant ateleia to benefactors and to create special public servants units to safeguard the city’s supplies: the “epimelitai” and the “sitophylakes,” who were responsible for the amount and the price of grain being unloaded at the “emporion” (the marketplace at Piraeus port) and the final price bread

⁹² Thucydides, *History*, 3.2.

was sold at. All in all, Athens was dependent on imports of grain city, as the growing population, especially during the gold 5th and 4th centuries, could not have been fed only by local production; and grain was at the core of the Attic diet.

First signs, though disputable ones, of the city's dependence on grain imports appear at the 6th century. At that point, we detect the first rules for merchants exporting goods from Athens: Solon's law forbids any export of Athenian products, under the shadow of curses, making a single exception for oil. Some scholars find this the first attempt to secure Athens' grain sufficiency. But as there is no direct reference to grain, other scholars find this law an indirect attempt to reinforce oil production and exports. The prohibition of the export of agricultural products except olive oil implies that olive cultivation was already developed, but also that this law was an attempt to check the free exportation of grain by the large landowners,⁹³ or to stop the sale of corn to Aegina and Megara, both of which were potential enemies.⁹⁴ Grain trade could have been of much importance at that period also because of a possible shortage due to the change of the cultivation of cereals to that of olive trees and vines, which were more suitable for Attica's soil.⁹⁵ The fact is that Solon's law does not speak of grain at all and many scholars believe that grain has nothing to do with this law, which is just a law encouraging the production of oil.⁹⁶

Later, as the needs grow and Piraeus becomes the center of global free trade, Athenians decide that grain was too important to be freely sold and bought. Ships arrive at the emporion from all parts of the known world, "emporoi" (merchants) unload grain and sell it to wholesalers, who, in their turn, sell it to bakers: bread was the only food product sold ready to consume, without the need of cooking at home.

"There are 7 laws relating to the grain trade from Athens. Isager and Hansen have provided the most concise treatment of 5 of them and the sources in which they appear: Finally the

⁹³ Garnsey, *op.cit.*, 110-1; Jameson, *op.cit.*, 11.

⁹⁴ Bury-Meiggs, *op.cit.*, 122.

⁹⁵ Croix, *op.cit.*, 46.

⁹⁶ Bissa, *op.cit.*, 179.

grain trade was regulated through legislation. Among the laws on grain the following have been transmitted to us: 1. It is forbidden to export any crop except olives;⁹⁷ 2. It is forbidden to purchase more than 50 phormoi of grain at a time;⁹⁸ 3. It is a capital offence for persons resident in Athens to ship grain to harbors other than the Piraeus;⁹⁹ 4. Any grain ship touching in at the harbor of the Piraeus is required to at least 2/3 of her cargo and may re-export a maximum of 1/3;¹⁰⁰ 5. It is forbidden for persons resident in Athens to extend a maritime loan unless the ship under contract conveys grain to the Piraeus.”¹⁰¹

Heavily regulated, the grain market needed some people to make sure rules were followed: the overseers (epimelitai) and the regulators (sitophylakes). The epimelitai were the ones who oversaw the unloading of the grain load at Piraeus.

“Kotsiris¹⁰² identified two groups that the regulatory tasks were divided between. The first were the “overseers of the import market” or epimelitai, whose responsibility was to ensure that all grain ships entering Piraeus, the port Athens controlled, sold at least two-thirds of their grain to Athenians. The emporoi (the shipmasters delivering grain to Athens) were prohibited by Athenian law from retaining more than one-third of their grain, presumably for later sale or sale at a different port.”¹⁰³

Additionally, Athenians picked thirty-five citizens each year, named them sitophylakes and charged them with the duty to control grain trade and bread price.

⁹⁷ Plutarch, *Solon*, 24.

⁹⁸ Lysias, *Speeches*, 22.6.

⁹⁹ Demosthenes, *Speeches*, 34.37, 35.50; *Lykourgos 1.27*.

¹⁰⁰ Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution*, 51.4.

¹⁰¹ Demosthenes, *Speeches*, 35.51, 56.6, 56.11; Bissa, *op.cit.*, 177.

¹⁰² L.E. Kotsiris, An Antitrust Case in Ancient Greek Law, 22 *Int'l L.* 451 (1988). <https://scholar.smu.edu/til/vol22/iss2/7> (accessed 28-4-2021).

¹⁰³ Wayne R. Dunham, *Cold Case Files: The Athenian Grain Merchants 386 B.C.* (U.S. Department of Justice, Antitrust Division, 2007).

“Aristotle mentions that the sitophylakes, 15 in Piraeus and 20 in Athens, also picked by lot, had to control the wheat and barley, before it was milled. They also had to check the bread sellers, to make sure the bread weighed as the law ordered. A lighter bread was considered adulteration.¹⁰⁴

Ancient writers mention that the price of grain had a lot of ups and downs. More specifically, it went very high in times of lacking and very low when there was abundance. In order to stabilize the market, the Athenian state named a regulators’ body, called the Sitophylakes, with the purpose to impose a price for grain, that the state considered fare. But, as I. Finley, Professor of Ancient History at Cambridge University, has concluded, this policy completely failed. Because, despite constant reforms, despite the death penalty for profiteering, and despite courts condemning to death the last and corrupted sitophylakes, the price continued to go up and down, worse than before.¹⁰⁵

The Sitophylakes (10 at first and 35 in the years 330-320, years of rich production) had the task to oversee the grain trade. According to Lysias, the Sitophylakes had to be alerted, so that the grain merchants, at the time of the arrival of the grain at the market, would not purchase more than a certain quantity (50 formous=baskets) a day. This measure was to prevent monopoly and profiteering.”¹⁰⁶

Of course, the sitophylakes were not alone: at the Emporion also worked the agoranomoi, the metronomoi (public slaves), and the anti-nomian: a sudden proof that the Athenian democracy felt a deep need to protect its citizens from what, even then, must have been considered a malicious tribe: the merchants.

“In the play *Athenean State*, Aristotle mentions that the state selected by lot 10 agoranomous, who had to oversee the

¹⁰⁴ Prasianakis, Varoufakis, Matsas, www.bep.gr (accessed 28-4-2021).

¹⁰⁵ G. C. Bitros–A. D. Karayannis, “Values and Institutions as Determinants of Entrepreneurship in Ancient Athens,” *Journal of Institutional Economics* 4.2 (2008): 205-30.

¹⁰⁶ Hala, *Economy Of Ancient Athens*.

products sold in the market, so that they should be clean and unadulterated (“kithara kai akibdila”), meaning they should follow hygiene rules and they should not have been adulterated. In case of juggle, a fine was imposed to both the producer and the merchant. That way the consumer was protected.¹⁰⁷

The Metronomoi were those who oversaw the means of weighing (metra and stathma). Just like the Agoranomoi, the Metronomoi were 10, 5 at the Athenian agora and 5 at the agora of Piraeus.¹⁰⁸

Magistrates such as the Athenian metronomoi, the weight inspectors, seem to have been primarily concerned with trying to ensure honest practice in the marketplace; the use of a single agreed weight system would also make it easier for citizen consumers to compare the prices of different merchants.”¹⁰⁹

Of course, rules are made to be broken, especially when money is at stake. And as the texts prove, a great deal of money was at stake in cereal trade, even in antiquity.

“It is worth mention that, while in the middle of the 4th c. BC the price of an attic medimnos (52,18 liters or 40,27 kilos) of grain was 5 drachmas, around 330 BC it rose to 16 drachmas.”¹¹⁰

Thus, the city courts often found themselves judging on accusations of profiteering, through cereal trade. And the price for those intending to make fortunes out of the need of people to be fed, was heavy: the death penalty.

¹⁰⁷ Prasianakis, Varoufakis, Matsas, www.bep.gr (accessed 26-4-2021).

¹⁰⁸ Hala, *Economy Of Ancient Athens*.

¹⁰⁹ Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution*, 51 in Neville Morley, *Trade in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹¹⁰ Demosthenes, *Speeches*, 34.39; Giannis Stogias, “Οι νομισματοκοπίες των Αθηνών” (The Mints of Athens), in W. R. Dunham, “Cold Case Files: The Athenian Grain Merchants 386 B.C.,” *Economic Analysis Group Discussion Paper* (2007), 1-23. <http://www.usdoj.gov/atr/public/eag/221241.pdf> (accessed in 27-4-2022).

“Their [sc. the resident alien wholesalers’] interests are the opposite of other men’s: they make the most profit when some bad news reaches the city and they can sell their grain for the higher price. They are so delighted to hear of your disasters that they either get news of them before anyone else, or spread the rumors themselves.¹¹¹

Some of these men would send off goods from Egypt, others would travel on board with the shipments, and others would remain here in Athens and dispose of the merchandise. Then those who remained here would send letters to those abroad to inform them of the prevailing prices, so that if grain were expensive in Athens they might bring it here, and if the price should fall they might head to some other port. This was the main reason, men of the jury, why the price of grain rose: it was due to such letters and conspiracies.¹¹²

The right to bring an action for offences like supplying grain to a market other than Athens or making excessive profits on the sale of bread was not limited to those directly injured; any concerned citizen might bring a prosecution and benefit from half of any fine levied if successful; in theory a strong deterrent against merchants going against the perceived interests of the polis, or at least an additional risk to be considered.”¹¹³

Price spikes like the ones dominating modern economic front-pages and news bulletins were at the core of political dispute in Athens of the 4th century BC. Scholars find that Lysias’ speech *Against Sitopolon* was the first attempt from the state to barricade a cartel.

“The two regulations most relevant to the case brought against the grain merchants were profit controls and purchase or inventory limitations imposed on the grain merchants. They were prohibited from adding more than an Obol (one-sixth of a Drachma) per medimnus to the price of grain they had paid to the *emporoi* (the ship-masters importing the grain

¹¹¹ Lysias, *Speeches*, 22.14.

¹¹² Demosthenes, *Speeches*, 56.8.

¹¹³ Morley, *op.cit.*

into Athens). A Drachma was approximately what a stone-cutter or a carpenter would get paid for a day's labor. The most controversial of the restrictions, in terms of modern translations, is unfortunately also one of the key regulations the grain merchants were accused of violating and that was a prohibition on hoarding. Lysias cites a law that prohibits anyone from buying more than 50 phormai of grain...

In response to a negative supply shock to the grain market, regulators encouraged grain importers to form a buyers' cartel (monopsony), hoping that it would reduce retail prices by first lowering wholesale grain prices. In reality, the decrease in wholesale prices resulted in a decrease in the willingness of producers in other regions to supply grain to Athens, and retail grain prices increased substantially. Grain importers soon found themselves on trial for their lives in what is probably the earliest recorded antitrust trial."¹¹⁴

In antiquity, the same carrot that modern countries run to was used: tax exception, the well-known ateleia. Ateleia was the relief of the taxes imposed to the metikoi trading goods at Piraeus port. King of Bosphorus, Leukon, was granted ateleia for giving motives to merchants to take their grain to Athens. Several years after ateleia was granted to Leukon, Demosthenes defended his privilege at the Athenian court in his speech *Against Leptines*. Leptines was an Athenian citizen, obviously well off, who proposed a law to abolish the privilege of ateleia:

“A large proportion of the speech is devoted to arguing that there are holders of the privilege who deserve it: to deprive them of it, as Leptines' law does, imposes on them a financial loss in some cases, and in every case an insult. The first example is Leukon, who was the ruler of the country of Bosphorus on the north side of the Black Sea.¹¹⁵ That was a growing area from which a large part of Athens' food supply was imported. As an act of friendship, Leukon allowed grain to be

¹¹⁴ Dunham, *op.cit.*

¹¹⁵ Demosthenes, *Against Leptines*, 20.29-40.

shipped from Bosphorus free of export tax, on condition that it was taken to Athens. In gratitude the Athenians had given him Athenian citizenship and other privileges, including *ateleia*. Since Leukon was never likely to visit Athens, this was purely a compliment; but it would be correspondingly insulting to take *ateleia* away from him, and might well provoke him to stop the Athenians' exemption from Bosphoran export tax.¹¹⁶

Leukon, who controls the trade, has granted exemption from dues to merchants conveying corn to Athens, and he proclaims that those bound for your port shall have priority of lading. For Leukon, enjoying exemption for himself and his children, has granted exemption to every one of you."¹¹⁷

It seems, though, that regulation was proved incapable of assuring sufficient supplies for the city. During the 4th century BC Athens suffered increasing difficulties in guaranteeing adequate grain supplies after the loss of its naval supremacy and the empire. This is the context of Xenophon's proposals, dating from the middle of the century, which are expressly intended to make the city more attractive to merchants and thus to influence their decisions about which port to visit. New ways had to be found to attract cereal merchants.

"If prizes were to be offered to the market officials for settling disputes between merchants justly and promptly, so that sailings were not delayed, the effect would be that a far larger number of merchants would trade with us and would so with much greater satisfaction it would also be an excellent idea to reserve seats in the front row of the theatre for merchants and ship owners, and to offer them hospitality occasionally, when the high quality of their ships and merchandise they carry entitles them to be considered benefactors of the state. If they could look forward to such honors they would look on us as friends and hasten to visit us so as to gain the honor as well as the profit. Any rise in the number of residents and visitors

¹¹⁶ Douglas M. MacDowell, *Demosthenes the Orator* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹¹⁷ Demosthenes, *Speeches*, 20.30-32.

would of course lead to a corresponding expansion of our imports and exports, and of the money received from sales, rents and customs.¹¹⁸ It is noticeable that Xenophon emphasizes on the importance of being able to offer the swift resolution of legal disputes, so that non-resident merchants were not forced to hang around Athens waiting for justice (becoming liable for the “metric tax” after a month), but could head off on their next voyage.”¹¹⁹

But as the border between use and abuse is often crossed, when money and trade are involved, ancient writers give us a sense of how these privileges turned to ground for bribe.

“Many of these leading Athenians established intensely personal, hereditary connections with the Spartokidai. Just as it was Gylon’s grandson Demosthenes who defended Leukon’s *ateleia* in 355 BC, and, according to Dinarchos,¹²⁰ set up public statutes of the Spartokidai in exchange for personal, yearly gifts of grain; it was Isocrates’ pupil Androtion who moved honors for Leukon’s sons in 346 BC;¹²¹ and it was Agyrrhios’ great-grandson, also named Agyrrhios, who did the same for Spartokos III in 285/4.”¹²²

When things got rough, something that obviously happened short after the Peloponnesian War, authorities introduced a tax in goods: a special grain tax. The Athenian grain tax law of 374/3 BC was imposed “in order that there may be grain for the people in the public domain,” as scholars assume, but without being sure. As it is, also, “not clear why anyone would bid for the right to bring the grain tax.”

“On the proposal of Agyrrhios, revealed here active fourteen years after the latest literary mention of him, the Athenians decide to sell the one –twelfth tax (which Stroud unhelpfully calls the 8 1/3 tax) from Lemnos, Imbros and Skyros and the

¹¹⁸ Xenophon, *Ways and Means*, 3.12.

¹¹⁹ Morley, *op.cit.*, 58.

¹²⁰ Dinarchus, *Speeches*, 1.43.

¹²¹ IG II², 212.

¹²² IG II², 653; Moreno, *op.cit.*, 74.

2% tax, ‘in terms of grain.’ Each portion will consist of 500 medimnoi, 100 of wheat and 400 of barley. Those who ‘buy’ the tax have to transport the grain to the Aiakeion in Athens at their own expense.¹²³ The law orders the Assembly to sell the grain collected from two taxes –the pentekoste or 2% tax on grain and the dodekate of 8 1/3% tax collected in the islands of Lemnos, Scyros and Imbros– not before the month of Anthesterion at a price fixed by the Assembly.¹²⁴ The pentekoste was collected on all grain imports and the dodekate was a transit tax collected on all grain that merchants brought to the islands and then shipped to other ports. The month of Anthesterion was right before the harvest and during the time when the seas were closed to shipping. Since shortages of grain might occur at this time, the law therefore instructed the Assembly to sell the grain collected from the two taxes during this month, in order to keep prices low.”¹²⁵

The tax was only imposed on grain trade from these three islands, but it is characteristic of the degree of state intervention in a constant battle to ensure affordable bread for people.

Conclusion

To conclude, we know that grain was one of the most important commodities in trade for both Greece and the Black Sea, as it was the main staple food for the majority of the population. The first imports from the Black Sea probably happened even in the 6th century BC. Most of the evidence about trade in general, coming from the written sources and the archaeological finds, concerns Athens. In the 5th century BC, Athens had to import grain as the local production was not

¹²³ R. Osborne, “Archaeology, the Salaminioi, and the Politics of Sacred Space in Archaic Attica.” In Susan E. Alcock–Robin Osborne, *Placing the Gods: Sanctuaries and Sacred Space in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994): 143-60.

¹²⁴ “The Athenian Grain-Tax Law of 374/3 B.C.,” *Hesperia Supplement* 29 (1998): 4-9.

¹²⁵ Edward Harris, *Democracy and the Rule of Law in Classical Athens: Essays on Law, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 36-44.

sufficient, but there was no reason for importing it from such long-distance suppliers, such as the Black Sea, since Euboea, Boeotia, and Thessaly were also grain suppliers and were within the region. Furthermore, there is no direct evidence of regular and substantial imports from Pontus, at least until the battle at Aigospotamoi in 405 BC at the end of the Peloponnesian War. What has to be noted is that Euboea, a constant grain exporter to Athens, had rebelled and left the Delian League in 411 BC. It is probable that thereafter Athens turned to its long-distance suppliers of grain, such as the Black Sea, more regularly. In the 4th century things changed even more, as a specific export policy for grain was established between Athens and the Spartocid dynasty of the Bosporan Kingdom. The regular grain trade between the Black Sea and the other cities in mainland Greece and the Aegean world, such as Mytilene, Corinth, Sparta, and Epirus, is not possible to be estimated, as few evidence exists.