

FROM AKYAR TO SEVASTOPOL: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PORT CITY UNTIL WORLD WAR I

Yunus Emre AYDIN , **Ulaş Kutsi ÇEZİK** 

Karadeniz Technical University of Trabzon (Turkey)

E-mails: y.eaydin61@gmail.com; ulaskutsicezik@ktu.edu.tr

Abstract: *Akyar is a fortified port city located on the southern tip of the Crimean Peninsula. Originally a small Tatar settlement, this area was annexed by the Russians in 1783 and the city was renamed Sevastopol. While this port was once used as a trading port, the city's true importance stems from its being the centre of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. As is well known, a key factor shaping Russian foreign policy for long had been their quest for access to warm waters. When considering Russian geography, the rationale behind this endeavour becomes clear. In pursuit of this ambition, the Straits played a crucial role. To reach the Straits, it was necessary to first establish naval superiority in the Black Sea with a strong fleet. Prioritizing the Black Sea Fleet was not the only reason for the Russians, but they saw it as a defensive necessity. In this context, following the annexation of Crimea in 1783, this port city under Russian rule gradually became the centre of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Although it continued to be used as a trading port for a long time, especially in the last quarter of the 19th century, the necessity of turning it into a naval base started to be discussed, and ultimately the port of Sevastopol was transformed into a naval base. This study examines the transformation of Sevastopol from a small Tatar settlement into the centre of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.*

Keywords: Sevastopol, Crimea, Ottoman Empire, Russian Empire, Black Sea

Rezumat: *De la Akyar la Sevastopol: dezvoltarea oraşului-port până la Primul Război Mondial. Akyar este un oraş portuar fortificat situat în extremitatea sudică a Peninsulei Crimeea. Inițial, o mică așezare tătarască, zona a fost anexată de ruși în anul 1783, iar*

orașul propriu zis a fost redenumit Sevastopol. Folosit cândva în calitate de port comercial, adevărata importanță a orașului rezidă în faptul că a fost și rămâne principala bază navală a flotei ruse de la Marea Neagră. Este cunoscut faptul că un factor cheie care a modelat politica externă a Rusiei pentru mult timp a fost obținerea accesului la ape calde. Când luăm în considerare geografia rusă, rațiunea din spatele acestui efort devine clară. În urmărirea acestei ambiții, Strâmtoarele Bosfor și Dardanele au jucat un rol crucial. Pentru a ajunge în Strâmtoare a fost necesară, întâi, instituirea superiorității navale ruse în Marea Neagră, prin intermediul unei flote puternice. Prioritizarea Flotei Mării Negre nu a fost o ratio ultima pentru ruși, dar ei au considerat-o drept necesitate defensivă de primă mână. În acest context, în urma anexării Crimeii în anul 1783, acest oraș-port a devenit treptat, sub stăpânire rusă, centrul Flotei Ruse de la Marea Neagră. Deși a continuat să fie folosit în calitate de port comercial pentru o lungă perioadă de timp, mai ales în ultimul sfert al secolului al XIX-lea, cercurile oficiale ruse au început să discute despre necesitatea transformării sale într-o bază navală. În cele din urmă, Sevastopolul a fost transformat într-un port naval. baza. Acest studiu examinează succint transformarea Sevastopolului dintr-o mică așezare tătară în centrul flotei ruse de la Marea Neagră.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, Russians have always faced difficulties in accessing the seas due to geographical constraints. While they have access to four different seas – the Arctic Ocean to the north, the Pacific Ocean in Far East Asia, the Baltic Sea to the west, and the Black Sea to the south – the Arctic Ocean is impassable due to its climate, and the port opening to the Pacific, Vladivostok, is surrounded by Japanese territory. Additionally, although Russians held significant positions along the northern and eastern shores of the Baltic Sea, they had to overcome German and British threats to access the oceans through the Baltic Sea. Finally, there is the Black Sea, which connects to the Mediterranean via the Istanbul and Çanakkale Straits, providing access to the oceans.¹ These geographical constraints undoubtedly influenced the empire's economy but considering the tumultuous political environment of the 19th century, it further emphasized Russia's need for a strong navy.

Efforts to develop the Russian navy began during the reign of Tsar Peter the Great, who recognized the necessity of a strong navy for a powerful empire. To expand Russia's access to warm waters, Tsar Peter initiated preparations to capture the fortress of Azov. The first campaign on Azov took place in 1695, but it

¹ M. A. Petrov, *Podgotovka Rossii k mirovoy voyne na more* [Russia's Preparation for World War at Sea], Moscow, Voennoye Izdatelstvo, 1926, p. 7-8.

failed due to the arrival of Turkish reinforcements via the Sea of Azov.² Understanding the imperative of a navy following this setback, Tsar Peter immediately ordered the construction of naval fleets on rivers and seas, with the city of Voronezh being the first place to commence naval construction activities. By the spring of 1696, 30 large ships and approximately 1000 flat-bottomed boats (known as “barkas”) had been built. In May, this fleet was transported down the Don River, besieging Azov and capturing it on July 19, 1696.³ With Azov secured, Russia’s main objective was to control the Kerch Strait and gain access to the Black Sea. To this end, construction began on a naval base and port in Taganrog. The next goal for the Russians, having reached the sea, was to create a large navy. For this, Russia launched a massive mobilization effort and invited shipbuilding experts from other countries.⁴

During the period when the Black Sea was under full Ottoman control, to such an extent that it was referred to as the “Turkish Lake,” Russian merchant ships and battleships had no permission to enter these waters. The first Russian battleships in the Black Sea were sighted on August 5, 1771, during the ongoing Russo-Turkish War of 1768–1774, under the command of Prince Dolgorukiy. Initially, Prince Dolgorukiy had ordered Admiral Aleksey Naumovich Senyavin, commander of the Don and Azov fleets, to survey the southern shores of the Crimean Peninsula from Feodosiya to Balaklava. However, upon receiving reports of approximately 40 ships near Yalta, making the task difficult, Prince Dolgorukiy ordered artillery and military supplies to be brought to Sudak and Yalta to search for these ships. On August 5, under the command of Admiral Sukhotin (Yakov Filippovich), four Russian battleships from Yenikale arrived at the southern shores of Crimea.⁵

Settlement attempts along the Black Sea coast began during Peter the Great’s reign but could only be realized after the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca in 1774. Ships from the Azov fleet played a significant role in establishing the Black Sea fleet. However, the construction of new and stronger ships necessitated a new centre, which became the city of Kherson. Additionally, ships were reinforced from

² Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Rusya Tarihi Başlangıçtan 1917’ye Kadar* [The History of Russia from the Beginning to 1917], Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2014, p. 272-273.

³ P. M. Andrianov, *Epokha Petra Velikogo* [The Era of Peter the Great], in A. S. Grishinsky, V. P. Nikolski (Eds.), *Istoriya Russkoy armii i flota* [The History of the Russian Army and Navy], Ch. I, Moscow, Obrazovaniye, 1911, p. 84-85.

⁴ Akdes Nimet Kurat, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

⁵ V. F. Golovachov, *Istoriya Sevastopolya kak russkogo porta* [The History of Sevastopol as a Russian Port], St. Petersburg, Izdaniye Sevastopolskovo otdela na Politehnicheskoy Vystavke, 1872, p. 24.

the Baltic fleet to support the growing Black Sea fleet. In this context, six frigates were sent from Europe to the Black Sea, but when the Ottoman Empire only allowed four of them to pass through the Dardanelles, the other two returned to Baltic ports. Although both Kherson and Taganrog were turned into fleet bases, they lacked sufficient depth for large ships to dock. Hence, following the annexation of Crimea in 1783, Akyar Bay gained prominence, leading to the decision to designate Sevastopol as the main port.⁶

AKYAR (SEVASTOPOL)

The first known inhabitants of the region where this port city is located in the southwest of Crimea were the Taurians. The city of Chersonesus was founded in the region in the 5th century BC.⁷ The area remained under the control of the Roman Empire and later the Byzantine Empire. The city was renamed to Kherson during the Byzantine period, referring to its old Russian name during the Byzantine era, Korsun, not to be confused with the city of Herson, located on the banks of the Özi (Dnieper) river in southern Ukraine today. After the Byzantine era, the city remained under the control of the Genoese until it was conquered by the Ottomans in 1475. From 1475 to 1781, the city was ruled by the Crimean Khans, and in 1783, it was seized by the Russian Empire.

The name Akyar first appears in Ottoman tahrir registers from the 1680s, which show landowners in southern Crimea. According to these records, in 1686, the village of Akyar was a small settlement in the Mankub kaza of the Kefe province, inhabited entirely by 23 Muslim landowners. After the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca was signed in 1774, it came under the administration of the Mankub kaza, which was part of the Bakhchisaray kaymakamlık of the Crimean Khanate.⁸ The fate of Akyar, a small Tatar village in the 17th century, took a turn when an

⁶ V. A. Zolotarev, *Rossisiyskiy voyenny flot na Chernom more i vostochnom Sredizemnomorie* [The Russian Navy on the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean], Moscow, Nauka, 1988, p. 33-35.

⁷ S. Yu. Saprykin, *Predposylki osnavaniya Hersonesa Tavricheskogo* [The Background of the Foundation of Tauric Chersones], in "Antichnyie drevnosti i Sredniye veka" [Ancient Antiquity and the Middle Ages], Sverdlovsk, Izdaniye Sverdlovskovo universiteta, 1981, Vol. 18, pp. 35-49.

⁸ A. V. Efimov (Ed.), *Osmanskiy reestr zemelnykh vladeny yuzhnogo Kryma 1680-h godov* [The Ottoman Register of Land Holdings in Southern Crimea in the 1680s], Ch. 3, Moscow, Institut Naslediya, 2021, p. 148-149.

unnamed French traveller arrived in Crimea. Impressed by the location and advantages of the port, the observations of this traveller reached the ears of Empress Catherine II. Engineers were dispatched to the region, and when the traveller's observations were confirmed, work immediately began.⁹ Indeed, the geopolitical location of Akyar made it an ideal candidate for a naval port. The port had a central location in the Black Sea, giving it a perfect advantage for both defence and offensive. The Akyar port was large enough to accommodate a large fleet, making it one of the best bays in the world in this regard. The bay, divided into 5 different coves, was approximately 6 verst (about 6.4008 km) long, 500–850 meters wide and 10–25 meters deep.¹⁰ Additionally, the Sevastopol Bay, which extends east–west, is surrounded by the Crimean Mountains to the north and the Balaklava hills to the south. These mountains protect the Sevastopol harbour from the winds. Not freezing in winter and being sheltered from winds, the Sevastopol harbour was in a more advantageous position for the navy compared to other Russian ports. The port offered many strategic and physical advantages for use as a naval base. In 1773, before the annexation of Crimea, a group led by sailor Ivan Baturin came to the area to collect detailed information about the cove and port of Akyar and they drew up a map of the port. It was in 1778 that A. V. Suvorov, who first came here with his fleet, pointed out the strategic importance of Akyar Bay, stating: “A port as suitable as this for protecting the fleet cannot be found in Crimea if not the entire Black Sea area.”¹¹

The founding date of the city known as Sevastopol is June 14, 1783, when the Dutch-born Russian Admiral Thomas MacKenzie laid the first foundation stones. On February 21, 1784, Empress Catherine II ordered Prince Potemkin to build a large fortress, a shipyard, a port, and a military village.¹² After the annexation of Crimea, Grigoriy Potemkin, a famous commander of the time, proposed that the Tatar village of Ahtar/Akyar be renamed Sevastopol, meaning “venerable, famous, glorious, sacred city” in Greek. The renaming was officially accepted in early 1784.¹³ After Crimea came under Russian rule, efforts were made to erase the

⁹ Edmund Spencer, *Turkey, Russia and Black Sea and Circassia*, London, Routledge, 1855, p. 253.

¹⁰ I. Protopopov, *Ocherk osady i oborony Sevastopolya* [An Essay on the Siege and Defense of Sevastopol], Odesa, tipografiya Okr. Shtaba Odesskogo voennogo okruga, 1885, p. 9.

¹¹ C. F. Nayda (Ed.), *Istoriya Goroda-Geroya Sevastopolya* [The History of the Hero City Sevastopol], Kiev, Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk USSR, 1960, p. 27.

¹² *Polnoye Sobraniye Zakonov Rossiskoy Imperii 1784-1788* [The Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire 1784–1788], Vol. XXII, № 15.929, St. Petersburg, 1830, p. 21–22.

¹³ F. V. Livanov, *Sevastopol do Krymskoy voyny i posle onoy: Istoricheskoye opisaniye* [Sevastopol before and after the Crimean War: A Historical Description], Moscow, Tipografiya

maintenance.¹⁶ In 1787, the fleet in Sevastopol had grown to comprise a total of 30 battleships, including three ships in Kerch and Feodosia. These ships were equipped with approximately 860 firearms.¹⁷ Designed as a naval base due to Russia's regional position, Sevastopol played a crucial role in the 1787–1792 Russo-Turkish War, rendering the Ottoman fleet in Özi ineffective.¹⁸ In 1797, during the reign of Tsar Paul I, the city's name was changed back to Akyar, but it was renamed Sevastopol again after 1826.¹⁹

According to commercial records from 1803, the number of merchant ships arriving at the port of Sevastopol was as follows: 21 Russian, 1 British, 1 French, 28 Turkish, and a total of 57 ships from other countries.²⁰ However, on February 23, 1804, merchant ships were banned from entering the port for security reasons. This caused the city to meet difficulties in accessing raw materials, in the face of which leading figures of the city asked the government to allow merchant ships to bring goods to Sevastopol. However, due to security reasons, this request was rejected, and instead, the government proposed to build a trading port in Balaklava, which would also serve the city of Sevastopol.²¹ In 1806, English poet and traveller Reginald Heber, who visited Crimea, wrote about this trade ban, stating that it negatively affected the city's prosperity and increased the prices of imported goods.²² Trade permit for the port of Sevastopol was obtained in 1808 upon an application filed by Ivan Ivanovich de Traverse, the commander of the Black Sea Fleet.²³ However, merchant ships trading in Sevastopol were required to dock not at the main harbour but at one of the city's five coves, particularly Artillery Cove.²⁴

¹⁶ F. V. Livaonov, *op. cit.*, p. 10-11.

¹⁷ V. F. Golovachov, *op. cit.*, p. 101-103.

¹⁸ Constantin Ardeleanu, *The Opening and Development of the Black Sea for International Trade and Shipping (1774-1853)*, in "Euxeinos", 14 (2014), s. 32-32.

¹⁹ S. R. Grinevetskiy, I. S. Zonn, S. S. Zhiltsov, *Sevastopol*, in A. N. Kosareva (Ed.), *Chernomorskaya entsyklopediya* [The Black Sea Encyclopedia], Moscow, Mejdunarodnye otnosheniya, 2006, p. 457.

²⁰ John MacGregor, *Commercial Statistics: A Digest of the Productive Resources, Commercial Legislation, Costume Tariffs*, Vol. II, London, Whittaker and Co. Ave-Maria Lane, 1850, p. 493.

²¹ *Istoriya Goroda-Geroya*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

²² N. I. Hrapunov, *Vzglyad izvne: Britanskiy poet i puteshestvennik Reginald Heber o sostayaniyi Kryma v 1806 g.* [A View from the Outside: British Poet and Traveler Reginald Heber on the Bad Condition of Crimea in 1806], in "Krymskoye istoricheskoye obozreniye" [Crimean Historical Review], Vol. 3, 2015, p. 263.

²³ F. V. Livanov, *op. cit.*, p. 10-11.

²⁴ H.D. Seymour, *Russia on the Black Sea of Azof: Being a Narrative of Travels in the Crimea and Bordering Provinces; with Notices of Naval, Military, and Commercial Resources of*

During the Crimean War, with Sevastopol being the focal point of the Allied powers, the fate of the city and its port took another turn. During the Crimean War, the Sevastopol harbour was an important location for the Black Sea fleet. This is evidenced by the fact that the first target of the Allied forces was Sevastopol. British First Lord of the Admiralty Sir James Graham's remarks in December 1853, following the Battle of Sinop, illustrate this: "The security of Istanbul and the peace of Europe cannot be ensured unless the Russian fleet and naval arsenal in the Black Sea are destroyed. The eye tooth of the Bear must be drawn." This statement reflects the importance of the Crimean plan.²⁵ According to the general view of the Allied forces, capturing Sevastopol was the best way to punish the Russians. Furthermore, the fall of Sevastopol, where the Russian Black Sea fleet was based, would bring Russia to its knees. Therefore, they thought that the best plan would be to capture Sevastopol and destroy its military installations and Black Sea fleet.²⁶

As a result of the changing conditions with the signing of the Paris Treaty in 1856, the Russian Empire needed a stronger navy in the Black Sea.²⁷ However, immediate action could not be taken in this regard and, by the 1880s, with the industrial boom in Russia, the port of Sevastopol became one of the country's largest trading ports of the time.²⁸ The export figures of the port, which amounted to 556,000 rubles in 1875, increased to 10,360,000 rubles in 1886 and 25,821,000 rubles in 1888.²⁹ This vibrant trade volume had wide press coverage in the Russian press. While debates continued about the location of the new port, international trade persisted at the port of Sevastopol. Large quantities of Russian grain were being brought to Sevastopol and loaded onto foreign ships for export.³⁰ The significant increase in trade figures and the importance of the Sevastopol port among the country's other ports undoubtedly owed much to the Lozovo-Sevastopol railway, built between 1872 and 1875.³¹

those Countries, London, Murray, 1855, s. 65.

²⁵ Andrew Lambert, *The Crimean War: British Grand Strategy against Russia, 1853-56*, 2nd ed., Burlington, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011, p. 114.

²⁶ Orlando Figes, *Crimea. The Last Crusade*, London, Penguin Books, 2011, p. 196-197.

²⁷ F. N. Erantsov, *Po voprosu o Sevastopolskom porte* [On the Issue of the Sevastopol Port], St. Petersburg, Tipografiya M.D. Lomkovskovo, 1889, p. 2.

²⁸ *Istoriya Goroda-Geroya*, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

²⁹ F. N. Erantsov, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

³⁰ "Novosti" [News], 9 May 1895, № 126, p. 4.

³¹ Yunus Emre Aydın, *Lozovo-Sevastopolskaya zheleznaya doroga: ot zamysla k voploshcheniyu* [Lozovo-Sevastopol Railway: from Concept to Implementation], in "Prepodavaniye istorii v shkole" [Teaching History at School], Moscow, № 5, 2022, p. 77-80.

With the Russian Ministry of Defence deciding on the modernization of the naval base in the Black Sea in 1882, efforts began to relocate the trading port in Sevastopol.³² In this regard, a commission was established under the chairmanship of Prince Alexey Aleksandrovich in 1885. After elaborating studies, the commission decided that the Sevastopol port would meet all needs of the navy, thus being suitable for use as a naval port, and that the trading port had to be relocated elsewhere in the city. Thereupon, Alexei Alexeyevich Peshurov was assigned to research a suitable port location.³³ The same year, a communication from the Russian Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Transportation urged the city administration of Sevastopol to take action for the relocation of the trading port.³⁴ Studies suggested potential relocation sites, such as Strilets'ka Bay, Inkerman Bay, and Balaklava Port, which were closer to Sevastopol.³⁵ Considering that the new port would require a railway network, the Ministry of Transportation also researched the location of the new port and evaluated numerous alternatives. Based on these evaluations, the cost of building a railway to Holland Bay in Crimea was estimated at 3.41 million rubles, and 3.1 million rubles for Kilen Bay. It was noted that if the railway to Kilen Bay were constructed from the east, the cost would decrease to 2.52 million rubles.³⁶ However, both projects were rejected on the grounds of their long distance to the military port and the marshy terrain near Inkerman, rendering it unfeasible. While the commission recommended the relocation of the trading port to Strilets'ka Bay, Alexander Mavrikievich Berh's studies highlighted the advantages of Inkerman Bay, arguing for the construction of a new trading port in Inkerman.³⁷

To establish the Sevastopol port as a naval port and relocate the trading port elsewhere, a new commission was formed under the leadership of A. A. Peshurov, Commander-in-Chief of the Black Sea Fleet. Besides Peshurov, the commission included General Engineer A. M. Berh, Commander of Sevastopol Port Mihail Nikolaevich Kumani, Major General Masolov, engineers from the Ministry of Transportation, Gusin, city administrator and Lieutenant Colonel-Engineer Fedor Nikolaevich Erantsov, and Major General A. N. Chikalev.³⁸ Most members of the commission expressed their opinion in favour of locating the new port in Strilets'ka

³² *Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskiy Arkhiv* [The Russian State Historical Archive], F. 268, Op. 3, D. 111, p. 35.

³³ F. N. Erantsov, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

³⁴ "Novosti" [News], 20 October 1895, № 289, p. 5.

³⁵ *Istoriya Goroda-Geroya*, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

³⁶ *Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskiy Arkhiv*, F. 95, Op. 8a, D. 275, p. 25-26.

³⁷ F. N. Erantsov, *op. cit.*, p. 4-5.

³⁸ *Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskiy Arkhiv*, F. 268, Op. 3, D. 111, p. 2.

Bay. The commission also brought forth the idea of connecting this bay to the Lozovo–Sevastopol railway with an additional railway line. The studies that were carried out predicted that the cost of building an 8-verst-long line would range between 2,050,000 rubles and 2,300,000 rubles.³⁹

All previous meetings had remained inconclusive but, in the commission meeting of April 24, 1890, it was decided to relocate the trading port to Feodosiya (Kefe).⁴⁰ This decision was confirmed on June 14, 1890.⁴¹ As part of the same decision, it was announced that a railway would be constructed to connect the Canköy station of the Lozovo–Sevastopol railway line with the port of Feodosiya. Despite being further away from Sevastopol compared to other ports under consideration, the Feodosiya port was chosen as a trading port owing to its wide and deep bay and its being sheltered from winds.⁴² While debates continued over the location of the new trading port, the Sevastopol port maintained its commercial character until 1899, allowing the city's needs to be met.⁴³

According to a pronouncement by the Russian Ministry of Maritime Affairs, while Sevastopol would be used as a naval port from then on, it was stated that a coastal port would be built there to meet the city's supply needs. According to news published in local Crimean press, plans for the port had been prepared, and work was nearing completion.⁴⁴ On May 26, 1895, during a meeting with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the naval command, it was decided to gradually close the Sevastopol port to trade and shift all commercial activities to the Feodosiya port.⁴⁵ However, despite all this information, the port maintained its commercial character to some extent in addition to being the centre of the Russian navy, as in the early 1900s, along with other ports on the Crimean Peninsula, the Sevastopol port was used as the starting point for trips to Southern Europe. Russian Trading

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 7; *ibidem*, F. 268, Op. 3, D. 2, p. 45.

⁴⁰ *Obzor deyatelnosti Ministerstva putey soobshcheniya za vremya tsarstvovaniya Imperatora Aleksandra III* [Overview of the Activities of the Ministry of Railways during the Reign of Aleksandr III], St. Petersburg, 1902, p. 198.

⁴¹ *Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskiy Arkhiv*, F. 446, Op. 2, D. 3, p. 34.; *Polnoye sobraniye zakonov Rossiskoy imperii 1784-1788* [The Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire 1784–1788], Vol. X, № 6.966, St. Petersburg, 1893, p. 564.

⁴² *Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskiy Arkhiv*, F. 268, Op. 1, D. 1495, p. 7-8.

⁴³ S. A. Knushevitsky, *Obzor kommercheskoy deyatelnosti yuzhno-russkih portov* [Overview of Commercial Activities of South Russian Ports], Kharkov, 1910, p. 118.

⁴⁴ "Krym" [Crimea], 29 November 1891, № 141, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskiy Arkhiv*, F. 229, Op. 3, D. 555, p. 2-3.

and Shipping Company steamers were used on these trips.⁴⁶



Figure 2. Sevastopol Port (1842)⁴⁷

In 1907, an article was published in a local Crimean newspaper, reporting that Sevastopol could possibly become a trading port again. Given that other ports on the southern coast of Russia were freezing up during the winter months, adversely affecting trade as ships could not dock, it was proposed that Sevastopol, being a non-freezing port most suitable for trade, should regain its commercial status. Based on this, reinstatement of the city's commercial privileges was requested, yet to no avail.⁴⁸ Due to the city's commercial needs, this issue continued

⁴⁶ D. S. Dokuchev, N. A. Dokucheva, *Puteshestviye kak osvoeniye prostranstva: kanikulyarnye poezdki v Krym na rubezhe XIX-XX vekov* [Journey as an Opening of Space: The Crimean Vacations of the late 19th–early 20th centuries], in “Sovremenniyе problemy servisa i turizma” [Modern Problems of Service and Tourism], Vol. 1, № 9, 2015, p. 16.

⁴⁷ K. Bassoli, *Vidy Kryma* [View of Crimea], Odesa, Litografiya D. Klenova, 1842, p. 3.

⁴⁸ “Krymskiy Vestnik” [Crimean Bulletin], 10 March 1907, № 56, p. 2.

to be repeatedly brought up by the Crimean press. A news report from 1910 suggested that Strelets Bay in Sevastopol be opened for maritime trade, but this suggestion was also rejected.⁴⁹

Documents found in Ottoman archives⁵⁰ regarding the transformation of the port into a naval base are also important as they provide evidence of the shift that the port underwent and the value that states attached to their navies prior to World War I. Documents sent by Ottoman diplomats in Russia convey how Sevastopol transitioned into a naval port. Indeed, the fact that before World War I, the primary target of the German battleships Goeben and Breslau, seeking refuge in the Ottoman Empire, was the Sevastopol port signifies the critical importance it had at the time.⁵¹

At the beginning of the 20th century, in 1905, Russia suffered both a significant loss of prestige and nearly complete decimation of its navy, except for the Baltic Fleet, due to the defeat in the Russo-Japanese War.⁵² Of the 15 armoured battleships sent to Japan, Russia lost 14, along with 10 out of 19 cruisers, all three coastal defence ships, and two minesweepers.⁵³ Wanting to enhance its navy before a potential war, Russia found itself torn between prioritizing the Baltic Fleet or the Black Sea Fleet. However, due to the threat from Germany and the need to protect the capital, St. Petersburg, priority was given to the development of the Baltic Fleet. Nevertheless, with the Ottoman Empire initiating modernization efforts for its navy starting from 1909, and particularly with the order placed in 1911 to acquire dreadnoughts from England, Russia began to pay more attention to the Black Sea Fleet.⁵⁴

Before World War I, the Russian Ministry of Maritime Affairs presented a bill to the State Duma in November 1913 for the renewal and strengthening of military

⁴⁹ "Krymskiy Vestnik" [Crimean Bulletin], 13 April 1910, № 97, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Yunus Emre Aydın, *Sevastopolskiy port v kontse XIX – nachale XX veka po materialam turetskih arkhivov* [Sevastopol Port in the late 19th–early 20th centuries based on the materials of the Turkish Archives], in "Chelevocheskiy kapital" [Human Capital], № 11(143), 2020, p. 131-138.

⁵¹ *The Times Documentary History of War, "Operations of Goeben and Breslau"*, Volume III, Naval I, London, Printing House Square, 1917, s. 51-54.

⁵² Burak Gülboy, *Birinci Dünya Savaşı Öncesinde Rusya ve Osmanlı Donanmaları Arasındaki Silahlanma Yarışı* [The Arms Race between the Russian and Ottoman Navies before the First World War], in *Türk-Rus İlişkiler Üzerine Makaleler* [Articles on Turkish–Russian Relations], ed. Yeliz Okay, İstanbul, Doğu Kitabevi, 2012, p. 51.

⁵³ M. A. Petrov, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁵⁴ Burak Gülboy, *op. cit.*, p. 54-56.

ports, naval radio stations, and observation points, including those in Sevastopol and other ports. According to this bill, the total cost required for the renewal of all military ports was estimated at 17,967,511 rubles. For the specific renewal and strengthening works at the Sevastopol port, such as reinforcing coastal lines, constructing mine depots, and shipbuilding, the cost was indicated as 1,429,690 rubles.⁵⁵

CONCLUSIONS

Akyar, a small Tatar village situated on the southern tip of the Crimean Peninsula, stands out due to its strategic location. Positioned dominantly overlooking the Black Sea, Akyar drew attention following the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Empire in 1783.

With the initiatives of Empress Catherine II and Prince Potemkin, it was developed into the focal point of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. In 1784, a port was constructed in Akyar, renamed Sevastopol as part of Catherine II's Greek Project. Although commercial activities were conducted in the port city for a considerable period to meet the region's trade demands, particularly during the Crimean War of 1853–1856 and the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–1878, these conflicts underscored the necessity of a naval presence in the Black Sea, prompting the Russians to prioritize the Black Sea Fleet thereafter. In order to meet the commercial needs of the Crimean Peninsula, the trade port was relocated to the city of Feodosiya, and Sevastopol emerged as the centre of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

Consequently, Akyar, once a small and inconsequential Tatar village, evolved into a significant naval centre within the scope of Russian Black Sea policy. The strategic importance of Sevastopol persists to this day.

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