



Summary :

Sinope was founded in the second half of the 7th century BC as a Greek colony on the southern coasts of Euxine Sea. The city evolved into an extremely important port in the following centuries and gained economic power, thanks to the exploitation of the area's natural resources and in commerce. In 183 BC it became part of the Mithradatic kingdom and became its capital. It regained its freedom after the victory of the Romans in the 3rd Mithradatic War, in 70 BC, but soon Julius Caesar re-established it as a Roman colony. As a city of the Roman Empire, the importance of Sinope in the political and economic life of the southern coasts of Euxine Sea greatly increased, while archaeological ruins testify to the urban organization and prosperity.

Geographical Location

Northern coasts of present-day Turkey

Historical Region

Pontos

Administrative Dependence

Pontos, Kingdom of Pontos, Province of Pontos

Geographical Coordinates

1. Anthropography

1.1. Geographical Position

Sinope is identified with the modern city of Sinop, capital of the province of Sinop on the northern Turkish coast. Sinope was built on the cape to the west of the mouth of the Alys River and almost opposite the peninsula of Crimea. The position was not chosen by Ancient Greeks at random. Apart from the particularly mild climate, compared to other areas of the Black Sea (Euxinus Pontus),¹ Sinope had the best natural ports² on the southern coasts of the Black Sea and was a natural and safe point of reference for ships sailing along these coasts.

1.2. Derivation of the Name

According to historical sources, Sinope was named after the nymph Sinope, whom Apollo kidnapped and then hid in the area. The nymph was the daughter of the Asopos River of Boeotia. However, according to Eumelos, the nymph's father was the Asopos River flowing between Sikyon and Corinth.³

1.3. Year of Foundation

It is very important to verify the year Sinope was founded, since its foundation is directly associated with the foundation of several other [colonies](#)-cities on the southern coasts of the Black Sea. Although there is contradictory evidence, the archeological findings from excavations in the area, which are still in progress, have been really helpful in verifying the year of foundation and understanding the city's history. Until 2004 the archeological findings implied that the Greek colony of Sinope was founded in the second half of the 7th century BC.⁴

1.4. Demographic – Ethnological Information

Sinope was founded by Greeks but the area had already been inhabited by native populations. Besides, according to Herodotus, the



[Cimmerians](#) had already founded a colony in the peninsula where the city was later built.⁵ This is also evidenced by the lack of Greek archeological findings in the excavations carried out in a camp outside the Hellenistic walls of the city, on the northern side of the peninsula.⁶ Because the main source of income for the people in Sinope was the exploitation of the area's natural resources and trade, they are expected to have got on well with the natives. According to Xenophon, there were permanent Paphlagonian representatives in Sinope, who acted on behalf of their ruler and helped commercial transactions.⁷ As a result, a lot of natives were quickly Hellenized, either because they were in regular contact with Greeks or because they had chosen to live in Sinope. In general, the population of Sinope soon increased and the city founded its own colonies on the southern coasts of the Black Sea.⁸

2. Historical Background

According to ancient sources, the foundation of the city is ascribed to Autolycus of Thessaly, the companion of Hercules during the expedition of the Argonauts, who was honoured as a hero by the people of Sinope.⁹ The legend says that the first Greeks arrived there before the Homeric times.¹⁰ According to different sources, the city was founded by Abrodontas or Abro,¹¹ who had possibly come from [Miletus](#).¹² Besides, ancient sources tend to agree that Sinope was founded by the Milesians.¹³ There is a chance that Abrodontas came from Argos and had previously lived in Corinth.¹⁴ Although there is neither archaeological evidence nor reliable source relating Corinth to Sinope's foundation, some sources claim that Aetes, the King of Colchis, was of Corinthian origin,¹⁵ which reveals the connection between Corinth and the region of the Black Sea.

Sinope, just like other cities on the southern coasts of the Black Sea,¹⁶ appears to have two different moments of foundation, in the mid-8th century and in the second half of the 7th century BC. However, archaeological findings so far have suggested that the city was founded in the second half of the 7th century BC, possibly in 632/631 BC, according to Eusebios. In particular, no buildings have been found, but only earthenware of the time. It is likely that the original colony was founded near the acropolis of Sinope, not fully excavated yet because there used to be a top-security prison there until 1998. These few findings suggest that the people of Sinope, during the second half of the 7th and the 6th century BC, were mainly engaged in trade. For the time being, there is no evidence of extensive inland agricultural activities in Sinope at the time.¹⁷

In the 5th and in the early 4th century BC Sinope developed rapidly. Unfortunately, there is little information about that period. However, it is known that in 430 BC Pericles and Lamachus overthrew Timesilaos, the tyrant of Sinope.¹⁸ When democracy was restored 600 Athenians went to Sinope as colonists, as evidenced by archaeological findings. In particular, the excavations suggest that around the end of the 5th century BC the city expanded significantly due to new houses built,¹⁹ while lots of sepulchral steles of the 5th and the 4th century BC declare the Athenian origin of the dead.²⁰ The city started to thrive and this is evidenced by its colonial activities on the eastern coasts of the Black Sea. According to Xenophon,²¹ Sinope founded [Trapezus](#), [Kotyora](#) and Kerasous. These cities paid annual taxes to Sinope, in exchange for their protection from foreign threats.²² At the same time, Sinope expanded its trade activities to the northern coasts of the Black Sea, where excavations brought to light a considerable number of Sinopean vessels in an early style as well as earthenware.²³

Around 360 BC Sinope had lost much of its power. [Datames](#), the satrap of Cappadocia, attacked the city and he would have captured it if he had not been ordered by the Persian King Artaxerxes II to stop the attack.²⁴ Finally, Datames must have allied with Sinope, as evidenced by a series of coins of the time bearing the word 'DATAM'.²⁵ It is known that some decades later Sinope sent ambassadors to Persepolis to meet the Persian King. They were surprised to see Alexander the Great instead of Darius III.²⁶ The limited sources of information and the archaeological findings, in general, do not provide a clear picture of Sinope's history in the 4th and 3rd century BC.

In the second half of the 3rd century BC Sinope was still considered an important city thanks to its geographical position. The ruler of Sinope could control trade on the southern coasts of the Black Sea and exploit the below mentioned resources. For these reasons



Mithradates II attempted to capture it in 220 BC. He may have made it if the Rhodians had not offered Sinope substantial financial support.²⁷

In 183 BC [Pharnakes I](#) captured the city.²⁸ The Rhodians tried to complain to their Roman allies, but Rome did not respond to their complaints. Sinope became the capital of the Mithradatic Kingdom, while [Mithridates VI](#) Eupator was born there.²⁹ As the capital of the Mithradatic Kingdom during the Mithradatic Wars the city sided with Mithradates VI.

In the [Mithridatic War III](#) in 70 BC the Roman general Lucius Licinius Lucullus besieged and captured the city before killing the guard posted there by Mithradates VI. He did not punish Sinope but gave the city its freedom and autonomy.³⁰ Although Sinope had already been annexed to the Roman Empire, the Romans granted its administration to Pharnakes I for a short period. Pharnakes must have been removed shortly before 47 BC, when Julius Caesar refounded the city as a Roman colony under the name Colonia Julia Felix Sinope.³¹

As a city of the Roman Empire, Sinope once again played an important role in the political and economic life of the southern coasts of the Black Sea. This is shown by the fact that, together with Trapezus, it possibly was the base of the so-called Roman Pontic Fleet (classis Pontica), from the mid-1st century until the 3rd century AD.³² Furthermore, as evidenced by the available sources, the city was quite prosperous and able to finance the building of water supply channels, which provided the city with fresh water coming from 25 km away.³³ It should be noted that the coins of that period bore Latin inscriptions, since the city was a Roman colony (colonia).³⁴

3. Economy

Fishery played an important role in Sinope's economy. It is worth mentioning that the term 'fishery' does not refer only to fishing, but to the construction of fishing boats and occupations associated with the manufacture of fishing nets as well as fish salting and packing. According to sources, the city was particularly benefited from bonito fishing.³⁵ The fish were salted, exported and sold, often at quite high prices.³⁶ Aelianus describes the way the Black Sea tuna was fished with nets on the southern coasts of the Black Sea.³⁷ Although only Amastris and Heraclea are mentioned, Sinope probably followed the same methods for tuna fishing, even if the results were not as impressive as in the other two cities.³⁸ Finally, mullets³⁹ could bring good profits on the central and southern coasts of the Black Sea.

Sinope and, particularly, its inland were famous for the quantity and the quality of timber produced. Firs, maples and oaks of the region were famous as the most suitable timber for shipbuilding.⁴⁰ According to Theophrastus, these kinds were superior to the same trees growing on the northern coasts of the Black Sea.⁴¹ This resulted in the development of shipbuilding in the area, already from the mid-4th century BC.⁴²

According to Strabo and unlike other areas on the coasts of the Black Sea, in the area of Sinope there were olive trees.⁴³ It is likely that olive oil was one of the most important exportable goods of the city, as evidenced by the several Sinopean amphoras discovered on the northern and western coasts of the Black Sea.⁴⁴

One of the most exportable goods of Sinope, exclusively on the hands of the city, was the so-called Sinopean dye.⁴⁵ It was a red dye, used in painting by the best Greek painters,⁴⁶ in architectural design⁴⁷ and in medicine.⁴⁸ The building of roads in the mainland of Asia Minor in the Roman period put an end to the Sinopean monopoly and the Sinopean dye reached the Mediterranean via Ephesus.⁴⁹

4. Religion

As a Greek colony, Sinope is expected to have worshipped Greek gods. It is also expected that the city and its wider area had sanctuaries to Persian deities, since the Mithradatic dynasty, proud of their Persian origin, made Sinope the capital of their kingdom.



According to Tacitus, in Sinope there was a sanctuary to god Sarapis and goddess Isis.⁵⁰ When Ptolemy I reigned in Egypt, the statue of Sarapis was transferred from Sinope to Egypt. Tacitus says that after the statue had been transferred to Egypt, a grandiose temple was built at the site of the sanctuary. Archaeological findings prove the existence of the sanctuary of Sarapis in Sinope, although it was not as grandiose as Tacitus mentions.⁵¹

5. Buildings

As mentioned above, Sinope was built on the cape to the west of the mouth of the Alys River and almost opposite the peninsula of Crimea. The cape has an area of 20x20 km and is divided into two parts, connected through a narrow strip of land. The Greek colonists took advantage of the natural ports formed thanks to the geography of the area and built Sinope at this very strip of land.⁵² It is also known that another port, used by the Ten Thousand ('Myrioi') of Xenophon during their return journey, existed near the city.⁵³

According to Strabo's accounts, in the 1st century AD the city was fortified, had ports, roads, gardens, suburbs (probably with fine and lavish mansions), a gymnasium and a market.⁵⁴ The letters of Pliny the Younger inform that an aqueduct was built, while water channels carried fresh water to the city from a distance of about 25 km.⁵⁵ In addition, according to inscriptions, Sinope had a Roman amphitheatre.⁵⁶

Archaeological findings prove that the urban area of Sinope developed significantly as a part of the Mithradatic Kingdom. In particular, houses of that period have been discovered in almost the entire area inside the walls preserved so far, while a number of larger houses have been found along the coast.⁵⁷ The fact that the city was thriving at the time is evidenced by the approximately 50 burial monuments with colonnades and other similar monuments with elaborate decorations, such as a pair of lions attacking their victim, found in the cemetery of Kum-kapi.⁵⁸

Finally, excavations near the eastern wall have brought to light the foundations of a small Hellenistic temple.⁵⁹

1. Strabo 2.1.15-16.

2. Strabo 12.3.11. Polyb. 4.56.

3. Eumelus F5, F451 (Jacoby)· Apoll. Rhod., *Argon.* 2.946-947· Schol. Apoll. Rhod. 2.946.54c· Diod. Sin. 4.72.

4. Doonan, O., "Sinope", in Grammenos, D.V. – Petropoulos, E.K. (ed.), *Ancient Greek Colonies in the Black Sea* (Thessaloniki 2003), pp. 1380-1381.

5. Herodotus 4.12.2.

6. Doonan, O., "Sinope", in Grammenos, D.V. – Petropoulos, E.K. (ed.), *Ancient Greek Colonies in the Black Sea*, Archaeological Institute of Northern Greece (Thessaloniki 2003), p. 1381.

7. Xenophon., *Anabasis* 6.1.15.

8. According to Xenophon (*Anabasis* 4.8.22), Trebizond, Kotyora and Kerasous were colonies of Sinope.

9. Pseud. Skym. 945· Strabo 12.3.11· Anonymus, *Peripl.* E.Π. 22.



10. Homer, *Iliad* 10.267· *Odyssey* 19.392-466· Burket, W., *Homo Necans. The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (London 1983), p. 131.
11. Pseud. Skym. 947· *RE* 7.2, column 2155.
12. According to Anonymous (*Peripl.* E.II. 22), Abrodon came from Miletus, but Drews believes that his name didn't have Ionic roots (Drews, R., "The earliest Greek settlements on the Black Sea", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 45 (1976), pp. 25-26).
13. Strabo 12.3.11· Diod. Sin. 14.31.2· Pseud. Skym. 995-996.
14. *RE* 2.1, column 461.
15. Epimenides 457F11 (Jacoby)· Diophantus 805F1 (Jacoby).
16. For example, Amisus (Pseud. Skym. 917-918, Strabo 12.3.14), Cyzicus (*RE* 12.1, col. 229), Heraclea (Strabo 12.3.4· *RE* 8.1, col. 433-434).
17. Akurgal, E., "Sinop Kazilari / Die Ausgrabungen von Sinope", *Türk Arkeoloji Dergesi* 6.1, pp. 47-61· Boysal, Y., *Über die Älteren Funde von Sinope und die Kolonisationsfrage* *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1959), pp. 8-20· Doonan, O., "Sinope", στο Grammenos, D.V. – Petropoulos, E.K. (ed.), *Ancient Greek Colonies in the Black Sea*, Archaeological Institute of Northern Greece (Thessaloniki 2003), pp. 1381-1382.
18. Plut., *Per.* 20.
19. Akurgal, E. – Budde, L., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Sinope", *Türk Tarihi Kurumu* 5.14 (Ankara 1956).
20. French, D., "Sinopean Notes 1", *Epigraphica Anatolica* 18 (1990), pp. 45-64.
21. Xenophon, *Anabasis*. 4.8.22.
22. Xenophon, *Anabasis* 5.5.7-10.
23. Fedoseev, N., "Classification des timbres astynomiques de Sinope", στο Garlan, E. (ed.), *Production et Commerce des amphores anciennes en Mer Noire* (Aix en Provence 1999), pp. 27-48.
24. Polyainus., *Strategem.* 7.21.
25. Langella, A., "Sinope, Datame e la Persia", *Dialoghi di Archeologia* 7.2 (1989), pp. 93-107.
26. Arr. *Anab.* 3.24.4.
27. Polybius 4.56.
28. Polybius 23.9· Strabo 12.3.11.
29. Strabo 12.3.11.
30. App., *Mithrid.* 83· Plutarch., *Luc.* 18· Cic. Pro Leg. Man. 8.
31. Strabo 12.3.11· Pliny, *Ep.* 10.90-91· *RRAM* vol. 1, pp. 414-415.
32. Josephus *Ant.* 16.21· Strabo 12.3.11, AE (L'année épigraphique) 364 (1961), ILS 2824· Speidel, M.P.M. – French, D.H., "Bithynian troops in the



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33. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.90.

34. Head, B.V., *Historia Numorum. A Manual of Greek Numismatics* (Oxford 1911), p. 509.

35. Strabo 7.6.2, 12.3.11· Ail. 4.9, 9.59, 15.10.

36. Pliny, *HN* 9.18· Diod. S. 37.3.5.

37. Ail. 15.3.

38. Ail. 15.5· Pl., *HN* 9.18.

39. Athen., *Deipn.* 3.118c, 7.307b.

40. Strabo 12.3.12· Theophrastus 4.5.5.

41. Theophrastus. 4.5.3.

42. Polyenus., *Strateg.* 7.21.2.5· Robinson, D., "Ancient Sinope", *American Journal of Philology* 27 (1906), pp. 25-153, 245-279.

43. Strabo 2.1.15, 12.3.12.

44. Monachov, S., "Les amphores de Sinope", *Anatolia Antiqua* 2 (1993), pp. 107-132.

45. Plin., *HN* 35.15· Strabo 12.10.

46. Plin., *HN* 35.32.

47. Vitruv. 7.7· Plin., *HN* 35.15.

48. Plin., *HN* 35.11.

49. Strabo 12.10. However, it is worth mentioning that Robert mentioned that the *crocus sinopeus*, from which dye was made, was exported from Sinope until 1855. Robert, L., *Noms Indigènes dans l'Asie-Mineure Greco-romaine (1er partie)* (Paris 1963), p. 182.

50. Tac., *Hist.* 4.83-84.

51. Akurgal, E. – Budde, L., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Sinope", *Türk Tarihi Kurumu* 5.14 (Ankara 1956)· Budde, L., "Kurzer vorläufiger Bericht über die Grabungen in Sinope der Kampagnen 1051-1953", *Türk Arkeoloji Dergisi* 6.2 (1956), pp. 5-10.

52. Strabo 12.3.11· Polybius 4.56.

53. Xenophon, *Anabasis* 6.1.15.

54. Strabo 12.3.11.

55. Plin., *Ep.* 10.90.



56. CIG 4157· IGR 3.95.

57. Budde, L., "Kurzer vorläufiger Bericht über die Grabungen in Sinope der Kampagnen 1051-1953", *Türk Arkeoloji Dergesi* 6.2 (1956), pp. 5-10.

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59. Doonan, O., "Sinope", in Grammenos, D.V. – Petropoulos, E.K. (ed.), *Ancient Greek Colonies in the Black Sea*, Archaeological Institute of Northern Greece (Thessaloniki 2003), p. 1382.

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Chronological Table

Middle of the 8th c. BC: first (probably) foundation of Sinope

632/631 BC: (second) foundation of Sinope

430 BC: Pericles and Lamachus overthrow the tyrant Timesilaos. Athenian colonists arrive at the city.

Approximately 360 BC: Datames attempts to occupy the city, but finally he allied with Sinope.

220 BC: Mithradates II attempts to occupy Sinope but without success

183 BC: Pharnaces I occupied the city. Sinope becomes the capital of the Mithradatic kingdom.

70 BC: Lucullus lays siege and occupied Sinope

Approximately 50 BC: The Romans give the city to Pharnaces II, but they removed him just before 47 BC.

47 BC: Julious Caesar re-established the city as the Roman colony "Colonia Julia Felix Sinope"