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CONTINUITY OF URBAN LOCATIONS AND THE MAIN, COMPLEX  
PHYSICO-GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES IN THE CRIMEAN  
PENINSULA (U.S.S.R.)

In geographical literature we have been coming now for a long time across various examples supporting the hypothesis that physico-geographical boundaries seem to have fostered the process of human settlements, urban settlements in particular, concentrating near such boundaries.<sup>1</sup> As examples mentioned are however well scattered both in time and space, for that very reason only they may have furnished arguments for justifying the point of view according to which geographical phenomena should be regarded as unique in their character, precluding the possibility of adopting any generalization in the regional geography. Should we therefore wish to get a little bit closer to the chance of saying that the thesis as suggested in the beginning is true, we must carry out a number of thorough comparative studies covering both geographical areas involved as well as historical epochs.

In this paper an attempt has been made to prove, against a background of a chosen territory, that the afore-mentioned tendency according to which urban settlements used to emerge close to the more crucial physico-geographical boundaries not only exists but has equally well been prevailing since the ancient times till this very day.

A small piece of land (approx. 26 thousand sq.km) has been chosen in the Crimean Peninsula as a proof ground for the following reasons:

1. Urban settlements there have traditions dating back to the sixth century B. C. at least;
2. Conditions of the natural environment there are highly diversified while the main, complex physico-geographical boundaries appear extremely distinct in this region;
3. The history of mankind within this territory is characterized by, among other things, its high dynamism randomness of the ethnic and

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. G. Taylor (1951); M. Janiszewski (1968, 1973, 1982); B. Dumanowski (1974); K. Seibert (1978) et al.

cultural formations and groups with relevant subperiods having been rather clearly separated from each other.

Physico-geographical boundary represents in itself a particular form of spatial diversification in the natural environment. A complex physico-geographical boundary as found in the geographical space has been assumed in this paper as a kind of gradient zone which differing in its width tends nevertheless to undergo essential changes as regards elements of the natural environment and their features. However, an almost unlimited number of such boundaries may be proposed, as we know, depending on the research needs and on the minuteness with which preliminary material has been worked out. Since only the most general regularities have been intended to be grasped in this paper to create a kind of bridging between the phenomena under investigation, no more than two and yet very important boundaries of the discussed type were taken into account:

1. Boundary formed between sea and mainland;
2. Boundary between mountains and the steppes.

Because studies taken up are rather general in their character and because of a considerable length of time involved in the process (from the sixth century B. C. till this day), the history of the region has been divided into four well-defined subperiods, viz:

- I. Antiquity, from the sixth century B. C. till the fourth century of our era;
- II. The early Middle Ages, from the fifth till the thirteenth century of our era;
- III. The Genoese-Tatar Period, from the fourteenth till the eighteenth century;
- IV. Contemporary Period covering the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Over forty urban locations, i.e. spots on the map where towns used to exist in at least one of the sub-periods have been identified throughout the entire length of the time under study. These locations represent most, if not all, of the urban settlements that existed in the Crimea.

Fundamental for the whole study remains the question whether physico-geographical boundaries under investigation have proved to be really those elements which attracted people and made them settle in bigger urban communities over the whole period of time, including all its four sub-periods, and whether urban settlements created in these areas stood the test of time better than in other places?

An answer to this question was possible no otherwise only after a thorough investigation of historical background of each of the loca-

tions, and required a sort of mathematical analysis to calculate "continuity" of such a location in the number of years, rounded off to full centuries, during which settlements, urban in their character, used to exist and prosper in those places. As the next step in the procedure, the chosen locations have been classified into groups according to sub-periods in which towns arose, and also according to the relationship that existed between them and the two main complex physico-geographical boundaries of the Crimea (for averaged result of this mathematical procedure see Table 1).<sup>2</sup>

Table 1

Historical continuity of the new urban settlements in the Crimea, in years, over four sub-periods (I to IV) against a background of the main, complex physico-geographical boundaries existing in the Peninsula.

Period in which settlement came into being	Location of urban settlement:			
	Sea-land and Mountains -steppe Boundaries	Sea-land only	Mountains -steppes only	Outside said Boundaries
I	1900 (2)	1080 (11)	800 (1)	400 (2)
II	700 (1)	925 (4)	600 (1)	700 (5)
III	—	—	700 (2)	—
IV	200 (1)	100 (1)	100 (2)	100 (9)
I—IV aver.	1175 (4)	980 (16)	500 (6)	330 (16)

NOTE: Numbers in brackets denote urban settlements in the given sub-period.

As this will be seen, the physico-geographical boundary land-sea is marked by the existence of long-lasting urbanized areas. The life of these areas was, on an average, two times longer than that of the less numerous settlements situated near the other main physico-geographical boundary formed by mountains and steppes, and three times longer than that of the remaining urbanized areas located away from any of the two physico-geographical boundaries mentioned above. However, on an average, there are four locations which, situated close to both boundaries at the same time, have lasted approximately twenty per cent longer, in terms of time, than the settlements near the sea, although one of these areas, notably Sevastopol, belonging among the

<sup>2</sup> Reference is made in Table to locations of urban settlements that are completely new in the subperiod. In subperiods II to IV one will not find therefore settlements whose existence continued from earlier sub-periods. On the other hand, on maps (A—D) one will be able to spot all the urban locations existing in respective sub-periods.

youngest locations (no more than 200 years old) has affected the average value of the calculated historical continuity.

Most of the Crimean urbanized areas, twenty six in number, do concentrate within the discussed, narrow, boundary strips of the land, and especially in the land-sea zone where almost half of all the locations have their place (20). And ten have remained linked with the mountains-steppe boundary region.<sup>3</sup>

In general, on the example of Crimea, we may think to be facing an outspoken regularity of the phenomenon that may even have something of universality in its character. The said regularity might be formulated in the following way: The high-rank and complex physico-geographical boundaries appear particularly attractive to the urban settling process which is manifest in the fact that concentration and continuity of towns near such boundaries prove to exceed the average figures both in intensity and time.

Then another attempt was made to answer the question whether the said regularity may have had anything in common with the main types of social and cultural formations that were dominating in the Crimea over various periods of its history. From among numerous groups and formations, two extreme ones have been chosen for this purpose, whose historical significance for the region was outstanding enough. These included: a) formation characteristic of the communities of sailors and traders, virtually settled in the place and engaged also in a relatively highly effective farming and craft; b) formation tied with the typically mainland communities, or with communities more primitive than those around them, engaged — in the beginning exclusively — in the nomadic, pastoral and predatory, activities.

Urban locations founded or restituted by the first of these groups included ancient Greeks, the Byzantines and mediaeval Genoese and were situated almost entirely in the coastal region (see Maps A—C).

Much less numerous proved to be urbanized areas associated with the formations of the latter type, and these included the ancient Scyths, mediaeval Tatars, etc., who inhabited primarily the zone of the mountains-steppe boundary region (see Maps A, C). Table 1 shows that in certain sub-periods (notably II and IV) there were however dominating in number also urban locations that had little in common with the boundaries analysed in this paper. This applies to the refugial towns of the early Mediaeval Ages, situated deep in the mountains, whose

<sup>3</sup> Aggregates of these values do not agree with the data specified in Table, for some of the locations occur on two boundaries at the same time (in Table they are specified as a separate category).

existence was mainly due to the extremely disadvantageous political situation prevailing at that time in the Crimean Peninsula and seriously affecting the processes of settlement (see Map B). This was the time of innumerable wars and invasions connected with the fall of the empires of antiquity.

Another group of towns includes contemporary in-steppe locations, far away from mountains and the sea, whose emergence and growth were made dependent on the development of modern communication routes (roads) and on the irrigation of farmland (see Map D). Irrigation of farmland required, in turn, considerable transformations in the natural conditions of environment through the supply of large quantities of fresh water from places outside the Peninsula (the Lower Dnieper).

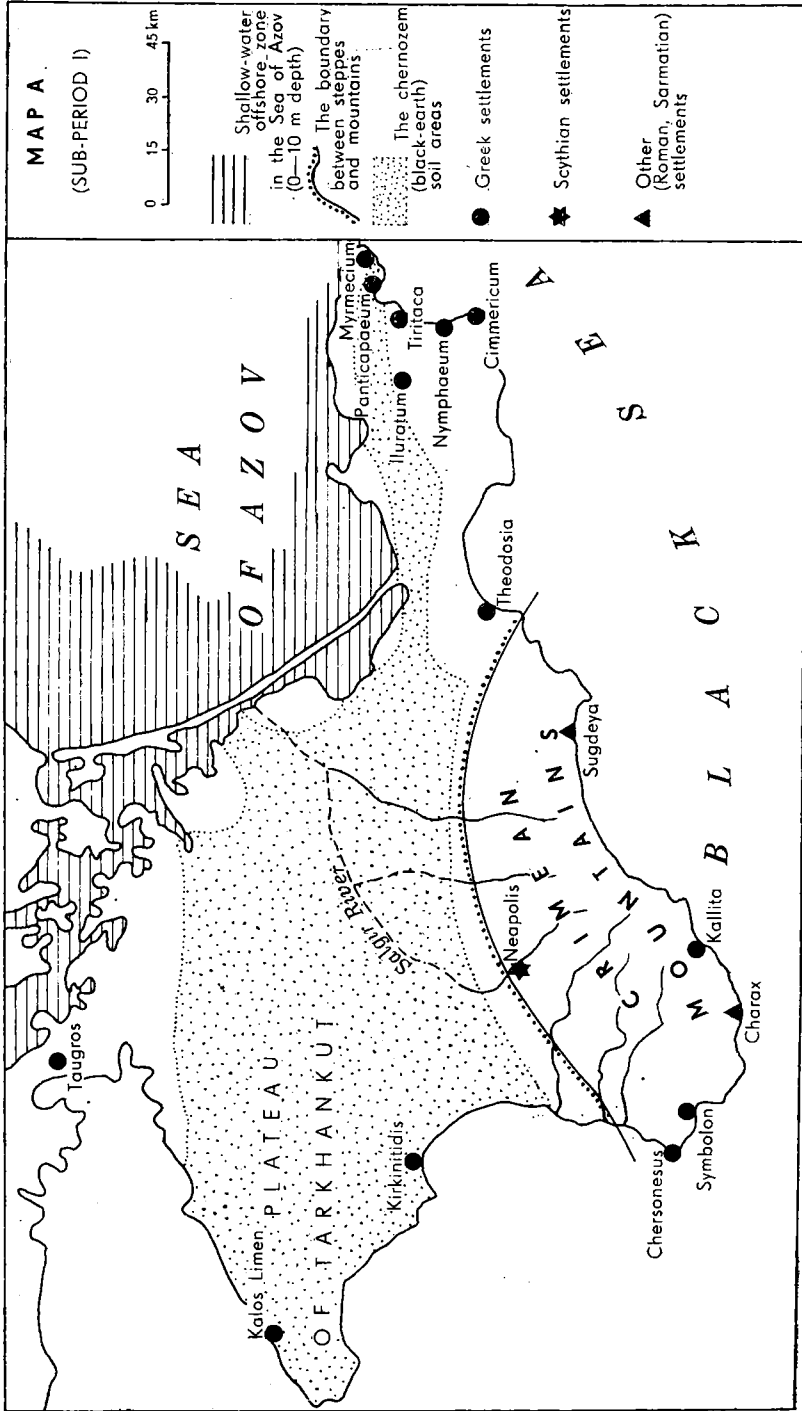
Both of the above-described groups of towns came accordingly into being as a result of quite specific circumstances as if leveling tendencies deriving from the natural features of the Crimean environment. Towns of that type represent about eighty per cent of all the urbanized areas situated outside the investigated physico-geographical boundaries of the Peninsula.

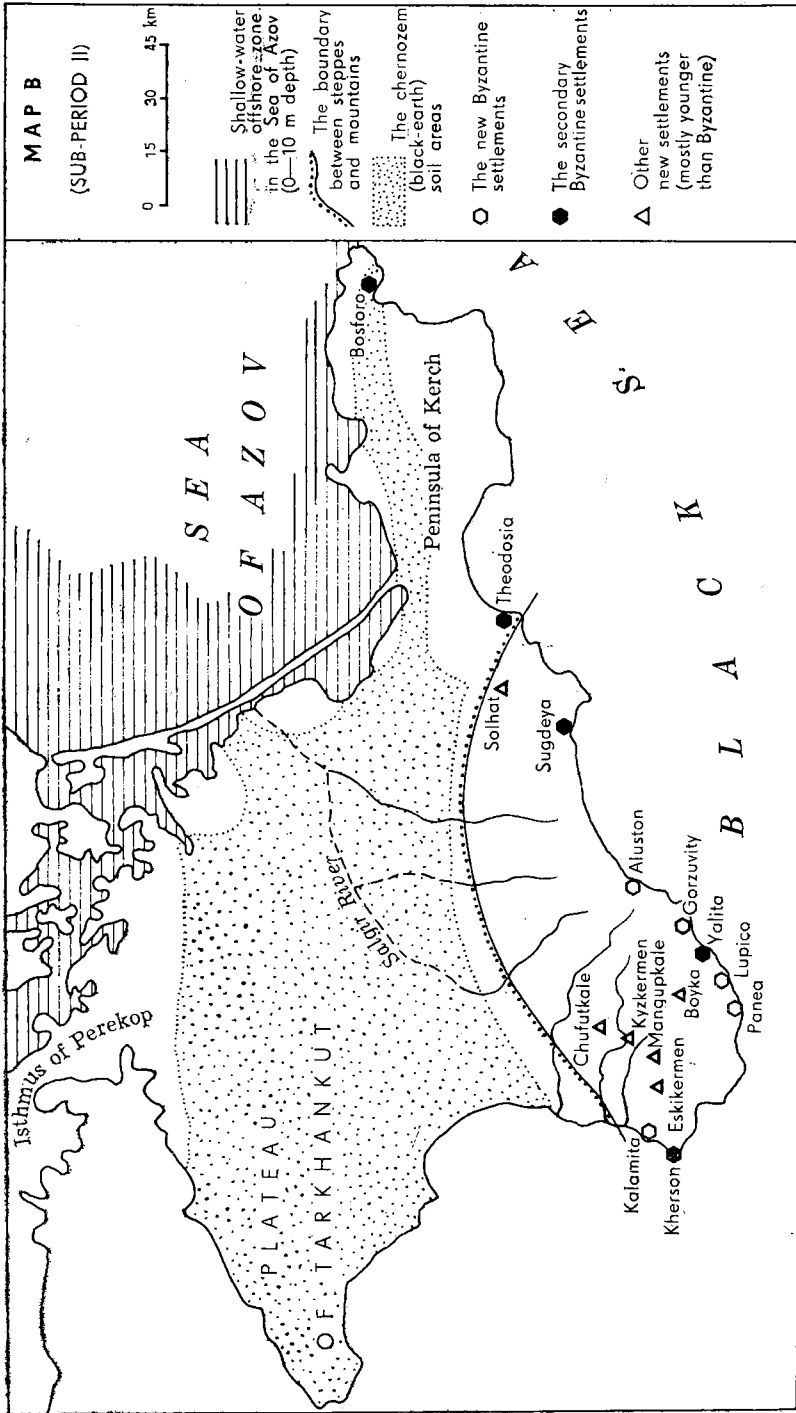
To sum up the problems presented in this paper, the following may be said about what has historically been going on in the territory of the Crimean Peninsula:

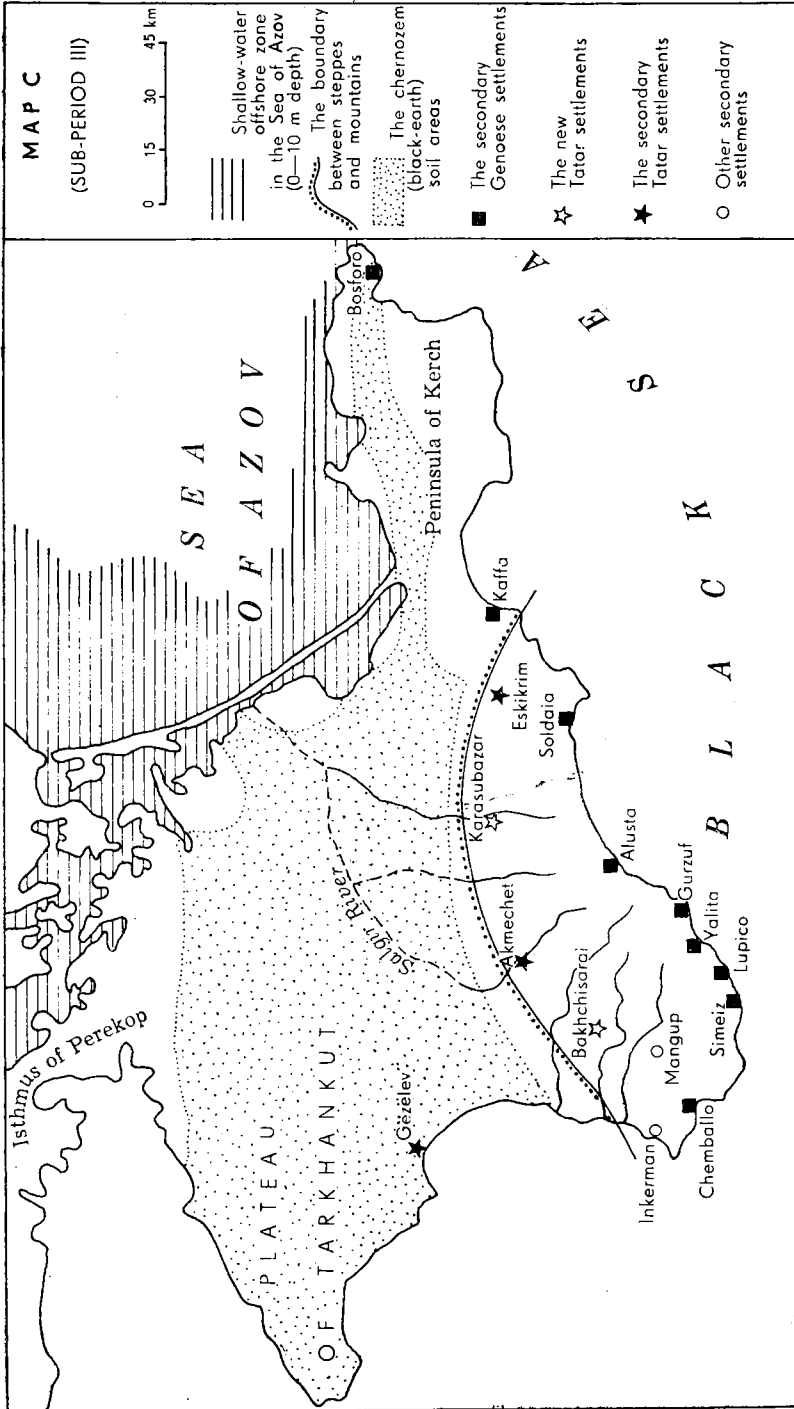
- 1) There is being noted a marked tendency according to which respective areas have been undergoing a privileged process of urbanization in spatial associations with the natural gradient zones, i.e. main, complex physico-geographical boundaries; the said tendency was manifest in higher concentration of urban locations situated near the boundaries under study, and in their longer historical continuity;

- 2) There is being observed the existence of at least two extreme cultural and ethnic tendencies in the development of urbanized areas spatially linked with different types of boundaries.

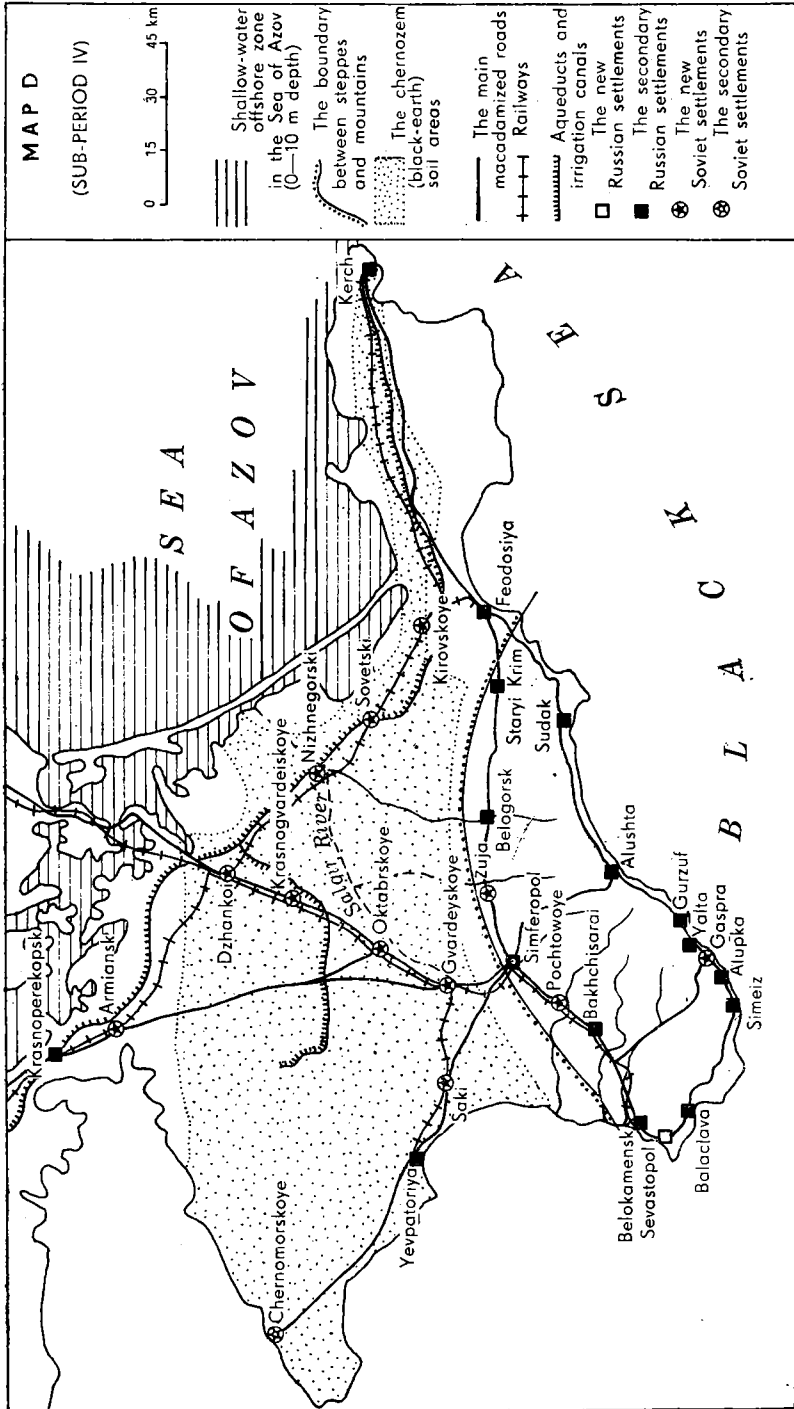
The very simple method of assessing the impact spatial diversification of natural environment may have had on the urban settlements, as suggested in this paper, introduces certain new elements into the modest methodology of research covering the role of the natural environment in human activities and will result, let us say, in paying a closer attention to the attempts at finding some synthetic indicators which seem promising, more than ever, in studying so very complex systems and interrelations.











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