

Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks

Four Centuries of History

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Oxford • New York

Greek Merchant Networks in the Age of Empires (1770–1870)

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The formation and evolution of Greek merchant capitalism within the Ottoman Empire, particularly since the last quarter of the eighteenth century, is a subject that has attracted the research of many Greek historians. From very early on, transport and trade activities within the Ottoman economy attracted groups from different ethnic origins and religions. The Greek population in the Ottoman lands was characterized by great mobility until the first decades of the nineteenth century, and commercial emigration was influenced by both non-economic and economic factors.¹

The non-economic factors that determined commercial emigration during the early industrial period were place of origin and family and local ethic-value systems (including religion, language, customs, knowledge/technical know-how). The economic factors behind this mobility are mainly equated with commercial activities and the specialization of certain groups of particular areas in certain crafts: stone building from the regions of Epirus and the Peloponnese; painting from the regions of Epirus and western Macedonia; sponge fishing from the Dodecanese islands.

The commercial emigration of Greeks spread throughout the unified territory of the Ottoman Empire from the seventeenth century onward and was subordinate to local and central Ottoman authorities. The vast area of the Ottoman Empire that extended from the Balkans to Asia Minor, the Middle East and North Africa included the geographical area which later became the modern Greek state in the southeast tip of the Balkan peninsula. Trade in agricultural products, raw materials and manufactured goods (mainly cloth) developed in the ports and inland markets of the Ottoman Empire, which were in close contact with corresponding ports from the Black Sea to the Italian peninsula, France, Holland and Great Britain. The activities of the Greek traders were not usually connected to local production, but were the link in the chain of the movement of trade from the East to the West. As Ina McCabe indicates for the Armenians, organized groups of Greek trading families were formed in the Ottoman Empire and eventually expanded in the East and West and formed the extended networks of Greek diaspora entrepreneurship (see also Harlaftis, Chapter 7 in this volume).

Thus sea trade became the axis of the economic development of the eastern Mediterranean, and the port cities of Smyrna, Constantinople, Thessaloniki, Alexandria, Taganrog and Odessa provided the mechanism for linking the agricultural production of the hinterland of the Ottoman and Russian Empires with western Europe. Nevertheless, an extended network of inland routes, despite its inferior infrastructure, developed and spread from the southern Balkan peninsula of the Ottoman Empire to central Europe and thus to the adjacent Hapsburg and Russian Empires.

An interesting and under-researched subject is the coexistence of various ethnic groups within the borders of the great empires, ethnic groups that could offer competitive, similar or complementary services to an economic centre. For example, historical research might be able to confirm the withdrawal of Jewish merchants from certain Mediterranean markets in the seventeenth century and their replacement in these economic gaps by Greeks, or the coexistence of Greeks and Armenians in other cases. The establishment of these mobile, organized ethnic groups of trading families in the main economic centres of the great empires offered them access to a vast area for the expansion of their networks, and the ability to manage their business from a centre that provided commercial intelligence. Great empires, like the Hapsburg, the Russian and the British, attracted these organized ethnic groups of trading families and provided them an ideological framework, a sense of economic belonging, often with conciliatory advantages.

Different ethnic minorities mobilized by the same economic motives migrated toward the economic centres of these Empires offering a unique experience for migration and for gaining knowledge of new countries, new ideas and new practices of trading. The experience of ethnic coexistence may be the subject of social anthropology, but it is certainly an important issue in regard to the economic and social behaviour of migrant entrepreneurs. For example, we come across Greeks living, operating and competing as merchants along with Slavs in Pest, Trieste and Vienna, with Jews in Odessa, and with Germans and Italians in London and Manchester. The 'homogeneous' social and economic environment offered entrepreneurial opportunities. The host countries, as new social and economic environments, offered new entrepreneurial opportunities along with new cultural and entrepreneurial models.

It is to be expected that all trade diasporas were not identical, although we can draw interesting comparative characteristics, whether we are referring to the Armenians of the seventeenth century in New Julfa, or to the Greeks in eighteenth-century Smyrna. As Jonathan Israel clearly indicates in Chapter 1 of this volume, the diasporas are not homogeneous even in regard to their own internal organization. Recent studies of merchant communities, diasporas and trade networks provide new dimensions and perspectives through a comparative approach. Finally, we may have to completely reconsider this major issue that is generally known as

Greek Diaspora, a concept that has frequently been promoted in a rhetorical way for political reasons by Greek national historiography (Tomadakis 1953; Psiroukis 1975).

In the discussion about ethnicity,² various approaches have been undertaken, tackling the concepts of 'ethnic group' and 'ethnic community'; the underlying question, however, is always the issue of national identity. From these various analytical approaches to the issue of ethnicity, we will choose that of the ethnic network. Thus an ethnic network based on group solidarity, kinship and common culture provides to its members economic advantages plus economic resources.

The close relationship between the ethnic group and entrepreneurship has taken the forefront recently in the relevant literature. Particularly, when entrepreneurial groups with common historical background and cultural values – the Jews, for example – found themselves in different host countries under different circumstances, they followed different entrepreneurial models (for example see Godley 2001). The entrepreneurial activity was often based on family and national bonds that provided financial, social and psychological security along with specialized knowledge. The concept of entrepreneurship has various definitions in economic theory. The importance of entrepreneurship in trade is brought to the fore by the Austrian school of Hayek and Kirzner, who focus their attention on the way private information is used in competitive markets in order to counterbalance continuous fluctuations. According to this theory, the entrepreneur acts as the agent whose aim is profit earned particularly under the irregular circumstances of the market (Casson 1990: 46, 73).

The analysis of the ethnic group and entrepreneurship brings out the cultural features of this relationship. Studying entrepreneurial groups such as the Jews with their common historical background and common cultural values, scholars come across different entrepreneurial paths and models that developed in their different places of settlement. This interesting point has been raised in recent research and has been further enriched by sociological and social anthropological approaches. Why should we study the relation between ethnic group and entrepreneurship? It is well known that ethnic groups adjust themselves to the conditions and circumstances found in their place of establishment. It is indispensable to focus on the collateral relation between ethnicity and entrepreneurship and to analyse a system of relations and values shared between people with common ethnic background and migrant experience.

In order to understand the relationship of the ethnic group and entrepreneurship we shall examine three interrelated factors: first, the structure of the conditions of the market; second, the special features of the group (selective migration, culture, creation of social networks); and third, the strategy of the group (the relation between opportunities and ethnic characteristics) (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990: 115–35). These factors developed in different periods of time and geographical

areas, and can be traced in the merchant networks that were formed by diaspora trading groups. The cohesion of the period from 1780s to 1870s enables us to study common characteristics and entrepreneurial practices in the Greek merchant networks.

The Chiots and the Vlachs formed networks that expanded from their place of origin to their place of settlement. The two networks shared three well-known common characteristics: religion, language and place of origin.³ However, they present a distinct difference: the Vlachs are considered to be an ethnic group distinguished by specific cultural features, while the Chiots are characterized by their place of origin.

It is of particular interest that the Chiots were conscious of being a distinct entrepreneurial group (and their contemporaries regarded them as such), whereas the Vlachs, who were an entrepreneurial group with special cultural characteristics (language), did not regard themselves as an entrepreneurial group, nor were they regarded as such by the others.⁴ Nevertheless the importance of both groups was pivotal for the social and economic formation of Greek-diaspora merchant communities.

The economic emigration during the Ottoman Empire leads us to the history of the trade diaspora. The theoretical discussion of the 'trade diaspora' was initiated by Abner Cohen. This concept refers to an ethnic group socially interdependent but dispersed in various communities. The field of research initially focused on entrepreneurial groups in Western Africa and Southeast Asia (Cohen 1971; Dobbin 1996).⁵ A central issue was whether the emergence of these entrepreneurial minorities should be attributed to the sorts of economic factors that exist in every society of capitalist development or whether it is just a vague response to economic and political circumstances. Commercial transactions provided new sources of income to the powerful states that were formed in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and in southeast Asia during the nineteenth century. Within this framework, and under these circumstances, certain groups of minorities – such as the Jews and the Chinese – were activated with an immediate response to the needs of the commercialization of goods. The reasons for this response do not lie only in economic or cultural interpretations (Reid 1997: 36–7).

My purpose here is to examine closely the case of the different sub-groups that made up part of the central core of the Greek diaspora from the last quarter of the eighteenth century until mid-nineteenth century. We will focus on three types of network, the first and the second belonging to a lesser-known part of the Greek diaspora, the inland trade routes. The first is the network of the Vlachs from Epirus and western Macedonia, particularly from the mountain region of Pindos (northwest of modern Greece), which concentrated on inland transport trade toward the Ottoman and the Hapsburg Empires (Pest, Vienna). The second network is one that was composed of organized commercial groups from Epirus

which directed their entrepreneurial activities toward the Adriatic port-cities of Venice and Trieste, as well as to the inland routes that led to the Russian Empire (Nizna, Moscow). The third network is the most famous one, the islanders of the Chiot maritime transport trade who conducted their activities from the Ottoman to the British Empire (London, Manchester) and covered almost every corner of the Greek entrepreneurial diaspora (Chatziioannou, forthcoming).

One of our main questions here is whether we can identify sub-groups in the Greek diaspora with special internal features and external motives.⁶ We know that Greek, Serb, Vlach and Albanian merchants, inhabitants of regions of the Ottoman Empire, had been trying in the eighteenth century to acquire economic access mainly to Hungary and Transylvania, but to Russia as well (Cicanci 1981, Bur 1986: 17–85; Papastathi-Tsourka 1994). What is mainly missing is to confront sub-groups of the same ethnic group, or different ethnic groups in the same territorial domain: on one hand inland migrations and entrepreneurial ventures in the Ottoman, Hapsburg and Russian Empires and on the other sea-route migrations and business activities in the British Empire.

Greek merchants who traversed the overland routes in the Ottoman period departed mainly from towns in Thessaly, Epirus, Albania and Macedonia, heading for transit stations in the Balkans, Central Europe and Russia. Overland trade routes started from Yannina and Metsovo in Epirus, or Siatista, Kozani and Serres in Macedonia, frequently using old Roman routes such as the *Via Egnatia*, passing through such cities in the Balkans and Central Europe as Sibiu, Brasov, Kecskemét, Miskolc, Zemun, and in many cases terminating in Pest and Vienna, capital of the Hapsburg monarchy, or accordingly in Nizna and Moscow in the heart of the feudal economy of imperial Russia.

Traian Stoianovich, in his classic study 'The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant', describes the gradual evolution of Balkan merchants since the seventeenth century, from land carriers, thieves and pirates, to agents accepting orders and dabbling in money-lending, then to independent merchants and bankers aiming to political activities, and finally to politicians with parallel business activities (1992: 63–4). The above hierarchy of the Balkan merchant, predicated on a linear evolution, corresponds to a more complex historical reality. It is difficult to identify the activities, in the case of Balkan and Ottoman merchants at least, before the middle of the nineteenth century. To complicate matters further, the Austrian authorities, in the framework of a bureaucratic evaluation and registration of the population, imposed a categorization of 'classes' on all Balkan merchants which could not possibly include the variety and complexity of their business activities. The most appropriate approach, that of Stoianovich, evaluates business activities in the main city-centres of the Balkan overland trade, where the geographical place of origin provides a first criterion for the classification of merchants on land routes.

A region/cradle of commercial tradition and business culture can be located along the overland trade routes: the settlements in the Pindos mountains in both Epirus and western Macedonia (Siatista, Kastoria, Kozani, Vlasti, Moschopolis), the homeland of Greeks, Vlachs and Albanians, all Ottoman subjects who can be categorized as 'minorities' within the Ottoman state, and who competed with Serbs and local merchants in the main economic centres where they emigrated. Moschopolis has been described as the place of origin of a large percentage of merchants of Vlach origin: in the registration of merchants in 1766 (1767) in Vienna, 12 out of 82 Greek merchants were from Moschopolis⁷ and in the overall table for the same period (1770), compiled by Stoianovich, Moschopolis is listed as the place of origin of 98 merchants out of 362–70 in Croatia, Srem, Semlino, Vienna and Tokai (Stoianovich 1992: 17)⁸.

Thus, these small mountain towns with domestic wool industry, commercial connections, and experience in organizing land transport produced an organized group of Vlach merchants with expanded networks, among which are included many distinguished entrepreneurs, the most illustrious of whom are the three generations of the Sinas family in Budapest and Vienna (Laios 1972). The Moschopolis merchants' business methods in Pest and Vienna remain to be identified and will probably prove to be similar to those of the Chiots in many respects.

The degree of success of entrepreneurial ventures depends on various factors, both external and internal, and comparison of the economic emigration of sea and land routes can fill out the picture of the Greek merchant-entrepreneur. I submit the following hypothesis: sea trade opened up business horizons for most of the members of the Greek economic diaspora and created a commercial tradition contrary to what happened to the corresponding overland trade. It is known that sea trade created surplus commercial capital through the captain-merchant who offered both services in sea transport and the means of transport, the ship. The carriers on land routes (*kiratzidhes*) do not seem to have played the same role in Greek commercial transactions. Particularly important for land trade are non-economic factors, such as Ottoman assaults as well as local national uprisings, which threatened economic practice and upset commercial transactions in most of the small Balkan markets, the cradles of Greek merchants, such as Moschopolis, Philippoupolis, Meleniko, etc. The importance of the quest for national identity, a quest that impregnated the multi-ethnic communities of the diaspora, combined with the political absolutism and economic feudalism of the places of settlement, should be stressed in connection with the early commercial diaspora of overland emigration to the Balkans, Central Europe and Russia. We can trace two common features in the formation of Greek merchant networks inside great empires. The first is that Greek merchant communities (*paroikies*)

embraced all sub-groups of the same ethnic group. The comparison between the Greek communities in Austro-Hungarian and Russian economic centres (Pest, Vienna, Trieste, Nizna, Moscow, Odessa) during 1780–1830 and those in Britain (London, Manchester) during 1830–1870 share many similarities, namely the creation of a community, at the heart of which lay the Church, religion being central to the cohesion of the group as it offered social philanthropy to the weaker members of the community, thus providing a common and stable background for economic survival and differentiation. The second feature is that maritime transport and inland transport of foodstuffs, furs, leathers and cloth were organized on the same model – that is, social networks. The sub-groups present the same characteristics of an introvert social group that is reproduced through endogamy and reproduction of common cultural patterns, offering certain similarities with guilds. The transformation of social networks to trade networks was easily achieved through chain emigration, based on close relations with persons living in the place of origin.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, Greeks in the commercial enclaves of the Italian peninsula were engaged in a general import-export trade with the centres of the Ottoman Empire. Trade was based on tightly controlled merchant-commercial information and markets. One of the main functions of Greek merchants in the Italian peninsula, and particularly in the large Austrian port of Trieste (as is revealed by the relevant sources, see Katsiardi-Hering 1986), was commissioning merchandise from Ottoman lands and Greece, alongside personal business affairs. The client in the eastern port commissioned the buying and selling of merchandise or currency of interest to him, and the merchant in the western port executed these orders in the most profitable way, charging credit and issuing bills of exchange in his client's name, and keeping the agreed commission. Thus the expatriate-merchant provided his fellow merchant in Ottoman territory and Greece with knowledge of the western market through his active participation in commercial negotiations (Chatziioannou 2003). The same trade practices would follow similar patterns in other Greek merchant communities as well.

Knowledge of trade and transport of the same commodities, ways of penetrating the local market and a common language or dialect are some of the basic reasons for cooperation between the first immigrants. The transition from simple middle-man trade to complex multi-national entrepreneurial activity indicates the formation of primary capital accumulation, the consequent successful management of a limited capital through social connections which led to access to abundant financial sources. The Mediterranean ports of the Italian peninsula had open, extra-dependent economies and did not belong to a unified state until 1862. The diaspora entrepreneurial group that stood out during the late eighteenth century in the Italian peninsula is that of the emigrants from the region of Epirus in northwest

Greece. Emigrants from this region were found in all Greek settlements in the Italian peninsula in the eighteenth century.⁹

The Epirotes, the Vlachs and the Chiots constituted distinct groups within the Greek merchant communities. They formed different merchant networks sustained by maritime and inland transportation that traded agricultural, pastoral and manufactured goods within and outside the borders of the Ottoman Empire. The strengthening of the Chiot network in comparison to that of the Epirotes and that of the Vlachs may be attributed to the comparative advantages of maritime trade over land trade. Epirotes and Vlachs never managed to constitute a homogeneous force in the diaspora trade centres in which they settled, namely Moscow, Venice and Vienna, whereas Chiots formed 'cartels', wherever they established immigrant communities, particularly in London, maintaining strong ties with their native island (Chatziioannou and Harlaftis forthcoming). The Chiot success can equally be attributed to the more mature capitalist conditions that sustained it. The structure, the patterns and the evolution itself of the entrepreneur in the Habsburg Empire were strongly influenced by the court as well as by the imperial bureaucracy.

In contrast, in the British Empire the development of the liberal businessman provided different social patterns for the newcomers, the Chiot merchants. Establishment in Britain offered the Greek-diaspora merchants of the nineteenth century the unique experience of a competitive entrepreneurial environment, in addition to living within a society with a rigid class system which provided a variety of social and cultural patterns. Every diaspora Greek was aware of the social and economic rules of Victorian England. The archetype of the British entrepreneur, his business culture and practices, gave the prototype to Chiot entrepreneurship. England became the most important junction for the path and development of Greek trade networks. The liberal British political and economic framework provided all the right conditions for entrepreneurial competition: Greeks were brought face to face with the Germans, the Jews, the Scottish, the Irish – all ethnic groups that developed due to the family formation of their companies. That the Greeks competed with these ethnic groups is evident, and the ones that were able to withstand and were more resilient during the nineteenth century were able to assimilate socially and culturally into British bourgeois life, with the prime examples being Eustratius Ralli and Michael Rodocanachi.

The presence of the Vlachs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire can be detected from early on. The central administration in Vienna, in order to defend the southern borders of the Empire against the Ottomans, had formed, according to one historiographic interpretation, an informal defensive system that used the Vlachs as a 'zone-fence' which expanded from Belgrade along the river Sava to Vidin and Bucharest. The organization of this defensive system was facilitated by the particular social organization (*zantruga*) that was common in the southern

Balkans (Wace and Thomson 1914; Nouzille 1991: 255–6). The concentration of the population of Vlachs along the boundaries brought the Vlach groups in contact with the roads of communication from the southern Balkans to central Europe. It is obvious that during a time and place when the differences between transporter and merchant were rather blurred, land transport could be made easy by the chain establishment of various groups of Vlachs in the main trading urban centres of the Balkans and central Europe. A known land route that led from Moschopoli to Salonica, then to Zemun and finally to Budapest, made the Vlachs, if not the only at least one of the few closely knit groups of merchants which carried on commerce between the Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires (Kasaba 1988: 20–1).

In short, we would characterize land economic emigration more limited than maritime economic emigration. Sea trade gave more opportunities for capital formation since the merchant captain not only owned the ship but also participated in the ownership of the cargo and in any profit. The equivalent *kiratzides* (land transporters) did not play the same role in the commercial transactions. In this way, land transport did not lead to the formation of an entrepreneur of the type which sea transport produced and which consequently led the Chiot to ship ownership (Harlaftis 1996). And in this case the place of establishment of the diaspora merchants proved the most important factor in the transformation of their business.

The period between 1875 and 1914 has been described by E. Hobsbawm under the old-fashioned title *The Age of Empires*. His study emphasizes the beginning of a new era for the international economy, focusing on the colonial features of the new imperialistic economy, affecting mostly the distribution of international trade (Hobsbawm 2000 [1987]: 61). The diaspora merchants, closely connected with the evolution of international transport and trade, would confront a critical turning point by the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Looking back to the Ottoman-based Greek commercial migration that had been moving for over a century and had expanded through sea and land routes to Amsterdam, Calcutta, Beirut, Alexandria, Tunis, Minorca, etc., we may observe that by the last third of the nineteenth century such commercial migration was almost over. A major factor here was the slow disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Greek national state. The formation of the Greek state (1828) and the associated return and settlement of expatriates marks the first watershed in the history of Greek emigration. This was a crucial historical moment for the whole of the Greek merchant diaspora¹⁰, offering a strategic turning point for declining merchant communities or a reorganization of business firms. Some of the old merchant networks of the Vlach and Epirote groups vanished, whereas others like the Chiot networks modified their organization and strategy following the paths of imperialistic expansion.

Notes

1. For a bibliography on the Greek diaspora, as well as evaluation of the meaning of terms such as 'diaspora', 'enclave', 'community', see Hassiotis 1993. For a brief note on Greek commercial migration, see Chatziioannou 1999: 22–38.
2. On the meaning of ethnicity, see Hutchinson and Smith 1996.
3. For the dynamics of these characteristics in Greek diaspora communities, see Kitromilides 1999: 131–45.
4. The matter here is not Vlach identity but the economic activities of a population group of Vlach-speakers from the southern Balkans, known mainly from place of origin and surname. The learned class of Vlachs had Greek education. On the topic of education, see Konstantakopoulou 1988 and Katsiardi-Hering 1995: 153–77.
5. For common culture as evidence of solidarity in mercantile diaspora groups, see Curtin 1984: 1–3.
6. These sub-groups have been described by Scott (2000: 20) as '...an informal association of people among whom there is a degree of group feeling and intimacy and in which certain group norms of behaviour have been established'.
7. Registrations of the population in Austria and Hungary started during the reign of Maria-Theresia. See for example Gurther 1909 and Enepekides 1959. The registration mentioned here is reproduced in Stoianovich 1992: 17.
8. A bibliography for Moschopolis is gathered in Peyfouss 1989.
9. Emigrants from Epirus constituted 13 per cent of the Greek community of Venice from the late sixteenth century until 1866 (Kyriakopoulou-Kyriakou 1978: 263–6. The history of the Durutti family, migrants from a small village of Epirus in the port of Ancona in the early nineteenth century, is a typical example (Chatziioannou 1997: 17–41.
10. For a political view of the term 'diaspora' see Conostas and Platias 1993: 3–28.

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