

## **Changes in the Mediterranean trade and shipping of the 18th century: The dynamics of the 'maritime city' of the Ionian and Aegean Seas**

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The history of the Mediterranean trade 'after Braudel', in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has attracted little attention from mainstream historians in the last decades with very few exceptions. The expansion of European trade in the Atlantic and Indian oceans and the wealth that this brought has overshadowed the importance of Mediterranean. The eighteenth century can be instead considered the "golden century" with great changes that brought the Mediterranean trade prominent to the European scene. It was characterized by the competition of the Great Powers for its control and the expansion to the East, to penetrate to the lands of the Ottoman Empire. From the end of that century the Mediterranean also profited from the opening of the Black Sea trade and from growing grain exports from south Russia: two factors which brought the Levant and Black Sea trades gradually to the central stage of European international trade.

While it is true that the French were the undisputable main seafarers and carriers of the Levant trade of the first half of the eighteenth century, the Greeks were able to take advantage of the almost continuous wars between the French and the British. The fleet "dei Greci", as they are found in the archives, became visible in the western Mediterranean ports since the early eighteenth century. Greek shipping companies were based on what has been described as the "maritime city" consisted of the islands of the Ionian and Aegean seas in the northeastern Mediterranean. At the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the "maritime city" had become a substantial economic power. It included 1800 shipping families that owned multiple shipping firms on about 40 islands and handled a deep-sea going merchant fleet of about 1000 vessels of 120,000 tons, armed with 6,000 canons and manned by 18,000 men. It was an international fleet with experienced seamen, shipowners and merchants that followed the sea-routes of entrepreneurial networks that expanded from the Black Sea to the Iberian peninsula, the northern European seas and the other side of the Atlantic. The concept of the "maritime city" is used to stress the unity of business beyond political boundaries. These Greeks were Ottoman, or Venetian/Ionian subjects who during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> were able to compete successfully with Italians, Ragusans, French, Spanish, English and Dutch to such an extent as to establish themselves as the main carriers of the Levant and Black Sea trade. They had developed not only maritime transport but also land transport in southeastern Europe carrying the trade between the Ottoman, the Hapsburg and the Russian Empire with western Mediterranean and the European Atlantic seas.

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This presentation will examine the dynamics of the shipping businesses of the island communities of the “maritime city” via a model of sea transport systems. This model using the tools of maritime economic history, economic geography and institutional economics helps to identify the dynamics of the overall shipping and trade of the Mediterranean sea, the competitiveness of the local carriers, the unification of the Mediterranean markets and their integration to a globalizing economy. The above analysis is based on a long-term research in more than 20 archives in Mediterranean port cities in six countries that produced a database of 15,000 Greek-owned ships; the research was carried out in the Department of History of the Ionian University.