

## Historein

Vol 21, No 2 (2024)

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Review of Ioannis K. Hassiotis, Ο Οδυσσέας στις θάλασσες του Νότου: Η ελληνική παρουσία στις υπερπόντιες κτήσεις της Ισπανίας (16ος–17ος αι.) [Odysseus in the southern seas: The Greek presence in the Spanish overseas territories (16th–17th century)]

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doi: [10.12681/historein.35789](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.35789)

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#### To cite this article:

Sakkas, K. (2024). Review of Ioannis K. Hassiotis, Ο Οδυσσέας στις θάλασσες του Νότου: Η ελληνική παρουσία στις υπερπόντιες κτήσεις της Ισπανίας (16ος–17ος αι.) [Odysseus in the southern seas: The Greek presence in the Spanish overseas territories (16th–17th century)]. *Historein*, 21(2). <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.35789>

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Ioannis K. Hassiotis,  
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Sakkas, Konstantinos. 2024. “Ioannis K. Hassiotis, *Ο Οδυσσέας στις θάλασσες του Νότου: Η ελληνική παρουσία στις υπερπόντιες κτήσεις της Ισπανίας (16ος – 17ος αι.)* [Odysseus in the southern seas: The Greek presence in the Spanish overseas territories (16th–17th century)]”. *Historein* 21 (2).  
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Ioannis K. Hassiotis

*Ο Οδυσσέας στις θάλασσες του Νότου: Η ελληνική παρουσία στις υπερπόντιες κτήσεις της Ισπανίας (16ος –17ος αι.)*

[Odysseus in the southern seas: The Greek presence in the Spanish overseas territories (16th–17th century)]

Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2022. 448 pp.

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This monograph is authored by Ioannis K. Hassiotis, an emeritus professor of modern history of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. His teaching legacy has greatly enriched students' education, nurturing their growth into adept historical researchers. Primarily, his studies centre on the Greek diaspora (fifteenth-twentieth century), which aligns with the research framework of this monograph. Typically, Greek diaspora research concentrates on Western and Eastern Europe, highlighting the mapping of socioeconomic conditions during its formation and its ties to the Greek space under Ottoman control.<sup>1</sup> From the author's perspective, the presence of Greeks in Latin America is demonstrated as a largely underresearched chapter.<sup>2</sup> The literature in Greek is evidence of the limited scope of secondary material on this research field.<sup>3</sup>

The monograph examines social, political, economic and military aspects related to the Greek influence in Spain's newly acquired southern seas territories. It contextualises this history through migration patterns, socioeconomic practices, interactions with the Spanish bureaucracy, individual stories and microhistories in the acquired regions. The work critically compiles information from secondary literature and various primary sources.

The first two chapters endeavour to delineate the political, military, economic and social factors shaping the early Greek-Spanish interactions. This led to the formation of a migration axis, facilitated by the Venetians and Genoese, moving from Frankish-controlled areas in the Greek region to the Italian peninsula and thence to the Iberian one. Furthermore, the lack of maritime experience among the Spaniards prompted the systematic recruitment of Greeks to reinforce the goals of the *Ultramar*.<sup>4</sup>

In the next three chapters, the focus is on national and ethnic-topical naming issues,

highlighting notable Greeks. The common practice of Hispanicising surnames is explored, influenced by socio-administrative factors like Spanish bureaucratic superficiality and forming a kinship with Spaniards or natives. National and geographical designations provided security in identification, despite the challenges posed by synonymous surnames like Juan Griego and Jorge Griego that were compounded by geographical distance. Additionally, prominent individuals with toponymic surnames like de Candia and de Rodas distinguished themselves as *conquistadores*. A notable example among the de Candia is Pedro de Candia, whose deeds were mythologised in Spanish literature. The de Rodas, like Gaspar and Agustín, served as interpreters and mediators, benefiting from their intermarriage with indigenous people.

Chapter 7 examines the factors regarding the Spanish reception of the Greeks. The status of an *extranjera*,<sup>5</sup> “undesirable foreigner”, heavily influenced the descendants of mixed marriages between colonisers and natives, *mestizos*, creating a challenging environment of social-racial distinctions. However, circumstantial factors favoured the image of the *mestizos* by conferring them the status of *originario y natural* of Spain.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, obtaining permanent residency and forming families of dual origin enabled descendants of mixed marriages to integrate into the Spanish social group, the *criolos*.<sup>7</sup> Social assimilation issues are briefly discussed in chapters 11 and 12 as well, which focus on family formation, religious tolerance and community initiatives, and the quantity of information available regarding Greek presence in the New World. Despite assimilation, Greek influences endure in Iberian American toponymic names like Griego, Griegos or Del Griego.

Patterns of distrust towards the Greeks are also contained in the Spanish chronicles.<sup>8</sup> The issue of religious purity determined the Greeks’ participation in exploratory missions.<sup>9</sup> The Catholic Church placed limitations on non-Catholic Christians, crypto-Jews and crypto-Muslims. Consequently, Greeks practiced religious relativism to avoid control by ecclesiastical authorities. In 1540, Juan Martín de Candia and his wife, Edosia, maintained portable icons *a la griega* without facing oppression for their iconographic preferences.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, religious relativism is conspicuous in the temporary “reconciliation” with the dictates of the Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup>

In the following chapters (8 and 9), the author emphasises the Greek participation in administrative, landholding institutions and productive activities during peacetime. The cessation of expeditions prompted the engagement in productive trade activities and the participation in administrative and landholding institutions, which is reflected by knightly titles, state positions and acquisition of *encomiendas*.<sup>12</sup>

In chapter 10, the author attempts a quantitative and qualitative assessment. Quantitatively, there are differentiations in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish sources regarding the frequency of recording Greeks.<sup>13</sup> The number of Greeks is

impressive and ranks among the Genoese, Portuguese and Flemish.<sup>14</sup> Qualitatively, the educational level of the majority of Greeks is on the illiteracy spectrum,<sup>15</sup> with few exceptions.<sup>16</sup>

However, this specific field of research is fraught with difficulties regarding the precise national identification of those originating from the Hellenic space.<sup>17</sup> The contentious content of the term *nación* determines the researcher's investigative compass.<sup>18</sup> The accompanying paraphrastic renderings such as *de nación griego* or *naturales de Grecia* after the name are products of Spanish perceptive motifs of identification.<sup>19</sup> Spanish sources are biased due to the exclusive Spanish monopoly on exploring the New World. This bias explains the desire to Hispanicise figures like Pedro de Candia.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the numerical representation of the Greek element and its degree of consolidation are characterised by fluidity.

Another element that is worth circumspection is the careful position of this monograph in interpreting the term *levantiscos*. Ethnologically, this term includes nationalities from the entire spectrum of the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>21</sup> Notwithstanding the term's profound negativity, the Spaniards' utilisation of Greek nautical and administrative skills created a complex situation. Despite the strict restrictions and successive prohibitions outlined in specific royal decrees and structurally motivated by Catholic perceptions of the non-believers, the administration showed a particular interest in recruiting experienced foreign sailors. This interest stemmed from the essential services these sailors provided in various phases of overseas expeditions. However, the practical impact of the royal decrees was undermined by the frequent issuance of contradictory decisions by the crown. The crown's ongoing pursuit of new and experienced human resources for the naval forces, particularly for fleets in the Indian Ocean, rendered the decrees effectively useless in practice. Hence, questions arose as to whether the rejection, as expressed linguistically, religiously and politically, was taken seriously or bypassed in favour of fulfilling the interests of the Spanish monarchy.

The author relies extensively on unpublished Central and South American archives, along with contemporary chronicles, ship catalogues such as logs and manifests. This aids in the recognition of the Greek influence and perceptions of Greeks' behaviour. It indirectly sets the stage for future academic inquiry by highlighting potential insights from diverse sources. Spanish bureaucratic documents were crucial for compiling data on the identification and educational levels of Greeks.<sup>22</sup>

This book is an original contribution to the understudied history of the Greek diaspora in Spanish overseas territories. It explores the historical ties between the Greek and Spanish worlds, focusing on Greek contributions to the military, social and economic aspects of the Spanish *Ultramar*. The study also covers social mobility, assimilation, religious treatment, education and economic involvement in the New World. The monograph takes a cross-border perspective, emphasising the uniqueness of this case

study, and intersects with the socioeconomic, political and geopolitical dynamics of the era, thereby expanding the global history of Hellenism.

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- <sup>1</sup> In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, historiographical trends regarding this research subject aim to enhance critical inquiry. They delve into social, economic, demographic, and geographic aspects, placing emphasis on social stratification, economic factors and geopolitical conditions. Indicative works include Ioannis K. Hassiotis, Olga K. Hering and Evridiki A. Abatzi, eds., *Οι Έλληνες στη Διασπορά (15ος–21ος αι.)* [Greeks in the diaspora (15th–21st century)] (Athens: Hellenic Parliament, 2006); Ioannis K. Hassiotis, *Επισκόπηση της ιστορίας της νεοελληνικής Διασποράς* [Overview of the history of the modern Greek diaspora] (Thessaloniki: Vantias, 1993); Maria Stassinopoulou and Maria Christina Chatziioannou, eds., *Διασπορά–Δίκτυα–Διαφωτισμός* [Diaspora–networks–Enlightenment] (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2005); Olga K. Hering, “Από τις ‘ελληνικές κοινότητες του εξωτερικού’ στην ιστοριογραφία του μεταναστευτικού φαινομένου (15ος–19ος αι.)” [From the “Greek communities abroad” to the historiography of the migration phenomenon (15th–19th centuries)], in *Ιστοριογραφία της νεότερης και σύγχρονης Ελλάδας 1833–2002* [Historiography of modern and contemporary Greece, 1833–2002], ed. Paschalis Kitromilides and Triantafyllos E. Sklavenitis (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2004), 2: 223–49.
- <sup>2</sup> As Hassiotis explains in the book under review, *Ο Οδυσσέας στις θάλασσες του Νότου*, Greek historians have demonstrated little interest in Latin American history due to challenges in researching unfamiliar fields and a lack of relevant works in Greek academic libraries (16).
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 307–11. Indicative works include Christos D. Lazos, *Έλληνες στην ανακάλυψη και εξερεύνηση της Αμερικής* [Greeks in the discovery and exploration of America] (Athens: Aiolos, 1990); Anastasios M. Tamis, *Οι Έλληνες της Λατινικής Αμερικής/Los Griegos de America Latina* [Greeks in Latin America] (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2006); Ioannis K. Hassiotis, “Έλληνες στις υπερπόντιες κτήσεις” [Greeks in overseas territories], in *Τιμητικός τόμος Ευθυμίου Θ. Σουλογιάννη* [Volume in tribute to Efthymios T. Soulogiannis] (Athens: Foundation for Educational Studies and Applications, 2019), 223–359; Hassiotis, “Αψηφώντας τη γεωγραφία: Έλληνες στις υπερπόντιες κτήσεις της Ισπανίας” [Ignoring geography: Greeks in the Spanish overseas territories], *Istorikogeografika* 18 (2019): 93–121.
- <sup>4</sup> This term originally denoted Spanish claims in the Mediterranean. Later, during the overseas expansion, it included Spanish acquisitions in the Caribbean, Americas and the Pacific. Hassiotis, *Ο Οδυσσέας στις θάλασσες του Νότου*, 16.
- <sup>5</sup> Distrust and prejudice in the context of the conquering effort were evident in the complaints of Spanish military figures such as Pedro Menéndez de Avilés. He criticised the Spanish crown for its delay in recruiting skilled foreigners for the expeditions which he contrasted to the perceived illegal penetration by a multitude of “foreign and ill-disposed people” (*mucha gente extranjera y mal inclinada*). *Ibid.*, 152.
- <sup>6</sup> Mixed marriages with women of different ethnicities altered the identity of *mestizos*, aligning them with Spaniards against *indios*, *negros* and *mulattos* (descendants of mixed marriages between whites and blacks). *Ibid.*, 147.
- <sup>7</sup> The Hispanicisation of surnames indicates significantly the creolisation of the “Easterners”. *Ibid.*, 253.
- <sup>8</sup> An indicative example is from Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo: “The Greeks and generally the ‘Levantine’ (*levantiscos*), but also others of different ethnicities, were now countless”. In this passage, he criticised the authorities of Seville for their flexibility towards individuals of various ethnicities without delving into issues of conduct and intentions. *Ibid.*, 151–52.
- <sup>9</sup> Indicatively, in the field of participation in exploratory and conquering missions, in 1496, Queen Isabella established control of religious purity as a prerequisite through a decree. *Ibid.*, 162.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

- <sup>11</sup> Juan Miguel Teodoro had been accused (1696) by the Holy Inquisition of Mexico as a schismatic follower of the *triadites*, a fact that led him to adopt a “reconciliation” with the Catholic Church. *Ibid.*, 179.
- <sup>12</sup> The right to exploit the labour of a predetermined number of indigenous people, whose means of survival were ensured as an obligation by the *encomenderos*. *Ibid.*, 58, n. 104.
- <sup>13</sup> Based on general calculations in between 1500 and 1650, approximately 450,000 Europeans migrated to overseas territories. *Ibid.*, 233.
- <sup>14</sup> Representative evidence for the above claim is found in the records of foreigners in Peru from 1532 to 1560 and 1595 to 1606, where the numbers of *extranjeros* contribute to confirming the first set. *Ibid.*, 236.
- <sup>15</sup> The case of the Greeks does not differ from that of other ethnicities. For example, among the 2,692 recorded Europeans in Chile between 1531 and 1565, 63 percent were illiterate. *Ibid.*, 239.
- <sup>16</sup> The educated spectrum encompassed a limited number of literates, clerics, sailors and military personnel, along with individuals who, with a basic education level, could sign documents. *Ibid.*, 239.
- <sup>17</sup> The difficulty lies in the common phenomenon of Italianisation and Hispanicisation of their names, which affects their self-identification. *Ibid.*, 16–17.
- <sup>18</sup> Determinative adjectives like *griego* or information about the place of origin monopolise the confirmation of national origin. *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>19</sup> In Spanish territories, ethnic-religious categorisations differed from Europe, where the term *griego* commonly denoted Orthodox Christians. This variation stems from the scarcity of other Orthodox groups (Albanians, Slavs or Arabs) in the overseas territories. *Ibid.*, 63.
- <sup>20</sup> Fragmentary data and numerous compilations of individual microhistories depict small and disorganised Greek communities during the Spanish colonisation period. *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>21</sup> The negative significance lies in the word *levanter*, which denotes the disobedient and the rebellious. *Ibid.*, 24, n. 14.
- <sup>22</sup> Official state correspondence, payroll lists, notarial and judicial texts, as well as memoranda submitted to local authorities for personal and financial matters, are part of the historical sources. *Ibid.*, 65.