

The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 18, No 1 (2021)

Historical Review / La Revue Historique

The *H*istorical Review
La Revue *H*istorique



VOLUME XVIII (2021)

Section de Recherches Néohelléniques
Institut de Recherches Historiques / FNRS

Section of Neohellenic Research
Institute of Historical Research / NHRF

The Greek Community's Contribution to Batum's Political, Social and Economic Life, 1860s–1900s

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To cite this article:

Tchkoïdze, E. (2022). The Greek Community's Contribution to Batum's Political, Social and Economic Life, 1860s–1900s. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 18(1), 217–235. Retrieved from <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/historicalReview/article/view/31376>

THE GREEK COMMUNITY'S CONTRIBUTION TO BATUM'S
POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE, 1860s–1900s

Eka Tchkoïdze

ABSTRACT: Many aspects relating to the Greek diaspora in the Russian Empire from the eighteenth to the first quarter of the twentieth centuries have been researched in detail. Nevertheless, some pieces in this mosaic are less well known. Batum is one of them. Having first settled there in the 1850s, the Greeks of Batum are one of the largest and oldest minorities in the city. As such, they witnessed its transformation from Ottoman to Russian rule and from a small littoral village to a big, charming and cosmopolitan port-city. Batum's Greeks were actively involved in all spheres of city life, especially in entrepreneurship and politics. This article focuses on the oil and oil-related business activities in which the Greeks were especially successful. Some Greeks were prominent in the town's life, serving as councillors. The article reveals that the Greeks of Batum had a high educational and cultural level and made a significant contribution to the city's development. At the same time, they kept their Greek identity, supporting both the Greek church and schools in Batum.

The integration of the Black Sea port-cities into the Mediterranean and global economic realm became increasingly evident during the long nineteenth century. In the first half of the century, Odessa enjoyed prominence in commercial transactions with the major Mediterranean ports of Marseille and Trieste. However, the rapid technological, institutional, economic and political evolution during the second half of the century brought new structural changes in the pattern of economic development of the Black Sea port-cities.¹

Among the Black Sea port-cities, Batum was a special case. Massive quantities of black gold – petroleum – from the shores of the Caspian Sea found

* This study was financially supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (FR-19-1759, "Ethnic groups and their periodical editions in Georgia from 1819 to 1921"). I would like to sincerely thank the Rustaveli Foundation, whose funding allowed me to work on this project.

¹ Maria Christina Chatziioannou and Apostolos Delis, "Introduction," in *Linkages of the Black Sea with the West: Navigation, Trade and Immigration*, ed. Maria Christina Chatziioannou and Apostolos Delis (Rethymno: Centre of Maritime History, Institute for Mediterranean Studies–Foundation of Research and Technology, 2020), v.

their way to the world through Batum. As a result, from the 1860s to the 1910s, Russia became the world's largest grain producer and world's largest producer of petroleum.²

Odessa and Trabzon were among the first port-cities to flourish; Batum and others (such as Constanța, Varna, Zonguldak, Samsun) would follow.³ After becoming a part of the Russian Empire in 1878, Batum's potential was quickly recognised by the government, which constructed maritime infrastructure, making it into the most important port in the South Caucasus. Its importance lay in the fact that it had the safest harbour along the coast from Kerch to Sinop.⁴

Batum before 1878

The year 1878 is a watershed in Batum's history. Due to the victory of the Russian Empire in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, the region moved from Ottoman to Russian rule.⁵ Its strategic importance was first recognised by the British. In 1835 they appointed James Brant as vice-consul in the Pashalik of Trebizond, an extremely large area which included the small port of Batum and the adjoining area of Adjara. Brant, the first Briton to have visited Batum according to the British archives, provided a detailed description of the area. Batum was “at present one of so little importance as a trading mart that no respectable British merchant would think of going there”.⁶ However, the British were the first to establish a consulate in Batum.⁷ The first British consul, Frederick Guarracino, arrived on 24 April 1840. By late 1844 he had requested a transfer, citing the difficulty of living there: “No other European had ever resided

² Gelina Harlaftis, “As an Introduction: Black Sea History and the Black Sea Project,” in *Between Grain and Oil from the Azov to Caucasus: The Port-cities of the Eastern Coast of the Black Sea, Late 18th–Early 20th Century*, ed. Gelina Harlaftis, Victoria Konstantinova, Igor Lyman, Anna Sydorenko and Eka Tchkoïdze (Rethymno: Institute for Mediterranean Studies–Foundation of Research and Technology, 2020), xi–xii.

³ Eyüp Özveren, “A Framework for the Study of the Black Sea World, 1789–1915,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 20, no. 1 (1997): 94.

⁴ Gelina Harlaftis, *A History of Greek-owned Shipping: The Making of an International Tramp Fleet, 1830 to the Present Day* (London: Routledge, 1996), 84.

⁵ For a general overview of the region's history within the Ottoman Empire and how it became a subject of Russian interests, see Eka Tchkoïdze, “Oil and Soil: The Role of Batoum's Economic Development in Shaping of Geopolitical Significance of the Caucasus,” in Harlaftis et al., *Between Grain and Oil*, 467–71.

⁶ Hugo Greenhalgh, *Adjara and the Russian Empire, 1830–1878*, research by Robert L. Jarman (London: Archival Publications International, 2003), 3–4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

at Batoum before me, and the place being wholly inhabited by a population of bigoted Mussulmans I met with considerable difficulties and inconvenience in reconciling them to my presence here.”⁸

William Gifford Palgrave (1826–1888), a well-known English priest and traveller, in 1866 entered the British Foreign Office and was appointed consul in Sukhum-Kale (nowadays Sukhumi, western Georgia). His first report, written in January 1868, was a general review of the Province of Trebizond as a whole, describing in detail all the major towns. Batum's development since the first British reports in the 1830s was remarkable.⁹ According to Palgrave,

Batoum stands on the western side of an excellent harbour, the third in goodness on the Black Sea, Sebastopol being the first, and Sinope the second ... So complete, however, is the shelter afforded by the lighthouse point on the western side, and the opposite point, called “Serey”, on the eastern, that no wind has any serious effect within the haven. The anchorage is good, and the dimensions of the harbour admit of about twenty large vessels riding here in security. The town of Batoum was till recently little more than a Lazistan coast hamlet, mainly tenanted by fishermen and smugglers. But many circumstances have caused it a rapid increase, and are still causing ... The market place contains nearly 150 shops, and 50 more, lately built, stand in the neighbourhood of the quay.¹⁰

After the Crimean War (1854), the British consuls saw Batum as the key port on the Asian side of the Black Sea, situated as it was the Turkish border with Russia.¹¹ From that point it became of special importance for the Russian Empire as well.¹²

Greeks in Batum

The Russo–Turkish wars of the nineteenth century stimulated continuous waves of Greek immigrants to southern Russia. In this regard, the war of 1828–1829 was a special case.¹³ This process became even more acute after the last war in 1877–1878. The third Pontic stage of the resettlement of the Greeks took

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 470, doc. no. 104.

¹⁰ Ibid., 534–35.

¹¹ Ibid., 469.

¹² A trade route through Batum would have been in competition with the Trabzon–Erzurum–Tabriz transit route between England and Persia. Malkhaz Sioridze, *დოსიჰობ სდდჰობ* 125 (Batumi: Batumi State University, 2003), 37.

¹³ Grigorios P. Tilikidis, *Οι Καυκάσιοι Έλληνες προ και μετά την ρωσικήν επανάστασιν* (Athens: Typ. A. Frantzeskani kai A. Kaitatzi, 1921), 5.

on the character of a mass exodus in 1877–1884. After the Russian–Ottoman War of 1877–1878, up to 17,000 Pontic Greeks moved to the Terek region, in the Stavropol governorate, Sukhumi military district, Batum Oblast and Baku governorate.¹⁴ This exodus was systematically supported by the Russian authorities, since they were keen to strengthen the Christian element in their newly acquired territories. Thus, the Greeks and Armenians were mostly welcomed in this process, which lasted until the First World War.¹⁵

The Greek population in Russia before 1914 was estimated at about 600,000, of which 270,000 lived along the eastern coast of the Black Sea from Novorossisk to Batum.¹⁶ By 1919 an estimated 112,850 had settled in Georgia alone, which hosted the biggest amount of Greeks in the whole Caucasus.

Specifically, in Batum, the location of an ancient Greek colony called Vathys (Βαθύς) or Vathyn Limena (Βαθύν Λιμένα), the Greeks, mainly itinerant craftsmen and small traders, began to appear around 1850.¹⁷ Ioannis Kalfoglou wrote that the Greeks started to arrive in Batum in 1846 and had settled in five surrounding villages by 1884.¹⁸ Palgrave, in his aforementioned report (dated 1868), wrote:

¹⁴ Stavris Parastatov, “Cultural Exchange in the Black Sea Region: Greek Migration to the Russian Empire in the 19th Century,” in *Institution Building and Research under Foreign Domination: Europe and the Black Sea Region (Early 19th–Early 20th Centuries)*, ed. Iakovos D. Michailidis and Giorgos Antoniou (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2019), 32.

¹⁵ Eleftherios Charatsidis, “Υπερκαυκάσια,” in *Οι Έλληνες στη Διασπορά 15ος–21ος αι.*, ed. Ioannis K. Hassiotis, Olga Katsiardi-Hering and Evrydiki A. Abatzi (Athens: Hellenic Parliament, 2006), 203.

¹⁶ Harlaftis, *History of Greek-owned Shipping*, 7–8.

¹⁷ Artemis Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, “Μεταναστεύσεις των Ελλήνων στον Καύκασο κατά τον 19ο αιώνα,” *Δελτίο Κέντρου Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών* 10 (1993): 127.

¹⁸ Ioannis Kalfoglou, *Οι Έλληνες εν Καυκάσω: Ιστορικών δοκίμιον* (Athens: Typ. tis Avgis, 1908), 105–6. Ioannis Kalfoglou (1871–1931), a writer and journalist, was born in Chrysopolis (Üsküdar) in Pontus. At the end of the nineteenth century, he moved to Batum, for unknown reasons. After the Sovietisation of Georgia (1921), he settled in Constantinople. *Εγκυκλοπαίδεια του Ποντιακού Ελληνισμού (Ιστορία–Λαογραφία–Πολιτισμός)*, 12 vols. (Thessaloniki: Malliaris, 2007), 4:205. In 1918 in Batum he published a valuable work: *Ιστορία της εν Βατούμ ελληνικής κοινότητας* (Batum: Typ. S. Ch. Galinou, 1918). It contains 82 pages with documents about the Greek community in Batum, as well as city’s history written by himself. The book was published to support the schools of the Greek community of Batum. This article relies extensively on this unique volume.

The present town census gives – 4,500 Mahometans;¹⁹ 340 Greeks; 120 Armenians: making a total of 4,970 townfolk ... The “Greeks” here resident are of that ambiguous description common in the ports of the Black Sea; they are chiefly small victuallers, or retail spirit sellers. The Armenians of Batoum are a recent colony; they come from the inlands about Erzeroum.²⁰

According to this note, the Greeks were one of the oldest and largest minorities in Batum.²¹ After Batum's reintegration with Georgia, these statistics stayed the same. A Russian journalist and war correspondent, A. Frenkel, said that in 1879 the Georgian population numbered 7,200 (1,200 families), Armenians 120 (20 families), Greeks 210 (36 families), Circassians 600 (100 families).²² Another source puts the number of Greeks at 635 persons (111 families; 75 bachelors) in the same period.²³

The major number of Pontic Greeks settled in Adjara were from Asia Minor, particularly Santa (nowadays Dumanli), the village in the alpine zone, as well as the city of Trabzon and the provinces of Rize, Patsa, Ordu, Giresun and Samsun.²⁴ Trabzon always enjoyed special ties with Batum. For the Greek merchants who settled in Central Asia, the usual route started from Trabzon, went to Batum by ship, and then from there to Baku by road or, after its construction in 1871, railway.²⁵

Before the imperial census of 1897, the information about Batum's population came from private sources. For example, N.M. Dakishevich, in 1890 in his book *Батум* (Batum), mentions that the population of 14,500 inhabitants was comprised of two categories: Russian-subjects and foreigners. There were 510 Greeks in the first category and 174 in the second.²⁶ Probably those 174 Greeks

¹⁹ He later explains whom he means: “Turkish, Laz, Georgian, Circassian, Abkhazian.” Greenhalgh, *Adjara and the Russian Empire, 1830–1878*, 535.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ There are some travelers who described very vividly their impressions especially for Batum's Greeks. A well-known biologist Dr. E. Ericsson should be mentioned in this regard. His work contains broad references to his dialogues with the local Greeks. He underlines twice that only the Greeks ate seafood in Batum and even small Greek children were able to fish. E. Ericsson, “Из воспоминаний о Батуме и его окрестностях,” *Естествознание и География* 6 (1899): 3.

²² A. Frenkel, *Очерки Чурук-Су и Ватума* (Tbilisi: s.n., 1879), 11.

²³ Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, “Μεταναστεύσεις των Ελλήνων,” 127.

²⁴ Charatsidis, “Υπερκαυκασία,” 205; see also Marine Giorgadze, “Pontic Greeks in Adjara: Photo Histories,” *Σημειολογία–Semiotics Scientific Journal* 17 (2017): 43.

²⁵ Vlasis Agtzidis, *Παρευξείνιος διασπορά: Οι ελληνικές εγκαταστάσεις στις βορειοανατολικές περιοχές του Ευξείνου Πόντου* (Thessaloniki: Adelfon Kyriakidi, 2001), 51.

²⁶ N.M. Dakishevich, *Батум* (Tbilisi: s.n., 1890), 1–2.

were recent settlers and had not received official recognition, such as in the form of citizenship. Archival material reveals that in 1881, 253 Greek households (2,107 persons) were settled in the whole region.²⁷

In 1885, the military governor of Batum district wrote that a big group of Greeks (without indicating their number) had arrived in Batum from Constantinople. They had no accommodation and Batum's authorities had no means to offer them shelter. The governor asked the viceroy of the Caucasus to help them.²⁸ The viceroy's office sent an official reply some weeks later. According to this document, Greeks had provided the Russians with considerable help. As Russia needed a population it could trust, the viceroy asked the governor to do his best and to help them to settle in Batum and its vicinities.²⁹ In addition to the obvious political benefits of settling new Russian lands with trustworthy coreligionists, Greek settlers turned out to be the most socially dynamic ethnic group in the region, which revived the Black Sea economy, raising it to a fundamentally new level of development. The Greeks brought to the region a modern model of entrepreneurship, commercial navigation, representing a bridge between local producers and Western consumers.³⁰

According to the Russian imperial census of 1897, the number of Greeks of Batum was 2,764 (from a total of 28,508 inhabitants); in 1917 their number had grown to 4,008 (out of 35,048); in 1918 to 4,878 (out of 35,375); in 1920 to 8,598 (out of 45,446). Generally, they ranked in fourth place after Russians, Georgians and Armenians.³¹ For 1907, Kalfoglou, who had moved from Trabzon to Batum, provides the official statistics: 2,730 Greeks in Batum, plus 1,878 in the surrounding five villages, as well as his own estimation of 3,500 in Batum and 2,152 in the villages.³²

²⁷ N. Mgeladze and T. Putkaradze, “მოსახლეობის დინამიკა, ეთნოკონფესიური და სოციალური სტრუქტურა,” in სამხრეთ-დასავლეთ საქართველოს ისტორიის ნარკვევები: აჭარა, vol. 3, ბათუმის ოლქი (1877–1920) (Batumi: Shota Rustaveli State University, 2008), 86.

²⁸ Otar Gogolishvili, “რამდენიმე საარქივო დოკუმენტი ბერძნების შესახებ ბათუმის ოლქში,” *სემიოტიკა–Semiotics Scientific Journal* 16, no. 2 (2016): 77. The letter, kept in the Central State Historical Archive of St. Petersburg (fund 1213, inventory 14, file 445, 123–26), was published recently.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

³⁰ Parastatov, “Cultural Exchange,” 32.

³¹ This data is taken from archival material which was published in “ბათუმის მოსახლეობის ზრდა ეროვნული შემადგენლობის მიხედვით,” *არხეიონი–Archeion* 2 (2011): 114–15; see also, Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, “Μεταναστεύσεις των Ελλήνων,” 170.

³² Kalfoglou, *Οι Έλληνες εν Καυκάσω*, 11.

The Greek community of Batum was like other communities in the Austro-Hungarian and Russian economic centres in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the heart of the community lay the church, religion being central to the cohesion of the group as it offered social philanthropy to the weaker members.³³ The district where St. Nicholas' Greek church stood was called Urumta Mehele (Urum district) in the 1850s and 1860s, because its residents were Greeks.³⁴ After 1878 it was called Greek Street (Russian: Греческая улица [Grecheskaya ulitsa]; Georgian: ბერძნის ქუჩა [Berdznis qucha]). Nowadays it bears the name King Parnavaz.³⁵ The church became a centre of their national activity. It was built in 1865 and it is regarded the first stone building and the first Christian church in Batum. The church's rich history is well documented. Its ktetors, benefactors, servants and other Greeks associated with it are deserving of research in their own right.

In addition to their religious identity, the Greeks brought with them an educational culture. They opened primary schools that taught through the medium of Greek, Sunday schools, centres of folk art, etc., in their new places of residence.³⁶ It is also worth mentioning that among the different migratory waves of Greeks to different parts of Georgia in different periods, the Greeks of Batum and the wider Adjara region mostly retained the Greek language and traditions. They were also most educated and quite advanced culturally.³⁷

Batum after its Reintegration with Georgia (1878): An Overview

The last Russo-Turkish War in 1877–1878 had a profound effect on Batum and Adjara. More than three centuries of Adjarian subjection to the Ottomans came to an end and the whole region rejoined Georgia – but as part of the Russian Empire.³⁸ In the 1870s there was virtually no commerce like in other parts of

³³ Maria Christina Chatziioannou, "Greek Merchant Networks in the Age of Empires (1770–1870)," in *Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks: Four Centuries of History*, ed. Ina Baghdiantz-McCabe, Gelina Harlaftis and Ioanna Pepelasis Minoglou (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 377.

³⁴ Giorgadze, "Pontic Greeks," 45.

³⁵ It was very common to name the streets like this in the Russian Empire. The same happened in Tbilisi, where there was also a Greek Street. Sokratis Angelidis, *Ο Ελληνομώδης της Τιφλίδας* (Thessaloniki: Art of Text, 2003), 22. It still bears the same name.

³⁶ Parastatov, "Cultural Exchange," 32.

³⁷ Irine Garakanidze, "საქართველოში ბერძენთა გადმოსახლეობის ისტორია (მე-18-20 სს.)," in *ბერძენები საქართველოში*, ed. Rismag Gordeziani (Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University, 1990), 67.

³⁸ Greenhalgh, *Adjara and the Russian Empire, 1830–1878*, 587.

the Black Sea.³⁹ Its growth was almost exclusively due to the increasing export of petroleum from Baku.⁴⁰ The rising importance of oil,⁴¹ in connection with the establishment of railway lines,⁴² turned Batum into the most important port-city of the southeastern Black Sea coast, overtaking adjacent Trabzon, which was the traditional seaport of the area. Political decisions, then, affected the growth of the population of the port-cities.⁴³

After the 1880s, due to the growing world demand for petroleum, Batum was included on a large number of shipping routes that encompassed the main ports of the north-eastern Mediterranean.⁴⁴ Baku's oil was also introduced to Trieste via Batumi in the 1880s and, from there, distributed all over the known world.⁴⁵ The prosperity resulting from Batum's great economic development brought benefits for the inhabitants as well. One of the biggest changes happened this period, specifically in 1890, was the upgrading the British vice-consulate in Batum to a full consulate.⁴⁶

Greek Economic Activities in Batum: Oil and Oil-Related Greek Entrepreneurs

Batum became the oil-export gateway for Baku oil after the completion of the Baku–Batum railway network in the 1880s and the construction of the Baku–Batum pipeline, which ensured the systematic transportation of Baku oil to the world market. It immediately attracted internationally known entrepreneurs like the Swedish Nobels, the French financier Alphonse de Rothschild, the Armenian

³⁹ Harlaftis, *History of Greek-owned Shipping*, 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴¹ It is worth mentioning that by the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia became the world's leading oil extractor. However, it was not able to retain this position and was overtaken by the United States. Boris Ananich, "The Russian Economy and Banking System," in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 2, *Imperial Russia, 1689–1917*, ed. Dominic Lieven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 415.

⁴² Georgia's railway network should be examined as a part of Russia's intensive railway-building campaign, which started after 1861 and reached its peak between 1895 and 1899. Russia entered the twentieth century with the second longest railway system in the world, 40 percent of which had been laid in the 1890s. *Ibid.*, 416.

⁴³ Harlaftis, "As an Introduction," xiv.

⁴⁴ Harlaftis, *History of Greek-owned Shipping*, 85.

⁴⁵ Maria Christina Chatziioannou, "The Port of Trieste and the Black Sea Economic Challenges," in Chatziioannou and Delis, *Linkages of the Black Sea with the West*, 53.

⁴⁶ Hugo Greenhalgh, *Adjara and the Russian Empire, 1878–1917*, research by Robert L. Jarman (London: Archival Publications International, 2003), 195).

Alexander Mantashev⁴⁷ and the lesser-known Greeks Sideridis and Arvanitidis.⁴⁸ The latter two were the most important Greek oil exporters and shipowners trading in Batum. Both were established in Constantinople, from where they financed a large number of Greek purchases of steamships.⁴⁹ However, only scant archival material exists on them.

After foreign investors were officially allowed to have businesses in Batum in 1886, new perspectives opened up to the world's greatest entrepreneurs. In 1889, Sideridis established in Batum an oil tin can factory and three large petroleum storage tanks. The majority of workers employed by Sideridis were Greek. He provided them with extensive supports, including free accommodation. The Greeks were very good craftsmen: in the morning they would work in Sideridis' factories and in the afternoon they would engage in their handicraft. By the end of the nineteenth century, Batum's Greeks had managed to build approximately 30 houses,⁵⁰ two baths and many shops for themselves.⁵¹

In a volume of documents relating to oil production in Russia from 1883 to 1914, only one document (no. 49) refers to Sideridis' business activity. On 27 May 1895, the Paris agency of the Caspian-Black Sea Company (which belonged Alphonse de Rothschild)⁵² insisted that "certain measures be taken against their competitors as a whole, and more specifically, against Sideridis,

⁴⁷ The Nobels, Rothschild and Mantashev were called "petroleum kings" in the nineteenth-century Georgian press (see anonymous, "The Caucasus," *ივერია Iveria*, no. 16, 22 January 1904). For the development of the oil industry in the Russian Empire and the oil companies in Batum of the Nobel brothers Robert (1829–1896) and Ludwig (1831–1888), Alphonse de Rothschild (1827–1905) and Alexander Mantashev (1842–1911), see Tchkoidze, "Oil and Soil," 489–509.

⁴⁸ Harlaftis, "As an Introduction," xxxi.

⁴⁹ Harlaftis, *History of Greek-owned Shipping*, 84–85.

⁵⁰ Approximately five houses built at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century and owned by Greeks still adorn the city. See *Batumi's Architectural Monuments*, an album prepared by the Committee of Education, Culture, Tourism and Sport of Batumi Municipality, Batumi 2012, which contains the houses of M. Kongalidis (39), Nikiforodis (99), Symeonidis (122), Paraskevopoulos (151) and T. Triantafyllidis (167, see below for more details).

⁵¹ Gogolishvili, "რამდენიმე საარქივო დოკუმენტი," 78.

⁵² For Rothschild's business interests and activities in Georgia, see Eka Tchkoidze, "როტშილდების ფინანსური ინტერესები კავკასიაში მე-19 საუკუნის ბოლოსა და მე-20 საუკუნის დასაწყისში," in *Archival and Source Studies: Trends and Challenges*, ed. Teona Iashvili, Ketevan Asatiani, Nino Badashvili, Tamta Shonvadze and Dimitri Silakadze (Tbilisi: National Archives of Georgia, 2021), 242–50.

who has reduced prices”.⁵³ Another document, from 1891, also confirms that Sideridis was one of the main competitors of the Rothschild company.⁵⁴ By 1903, the Sideridis factory employed 320 (100 permanent and 220 part-time) workers. Thirty of those 100 workers were Greek and the remainder Armenian, Turkish and Georgian.⁵⁵

In 1910 there were only four main factories producing tin cans for kerosene. The leading factory belonged to the Arvanitidis Brothers. That year they produced enough packaging for 3,086,340 poods of kerosene and employed 300 workers; while the Khachatriants factory, the second one of these four, employed 250 workers and produced enough packaging for 608,614 poods of kerosene.⁵⁶

By 1912 those two big Greek companies had merged. A list of factories in the Russian Empire contains a reference to the Sideridis and Arvanitidis Trading House: Kerosene Oil Tin Can Factory.⁵⁷ The reference provides the factory’s address (Cemetery St., Batumi [г. Батумъ, Кладбищенск. ул.]) also the number of workers (350).⁵⁸ Sideridis and Arvanitidis employed masters from the Aegean islands of Chios and Kassos who eventually became some of the most important twentieth-century Greek shipowners.⁵⁹

Dakishevich, in his list of the 23 major entrepreneurs who owned factories and warehouses in the city, mentions Mavropoulos (no. 2), Angelidi (no. 18) and Simelidi (no. 19). Mavropoulos⁶⁰ and Angelidis had factories that produced

⁵³ *Монополистический Капитал в Нефтяной Промышленности России 1883–1914: Документы и материалы* (Moscow: Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union, 1961), 173.

⁵⁴ Gogolishvili, “რამდენიმე საარქივო დოკუმენტი,” 78.

⁵⁵ Marine Giorgadze, “პონტოელ ბერძენთა მეურნეობა, მატერიალური კულტურა და საზოგადოებრივი ცოფა,” in *პონტოელი ბერძენები აჭარაში წარსული და თანამედროვეობა*, ed. M. Giorgadze, N. Mgeladze, T. Tunadze, N. Dzneladze and M. Loria (Batumi: Shota Rustaveli Batumi State University, 2017), 164.

⁵⁶ *Обзор Батумской Области за 1910 год* (Batumi: Kapel, 1912), 38. An imperial Russian weight measure, a pood is approximately equal to 16.38 kilogrammes.

⁵⁷ In Russian: Сидеридись и Арванитидись, Тор. Д. Зав. для выдѣл. жестянокъ и ящик. и наполненіе жестянокъ керосиномъ.

⁵⁸ *Список фабрик и заводов Российской империи*, category no. 8 (Группа VIII, Обработка металловъ, производство машинъ, аппаратовъ и орудій) (Saint Petersburg: Kirschbaum, 1912), 202.

⁵⁹ Gelina Harlaftis, “The Role of the Greeks in the Black Sea Trade, 1830–1900,” in *Shipping and Trade, 1750–1950: Essays in International Maritime Economic History*, ed. Lewis R. Fischer and Helge W. Nordvik (Pontefract: Lofthouse, 1990), 79.

⁶⁰ He could be G. Mavropoulos, mentioned as a member of the ecclesiastical committee of Batumi’s Greek Community in 1897–99. Kalfoglou, *Ιστορία της εν Βατούμ, 26*.

oil cans; the former employed 25 and the latter 200 workers.⁶¹ Both exported kerosene, the first to Russia and the second to Turkey, Serbia and Bulgaria. As for Simelidis, he had machines for the manufacturing of oil cans with 20 workers; he exported to Russia and Italy.⁶²

Our attempts to identify any of the above-mentioned businessmen among the Greeks involved in different philanthropic activities was frustrated by the fact that we do not know their first names. N.G. Angelidis and K.A. Angelidis actively supported the Greek schools of Batum. Kalfoglou's list mentions G.D. Mavropoulos.⁶³ There is a reference to a Greek school curator in 1899 called K. Simulov,⁶⁴ who may be Simelidis. Two Arvanitidis feature in the same category: K. Arvanitidis, a school curator in 1909 and 1912–1913;⁶⁵ and Georgios Arvanitidis, a vice-president of the Poor Fund.⁶⁶ The documents on the Greeks published by Kalfoglou in 1918 contain no reference to a Sideridis.

The Greeks were very active in other businesses as well. The tobacco trade was entirely in Greek hands. The most successful in this field was Lazar Biniat-Oghli, who is quite well studied in Georgian.⁶⁷ However, this article focuses on oil or oil-related Greek businessmen.

Greeks in Batum's Political Life

Regulations for the self-government of cities were established in 1870 in the Russian Empire.⁶⁸ In Georgia only six cities had self-governing status (Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Poti, Batum, Gori and Akhaltsikhe). They began to acquire it in the 1880s and with many limitations.⁶⁹ Such cities were under a *городская дума* (urban council), which were entitled to elect an urban prefect (or mayor, in modern

⁶¹ Bearing in mind that Mantashev, the third oil giant after the Nobels and Rothschild, had 300 workers, this number is quite impressive.

⁶² Dakishevich, *Батум*, 9.

⁶³ Kalfoglou, *Ιστορία της εν Βατούμ*, 42.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁶⁷ For the recent publications on Biniat-Oghli, see Nana Kvachadze, *A Trip to Old Batumi* (Batumi: Batumelebi, 2014), 113–14; Giorgadze, “*ჰონტოელ ბერძენთა მეურნეობა*,” 148–53.

⁶⁸ See V.M. Gribovsky, *Государственное устройство и управление Российской империи* (Odessa: Technik, 1912), 155.

⁶⁹ T. Kopaleishvili, “საქალაქო თვითმმართველობის გამოცხადება ბათუმში 1888 წ.” საისტორიო მაცნე 11 (2002): 69.

terminology).⁷⁰ Batum acquired the status of self-administrated city in 1888,⁷¹ when the first elections to the city council were held. In that year, however, the urban prefect was not elected but was appointed by the governor-general of Kutaisi.⁷² A few months earlier, in November 1887, when a special committee had been created to prepare local elections for the first city council of Batum, one of its 10 members was Greek, Ch.S. Symeonidis (a merchant of the second guild, the only one with this status. Almost all members were householders).⁷³ Symeonidis was also a member of the ecclesiastical committee in 1887.⁷⁴

The First City Council (1888–1892)

Of Batum's 14,000 inhabitants, 525 citizens were entitled to vote.⁷⁵ The election was conducted over three days (25–26 August and 2 September 1888).⁷⁶ Each day, 12 councillors⁷⁷ were elected, making a total of 36, to a four-year term. The list of the councillors was published immediately in the *Caucasian Guide* for 1889.⁷⁸ It was republished in 1906.⁷⁹ Well-known Georgian prose-writer David Kldiashvili characterised the city council of Batum as “pied”.⁸⁰ Indeed, it was

⁷⁰ Gribovsky, *Государственное устройство*, 156.

⁷¹ Before that, from 1878 to 1886 Batum was a free port and the “military communal administration”. This type of administration was common only in the Caucasus. Besides Batum, it was found in the province of Dagestan as well as in the districts of Zakataly, Sukhum and Kars in Transcaucasia. Vladimir Bobrovnikov, “Islam in the Russian Empire,” in Lieven, *Cambridge History of Russia*, 216. For details on Batum free port, see Tchkoïdze, “Oil and Soil,” 475–80.

⁷² Eka Tchkoïdze, “Batoum, Mayors,” Black Sea Project Port Cities, <https://cities.blacksea.gr/en/batum/1-3-4/>.

⁷³ Ivane S. Meskhi, “Очерк развития батумского городского хозяйства,” in *Батум и его окрестности* (Batum: s.n., 1906), 485–86. This publication marked the 25th anniversary of the incorporation of Batum into the Russian Empire.

⁷⁴ Kalfoglou, *Ιστορία της εν Βατούμ*, 26.

⁷⁵ Obtaining the franchise was a very complicated and difficult process in the Russian Empire. See, briefly, Gribovsky, *Государственное устройство*, 77–87.

⁷⁶ The third day of polling on 27 August was postponed to 2 September.

⁷⁷ In Russian *гласный член* and in Georgian *ბმობანი*.

⁷⁸ *Кавказский календарь на 1889* (Tbilisi: s.n., 1888), 241.

⁷⁹ Meskhi, “Очерк развития,” 487.

⁸⁰ David Kldiashvili, *ჩემი ცხოვრების გზაზე* (Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo, 1961), 49. Kldiashvili (1862–1931) was educated at the best military schools of the Russian Empire. After accomplishing his studies, in 1882 he was appointed as a military servant in Batum. He lived there until 1908. His memoirs are entitled *ჩემი ცხოვრების გზაზე* (On the path of my life). Most of it is dedicated to the years he spent there. Thus this text is regarded as one of the

extremely colourful nationally and religiously. There were Russians, Georgians, Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Poles, Germans; Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics, Armenian-Catholics, Armenian-Monophysites and Protestants.

Ivane Meskhi, the author of the first article on Batum's history and administration and a member of the council for many terms,⁸¹ mentions that two of the 36 councillors were Greek.⁸² The identification of the first one was simple. His name was Nikolaos Panic Ephremidis of (Никл. Паникичъ Эфремиди) and he was elected on the second day of the elections (26 August). It was impossible to identify the second Greek councillor based on the names on the list. The only possibility is that David Thomas Kharazov may have been Χαραζίδης (Charazidis) in Greek. He was elected on the third day of polling (2 September).

In the Adjara Archives, a set of the minutes (no. 24) of the municipal council is signed by Nikolay Panikovich Ephremidis in Greek in pencil.⁸³ Kalfoglou's list of the 35 most important Greeks of Batum from the 1850s and 1860s mentions Nikolaos Ephremidis.⁸⁴ He donated 200 piastres for the building of St. Nicholas' Greek church.⁸⁵

The ethnic and religious proportions on the council were maintained in the following decades. The majority of the population and thus, of the councillors, were Georgians, followed by Armenians, Russians (with small ethnic groups like Poles, Germans etc.), with the Greeks in fourth place. Thus, two main electoral rival factions emerged, that of the Georgians and the Armenians.⁸⁶ In

important sources for the study of the political, social and cultural aspects of Batum in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁸¹ Ivane Meskhi served as a secretary of the council until 1918. Otar Turmanidze, "რუსული მმართველობის სისტემა და მხარის კოლონიზაცია," in სამხრეთ-დასავლეთ საქართველოს ისტორიის ნარკვევები: აჭარა, 4 ტომად, ტ. 3 ბათუმის ოლქი (1877–1920) (Batumi: Shota Rustaveli State University, 2008), 60.

⁸² According to the 1891 document mentioned above, it was Sideridis who usually financed Greeks' election campaign. Gogolishvili, "რამდენიმე საარქივო დოკუმენტი," 78.

⁸³ Sub-department of Adjara Autonomous Republic Government-Archives Administration, Fund I-7, Inventory 1, File 43, leaf 3.

⁸⁴ Kalfoglou, *Ιστορία της εν Βατούμ*, 11.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁶ These two factions were called parties (Georgian Party and Armenian Party). Besides their national character, the Georgians represented the small and middle class and the Armenians represented the bourgeoisie. Alexandre Bendianishvili, "ქალაქები, სავაჭრო-სამრეწველო დაბები, საქალაქო თვითმმართველობა და კომუნალური მეურნეობა," სამხრეთ-დასავლეთ საქართველოს ისტორიის ნარკვევები: აჭარა, 4 ტომად, ტ. 3 ბათუმის ოლქი (1877–1920) (Batumi: Shota Rustaveli State University, 2008), 237.

this context, it was extremely important whom the Russians and Greeks would support. Their choice could determine the winner of the elections.

The Second City Council (1894–1898)

Elections for the second council term were due to be held in 1892, but as problems had been identified in the regulations on the electoral franchise – Batum was the only place in the entire Russian Empire where this happened⁸⁷ – the elections were postponed until 12 October 1894. Of the approximately 25,000 inhabitants, only 318 citizens were entitled to vote. In the end, only 239 voters participated in the poll to elect 35 councillors.⁸⁸ The 1894 election was significant as it was the first time that councillors would appoint an elected mayor/prefect.

The election campaign was hard fought. Each ethnic group and each faction sought to promote its own candidate. The two Georgian members of the city Council, Gr. Volsky⁸⁹ and I. Meskhi, faced a difficult task: they had to affiliate with other groups in the city in order to ensure the necessary number of votes for victory. In his detailed description of the election campaign of the Georgians, Kldiashvili relates an interesting story demonstrating the delicate balance between the various nationalities and the diplomacy required to retain it. The Georgian side had decided to affiliate with the Greek voters, which they achieved with great skill.

First we [Georgians of Batum] arranged an appointment with a Greek voter with great prestige, Giango Benlis. Great caution was needed in the negotiations with him. I remember how nervous they, Gr. Volsky and I. Meskhi, were at the evening meeting in Meliton Lortkipanidze’s apartment. It was night when Benlis arrived. The negotiations lasted for hours. The signs were good. In a few days Benlis had to come back bearing two or three friends [obviously Greeks]. So it happened. On the arranged day, the meeting was repeated with utmost secrecy behind closed doors, hidden from everyone. Such meetings were frequently held. The case had the desired results. Greek voters joined with ours on the condition that Georgians would vote five Greeks as members to the city council. The Georgians’ secret operation ran successfully. The Georgians awaited the elections with hope and this hope had a brilliant ending.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Meskhi, “Очерк развития,” 492–94.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 494.

⁸⁹ Volsky was of Polish origin with a Georgian mother. He was entirely Georgian, however. Kldiashvili, *ჩემი ცხოვრების გზაზე*, 65.

⁹⁰ Kldiashvili, *ჩემი ცხოვრების გზაზე*, 69–70; see also Tchkoidze, “Batoum, Mayors.”

The only thing left to do was to find the suitable candidate. Eventually, the Georgians agreed on Luka Asatiani (1826–1901), former city mayor of Kutaisi. Re-elected in the next elections in 1898, he served as the first elected mayor of Batum from 1894 until his death in 1901.

As already mentioned, during the 1894–1898 council term the Greeks secured five of the total 35 seats. The joint support of the 19 Georgian councillors and the five Greeks led to the election of Luka Asatiani as mayor. Four of the five Greek councillors are easily identifiable on the basis of their name: P.S. Symeonidis, A.D. Dimitriadis, G.E. Benlis,⁹¹ and M.T. Michailidis. The identity of the fifth Greek member is not clear, but he may have been A.D. Semenov. In addition to the 35 councillors, nine deputy councillors were also elected. One of them was Greek, N.E. Giakalis.⁹² N. Giakalis is also mentioned as a member of the ecclesiastical committee in 1897–99 and 1899–1903.⁹³

Kalfoglou refers to Giangos Benlis as I. Ef. Benlis Mityllinaios.⁹⁴ In the 1860s, he donated 500 piastres for the building of St Nicholas' Greek church⁹⁵ and was one of nine members of the church building committee. He was also a member of the ecclesiastical committee from 1897 to 1899.⁹⁶

Another of the four Greek councillors, Achilles Dimitriadis⁹⁷ was re-elected many times (until 1911). He was born in Trabzon in 1861.⁹⁸ He was involved in the educational affairs of the Greek community as well as being one of the four members of the special committee that issued permits for the publication of Greek books in Batum.⁹⁹ His father, Dimtrios Dimitriadis, was a very active member of the Greek community in the previous decades.¹⁰⁰ Achilles was a member, like his father, of the ecclesiastical committee in 1897–1899, 1899–1903

⁹¹ It is interesting that the very active Greek Benlis is always referred to in Georgian and Russian by his shortened name, Giangos/Giango/Gianko; while in Greek he is always mentioned as Ioannis.

⁹² Meskhi, "Очерк развития," 495.

⁹³ Kalfoglou, *Ιστορία της εν Βατούμ*, 26.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11. His name was misspelled as Μιτυλληναίος. This is the only source mentioning Benlis' origin (Lesvos/Mytilini) and his father's name could be Ephraim.

⁹⁵ Kalfoglou, *Ιστορία της εν Βατούμ*, 20.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24, 26.

⁹⁷ It is worth mentioning that Achilles Dimitridis, a very active person in Batum's political life, was father of the well-known music conductor Odysseas Dimitridis (1908–2005), who was born in Batum and was the youngest of eight children. His second name was Ioannis. Giorgadze, "ჰონტოელ ბერძენთა მეურნეობა," 165–66.

⁹⁸ For some biographical details, see *ibid.*

⁹⁹ Kalfoglou, *Ιστορία της εν Βατούμ*, 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

and 1903–1905.¹⁰¹ He was also a church commissary (*ἐπίτροπος*) in 1898–1907, 1908–1911 and 1914–1917.¹⁰²

Michail Michailidis was a member of the ecclesiastical committee in 1887, 1897–1899, 1899–1903.¹⁰³ He also served as a church commissary in 1892–1893 and 1908–1911.¹⁰⁴

The Third City Council (1898–1902)

The first round in the elections to the third council was conducted on 18 October 1898. A total of 472 voters elected 27 councillors. The second round was held on 15 November, when an additional 14 councillors were elected, bringing the total to 41.¹⁰⁵ They were sworn in on 2 December 1898. There were four Greek councillors: Achilles Dimitriadis, son of Dimitrios; Michail Michailidis, son of Triantafyllos; Panagiotis Symeonidis, son of Symeon; Timoleon Triantafyllidis, son of Periklis.¹⁰⁶ As we see, only Benlis was replaced (by Triantafyllidis, who had been elected councillor for the first time).

The city directory of Batum for 1902 mentions that all of the Greek councillors owned their own homes.¹⁰⁷ Triantafyllidis, one of the most important doctors in Batum, was director of the City Hospital.¹⁰⁸ By all accounts, he was the most important person in the community, supporting with all means all Greek educational institutions of Batum over a number of years.¹⁰⁹

Michailidis was one of seven members of the city building committee.¹¹⁰ Dimitriadis was one of the three members of the committee for the evaluation and re-evaluation of public property, and was chief of the chamber of commerce, which had two committee members, one of whom was Councillor Symeonidis.¹¹¹

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 26–27.

¹⁰² Ibid., 37–38.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 26–27.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰⁵ Georgians were again the majority. For all 41 names, see Meskhi, “Очерк развития,” 497. The same list with addresses of all councilors in the first directory of Batum: *Всеобщий Адрес Ежегодник города Батума на 1902* (Batum: M. Nikoladze, 1902), 59.

¹⁰⁶ For the full list, see Meskhi, “Очерк развития,” 496–97.

¹⁰⁷ *Всеобщий Адресъ города Батума на 1902 годъ*, 58–59.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰⁹ Kalfoglou, *Исторία της εν Βατούμ*, 40.

¹¹⁰ *Всеобщий Адресъ города Батума на 1902 годъ*, 62.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 63.

In 1912, Triantafyllidis was president of the Benevolent Fraternity for the Poor of Batum, whose board of directors had 12 members. Councillors Michailidis and Dimitriadis were also on the board.¹¹²

The Fourth City Council (1902–1906)

The next elections were conducted on 10 November 1902. Of an initial electorate of 708 voters,¹¹³ this number was finally reduced to 492.¹¹⁴ The second round was conducted on 1 December 1902. A total of 38 councillors was elected, instead of the previous 41.¹¹⁵ They were sworn in on 4 January 1902. It was the weakest council in terms of Greek representation as only A.D. Dimitriadis was elected.¹¹⁶

Batum and Greece: Some General Observations

The first decade of the twentieth century appears as the best period for the shipping connections between Batum and Greece. In 1904, a total of 47 Greek ships (33 sailing and 14 steam) entered the port of Batum, ranking sixth in terms of number after the British, Turkish, Russian, French and German vessels.¹¹⁷ In 1907 exports from Batum to Greece amounted to 261 tons (£1,133), in 13th place, after Spain, Romania and Persia.¹¹⁸ Generally, from 1903 to 1907 the number of Greek steamships increased. For example, while in 1875 there were 28 steamships, by 1903 there were 210 and by 1907 287.¹¹⁹ Batum was in fifth

¹¹² Kalfoglou, *Ιστορία της εν Βατούμ*, 52.

¹¹³ Meskhi, *Очерк развития*,” 500.

¹¹⁴ Like the second elections, the third elections had an interesting background. The editor of an anti-Georgian newspaper *Черноморский Вестник*, Palm, published a deliberately provocative article in order to set the Greeks against the Georgians, as the Greeks were their traditional supporters. An anonymous author of an article published in the Georgian newspaper *Kvali* expressed the wish that Palm's intention would not be realised. *კვალი*, no. 39, 22 September 1902.

¹¹⁵ Meskhi, “*Очерк развития*,” 500–1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 500.

¹¹⁷ Greenhalgh, *Adjara and the Russian Empire, 1878–1917*, 527. New statistics show that there was in fact 89 Greek ships in Batum (35 sailing and 54 steam). I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer of this article, who kindly provided me with the new statistics on the Greek ships, which comes from Socrates Petmezas and Alexandra Papadopoulou, eds., *Black Sea Historical Statistics, 1812–1914* (forthcoming).

¹¹⁸ Greenhalgh, *Adjara and the Russian Empire, 1878–1917*, 543.

¹¹⁹ Georgios Ploumidis, “Στοιχεία για την ελληνική ναυτιλία στη Μαύρη θάλασσα (αρχές 20ου αιώνα),” *Δωδώνη* 14 (1985): 61. According to the new statistics, 1894 was the highpoint for the arrival of Greek ships to Batum's port, when there were 152 out of a total of 771 (almost

place for the number of Greek ship departures among 13 ports in on the Black and Azov seas, ranking behind Taganrog, Braila, Sulina and Galati.¹²⁰ Greek shipowners' main interest in Batum was oil.¹²¹

Importantly, Greece maintained a consulate in Batum. Two of the consul's names are known. A document dated 23 October 1893 naming the 15 candidates for membership of board of directors for the building Greek schools (all-boys and all-girls) is signed by P. Gofas, the consul.¹²² The city guide for 1902, when the Greek consulate was one of 14 consulates in the city, identifies Aristidis Pavlidis as consul.¹²³ The consulate was housed in a residence of a man called Angelidis.¹²⁴ Importantly, before the October Revolution Batum had more consulates than any other city in the Caucasus (even more than in Tbilisi, Baku, Kars and Novorossisk).¹²⁵

Conclusion

While the literature has highlighted the significance of Greek migration to the Russian Empire from the late eighteenth century up to the First World War, the case of Batum was under-researched. This article is a first attempt to present some aspects of Greek activity in the city, which was a village when the first Greeks first settled there. From 1878 to 1888, it grew into a very prosperous town and from 1888 to 1921 was an important, cosmopolitan city of international significance.

This article has focused on two aspects: the economic activities of Greeks (in oil or oil-related businesses) and their political activities. The consulted material shows that the most important Greek entrepreneur was Sideridis, the main competitor of Alphonse de Rothschild's business interests. In terms of political activities, the article has revealed three significant and largely

20 percent). From 1904 to 1914, the number steadily declined, to reach only 13 out of a total of 766 ships in 1913. Petmezas and Alexandra, *Black Sea Historical Statistics*. For the reasons why the Greeks had such a significant presence in Black Sea trade and shipping, see Harlaftis, "The Role of the Greeks," 90. Before 1870 Greeks accounted for 33 to 45 percent of the total tonnage clearing Black Sea ports.

¹²⁰ Ploumidis, "Στοιχεία για την ελληνική ναυτιλία," 63.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹²² Kalfoglou, *Ιστορία της εν Βατούμ*, 41–42.

¹²³ The total of 15 consulates is a quite impressive number in comparison to other places in the region.

¹²⁴ *Всеобщий Адресъ города Батума на 1902 годъ*, 57. He is likely to be the same businessman who dealt with oil packaging who we have mentioned several times.

¹²⁵ For the list, see Sioridze, *დასიძის სიძის* 125, 113–14.

forgotten personalities: Ioannis (Giankos) Benlis, Achilles Dimitriadis and Timoleon Triantafyllidis (about whom only a few lines exist in the *Encyclopaedia of Pontian Hellenism*).¹²⁶ Batum's Greeks supported the Georgians in all municipal elections. This coalition enabled the Georgians to promote their national interests under Russian rule. In their political activities, Batum's Greeks strongly supported their ethnic and religious identity. All Greek councillors were involved in the Greek church and in establishing of Greek schools. Consequently, this article opens new perspectives for a better understanding of the cultural, social and educational dimensions of the Greek presence in Batum.

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¹²⁶ *Εγκυκλοπαίδεια του Ποντιακού Ελληνισμού*, 10: 346.

