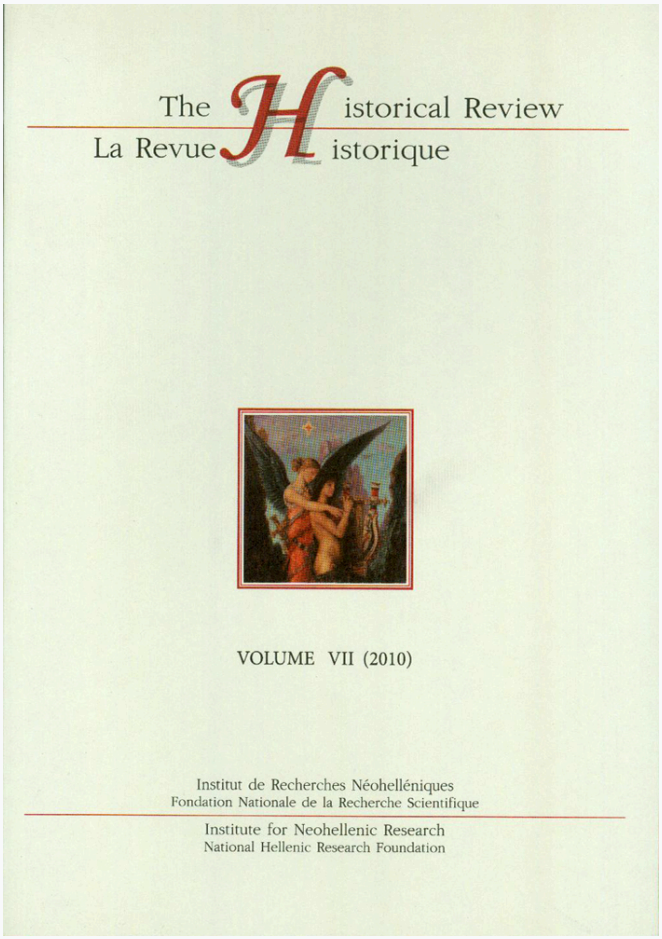
ePublishing

ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΤΕΚΜΗΡΙΩΣΗΣ
EKT NATIONAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 7 (2010)

Networking and Spatial Allocation around the Mediterranean, Seventeenth-Nineteenth Centuries



The Port of Messolonghi: Spatial Allocation and Maritime Expansion in the Eighteenth Century

Katerina Papakonstantinou

doi: 10.12681/hr.265

To cite this article:

Papakonstantinou, K. (2011). The Port of Messolonghi: Spatial Allocation and Maritime Expansion in the Eighteenth Century. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, *7*, 277–297. https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.265

https://epublishing.ekt.gr | **e-Publisher:** EKT | **Downloaded at:** 08/09/2026 03:14:30

THE PORT OF MESSOLONGHI: SPATIAL ALLOCATION AND MARITIME EXPANSION IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Katerina Papakonstantinou

Abstract: The main argument of this paper is that the spatial allocation of economic activity was reflected in shipping activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. Different but geographically near areas developed interwoven economic activities. In that sense this paper examines the economic relations among the merchant marine of Messolonghi, a small port in western Greece, the exporting port of Preveza in Epirus and the needs of Malta and Livorno for certain goods during the eighteenth century. Messolonghi, Preveza and Malta formed a triangle of commercial activities based on the different requirements and potential of each area: in products, people, capital and vessels.

The rise of the Greek merchant marine is dated to the beginning of the eighteenth century.[1] While 100 years later, during the Greek Revolution of the years 1821-1830, the fleets from the islands in the Aegean, namely Hydra, Spetses and Psara, became famous for their participation in the war, at the beginning of the eighteenth century it was the ships from the Ionian that visited Western Mediterranean ports. Ships from the Ionian Islands, which were then under Venetian rule, travelled to Venice and the ports of the Adriatic even earlier, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[2]

[1] George Leon , "The Greek Merchant Marine (1453-1850)", in Stelios Papadopoulos (ed.), *The Greek Merchant Marine, 1453-1850*, Athens: National Bank of Greece, 1972, pp. 32-43, reissued as Georgios Leontaritis, *Ελληνική εμπορική ναυτιλία (1453-1850)* [The Greek merchant marine (1453-1850)], Athens: EMNE-Mnimon, 1987, pp. 3-10; Gelina Harlaftis, "The Fleet 'dei Greci': Ottoman and Venetian Greeks in the Mediterranean Sea-trade, Eighteenth Century", in Michela d'Angelo, Gelina Harlaftis and Carmel Vassallo (eds), *Making Waves in the Mediterranean*, Messina and Taormina, forthcoming; *id*., "The 'Eastern Invasion': The Greeks in Mediterranean Trade and Shipping in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries", in Maria Fusaro, Colin Heywood and Mohamed-Salah Omri (eds), *Trade and Cultural Exchange in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Braudel's Maritime Legacy*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2010, pp. 223-252.

[2] Christa Panagiotopoulou, "Έλληνες ναυτικοί και πλοιοκτήτες από τα παλαιότερα οικονομικά βιβλία της ελληνικής αδελφότητας Βενετίας (1536-1576)" [Greek sailors and ship-owners from the older economic books of the Greek fraternity of Venice (1536-1576)], *Θησαυρίσματα* XI (1974), pp. 284-352; Chryssa Maltezou, "Τα πλοία της μονής Πάτμου (16ος-17ος αι.)" [The ships of the Monastery of Patmos, sixteenth-seventeenth

However, they started to participate actively in European trade during the eighteenth century, partly due to the start of the Industrial Revolution and the growing needs of European countries for raw materials and foodstuffs.[3]

Dutch, French and British ships had been sailing in the Mediterranean since the seventeenth century, until then satisfying the needs of European markets for raw materials and foodstuffs.[4] During the eighteenth century Northern European presence in the Mediterranean became intense and permanent.[5] Their trading activity in Mediterranean waters was often

centuries], in the proceedings of the international symposium, *I. I. Moni Ag. Ioannou tou Theologou: 900 Years of Historical Evidence (1088-1988)*, Patmos, 22-24 September 1988, Athens: EBMM, 1989, pp. 115-125; Gerassimos Pagratis, *Θαλάσσιο εμπόριο στη βενετοκρατούμενη Κέρκυρα (1496-1538)* [Sea trade in Corfu under Venetian rule (1496-1538)], Ph.D. thesis, Ionian University, Corfu 2001.

[3] Harlaftis, "The Fleet 'dei Greci' ".

[4] On the discussion regarding the presence of Northern European captains in the Mediterranean from the seventeenth century, see Colin Heywood, "The Realities of Braudel's 'Northern Invasion': The Mediterranean Voyage of the *Prudence* of London, 1628-30", in Fusaro, Heywood and Omri (eds), *Trade and Cultural Exchange*, pp. 23-44.

[5] There is a long list of publications on the European presence in Mediterranean waters during the eighteenth century. On the French presence, see Paul Masson, *Histoire du commerce français dans le Levant au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1911; Yolande Triantafyllidou-Baladié, *Το εμπόριο και η οικονομία της Κρήτης από τις αρχές της Οθωμανικής κυριαρχίας έως το τέλος του 18ου αιώνα (1669-1795)* [Trade and economy in Crete from the beginning of Ottoman rule until the end of the eighteenth century (1669-1795)], transl. M. Gyparakis and A. Karastathi, Heraklion: Vikelaia Vivliothiki, 1988, pp. 67 ff.; Edhem Eldem, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century*, Leiden: Brill, 1999; Xavier Labat Saint Vincent, *Malte et la commerce français au XVIIIe siècle*, Ph.D. thesis, Université Paris IV-Sorbonne, 2000. On the British presence in the Mediterranean, see G. Pagano de Divitiis, *English Merchants in Seventeenth-century Italy*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 117-123; M. D'Angelo, "In the 'English' Mediterranean (1511-1815)", *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* (2002), pp. 271-285; Miquel Àngel Casasnovas Camps, "The British Presence in Menorca during the XVIII Century", *International Maritime Economic History Association, Proceedings, 4th International Congress of Maritime History*, CD, Corfu, 21-27 June 2004. On the presence of European traders in the Eastern Mediterranean, see Vassilis Kremmydas, *Συγκυρία και εμπόριο στην προεπαναστατική Πελοπόννησο, 1793-1821* [Conjuncture and trade in the pre-revolutionary Peloponnese, 1793-1821], Athens: Themelio, 1980; Leontaritis, *Ελληνική εμπορική ναυτιλία*, p. 10; Elena Frangakis-Syrett, *The Commerce of Smyrna in the Eighteenth Century (1700-1820)*, Athens: Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1992; Nikos Svoronos, *Το εμπόριο της Θεσσαλονίκης τον 18ο αιώνα* [The commerce of Thessaloniki in the eighteenth century], Athens: Themelio, 1996, pp. 170 ff.; Elena Frangakis-Syrett, "Commercial Practices and Competition in the Levant: The British and the Dutch in Eighteenth-century Izmir", in Alastair Hamilton, Alexander H. de Groot and Maurits H. van den Boogert (eds), *Friends and Rivals in the East: Studies in Anglo-Dutch Relations in*

interrupted by wars, such as the Seven Years' War, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars; during these war periods Northern European ships withdrew from the Mediterranean, leaving space for local maritime powers to distinguish themselves in long-distance trade.

While ships from the Ionian Islands were trading in the Adriatic, ships owned by captains originating from Aegean ports and islands were active on north-south routes leading from the ports of the Black Sea to Istanbul and from the Ottoman capital to Thessaloniki, Volos, Cyprus, the coasts of the South-eastern Mediterranean and Egypt. They circulated mainly in Ottoman waters while transporting foodstuffs and especially wheat to the capital.[6]

The ports and islands of the Ionian Sea were under different political and economic regimes. Ships owned by captains originating from the Ionian Islands which were under Venetian rule were obliged to travel to Venice in order to be taxed and then to continue to their destinations.[7] Venetian maritime and commercial policy was often oppressive, although during the eighteenth century those measures became less restrictive because of the gradual decline of the Serenissima.

The coasts opposite the Ionian Islands, those of Epirus, Akarnania, Aetolia and the Peloponnese, were under Ottoman economic and political

---

the Levant from the Seventeenth to the Early Nineteenth Century, Leiden: Brill, 2000, pp. 135-158; *id.*, "Networks of Friendship, Networks of Kinship: Eighteenth-century Levant Merchants", *Euroasian Studies* I/2 (2002), pp. 183-205; Silvia Marzagalli, "Establishing Transatlantic Trade Networks in Time of War: Bordeaux and the United States, 1793-1815", *Business History Review* LXXIX (Winter 2005), pp. 811-844.

[6] Leontaritis, *Ελληνική εμπορική ναυτιλία*, p. 27; Georgios Salakides, "The Provisioning of Istanbul with Wheat in Turbulent Times: Yenishehir in Thessaly at the End of the 18th Century", *Balkan Studies* XLIII /2 (2002), pp. 129-149.

[7] Andreas Andreadis, *Περί της οικονομικής διοικήσεως της Επτανήσου επί Βενετοκρατίας* [On the economic administration of the Ionian Islands under Venetian authority], Athens 1914, Vol. I, p. 78; Olga Katsiardi-Hering, *Λησμονημένοι ορίζοντες ελλήνων εμπόρων. Το πανηγύρι της Senigallia (18ος-αρχές του 19ου αι.)* [Forgotten horizons of Greek merchants: the fair of Senigallia (eighteenth-early nineteenth century)], Athens: Karavias, 1989, pp. 85 ff.; Massimo Costantini, "Η εμπορική πολιτική της Βενετίας έναντι των κτήσεών της στην Ανατολική Μεσόγειο" [Venetian trade policy towards its dominions in the Eastern Mediterranean], in A. Nikiphoro (ed.), *Κέρκυρα, μια μεσογειακή σύνθεση. Νησιωτισμός, διασυνδέσεις, ανθρώπινα περιβάλλοντα, 16ος-19ος αιώνας* [Corfu, a Mediterranean synthesis: island identity, junctions, human environments, sixteenth-nineteenth century], proceedings of the international conference, Corfu, 22-25 May 1996, Corfu 1998, pp. 74-75; Frederic C. Lane, *Βενετία, η θαλασσοκράτειρα* [Venice, the maritime republic], transl. K. Kouremenos, ed. G. D. Pagratis, Athens: Alexandria, 2007, pp. 105, 584-585.

rule. Sailors and captains from the Ionian Sea travelled to both Venetian- and Ottoman-controlled areas for trade.[8] Although the Venetian and the Ottoman territories seemed to belong to two different worlds, people originating from both areas were often relatives and partners.[9] During the first half of the eighteenth-century captains from Cephalonia and Zakynthos [Zante] in the Venetian area and Aetoliko and Messolonghi on the Ottoman coast owned small boats capable of coastal navigation and local trade. By the middle of the century, however, captains originating from those places began to sail to various ports of the Adriatic Sea and the Western Mediterranean. Such ports as Trieste, Senigallia and Ancona in the Adriatic but also Valetta in Malta, Naples, Genoa and Livorno [Leghorn] were often visited by captains from Cephalonia and Messolonghi. When Trieste,[10] Senigallia and Ancona became free ports they attracted more and more ships from the Ionian Sea,[11] which then travelled even further, to Livorno, since it offered good economic opportunities as another free port and an English entrepôt.[12]

---

[8] K. A. Stassinopoulos, *Το Μεσολόγγι, Τ. α΄: Η λιμνοθάλασσα* [Messolonghi, Vol. I: The lagoon], Athens 1925, p. 79.

[9] Vassilis Kremmydas, *Το εμπόριο της Πελοποννήσου στον 18ο αιώνα, 1715-1792 (με βάση τα γαλλικά αρχεία)* [Trade in the Peloponnese in the eighteenth century, 1715-1792 (based on French archives)] Athens 1972, p. 302; Katsiardi-Hering, *Λησμονημένοι ορίζοντες*, p. 85.

[10] Olga Katsiardi-Hering, "Greeks in the Habsburg Lands (17th-19th Centuries): Expectations, Realities, Nostalgias", in Herbert Kröll (ed.), *Austrian-Greek Encounters over the Centuries: History-Diplomacy-Politics-Arts-Economics*, Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2007, p. 148, mentions that: "Merchants from Messolonghi 'discovered' Trieste's low prices during their visits to the open commercial fair held annually in Senigallia, to the north of the Papal port of Ancona. In 1742 they purchased cheap ironware and timber at the fair; on their next journey, they loaded their ships with currants, a new import, which they daringly exchanged for a quantity of timber in what was, after 1719, the free harbour of Trieste. Other Greeks were not slow to follow their lead, sailing into Trieste's still natural harbour overlooked by the medieval quarter of San Giusto from Messolonghi, but mostly from the Ionian Islands, Epirus, Roumeli, the Peloponnese, Crete and the Aegean islands."

[11] Trieste became a free port in 1719, Senigallia and Ancona in 1732.

[12] Livorno became a free port in 1676. See Despina Vlami, *Το φιορίνι, το σιτάρι και η οδός του Κήπου. Έλληνες έμποροι στο Λιβόρνο, 1750-1868* [The florin, the wheat and Garden Street: Greek merchants in Livorno, 1750-1868], Athens: Themelio, 2000, pp. 53-65; Pagano de Divitiis, *English Merchants*, pp. 117-113.

Map 1. Islands and ports in the Ionian Sea.

During the eighteenth century Greek maritime trade flourished. Seafarers from certain ports and islands were specialized in trading cargo from specific places. Products and places were interwoven. People from one place undertook the transportation of goods produced in neighbouring areas. Captains and sailors from Messolonghi traded wood from the area of Preveza, and captains from Hydra, Spetses and Psara traded wheat from Thessaly. The lack of a developed interior road network and the difficulties of transport on the mainland shaped traffic in the Southern Balkans. Since the Greek Peninsula is surrounded by sea, the majority of transport was organized by sea, because small ships could easily load cargo from every small port or bay. Mountains shaped the physical environment in which people organized their economic and social life.[13] Traversing the mountains was slow and expensive, and thus

[13] Fernand Braudel, *Η Μεσόγειος και ο μεσογειακός κόσμος την εποχή του Φιλίππου Β΄ της Ισπανίας* [The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world during the age of Philip II of Spain], transl. K. Mitsotaki, Athens: MIET, 1991, Vol. I, pp. 47-49; Max Derruau, *Ανθρωπογεωγραφία* [Anthropogeography], transl. G. Prevelakis, Athens: MIET, 2007, pp. 216-217, 223-224, 241.

products were instead transported to the nearest bay or port.[14] Messolonghi, Nafpaktos, Preveza and Sagiada were the ports in Aetolia and Epirus that linked mountainous areas with the sea.

The main argument of this paper is that the spatial allocation of economic activity is reflected in shipping activities.[15] From the bibliography it is known that certain areas created a network of interwoven economic activities: areas of production and areas of transport – terrestrial and/or maritime transport.[16] During the eighteenth century certain areas, ports and islands were specialized in maritime trade. Such maritime centres include, amongst others, Messolonghi, Hydra, Spetses and Psara. Messolonghi flourished between 1713 and 1815, while Hydra, Spetses and Psara showed growth in maritime activity during the years 1790 to 1815.[17] I will try to investigate that evolution using statistical data from the Amphitrete database, which was established for the purposes of the "Greek Maritime History, 1700-1821" research project conducted at the Ionian University during the period 2004-2007 under the supervision of Gelina Harlaftis.[18]

---

[14] Lois Lambrianidis, *Οικονομική γεωγραφία. Στοιχεία θεωρίας και εμπειρικά παραδείγματα* [Economic geography: elements of theory and empirical examples], Athens: Patakis, 2007, p. 61.

[15] Gordon L. Clark, Maryann P. Feldman and Meric S. Gertler, "Economic Geography: Transition and Growth", in Gordon L. Clark, Maryann P. Feldman and Meric S. Gertler (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography*, Oxford University Press 2003, p. 11.

[16] Clark, Feldman and Gertler, "Economic Geography", p. 8; Paul Krugman, "Where in the World is the 'New Economic Geography'?", in Clark, Feldman and Gertler (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography*, p. 53.

[17] Katerina Papakonstantinou, "Malta and the Rise of the Greek-owned Fleet in the Eighteenth Century", *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* XVI/1-2 (2006), p. 204.

[18] The research project was financed by the Pythagoras Programme of the Greek Ministry of Education and the European Union. See Gelina Harlaftis and Sophia Laiou, "Ottoman State Policy in Mediterranean Trade and Shipping, *c.* 1780 - *c.* 1820: The Rise of the Greek-owned Ottoman Merchant Fleet", in Mark Mazower (ed.), *Networks of Power in Modern Greece: Essays in Honor of John Campbell*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, pp. 1-44. The scope of the project was to identify the captains and the ships that could have been part of the Greek fleet in the eighteenth century. The project was led by Gelina Harlaftis and myself (as the post-doctorate researcher). A team of 20 people worked on different archives, namely in Venice, Trieste, Naples, Messina, Valetta, Genoa, Livorno, Marseille, London, Amsterdam, Athens, Cephalonia, Corfu, Thessaloniki, Heraklion and Istanbul. Data were retrieved mainly from the quarantine registers of the port-cities, the Scule Piccole e Suffragi of Venice, the Venetian consuls based in Trieste, Cephalonia and Ancona, the juridical archives in Thessaloniki, the Ottoman archives in Heraklion, and the archives of the Prime Minister's Office in Istanbul related to navigation licences and

I will use the concept of "maritime area" in order to show the geographical entity of certain areas.[19] The Ionian Sea forms a maritime area with unified and interrelated economic activities. To that maritime area belong the Ionian Islands (until 1799 under Venetian rule), the coasts of Epirus, Akarnania, Aetolia and Phokida, and the northern coast of the Peloponnese, that is the Gulfs of Patras and of Corinth, and the western coast of the Peloponnese; that area was under Ottoman rule with the exception of the city of Preveza, which was under Venetian rule. The shores and islands of the Ionian Sea belonged to two different authorities for long periods and had different economic and political characteristics, but the facts that they were neighbours and had access to the same sea present them as a unified area, especially if we take into consideration that people needed to communicate, to trade and to take advantage of the different possibilities the two regimes offered. Although the eastern coast of south Italy and Sicily also belong to the Ionian Sea, I do not include them in the same maritime area, because they do not appear to have had related economic activities and strong connections to the above-mentioned area.

In the present paper economic activities will be examined from a maritime perspective, and the interconnection of areas will be made through maritime transport as an economic activity that determines people. If we examine closely the routes of ships with captains originating from specific places, we can extract some conclusions regarding the economic functions of certain areas. The case study under examination will be the maritime activity of the port of Messolonghi.

---

licences to enter the Black Sea issued by the Ottoman admiralty. During three years of research more than 15,000 ships were registered for the period 1700-1821. Ships were selected according to the name of the captain and the mention of his origin as "Greco" in the sources and/or the name of the ship. Mentions of ships have been recorded annually, so there is repeated information for a single ship, trading in the Western Mediterranean ports, paying the fee at the Scuole Piccole e Suffragi or being issued a navigation licence in Istanbul.

[19] Fernand Braudel described the Mediterranean as a cluster of smaller seas in which life is the product of the interconnection of land and sea; Braudel, *Η Μεσόγειος*, pp. 9-10. Gelina Harlaftis distinguishes six geographical maritime areas; Gelina Harlaftis, Manos Haritatos and Helen Beneki, *Πλωτώ. Έλληνες καραβοκύρηδες και εφοπλιστές από τα τέλη του 18ου αιώνα έως τον Β΄ Παγκόσμιο Πόλεμο* [Ploto: Greek ship masters and ship-owners from the end of the eighteenth century until World War II], Athens: ELIA, 2002, p. 16.

Ships with Captains Originating from Messolonghi

The port of Messolonghi is located on the northern shore of the Gulf of Corinth, opposite Patras. It is located to the west of Nafpaktos [Lepanto], which was the main port of the area during the seventeenth century. For uncertain reasons Nafpaktos declined as a maritime centre, and the maritime activities of the area shifted to Messolonghi and nearby Aetoliko, also located in the lagoon of Messolonghi. Messolonghi has a natural port inside the lagoon and its hinterland is mainly plains producing a variety of agricultural products, while the nearby mountains had prosperous stock-raising. The port of Messolonghi, like the Bays of Aspra Spitia or Itea eastwards in the Gulf of Corinth, is the terminus leading from the highlands to the seaside.[20]

Not much is known about the increase in the long-distance maritime activity of Messolonghi and Aetoliko. It seems that the emergence of their fleet followed that of Cephalonia and Zakynthos. For that reason it is said that the development of Messolonghi and Aetoliko is connected with the maritime activity of sailors and captains from Cephalonia and Zakynthos, two of the Ionian Islands under Venetian rule, because they invested in the Ottoman areas in order to avoid the Venetian restrictions in shipping and trade.[21]

Regarding the fleet of Messolonghi, until recently only a list with ships and captains dated to 1764 was known:[22] the Venetian Consul John Lappos, based in Messolonghi, compiled a list of 48 ships of 6490 tonnage in total from Messolonghi and 29 ships of 4633 tonnage from Aetoliko. The importance of the port of Messolonghi is evident by the fact that the Venetian authorities established there in 1729 a sub-consulate, which belonged to the consulate of Nafpaktos until 1739 and then to that of Patras.[23] A variety of European

[20] Kremmydas, *Το εμπόριο της Πελοποννήσου*, p. 27.

[21] Stassinopoulos, *Το Μεσολόγγι*, p. 81; Dimitrios K. Dimitrakakis, *Τα οικονομικά του Μεσολογγίου (1740-1826)* [The finances of Messolonghi (1740-1826)], Athens 1939, p. 26; Serafim Maximos, *Το ελληνικό εμπορικό ναυτικό κατά τον 18ο αιώνα* [The Greek merchant marine during the eighteenth century], ed. and intro. Lukas Axelos, Athens: Stohastis, 1976, pp. 48 ff.; Katsiardi-Hering, *Λησμονημένοι ορίζοντες*, p. 91.

[22] Constantinos Sathas, *Ειδήσεις τινές περί εμπορίου και φορολογίας εν Ελλάδα επί Τουρκοκρατίας* [News on commerce and taxation in Greece under Ottoman rule], Athens: Notis Karavias Reprint, 1977, from the *Οἰκονομικὴ ἐπιθεώρηση* [Economic review] of 1878-1879, p. 43.

[23] Stassinopoulos, *Το Μεσολόγγι*, p. 86; Dimitrakakis, *Τα οικονομικά του Μεσολογγίου*, pp. 23 ff.; Maximos, *Το ελληνικό εμπορικό ναυτικό*, p. 26; Georgios A. Siorokas, *Το γαλλικό προξενείο της Άρτας (1702-1789)* [The French consulate in Arta (1702-1789)], Ioannina: Society for Epirot Studies, Foundation for Ionian and Adriatic Spaces, 1981, p. 56.

ships arrived in the Gulfs of Patras and Corinth in order to load wheat from the northern shore or from the Peloponnese.[24] Trade in wheat was illegal in many cases, since the Ottoman authorities often prohibited exportation of the product – although Ottoman local officials permitted exportation after being bribed. The loading of wheat onto the European ships was made by ships from Messolonghi that were active in smuggling. It is estimated that about 15% of the French ships carrying wheat from the Peloponnese or Aetolia to Marseille had taken part in smuggling.[25] European and Greek ships collaborated in order to export products, legal or illegal, from the western part of the Greek Peninsula.

Although it is not known when and under what circumstances the fleet of the port of Messolonghi had been created, there is evidence that it was destroyed on 10 April 1770 during the Russo-Turkish War, also known as the Orlov Revolt. It is mentioned that the fleet had been burnt out by pirates from Dulcino, who arrived in Messolonghi and totally destroyed all ships that were anchored in the port in April 1770.[26] In his letter to the Duc de Choiseul dated 22 April 1770, Pouqueville mentioned that the French Consul Rose in Patras informed him that he saw the city of Messolonghi burning for three days, and that, other than the city, 80 ships that were anchored in the port were burnt by the pirates.[27]

From the Amphitrete database, it seems that in the period after 1774 ships from Messolonghi continued visiting the ports of Valetta, Livorno and Trieste, carrying cargoes of wheat, cheese and wood (see fig. 1). The merchant marine of Messolonghi continued its presence in the waters of the Western Mediterranean until the 1810s. The data show that the number of ships from Messolonghi declined for a period of about 10 years;[28] the Venetian Consul

---

[24] Vlami, *Το φιορίνι*, pp. 94-96.

[25] Kremmydas, *Το εμπόριο της Πελοποννήσου*, p. 109.

[26] Michael B. Sakellariou, *Η Πελοπόννησος κατά την δευτέραν τουρκοκρατίαν (1715-1821)* [The Peloponnese under the second Ottoman rule (1715-1821)], Athens 1939, p. 179; Constantinos Sathas, *Τουρκοκρατούμενη Ελλάς, 1453-1821* [Greece under Ottoman rule, 1453-1821], Athens 1962, pp. 491-501; *id.*, *Ειδήσεις τινές περί εμπορίου*; Andreas K. Giannakopoulos, "Ανέκδοτα ναυτικά έγγραφα εκ Πατρών (1810) εκ των αρχείων του Υπουργείου Εξωτερικών Γαλλίας" [Unpublished maritime documents from Patras (1810) from the Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs], *Πελοποννησιακά* I (1975), p. 67; George A. Siorokas, *Η εξωτερική πολιτική του Αλή Πασά των Ιωαννίνων. Από το Τιλσίτ στη Βιέννη (1807-1815)* [The foreign policy of Ali Pasha of Ioannina: from Tilsit to Vienna (1807-1815)], Ioannina 1999, pp. 383, 389.

[27] F. C. H. L. Pouqueville, *Voyage de la Grèce*, Paris: Firmin Didot, 1826-1827, Vol. III, pp. 532-533; Stassinopoulos, *Το Μεσολόγγι*, p. 108.

[28] Those 10 years of decline include the Russo-Turkish War, known as the Orlov

John Lappos mentioned 48 bigger and smaller ships and boats in 1764,[29] while in the Ampitrete database we find larger ships capable of longer voyages to more distant areas. In 1762 the number of ships mentioned in the sources is 39; during the period 1754-1769 the number of ships from Messolonghi that appear in various archival sources varies between 16 and 39. After a period of about 10 years during which the fleet seems to have decreased, ships from Messolonghi appear more often in archival sources, in numbers that vary from 15 to 32 during the period from 1781-1798; for about 9 years, from 1784 to 1793, the number of ships from Messolonghi mentioned in the sources remains stable at about 29-32, and we can assume that this would be the number of bigger ships from Messolonghi that were travelling abroad each year at the end of the eighteenth century.

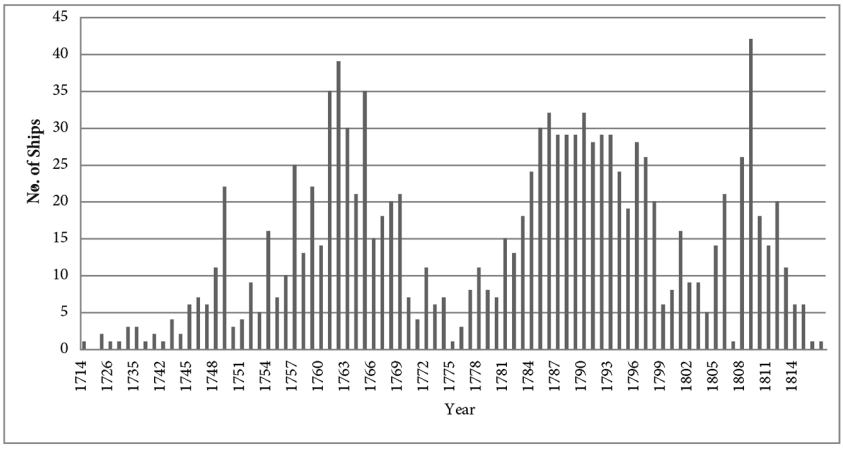


Fig. 1. Number of ships from Messolonghi, 1700-1821.

Source for figs 1-11: Amphitrete database, "Greek Maritime History, 1700-1821" research project, Ionian University, 2004-2007.

Revolt, during which the city of Messolonghi seems to have been destroyed. On the Greek entanglement in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774, see, amongst others, Pantelis M. Kontogiannis, *Οι Έλληνες κατά τον πρώτον επί Αικατερίνης Β΄ Ρωσσοτουρκικόν πόλεμον (1768-1774)* [The Greeks in the first Russo-Turkish War during the reign of Catherine II (1768-1774)], Athens 1903, reprinted by D. N. Karavias, Athens 1989, p. 89; Dionysis Tzakis, "Ρωσική παρουσία στο Αιγαίο. Από τα Ορλωφικά στον Λάμπρο Κατσώνη" [Russian presence in the Aegean: from the Orlov Revolt to Lambros Katsonis], in *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού, 1700-2000* [History of Neohellenism, 1700-2000] ed. V. Panayotopoulos, Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2003, p. 115; Nikos Rotzokos, *Εθναφύπνιση και εθνογένεση. Ορλωφικά και ελληνική ιστοριογραφία* [National awakening and nation building: the Orlov Revolt and Greek historiography], Athens: Vivliorama, 2007.

[29] Sathas, *Ειδήσεις τινές περί εμπορίου*, p. 43.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the fleet from Messolonghi seems to have faced a decline; the number of ships after 1809 falls, a fact that could be connected with the politics of the local pasha, Ali of Ioanina.[30] Dodwell mentioned in 1806 that:

> the oppressive government of the Pasha has however considerably diminished their commerce, and since I was at Mesaloggion, I understand that the number of their vessels are reduced to half…[Now] they have twelve large merchant vessels of three masts, which traffic with the west and thirty smaller ones with two masts, which carry on their commerce with the Ionian islands.[31]

On the other hand, Pouqueville mentioned that in 1813 the captains from Messolonghi owned 20 merchant ships and 40 *brazzeres* (small boats).[32] Ali Pasha had good economic relations with British traders who built a factory in Patras in 1808.[33] After 1810 the commercial centre of the area moved towards the Ionian Islands, which were by then under British rule. The growing importance of the port of Patras and of the British Ionian Islands decreased the commercial and maritime importance of Messolonghi, which could not adapt to nor take advantage of the changing political and economic environment.[34]

---

[30] In the bibliography it is mentioned that in the early nineteenth century Ali Pasha took measures against the port of Messolonghi and its fleet in order to promote English commerce through the port of Patras; see Stassinopoulos, *Το Μεσολόγγι*, p. 114, and Siorokas, *Η εξωτερική πολιτική του Αλή Πασά*, pp. 383-384. In the recently published archive of Ali Pasha no such mention is registered; see Vassilis Panayotopoulos, Dimitris Dimitropoulos, Panagiotis Mihailaris (eds), *Αρχείο Αλή Πασά Γενναδείου Βιβλιοθήκης. Έκδοση-Σχολιασμός-Ευρετήρια* [The Ali Pasha archive at the Gennadius Library: edition-comments-indices], 4 vols, Athens: Institute for Neohellenic Research / NHRF, 2007-2009.

[31] Edward Dodwell, *A Classical and Topographical Tour through Greece during the Years 1801, 1805 and 1806*, London 1819, pp. 92-93.

[32] "Les Missolonghites etaient gouvernés d'après leurs coutûmes, sous la souveraineté du sultan, ils avaient des capitalists, ainsi qu'une marine de vingt vaisseaux marchands et de quarante brazzeres, lorsqu'en 1804, la ville fut envahie par le satrape de Janina, et detachée, ainsi que l'Etolie, du sangiac de Negrepont."; Pouqueville, *Voyage de la Grèce*, p. 532.

[33] Siorokas, *Η εξωτερική πολιτική του Αλή Πασά*, pp. 383-384.

[34] On the changing economic environment of the area after 1800 and the incorporation of the Ionian Islands and their shipping into the British Empire, see Panayiotis Kapetanakis, *Η ποντοπόρος εμπορική ναυτιλία των Επτανήσων την εποχή της Βρετανικής Κατοχής και Προστασίας και η κεφαλληνιακή υπεροχή (1809/15-1864). Στόλος και λιμάνια, εμπορεύματα και διαδρομές, ναυτότοποι και ναυτικοί, επιχειρηματικότητα και δίκτυα, κοινωνία και πλοιοκτητικές ελίτ* [The deep-sea going merchant fleet of the Ionian Islands during the time of the British conquest and protection and the Cephalonian prominence

Seafarers from Messolonghi

The only evidence we have regarding the source of the ships is the origin of the captains, who were listed in the quarantine registers of various ports of the Western Mediterranean. An example from Valetta in Malta, "A di 21 Giugno 1741 Capito la martegana greca nominata Spiridione padronata la padrona Demetrio Agiomavriti da Misselongi", informs us that for the local authorities Messolonghi was a known port or that they registered what the captain had declared. For people living in preindustrial societies, local origin determined their identity. For a maritime society, the name of the port or island of origin determined their maritime identity and capability in sailing. In this framework, in the quarantine registers of Valetta the name of Messolonghi is very often mentioned.

Captains originating from Messolonghi appear in the quarantine registers of Valetta, Genoa, Livorno and Marseille, and the archival sources of Trieste, Venice and Ancona. The sources selected for the "Greek Maritime History, 1700-1821" research project provide a certain image of the travels of captains from Messolonghi. Since Western European and Ionian Island sources were mainly used, the picture that emerged presents a fleet of ships from Messolonghi travelling mostly westwards for the period under examination, that is 1700-1821. Although Messolonghi was under Ottoman rule, captains from this particular port do not seem to have travelled in Ottoman waters. However, if we examine the data more closely, we see that during the period 1805-1813, when data from Ottoman archives are available, the majority of ships from Messolonghi was issued navigation licences from the Ottoman authorities; out of 109 entries in the database, 78 (71.5%) licences to enter the Black Sea or to sail in the Aegean Sea were issued. That means that the nature and the density of the archival sources in certain periods shape a specific picture. Ships from Messolonghi took part in maritime trade on both sides of the Greek Peninsula, entering the Black Sea, from where the majority of wheat was exported, and shipping it towards the west.

Regarding the collective behaviour of the captains originating from Messolonghi, it seems that they had created networks of information and collaboration, since most of the ships frequented the same ports, carrying the same products addressed to the same receivers. The small society of

(1809/15-1864): fleet and ports, cargoes and sea-routes, maritime centres and sailors, entrepreneurship and networks, society and ship-owning élites], Ph.D. thesis, Ionian University, Corfu 2010, pp. 14-61.

captain-traders of the port-city of Messolonghi was based on information and connections with distant markets in order to continue trading.

During the period under examination captains from Messolonghi often and regularly visited ports in the Mediterranean or were issued navigation licences in Istanbul. The high number of ships from Messolonghi in the sources is depicted in the statistical data (see fig. 2). From 1742 ships from Messolonghi showed increasing activity in maritime trade with some peak years, such as 1765, 1786 and 1809. These three dates are peak years around certain periods, such as 1749-1773, 1776-1797 and 1799-1815. Those periods are characterized by wars, such as the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774), the French Revolution (1792-1802) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). We could assume that war periods were flourishing years for ships from Messolonghi. Indeed, the best year for the whole period under examination is 1786, while the war between Venice and Tunis was in progress and the port of Valetta became the base of operations for the Venetian navy.

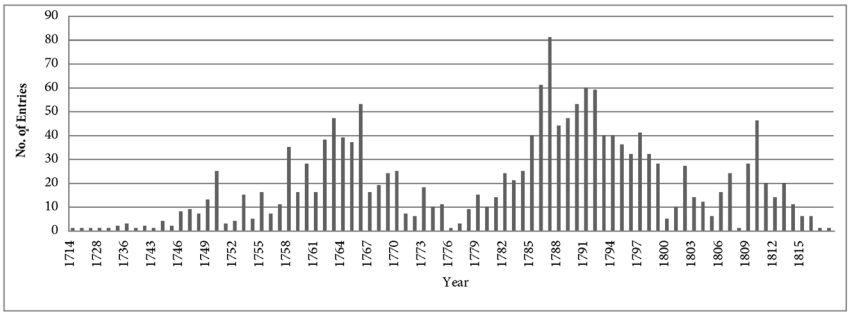


Fig. 2. The mobility of ships from Messolonghi, 1700-1821: arrivals and departures.

In order to find out what kind of trade captains from the port of Messolonghi exercised, we have to search out which ports they travelled to. In 1765 the majority of ships from Messolonghi, that is 41 out of 45 ships (91%), visited Valetta, the port of Malta in the Central Mediterranean; in 1786 (the peak year in arrivals for ships from Messolonghi) 52 ships out of 81 (64%) visited Livorno, while only 25 (30%) arrived in Valetta. In 1809 25 ships from Messolonghi out of 46 arrived in Valetta, while 21 arrived in Istanbul coming from the Black Sea. During the peak years the most visited ports were Valetta[35] and Livorno.[36] During the eighteenth century Valetta had become

[35] Labat Saint Vincent, *Malte*, pp. 209-210; Papakonstantinou, "Malta", pp. 200-202.

[36] On Greeks active in Livorno, see Vlami, *To φιορίνι,* pp. 53-65. On the British

an important entrepôt, while Livorno was the main port for British trade in the Mediterranean; efforts of the local authorities permitted ships from the Eastern Mediterranean to visit and trade in those important ports (see fig. 3).

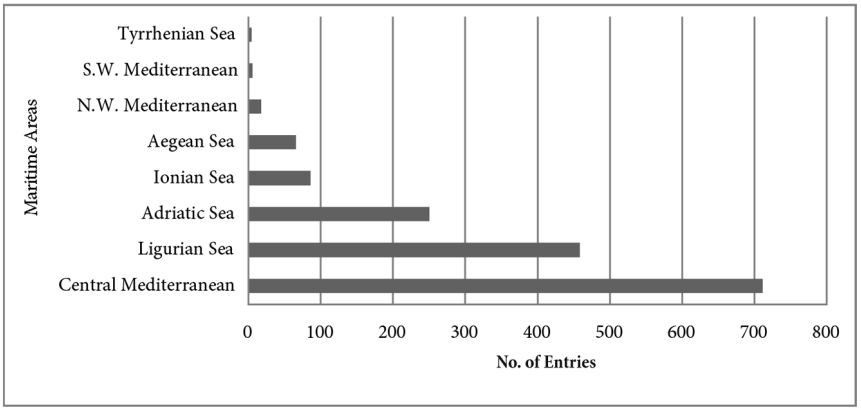


Fig. 3. Most visited maritime areas, 1700-1821.

From figure 4, it is clear that ships from Messolonghi visited often and regularly the two ports of Valetta and Livorno during the whole period under examination. In 1759 they visited Tripoli and after 1750 they travelled to Livorno quite often. The port of Livorno was known to many Greek captains from the beginning of the eighteenth century, and it seems that this was the most distant port they reached until the 1770s, when they started visiting Toulon in 1783, and Marseille, Barcelona and ports in the Atlantic Ocean in the 1790s. At the end of the eighteenth century, when the American and French Revolutions and the Napoleonic Wars broke out, captains from Messolonghi visited more distant ports in the Western Mediterranean, probably because of the high profits made by supplying blocked ports and areas in need of food. On the other hand, sailing longer distances towards the west became a reality for Greek ships quite late in the eighteenth century, when the economic realities changed and the European markets needed their services.

presence, see Pagano de Divitiis, *English Merchants,* pp. 117-123.

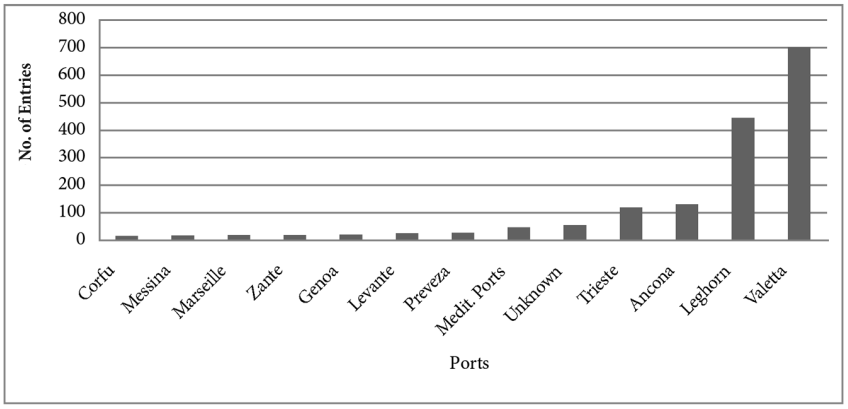


Fig. 4. Captains originating from Messolonghi and their destination ports, 1700-1821.

If we analyse the visits to the port of Valetta by ships from Messolonghi, we see a picture of sharp fluctuations during the eighteenth century (see fig. 5). Archival data from Valetta are quite complete and the image that appears must be close to reality, though, of course, we must take into consideration that next to legal trade the same seafarers were active in contraband and smuggling.[37] Malta had close relations with the Ionian Islands and the west coast of the Greek Peninsula, since from that area the authorities of Malta imported wheat, fruits, cheese and timber for local needs; the islands of the Maltese archipelago, Malta, Gozo and Comino, are small and without enough resources for the subsistence of the population.[38] On the other hand, the flag of Malta was often flown by Greek ships, especially those from Messolonghi, in order to provide them easy access to Western European ports.[39] It is noteworthy that until 1723 captains from Messolonghi formed the only Greek presence on the island. After that date ships from Messolonghi formed more and more of a minority regarding the number of Greek ships arriving at the island, since the majority belonged to captains with origins from the Aegean Sea, especially at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[40]

[37] Kremmydas, *Το εμπόριο της Πελοποννήσου*, p. 302.

[38] Papakonstantinou, "Malta", pp. 205-210.

[39] Maximos, *Το ελληνικό εμπορικό ναυτικό*, pp. 47-48; Kremmydas, *Το εμπόριο της Πελοποννήσου*, pp. 244-245.

[40] Papakonstantinou, "Malta", pp. 208 ff.

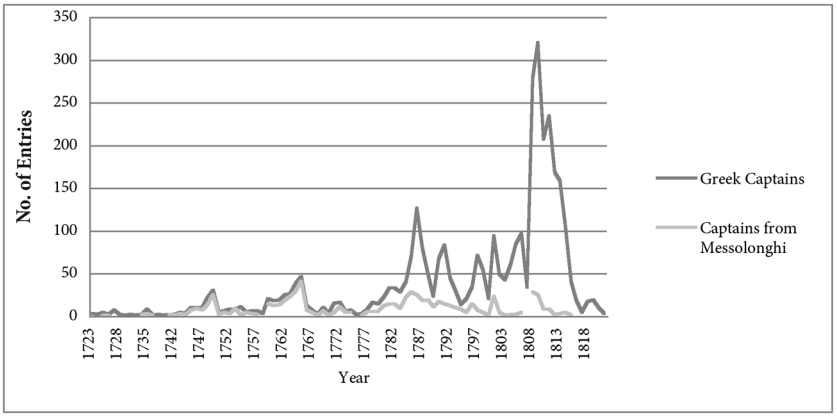


Fig. 5. Valetta as a destination for ships from Messolonghi and Greek ships in total, 1723-1821.

Livorno was visited by captains from Messolonghi in the second half of the eighteenth century; 1786 was the peak year with 51 arrivals[41] (see fig. 6). From 1750 onwards ships from Messolonghi started gradually visiting the port, and after 1786 their number also started gradually to decline. After 1786 arrivals of ships from Messolonghi did not follow the general trend of Greek ships that continued visiting Livorno;[42] figure 6 provides sharp differentiations in arrivals due to the war period, which had a strong impact on Livorno and its trade after 1793.[43]

[41] Vlami (*To φιορίνι*, p. 109), based on data from J.-P. Filippini, "Il movimento del porto di Livorno durante il primo period lorenese (1737-1801)", in *Atti del Convegno di Studi. La Toscana dei Lorena. Riforme, territorio, società*, Grossetto, 27-29 November 1987, Florence 1989, pp. 49-80, provides the same picture; while Vassilis Kremmydas, *Ελληνική εμπορική ναυτιλία, 1776-1835* [The Greek merchant marine, 1776-1835], Athens: Emporiki Bank of Greece, 1985, Vol. II, pp. 108, 110, gives the same number of 51 arrivals of Greek ships in Livorno. According to Kremmydas, in 1816 more than 140 Greek ships arrived in Livorno, in 1817 more than 119, in 1818 122 ships, in 1819 112 ships and in 1820 91 ships.

[42] In the Amphitrete database, for many ships arriving in Livorno we do not have the captain's origin, that is about 36.1% of the total (795 entries out of 2197). It is possible that many of the ships that continued to visit Livorno were owned by captains from Messolonghi.

[43] Vlami, *To φιορίνι*, pp. 108-131. On the Greek presence in the port of Livorno, see also Harlaftis, "The 'Eastern Invasion'", and *id.*, "The Fleet 'dei Greci'".

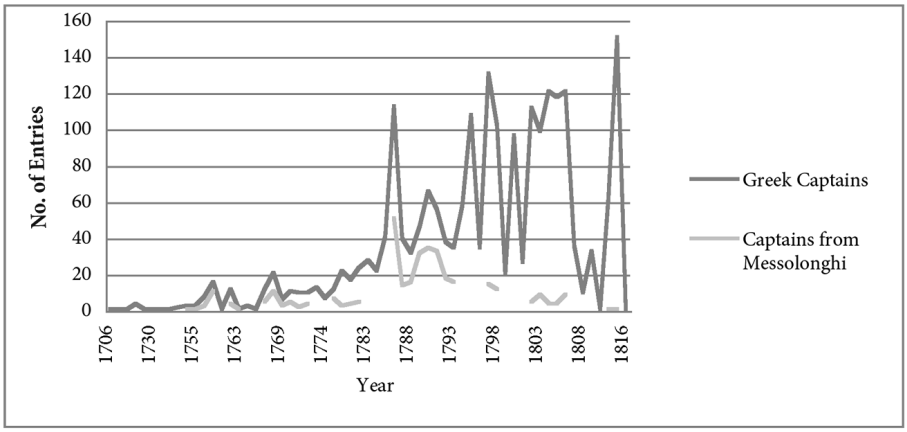


Fig. 6. Livorno as a destination for ships from Messolonghi and Greek ships in total, 1706-1816.

In order to understand the specific routes that ships from Messolonghi followed, we have to look at the cargo they carried. They transported products that had a high demand in different European ports. Livorno had become after 1766 the main entrepôt for wheat.[44] Malta imported a variety of products, especially wheat and timber. The archival sources usually mention the cargo in detail, but in rare cases indicate the weight and the volume of the cargo. We can only use the number of references to the cargo without being sure of its quantity. We have also to note that wheat usually did not form the only cargo of the ships. The majority of ships carried a variety of products in smaller or bigger quantities.

Captains originating from Messolonghi carried to Malta foodstuffs such as cheese, wheat and corn, raw materials such as tobacco, wood and wool, and industrial and handicraft goods such as leather and overcoats (see fig. 7). The foodstuffs were the products of local agriculture and stock-raising, which found an export market on an island that did not produce enough food to support its population.[45] The main product that was transported to Malta during the whole period was wheat; there were certain years that flourished, especially 1749, 1759, 1762, 1767, 1786, 1791 and 1797, periods that were characterized by problems in the destination market, and periods of more general turbulence in the economic environment of the Mediterranean.

[44] Vlami, *Το φιορίνι*, p. 96.

[45] Asterios Arhontidis, *Η Βενετοκρατία στη Δυτική Ελλάδα (1684-1699). Συμβολή στην ιστορία της περιοχής του Αμβρακικού Κόλπου και της Αιτωλοακαρνανίας* [Venetian rule in western Greece (1684-1699): contribution to the history of the Ambracian Gulf area and Aitoloakarnania], Aristolte University of Thessaloniki 1983, pp. 90 ff.

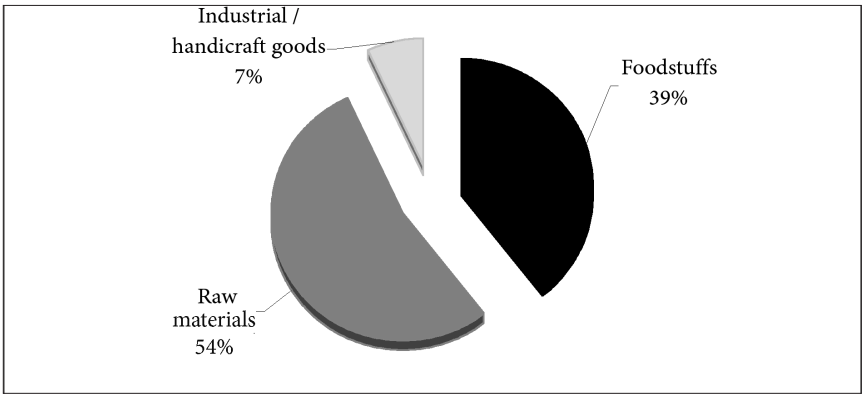


Fig 7. Cargo transported to Valetta by captains from Messolonghi, 1700-1821.

Olive oil does not seem to have had a permanent market in Malta. At the same time, ships from Messolonghi carried olive oil to Trieste, but the picture of only occasional visits remains the same. Instead of olive oil, wheat and other foodstuffs such as cheese, legumes, wine and spirits, olives, etc., were welcomed in the market of Valetta, and ships originating from Messolonghi frequently carried such cargoes. There seems to have been a specialization in certain markets and cargoes. In Valetta certain people were the main receivers of the products, and in many cases the buyers of the wheat were the two cities of the island of Malta, Valetta and Mdina. Regarding the raw materials, mainly wood was transported to Malta, but also wool on a regular basis. Construction wood was an important product for the authorities of Malta and firewood for the entire population of the island. As for the industrial and handicraft goods, they were mainly processed leathers produced in the tanneries of Epirus, Aetolia and the Peloponnese.

During the same period, although less frequently and without the continuity of the commercial relations with Malta, ships originating from Messolonghi also visited Trieste. The main products carried to the local market were foodstuffs such as cheese, lemons, olive oil, wheat and currants; raw materials such as wool and yarn were also transported, although less often. Some products consistently found buyers during the whole period, while others ceased to appear in the archival sources; it could be a coincidence, but also evidence of the changing demands of a fluid economic environment.

Captains originating from Messolonghi transported wheat to certain ports more often than to others. During the period 1700-1821 they transported wheat mainly to Valetta (74% of entries of wheat cargoes was transported to Valetta), to Trieste (11.64%), to Genoa (3.7%), to Livorno (3.4%), to Marseille (2.91%) and to other ports less often. Compared to the general picture of Greek shipping in the same period, Greek ships were transporting wheat mainly

to Valetta (37.31% of the Greek ships), while in second place comes Genoa (18.56%), followed by Marseille (4.61%), Trieste (4.16%) and Livorno (1.22%). This means that captains from Messolonghi were carrying wheat more often to certain ports, while the majority of Greek captains followed other routes. In both cases, Valetta remains high in the number of visits from Greek captains originating from various places.

Captains from Messolonghi travelled on the same routes, sometimes organizing their trips in convoy (*caravane*), not only because of the fear of corsairs but also because not all of them knew the way.[46] New captains had to learn from the older ones. Their ships met at the same ports and they departed from the same areas. In figure 8 the areas of departure for the ships from Messolonghi are mostly ports from the Ionian Sea that were familiar to them.

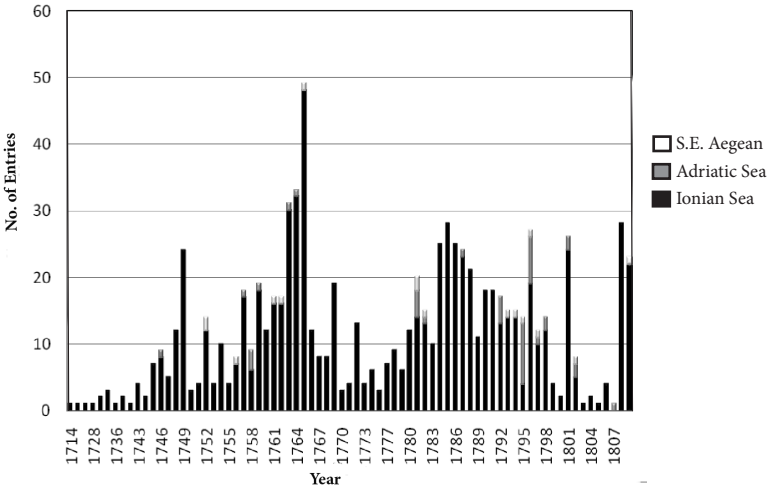


Fig. 8. Areas of departure for ships with captains originating from Messolonghi, 1714-1809.

Captains from Messolonghi did not frequent the ports of the Aegean Sea, although at the beginning of the nineteenth century the maritime centres of the area emerged; captains from Hydra, Spetses, Psara and many other Aegean islands and ports were transporting wheat from Volos, Asia Minor and Black Sea ports towards the Western Mediterranean. Captains from Messolonghi frequented the port of Preveza[47] but also other ports in the Ambracian Gulf (Gulf of Amvrakikos), such as Salaora, Arta and Kopraina (see fig. 9).

[46] Harlaftis, "The 'Eastern Invasion'", p. 17.

[47] On the traffic in the port of Preveza, see Georgios Papageorgiou, "Ηπειρωτικά λιμάνια στην ύστερη Τουρκοκρατία. Η περίπτωση της Πρέβεζας" [Ports in Epirus at the end of Ottoman rule: the case of Preveza], in *Ήπειρος. Κοινωνία – Οικονομία, 15ος-20ός αιώνας. Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Ιστορίας* [Epirus: society – economy, fifteenth-twentieth centuries: proceedings of the international history conference], Ioannina, 4-7 September 1985, Ioannina 1987, pp. 139-170.

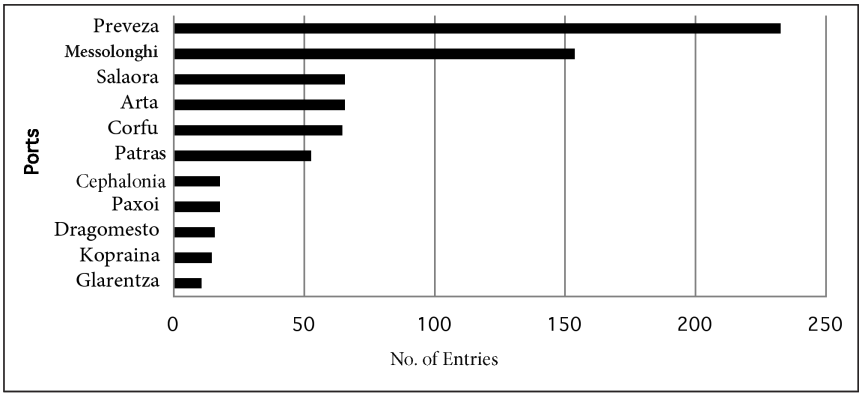


Fig. 9. Ionian ports of departure of ships with captains originating from Messolonghi, 1714-1809 (in total numbers).

The preference for the port of Preveza continued during the entire period (see fig. 10), but there were some peak years: 1765, 1772, 1785, 1790, 1796 and 1801. In those years ships from Messolonghi were exporting wood and firewood[48] to Valetta. Only in 1785 was wheat also exported from Preveza to Valetta.

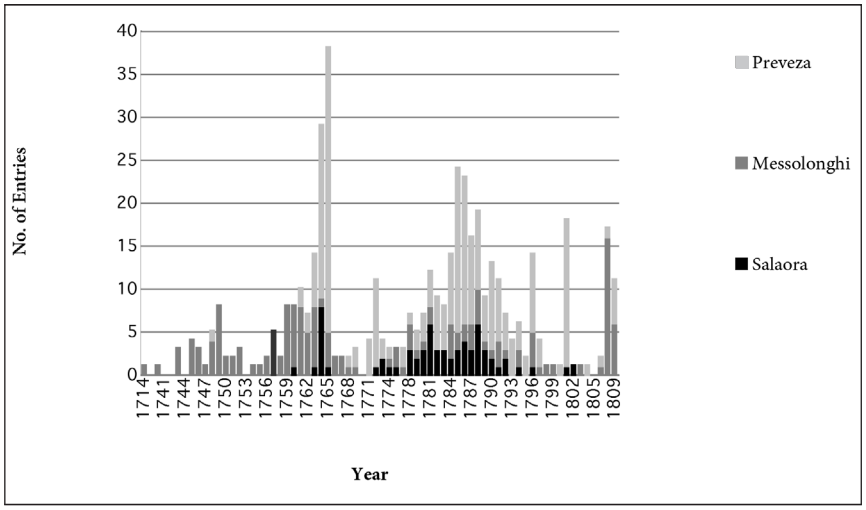


Fig. 10. Ionian ports of departure of ships with captains originating from Messolonghi, 1714-1809 (by year).

[48] On the exploitation of forests in the area of the Ambracian Gulf and the area of Preveza, see Helen K. Giannakopoulou, *Γαλλοελληνική εκμετάλλευση δασών στη Δυτική Ελλάδα (1710-1792)* [French-Greek exploitation of forests in western Greece (1710-1792)], Athens: ΕΚΡΑ–Library of Sofia N. Saripolos, 1987.

The same products were exported from Preveza, mainly towards Valetta. The island of Malta imported mainly foodstuffs, especially wheat, raw materials (wood and firewood) and handicraft products (leather). Captains from Messolonghi seem to have specialized in trading cargo from a certain area, that is the Ambracian Gulf and especially the port of Preveza, carrying it to Malta. In that sense Messolonghi and Preveza belonged to the same maritime area and developed interrelated economic activities (see fig. 11).

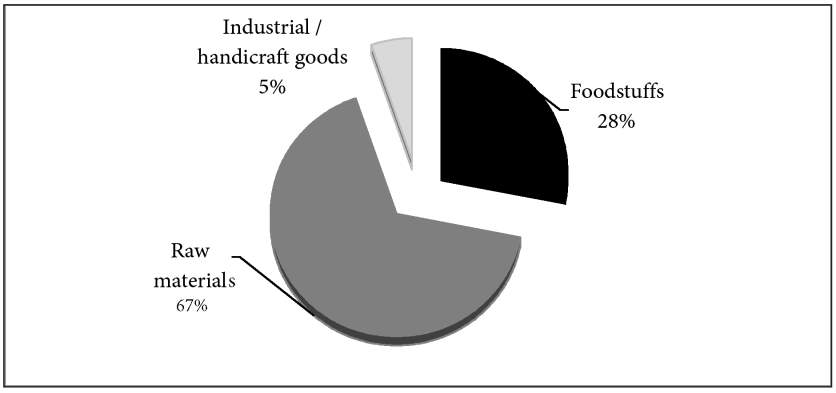


Fig. 11. Products exported from Preveza by ships with captains from Messolonghi, 1714-1809.

The period under examination was a turbulent period; at the end of the eighteenth century wars provoked shortages of foodstuffs. Captains from Messolonghi traded foodstuffs from the area of Epirus, Aetolia and the Peloponnese, exporting wheat from Arta and Preveza in Epirus and from Livadia and Messolonghi on the northern shore of the Gulf of Corinth. During the eighteenth century their main area of departure remained the Ionian Sea, while at the end of the century the main exporting areas for wheat became the Aegean ports (Volos, Smyrna, Thessaloniki) and the Black Sea ports. Captains from Messolonghi continued visiting Valetta and Livorno, two main markets for wheat where they had long-standing contacts. Times changed by the beginning of the nineteenth century, and their main competitors in Valetta and Livorno were captains from the Aegean who transported Aegean and Black Sea wheat. They specialized in trading wheat and adjusted to the new circumstances.[49] Captains from Messolonghi were slow in adapting to those changes; they did not compete effectively with captains from the Aegean and they remained outside the new economic environment the British rule of the Ionian Islands had created. For these reasons their fleet declined.

Ionian University

[49] Captains from Cephalonia, on the other hand, engaged in the Black Sea wheat trade from the beginning of the nineteenth century; Kapetanakis, *Η ποντοπόρος εμπορική ναυτιλία*, pp. 45, 155.