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Gelina Harlaftis and Katerina Papakonstantinou (eds), Ναυτιλία των Ελλήνων, 1700-1821. Ο αιώνας της ακμής πριν από την Επανάσταση [Greek shipping, 1700-1821: The heyday before the Greek Revolution]

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Gelina Harlaftis and Katerina Papakonstantinou (eds),
ΝΑΥΤΙΛΙΑ ΤΩΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΩΝ, 1700-1821.
Ο ΑΙΩΝΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΑΚΜΗΣ ΠΡΙΝ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΕΠΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΗ
[Greek Shipping, 1700-1821:
The heyday before the Greek Revolution],
Athens: Kedros and Ionian University, 2013, 887 pages.

Gelina Harlaftis has undertaken, for many years now, a laborious mission within the Greek and international research and academic community to restructure Greek maritime history in a new context. In order to succeed in this mission, she has mobilized students and colleagues and has gone through numerous archives and libraries. This effort has produced solid results so far, by studying the sea as a means of transportation, maritime trade, the ports, ships and navigation, shipping activities and maritime institutions. Therefore, this book, titled *Ναυτιλία των Ελλήνων, 1700-1821. Ο αιώνας της ακμής πριν από την Επανάσταση* [Greek shipping, 1700-1821: The heyday before the Greek Revolution], which has been co-published by the Kedros publishing house and Ionian University, offers us the opportunity firstly to study, to analyse and to understand how she organizes her research. The 11 colleagues and students who were part of this mission, along with the efficient co-editor of the volume, Katerina Papakonstantinou, have all been inducted into the analysis and study of shipping activities in archival documentation and quantitative records.

The volume contains 21 chapters, of which Harlaftis herself wrote five, as well as the introduction and the conclusion. This constitutes an advantage for the volume, since, due to the overwhelming amount of material, the different essays may naturally seem unequal in terms of methodology; however, they become coherent in the book. The first part introduces an analysis of shipping and its institutions, the role of the Ottoman state, piracy, quarantine stations (*lazzaretti*) in Western Europe, maritime business and the sea routes in the Ionian and Aegean seas. The second part presents the types of sailing ships, significant ports of the Mediterranean Sea from Malta, to Sicily, to Livorno, to Messolonghi, to Preveza, to the ports of the Black Sea, the networks and the maritime centres of the Ionian and the Aegean. Most of the studies have been based mainly on a complex database named *Amphitrete*, which contains processed archival sources from various European archives.

From a historical and geographical point of view, the volume analyses the major areas of the Ionian and Aegean sea regions that were active in the shipping

sector through their interconnections within the Mediterranean. It is exactly this point that indicates that a novel, fresh reading of the archival data highlights that the fleets of Hydra, Spetses and Psara, well-known from their participation in the Greek Revolution, in fact were not the fleets that gave birth to the vast Greek shipping business. I suggest that the belligerent events between the Greeks and the Ottomans in the Aegean during the Greek War of Independence and the study of specific archives, as well as the spectacular representation of maritime conflicts, created an inter-mediated image of such people as Andreas Miaoulis, the Kountourioti brothers, Konstantinos Kanaris and others; and thus these three islands – the places where these figures originally came from – have been featured in Greek historiography. Besides, they constituted part of the political body of the first period of the Greek State, so they continued to be active in the formation of their public image. Therefore, it seems that the renowned image of rebellious Greece as presented through the heroic events of the Aegean sea-fighters also prevailed over the hypothesis of the birth of ocean-going Greek shipping.

The fleets of Cephalonia and Messolonghi, less known in historiography, are presented in this book as important providers of transportation services to other countries. Soon, the subject of Ionian shipping will emerge further, after the publication by the National Hellenic Research Foundation of the forthcoming book by Panayiotis Kapetanakis, *Το Ιόνιο κράτος, 1815-1864. Εμπόριο και ναυτιλία υπό Βρετανική προστασία* [The Ionian State, 1815-1864: Shipping and trade under British protection]. In *Ναυτιλία*

των Ελλήνων, the 40 maritime centres of Greek shipping, as arranged following the analysis of data in the Amphitrite database, owned 1000 ocean-going vessels and 2500 coastal ships on the eve of the Greek Revolution.

The islands and ports of the Greek lands that dominated over a long period were focal points of the Mediterranean that connected the commercial worlds of East and West; deprived of other sources of wealth, they participated in the networks of maritime transactions of the Mediterranean, competing and cooperating with people of different religions and languages. Lands with limited agricultural activities turned towards shipping and piracy. These islands and ports became regions of primitive capital accumulation, as well as areas where valuable experience – technical know-how for commercial transactions and for shipbuilding – was gained. They became maritime centres, that is to say, areas for the construction of sailing ships, birthplaces of commercial ship captains and locations of economic transactions and maritime education.

The mechanisms of market unification and combined sea and land transportation are one of the new questions of economic history. This volume searches within shipping and maritime activities the mechanisms of port unification with focal points, of small or peripheral markets with central markets, from the Western Mediterranean to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

If we wish to uncover a major common factor that could describe the importance of each maritime centre for Greek shipping before the Greek Revolution, this would be the hunger for the provision,

supply and consumption of grains in the Mediterranean and in Europe. This is the exact motive that pushed all of the “small merchants” who were behind the trips that are thoroughly recorded in this volume. Besides, we know from Carlo Cipolla’s work about pre-industrial societies that since early modern times the European economy was principally agricultural and developed depending on international trade, textile manufacturing and building construction, in such a way that large social groups of pre-industrial Europe dealt precisely with the production and circulation of foodstuff, clothing and construction of public and private buildings, as well as services. Therefore, Greeks of the pre-industrial era, under foreign Ottoman, Venetian and Genovese sovereignty, by using various flags, chose and specialized in services and became the main carriers of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Usually, according to the sources, these were “small merchants”, ship captains who undertook a small number of often-dangerous sea voyages. At this point, a statistical analysis of trips per captain would be enlightening. From all kinds of freights, other than grains and foodstuffs, wood is of great interest; a detailed study of this trade, encountered first with wood trade exports from Epirus following the expansion of French trade in the Mediterranean, should be investigated further. Also, I believe that the emergence of quarantine stations as a major source for shipping history is one of the most dynamic characteristics of this volume and is revealed in a very capable way by Papakonstantinou in the chapter “Archival Sources and Amphitrite: The Research”.

In small- to mid-sized sailing vessels, the ship captains crossed the Mediterranean,

while facing multiple natural dangers and the endemic threat of piracy in the Mediterranean, aiming for what we presume was a small profit margin. Small, but compared to what? This is a major issue under investigation. People from small natural ports of the Greek peninsula, deprived of other financial revenues, embarked on dangerous maritime missions on the sea. The issue of national identity is secondary here, in other words, I think the answer to the question of which “nationality” were the captains, the passengers and the commercial representatives, who for example were registered at the quarantine station on Malta, is simple; they were Greek-speaking captains and commercial agents who originated from the Ionian Islands, the south-western Aegean, Hydra, Messolonghi and Galaxidi and who used whichever flag was convenient to them, especially the Greco-Ottoman, the Ottoman, the Ionian State and the one of Jerusalem.

Harlaftis is right to highlight that Greeks from the second half of the eighteenth century proved to be one of the groups that benefitted the most from the development of international trade and shipping in South-East Europe and especially in their own crucial area from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Black Sea. This growth in Greek shipping, from the second decade of the eighteenth century that reached a peak at the end of the eighteenth century and on the eve of the Greek Revolution, had a direct connection with international economic growth, especially from the Ionian Sea, which was under Venetian, French and British protection and had direct geographical access to Venice, Genoa and Naples, the blooming financial centres of pre-industrial capitalism. At this point

we could add that Greeks, before the establishment of the Greek State, within their small local societies, functioned under a situation of “free” trade policy, while the Dutch, French and British were constrained by the public policy and state control of their countries, especially during the eighteenth century. They enjoyed the privileges of state protection, but at the same time they had to bear commitments; let us keep in mind the Navigation Acts of the eighteenth century that prohibited the use of foreign crews

in the British navy or the Continental Blockade of the Napoleonic Wars at the beginning of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, Greeks scattered around the Mediterranean, people of Greek origin, adopted more flexible patterns and developed patterns of local capitalism, in other words, the locally supported capitalism of the sailors of Chios, Cephalonia, Spetses, Andros and so many other islands and, in certain cases, such as the Chiot group, made glocal capitalism into a reality.

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