



## The Greek Merchants of Moschopolis

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### Abstract

Moschopolitans, the residents of Moschopolis, enjoyed remarkable economic growth and prosperity. The first written records, referring to this shift and proving the commercial presence of Moschopolitans in Venice, have already appeared in the 16th century and consist mainly of correspondence. Exports of processed and unprocessed wool and the development of commercial contacts with markets of Venice constitute proof of the developed livestock in the studied area, which soon led to surplus products and the need for migration in search of new markets. So, a mountainous enclave was formed. The fabric was produced and exported to foreign markets and contributed to the initial formation of the “Industrial Revolution” in the Turkish-occupied country. Gradually, small domestic industries became the most important economic factor of the mountainous area throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The article studies the trade relations of Moschopolitans with the ports of Venice, Dyrrachium (Durrës) and Ragusa (Dubrovnik), through the commercial correspondence, the role of the Venetian consul (bailo) in Dyrrachium, Moschopolitans relations with the authorities of Constantinople and Dyrrachium and how and why they gradually withdrew from the markets of Venice.

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**Keywords:** Moschopolitans, Moschopolis, Vlachs, commerce, Greek merchants

## Introduction

The political and economic situation prevalent in the 16th century in the developed financial centres of Europe and the Ottoman-occupied Balkan countryside made the ports of the Adriatic the focal point of trade, dominated by the port of Venice. The trade contacts with the monetary economy of western Europe's cities portrayed the transition into a new era, for the traders operating under the Sultan and for their societies. It is worth noting that the movement of goods towards Venice, Ancona, and Messina during that period was mainly conducted through the ports of Dyrrachium (Durrës) and Ragusa (Dubrovnik). Trading houses were set up in the abovementioned areas, and agents were appointed. The people of Moschopolis had their own role to play within this financial system and developed key contacts with the Republic of San Marco. They were linked via the ports of Dyrrachium and Avlona (Valona) (Faroqhi, 2006; Bérard, 1893; Luca, 2011). Trade relations between Greece (Greci di Venezia) and the Most Serene Republic (Serenissima Repubblica Veneta) dated back to the period when Venice was a province of the Byzantine Empire (Maltezos, 1999).

The Treaty of Passarowitz in 1718 heralded the gradual economic and commercial decline of the Venetian state since it signified a transfer of commercial activity to the land routes of the Balkans and central Europe (Noradounghian, 1897; Bianchi, 1719; Lane, 1973). Furthermore, the great geographical discoveries, which caused the shift of the commercial interest focus from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, the renewed French capitulations, the favourable arrangements reached by the English and Dutch with the Ottoman Empire, and, of course, the development of the neighbouring ports of Ancona, Livorno, Fiume (Rijeka) and Trieste (Luzzatto, 1954; McNeil, 1974; Katsiardi-Hering, 1986), following the positive changes made by Charles VI and his successors, primarily affected the commercial power of the once-dominant Serenissima (Bur, 1978; Katsiardi-Hering, 1996; Panova, 1985; Paskaleva, 1988; 1985; Ingrao, 1994; Gross, 1973; Anderson, 1966; Kellenbenz, 1976). Moreover, its constant warfare with the Ottoman army, its inability to modernise its commercial fleet and develop its shipbuilding technology, and its characteristic unwillingness to take part in the political and war-related events in Europe, by continuously adopting a neutral stand, brought about a gradual weakening of its power and its ultimate decline (Lane, 1987; Dudan, 1938).

It would be wrong if the intense conservatism displayed by Venice were also not taken into account, in addition to the above, which expressed itself through its strong persistence to maintain its old, outdated structures, which may have stemmed from its glorious past, but nevertheless did not allow it to answer to the demands of the new era. The state's rigid interventionism in the city's economic and political life and its anachronistic political system

were not able to keep up with the historical events of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Caizzi, 1965; Sella, 1961; 1968; Rapp, 1976; McNeill, 1974; Bernardy, 1902; Cernovodeanu, 1967; Lane, 1973). Finally, it should be noted that Venetian technology, regarding the production of textiles and bare essentials, had come to a standstill. Not only was it not able to follow the latest technological progress, which other European countries enjoyed, but it also did not succeed in satisfying the demands of the mass market. Instead, it supplied the market with second-rate intentionally overpriced products (Sella, 1968).

### ***The Greek merchants in Venice: 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> century***

The historical changes in Venice were certain to affect the Greeks living and working in the city. An indicative example that while in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the merchant class numbered approximately 400 families, in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, their numbers had dropped to only 70 (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1978). The occupation of Venice by the French forces in 1797 simply sealed the impending decline while also dealing a decisive blow to the Greek Brotherhood (Confraternita dei Greci) (Manousakas, 1989; Maltezou, 1999). Napoleon appropriated all the funds deposited in the banks of Venice, including the business capital of its Greeks residents, and the funds owned by the Brotherhood, thus creating acute problems affecting the survival of numerous families and institutions founded by the diaspora (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1978; Manousakas, 1973; Maltezou 2008). The established “Municipalità Democratica” which replaced the previous regime, was short-lived, since a few months later, in October 1797, the Venetian hinterland (Terra Ferma) fell into the hands of the Habsburgs after the signing of the Treaty of Campoformio (Bernardy, 1902; Papaioannou, 1986; Hatzopoulos, 2002).

The Greek merchants referred to in Venetian sources as *commercianti*, *sensali*, and *negozianti* (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1978), developed large-scale activities in the city of San Marco in the last decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century, even though the port of Venice was no longer dominant in transit trade (Sella, 1961; Maximos, 1944). Several successful trading houses were operating in the city at the time. At the same time, Greek ship-owners, due to their small sailboats and low fares, were able to navigate the coastline of the Ionian Sea and the Adriatic and take advantage of the increased demand for products from the Turkish-occupied Balkans, such as wool, cotton, and leather. Within this political-economic climate, the merchants of Moschopolis appeared in the markets of Venice in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Moschopolitans in Venice**

Since the trade relations between the Moschopolitans and Venice were thus conducted within a pre-established framework of trade operations

between the Greeks and the Italian state, which dated back several centuries, this meant that the merchants of Moschopolis came across a fully organised and wealthy Greek community (*nazione greca*), which assisted them greatly from an economic and social perspective. The significant volume of trade that connected Moschopolis with the markets of the Serenissima can be clearly seen in the correspondence of the Venetian consul (*bailo*) in Dyrrachium. In 1957, the work of Martinianos, the Metropolitan of Xanthi, on the history of Moschopolis was published. When referring to the trade relations of the Moschopolitans with Venice, the author extensively relied on the monograph of Valeriu Papahagi *Aromânii Moscopoleni și comerțul Venetian în secolele al XVII-lea și al XVIII-lea*, which had been published in Bucharest in 1935, and on two articles by the same author that had been translated into Greek and were published in 1934 and 1935 in the magazine *Ipirotika Chronika*.

It is an undisputed fact that the publishing efforts of Papahagi were of significant significance and highly enlightening as regards the presence of the merchants of Moschopolis in Venice. It is also, however, a fact that his Romanian origin did not allow him on several occasions to objectively view the Moschopolitans as descendants of the Vlachs but rather as Romanians (Popović, 1937; Papahagi, 1935; 1939). Despite any such weaknesses, however, Papahagi seems to have ultimately achieved his goal, which was to show, as noted in the first pages of his books, through certain letters sent by Moschopolitan traders and consuls in the Serenissima Repubblica, how the merchants of Moschopolis presented themselves to the people of Venice, their relations with the Venetian authorities of Constantinople and Dyrrachium, the goods traded by them on both sides of the Adriatic and how and why they gradually withdrew from the markets of Venice (Papahagi, 1935).

Martinianos noted thus that in Papahagi's monograph, he found 23 letters of commercial interest, written in the Greek language, which belonged to various Moschopolitans and were kept in the "Documenti Greci" collection of the State Archives of Venice (Archivio di stato di Venezia). Three more letters by Moschopolitans, also written in Greek, were found in the "Carte Greche" file, which also included the correspondence with the Venetian *bailo* in Constantinople, the complete correspondence of the Glykides family from Ioannina, and, finally, several letters written by the Venetian consuls in Dyrrachium, who maintained contact both with their city and with the *bailo* of Constantinople. These documents prove beyond doubt the extensive trade relations developed between Moschopolis and Venice, mention the names and undertakings of numerous Moschopolitan merchants, and also provide a wealth of information on the kind of wares they traded-in.

Through the consular reports (*relazioni*) of the Venetians in Dyrrachium, it is apparent that the term "marchands grecs de Moschopolis" was not only used to refer to the Moschopolitans but also included a large

number of Vlach- and Albanian-speaking merchants from neighbouring regions (Papahagi, 1935; Vacalopoulos, 1969). The first written report on Moschopolitan merchants can be found in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives. More specifically, Comte, the French consul in Dyrrachium, in a letter to his country's Navy Minister, Count Pontchartrain, dated 8 February 1699, provided detailed information on the trade transactions between Venice and various regions of Macedonia, Epirus, and Albania. As described by the consul, about 100 Turkish and Greek (*turcs et grecs*) merchants settled in Shkodra, Elbasan, Moschopolis, Siatista, Ioannina, and Thessaloniki, who handled their trade with Venice through their respective agents (*tous de nation grecque*) located in the city.

Georgios Koumanos (Papastathis, 1999; Gavriliadi, 1988-1989; Papahagi, 1935; Luca, 2011), Kottonis, Stamatellos, Karagiannis, Ioannis Vellais, Michail Peroulis, Ioannis Ieronymos, and several others, all of Greek origin (*tous de nation grecque*), were just some of the agents living permanently in the Venetian Republic, who helped to establish trade relations with the afore-mentioned regions. According to Comte, 3,000 quintals of wax each year, 1,500 quintals of top quality processed wool (*laine fine*), leather from Córdoba (*cordouans*), and silk all left the port of Dyrrachium for Venice. Imports from Venice included 1,500 pieces of Venetian wool felt of exceptional quality and 300 pieces of *loundres*. Comte also noted that the goods as mentioned above were usually transported by English, Dutch and French ships, not only from the port of Dyrrachium but also from the port of Ragusa (Martinianos, 1957; Papahagi, 1934; Kilipiris, 1999; Ruffini, 1942; Carter, 1972).

### **The consular reports of the Venetians**

The correspondence of the Venetian consuls in Dyrrachium is a precious source of information that substantiates the extensive trade developed between Moschopolis and the markets of Serenissima (Papahagi, 1934; 1935). In the letters exchanged between the Venetian consuls in Dyrrachium, the bailo of Constantinople, and the Cinque Savi of Venice (*Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*), who were in charge of trade, frequent references are made to the merchants of Moschopolis (Martinianos, 1957; Papahagi, 1934; Kilipiris, 1999; Maltezou, 1970). The Venetian consul in Dyrrachium, who was entrusted with serving the interests of Venetian trade throughout Albania, held the highest rank, followed by the bailo and the ambassador of Venice to Constantinople. The consul in Dyrrachium, due to his position and duties, was in very close contact with the merchants of Moschopolis and recommended the most trustworthy of them to the Venetian authorities in Constantinople, where they were received in the audience (Papahagi, 1935). An indicative example can be found in a letter sent by Pietro Rosa, the Venetian consul to

Dyrrachium, to the bailo Ascanio Justiniani in April 1706 through Ioannis Kostas Zoupan from Moschopolis; the latter was recommended as a reliable partner of the Venetian Republic, which explained why he was asked to deliver Rosa's letter to Justiniani (Papahagi, 1934).

The letters periodically exchanged between the Moschopolitans and the representatives of Serenissima serve to prove the solid commercial ties that joined the two cities and bring to light a range of problems and difficulties that the Moschopolitans faced in trading via the port of Dyrrachium. For example, in a letter dated 7 October 1706, through which the Christian merchants of Moschopolis and Siatista, together with the Muslim merchants of Elbasan, expressed their intense displeasure to Pietro Rosa about the fact that the Cinque Savi exempted the Turkish merchants of Shkodra (*mercanti turchi di Teranova*) from the 2% tax imposed on all other merchants. To avoid the cause of such complaints, the Venetian consul hastened to inform them that the traders of Shkodra were subject to the same terms and that if such an event had occurred, it was purely an omission. At the same time, in a letter to the Cinque Savi, he pointed out that he had made every possible effort to ensure that the merchants of Dyrrachium would use the ships of Venice and not of Dulcigno (*Dulcignoti*) (Papahagi, 1935; 1934; Kilipiris, 1999).

Pietro Rosa's efforts to further develop and strengthen the trade between his homeland and the regions of Macedonia, Epirus, and Albania, were primarily thwarted by the presence and actions of Nikolaos Poulimenos (*Nicolò Pulimeno*) from Ioannina. He was a man who defended the interests of the Dutch and managed to secure the post of secretary at the port of Dyrrachium, instead of Dimitris Triantafyllou, who the Venetian Republic supported. The hatred of Poulimenos towards the Venetians was so great that he did not hesitate to express his deep desire to witness yet another Turko-Venetian war unfolding. Furthermore, around 1705, he leaked so-called complaints to the merchants of Moschopolis from the people of Peloponnese against the Venetians, which were so grave according to Poulimenos, that they had even reached the Sublime Porte (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957). What Nikolaos Poulimenos was aiming for, according to the Venetian consular reports, was to arrange for goods to be transported from Dyrrachium to Ancona, instead of Venice, by using ships from Dulcigno rather than Venetian ones (Papahagi, 1935). The merchants of Moschopolis and Siatista initially did not seem to acknowledge Poulimenos' post as a secretary at Dyrrachium port, the fact that Rosa tried to exploit at every given opportunity.

Thus, of particular importance is a letter, of which two copies have been found in Greek, and a translation into Italian, dated 26 June 1706, which means it was written two months after the afore-mentioned correspondence between Rosa and Justiniani. It is signed by eight merchants of Moschopolis and is addressed to Pietro Rosa, whom they inform about their extraordinary

commitment to the interests of Venice. More specifically, Georgios Giras (Jorghis Jira), Dimitris Georgiou (Dimitri di Jorghis), Simos Georgiou (Simo di Jorghis), Theodoros Adami Papas (Todori Adami Papa), Kostas Theodorou (Costa di Todoro), Georgios Theodorou (Jorghis di Todoro), Antonios Giras (Antoni di Jira) and Adamis Georgiou Giras (Adami di Jorghis Jira) contacted the consul of Venice. They expressed their desire to store their wares at his warehouses only while also designating Adam Giras as their proxy, who would travel to Dyrrachium to discuss these matters with him (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957).

Nevertheless, for a brief period, Poulimenos managed to persuade two merchants from Moschopolis, Ioannis Evangelou Papas and Dimitrios Bizoukas, to conduct their business using ships from Dulcigno (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957). The Dulcignians ignored the relevant prohibitions stated in the Treaty of Karlowitz and built their own ships, which they claimed to use only to conduct their own trade; in reality, however, they were used for piracy. Their actions caught the attention of Francois Pouqueville, who, during a journey around Albania, had noted the plundering frenzy of the approximately 6000 inhabitants of Dulcigno; he also pointed out the imperative need for the Dalmatian authorities, which governed the region, to take immediate measures to vanquish such elements (Martinianos, 1957).

### ***The Dulcignians at the port of Dyrrachium: a significant problem for Venetians***

The people of Dulcigno (Papahagi, 1935) were a significant problem for Pietro Rosa in general, as noted in all the letters sent by the latter to Venice and Constantinople, in which he provides a detailed description of the countless problems caused by the actions of the Dulcignian pirates. In February 1709, Rosa sent a trusted Moschopolitan merchant, Ioannis Georgiou Papas (Gianni Giorgio Papa), to the bailo of Constantinople, Alvise Mocenigo, to inform him about the unrest at the port of Dyrrachium and the tens of problems and misunderstandings being created by all the parties involved. However, the situation seems to have become even more complex due to the Russian-Turkish war of 1710. In a letter sent by Pietro Rosa to the Cinque Savi of Venice on 18 January of the following year, the beylerbeyi of Roumeli was ordered to march through the whole extent of his territory and even attack parts of the Adriatic coast.

Relevant information about the prevalent conditions at the time can be found in the various letters exchanged between Ioannis Nerantzis, a merchant from Siatista who lived permanently in Dyrrachium, and Dimitrios Vizoukas, a merchant born and residing in Moschopolis. They describe a dire situation involving the arrests of various *prokritoi* (regional leaders) who were considered suspects and armed gangs of thieves that plundered the regions of

Macedonia, Epirus and Albania, leaving hundreds of people at the mercy of their vindictive vengeance. These gangs even reached the suburbs of Moschopolis and threatened the Monastery of Saint Naum in Ohrid (Papahagi, 1935; 1934; Martinianos, 1957, Kilipiris, 1999).

The Moschopolitans' contact with Pietro Rosa continued on perfect terms over the next few years. Subsequently, the Venetian consul would constantly recommend the merchants of Moschopolis to the bailo in office, and the correspondence between Dyrrachium and Constantinople was conducted via Moschopolis. Thus, after Georgios Vretos, Rosa used the exact words of praise to recommend Michail Georgiou (Micali Giorgio) to bailo Zouane Emo in 1720, then Adam Giras (Adamo Gira), Chatzis Michail Simos (Cazì Micali Simo), and Michail Sideris (Micali Sideri) to bailo Francis in 1725 and, finally, Adam Giras (Adamo Gira) to bailo Dolfin in 1728; Adam Giras conflicted with his fellowmen, but conducted a significant volume of trade from Moschopolis to Venice (Papahagi, 1935; 1934; 1939; Martinianos, 1957).

### ***Moschopolitans being thwarted by the actions of the Dulcignians***

In the meantime, the commercial activities of the Moschopolitans, and the others trading from the port of Dyrrachium, were still being thwarted by the actions of the Dulcignians. Due to this, in the year 1720, the consuls of Venice, England, France, and Holland in Dyrrachium all pointed out that it was unacceptable to allow a rowdy gang of thieves to inconvenience the merchants of Moschopolis, Siatista, Ohrid, and Monastir, who played a decisive role in the commercial and economic progress of Dyrrachium (Papahagi, 1934; Martinianos, 1957; Laios, 1982). However, from 1720 onwards, more and more Moschopolitan merchants began to view the Venetian trade networks of Dyrrachium with a degree of suspicion. They turned their attention towards the shipowners of Dulcigno.

The Venetian consul in Dyrrachium did his utmost to restrict the entrance of Dulcignian ships into the port and the signing of trade agreements with Greek merchants; he also frequently intervened with the Cinque Savi to settle misunderstandings and tense episodes that occurred from time to time. More specifically, he tried to resolve any conflict or problem affecting the Moschopolitan merchants, as he noted clearly in late April 1720, since he had to keep them away from any agreements with the people of Dulcigno. This explains why, when captain Steffano Tripcovich, who supported the interests of Venice, refused to make the discount he had initially promised for the transfer of tobacco parcels and came into conflict with Michail Simou Georgiou (Micali Simo Giorgio), the Moschopolis merchant, and his partners, Rosa reassured them that he would narrate the facts to the Cinque Savi and they would make sure that justice was done (Papahagi, 1935).



Nevertheless, despite the keen efforts of Pietro Rosa, the number of Moschopolitans making agreements for the transportation of their goods with captains from Ragusa and Dulcigno was on the rise. The anxious letters sent by Rosa to the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia indicate the prevailing conditions. In May of the same year, more merchants from Moschopolis, namely Georgios Vretos (Giorgio Vretto) and Dimitris Vizoukas (Dimitri Visucha), as well as Georgios Nikolaou (Giorgio Nicola) from Verati, all signed an agreement with the French representative in Dyrrachium. They chartered a ship from Ragusa to transport their goods. It is worth noting that Georgios Vretos is the same person who, a few years earlier, had been recommended to the bailo of Constantinople by Rosa for the post of the interpreter at the Venetian consul in Dyrrachium, since he was considered a trusted person who supported the interests of the *Serenissima*. After his contact with the French consul, Vretos decided to distance himself from the Venetians and tried persistently to persuade other merchants from Moschopolis to follow suit and sign agreements with the Dulcignians.

According to Rosa, this sudden change of mind by Vretos was due to his displeasure at the result of his conflict with his recent partner, Nerantzis. By joint agreement, their case was referred to a team of four “arbitrators,” which consisted of the Moschopolitan merchants Adam Giras (Adamo Gira) and Michail Simou (Micali Simo), Avraam Levi (Abram Levi), a Jew from Ragusa, and Pietro Rosa. In the end, the committee ruled in favour of Nerantzis, and Vretos was asked to pay him a fine of 90,000 akçes (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957). A year later, another Moschopolitan merchant, Ioannis Sigkounas (Joanni Siguna), agreed with shipowners from Dulcigno to transport of Venetian textiles (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957).

### **Moschopolitan merchants’ commercial practices in Venice**

Apart from what has been noted above, the correspondence between the merchants of Moschopolis and the representatives of Venice also provides the opportunity to shed light on several parameters of the commercial practices and conduct adopted and followed by the merchants of Moschopolis. These parameters are related to how they were organised, the establishment of cooperatives and the development of their trade-business networks. Commercial goods, names of Moschopolitan merchants, partnerships with family members, fellow citizens, and people from neighbouring areas, tension, arguments, and problems are all depicted in the pages of these letters while also providing a glimpse into the particular climate of that period that considered the values of trust and solidarity as essential to the pursuit of commercial activities.

Venetian records provide us with the names of numerous Moschopolitan merchants. Some of the best-known families of traders are

Bendos, Sideris, Zoupan, Vizoukas, Papas, Vretos, and Sigkounas (Papahagi, 1935), while the most populous traders' family in the city were the Giras since almost all its members had formed essential trade relations with Venice, according to Rosa (Papahagi, 1935). Nikolaos Theodorou (Nicola Theodoro), Dimitrios Konstantinou Bendou (Dimitrie al lui Bendu), Georgios Papas (Georgio Papa), Georgios Theodorou (Georgio Theodoro), Ioannis Georgiou (Gianni Gheorgiu), Nikolaos Stavrou (Nicolò Stavro) are considered to be among the first Moschopolitans to develop economic activities in Venice (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957). More specifically, letters from that period often include the names Adam Giras (Adam Jira), Antonios Giras (Antoni Jira), Georgios Giras (Jorghi Jira), Michail Giras (Michali Jira), Dimitrios Georgiou (Dimitrio Gheorgiu), Simos Georgiou (Simo Gheorgiu), Kostas Theodorou (Costa Theodoro), Georgios Theodorou (Georgio Theodoro), Lazaros Georgiou (Lazaro Georgio), Dimitrios Theodorou (Dimitrio Teodoro), Georgios Michalis (Giorgio Micali), Ioannis Manolis (Zuanne Manoli) and Georgios Manolis (Giorgio Manoli ) (Papahagi, 1935; 1939; Mertzios, 1947; Martinianos, 1957).

Trade was usually conducted through cooperatives, whose members often included residents of neighbouring settlements to Moschopolis. One such example is the cooperative companies that the Moschopolitans established with several merchants from Siatista. Another such case is the partnership between Ioannis Georgiou Papas (Giovanni Giorgio Papa) and Dimitrios Vizoukas (Demetrio Bisuca) from Moschopolis, with Ioannis Nerantzis (Giovanni Neranzi) from Siatista, from 1705-1712. In a letter by Rosa, it is understood that following the death of the two Moschopolitans, their position in the company was taken over by their brothers, Nikolaos Papas (Nicola Papa) and Kostas Vizoukas (Costantin Bisuca), who continued their cooperative activities with Ioannis Nerantzis (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957; Laios, 1982)<sup>44</sup>.

In a letter dated 1720, Pietro Rosa mentions that Georgios Vretos from Moschopolis set up a cooperative with Luigi Matteo, whose partners included certain Greeks and Turks, who transported goods to Venice (Papahagi, 1935). The sign "di ragione di Nicolo Cazi Michali da Siatista e compagni da Moschopoli per Fiume Trieste" referred to the cooperative company of Nikolaos Chatzis Michalis from Siatista, who sent packages of goods to Fiume and Trieste in 1741, in collaboration with Moschopolitan merchants, by chartering ships from Dulcigno (Martinianos, 1957; Kilipiris, 1999). In 1742, Dimitrios Theodorou and Lazaros Georgiou sent Ioannis Dimitriou, their permanent representative in Venice, 681 parcels of tobacco, weighing 32,112 okas and 114,336 lbs (Papahagi, 1935).

The cooperatives developed and flourished because of a network of emotional bonds. Thus, commercial networks were created that reflected the

mentality and ethos of the parties mentioned above while also shaping the required conditions and strategies for financial profit. In particular, as regards the society of Moschopolis and the prosperity it enjoyed, the influx of large amounts of capital in the surrounding area proved that the flow of money into the city entirely depended on the networks established by members of the merchant class. Many letters show the ties that developed between the merchants. The young people who were sent to train with a great merchant or representative had to abide by what he said for a certain period and serve as apprentices to be taught tricks of the trade. Finally, the correspondence between the merchants of Moschopolis also shows that they avoided writing about specific issues in their letters, choosing instead to use trusted individuals to deliver the messages in person.

The port of Dyrrachium was the most important port linking the Moschopolitans to Venice. That is why Moschopolitans could also frequently be found in Avlona, where their stores and warehouses (Vacalopoulos, 1992; 2003). In addition, as noted in the letters, the Moschopolitans also used other ports along the Adriatic coast, such as Castelnuovo, Perast, and Dobrota, which were part of “Venetian Albania” (Papahagi, 1935) and mainly served the trade from Venice. The Moschopolitans had also developed trade relations with Ancona apart from Venice. The characteristic phrase “per via di Ancona” shows the regular trade contact and collaboration between numerous Greek merchants and this large Adriatic port. Over time, it seems that trade relations were also established with the ports of Trieste and Fiume (Papahagi, 1935, Martinianos, 1957).

### ***Commercial goods handled by the merchants of Moschopolis***

The “manifesti di carico” and “viscontri di scarico” docked in Dyrrachium provide valuable and detailed information up to the year 1755 on the goods handled by the merchants of Moschopolis. The lists mentioned above show that large quantities of wool and leather, treated and untreated, were transported from Moschopolis to Venice. A detailed account of the goods exported from Dyrrachium would include wool, *ampades* (capoes), *tserges* (rugs), *velentzes* (carpets), yarns, *sahtiania* (processed goatskin), *maroquins*, cloaks, coats, bed linen, carpets of varying quality, from very thick to very thin, in many different colours and of exceptional quality, sheepskin treated with varnish and unprocessed sheep and calfskins, coffee, saffron, tobacco, and wax (Papahagi, 1935, Martinianos, 1957; Mertziotis, 1947; 1936; Luca, 2004).

Venice supplied the markets of Moschopolis with felt, velvet (Beaujour, 1829), gold-woven fabric, silk, taffeta, londrins (Beaujour, 1829), scarves, kaftans, gold decorative braids, different types of fabric (Beaujour, 1829; Papadopoulos, 1989) and clothing, of varying quality, since they were

required to cover the ever-increasing but also diverse needs of the East. Imports also included glass items, glasses, carafes, bottles, many of which made at the workshops on Murano island, others made of beautifully crafted porcelain (an art originating from Majorca), pistols, cordons, products for dyeing and storing leather and fabric, iron wire, cosmetics, decorative items, mirrors (Dimitropoulos, 1996; Tenenti, 1959; Luzzatto, 1995; Brunello, 1981), lamps, rails, paper, books (Liata, 1977; Tsirpanlis, 1981), ink, pewter, sugar, coffee, nuts, crosses, chalices, chandeliers, iconostases, prayer books (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957; Koltsidas, 1999).

Many other merchants from neighboring settlements to Moschopolis also actively exchanged trade between Dyrrachium and Venice. Furthermore, it would be wrong to think that the merchants mentioned above were only interested in establishing trade relations with Venice and the markets of Europe. Tens of merchants traveled to the small markets of Elbasan, Berat, Tirana, Kastoria, Mascholouri, Ellassona (Asdrachas, 1975), Larisa, and Thessaloniki to sell their wares, and also took part in the large annual trade fairs (Martinianos, 1957; Arsh, 1994; Vacalopoulos, 1992; Papahagi, 1939; Katsiardi-Hering, 2003; Karanatsis, 1994; Svoronos, 1996). Antonio Bartolovich, the consul of *Serenissima* in Dyrrachium, in a letter dated 8 February 1761, provides a detailed account of how the merchants arriving at the port had to travel through several regions to procure the products they exported to the Venetian Republic. For this reason, we find many of them transporting cotton from Serres, wool from Monastir and Skopje, silk (Sella, 1961; Cousinéry, 1831; Iglesi, 2004) from Thessaloniki, wax from Vlachia and Serbia, treated leather from Ohrid and sheepskin from Elbasan, Tirana and Berat (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957). The correspondence of that period shows that the currency used for these transactions were the zecchini and ducats of Venice, the reals of Spain, and the akçes and grossi of the Ottoman Empire (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957; Liata, 1996).

Cotton was undoubtedly one of the most important products exported from regions under Ottoman rule. The most significant quantities of cotton in the Ottoman Empire were gathered from the valleys of Serres and Smyrna. For the Moschopolitans and other merchants of Macedonia and Epirus, Serres and its surrounding villages became the most popular trading hub, which they regularly visited for their supplies in cotton. Cotton crops in the region reached such a level in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that they greatly exceeded wheat crops (Beaujour, 1800; Clarke, 1824; Vacalopoulos, 1976; Leontaritis, 1981). Different packaging methods were used on each occasion, depending on whether the cotton would be transported by land or sea. Its price also fluctuated depending on the demand and quantity on offer (Beaujour, 1800; Vacalopoulos, 1976; Iglesi, 2004). Cotton was not only considered essential

for the Venetians. The French, and mainly the Habsburgs, also acquired large quantities of cotton from the region of Serres.

The regions of Albania and Thessaly were at the heart of the wool production. Skoutari, Elbasan, the mountainous Vlach villages, Larisa, Trikala, as well as Giannitsa, Sofia, and Plovdiv were the most important centres for the show and collection of wool. The wool stood out for its quality and how it was processed. It was undoubtedly a staple for the demands of the rapidly expanding European textile industry, which was a well-known fact to the merchants of the Ottoman Empire that they tried to exploit in every possible way. Finally, to procure wax, the Moschopolitans traveled to several regions of Albania, frequently visited Bosnia, and even went as far as Vlachia, as can be seen in their correspondence (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957; Papastathis, 1999; Mertzios, 1947).

Finally, the letters exchanged between the Moschopolitan merchants show that many of them arrived in the prosperous state of the Republic of San Marco not only to obtain or sell wares, teach their children the art of trade or settle there as commercial agents, but also because they were interested in coming into contact with the civilisation of the west, for study and education (Papahagi, 1935; 1937). Thus many of the Moschopolitans' children arrived in Venice and joined the classes of the Flanginian School; they were taught sciences and letters in the learning environment of the Serenissima and returned to their birthplace to convey their knowledge to their fellowmen. The best-known example is Ioannis Chalkeas from Moschopolis. They served twice as director of the Flanginian School and as a priest at the Greek church of St George (San Giorgio dei Greci) (Martinianos, 1957).

### **The Greek language and the Moschopoli's location**

A study of the letters published by Papahagi provides the opportunity to arrive at certain general conclusions regarding the presence and commercial activities of the Moschopolitans in Venice. What is depicted through the numerous letters is that the correspondence exchanged by the Venetian consuls never refers to Vlachs but always to Greek merchants from Moschopolis (Papahagi, 1935). The reason is obviously linked to the Moschopolitans always used the Greek language for their commercial transactions. There is no single Vlach word in their letters; however, several Italian ones are. What is also clear is that they always made proper use of the accents and breathings of the Greek language, and their spelling was very satisfactory given the circumstances at the time. The Vlach language was used only within their family environment, often in their own towns, but never for official trade agreements and transactions. After all, it should be noted that Venice already featured a rich and prosperous Greek community, which was

an element that rendered the use of the Greek language essential and particularly useful for those operating in the Serenissima.

The Moschopolitans' decision to use the Greek language for their transactions did not only refer to the trade contacts they developed in Venice. It was also used in the Balkans and Central Europe markets where they operated and, as expected, in the settlements they established. The Greek language was the essential tool for all economic agreements of the Vlach-speaking community since it was the official language of commerce for almost all merchants in the Turkish-occupied Balkan regions. This particular functional role of the Greek language (*lingua franca*) was precisely why the Moschopolitans chose to exclusively use Greek for their commercial transactions and contact with third parties (Stoianovich, 1960; Karakosta, 2011).

Moschopolis, as the place of origin of merchants, appears in the State Archives in various corrupt forms as Moscopolì, Moscopoli, Moscopolj, Moscopole, Voscopoli, Voscopolij, Voscopoli, Voscopolj. Moschopolitans appear as Moscopoliti, Moscopolit, Moscopolean, Muscopul'ian, mercanti moscopoliti, greci din Moscopole, certi mercanti greci di Moscopoli, I Greci di Moscopoli, mercanti greci da Voscopoli, mercanti greci di Moscopoli (Papahagi, 1935; Katsiardi-Hering, 2006; 1996; Vlami, 2000; Peyfuss, 1975).

On the Venetian consuls, a great wealth of information can be found in the letters of Pietro Rosa, Giambattista del Rossi, Francesco Cumano and Antonio Bartolovich. However, Pietro Rosa was the consul whose correspondence is the most dependable and complete in providing a detailed description of the Moschopolitan merchants. Through the texts of the Venetian consul, the latter are at times presented as being honest, loyal, and dedicated to the Republic of San Marco. Elsewhere they are characterized as being disloyal and dishonest, depending on the outcome of their trade transactions at the port of Dyrrachium and the prevalent conditions at the time. The fact that Rosa lived in Dyrrachium for many years allowed him to get to know the Moschopolitans very well, especially concerning their mentality, way of thinking, and the methods they used to link the two sides of the Adriatic through trade (Papahagi, 1935).

He did not hesitate to cooperate with them on issues relating to his country, as shown above. Thus, several Moschopolitans whom Rosa trusted to ensure the safe transfer of the correspondence sent by the Venetian authorities in Dyrrachium to Constantinople and vice versa. The route Dyrrachium-Moschopolis-Constantinople, which covers approximately 800 kilometres, seems to have been used quite regularly by caravans. The fact that Moschopolis was located mid-way along this route is clearly depicted in the phrase *per via di Moscopoli*. Within this framework, although the Moschopolitans were Ottoman subjects of the Sultan, they were introduced

and acted as loyal friends and partners of the Venetian Republic in the East. Although the fact that the Moschopolitans were viewed as trustworthy by the Venetian State meant that they enjoyed a certain prestige and value, as did their city, there is, however no doubt that they tried to exploit this trust to the utmost, to gain the most significant possible benefits from trading with the said Italian city (Papahagi, 1935).

### **The decline of commercial activities between Moschopolis and Venice**

From 1741, however, there is an increasing number of references stating that the Moschopolitan merchants were no longer considered the loyal and dedicated merchants of past years. Their collaboration with ships serving the economic interests of Ragusa had become more and more frequent, while several complaints were arriving at Dyrrachium about them forsaking the laws of trade and illegally importing a great many products (Papahagi, 1935). In 1755, Konstantinos Segkounas was the name of the last Moschopolitan merchant that appears in the letters exchanged between the Venetian consul in Dyrrachium and the Cinque Savi.

Another important observation, regarding the letters from that period, studied and published by Papahagi, is the fact that, in referring to their city, the rulers of Venetian did not only provide information related to the merchants but also frequently presented detailed accounts of the overall political and social situation in Albania. Thus, on 30 April 1711, we see Pietro Rosa informing the Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia about the turbulent situation in Macedonia and the Balkans due to the outbreak of the Russian-Turkish war. He comments on the plundering and destruction that the armed gangs were carrying out in the area of Monastir and Ohrid. At the same time, letters of similar content and interest are also found in the correspondence of 1736, when the next war broke out between the Czar and the Sultan (Papahagi, 1935).

This intention to provide a detailed account of the activities in the Turkish-occupied East, particularly in the Balkan hinterland, also explains the existence of a letter dated 1742, sent by consul Giambattista de Rossi to the governor-general of Dalmatia and Venetian Albania, Girolamo Querini. In the letter, he speaks of highly infectious disease, with symptoms similar to the plague or cholera, which had taken the lives of countless inhabitants of Elbasan, Dulcigno, Siatista, and Moschopolis. As regards Moschopolis in particular, the consul certainty notes that 200 people had died up to that point (Papahagi, 1935; Martinianos, 1957). In fact, the Codex of the Holy Monastery of Timios Prodromos in 1740 speaks of a “great famine” that affected the city and lasted from February to June. In August 1896, Martinianos mentions that he found a small 6-page leaflet in the library of the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petra on Athos, attached to an issue of the Liturgy

of St Naoum that had been conducted in Moschopolis in 1740. The sixth page had no writing but bore four images commonly found in the books published in Moschopolis, along with the stamp of the city's printing house. In the remaining five pages, famine had been mentioned that had affected Macedonia that year. There is an eloquent description of the dire situation faced by the city of Moschopolis and detailed records of how the food prices had risen (Martinianos, 1939).

## Conclusion

The correspondence continued undiminished until 1761 when we find the final mention of Moschopolitan merchants in a letter by Antonio Bartolovich. The Venetian consul in Dyrrachium, in a lengthy but fascinating letter, put forward the reasons that led the port of Serenissima to decline and drove the merchants to the markets of Central Europe (Papahagi, 1935; Vacalopoulos, 1958; 1969; 1980). The observations made by Bartolovich clearly indicate the economic focus that the Republic of San Marco had adopted. The heavy taxes imposed on the goods leaving the port of Dyrrachium led many merchants to Thessaloniki and Sagiada. This change in maritime routes, combined with the large number of shipwrecks that had occurred, made several merchants decide to turn to overland trade (Vacalopoulos, 1958; 1969; 2003). Apart from the consul's statements, another fact that should be taken into account is that tariffs (*dazi*) had been abolished in Ancona since 1737, through a decision taken by Pope Clement XII, followed by Trieste in 1754, according to a decree by Maria Theresia (Babudieri, 1988; Harlaftis, 2005). For the Venetian consul, the indicated solution that would revive the commercial traffic at the port of Dyrrachium was to lower the tax contributions imposed on the merchants; this never happened, however. The final mention of Moschopolitan merchants arriving at Serenissima is in a letter by Bartolovich on 8 February 1761. Thus, the trade relations between Venice and Moschopolis came to an end. However, they continued to relate a few years later intellectually. Theodore Kavalliotis, a distinguished scholar, cleric, and teacher from Moschopolis (Kekridis, 1991; Skenderis, 1928; Zaviras, 1872; Peyfuss, 1976; Papacostea, 1970), printed his work with the title *Protopeiria* at the printing house of Antonio Bartoli (Papahagi, 1935; 1934; Martinianos, 1957; Kilipiris, 1999; Patrinelis, 1989).

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