



Summary :

This region includes the Black Sea coasts of Novorossiya (New Russia), which during the 19th century became the granary of Europe. The Greek merchants of the diaspora who had settled in the merchant colonies of the main harbours of the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and Northern Europe, in collaboration with the Greek nautical enterprises of the Ionian and the Aegean islands, developed enterprising networks which transported huge amounts of grain to the industrializing Europe.

Date

18th-20th century

Geographical Location

North and east coasts of the Black Sea from the region of Odessa to Batumi

1. Human geography

This region includes the Black Sea coasts from the river Dniester, continues to [Crimea](#), to the [Azov Sea](#) and ends up to the southern coasts of [Caucasus](#) at [Batumi](#) (Batumi), in the modern Georgian-Turkish borders. Today these coasts are shared by Ukraine, Russia, Abkhazia and Georgia. The region, which was gradually taken by the Russian Empire from the Ottomans from the decade of 1770 until 1880, was called New Russia or Novorossiya.

When at the end of the 18th century the Russians intruded the northern coasts of the Black Sea, there was practically no trade in the region. "During the beginning of the 19th century", according to Vasilis Kardasis, "the Russian south had the characteristics of the steppe: a wide region with shrubs, oak trees and grass. What gave the ground a particular aspect was the black earth, the *chernozem*, a common attribute of the northern regions which neighbour the Black Sea. The dark colour gave the name to the territorial area located between the coasts and to a theoretical axis which almost touches Kiev, continues to the east until the left bank of Volga and approaches the Uralian mountain ridge".¹ Since this huge area was virtually uninhabited and the great fertile plains totally uncultivated, the first concern of the Russian government was to attract people and to raise the population, offering special privileges to the immigrants in the form of land, farming equipment and building material. These motives, which were aimed in encouraging the local Russian populations to migrate, provided further benefits to the foreign colonists. The new inhabitants were German, Jewish, Armenian, Dutch, Swiss, Polish and Italian. A large number came from the Christian populations of the Ottoman Empire and were Bulgarians, Serbians, Rumanians and [Greeks](#). The Greeks came from the islands of the Aegean and from other parts of the Ottoman Empire, thanks to a decree of Catherine II. The encouragement of the Greeks to settle in southern Russia coincided with the Russian protection of the Ionian Islands, with the result that a great number of inhabitants from the islands moved there too. From the decade of 1770 and until the end of the 19th century the endemic Russian-Turkish wars and the Greek rebellions triggered continuous migratory waves of Greeks not only towards Russia but also towards the Principalities of Danube, which were under Russian protection. Either way, the economic development of the harbours of the Black Sea was an attraction for the immigrants, which continued arriving until the end of the century. The motives for one to live in the South were so many that the population of New Russia rose from 162,920 inhabitants in 1782 to 3,400,000 in 1856.

The Greek population living on the coasts of southern Russia before World War I is estimated at 600,000 people, from which 115,000 dwelled in the northern coasts of the Black Sea, between [Odessa](#) and [Theodosia](#) (Feodosia). 160,000 dwelled in the region of the Azov Sea, whereas 270,000 lived scattered on the eastern coast, from [Novorossiysk](#) to Batumi. The rest lived in the region of Caucasus. The Greek element, especially people who came from the [Pontus](#), held an important position also in the southern coasts of the Black Sea, which belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Thus, a great part of the Greek immigrants in southern Russia during the 19th century were from the [Pontus](#).

The Russian coastal regions of the Black Sea where the Greeks mainly settled were totally undeveloped. The Greeks evolved into the



most important merchants of the region. Their trading connections, the existence of a substantial Greek population in every coast, as well as the knowledge of the local dialects and customs made access to the local markets easier for the Greeks than for the merchants of other ethnic groups. Furthermore, the environment of the Black Sea, which offered the main bulk of the merchandise transported via the trade network, was extremely difficult, especially before the [Crimean War](#). The Black Sea was famous for its sailing difficulties, such as strong currents, sudden storms and thick fogs. The entrance from the Straits of the Dardanelles with a southern current of a speed of 2-4 miles meant great delays for the sailing ships, which had to wait for a favourable wind. Furthermore, the strong northern winds kept ships tied in the Bosphorus for months, whereas the north-western ones brought rain and fog and the north-eastern ones tempests. Most of the great rivers of Europe, such as Dniester, Bug and Don, flow into the north and the east coasts of the Black Sea. Hundreds of miles of marshes cover its coasts, which are thus left without any natural harbour. Rivers, as well as the Azov Sea, would remain frozen for more than three months during winter and the sudden ices would form a common danger. Finally, malaria and cholera were another threat. Ships which passed from [Constantinople](#) had to remain in quarantine in Russian harbours and this was also an important reason of delay. Most of these harbours had improvised docks, which however in numerous cases did not even exist, so that the ships had to load their cargo in the open sea.

2. Trade and shipping

The great development of the region came thanks to the exports of grain and sea transports. The Black Sea became the granary of industrializing Europe. The vast plains which ended at the coasts of the Black Sea were transformed into the most important grain-exporting region in the world, followed by the United States. Table 1 (see audiovisual material) indicates the importance of the exports of the Black Sea on an international level, especially in comparison to the exports of the United States. Table 2 shows the impressive rise of the exports of grain from southern Russia in comparison to the exports from the Danube.

Grain “built” the cities-harbours of southern Russia. From the late 18th century and particularly after the mid-19th century, many cities-harbours which based their prosperity on the export sea trade were developed at full speed. A dense network of great, medium and small cities-harbours was developed and created the urban zone of the northern and eastern coasts of the Black Sea. Three peripheral harbour systems were created in the region. The first harbour system included the Ukrainian ports of the northern coasts of the Black Sea: Odessa, the leading port of this harbour system, [Mykolaiv](#) on the river Bug and the Crimean ports [Sevastopolis](#) (Sevastopol), Eupatoria and Theodosia (Feodosia). Table 3 shows clearly the abrupt rise of the ship departures from these harbours. This rise is apparent after the 1860’s. Odessa, which remained the greatest harbour of the Black Sea, was until then the main exporter of grain and the seat of the great Greek merchant houses.

After the Crimean War a series of socioeconomic reforms in southern Russia established a new economic order in the region. The most important social reform was the **emancipation of the serfs** in 1861, which had as a direct result the increase of the cost of labour. Many great land-owners of southern Russia faced grave difficulties in the new conditions of the “free market” and sold their estates. The new buyers were Jewish in their majority: in the region of Odessa, for example, 75 % of the lands which were sold were bought by Jews.² Furthermore, trade reforms which took place in Russia, according to which foreign merchants could enjoy the same privileges with the native merchants, revoked the favourable position of the Greeks who had gained Russian citizenship. Odessa’s harbour stopped being a **free port** in 1857 and thus it did no longer offer its advantages to the importers of the region. Furthermore, a series of bad crops in Odessa’s hinterland during the end of the 1850’s left small margins of profit from grain export. Competition with other grain-producing countries, like the Danubian regions, the USA and India, decreased even more the profits of the old export merchant houses, a great number of which decided to stop their activities in Odessa.

As a result, the great Greek merchant houses were gradually replaced by a large number of Jewish brokers, speculators, agents and suppliers, who were ready to accept smaller margins of profits, whereas some great Jewish houses specialized in the exportation of grain worldwide, such as the ones of Louis Dreyfus in Paris and of M. Neufeld in Berlin. Apart from that, the development of the harbours of the Azov Sea and of the Caucasus region, after the completion of basic works of infrastructure in the decades of 1860 and 1870, such as the railroads and the telegraph lines, decreased the importance of Odessa as the greatest export city of southern Russia. In the last third of the 19th century exports from the nearby city-harbour of Mykolaiv and from the cities-harbours of Azov and Caucasus were increased and surpassed the ones of Odessa.



The second harbour peripheral system of the Black Sea included the harbours of the Azov Sea with [Taganrog](#) as the leading port as well as other secondary ones following it, such as [Kerch](#), [Berdiansk](#), [Rostov](#), Yeysk and Ahtari. Taganrog, known to the Greeks also as Taiganio, the outermost harbour of the Azov Sea, developed slowly, mainly during the 19th century. Its evolution was not impressive, since the nearby harbour of Rostov had developed a noteworthy activity between the decades of 1880 and 1890. The shallow waters of the Azov Sea, the difficulties in navigation and the deficiency of the harbours –long delays due to the quarantine in the harbours of Kerch and to the sandy barrier of the Straits at Yeni Kale- contributed to the increase of the cost of transportation and insurance and to the delay of the development compared to Odessa before the Crimean War. Later, the quarantine at Kerch was abolished, the narrow passage was widened through dredging, assuming a depth of twenty-four feet, and the route to the Azov Sea was opened for big steamships. Between the decades of 1860 and 1870, the railroad line connecting the harbour with the hinterland was constructed and banks were created.

Nevertheless, in the Azov Sea there were still unsolved problems. Taganrog, which gathered two thirds of all exports, was in a distance of 30 miles from the regular anchorages and 40 miles for the great steamships. Before the 1870's and the introduction of the tugboats powered with steam, the conditions that prevailed for the captains and the crews, who travelled two or even three nights with boats for Taganrog, were extremely difficult. In [Marioupolis](#) (Mariupol) ships had to anchor in a distance of 6 miles, in Berdiansk and in Kerch in a distance of 5 miles. Thus, their losses from reloading were great. All cargoes had to be loaded first in barges and then from the barges to ships, whereas as soon as they crossed the sandy barrier of Kerch a part of the cargo had to be reloaded for a third time. Losses were estimated at 1% of the value of each exported cargo from the Azov Sea. Furthermore, many cases of stealing were reported. Table 4, which clearly shows the rising course of the exports of the Azov Sea, proves the importance of Taganrog as the main centre of export, but also the sudden rise of the sea traffic at Batumi, which belonged to the third harbour system of the Russian ports.

The third peripheral system covered the long eastern coast of the Black Sea, the coast of Caucasus actually, where the development of trade was impressive. In 1900, it represented 38% of the total tonnage of the departures from the harbours of southern Russia. The development of these harbours was supported by the exports of the mineral riches of the Caucasus. The will of the Russian government to develop this part of the country was manifested with the construction of infrastructure works: harbours, piers and the opening of the Transcaucasian railroad line in 1883. Poti was one of the first harbours which were developed thanks to the abovementioned efforts. However, it lost its importance very quickly because of its extremely unsafe anchorage, but mainly because of the annexation of Batumi by Russia in 1878. In 1880 and 1890 Novorossiysk became the main harbour of the northern Caucasus, from where grain, petrol and cement were exported. The stable development of this new harbour was the reason for the substantial decrease of cargoes from Taganrog. In winter, when the Azov Sea froze, Rostov-on-Don's grain was exported via Novorossiysk.

Batumi was soon to become the most important harbour of the region of Caucasus, after abundant governmental investments in works of shipping infrastructure. Its importance is due to the fact that it was the safest harbour of the whole coast from Kerch to [Sinop](#) and its development was based almost exclusively to the continuously rising exports of petrol from Baku. The yearly production of petrol was increased from 500,000 barrels in 1873 to 3-4 millions in the early 1880's. Illuminating, heating and lubricating oils formed the greatest bulk of trade. From 1892 kerosene was exported to India, China, Japan and other harbours of the Orient, with the result that the gates of these sea routes opened to the Greek-owned ships.

3. Merchant dispersion and Greek shipping

The Greeks evolved into the main merchants and transporters of grain cargoes at the northern and eastern coasts of the Black Sea. From the end of the 18th century the sea trade of the northern and eastern coasts of the Black Sea was organized and extended thanks to an enterprising network developed by the merchant houses of the Greek diaspora in collaboration with the Greek ship-owners of the Aegean and of the Ionian Sea. The research for Greek ships in the archives of the great harbours of the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and Northern Europe indicated the width of the enterprising networks of the Greeks in the 19th century and their dominance in the European trade of the Levant and led the historian Tzelina Harlaftis fifteen years ago to classify the international enterprising network of the Greeks into two phases: the Chian and the Ionian one.³ The Chian phase covers the decades from 1830



until 1860 and took its name by the origin of the majority of the families which were occupied with trade from the island of [Chios](#). This is the era of sailing ships, during which the great Greek merchant houses abroad become huge, like the ones of the [Rallis](#), [Rodokanakis](#), Petrokokkinos or Skylitzis brothers based in London in the West, Odessa and Constantinople (Istanbul) in the East, and were concerned with the triadic form of their enterprises: trade, shipping and money-lending activities. It is clear that the Chians, and then the Ionians, managed to develop in such a degree due to the abolition of the merchant monopolies by the European powers, which offered many new chances for competition. The [Chian network](#), which was maintained strong for one more generation, was replaced by the [Ionian network](#), i.e. by entrepreneurs of the diaspora originating in their great majority from the Ionian Islands, such as the [Vallianos](#) Brothers. This is the period during which the new technology of steam prevails in the sea and in the European shipping the passage from sailing ships to steamships occurs. The entrepreneurs of this period are specialized in shipping and place the foundations for the Greek shipping enterprises of the 20th century.

The Chian network was practically formed by 60 families of the Greek merchant Diaspora based in London and with the Rallis brothers as their leading merchant house. In 1820 the members of the Chian network were settled in all main harbours of the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and Northern Europe, whereas in 1850 they had extended their activities to New York, New Orleans, Calcutta and Bombay. The impressive rise of the Greek merchant houses in the middle of the 19th century was closely related to the merchant routes of the British Empire.

At the Russian coasts of the Black Sea, Odessa was the most important harbour, a knot of the Chian network, and the main grain-export harbour until the 1860's. Until that time Greeks were the most powerful merchant community of the city. The dominance of the houses of Rodokanakis, Rallis, Pappoudof, [Zarifis](#) and [Mavros](#) is obvious: only these five houses controlled at least one quarter of Odessa's internal trade during the period 1833-1860. The network of the Greeks in the same period was extended to Azov and was represented by the company of Rallis and [Skaramangas](#), which was a branch of the house of the Ralli Brothers of London, and by Rodokanakis, Pappoudof and [Avgerinos](#), who transported more than half of the total of the grain export and almost the total of the exports of animal fat and wool towards Great Britain.

The abovementioned merchants collaborated closely with the Greek sailing ship owners of the Aegean and the Ionian Sea. In 1850, the overseas cargo fleet of the island of the Ionian and the Aegean Sea was doubled in comparison to the pre-revolutionary period and was comprised of 1,300 big sailing freighters. The importance of the Greek shipping at the Russian coasts of the Black Sea becomes apparent in Table 5, where the Greek-owned ships (ships belonging to Greeks under different flags) formed more than one third of the total traffic of the harbours of Odessa, Mykolaiv, Sevastopolis and Theodosia during the years 1830-1860. The importance of the Greeks becomes more evident if one compares them with the British, which formed the second most important - after the Greek- shipping and merchant force in the Russian coasts. The presence of the Greeks is even greater in the harbours of the Azov Sea (Taganrog, Kerch, Berdiansk and Mariupol), where Greek ships formed more than 50% of the total traffic and the presence of the British was much smaller.

In the last quarter of the 19th century the sea-bound grain trade passed from the Chian to the Ionian businessmen. The Ionian network comprised approximately 140 families, half of which came from the islands of the Ionian Sea, especially Kefallonia and Ithaca. The Vallianos Brothers were the main trade-nautical house of the Ionian network. The greatest number of the families of Ithaca-Kefallonia was settled in the Azov Sea and the Danube, whereas branches of their enterprises were located in London and Marseilles. During this period the sailing fleet reached its highest peak; in 1875 2,500 cargo sailing ships belonged to owners from the Ionian and the Aegean Sea, which were always in a direct collaboration with the merchants in the Black Sea.

After the middle of the 19th century, the region of Odessa lost its prevalence in exports. The Crimean War, as we have already mentioned, and the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 brought many changes; the great Greek merchant houses based in London lost their monopoly and turned towards the markets of India and America. The Greek merchant houses of the region closed and were partly replaced by Jewish merchants. After the Crimean War, Mykolaiv emerged into the fastest developing town of the region; Greek families settled there, amongst which the families of Rodokanakis and Sevastopoulos from Chios distinguished themselves, as well as the families of [Lykiardopoulos](#), Karydas and Dendria from Kefallonia, and the family of Mavros from the Cyclades. In 1882 these families transported half of the exports of Mykolaiv.



The harbours of the Sea of Azov developed much faster in the whole region of the northern and eastern coasts by providing 40-50% of the total exports of the Russian south and competing in importance Odessa and Mykolaiv. Azov was the nucleus for the attraction of members of the Ionian network. Powerful families from Chios which had remained were incorporated into the Ionian network, especially via marriages with the powerful family of the Vallianos from Kefallonia.

As in the Danube, also in the Sea of Azov Greeks had the control of trade during the 19th century. Thanks to the similarity of circumstances, they acquired a specialized experience and were given the possibility to create a system "alternating" between the two regions. In 1851-1852, as shown in Table 6, they administered along with the English more than half of the total exports. It is thus expected that before the 1870's almost half of the cargo which left the Sea of Azov belonged to Greeks, whereas in the 1870's, notwithstanding the nautical development of the British in the same region, Greeks still controlled one third of it (Table 7).

At the harbours of the Azov Sea the Greeks and the British controlled more than two thirds of the sea traffic. It is noteworthy that, whereas during the decade of 1870, in the peak of the sailing ship seamanship, the percentage of the capacity of the British and the Greek ships was almost equal, during the 1880's and 1890's the British ships, and mainly steamships, prevailed. It is of course interesting that when the Greek-owned fleet made the transition from the sailing ships to steamships in the early 20th century the Greek-owned seamanship reached the British in the Azov Sea (Table 7).

The newly-developed harbours of the coasts of Caucasus from Novorossiysk to Batumi reasonably attracted Greek businessmen. The British consulate of Novorossiysk reports that in 1888 three of the eight main exporters were Greeks: Skaramangas, Vallianos and Sevastopoulos. The most important Greek exporters of petrol in Batumi were the [Sideridis](#) and the [Arvanitidis](#) Brothers, settled in Constantinople, which evolved into important financiers of Greek steamships. Chrousakis, who appears as a ship-owner in 1890 at the Lloyds ship register, was the owner of one of the three factories in Caucasus which manufactured pharmaceutical licorice, which was exported mainly to the United States. Statistics show that the Greeks also held a great share of the total departures of the eastern harbours of the Black Sea.

Table 8 reveals the size of the examined harbours of the northern and eastern coasts of the Black Sea in comparison to the western (Balkan) coasts. In the table, the northern and eastern harbours include Odessa, Mykolaiv, Taganrog and Batumi, whereas the western include the harbours of the Danube, [Varna](#) and [Burgas](#). It is clear that the Russian harbours precede the ones of Romania and Bulgaria, whereas the rise of the nautical traffic of all of them, which is tripled and quadrupled during the last third of the 19th century, is impressive.

Table 9 gives us a comparative aspect of the importance of the harbours of the Black Sea in relation to the total sea traffic in the Eastern Mediterranean. We see that the sea traffic of the Black Sea comes second after the harbours of the north-eastern and south-eastern Mediterranean. North-eastern Mediterranean includes Piraeus, [Smyrna](#), Patras, Thessalonica and [Syros](#), whereas south-eastern Mediterranean includes Alexandria, Jaffa, Beirut and [Alexandretta](#). The analysis of the statistics of all the regions has proved that the Greeks were not just the transporters of the bulk cargos of the harbours of the Black Sea, but also of the whole eastern Mediterranean during the 19th century, until the beginning of the World War I.

1. Καρδάσης, Β., *Έλληνες Ομογενείς στη Νότια Ρωσία, 1775-1861* (Athens 1998), p. 29.
2. Χαρλαύτη, Τ., *Ιστορία της ελληνόκτητης ναυτιλίας, 19ος-20ός αιώνας* (Athens 2001), p. 169.
3. For the "Chian phase" of the period 1830-1860 see Χαρλαύτη, Τ., *Ιστορία της ελληνόκτητης ναυτιλίας, 19ος-20ός αιώνας* (Athens 2001), p. 129-169. For the "Ionian phase" of the period 1870-1900 see *ibid.*, p. 173-213.



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Ινστιτούτο Ιστορίας Εμπορικής Ναυτιλίας

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Glossary :

Chian network

The network was comprised by the Greek merchants who were active commercially in the Black Sea, in the Mediterranean and in Western Europe during the period 1830-1860. The most important merchants originated from the island of Chios and very often were connected with kinship ties. These merchants combined trade with shipping and their companies were characterised by discipline and cohesion. The most important families were those of Rodokanakis, Zizinias, Rallis, Dromokaitis, Petrokokkinos, Agelastos. The network's importance declined with the changes in Black Sea trade after the Crimean War (1853-1856), in connection with the technological changes in sea transport.

emancipation of the serfs in Russia in 1861

Serfdom was established in Russia from the 17th century. It constituted a legal, economic and social network of dependence of a large part of the agricultural population that cultivated areas of the Russian nobility. The feudal obligations of the Russian serfs towards the landowners can be limited to two basic categories: provision of work (*barschina*) and paying taxes (*obrok*). In 1861, the tsarist regime, as part of the attempt to modernize the state after the Crimean War, abolished serfdom, liberating 23,000,000 serfs. The now free peasants were obliged to financially compensate the landowners for a part of the land they bought off.

free port (porto franco)

In international terms free ports or *porti franchi* were commercial ports where the payment of customs duties, mainly for transit trade's products or for cargo temporarily stored there, was abolished. Well-known free ports in the Mediterranean Sea were those of Trieste and Livorno and in Romania the ports of Galați, Sulina, Brăila and Costanța.

Ionian network

The Ionian network was comprised by the Greek merchants, who were active commercially in the Black Sea (in Odessa and Nikolaiev, ports of the Azov Sea and Danube), Mediterranean and Western Europe during the period 1870-early 20th c. The most important merchants of the network originated from the Ionian islands and especially Cephalonia and Ithaka. The network's members started their activity as sailing shipowners and they were later involved in trade. At the end of 19th c., they were involved in transportation of cargoes of the same kind, especially grain and coal. The network's members became important shipowners. The network's most important personalities were Athanasoulis, Antypas brothers, Aravantinos, P. Vallianos, N.P. Vlassopoulos, Drakoulis brothers, Theofilatos and Stathatos, Theofilatos brothers, Kavvadias brothers, G. Kakoulatos, A. Kourkoumelis, Lykiardopouloi brothers, Melissaratou brothers etc.