



Summary :

The benefaction of Greek entrepreneurs of South Russia took various forms (donations, endowments) and it was part of their entrepreneurial culture. Merchants' and bankers' birth place, the period of their settlement in Russia, the conditions in the places of reception and the class diversities among Greek entrepreneurs constituted the determinants of this phenomenon.

Date

17th century - early 20th century

Geographical Location

The northern coast of the Black Sea

1. Introduction

The various donations, before and after death either towards the birth place or the places of reception were part and parcel of the entrepreneurial culture of Greek merchants and entrepreneurs of Diaspora. Bequests and beneficial practices reveal the entrepreneur's profile, they outline the national and local particularities and they articulate with his social role. The entrepreneur's participation, either high or low, as a financial protagonist in social activities took him to the forefront and revealed the cultural or political views, which construed his social behaviour. During the period between the middle of 17th century and the Russian Revolution, there were many cases of social benefaction among the Greek entrepreneurs in South Russia, which necessitates the classification and interpretation of this phenomenon on the basis of four proposed components: the place of origin, the period of settlement, the place of reception and the social diversity.

2. Components of the phenomenon of benefaction

2.1 The place of origin

The place of origin constitutes an important factor in the formation of the practices of benefaction. For instance, Epirus and [Chios](#) occasioned two different migratory directions and practices of endowment. The Epirote merchants, who comprised an important part of the Greek Diaspora, especially during the first period, came from a mountainous and arid place, they followed the overland trade routes via the Balkans and Central Europe and they settled in the big cities of the Russian inland, such as Nizhni, Kiev or Moscow. They set out having small capital and, but gradually they accumulated wealth; The Epirote merchants stood out for their austerity and moderate life, while very few of them visited their birth place during the years of absence. Usually, they were celibate and died without leaving descendants. Frequently, they bequeathed their entire fortune in the communities of their birth place. They showed strong solidarity of community and they manifested interest for the diffusion of education in Epirus being under Ottoman rule.

Chians constituted a different case. In most of the cases, they emigrated after the catastrophe of Chios. They came from an island with strong commercial and maritime legacy and, as they possessed a considerable capital, they [settled in the ports of south Russia](#) and were registered in the merchants' first class. They dealt with [corn trade and ship-owning](#). As they had already developed powerful nets of kinship as well as commercial relations in the European ports, they summoned assistance from there in order to enlarge their enterprises. They took Russian nationality, while they were related to other powerful Chian families by marriage. They bequeathed small amounts of money to the birth place and they distributed their big commercial fortunes to their descendents.

2.2 The period of settlement

The temporal distance from the establishment of the Greek state altered the practices of benefaction. The most important bequests came from the first generation of the diaspora, who passed away in the hope of seeing their native land free and they invested a lot of money in building churches and schools as well as liberating captives, ameliorating the communities' infrastructure and paying the



taxes of Greeks who were Ottoman subjects. The local institutions received the bequests. The capital was usually invested in Russian banks and the beneficiary received the annual dividend or the capital gains.

The second period coincided with the first steps of the independent state up to 1870. Many bequests were appropriated to the national centre for institutions of national importance, such as the University, the Hatzikonstas Orphanage, the Rizareios Academy etc. After 1870, the benefactions towards the state fall into decline, since the diaspora showed an increasing interest for profitable investments in the Greek market. As a result, large capitals of the Greek diaspora were invested in the enterprises of Greece, while the state proved to be unable to manage successfully the emigrants' bequests. During the Balkan Wars there was a new increase in benefactions in favour of the national fleet –though much lower than those offered by emigrants in the United States of America.

2.3 The place of reception

The third interpretative component of the phenomenon of benefaction comprises the reception place and the local conditions, which formed the way of life among the Greek diaspora and the practices of benefaction. In [Odessa](#), the first port of reception for Greeks who traded mainly in corn, the diaspora developed a strong communal organization as well as educational and artistic activities. As the Greek element became weaker after the Crimean War (1853-1856) and the communal organization and administration declined, the oligarchic character of the communal organizations and institutions resulted in silencing the class divisions and conflicts of interests, while the ethics of benefaction faded. The assimilation of the dominant class of Greek entrepreneurs into Russian nobility, the loss of the native tongue and the transition from trade activities to the rentier status reduced their concern for the communal matters and the amelioration of the non-privileged Greeks' position. Their behaviour and mentality were rather cosmopolitan and aristocratic than nationally oriented. During that period, they showed limited interest for the Greek educational institutions, such as the [Greek Commercial School](#) and [Rodokanakeio girl's school](#), which depended on bequests and contributions.

The Greek diaspora in [Taganrog](#) had a different structure. The Greeks took action mainly in the local institutions and organisations without these institutions being ethnically identified. The Greek entrepreneurs of Taganrog, the majority of whom came from the Ionian and Aegean inlands, supported the works of social benefaction for all the citizens. The municipal administration was given substantial benefits for embellishment, infrastructure and cultural works, such as the Church of Saints Constantine and Helen, the monastery of Jerusalem (A. Varvakis' bequest), the stone stair that leads to the waterfront (G. Typaldos' bequest), the naval-trade gymnasium, the Red Cross etc. Nevertheless, there is no reference to any Greek school established for the preservation of Greek language. As a result, most of the Greeks lost quickly their Greek ethnic identity. In [Rostov](#), which was the third port of the diaspora's settlement, the Greeks came from the neighbouring Taganrog and from the Pontus. There, the Greek Church was built in 1907, while the Greek mixed school was established by the bequest of Theofanous brothers, who originated from Kefalonia.

2.4 The entrepreneurs' social diversity

Class diversity and social gaps among the Greek entrepreneurs influenced their practices of benefaction. A comparison between the economic differences among the entrepreneurs, which impose respective social limits, vitiates their homogeneous image. For instance, there was a clear distinction between the prince merchants of corn trade, who belonged to the first class, and Emmanuel Xanthos, who managed to join the third mercantile class after he had worked hard for it. As a result, the first ones frequented the Russian aristocratic entourage and they found the international economic elites appealing, while the latter associated with his compatriots and the middle mercantile class. The social gaps and gradations affected the practices of benefaction, while raising protests of the middle class, who condemned the provocative attitude of the notables of the community, many of whom enjoyed special privileges within the community institutions. In 1847, for example, on the occasion of the establishment of the [Greek Charitable Community of Odessa](#), there was severe criticism for granting six votes to the Society's benefactors. The rich Greek of the diaspora were accused of showing idleness and procrastination regarding the establishment of a society for the care of poor sailors and breadwinners of the city as well as showing little concern for the amelioration of the educational institutions.

Although the church, the community and the education were at the core of the social practice of the first generation, their descendents pursued their integration in the Russian establishment. They were educated in Russian schools, they acquired titles of nobility and they showed little interest for the national affairs. This distance is manifested in their plan to erect a separate church in order to draw the



boundaries between themselves and the middle class, which was rallying round the church of the Holy Trinity.

3. Conclusion

In the case of the entrepreneurial diaspora in Russia, social benefaction served as a vehicle for broadening the social base and acquiring respect and appreciation among their Greek of the Diaspora and local society, which were necessary for those involved in business competition within an alien, even hostile environment. The social dimension of the entrepreneur's role – played to the utmost by Greek merchants- counterbalanced the traders' reputation, as it got often deflated, since scandals and bankruptcy were common, especially in corn trade. In parallel, the benefaction opened the way of social acceptance in case the benefactors redeployed their capital towards Greece. It could also be an important factor for achieving state titles, offices and public positions.

Their persistence in educational and patriotic aims, especially during the first period of settlement, differentiates the Greek entrepreneurs' practices of benefaction from the respective ones of other national groups in Russian territory. Their social mission was channelled into the Greek community, their birth place and, finally, the Greek governments. As the Greek state was struggling for augmenting national territory and economic viability, the benefactions declined.



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