



Περίληψη :

Grigorios Kouppas was a notable merchant operating in southern Russia between the years 1858-1883. He initially worked as a clerk in the Sevastopoulos' Bros merchant house in Odessa, during the transitional phase of the Russian grain trade (1860-1880), when the expansion in the railway network brought about the decline of the Greek merchant houses and the rise of the Jewish ones. He was an eye witness to the Jewish pogroms in Odessa in 1871 and to the ascent of Russian Panslavism. He was the main shareholder in the Kouppas Bros machine shop in Pireus (1883).

Τόπος και Χρόνος Γέννησης

1843, Mytilini, Lesvos

Τόπος και Χρόνος Θανάτου

1916, Mytilini

Κύρια Ιδιότητα

Merchant

1. Family – Location in the Azov Sea area

Grigorios Kouppas (1843-1916) was born in the city of Mytilini on the island of [Lesvos](#). He was the first-born son of Spyridon Kouppas, a ship-owner and merchant hailing from the Ionian Islands who had located in Mytilini. The financial difficulties that many members of his extended family faced, urged Spyridon to travel to [Constantinople](#) and the Black Sea in pursuit of grain cargos. New developments in the [grain business](#) after the Crimean War (1854-1856) reached him in [Odessa](#) working as a clerk in the grain office of Markos and Alexandros [Sevastopoulos](#). The sudden death of his wife and the need to sustain his extended family, however, brought him back to Mytilini (1864).

The natural disasters that hit Lesvos, like the great Kamada – the frost that destroyed crops in 1851 –, but also the 1867 earthquake, afflicted the Kouppas family and Spyridon's sons had to re-locate. Grigorios, who had studied in the Greek Gymnasium in Mytilini, was sent towards the end of the 1850s to the [Azov Sea](#), more specifically [Taiganio](#) (Taganrog), to work in the Sevastopoulos' Bros branch office, where his father had also worked. Out of the other three sons, Epameinondas was sent to Russia, Panaretos to [Smyrna](#) in order to enter priesthood and Achilles, the youngest, the subsequent founder of the machine shop "Ach. Kouppas & Co." was sent to Athens and Manchester.

When the branch office in Taiganio closed down, Grigorios relocated in [Mariupol](#), where for five years he served his apprenticeship in the French merchant house of Henri Pelagatti. Consequently, he took up the former position of his father in the Moldavanka suburb of Odessa, as a storehouse manager for the Sevastopoulos Bros.

2. Life as a clerk and the grain trade

During the third fourth of the 19th century, acquiring a "respectable occupation" was not an easy feat in southern Russia. [Relocation](#) from the Aegean Islands towards the Black Sea and the Azov Sea was a choice only in cases where the immigrant-to-be, deprived of means of production and labour in his country, was willing to take risks and suffer hardships in order to make a living. Grain trade and the life of a clerk meant constant transfers in pursuit of producers, top-quality grain and the most cut-rate prices. Grigorios Kouppas was one of the few Greeks who continued, on behalf of their bosses, to seek out Russian peasants in the mainland, while, at the same time, most of the grain trading export



companies bought from intermediaries, mainly Jews.

The development of the railway network made possible to connect the productive areas in the mainland of southern Russia with the exporting ports. This led to a change in the methods of grain trade. "Scattering grain" in way stations was Kouppas' favourite catch-phrase that described the new trend. In an effort to face the failing crops that often afflicted the Odessa area, Kouppas had to transport in harsh climatic conditions and pitiful means of transportation. It took over twenty years for him to allow himself the luxury of a respectable rest in a hotel and twelve to return for the first time to his birth place.

3. Geography of transportation

With the mobility of the "wandering Jew", as he himself stated, Grigorios' travels started from the Odessa grain storehouse (1864) to the markets of the Russian mainland. In the Easter of 1865 he was in Akkerman of Bessarabia, while on May 1868 and during Easter of 1869 he returned to Bessarabia in order to purchase grain. On February 1872 he visited his brother Achilles in Athens, while his brother Epameinondas was in Bessarabia and Odessa trading in grain. In 1873 failing crops urged him to scout Polish and northern Bessarabian markets. In spring 1874 he travelled once again to Akkerman and his brother Epameinondas to Elisavetgrad. On November 1874, failing crops in Odessa forced him to locate for one and a half year in Taganrog in the Azov Sea and brought Epameinondas in [Theodosia](#).

His migration from the sources of the river Prut to the coast of the Azov Sea, was preceded by smaller transports to [Berdiansk](#), [Rostov](#), Yekaterinodar and the Caucasus area, where he obtained valuable information about the inhabitants, their way of life and the way they traded in grain. The declaration of the [Russo-Turkish war](#) (1877-1878) finds him in Constantinople returning from Lesbos, and the stand-still in the exporting ports of southern Russia leads him to the overland markets of Romania, to Iasi, to Bucharest and to [Galati](#), seeking out great amounts of grain to supply the Czar's army.

4. The rivalry between Greeks and Jews in the Russian grain trade

Grigorios Kouppas experienced the intense rivalry between Greeks and Jews in the Russian grain trade, a rivalry concerning the ways of conducting commerce, the capital each ethnic group was able to mobilise, as well as their ethnic-religious differences. Time and time again he sends detailed descriptions of riots between Greeks and Jews in Odessa, centered around the Greek Church of the Holy Trinity, which was located in a neighborhood mainly populated by Jews, because of massive Jewish migration towards the city. His correspondence has preserved a rare and detailed description of the two-day riots that shocked Odessa on March 1871, during which Greeks, Russians and the rest of the population united against the Jews, while the police did not actually try to protect the latter. Jews were the scapegoats for the amassed social discontent due to the prolonged financial recession plaguing the city.¹

5. Construction of national identity

Grigorios Kouppas' letters allow us to follow the procedure of constructing a national identity among the members of the Odessa Greek diaspora and the change taking place at this time regarding Russian attitudes towards the Greeks. After the annexation of the Ionian Islands to the Greek state (1864), Grigorios Kouppas became a Greek citizen and



shared the sentiments of solidarity and support that most of the Odessa diaspora showed towards Greek irredentism. From 1867 onwards he pointed out the danger that the diffusion of Pan Slavism in Russia might mean for Greeks and painstakingly tried to convert his friends' "Russophile" sentiments, mainly those of the Greek Ottoman subjects living in Lesvos under Ottoman rule.

In his correspondence, the gradual demystification of the protecting emperor of the same faith and heavy critique against Russian despotism are apparent; however, he kept his distance from early revolutionary movements and attempts.

6. Enterprising prospect and investing

Grigorios Kouppas passed from the position of "onerous salariat" to independent merchant; he often collaborated in commercial enterprises with his brother Epameinondas, who had located in [Mykolaiv](#). His "duties" as first-born son weighing on his budget, such as the endowment of his sisters in Mytilene and the sponsoring of his brother's studies in Athens and Britain, did not allow him to quickly accumulate wealth. He preferred investment to saving, inserted investing as a concept into family finances and organised a balanced portfolio made up by stocks and bonds from different countries in order to cover his family's yearly expenses. Towards the end of his stay in Russia, he was thinking about buying a great area of land to graze cattle and cultivate.

His investment aspirations, however, were turned to Athens, where some of the Greek Diaspora capital was invested after 1870. Discussions with his brother Achilles, who worked as an engineer in Lavrio, lead him to industrial investment. Influenced by the Russian industrialization process that was developing rapidly thanks to foreign capital, Grigorios Kouppas suggested opening a machine shop in Rostov, while Achilles, who was acquainted with the Piraeus market, considered imperative its location in the rising industrialised centre of the Greek state. Grigorios contributed to the foundation and operation of the factory, coming to Athens in 1881 and depositing 200,000 drachmas as stock capital to the machine shop. He remained a stock associate, with limited liability in the business, and involved himself more with the development of his estate in Mytilini, where he and his family located. He passed away in Mytilini in 1916.

1. See quotation "The Jewish pogrom in Odessa (March 1871)".

Βιβλιογραφία :

	Καρδάσης Β. , <i>Έλληνες ομογενείς στη νότια Ρωσία 1775-1861</i> , Αλεξάνδρεια, Αθήνα 1998
	Herlihy P. , "Greek Merchants in Odessa in the Nineteenth Century", <i>Harvard Ukrainian Studies</i> , 3-4, 1979-1980, 399-420
	Σιφναίου Ε. , "Οι αλλαγές στο ρωσικό σιτεμπόριο και η προσαρμοστικότητα των ελληνικών εμπορικών οίκων", <i>Τα Ιστορικά</i> , 40, Ιούνιος 2004, 53-96
	Kremmyda E. , <i>Achille Couppas et Cie: Histoire d'un constructeur mécanique du Pirée 1882-1940</i> , École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris 2001



	<p>Σιφναίου Ε., "Εθνικός αυτοπροσδιορισμός σε ένα οικονομικά μεταβαλλόμενο περιβάλλον. Η μαρτυρία ενός Έλληνα εμποροϋπαλλήλου από το ρωσικό εμπόριο σιτηρών", Στασινοπούλου, Μ. – Χατζηγιάννου, Μ.Χ. (επιμ.), <i>Διασπορά-Δίκτυα-Διαφωτισμό</i>, Αθήνα 2005, Τετράδια Εργασίας 28, 125-144</p>
--	---

Πηγές

Ελληνικό Λογοτεχνικό και Ιστορικό Αρχείο (Ε.Λ.Ι.Α.), G. Kouppas-Black Sea, copies of letters 1863-1883.

Παραθέματα

The grain trade in Moldovanka

«Αλλά αι εμπορικά υποθέσεις, αίτινες κατ' αυτούς τους μήνας επιπολλάζουσιν διά την κατάβασιν των νέων σίτων, με ανεσχέτησαν τούτου του καθήκοντος [εννοεί την αλληλογραφία]. Παντού το εμπόριον έχει μεγίστην κίνησιν, εδώ δε η Μολδοβάνκα κατήντησεν υπερβολική, διότι ου μόνον καθ' όλην την ημέραν αδιακόπως έρχονται οι χωρικοί, αλλά και κατά μέγα μέρος της νυκτός, εις τρόπον ώστε αι αγοραί αρχίζουν από της 1ης ώρας της πρωίας και παύουν περί την 10ην της εσπέρας, εντεύθεν, φίλε, δύνασθε να καταλάβητε πόσος καιρός μένει προς ανάπαυσιν, και πολύ ολιγώτερος διά τους εντολοδόχους (ως εγώ π.χ.), οίτινες χρεωστούν μετά την παύσιν της αγοράς, να καταγράψωσιν τας καθ' όλην την ημέραν πράξεις των. Αιτία δε τούτου είναι οι Γερμανοί, όντες οι δραστηριότεροι πάντων των χωρικών, την δε ημέραν Ρώσοι, Μολδοβάνοι και Βούλγαροι».

Ελληνικό Λογοτεχνικό και Ιστορικό Αρχείο (Ε.Λ.Ι.Α.), Γ. Κούππας-Μαύρη Θάλασσα, αντίγραφα επιστολών 1863-1883, G. Kouppas' letter from Odessa to Leonidas Kouppas in Mytilini, 10-10-1864.

The Jewish pogrom in Odessa (March 1871)

«Ο όχλος έπεσεν μανιωδώς κατά των Εβραίων, συνέτριψε τα παράθυρα των πέριξ οικιών και διαίρεθείς καθ' ομάδας διεσκορπίσθη καθ' όλας τας οδούς της πόλεως συντρίβων τα παράθυρα των εβραϊκών οικιών από του κατωτέρου μέχρι του 3ου και 4ου πατώματος, εις τρόπον ώστε οι χριστιανοί ηναγκάσθησαν να θέσωσιν εις όλα τα παράθυρα των οικιών των εικόνας και σταυρούς προς διάκρισιν· ούτως η πόλις άπασα μετεβλήθη εις απέραντον εικονοστάσιον, το δε εσπέρας έθεσαν προ των εικόνων και κανδύλας ώστε έγινε εν είδος τι φωτοχυσίας· η δε αστυνομία περιεφέρετο τας οδούς χάσκουσα, μη θέλουσα ή μη δυναμένη να καταστείλη την ταραχήν· ένεκεν τούτου τη επαύριον, Τρίτην, ο καταστρέφων όχλος εγένετο θρασύτερος και πολυπληθέστερος· εισήρχετο εις τας οικίας, κατεσύντριβε, διεσκορπίζε και ελεηλάτει τα εν αυταίς· έβλεπε τις εκ των παραθύρων ριπτόμενα φορτεπιάννα, τραπέζας, καθέδρας, ασημικά, χρήμα κλπ. Τα οποία ετέροι εν ταις οδοίς κατεσύντριβον· τα παντοπωλεία, ρακοπωλεία, ωρολογοποιεία, πλούσια μαγαζία ρουχικών και άλλων πολυτίμων πραγμάτων διηρπάγησαν, αι συναγωγαί κατεσυντρίβησαν· εκ των Ιουδαίων ουδείς εφαινετο· πάντες εκρύβησαν και αλοίμονον εάν τις επαρουσιάζετο».

Ελληνικό Λογοτεχνικό και Ιστορικό Αρχείο (Ε.Λ.Ι.Α.), Γ. Κούππας-Μαύρη Θάλασσα, αντίγραφα επιστολών 1863-1883, G. Kouppas' letter from Odessa to Ioannis Chatzis Giannakis in Mytilini, 11-4-1871.

Χρονολόγιο

1843: Birth of Grigorios Kouppas in Mytilini.

1858: Location in Taganrog in the Sea of Azov. Clerk at the Sevastopoulos' Bros merchant house.

1859-1863: Apprenticeship in the French merchant house of Henri Pelagatti in Mariupol.

1864: Location in the Odessa Moldovanka suburb.



1868: His younger brother Epameinondas called to work at the same office.

1874: Failing crops in Odessa force him to migrate to the Azov Sea. There he becomes acquainted with Greek grand merchants of grain trade and members of the Greek community of Taganrog.

1875: The pursuit of grain sends him to the Caucasus.

1877-1878: Preparation for the Russian-Turkish war finds him in Bessarabia, in order to supply the Russian army with grain during the campaign.

1879: Moves around the cities of Podolia working for the Sevastopoulos' office, as well as for himself.

1880: Collaborates with his brother in independent grain trading enterprises.

1882: Invests in the machine shop "Achilles Kouppas A.E" (1882-1987).

1883: Locates initially in Piraeus and consequently in Mytilini

1916: Dies in Mytilini.