

Gelina Harlaftis: The Ottoman-Greek and Venetian/Ionian fleet in the Western Mediterranean grain trade during the Napoleonic wars

This paper based on a combination of primary archival material of Greek, Turkish, Italian, Maltese, French, English and Dutch archives will indicate the rise of Greek-owned shipping carrying grain to the Mediterranean ports during the Napoleonic wars. This has been a rather complicated task considering that Greeks during the period under examination were Ottoman and Venetian/Ionian subjects and flew the Ottoman, Venetian, Ionian, Austrian, Maltese, Jerusalem and Russian flags. This was a neutral fleet that used mainly the Ottoman flag, but also various other flags if the political circumstances dictated at particular times, thereby becoming highly important for the carriage of the Levant trade, and particularly grain for the main western Mediterranean port cities. In the 1780s the Greek-owned fleet carried almost 30% and in the 1790s almost 45% of the entire Levant trade of Livorno. During the 1790s it carried one third of the grain from Levant and the Barbary States to Marseille; while in 1796 Ottoman vessels were the only grain carriers to that city. In that same year, Ottoman Greek vessels bringing grain to Genova, were only second to the Genovese fleet. But beyond grain and the Levant trade, the archival evidence indicates that Greek-owned vessels remained in the western Mediterranean and carried the regional trade among Genova, France, Spain and Portugal before returning to the Levant. In this way they became important not only in the grain trade from the Levant but also in the total trade of these ports. During the period under examination Ottoman and Venetian/Ionian Greeks were the seafarers of the Ottoman Empire involved not only in the external but also in the internal trade of the Empire. By the end of the Napoleonic wars they had doubled the size of their fully armed merchant vessels mainly under the Ottoman flag and with the support of the Ottoman state.