Exchange and Non-Exchange: Confronting Borders in the History of the Black Sea

Guest Editors: Alexander E. Balistreri and Boris Belge
Table of Contents

by Alexander E. Balistreri and Boris Belge 3

Conditional Welcome: Russian Refugees as a Source of Skilled Labor in Interwar Turkey
by Pınar Üre 12

Across the Black Sea and into Eurasia: An Ottoman Greek with Skills and Connections in Georgia, Ukraine, Siberia, and China in the Early Eighteenth Century
by Iannis Carras 25

Enemy Shores? The Dilemmas of Writing Cold War Histories of the Black Sea
by Etienne Forestier-Peyrat 42

Prosperity and Conflict in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Rostov-on-Don: Russian, Cossack, and Armenian Economic Cultures on the Northern Black Sea Coast
by Michel Abeßer 56

Publishing Information/Contact 72
Editorial.
Exchange and Non-Exchange: Confronting Borders in the History of the Black Sea
by Alexander E. Balistreri and Boris Belge

It is possible, perhaps, to pinpoint the exact day on which all the sides of the Black Sea were at their closest to one another, symbolically speaking. On 3 January 1922, Mikhail Frunze, as extraordinary representative of the Ukrainian SSR to Turkey, invited Turkish and other dignitaries to the Ukrainian embassy in Ankara. The flags of Soviet Ukraine, Soviet Russia, Soviet Azerbaijan, and Turkey stood proudly at the front of the dining hall under the words “Long Live the Entente of the Peoples of the East.” More Turkish and Ukrainian flags adorned the walls. Frunze addressed the assembled dignitaries and commended the recent signing of the Turkish-Ukrainian Treaty of Friendship and Fraternity. Mustafa Kemal Paşa (later Atatürk) responded warmly. “It might be said,” remarked the Turkish nationalist leader, “that Ukraine and Turkey are actually two contiguous countries [iki muttasıl memlekettir]. Turn your eyes to the north: A sea! But if, for a moment, we imagine the sea to be gone, we see two countries at their closest proximity to one another. The sincere friendship between the peoples of these two countries is equally close.”¹

For the rest of the twentieth century, however, Frunze and Mustafa Kemal’s invitation to erase the Black-Sea barrier from the imagination was not reflected in the real world. Instead, politics and academia on all sides turned inward, hardening the physical and scholarly borders around the Black Sea. On the Turkish side, the state, alongside many historians and ethnographers, enthusiastically pursued efforts to establish the essential Turkishness of the country’s Black-Sea region (Karadeniz). Along the coast, the young Turkish Republic insisted on its cabotage rights, ending the predominance of foreign shipping in the southern Black Sea. Indeed, such shipping became an essential issue of the nation-state: The Ottomans, who had given up their exclusive control of the coastline to foreign shipping companies, were now, as Turks, to take command of the country’s shorelines, and especially its coveted Straits.² On land, meanwhile, local populations with “dangerous” connections beyond Turkish borders — the Greek Orthodox or Laz, for example — were either physically removed or somehow “demonstrated” to be Turkish. Old place names of non-Turkish origin were Turkified and the local, pre-Republican archives were destroyed.³ Though the people living in the Turkish Black-Sea region themselves remembered a shared past and only partially adopted the insular approach of official history,⁴ the prospects of pursuing the topic of a shared Black-Sea history remained limited at the academic level. In a delayed reaction to
the end of the Cold War; however, the 2000s saw a spectacular rise in interest in Black Sea regional studies from the Turkish side. Universities began to host regular international conferences on the Black Sea; newly established publishing houses, think tanks, and university departments began to publish several journals on Black Sea studies — journals that show no signs of thirsting for content. Turkish research conducted in the later period has tended to fall into one of three categories: works in security studies, emphasizing Turkish geopolitical and state interests; works highlighting the heritage of Turkish or Turkic peoples around the Black Sea; and works that attempt to reclaim the lost polyethnic heritage of the Turkish Black-Sea region.\(^5\)

As for the northern part of the Black Sea, things did not begin on much better footing. After the establishment of the Soviet Union, researchers concerned themselves mainly with territorial conflicts and contemporary problems in the region, such as the (re-)incorporation of the Southern Caucasus into the Soviet state by the Bolshevik commissar for nationality polices, Iosif Stalin. During the later decades of the Soviet Union, a certain interest was sparked among historians of the eighteenth century toward Catherine II’s ambitious geopolitical “Greek Project,” but the Black Sea as a contested contact zone between two empires was only rarely the main focus of historical research. Among others Elena Druzhinina stood out as an expert in the eighteenth century. Her work was mainly interested in social and economic history of the northern Black Sea.\(^6\) During the last years of the Soviet Union and after the end of the Cold War, the Black Sea became the topic of numerous articles, books, and conferences.\(^7\) However, even these approaches tended to be written or discussed from either a predominantly Russian perspective or from scholars from the field of Middle and Near Eastern studies alone. While this division is not surprising (given the specific needs and demands for research in the field, namely language skills and academic education), it remains an obstacle to the production of a synthetic, cross-regional history of the Black Sea.

Is it possible to bring these disparate realms of scholarship together? This special issue of *Euxeinos*, whose contributors explore the themes of mobility and stasis in modern Black Sea history, emerged from an international workshop that we (the editors) organized at the University of Basel in December 2018. As historians working on these regions on their respective sides of the Black Sea, we had the opportunity to discuss with scholars working on different segments of the region what all of us might learn from one another.\(^8\) In a keynote address entitled “Black Sea Crossings: Migrants and the Worlds They Made,” historian Eileen Kane presented a series of models that historians have used or might use to view the Black Sea as a region. Yet, as Kane admitted, none of these models seemed to work for the Black Sea at all times: The sea was a historical *hub* in some global networks but not in others; it served as a *highway* or *bridge* for merchants, migrants, and agents of modernization, but travel across the Black Sea was usually unidirectional;
it was an arena of competition but also, at times, a mare clausum. In the symbolic-discursive realm, too, the field of Black Sea studies struck us as ambiguous. We, as scholars, were trying to put the Black Sea at the center of our analysis, but the countries around the Black Sea themselves have often perceived it as more of a “backyard”: Indeed, no internationally recognized state today has its capital on the sea. Eyüp Özveren, a pioneer in the establishment of Black Sea regional studies as a field, goes as far as to call the “Black Sea world” a “permanent frontier zone.”

These contrasting, even contradictory, facets of the Black Sea, along with the institutional fragmentation of twentieth-century scholarship around its shores, have called into question the value of studying the Black Sea as coherent region in modern history. Though they had their precedents, it was particularly starting in the late 1990s that global scholars began to attempt to prove the value in studying the modern history of the Black Sea as a region. The large number of academic analyses in the social sciences and area studies today generally focus on the Black Sea merely as a newly emerging region of significant geopolitical interest; this “scholarly projection” of regional thinking has been complemented by works intended for a wider audience, reinforcing the idea in the public mind of the region as a coherent object of historical research. Yet the predominant vision of a coherent Black Sea region of security and energy cooperation today does not necessarily tell us about the “regionalness” of the Black Sea in modern history. Answering this question, as scholars like Charles King, Eyüp Özveren, and Stephan Troebst, among others have posited, requires weighing various criteria for different historical periods. The following fields have been identified by some or all of these scholars as potential criteria: (1) an endogenous feeling of shared regional identity; (2) the external imposition of “regionalness” through cartography or the pursuit of regional geostrategic interests; (3) the weakening or strengthening of state borders vis-à-vis common markets or porous civil societies; and (4) cultural transfer and migration.

With this special issue, we take one of these criteria and posit the degree of exchange or non-exchange as one of the main measures of “regionalness” in Black Sea history. The degree to which the geography and geopolitics of the Black Sea allowed—or hindered—exchange and mobility is one of the fundamental questions of today’s scholarly interest in the Black Sea. Research on exchange and mobility has dealt with people, goods, or ideas and has mainly focused on the period after the mid-eighteenth century, when the expansion of the Russian Empire southward began forcing the Ottoman Empire to concede ever more trade on the Black Sea to Russian seafaring. Following the eighteenth-century wars between the two empires, the Black Sea ceased to be an “Ottoman lake” and entered into a phase of intense mobilization and competition between multiple states, groups, and individuals.
number of recent studies have traced individuals’ and groups’ modes of mobility in the Black Sea region. Among them is Kelly O’Neill’s book, which describes Crimea as a Russian “southern empire” closely interconnected with the worlds of Greek merchants and the Ottoman Empire.\(^\text{14}\) In her study of Russian Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, Kane demonstrates how the Russian state monopolized travel on the Hajj by establishing state-sanctioned routes and boosting its own steamship company (ROPiT) as the main travel agent for religious pilgrimage to both Mecca/Medina and Jerusalem. In doing so, the Russian Empire expanded its geographical reach using new routes through the Black Sea, while simultaneously amplifying the movement of people across it.\(^\text{15}\) In his study of migration across the Russian and Ottoman Empires, meanwhile, Andrew Robarts highlights the density of exchange, both official and non-official, and focuses on one unintended side-effect of this cross-border exchange: alongside people, diseases like plague and cholera also spread across imperial borders. This posed a tremendous challenge for the administrations of both states, threatening lives and economic prosperity on either side. Therefore, Robarts’s story is one of mobility and of non-mobility: Especially during the spread of diseases and the immediate aftermath, Russia and the Ottoman Empire tried to reinforce their border regimes in order to prevent or at least obstruct uncontrolled transimperial movements, thereby contributing to and encouraging illegal practices such as smuggling, corruption, and others. While mobility in the modern period is often conceived in terms of popular movement outside of the absolute control of the state, state-induced forced mobility and its devastating consequences for the Circassians, Crimean Tatars, and other populations around the Black Sea form another node of research.\(^\text{16}\) Yet another line of research focuses on the exchange of ideas and knowledge across the Black Sea and into Europe and the Ottoman Empire.\(^\text{17}\) Most recently, a significant amount of research has been devoted to the mobility of cultural goods, forms of everyday life and leisure and tourism in the Black Sea region.\(^\text{18}\) Mobility across the Black Sea and its shores was a crucial element for the economic prosperity of the region; it comes as no surprise that the closure of borders and routes corresponded, generally speaking, to phases of economic and political uncertainty.

The forms, practices and, repercussions of mobility and non-mobility are at the core of all four articles comprising this special issue.

In her contribution, Pınar Üre introduces an important yet largely overlooked community connecting the northern and southern shores of the Black Sea – “White Russian” refugees to Turkey in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Making their way into Turkish republican society as a “skilled labor force,” such refugees were both agents of Turkey’s modernization as well as cultural ambassadors, for example, merging Russian and Turkish dishes into a trans-Black Sea cuisine. Üre argues, in fact, that this connection forged by refugees from Russia helps us to better understand Turkish modernization as multipolar, not entirely reliant on any one
model or actor.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, skilled labor moved from south to north and assisted in Russian modernization. Alexandros Levantinos, a mining engineer from the Ottoman Empire, is at the center of Iannis Carras’s biographical study. Carras uses the case of Levantinos to demonstrate the immense reach of mobility across and beyond the Black Sea region in early modern period. Born in the Pontus region, the engineer eventually ended up in the silver mines of Nerchinsk, supported and sponsored directly by the Russian state. Carras shows that the individual connections required by Levantinos to establish his position in Russia existed in tension with his ability to move freely across state boundaries.

Dealing with the second half of the twentieth century, Etienne Forestier-Peyrat emphasizes the ambiguous effects of the Black Sea’s divide during the Cold War, when NATO confronted the Warsaw Pact at the Soviet-Turkish border. Here, stasis, rather than mobility, may strike us as the defining factor of the Black Sea region. Going beyond geopolitics, however, Peyrat pays close attention to local factors and cultural entanglements such as individual cross-border mobility, resource exchange (gas), and the important role of tourism and leisure on both sides of the border. This allows him to draw a more subtle picture of the Black Sea: The region appears to be divided and connected at the same time.

Finally, Michel Abeßer focuses on one particular location, where two settlements on the shore of the northern Black Sea—a Russian core and an Armenian colony—gradually merged into today’s city of Rostov-on-Don. Using the lens of economic cultures, his contribution demonstrates this movement towards each other was by no means linear and always peaceful. Instead, the story of migration and Rostov’s interethnic co-existence is characterized by interaction and conflict as well as cooperation and distinction.

Taken together, all four contributions shed light on different forms of exchange and non-exchange on mobility and stasis between various groups and regions and on the role of states in promoting or preventing such mobility. While the Black Sea in some cases appears to be a contact zone, in others it is more a divisive border. For historians, the Black Sea itself clearly remains a “frontier zone” of historical research, bringing scholars from Russian and Middle Eastern Studies together and forcing them to rethink their own assumptions and mental maps.
**About the authors**

Alexander E. Balistreri is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer (wissenschaftlicher Assistent) at the University of Basel. Following studies in Wisconsin, Princeton, and Istanbul, he earned his doctorate at Princeton University’s Department of Near Eastern Studies. His major research project compares state-building projects in the Anatolian-Caucasian borderlands. Balistreri’s recent publications include a review essay on modern Caucasian historiography in the journal Kritika and an in-depth study of the Russian Revolution’s effects on the empire’s periphery (in 100 Yılın Ötesinde Ekim Devrimi ve Türkiye, Istanbul 2020).

Boris Belge is an SNSF Ambizione post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Basel. His project «Managing Trade» investigates infrastructure and economic practices in the port of Odessa (1794–1905). His dissertation was published in 2018 by Böhlau Verlag (Klingende Sowjemoderne. Eine Musik- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte des Spätsozialismus, Köln 2018). He also co-edited the collected volume Goldenes Zeitalter der Stagnation? Perspektiven auf die sowjetische Ordnung der Brežnev-Ära (Tübingen 2014, together with Martin Deuerlein). His research interests include trade, the economic and maritime history of Imperial Russia as well as social and cultural history of late socialism.
Endnotes

1 Yavuz Aslan, Mustafa Kemal-Frunze Görüşmeleri: Türk-Sovyet İlişkilerinde Zirve (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2002), 111. Frunze’s delegation to Ankara is pictured on the cover of this special issue of Euxeinos.

2 For this contemporary perspective on coastal shipping, see: Türkiye Cumnüriyeti Ticāret Vekāleti, Yıllıḳ: Türk Deñiz Ticāreti (İstanbul: Ticāret-i Bahriye Müdürülüğü, 1927), 4 and passim. The builders of the Bulgarian nation-state held similar views about their recent past and sought to ensure their economic and scientific command of the Black Sea shores. Such efforts on the part of Bulgaria were not lost on Turkish observers, who quickly translated Bulgarian works on the Black Sea as an example of what Turkey might accomplish, too; see: Sava Nikolov Ivanov, Černo more: Obštodostăpni studii, Kn. 1 (Varna: Edinstvo, 1925), translated into Turkish as: Sava N. İvanof, Ḋaradeñiz (İstanbul: Ticāret ve Şanāyi’-i Odası Ticāret ve Şanāyi‘-i Bahriye Şu’besi, 1928).


5 The first Turkish publishing house devoted to the Black Sea region was Serander, which was established in Trabzon in 1999. It has published 27 issues of the journal Karadeniz Incelemeleri Dergisi (Journal of Black Sea Studies) since 2006; its articles focus heavily on the history of the Black-Sea region in Turkey. The first Turkish journal devoted to Black Sea studies was Karadeniz Araştırmaları (Black Sea Studies), which began publication in 2004 under the auspices of the Karadeniz Araştırmaları Merkezi (Center for Black Sea Studies) and has published 61 issues to date. The journal has the expressed aim of conducting research on the geostrategic importance of Turkey, the history and culture of the Black Sea region, and regional Turkic cultures. Recently, it has published a series of special issues devoted to the countries and regions on the Black Sea’s northern shore. The journal Karadeniz (Black Sea) began publication in 2009 and has published 43 issues to date. The relevance of its articles to Black Sea studies has become increasingly tenuous. Finally, the Karadeniz Araştırmaları Enstitüsü (Institute for Black Sea Studies), housed at Trabzon’s Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi, edits the journal Karadeniz Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi (KAREN) (Journal of the Institute for Black Sea Studies) and has published 7 issues since 2015. While KAREN is the most consistently relevant to Black Sea studies, like Karadeniz Incelemeleri Dergisi, it remains heavily focused on the Turkish Black-Sea region. Karadeniz Incelemeleri Dergisi publishes articles in Turkish, and rarely in English, while the other three journals also accept, and occasionally publish, articles in Russian. It is difficult, however, to ascertain how “international” such efforts truly are. In addition to these journals, the Karadeniz Stratejik Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi (Center for Strategic Research and Practice on the Black Sea) has held a number of conferences with the stated aim of bringing scholars from around the Black Sea together. The Turkish publishing house İletişim has led the way in the approach of reclaiming “forgotten” aspects of Black Sea identity and reviving academic interest in the region’s ethnic minorities; among others, this work is representative of the trend: Uğur Biryol, ed., Karadeniz’in Kaybolan Kimliği (İstanbul: İletişim, 2014).


Eileen M. Kane, Russian Hajj: Empire and the Pilgrimage to Mecca (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

For an impressive example of recent research on this topic, see: Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, “Imperial Refuge: Resettlement of Muslims from Russia in the Ottoman Empire, 1860–1914,” (Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 2018).

A large research project situated at the University of Graz studies forms of knowledge exchange between Europe and the Black Sea region and has already launched its first publication: Dominik Gutmeyr and Karl Kaser, eds., Europe and the Black Sea Region. A History of Early Knowledge Exchange (1750-1850) (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2018).
Conditional Welcome: Russian Refugees as a Source of Skilled Labor in Interwar Turkey
by Pınar Üre

This article examines the so-called “White Russian” refugees, an important yet little-studied community, and their employment in early republican Turkey. Fleeing from the Bolshevik Revolution, refugees from Russia connected the two shores of the Black Sea by offering their expertise and knowledge in a number of fields in their host country. Russian refugees served as a source of skilled labor, and they functioned as agents of Turkey’s economic, industrial, and cultural transformation. Russian ballerinas took to the stage in important ceremonies while Russian chefs opened the first European-style restaurants in Turkey’s new capital, Ankara. Moreover, a significant number of Russian engineers worked in some of the most important industrial enterprises and trained Turkish technicians, a much-needed workforce as the country launched an ambitious industrialization program in the interwar years. Russian refugees not only filled the skilled-labor gap, but they also trained apprentices in their professions, transferring their knowledge to locals. In the end, the interaction between Russian refugees and their host society sheds new light into Turkish modernization, which was a multipolar process and was inspired by different models, rather than a single role model.

Key words: White Russians, refugees, Turkey, modernization, knowledge exchange

The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the ensuing Russian Civil War led to an enormous wave of refugees, among whom were a significant number of anti-Bolshevik intellectuals, aristocrats, imperial officers, and bureaucrats. Turkey was the first stop for most post-1917 refugees, generally known as “White Russians” for their alleged affinity for the anti-Bolshevik White forces, although after a brief period many preferred to leave for better opportunities in Europe. However, some Russian refugees opted to stay in Turkey. Even among the refugees who settled in Europe, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, there were some who came to Turkey either permanently or temporarily, mostly for professional reasons. This happened in spite of the Turkish government’s restrictions on foreign labor in the 1930s, as Russian refugees received exceptional treatment, partly because of their cultural capital.

This article will discuss how the cultural capital of the Russian refugee community helped them carve out a space for themselves in Turkey in the interwar period. Immediately after its establishment, the new republican regime started a
program of cultural and industrial modernization, which necessitated a skilled labor force in various fields. At the same time, the new lifestyle of republican elites led to the proliferation of new urban tastes. This situation led to a confluence of interests between Russian refugees and the young republican regime. Russian ballerinas took to the stage in important ceremonies and Russian chefs opened the first European-style restaurants in Turkey’s new capital. Moreover, a significant number of Russian engineers worked in Turkey and trained Turkish technicians, a workforce badly needed by a country that launched an ambitious industrialization program but lacked the necessary human capital. These refugees not only filled the skilled-labor gap, but many also trained apprentices in their professions, transferring their knowledge to Turkish nationals. Russian refugees’ status as the bearers of technical, artistic, and cultural information offers a unique view of interwar Turkey from a little-studied perspective.

In existing literature, the question of migration across the Black Sea is addressed with regard to the plight of ethnic minorities such as Crimean Tatars, Caucasian Muslims, and Armenians from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Another thread focuses on unskilled labor migration in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, mostly with an emphasis on illegal trade and sex trafficking. This article will try to combine the theoretical aspects of these chronologically diverse studies, and will open to discussion the presence of “broader networks of trade and culture at the boundaries of the Black Sea.” On the one hand, the question of Russian refugees will be treated within the context of labor migration. On the other hand, the role of refugees in cultural exchange will be highlighted. Refugees of the Russian Civil War were not passive subjects in the history of war and revolutionary violence. On the very contrary, many of them were highly skilled people who reinvented themselves under drastically different conditions away from home. They not only filled the labor shortage in host societies but also transferred their expertise and knowledge in a wide range of areas from classical ballet to food culture. The circulation of people, knowledge, and ideas across the Black Sea as discussed in this article may hopefully contribute to the growing literature that examines whether the Black Sea can be regarded as a bridge, hub or common ground, and not only as a border separating peoples and countries.

Bernard Lewis’s classic account, in which he identified Western Europe as the source of Turkish modernization, has long dominated academic discussions about the subject. However, recent studies suggest that the Soviet Union, not only as a case of comparison, but also as a major source of inspiration, played a crucial role in the modernization reforms of the Turkish Republic. The connections and interchanges between the two governments across the Black Sea meant that Soviet and Turkish modernization processes were not only similar, but also linked to one another. Therefore, recent scholarship presents a more vibrant and multidimensional portrait of Turkish modernization as a process in which the
Turkish government established channels of communication with multiple actors in an attempt to avoid dependence on any one powerful actor in the international arena.

In line with recent scholarship, this article suggests that early Republican modernization policies benefited from contacts with different, and sometimes contradictory, sources. In its attempts to develop a program of modernization, the Turkish government looked to both Western Europe and the Soviet Union for guidance, and successfully maintained its independence vis-à-vis these actors by balancing its relations. However, state-level contacts were not the only sources of Turkish modernization. As the case of Russian refugees illustrate, non-state actors also played a prominent role in fulfilling the modernization goals of the new regime. From engineering to urban culture, the young republic had an urgent need for experts, and Russian refugees filled an important and much-needed function in Turkish economic life, as they met the demand for skilled labor shortage. Therefore, paradoxically enough, there were “two Russias” that were somehow linked to Turkish modernization: The first one was Soviet Russia, which provided the Turkish government with expertise, financial credit, and political support. The other, although on a smaller scale, was the ‘White Russian’ refugee community scattered around the world after the Bolshevik Revolution.

Many Russian refugees, even though they did not obtain citizenship, lived and worked in Turkey, at a time when there were serious restrictions on both foreign and native non-Muslim labor force. The Law on Arts and Crafts Reserved for Turkish Citizens in Turkey (Türkiye’de Türk Vatandaşlarına Tahsis Edilen Sanat ve Hizmetler Hakkında Kanun), which was ratified on 11 June 1932, aimed to nationalize not only capital but also the labor market in the young republic. The law listed professions that could now be performed exclusively by Turkish citizens. The list was very long. The second article of the law stipulated that foreign nationals were barred from employment in government institutions, including municipal and provincial administrations, and that they could not work as pilots. The article allowed the cabinet to permit employment in exceptional cases. Restrictions on jobs related to government or military service are perhaps understandable. However, the long list of professions listed in the first article of the law were very unlikely to pose a national security threat. Most of them were low-income jobs with little strategic meaning. According to the first article, foreign nationals could not be employed as janitors, cobblers, haberdashers, cloth producers, waiters, photographers, veterinarians, drivers, construction workers, musicians, singers, barbers, and so on. The law did not explicitly have an ethnic or religious connotation, but as Aktar noted, it primarily targeted Greek citizens still residing in İstanbul. The law permitted a transition stage that allowed foreign nationals to continue their work until 1933, which was later extended until 1934.

In 1934, when the law’s extension period expired, the League of Nations and
the American ambassador to Turkey intervened on behalf of Russian refugees. Eventually, the Turkish government granted exceptional treatment to Russian refugees, who were allowed to retain their jobs. The newspaper *Cumhuriyet* quoted that at the time of the 1932 Law, there were 24 White Russian musicians (and three Soviet subjects), seven Russian carpenters, 54 White Russian drivers, and 13 Russian groceries in Istanbul. However, the pressure exerted by the Americans and the League does not seem to be the only reason for the exceptional treatment of Russian refugees. Since the 1920s, the Turkish government was careful not to offend the Soviet leadership over the refugee question and promised to sort out the refugee crisis only through dialog with the Soviets, as this issue was regarded as a bilateral problem between the two countries. As I will demonstrate later in this article, the refugees’ role in filling the gap in qualified labor shortage might be another, and a more valid reason.

It should be noted that Russian refugees were not the only group of people who received exceptional work permits in the interwar period. It is a well-known fact that a significant number of experts, including academics, architects, urban planners, and engineers from Germany, Austria, and Hungary came to Turkey upon the encouragement of the Turkish government in the 1920s and especially in the 1930s. Even though there is no comprehensive work on foreign experts and knowledge transfer in Turkey in the early republican period, there are case studies on particular individuals or institutions. The contribution of German scholars to the institutionalization of Turkish academia and the role of European architects in the transformation of Ankara from a traditional Anatolian city to a modern capital are some of the subjects that were addressed in Turkish-language scholarly works, if not in English. However, Russian refugees are unique among other foreigners who worked and lived in Turkey. First, unlike Hungarian, German, or Austrian experts, whose numbers were limited to a few individuals and who were intentionally invited by the Turkish government, Russian refugees were the remnants of a big refugee wave that altered the demographics of Istanbul at the beginning of 1920s. Second, Russian refugees were political exiles, and they escaped from the Soviet regime, which was the most important ally of Turkey in the interwar period. In the exchanges between Soviet and Turkish statesmen, the issue of “White Russians” often came up as a sign of Soviet anxiety about their continuing presence on Turkish soil. It was against this backdrop that Russian refugees made either small or big contributions to Turkey’s industrial, economic, and cultural transformation.

**Russian Refugees as Agents of Industrial Transformation**

Engineers seemed to be the preferred professional group among Russian refugees, which is not surprising considering the industrial development targets of the young republic and its dire need for trained experts. As early as 1924,
one “White Russian” engineer was listed as an employee at the Ministry of Public Works. The specialists were in most cases given work permits on the condition that they would train Turkish experts in line with the developmentalist spirit of the early republican years. For example, in November 1930, White Russian Aleksandr Sergeyevich Seleznov petitioned to work as a motorist in Turkish waters and train Turkish motorists at the same time. His application was approved on the condition that only Turks would be employed in his workshop.

Apparently, White Russian engineers worked not only in Istanbul, but also in various Anatolian towns. For instance, a document from September 1935 shows that a certain Russian refugee named Niko, who lived in Koyulhisar in the province of Sivas and worked on construction projects in this town, was given a work permit and was exempted from the 1932 Law. Another document from November 1936 proves that the visa application of a certain Russian refugee, Florinsky, was approved, because his son-in-law Ivanov, who worked as an engineer in Eregli coal mines, was the only person who could support him financially. In the summer of 1937, a White Russian engineer living in Belgrade received both a visa and a work permit to work at the Iron and Steel Factory in Karabük upon the request of the Ministry of Economy. This permit is all the more interesting because the establishment of the Karabük Iron and Steel Factory was advised by Soviet experts in their 1932 report, which outlined suggestions for Turkish industrialization. As a result of the changing international atmosphere on the eve of the Second World War, Turkey eventually secured the necessary financial support from the British H.A. Brassert Company in 1936. The construction of the factory started in April 1937, and it began production in 1939. The Karabük Iron and Steel Factory operated under the auspices of Sümerbank, a major state-owned bank and industrial holding company established in 1933 with Soviet credit. The work permit given to an anti-Bolshevik refugee engineer at a factory whose establishment was advised by the Soviets and which was ultimately financed by the British attests to the pragmatism of the Turkish government and the diversity of its sources for capital and labor in the interwar years.

White Russian engineers and specialists, who lived either in Turkey or Europe, also functioned as agents of economic cooperation between Turkey and European countries. In February 1934, the “White Russian” Coto Servashidze, who was working as an expert in Tevfik Cenani Milk Factory in Istanbul, was allowed to go to Europe to represent his company on a business trip. Similarly in May 1936, another White Russian Pierre (Pyotr) Shchepotiev, an expert on cement machinery who worked in Belgium, was given a one-month residence permit upon the invitation of Istanbul Anadolu Çimentoları Türk Anonim Şirketi (Anatolian Cements Turkish Joint Stock Company). Shchepotiev was also expected to train Turkish workers in his area of expertise. In August of the same year, his residence was extended for another month.
Similar examples abound: In December 1936, White Russian Baron Jacques de Schweitzer, the representative of a French construction firm, was permitted to visit Turkey for at most three months to discuss the reconstruction of the Mudanya-Bursa road with asphalt. In February 1938, White Russian Kovalensky paid a visit to Turkey with his Nansen passport as the representative of La Bougie B. G. Factory, from which the Turkish Air Force made a purchase. In March 1939, Von Nessler, a Russian refugee with a Nansen passport, received a travel permit to visit Turkey as representative of Verkaufsgemeinschaft Pyrotechnischer Fabriken, a Berlin-based fireworks company, which wanted to establish commercial relations with Turkey. There were also White Russian investors who set their eye on launching business ventures in Turkey, as did a certain Yuhaim Bulichev, a White Russian businessman living in Germany, who was permitted to visit Turkey in February 1932 with the aim of opening a textile factory in Istanbul.

Juxtaposing these travel and work permits alongside the Law on Arts and Crafts of 1932 discussed above, an interesting paradox appears: While the law restricted foreign labor employment even in low-income jobs, the above examples prove that many Russian refugees secured jobs in the industrial sector, rightly considered to be the commanding heights of the Turkish economy. The desire to nationalize the labor market existed side by side with a pragmatic use of refugees’ expertise, whose skills were necessary until the government could replace them with a well-trained workforce made up of its own citizens.

**Russian Refugees as Agents of Commercial Interaction**

Like engineers and technical experts, Russian refugees who engaged in commercial activities did not encounter serious difficulties when they travelled to Turkey. Tobacco merchants were particularly frequent visitors, a trend highlighting tobacco’s importance for Turkish economy in the 1920s and 1930s. In December 1928, a White Russian merchant named Volf Laybov received a travel permit to visit Turkey with two German factory owners to purchase a significant amount of tobacco. Likewise in June 1933, another White Russian merchant, Moise Leibmann, who was living in Amsterdam with a Nansen passport, and was known as a respectable merchant by the consulate in The Hague, was permitted to enter Turkey to engage in the tobacco business.

In April 1934, White Russian Aleksandr Orlov, who lived in Thessaloniki, wanted to visit Istanbul to purchase a large amount of tobacco. The document granting his permit explains the government’s policy on White Russian merchants in detail. According to the Settlement Law of 1934, a cabinet decision was needed for all White Russians entering Turkey so that they could be registered. Orlov’s permit stated that, this rule notwithstanding, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the approval of the Ministry of Interior, could authorize visas for those White Russians whose visit would be economically useful for Turkey and who would spend a
limited time in the country, as long as their identities were approved by Turkish embassies and consulates. The document hints at the commercial usefulness of the Russian refugee community and echoes the pragmatic attitude of the Turkish government with regard to Russian refugees.

**Russian Refugees as Agents of Cultural Transformation**

The work and residence permits granted to White Russians also mirrored the new tastes and cultural priorities of republican elites. The transformation of urban culture, especially in the new capital Ankara, required professionals that could serve the needs of a modern city life. Such professionals, although in high demand, were difficult to find among the country’s native population, and Russian refugees were a likely source of expertise. Falih Rifki Atay, an important writer in Atatürk’s close social circle, argued that Russian refugees first changed urban life in Istanbul: They taught city-dwellers how to enjoy the beach, and changed the understanding of entertainment. According to Atay, Russian refugees socialized more with Muslim Turks than with the Jewish or Christian population of the city, which Atay ties to the fact that Turks and Russians were very much alike in their traditions.

Even though Istanbul was the first recipient of the changes brought by Russian refugees, Ankara followed suit after it became the new capital. An iconic landmark in Ankara’s social scene in the early republican years, the famous Şehir Lokantası (City Restaurant) was a perfect example showing the role played by Russian refugees as transmitters of modern urban culture. The restaurant was opened in the new capital in 1928 by Krikor Karpovich, better known as Karpich Baba (very possibly a Russified ethnic Armenian), who had left Russia after the Revolution. Karpich probably first left for Iran, as official documents noted that by the time he received Turkish citizenship with his wife Margirit in 1935, he was an Iranian citizen. After first settling in Istanbul, Karpich was invited to Ankara in 1924 by the owner of Taşhan, a major shopping mall in the old center of the city. He first started with a small European-style restaurant in Taşhan, which heralded Karpich’s future endeavors. He managed to open the larger Şehir in 1928 when he received the necessary credit from İş Bankası, a bank recently established by the government to support entrepreneurial class in Turkey. Karpich’s Şehir, which was generally referred to only by the name “Karpich,” became a popular meeting point for Ankara’s intellectuals, diplomats, bureaucrats, and politicians, including Mustafa Kemal. The restaurant brought European-style food culture to the young capital in the heart of Anatolia: it had a strict dress code for its customers, and it was the first venue that brought together dance, music, and fine dining in this rising Anatolian city. Apparently, its modernizing role was supported by the government, because in addition to the initial credit he received from the bank, the government paid an annual sum of 6,000 liras to Karpich every year.

It seems that Karpich invited other Russian refugees both from Istanbul and
from Europe to work at his establishment. For instance, in 1932, he requested the government to bring Danial Efendi, a caviar expert, from Paris. In December of the same year, Danial Efendi received a work permit on the condition that he would teach his job to Turks, because there were no caviar experts in Turkey at the time.\textsuperscript{39} If caviar consumption was a marker of one’s social class in modern Ankara, then it was necessary to train servicemen by experienced professionals to meet the demand for this new pleasure.

Some of the most prominent intellectuals of early republican years attest to Karpich’s role in transforming Ankara’s urban culture. The famous writer Nurullah Ataç said that “he [Karpich] is the man who taught us how to dine.”\textsuperscript{40} Ahmet Muhip Dıranas, a prominent poet, noted that Karpich was like the Beethoven of his profession: His dedication to his restaurant had the trappings of artistry. According to Dıranas, Şehir Lokantası was more than a restaurant; it was a school that established a tradition and trained students. Dıranas argued that what he saw in Karpich was “a humble representative of the advanced civilization that will be born out of the marriage between East and West.”\textsuperscript{41} Falih Rifki Atay remarked, “[W]herever you go in Anatolia and in whatever restaurant or hotel you see a decent servicemen with proper manners, it is possible to conclude that he was trained at Karpich’s.”\textsuperscript{42} Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar concluded that Karpich was largely responsible for foreigners’ good impressions of Ankara.\textsuperscript{43} Another important novelist, Reşat Nuri Güntekin similarly stated that Karpich was a source of pride for Ankara, as he created a tradition of fine dining that merged Eastern and Western food cultures with a totally Western façade.\textsuperscript{44} The striking common point in these eulogies is that Karpich’s restaurant is described as a school, as a place where the knowledge of modern urban life was transferred to the citizens of the young Turkish republic through the agency of a Russian refugee. This knowledge helped create a Western-looking urban culture, but in fact it was informed by both Eastern and Western sources.\textsuperscript{45}

After Karpich’s death in 1952, Süreyya Lokantası (Süreyya Restaurant) replaced Şehir as the new meeting place of political and intellectual circles in Ankara.\textsuperscript{46} Süreyya was opened by Sergey Khomyakov (who later changed his name to Süreyya), a former officer in General Pyotr Wrangel’s Army. Sergey (or Süreyya) was trained by Karpich, as he worked as the chief waiter in Şehir for a long time.\textsuperscript{47} He opened his own restaurant in 1942. Süreyya Lokantası was more like a night club, because this new venue placed more emphasis on music and dance than Karpich’s Şehir. Not only did these venues become the meeting place of diplomats, intellectuals, politicians, and journalists in republican Ankara, they also trained the next generations of waiters and chefs, thus creating a tradition of fine dining in the Turkish capital.

Ballet was another sphere of modern urban life that showcased the role of Russian refugees as transmitters of European culture. Russian ballet dancers were
employed to perform on important occasions, while some worked as teachers of the first generation of Turkish ballet dancers. One example was the work permit given to Valeria Elanskaya, the principal dancer of the Paris Opera. Elanskaya first received her work and residence permit in February 1937 for a month, which was extended for another month in May of the same year. Elanskaya was expected to dance in Ankara Palas, an important public space in the new capital, where republican balls and dancing events hosted the top echelons of society.

A more important name for the history of Turkish ballet was Lydia Krassa Arzumanova, a graduate of the Imperial Ballet School in St. Petersburg, who immigrated first to Yekaterinodar (Krasnodar after 1920) and then to Istanbul in 1921. Arzumanova was important because she opened the first ballet studio in Turkey. Until the establishment of her studio, theater companies from Europe toured Istanbul and staged performances, but there were no local ballet companies. Arzumanova’s students put on their first performance in 1931, and throughout the 1930s, they performed on several occasions, mostly for charity purposes and to raise money for the Red Crescent and similar humanitarian organizations.

Arzumanova taught ballet in the Halkevleri (People’s Houses) of Istanbul in the 1940s, but she briefly continued her career in Ankara in the same decade, where she prepared the choreography of the first “Turkish ballet,” Bir Orman Masali (A Forest Tale). The music for this piece was composed by the famous Turkish composer Ahmet Adnan Saygun and it was staged for the first time in Ankara to commemorate the 12th anniversary of the establishment of the Halkevleri. Arzumanova trained some of the first stars of Turkish ballet, including Yıldız Alpar. Arzumanova helped Alpar study in France with her former teacher from St. Petersburg, Olga Preobrazhenskaya, which meant that the continuing connections between Russian refugees in Turkey and France helped the training of the new generation of Turkish artists.

**Conclusion**

In 1933, on the tenth anniversary of the Turkish Republic, a Soviet delegation visited Turkey. The delegation included high-ranking military and political leaders as well as a documentary crew. The visit was immortalized by the documentary Ankara: The Heart of Turkey, which praised the transformation of the new Turkish capital from a dusty Anatolian town to a city with modernist architecture thanks to the progressive outlook of the republican regime. Paradoxically enough, it was Russian refugees, who had escaped from the Bolshevik Revolution and the Soviet regime, that played a role in this transformation much appreciated by the Soviet delegation. In Ankara and elsewhere in Turkey, Russian refugees connected the northern and southern shores of the Black Sea by transferring technical and artistic knowledge to Turkish citizens, as well as by creating a trans-Black Sea cuisine.

The examples brought forward in this article suggest that those Russian
refugees who had the necessary skills and professional experience were permitted to stay and work in Turkey, sometimes for temporary periods and sometimes for life if they became citizens, because the young Republic did not have sufficient qualified labor to replace them. This pattern shows that the Turkish government, in addition to ethno-religious concerns, was also motivated by pragmatic motives in its immigration and refugee policy. The professional background of refugees and their contributions to Turkey’s economic and industrial development played a certain role in their inclusion into the Turkish society.

The integration of Russian refugees in the Turkish labor market allows us to reach some conclusions about the reforms in the first years of the Turkish Republic. Turkish modernization was not one-sided and one-dimensional, and Western Europe was not its only source of inspiration. On the contrary, the Turkish republican modernization project benefited from multiple transnational sources. Contacts with the Soviet Union were financially and politically a very important component in early republican modernization. However, the ‘Russians’ who contributed to Turkish modernization were not limited to the Soviets but also included former imperial Russian subjects who were scattered around the world.

About the author

Pınar Üre completed her B.A. and M.A. degrees at Bilkent University’s Department of International Relations in Ankara, Turkey. She received her Ph.D. degree in International History under the supervision of Prof. Dominic Lieven from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2014. Her monograph, *Reclaiming Byzantium: Russia, Turkey, and the Archaeological Claim to the Middle East in the 19th Century* was published by Bloomsbury Publishing in 2020. Her research interests include knowledge exchange and intellectual encounters between late imperial / early Soviet Russia and late Ottoman / early Republican Turkey, and, more recently, the question of Russian refugees in early Republican Turkey. She is currently teaching as an adjunct faculty member in the History Department of TOBB University of Economics and Technology in Ankara, Turkey.
Endnotes

1 Even though refugees of the Russian Civil War were considered “Russians” by their host countries, in reality, their demographic makeup reflected the diversity of imperial Russian society. From Jews to Kalmyks, Don Cossacks to Georgians, the term “White Russian” was used to include a wide range of peoples fleeing from the Bolsheviks, many speaking languages other than Russian. The refugees in Turkey also included a large number of Muslims, especially from the Caucasus and Crimea. However, Turkish official documents and newspapers never refer to Muslim refugees from Russia as White Russians, thus making an ethno-religious distinction between the refugees. Setting Muslims aside, all non-Muslim refugees – whether they were Buddhist Kalmyks or Georgians – were classified as White Russians in newspaper articles, official documents, and personal accounts. In this article, I will use the term White Russian as it was understood by the Turkish society of the period both for the sake of clarity and because the Turkish government treated Russian refugees based on this broad categorization that transcended ethno-linguistic boundaries. Questions surrounding Muslim refugees were conditioned upon very different dynamics, and their situation requires a separate study, which falls outside the scope of this article. For further discussion about the status of White Russians in Turkey, see Pınar Üre, “Remnants of Empires: Russian Refugees and Citizenship Regime in Turkey, 1923-1938,” Middle Eastern Studies 56, no. 2 (August 2019): 207–21; Bülent Bakar, Esir Şehrin Misafirleri Beyaz Ruslar (İstanbul: Tarihçi, 2012).


5 Idem, 238–39.


12 Semyon Ivanovich Aralov, Bir Sovyet Diplomatının Türkiye Anıları, trans. Hasan Ali Ediz (İstanbul:


Cumhurbaşkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi (President Republican Archives, hereafter BCA), Institution Code: 30.11.1.0, Location No: 8.28.20 (22 October 1924).

BCA, Ins. Code: 30.18.1.2, Loc. No: 15.72.7 (9 November 1930).


Nansen passports were issued by the League of Nations to people displaced by revolutions and wars after the First World War. The idea was formulated in the 1920s by Fridtjof Nansen, the Norwegian-born High Commissioner for Refugees of the League. For more information, see “Nansen – A Man of Action and Vision,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, last modified 14 September 2009, https://www.unhcr.org/events/nansen/4aae50086/nansen-man-action-vision.html.

BCA, Ins. Code: 30.18.1.2, Loc. No: 42.8.5 (17 February 1934).


Euxeinos, Vol. 11, No. 32 / 2021


Halkevleri were established in 1932 and operated until 1951. Their purpose was to strengthen republican reforms across towns in cities in Anatolia, as well as to introduce artistic and academic knowledge to the broader Turkish public. Halkevleri organized lectures and offered free courses about music, folklore, dance, fine arts, drama, literature, among others. Halkevleri also provided libraries to the public and conducted research about various aspects of Anatolian culture and society. For more information, see Sefa Şimşek, Bir İdeolojik Seferberlik Deneyimi: Halkevleri, 1932-1951 (İstanbul: Boğaziçi University Press, 2002), 215–25.


For a detailed analysis of citizenship policies towards Russian refugees, see Üre, “Remnants of Empires.”
Across the Black Sea and into Eurasia: An Ottoman Greek with Skills and Connections in Georgia, Ukraine, Siberia, and China in the Early Eighteenth Century

by Iannis Carras

Following the life and movements of a well-connected Ottoman Orthodox in the Russian Empire, this article seeks to contribute towards an understanding of the ways in which individuals and groups from the Black Sea region were incorporated into the business and statecraft of empire. Alexander Levantinos, a technician from Gümüşhane, in the Pontus or Black Sea region of Anatolia, serves as a characteristic example of Pontic iterant miners, moving within the Russian and Ottoman Empires and the territories in-between in search of new veins to exploit. Initially intending to search for copper in Russia, Levantinos was eventually granted permission to move to the region of Nerchinsk, where he established silver mines and transferred the necessary skills for silver mining to local workers. Simultaneously, he was engaged in trade with China. Levantinos’ biography demonstrates the overlap between state service, craftsmanship, and trade in Russia of the early eighteenth century. The tension between the transfer of skills and commercial transaction as an autonomous sphere, and transfer and exchange as embedded in a range of power relationships is central to Levantinos’ achievement. This tension should serve to underline the degree to which actors such as Levantinos contributed to the expansion of the simultaneously “minimalist” and “activist” Russian state, an expansion from which they benefited.

Key words: Business of Empire, Pontic Craftsmen, Black Sea migration, Mining in Russia, Nerchinsk

Research on the Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire (often referred to as “Greeks” in Russian documents, or the “Romioi” or “Romaics,” with its broader connotations, as they denoted themselves) who migrated to Russia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has thus far focused on members of the clergy and the religious and cultural ties that were a consequence of their wanderings. There have, of course, been exceptions; for example, the story of Marinos Harvouris (1729-1782), who engineered the transportation to St. Petersburg of the granite thunder rock on which Peter I’s statue by Étienne Maurice Falconet was set. This short article will focus on the case of Alexandros Levantinos, migrant, technician and mining engineer from the Ottoman Empire.

Alexandros Levantinos should in no way be considered unusual. An
unquantifiable number of Orthodox Ottoman subjects either moved between or migrated to Russian regions from at least the mid-seventeenth century on, often for reasons of trade. The thrust of much recent scholarship has tended to play up the autonomy of trade and traders vis-à-vis other groups and the states in which they operated. Still, as described throughout Erika Monahan’s groundbreaking analysis of commercial life in Siberia in the seventeenth century, one consequence of the development of Russia from a ‘domain state’ to a ‘tax state’ was “the recognition that the effectiveness of the state’s regulation, mediation and participation in commerce in large measure determined its fiscal well-being.”

Through following the life and movements of a well-connected Ottoman Orthodox in the Russian Empire, this article seeks to contribute towards an understanding of the ways in which individuals and groups from the Black Sea region were incorporated into the business and statecraft of empire. The tension between the transfer of skills and commercial transaction as an autonomous sphere, and transfer and exchange as embedded in a range of power relationships is central to Alexandros Levantinos’ achievement. This tension should serve to underline the degree to which actors such as Levantinos contributed to the expansion of the simultaneously “minimalist” and “activist” Russian state, an expansion from which they benefited.

**From the region of the Pontus through Georgia**

Alexandros Levantinos, son of Paul, was a technician from Gümüşhane, in the Pontus or Black Sea region of Anatolia. Unusually for the time, our sources include not only Alexandros’ patronymic, but also a surname “the Levantine,” suggestive of status, earlier mobility and perhaps contacts with the West.

The mountainous, amphitheatric inland city of Gümüşhane or “Kan” (in the Eparchy of Chaldia, not far from today’s city of Gümüşhane) was translated into the Russian of the time as the “Silver city” (gorod serebrianyy). This translation may indicate that the current Greek name for Gümüşhane, “Argyroupolis,” had been in partial use before 1846, contrary to the predominant view. With its four stone bridges, its many baths and Hans, its fountains, school and religious edifices, Gümüşhane was an urban centre, for the most part inhabited by Orthodox Pontic peoples. The city also incorporated a parish of Armenians who had fled Persian lands in 1698 and a significant Muslim minority. The region of Chaldia as a whole was associated in accounts of the time with the “crypto-Christians,” populations who had supposedly converted to Islam but retained Christian beliefs and rites, a phenomenon which may have been connected to Ottoman concessions regulating the mining economy.

Gümüşhane flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the extraction of lead, and, from the lead ore, a little gold and, particularly, silver. It was populated by itinerant miners, charcoal bearers and burners. Its air must have been
thick with the stench of burning ores, and the mountain slopes around increasingly bare. Gümüşhane had its own mint, and it supplied the imperial treasury with some seven thousand kilograms of silver each year. The city was characterized by the cross-fertilization of Armenian and Greek metal craftsmanship, and the production and exchange of highly prized objects: chalices, reliquaries, sprinklers, icons and gospel books with silver-gilt covers, enameled crosses and other items such as gold embroideries, silks.

Caravans would arrive at the marketplace (not fair, as this was permanent) here from as far away as Baghdad. Gümüşhane was also a center for learning with its own school. It was connected both to the influential Monastery of Panagia Soumela in Trebizond, and through the supply of alms, and religious, scholarly, artistic and commercial exchange to more distant Moldavian and Wallachian lands.9

Though there is no indication as to Alexandros Levantinos’ position in the highly inequalitarian Ottoman mining hierarchy - he is not mentioned in documents related to Gümüşhane as a chief metallurgist (“madenci usta bası”) or indeed serving in any other senior capacity in dependent areas - it is clear that he specialized in the construction of mines.10 Alexandros’ brother and close associate, Benjamin Levantinos, was recorded even before 1694 as a resident of Nezhin (Nizhyn in Ukrainian, Nizna in Greek) in north-eastern Ukraine. From this center for migration and exchange, where a large number of Ottoman Orthodox merchants were to settle during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Benjamin Levantinos traded in association with other Orthodox Christians from the Ottoman Empire, including Athanasios, son of Matthaios of Tarnovo (located in Macedonia according to the source, but today in north-central Bulgaria), in an area that stretched from Bucharest to Brasov, Lviv, and up to Moscow:11 In 1704, Benjamin Levantinos was resident in the Monastery of Saint Nicholas in Moscow where many of his fellow Ottoman Orthodox merchants and members of the clergy also rented cells. At that date he provided surety before the officials of the Posolskiy Prikaz (the Ambassadorial Chancellery) for the Hieromonk Pangratios who had arrived in Moscow from Constantinople. “I, Benjamin Levantinos, have taken the priest Pagrati [under my surety] so that he should not leave Moscow for anywhere else, and I place my hand.” As this is Benjamin’s own hand, it is clear that he knew how to write, indicative, once more, of status.12

Alexandros Levantinos and his brother Benjamin had both accompanied Archil of Imereti (1647-1713), the son of Vakhtang V Shahnawaz, as part of the Georgian prince’s mission to Moscow. The prince’s entourage, comprising some sixty-five members, arrived in Moscow in August 1684.13 There were a number of other Ottoman Orthodox (or Greeks) in the service of Archil of Imereti, among them Dimitris Konstantinov, who is recorded as living in the Georgian prince’s residence in Moscow in 1708, as well as a certain Iuri Konstantinov, who travelled in the entourage along with another three apprentices or assistants (the Ukrainian term
“cheliadnik” was used to describe such people). As the mobility of members of the clergy between the regions indicate, contacts between the Georgian principalities and the Pontus region were extensive, and remain understudied.\textsuperscript{14}

To the mines of Nerchinsk

Alexandros Levantinos’ skills were in demand and he moved throughout Russian controlled regions. Initially, he intended to search for copper in the area of Nizhny Tagil in the Urals just north of today’s Ekaterinburg.\textsuperscript{15} But Peter I ordered him to travel on to Tomsk to locate and process silver, a metal in which the Russian state was deficient. Peter I desperately needed silver to finance his military and other projects. Alexandros’ efforts to locate silver in Tomsk were unsuccessful, and he was granted permission to relocate to the region of Nerchinsk to continue his investigations.

The Cephalonian Athanasios Skiadas, an instructor at the Slavo-Greko-Latin Academy from 1722 and one of the foremost Greeks in the Russian Empire during the early eighteenth century, remains an important source for the activities of other Ottoman Orthodox in the Russian Empire. In his historical work on Peter I, Skiadas notes that the Russian Emperor: “[…] dispatched practical people to investigate the coastal extremes of Tartary of Siberia, and to locate the veins of metals”.\textsuperscript{16} Alexandros Levantinos was thus a pioneer. In August 1700, once settled in remote Nerchinsk, he composed a report addressed to the “Great Sovereign” in Moscow, stating that in 1697 he had requested permission to travel to China for his “trade” (\textit{kupechestvo}).\textsuperscript{17} He had been ordered to travel to Nerchinsk, to the fortified post of Argunsk for the creation of silver mines. On arrival in Nerchinsk, Levantinos visited the Stolnik and Voevoda Ivan Samoilovich Nikolaev and was granted twelve workers and fifteen Cossacks from Argunsk as helpers.\textsuperscript{18}

Alexandros Levantinos wrote his references to the \textit{Sibirskiy Prikaz} (the Siberian Chancellery) in Greek. In this case, and possibly in others, their translator into Russian was the state official Fedor Konstantinov.\textsuperscript{19} It is worth pointing to the long lapse between the dispatch of the letters from Nerchinsk and their receipt in Moscow. This petition was written on the 1 August 1700. However, the translator received the letter in Moscow only in April 1702, more than twenty months after it had been written. However strict Levantinos’ instructions may have been, distance rendered him a partly autonomous actor once established in the Sino-Russian borderlands.\textsuperscript{20}

In Argunsk, Alexandros Levantinos and his workers explored the mining areas “deep in the mountains” where excavations had previously been attempted. The traveler Corneille Le Brun referred to such mines when he passed through the area in 1695: “It is a half-day’s drive from the fortification of Argoun through the mountains. There you can find a full silver mine, where you can still see several shafts […],” constructed by locals in the area.\textsuperscript{21} Alexandros Levantinos noted that
these mines “had been opened up in the old days by the Mongols,” but these latter “did not know how to operate [a mine] at depth.” And he proceeded with his report:

Then, as time pressed on me, since the speed of our actions was significant, I ordered the workers to dig in two new places and a third that already existed. And the Cossacks started shouting that we would find nothing there. But I, wishing to perform Your Ukaz, Great Sovereign, stepped up my efforts and dug into the depths to five or six sazhen [approximately eleven or twelve meters] and found a vein, and from the new mine I extracted three types of ore, about twenty pud in all [approximately 328 kg].

And now there are ten workers and three craftsmen [i tri mastera], but the workers do not have the necessary supplies. Each kiln requires a large amount of raw material; so, especially now at the beginning, twenty additional workers are required to dig the ores and to find charcoal for the kilns at the factory. Also, let me tell you, Great Sovereign, that the laborers here are expensive and hard to find, and the people in general are few and wild and they do not want this work [...]. Workers must therefore be sent from other parts. 22

Alexandros Levantinos further complained that many of the workers were drunkards. Thus, in Nerchinsk, Alexandros worked continuously ensuring a steady supply of charcoal for the forested area and setting up a processing facility for the extraction of silver from lead. At the same time, in a notable case of technology transfer and the transplantation of working methods from the Ottoman Black Sea littoral to the border regions of China, he trained local craftsmen, providing them with the necessary knowledge to continue in his task. 23

From Siberia, Alexandros, Benjamin his brother, and other Greeks with whom they worked kept up a lively correspondence. Their trans-imperial communication spanned the breadth of the Russian and Ottoman states, drawing disparate regions together. Some parts of letters have been preserved, composed in an idiosyncratic vernacular Greek mixing and melting local dialects, Slavic and Ottoman words. Thus, Benjamin Levantinos, Symeon/Simon Grigoriou (alternatively Grigoriev) and Dimitrios Theodori (all such names are preserved in multiple versions) composed a joint letter to a certain Christodoulos in Moscow in July 1706. 24 Then, in November of the same year, they wrote again from Tobolsk:

[...] however you know that up until today we are in Tobolsk [Tobolla] and with us the merchant [kouptzenos] with all his company and God willing we move on in the following days [...].

They then requested that Christodoulos convey “much reverence from our part” (the Greek proskynemata conjures up connotations of worship and pilgrimage) to a number of Russians and Ottoman Orthodox; they sent Christodoulos information on merchants heading towards Moscow; and also the regards of a member of the
clergy who was well-known to Christodoulos and was also in the area of Tobolsk. One should perhaps imagine the letter being read aloud to those gathered in the Monastery of St. Nicholas in Moscow. The reverences performed in this epistle served the purpose of re-enacting in writing, and re-creating in fact, the network of relations which provided some of the protection that rendered movement and exchange possible. Finally, Benjamin and his companions enquired what they should do with Christodoulos’ possessions and all his merchandise that they were transporting with them: “as we don’t have any letter telling us what to do with your retail goods, and so we’re writing to inform you of this; for the moment, according to the oath we are asking you for your proper letter concerning all these things”.

The brief letter by Benjamin Levantinos and his companions in Tobolsk ended with the following:

Should you wish to learn about the lord and prince Mikhail Yakovitzi [Knyaz’ Mikhail Yakovlevich Cherkasskiy], may God grant him health, as he took care of our bread for every day that we spent there. He provided us with all the carts we required for the road and he granted each one of us a piece of fur and one dog-coat, and may God grant him many years, as He wishes it.25

In other words, this group travelling eastwards were provided not only with provisions, but also with means of transport (podvody) and cheap clothing and fur, their mobility very much sponsored by the Russian authorities.

Other Ottoman Orthodox (or Greeks) who worked with Alexandros Levantinos in Siberia were the traders and miners of Spyridon and Dementis Marinou who were also listed in the catalogues of Greeks of Moscow as merchants resident in the Monastery of Saint Nicholas in Moscow.26 The documents also mention a Gregory son of Paul, who traveled with Benjamin Levantinos from the Ottoman Empire via Georgia (the extent of their kinship is uncertain, but they do have the same patronymic), and an assistant or apprentice named Philip.27 And there were other cases of those traveling independently of Alexandros Levantinos to work in Russian mines.28

Alexandros Levantinos’ plant produced wrought silver in 1704 and operated up until at least 1709. However, as appears from their correspondence, Levantinos and his assistants continued their trading activities during the time that they found themselves in Siberia.

**Deeper into China?**

Alexandros Levantinos was a servant of the Russian state, but he was also a merchant. In summarizing his brother’s activities, Benjamin Levantinos explained:

[...] for his faithful service, Great Sovereign [za ego k Vam, Velikomu Gosudaryu, vernyuu sluzhbu], for discovering silver ore in the Siberian mountains, and especially in Nerchinsk, and for setting up factories there, and even training some of the locals, for his many troubles, you rewarded and – at his request – ordered
him to trade, according to the example of others who have rendered services to Your Majesty the Tsar in the Russian state [...].

In Siberia, Alexandros Levantinos sought and obtained permission to trade within China, searching for possible new sources of silver and other precious metals on route. As a colleague of Alexandros Levantinos, Konstantinos Yakovlevos, who had traveled from Nerchinsk to Moscow and then returned, informs us:

'[...] and from these factories [from Nerchinsk] Alexandros and Konstantinos joined with trader Grigori Bokov and with other traders to trade in China, transporting their wares with them. And in China Alexandros and the merchants sold squirrel fur [...] and ermines [...]'.

Nerchinsk was border territory, at times described during this period as being within China. And, in any case, Alexandros Levantinos was not the first “Greek” to travel deeper into the country. The Moldovan Nikolaos Spatharios / Nikolai Gavrilovich Spafarei / Nicolae Milescu Spătaru (1636–1708) had traveled in 1675 via Nerchinsk en route to Beijing, a journey that lasted some three years. His entourage included various Ottoman Orthodox merchants, including Konstantinos Ivanov and Theodoros Pavlov. Spyridon Ostafiev and Ivan Yuriev, Macedonian Greeks who accompanied the same mission, were traders in precious stones. Returning through Persian territories, they were accused of selling a significant portion of their goods for personal gain, and of not returning amounts owed to their creditors; they were, however, eventually acquitted by a Russian court.

Athanasios Skiadas emphasizes precisely this relationship between diplomatic missions and trading activities within China: ‘[...] they would send ambassadors to the rulers there on a number of occasions, both to preserve good relations [...] and to accompany the traders who engaged in commercial activities there’.

Among the various writings of Nikolaos Spatharios, his *Book in which the journey through the kingdom of Siberia from the city of Tobolsk, up until the boundaries of the kingdom of China is told, in the year 7183* is worth mentioning here. So too his transfer of Jesuit astronomical texts from China back to Moscow. Spatharios’ description of the journey was one of several texts about China that were reformulated by the future Patriarch of Jerusalem, Chrysanthos Notaras (1655/60–1731), who journeyed to Moscow between 1692 and 1694. It is worth noting the number of surviving copies of these Greek-language manuscripts on China.

Unlike the Greeks who had been in the entourage of Spatharios’ embassy, another, Dimitris Konstantinov from Constantinople, had benefited from some kind of a collaboration with a merchant of Bukhara, and was engaged in trading within Chinese lands, without (it would seem) having followed an official embassy. He journeyed into China at least twice. Thus, in 1685, he imported Chinese fabrics worth more than four thousand rubles into Russia. This example of a high-value commercial transaction without formal authorization constitutes only one example
of the authorities’ inability to control trade across the vast territories nominally under their control, and, at the same time, of the inability of extant official sources to convey the full extent of cross-frontier contacts in these regions.\textsuperscript{36} The ledgers of Greek merchants operating from Nezhin include mention of some products of Chinese provenance.\textsuperscript{37}

Just a few years after Alexandros Levantinos, Savva Raguzinsky (1669-1738), merchant of Constantinople, a Serb originating from the region of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), and one-time confidant of Peter I, led a further official Russian expedition to China (1725-1727). Raguzinsky noted the Chinese authorities’ belief that a full fifty official Russian caravans had reached their capital thus far. The Russian authorities could count only fourteen.\textsuperscript{38}

The Russian authorities sought to prevent the theft of silver from Russian mines and its resale in China, a fairly common phenomenon, since the (usually) camel caravans destined for China passed through Nerchinsk, at times following a course parallel to the Amur River into Manchuria. In many but not all cases the final destination of caravans was Beijing.\textsuperscript{39} Nikolaos Spatharios too had been accused of marketing furs for personal gain, and not only for the enrichment of the Russian treasury. Alexandros Levantinos was forced to defend himself against the similar accusation that he was expropriating silver. Such accusations may be considered standard given that the system of \textit{kormlenie}, or feeding, blurred the boundaries between state service and personal enrichment, and also the suspicions that resulted from the lack of control exerted by Moscow over such a distant periphery.\textsuperscript{40}

Although the Orthodox of Ottoman provenance journeying to China were undoubtedly very few, their presence so far from the Black Sea littoral from which they embarked on their journey is indicative of their status as a group with the privilege of movement and therefore of their large dispersion within Russian territories. No additional information has been found regarding Alexandros Levantinos’ points of call and activities within China, but it should be noted that on this particular journey he was following a route followed by others of similar provenance who had been trading in the area.\textsuperscript{41}

**Privileges and networks**

Upon completion of his mission in Siberia and his return to Moscow, Alexandros Levantinos recorded the difficult economic situation in which he found himself. As was standard practice for supplicatory letters of the time, he sought to present his plight in the most distressing way possible. In his appeal, preserved in the third person, he notes that during his absence, his wife and children, who had remained more than ten years without him in their Black Sea homeland, had been fed on borrowed money. As a result, their debts greatly increased, debts that he did not have the means to repay. In order to cover these debts, Alexandros Levantinos requested permission to trade freely in goods throughout the Russian
state, following the example that had been set by a number of other “brothers,” each of whom had received “a Gramota of his Majesty the Tsar” in return for their services. In particular, Alexandros Levantinos had in mind the inhabitant of Nezhin Paraskevas Theodorov, originally a captain from the Black Sea port of Sinop or Sinope, also in the Pontos, who benefitted from his connections to both Ottoman and Russian courts, and the aforementioned Sava Raguzinski.

Alexandros Levantinos’ petition turned out a success, and on 11 March 1710, he was granted a Gramota allowing him the same trading conditions that were granted to Russian subjects of up to two thousand rubles trade annually throughout the Russian state:

 [...] As a reward for his labors, he should be granted the right, according to the example of his brother Greeks and of Paraskevas Theodorov, to trade non-banned products worth up to two thousand rubles within the Russian state of His Majesty the Tsar, and to pay customs duties in accordance with the Trading Charter according to the example of Russian traders [...] and that he should be provided with a Gramota and a passport, allowing him to travel up to the borders, as well as from the borders to Moscow.

In other words, Alexandros Levantinos was to pay the same customs duties as the Russian merchants of the time, considerably less than other foreign merchants, primarily (it would seem) in order to trade between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. It was no coincidence that the Tsar confirmed the privileges of the Nezhin Brotherhood at the same time that he granted this Gramota to Levantinos. The context for conceding these privileges was the preparation for renewed conflict with the Ottoman Empire, and the consequent need to ensure the loyalty of those border peoples that could aid Russia through contacts with the Orthodox populations of the Ottoman Empire, and also through information and supplies, during the course of the conflict.

Looking at the years immediately following 1711, the sources examined provide some information on the interconnection between the two brothers Alexandros and Benjamin with Orthodox Ottoman merchants in both Nezhin and Moscow. Alongside others, including Nikolai Konstantinov, they can be traced trading from Moscow through Astrakhan into the territories of today’s Georgia, Persia and the Ottoman Empire, even, in 1712, as far as Constantinople.

Alexandros Levantinos returned to his homeland to accompany his wife, children, nephews and other assistants on their journey to Russia through Georgia (a family reunion, and migration). Alexandros’ brother, Benjamin, who resided in the Monastery of St. Nicholas when in Moscow, married a Georgian girl, with whom he settled permanently in Russia. Benjamin was in Moscow on the 1st February 1713. According to the goldsmith Iuri Konstantinov, Benjamin spent that night in a cell of the monastery of St. Nicholas drinking alongside Paraskevas Theodorov and others, cursing and generally causing turmoil. The sources that have been
examined do not shed any further light on the subsequent life and works of Alexandros Levantinos and his brother Benjamin. The lack of scholarly attention accorded to the Levantinos brothers must be considered surprising, given their early, albeit relatively small-scale, attempts to establish silver mines in the Russian state.  

Trade and service to the Tsar

Alexandros Levantinos was a craftsman, a trader, a servant of the state, and also a prominent “Greek” or Orthodox of the Ottoman Empire who had acquired a range of commercial privileges for himself in the Russian Empire. He and his brother Benjamin are described as “mining technicians” and also “goldsmiths” in texts of the time, and they should be considered characteristic examples of a Pontic iterant miners, moving within the Russian and Ottoman Empires and the territories in-between in search of new veins to exploit. As an expert in metals, Benjamin proved himself particularly helpful to the Russian authorities whenever they wished to ascertain the value of metals dispatched to Moscow from mines being developed throughout state territories. Thus, in 1702 he had estimated that a particular raw ore “was not silver but magnesium.”

Alexandros Levantinos, dispatched by the Russian state to develop the mines of Nerchinsk, also constitutes a characteristic example of the overlap between state service, craftsmanship and trade in Russia of the early eighteenth century. As many documents of the time reveal, the terminology of service was expanded to cover other activities, including craftsmanship and market exchange. State institutions, the military and royal or imperial courts, contributed to reducing the marginal costs and thus allowed for profitable commercial transactions to take place alongside service. Opportunities for certain Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman world to prosper and move rapidly up the social scale – the lucky ones that survived that is – resulted.

Alexandros Levantinos augmented his status at considerable personal risk. The social status of such privileged movers, however, was either directly or indirectly bound to the Russian Court: experienced miners, craftsmen and tradesmen such as Alexandros Levantinos were “Court Greeks” to borrow a term used primarily for the Jews of the Courts of Central Europe. Such entrepreneurship as Alexandros Levantinos and other pioneers like him exhibited, bridged the divide between craftsmanship, market exchange and politics. Thus, if the case of Alexandros Levantinos and his associates fits with most of Erika Monahan’s analysis, it is worth adding that the networks that offered Levantinos opportunities were still for the most part based on services provided to, and the protection and privileges afforded by, the Russian and other courts. Extreme political risk rendered both craftsmanship and market exchange dependent on a range of other power relationships.
About the author

Iannis Carras received his doctorate from the Faculty of Political Sciences of the John Capodistrias University of Athens in 2010 for his dissertation on “Trade and Brotherhood: Balkan Merchants in Russia 1700–1774.” Carras’ BA (MA Oxon) was from the University of Oxford (Lincoln College). He holds an MA in Russian Studies and Transition Economics from the School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University (Bologna and Washington DC). His articles include: “Godparenthood, Surety and Migration: Greeks to the Russian Empire in the 18th and early 19th centuries”, “Understanding God and tolerating humankind: Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment in Eugenios Voulgaris (1716-1806) and Platon Levshin (1737-1812)” and “Orthodoxe Kirche, Wohltätigkeit und Handelsaustausch: Kaufleute und Almosensammler entlang der osmanisch-russischen Grenzgebiete im 18. Jahrhundert [Orthodox Church, charity and trade: merchants and alms-collectors along the Ottoman-Russian border in the 18th century], Erfurter Vorträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Orthodoxen Christentums, 19, Universität Erfurt, Erfurt, 2020.” He has worked as part of The Black Sea Port-Cities research program, and is currently a post-doc at the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki and Senior Lecturer at the IES EU Center in Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany.
Endnotes

1 The research for this paper was supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) of the European Union and the Greek National Funds through the operational Programme “Education and Lifelong Learning” of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) – Research Funding Programme: Thales, investing in knowledge society through the European Social Fund. This paper has been published in a considerably different version in Greek. Iannis Carras, “Μετανάστευση και υπηρεσία στον Τσάρο: ένας Ρωμίος στη Ρωσία και Κίνα των αρχών του 18ου αιώνα” [Trade and service to the Tsar: a Romaic in Russia and China of the early 18th century], in Σλάβοι και Ελληνικός Κόσμος. Πρακτικά Α’ Επιστημονικής Ημερίδας Τμήματος Σλαβικών Σπουδών [Slavs and the Greek World: Proceedings of the First Scholarly Conference of the Department of Slavic Studies], ed. Πάνος Σοφούλης [Panos Sofoulis] (Athens: Εθνικόν και Καποδιστριακόν Πανεπιστήμιον Αθηνών, Department of Slavic Studies, 2014), 169–82.


3 For migration from the Ottoman Empire to the Russian, including difficulties in distinguishing between the peoples of the Ottoman Empire and the problem of quantification, see Iannis Carras, “Connecting Migration and Identities: Godparenthood, Surety and Greeks in the Russian Empire (18th-Early 19th Centuries)”, in Across the Danube. Southeastern Europeans and their Travelling Identities (17th-19th C.), ed. Olga Katsiardi-Hering and Maria A. Stassinopoulou (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 65–109.

4 Jarmo Kotlaine, for example, has provided much needed information on seventeenth-century trade, south and east. J. T. Kotilaine, Russia’s Foreign Trade and Economic Expansion in the Seventeenth Century: Windows on the World (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 411–90 and passim.


6 RGADA f. [fond] 52, Snoshcheniya Rossii s Gretsiy [Russian-Greek Relations] op. [opis’] 1 d. [delo] 25 (1694) l. [list / listy] 7. See also RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 36 1706 l. 3v. Alexandros is referred to as coming from the city “Kana of Anatolia,” a reference to the usual name of Gümüşhane in the Greek of the time, “Kan.” As is the case with most of the Orthodox merchants travelling to Russia in the early eighteenth century, Alexandros Levantinos and his brother Veniamin refer to themselves, on occasion, as Constantinopolitan, this being a characteristic of itinerant populations and also a mark of higher social status. Another Orthodox Christian from Gümüşhane who travelled to Moscow was Ivan Anastasov, his guarantor in Moscow being Veniamin Levantinos. RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 2 1708 l. 4v.

7 RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 2 (1708) l. 4v. See the discussion of the issue in Anthony Bryer with David Winfield, Selina Balance and Jane Isaac, The Post-Byzantine Monuments of the Pontos: A Source Book. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 324–50.


For information on the chief miners of Gümüşhane, see Χρυσόστομος Μυρίδης [Chrysostomos Myridis], “Η οικογένεια των Σαρασιών και ο Γερβάσιος Σαρασίτης” [The Sarasites family and Gervasios Sarasites], Αρχείον Πόντου [Pontic Archive], vol. 17, Athens, 1937, pp. 1-82.

10 RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 25 (1694) ll. 3-4.
11 RGADA f. 52 op. 1. d. 24 (1704) l. 2.
12 RGADA f. 52 op. 1d. 36 (1706) ll. 3-4. See also RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 2 (1708) ll. 11-11v.
13 RGADA f. 124 Malorossiyskiye dela [Little Russian Affairs] op. - d. 12 (1711) ll. 5-6.
14 RGADA f. 111 Verkhovnyy uezdnyy sud [High Uezd (County) Court] op. 1. chast’ 3 d. 147 (1694-1695) l. 390. RGADA f. 111 Verkhovnyy uezdnuy sud [High Uezd (County) Court] op. 1. chast’ 4 d. 158 (1698) l. 189.
15 The reference is to the year 1720. Αθανάσιος Σκιαδάς [Athanasios Skiadas], Γένος, Ήθος, Κίνδυνοι, και Κατορθώματα Πέτρου του Πρώτου Πατρός Πατρίδος Αυτοκράτορος Πάσης Ρωσσίας, και τα εξής. Ενετίσιν, ψηλά’ [Lineage, Character, Perils, and Achievements of Peter the First, Emperor of All Russia, and so on] (Venice: n.p., 1737, 445.
16 “On trouve à une demi journée du château d’Argoun, dans les montagnes, une mine d’argent comblée, où l’on voit encore plusieurs fontes que les peuples de Nieucheu et de la Daurie y ont faites autrefois: Delà, jusqu’à Nersinskoi, capitale de la Daurie, il a dix journées de distance par terre, sur des chameaux.” Corneille Le Brun, Voyages de Corneille le Brun par la Moscovie en Perse et aux Indes Orientales 1, (Amsterdam: chez les frères Wetstein, 1718), 140.
17 The term kupechestvo can be translated in a number of ways, from “craft” to “trade.” “Great Sovereign” is a translation of Velikiy gosudar’.
18 “On trouve à une demi journée du château d’Argoun, dans les montagnes, une mine d’argent comblée, où l’on voit encore plusieurs fontes que les peuples de Nieucheu et de la Daurie y ont faites autrefois: Delà, jusqu’à Nersinskoi, capitale de la Daurie, il a dix journées de distance par terre, sur des chameaux.” Corneille Le Brun, Voyages de Corneille le Brun par la Moscovie en Perse et aux Indes Orientales 1, (Amsterdam: chez les frères Wetstein, 1718), 140.
19 RGADA f. 151, Delo o gornykhi zavodakh i promyslakh, op. 1 d. 48 l. 22.
20 RGADA f. 151 op. 1 d. 48 l. 22.
21 RGADA f. 111 Verkhovnyy uezdnuy sud [High Uezd (County) Court] op. 1. chast’ 3 d. 147 (1694-1695) l. 390. RGADA f. 111 Verkhovnyy uezdnyy sud [High Uezd (County) Court] op. 1. chast’ 4 d. 158 (1698) l. 189.
set up an iron processing unit. RGADA f. 214 op. 5 d. 1553 (1709) ll. 1, 9v-10. For mining techniques and problems associated with the supply of charcoal for the smelting and extraction of silver ore from the argentiferous (galena) lead as practiced in the mines of Gümüşhane in the eighteenth century, see Xarά Lιουδάκη-Κυριαρίου [Chara Lioudaki-Kyriariou], Μετάλλεια της Μικρασίας και του Πόντου: Η Συμβολή τους στην Επίβιωση και Ανάπτυξη του Μικρασιατικού Ελληνισμού [Metals of Asia Minor and of the Pontus: Their contribution to the survival and development of the Greeks of Asia Minor] (Athens: private publication, 1982), 75–90. Also see: A. Bryer, “The question of the Byzantine mines in the Pontos: Chalybian iron, Chaldian silver, Koloneian alum and the mummy of Cheriana,” in Peoples and Settlement in Anatolia and the Caucasus 800-1900, ed. Anthony Bryer, (London: Variorum Reprints, 1988), 138–39 [reprint of Anatolian Studies no. 33 (1983): 133–50].

For the mines of Netchinsk, see I. Bogolyubskiy, Историко-статистический очерк производительности Нерчинского горного округа с 1703 по 1871 год (St. Petersburg:.tip. V. Demakova, 1872).

For Dimitrios Theodori from Constantinople, who was also to work as an expert technician in the mines of Siberia, see RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 11 (1705) ll. 19-19v. For Symeon Grigoriou, see RGADA f. 151 op. 1 d. 48 l. 15v. Knyaz’ Mikhail Yakovlevich Cherkasskiy, Voevode of Tobolsk from 1697 to 1710, son of a Kabardinian Circassian prince baptized into Orthodoxy, was at the forefront of Peter I’s attempts to expand mining within Russia. RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 11 (1705) ll. 6-6v.

RGADA, f. 124 op. - d. 12 (1711) l. 6v. RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 2 (1708) I. 12. For Symeon Grigoriou, see RGADA f. 151 op. 1 d. 48 l. 15v.

RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 36 (1706) I. 3. A few years later, Benjamin Levantinos seems to have a different set of apprentices or assistants (archival evidence suggests a high turnover, with assistants often changing those they were employed by and even setting themselves up independently of their former masters). Often these assistants were relatives, and in 1712 two of Levantinos’ assistants are described as nephews. RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 8 (1712) l. 1.

See, for example, the case of a certain Nikephoros from the Monastery of Prophet Elijah in Ioannina. RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 16 (1712) l. 7. For a further case of an Ottoman Orthodox miner who arrived in Russia in 1709 accompanied by a “ Yianni the Greek”, see Peter I, Pis’ma i bumagi Imperatora Petra Velikago, vol. 9, 1709, (Moscow: Akad. Nauk SSR, 1950), 635. One might add that Alexis Zorbas of Nikos Kazantzakis’ famous novel is one who followed in the footsteps of Alexandros Levantinos. As Zorbas narrates it: “On another occasion I found myself in Russia; because I even went there, again for metals, for copper.” Zorbas claims to have been in the Black Sea region of Novorossiysk. Νίκου Καζαντζάκη [Nikos Kazantzakis], Βίος και Πολιτεία του Αλέξη Ζωρμπά [Life and Times of Alexis Zorbas] (Athens: Kazantzakis publishers, 1981), 84. The novel was translated into English as Zorba the Greek.
then Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, and Chrysanthus Notaras’ reworking was dedicated in 1694 to prince
Constantin Brancoveanu of Wallachia. Nikolai Milescu Spatharii, Sibir’i Kitay, ed. V. Solov’ev, A.

35 For the journey of Nikolai Spatarios to China in 1675, for which there is a considerable
bibliography, see also: Каталог чиновников [Katalog Chinosnikov], “Инициативу катализма апкнров
епископов (1700-1784)” [Historical catalogue of prominent men (1700-1784)], in Миссионерская
библиотека [Medieval Library], vol. 3, ed. K.N. Sathas [K.N. Sathas] (Venice: Τύπος του
Χρόνου, 1872), 71–200, esp. 93; Émile Picot, “Nikolas Spathar Milescu” in Bibliographie
Hellénique ou description raisonnée des ouvrages publiés par des Grecs au dix-septième
For a relevant bibliography and for information on the Jesuit and other sources for these texts on China
by Chrysanthos Notaras, see Металлинос [Michail Laskaris], “Ο Χρύσανθος Νοταράς και η
Κίνα” [Chrysanthos Notaras and China], Ελληνική Δημιουργία [Greek Creativity], vol. 6 (1950), 433–
40; Πινελόπη Σταθή [Pinelopi Stathi], Χρύσανθος Νοταράς Πατριάρχης Ιερουσαλήμ [Chrysanthos
Notaras the Patriarch of Jerusalem], (Athens: Syndemos ton en Athenais Megaloscholition, 1999), 21,
See also the bibliography in Gerhard Podskalsky, Η Ελληνική Θεολογία επί Τουρκοκρατίας 1453-
1821, Η Ορθόδοξη στη Σφαίρα Επιρροής των Δυτικών Δογμάτων Μετά τη Μεταρρύθμιση [Greek
Theology under Turkish rule 1453-1821, Orthodoxy under the influence of the Western doctines after
the Reformation], trans. Γ.Δ. Μεταλληνός [G.D. Metallinos] (Athens: Morphotiko Idryma Ethnikes
Trapezes, 2005), 340–44.

36 RGADA f. 214 Siberškiy prikaz (1685) st. 935, ll. 8, 58-61. I’d like to thank Erika Monahan for first
drawing my attention to this merchant, and note that she has also referred to him and to other Greeks
in Ostafii Filat’ev’s and other Russians’ employment engaged in the China trade in her own work.
Dimitris and Constantine are very common Greek names, so one should not equate this Dimitri with
the one in the service of Archil to Imereti without corroborating evidence. Monahan, Merchants of
Siberia, 161, 224. The Greek Dimitri Grigoriev and his factors were trading precious stones between
Russian and Chinese territories in the early 18th century. RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 16 (1718) l. 1-2.
See also: V.A. Aleksandrov, Rossiya na dal’nevostochnykh rubezhakh (vtoraya polovina XVII v.)

37 Though ‘Chinese’ can also signify a style, for example, of sown clothing. RGADA f. 52 op. 1
d. 16 (1708) ll. 1-3. See also N.I. Pavlenko, “Торгово-промысловая политика правительства
During the final years of the eighteenth century the brothers Zosima also enjoyed extensive commercial
relations trading with Russia with China. G.L. Arsh, “Грецеския учене и грекеския купць–
pokrivitiel natsional’nogo prosvesheniya–в Rossii (XVIII–XIX vekov),” in Greki Rossii I Ukrainy,

38 Raymond H. Fisher, The Russian Fur Trade 1550-1700 (Berkeley: University of California Press,
1943), 222, 227; Mark Mancall, Russia and China: Their Diplomatic Relations to 1728 (Harvard:
Cambridge University Press, 1971), 168. For attempts by Peter I to establish companies that would
trade with China, see Herrmann Kellenbenz, “Marchands en Russie Aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (II),”

39 RGADA f. 151 op. 1 d. 48 ll. 14v-15, 18v-19. For caravans see esp. l. 14v.

40 RGADA f. 151 op. 1 d. 48 ll. 151 156. Doklady i prigovory, sostavshiesia v Pravitel'stvuushchem
Senat v tsarsstovanie Petra Velikogo, izd. Akademie nauk / Pod red. N. V. Kalachova i N. F.
Dubrovina. SPb., 1880. Т. 1, 124.

RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 11 (1709) ll. 1-2.

Captain Paraskevas, as he was often called, had been granted a large part of his initial capital by Alexandros Maurocordatos (1636-1709), Dragoman to the Ottoman Porte. Ya.S. Grosul et. al., eds., Istoriicheskiye svyazy narodov SSSR i Rumynii [...] (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), 223.

These tax exemptions also extended to his factors. RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 20 (1710) ll. 3-3v. See also text of the privileges granted to Alexandros Levantinos “for his services” in PSZ, collection 1, vol. 4, no. 2259, (March 11, 1710): 480–81.

In addition to family geography, this route may have been chosen to avoid areas of greater risk due to the Ottoman-Russian war of 1710–11.

According to Benjamin, Iuri was the cause of the commotion. RGADA f. 158 Prikaznye dela novykh let [Chancery Affairs from Recent Years] kniga 7 (1713) ll. 7v, 11-11v.


See Alexandros Levantinos described as a “specialized silver mine technician” in RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 11 (1709) l. 1.

RGADA f. 52 op. 1 d. 36 (1706) l. 3.

RGADA f. 151 op. 1 d. 47 l. 113, 176.

RGADA f. 151 op. 1 d. 48 l. 23.

See the discussion in David Sorkin, “The Port Jew: Notes Toward a Social Type,” Journal of Jewish Studies 50, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 87–97. The question of the role of Ottoman Orthodox traders such as the merchant, poet and cartographer Vasileios Vatatzis in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Persia has become a focus for contemporary scholarship, and can, I think, usefully be compared to developments outlined here. Marinos Sariyannis, “An Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Greek’s Travel Account in Central Asia,” in The Central Asiatic Roots of Ottoman Culture, ed. İlhan Şahin, Baktibek İsakov, and Cengiz Buyar (İstanbul: İstanbul Esnaf ve Sanatkârlar Odaları Birliği, 2014), 47–60. The latter work includes useful bibliographical material therein. Also see the ongoing research project Transottomanica based at the Justus-Liebig-Universität in Gießen.
Enemy Shores? The Dilemmas of Writing Cold War Histories of the Black Sea
by Etienne Forestier-Peyrat

In his contribution, Forestier-Peyrat revisits the history of the Black Sea during Cold War, a period normally neglected by scholars of the region. Specifically, he attempts to synthesize two trends in modern Black-Sea historiography: an earlier genre of scholarship that emphasized geopolitical rivalries, and a more recent trend that has highlighted cultural and economic exchange. He argues for the existence of a permanent equilibrium between the two facets of realpolitik and culture. In the Black Sea region, conflicts, forced migrations and military tensions were simultaneously parts of a geopolitical horizon and elements of daily life for local populations. Official attempts to redefine the political geography of the region, through the promotion of tourism or the cutting off of trade, for example, were necessarily implemented in conversation with local memories of mobility or rivalry. In a conclusion, Forestier-Peyrat argues that the tension between local and geopolitical during the Cold War has not reached a clear resolution.

Key words: historiography, geopolitics, Cold War, borders, tourism

“Consigning the twentieth century to history,” Charles S. Maier famously argued, involves understanding its connections to “the emergence, ascendancy, and subsequent crisis of what is best labeled ‘territoriality.’” While the observation may be made in general discussions of the past century, it is adjustable to a wide scope of regional settings, for which the 1990s meant a swift change of the dominating forms of territoriality, understood as the “geographical expression of social power.” Writing a few years before Maier’s assessment, Y. Eyüp Özveren considered the twentieth century to be a “short century” for the Black Sea, a mare clausum dominated by the Soviet hegemon, and hypothesized that the twenty-first century would see the renewal of a polycentric commercial system connected to the global economy.

While Özveren made this claim as an economic historian, Stefan Troebst approached the same transformation from the point of view of political and cultural identities in Central Europe, when he discussed the possible return of the Black Sea as an element of Polish national identity in the continuity of the Intermarium (pl. Międzymorze) concept developed in the 1920s-30s. While regional historiography has well-established traditions for studying the ancient, medieval or early modern history of the Black Sea, the Cold War, by contrast, appeared as a time of abrupt decline, for which historians of the Black Sea seemed to have little more to say
beyond discussions of rivalries for the Straits or military antagonism.

In recent years, however, new directions have been explored in Black Sea histories, with insights from historians and scholars of different geographical, linguistic, and disciplinary backgrounds. The most noticeable trend is probably the rise of cultural approaches to developments around the Black Sea space from the 1930s to the 1980s. A special issue recently devoted to Black Sea history put forward a “broadly epicurean theme, exploring the rich histories of wine, food, travel and leisure” and notably emphasized the growing historiography on tourism and leisure in the socialist Bloc in the 1950s and ’60s. New approaches to Turkish history during the Cold War—notably economic change and cultural mobilization—have also contributed to this reevaluation.

What remains to be seen, though, is whether this new cultural approach to the Black Sea space during the Cold War can be reconciled with more traditional interpretations that emphasized great-power rivalry and military confrontation. The aim of this paper is to suggest the way these two historiographical generations could be combined to make sense of Black Sea history after the Second World War. Most importantly, I suggest paying more attention to events and spaces that highlight the permanent equilibrium between the two facets of realpolitik and culture. In this border region, conflicts, forced migrations and military tensions were simultaneously parts of a geopolitical horizon and elements of daily life for local populations. In particular, I emphasize the importance of collective memory—and forgetting—in the way populations made sense of their recent history and quickly reorganized mental maps of friendship and confrontation over just a few decades.

The Black Sea after 1945: Geopolitics and Rivalry

The revivalist interpretation of the Black Sea in the 1990s essentially relies upon the geopolitical divide in the region created by Turkey’s alignment with the United States and the Atlantic Alliance in the late 1940s. A few years earlier, Turkey had been a major hotspot of the early Cold War, due to Soviet dissatisfaction with Ankara’s highly ambiguous attitude during the World War. In February 1945, Stalin demanded at Yalta a transformation of the Straits regime established at the Montreux Conference (1936). This came as a shock to the Turks, who reminded Soviet leaders they had hailed the Straits regime as a sign of the friendship existing between “two energetic countries full of hope for the future.” Even before the question could be properly discussed, Foreign Commissar Molotov notified the Turkish ambassador, Sarper, of his government’s decision to denounce the Turkish-Soviet friendship treaty of December 1925. With concern growing in Ankara, a mysterious explosion damaged the only border bridge that existed between Eastern Anatolia and the Armenian Soviet Republic, in Margara, on 30 May 1945: while probably an accident, this explosion testified to Ankara’s nervousness as...
it was the direct result of the Turks secretly mining part of the bridge since the Second World War in order to prevent attacks against the Kars region.\textsuperscript{12}

In June 1945, Molotov further suggested that the Soviet Union would like to build military bases along the Straits and implied that any general settlement with Turkey should include territorial adjustments—i.e., Turkish concessions of territory near the Soviet border. While this added another layer to the crisis in the Eastern Black Sea, Molotov’s statement was followed in December by a letter published in \textit{Pravda} and in the Georgian-language \textit{Komunisti} by two Georgian historians, Simon Djanashia and Niko Berdzenishvili, who claimed for the Georgian SSR large tracts of land in Eastern Anatolia. Historical claims were made about the belonging of the Lazistan, Trabzon and Ardahan regions on the basis of travel accounts as well as ethnographic and archeological knowledge.\textsuperscript{13} Simultaneously, the Armenian diaspora mobilized to support Armenian claims to several Eastern Anatolian districts.\textsuperscript{14}

This general narrative of geopolitical confrontation between the two predominant Black-Sea states may be followed well into the early 1950s. Turkish participation in the Korean War, a major event for public opinion, quickly led to Turkish integration in NATO (1952) and the Baghdad Pact (1955, soon to become CENTO).\textsuperscript{15} Turkey’s heavy investment in security and intelligence cooperation to secure its northern and eastern borders was widely criticized in Soviet newspapers and radio propaganda.\textsuperscript{16} NATO integration for Turkey meant the establishment of U.S. military infrastructure in the country. While the major base was located in İncirlik near the Mediterranean, a network of observation stations in Samsun, Trabzon, Sinop, and Karamürsel focused on the Black Sea.\textsuperscript{17} Turkey was involved in the U.S.-sponsored launch of observation balloons (GOPHER Project) over the Soviet Union, leading to official representations by Soviet diplomacy in 1956, while the shooting down of a U2 spy plane based in Turkey sparked bilateral tensions.\textsuperscript{18}

**Local Dimensions of the Early Cold War**

In order to reconnect this geopolitical history of the early Cold War on the Black Sea with cultural approaches to the 1950s-1960s, we need to examine the local consequences of this period. The Black Sea region often made headlines as a place where East-West borders—more aptly described in the regional context as a North-South divide—provided opportunities for incidents. Geopolitical rivalry translated into very local manifestations, as expressed by the Turkish government’s decision in August 1945 to hand over to the USSR prisoners of war on the Anatolian border in an effort to court Soviet leaders. After the exchange resulted in a mass execution of prisoners, this “Boraltan tragedy” came back to haunt Kemalist politicians in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{19}

Borders in the Western Balkans also involved numerous personal tragedies and conflicts, as relations between Bulgaria and its southern neighbors soured.
In October 1950, the Bulgarian Politburo had to examine simultaneously a border incident with Greece around disputed islands and a trade conflict with Turkish authorities, which had blocked 131 freight cars.\textsuperscript{20} The Soviet-Bulgarian and Soviet-Turkish borders were increasingly mined and closed to any kind of traffic. Simultaneously, circulation along the Danube was severely restricted in comparison to what it had been a few years earlier, creating strong limits to regional trade. In Trabzon, British Consul Vorley Harris noted in June 1951 that transit trade between Iran and Central Europe had all but disappeared.\textsuperscript{21} Seafering stagnated and the completion of a seaside road from Hopa to Samsun in the early 1950s put a stop to the “once prosperous \textit{kayık} trade” that had drawn state suspicion for the illicit circulations that it had made possible.

Only rarely did maritime connections allow for diplomatic openings. When the new Soviet ambassador Lavrishchev arrived in Ankara in February 1948, the Turkish press emphasized that the Soviets had recently made a few conciliatory steps, releasing a Turkish boat and its crew they had intercepted in Soviet waters, or easing the constraints weighing upon the Turkish consulate in Batumi, Georgia, an institution under strong Soviet pressure since it had witnessed the mass expulsions of the 1930s and was suspected of being a hotspot for Turkish propaganda among Muslims living in Adjara.\textsuperscript{22} Those were, however, small measures in comparison with the general climate of closure around the Black Sea.

Fear of spies and saboteurs entailed severe control of circulation and the targeting of some populations. Muslims, especially Turkish-speaking, of Bulgaria were under particular scrutiny and more than 150,000 of them emigrated at the end of 1950 to Turkey, significantly increasing tensions on both sides of the border.\textsuperscript{23} The tensions that existed along the Black Sea contrasted with the already more flexible approach of neighboring Yugoslavia: In search of allies, it agreed in 1953 to a “free migration” agreement with Turkey.\textsuperscript{24} While the Soviet Union had included as early as the 1930s many parts of its Black Sea shores in restricted access areas, similar measures were adopted across the region, in Turkey starting from the late 1930s. Discussing the state of mind among the “seafaring people” of the Rize province, Consul Harris noted that an “atmosphere of tension and suspicion becomes more and more pronounced as one approaches the Russian frontier.”\textsuperscript{25} During the first years of the Cold War, unmasking and arresting spies became part of the political game that unraveled the history of connections and diversity in the region.\textsuperscript{26}

\textbf{Faces of the Thaw on the Black Sea}

With a diplomatic note sent on 30 May 1953, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov solemnly abandoned all territorial claims against Turkey. Soviet diplomats started to diligently notify Turkey of the passage of all Soviet military ships across the Bosporus, in a ostensible effort to repudiate former claims concerning the Straits
regime, and, one month later, the Soviet Union took part in the Izmir trade fair for the first time\textsuperscript{27}. All these steps testified to an attempt to reverse the place of the Black Sea in international relations. In its attempt to mend relations with Turkey, the new Soviet leadership obviously tried to reject the blame for the 1945-1946 crisis, pointing to the role played by the “Georgians” Beria and Stalin. In a private conversation with Turkish ambassador Seyfullah Esin in late 1955, Khrushchev hinted clearly at the removal of sinister Caucasian influences on Soviet foreign policy.\textsuperscript{28}

Simultaneously, Khrushchev and his associates accelerated the development of mass tourism and leisure institutions across the Soviet Union, particularly along the Black Sea, as part of their program of breaking with Stalin’s legacy. On 1 June 1959, a landmark decision by the Soviet Council of Ministers established a blueprint for building resorts, sanatoria, hotels and leisure facilities across the country, while other socialist countries followed suit. Bulgaria, Crimea, the Sochi area and Georgia became busy resorts and enjoyed an iconic status in the imaginary of “Red tourism” that was widely reflected in popular culture, for example in movies such as \textit{To the Black Sea} (1957).\textsuperscript{29} The zone had become a place of informal encounters between Eastern and, less frequently, Western Europeans, a situation conducive to cultural influences, but also to black market activities and unapproved forms of sexual intercourse.\textsuperscript{30} Foreign tourism to and from the Soviet Union had been considerably eased in 1954–’55, but Soviet citizens still gave a premium to summer holidays on the Black Sea, with regions such as Abkhazia and Adjara, in the Georgian SSR, conveying a highly exotic appeal to tourists from the Soviet West, while the Baltic republics were appreciated as a place of tourism for their “European” look\textsuperscript{31}. More than 230,000 Soviet tourists flocked to Adjara every year in the Brezhnev period, with increasing numbers of “wild” tourists who overwhelmed existing infrastructure.\textsuperscript{32}

In Central Europe, Bulgaria was a myth of a sort, having established in 1948 a state tourism operator (Balkantourist) in order to develop socialist mass tourism and popular resorts, with a clear preference for seaside facilities. By the 1970s, it had become the seventh largest tourism company worldwide and managed an extensive network of hotels, resorts, and leisure facilities on the “Red Riviera.”\textsuperscript{33} The promotion of socialist modes of consumption and leisure was fully part of the new forms global competition and the Black Sea space was definitely one of the most important arenas for a demonstration of the relative affluence of socialism. The junction of geopolitical and cultural aspects of the Cold War in Bulgaria was demonstrated by Khrushchev’s famous speech in the Bulgarian town of Varna on 16 May 1962. The Soviet leader called for the Black Sea to become a space of peace and criticized Turkey’s Western alliance.\textsuperscript{34} But his speech also hailed the quick development of “our Black Sea coast” as a space of prosperity and leisure, as opposed to NATO’s militarism.\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, while Turkey experienced a similar
tourism boom in the 1960s (168,000 foreign tourists in 1964 compared to 415,000 in 1967), it was almost exclusively concentrated on the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, leaving the Black Sea area, in tourism terms, as a backwater exposed to the Soviet threat.

While the Black Sea could be promoted as a socialist space of prosperity, it simultaneously had to be erased as a potentially contentious issue from a geopolitical point of view. Quite telling in this regard was the difference between Soviet-Turkish official visits organized in the 1930s, when Turkey and the USSR shared a joint “anti-imperialist agenda,” and the 1960s. This resumption of official delegations at government and ministry level was widely presented as a return to interwar practices of friendship, good-neighborliness and economic cooperation. Premier Kosygin’s trip to Turkey in December 1966 and President Cevdet Sunay’s visit to the Soviet Union in November 1969 could easily be compared to İnönü’s trip as Prime Minister to the Soviet Union in 1932 and Voroshilov’s stay in Turkey on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Turkish republic.36

A major difference resided, however, in the erasure of the Black Sea dimension in these visits. İnönü had staged his departure in April 1932 from the Bosporus on the Gruzia as a major public event.37 Voroshilov had acted similarly when boarding his ship to Turkey on 25 October 1933.38 Technological changes now allowed top politicians to privilege air over sea travel. However, there was a more symbolic dimension to the receding of the maritime dimension in USSR-Turkish relations. There was no more desire to put the sea itself at the center of bilateral cooperation, since it was another reminder of the world division and the tensions of the immediate postwar period. Forgetting the Black Sea could be seen as a way to improve relations between the Blocs, as demonstrated by wider transformations in the collective memory of populations throughout the region. Narratives about past events such as migrations, mass violence, or revolutions were largely submitted to pressure and silencing, surviving in the form of subaltern memories at the local level. In Northern Turkey and Balkan countries, this was particularly true as far as past relations with ethnic minorities were concerned, through efforts to tear down historical and religious buildings or turn them to new uses.39

Integration(s) and Autarky Around the Sea

Détente did not significantly alter the economic division of the Black Sea space, despite a few attempts to use the Danube basin to promote cooperation in the region.40 The Eastern Bloc amounted to 16.8 percent of Turkish imports and 18.4 percent of Turkish exports in 1957, but its share decreased to approximately 7.6 percent in both directions by 1961 as integration with Western Europe and the US grew.41 The Black Sea dimension has probably remained one of the least-studied aspects of regional integration in the East. In part, this may be related to the challenges posed by Romania since the mid-1960s, after its break with economic
integration plans of the COMECON in 1964 and the increasingly autonomous course followed by its leadership that provoked a nested Cold War within the Eastern Bloc. Tensions mounted on the border between Romania and the Soviet republics of Ukraine and Moldova, accelerating plans to achieve a canal between Danube and Black Sea in South Romania, out of Soviet reach, and adding new spatial rifts to the map.

Simultaneously, the Turkish Black Sea coastal region (Karadeniz) benefited little from Turkey’s integration to the European Economic Community, except as a pool for rising outward migration, a fact constantly emphasized by local elites to foreign visitors. When presenting the situation of his region to British diplomat P.H. Laurence, the rector of Erzurum University complained: “This is an underdeveloped country.” The economic and political rise of Iran in the 1970s and the difficulty Iran still had with trade transit through the USSR led some to present combined sea-land transportation through Eastern Anatolia as an alternative route to meet the needs of Iran’s Northeastern provinces. But Laurence witnessed the stagnation of Black Sea Turkish ports and the lack of investment in Hopa, which remained the most important among them. Concerning road transportation, he noted: “On my journey out I passed scores of TIR trucks rumbling slowly eastwards, with rather smaller numbers coming west. The greatest number, as always, were Bulgarian, followed by Romanian and Turkish, with a scattering of Yugoslav, Greek, Iranian and Austrian.”

The Karadeniz did not enjoy in the Turkish imaginary the appeal of the Black Sea in Communist Europe, being mainly understood as a repository of conservatism and marginal ethnic identities, notably in the Laz region. They shared, however, some parallel changes since the 1930s with the rise of new forms of cultivation (citrus and tea) that transformed local landscapes and societies. The cultivation of tea was imported in the 1930s from Adjara to Turkish Eastern Black Sea provinces thanks to official and private efforts, and fully developed in the 1950s. But, as Mathijs Pelkmans emphasizes, citrus and tea cultivation and tourism thrived in Soviet regions such as Adjara because they were “the outer limit of the Soviet world” and such crops were deliberately developed to replace regional trade. At the same time, Turkish tea cultivators were progressively affected by the liberalizing trends that characterized the country in the 1980s, leading to the end of the state monopoly on tea (Çaykur) in 1986.

Local Factors in Late Cold War Tensions

Indeed, the 1980s were a time of uncertainty in East-West relations in general, and Turkey was an obvious candidate for a surge in political and military tensions after the Iranian revolution erupted and the Soviet Army intervened in Afghanistan in late December 1979. The Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) circulated inflammatory materials against Soviet aggression and lamented the fact
that “some among the new generations who do not know about the War of '93 [the Turco–Russian War of 1877–'78] and are unaware of the oppression Turks and Muslims are suffering in the Soviet Union prefer the Communist International anthem to the Turkish national anthem.” Overall, however, Turkish and Soviet leaders pursued a businesslike relationship throughout the early 1980s, although official propaganda in the borderlands called for increased vigilance to “defend the border.”

The rise of infrastructural and economic interdependence played a major role in the persistence of cooperation in the Black Sea basin. In June 1978, a political agreement between the two countries settled the delimitation of the continental shelf in the Black Sea and regulated the use of foreign military bases in the region. Negotiations concerning Soviet gas supplies took off in the early 1980s, at a time when the USSR was involved in a controversy with the Euro-Siberia gas pipeline. In September 1984, a protocol was signed to lay down the framework for Soviet sales of gas to Turkey through the Black Sea, in exchange for food and industrial goods. Turkish newspapers incidentally mentioned that a land pipeline connecting Eastern Turkey to that Soviet Caucasus had been requested by the Turks, but that the Soviets had declined on the grounds that the South Caucasian republics were already dependent on neighboring Iran to cover their own consumption since the early 1970s.

While such matter-of-fact explanations could indeed be raised by Soviet planners and economic managers, the failure of this project was not entirely unrelated to tension that existed along Caucasian borders. The most obvious among these tensions was the question of genocide and the push made in Soviet Armenia for its recognition; the effect of these tensions was expressed explicitly by Turkish ambassador Cankardeş, in May 1984, saying that “Soviet statements about wishing to have good neighbourly relations with Turkey were belied by the Soviet attitude on Armenia.” The mass demonstrations that happened in Yerevan in April 1965, on the 50th anniversary of the genocide, revealed the challenge of national feelings and memories to the narrative of good-neighborliness, especially as they enjoyed support among officials in Armenia. The development of Armenian terrorism in the late 1970s and early 1980s created a highly perilous situation for Soviet leaders who perceived its disruptive power. Soviet central diplomats and many members of the Politburo hesitated about the course to follow in the tension between domestic and international issues throughout the decade.

The growing international assertion of Soviet Union republics since the end of the Second World War meant republican leaders enjoyed wider leverage in the sphere of international relations. The Armenian representative to the Soviet-Turkish border commission almost created a scandal during the final stage of the negotiations held in Ankara in December 1973 when he refused to sign the agreement and looked for support among the leadership of Armenia. While
Soviet-Turkish cooperation lived on in the management of the dam at the border, the specifically Armenian dimension of the relationship was a source of tensions. These tensions were all the more striking since the leader of Soviet Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, ostensibly supported a Turkish-Soviet diplomatic rapprochement and his promotion to the Moscow Politburo in late 1982 enhanced his influence. He warmly welcomed Turkish statesmen coming to the Soviet Union, lobbied for closer relations in the field of trade and culture, and held particular interest in the Azeri émigré community in Turkey. As the 1980s moved on, domestic and international aspects of the Azerbaijani-Armenian-Turkish nexus evolved into the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis during the Perestroika.

The place of regional actors in Black Sea tensions during the 1980s was part of a general trend in the evolution of the late Cold War. Bulgaria once again came to the fore of regional tensions, due to the harsh treatment inflicted upon Muslim minorities in the country. After several years of socio-political incitement to full assimilation, a mass campaign against Turkish names and manifestations of Turkishness started in South Eastern Bulgaria in the winter of 1984. By 1985, Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov famously stated that “there are no Turks in Bulgaria.” Until the end of the Cold War, the situation of Turkish speakers and Muslims in Bulgaria remained a major source of conflict between Turkey, supported by the NATO, and its Eastern neighbors. The policies pursued by Bulgaria, considered a major ally of the Soviet Union, were perceived as involving Soviet responsibility, despite Gorbachev’s efforts to include the Black Sea in his new strategic thinking on disarmament and peaceful cooperation.

**Conclusion**

Black Sea history during the Cold War consisted of a permanent interplay between global and local trends, as well as between geopolitics and lived experiences in the region. Ten years before the end of the confrontation, a Georgian citizen petitioned Leonid Brezhnev that permanent maritime routes be established between Turkish and Soviet ports as part of a Black Sea contribution to Détente. The letter, written a few days after the bloody 1980 military coup in Turkey, imagined that this initiative would open “new perspectives, maybe roadtrips to Turkey and many other important issues in the field of mutual cultural enrichment.” While in contradiction with the official tone of the moment, the letter captured the rise of structural interdependence in the region.

Beyond infrastructures, this interdependence was also based on a growing awareness of the environmental hazards that threatened the Black Sea. Water pollution and eutrophication was a scourge throughout the region and severely threatened fisheries in the late 1980s. The desolate port landscape that featured in Vasili Pichul’s highly successful film *Little Vera (Malen’kaya Vera)* was in itself an emblem for the need to “save the Black Sea” as more and more people...
and organizations emphasized. As socialist regimes crumbled, this slogan was progressively replaced by initiatives to base a reintegration of the Black Sea space upon market and liberalism, an idea that was quickly embraced by Turgut Özal’s Turkey in an attempt to gain leadership in the region through the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) that embodied its values.

The end of the Cold War did not, however, represent a clear-cut divide for the Black Sea in the sense of returning to what this space had been half a century earlier. Empires had crumbled, peoples had been deported or exterminated, ideologies had failed across the region. This violent history, however, was not the yet the object of any consensus in the collective memory of the region and official narratives still held sway. In 1992, Turkish historian Erol Mütercimler published a detailed study of Bolshevik-Kemalist interactions during what is known as the Turkish War of Independence. The book, as made plain from its very title, Support Coming from the Sea, focused on the Black Sea as a space of assistance between revolutionary and anti-imperialist forces. Ironically, what had been somehow conceived as a tribute to improved Turkish-Soviet relations praised cooperation between two vanishing ideologies. Post-Socialism and Post-Kemalism were now on the agenda and Kemalist ships bringing Bolshevik weapons to the Turkish shore were replaced by shuttle trade and traffic of all kinds from one end to the other of the Black Sea.

About the author
Etienne Forestier-Peyrat is assistant professor (maître de conférences) of contemporary history at Sciences Po Lille-University of Lille, France. His research interests include the history of international relations (borders and migration), of international law, and of empires, with a particular focus on Eastern Europe, Eurasia, and the Middle East. He has recently published Histoire du Caucase au 20e siècle (Paris: Fayard, 2020). In addition to articles published in Ab Imperio, Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, and several other journals, Forestier-Peyrat also has co-edited a collected volume on globalized borders (Les frontières mondialisées, with Sabine Dullin, Paris 2015).
Endnotes

8 This is an approach successfully carried out by Mathijs Pelkmans in his work on the Adjarian border region in Georgia, Defending the Border: Identity, Religion and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).
15 Gavin D. Brockett, “The Legend of ‘The Turk’ in Korea: Popular Perceptions of the Korean War and

16 Rasim Dirsehan Örs, Rus Basınında Türkiye ve NATO. Soğuk Savaş Yılları (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitapları, 2011).

17 Cable from the British embassy in Ankara, 3 May 1957, The National Archives (hereafter: TNA), FO 371/130185.


20 Letter of the Bulgarian MFA to the CC BCP, undated (early October 1950), Central State Archives, Sofia (hereafter: TsDA), f. 1B op. 6 a.e 1082 l. 123.

21 Vorley Harris, “The Consulate at Trabzon,” June 1951, in The Reports of the Last British Consul in Trabzon, ed. Christopher Harris (İstanbul: The Isis Press, 2005), 23.


23 This tension led the Bulgarian leadership to turn to the famous Turkish exile writer Nazım Hikmet for support. Gözde Somel and Neslişah Leman Başaran, “Engagement of a Communist Intellectual in the Cold War Ideological Struggle: Nâzım Hikmet’s 1951 Bulgaria Visit,” in Örnek and Üngör, eds., Turkey in the Cold War, 87–105.


25 Vorley Harris, “Tour of the Rize Vilayet,” 3-7 July 1950, in Harris, ed., Reports, 38.


27 Letter from the Turkish MFA to the PM, 10 August 1955, Republican State Archive, Ankara (hereafter: BCA), 30.1.0.0/61.379.2.

28 Cable from the British Embassy in Moskow, 17 November 1955, TNA, FO 371/117723.


50 Mirza Gökgöl, Doğu-Karadeniz bölgesinde bir araştırmaya gezişi (Istanbul: Kenan Basımevi, 1937); Ildikó Bellér-Hann and Chris Hann, Turkish Region, State, Market & Social Identities on the East Black Sea Coast (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2000).
51 Pelkmans, Defending the Border, 6.
52 Ceren Kenar and Doğan Gürpınar, “Cold War in the Pulpit: The Presidency of Religious Affairs and Sermons during the Time of Anarchy and Communist Threat,” in Örnek and Üngör, eds., Turkey in the Cold War, 36.
54 Jeronim Perović, ed., Cold War Energy: A Transnational History of Soviet Oil and Gas (Cham: Palgrave

Cable of the British Embassy in Moscow, 9 May 1984, TNA, FCO 9/4849.


Secret report of G. Nalbandjan to authorities of Armenian SSR, HAA, f. 1 op. 52 d. 83 ll. 19-47.


Sandro Gualia to Leonid Brezhnev, 22 September 1980, Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia – Party Archives (SSShA PA, Tbilisi), f. 14 op. 119 d. 679 ll. 8-12.


H. Deniz Yükseker, Laleli-Moskova Mekiği: Kayıtdışı Ticaret ve Cinsiyet İlişkileri (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003).
Prosperity and Conflict in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Rostov-on-Don: Russian, Cossack, and Armenian Economic Cultures on the Northern Black Sea Coast
by Michel Abeßer

During the nineteenth century, the Russian settlement of Rostov and the Armenian colony of Nakhichevan on Don slowly merged into a single urban and economic space. This contribution analyses how these increasingly entangled communities negotiated conflicts and to what extent disputes about trading opportunities and state privileges shaped their urban identities. On the empire’s periphery, Armenians, Russians and Cossacks framed their positions with narratives of soslovie, class or religious belonging, until the beginning of the Great Reforms, when the state increasingly levelled differences in administration and economy and growing national sentiments increasingly altered multiethnic communal life.

Key words: Rostov-on-Don, economy, Armenians, urban identity, trade

Introduction

“Be on guard at the market! To cheat on you, it takes ten Jews, five Greeks, but only one Armenian!” This warning circulated among Russian merchants (kuptsy) at the Black Sea markets of the nineteenth century and ranks the tsar’s non-Russian subjects by their degree of deceitfulness and dishonest calculus when conducting the business of trade. Armenians seem to be those around whom a Russian trader should be most cautious. Count Peter Pallas, travelling around the new south Russian provinces by order of Empress Catherine II, drew an entirely different picture. In the late summer of 1794, Pallas’s retinue arrived in Nakhichevan, an Armenian colony founded 32 kilometers away from where the Don entered the Sea of Azov. The count was amazed by the short period of 16 years the Armenian settlers needed to erect a flourishing settlement on the edge of the steppe. “The vitality of the Armenians’ industries, their factories, their craftsmen and trading enterprises compared with those of the Russians and the Greeks, yes, even the German ones, is so striking, that a decent patriot is instantly driven by the desire to move the whole Armenian people from the Aras plateau into Russia. If properly encouraged they would easily accept such an offer.” From Pallas’s state-bound perspective, the Armenians exhibited certain attributes well suited to the Catherinian Zeitgeist of revitalizing the empire and its economy. In his account, Pallas further contrasted “diligent, sober and good Armenian peasants” with “hostile and malevolent Don-Cossacks,” who, according to him, rejected Catherine’s call for revitalization. The
The Russian Empire’s definitive arrival at the northern shores of the Black Sea at the end of the eighteenth century constitutes a major caesura in the empire’s foreign and domestic policy alike. The political, social, cultural, and economic transformation that ensued when integrating the vast area into the empire’s fabric had a long-lasting influence way beyond the demise of the Russian monarchy. Constant access to the Black Sea served the economic imperatives of St. Petersburg and transformed the country’s economy towards the export of increasing amounts of grain, an export that would eventually become a cornerstone of financing late industrialization in the second half of the nineteenth century. The possession of the northern coastline of the Black Sea, with the “pearl” of Crimea, put Russia in the center of a constant exchange of goods, peoples and ideas that influenced the very character of the empire.

Russian expansion and settlement of the new areas represented an ambivalent and complex process, something that Marc Raeff has pointed out, arguing against current views of the northern Black Sea’s integration as a linear “success story.” According to Raeff, this approach “harbors the danger of anachronistic judgement.” The settlement of the area (zaseleniye) with Ukrainian and Russian peasants, Serbs, Germans, Greeks, and Armenians, alongside the construction of towns (gradostroitelstvo), became the main tools of empire-building in the region, soon to be called “New Russia.” The limits of Catherine’s and Potemkin’s vision become apparent, however, when we study the fate of the ambitious plans to fashion Ekaterinoslav’ as “the Athens of southern Russia” or the limited success of German settlers in spreading their knowledge and work ethic among the Russian peasantry.

The building and development of towns (into cities) in New Russia has received a fair amount of attention, in particular the fate of Odessa, the most prominent example of flourishing urbanization in New Russia. With the exception of existing Crimean settlements and newly founded towns, most urban structures—either port towns or administrative centers—developed around points of military significance, such as fortresses. A promising yet understudied case for analyzing the transformation of these new towns into developed urban centers of their own within a multiethnic context is the Don delta region and its center, today’s Rostov-on-Don. The city became one of the empire’s main gateways to the Black Sea during the nineteenth century. Its social and economic development was coined by the interaction between its Russian core and the Armenian colony of Nakhichevan on the one hand and the Don Cossack area surrounding it on the other. Its proximity to the Armenian settlement, which enjoyed several privileges of self-administration, and the area’s island position...
within the Don Cossack Region distinguished Rostov from other cities of the Russian Empire with regard to its socio-economic and political constitution. It thus provides an interesting space for Russian and Black-Sea history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Crucial to New Russia’s economic success was the accommodation of different ethnic groups in a local setting: How did these respective economic cultures shape a common economic and social space? What role can we ascribe to the geographical location that remained peripheral long after its formal integration into the state? To what extent did this coexistence of different economic cultures serve as a catalyst or obstacle to prosperity?

One way of approaching the history of Rostov is through the prism of imperial politics. The empire’s economic, political, and military interests overlapped constantly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The city provided a crucial node in the wars against the Ottoman Empire, for the domination of the Black Sea, and for the provision of troops and cargo in the Caucasian Wars that lasted nearly a century. Its harbor and customs post became vital in exploration and the expansion of Russian trade with the Caucasian mountaineers. Several reforms reflect this link of economic and military interests. In 1887, the State Council and the War Ministry in St. Petersburg transferred Rostov and Nakhichevan to the Autonomous Don Cossack District in order to overcome the severe economic stagnation of the latter caused by its increasingly outdated social institutions. As a major export hub for grain, Rostov’s potential to contribute to the financial prosperity of the empire was realized from early on. A report from the ministry of the Interior in 1840 estimated optimistically that Rostov could surpass Odessa as the Empire’s main export port for grain at the end of the century.8 On the other hand, compared to Odessa, Taganrog, or Novocherkassk, the city never received the same amount of attention from the imperial center’s city planners. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century did it receive the status of a regional administrative center.

Viewing Rostov only in the context of its value to the empire, however, does not give sufficient justice to the region’s specific character, as migration and ethnic diversity created a unique setting of economic interaction and conflict. Migration, both domestic and foreign, legal and illegal, shaped the area’s socio-economic and ethnic fabric. Catherine the Great’s settlement policy for New Russia aimed at encouraging Russian peasants from the central regions to resettle to New Russia guaranteeing tax exemptions or immunities to generate provisions for the army.9 Nobles who had received land for their services resettled whole serf villages into New Russia. Yet illegal migration to the south, a much older historical phenomenon, remained a constant source of concern for St. Petersburg, as peasants fleeing from the oppressive system of serfdom would deprive the nobility, the estate Catherine II. so carefully nurtured, of its economic foundation in the long run. Until the 1840s, the garrison of The Fortress of Saint Dimitriy of Rostov sent expeditions
throughout the district to catch these runaway serfs, or begly, while the crown regularly reminded Cossack atamans about sending begly back to their masters in the north. Nevertheless, these migration flows were central to the economic life of the region. They not only provided the local economy with a potential workforce decades before the abolition of serfdom in the mid-nineteenth century, they also left an imprint on the illegal economy: In the mid-nineteenth century, the forging of passports for escaped peasants and counterfeit money became the most prominent forms of economic crime in the Cossacks’ capital Novocherkassk and in the Armenian city of Nakhichevan.

Besides the ethnic blending of Russians, Ukrainians, Cossacks, Armenians, Kalmyk, and Tatars, ethnicities encompassed by the Russian Empire, an increasing number of merchants of Greek and English descent settled in Rostov for business as well. They not only linked Rostov with trade networks unfolding between Russia and Western Europe, their presence and the capital they invested also redirected trade routes in the empire, transforming the local economy and its different economic cultures.

These economic cultures included culturally and religiously grounded ideas of a just economy, a specific understanding of property rights, as well as economic practices of production and distribution. Max Weber famously considered protestant work ethics as the bridge between religious convictions and economic premises and behavior. In the Russian Empire, the community of Old Believers has been discussed as one viable example of a marginalized and prosecuted community with specific religious values that contributed to their economic success in the Moscow regions textile and craft market. We can understand economic cultures as the economically related patterns of thought, perception, and behavior of a distinct social group, both on the level of discourse and practice. Local economic cultures were articulated in petitions, found their expression in the daily trading practices at local markets, or permeated statements made at commercial courts. The proximity of Russians, Armenians, and Cossacks in the Rostov region provides us with an opportunity to improve our understanding of economic transformation of the Russian empire’s multiethnic periphery. It is during this period, between Catherine II’s reign and the late nineteenth century, when the eighteenth century’s “interethnic division of labor” was transformed by demographic change, migration, state politics of modernization, and the transformation of the Russian markets.

Unique to the ethnic communities in Rostov and Nakhichevan is their spatial proximity while being divided in two different political and social structures at the same time. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these two cities slowly merged into one southeastern metropole. The leading encyclopedia *Brokgauz-Efron* reminded its readers in 1897: “Recently Nakhichevan has expanded towards Rostov so drastically that one needs to look into the old plan
of 1811 to rediscover their actual political border.” Both cities expanded during the second half of the nineteenth century, especially after the abolition of serfdom and the expansion of Black Sea trade, slowly merging into one urban structure linked by public transport, annually described in address books and almanacs, and even supervised by a shared police administration. Yet the division into two different political entities with local self-administration remained intact beyond the end of the Russian empire. Within this framework, exemplary conflicts of (1) land distribution, (2) the river Don, (3) the customs system, and (4) the question of nationality can help us to shed light on Russian, Armenian and Cossack economic cultures and their gradual transformation.

**Land**

Rostov developed on the lower Don from small settlements located west of the fortress of Saint Dimitriy of Rostov in the last third of the eighteenth century. Its coat of arms, divided into a blue field on the left and a red field on the right, illustrates the military importance ascribed to it. According to the official description, a tower on the blue field signifies a barricade against raids of the neighboring predatory peoples and the Empire’s superiority over them while the red field shows the trophies of armaments seized from them. Due to its auspicious geographical location, Rostov was transformed from a military settlement on the Russian border with the Ottoman Empire, housing some 1,200 residents, into the central trading hub of Russia's southeast. At the end of the nineteenth century, its population having increased to 100,000, Rostov connected trade flows from Siberia, the Urals, the Volga basin, and Russia's grain provinces with the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea, and the Caucasus. Trade networks multiplied after new train lines connected Rostov to Novorossiya, Prikavkaz, and the central provinces surrounding Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Armenians resettled from Crimea founded Nakhichevan east of the fortress of St. Dimitry in the 1780s. The process of resettlement, set into motion by Catherine II, drained the weakened Crimean Khanate of its most important economic actors and used them to develop the formerly “wild field” that was to become New Russia. The Armenians were one of the first groups, alongside the Greeks actively resettled into New Russia under Count Potemkin in order to develop the area. Benefitting from privileges of self-government, the remission of taxes and services, as well as the generous financial support from Armenian communities in Persia and India, Nakhichevan quickly turned into a flourishing town of traders and carpenters with 5,000 residents at the turn of the century. Since the seventeenth century, the Russian state constantly provided the Armenian communities with privileges and monopolies over long-distance trade in order to benefit from their trading networks linking India and Persia with Western Europe. Due to their seclusion and corporative organization, the influence on local agriculture was rather...
However, in Nakhichevan, Armenians would not only provide credit for Russian merchants who suffered from the general lack of capital but also provide them temporary access to their trade networks to purchase rare goods from greater distances. Most importantly, the Armenians secured provisions for skilled artisans, the predominant profession in the first half of the nineteenth century. 2,940 craftspeople (out of a total population of approximately 8,000) were registered in 1822. These artisans significantly contributed to regional development: Industries supplied by their shops for tanning, candle making, tool manufacture, or wine and liquor production increased the city’s attraction for merchants from Odessa and abroad, who settled permanently in Rostov or opened a branch of their own business there. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, Rostov offered not only the chance for merchants to export raw materials but, increasingly, ways of processing them locally before export.

Arguing for a specific economic mentality of the Armenians is tempting but not easy to ground empirically. The Armenian historian Sarkis Kazarov, with some over-embellishment, argues that the Armenian “love for work, entrepreneurial spirit, resourcefulness and skill as well as honesty and neatness were necessary for economic success.” A more prominent characteristic of the Armenian business practices was the eagerness to keep revenues and expenses balanced and, if need be, radically cut expenses. Much of the Armenians’ reputation among Russian merchants as being greedy derived from these economic behaviors, today considered as rational. Accordingly, merchants would purchase goods at the end of trade fairs around Rostov, when prices would have dropped. Repeatedly, this caused their Russian counterparts to complain to the vicegerent in Taganrog about Armenians’ “unchristian trading practices” The resemblance of these complaints to those of Muscovite merchants in the sixteenth century against English traders in Archangelsk should raise caution about taking these claims as proof of a genuine religiously founded economic culture. It rather illuminates ways of framing economic interests with religious narratives promising success in a specific situation. However, the practices of Russian merchants’ economic culture did not remain static and gradually changed by Rostov’s burgeoning entanglement with Black Sea trade. From the 1840s onwards, an increasing number of Russian merchants sold their goods at the Rostov trade fair in late summer at prices significantly beyond the value of the goods. Their aim was to quickly accumulate cash money, constantly in shortage within the country, in order to travel to the northern grain-producing provinces in order to buy grain and linen seeds; these they could sell to Greek and English traders in Rostov with considerable profit margins.

For their part, the Don Cossacks inhabiting the vast area surrounding Rostov and Nakhichevan had since the seventeenth century received numerous economic monopolies from the Russian tsars that were to provide the economic basis for
their existence and their ability to provide military service to the Empire when necessary. Among the Don Cossacks’ economic activities, the most important included raising cattle and horses, exploiting salt lakes in the region, mining anthracite, fishing in the Don, and taking advantage of the right to customs-free trade in their products. The constant pursuit of such activities also helped define their identity. After the Cossack hosts gradually lost their independence to the Russian tsars in the seventeenth century and the Cossack and peasant uprisings in the eighteenth century, Count Potemkin, as the architect for New Russia, decided to enact a systematic subjugation of the Cossacks in order to erase the security threat once and for all. Don Cossacks increasingly perceived the expansion of Russian military presence in the Don region as a potential risk to their independence and something that portended Cossacks’ gradual inclusion in the Russian military forces. The fortress St. Dimitry, the later nucleus of Rostov, became a symbol of that threat, since the loss of autonomy was aggravated by new limits on Cossacks’ fishing privileges and new customs controls at the nearby post on the Temernik River. Don Ataman Efremov and his troops’ open refusal to obey in the 1770s led to the former’s arrest. Catherine and Potemkin, faced with the escalating Pugachev revolt, secured the support of the Don Cossacks for the crown by pardoning Efremov and generously reinstating and extending the economic privileges of the Cossack stanitsy around Rostov. As a second strategy of this twofold approach for subjecting the Don Region to central control, Potemkin coopted the Cossack elite into the Russian nobility, providing them with titles, ranks, and hereditary land.

According to various economic indicators such agricultural and (pre-)industrial productivity, the Oblast’ of the Don Cossack Host was among the most backward areas of the empire at the end of the nineteenth century, despite its economic and demographic potential. The characterization of the Cossacks’ economic culture as rather conservative and hostile to social change and economic modernization is underlined by local resistance to establish the zemstvo system in the reform period. Only after six years, the project to establish zemstvo structures was abolished due to Cossack opposition. Motives for rejecting aspects of modernization however differed – while the Don Cossacks nobility did not show any interest in sharing local power with new Zemstvo institutions, simple Cossacks in their settlements would risk their cattle and horses by not letting veterinarians vaccinate or treat them out of superstition. Nonetheless, Cossacks played a significant role in developing and exploiting the economic potential of the region between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, all the more as some of the Cossacks’ economic interests and imperatives were compatible with those of the Russian and Armenian communities. The existence of a Union of Trade Cossacks within the Cossack host proves, that at least for a time, certain segments within the Cossack communities were willing to engage in economic activity that went beyond barter trade and that depended on longer time horizons. The Cossacks’ small sailing
ships on the Don (strugi) served in the waging of war against the Ottomans in the eighteenth century. However, Russian observers in the late nineteenth century found them to be archaic and proof of Cossacks’ inability to adapt to the age of steamships. Nonetheless, the strugi retained their economic importance for cargo transport well into the second half of the century, thanks to the shoals of the Don. Despite the skepticism of the Cossack community towards modernization in general, traditional cargo transport that increased drastically over the course of the century provided a significant income for those settlements located on the river’s embankments. Despite their grievances, the Cossack economy became increasingly linked with those in the city by mid-century. Rostov and Nakhichevan turned into a proxy sales market for Cossack-produced salt that the Armenians would need for curing their fish, while anthracite mined by the Cossacks slowly began to replace the scarce wood as the main fuel in the southern step region.

One central issue of conflict between the communities was land. The Russian state granted Nakhichevan more than half of the 260 square kilometers of land that had previously belonged to the Cossacks, the fortress, and its settlements. 24,000 dessyatiny were split into 4,000 for the fortress and 20,000 for the Armenian settlement. The fact that the first decree of Catherine regarding the colony had only granted 12,000 dessyatiny in 1779 suggest that the delegates of the Armenian community in the capital had been successful in representing their interests at the court through informal channels.

With the population of Rostov growing significantly faster than that of Nakhichevan, the proportion of land held by each city remained a constant source of conflict throughout the nineteenth century. The Armenian magistrate frequently complained against the “wild settlements” erected by begly from the center of the empire. Thousands of begly, lured by the promise of economic and social improvement and the myth of a secure space in the south (“On the Don no one gets handed over” – “S Dona vydachi net”), built houses and huts close to the Don and the markets, ignoring any borders between the two communities.

For Armenians though, settling outside their own territory could increase the risk of being robbed or murdered by vagabonds or Cossacks. Several cases of such attacks against residents in the five Armenian villages surrounding Nakhichevan in the early period of the two cities (1790–1820) led the local courts and the commander of the fortress to get involved. The Viceregency of Taganrog as well as the governor in Ekaterinoslav clearly understood the security issues linked to the question of land property as they reviewed and demanded better protection of the land property. The uneven distribution of land between the two cities, however, remained unchanged. Before the First World War, Nakhichevan could compensate its smaller trade revenues in comparison to Rostov by renting land to carpenters, traders and businessmen, thereby significantly increasing its annual budget.
The river

The river Don, as the main hub for trade and source for fishing, became the site of conflict between Armenians, the citizens of Rostov, and Cossacks since the foundation of the settlements. The arrival of the Armenians amplified the preexisting conflict between Russians settled around the fortress and Cossacks regarding fishing rights in the lower Don and its delta. Don Cossacks felt that their monopoly on fishing and custom-free trade granted by the tsars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a monopoly that provided them a considerable source of income, had been violated. The court in St. Petersburg was forced to mediate these conflicts throughout the nineteenth century.44

With the two cities gradually emerging as economic centers, the river could turn into a locus of contestation in trade. In 1840, Armenians started building shops on the left embankment of the Don, opposite to Rostov’s port, and bought most incoming food from the surrounding areas, food that previously had been sold directly on the market in Rostov to the Russian urban population.45 The Cossack providers benefitted from the Armenian’s restructuring of the regions market, as time and effort for selling their goods on the local market could be spared. Yet the resale of fish, grain, vegetables, and meat to the residents of Rostov by the Armenians led to an increase of market prices and hardship among the poorer strata of the local population. In this case the Armenians’ economic agility threatened the public order and the governor was, a year later, to give in to a petition and forbid this form of trade.46

At the same time, the river as the lifeline of both cities demanded technical, administrative, and financial cooperation in order to adapt to modernization. Both city dumas cooperated in building a new bridge in the 1860s47 and in accumulating the financial means to rent an expensive dredge able to deepen the river for the passage of bigger ships in 1899.48 Later on, a common horse tramline serviced main streets and squares in both cities. The Delta Committee, founded in 1865, became an institution of merchants, experts, and state administrators of different nationalities that explored the delta, accumulated financial support from the state, and realized different projects to deepen the last 20 kilometers of the river between the cities and the Sea of Azov.49

The Custom system

Since 1749, when Empress Elizabeth founded the first customs post in the region near the Temernik River, Cossacks and the state engaged in endless conflicts over taxation and its evasion.50 In the nineteenth century, it was thanks to the efforts of Governor Vorontsov that the establishment of a customs post in Rostov in 1836 boosted Rostov’s economic development and significantly increased the financial radius of operation of its administration, 35 years prior to the reform of the city administration. Within just ten years, trading volume in Rostov increased thirty
times, surpassing that of the Vicegerency of Taganrog. While the total volume of trade in 1823 was under 150,000 silver rubles, the opening of the customs post increased the volume from 342,000 rubles in 1836 to 2.8 million ten years later. In 1848, the magistrate of Nakhichevan appealed to the authorities in Taganrog and the governor and demanded that the 10 percent share of the customs revenue the state had granted to Rostov’s city budget should be shared with Nakhichevan. The members of its Magistrate argued that many cargo goods were actually stored on the cities’ part of the right embankment of the Don before being shipped, and that Rostov already possessed two large fairs as a considerable sources of income. Although the governor denied the claim by pointing out that only 5 percent of the exported goods actually came from Nakhichevan, the whole case set an avalanche of statistical evaluation in motion and increased the attention of the central authorities on the prosperity of the cities. Given the practice of exporting goods from the countless warehouses on the right embankment, the distinction between the two cities had already become blurred.

**Nationality**

Despite their growing economic entanglement and the increasing consolidation of the two urban structures into one, Rostov and Nakhichevan remained two separate political entities until the end of the empire. During the first decades after the establishment of the New Russian territories, the ties between Small Russian and New Russian inhabitants were significantly greater than those between migrants from Central Russia and New Russian residents. According to John LeDonne, these mutual affinities benefitted from the presence of the large Cossack population, extensive networks of Greek communities and the geophysical unity of the Dnepr basin. However, the increasingly nationalized political discourse under the reign of Alexander III and Nicholas II, as well as the transfer of both cities to the Oblast’ of the Don Cossack Host in 1887–88 made the vague category of Russian nationality a predominant factor within debates on urban consolidation and economic prosperity. The decline of the economic status of the Don Cossacks made nationalistic narratives effective tools to frame socioeconomic change that had already began undermining the status of the Cossack community. Given the predominance of Don Cossacks in the Rostov area and an increasing number of lower-class laborers from central Russia that immigrated, the perception of Armenians in the region gradually changed. Cossacks felt a growing contrast between their symbolic military role for the Russian state and their declining economic status, as the Don-Region remained economically stagnant, despite its enormous economic potential. The experiment of uniting Rostov with the Don-Cossack district in order to improve the economic situation lasted only from 1886 to 1904. The opening of the oblast’ to foreign investment increased the popular perception that the Armenians personified a capitalist modernization in which the
Cossacks were not participants. The Russian-Cossack local historian A.M. Grekov claimed in books and newspaper articles that the Armenians “received land in the interest of developing the region, which they did not do, but rather enriched themselves at the expense of the Russian population.”

Among the cosmopolitan-minded economic elites of Rostov, a strong Russian national sentiment did not seem to have spread significantly by the turn of the century. However, some of the existing Societies for Mutual Credit, which provided local entrepreneurs with capital, began to restrict their activity to Russians only. Furthermore, the duma of Nakhichevan repeatedly refused attempts by the Rostov city duma to unite the two cities as the Armenians would have been degraded in a unified city duma to a minority. Although in the last decades of the empire, the overarching majority of Nakhichevan’s citizens were Russians, the restrictive electoral law ensured the political dominance of the Armenian elites; most of the city’s real estate (possession of which granted suffrage) belonged to the Armenians. In this specific setting, the strict electoral census system that allowed only a fraction of the residents of one city to vote for representatives in its duma, a system otherwise associated with the repression of Russian civil society by the autocratic state, became the means to ensure the political power of a minority ethnic elite whose population had experienced unfavorable demographic development.

**Conclusion**

This contribution has considered the interactions, cooperation, and conflict between ethnic communities whose separate settlements in South Russia gradually merged into one urban space. Especially in the period prior to the Great Reforms, different economic cultures came into conflict and were renegotiated within a space that promised prosperity to its inhabitants. In many cases, ethnic difference was far less important than economic matters; to understand Rostov as a multiethnic imperial city in the nineteenth century requires us to take as much a class perspective on class as one of nationality or ethnicity. Modernization in the Russian Empire depended on the interaction between the central authorities and the peripheries that ought to be modernized. Both cities developed into one main gate of the Russian Empire towards the Black Sea. During the course of the nineteenth century, questions of ethnic difference became a proxy for economic matters, with ethnic belonging increasingly becoming a proxy for class interests as the nineteenth century progressed as well. The very rivalry of these groups meant the state was constantly called on to adjudicate. While conflict over the ways of conducting economic life was therefore central to maintaining difference, it also created patterns of interaction between separate groups. Some groups such as Armenians, Greeks and later European traders became increasingly linked to international trade, thus becoming vehicles for the large-scale reorganization of economic life in the city. The first Russian merchants engaging in trade with...
Greek and English grain buyers not only benefitted from high profit margins and managed to increase their social status, but foreign traders also served as catalysts for adapting and transforming local economic cultures.

With the increasing economic significance of the area, the political self-confidence of local elites, and the growing number of infrastructural challenges, the ability for Rostov and Nakhichevan to negotiate and solve the problems between them became a crucial prerequisite for modernizing the urban space. When Russian and Armenian merchants or members of their respective administration agreed on long-term investments for a common horse tram, to build a bridge, or to modernize the embankment of the river, they did so with common economic interests and from a similar position within the social hierarchy of the empire.

Most major conflicts before the 1880s evolved around the balance between the economic exploitation of the region’s space and sometimes conflicting understandings of justice within the two communities. The Russian state protected the Armenians’ privileges as long as their economic activity did not threaten the social and public order. The nationalization of public discourse at the end of the nineteenth century—accompanied by the decrease in symbolic protection—and demographic transformation also encouraged Armenian elites to consider their community and political dominance as national. The limitation of voting rights for the city duma offered them a means to secure their political and economic position vis-à-vis a growing Russian majority within Nakhichevan itself. Contrary to this political entrenchment, spatial markers of difference between the Russian and Armenian community had increasingly vanished from the city map.

About the author

Michel Abeßer works as an assistant professor (akademischer Rat) under the chair for Eastern European History, University of Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. He defended his dissertation in 2016 and published it in 2018 with Böhlau Verlag (Den Jazz sowjetisch machen: Kulturelle Leitbilder, Musikmarkt und Distinktion zwischen 1953 und 1970, Köln 2018). He also edited the collected volume De-Stalinisation Reconsidered: Persistence and Change in the Soviet Union (Frankfurt and New York 2014). His research interests include Soviet culture and youth as well as economy and ethnicity in Imperial Russia.
Endnotes


8. A.A. Skal’kovskiy, Rostov-na-Donu, (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya ministerstvo vnutrennich del’, 1847).


10. Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Rostovskoy oblasti (GARO) f.518 op.1 d. 68 l. 98 ob.


D. Bagaley, Kolonizatsiya Novorossiyskogo kraya i pervye shagi ego po puti kul’tury (Kiev: Kievskaia starina, 1889), 110.

“Delo o vyskanii s Nachichevanskoyu kupca Chechmachova 1500 rubl moskovskim kupcov Vishnikovski na otpushchennoj tovar“ 26.6.1851-16.8.1864, GARO f. 579 op. 1 d. 474

Kazarov, Nakhichevanskoye kupechestvo, 20.

Ibid.

Voennoye-statisticheskoye obozreniye Rossiyskoy Imperii 1837-1854, Vol. 11, Novorossiyskaya guberniya, Besarabskaya oblast’ i zemlya voiska Donskago 1849-1850 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya Departamenta General’nago shtaba, 1849), 142

Shane O’Rourke, The Cossacks (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 147.

Brian J. Boeck, Imperial Boundaries: Cossack Communities and Empire-Building in the Age of Peter the Great (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); John P. LeDonne, Ruling Russia: Politics and Administration in the Age of Absolutism, 1762-1796 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 291 et seq..


O’Rourke, Cossacks, 135 et seq.


Tipografiya V. I. Babenko, (1904), 37–40.

Savel’ev, Obshchestvo, 97.


Polnoye sobranie zakonov Rossiyskoy Imperii (PSZRI), Vol. XX, Art. 14942 (24 November 1779); A.M. Bogdanyan, Iz proshlogo (O pereseleniia armany Kryma na Don): Kratkiy istoricheskiy ocherk (Rostov-on-Don: Rostovskoe knizhnoe isdatel’stvo, 1947).

“Perespiska s Ekaterinoslavskoy kazennoy palatoy, Nakhichevanskim armyanskim magistratom i zakhvat kuptsov Adabaizhev i dr. obshchestvennoy zemlya gorod Nakhichevan bez gorodskogo dokhodov,” GARO f. 579 op. 1 d. 233.

See for example the novel of Grigoriy Danilevskiy, “Begly v Novorossii,” in Vremya 1-2 1862 / 1-3 1863.


Delo o zakreplayushchikh ustroystva torgovlykh zavedeniye na levoy storone Done” (16 June 1846-4 February 1867), GARO f. 579 op. 1 d. 465.


“Istoricheskaia spravka po voprosu ob uchrezhdenii v Rostov na Donu gradonachal’stva” (4 February 1904), RGIA Nauchnyy-spravochnyy bibliotek, [papka 132p].

Koshkin, Donskoe torgovoe obshchestvo, 17–18; Savel’ev, Obshchestvo, 37–40.
Michel Abeßer

59  A. M. Grekov, Priazov’e i Don’. Ocherki obshchestvennoy i ekonomicheskoy zhizn’ kraya (St Petersburg: Tipografiya “Obshchestva pol’za”, 1912).

60  Ibid., 120.
Publishing Information
The Online Open Access Journal Euxeinos. Governance and Culture in the Black Sea Region is published by the Center for Governance and Culture in Europe (GCE-HSG), University of St. Gallen, Switzerland with the financial support of Landys & Gyr Stiftung.

Free download for noncommercial private, scholarly and educational purposes. Every other form of distribution is permitted only after consultation with the editors.

Euxeinos Editorial Team
Prof. Dr. Michael Dobbins
Prof. Dr. Dirk Lehmkuhl
Prof. Dr. Ulrich Schmid
Dr. Sandra King-Savić
Dr. des. Oleksii Chebotarow
Zsófia Schmidt, M.A.
Alexander Mishnev, M.A.

Editor-in Chief
Dr. Sandra King-Savić

Copy Editor and Managing Editor
Alexander Mishnev, M.A.
Dr. des. Oleksii Chebotarow

Contact
Center for Governance and Culture in Europe (GCE-HSG)
University of St. Gallen
Müller-Friedberg-Str. 6/8
CH-9000 St. Gallen
Switzerland
Phone: +41 (0) 71 224 25 61
Email: euxeinos@unisg.ch
URL: www.euxeinos.ch
Facebook https://www.facebook.com/euxeinos1

Cover image: Mikhail Frunze, extraordinary representative of the Ukrainian SSR to Turkey, together with Bolshevik delegation members and Turkish officials in Ankara, circa January 1921. From the Russian Foreign Ministry's online project commemorating the 1917 revolution ©.

ISSN 2296-0708
© Center for Governance and Culture in Europe, University of St. Gallen

Euxeinos by GCE University of St. Gallen is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.