

Greek Merchants, Their Wives, and Transiency of Migration in Eighteenth-Century Hungary

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In diaspora studies, the dispersed Greek population has been recognized as one of the “classical” diasporas, along with the Jews and the Armenians. From the epoch-making international congress on the Hellenic diaspora² up to a recently published collection of works,³ the phrase “Greek diaspora” has been applied in almost all the cases from antiquity to modern times. The wandering Odysseus and the refugees after World War II (and probably the young emigrants responding to the euro crisis of the 2010s) constitute examples of the diasporicity of the Greeks. The Greek merchants who increased their numbers and influence over the local and international economy in eighteenth-century Central and Eastern Europe, especially Hungary after the peace of Passarowitz concluded in 1718, are often referred to as a “diaspora” as well.⁴ We consider this application of the word too broad, however. In this paper, we would like to discuss the diasporicity of the Greek merchants in Hungary, especially before naturalization in 1774, by investigating the transiency of their stay and the role of their wives.

William Safran defines diasporas as “expatriate minority communities” (1) that have been dispersed from an original “center”; (2) that retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their homeland; (3) that feel themselves not fully accepted by their host society; (4) that consider their homeland to be a place to return to eventually; (5) that have the will to commit to the maintenance and restoration of their homeland; and (6) whose relationship with the homeland helps consolidate their consciousness and solidarity.⁵ According to this definition, the most important features of diasporas are their dispersal and, above all, their attachment to their homeland. This homeland-centered definition of diasporas can be criticized, however, because “decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return.”⁶ In particular, explains James Clifford, the “centering of diasporas around an axis of origin and return overrides the specific local interactions (identifications and “dis-identifications,” both constructive and defensive) necessary for the maintenance of diasporic social forms.”⁷ Rogers Brubaker, moreover, comments on the definition of diasporas,

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² Fossey, John M. (ed.): *Proceedings of the First International Congress on the Hellenic Diaspora from Antiquity to Modern Times*. 2 vols., Amsterdam, 1991.

³ Rozen Minna (ed.): *Homelands and Diasporas: Greeks, Jews and Their Migrations*. London/New York, 2008.

⁴ For example, Seirinidou, Vasiliki: The ‘Old’ Diaspora, the ‘New’ Diaspora, and the Greek Diaspora in the Eighteenth through Nineteenth Century. In Rozen M. (ed.), 2008, pp. 155–159.; In Hungarian ex. Stamatopoulos, Vasilios (szerk.): *Görög örökség. A Görög Ortodox Diaszpóra Magyarországon a XVII–XIX. században*. Budapest, 2009.

⁵ Safran, William: *Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return*. *Diaspora* 1(1), 1991. pp. 83–84.

⁶ Clifford, James: *Diaspora*. *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (3), 1994. p. 306.

⁷ Idem, p. 322.

emphasizing the importance of “boundary-maintenance” that makes it possible for the concerned community to keep its own identity. That is, “the interesting question, and the question relevant to the existence of a diaspora, is to what extent and in what forms boundaries are maintained by second, third, and subsequent generations.”⁸ For Brubaker, however, the more crucial thing is to think of diaspora, community, and identity “not in substantialist terms as a bounded entity, but rather as an idiom, a stance, a claim.”⁹ If we follow Brubaker’s concept of diaspora, it would be senseless to ask whether the Greek merchants in Hungary constituted a diaspora or not. In any case, before asking this question, we have to ask another question: Were the Greeks who controlled the commerce of the mid-eighteenth-century Carpathian Basin dispersed from their homeland? Moreover, did they constitute a community abroad?

In order to investigate these questions, we focus on the role of the wives of the Greek merchants in Hungary. The importance of the roles of women in the migration process has been analyzed in gender studies and migration studies.¹⁰ Among the various functions of female migrants, we concentrate our attention on the role of women in community building and, thus, their impact on the permanence/transiency of migration.¹¹

In studies of Greek communities and their enterprises, it has been emphasized that their activities were broadly based on family ties. For example, Katerina Papakonstantinou shows how the Pondikas family members organized their business between Pest and the Bulgarian town of Pazardzhik in the second half of the eighteenth century.¹² In addition, scholars studying the Greeks of the Mediterranean have observed that Greek-owned shipping firms were heavily based on strong family and common-island ties, and in enterprises of this type, women played a crucial role in enhancing solidarity and strengthening ties.¹³ Concerning the Greeks of eighteenth-century Hungary, although it has been reported in several studies that the Habsburg authorities insisted that the Ottoman merchants lived together with their wives and children,¹⁴ it remains unknown where the wives resided and what significance this had on the transiency/permanence of the Greek merchants in Hungary. The purpose of this paper is to investigate these questions, analyzing the registration of Ottoman merchants carried out in 1769 in the Heves and Exterior-Szolnok county (hereinafter Heves county).¹⁵

8 Brubaker, Rogers: *The ‘diaspora’ diaspora. Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28(1), 2005. pp. 6–7.

9 Idem, p. 12.

10 For example, Sharpe, Pamela (ed.). *Women, Gender and Labor Migration: Historical and Global Perspectives*. London/New York, 2001.

11 Harzig, Christiane: *Women migrants as global and local agents: New research strategies on gender and migration*. In: Sharpe, Pamela (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 15–28.

12 Papakonstantinou, Katerina: *The Pondikas Merchant Family from Thessaloniki, ca. 1750–1800*. In: Faroqhi, Suraiya & Veinstein, Gilles (eds.): *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire*, Paris/London/Dudley, MA, 2008. pp. 133–149.

13 Harlaftis, Gelina: Mapping the Greek Maritime Diaspora from the Early Eighteenth to the Late Twentieth Centuries. In: McCabe, Ina Baghdiantz & Harlaftis, Gelina & Minoglou, Pepelasis Ioanna (eds.): *Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks: Four Centuries of History*, Oxford/New York, 2005. p. 159.; Minoglou, Pepelasis Ioanna: *Women and Family Capitalism in Greece, c. 1780–1940. Business History Review*, 81, 2007. pp. 517–538.

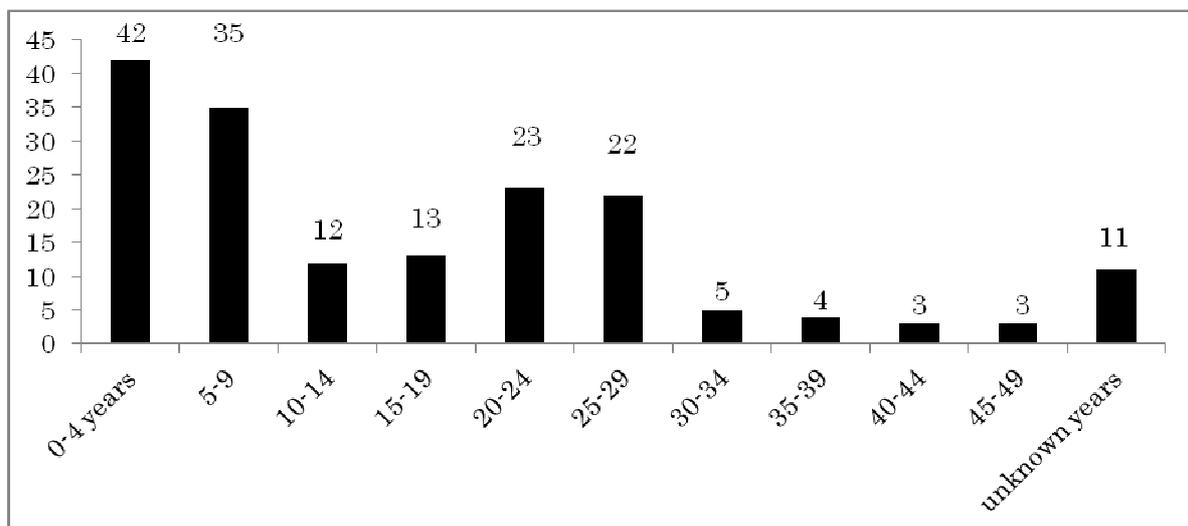
14 Par example, Petri Edit: A görögök közvetítő kereskedelme a 17–19. századi Magyarországon. *Századok* 130, 1996. p. 80.

15 MOL. C42. 16.cs, 423-487/1770 (the register of Greeks of Heves county).

Duration of migration

To begin, let us examine how many years the Greek merchants had resided in Heves county. In 1769, 173 Greek merchants were registered. Ninety of them were master-merchants (*quaestor*), 10 of them were partners (*consocius*), 35 were journeymen (*sodalis*), 36 were apprentices (*tyro*), and two were servants (*servus*). The average age of the members was 31.28 years. Naturally, the oldest were the master-merchants (on average, 31.34), whose age extended from 19 to 70 years of age. The youngest journeyman was 15, the eldest 41 (on average, 23.34). The apprentices consisted of lads under 20, the youngest being 8 years of age (on average, 14.80).

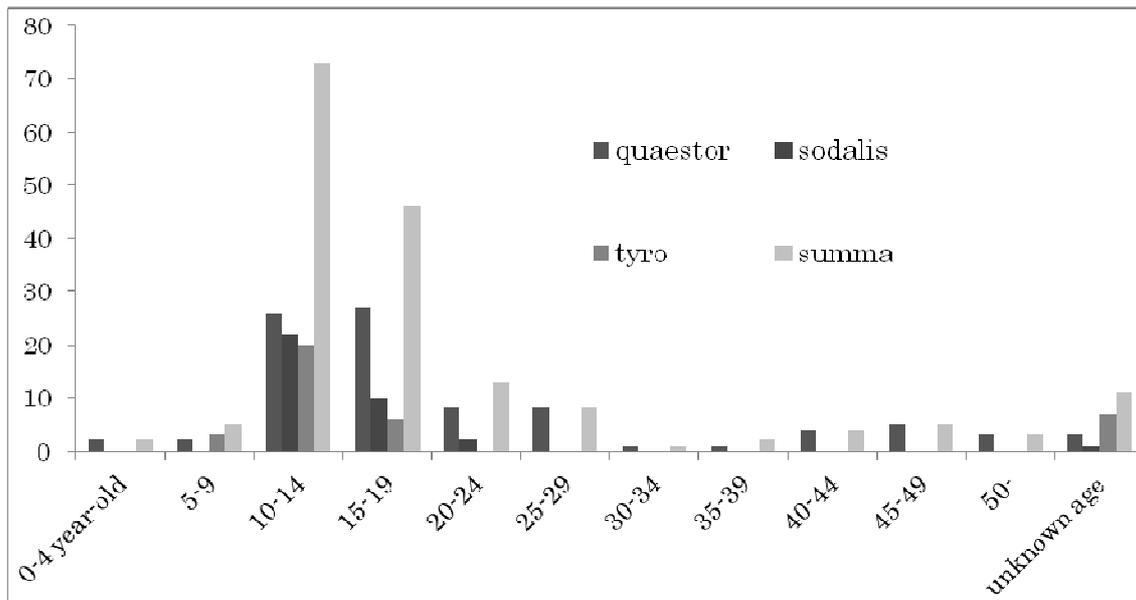
The register records the first time each merchant entered Hungary. Thus, we can calculate the duration of their residence in Hungary. The earliest case, Nicolaus Turnaj, who came from the Bulgarian town of Tarnovo and was living in Gyöngyös, crossed the border in 1721, at the age of 15, at the checkpoint of Brassó (today Braşov) in Transylvania. Including Turnaj, six merchants stayed in Hungary for more than 40 years. On average, the master-merchants had resided there for 20.99 years, the journeymen 8.97 years, and the apprentices 2.38 years. In general, they remained in Hungary for 14.56 years.



Graph 1. Greek merchants' duration of residence in Heves county

We can also calculate the age of the Greeks when they have arrived at the Hungarian border for the first time. Two babies aged less than one year entered Hungary in 1740: Petrus Hati, from Moscopole (today Voskopojë in southern Albania), and Staphanus Rali, from Tarnovo. After 29 years, in 1769, both ran their own businesses, Hati in Gyöngyös trading in Turkish goods (*cum mercibus Turcicis*), Rali in Pásztó dealing in textiles, rope, and salt which had purchased in Hungary (*mercibus in Hungaria reperibilibus utpote tela, fune, sale et his*

similibus quaestum exercet). Although it is not possible to discern how Hati and Rali traveled, almost all those who crossed the border under the age of 20 were brought by their elders. For instance, in 1740, 11-year-old Joannes Kota went across the Danube at Zimony (today Zemun) with older Greeks (eductus per seniores graecos), and Nicolaus Sörter was 12 years old when he arrived in Zimony with his father. The majority of merchants (73%) set foot on Hungarian soil for the first time in their teens. The average age at arrival was 14.56 years of age.



Graph 2. Greek merchants' age of entry into Hungary (Heves county)

Another example, the cases of the Greeks in Bihar county show similar features. As the register of Bihar does not include data for apprentices, the average age in 1769 (41.90) and the duration of residence (24.44) are a little higher and longer. Of these individuals, 51% came to Hungary in their teens, at an average age of 16.84 years.¹⁶

We can conclude that the Greek merchants arrived in their early youth, probably as apprentices or journeymen, and they subsequently played an active part in commerce in Hungary.

Bonds of family?

The register of Heves includes partial information about how, or with whom, these men came to Hungary. As we saw above, most of those who came to Hungary in their teens were brought by older merchants, that is, they traveled with caravans, while some young boys made the trip with their fathers, mothers, or brothers. However, such a bond did not always mean family members lived together in the same town. In Heves county, we can observe several cases in which a corporation (societas) included some family members. For example, Antonius Kozma,

¹⁶ MOL. C42. 16.cs, 211-224/1770 (the register of Greeks of Bihar county).

who came to Hungary as a 17-year-old in 1760 from Moscopole with his brother, worked under his brother Constantinus Kozma as a journeyman in 1769 in Gyöngyös. Georgius Pál brought his two sons, 21-year-old Joannes and 16-year-old Georgius, from the Macedonian town of Kozani in 1766. Three years later, the two young men were working in Gyöngyös as journeymen for their father.

By contrast, in many cases children lived in a town other than that of the relatives who had brought them. Fourteen-year-old Theodorus Naum arrived in Gyöngyös to work under Demetrius Todor as an apprentice, being accompanied by his brother, who lived in Vienna. Similarly, a Gyöngyösian journeyman named Joannes Pap had a brother, Christophorus, in Prague, who brought him to Hungary; Georgius Kalo, a farm contractor (*arendator praedii*) in Fegyvernek, had arrived there with his parents, who lived in Szentendre. Some parents did not even remain in the Habsburg monarchy. For instance, Antonius Bendela's mother went back to Macedonia (*in Turciam jam reversa*) after she had left her 12-year-old son in Gyöngyös.

It is certain that they kept close ties with one another, even if their places of residence were dispersed. For example, when the Hungarian authorities asked whether he intended to remain there or to go back to his homeland, Cosma Presula, a 30-year-old journeyman in Gyöngyös, said, "as being unmarried, I cannot decide it without asking the opinion of my brother, who lives in Poland." However, these ties by blood did not play a more decisive role in their economic activities than their ties to the land. A Gyöngyösian corporation led by Constantinus Moska consisted of seven members whose family names differed from each other (Moska, Rali, Sapuna, Sári, Urete, Zembovics, and the above-mentioned Presula). Six of them, however, did come from same Macedonian town, Moscopole, and one from Kastrol. Another example is Constantin Alexander, who employed as apprentices two boys, 11-year-old Georgius Dimon and 10-year-old Georgius Trandafil, who had been brought from his native town, Kozani. Naturally, there were also corporations in which only a slight relationship among its members was observable. Stephanus Demeter, who came from Tarnovo, employed four teenage apprentices at his store (*fornix*): three Rascians (*rascianus*) from the Hungarian towns of Komárom and Tokaj, and one Wallachian (*valachus*) boy from Brassó in Transylvania.

It follows from what has been said above that the residence forms and the economic activities of the Greek merchants did not depend exclusively on their family ties. Such multiformity shows that the Greek migrants in Hungary had not constituted a stable structure as a community at that point.

Loci of wife and family

We therefore need to examine what kinds of ties did bind the Greek migrants to each other. Several works have drawn attention to the importance of the "Compagnia," which functioned as a kind of merchant guild. In the mid-eighteenth century, there were seven Compagnias in Hungary: Tokaj, Miskolc, Gyöngyös, Eger, Diószeg (today Diosig), Kecskemét,

and Újvidék (today Novi Sad).¹⁷ By maintaining particular networks within and over the boundaries of towns or counties, the Compagnia gave a basic framework to the life of the Greek migrants,¹⁸ but we will not examine this in detail in this paper. Rather, because we are concerned here with the connections between migrants and their homelands, we will concentrate on the problem of wives.

The register of Heves recorded whether the Greeks were married or unmarried. According to its records, 50 of them were married, 68 unmarried, 5 widowers, and 50 unknown. Among the unknowns, the columns of all the apprentices (36) were blank from the outset. Moreover, nine journeymen and two master-merchants and two partners were teenagers. Thus, assuming that 48 of the unknowns were indeed unmarried, it is surmisable that two-thirds of the Greeks were unmarried (67.78%), and 29.24% were married. Almost all married people were master-merchants (48); there was only one married partner and one journeyman. Among the master-merchants, half of them were married (53.33%). The document also records where the wives lived, whether it was in Hungary with their husbands or in their homeland, Macedonia, Bulgaria etc. The ratio was 14:34. That is, 70.83% of the married couples were living apart. Because of this information, it is possible to reconstruct the typical life path of the Greek merchant. He departed his homeland, Macedonia or Bulgaria, in his teens. After traveling to Hungary with older merchants across the custom of Zimony or Brassó, he began work under a master-merchant as an apprentice or journeyman. Probably in his thirties, he would return to his homeland as a master-merchant, get married, and then depart again for Hungary, leaving his wife and children at home. Therefore, it seems reasonable to say that the axis of the family ties of the Greek merchants lay between Hungary and the homeland, not within Hungary.

The importance of family ties in their behavior appears more clearly in their responses to the question asking whether they would remain permanently as subjects of the Hungarian monarch or return to their homeland. As the Hungarian authorities placed conditions on them bringing their family for settlement, many merchants mentioned the locus of their wives as the reason for their decision. Among 48 married master-merchants, all 16 whose wives lived in Hungary chose to remain, and 11 of the 34 whose wives were in their homeland intended to return. By contrast, only ten merchants said that they would remain if their wives could come to Hungary (*si uxorem suam educere poterit*). The reasons given by the rest (14) are unknown. That is, just half of the married men intended to live in the place of residence of their wives.

The same tendency appears in the answers of unmarried men to the same question. Among the journeymen and the apprentices, who were predominantly unmarried, only 11% and 8% of them said they intended to remain (the reasons are unknown). In contrast, 51% and 36% of them said they would return home. As stated above, family ties operated in both directions, affecting

17 Bur, Marta: Handelsgesellschaften-Organisationen der Kaufleute der Balkanländer in Ungarn im 17.-18. Jh. *Balkan Studies* 25(2), 1984. pp. 267–307.

18 For example, the members of the Compagnia of Kecskemét have been found not only in Jász kun district surrounding the town, but also in another seven counties: from Békés county in the east to Pozsony (today Bratislava) in the west. Edit Petri: A kecskeméti görög kereskedők története a XVIII. Században. *Cumania* III, 1975. pp. 34–36.

both the decision to remain and to return, so these low percentages do not necessarily mean that family ties took precedence over everything else. For example, the fact that among the master-merchants, there were no significant differences between the answers of the married and the unmarried (66% of the married and 59% of the unmarried master-merchants intended to remain) could be interpreted to mean that their higher social status and average age and their broader business sphere were more decisive factors than family ties. However, further research is required on this.

We limit here the discussion to emphasizing the importance of place of residence of family members. As in the case of Thomas Popovics, who lived in Mezőtúr for 21 years dealing in various Turkish and Hungarian goods with one journeyman and who declared that he intended to return to Macedonia because of his mother (*Redibit post Matrem in Macedoniam*), the loci of family had undeniable gravity. The family ties functioning here were not restricted to the migrant land but rather crossed the boundaries between Hungary and Macedonia.

From what we have discussed above, we want to present following hypothesis: Before settlement in Hungary around 1774, Greek migrant society there did not constitute a continuous community of a diaspora, being simply a temporary and loose agglomeration. It is inferred that after settlement, the Greeks of Hungary began to form a sustainable community. Thus, a further direction of this study will be to analyze more precisely their sociabilité, or social network, and to trace its changes after settlement in the 1770s.

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