

The History of Greek Shipping

By Spyros M. Polemis

The Greeks, more than any other people in the world, have remained, during their entire, very long history, mariners without interruption; they have loved the sea, they have thought of it as a beautiful element, and they believed it had godlike powers; whilst the others, such as the Phoenicians and the Romans, used it to conquer other people. The Greeks considered the sea a friendly environment and they were happy with the sea's caprices. Very quickly they came to realize that the sea could offer them a way of life, together with the joy of freedom and an increasing freedom of spirit. Seamanship came naturally to the Greeks, and this had to do with the landscape of their surroundings, the geographical position of Greece, her climate and her endless coastline. The landscape is mountainous and the farming area only comprises one-fifth of the entire nation and hence it can only offer a poor harvest. Thus, the sea was a way out. The endless coastline which covers 92 % of Greece's orders, forms closed inlets, natural harbours, deep bays, golden beaches and hundreds of picturesque islands. It was natural, that such beautiful surroundings would inspire the Greeks and would also instil in them a love for the sea. The geographical position of Greece was an advantage because she was approximately in the middle of the Ancient Mediterranean, between Asia and Italy, near Egypt and Libya to the South, and next to the other Balkan countries to the North: she was at the crossroads of the most ancient shipping lanes. The distances were not great and for thousands of years our seamen were navigating under clear skies, almost always in sight of land.

The Greek climate, although it had great variety, rarely endured typhoons or very strong gales. The temperature was always pleasant, blue skies, clear atmosphere, and the sun almost a permanent source of light. Such an environment does make for a freer spirit, strengthens the imagination and makes people optimistic, liberal and daring. In other words, it created the necessary conditions for the Greeks to become very good shipping men.

THE MARITIME PRE-HISTORY OF THE GREEKS

The Greeks basically started their pre-historic times in shipping with the emergence and dominance of the fleet of Crete and to a smaller degree with the establishment of similar fleets of some cities of Continental Greece. Before the Cretans, the Aegean was dominated by the Karas, the Helegas and the Phoenicians, who engaged in maritime commerce and piracy. The Greeks, because of these powerful fleets and because of attacks by the pirates, withdrew inland to more defensible positions in the mountains. Later on, however, under strong leadership they ventured out into the sea and they took up piracy. Piracy was not considered bad in those days, because to be a pirate you had to have virtues; you had to be brave, daring and you had to possess seamanship. Pirates were considered as privileged people and they were greeted with hospitality.

Thus, the Cretans were the first who succeeded in building up a considerable navy and conquered the Mediterranean. Minos, the King of Crete managed to push the Karas out of the Cyclades and clean-up the Aegean from the pirates; the ships of Crete started to engage in maritime commerce and with the passage of time they would sail to all the ports of the then known Mediterranean.

There were about 100 cities that were carrying on maritime commerce, first of which was Phaestos, and especially the capital of Crete, Knossos. Their power was so great that all the cities were without protective walls.

Under the leadership of King Minos, the Cretans really became masters of the seas. The decline of Crete as a maritime power came about through violent happenings. There were very destructive fires and violence as a result of the invasion of the Achaids. This was around 1450 BC, at a time when the Cretan fleet had weakened or was far from the island.

Thus, we come to the second phase of the development of the pre-historic Greek fleet, after the domination of the Cretans, with the emergence of mariners from the ports of continental Greece.

It is difficult to know the facts of that period with any large degree of accuracy because mythology engulfed historical events. With the passage of time and centuries, the maritime history of a region was only retained as legend through mythological gods or heroes. Hercules was one of the great seamen of the time, as was Jason, and many of their compatriots who eventually established such a vibrant trade within the Black Sea, at a time when the Cretan fleet had weakened.

Pre-Hellenes were the inhabitants of Greece before the Dorians came, and before they were called Hellenes. The advance against Troy, which was indeed the biggest maritime operation of the pre-historic period, gives us an idea of the size of the fleets and consequently power and domination of the cities of that period. Mycenae was then the biggest maritime power and this is why Agamemnon was the leader of the expedition. Mycenae contributed 300 ships, in a total of 1,186 vessels that sailed against Troy. The islands contributed 174 ships from which 80 were from Crete. Homer and Hesiod poetically describe part of the maritime history of the period and the seamanship of the pre-historic Greeks. Hesiod talks about the most basic premise, the seamanship of people, that people learn by necessity, for when their land is not fertile and does not produce, they take to the sea and learn the hard way.

Hesiod also gives some sound advice. Good advice for us all, I believe. For a prudent merchant and shipowner, Hesiod says, it is unforgivable to load on his ship all his fortune, because in the case of an accident, he may be totally destroyed. Not to be taken literally but metaphorically a very good parallel. He also suggests that larger vessels, not small ones, should be used for the carriage of cargoes.

This sounds very familiar indeed. During his time, the 8th century BC, the most suitable periods for sailing's were the spring and the summer. The mariners of the day, before the rains came, "and before the new wine was opened", would stop their voyages and would take their ships out of the water. The boats would stay on shore all during the autumn and the winter.

The "DANAIS" and the "ARGO" are the first named ships of the Greek merchant marine. They were both equipped with sails and 50 oars; the first ship belonged to Danaos and the second to Jason.

The ships of course were not just used for cargoes but also for adventurous voyages to discover new places or for expeditions of war and conquest.

The "ARGO" was built in Tifan, a city in the Gulf of Corinth, a city famous in those days for her shipyards and a home of the best mariners of that period.

The ships that followed "ARGO", in Homer's time, were of 20 and 50 oar construction, with a higher stem and deeper hold, better for the open sea. Ship construction, according to Homer, was quite advanced. The boats were painted on the outside both for preservation but also for decorative purposes, with "miltos", equivalent to today's red lead or primer, and they were either covered with red or blue paint or tar.

The 20-oar vessels had about 50 crew, whilst the 50-oar ones, about 120 men. There were two officers, the master who was the navigator but also steered the boat, and the bursar, who was also the steward. They usually sailed only during the day, whilst for the night if they were not in a safe port or safe enclosed bay or anchorage, they would draw the boat out of the water on to a beach.

THE HISTORICAL PERIOD

The historic, rather than the pre-historic period of the Greek merchant marine starts at about 1104 BC, when the Dorians descended on Greece. As of this date the inhabitants of Greece are called Hellenes (Hellenes). The social upheaval that took place in that period momentarily slowed expansion of the Greek merchant marine, and it took approximately three centuries before the Greek marine was prominent again.

The nautical advances and colonialism of the historic period was due to the independence and progress of the Greek city-states. The return to dominance of the seas by the Greeks was because of the need to colonize, the need and the natural inclination to trade across the seas, and for political freedom and freedom of the spirit.

Colonialism was at its height at about the 8th century BC, both because they wanted to send to new fertile lands the overspill from the increase in their cities' population, but also because they wanted to expand their activities in the sea trade.

The Greeks in contrast with the Phoenicians, by colonizing, did not want to profit through violence and stealing, but instead this was a sign and an expression of their love for adventure and the discovery of new places, as well as of their nautical instincts.

In certain cases, colonies were established for the sole purpose of ensuring that the mother city-state had a monopoly on the produce of the region. The colonies of Fasis and Pityous in the Black Sea ensured the tar and the lumber of the Caucasus, and those old Crimean grains from Russia.

During the colonization period and up to the 4th century BC, the Greek merchant fleet sailed throughout the Mediterranean, from Syria and Cyprus through the Bosphorus and into the Black Sea, and from Libya through Italy to Spain. The maritime tradition of the Greeks and their high degree of seamanship is primarily due to what the Greeks achieved during the historic period; in other words, during the rise, the strengthening and the dominance of the city-states and the development of the fleet and/or the merchant marine of each. In the history of each city-state one finds the reasons why the Greeks created and established a seamanship and a maritime tradition that has lasted through the ages until today.

The most famous cities for their successful merchant fleets of the Doric period, are Corinth, Megara, Chios, Samos, Fokaia, Militos, Syracuse, and of course Athens.

Fokaia's success was such that her merchant ships, using Ischia as their foreign base, sailed all along the Spanish coast and even ventured into the Atlantic, and that was more than 2,500 years' ago.

Syracuse, also one of the industrious Greek cities, which was a colony established by Corinth and Megara in about 850 BC, was for five centuries a center of shipping with a very strong shipping industry, of many successful shipyards for Triireis, the warships of the day, a large merchant fleet, and a trade center for grain. Merchants from Marseilles, Italy, Greece, the Cyclades and other places, came to Syracuse to buy grain. Another factor in the successful creation by the Greeks of a maritime tradition was the Amfiktioniai, a kind of trade association formed by the city-states. They were originally thought of as religious associations but eventually they became trade associations and associations for the protection of their sea trades, their merchant fleets and the cities themselves.

From the Greek maritime history point of view, the most important associations were those of Kalavrias and Dilou. The first was founded by the famous seaman Nafplios and Athens, Aigina, Epidavros, Ermioni, Nafplion, Prasiai and Orchomenos were the members. The second was founded by Theseus with Dilos as a base.

Athens of course, as we said previously, was perhaps the biggest influence on the development of Greek shipping since pre-historic times. Their political strength, their strong colonies such as Militos, Fokaia and Samos grew to almost equal prestige, strength and maritime power as Athens, and they created their own colonies and expanded the sea trade to faraway lands. The most notable citizens of Athens who are basically responsible for establishing the maritime tradition of Athens, are Peisistratos and especially Themistocles between 561-461 BC Themistocles is considered as the most prominent maritime personality of Athens, and one of the most famous in maritime history. He believed that the future of Athens was in the sea, and he devoted his energies in establishing for Athens a secure, commercial harbour (Piraeus) and in expanding her merchant marine. He also pushed very hard to convince his fellow Athenians to build a strong navy which they could pay for through the income they received from Lavrion mines, so their merchant ships could be protected. This they did, by building 100 Triireis.

The third factor was that he was successful in imposing a mandatory service of all Athenians on board the warships, thus creating a large pool of very able seamen. All these programs established by Themistocles proved to be extremely beneficial not just for Athens, but for the Greek merchant marine as a whole. As Athens quickly became a very powerful maritime state, they won important battles at sea, kept Greece free, came to control the maritime trade of more than 300 cities, and they made certain that the sea lanes remained open for the sea trade. Piraeus became the largest maritime center where manufactured goods and other commodities were stored and traded, and where merchants made agreements to transport cargoes. In other words, "The Baltic".

Athens profited from the merchant marine, also because of taxes and different levies. All commodities going through Piraeus, either being imported or exported were taxed by 2% on their value or 5% if they were destined for a friendly port, whilst all freights for transactions concluded in Piraeus were taxed 6%. The Athens grain trade of that period is estimated at 150,000 tons a year of which 50,000 tons was re-exported. Not a small figure, by any means, for the merchant marine of the day, when one considers the size of the ships which had to carry this quantity, the fact that they only sailed during spring and summer, and given the slow speed and the great distances they had to cover.

Just for one round trip to the Black Sea, a vessel needed several weeks, under favourable conditions. They had to load cargoes for the northbound voyage, get there under sail, reload, and thus sail both legs in a loaded condition. Ballast voyages were not contemplated then. They also stopped in other ports on both northbound and southbound voyages for part cargoes, and it was therefore improbable for a ship to do more than two round trips per year. For each loading of grain from Russia, for example, the shippers prepared a Bill of Lading, a kind of inventory of merchandise loaded (as they said) and when the vessel reached the Bosphorus this was checked by the authorities there, who informed Piraeus of which ship, her type, and what quantity of cargoes to expect.

The shipowners and merchants obtained money for their investments from rich citizens and bankers, through a loan agreement. This was always a written agreement, which was given to a mutually trusted person for safe-keeping. The repayment of the loan was made within 20 days from arrival in Piraeus, and provided that the cargo was not damaged. If part of it was damaged, lost, jettisoned, or stolen, the money lender received both capital and interest in proportion to the value of the sound cargo remaining. Of course as one can understand, the rates were high because the bankers shared in most of the marine risks involved. For a Crimean round voyage, the interest was between 22.5-30%. As collateral the banker required a mortgage on the ship, on the cargo, on the seamen on board provided they were slaves and the loan could only be half the value of the cargo. There was also a personal guarantee for if the Owner could not repay his debt, and the proceeds of the sale of ship and cargo by the banker were not enough, he was liable for everything else he had, not just his wealth in shipping, but all his property ashore, as well. In addition to all this a guarantor was also required, who would guarantee the Owner and pay the Owner's debts in case of default.

The maritime policies of Athens are the first in history to provide regulations for the shipping industry. Athens invoked protective measures, special laws, political and financial measures to expand and sustain their maritime superiority, their shipping industry and sea trade. Within this system individual initiative was free to act, and free from any intervention by the state. The state laid down some rules concerning the organization of the industry but did not otherwise interfere. The entire sea trade was done by and for the benefit of the shipowners, the seamen, and the merchants, whilst the state only regulated and stayed away from direct involvement. There was a system for quickly resolving differences, through arbitration and the courts; the system otherwise generally provided for free enterprise Athens was many centuries ahead of her time in the measures she took for shipping, and we see the signs and the results of those initiatives today.

The merchant ships were designed specifically for carrying as much cargo as possible that is why they were wide and deep, in contrast to the long and thin warships.

There were three types of vessel basically, one of about 130 tons, another of about 250 tons and the third of about 400 tons. They all used sails during the voyage and oars for manoeuvring in the ports. They had no decks.

From 322 BC, after the sea battle of Amorgos, Athens' Maritime power declined, and her role in shipping was taken by Rhodes; Piraeus lost ground to Alexandria, Milos and Smyrna to Ephesus and Foiniki to Syria.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT'S INFLUENCE

Alexander the Great's conquests opened new horizons for shipping since he expanded the Greek influence to Asia, and through his trusted friend, Admiral Nearchos, established new ports from India to the Persian Gulf. Alexander did not limit himself to conquering a great part of Asia but he also organised the trade by sea from those countries.

The ports that were created in India were provided with very large storage facilities so that the produce from the nearby regions could be brought there for trans-shipment by sea. Before Alexander, Indian goods were shipped only in small quantities, overland, and hence they were very expensive in the Mediterranean markets. Since Alexander, the merchant ships carried large quantities of Indian produce to the Persian Gulf, more cheaply. India was now also able to receive European products through the same routing.

In general, a new period for Greek shipping emerges, with the end of the classical times in Greece. New, bigger countries became prominent, city-states lost influence, larger areas with greater populations had to be catered for, and therefore the size of ships increased.

Alexandria, which as we saw took over from Piraeus as the centre for shipping, eventually became a very cosmopolitan city, populated mostly by Greeks and Egyptians, and then by scores of other races.

The first lighthouse for shipping was built on Faros island, in the port of Alexandria, and hence the word "faros" meaning, in Greek, lighthouse. The lighthouse was 120 metres high the light was visible from 40 miles, and mirrors were used to reflect and increase the intensity of light. It was built in 280 B.C.

The policy of the Ptolemeoi concerning the merchant marine were very different to that of Athens, in that there was gross interference by the State.

At the same time that Alexandria was becoming a very strong maritime centre, Rhodes' contribution to shipping reached its peak. Their efforts in this respect, since they were not really producers themselves in any large quantity, given the size of the island, were to be a trans-shipment centre, and with the advantage of their geographical position, this they managed to do successfully for centuries. Like Athens, they charged 2% on all cargoes going through the island and they encouraged a close relationship between the shipowners, the merchants and the bankers. This levy raised 1,000,000 drachmas a year; a very large sum of money for that period. Rhodes started to decline after a very destructive earthquake in 225 B.C., and later in 167 B.C., when the Romans, who had by now started to become more active in the maritime affairs of the Mediterranean, proclaimed Delos as a free port.

THE ROMAN PERIOD

The Greek city-states' maritime power in general declined during the Roman period, but only to the extent of calling it maritime power, because as a race, the Greeks continued to be very much involved in merchant shipping. Rome conquered Macedonia in 168 B.C., the rest of Greece in 146, Syria in 65 and Egypt effectively from 31, which meant that she had conquered all the then known world. This however did not mean that the Romans turned to the sea.

Roman strict customs did not allow its citizens to become merchants or shipowners. However, Rome did need the services of a merchant marine, and although later on in their history they relaxed their rules out of necessity and greed, they did have to rely on the traditional maritime people, the Greeks, to carry out the sea trade. Thus, the maritime policy of Rome was to ensure for these traditional maritime people and their ships, freedom of the seas and freedom of their maritime trade. This they did through a number of measures such as building new ports, upgrading existing ones, opening canals, installing lighthouses, and above all, protecting the merchant ships, especially from pirates.

It is interesting to note at this point that during Roman times, we see the beginning of the passenger and tourist trade who travelled on board merchant ships. This came about because of the frequent and regular trips of merchant ships given ports, but also because Rome having conquered the world, brought peace, especially all along the Mediterranean and the European Atlantic coasts. Merchants travelled to buy merchandise and close deals, the unemployed to seek work, soldiers going on leave, public servants being sent to a new post, and scores of Romans going on holiday to Athens, Corinth, Delphi, Rhodes and to the Aegean Islands to see these historic places and to attend the Olympic Games and other Greek festivals. A substantial number also came to Greece to study, one of whom was none other than Julius Caesar who went to Rhodes to read law. The merchant ships during those times, especially those for grain, increased in size, basically because of the larger population of Rome, because of the increase in distances, and as a better defence against the pirates. Thus Emperor Augustus suggested to the Greek shipowners in Alexandria, to build larger vessels. It seems that some were as large as 1,300 tons DWT. It is interesting to note that the Roman Emperor suggested, did not order, the Greek shipowners, which meant that he probably thought they knew best as to which ships should be built.

The owners would operate either as today in other words to charter their vessels to merchants and receive the freight, or they would also act as the shippers and the receivers of the cargo. If they chartered their vessels, Charter Parties were signed, containing terms very similar to today's, such as the name of the owner, the DWT of the ship, the amount of freight and when it should be paid, the type or types of cargoes to be loaded, the number of days allowed for loading and discharging, the demurrage, the fact that the owner had to equip his vessel properly for the voyage, engage the required crew and carry the cargo in an undamaged and dry condition. Very familiar words indeed. The only exception was that the name of the Master was also written in the Charter Party.

So, as we have seen, the Romans relied on the traditional maritime people, especially the Greeks from Greece and their colonies, not only for their seamanship and their knowledge but also because of their experience in shipping, accumulated and refined primarily during Classical times.

THE BYZANTINE ERA

Thus, we come to the year 330 A.D., when Constantinople was celebrated as the capital of Byzantium. Constantinople was of course a very old commercial harbour and eventually became the heart of the Byzantine sea trade. Greeks were by far the biggest majority in the population of Byzantium, they had retained their influence on this eastern part of the Roman Empire and thus were again able to expand and further develop their activities in shipping, and to create once more a long period of maritime history.

Again we find that from the tradition and all the other attributes we talked about, it was the policies in shipping which Byzantium adopted, that greatly assisted in the success of the Greek merchant marine through the centuries that followed.

Emperor Nikiforos in 803 A.D., founded the first marine bank in history. The bank would loan captains and shipowners for the building of ships and charge 17% interest.

There was a Ministry of Mercantile Marine, which exercised the necessary control over the merchant marine, which would measure the ships, establish the ownership, register the vessels and keep a register of accredited captains.

Also in the Byzantine era they established the mutual insurance, i.e. the P & I clubs, laws concerning insurance claims, maritime loans, the responsibilities of the shipowner, and regulations that govern the relationship between the owner and his crew. But as history repeats itself, there had to come a time from about the 8th Century A.D., that the decline of the Byzantine Empire started, first by allotting responsibilities for the sea trade in the Mediterranean to Italian cities, like Amalfi, Genoa and Venice, and also because the Arabs were becoming stronger.

From the 13th century, Byzantium lost substantial power and influence to the Italian cities and the Greek merchant marine reached a very low point in its history, although Greek seamen continued to play an important role by serving on foreign ships.

On the eve of the Ottoman conquest, conditions in Byzantium would lead one to assume that Greek maritime activity was insignificant. Long before the Fall of Constantinople, the Byzantine Emperors became puppets in the hands of the Italian commercial republics, notably Genoa and Venice. With the Empire's trade completely ruined, we can hardly speak of a maritime economy. Whatever maritime activity was still in Greek hands, was of a local nature and economically inconsequential, as both external and regional coastal trade was now in the hands of the Italians.

Because of this downfall of the Byzantine economy, the Venetians and the Turks were the beneficiaries of the skills of the Greek craftsmen and seamen of the coastal regions of the Aegean and the Black Sea. Having lost its economic vitality, Constantinople was unable to continue her naval tradition; commerce, shipbuilding and specialisation in navigation, had now passed to foreign hands. On the islands however, under Venetian, Genoese and even Turkish domination or occupation, shipbuilding continued. The Greek islanders ranked among the finest galley builders in the first half of the 15th century.

Thus, the Greek merchant marine became almost insignificant until the 16th century, although it was really in the 18th century that its activities were diversified and expanded. This was as a direct outcome of the emergence of a powerful Christian merchant class that was able to capture not only the local and the regional trade but also that of the Eastern Mediterranean, South Russia and part of Central Europe.

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The emergence of this Christian merchant was basically due to the social changes brought about by the conquests of the Ottoman Empire. The 100 year period that begins with the Fall of Constantinople and ends with the death of Suleyman the Legislator, in 1566, is marked by the phenomenal expansion of the Ottoman Empire. It was a century of almost continual success that brought the Ottomans to the zenith of their power. During the reign of Mehmed the 11 (1451-1481), Ottoman rule was extended over the entire Balkan peninsula, with only a few important islands, including Crete and Cyprus, remaining in Venetian hands, while the Knights of St. John and the Genoese maintained their positions at Rhodes and Chios respectively.

By 1566 both Chios and Rhodes had fallen to the Ottomans and within a few years Cyprus too, was destined to the same fate. The expansion of Ottoman rule over the Balkan peninsula, which had been ravaged by centuries of near-anarchy and constant conflict among Byzantines, Venetians, Serbs, Bulgarians and Genoese, brought at last a semblance of unity, peace and security.

A new social structure was established that created considerable social mobility which in turn permitted the resumption of agricultural activity, almost suspended during the period of anarchy that preceded the Ottoman conquest, stimulated local and regional trade, and created conditions favourable to the growth of a commercial class.

Another basic factor in the productive elements of Ottoman society, such as the tillers of the soil and the craftsmen, the merchants enjoyed a privileged position. While the craftsman and the farmer worked under strict

regulation of the production and sale of their goods, the merchant had greater freedom in the accumulation of capital. A lesson, I believe, for some people in governments around the world, and a lesson repeated in history many times but unfortunately ignored, very much to the detriment of their fellow countrymen, to come back to history.

The merchant's privileged position was determined by the function he exercised in the economy. Not only was he indispensable in international and inter-regional trade, but he also supplied raw materials for local industries and above all, foodstuffs. Commerce proved to be the most effective way of capital accumulation, thus becoming the most profitable field for investment. Through the various functions it fulfilled, the merchant class formed an indispensable element in the state, and thus the state and the law accorded it a privileged position.

Whilst it is difficult to assess with any precision the economic life of the Ottoman Empire, it is certain that the State consciously encouraged the Greek and other Balkan merchants to expand their trade with the West through the Balkan overland routes, as well as by way of the Adriatic and the Danube. Another stimulus to the expansion of commercial activity was the inability of Venice, weakened by her naval wars with Turkey, to monopolise the Adriatic commerce.

The Greek merchant class began to play an important role in the economic life of the Empire immediately following the Fall of Constantinople. For instance, in 1477 we find a five man consortium of Greeks, outbidding their Muslim competitors in purchasing the customs agencies of the ports of Constantinople, Galata, Gallipoli, as well as other ports along the Aegean, for the sum of 450,000 ducats, a considerable fortune when one considers that the entire revenue of Venice from her Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean dominions in 1469, was 180,000 ducats, less than half of what the Greeks had spent. Thus being in a position to secure such income for rapid accumulation of capital, the Greek merchant class grew rapidly.

By the end of the 15th century, the Greeks were active not only in internal commerce, but also in international trade extending from the Black Sea, the Adriatic and Italy to Marseilles, Antwerp and Moscow. Ancona had a phenomenal growth as a major, international trading centre during the first half of the 16th century, and it was one of the first commercial centres outside the Balkans which attracted a considerable number of Greeks. By the middle of the 16th century, there were about 200 Greek houses already established in Ancona.

With this general background in respect to the activities of the Greek merchants, let us now turn to shipping proper.

With respect to the direct involvement of Greeks in interregional maritime commerce we have no precise data. Although Greek ships were to be found in Eastern ports as well as in Alexandria and Venice, Ragusans and Venetians almost entirely monopolised the trade of the Ottoman Empire with the West, at least during the first half of the 15th century; the French, English and Dutch entered the picture later. However, Greek maritime commerce in the Adriatic was quite prominent at this time. Also, the maritime economy of Livorno during the second half of the 16th century further supports the assumption as to Greek shipping participating in the trade beyond the central Mediterranean. Between 1573 and 1593, ships reported as arriving in Livorno from Zakyntho, Crete, Chio, Constantinople and Alexandria, were listed as Greek, French, etc., but determining the ownership of the vessels going from the Greek islands was very difficult because of the fact that they were manned either wholly or in part by Greeks. It seems that four centuries ago things were not very much different than what they are today, in determining the ownership of ships. It must be the usage of the trade, as they say in the Baltic, and perhaps most significantly, as we have already seen from history up to now, the need to be free and independent, the only climate that is conducive to the growth and success of free trade, free enterprise and of course shipping.

The Greeks also increased their influence and took advantage of the situation to expand their shipping activities and trade, because of some of the events in the Europe of the 16th century.

The population of Europe was increasing rapidly, and hence the demand for grain was also mounting at a tremendous pace. Portugal was in desperate need for grain, having suffered six famines between 1560 and 1600. The Turkish-Spanish War wrought havoc to the trade, and both Constantinople and Italy needed grain badly.

Thus, the growth of commerce and of shipping in the Aegean and especially Greece, was provided with an important stimulus.

Salonica, Volos, Preveza and other smaller ports, regularly exported grain to the West. In spite of all attempts by the Ottoman Government to regulate the movement of grain, the illicit trade flourished. The beneficiaries were the producers, but especially the Greek merchants and shipowners. The fast, light carriers were the Greek grain carriers of the Aegean. The illicit grain trade was one of the most lucrative activities of the Greeks, enabling them, as we shall see later, to amass considerable fortunes.

At the time the Balkans came under Ottoman control, most of the Aegean islands were under Venetian and Genoese occupation, and the Archipelago was infested with pirates, which presented a serious threat to Ottoman commerce. Consequently, the Turks embarked on naval campaigns to try to clear this problem.

The existing social-economic conditions in the islands under the Italians, facilitated Turkish efforts. The feudal system imposed by the Italian republics was much more oppressive than the Turkish rule at the time. There was harsh economic exploitation by the Italians, heavy taxation and religious oppression, and it is thus a matter of record that the Greeks rarely came to the support of their Italian masters but instead, frequently collaborated with the Turks. This was later justified; for once the authority of the Turks was established over the Greek islands, the situation changed dramatically. People returned to re-populate the islands, and a semblance of peace prevailed in the Aegean. Under Turkey, taxation was less severe, and most of the islands were given considerable privileges which eventually amounted to autonomy.

All the measures of a freer economy were calculated to encourage individual enterprise, make the islands economically productive and thereby profit the state. Words or policies that are true and correct in any period in history that we may be talking about. Characteristic of the Turkish policy at the time is the following directive by the BEYLERBEYI of Cyprus.

"As the island of Cyprus, newly-conquered by my invincible army, is exhausted from war, I order that the inhabitants of this province be oppressed in no way, that justice be administered with leniency, and that taxes be levied with moderation, so that the island may regain its former splendour and prosperity".

It is clear, therefore, that the establishment and the different policies of the Ottoman Empire, were beneficial to the Greeks of the time and gave them the opportunity to play an important role in the economy of Europe. The revival of the economic life of the Aegean inevitably entailed the rapid growth of maritime activity.

Also, as we have seen in maritime, pre-historic times, piracy had played an important role. Equally, piracy during this period was instrumental in the initial, capital accumulation among Greek mariners. The Greek pirates became more prominent in the beginning of the 16th century, either working independently or in collaboration with others. Some of those who started as fishermen and small-time pirates, attained immense power, such as the Barbarossa brothers, of Greek origin. During the second half of the century, the Greek pirates came into their own, one of the most notable Cretan pirates being Manousos Theotokopoulos, Domenico's brother.

In the Greek islands, piracy became an integral part of the local economy, an accumulation of capital that eventually was invested in proper maritime enterprises. It would be difficult to visualise a regional merchant marine emerging out of an economy allowing small margins for the accumulation of capital. The pirates, both Greeks and Western Europeans, had established an economic relationship with the local people, especially the merchants who bought pirate goods cheaply, as well as with the Turkish authorities.

Occasionally, pirates would operate with the protection of local authorities or persons of wealth. In some cases, piracy seems to have been a communal enterprise and some islands, such as Milos, Kimolos and Mykonos, became prosperous as a result of their special relationship with pirates. Yioura, Amorgos, Skopelos, Skiathos, los, Hydra, Spetses, Tinos, Psara and others, also had special relationships with pirates. In brief, piracy was intimately related to the regional economy of Greece, allowed for the accumulation of capital, supplemented and indirectly

supported legitimate, commercial ventures, and thus was instrumental in the development of the Balkan merchant and the Greek merchant marine.

What we have said so far is, what was happening during the first years, so to speak, of the Ottoman Empire, i.e. approximately until the end of the 16th century.

The years and the decades that followed, saw the beginning of the downfall of the Empire. The Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699 represents the end of an era and a turning point in the history of South East Europe.

Whilst the question of the decline of the economic life of the Mediterranean remains a controversial issue, it is clear that the emergence of the oceanic trade routes opened new horizons in shipping. The establishment of the European merchants and shipowners in the principal Ottoman ports and their virtual monopoly of commerce in association with the Greeks (Ottoman subjects), had a damaging influence on the economic life of the Empire. These merchants and shipowners were the beneficiaries of the economic crisis.

The Greeks were the suppliers of the raw materials of the whole Balkan Peninsula, and controlled most of the trade and shipping with Egypt, the Aegean islands and Continental Greece. From simple carriers and local merchants, the Greeks were now assuming the role of shipping agents, handling goods for foreign accounts, as well as importers and distributors of goods to their final markets. Of course, in the beginning their activities in international trade were still restricted, since most of the seaborne commerce was in the hands of the English, Dutch, French, and others.

A brief examination of the economic setting of Constantinople at this period, gives us also some insight into the maritime, commercial organisation of the Empire and the Greek merchant fleet.

Constantinople, the administrative and military centre of an immense empire, was the largest city in Europe at the turn of the 17th century, with a population of approximately 700,000. The bulk of the goods imported were destined for the provisioning of the City and the armed forces. The concentric character of this City's trade served as a strong stimulus to the rapid growth of an indigenous merchant class, which controlled the domestic market; the exclusion of all foreign shipping from the Black Sea was also instrumental to the strengthening of this class, predominantly Greek, and to the development of a sizeable Greek merchant marine. Despite the importance of the land routes, Constantinople, between 1592 and 1783, depended primarily on such a merchant marine. Local traffic alone connecting Constantinople and Galata, required a considerable number of small craft. It is estimated that during the second half of the 17th century, approximately 15 to 16,000 peramas and caiques along with other types of vessels, were needed for local transportation. Here again, the Greeks played a very important role. One account gives us a good picture of the immense maritime activity of the period. There were 2,000 and some say 9,000 captains of the Black Sea, and 3,000 captains of the Mediterranean, mainly Greek.

It is said that the shipowners who resided at Yeni Koy were for the most part Greeks, possessing enormous fortunes. This is entirely explicable given the advantageous position of the Greeks, who not only controlled the interregional and coastal shipping, but were also in a commanding position geographically. Greeks were to be found everywhere from the Black Sea to Alexandria as merchants, mariners, shipowners and shipping agents. Their centre of activity was Galata, and the Aegean and the Black Sea constituted their bases of operation. The grain trade, and especially the illicit grain traffic, was their most profitable activity. Indeed, the grain trade was a Greek quasi-monopoly placing them in the position to manipulate the market to their advantage. The international commerce at that time was however still in the hands of the other Europeans. As a rule, the Greek merchant marine of the Ottoman era was not only involved in distant voyages, but rather restricted to the coastal shipping of the Aegean and the Black Sea, although ships belonging to Patmos and Castelorizo in the first half of the 17th century did venture as far as Italy.

Of course, all of what we have talked about so far was only one side of the coin, one insight to the rise and later the domination of the Greeks as a world maritime power.

At the turn of the century (around 1700) and during the whole of the 18th century, the consolidation of political power by the Greeks helped the expansion of Greek Mercantile activity. During the 18th century, wealthy Greeks secured a virtual monopoly of influential posts in the Ottoman bureaucracy and for more than a century they monopolised many positions, one of which was that of Under-Secretary of the Navy, Dragoman of the Fleet. As financiers, merchants, and now politicians, they constituted a very influential class which safeguarded and expanded class interests and contributed to the growth of the mercantile activities of the Greeks. Also, early in the 18th century, the Phanariotes expanded their banking activities, challenging successfully the Jewish and American banking monopolies. By the end of the century Greek bankers were active in practically every important commercial centre of the Empire and at the beginning of the 19th century; they were established in Vienna and South Russia. By this time the Greek merchant mariners themselves had extended their activities beyond the Balkans into Italy, a traditional commercial centre for the Greeks into the rest of Europe and England. Undoubtedly the growth of Greek economic power contributed to the expansion of Greek shipping, to the extent that by the end of the 18th century, the Greek merchant marine was able to displace the West.

In addition, the role played by the 18th century, international conflicts in the expansion of Greek mercantile activity can hardly be overlooked. The mid-century European conflicts, adversely affected the commerce of the naval powers, particularly the French, and created conditions which proved advantageous for the Greek merchant marine. Of great importance also was the extension of Russian protection through the protégé system to Greek mariners. Navigating under the Russian flag gave them greater security. The Anglo-French wars of the late 18th and 19th century, eliminated French commerce in the Eastern Mediterranean, thus giving the Greeks the opportunity to secure their maritime position and expand their activities throughout the Mediterranean. And all this, do not forget, whilst the Greeks were still under Turkish occupation.

Destroying each other's seaborne trade was a key policy of the maritime powers during the 18th century. The anarchy of the war period rendered difficult the policies of the seas and gave an impetus to piracy. During this period, the Aegean was infested with pirates of all nations and it was then that the Greek piratical enterprise, conducted alongside commerce, reached its climax. Piracy and commerce are parallel interdependent enterprises during the formative period of the Greek merchant marine of the time. Other factors for the expansion of the Greek merchant marine of the mid-18th century, were:

- (1) the existence of a surplus of exportable agricultural products
- (2) the increasing demand in Western Europe for such agricultural products from the Balkans
- (3) the accumulation and investment of capital in the interregional commerce, and above all because of
- (4) the possibility of investment in the shipping industry under auspicious competitive conditions which would render maritime investment profitable, notwithstanding the competition of the maritime powers.

Rather familiar words and situations, except that now the competitors are of a slightly different breed.

The first, sizeable merchant marine emerged in Western Greece; Messolongi and Galaxidi were among the first around 1730. It is not surprising that the first Greek merchant marine able to compete with foreign shipping emerged on the western coast of Greece, an area commercially connected with Messina, Ancona and Livorno where England's position was predominant. Nor is it an accident that Theodosios Panou, a leading merchant of Yiannena, was able to buy two English ships in partnership with other Greek merchants, just four years after his appointment as British Consul at Yiannena. This was because unlike the French, the English were willing to accept the participation of foreign merchants and foreign ships in their endeavour to increase the flow of British goods and promote their export trade. In an effort to secure the cooperation of the Greek merchants, the English were willing to accept Greek investment in English ships, a concession which France too was compelled to grant around 1740. (Joint ventures and I guess we can draw some conclusions from them).

History does indeed teach us lessons and we do have examples in history from which we can learn, from which we can judge and be able to foresee what situations, perhaps unpleasant, might arise in the future.

European Shipowners of today are considering joint ventures with companies of developing nations, especially in the East. Might we draw a parallel with 1740? Or is it inevitable that history will repeat itself, no matter what we say.

The entire Greek population of seamen during the long period from the fall of Byzantium to Independence was present all over Europe. Greeks manned the oars on Venetian vessels or became officers on Turkish ships. The continuation of the life at sea for the Greeks during their occupation was not a matter of choosing a profession but an inescapable, irresistible continuation of their centuries' old seamanship and tradition. They served with Columbus, Magellan, Cavendish and Drake.

We have seen the perseverance of the Greek people and their compulsive urge to continue a life at sea during the occupation, and from the 18th century a New Greek merchant marine re-emerges, although the people were still not free.

France, for example, tried very hard with protective measures, advantageous economic policies, shipbuilding grants and others to build a strong merchant marine, but without much success, solely because of their lack of tradition and seamanship.

The Greeks on the other hand, without financial help, without help from the State, rather the opposite, without flag, without national cargoes and surrounded by merchant fleets of strong nations, did succeed in re-creating a merchant marine.

As we said before, the beginning of this revitalisation started primarily in Corfu, Preveza, Arta, Messolongi and Galaxidi, because of their closer, earlier ties with the Italian cities. The most prominent bases for shipowners were Galaxidi and Messolongi. In 1764 the Galaxidi merchant marine had 50 ships of 10,000 tons total, and about 1,000 seamen. Messolongi in 1770 had 80 ships. Other places which started again to be active in shipping were of course the Aegean islands, where for the inhabitants the sea has always been, especially during the occupation, a natural extension of their habitat. The islanders were never far from a life at sea through the ages. Their unbroken connection with ships helped them tremendously, because when conditions allowed, they were ready to embark in maritime commerce and to build large fleets.

Hydra too was among the first to commence the re-vitalisation of the Greek merchant marine, starting in 1656, followed by Spetses, Andros, Kasos, Psara and Mykonos. These islands, which eventually developed even their own maritime laws, had organised their shipping industry very much like the city states of the classical period. Perhaps their biggest obstacle was that they did not have a flag. They did use a kind of altered Turkish flag, but they were limited to voyages within Turkish waters. Eventually for voyages to distant places, they used the British flag, the Russian flag and others.

The Greeks of the 18th century also had very close ties primarily out of necessity, in that they needed to group their resources together to build or buy ships. These groupings of course would not have worked very well unless the shareholders were living in the same city or island, and they were perhaps friends or had family-ties. Shareholders were basically captains and members of their families or friends and other seamen who had managed to save from many years at sea. These were the people who formed the basis of the shipowners that eventually built large, family concerns and ended up later in the 20th century to own the biggest fleet in the world.

The re-emergence and re-establishment of Greek shipping had been completed by the beginning of the 19th century. By such time the rejuvenated Greek merchant marine had built 2,000 new ships. Many, especially the bigger ships, had been ordered from foreign yards, but Hydra, Spetses, Psara, Galaxidi and others, were very busy building ships.

In 1792, the first Greek insurance company was formed in Trieste, followed by others in 1808, and 1814 in Odessa.

With every year that passed, progress was rapid. Greek seafarers made a lot of money but they also gained further knowledge and experience and they sought to advance and refine their ships and themselves in warfare against the pirates, as they had no navy to assist them.

Their efforts required courage and bravery, and these factors together re-awakened their national pride and national conscience, which prepared them for the fight to liberate Greece.

Many Greek mariners of that period became very famous, like Andreas Miaoulis. He became captain on his father's merchant ship at the age of 16, and later, in 1822, Admiral of the United Navies of the Greek Islands during the War of Independence.

The new, revitalised spirit made the Greek seamen feel freer, the growth of their merchant fleet gave them confidence and their success in fighting off pirates and others to reach their destinations with the loaded ships made them feel more independent. Thus, the Greek revolution was born on the ships of the Greek merchant marine, and their decks were the first free soil.

The awakening of the conscience of the Greeks came also as a result of their frequent contact with the West, which was continuing the Greek civilisation. The crews which so often reached Europe, saw the life of the free people, their schools, their educational systems, their freedom of expression and they were deeply affected. So it was natural therefore, coupled with the freedom of spirit of their profession they yearned to be free.

The contribution of the merchant fleet to the liberation of Greece is almost without bounds. Apart from all the other factors mentioned, the Greeks had no navy, and therefore their merchant ships, without too much effort, became their warships. The seafarers, shipowners and ordinary seamen alike, also gave great sums of money to the war effort.

The losses were devastating. From some 600 ships that started the war, only about 50 survived. The merchantmen also stayed away from their traditional commercial roles for about 10 years, thus losing vast revenue.

SINCE INDEPENDENCE

As one can imagine, it took Greece years to recover. With the Greek fleet practically wiped out, the merchant fleets of the West dominated the seas. The now free Greek state, realising the importance of shipping to the nation, tried to help. The old shipyards of Hydra, Spetses, Andros, Skiathos and Galaxidi, commenced with renewed vigour. Thus, from 1834 when statistics started, the merchant marine already had 708 ships and by 1851, 1437 ships of 237,000 gross tons.

From the appearance of the steam-driven ships, the Greek fleet declined somewhat, as they did not have the larger sums of money required to build them. Thus, the first Greek steam-driven ships came almost 50 years after the "Clairmont", which is considered the first real steamship, and it was the Greek state that ordered them, not the shipowners. There was also a lack of confidence in the new ships, and Galaxidi fell victim of such wavering. Once they owned 500 vessels, now they are no more.

From about 1870 the Greeks started to buy cargo vessels more frequently. Vallianos, one of the most famous, was able to order four new buildings. Generally, however, the lack of funds is evident. Shipowners, captains, seamen and their relatives united their savings to put up a deposit and buy a ship. By necessity they looked for cheaper vessels; in other words, older vessels. To overcome the difficulties these older ships represented, they economised severely and they worked like slaves. The owners sailed with the ships and they were able to use smaller crews

because of their expertise and high seamanship. As a result they managed to overcome foreign competition. Thus by 1901 the Greeks had 1,152 sailing ships of 181,473 grt and 158 steamers of 231,541 grt.

In the years that followed, Greek shipping continued to grow, although it did suffer again severe setbacks. In the beginning of the First World War, the Greeks had 475 steamers and 884 sailing ships of 1,001,116 grt. At the end of the War, 57.5% of their steamships had been lost. They had just 205 vessels. In spite of this, however, they did not lose heart. They threw themselves into the fight to rebuild their fleet with new zest. One source of money was insurance recoveries, and in contrast to the past, foreign banks started to lend money. The Greek state also made for the first time a big contribution to the revival, by legislating to return to the Greek owners taxes levied on extra war profits, provided they would within a certain time limit, buy or order new ships and put up themselves double the amount of the tax. The owners ordered quite a number of ships, but by 1929, when the recession began, they again suffered a big setback.

After the Second World War, the Greek government gave certain guarantees, so that 100 Liberties and 7 T2 tankers could be given to Greek owners. This was the beginning of the latest re-vitalisation of the Greek merchant marine, and in the 30 or so years that followed, they reached the highest peak yet in their very long maritime history of almost 5,000 ships of 52,000,000 gross in 1977 or 4,750 ships of over 54,000,000 gross tons in 1981, the largest fleet in the world. A magnificent achievement indeed.

Thus, we have gone through history, we have heard of reasons, we have seen the struggles, we have listened to facts, but only one aspect of their character really stands out. The Greeks, who more than any other people in the world, have remained mariners without interruption throughout history; they have loved the sea, they have thought of it as a beautiful element, they have been happy at sea, a friendly environment for them - an extension of themselves. They enjoyed the feeling of independence, and the optimistic outlook it gave them. They enjoyed its freedom and the freedom of the spirit. So, we have not in fact been talking about history at all, but about a love affair between the Greeks and the sea, an inseparable couple, two inseparable elements of life.