



Summary :

The "System of the Greek Grand-merchants" in Constantinople-Istanbul (*Σύστημα των εν Κωνσταντινουπόλει Ελλήνων Μεγαλεμπόρων*) was the guild of the Greek grand-merchants of Constantinople. Within the framework of the System, the important work of Nikolaos Papadopoulos *Commercial Encyclopedia* was published.

Date

late 18th-early 19th century

Geographical Location

Constantinople (Istanbul)

1. The System of the Greek grand-merchants in Constantinople

The System of the Greek Grand-merchants in Constantinople was the guild of the Greek grand-merchants involved in external trade. Greeks in the late 18th century took advantage of the recess in French commerce and the naval blockades and transferred European products through Vienna, holding the title of interpreter to some foreign power, in order to reap privileges in their mercantile activities. The System was founded around 1795. In 1806, during the reign of the sultan Selim III, the Sublime Porte granted Greeks the same privileges the foreigners had. Consequently, the System was established, headed by two elected commissioners, "vekilides" (from the Ottoman *vekil*) or "deputati", whose election was ratified by the Ottoman administration. The deputati made proposals, and the Ottoman authorities granted the privileges with lifelong-term *berats*. With these privileges, sponsored by [Dimitrios Mourouzis](#), the subjects of the empire consolidated their position *vis-à-vis* the foreigners. The *beratli* merchants could have a *fermanli* (commission agent) in [Smyrna](#) and Salonica, while they paid the goods according to rates stipulated by the treaties signed by the Porte and the respective countries. They were judged only by the High Court (*Arz Odasi*) when the difference overcame the amount of 4000 piasters, and they had to pay a 2% tax during crises, just like the foreigners did. They came exclusively, under the authority of the *beglikçi efendi* (second chancellor of the Ottoman Empire), who was also in charge of resolving the disputes among them. The *haraç* tax was also paid to him.¹

The legislative vacuum concerning commerce in Ottoman Law provided the litigant parties with the opportunity to choose the judge who would resolve their dispute. The foreigners agreed with the Porte for their subjects to be judged by the diplomatic agents of their own country, who also selected the judges in cases of dispute among foreigners. When dispute among an Ottoman subject and a foreigner occurred, the judges were chosen on the agreement of the litigant parties. Appeals were tried in *Arz Odasi* and the procedure took place before the interested party – the foreign diplomat. For the disputes between Greeks and foreigners, the System undertook initiatives equivalent to those of the foreign diplomats, in order to support its members' interests. The arbitrations were tried according to the decrees of the System's statute and the European Law, and that is why the use of the French Commercial Code was necessary, hence its translation in 1817 by Nikolaos Papadopoulos (1769-1820), theoretician of the System. When Iakovos Argyropoulos (1812-1817) was interpreter, the *beratlis'* privileges in [Constantinople](#) and Smyrna (where the System had operated from at least 1806, when its statute was published), were extended to the Greeks of Thessaloniki and Aleppo.²

2. The Commercial Encyclopedia

The beneficent privileges, combined with the favorable conjunction, brought an increase in both business and profits for the System's members. Expression of the System's rise is the provision for the education of its members with a decision dating to 1813, which led to the foundation of the Literary Society in 1817, which seems like a predecessor of "educational foundations" of contemporary credit organizations. The compilation and publication of the Commercial Encyclopedia *Hermes o Kerdoos* by Nikolaos



Papadopoulos (4 volumes were published during the period 1815-1817), a valuable and manifold handbook for both the education and the practice of the mercantile profession, was the first venture, to be followed by many others up until the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821. The foundation of the insurance company "Kindynasfaleia" ("Dangersecurity)" (1819-1820), in the framework of the System, with Nikolaos Papadopoulos as its promoter, also proves the will for modernization among the System's associates.³

1. Σκλαβενίτης, Τ., *Τα εμπορικά εγχειρίδια της Ενετοκρατίας και της Τουρκοκρατίας και η Εμπορική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια του Νικολάου Παπαδόπουλου* (Αθήνα 1990), pp. 75-76.
2. Σκλαβενίτης, Τ., *Τα εμπορικά εγχειρίδια της Ενετοκρατίας και της Τουρκοκρατίας και η Εμπορική εγκυκλοπαίδεια του Νικολάου Παπαδόπουλου* (Αθήνα 1990), pp. 64-65, 76-77. For general information on the System see Σκλαβενίτης, Τ., «Τα Συστήματα των εμπόρων της Σμύρνης και της Κωνσταντινούπολης (1806-1820)», in *Ο έξω-Ελληνισμός. Κωνσταντινούπολη και Σμύρνη (1800-1922). Πνευματικός και Κοινωνικός βίος (30 και 31 Οκτωβρίου 1998)* (Αθήνα 2000), pp. 48-75.
3. Σκλαβενίτης, Τ., *Τα εμπορικά εγχειρίδια της Ενετοκρατίας και της Τουρκοκρατίας και η Εμπορική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια του Νικολάου Παπαδόπουλου* (Αθήνα 1990), pp. 65-73, 77-83.

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	Σκλαβενίτης Τριαντάφυλλος , <i>Τα εμπορικά εγχειρίδια της Ενετοκρατίας και της Τουρκοκρατίας και η Εμπορική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια του Νικολάου Παπαδόπουλου</i> , Εταιρεία Μελέτης Νέου Ελληνισμού, Αθήνα 1990

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	Ερμής ο Κερδώς ήτοι εμπορική εγκυκλοπαίδεια συγγραφείσα παρά Νικολάου Παπαδοπούλου http://anemi.lib.uoc.gr/metadata/a/9/9/metadata-01-0000190.tkl
	Παπαδόπουλος Νικόλαος http://www.lib.uoa.gr/hellinonmimon/authors/Papadopoulos.html

Glossary :

	berat A sultanic decree that bestowed an office or a set of privileges on an individual or a group of people. They were given not only to all state officials, but also to the members of the high clergy, including patriarchs and metropolitans.
	haraç (Ottoman Turkish: <i>haraç</i> or <i>cizye</i>): an entity of taxes payed directly to the central authorities by the non-Muslim Ottoman subjects (in addition to the other taxes that were payable by Muslims and non-Muslims alike). The non-Muslims, according to Islamic holy law, recompensed thus for the tolerance and protection offered by the Islamic State. Since 1474, the Orthodox Church, i.e. the patriarchates and the autocephalus archdioceses, had to pay annually the <i>haraç</i> or <i>vasilikon haratsion</i> . The patriarch or the autocephalus archbishop was responsible for the payment of the <i>haraç</i> ; he collected the money through the taxes that the communities had to pay to the dioceses. The amount of these lump-sum (<i>maktu</i>) taxes was fixed by the sultanic authorities, although some aspirants of the patriarchal throne undertook to raise it in order to ascend to the throne.