

“This innovative book of Ariadni Moutafidou is an original investigation of the economic, social and cultural world of Greek merchant-entrepreneurs in their time of prominence. Moutafidou, a highly regarded historian who wrote extensively about the history of Greece in modern times, explores the mercantile operations of prominent Greek businessmen and their entrepreneurial networks extended across geographic boundaries connecting culture, ideology and mentalities with economic practice and business performance. The world and worldview of Greek merchant-entrepreneurs, the author argues, do not just serve as a paradigm, but constitute an integral part of the merchant-entrepreneurs’ cosmopolitan world within the broader European-Mediterranean milieu during the nineteenth century. Exploring the complex ways in which traditional societies / international business communities go through complex processes of modernization, adopting, resisting or negotiating with the West or rather with modernity, Moutafidou offers fascinating views in their ideas, concepts and understandings.

The author skilfully explores and combines a wide range of primary and secondary sources such as rare autobiographical accounts, archival documents, commercial guidebooks, family records, with social and behavioral, cultural and economic theories, as in the case of the investigation and analysis of philanthropic activities of distinguished members of the Greek mercantile diaspora in the broader Mediterranean, just to name an example (p. 185-191).

The study’s investigation embraces three broad themes involving modernity and modernization, diaspora (commercial and family networks, dynamic identities and multiple loyalties), and culture (enclave communities / economic growth, common, commercial culture / economic performance, bourgeois and capitalist culture).

The book is divided into four sections. The first one examines the perception of merchant-entrepreneurs on commerce and morality in seventeenth century France and in the nineteenth century Levant, comparing and exploiting similarities and differences at various times and in divergent regions. Among the themes broached are the factors influencing business performance, such as the link, or rather the interaction between politics, religion, and economy, the impact of the institutional framework for business, but also of business/entrepreneurial and ethnic/national cultures, or even of a secularized theism on economic performance, the limits of Christian mercantile morality in cases in point, such as moneylending and slave trade, in pre-modern and modern times. Thus, for example, pointing to an overall influence, and therefore fundamental constants, marking continuity throughout times and places, the author argues that detected divergences and complex nuances were associated with varying times (before and after the French Revolution) and regions (West and East), interconnected with the political, institutional, organizational framework, the merchant-entrepreneur’s position within the state, in the hierarchy of power, his place in society, the importance of his religious identity and the position of religious communities in the power structure, as in the perception of merchant-entrepreneur of trade, nobility and state, and even more plainly in their perception of slavery and slave trade, particularly connected “with the formative power of profit shaping and even bending mercantile morals and the perception of self” (p. 39).

The next two sections explore distinctive case studies of distinguished merchants and entrepreneurial families of the Greek diaspora stressing the significance of human agency in economic history, examining business methods, networks of operations and commercial activities, shedding light on broader issues associated with political and economic, social and cultural developments. Thus topics explored by Moutafidou include enclave/socio-economic communities and interaction with the environment, business culture, mobility, cosmopolitanism and citizenship, challenges of worldwide economy and the essence of entrepreneurship, liberalism/conservatism, mercantile bourgeoisie, memory culture, family history, politics, charity etc. Next to Vikelas, the first President of the International Olympic Committee, and Malta-based broker Pappafy, an influential businessman of the British and Mediterranean economic world and a celebrated philanthropist, the Melas, Mavros and Basileiou families, the Rallis, Petrocochinos and Salvagos, Benakis and Choremis, Syngros and the Zarifis, are only few of the many captivating figures appearing in the book.

Relations between distinct, ethnic mercantile communities are a key theme of investigation, comparison and analysis throughout the study. The fourth section in particular examines the Greek merchants' perception of the Jewish other, as well as the relations and connections among their business communities and prominent members in East and West such as the Bischoffsheims, Oppenheims, Sterns, or Camondos. Within this context, the author investigates how regions, cultures and individuals shape commercial competencies, and the parameters and scope of successful, international business in this particular paradigm. She further outlines an understanding of standards and the new challenges in the first era of globalization, and the response and position of one to the other in the international entrepreneurial field, and whether this was a question of entrepreneurial culture, or of the degree of progress and innovation in varied entrepreneurial regions.

“Independently of whether they perceived the environment and the challenges of the markets' growing expansion in terms of dynamic, or static cultures (or even of a high-performance mix of both)”, the author argues, “Greek merchant-entrepreneurs were in fact embedded within a common, capitalist culture. Particularly during the era of the first globalization, their willingness and striving to become an active, even prominent, part of the world economy had an impact on their economic performance, on their interaction with other leading business communities, as well as on their perception and understanding of self, the other and the world as a whole.” (p. 262)

In sum, this study offers fascinating insights and opens new ventures to our understanding of the socio-economic and cultural worlds of Greek businessmen of the modern era. A significant contribution to Greek economic history in particular, and to nineteenth century history of entrepreneurship in general, this book is wide-ranging and well informed, and also open-minded, judiciously argued and thought-provoking. Historians of Greek economic and social history and economists specializing in international trade networks, their students, and a general interested public will appreciate this significant contribution to the study of economic, social and cultural history of Greece and the Near East.” - **Alexandros Dagkas, Emeritus Professor in Social History, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Faculty of Educational Sciences, GR - 541 24 Thessaloniki, Greece**