

6. Collectivity and individualism

The historic opening of Egypt to the West, especially during the second half of the 19th century, went hand in hand with the

emerging economic dominance of the European colonial powers. The establishment of the Egyptian cotton industry resulted in major economic changes and significant commercial activity. At the same time, it promoted the introduction of western institutional models in Egypt, the development of modern banking and financial systems, and improvements to the state infrastructure.

Through their family and business networks, the Egyptian entrepreneurs facilitated the penetration of the European metropolises into the colonial markets. The Achilopoulos, Salvagos, Rodokanakis, Zervoudakis, Rostovitz, Choremis, Benakis and Rallis families were involved in the foundation of local and international financial institutions such as the National Bank of Egypt, the Land Bank of Egypt, the Deutsche Orient Bank, the Banque Générale d'Égypte, the Banque d'Alexandrie, the Anglo-Egyptian Bank, the Banque d'Escompte d'Égypte, the Bank of the Orient, the Bank of Athens and the Ionian Bank.

Egyptian Greeks were also involved in transport (river navigation and steam shipping), real estate, water supply and irrigation services, the Ramleh railway, the port of Alexandria, and manufacturing, travel and advertising companies.²⁴ Theodore P. Kotsikas introduced the distilling of white spirit to Egypt, Volanakis produced cognac and rum made of grapes and sugar cane, the Klonaridis brothers brewed *Stella* beer. The Lagoudakis family was involved in printing and cigarette paper production, Nestor Tsanaklis dominated the cigarette industry, and the Kyriazis brothers were prominent in tobacco. Stylianos Sarpakis established a lithography company, Marangakis and Zerefos set up a brick making factories in Cairo, Alexandria, Tanta and Mansoura, and Mikes Salvagos contributed to the development of the domestic pharmaceutical industry by facilitating the expansion of Swiss, French and British producers into the Egyptian market.

A large number of pharmacists and bakers figure in the surviving membership registers of the Greek Chamber of Commerce in Cairo. The merchants Kaloglopoulos, Aifantis, Tagaris, Karagiorgas, Marcos Reboulis, Asklepios Epitropakis, and Zenon Gregoropoulos

dominated the coffee market, Stylianos Manousakis was the leading producer of sausages, and Athanasios Valsamides, Spyros Spathis and Panayotis Vlassopoulos monopolised the production of carbonated drinks. Emmanuel Roussos set up the first Greek-owned factory producing sugared almonds, loukoum, candies and halva according to European standards. Georgios Paraskevoulatos established the first chocolate factory in Egypt, while the pastry shop *Petit Trianon*, owned by the Lemonias brothers, sweetened the life of its customers, for a price.

At the turn of the century, the dominant position of the European powers and the accession of Egypt into the international labour market facilitated the precipitate economic advance of the Egyptian Greeks, who effectively served as a proxy for the largely non-existent native Egyptian bourgeoisie. This phenomenon resulted in the founding of the Greek Chamber of Commerce in Alexandria in 1901, with Emmanuel Benakis as its president.²⁵ A large number of merchants were members, some of whom monopolised the production of tobacco, spirits, leather etc. Many small-scale traders and merchants were also members, hoping to benefit from the support and solidarity provided by their compatriots.

Over the ensuing decades, the increased economic presence of the European powers and the growth of the Egyptian economy resulted in the expansion of the Greek Chamber of Commerce of Alexandria. A second chamber was established in Cairo in 1923, with Dimitrios Martinos as its first president. It functioned in tandem with the Chamber of River Navigation, which focused on the commercial management of Nile transport.²⁶ The remarkable commercial activity of the Egyptian Greeks is recorded in detail in the monthly bulletins of the Greek Chambers of Commerce of Alexandria and Cairo.

The economic success of Egyptian Hellenism was reflected in the careers of its leading businessmen. In addition to their individual economic activities, and beyond their support of national-local solidarity within the framework of fraternal associations, they were also extremely interested in the socioeconomic progress of the Greek state,

conscious of their obligation to the fulfilment of national desires and expectations. This is clearly reflected in their role as benefactors.²⁷ The specific model of benefaction propagated by these individuals is illustrated in the following table showing their tripartite focus on native land, community, national centre.

