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Pelt, Mogens

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# **Transferring Ottoman experience into a Post-Ottoman world: the Case of Bodosakis-Athanasiadis**

Mogens Pelt, Associate Professor, the Saxo-Institute at the University of Copenhagen, Ph.D et Dr.phil.

The following is an attempt to unfold how we can use the personal stories of refugees and migrants from the Ottoman Empire

to identify

- 1) the flurry of transformative experiences that have left their imprint well into the Cold War era

to identify

- 2) what can be salvaged from these events and analyzed in critical new ways

to identify

- 3) the material and immaterial goods which they have taken with them

I shall focus on the Ottoman Greek businessman Prodromos Bodosakis-Athanasiadis. He was born in Bor in Cappadocia around 1890. He died in Athens in 1979. He was one among more than one million, Ottoman Greeks, or Rums, Armenians and Muslims who lived the transformative experience not only as immigrants in the Ottoman Empire but also as refugees from the Empire.

A biographic approach will give us an opportunity to observe at close hand the choices, which an individual makes in a situation where his or her official identity is being reformulated and acquires

new meanings in relation to official belonging and to other groups whose definition is in flux. This combined with the wide span in terms of time and space - like in the case of Bodosakis - may also make it possible to follow changes of identity and to determine the character of these processes.

In Greece Bodosakis became one of the country's leading industrialists, controlling at one time nearly half of the Greek industry; he had played a pivotal role in engaging German industry in Greece, in the inter-war period as well as in the post-war period; he had been an important link between Greek business and government on the one hand and US political and business interest on the other during the crucial period when Washington decided to engage itself economically and politically in post-war Europe as later formulated in the Truman Doctrine and practiced by the European Recovery Program (Marshall Aid).

Bodosakis was close to many Greek politicians - not for ideological reasons - but because, as he would say himself, I am in favour of the government. I am not a supporter of any political party. Perhaps most obviously in the case of his close relationship with Ioannis Metaxas, the Greek dictator between 1936 to 1941.

In the inter-war period, he made himself a name as one of the leading arms traders in the Mediterranean. He was selling to Spain, Romania, Turkey and to the Middle East, and, according to British sources he was only one who would be able to bring arms across the Mediterranean in time of war: 'it would not be possible' the British Legation in Athens claimed, 'to supply the requirements of the British forces in Egypt, Palestine and Cyprus and the anti-aircraft shells required by the fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean from the United Kingdom in time of war.[...] Even if our fleet were not in complete control of the Eastern Mediterranean there is no doubt that the Greeks [i.e. Bodosakis] who, as we know to our cost, are adept at smuggling, would have no

difficulty in arranging for the shipment of these supplies to Egypt, Palestine or Cyprus, when the time came. [...] The company [Bodosakis'] is certainly short of business as a result of the virtual cessation of its profitable trade with Spain, and, to a lesser extent China.<sup>1</sup>

In the following I shall discuss how Bodosakis developed his business and examine the relationship between his career and his background as a refugee from the Ottoman Empire who had come to Greece in the wake of the forced exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in the aftermath of First World War and the Greek defeat in Asia Minor. I shall discuss the ways in which migration can be said to have influenced his career and the extent to which it may have conditioned his possibilities for success. I shall seek to tie together the socioeconomic and political consequences of these experiences.

Bodosakis' career offers an exceptional case for an examination of this sort because it transcends his own time and place and because his individual agency links issues connected with high politics, business, ideology and culture in a time of epochal crisis and rapid change. In this way, in addition to the story that passed before the eyes of contemporaries in the slipstream of Bodosakis' march through the decades in the shape of a panorama of individuals, places, encounters and dramatic events, his story is also one of the impersonal forces, of an economic, social and political nature, a story that precedes and succeeds the life of the individual, of the group and the singular event.

In the following I shall focus on the major transformative experiences had shaped his career and his impact on the 'new worlds' he entered; but also on the most important of his networks and how they were established; how Bodosakis managed to transfer his Ottoman experience into the post-Ottoman world of inter-war Greece and his inter-war experience into the post-war era.

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<sup>1</sup> 8 March 1939, PRO, FO 371/21767.

We can roughly divide his networks stemming from the Ottoman Empire into three categories

Contacts with Young Turks and military men

Contacts with German personal and institutions active in the Ottoman Empire

Contacts with un-named men operating in the area

Bodosakis grew up in turco-phone settings in a society in which inter-communality and syncretism was the order of the day. Later citizens of Turkey would notice that Bodosakis spoke an immaculate Turkish fluently while he mastered Greek less well and would go on using Turkish expressions like ‘canim’ also when talking Greek.

When Bodosakis was around seven or eight years old the family migrated from Bor to Mersin in Cilicia.

**Transition 1:** By bringing the family to Cilicia his father did what many others did at that time. Cilicia was pulling peoples from Cappadocia and the south-east of Asia Minor in their thousands; from the Syrian lands, from Cyprus, the Aegean Islands and the Greek mainland. Some came as seasonal labourer others to settle on a permanent basis.

To a few it was a Klondike. Within a generation Cilicia had become second only to the province of Izmir in terms of cash crop agriculture and industry and at the time when Bodosakis family arrived the province of Cilicia already had fostered its first generation of business tycoons. But before we examine Bodosakis’ relationship with these people we shall briefly discuss his fathers’ migration from Bor to Mersin.

As mentioned, migration from Cappadocia to Cilicia was common by the turn of the century. However, according to both later and contemporary Rum sources from Bor, it was unusual that a Rum would leave Bor. Bor had a rich soil and was surrounded by fertile land. It was also diversifying from agriculture into industry - in particular carpet production would make Bor stand out. This was something that made it different from many other towns in Cappadocia.

The motivation in the case of Bodosakis' father does not seem to have been push, but a desire to climb the social ladder. While he never made it big in Mersin where he founded a grocery and a mill, he managed to make it through until the war. However, within the first year after the Ottoman Empire entered the war he went broke. It is not clear for what reasons exactly. But one reason seems to be that his firm had accrued great debts because of a bad harvest; another reason seems to have been that his father and brothers were intimidated by climate where Christians were deported and accused of fifth column activities for no reason other than rumours and Envers's declared policy of wanting to 'Turkify the space and the economy.' But it stands a fact that his father's company was in debt to two of the big banks, the Bank of Athens and the Ottoman Bank, but also to the Mavrommatis family, one of the local Rum tycoons. Soon afterwards Bodosakis took over the management of his father's firm.

**Transition 2:** Within the following three years Bodosakis rose to become one of the official contractors of the Ottoman armies in Cilicia, a prominent contractor of the Baghdad Railway and one of the richest and most powerful Rums of Asia Minor.

While contingency and not least talent did play a role for the extremely successful turn Bodosakis' career would take during the war, is it possible to explain its overall trend by more general conditions that also apply to other business people in the area.

We need contingency and talent to understand how a relatively humble and unprivileged businessman would raise to such highs as Bodosakis did in such a short time. But the key to understand why it would be him and not the local and well-established tycoon Mavrommatis must be explained by other factors. Cilicia had developed a strong and modern industry within spinning, clothing and food production. During the last decades before the war, the most successful companies were those run by owners who were under consular protection of various European powers. The head of the Mavrommtis family was the consul of Russia. It seems that no one Rum family managed to do well without some sort of protection. But there was an alternative to protection from the European powers - protection from local powerful Muslims and representatives of the government. Shortly after the Ottoman government made its adherence to the Triple Alliance known, it abolished the capitulations unilaterally. It was a blow to those who had relied on such protection, in particular if the protector belonged to the Entente like Mavrommatis.

This, in turn, offered a breakthrough to those who had relied on local power - most famously the Simeonoglou and Tripanis families - who were already prominent industrialists before the war.

The imperative of war also made the ruling Young Turks in Cilicia to renounce on the attempts to Turkify the economy made them decide to rely on Christian producers. This practice, in turn, also created a new nexus namely - the Young Turk protecting officer or official, and the Christian businessman. This nexus created a strong echo already during war because it became a source of corruption beyond the usual and created a whole new class - the so-called harb zenginler - war profiteers - that typically would count both the protecting Young Turk and the Christian businessman. Such a relationship goes a long way also to explain the extraordinarily steep curve of Bodosakis career during the war.

In relation to the society in which he rose, all this places Bodosakis among those who before the war had faced the unfair competition from industrialists protected by the European consuls. His

fortune was anchored in Ottoman society and was dependent on local powerholders, Rums and Muslims, alike. After the outbreak of the war he became increasingly dependent on the ruling Young Turks and developed strong networks which among others would include Enver Pasha and others. His embeddedness in Ottoman society and local practice showed itself in the ways in which he dispensed donations and good works as a benefactor.

At the same time, he established close relations with persons and institutions from Germany, the most powerful ally of the Ottomans. The networks he established with the Baghdad Railway pointed to the future. Among his most important contacts were Deutsche Bank and Philipp Holzmann. But his networks stemming from that connection were not confined to big business alone. As the logistics of his operations were enormous he also created a huge network of un-named men to facilitate delivery and transportation in a region stretching from the Mediterranean coast of Anatolia to Mesopotamia and the lands Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. Therefore, and because caravan transport remained a most important way of carrying goods also in the inter-war period we should include in his networks that pointed to the future the anonymous caravan leaders too.

**Transition 3:** At the end of war Bodosakis had become a rich man. He left Cilicia shortly before the armistice. According to his own account he did so because he had just escaped a predatory attempt by a greedy Young Turk Bahaeddin - perhaps the notorious Sakir - to extort money. But other sources indicate that he felt under pressure for other reasons - seemingly first of all because of accusations of being a war profiteer raised against him and his protector Remzi Pasha.

It must be regarded as a post ex-facto accusation as it would only make sense in the new post-war settings when also the Patriarchate was turning towards Greece and about to give up its old ties with the Ottoman government. His own behaviour betrays a keen interest to be in a good standing with



Patriarchate and the new directors of his main bank, the Ottoman Bank - both with their headquarters in Istanbul which now was under de facto occupation by the Entente powers.

Upon his arrival to Istanbul Bodosakis was almost completely unconnected to the powers of this new world order - and his efforts must also be seen as the first series of many which Bodosakis would perform each time he had to migrate from one world to another. In this case from the world of the Young Turks' Ottoman Empire - an enemy power of the Entente - to the new Entente dominated world order. In order to complete the transition from his old world to the new one, he had to make use of the currency he brought along with him. In this case it would be his connections and know-how of the Ottoman world. He offered his services to the Entente powers, and was particularly successful with the Greeks and the French. The former were among the occupying powers of Istanbul, the latter holding the mandate of Cilicia. In Istanbul, he established his headquarters at the Pera Palas Hotel which had brought soon after his arrival to Istanbul. It was good investments not only in terms of prestige and but also of connections. Pera Palas would soon serve as the headquarters for Entente commission running Istanbul. He also housed Mustafa Kemal and later a number of officers from the Greek army who had left or been dismissed in the wake of the return of King Konstantin.

In Cilicia, he provided the French with cereal and assisted them in feeding the population at a time the famine was looming. His good works were directed to the Armenian community that was gaining in the strength in the early period of the French mandate. It also seems that he made good use of his Young Turkish connections. Vice-General Fahrettin Altay was stationed in Konya, a traffic crossing point for getting from Cilicia to Izmir and Istanbul. Bodosakis had returned to Cilicia in early 1919 after the Entente powers had occupied the province and within the first years of the French mandate Bodosakis build up a very strong economic position as a supplier to the

French. He also enhanced his position in the Rum community while the heirs to last tycoon of the Mavrommatis family lost ground steadily. However, at a certain time during the French mandate Bodosakis would cease to come to Cilicia. According to his own account, because it had become too dangerous for him. Here we should recall that Mustafa Kemal's guerrillas were steadily gaining territory - and that he was on the black list of the Kemalists. However, it also seems that his past as profiteer and his close collaboration with the military governor of Cilicia during the war years, Remzi Pasha, had caught up with him.

In Istanbul, he had to choose side in the cleavage that split the Rum community between the supporters of the former Greek prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos and king Konstantin. Like most Rums of Anatolia Bodosakis sided with Venizelos; he got a leading position in the Amynta, an organization that worked for Venizelos to support the Greek case in the eyes of the Entente powers - and if necessary for an autonomous Ionia.

It was in that process that Bodosakis began to profile himself as a benefactor for the Greeks of the nation state - and in that way he attempted to enter the hall of fame of benefactors to Greek national cause.

In other words, Bodosakis was beginning to invest in cultural capital in order give credentials to his profile as a supporter of the Greek cause. He also acted as go-between for Venizelos in various cases, and as a source of information on the conditions of the Rums of Anatolia and not least of Cilicia.

Bodosakis also used his time to consolidate his interests abroad. He established commercial relations with cereal suppliers of the Soviet Union, he reaffirmed his German connection through his old German network and established some kind of a personal relation with Emil Georg von Stauss, the director of Deutsche Bank a relationship, that pointed to the future. Von Stauss, was a

close friend of Hjalmar Schacht, the later president of Reichsbank, But he became especially close to Herman Göring, the key-person to the German armament industry.

At the time of the forced exchange of populations, Bodosakis was abroad. He claims that he was considering various alternatives before deciding to settle in Greece. He also claims that he did so because Venizelos asked him do to so and in spite of Mustafa Kemal asking him to stay in Turkey.

**Transition 4:** His reason for deciding for Greece must be explained by fact that Turkey hardly was an attractive alternative any more.

His Greek connections would include Venizelos himself and - as we shall see a few powerful Venizelist military men who had stayed with Bodosakis at the Pera Palas after they had left the army in the wake of the King' return.

Now, in wake of the disaster of 1922 the table had turned meaning that the Venizelists were back in power while the Royalists were on the run.

Here we should recall that as whole Greece was much less developed than the leading industrial centres of the Ottoman Empire and that the great influx of refugees from these places brought along with them expertise and know-how as well as capital and business networks which were not existing in the Greek national state.

Regarding the connections to Venizelos, Bodosakis was not the only refugee who attempted to lean on the patronage of this powerful man. Bodosakis' competitors from Cilicia who had also made a fortune during the war years Simeonglou and his partners were seeking Venizelos' patronage too. And at the end the day, it seems to have made a difference when it was these men who got a promising concession of establishing flour mills in Piraeus.

While Bodosakis had been forced to leave all his real estate behind, he still had access to 3,5 million gold liras either in shape of deposits in foreign banks or in the shape of gold he had brought along with him.

Greek politics during the first post-war years were extremely volatile and dominated by various Venizelists leaders jockeying for power. Behind the scenes - and sometimes openly - military men also wanted to have their say. Bodosakis' early fortunes shifted all depending on which Venizelist leader who was in power. Some would support his investment projects, others would prefer to give the concessions to his competitors. But it remains a fact that Bodosakis was perceived as an actor of some importance and his friendship worth to seek - or as an enemy to fear.

In 1925 those who saw him as an enemy managed to bring him down, according to his own account, when he lost a fortune by speculating against the British Sterling. His future as business man was rescued by one of his old military acquaintances, General Pangalos, who took over power by a coup d'état in 1925 - and offered Bodosakis a concession on the automatic telephones in Greece while at the same time he put pressure on the most important bank in Greece to open a credit for Bodosakis. At the end of the day, Bodosakis would establish a cooperation with Siemens - one of the leading companies within the vanguard R&D heavy industrial branch of electro-technique. To achieve this, Bodosakis made use of his German networks and according to his own account it was good words from Deutsche Bank that made Siemens placed their trust in him.

However, it would be his relationship with the other military strong man of the époque, George Kondylis that brought him to new highs in his adopted homeland Greece. The breakthrough came after the impact of the Great Depression had forced Greece to direct a greater share of its trade to Germany and made the social and economic stability of the country dependent on the German market. The turning point was the loss of power of the Venizelists to the Royalists and the

introduction of a rearmament programme under the new Minister of War, Kondylis. In early 1934 Bodosakis brought the Greek Power and Cartridge Company while Kondylis turned to Germany for the procurement of war material to rearm the country. This move constituted a break with Greek armament politics since the first wave of rearmament prior to the Balkan Wars that had relied on the Entente powers. So discretion was needed.

Here Bodosakis' German networks proved important once more. They took an international dimension when in 1935 Bodosakis signed an agreement with the German armament firm Rheinmetall-Borsig which was close to Göring. In this way, the Germans managed to break the monopoly of France steel industry in South-eastern Europe which had been guaranteed by an international cartel agreement. In the following few years Bodosakis' company turned into the largest and most modern armament company south of the Skoda Works and east of Italy. His company also became a major player on the international armaments market to such an extent that it made a difference in the supply of gold and hard currency in Greece and Germany. Bodosakis' German network would also function as a back channel for the clique close to the Greek dictator and an alternative to the official diplomatic chain of command. Bodosakis' company also proved to offer both Germany and later Britain a platform by which it was possible to reach the Middle East.

A few days before the German occupation of Athens Bodosakis fled to Egypt where a Greek government in-exile was established. According to his own account he did so because he feared German revenge for having sold war material to the British. At that time, he had managed to liquidate his assets bound up in his industrial complex and to have them transferred to accounts in his name in London, New York and Egypt. Never had he been more influential and powerful than he was from the beginning of the second half of the 1930s to the eve of the German invasion of

Greece. This was something he took with him when he went in exile. Greek politics in the period from 1941 to 1953 was marked by chaos and extreme instability.

### **Transition 5: Egypt and the United States**

The first period of his exile he dedicated to establish an armament industry either in the British Empire - South Africa - or in the US. After his attempts in South Africa failed he moved to the US. Here his reputation travelled with him and he was regarded with suspicion by the authorities as being one of the most dangerous Greeks. This in combination with the attack on Pearl Harbor put an end to any further moves in this direction.

But by late 1942 he once more managed to translate his networks and know-how into a valuable political currency. He was recruited by OSS. Agent Amoss told Colonel William J. Donovan, the head of the OSS, the following: ‘The sinister Greek Magnate Bodosakis, now in this country, is an intimate of Admiral Canarius [i.e. Abwehr chief Wilhelm Canaris]. Bodosakis (who is not an informant in this case) has convinced me that he should be used by our Organization to contact and pervert Canarius and several Nazi and Pro-Nazi leaders in Rumania, Bulgaria and Spain.’<sup>2</sup>

By October 1943 shortly before he left the US to go to return to Egypt and join the Greek community there, according to US intelligence, OSS, the future ‘power behind the political throne of Greece will be Bodosakis who, through the ministers controls the Greek Army, Navy and Air Force.’<sup>3</sup> In other words, OSS was expecting a very powerful person to arrive to Egypt. This also seems to have been the British evaluation. Shortly after his arrival, the British had him arrested - according to Bodosakis - on request by Greek government in-exile. After his release, he stayed in Lebanon before he returned to Greece. On the political and social level, it was a country marked be

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<sup>2</sup> January 5 1943, German Inner-Intelligence Service, Secret, Ulius L. Amoss to Colonel William J. Donovan , CIA-RDP13X00001R000100400001-9.

<sup>3</sup> 19 October 1943, Ulius L. Amoss to Mr. Whitney Shepardson. Greece, Secret, CIA-RDP13X00001R000100030013-7.

polarization, civil war and weak government until 1953. On the economic level, it was a country marked by destruction of its human and material resources as well as in urgent need for reconstruction as a result of the Axis occupation and the Greek Civil War.

### **Transition 6: Returning to post-war Greece**

At that time, he had established contact with various US agencies that were planning for the future of Europe, the Near East Foundation and Henry Hill from American Express. In this way, his ideas about the future of Greek economy and industry found their way into the US planning of post-war reconstruction of Europe, and in that way also into the Marshall Aid Program for Greece.

However, US money ran out before the development programme for Greece had been completed. Bodosakis now turned to West Germany, reactivated his old contacts and soon Krupp would participate in a large project to modernize Greece.

In the period from 1945 to 1958 Bodosakis once more established a very strong position in Greek economy and politics. Once more he managed to transfer his experiences and contacts from an old world into a new period. But from 1955 onwards he began to meet resistance from a younger generation of politicians headed by Konstantin Karamanlis. He also met competition from an emerging layer of industrialists who responded to the possibilities of an emerging Greek home market and new sources of outlet beyond the borders. At the same time, the organization of Greek industrialists began to play a more prominent role compared to individual industrialists. It did not mean that Bodosakis was without influence but that an époque during which he wielded extraordinary powers was over.