Dēmētrios S. Inglezēs: Greek Merchant and City Leader of Odessa

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Demétrios S. Inglezès: Greek Merchant and City Leader of Odessa

Greek merchant settlement of the northern coast of the Black Sea extends back to classical and Byzantine times. After the founding of Odessa in 1794, Greek and other foreign merchants played a major role in transforming this provincial backwater into one of the leading grain emporiums of Europe, a cosmopolitan city of ethnic diversity and cultural vitality. Demétrios Spyridonovich Inglezès (1773-1844) is a concrete example of the prosperous Greek trader who assimilated to his new environment and engaged in numerous civic endeavors promoting the commercial and urban growth of Odessa during its formative decades. He also retained a sense of Greek identity and participated in the Russian philhellenic movement during the Greek revolt of the 1820s. The experience of this prominent merchant typified that of other successful Greek traders in Odessa and contributes to recent scholarship on that city’s Greek community and on the broader theme of historical connections and contacts between Russia and the Greek east in the post-Byzantine era.

Demétrios S. Inglezès, born on the Ionian island of Cephalonia in 1773, came from an old noble family included among the aristocratic families enrolled in the Cephalonian golden book. The research for this article was made possible by the support of the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) and by the assistance of the archival staff at the state archive of Odessa oblast (GAOO).


This article is based almost entirely on Inglezès’s personal archive, in the state archive of Odessa oblast. The fond contains fifteen dela, ranging from two to seven pages except for his formuliarnyi spisok, a thirty-three-page document constituting the best single source on Inglezès. GAOO, fond 268, opis’ 1, dela 1–15. The formuliarnyi spisok is in delo 2. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent references to GAOO are from this fond and opis’.

The information in the fond has dictated that this research focus on the public rather than the private life of Inglezès. While described as a lichniyi fond, it contains precious little on his family, household, residence, merchant firm, and other personal matters that would lend a more human dimension to this portrait of Inglezès. Even some of his civic endeavors are not described in sufficient detail, thus imparting a sense of incompleteness to this discussion of his activities. Despite these constraints, the fond does contain enough information to suggest the extent of his assimilation and wide-ranging public service. Further investigation of municipal records will probably unearth additional material on his public and, perhaps, his private life, thereby allowing a more well-rounded profile of Inglezès.

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active in trade, and “diligent and unselfish in important civic positions entrusted to them,” a family tradition Démétrios Spyridonovich would continue in southern Russia.²

Inglezes’s early years are shrouded in uncertainty. With the death of his father in 1787, the fifteen-year-old Démétrios and his uncle left Cephalonia and worked as shippers at Taganrog, a naval and commercial port on the Sea of Azov with a sizable Greek population. The two volunteered their services to the Russian navy in the Russo-Turkish War of 1787–1792, during which Inglezes participated in four Black Sea campaigns and was promoted from ensign to captain. For reasons that are unclear, Inglezes attempted to return to Cephalonia after his naval stint. The journey home was a disaster, with Inglezes barely surviving a storm that destroyed the ship’s cargo and his family papers. The exact date of Inglezes’s arrival in Odessa is unknown. In 1805, however, Armand-Émmanuel du Plessis, Duc de Richelieu, the governor-general of Novoroßësiia whose enlightened administration stimulated Odessa’s growth, called on Inglezes to hire commercial vessels to ship supplies to Russian forces on the Russian-protected Ionian islands. Inglezes, using his own capital, fulfilled this task to the satisfaction of Richelieu.³

Inglezes’s settlement in Odessa was part of the large wave of Greek migration to southern Russia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Greek and other foreign settlers were drawn by tsarist incentives, including exemptions from taxes and service. The commercial potential of Odessa and other ports beckoned to enterprising Greek traders and shippers, and they soon became the backbone of Russia’s emerging merchant fleet in the Black Sea. Russo-Ottoman commercial agreements also permitted Greek subjects of the sultan to fly the Russian flag on Greek vessels. These factors stimulated Russian commerce in the Mediterranean and the growth of a Greek merchant marine that reaped lucrative profits during the Napoleonic era.⁴

Greek commercial success in Odessa’s burgeoning grain trade has been well documented in several studies.⁵ Inglezes participated in this commerical upsurge, becoming one of the city’s most prosperous and respected merchants. By 1817 his firm was one of the ten wealthiest Greek companies in Odessa; the net worth of the ten firms together was about ten million rubles.⁶ In 1847, three years after his death, the Inglezes firm was considered one of the leading companies in the Russian Empire. Further investigation of custom registry records and other commercial documents may reveal more specific information on the organization, activity, and profits of his firm, his ties with western trading houses, and his standing in a stratified Odessan Greek society.

In view of his success, his company clearly took advantage of Odessa’s strategic location on a

2. GAOO, f. 268, op. 1, d. 1 “Dokumenty o proiskhodzhenii roda Inglezi iz dvorian Venetsianskoi respubliki,” l. 1–7a.
commercial nexus linking the Black Sea to the archipelago and the Mediterranean, a diaspora network benefiting from frequent contacts with business partners and compatriots. Inglezès made Odessa his permanent home, finding and helping to build a conducive environment for a successful and productive life. Commercial prosperity facilitated assimilation as did his Eastern Orthodox faith and his marriage to Ekaterina Zoeva Kutsovskiaia, the daughter of a Russian noble. They had five children, and Inglezès family members still resided in Odessa in the early twentieth century. Inglezès's assimilation is indicated by his broad range of civic activity, which earned him a reputation for honesty, resourcefulness, and conscientiousness. Successful merchants were often called upon by local authorities to participate in municipal affairs. Inglezès served on numerous committees, including the commercial court that handled trade disputes and committees on construction, the status of Odessa as a free port, quarantine and customs facilities, and municipal revenues and expenditures. Although the Inglezès archive provides few details on his duties and tasks, Inglezès's involvement in municipal governance did shape the city's urban and commercial development, which in turn contributed to the continued success of his firm. Inglezès's wide-ranging civic spirit supported numerous endeavors indicative of his integration into Russian and Odessan society. During the Napoleonic campaign of 1812, he was appointed by local authorities to collect donations from fellow Greeks for Russia's defense. Under his direction and with sizable contributions from other wealthy merchants like Theodòros Saraphinos and Grégorios Marazlès, the Greek community donated one hundred thousand rubles, more than any other ethnic group in Odessa. Inglezès also collected donations from local Greeks for the construction of a hospital and an Orthodox church. In 1815 correspondence the hospital commission expressed gratitude for his efforts to raise twelve thousand rubles for this benevolent project and announced its intent to commemorate Inglezès and other contributors on a marble plaque near the building. Odessa confronted several outbreaks of plague because of its regular traffic with endemic centers of the disease in the Near East. During the 1812–1813 plague epidemic, Governor-General Richelieu divided the city into five sections, each with its own inspector and doctor who could impose a quarantine. Inglezès was an inspector and organized the supply of food and other essentials to the poor in his section. He performed his assignment diligently, often using his own money for emergency aid. Inglezès's public service included a brief stint as mayor from 1818 to 1821, an appointment based on his growing reputation for honesty and industriousness in municipal affairs. His tenure


8. GAOO, d. 2, l. 1–8. Herlihy, “Greek Merchants in Odessa,” 418, notes that several members of the Inglezès family were included in the Odessa city directory for 1910.


10. GAOO, d. 2, l. 1–7, and d. 3, “Uchastie v komitete o dokhodakh i raskhodakh Odessy,” l. 1–7. Inglezès was not the first Ionian Greek to participate in municipal governance. The merchant Ivan P. Destunis served as burgomaster on the Odessan town council from 1797 to 1800, earning the praise of government authorities, including Tsar Paul I, for his successful discharge of duty and his contribution to the well-being of the new town. See Theophilus C. Prousis, “The Destunis Collection in the Manuscript Section of the Sàlykov-Shchedrin State Public Library in Leningrad,” Modern Greek Studies Yearbook 5 (1989): 407–408.


was highlighted by the visit in 1818 of Tsar Alexander I who awarded Inglezès the Order of St. Vladimir, Fourth Class, for his “earnestness and diligent service.” The tsar acknowledged the rapid growth of the city his grandmother had founded and bestowed upon it forty thousand rubles for public works projects, including an aqueduct and street paving. The tsar thus tried to address two key problems plaguing urban life in Odessa, the lack of adequate fresh water and the absence of paved streets. Despite tsarist concern, municipal officials were unable to resolve these issues until the late nineteenth century.

Inglezès also retained his sense of Greek identity. Greek settlers formed compact neighborhoods in the center of town with a Greek street and a Greek bazaar. Regular commercial traffic in the Mediterranean allowed Odessan merchants to maintain their ties with relatives and compatriots. Above all, the Greeks of Odessa preserved and cultivated their faith, language, and cultural heritage, as did the Greek communities of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and western and Central Europe. Greek merchant wealth and Russian patronage helped stimulate a Greek intellectual awakening commonly known as the neohellenic enlightenment.

Inglezès contributed to Greek learning primarily through his association with the Greek commercial gymnasium of Odessa, one of several local educational institutions in his record of public service. Several Greek merchants, including Inglezès, founded the school in 1817 and organized its administration and curriculum. The gymnasium, whose teachers were mostly Greek, taught courses in commerce and navigation; geography and world history; ancient and modern Greek, Russian, Italian, and German; religion; and natural sciences. By 1818 the school had about two hundred and fifty students from Russia and the Greek world, and its initial success as an educational institution was noted by Russian and Greek contemporaries. With a Greek theater founded in 1814, the school made Odessa a Greek cultural center. The city’s location linking Russia, Europe, and the Greek east also made it a natural point for the exchange and circulation of Greek books published in Moscow, Venice, and Vienna.

13. GAOO, d. 2, l. 13–16, 1–8. Additional research in GAOO, especially the records of the city council, may further illuminate Inglezès’s term as mayor.


Inglezès did not join the Philikē Etaireia, the conspiratorial society that was founded in Odessa in 1814 and hatched the Greek revolt. His noninvolvement in this revolutionary organization underscores his attachment to his new homeland and the stratification of Greek merchant society. The Etaireia, a product of economic anxiety, social dislocation, and embryonic national consciousness, attracted membership from a broad spectrum of diaspora and Ottoman Greeks, with merchants making up the single largest group (53.7 percent). Most of these merchants, typified by the Etaireia’s three founders, consisted of small-time traders adversely affected by declining grain prices and falling profits, which they attributed to the return of French and English ships to the Mediterranean after the Napoleonic Wars. Their ranks included peddlers, shipping agents, merchant clerks, and others who had failed in the competitive world of the merchant diaspora. The Etaireia did not draw heavily from established and prosperous merchants whose wealth set them apart from traders experiencing economic reverses and who were reluctant to join a political conspiracy that could trigger Ottoman reprisals against their successful commercial activity in the Levant.

This pattern of Etaireia membership generally prevailed in Russia. Most Greeks who joined were recruited in Odessa after Alexandros Ypselantes assumed leadership of the society in 1820. The prestige of his Phanariot name and his position as aide-de-camp of the tsar lent credence to widespread but false rumors that the tsarist government endorsed the Philikē Etaireia and Greek liberation. While a few moderately successful merchants joined the society, most Greek etairists in Russia (85.5 percent) were struggling petty traders and clerks who had little to lose in supporting an uprising against Ottoman rule. Ypselantes was patronized financially by a handful of established merchants in Moscow and Odessa but did not receive the amount of contributions he might have expected from Greek commercial wealth in Russia. The sparse donations he received from Inglezès and other leading merchants in Odessa prompted his scorn. In a letter to Emmanouēl Xanthos, a founder of the society, Ypselantes noted that the leading merchants sympathized with his plans but did not open their purse strings. Indeed, they were misers who “could donate five hundred thousand if they had convictions. This good cause will happen even without them.” The wealthy merchants in this stratified Odessan Greek society feared, with prophetic justice, that a revolt would provoke an eastern crisis disrupting their flourishing trade in the Black Sea and Mediterranean. This sense of restraint and prudence was even more understandable in the case of Inglezès, who was mayor of Odessa when the Philikē Etaireia was trying to recruit new members there.

After the outbreak of the Ypselantes insurrection in Moldavia, the Greeks of Russia, and Russian society in general, promoted Greek independence in various ways. Because of its Greek community and its proximity to the Greek world, Odessa became a natural center of philhellenic activity, described by the exiled Aleksandr Pushkin. Inglezès and other prominent merchants collected donations, arms, and supplies for Ypselantes’s beleaguered forces confronting Ottoman regular troops and reprisals. Ypselantes acknowledged this assistance in a letter of March (23 March n.s.) to Inglezès, calling him a “benefactor of the fatherland and the genos” for his efforts to raise support.

17. The society’s founders were Emmanouēl Xanthos, a clerk in a firm that was out of business, Nikolaos Skouphas, an artisan who lost property because of bankruptcy, and Athanasios Tsakaloff, a clerk in a shipping company. George D. Frangos, “The Philikē Etaireia, 1814–1821: A Social and Historical Analysis” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1971), discusses in great detail the social composition of the society.
20. Ibid., 300–304, 333–346, on the patriotic activity of Greeks in Russia after the Ypselantes uprising. On Russian philhellenism see Theophilus C. Prousis, “Russian Cultural Response to the Greek War of Independence (1821–1830)” (Ph.D. diss. University of Minnesota, 1982), and on Pushkin see the recent
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Inglezes also collected Greek aid organized by Russian state and church officials. The relief project, an expression of Russian religious sympathy for Orthodox brethren, was prompted by Ottoman persecution of the Greek church, including the execution of Ecumenical Patriarch Grégorios V, and by the arrival in Odessa and Bessarabia of refugees fleeing Ottoman reprisals in Constantinople and the Danubian principalities. Their need for emergency shelter, food, and medical treatment drew the attention of regional and central authorities and became the impetus for a relief effort organized by Aleksandr N. Golitsyn, minister of public education and ecclesiastical affairs who sponsored many charitable works during his public service career. Golitsyn organized a second relief drive after the massacre at Chios in April 1822 left most of that island’s population dead, displaced, or enslaved. Immortalized in Eugène Delacroix’s “Scenes from the Massacre of Chios,” this event aroused a Russian campaign to raise funds to ransom Greeks in Ottoman captivity. Although the tsarist regime condemned the Greek revolt as a threat to the Metternichian order of legitimacy, it endorsed Greek relief as a means to uphold Russia’s traditional protection of co-religionists. Archival records amply demonstrate that a broad cross-section of society, from the imperial family to parish priests and peasants, contributed because of the religious bond with Orthodox Christians of the Greek east.

The Greeks of Russia supported the relief projects by collecting and donating funds. For Inglezes and other prominent Greeks the relief effort was a natural extension of their civic activism and sense of Greek identity. Urged by Golitsyn to participate because of his “distinguished merit” in previous public service, Inglezes became treasurer of the Odessa assistance committee that distributed aid to refugees. His methodical records of committee revenues and expenditures document the concrete assistance rendered by the committee during its existence from 1821 to 1831. Inglezes’s elaborate record keeping won him praise from regional and central authorities. In early June 1822 Golitsyn wrote to Inglezes that Tsar Alexander I was grateful for the committee’s “diligence, righteousness, and good sense” in dispensing funds. The governor-general of Novorossiia, Mikhail S. Vorontsov, a major architect of that region’s growth, wrote to Inglezes in July 1826 and noted Tsar Nicholas I’s approval of the committee’s continued work on behalf of the refugees and the well-being of Odessa.

Golitsyn asked Inglezes to collect ransoms for Greek prisoners of the Ottoman government. In his letter of December 1822, Golitsyn described this new endeavor as another opportunity for Inglezes to demonstrate his civic and humanitarian spirit: “where faith summons and humanity calls, your heart will inspire you to continue assisting your compatriots and thus gain an eternal reward.”


22. GAOO, d. 14, “Ob Odesskoi grecheskoi vspomogatel’noi komissii,” l. 1–1a. In addition to his participation in Greek relief efforts, Inglezes served on the initial staff of the office of public assistance (1823–1825). See d. 6, “O deiatel’nost’i v Odesskoi prikaze obschestvennogo prizreniia,” l. 1–2a. Copies of Inglezes’s records are located in GAOO, f. 1, op. 200, d. 72, l. 344–390, and in the Central State Historical Archive, Leningrad (TsGIA), f. 797, op. 2, d. 6395, l. 125–131, 146–152; d. 6450, l. 4–12, 29–35, 44–52, 69–72a, 91–96, 118–126; and d. 6520, l. 138–144. The distribution process of the committee and the amounts of assistance issued to refugees are covered in Prousis, “Russian Philorthodox Relief,” and Piatigorskii, “Deiatel’nost’.” Golitsyn’s letter is in GAOO, f. 268, op. 1, d. 14, l. 2–2a, and Vorontsov’s is in l. 8. See Herlihy, Odessa, 76–82, 116–137, on the policies of Vorontsov in Novorossiia.

23. GAOO, f. 268, op. 1, d. 14, l. 4–4a.
religious and patriotic terms, underscoring that "faith and fatherland" were at stake and calling Inglezès "a friend and fellow countryman." Inglezès donated one thousand rubles to the ransom drive and collected additional funds from local Greeks.

Inglezès also organized support for the new Greek government of President Ioannis Kapodistrias. During a visit to St. Petersburg in 1827, Kapodistrias wrote to prominent Greeks in Moscow and Odessa asking for their financial help. His letter to Inglezès, couched in religious and patriotic terms, stressed the precarious status and strained resources of his government. Inglezès collected donations from local Greeks and notified trade associates on the Ionian island of Zante to loan an undisclosed amount, assistance that Kapodistrias acknowledged in his correspondence. For his philhellenic activity during the Greek War of Independence, Inglezès received the Gold Cross of the Order of the Savior from King Othon in 1844.

Funds raised by the Greek communities of Russia were insignificant compared to the large and sustained relief support from Russian society, church, and government. Personal relief contributions by wealthy Greeks like Inglezès (1,000 rubles) and Zoës Zösimas (2,000 rubles) were surpassed by contributions from leading Russian nobles like Anna A. Orlov-Chesmenskaïa (8,000 rubles), Dmitrii N. Shereemetev (7,000 rubles), and Aleksei B. Kurakin (3,000 rubles).

Reversals in Mediterranean commerce during the Greek war kept the Greek donations down. The sultan, suspecting Russian machination in the Greek revolt, confiscated Russian grain cargoes and closed the straits to Greek merchant ships and to all vessels flying the Russian flag. Some Greeks, such as Nikolaos Patsimades who collected only 1,620 rubles from Moscow Greeks, attributed meager donations to falling trade revenues that compelled individuals "generally known for their compassion" to restrict relief support.

The setback in the Black Sea grain trade, greatly aggravated during the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829, alarmed established traders. In a memorandum written right after the conflict, Inglezès registered concern about the precarious nature of Mediterranean commerce. He noted that, with the start of peace negotiations, the sultan would soon restore free navigation and foreign merchants would again trade with Novorossiia. Russia's interests (and his own) were served by resuming grain exports before the ratification of the peace treaty. With the approach of fall, Russian merchants had to begin operations as quickly as possible because of the four-month commercial break during winter. If the reopening of the grain trade were postponed until the spring or summer of 1830, European merchants would turn to Egypt or other grain sources in the Levant. Although it remains unclear what, if any, influence this memorandum had on the speedy recovery of the grain trade, Inglezès's thoughts reflected his concern for the continued development of Odessa as the strategic center of the Mediterranean-Black Sea commercial network.

Inglezès's memorandum was written during his most active period of public service. He again combatted plague during the epidemic of 1829-1830. Appointed commissioner of health by Vorontsov, Inglezès worked very hard. Vorontsov wrote to Inglezès, "I consider it my duty to say that without your vigorous assistance it would not have been possible to achieve the success which crowned our joint efforts and saved the city from a terrible calamity." Vorontsov also

24. Ibid., d. 1, l. 34—35. During ten years in Russia (1821—1831), Oikonomos published several sermons and scholarly works and promoted the Greek cause in the context of Greek-Russian religious ties. His career in Russia is similar to that of another Greek cleric described in Stephen K. Batladen, Catherine II's Greek Prelate: Eugenios Voulgaris in Russia, 1771-1806, East European Monographs (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

25. GAOO, d. 14, l. 5—6, and TsGIA, f. 797, op. 2, d. 6449, l. 1—192. Inglezès and fellow merchants Alexandros Koumarbas and Alexandros Mavros organized the ransom collection in Odessa, one of numerous Greek communities in Russia that participated in the ransom drive.


27. TsGIA, f. 797, op. 2, d. 6484, l. 13—18a; d. 6504, l. 1—26; d. 6506, l. 1—21; d. 6395, l. 127; d. 6517, l. 14—16.

28. GAOO, d. 8, "Mnenie o torgovlykh perspektivakh po vyvozu khleba za-granitsu iz nashikh portov posle voiny," l. 1—1a.
conveyed the gratitude of Tsar Nicholas I for Inglezēš’s humanitarian work in fighting the plague.²⁹

During the cholera outbreak of 1830, Vorontsov appointed Inglezēš to a commission to prevent the spread of the disease. The governor-general believed, based on previous “outstanding zeal for useful service and for the common good,” that Inglezēš would succeed in this new effort. In 1837 Vorontsov again called on Inglezēš to help fight the plague. For his work during this outbreak, Inglezēš received a gold medal from the tsar.³⁰ His activity against plague and cholera also earned Inglezēš the lasting gratitude of Odessa’s inhabitants and officials.

In 1833 a poor harvest threatened Odessa’s food supply and raised the possibility of famine. Vorontsov urged local merchants to procure grain from Bessarabia and he notified police and quarantine officials in Bessarabian towns that their assistance would be needed. Inglezēš’s involvement was again solicited by the governor-general, who cited his past service record and referred to him as “one of the most solid and respected men we have here.”³¹ Inglezēš and other merchants contributed to the success of this project by shipping grain to Odessa and, thus, helped avert the worst consequences of the bad harvest. In his letter of appreciation to Inglezēš, Vorontsov provided compensation for his expenses and again conveyed the tsar’s praise for his humanitarian work.³²

Inglezēš was also active in the attempt to pave Odessa’s streets. The absence of paving had given credence to Pushkin’s line in Evgenii Onegin, “I lived then in dusty Odessa.” In 1827 local merchants and sea captains had been urged to procure foreign stone, instead of local limestone with its soft composition, for street paving.³³ Upon conclusion of the Russo-Turkish War in 1829, Inglezēš, fully aware of the commercial advantages of paved streets and stone bridges for Odessa, became involved in this endeavor. His correspondence indicates that merchant associates in Livorno, then a prominent port in the Greek commercial networks, began purchasing the required stone and that he expected equally satisfactory reports from merchant contacts in the archipelago. Inglezēš pledged, “as a citizen of Odessa,” full support for this project that would benefit the city and his own firm.³⁴

The Inglezēš archive contains many documents regarding this project, such as tsarist authorization (1832) for his travel to Constantinople, Greece, and the Ionians to procure stone and an official record (1833) certifying his return from abroad and his safe passage through quarantine.³⁵ Little came of this early attempt to pave Odessa’s streets; mud and dust continued to hinder efficient local transport. By 1861, the city was only partially paved, and not until 1895 were streets in the center of town and in some of the outlying areas paved.³⁶

When Inglezēš died in 1844, he had carried to Russia the Inglezēš family tradition of commercial success and civic activism. He had earned the esteem of Odessa’s citizens and officials alike for his participation in municipal affairs, particularly his steadfast humanitarian work. A cross-section of the city’s population attended his funeral at the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church. Inglezēš held a prominent place in the stratified Odessan Greek society. His experience illuminates both the common pattern of assimilation, public service, and retention of ethnic identity among wealthy and established Greek merchants of the diaspora and the durability of historical bonds between Russia and the Greek east.

²⁹. Ibid., d. 15, “O merakh prekrashchenii kholery i chumy v Odesse,” l. 3–3a.
³⁰. Ibid., l. 5–5a., l. 7, l. 8–10.
³¹. Ibid., d. 10, “O zakupke khleba dia pomoshchi bedstuiushchim ot urozhnaia,” l. 1–1a, 6–7.
³². Ibid., l. 2–2a.
³³. Herlihy, Odessa, 131.
³⁶. Herlihy, Odessa, 132, 237.