



Summary :

The Vallianos Bros merchant house is an example of a Greek Diaspora establishment that was involved in international commercial, maritime and banking activities during the second half of the 19th century. The three brothers located in Taganrog in the Azov Sea, London and Marseille created a colossal international company that left its mark not only in the transition from sailing boats to steamboats within the entire Greek commercial fleet, but also in the development of Greek shipping in the 20th century.

Date and Place of Birth

The family started its entrepreneurial activity abroad around the end of the 19th century

Date and Place of Death

The company ceased its entrepreneurial activity in the beginning of the 20th century.

Main Role

Merchants and ship-owners

1. Biographical data

The Vallianos family from the Keramies village in the Livatho region of Cephalonia (Kefalonia), distinguished itself in maritime and commercial activities during the 18th and 19th centuries. Continuing the Cephalonian shipping tradition – the island boasted a significant fleet during the 18th century – the family’s activities are recorded in the archives of Western ports, where many sea captains named Vallianos are recorded (Andreas, Alexandros, Gerasimos, Rokos, Theodoros, Antonios), their actual relationship to the Vallianos house forefathers remaining obscure, however. The family reaches its prime during the second half of the 19th century with the establishment of their commercial house initially in the Black Sea and based in [Taganrog](#) in the [Azov Sea](#), and later with offices in London and Marseille.

Father of the company’s founders was Athanasios Vallianos, who was probably born around the middle of the 1770s, and had 8 children with his wife Fronia: Santina, Spyros, Nicholaos, Metaxas, Marinos (1808-1896), Panagis (1814-1902), Andreas (1827-1889) and Maria. Marinos, Panagis and Andreas formed the important brotherly triad that created the Vallianos Bros merchant house.

2. Entrepreneurial activity

The house distinguished itself during the second half of the 19th century, while its heyday lasted from the 1870s until the beginning of the 20th century. The variety and sheer volume of their activities made the Vallianos Bros a leading business group within the international Greek entrepreneurial network, the “[Ionian Network](#)”, which handled commercial, shipping and banking activities from the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean to the Western Mediterranean and Northern Europe.

Marinos (Maris) Vallianos was the first one to leave Cephalonia in the beginning of the 1820s. He took ship and worked in a Cephalonian sailing boat, when after a few trips in the Mediterranean he decided to locate in Taganrog in the Azov Sea, probably towards the late 1820s. It was the time of the boom in grain trade in Southern Russia from [Odessa](#) to the Azov Sea. The exponential growth of grain exports rendered the area a centre of attraction for people from the Ionian and Aegean islands, who flocked the area from the late 18th until the late 19th century.

Taganrog, the utmost and most significant port in the Azov Sea located next to the Greek city of [Marioupolis](#), attracted Greek population from the beginning of the 19th century onwards. The fabulously rich [Ioannis Varvakis](#) lived there from 1815 until his death



in 1825. A [notable Greek commercial community](#) was founded during the 1830s and 1840s with the establishment of branch offices for great [Chian merchant houses](#) of the Greek Diaspora, such as the [Rallis](#) Bros, [Skaramangas](#), [Rodokanakis](#), [Avgerinos](#), [Pappoudof](#) and Laskaridis. The Taganrog exports continued their growing course all through the 19th century, despite the difficulties in navigation due to the shallow waters of the Azov Sea, the unsuitable ports and the long delays because of the obligatory quarantine in [Kerch](#) and the sand barrier in the straits of Yeni Kale.

Maris Vallianos in the late 1820s was employed as a boatswain in small ships sailing the Azov Sea, owned by the Cephalonian grain merchant Avgerinos. These small ships were of uttermost importance for navigation in the Azov Sea. The port of Taganrog that handled 2/3 of all the exports in the area was located 30 miles away from the roadsteads because of the shallow waters. Before the 1870s, when steam tug boats had not yet been introduced, the conditions for both sea captains and crews were extremely harsh. They had to travel two or three nights by rowboat to Taganrog and men often had to remain in the boats for days.

It appears that in the 1840s Maris managed to buy several small sailing ships and to establish his own company trading in grain, managing himself both the cargos and the ships transporting between the Azov Sea and [Constantinople](#). In the meantime his brother Panagis Vallianos, after some years of service on the Cephalonian sailing boat of captain Gerasimos D. Vergotis, joined forces with his older brother Maris in Taganrog. The business of Maris and Panagis Vallianos hired exclusively fellow Cephalonians and gradually expanded to all the ports of the Azov Sea (Marioupolis, [Berdiansk](#) and Yeysk) owning agencies, depositories, barges and sailing boats; in fact they are recorded as owners of two large sailing ships during the 1840s. Their big break, though, probably came around 1847-1848 due to the increasing demand of grain from Western Europe. Panagis appears to have located in Zante (Zakynthos) for the time, the island operating as a way station for the house's cargos. There he received orders for the shipments' final destination. According to the archives of the British consulate, between 1851 and 1853 Maris Vallianos is recorded as one of the three most significant Taganrog exporters.

The Crimean War is considered a focal point in the history of the Vallianos business; during its course the brothers gained huge profits through contraband – as long as Russians were concerned – grain exports, which they performed indifferent to the prohibitions imposed by the belligerent parties. Maris Vallianos remained in Taganrog for a striking 70 years until his death in 1896, and evolved into the greatest exporter dealing in the Azov Sea during the second half of the 19th century, handling thousands of tons in grain cargo for the family business. Quite unknown, however, to Greek historiography dealing with the Greek merchant diaspora communities is the one located in Taganrog, a city that Russians call even to this day “the city of Greeks”.¹

In 1858, two years after the end of the Crimean War, Panagis Vallianos located in London, the greatest financial centre of its time. That decision determined the enterprise's internationalization. He established the *Vallianos Bros* company in the City, specifically on 19, Broad Street, where it remained for the next 44 years until his death in 1902. In London, however, Panagis did not just represent only himself, but acted as an agent for the Theophilatos and Millas families, both Danubian grain merchants. Moreover, he gained access to the [Baltic Exchange House](#), the main international grain market, and due to the company's 15 years of solid fame, opened an account in the Bank of England. Furthermore, in the beginning of the 1860s the Cephalonian Panagis Vallianos was still a subject of the British Empire.

His brother Andreas Vallianos, by many years his junior, also started off his career in Taganrog and later on undertook the management of the Constantinople business until 1867. Two years later he too took the leap forward, settled in Marseille and opened a branch office in the most significant Mediterranean port. For the next twenty years, during the time of his entrepreneurial activity in Marseille between 1869 and 1889, the Vallianos Bros merchant house reached its peak. Despite being the youngest of the three brothers, however, Andreas died first in 1889, aged 69.

Consequently, beginning from Cephalonia and the Azov Sea from the 1820s, until the 1870s the Vallianos enterprises had created a dense commercial network around three nodal points, Taganrog, London and Marseille. Moreover, the brothers employed agents and associates in 14 ports of the Black Sea – Marioupolis, Berdiansk, Yeysk, [Novorossiysk](#), Odessa, [Mykolaiv](#), [Sevastopol](#), Yevpatoria, [Theodosia](#), [Galati](#), [Braila](#), [Sulina](#), [Varna](#), [Pyrgos](#) (Burgas)– and at least 16 of the Eastern Mediterranean – Constantinople, [Smyrna](#), Alexandria, Patras, Cephalonia, Zakynthos, Ithaca, Corfu, Galaxidi, [Syros](#), [Milos](#), Piraeus, [Santorini](#),



Poros, Spetses and Hydra.

Extensive documentation for the final years of the company's network, its agents and associates as well as its transactions, is available in the account books in the Vallianos Archive in the Greek State General Archives in Cephalonia. Between 1901 and 1902, the house engaged the services of several agents in 8 countries and 28 areas: Alexandria, [Andros](#), Zakynthos, Cairo, Cephalonia, Constantinople, Corfu, Genoa, Larnaca, London, Malta, Manchester, Marseille, Nafplio, Mykolaiv, Paris, Patras, Piraeus, Pyrgos (Burgas), Raidestos (Tekirdağ), [Rostov-upon-Don](#), [Samos](#), Smyrna, Tangarog, Trieste and [Chios](#).

After Andreas and Maris died around the end of the 1880s and the beginning of the 1890s, all the power came into the hands of Panagis, who kept his control over the establishment until his death in 1902. During the last decade of his entrepreneurial activity, the main agents who managed the branch offices in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea were exclusively his nephews: Michail (son of his brother Spyros) was located in Rostov, Athanasios (also Spyros' son) in Novorossiysk, Gerasimos Michael Kambitsis (son of his sister Maria) and Athanasios Lazarou Rosolymos (son of his sister Santina?) in Constantinople, Athanasios (son of his brother Metaxas) and Marinós (son of his brother Maris) in Paris, while Vasileios (Metaxas' son) and Alkiviadis (Maris' son) worked with him in London. All these nephews inherited him, although after his death the cohesive link broke and the company ceased to exist. They closed it down and each one followed his own path, although the definite closure of all affairs related to the Vallianos Bros took them at least another decade.

Even though the business operated only for one generation, it left a lasting impression in the Greek entrepreneurial world. Its main advantage and the point of difference with other companies was shipping, a commercial field where the brothers were pioneers. Initially, they used the new steam technology before every one else and, secondly, they introduced new methods of maritime management through the establishment of their London-based shipping office. In the 1860s the Vallianos Bros owned five sailing boats. Ten years later the fleet had multiplied by five: they then had 25 large sailers, which became 40 in 1880. Panagis Vallianos was the one who bought the first small cargo steamboat, while in 1880 he invested in 6 large freighters and owned 20% of the Greek steamboat fleet. In the middle of the 1880s steamboats constituted 50% of their fleet. In this way the brothers preceded by twenty years their fellow ship-owners as far as embracing the new technology was concerned. They remained the most significant ship-owners until Panagis' passing in 1902, which also was the year that the Greek owned steamboat fleet outnumbered the sailing one.

Of great significance for the leading part of the Vallianos brothers within the "Ionian Network" was the London office ran by Panagis Vallianos. His was the first Greek shipping agency in London also operating as an affreightment and brokerage office, thus accommodating hundreds of commercial and maritime Greek businesses transporting cargos in Britain and Northern Europe, as well as a nautical bank. This last service was of the uttermost importance for many captains and ship-owners transitioning from sail to steam.

The Vallianos house besides sea trade and shipping was also involved in monetary and pecuniary activities, such as the commissioned change of bills of exchange and the issue of commercial and maritime loans with interest. Furthermore, they issued loans with a 7-8% interest for the purchase of steamboats, provided that the loanee had already secured half of the requisite sum and mortgaged the ship. Since the Vallianos Bros charged 1% more interest on loans than the Bank of England, it is estimated that their profit from each loan amounted to 14% of the total sum. This kind of loan – with a mortgage debt – was, according to Greek legislation, against the law before 1910, making it thus impossible to borrow money either from Greek or foreign banks for that kind of purchases.

Consequently, the powerful Vallianos Bros financed a great number of captains who evolved into significant 20th century ship-owners not only from Cephalonia, but also Andros, Chios, Syros, [Leros](#), Spetses and other Greek areas with nautical tradition.

After the passing of Panagis Vallianos and until the outbreak of World War II, 20 Greek maritime agencies opened up in London, all mimicking the first one he established in 1860. Andreas Laimos, heir to one of the most significant 20th century ship-owning families reflects the sentiments of his peers when characterizing Panagis Vallianos as the "patriarch" of Greek shipping.

The course of the Vallianos family in the areas its members settled down, however, was not always smooth. Their immense financial potency often led to confrontations between the brothers and the political and financial authorities of the areas in which they were



active. In a generalized effort to control foreign merchants, for example, the Russian government in 1881 started purging and taking into custody a notable number of Taganrog grand merchants on the charges of fraudulent tax evasion. Maris Vallianos, the “emperor” of the trade in the Azov Sea area was imprisoned for some time, while other eminent members of the Greek community in town were also prosecuted. The trial dragged on for the next eight years in the courts of Kharkiv (Kharkovo) and the “Vallianos case” closed in 1889, possibly after an intervention from the Greek state, although further historical research is in need for this case in both Russian and Greek archives.

Around the same time Panagis Vallianos also faced serious problems because of an infamous - at its time – trial, the “Vallianos Brothers vs. Bank of England” case. He himself was not accused of fraud. On the contrary, he was the one swindled in his own company by his own clerk, the Chian Antonios Isidoros Glykas, who embezzled £70.000 between February and October 1887 by cashing 43 counterfeit bills of exchange in the Bank of England. Panagis Vallianos sued the Bank of England because it gave permission for changing the checks without consulting with him. The case overwhelmed the City because it did not just concern Vallianos and the Bank of England but all the merchants in town and their transaction with it. Panagis won the case in the court of appeal in 1889, but lost it in the House of Lords the next year for just one vote.

3. Marital strategies

The Vallianos Bros employed marital strategies to reinforce and expand their interests, a method employed by all the Greek Diaspora entrepreneurial merchant houses. Marinos and Panagis did not marry daughters of wealthy merchants because they started off with limited means. Marinos married a girl from Cephalonia and had two sons in Taganrog, Alkiviadis and Athanasios. The first born, Alkiviadis, was sent as soon as he came of age to his uncle Panagis, on whose side he remained for the following 30 years. Panagis Vallianos procured for his nephew’s wedding with the daughter of the London-based grand merchant Xenophon Ballis. Athanasios, on the other hand, married Katina, the daughter of Stephanos Ralli, thus enforcing kin relations between the Vallianos family and the powerful Ralli family. Athanasios Vallianos – son of Maris – and Katina Ralli resided in Paris in the beginning of the 20th century and moved during the Interwar period to Cannes, where their children remained.

Panagis Vallianos married the Zakynthian Kata Vegdatopoulou during his time on the island in the 1840s and early 1850s, when he managed a branch office for the company. His young wife passed after a short period of time, as did his boy Christophoros. Panagis Vallianos never remarried. In 1858 he moved to London alone, where he passed the rest of his life totally focused on his business.

The two big brothers, however, saw into their younger brother’s wedding to a daughter of a wealthy merchant. Consequently, in 1850 Andreas Vallianos married Euphrosyni Melas, daughter of the Taganrog grand merchant Georgios Melas, who was also related to eminent families of the entrepreneurial diaspora. Euphrosyni’s brothers had established a [vigorous enterprise](#) in the 1850s: Vasileios Melas ran the London office since 1854, Leon and Konstantinos the one in Marseille from 1857 and the youngest brother Michail was located in Galați. So, when Andreas and Euphrosyni Vallianos settled in Marseille in 1869, they met up with family members. Professionally, Andreas followed the traditional path entering the family business. The same strategies were involved in their children’s marriages as well. Andreas and Euphrosyni’s offspring married into significant and wealthy families, such as the Petrokokkinos, [Negropontis](#), Zarifis, [Kouppas](#) and Ambanopoulos ones.

4. National benefactors

The Vallianos brothers rank among the national benefactors of the Greek state. In 1888, Panagis from London and Maris from Taganrog sent to Athens the amount of 2,800,000 drachma in order to construct the National Library building, while in their homeland Cephalonia the Panagis A. Vallianos endowment essentially became after his death the island’s “social welfare”. In his will Panagis bequeathed and endowment of 500,000 pound sterling “in order for the revenue to be used in philanthropic deeds on the island of Cephalonia; in these purposes the foundation or help to churches, hospitals and schools is included, as well as relief from time to time for paupers or elderly people living in Cephalonia or originating from the island”.² The endowment took care of all social welfare issues on the island: hospital, poorhouse, foundling hospital, lunatic asylum; it also provided help to churches, orphanages, indigent children, earthquake victims etc. Besides all the above, a number of schools was also established in order to promote



education: the Vallianeios School at Keramies , the Argostoli Commerce and Nautical School, the Technical School and the Practical Agricultural School. Especially during the first half of the 20th century the Panagis A. Vallianos endowment, which is still in effect nowadays, greatly helped Cephalonia.

1. The significant work of Eurydiki Sifnaiou on the Sifnaios brothers business in Taganrog illuminates the financial and social life in town, as well as local Greek entrepreneurial activity. Σιφναίου, Ε., *Τέσσερις τόποι, τρεις γενιές. Επιχειρηματικότητα και νοοτροπίες στην οικογενειακή επιχείρηση διασποράς* (in print).
2. Vallianos Archive, ΓΑΚ, *Αρχαία Κεφαλληνίας*, fol. 1.

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Glossary :

	Baltic Exchange House
The Baltic Exchange House was founded in 1823 as "Baltic Coffee House" and soon became the most important market for the purchase of cargoes in London. Its aim was to restrict the number of the traders and protect its 300 members from speculators. A significant number of its members were Greek.	
	Chian network
The network was comprised by the Greek merchants who were active commercially in the Black Sea, in the Mediterranean and in Western Europe during the period 1830-1860. The most important merchants originated from the island of Chios and very often were connected with kinship ties. These merchants combined trade with shipping and their companies were characterised by discipline and cohesion. The most important families were those of Rodokanakis, Zizinias, Rallis, Dromokaitis, Petrokokkinos, Agelastos. The	



network's importance declined with the changes in Black Sea trade after the Crimean War (1853-1856), in connection with the technological changes in sea transport.



Ionian network

The Ionian network was comprised by the Greek merchants, who were active commercially in the Black Sea (in Odessa and Nikolaiev, ports of the Azov Sea and Danube), Mediterranean and Western Europe during the period 1870-early 20th c. The most important merchants of the network originated from the Ionian islands and especially Cephalonia and Ithaka. The network's members started their activity as sailing shipowners and they were later involved in trade. At the end of 19th c., they were involved in transportation of cargos of the same kind, especially grain and coal. The network's members became important shipowners. The network's most important personalities were Athanasoulis, Antypas brothers, Aravantinos, P. Vallianos, N.P. Vlassopoulos, Drakoulis brothers, Theofilatos and Stathatos, Theofilatos brothers, Kavvadias brothers, G. Kakoulatos, A. Kourkoumelis, Lykiardopouloi brothers, Melissaratou brothers etc.

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