

Developing maritime trade in the Sea of Azov: The case of port Mariupol and the role of Austrian merchants

International Journal of Maritime

History

1–29

© The Author(s) 2025



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/08438714251380229

journals.sagepub.com/home/ijmh**Svitlana Arabadzhy** 

University of Oslo, Norway

Mariupol State University, Ukraine

Abstract

The article examines the expansion of the port-city of Mariupol during the so-called ‘Greek period’ of its history, spanning from its inception until 1859. The early nineteenth century was characterised by the establishment of port systems on the Sea of Azov, where Mariupol emerged as the second port and played a pivotal role in linking the Azov Sea region to global markets. Based on archival materials from Ukraine, Austria, Croatia and the UK, as well as statistical data and press, this article examines the role of the local community and Austrian merchants in the development of maritime trade. Furthermore, it investigates the internal and external economic and political factors that influenced commercial endeavors through the port of Mariupol.

Keywords

Austrian merchants, grain trade, Mariupol, Mimbelli, Russian Empire, Sea of Azov

The signing of the Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji in 1774 marked the beginning of prospects for the advancement of maritime trade in the Sea of Azov and its gradual integration into the global economy.¹ Being the shallowest sea in the world, a maximum of 14 metres

-
1. Gelina Harlaftis, ‘Black Sea Maritime and Economic History. The Integration of the Port-cities to the Global Economy’, in Gelina Harlaftis, Victoria Konstantinova, Igor Lyman, Anna Sydorenko and Eka Tchikoidze (eds), *Between Grain and Oil from the Azov to the Caucasus: The Port-cities of the Eastern Coast of the Black Sea, Late 18th–Early 20th Century*. Black Sea History Working Papers, vol. III (Rethymnon, 2020), 3–32.

Corresponding author:

Svitlana Arabadzhy, University of Oslo, Niels Henrik Abels vei 36, 0371, Oslo, Norway.

Email svetlana.arabadzhy@gmail.com

deep, the surrounding area of the Sea of Azov is covered with chernozem soil, known for its remarkable fertility. Chernozems are among the most productive soil types for grains worldwide.² The significant demand for grain in Europe facilitated the emergence of a network of ports. It spurred the active development of the Azov hinterland, with the goal of increasing grain yields as the primary export commodity of the region.³

In the late eighteenth century, Taganrog was the sole port along the coast of the Sea of Azov, maintaining its dominance in the export–import trade of the Black and Azov Sea regions until the 1850s.⁴ The establishment of a second port was associated with the forced relocation by the Russian Empire of Christians from the Crimean Khanate⁵ to the shores of the Sea of Azov.⁶ Afterwards, Mariupol became the second port in the Azov Sea, with the resettled Greek population serving as the driving force in organizing the supply of export goods.⁷ For almost 40 years, the ports of Taganrog and Mariupol

2. Only 9% of Europe is covered by this kind of soil, for more see: Arwyn Jones, Luca Montanarella and Robert Jones, *Soil Atlas of Europe* (2005), 29.
3. For more on the role of the hinterland on the Black and Azov Sea region sea, see: Anna Sydorenko, 'Crimean Port-cities and their Hinterland Connections: The Dynamics of Change, 1800–1917', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 33, No. 4 (2021), 668–89.
4. For the role of the port-city of Taganrog see: Evrydiki Sifneos and Gelina Harlaftis, 'Taganrog: Greek Entrepreneurship in the Russian Frontier of International Trade', in Gelina Harlaftis, Victoria Konstantinova, Igor Lyman, Anna Sydorenko and Eka Tchikoidze (eds), *Between Grain and Oil from the Azov to the Caucasus: The Port-cities of the Eastern Coast of the Black Sea, Late 18th–Early 20th Century*. Black Sea History Working Papers, vol. III (Rethymnon, 2020), 191–234.
5. Anna Hedo and Margaryta Aradzhoni, 'Political Reasons for the Resettlement of the Greeks from the Crimea to the Northern Azov Sea Region in 1778 (based on the archival documents)', *The Oriental Studies*, No. 84 (2019), 3–54; Svitlana Arabadzhy, 'Construction of Regional Myths: A Case Study of the Greeks of the North Azov Sea region', *Skhid*, 5, No. 1 (2023), 43–50.
6. For the development of the port-city of Mariupol on the North Azov Sea coast, see recent studies: Svitlana Novikova and Vira Volonyts, 'Ethnic Factor in the Economic Development of Mariupol (Late 18th–Early 20th Century)', in Gelina Harlaftis, Victoria Konstantinova, Igor Lyman, Anna Sydorenko and Eka Tchikoidze (eds), *Between Grain and Oil from the Azov to the Caucasus: the Port-cities of the Eastern Coast of the Black Sea, Late 18th–Early 20th Century*. Black Sea History Working Papers, vol. III (Rethymnon, 2020), 259–98.
7. The term 'Greeks' is used as a generic name for the Greek Orthodox Christians who were resettled from the Crimea in 1778. The term is employed here as a transitional concept, reflecting the shift from a confessional to an ethno-national identity in the nineteenth century. This usage follows the interpretation developed by Paschalis Kitromilides in his seminal works, where he emphasises that, in the late Ottoman context, the term Greek primarily referred to Orthodox Christians under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, rather than to a linguistic or ethnic group. See: Πασχάλης Κιτρομηλίδης, *Νεοελληνικός Διαφωτισμός. Οι πολιτικές και κοινωνικές ιδέες* [*Modern Greek Enlightenment. Political and social ideas*] (Athens, 1996); Paschales Kitromelides, *Enlightenment and Revolution: The Making of Modern Greece* (Cambridge, 2013). A particularly illustrative example of this transformation is the case of the Mariupol Greek community, whose relocation from Crimean Khanate

established the Azov port-system,⁸ facilitating the export of goods to European markets from the region. The emergence of ports in Berdyansk and Rostov, alongside Taganrog and Mariupol, impacted the redistribution and dynamics of export flows.⁹ Throughout the nineteenth century, these Azov ports, as Gelina Harlaftis states, experienced ‘unprecedented economic development’.¹⁰

The Russian Empire, which had annexed vast coastal territories and was eager to profit from international trade, lacked both an adequate merchant fleet and the commercial resources to develop it. This double shortage created significant opportunities for foreign merchants. However, the frequent wars between the Russian and Ottoman empires throughout the nineteenth century, combined with the difficulties of navigation in the shallow waters of the Sea of Azov and the long periods of quarantine, meant that trade along the Azov coast was fraught with risk.¹¹ Despite these challenges, the Azov ports attracted those who were willing to take risks and make quick decisions. It was foreign shipowners and merchants who became the driving forces behind the development of trade, creating networks and facilitating the supply of both export goods to European markets and import goods to Russian Empire.

Researchers have devoted considerable attention to the role of Greek international commercial networks in the development of trade along the Azov coast, highlighting the contributions and strategies of Greek medium-sized family firms in Taganrog and Rostov, as well as in Black Sea ports.¹² While Greek shipowners and merchants tended to reside in ports with the most significant export potential, such as Odessa,¹³

occurred prior to the emergence of ethno-national redefinition. This case has been examined in detail by Vladyslav Ivatskyi, who demonstrates how a confessional Orthodox identity evolved, within the framework of the Russian imperial and educational system, into a modern Greek national identity. For more see: Vladyslav Ivatskyi, ‘Formation of the Historical Consciousness of the Greek Community of Ukrainian Azov Sea Area (from the End of the Eighteenth till the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century)’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, Mykolaiv V.O. Sukhomlynskyi National University, 2016), 243.

8. Harlaftis, ‘Black Sea Maritime and Economic History’, 4.
9. Svitlana Arabadzhy, ‘Azov Sea Gateway: The Greeks and the Rise of Mariupol as a Port City (1780–1869)’, in Gelina Harlaftis, Anna Sydorenko, Alexandra Papadopoulou and Apostolos Delis (eds), *Black Sea History in the Long 19th Century. Development of Port-cities and Integration to the Global Economy* (Leiden, forthcoming).
10. Gelina Harlaftis, ‘Economic and Social Development of the Port Cities of the Sea of Azov and the Greeks in the Long Nineteenth Century: An Introduction’, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 22, No. 1 (2010), 239.
11. Evrydiki Sifneos, ‘Merchant Enterprises and Strategies in the Sea of Azov Ports’, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 22, No. 1 (2010), 260–63.
12. Gelina Harlaftis, *A History of Greek-owned Shipping: The Making of an International Tramp Fleet, 1830 to Present Day* (London, 1996); Evrydiki Sifneos, ‘Greek Family Firms in the Azov Sea Region, 1850–1917’, *The Business History Review*, 87, No. 2 (2013), 279–308; Patricia Herlihy, ‘The Greek Community in Odessa, 1861–1917’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 7, No. 2 (1989), 235–52; Vassilis Kardasis, *Diaspora Merchants in the Black Sea: The Greeks in Southern Russia, 1775–1861* (Lanham, 2001).
13. The article retains the nineteenth-century spelling of the name of the city of Odesa, in southern Ukraine: Odessa.

Taganrog and eventually Rostov, Austrian and Sardinian subjects played a significant role in advancing export trade in Mariupol. Yet, despite the port's dynamic history, there are currently very few studies dedicated to its history,¹⁴ primarily owing to the significant loss of sources and their dispersion across various archives.¹⁵ The article is based on unpublished sources from the archives and museums of Ukraine, Croatia, Austria and the UK, as well as published materials, including statistics, consular reports and periodical press from the Russian and Austrian empires.

This article examines the development of the port city of Mariupol during the period when special rights were granted to the Greek population and explores the resulting impact on the city's growth up until 1859. It focuses on the role of Austrian merchants as key 'agents of change' in the expansion of maritime trade in Mariupol, using the Mimbelli family as a case study. The article is structured into four sections. The first section reconstructs the legislative framework governing the life and activities of both the local population and foreign merchants in the city, analysing the significant impact of some restrictions on urban expansion. This section examines the transformations in port administration, the navigational hazards of the Sea of Azov, the dynamics of Mariupol's export trade, and its role within the broader international trade network of the region. The second section contextualises the development of Austrian trade through the ports of the Azov and Black seas, highlighting both quantitative and qualitative shifts and their underlying causes. The third section investigates the contribution of Austrian subjects to the expansion of maritime trade in Mariupol, with a particular focus on the Mimbelli family as a case study. It examines the organization of the Mimbellis' commercial activities, the importance of familial ties and shared geographic origins in their business operations and the expansion of their shipping fleet. Special attention is given to the trade routes that facilitated the growth of their enterprises. Finally, the concluding section outlines the extension of trade routes and the Mimbelli family's collaborations with various merchants in Mariupol and beyond.

Mariupol: Rise as a Sea of Azov trade hub

Before the establishment of the port, Ukrainian Cossacks utilised the mouth of the Kalmius River as an access point to the Sea of Azov.¹⁶ However, the presence of the

14. Volodymyr Vesnin, 'The Role of the Mariupol Port in Russia's Foreign Trade at the End of the 19th and the Beginning of the 20th centuries', *Ukrainian Historical Journal*, 3 (1971), 84–6; Svitlana Novikova, 'Activity of Shipping Companies in Mariupol (the Last Quarter of the 19–Early 20 Centuries)', *Bulletin of Mariupol State University. Series: History. Political Studies*, 15 (2016), 57–63; Vira Volonits, 'The Greek Merchants in Mariupol Foreign Trade in the 19 century', *Bulletin of Mariupol State University. Series: History. Political Studies*, 12 (2015), 17–24; Arabadzhy, 'Azov Sea Gateway'.
15. A total of 20,136 storage items of the Mariupol Greek Court documents which were stored in the State Archives of Donetsk Region were destroyed during World War II, as well as part of port's documents which were housed in the State Archives of Odessa Region. In 2022, as a result of the Russian Federation aggression, many documents stored in Mariupol Museum of Local Lore disappeared.
16. Irina Ponomariova, 'Ethnic Processes in Mariupol and Russia's Imperial Migration Policy (19th–Early 20th Century)' in Gelina Harlaftis, Victoria Konstantinova, Igor Lyman,

Greek Orthodox Christians community in the region would later affect the growth of a port in Mariupol. The coercive nature of the population resettlement granted the new inhabitants of Mariupol significant rights and privileges, distinguishing this port-city from the others along the Azov and Black Seas. The Greeks' preference for living as a distinct community influenced the city's governance structure. Initially, the internal administration of Mariupol was overseen by the Mariupol Greek Court, which was a multifunctional local authority body responsible for administrative and policing duties, as well as for investigating civil cases and managing the port.¹⁷ Access to the Court was exclusively reserved for the resettled population and their descendants. The Court had jurisdiction over the entire Greek community, including the port city and 21 Greek villages, and operated under the laws of the Russian Empire. The Court functioned from 1780 to 1869, albeit with restricted responsibilities after 1859, making Mariupol unique among the cities on the Azov and Black Sea coasts for granting a single community special rights for 89 years.¹⁸ In comparison, Taganrog also established a Greek Magistrate. However, it was open to all Greeks who came to the city and settled there and operated only until 1836.¹⁹

Secondly, Mariupol was a 'closed' city where, until 1859, only the descendants of Greek Orthodox Christians were permitted to reside,²⁰ with exceptions granted to merchants, consuls and their families. The Ukrainian population came to the city for temporary work, but were not allowed to 'assign residency' in Mariupol. Such restrictions contributed to the city's slow population growth until 1859. For instance, Mariupol's population was 2992 in 1782, 3333 in 1816, and 5289 in 1858, reflecting only a 77% increase over 76 years.²¹ In contrast, in the subsequent 39 years, after permission was

Anna Sydorenko and Eka Tchoidze (eds), *Between Grain and Oil from the Azov to the Caucasus: the Port-cities of the Eastern Coast of the Black Sea, Late 18th–Early 20th Century*. Black Sea History Working Papers, vol. III (Rethymnon, 2020), 236.

17. The main functions of the Mariupol Greek Court covered almost all aspects of the life of the city's population and all Greek settlements. These included the supervision of economic activities, the collection of taxes, the preparation of statistical and descriptive reports on economic development, the implementation of the orders from higher authorities, policing, the consideration of civil cases and criminal investigations (including interrogations). After interrogation, cases were sent to the Criminal Court Department of the Ekaterinoslav Province (*Departament ugovnogo suda Ekaterinoslavskogo namestnichestva*), later to the Ekaterinoslav Criminal Chamber (*Ekaterinoslavskaya Ugolovnaya palata*) for sentencing. Svitlana Arabadzhy, 'Mariupol Greek Court: Fields of Activity and Functioning Problems', *Bulletin of Mariupol State University. Series: History. Political Studies*, 17 (2016), 11–13.
18. Arabadzhy, 'Mariupol Greek Court', 9–15. On the process of limiting the Court's jurisdiction, see Anna Gedo, Nataliia Terentieva and Rena Saenko, *Greek Court of Mariupol. History of foundation and its activity* (Kyiv, 2010), 120.
19. Sifneos and Harlaftis, 'Taganrog', 203.
20. *Полное собрание законов Российской империи* [*Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire*], Col. 2, No. 34308, vol. 34 (St Petersburg, 1861).
21. Anna Gedo, 'Greeks of the Northern Azov Sea Region in the Materials of Demographic Statistics of the 18th and 19th Centuries: Informative Opportunities, Problems of

granted for other ethnic groups to settle in the city, its population surged by 488% by 1897.²² The 'closed' status of the port city also impacted commerce, as only Greeks were authorised to manage grain supplies, construct and lease grain warehouses, and oversee other organisational matters, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts between the Greeks and foreign merchants.

In 1782, 8% (243 individuals) of Mariupol's population were merchants.²³ After the Russian Empire introduced guild classifications in 1775, aspiring third-guild merchants required only 500 rubles in capital – a relatively accessible threshold that enabled many Greeks to enter the merchant class.²⁴ However, when the minimum capital requirement increased in 1807 from 1000 rubles for the third guild to 8000 rubles, most Mariupol merchants were reclassified as bourgeois (*meshchane*). According to records from the Mariupol Greek Court, by 1816, only five second-guild and six third-guild merchants remained, reducing their share of the population from 8% to 0.3%.²⁵ The absence of first-guild merchants among the Greeks, who did not have a capital of 50,000 rubles, restricted their ability to participate in international trade until 1824.²⁶ Even when second-guild merchants were permitted to trade internationally, the Greeks did not begin exporting until the mid-nineteenth century.

Foreigners had three options for organising their commercial activities in Mariupol or other ports on the Azov and Black Seas. The first was to obtain the status of 'transient merchant' (*kuptsa zaezzhego*), which permitted foreigners to engage in wholesale trade within the customs outpost but not within the city itself. This status required the payment of customs duties and other taxes, as well as an additional levy of 1.25% on capital exceeding 25,000 rubles if trading continued beyond 6 months. After 1 year, merchants were required to transition to 'guest' status, leave the Russian Empire or remain as non-traders. The option to become a foreign 'guest' involved acquiring citizenship in one of the port cities along the Azov or Black Seas, with the obligation to pay the necessary customs duties and taxes, as well as a 1.25% levy on capital exceeding 50,000 rubles.²⁷

Preservation and Access', *Zaporizhzhia Historical Review*, 7, No. 59 (2023), 31; Мариупольський краєзнавчий музей [Mariupol Museum of Local Lore] (hereafter MKM), sprava 3474-Д, folio 14-14 verso; *Urban settlements in the Russian Empire* (7 vols, St Petersburg, 1860), II, 195.

22. *The First General Census of the Population of the Russian Empire, 1897. XIII. Ekaterynoslav guberniia* (St Petersburg, 1904), 1.

23. Gedo, 'Greeks of the Northern Azov Sea Region', 31.

24. *Complete collection of laws ...*, Col. 1, No. 14275, vol. 20. Merchants of the third guild had to have a capital of 500–1000 rubles, those of the second guild had to have from 1000 to 10,000 rubles and those of the first guild had to have 10,000 and more. The merchants paid 1% of the capital, which was recorded when they were enrolled in the guild. For more see: *Complete collection of laws ...*, Col. 1, No. 14327, vol. 20.

25. MKM, sprava 3528-Д, 1816, folio 14-14 verso.

26. Until 1824 only merchants of the first guild were allowed to attend to international trade; after the Manifest of 14 November 1824 merchants of the second guild were allowed to trade internationally, but only those with the minimum capital of 20,000 rubles, for more see: *Complete collection of laws ...*, Col. 1, No. 30115, vol. 39.

27. *Complete collection of laws ...*, Col. 1, No. 22418, vol. 29.

In port-cities, merchants holding 'guest' status were required to join one of two guilds. Importantly, foreigners were forbidden to trade outside the port cities and provinces where they were based, and could not register with guilds in other cities as foreign 'guests'.²⁸ In the cities where foreigners joined guilds, they were allowed to purchase property and received extended economic rights, such as to establish factories, manufactories and merchant houses.²⁹ The third option was to become a consular representative of a port-city.

To protect the rights of local merchants and landowners, foreign merchants were prohibited from purchasing export goods directly from peasants in villages.³⁰ In the case of Mariupol's port, merchants were required to buy all export goods from the Greek population. Additionally, they were obliged to pay municipal taxes but were not entitled to election to the Mariupol Greek Court or participation in city governance. In 1817 there were no foreigners in Mariupol except the Greeks.³¹ By 1822, 13 foreign merchants had settled there.³²

The earliest references to ships arriving at Mariupol port appear in descriptions of the city dating back to 1782–1783.³³ These accounts do not specify whether the incoming vessels were foreign or coastal but detail loading difficulties. Larger ships were unable to approach the shore closely owing to its shallowness and had to wait for loading approximately 2.3 nautical miles from the coast. While the average depth of the Sea of Azov is 7 metres, it decreases significantly to 5 metres or less closer to Mariupol's shore (see Figure 1). Flat-bottomed boats were used to transport goods to the vessels, delivering them in small batches.

The shallowness of the Sea of Azov was not only challenge on the route to Mariupol. All foreign vessels were initially required to call at Taganrog for a quarantine clearance certificate owing to the absence of such facilities in Mariupol. In emergencies, such as shipwrecks, the Mariupol Greek Court, responsible for port matters, had to request assistance from the Taganrog port administration. Providing timely aid to crews was difficult, as Taganrog was over 100 kilometres away. To enhance port operations and ensure quicker vessel response, the Mariupol Port Authority and Quarantine Outpost were established in 1808.³⁴ In 1833, even stricter quarantine was implemented; a new Regulation (*Ustav*) on Quarantines was introduced to prevent the spread of infectious diseases

28. The ports of the Azov and Black Seas were located within the geographical boundaries of the Yekaterinoslav, Kherson and Tavrida provinces (*guberniia*). Mariupol was part of the Ekaterinoslav one.

29. *Complete collection of laws ...*, Col. 1, No. 22418, vol. 29.

30. *Complete collection of laws ...*, Col.1, No. 22418, vol. 29.

31. МКМ, справа 3479-Д, 1817, folio 4-4 verso.

32. МКМ, справа 6223-Д, 1823, folio 9.

33. 'Описание городов и уездов Азовской губернии' [Description of Cities and Counties of Azov Province], *Notes of the Odessa Society of History and Antiquities*, 3 (Odessa, 1853), 293. For more on the discussion of the dates of the topographical descriptions, see: Anna Gedo, 'Topographical Descriptions as Source from History of Greek Societies of Ukraine (End XVIII–Beg. of the XIX)', *Historical and Geographical Studies in Ukraine*, 9 (2006), 347–65.

34. *Complete collection of laws ...*, Col. 1, No. 23075, vol. 30.

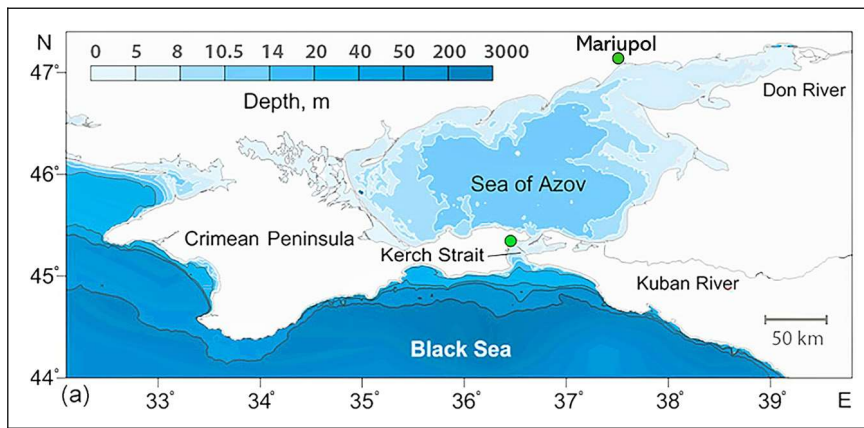


Figure 1. Depth of the Sea of Azov.

Source: Ivan Zavalov, Alexander Osadchiv, Roman Sedakov, Bernard Barnier, Jean-Marc Molines, Vladimir Belokopytov, 'Water Exchange Between the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea through the Kerch Strait', *Ocean Science*, 16 (2020), 16.

along the Azov coastline. This measure required all vessels bound for Azov ports to undergo quarantine procedures in Kerch.³⁵ The following year, the Mariupol Quarantine Outpost was disbanded, leaving only a doctor in the city, who subsequently reported to the Mariupol Greek Court.³⁶ Despite numerous preventive measures, diseases periodically spread in the port cities, significantly affecting the dynamics of foreign trade.³⁷

The ports of the Sea of Azov were crucial to the Russian Empire's international trade, exporting large quantities of grain from its hinterland to European ports. Until 1835, Mariupol and Taganrog served as the principal maritime trade gateways of the Sea of Azov. The analysis of the value of export goods dispatched through the ports of the Black and Azov Seas reveals that from 1828 to 1835, Mariupol and Taganrog accounted for up to 37.2% of the Russian Empire's total exports via southern ports (see Table 1). However, Taganrog maintained a leading position, with Mariupol's share in foreign trade not exceeding 28.1% during this period. Numerous factors, including military conflicts, crop failures and epidemics, influenced the dynamics of trade. For instance, the significant reduction in trade volumes through Mariupol port in 1834 and 1835 was attributed to a grain harvest failure and insufficient stocks in the port. Conversely, Taganrog had superior storage and export capacity, sourcing grain from both nearby and distant areas due to the extensive river system of the Don and Volga.³⁸

35. *Complete collection of laws ...*, Col. 2, No. 5690, vol. 7.

36. *Complete collection of laws ...*, Col. 2, No. 6763, vol. 9.

37. The situation with the spread of infectious diseases in Mariupol was always the focus of attention of the consuls, who reported on the ways of spreading the diseases, the number of deaths and those who recovered. See, for example, The National Archives (UK), Foreign Office, 65/355, 1847.

38. Sifneos and Harlaftis, 'Taganrog', 204.

Table 1. Dynamics of foreign export trade in percentage ratio of the Black and Azov Sea ports, 1828–1835.

Year	Black Sea (Odessa, Theodosia, Evpatoria and Kherson)	Azov Sea (Taganrog and Mariupol)	Mariupol percentage of total Azov Sea exports
1828	67.2	32.8	17.8
1829	93.1	6.9	11.2
1830	69.7	30.3	28.1
1831	62.6	37.4	21.6
1832	66.3	33.7	26.1
1833	76.6	23.4	17.8
1834	71.4	28.6	4.4
1835	70.8	29.2	6.3

Source: *The State Foreign Trade of 1828 (1829–1835) in its Various Forms*, table II.

Mariupol's primary export was durum wheat, known as *arnautka*, characterised by long, hard, semi-translucent yellow grains. It was prevalent in the Azov steppes and well-suited to the region's fluctuating temperatures and winds and arid climate.³⁹ Azov's *arnautka* was of the highest quality owing to its fertile soil, followed by that of the Crimean Peninsula and then Odessa. Priced approximately 10% higher than soft wheat between 1824 and 1829,⁴⁰ *arnautka* was in high demand in Italian cities, where reports and newspapers praised Mariupol's wheat as superior for pasta production.⁴¹

The expansion of trade stimulated the development of the city's and port's infrastructure. In 1836, plans were made to construct a dam and a stone embankment to facilitate the loading of export goods. By 1848, the need to repair the dam and pave the embankment had become apparent. Consequently, the port area underwent substantial modernization, further improving the transportation and loading of cargo (see Figure 2).⁴² Thus, as a port city, 'closed' Mariupol offered certain advantages to foreign merchants, such as low competition from the local population and access to highly sought-after wheat *arnautka* for export. However, disadvantages included difficult navigation owing to shallow waters and privileges that excluded non-Greeks from the city's government and trade supplies.

39. Mihail Volskij, *Очерк истории хлебной торговли Новороссийского края с древнейших времен до 1852 года* [Outline of the History of Grain Trade in the Novorossiia Region from the Earliest Times to 1852] (St Petersburg, 1854), 97.

40. Volskij, *Outline of the History of Grain Trade*, 98.

41. *Atti del Comitato dell'inchiesta industriale (1870–1874)*, Vol. 1 (Rome, 1873), 40, 47.

42. *Новороссийский календарь на 1840 год* [Novorossiysk calendar for 1840] (Odessa, 1839), 148. Additionally, a decision was made to construct a road to the port to enhance connectivity and facilitate the transportation of export commodities. These projects were completed by 1852. Державний архів Одеської області [State Archives of Odessa region] (hereafter, DAOO), fond 1, opis' 192, sprava 111, folio 4.



Figure 2. Postcard view of the port of Mariupol following its mid-nineteenth-century modernization. The postcard is estimated to have been printed at the close of the nineteenth century.

The beginning of Austrian trade in the Azov and Black seas

Austria was among the first nations to sign a commercial agreement with the Russian Empire in 1785, obtaining navigation rights in the Black Sea. A year earlier, Austria had concluded a commercial treaty with the Ottoman Empire in 1784 to secure free passage through the Straits, which were under Ottoman control.⁴³ In 1784, Russia promoted international trade by designating Kherson, Sevastopol and Feodosia as free trade ports with equal status to Saint Petersburg's principal port.⁴⁴ That year, 'Fabri & Co,' an Austrian merchant firm, was established in Kherson, primarily engaging in overland trade.⁴⁵ However, the onset of the Russo-Ottoman War in 1787 and the Habsburg Monarchy's entry into the conflict in 1788 brought trade activities to a halt. After the Treaty of Jassy was signed in 1792 and Odessa's port was opened in 1794, Kherson's trading importance declined rapidly.⁴⁶

43. Constantin Ardeleanu, 'The Opening and Development of the Black Sea for International Trade and Shipping (1774–1853)', *Euxeinus – Governance and Culture in the Black Sea Region*, No. 14 (2014), 33, 35.

44. *Complete Collection of Laws ...*, Col.1, No. 15935, vol. 22.

45. Apollon Skal'kovskij, *Хронологическое обозрение истории Новороссийского края 1730–1823* [Chronological Overview of the History of the Novorossiysk Region 1730–1823], part 1 (Odessa, 1836), 163.

46. Vladimir Zolotov, *Внешняя торговля Южной России в первой половине 19 века* [Foreign Trade of Southern Russia in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century] (Rostov, 1863), 27.

According to statistical reports on the state trade of the Russian Empire, first published in 1802, Austrian vessels began trading through the Black Sea and Azov Sea ports in 1812.⁴⁷ However, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, their numbers were minimal; only four ships engaged in trade within the Azov–Black Sea region in 1813,⁴⁸ increasing to 11 in 1814.⁴⁹ The early statistical reports of the Russian Empire grouped trade data by sea. Still, they lacked details on specific ports, making it difficult to determine which ports Austrian vessels entered in the early nineteenth century.

The number of ships flying the Austrian flag arriving at ports in the Azov–Black Sea region increased sharply from 1815, reaching 102 vessels in 1816 – nearly a 10-fold rise.⁵⁰ By 1820, Austrian-flagged ships ranked second in number among those arriving at ports in the Black and Azov Seas, totalling 188 vessels.⁵¹ This surge resulted from the Austrian Empire's annexation of the former Republic of Ragusa following the Vienna Congress's decision in 1815. Ragusian mariners were among the first to successfully establish trade routes through the Black and Azov Sea ports; for instance, 29 loaded ships departed these ports in 1803⁵² and 59 in 1805.⁵³ The seamen of the Republic of Ragusa traded exclusively with Russia via its southern ports as they became one of the major carriers in the Mediterranean during the French wars.⁵⁴

On 25 May 1804, Antun Lukin Flori (1775–1811) received a certificate confirming his status as a subject of the Republic of Ragusa, residing in Taganrog, and authorising him to represent the interests and conduct trade on behalf of Stefano Chersa and other merchants and shipowners.⁵⁵ In 1808, Stefano Lukin Flori, another influential shipowner from the Peljesac Peninsula (Sabbioncello), settled on the coast of the Azov Sea in Taganrog and eventually began trading through Mariupol's port. Profiting from the grain trade, Stefano relocated to Constantinople, where he established a trading house and a bank.⁵⁶ His brother Nikola moved to Livorno, where a branch of their trading house was established.⁵⁷

Another influential figure in Ragusan commerce who initiated trade in the Azov Sea ports was Balthasar Drascovich. According to Russian sources, by 1806, Balthasar had

47. *Государственная внешняя торговля 1812 года в разных ее видах* [*The State Foreign Trade of 1812 in its Various Forms*] (St Petersburg, 1813), table I.

48. *The State Foreign Trade of 1813 in its Various Forms* (St Petersburg, 1814), 32, 33.

49. *The State Foreign Trade of 1814 in its Various Forms* (St Petersburg, 1815), 34, 35.

50. *The State Foreign Trade of 1816 in its Various Forms* (St Petersburg, 1817), 24, 25.

51. *The State Foreign Trade of 1820 in its Various Forms* (St Petersburg, 1821), 34, 35.

52. *Государственная торговля 1803 года в разных ее видах* [*State trade of 1803 in its various forms*] (St Petersburg, 1804), table XXII.

53. *State trade of 1805 in its various forms* (St Petersburg, 1806), table XXII.

54. Apostolos Delis, 'Shipping Finance and Risks in Sea Trade during the French Wars: Maritime Loan Operations in the Republic of Ragusa', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 24, No. 1 (2012), 231.

55. In Croatian scientific literature, he is referred to as Stjepan A. Kerse. In Orebic, the family is known by the surname Krsa. Nenad Vekarić, *Pelješki Rodovi A–K* (Dubrovnik, 1996), 370.

56. Stjepan Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci* (Split, 1960), 178.

57. Vekarić, *Pelješki Rodovi A–K*, 144.

already established a merchant house in the port city of Taganrog.⁵⁸ In 1812, his annual trade turnover via Taganrog reached 117,897 rubles, with 31% from imports and 69% from exports.⁵⁹ The following year, Melchior Drascovich, presumably his relative, also began trading in Taganrog.⁶⁰ Trade through the Azov port proved profitable, allowing the Drascovich family to expand their import and export volumes rapidly; by 1817, Balthasar's trade turnover through the Taganrog port totalled 1,193,538 rubles – nearly 10 times the figures from 5 years earlier.⁶¹ That same year, he was appointed Austrian vice-consul in Taganrog.⁶² His commercial success facilitated trade expansion, leading Balthasar to begin exporting from Mariupol's port in 1819.⁶³ Owing to active Austrian trade in Mariupol, an Austrian consular agency was established in 1845, led by Giovanni Drascovich, a member of Balthasar's family.⁶⁴ After 17 years of service in Mariupol, Giovanni resigned in 1862, and his son, Eugen Drascovich, took over.⁶⁵ Thus, the Drascovich family chose the third option and developed the trade in the Azov ports as representatives of the Austrian consular authorities for more than half a century.

In the 1820s, other merchants, initially likely Austrian subjects who later became Russian citizens, established enterprises in Mariupol. Among them were Nikola Vuchetich, who began in 1817,⁶⁶ and Vidovich, a second-guild merchant in Mariupol by 1830. In that year, the port of Mariupol recorded unprecedented export volumes, surpassing all previous years and increasing its annual exports by 2232% compared with the average figure for the preceding 5 year period (1825–1829) (see Figure 3). This notable increase resulted from strong demand for grain in European countries and the conclusion of the Russo-Ottoman War, which facilitated a surge in international trade that had previously been restricted on the Black Sea during the conflict. The total value of goods exported from Mariupol in 1830 amounted to 4,308,163

58. N. Tregubov, 'Замечания о Таганрогском порте' ['Remarks on the Port of Taganrog'], *Вестник Европы* [*Herald of Europe*], No. 11 (1806), 219.

59. *The State Foreign Trade of 1812 in its Various Forms*, 82.

60. *The State Foreign Trade of 1813 in its Various Forms*, 144.

61. *The State Foreign Trade of 1817 in its Various Forms* (St Petersburg, 1818), 119. This sharp increase in trade was driven by the high demand for grain in Europe and the rise in its price, resulting in a record export of goods through the ports of the Black and Azov Seas in 1817. For more see: Volskij, *Outline of the History of Grain Trade*, 89.

62. *Vereinigte Laibacher Zeitung*, 25 März 1817.

63. *The State Foreign Trade of 1819 in its Various Forms* (St Petersburg, 1820), 143.

64. *Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Abteilung Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv* (hereafter, *AT-OeStA/HHStA*), Ministerium des Äußern, AR F8-4-3. Unlike the document, the German version of the name Giovanni – Johann – is used in Austrian literature. See: Rudolf Agstner, *Handbuch des k.(u.) k. Konsulardienstes Die Konsulate der Donaumonarchie vom 18. Jh. bis 1918* [*Handbook of the k.(u.) k. Consular Service the Consulates of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy from the 18th Century to 1918*] (Vienna, 2018), 344.

65. *AT-OeStA/HHStA*, MdÄ AR, F8-22-1.

66. *The State Foreign Trade of 1817 in its Various Forms*, 119.

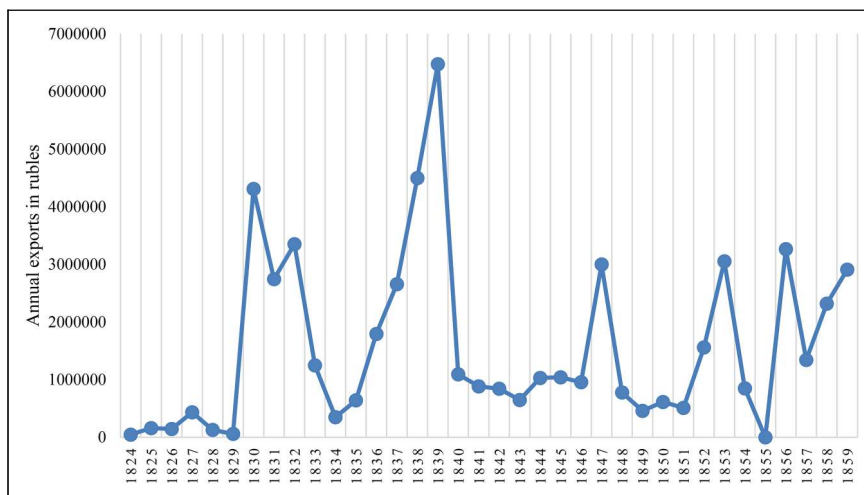


Figure 3. Export volumes through Mariupol port, 1824–1859.

Source: *The State Foreign Trade of 1824 (1825–1841) in its Various Forms*, table II; *The State Foreign Trade in its Various Forms for the Year 1842 (1843–1859)*, table II.

rubles, with a quarter attributable to Vidovich's exports, totalling 1,146,434 rubles, whose ships sailed under the Russian flag.⁶⁷

It is known that not all Ragusan shipowners swiftly switched to Austrian flags after the Vienna Congress; some continued using Tuscan, Russian, British or Ottoman flags for a period.⁶⁸ The Austrian Empire made efforts to encourage crews, predominantly Austrian subjects, to obtain navigation documents in Austrian ports. Nevertheless, some shipowners delayed changing their flags. For instance, according to Stepan Vekarić, in 1820, 67% of the 36 long-distance ships from the Peljesac Peninsula adopted Austrian flags, while 33% continued using flags from other countries.⁶⁹ Later, in 1847, Austria and Russia signed a treaty on trade and navigation, equalising the ships and goods of both states in terms of payments and various fees.⁷⁰

The case of the Mimbelli Brothers and their role in Mariupol's trade development

Shipowners from the Peljesac Peninsula made significant contributions to Mariupol's development by trading through its port, with some becoming merchants, establishing merchant houses and settling in the city for extended periods. Among them were members of the Mimbelli family, who moved to Mariupol in 1832 and commenced

67. *The State Foreign Trade of 1830 in its Various Forms* (St Petersburg, 1831), 5, 81.

68. Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 64.

69. Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 64.

70. *The State Foreign Trade in its Various Forms for the Year 1847* (St Petersburg, 1848), VIII.

grain trading.⁷¹ Luca (1792–1876) and his brothers Giovanni (1796–1880), Stefano (1805–1881) and Antonio (1801–1880) Mimbelli hailed from the town of Orebic. They were regarded as the most influential shipowners on the Peljesac Peninsula throughout the nineteenth century.⁷² Originally from Portoferraio on the island of Elba, they relocated to Stankovic in 1716 and later to Orebic.⁷³ The family was involved in maritime trade during the Republic of Ragusa, transporting grain from the Levant to the western Mediterranean. In the eighteenth century, the family jointly owned two vessels.⁷⁴ During a voyage in 1807, the Mimbelli family's ship was seized by the French and taken to Dubrovnik.⁷⁵ Despite political changes, the Mimbelli family's trade activities remained consistent and they arrived in Mariupol as Austrian subjects, with their ships primarily sailing under the Austrian flag.

Like certain other individuals from the Adriatic coast, the Mimbelli family possessed limited financial capital and owned few ships at the beginning of the nineteenth century, making it difficult for them to compete with merchants in cities such as Odessa or Taganrog. It may be inferred that their decision to settle in Mariupol was influenced by the lower level of competition in the port city, while also presenting significant opportunities from undeveloped lands with potential for future use. They chose the second option, becoming foreign 'guests' with economic benefits.

When the Mimbelli brothers arrived in Mariupol, they owned a few ships, including the *Panselinos*, constructed in Venice in 1827, and the *Flori*, built in Fiume (Rijeka)⁷⁶ in 1831.⁷⁷ It may be suggested that the *Flori* initially belonged to the family of Stepan Flori, who had previously begun trading through the Azov ports and collaborated with the Mimbelli family. In 1832, their first year of grain trade via the Mariupol port, the Mimbelli brothers exported goods worth 271,270 rubles, accounting for 8% of the total trade at the Mariupol Customs outpost.⁷⁸ During the first decade after settling in Mariupol, two of the Mimbelli brothers captained their own vessels.⁷⁹

71. The Certificate signed by Mimbelli indicates that he started his commercial activity in Mariupol in 1832, see The National Archives (UK), Foreign Office, 65/504, 1857. Nenad Vekarić points out that Luca Mimbelli moved to Mariupol in 1829; see Nenad Vekarić, *Pelješki Rodovi L–Z* (Dubrovnik, 1996), 81. Frano Glavina indicates that the family started a business in Mariupol in the early 1830s, see Frano Glavina, 'Pelješčani u Svijetu (Prilog Povijesti Našeg Iseljništva)', *Pelješki Zbornik*, Nos 3–4 (1984), 139.

72. Vekarić, *Pelješki Rodovi L–Z*, 81. In oral tradition, the surname is recorded in the Croatian form *Mimbelić*. The article retains the spelling of the forenames and surname as used by the merchants in their signatures, see DAOO, fond 1, opis' 193, sprava 15, folio 14.

73. Vekarić, *Pelješki Rodovi L–Z*, 81.

74. Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 266–67.

75. Stepan Vekarić points out the names and types of the ships. One was a polacca *Sv. Jos. Sv. Ant. pad Sv. V. Fer.* (owned together with Fiscovich from 1761 to 1783), and the second was a nave *Gos. od Karmena, Sv. Josip* (in possession with Pilcovich from 1776 to 1795); see Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 175.

76. For the purposes of this article, the name Fiume will be used, as it appears in the sources.

77. Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 272.

78. *The State Foreign Trade of 1832 in its Various Forms* (St Petersburg, 1833), table 16.

79. Determining which brother worked on which ship is not always possible, as the *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* primarily listed only the captains' surnames without initials.

Their enterprises operated as a form of family firm, involving all brothers and some distant relatives. This familial firm model was an effective means of organising maritime trade, enabling the efficient reinvestment of profits into fleet expansion.⁸⁰ In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Mimbelli family commonly purchased ships under joint ownership. For instance, in 1847, of the 11 ships owned by the Mimbelli brothers sailing under the Austrian flag, two belonged to Luca Mimbelli. Giovanni, Antonio and Stefano jointly owned four ships, while the brothers co-owned five with other individuals from the Peljesac Peninsula, such as Stefano and Nicolo Chersa, Giuseppe and Nicolo Squippa, and S. Fiscovich (see Table 2). In addition to the brothers, ship captains were often co-owners, close or distant relatives, or other natives of the Peljesac Peninsula. Giovanni Mimbelli, for example, was married to Nata Squippa, also from Orebic.⁸¹ Together with her father, Giuseppe Squippa, Giovanni co-owned the ship *Madre Mimbelli*, captained by another family relative, Nicolo Sgiuppa, who also held a small ownership stake. Giovanni further co-owned the ship *Fortunata Mimbelli* with his father-in-law and brothers. Stefano Mimbelli was married to Margarita Sugni, whose brother, Giuseppe, captained the *Calmius*.⁸² A member of the Fiscovich family, uncle to both Margarita and Giuseppe Sugni, held a share in the ship *Diletta Mimbelli* and served as its captain. The Covachevich family, also related to the Mimbellis, collaborated with them; for instance, F. Covachevich captained the *Favorita Mimbelli* in 1854.⁸³ Thus, the Mimbelli family's strategy was to reinvest in shipbuilding, involving relatives in its purchase and management.

In 1836, the brothers began trading independently; Luca established his own enterprise in Mariupol, while Giovanni, along with his two younger brothers, Stefano and Antonio, founded the merchant house *Mimbelli Brothers*.⁸⁴ Despite their separate ventures, Luca and Giovanni continued to purchase and jointly own ships such as *Meotide* and *Io*. The enterprises established by the Mimbelli brothers serve as an excellent example of effective merchant houses founded on kinship, ethnicity, religion, culture and strong ties to their place of origin. For instance, Mimbelli crews were recruited from their Adriatic homeland and, according to Stepan Vekaric, received higher wages than crews on other ships.⁸⁵ At the same time, the Mimbellis demanded exceptionally swift unloading and loading of their ships, actively participating in and overseeing the process. When several Mimbelli ships arrived simultaneously at the port of Mariupol, speed competitions were held between them. Loading in Mariupol typically took 3–4 days. Trust and a shared interest in successful operations were essential unifying factors. Timely access to international and local information through their familial network regarding trade, harvests, diseases and other relevant matters enabled swift

80. It was also common for Greek merchants to set up family firms in the ports of the Azov and the Black Sea. For more see: Sifneos, 'Greek Family Firms in the Azov Sea Region', 279–308; Harlaftis, *A History of Greek-owned Shipping*, 2–106.

81. Maritime Museum of Orebic, Croatia, *Diary of Captain Joso Sugni (Šunj)*, 123.

82. Maritime Museum of Orebic, *Diary of Captain Joso Sugni (Šunj)*, 120.

83. *Annuario Marittimo Del Lloyd Austriaco per il 1854* (Trieste, 1854), 109.

84. Glavina, 'Pelješčani u Svijetu', 139.

85. Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 133.

Table 2. The shipping fleet of the Mimbelli family until 1858.

Name of ship	Type	Tons	Place built	Built	Shipowner	Flag
<i>Panselinos</i>	Brig	376	Venice	1827	Luca Mimbelli	Austrian
<i>Flori</i>	Pol	378	Fiume	1831	Antonio, Giovanni, Stefano Mimbelli	Austrian
<i>Azoff</i>	Brig		Rostov	1836	Mimbelli	Russian
<i>Meotide</i>	Pol	500	Fiume	1838	Antonio, Giovanni, Stefano Mimbelli	Austrian
<i>Fortunata Chelli, from 1844 Fortunata Mimbelli</i>	Pol	492	Fiume	1838	Antonio, Giovanni, Stefano Mimbelli, Giuseppe Sgiuppa	Austrian
<i>Calinius</i>	Nave	562	Fiume	1840	Antonio, Giovanni, Stefano Mimbelli	Austrian
<i>Venoge</i>	Bark	361	Fiume	1841	Stefano Chersa, Luca Mimbelli, Nicolo Chersa	Austrian
<i>Favorita Mimbelli</i>	Nave	543	Fiume	1845	Luca Mimbelli	Austrian
<i>Diletta Mimbelli</i>	Nave	610	Sussak	1847	Stefano Chersa, Luca Mimbelli, S. Fiscovich	Austrian
<i>Io</i>	Brig	200	Fiume	1839	Luca, Giovanni Mimbelli from 1847	Austrian
<i>Madre, later Madre Mimbelli</i>	Nave	674	Fiume	1847	Giovanni Mimbelli, Giovanni Sgiuppa	Austrian
<i>Padre Mimbelli</i>	Nave	683	Fiume	1847	Antonio, Giovanni, Stefano Mimbelli	Austrian
<i>Francesco Luca</i>	Nave	439	Fiume	1851	Luca Mimbelli	
<i>Cognate Mimbelli</i>	Nave	767	Pecchine	1854	Antonio, Giovanni, Stefano Mimbelli	Austrian
<i>Fratelli Mimbelli</i>	Nave	757	Pecchine	1854	Antonio, Giovanni, Stefano Mimbelli	Austrian
<i>Luchino Mimbelli</i>	Brig	200	Livorno	1856	Stefano Mimbelli	Russian
<i>Catterina Mimbelli</i>	Brig	200	Livorno	1856	Stefano Mimbelli	Russian
<i>Baldassare Stefano Mimbelli</i> ^a	Clipp	350	Livorno	1857	Stefano Mimbelli	Russian

Source: Data processed from *Annuario Marittimo Del Lloyd Austriaco per il 1848, 1854, 1855*, Vekarić, *Pejkeški Jedrenjaci*, 276.

^aAccording to *Russian Commercial Fleet to 1st January 1858*, *Luchino Mimbelli*, *Katerina Mimbelli* and *Balthasar Stefano Mimbelli* had tonnages of 82, 96 and 132 Russian last, respectively. However, the newspaper *Announcements of the Kerch–Yenikolsk City Administration* reported that *Balthasar Stefano Mimbelli* had a tonnage of 132 Russian last in 1858, while in 1859, 1861 and 1862, the tonnage ranged from 175 to 179½ Russian last. The tonnage of *Katerina Mimbelli* also varied, recorded as 176¼ Russian last. In contrast, comparing the tonnages of other Mimbelli ships, such as *Calinius*, *Padre Mimbelli* and *Fratelli Mimbelli*, with the newspaper's data, the values largely align. Since ships flying the Russian flag were measured in Russian last and different sources provide varying figures, the table presents the tonnage of the vessels in metric tonnes based on Vekarić's study. See: V. Mel'nickij, *Русский коммерческий флот по 1-е января 1858 года* [*Russian Commercial Fleet to 1st January 1858*] (St Petersburg, 1859), 29–30; *Объявления Керч-Еникальскаго градоначальства (Kerch)* [*Announcements of the Kerch–Yenikolsk City Administration*], 29 June 1858, 2 August 1859, 25 October 1859, 28 May 1861, 1 October 1861, 4 March 1862, 11 March 1862; Vekarić, *Pejkeški Jedrenjaci*, 276.

decision-making and course adjustments for the ships. The family dynamics suggest that Austrian subjects did not integrate into the local population in the first half of the nineteenth century, but instead continued to marry within their own community. Their strategy appears to have been to establish familial ties with other maritime families from their place of origin and to reinvest part of their profits in jointly constructing new vessels.

It is essential to examine the shipping routes of the Mimbelli in 1836 in order to determine the reasons for their success. The *Panselinos* commenced its voyage on 6 January from Constantinople, following this route: Livorno–Fiume–Sabbioncello–Ragusa–Constantinople–Kerch–Mariupol–Kerch–Constantinople–Kerch–Mariupol–Kerch–Constantinople–Livorno–Marseille.⁸⁶ The vessel arrived in Livorno on 13 January 1837, having sustained significant damage.⁸⁷ The sea route of the *Flori* was as follows: Livorno–Constantinople–Theodosia–Kerch–Mariupol–Kerch–Constantinople–Marseille–Livorno–Constantinople–Odessa–Kerch–Mariupol–Kerch–Constantinople–Livorno–Marseille.⁸⁸

The Mimbellis' primary objective was to reach the Azov Sea as quickly as possible, often placing their vessels at risk, as the Kerch Strait and port remained partially icebound until March.⁸⁹ For instance, on 9 March 1836, the *Flori* arrived in Kerch. Overnight, a westerly wind caused the ice to detach from the shoreline. Captain Mimbelli assessed the situation and navigated towards Yeni-Kale to prevent a collision. The following day, Kerch harbour was ice free, and the ship returned undamaged.⁹⁰ The Mimbellis' vessels continued to take such risks, frequently arriving among the first. Even when they started outsourcing management, they still maintained this approach; for example, on 2 March 1859, the *Balthasar Stefano Mimbelli* was among the first 10 ships,⁹¹ as well as the *Meotide* on 21 February 1839.⁹² This tactic aligned with the Mimbellis' strategy of maximising voyages to Mariupol to expedite loading and selling export goods.

From 1834, ships bound for the Sea of Azov were subject to compulsory quarantine in Kerch, resulting in long queues for inspection before the quarantine period began.⁹³ In spring, 20–30 ships were recorded daily, with all crew members undergoing examination.

86. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 4 February 1836, 6 March 1836, 31 March 1836, 24 April 1836, 12 May 1836, 26 June 1836, 21 July 1836, 7 August 1836, 18 September 1836, 9 October 1836, 22 December 1836.

87. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 19 January 1837.

88. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 21 January 1836, 28 January 1836, 3 March 1836, 20 March 1836, 31 March 1836, 7 April 1836, 26 May 1836, 29 May 1836, 2 June 1836, 12 June 1836, 26 June 1836, 14 August 1836, 21 August 1836, 18 September 1836, 27 October 1836, 10 November 1836, 24 November 1836.

89. For more about the role of the Kerch port and straits, see Anna Sydorenko, 'Controlling the Straits: The Development of the Port of Kerch' in Gelina Harlaftis, Victoria Konstantinova, Igor Lyman, Anna Sydorenko and Eka Tchikoidze (eds), *Between Grain and Oil from the Azov to the Caucasus: The Port-cities of the Eastern Coast of the Black Sea, Late 18th–Early 20th Century*, Black Sea History Working Papers, vol. III (Rethymnon, 2020), 105–38.

90. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 10 April 1836.

91. *Announcements of the Kerch-Yenikolsk City Administration* (Kerch), 8 March 1859.

92. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 21 April 1839.

93. *Complete collection of laws ...*, Col. 2, No. 6763, vol. 9.

This provided a further incentive for the Mimbellis to reach Kerch swiftly, aiming to be among the first to proceed to Mariupol. During the first half of the nineteenth century, quarantine lasted between 14 and 28 days, extending to 60 in cases of infection.⁹⁴ For example, in 1837, the *Flori* underwent 23 days of quarantine from 16 March to 7 April before departing for Mariupol on 8 April.⁹⁵

The *Flori*'s itinerary in 1836 exemplified the Mimbellis' shipping patterns in the mid-1830s. Their vessels wintered in the Mediterranean (Marseille, Livorno) or Adriatic (Trieste, Fiume, Sabbioncello, Ragusa), sailing to Constantinople in January, sometimes with cargo, and onward to Kerch in March, occasionally via Feodosia or Odessa. Quarantine in these ports shortened the Kerch quarantine and facilitated the sale of imported goods. After quarantine, ships proceeded to Mariupol, loaded cargo and returned via Kerch and Constantinople to Marseille or Livorno, where they sought to sell commodities at a profit if not pre-freighted. In 1836, Captain Mimbelli, unable to sell grain profitably in Marseille, proceeded to Livorno instead.⁹⁶ From there, he sailed in ballast to Constantinople⁹⁷ before retracing his route, substituting Odessa for Feodosia. This strategy enabled two Azov entries to acquire and sell goods in key grain transshipment ports – Livorno, and Marseille.⁹⁸ Following England's 1828 Corn Laws, selling grain from Mariupol and other Azov and Black Sea ports to storage hubs became faster and more lucrative. During tariff reductions, grain moved rapidly from Livorno and Marseille, generating substantial profits for trading houses.⁹⁹

The Mimbellis' ships frequently called at Fiume,¹⁰⁰ Ragusa¹⁰¹ and Sabbioncello, as evidenced by the *Panselinos*' 1836 route. This served multiple purposes. Firstly, stopping at Sabbioncello enabled captains and crew, primarily natives of the Peljesac Peninsula, to visit relatives and deliver essential documents and messages from shipowners.¹⁰² Secondly, Mimbelli commissioned ships from the Fiume shipyard, suggesting that *Panselinos* may have docked there for discussions. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Fiume shipbuilding was considered highly cost-effective, attracting Adriatic shipowners.¹⁰³

In 1838, two new vessels, the *Meotide* and *Fortunata Chelli*, were launched in Fiume (see Table 2). Both featured impressive load capacities of 500 and 492 tonnes, respectively. Typically, after a new ship was commissioned, one of the Mimbelli brothers assumed command. For instance, in 1838, Pilcovich became captain of *Panselinos*, while Mimbelli took charge of *Fortunata Chelli*.¹⁰⁴ Following the launch of the

94. *Complete collection of laws ...*, Col. 2, No. 5690, vol.7; No. 14614, vol. 16; No. 23283, vol. 24.

95. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 11 April 1837, 9 May 1837.

96. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 12 June 1836.

97. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 30 June 1836.

98. Volskij, *Outline of the History of Grain Trade*, 87.

99. Volskij, *Outline of the History of Grain Trade*, 108.

100. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 26 December 1835, 31 March 1836, 25 August 1840.

101. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 31 March 1836, 2 December 1841, 3 April 1842.

102. Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 178.

103. Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 82.

104. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 18 December 1838.

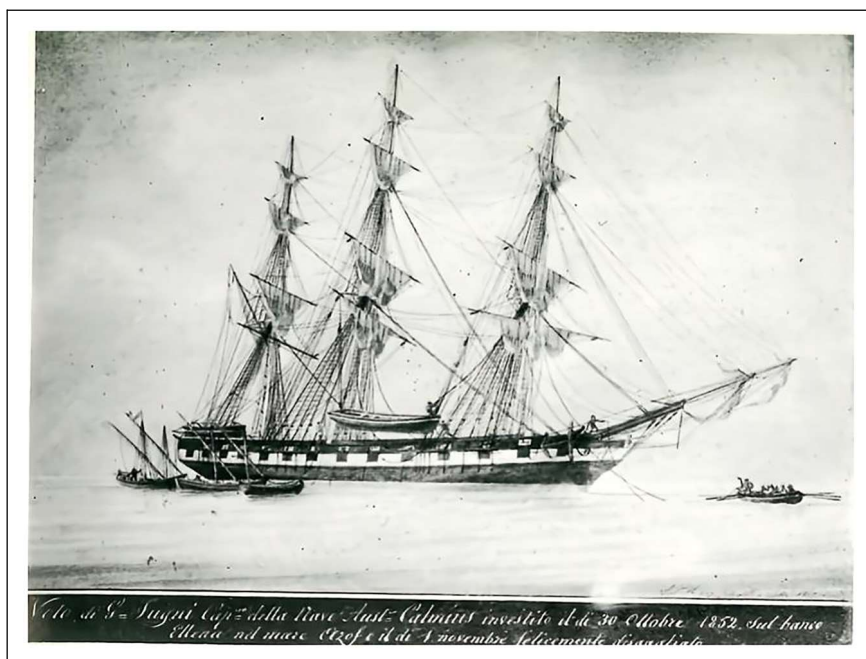


Figure 4. Painting, *The Grounding of the Austrian Ship Calmius in the Sea of Azov, 1852*, watercolour on paper by Antoine Roux.

Source: *Ex voto Marinari del Santuario di Montenero* (Livorno, 1984), 95.

Calmius (562 tonnes) in 1840, Stepan Mimbelli became its captain. Built in Fiume and registered in Trieste, it was among the largest and finest ships in the Austrian merchant marine at the time (see Figure 4). Giuseppe Sugni, who joined *Calmius* as a cadet in 1840, admired its design and modern stern superstructure, which housed cabins decorated with American wood.¹⁰⁵ For over 5 years, *Calmius* was the largest Austrian-flagged vessel to dock at Mariupol.¹⁰⁶ However, in 1847, the Mimbelli brothers acquired two even larger ships in partnership: the *Diletta Mimbelli* (610 tonnes) and the *Madre* (647 tonnes).¹⁰⁷

During the first decade of grain trading in Mariupol, the Mimbelli brothers achieved substantial profits, enabling them to expand their fleet from two to seven ships. Several factors contributed to their success. Firstly, grain was a highly demanded commodity in Europe, ensuring a stable income. Secondly, they established a commercial enterprise in Mariupol, where competition remained minimal. Residing in the city granted them direct access to the local grain market, including high-quality wheat *arnautka*, allowing purchases at favourable prices. Additionally, as both shipowners and captains, they maximised efficiency, generated additional income and closely

105. Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 89.

106. Data processed from *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 1840–1844.

107. *Annuario Marittimo Del Lloyd Austriaco per il 1848* (Trieste, 1848), 40–41, 46–47.

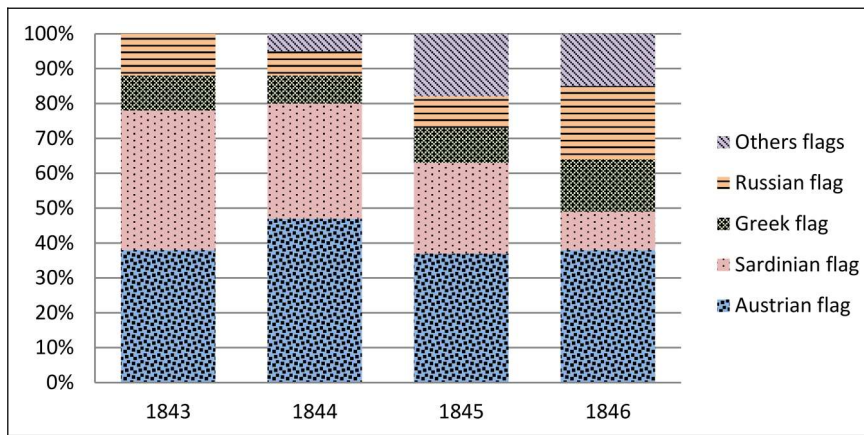


Figure 5. Percentage distribution of vessels by country calling at the port of Mariupol, 1843–1846. Most of the vessels under the Russian flag, as well as Ottoman and Ionian, before the Crimean War were Greek owned, in the sense proposed by Gelina Harlaftis, for more see: Harlaftis, *A History of Greek-owned Shipping*, 27. However, the Mimbelli family of shipowners also operated under the Russian flag; for instance, their brig *Azoff* sailed under it. Notably, before the Crimean War, this was their only vessel flying the Russian flag. However, from the 1860s onwards, they increasingly adopted it. Considering this, the percentage of Greek-owned ships would be as follows: 22% in 1843, 17% in 1844, 21% in 1845 and 46% in 1846.

Sources: *The State Foreign Trade in its Various Forms for the Year 1843 (1844–1846)*, tables XXII and XXVI.

monitored market conditions. Analysis of their shipping routes indicates stability until 1842, with biannual voyages to Mariupol and deliveries to Livorno and Marseille. Another strategic decision was reinvesting profits into new vessels, designed to increase export capacity. Furthermore, their coordinated navigation through shallow and hazardous areas, particularly the Azov Sea,¹⁰⁸ enhanced safety and efficiency. A distinctive feature of the Mimbellis' operations was the synchronised departure of multiple ships from Constantinople, their near-simultaneous arrival in Kerch and subsequent passage to Mariupol.¹⁰⁹ Lastly, their collaboration with other Peljesac Peninsula shipowners played a crucial role in their sustained success.

Between 1843 and 1846, Austrian-flagged ships accounted for 37–47% of the total merchant vessels entering the port of Mariupol (see Figure 5). In contrast, in Berdyansk – another port on the Sea of Azov and the closest to Mariupol, the share of

108. For more about the peculiarities and dangers of the routes to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov see Apostolos Delis, 'Navigating Perilous Waters: Routes and Hazards of the Voyages to Black Sea in the Nineteenth Century', in Maria Christina Chatzioannou and Apostolos Delis (eds), *Linkages of the Black Sea with the West. Trade and immigration*. Black Sea History Working Papers, 7 (2020), 2–33.

109. For example, on 28 April 1841, five Mimbelli ships simultaneously sailed from Kerch to Mariupol, and on 29 July the same year, six ships simultaneously arrived in Constantinople, see *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 27 May 1841, 22 August 1841.

Austrian ships in trade was significantly lower: 11% in 1843,¹¹⁰ 22% in 1844,¹¹¹ 31% in 1845¹¹² and 12% in 1846.¹¹³ A comparison of these figures suggests that Austrian subjects in Berdyansk had not yet established trading companies or secured grain supplies.

The trade analysis indicates that in 1844, of 27 Austrian ships operating through Mariupol, 44% were owned by individuals from the Peljesac Peninsula: 22% by the Mimbelli brothers and their partners – the Chersa and Sgiuppa families, 19% by S. Flori, and 4% by the Copsich and Boghich families. Seven per cent belonged to N. Sevastopulo, a representative of Greek international commercial networks.¹¹⁴ The remaining 49% of owners, based on their surnames, probably resided on the Adriatic coast and were not Austrian by birth. Fiume was the principal shipbuilding centre for Austrian-registered vessels trading on the Azov coast. In 1844, 45% of ships arriving in Mariupol were built in Fiume, 19% in Venice and 19% in Trieste.

In 1844, 22% of ships entering Mariupol twice, in spring and autumn, belonged to the Mimbelli, Chersa, Copsich, Boghich and Flori families. The established grain supply and the presence of Mimbelli merchant houses in the city facilitated increased trade by Peljesac inhabitants through Mariupol. Among vessels calling at Mariupol once a year, seasonal trade distribution was 26% in spring, 22% in summer and 30% in autumn.¹¹⁵ Including ships visiting twice, the busiest periods were autumn, coinciding with the new grain harvest, and spring. The average tonnage of Austrian vessels in 1844 indicates that the Mimbelli brothers significantly outperformed competitors. Their ships averaged 445 tonnes, compared to 337 tonnes for S. Flori and 274 tonnes for other owners. Additionally, the average age of the Mimbellis' vessels was lower, at 8 years, compared with 13 years for S. Flori.¹¹⁶ These advantages enabled the Mimbelli brothers to expand their fleet and dominate the grain trade successfully.

110. *The State Foreign Trade in its Various Forms for the Year 1843* (St Petersburg, 1844), table XXII.

111. *The State Foreign Trade in its Various Forms for the Year 1844* (St Petersburg, 1845), table XXII.

112. *The State Foreign Trade in its Various Forms for the Year 1845* (St Petersburg, 1846), table XXII.

113. *The State Foreign Trade in its Various Forms for the Year 1846* (St Petersburg, 1847), table XXVI.

114. Harlaftis, *A History of Greek-owned Shipping*, 50.

115. Calculation on the basis of shipping routes from *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 5 March 1844, 9 March 1844, 19 March 1844, 6 April 1844, 16 April 1844, 20 April 1844, 4 May 1844, 7 May 1844, 16 May 1844, 18 May 1844, 19 May 1844, 20 May 1844, 30 May 1844, 1 June 1844, 4 June 1844, 13 June 1844, 18 June 1844, 20 June 1844, 22 June 1844, 25 June 1844, 11 July 1844, 12 July 1844, 16 July 1844, 18 July 1844, 15 August 1844, 17 August 1844, 20 August 1844, 22 August 1844, 29 August 1844, 31 August 1844, 5 September 1844, 12 September 1844, 17 September 1844, 21 September 1844, 26 September 1844, 3 October 1844, 8 October 1844, 10 October 1844, 22 October 1844, 26 October 1844, 31 October 1844, 5 November 1844, 16 November 1844, 19 November 1844.

116. Data processed from *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 1844.

Broadening commercial routes and internal–external cooperation

The Mimbellis sought to increase grain sale profitability by exploring new markets. In winter 1842–43, Stefano Mimbelli sailed the *Calmius* to Malta and then Algeria instead of selling grain in Livorno or Marseille, aiming for higher profits.¹¹⁷ His expectations were met, and the grain was sold at a favourable price in Oran before being unloaded in Mers el-Kebir.¹¹⁸ On the return journey, the vessel called at Malta, acquiring copper for future sale.¹¹⁹ In autumn, the Mimbellis delivered another grain cargo to Orano, after which the ship sailed to Alexandria.¹²⁰ Notably, Stefano Mimbelli personally tested this new route on the *Calmius*, and by December 1843, the *Flori* also sailed to Orano.¹²¹ Other Mimbelli ships maintained regular routes that year. In subsequent years, additional vessels, including the *Fortunata Chelli* in 1844¹²² and *Panselinos* in 1845, were dispatched to Orano.¹²³

The Mimbelli and Flori families were the first Austrian shipowners to intensify grain exports, loading three times a year in Mariupol, Odessa and Kerch. The *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* highlighted the success of the *Flori*, *Panselinos* and *Io*, hoping to encourage other Austrian shipowners to trade through the Azov ports.¹²⁴ In January 1843, the *Panselinos* took 37 days to travel from Constantinople to Kerch and complete quarantine. Over the next 21 days, it reached Mariupol, loaded cargo and returned to Kerch. The vessel then sailed to Constantinople in 5 days and reached Marseille in 3. Thus, the round trip from Constantinople to Mariupol lasted 63 days, with 59% spent on the journey to Kerch and quarantine. Given that the average voyage from Constantinople to Kerch took 5 days, approximately 51% of the time was spent in quarantine. The duration of the voyage from Constantinople to Marseille took 29 days, less than the quarantine period.¹²⁵ On a second voyage from Marseille to Mariupol, the *Panselinos* spent 28 days on quarantine and sailing from Kerch to Mariupol, while the return journey from Constantinople to Livorno took 23 days.¹²⁶ Concluding its second full voyage on 14 September, the vessel completed a third trip to Kerch and transported another cargo.

The *Flori* first voyaged to Odessa, taking 28 days from Livorno to Constantinople and another 22 to Odessa. Its second journey from Marseille to Mariupol was nearly

117. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 6 December 1842, 16 February 1843.

118. Mers El-Kebir is a port situated in close proximity to Oran, Algeria. Maritime Museum of Orebic, *Diary of Captain Joso Sugni* (*Šunj*), 125.

119. *Diary of Captain Joso Sugni* (*Šunj*), 126.

120. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 30 September 1843, 23 November 1843.

121. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 28 December 1843.

122. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 18 July 1844.

123. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 17 July 1845.

124. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 17 February 1844.

125. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 14 May 1844, 3 June 1844.

126. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 5 September 1844, 23 September 1844. For more about lengths of other routes from the Black and Azov Sea ports see Delis, 'Navigating Perilous Waters', 21.

simultaneous with the *Io*. Although the *Flori* departed Marseille a day earlier, both reached Kerch on the same day, spending 22 and 21 days, respectively.¹²⁷ Their third voyage from Marseille to Kerch lasted 31 days (see Table 3). This time, all three vessels did not call at Mariupol, loading grain in Kerch instead. Two factors enabled this: unusually warm spring and autumn weather, which extended Mariupol's port operations by 15% compared with the previous year (see Table 4), a phenomenon recorded only in 1850 and 1853, and the introduction of the *Additional Regulation for the Kerch Main Quarantine*. This regulation permitted cargo from Azov ports to be transferred directly from cabotage vessels to foreign ships within the quarantine zone.¹²⁸ The absence of ice in the Sea of Azov, combined with these new regulations, allowed goods to be shipped to Kerch in late autumn 1843. That year, Luca Mimbelli and *Mimbelli Brothers* accounted for 22 and 19%, respectively, of Mariupol's total exports, or 41% in total. This figure was significantly higher than their average share of 25% in the port's export trade during the period from 1838 to 1858. The 1843 figure of 41% was exceeded by approximately 2% only in the year 1850 (see Figure 6).

In 1844, Mimbelli expanded trade routes further, sending *Venoge* and *Panselinos* to Naples.¹²⁹ In 1845, *Panselinos* departed from Trieste.¹³⁰ The most significant shift occurred in 1846 when England repealed the Corn Laws and introduced the Importation Act, imposing a uniform grain tariff. Amid Ireland's Great Famine (1845), Mimbelli dispatched a vessel to Cork in 1846,¹³¹ followed by *Calmius* in 1847.¹³² Their ships later reached Cardiff, London and Newcastle. Direct shipments to Britain and Ireland were highly profitable owing to significantly higher grain prices there. In 1853, wheat cost 57.7 kopecks of silver per *pood*¹³³ in Odessa but 120.9 in London.¹³⁴ Ships returned carrying coal to Livorno, Constantinople or Azov ports.

In the 1850s, the Mimbellis' ships began sailing to the shores of Southeast Asia with the aim of expanding profits. In November 1850, the vessel *Padre Mimbelli* departed from Marseille for the island of Sumatra to purchase black pepper. Instead of ballast, the ship was loaded with 300 tonnes of salt, which was in demand in the region.¹³⁵ The voyage to the island took 4 months. Owing to a poor harvest, the captain was unable to quickly procure the required quantity of pepper, and the vessel remained on the island until August 1851, when the 674 ton *Padre Mimbelli* was fully loaded with pepper, sugar, rice and other goods. On 3 January 1852, the vessel arrived in

127. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 15 June 1843, 22 July 1843.

128. The *Additional Regulations* ... stipulated that the transfer of goods from a cabotage ship to a merchant vessel was 'at the discretion of the highest local authority' (author's translation). This provision enabled the quarantine authorities to control the number of vessels permitted to engage in such transfers. See *Complete Collection of Laws* ..., Col. 2, No. 14615, vol. 16.

129. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 1 August 1844, 6 July 1844, 25 July 1844.

130. *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 6 March 1845.

131. Maritime Museum of Orebic, *Diary of Captain Joso Sugni (Šunj)*, 128.

132. *Lloyd's Register of British and Foreign Shipping. From 1st July, 1847, to the 30th June 1848* (London, 1847), 141.

133. 1 *pood* is equivalent to 16.38 kilos.

134. Zolotov, *Foreign Trade of Southern Russia*, 60.

135. Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 150.

Table 3. Distribution of time employed on each leg in the route Marseille – Kerch, 1843.

	Days in total	Up to Constantinople	Percentage of the total voyage	Stay in Constantinople	Percentage of the total voyage	Constantinople – Kerch	Percentage of the total voyage
Marseille–Kerch, pol. <i>Flori</i> (June)	21	14	66.7	2	9.5	5	23.8
Marseille–Kerch, brig. <i>Io</i> (mid September–mid October)	31	24	77.4	2	6.5	5	16.1
Marseille–Kerch, pol. <i>Flori</i> (mid September – mid October)	31	24	77.4	2	6.5	5	16.1

Source: Processed data from *Giornale del Lloyd Austriaco* (Trieste), 1844.

Table 4. Opening and closing of the port of Mariupol, 1838–1853.

Year	First ship to arrive	Last ship to depart	Percentage of year the port was closed	Year	First ship to arrive	Last ship to depart	Percentage of year the port was closed
1838	4 April	7 November	41	1846	19 March	6 November	36
1839	4 April	3 November	42	1847	25 March	29 October	40
1840	17 April	4 November	45	1848	22 March	19 October	42
1841	17 April	29 October	46	1849	8 April	14 October	48
1842	25 March	12 October	44	1850	9 April	19 November	39
1843	2 March	14 November	29	1851	28 March	31 October	40
1844	11 March	31 October	36	1852	29 March	30 October	41
1845	6 April	28 October	44	1853	6 March	19 November	29

Source: *The State Foreign Trade of 1838–1841 in its Various Forms*, table XXIII; *The State Foreign Trade in its Various Forms for the Year 1842–1853*, tables XXIX, XXXIII, XXXVII.

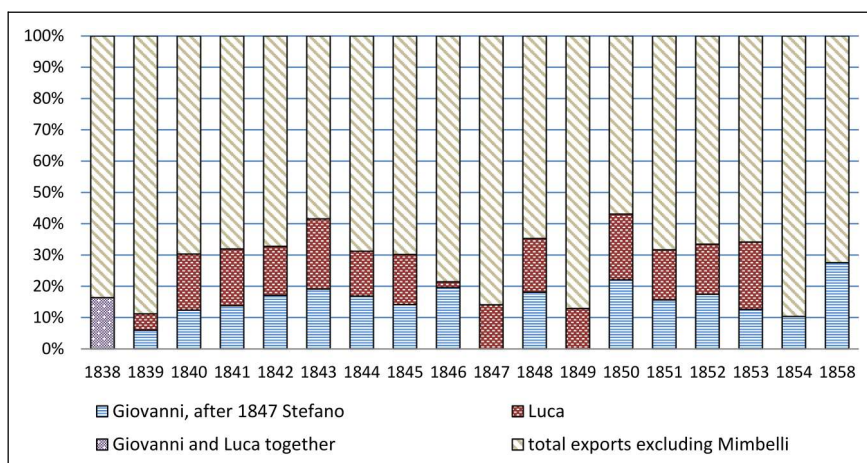


Figure 6. The Mimbelli share of total exports through the port of Mariupol, 1838–1858.

According to Russian statistical reports, in 1853 Giovanni was trading in Mariupol and Yeisk.

Source: *The State Foreign Trade of 1838 (1839–1841) in its Various Forms*, tables XXVIII; *The State Foreign Trade in its Various Forms for the Year 1842 (1843–1854, 1858)*, tables XXXVIII, XLII and XLIII.

Marseille.¹³⁶ It can be assumed that, despite the long voyage to Sumatra, the journey was profitable, as the same vessel was sent to Sumatra again in 1854.¹³⁷

After the first decade of the Mimbelli activities, family members gradually changed their place of residence, thereby expanding the family's presence in various ports. In the early 1840s, Giovanni, one of the founders of *Mimbelli Brothers*, purchased a house in Livorno, where he eventually relocated. Russian records from 1847 list Stefano Mimbelli, rather than Giovanni, as the head of their trading house in Mariupol. In 1851, Luca Mimbelli moved to Livorno, where he established a merchant house.¹³⁸ The last recorded instance of Luca's trade through the port of Mariupol dates to 1853.

The years 1852 and 1853 proved to be significantly more successful for the Mimbelli family compared with the preceding period. In 1853, the volume of trade conducted by Luca Mimbelli through the Mariupol port reached a record high of 657,894 rubles, representing a 705% increase relative to 1851. The *Mimbelli Brothers* increased their trade turnover by 241% in 1852 and by 382% in 1853 compared with the same baseline year (see Figure 7). This substantial rise was primarily driven by the elevated demand for grain in Western Europe, consequent to the failure of the crop.¹³⁹ The commercial success enabled them to commission the construction of two long-distance vessels, which were completed in 1854. Among 36 long-distance and coastal ships built at

136. Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 218–19.

137. Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 142.

138. Vekarić, *Pelješki Rodovi L–Z*, 81.

139. Zolotov, *Foreign Trade of Southern Russia*, 58.

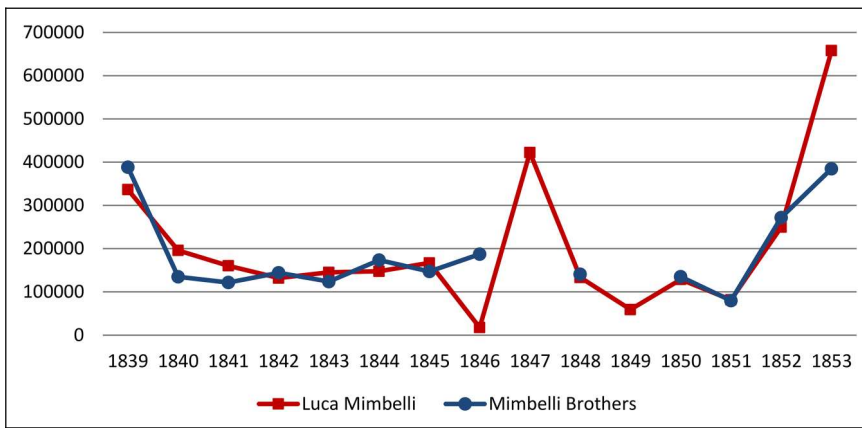


Figure 7. Dynamics of foreign export trade of Luca Mimbelli and 'Mimbelli Brothers' in rubles, 1839–1853 (there is no information on the volume of the export trade of the *Mimbelli Brothers* in 1847 and 1849).

Source: *The State Foreign Trade of 1839 (1840–1841) in its Various Forms*, tables XXVIII; *The State Foreign Trade in its Various Forms for the Year 1842 (1843–1854, 1858)*, tables XXXVIII, XLII and XLIII.

Austrian shipyards that year, two belonged to Mimbelli – *Cognate Mimbelli* and *Fratelli Mimbelli* (see Figure 8). While the average tonnage of vessels built was 531.6 tonnes, the Mimbelli ships were the largest at 767 and 757 tonnes, respectively.¹⁴⁰ During the Crimean War, the Mimbellis lost property, including *Azoff*, which flew the Russian flag.¹⁴¹ From 1855, only Stefano Mimbelli officially resided in Mariupol, while Antonio lived in Orebic and Luca in Livorno.¹⁴² After Luca's relocation, ship ownership changed between him and S. Chersa, N. Chersa and S. Fiscovich. *Meotide* and *Diletta Mimbelli* became wholly owned by Luca, while the Chersa family took ownership of *Venoge*.¹⁴³ The Chersas continued cooperating with *Mimbelli Brothers* in Mariupol, and their ship exported commodities ordered by Mimbelli.¹⁴⁴

Back in 1858, there were only three long-distance ships registered in the port of Mariupol. They all belonged to Stefano Mimbelli and sailed under the Russian flag (see Table 2). To save money on transport, the Mimbelli brothers got some cabotage ships to handle delivery and transshipment of cargo. In 1858, eight cabotage vessels were assigned to the port, accounting for 20.5% of the total number of cabotage ships in Mariupol.¹⁴⁵

140. *Annuario Marittimo Del Lloyd Austriaco per il 1855* (Trieste, 1855), 204.

141. *Il Diavoletto: Giornale Triestino*, 20 January 1858; Vekarić, *Pelješki Jedrenjaci*, 256, 272.

142. *Annuario Marittimo Del Lloyd Austriaco per il 1855* (Trieste, 1855), 97.

143. *Annuario Marittimo Del Lloyd Austriaco per il 1854* (Trieste, 1854), 103, 130, 166.

144. *Announcements of the Kerch–Yenikolsk City Administration (Kerch)*, 1 June 1858.

145. V. Mel'nickij, *Russian Commercial Fleet to 1st January 1858*, 30. The total tonnage of the eight cabotage ships was 135.25 Russian last, equivalent to 270.5 English registered tons. For further details on the conversion of Russian last to English registered tons, see: Anna

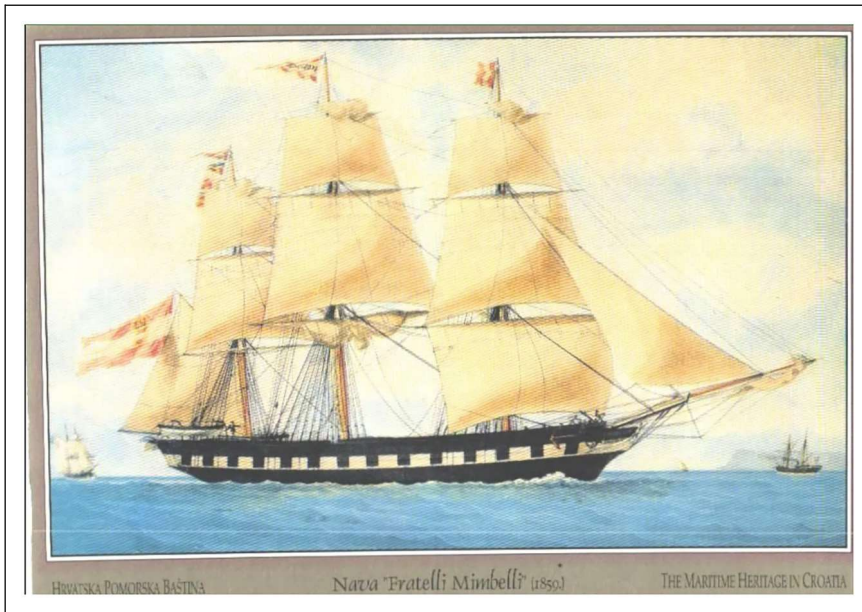


Figure 8. Postcard depiction of the sailing ship *Fratelli Mimbelli* (1859), from the series *The Maritime Heritage in Croatia*. Published in Croatia, probably by a cultural heritage institution, late Twentieth century.

The Mimbellis' relationship with the local populace was both collaborative and violent. Merchants sometimes decided who to hire for transportation and other tasks. However, the Greeks held the exclusive prerogative to organise the supply of goods and deliver them to the port. This led to conflicts between the Mariupol community and the merchants. The Greeks complained to the authorities about violations of their rights by foreign merchants.¹⁴⁶ Conversely, the Austrian consul, in his reports, highlighted the arbitrary nature of the Greeks' demands for additional commissions from foreign merchants.¹⁴⁷ Yet, the Greeks not only engaged in conflicts but also cooperated with foreigners, including the Mimbellis. The Mariupol merchant Chebanenko used

Sydorenko, *Οι πόλεις-λιμάνια της Κριμαίας: δημιουργία, δυναμική και προσαρμογή. Από τον Κριμαϊκό πόλεμο έως την Ρωσική Επανάσταση* [*The Port Cities of Crimea: Creation, Dynamics, and Adaptation. From the Crimean War to the Russian Revolution*] (Crete, in press, 2025).

146. See, for example, the complaint filed by the Greek community of Mariupol against Stefano Mimbelli, DAOO, fond 1, opis' 197, sprava 542.

147. 'Geschichtliche und statistische Notizen über den District von Mariupol am Azow'schen Meere nach einem Berichte der k. k. General-Agentie in Mariupol' in *Mittheilungen über Handel, Gewerbe und Verkehrsmittel sowie aus dem Gebiete der Statistik überhaupt nach Berichten an das K.K. Handels-Ministerium* (Wien, 1851), 229.

Mimbelli vessels to transport cargo to European ports.¹⁴⁸ For instance, in 1858, the *Panselinos* delivered furniture to Chebanenko in Mariupol, and in 1859, the *Diletta Mimbelli* transported cargo from Mariupol on behalf of the Greek merchant.¹⁴⁹ Among Chebanenko's other reliable partners were the Tuscans, with whom the Mimbelli family also collaborated. In 1858, Stefano Mimbelli became the Tuscan consul in Mariupol.¹⁵⁰ The Mimbelli family also cooperated with Greek merchants who had trading houses in both the Azov and Black Sea ports and the Mediterranean. An example of such cooperation was the shipment of commodities for one of the principal Greek merchant houses, Rodocanachi & Co. In 1845, the Mimbelli vessels *Flori*, *Calmius* and *Venoge* transported 2050 quarters of flax, 7145 quarters of wheat and other goods to Marseille.¹⁵¹

Conclusion

Until 1859, the city's Greek population actively developed the port of Mariupol. The Greeks cultivated some of the export grain and organised the transportation and delivery of goods from the hinterland to the port, while foreign merchants managed the export and shipping of commodities. Local merchants lacked the financial resources to engage in international trade and foreigners filled this gap. Austrian subjects were among the most active owners of merchant houses, facilitating Mariupol's integration into the global grain market and contributing to the city's economic growth. The Mimbelli family's share of export trade averaged 25%, peaking at 42% of total exports through Mariupol's port. The unique conditions of conducting commerce on the Sea of Azov coast made them simultaneously merchants and international carriers, enabling them to earn stable profits and expand. They achieved a gradual growth of their enterprise and merchant fleet by balancing guaranteed profits from bulk cargo transportation and grain trade with the risks of exploring new routes to generate higher returns. To expand their fleet, the Mimbellis occasionally involved close and distant relatives in the ownership of vessels. Crews primarily comprised individuals from the Peljesac peninsula, while captains were typically either relatives or residents of the region. Thus, their networks were founded on kinship and shared historical and cultural ties. These strategic decisions contributed to the successful development of their merchant houses, establishing them as leading figures in Mariupol's maritime trade and key intermediaries connecting the port to global markets.

Following the designation of Mariupol as an 'open' city in 1859, which granted newcomers the possibility of obtaining residency, the city experienced a sharp demographic

148. In census documents (*revizskie skazki*) dated 1816 the last name of this family is mentioned as 'Krymli Mirzov' (or 'Krymli Mirza'), but in 1835 a note 'also known as Chebanenko' was added. *Revizskie skazki* of Mariupol from various years are available online: <https://www.azovgreeks.com/> (last accessed 25 February 2025).

149. *Announcements of the Kerch–Yenikolsk City Administration* (Kerch), 26 October 1858, 23 August 1859.

150. *Il Diavoletto: Giornale Triestino*, 22 February 1858.

151. Data processed from the database 'Le Sémaphore de Marseille' created from the newspaper *Le Sémaphore de Marseille* by Gelina Harlaftis and Apostolos Delis and kindly provided to the author.

surge. This transformation had far-reaching implications, not only altering the ethnic and demographic structure of the population, but also reshaping the logistics of supply and storage, and intensifying the city's commercial and competitive landscape. Further research will examine shifts in trade patterns through the port of Mariupol after 1859, with particular attention to the comparative strategies of Austrian, Greek, and Italian merchants operating in the city under both its 'closed' and 'open' status.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The article was written within the project 'Becoming Greek South of Ukraine, 1774–2021: The History of Ukraine through its Greek Minority Between Local and Transnational Contexts' (UAGREEKS). This project received funding through the MSCA4Ukraine project, which is funded by the European Union (grant number 1233124), HORIZON EUROPE Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.

ORCID iD

Svitlana Arabadzhy  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4214-450X>

Author biography

Svitlana Arabadzhy is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History at the University of Oslo and an Associate Professor in the Department of History and Archaeology at Mariupol State University. Her research focuses on the Greek minority in Ukraine, migration, maritime economic and social history, and port history, with particular attention to the Azov and Black Sea region.