

The Prominent Altinalmazis Family of Adrianople

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Abstract: The present study is about the history of the powerful, patriarchal family of the industry owners Altinalmazis. It refers to the origin of their name and the first references to members of the family, during the Greek Revolution of 1821, mainly in Adrianople. It records the Altinalmazis, who excelled in the city's economic, political, cultural and philanthropic life during the 19th century until the early 20th century.

After the Asia Minor catastrophe, in 1922, the Altinalmazis are recorded, as refugees, to transfer their action and businesses to New Orestiada and especially to Alexandroupoli. Their high educational and economic level, their important charities and businesses and their service as mayors and powerful political factors of the area, during the critical political and historical events of their time are documented.

It ends to the latest reference to the name of Altinalmazis, since no known descendant of the family is now alive in Alexandroupoli, where they mostly lived.

Key words: Altinalmazis family, Adrianople, Nea Orestiada, Alexandroupoli, industrialists, mayors

1. Introduction

Orestiada is a city built in 1923, after the Asia Minor catastrophe, 18 kilometers south of Adrianople, entirely by Greek refugees, who took refuge in Karagats, in a rural, uninhabited area, on the west bank of the Evros river, where the railway station of Adrianople was located. They built a new city, which they named Nea Orestiada, to remind them of the old Orestiada (Karagats) (Kourtidou, 1928; Album Thrace Macedonia, 1932).

Adrianople, a city with a rich history, was the capital of the homonymous vilayet of Turkey, with a multinational and multicultural character and with the Greeks having more power and influence over the others. The city had a leading presence in the region, in trade and economic life as well as in education and culture (Gonatas, 1956).

Stylianos Gonatas, a military man, a politician and later a prime minister of Greece, was in Adrianople during the Macedonian Struggle in 1907–1908 and wrote about Karagats, the suburb of Adrianople where the inhabitants of New Orestiada came from. He wrote that it was three quarters of an hour away from the city and that it was its international, aristocratic center, analogous to Kifissia for Athens. He also refers to the number of Greek schools and boarding schools in the area, which made Adrianople the culture center of Thrace (Gonatas, 1956).

Konstantinos Kourtidis, a doctor and a member of the Greek Parliament from the regional unit of Evros, was born in Adrianople in 1870 and wrote in 1944 that Adrianople was the second city in the Ottoman Empire and the capital of Thrace, with a population, at the end of the 19th century of 110,000 inhabitants, of which the 40–45,000

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were Turks, the 40,000 Greeks, the 15,000 Jews, the 5,000–6,000 Armenians, about 2,000 were Bulgarians and about 2,000 Europeans, employees of the Eastern Railways (Kourtidou, 1956).

The Greeks of Adrianople stood out for their culture and social status. For example, for many years after 1878, the chief of the police was Greek, the assistant and replacement of the Turkish Commander-in-Chief until the Balkan Wars was always Greek and also the official Prefectural newspaper was published in Turkish and in Greek. These facts testify to the power and the economic strength of the Greeks in the region. The Greeks were engaged in arts, trade and viticulture. Moreover, Greek people, well known for their wealth, owned important banks equal to those in Constantinople with which they had close cooperation and whose good reputation was recognized by foreign banks (Kourtidou, 1956).

The economic and educational conditions of the city, therefore, were the most favorable for the development of one of the most powerful families of Adrianople, the family of the Altinalmazis, a family of industrialists, especially rich and powerful, who excelled in the economic life of the whole district. Their business activities included flour mills, an ice house, distilleries and refrigerators. Prominent citizens of the region, with intense philanthropic activities, starred in the political and intellectual life of the region (Terzis, 1998).

2. Origin of the Family Name and Roots of the Family

There are various theories of the etymological origin of the last name Altinalmazis.

One theory associates it to the pride and the contempt for the money of a member of the Altinalmazis family, who didn't bend over to pick up a gold coin which once his friends threw on his way, in order to test his reaction. But he passed by the gold coin (altın in Turkish) and did not pick it up (almaz in Turkish).

S. Kargakos writes the name without the middle "I", as "Altinamazis" and mentions a similar theory, that the name derives from altın + amaz = he who cannot be bribed. He also makes reference to a completely different etymology, from altı + namaz = he who bends down (to the ground) and prays seven times (Kargakos, 2000).

Aivaliotis and Papazisis mention the theory that Altinalmazis was a cooking oil trader with great professional consistency. He himself said that he did not take (almam) the dregs from the bottom (altını) of the barrel, a fact that led to the creation of his nickname-surname (Aivaliotis Papazisis-Adamantidou, 2011).

The information about the roots of the Altinalmazis family, which comes from Adrianople and Ainos, go back to the time of the Greek Revolution of 1821, during which the family members made great sacrifices for the liberation struggle. Charalambos Altinalmazis, the patriarch of the family, was one of the chiefs who were hanged in Adrianople by the Ottomans, together with Patriarch Cyril, by decree of the Sultan, when the Greek Revolution broke out in 1821. The family also included Argyrios Altinalmazis, from Ainos, who was killed in the battle of Karystos, in 1826, fighting with Favier (Terzis, 1998).

3. Miltiadis, Petros and Emmanouel Altinalmazis

The presence of the Altinalmazis family as a multidimensional family became more pronounced in the second half of the 19th century, as evidenced by the archives of the famous Educational Association of Adrianople, which starred then in the national, cultural and charitable events of the city. In these archives we find information about the patriotic action of the Altinalmazis, their financial support of the Association with donations and their constant presence in public life, as Presidents of the Association, as indicated by the following (Melanidou, 1956; Terzis, 1998):

Adrianople's Educational Association
Chairmen of the Board of Directors
First period - Headquarters Adrianople
Emmanuel Altinalmazis, merchant, years 1872, 1873, 1874
Ioannis Emm. Altinalmazis, merchant, year 1877
Miltiadis Altinalmazis, banker, years 1906–1914
Second period - Headquarters Thessaloniki
Ioannis P. Altinalmazis, merchant, year 1925
Board of Directors of the Educational Association of Adrianople
Konstantinos Altinalmazis (Elections, 1919)
Donations to EAA years 1903–1909
Aristides Altinalmazis
Konstantinos Altinalmazis
Miltiadis Altinalmazis
Vassilios Altinalmazis
Emmanuel Altinalmazis.

Another prominent member of the family was Miltiadis Altinalmazis, who was born in Adrianople and developed intense political, cultural, economic and charitable action. In Adrianople, in the famous schools of the city began his education and in 1860 he went to Athens, where he studied law at the National University. Highly educated, jurist and multilingual, he offered great help to the Greek community of Adrianople, to which he returned after his studies. As an Elder and an Advisor of the General Administration of Adrianople, a position very important at the time, he helped poor Greek children to have access to higher education (Terzis, 1998).

At the same time, he was financially growing. He created a bank, an industry and model farms. For his work in the period 1903–1905 he was awarded the Mecidiye Medal of the 3rd class, which was an honorary distinction to important persons of the Ottoman Empire. He had his private library, very large and rich, with many rare books, which he donated to the High School of Alexandroupolis, after the Population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923. He died in 1924 (Terzis, 1998).

The holiday home of Miltiadis Altinalmazis, a beautiful stone built, neoclassical building of 1899, is located in Alexandroupoli and since 2002 houses the Ethnological Museum of Thrace, under the direction of Angeliki Giannakidou. It is a remarkable architectural example of its time, intertwined with the infrastructure projects of the settlement of Dedeagac, which was developing during that period. The house was sold by the widow of Miltiadis Altinalmazis, Zenovia in 1937, based on a dowry agreement, to the grandfather of Chrysoula Vassilios Zaferiadou, from Ortaxi, to whom it was given as a dowry. In 1998, the family of Polychronis Giannakidis leased it from the Papathanassiou family, to which it belongs today, and restored it with modern materials and equipment, in order to fully serve the requirements of the museological exhibition and operation (Ethnological Museum of Thrace, 2018).

Petros Altinalmazis, a businessman from Adrianople, was also a member of the Altinalmazis family, who owned a motorized flour mill and an ice house — refrigerator, at Vassileos Alexandrou Street (Ortaköy caddesi). His large mansion was located on the Karaağaç Caddesi, which led from the mill to the Railway Station. King Alexander of Greece stayed there, when he entered the city as a liberator in 1920, with the Treaty of Sevres. With the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 and the Population exchange between Greece and Turkey, Petros Altinalmazis,

having to leave Karagats, moved his business and relocated them in CumÇiflik (today's Nea Orestiada) (Ayvaliotis & Papazisis 2011).

The residence of the businessman Emmanuel Altinalmazis, grandfather of Emmanuel, who had settled permanently in Dedeagac before the Population exchange and had married the daughter of Ioannis Fimerelis, Myrsini, was also located on a street of Karagats (Terzis, 1998).

4. Ioannis, Aristeidis and Emmanouel Altinalmazis

In Adrianople, it is worth mentioning the Insurance Agency "London Ins Corp.", by Ioannis Altinalmazis, located on one of its main streets, Rustenpasattani Street. Besides, in the wider region of Adrianople were the large estates of the Altinalmazis family (Aivaliotis & Papazisis, 2011).

Among the memorable members of the family there is the militant Aristeidis Altinalmazis, who, after the formation of the Thracian Committee, was the first of the volunteer patriots to be initiated as a "brother" in the Committee of the Struggle of Adrianople (Terzis, 1998).

To the period of the Macedonian Struggle, in Adrianople, is also referred the personal testimony of Stylianos Gonatas, who was then an officer of the Greek army, in Adrianople, under the false name, Stergios Grigoriou and a false status, as a secretary of the Greek Consulate. He reports in 1908 that a regulation, that would rule the Organization of all Greeks, inside and outside the borders of Greece, during the Macedonian struggle was considered necessary. Thus, a Regulation was drafted entitled: "Regulation of the Panhellenic Organization", although in reality there was no "Panhellenic Organization", whose Senior Management supposedly had an "Invisible Center", located in Athens and then there were the "Higher Centers" which were composed of the Greek Consulates abroad, then the "Committees" of the various regions and finally the "brothers". During the initiation, both the members of the Committees and the brothers took an oath before a priest. Gonatas therefore mentions the members of the Adrianople Commission (Gonatas, 1956):

Adrianople Committee: Ioannis Sfikas, Georgios Meletiou, Ritoridis Hatzopoulos, Kimon Delikatos, Aristeidis Altinalmazis, Miltiadis Kitanidis, Aristeidis Papadopoulos, Panagiotis Tziritis, Iakovos Konstantinidis.

When the Neo-Turkish movement prevailed, in the same year, the pressure and the persecution of the non-Turkish population were intensified, which led to the expulsion of all the members of the "Panhellenic Organization", except those who belonged to the Consulate (Gonatas, 1956).

Another prominent member of the Altinalmazis family is Emmanuel Altinalmazis, a merchant from Adrianople who is well-known as the first mayor of Alexandroupoli. This happened during a period of intense historical upheavals, specifically during the Allied Administration of Thrace, when, in the autumn of 1919, the Council of the Great Powers, after a letter from Venizelos, decided on the allied occupation of Western Thrace. Immediately then, a small number of allied troops, under French leadership, occupied Thrace, which was after that placed under French Administration (Tsintarakis, 2010).

Emmanuel, therefore, was the first appointed mayor of Dedeagac. during the period of the Allied Administration. After the liberation of the city, in 1920, he was re-appointed mayor of Alexandroupolis, by the Greek Administration, a position he held until March 1924 (Kargakos, 2000). Moreover, when, in July 1920, King Alexander who gave his name to the city, which was renamed later in his honor Alexandroupolis, arrived with the battleship "Averoff" in the port of Dedeagats for a visit, he was accompanied by the Mayor Emmanuel Altinalmazis. The report for the liberation of the city (14 May 1920), were also signed by, among others, the

mayor Emmanuel Altinalmazis (Tsintarakis, 2010).

5. Konstantinos Altinalmazis

Konstantinos Altinalmazis was born in 1876 in Adrianople and died on March 15, 1948, in Alexandroupolis. He was the son of Ioannis and Hariklia. He married Eleni Pinatzi, from Kio, in Asia Minor, with whom he had a daughter, Sophie Altinalmazis, later Dimoula (Kyrkoudis, 2008).

Konstantinos became well-known as the first and longest-serving elected mayor of Alexandroupoli (1924–1941). As mayor, for about twenty years, he is considered to have transformed Alexandroupoli with his work, from a village into a modern city of culture, in which, in fact, he was very popular (Apostolidis, 1998).

His activities began in Adrianople, where he returned after his studies at the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Athens. The Greek Community, that was very active at that time, appointed him, who was still a young scientist, as the General Secretary of the Educational Association, which was, in all probability, an illegal branch of the “Friendly Society” (Filiki Eteria), still operating in Thrace. In 1919 he became president of the Association. His business as a pharmacist and an agent for the Fire Insurance “Nord” was based on the main street of Adrianople, Saraclar Caddesi (Kyrkoudis, 2008).

Later, he got positions in almost all Institutions and Associations, national and charitable in Adrianople and offered greatly (Album of Thrace, Macedonia, 1932). For example, as an inspector of the Community Orphanage, he revealed the secret correspondence with the Albanian Committee of five Albanian-speaking scholars of the Greek government, including the later Prime Minister of Albania, Van Noli. His offer includes the exemption of many Greeks from their compulsory service in “Amele-Tambourou”, the Ottoman labour battalions (Turkish: Amele Taburları) (Kyrkoudis, 2008).

After the liberation of Adrianople in 1920, the High Commission of Thrace appointed him as a Municipal Commissioner and sent him to Alexandroupoli in order to welcome the mayors of other Greek cities. In addition, by order of the General Administration of Thrace, he worked as an assistant mayor close to the Turkish mayor Sefket Bey (Apostolidis, 1991; Album of Thrace Macedonia, 1932).

His continuous social and national actions annoyed the Bulgarians, who, after their retreat from Adrianople, sentenced him to death along with twelve other prominent people. Eventually, by happy chance, everyone was saved, due to the confusion that was spread with the invasion of the cavalry of Ember Pasha in Adrianople. Finally, the collapse of the Asia Minor Front in 1922 stopped the work of Konstantinos Altinalmazis in Adrianople, who, along with other refugees, arrived in Alexandroupoli, where he settled permanently, practicing the profession of pharmacist (Apostolidis, 1991).

Alexandroupoli had already become a municipality since 1919. Emmanuel's brother was appointed mayor, who remained in the municipal authority until 1924. The authorities of Alexandroupoli and the lawyer Konstantinos Manatos invited then Konstantinos Altinalmazis to receive from the first appointed mayor Emmanuel who was also his brother the local government, who handed it over to him on October 28, 1924. The first municipal elections followed, on October 25, 1925, by which he was elected the first elected mayor of the city (Kritou, 1995; Ordobouzanis, 2014).

Since then, Konstantinos Altinalmazis has been the elected mayor for four consecutive municipal terms: 1925–1929, 1929–1933, 1933–1937 and 1937–1941. In April 1941, after the occupation of the city by the Germans, he left Alexandroupoli, along with the rest of the city authorities. On January 26, 1946, after the

liberation of the country and the normalization of the situation, he returned from the exile, leaving his family in Athens where he had also lived as a retiree and undertook his duties as a mayor until his death in March of 1948 (Kyrkoudis, 2008).

6. The Work of Konstantinos Altinalmazis

Konstantinos Altinalmazis was elected mayor for the first time in 1925, when the consequences of the collapse of the Asia Minor front, in 1922, were evident in the region and there were thousands of refugees. In this social and political context, he set as his main goal the housing of the refugees who had entered the city after the Asia Minor catastrophe. In this direction, his program can be considered successful, as at the end of his third four years as mayor of the city, there were no more homeless refugees in the city and the villages of the area. It is considered, in fact, that, thanks to his efforts, having also the personal support of Venizelos, he managed to have completed the work of housing the refugees, long before the other cities of Greece (Kritou, 1995).

In the field of infrastructure are included the following (Album of Thrace Macedonia, 1932):

- Caring for fire fighting. A fire truck was purchased during his first four years as a mayor and the first Fire Brigade of the Municipality was formed.
- The water supply of the city. A water reservoir was built, which received the groundwater of the river and is located at the highest point of the Exopolis.
- The cleanliness and the collection of garbage which was constantly increasing in the city.
- Caring for sports. Under the inspiration and help of Major Dioskouridis, the first Municipal Stadium of the city was built (today known as the National Stadium of Fotis Kosmas). At this stadium were held the Panthracian Athletics Games in 1930 and the Panhellenic Games in 1953 (Kyrkoudis, 2008).

During his second term as a mayor (1929-33), the construction of important projects continued, completely reshaping the appearance and the infrastructure of the city. More specifically (Album Thrace Macedonia, 1932):

- The construction of the new port of Alexandroupoli was begun, giving a new impetus to the economic development of the city (Apostolidis, 1998)
- The water supply problem has been resolved.
- The first Philharmonic of the Municipality of Alexandroupoli was created.
- The first urban design of the city was approved.
- The Municipal Electricity Company of Alexandroupoli was created.
- The first Municipal Slaughterhouses were built.
- The Municipal warehouses of flammable materials were constructed.
- Fish shops (fish market) were created.
- City streets, such as Emporiou and Mazaraki, were paved with concrete, after paving with river gravels (Kyrkoudis, 2008).

At the same time, a great dream of Konstantinos Altinalmazis, during the 1930s, was the transformation of Alexandroupoli from a new provincial town built by refugees into a touristic summer and winter resort. In order for Alexandroupolis to become a state-of-the-art spa town in Europe, since the Greek National Tourism Organization had already ceded the use of the thermal springs of Traianoupoli to the municipality of Alexandroupolis, Konstantinos Altinalmazis with the partnership of Alexandros Papathanasis, a member of the Greek parliament in Evros, developed a comprehensive plan to transfer the thermal waters from Traianoupoli to

Alexandroupoli by pipelines and to construct modern facilities and hotels by the beach, in the area of the Municipal Garden, opposite Pasaïki (Ordobouzanis, 2013).

Therefore, from the second four years of his election, Alekos Papathanasis, as a member of the Liberal Party at the time, managed to pass by Parliament a special law that imposed a one-cent municipal tax on all goods imported or exported from Alexandroupoli's port, in order to raise the required amount of money that would provide the necessary funds for the construction of this grand project. Worth mentioning is the front page of the daily newspaper "Macedonia", of June 26, 1931. Its column "Macedonia in the provinces" that was entitled "Alexandroupoli—a unique spa town of tomorrow" and written by K. Skaltsa, is referred to the beneficial effects, unique in Europe, of the thermal springs of Feres, that was located 13 km from Alexandroupoli (Ordobouzanis, 2013).

During the third four years that Konstantinos Altinalmazis was a mayor of Alexandroupoli (1933-1937), important historical events happened in Greece. Venizelos' party lost the elections, N. Plastiras attempted a failed coup, an assassination attempt was made against Eleftherios Venizelos, Venizelos also attempted a failed coup in 1935, a referendum was made that led to the return of the monarchy in Greece and then, on August 4, 1936, a totalitarian regime under the leadership of General Ioannis Metaxas was imposed to the Kingdom of Greece. All these events had an important impact on Konstantinos Altinalmazis. As he had joined the Venizelos failed coup in 1935, he was arrested and sentenced by a military court to prison (Kyrkoudis, 2008).

After the return of the monarchy, King George had granted an amnesty for those who took part in the failed coup of 1935, but the Government had not yet brought back the elected mayors to their positions. Then, in the summer of 1936, when, during the tour of King George and his successor Paul, in Alexandroupoli, at the dinner organized by the Authorities of the city, the King asked the elected mayor Konstantinos Altinalmazis to greet him and not the appointed mayor Victor Koutavelis. After that Konstantinos Altinalmazis returned to his duties as the mayor of the city and continued his work until 1937, when his term ended (Apostolidis, 1991).

For fourth consecutive four-year term, Konstantinos Altinalmazis was elected mayor of Alexandroupoli in the municipal elections held by the I. Metaxas regime in 1937, proving that he had the trust of the citizens, who laid their hopes on him to work for the development and the progress of the city (Ordobouzanis, 2013).

However, World War II that was followed by the four-year German, Italian and Bulgarian — for the Alexandroupoli, Bulgarian — occupation of the country, interrupted the work of the mayor, who became himself a refugee, along with many residents of the city, in Athens. After the liberation of the country and his return to Alexandroupoli and to his duties as a mayor, in January 1946, he found out that the amount that had been saved for the project of transferring the thermal water of the springs of Traianoupoli to Alexandroupoli were gone, by the authorities during the occupation, leaving unfinished such a huge project (Kritou, 1995).

The difficult years of the civil war followed, during which, on March 15, 1948, he died at the age of 72. Konstantinos Altinalmazis, as a mayor, was much loved by the people of Alexandroupoli. The funeral ceremony, in the church of Agios Nikolaos, was attended by a large crowd, so that the whole area both inside the church and outside was entirely full of people. Today his body is buried at the Old Cemetery of Alexandroupolis, at his family grave. The Municipal Authority, appreciating and honoring his work in the municipality of Alexandroupoli, unanimously agreed to name after him a street of the city (Apostolidis, 1991).

Moreover, in the summer of 2013, in Parmenion Park, in Alexandroupoli, which was formerly a camp and a property of the Greek Army, renovation work has started, in order to its transformation into an Eco park of 80 acres, with a capacity of about 1400 seats, which included an open-air theater, a restaurant and a cafeteria, walking

paths, green areas, a lot of water, kiosks and parking lots. The project was realized and then the park was renamed to Altinalmazis Park, in memory of the longest-serving mayor of the city, Konstantinos Altinalmazis. The opening ceremony took place on May 5, 2017, by the mayor of Alexandroupoli Evangelos Lampakis (e-evros.gr, 2017).

7. The End and the Bequest of the Altinalmazis Family

Today there are no living descendants of the Altinalmazis family in Alexandroupoli. Its last known descendant was Ioannis Altinalmazis, who died on August 30, 1974. Son of Emmanuel Altinalmazis, he was born in Alexandroupolis in 1903. He ran his company “I. Altinalmazis Distilleries”. He was married to Konstantinos Malamatina’s daughter, Paraskevi, with whom he had a son, Emmanuel. Emmanuel, however, died in London, where he had gone after his high school studies, to study as a Mechanical-Electrical Engineer (Terzis, 1998).

His parents, devastated by the death of their only child, left a bequest, according to which the income of the shops located at the corner of 14th of May and Venizelou streets, in Alexandroupoli, where the multi-storey Altinalmazis mansion is now, of three offices and two stores, should be managed by a committee in order to grant scholarships for poor students, for their studies at the University, especially as Mechanical and Electrical Engineers (Bequest Emmanuel I. Altinalmazis, 2014; Terzis, 1998).

8. Conclusion

The prominent Altinalmazis family from Adrianople lived and flourished during very intense and critical historical moments of Greece. In time of war, through constant changes of governments, frequent changes in state borders, economic hardship, dictatorships, foreign occupation, civil conflicts, during the 19th and the 20th century, not only were its members present but also often starred or paved the way.

The historical events of the beginning of the 20th century led the Altinalmazis to become refugees, from Adrianople and Ainos, in search of a new settlement, in the neighboring prefecture of Evros, in Nea Orestiada and mainly in Alexandroupoli. Its members were not only rich and powerful people but also educated, with moral principles, willingness to offer and vision for the future. Their political, social, charitable and cultural activities have been great. Being patriarchal and multifaceted, overall the Altinalmazis family deserves to be known and remembered, because studying the family’s history we get to know and understand better the history of the near the border prefecture of Evros and the history of Greece.

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