



Περίληψη :

The guilds were unions, or associations of craftsmen and professionals in the cities, under the monitoring of the state. They were formed for the protection of their members' interests and the transmission of practical knowledge (via the apprenticeship), and they also exerted political influence. The guilds in the capital were under the direct control of the prefect of the City (*praefectus urbi*). Since practically their dependence from the state was limited, they constituted one of the poles of power in Constantinople. From the beginning of 13th century, the system of guilds seems to fall into decay.

Χρονολόγηση

4th-13th century

Γεωγραφικός εντοπισμός

Constantiople

1. Historical framework

The craftsmen and professionals in the cities of the early Byzantine Empire were organised in unions (*collegia*) according to the Roman tradition. The unions or *somateia* (guilds), that were under the monitoring of state and acted as legal persons, aimed at the cohesion and the protection of interests of their members, the maintenance of the competition in a reasonable framework and the transmission of practical knowledge (via the apprenticeship), the representation of various branches in the authorities and the preservation of their political influence. As long as the *somateia* (guilds), were not depended on powerful protectors or the central power, they constituted institutions of political influence. From the 3rd century A.D. onward, the guilds constituted a considerable factor of economic stability and this is why the authorities sought to take the professionals in their work, to achieve stabilisation of prices and avoid shortage of goods in the market.

The guilds of the capital were under the direct control of the **prefect of the City** (*Praefectus Urbi*).¹ Practically their dependence on state was limited as it can be deduced by the financial demands of the professionals in Constantinople from **Justinian I**. Judging by a strike of the builders in Sardeis (459) and the feeling of professional pride at the burial inscriptions in Corycus, the guilds of the provincial cities seem to have known even greater independency. Guilds had three functions: *First* they promoted their financial interests; *secondly* through them the state could control the economy; and *thirdly* they had major political activity. Circumstances would determine which one of these functions would prevail.

2. The Dark Ages

The 7th and 8th centuries was a period of profound decline of the urban life. It seems that in this period the guilds of Constantinople knew a temporary recession, but they did not completely disappear. Their members are referenced in the sources as *ergasteriakoi* (workshop members). They took part in the expedition of **Heraclius** against the Avars (623), they manned the Byzantine fleet in the enterprise against **Cherson** (695) and they were compelled to take oath of faith to Leo IV (776).

3. The guilds of Constantinople in the 10th century

3.1. The Book of the Eparch

In the beginning of the 10th century the economy of the empire had recovered and the guilds of the capital were numerous and flourishing. This situation reflects the dynamism and the specialisation of the urban Byzantine economy. The **Book of the Eparch** is dated to this period (it was issued as *diataxeis* (rules, decrees) during the reign of **Leo the Wise** and when Philotheos was Eparch of Constantinople in 911-912). This book provides us with a lot of information on the *systemata* (*collegia*) *systems* or *politica somateia* (City's guilds) of Constantinople that had to do with the organisation, operation and ways to control these.



3.2. The notaries

The number of the *systemata* (guilds) in Constantinople that the *Book of the Eparch* refers to is limited. Thus we can conclude that many professionals practised their economic activities freely and did not belong to guilds. The *taboularioi* or notaries are the first to be mentioned in this list. According to the most extensive report of our source, the notaries allocated clerks [*Book of the Eparch* (from now on *BoE*), 1. 17-19] who drew up various contracts, wills and other documents. The wage of the notaries was proportional to the value of the contract (*BoE* 1. 25). The wage of the clerk was two *keratia* (unit of weight and value) per *nomisma* (*BoE* 1. 19). Any differences within the guild were ruled first by the *primikerios* or, to the second degree, by the court of the prefect (*BoE* 1. 11). The registration of new members included witness-testimonies of the *primikerios* and of the members of the guild, the examination of the candidate's technical training (who presented himself at the office of the prefect wearing a certain garment designated as *ephestris*), the payment of the registration (3 *nomismata* to the *primikerios*, one to the notaries and 6 to the cashier), a ceremony, in order for the notary to be blessed, and his transportation to the office (seat) of the district, where he would practise his jurisdiction. The appointment was celebrated in the residence of new member (*BoE* 1. 1-3).

3.3. Professions related to money

Second in the list of the associations are the professionals that are directly related to [money](#), the silversmiths (*argyropratai*) and the money-changers (*trapezitai*). They placed their tables (*abakia*) in front of their workshops, along the [Mese](#), the avenue of Constantinople, and they placed on them rows of coins. The limits between these two guilds were vague. The silversmiths and the goldsmiths (*chrysochooi*) processed gold, silver, pearls and precious stones, they manufactured, sold but also bought objects from individuals (*BoE* 2. 1-2). The money-changers or money-lenders were very affluent individuals that possessed precious metals and money in big quantities, which they multiplied by lending it or through other ways.²

3.4. Branch of clothing

After the professions related to money, a group of guilds is mentioned in the *Book of the Eparch* which included many specialities. In general they dealt with the production and clearance of silk and other types of textiles and clothing.³ *Metaxopratai*, *katartarioi*, *serikarioi*, *vestiopratai*, *prandiopratai*, *othoniopratai*. The *metaxopratai* bought unprocessed silk from foreigners and especially Syrian Arabs, or people living in the provinces, probably from the S. Italy and the Peloponnese, namely from tradesmen that resided in the commercial hospices (*mitata*) of the capital, without paying for commercial fees (*BoE* 6. 5), in order to sell it to the *katartarioi* and the *serikarioi*. The tradesmen of the provinces were allowed to return to [Constantinople](#), the *metaxopratai*, however, were not allowed to leave the capital neither to sell to [Jews](#) or to tradesmen of a different nationality, because silk was included in the merchandise that was not allowed to be exported (*kekolymena*, *BoE* 6. 12, 16). The *katartarioi* prepared the silk for the final process (*BoE* 7. 1). The *serikarioi* wove, dyed, cut and wrapped in rolls in their laboratories and their looms (*BoE* 8. 3) the silk which had been processed by the *katartarioi* or the unprocessed silk by the *metaxopratai*. The rolls were placed in *kylestareia* (*κυλιστάρεια*) by the approval of the prefect (*BoE* 8. 9). The *serikarioi* could not manufacture silk, only the imperial workshops were allowed to do that (*BoE* 1. 8), they could not sell their products to Jews or to tradesmen of a different nationality (*BoE* 6. 16) could not dye by using blood (*BoE* 8. 4), and they were compelled to accept control of the state inspectors of seals (*boullotoi* and *mitotai*, *BoE* 8. 3).

The *vestiopratai* and the *prandiopratai* were specialised in the sale of textiles and clothing. The *vestiopratai* received their merchandise from the *serikarioi* and less often from the *serikarioi*. In order for the imperial monopoly to be protected, the *vestiopratai* could not sell protected or seamless cloths to foreigners and the provinces. Purchases of clothing over 10 *nomismata* were had to be declared to the prefect (*BoE* 4. 1-2).

The *prandiopratai* bought and put in the market ready-made products, which were imported by Syrian tradesmen, after paying the customs in the harbour of [Seleukeia](#), one of the two main commercial gates of Asia Minor to the east (*BoE* 5. 1) ([Trebizond](#) was another gate). These products, the so-called *saracen merchandise*, were *chareria*, namely silk textiles, *thalassai*, *bagdadikia*, *foufoulia*, *audia*, *chamia* and *esophoria*. All these were placed at the *mitata* (hostels) for the merchants, in order to be purchased



within 3 months by the *prandiopratai*, the Syrian tradesmen that had been living in Constantinople for over a decade, and to the sovereigns (BoE 5. 2, 4, 5). All the imported merchandise that remained indisposed ended up to the prefect.

The *othoniopratai* or *mithaneistraded* textiles made of linen from Strymon and Pontus (BoE 9. 1). The importers were respectively Bulgarians or inhabitants of Pontus. From these regions honey was also imported that was intended for the *saldamarioi*. The *othoniopratai*, the *saldamarioi* and the *prandiopratai* could, with the approval of prefect, go over to Bulgaria or to the Pontus, in order to exchange these goods with textiles (*blattia*, *prandia* and *chareria*, BoE 9. 6). The *othoniopratai* could transport their merchandise to the streets of Constantinople only in days specified by the authorities (BoE 9. 7). The *othoniopratai* supplied the *vestiopratai* with linens for the (inner) lining of silk clothing (BoE 9. 1).⁴

3.5. Myrepsoi

The *myrepsoi* traded spices, perfumes, colourings (*myreprika*). The identification of these goods is not always obvious. Pepper, cinnamon and aloes, were considered as spices, amber, calf, incense and myrrh as perfumes, logwood (*barzin* or *mpakam* in Arabic), papyrus, smoke tree and the *zygaia* as colourings (BoE 10. 1). The *myrepsoi* set up their tables on a row along the Mese, from the [Chalke Gate](#) up to [Milion](#) (BoE 10.1). *Myreprika* were imported mainly by the Arabic world via Chaldea and Trebizond or from other places. The phrase 'from other places' is related perhaps exclusively to the Byzantine provinces, from where smoke tree and *zygaia* were imported.

3.6. The candle- and soap-makers, and the grocers

The sixth group included professionals who placed in the market products that could be easily imported illegally: candle-makers (*keroularioi*), soap-makers (*saponopratai*) and grocers (*saldamarioi*). The candle-makers took beeswax mainly from the Bulgarians (but also Russians), and the Church, and they could buy only the necessary quantity of oil (BoE 11. 3). The soap-makers manufactured with ash, oil and other materials and sold the common and the luxurious soap from France. They were, however, allowed to import soap from abroad (BoE 12). The grocers placed food in the market: seafood, cheese, butter, oil, legumes, and salted fishes; utensils: barrels, vessels, and manufacture material: bitumen, cedar oil, nails, flax and plaster (BoE 13. 1).

3.7. Tanners

The seventh group included the *lorotomoi*, *malakatarioi* and tanners. The first bought processed skins and cut from these various leathers for the needs of state. The *malakatarioi* processed the leather intended for sandals and the *vyrsodepsai* belonged to the same guild, but were inferior to the *malakatarioi* and they were overseen by a *symponos*, close collaborator of the prefect (BoE 14).

3.8. Professions related to food-supply

The eighth group included professionals that provided Constantinople with various goods. The *makellarioi* (butchers), sheep- and pig-merchants (*provatemporoi* and *choiremporoi*), in collaboration with the *provatarioi* (householders of herds of sheep) or with the subscription of villagers (*choritai*) [supplied Constantinople](#) with meat. The *makellarioi* bought their sheep direct from the *provatarioi*, eastern of the Saggarios River, the geographical limit of the region of Constantinople and led the herds to the capital, with an intermediary station at [Nicomedia](#). In this way tradesmen and intermediaries were excluded, the price of the meat would remain low and the profit would entirely go to the *makellarioi* (BoE 15. 3). The *choritai*, who lived in the countryside, supplied the *makellarioi* with carcasses (BoE 15. 4). The *makellarioi* bought pigs in the forum Tauri, in the presence of the *eparchikoi*, who determined their price (BoE 16. 2), until Lent they would bring sheep in the [Strategion](#) (BoE 15. 1) and during Easter and Pentecost lambs in the Tauros (BoE 15. 3-5). In general, the system of alimentation with meat in the capital was very flexible, and during periods of great demand, sufficiency was not guaranteed without the entanglement of tradesmen.

The fish-suppliers (*ichthyopratai*) bought their merchandise in the seashore by sailing into boats and they never salted or sold fresh fish to foreigners (BoE 17. 2). Bakers and their animals worked exclusively in the production of bread and were not used by the state for other functions (BoE 18. 2). The bakers had to come to the prefect and to adjust under the supervision of the *symponos* the



weights of bread in every change in price (BoE 18. 4). The *kapeleia* (wine shops, inns), that offered wine to the citizens, were closed at night and did not operate on Sundays and feasts (BoE 19. 3). The *kapeloi* (innkeepers, wine merchants) were responsible to adapt their vessels and measures to the changes of the wine price (BoE 19. 1). The estimators (*bothroi*) had to appreciate the precise value of horses that were sold obligatorily in the forum of Amastrianos (BoE 21. 3-4, 21. 8, 21. 4), to avoid the smuggling of horses or they travel for this reason away from the City (BoE 21. 8), and unriddle cattle-stealing (BoE 21. 9).

3.9. Craftsmen

The ninth group of professionals included builders, cabinetmakers (*leptourgoi*), lapidaries (*marmararioi*), plaster-craftsmen (*gypsoplastai*), doormakers (*askothyrarioi*), dyers (*zografoi*) (BoE 22). The agreed work should be finished in time and using safe methods (BoE 22. 2). If the employer did not have the materials, the contractors asked from the prefect their exemption from their conventional obligations (BoE 22. 1). The employer had to pay the agreed wage or increase it, if the prefect believed that it was low (BoE 22. 4). It was estimated that the construction made of stone would last for ten years with a minimum duration of 6 years, provided that no natural destruction would take place. If the buildings collapsed earlier, the contractor would restore the damage. (BoE 22. 4).

4. The guilds and the state

Controls were practised by the prefect and the employees (*eparchikoi*) (BoE 1. 4). The *legatarios*, who supervised and presented to the prefect the foreigner tradesmen, was the prefect's right hand. He would control the merchandise transported by foreigners and he determined the duration of their stay in the Byzantium (up to three months). When the permission to stay expired, the *legatarios* would lead the foreigners in front of the prefect, who would control the list of their purchases, to make sure that no *kekolymena* would be exported (BoE 20). Apart from the *legatarios*, the *symponos* was controlling weights and measures, concerning the guilds of tanners (BoE 14. 2), bakers, (BoE 18. 1, 4) and *kapeloi* (BoE 19. 1) and his attorneys officials, *exarchoi*, who were related with the *prandiopratai* (5. 1) and *metaxopratai* (BoE 6. 4) and were responsible for the seals (*boullotai*) and the control of the quality of thread (*mitotai*) (BoE 8. 3).

The professional unions in Constantinople in the 10th century, despite the fact that they constituted associations or communities regulated from the same legislation, they presented differences and particularities (for example their people in charge brought various names in their organisation: *prostates*, *prostaeuon*, *protostates*, *proestos* and others). The operation of the craft guilds represented a paradoxical mixture of free enterprise and state intervention. Each member was free to invest money, but within the limits that his profession imposed to him. The state aimed at a healthy competition and the neutralisation of an illicit one: thus it determined specific places⁵ to exercise the profession (by this way the disintegration of the market was deterred, effectiveness was increased and the expenses of the enterprising activities remained low). It also prohibited the professionals from creating monopolies (such as cause wretched increase in the rents of their competitors) or store concealed products, in order to they put them in the market in periods of crisis, and compelled the businessmen of one branch to act collectively when they had to buy imported products. Thus all professionals bought in the same price. From this moment the competition was free.

The individual initiative was determined by the time of buying and the disposal of product, the level of investment and the price of sale. The price of sale fell into restrictions, since it could not exceed a percentage of 4-12%, apart from an increase that involved the deterioration of product and necessary expenses.⁶ The state controlled the quality of the products and supervised vigilantly the distribution of the *kekolymena* (*κεκωλυμένα*, luxurious products or with strategic importance) and watched closely the registration of the new members. The attendance in the guilds did not constitute a hereditary right, as in Rome, but it mainly depended on references to ensure the personal integrity and the professional sufficiency of the candidate member, payment of the registration fees (between 2 and 12 coins (*nomismata*) and the donation of money to old members.

There were many obligations for the guilds members (presence in public events or in assemblies of their guild (BoE 1. 26) and prohibitions that had a market-regulation-code character or other (smuggling, falsification, falsifications, counterfeiting) (BoE 1. 4-5, 9 · 2. 6-8). Strict rules were applied in relation to the stay of foreign traders in Constantinople. The restrictions were accompanied by



finances and physical punishment (severance of arms, forced haircuts and others).

5. The later Byzantine period

It appears that the system of Byzantine guilds in [Constantinople](#) gradually fell into disruption and started to be dissolved from the beginning of 13th c. onward. This process was the result of the commercial sovereignty of the [Venetian](#) and [Genoese](#) tradesmen, the decrepitude of the government-owned power and the decline of guilds that concerned concrete sectors as such as the silk industry, as consequence of competition that was developed between the capital and the provincial cities.

1. *Basilica* VI, 4, 13 = *Codex Iustinianus* I, 28, 4. «Πάντα τὰ ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει σωματεῖα καὶ οἱ πολῖται καὶ οἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ δήμου πάντες τῷ ἐπαρχῷ τῆς πόλεως ὑποκείμεθα». See *Basilica* - H.J. Scheltema and N. van der Wal, *Basilicorum libri* LX. Series A, vols. 1-8 [Scripta Universitatis Groninganae. Groningen: Wolters, 1:1955 - 8:1988.], end *Codex Iustinianus*, ed. P. Krüger (Berlin, 1929) in *Corpus iuris civilis*, 2 vol. (Berlin, 1929; Dublin-Zürich, 1972).

2. Dagron, G., «The Urban Economy, Seventh-Twelfth Centuries», in Angeliki E. Laiou (ed.-in-chief), *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D.C. 2002), p. 436.

3. Dagron, G., «The Urban Economy, Seventh-Twelfth Centuries», in Angeliki E. Laiou (ed.-in-chief), *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D.C. 2002), pp. 439-40.

4. *Το Επαρχικόν Βιβλίον Λέοντος Στ' του Σοφού*, edit. T. Κόλιας - M. Χρόνη (Αθήνα, 2010), p. 153-162.

5. All the *πρανδιοπράται* merchandised *εν ενί τόπω του Εμβόλου* (central porticoed street) (*BoE* 5. 2), the *μεταξοπράται* disposed their merchandise in the forum, namely the main square-market of Constantinople (*BoE* 6. 13). The workshops of the *χρυσόχοι* were located along the Mese (*BoE* 11), and those of the *μυρμηνοί* between the Great Palace and Hagia Sophia (*BoE* 10.1). The workshops of the *κηρουλάριοι* had to be 30 *οργυῖες* (fathoms) away from each other, apart from those that were in the atrium of Hagia Sophia (*BoE* 11. 1), and those of the *σαπωνοπράται* had to be 7 *πῆχεις* (forearms) and 12 feet away (*BoE* 12. 3). The *ιχθυοπράται* had their benches at the *Μέγιστες Καμάρες* (*BoE* 17. 1). It was forbidden to the *μαγκιπεῖα* to engage the ground floor of multi-storey buildings, so that damages from fires would be avoided (*BoE* 18. 3).

6. More specifically the *μεταξοπράτης* would gain one *ογγύα* (ounce) of linen per *νόμισμα* (*BoE* 6. 9, 7. 2, 8. 8), the importer of linen one *κεράτιον* per *νόμισμα* from the *οθωνιοπράτης* (*BoE* 9. 6), the *σαλδαμάριοι* two *μυριάσια* per *νόμισμα* (*BoE* 13. 5). The profit of the *μακελάριοι* was estimated in goods and it consisted in the entrails, the head and the feet of the animal (*BoE* 15. 2). Two *μυριάσια* per *νόμισμα* (=1/6 or 16.66%) was the gross profit of bakeries from which the rent of the building had to be taken out, the payment of the labour and the expenses for the purchase of combustible materials, so that the net profit would be one *κεράτιον* per *νόμισμα* (4.2%) (*BoE* 18. 1).

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Γλωσσάριο :

	carat (keration) (lat. siliqua) A measure of weight in the Mediterranean world based on the carob seed (<i>Ceratonia siliqua</i>) and weighing 1/1728 of the Roman pound, or 0.189 g. Since the solidus weighed 24 carats, the secondary meaning of carat is 1/24 of pure gold, commonly used today as a measure of the fineness of gold. (Grierson, 1999)
	nomisma A term meaning "coin," more especially the gold solidus. In the late tenth century it was split into two separate denominations, a heavier histamenon and a lighter tetarteron. From 1092 onward, the heavier coin was generally termed a hyperpyron, while the lighter coin ceased to be struck. (Grierson, 1999)
	praefectus urbi (prefect of the city) (later referred to as the <i>eparch</i> of the city) Administrator and virtual governor of Constantinople in the Early/Middle Byzantine Era. He was responsible for the surveillance and the harmonious life of the Capital. One of his responsibilities was to control the commercial and manufacturing activities of Constantinople. After 1204, however, the office began to diminish, while from the 14th century, his responsibilities were assumed by two officers, the so-called <i>kephalatikeuontai of the capital</i> .

Πηγές

J. Koder (ed.), *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 33, Wien 1991)

Παραθέματα

Title and headline of the Book of the Eparch

Διατάξεις Λέοντος τοῦ εὐσεβεστάτου καὶ εἰρηνικωτάτου βασιλέως Ῥωμαίων περὶ τῶν πολιτικῶν σωματείων, ὅπως ἕκαστον αὐτῶν ὀφείλει πολιτεύεσθαι τε καὶ διαπράττεσθαι, ἐκφωνηθεῖσαι ἐπὶ τῆς ἡγεμονίας Φιλοθέου πρωτοσπαθαρίου καὶ ἐπαρχου ἐν τῷ ἔτει τῷ ,σικ'

J. Koder, *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen* [Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae. Series Vindobonensis 33. Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1991]: 72-142.