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Products and markets - The activities of the imperial guilds of Constantinople

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Abstract

In the present paper the questions that are covered concern specific entrepreneurial aspects of the imperial guilds in Constantinople of the 10th century. The mentioned aspects are dealing first with the products and services offered by the guilds and secondly with the places, streets and areas where the guild members allowed to do their business. All this information is stated in the Book of the Eparch (BE) or Book of the Prefect («Το Επαρχικόν Βιβλίον»). Accordingly we are analyzing first the structure and quantity of the products / services mentioned in the Book of Eparch (BE) and next we are mentioning the used locations prescribed by the Prefect himself. Therefore the investigation analyses the products / services as well as the places connected with each of the products and services that are sold there.

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1. Prolegomena

The prosperous economic and trade situation of the 10th century affected the well-being of the whole East Roman Empire. But as it is common, it concerned firstly and expectedly the capital of the East Roman Empire, Constantinople. The meaning of Constantinople as the «Polis» («The City») of the empire was exceptional for the economy and trade. The political territory of the capital covered a large part of the surrounding areas having a radius of one hundred miles in any direction (Κόλιας, Χρόνη, Το Επαρχικόν Βιβλίον, 2010, p. 17). Due to this fact the emperors appointed the Eparch («Επαρχος») a person to be in charge of all issues concerning the administrative, economic, legal and civil agendas.

He was ranked in the 18th position below the emperor, but in reality he was “the second man” in the city (Κόλιας, Χρόνη, Το Επαρχικόν Βιβλίον, 2010, p. 14; «in the city above all, after the emperor and outside of the city <beyond the 100 miles> has no other authority, but only to judge» - «εν τη πόλει μείζων πάντων εστί μετά τον βασιλέα, εξελθών δε του όρους της πόλεως εξουσίαν ουκ έχει πλην του κελεύειν και δικάζειν»

(Κόλιας, Χρόνη, Το Επαρχικόν Βιβλίον, 2010, p. 16, in: Mavridis, & Vatalis, 2014)) functioned as a mayor or the «father of the city» (Κόλιας, Χρόνη, Το Επαρχικόν Βιβλίον, 2010, p. 14, in: Mavridis, & Vatalis, 2014).

The Eparchos (prefectus urbi) had a number of other imperial officials in his office and under his command in order to support him in managing his important and decisive work. The Eparchos or prefectus urbi had his residence in the Mese Odos (Μέση Οδός) of Constantinople close to the forum of emperor Constantine the Great. Under the subordination of the Eparch were 14 types of officers (see Mavridis, D. G. & Vatalis, K. I., 2014). Among others those officers had to be aware that all members of the guilds were selling only the prescribed products and additionally that they used the right streets, places and other named locations, like Emboli for their business.

2. The imperial guilds of Constantinople

In the EB there are 21 different guilds or collegia (see Χριστοφιλόπουλος, 1935 / 2000, pp. 77-96 and Koder, Das Eparchenbuch, 1991, pp. 72–143). The first collegium concerns the notaries (ταβουλάριοι - tabularii, συμβολαιογράφοι - symvolaiografoi). The second group concerns the dealers in bullion (argyropratai - αργυροπράτες, χρυσοχόοι - chrysochooi or goldsmiths). Group three concerns the bankers (τραπεζίτες - trapezites, καταλλάκται - katallaktai, κολλυβιστές - kollyvistes, εξισωτές - exisotes, κολλεκτάριοι - collectarii, αργυραμοιβοί - argyramoiboi, σαράφης - sarafis).

The argyropratai are dealing with gold, silver, jewelry and precious stones (πολύτιμοι λίθοι) and with money exchange the latter (bankers). The fourth concerned group is the domestic silk garments merchants (vestiopratai - βεστιοπράται). The fifth group is called prandiopratai (πρανδιοπράται) who are silk importers mainly from Syria and Baghdad. The sixth syllogos (guild) is named metaxopratai, metaxarioi or melathrarioi (μεταξοπράται, μεταξάριοι, μελαθράριοι), which means raw silk merchants.

The seventh group is the raw silk dressers or silk spinners (καταρτάριοι, katartarioi) who are producers of silk fibers from the cocoons of the silk worm. In the eighth chapter of the EB are regulations about the clothiers or silk dyers (σηρικήριοι, serikarioi). They buy raw silk and sell the made cloths to the silk stuff merchants (vestiopratai, βεστιοπράται). The ninth guild is dealing with imported silk and linen stuff (οθωνιοπράται, othoniopratai, μιθανείς, mithaneis) coming from Strymon in Makedonia, Kerasous in Pont Euxine and other places.

The tenth group, the perfume merchants (μυρεψοί, myrepsoi) are importers of items coming mainly from Chaldia / Pontos through Trapezous. The eleventh group are the wax and taper merchants (κηρουλάριοι, keroularioi) who are producers and sellers of wax items (e. g. candles for the churches). As number twelve mentioned in the EB are the soap merchants (σαπωναπράτες, saponopratai). The guilds ranged between the 10th and 12th group deal with house, body and spiritual culture (perfumes, candles and soaps) items.

The 13th guild is that of the grocers (σαλδαμάριοι, saldamarior, from sal = salt + gamina = vegetables) while the guild of the saddlers (λωροτόμοι, lorotomoi, μαλακατάριοι, malakatarior, βυρσοδέψες, vyrsodepsai) takes up the 14th place. The 15th group is the butcher's guild (μακελάριοι, makelarioi) and is followed in the 16th place by the guild of the pork merchants (χοιρέμποροι, choiremporoi).

The guild of the fishmongers (ιχθυοπράται, ichthyopratai) is the 17th group and the bakers guild (αρτοποιοί, artopioi, μάγκιπες, mangipes) the 18th one. In the above mentioned places - 13th to 18th, except for the saddlers – the concerned guilds deal with daily food items for the mass population, like the bakers who are the a-to-po-qo, artopokos, artopopos, artopoios, pistor, artopastas, «bread-pastor» of the linear B tablets (see Mavridis, D. G., 2008, Disclosed Intellectual Capital Aspects in Creto-Mycenean Palatial Linear B' Clay Tablets.).

The 19th guild is the inn-holders (κάπηλοι, kapeloi) and being tavernians (kapeloi) they were less respected. They sold wine, «pusca» (oxycraton, οξύκρατον, see Κουκουλέζ, Φ., Βυζαντινών βίος και πολιτισμός, B. I, 1955, p. 194) and food during the week – in six days, from the second hour of the day (about 7.00 a.m.) up to the second hour of the night (7.00 p.m.), but “never on Sundays”, nor on big holidays.

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