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"ORDINARY PEOPLE" AND THEIR PROFESSIONS: THE CONTRIBUTION OF SIGILLOGRAPHY TO THE STUDY OF BYZANTINE SOCIAL HISTORY (6TH-12TH CENTURIES)

Pantelis Charalampakis

Abstract

Sigillography is nowadays an indispensable tool for the study of Byzantine society. And yet, only the pieces related to the Church, the State and the aristocracy have been approached and sufficiently examined. Through a systematic collection and study of the seals issued by professionals, this paper discusses occupations that were not directly related to the public or ecclesiastic sector but were practiced by free-lancers, "lesser figures" within the Byzantine Empire, from the sixth to the 12th century. Combining various sources such as seals, inscriptions, literary texts and official documents, the main emphasis will be on fundamental issues of research, as well as on methodology.

Keywords: Byzantium; social history; professions; free-lancers; seals; inscriptions; iconography; ethnicity; linguistics

The aim of this paper is to present the topic I have been working on thanks to the New Europe College fellowship for the academic year 2020–2021, and to show the potential for future research, as a preface to my forthcoming monograph.[1] In this context, and considering that the cataloguing process is still in progress due to the large number of specimens (seals) dispersed in many countries, special attention will be put on the theoretical aspect of my work. In particular, I will try to familiarize the reader with the theoretical approach of the issue, the questions that have arisen, and the methods used to systematically collect and study the material.

Byzantine lead seals from the 6th to the 12th centuries are the main source for this study. These two chronological boundaries were chosen because the former marks the earliest seals that can be confidently attributed to individuals as freelance professionals, and the latter marks the time after which lead seals became very rare and were used only by the upper class of Byzantium, apparently because the cheap and easy to find wax prevailed over the more expensive and difficult to find metal. The pieces come from the collections of museums and other institutes, from private collections, and from auction catalogues or other sources related to the antiques market. Most of them are already published, but I am also working on some unpublished specimens.

For the readers' convenience, and also to avoid loading the paper with bibliographic titles, the references to seals are, whenever possible, links to the Dumbarton Oaks and Harvard Art Museums online catalog of Byzantine seals, instead of the standard printed editions.[2]

The background

The study of the Eastern Roman Empire, what we conventionally call Byzantium today, began in Renaissance and post-Renaissance Europe after the fall of Constantinople. At that time, intellectuals were mainly interested in the editing of texts and in history as a sequence of events. And now, centuries after Hieronymus Wolf's *Corpus Historiae Byzantinae* (1557),[3] Byzantine Studies has made not only significant, but unimaginably great steps forward. Every scholar and every "school" in every country has contributed, in one way or another, to paving the way to an understanding of this well-known and yet so mysterious medieval world.

In the 20th century, and now in the 21st century, it is not only the quantity of newly discovered sources or the advances in technology that have helped specialists to advance their research. It is also, and perhaps above all, the new perspectives and interpretations of what we already have before us. It is in this spirit that great efforts have recently been made to discover the origins of the famous Byzantine system of provincial administration, or to determine the self-consciousness of the Romans – or, as we shall call them from now on, the Byzantines – to mention just a few topics. On the other hand, it is true that more often than not the availability of sources guides our research and limits our perspectives. In the case of Byzantine social history, scholars have touched on almost every aspect of

it, and new ideas are being introduced every day. However, research is based mainly on literary sources: legislative and other official documents, historical works, hagiography and, to a lesser extent, epistolography and poetry. The study of Byzantine professionals, in particular, boosted after the discovery of the so-called *Book of the Eparch* by the Swiss scholar Jules Nicole in 1891.[4] The *Book of the Eparch* is either an official document or a draft of such a text, a manual prepared for use by the Eparch of Constantinople, who was, in modern terms, the mayor of the city. It contains instructions for the guilds of various professions active in the city. Naturally, this document has aroused great interest among Byzantinists, who now have the opportunity to study the Byzantine professions closely from a first-hand source.

And yet, neither the *Book of the Eparch* and other legal documents (especially from the early period), nor the multitude of literary sources come directly from the professionals themselves. Scholars of Modern Studies rely on archival material (business correspondence, vouchers, invoices, etc.), but almost nothing of this kind has survived from the Byzantine period. There are, however, two categories of sources directly related to the professionals: the inscriptions and the seals. The inscriptions are, for the most part, funerary texts inscribed on stone, and they mention the name and occupation of the deceased, sometimes the date of death, age, spouse's name, and origin. There is no systematic study of the funeral monuments of professionals. Surprisingly, the same is true for the seals directly related to the Byzantine working class, and this is the subject of this paper.

So far, there are only four studies (short articles) on seals issued by Byzantine professionals.[5] We still lack an overview of the material and a more systematic and synthetic study of these professionals through their seals, published and unpublished, as well as through auction catalogues. It must be stressed that a study of lead seals alone cannot stand on its own; it is essential to examine, compare and, if necessary, combine information from other sources, such as literary texts and official documents, from historical works to epistles and private contracts, laws, monastic typika, etc., as well as inscriptions on stone or metal other than lead. In short, this is a rather complicated subject that combines a variety of sources.

What is a seal and who needs it?

Before going into the details of the research topic, it is important to briefly explain what these seals are and how they are used. This information is important because it is related to the next question: who needs seals, or more specifically, who needs to seal a letter or other document?

People have been using seals for millennia. At first, the seal was a symbol of personal power and authority, but also a tool in the hands of the state mechanism, used for practical purposes. Finally, the evolution of human society, combined with a number of other factors, such as the access of more and more people to literacy and written forms of communication, made it necessary for professionals and other individuals to use seals to protect the contents of their writings or to certify their authenticity. As far as Byzantium is concerned, in short, people needed seals to do three things: a) to secure a non-visible letter; b) to certify the authenticity of an open, visible letter; c) to seal a package intended for the market.

How were these seals used? Unlike modern ones, seals in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages were very different. There were two types of sealing practices, using either a metal disc or wax. The latter, which is not a durable material, has unfortunately not survived (although occasionally people still use this method of sealing). As for the first type, we know of tens of thousands of metal disks made of gold, silver, or lead that were issued by the people of the time. The gold seals were reserved exclusively for the emperor; the silver seals were used only by certain local rulers in the late period; and the lead seals were used by everyone.

These seals were metal discs of small diameter, like a modern coin, on which the owner placed images and/or text. Making a seal was simple, but still required a special procedure. First, the person interested in having a seal had to find a technician to make a boulloterion. The boulloterion was an iron, plier-like instrument with two touching edges that were flat on the inside. There, the craftsman (either the same person who made the instrument or another) would carve an image, text, or whatever the client wanted on the flat surfaces, creating a negative of the future print. The next stage would be the production (by the same person or another) of small metal disks with an open channel running through them. The disks were produced in large quantities, in molds.[6] Whether or not these disks were easy to find in the right size, they would not have been expensive.

The boulloterion, however, seems to be an expensive thing, and the more exquisite the work, the higher the price.

In short, the sealing procedure was as follows: the person had to roll the paper, tie it with a thin cord, then pass both edges of the cord through the channel of the blank disk. The disk was then placed horizontally between the two flat surfaces of the boulloterion, the lower part of which touched a solid surface, and the person, holding the instrument firmly with one hand, struck the upper part with a hammer. The lead, being a soft metal, would allow the surfaces of the disks to receive the imprint of the negatives of the boulloterion and thus, after releasing the disk from the instrument, you would have not only printed both sides, but also secured the letter, because the strike would have pressed the channel and closed it around the thread. When they wanted to open a letter, they would either cut the thread or pull the lead disk (and that is why usually at least one of the channel holes is broken with an opening to one side of the disk).

Byzantine seals and the seals of Byzantine professionals

Seals are one of the instruments used by scholars for the study of Byzantine administrative, political, ecclesiastical, prosopographical and, more recently, social history. Although the first works on such seals appeared as early as the 18th century, only sporadically have scholars (notably G. Schlumberger, V. Laurent, and G. Zacos) attempted to approach them systematically. With the development of Byzantine Studies, and because these seals are first-hand sources, their importance has increased significantly in the last four decades. This is also due to the amount of publishing activity, the many archaeological expeditions and excavations, the old and new collections that are now available to the public, the auctions that are available online, and so on.

And yet, despite the importance of seals for Byzantine Studies, from the available material (which is estimated to be over 100,000 specimens), only those seals related to the Church, the State, and the aristocracy have been approached and sufficiently studied. Lower-class Byzantine professionals who made seals have been occasionally mentioned in various academic publications, but we still lack a systematic collection and study of all this material. Scholars have not done much research on this topic (there are only four short articles on professional seals – see above) for several reasons, which I will try to summarize here.

First, there is the traditional assumption that all Byzantine seals were issued by important people, either state officials or members of the clergy and aristocracy, and in any case by wealthy and notable people. Second, there is a selective approach to the sphragistic material: precisely because the seals of such professionals are considered less important compared to the seals of well-known military commanders or aristocrats known through literary sources or patriarchs, etc., scholars have not paid the necessary attention to them.[7] A third reason has to do with archaeology: professionals who used seals for their correspondence are more likely to be found in urban centers, or at least in busy places. Of course, there is always the possibility that they worked in more remote or isolated or less busy places. But in general, craftsmen and merchants had to be among many people in order to work. Let us not forget that in those days it was difficult to travel long distances, so it is more likely that a craftsman who had enough work to need correspondence and seals would be in a busy place; the same for a doctor, a butcher, and so on. Even if a small, isolated village had a butcher, for example, we cannot imagine how he would write letters, or who would write them for him, and why he would need seals. Besides, the problem is that most of the busy places, i.e. the Byzantine cities, are literally under the presently inhabited cities, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to uncover the layers underneath. Fortunately, there are still some major Byzantine cities that are not covered by later layers and have been (or are being) systematically excavated: Corinth, Pergamon, Cherson, Gortyna, Justiniana Prima, to name just a few of the most important. Apart from the big cities, there is a lot of research going on in smaller places, such as fortresses and monastic complexes, where it is less likely to find seals made by professionals (to my knowledge, no such seals have yet been excavated in fortresses or monasteries).

After collecting as many seals of professionals as possible, it is surprising to see that only a few professions are mentioned on the seals of their owners. There are still many professions known from other sources that have no known seals. It is possible, of course, that these people did not own a boulloterion for one reason or another. But most likely, if not certainly, it is because we have not yet discovered their seals. Such occupations are, for example, the τοξοποιὸς (bow maker),[8] and the ἐργολάβος (the head of the workshop; contractor; businessman).[9]

What can a seal tell us about Byzantine professionals?

Byzantine seals of this kind, issued by professionals, although more modest in appearance and therefore less talkative than others (for example, those issued by high military officials or members of the aristocracy), still provide us with ample information about the owner's name, origin/ethnicity, spoken language, religious attitude, occupation, level of literacy, wealth status, artistic preferences, etc. The most important of the information that can be gleaned from lead seals made by experts is summarized and categorized below. It should be noted, however, that not all of this information appears on the same seal; some things we may see on one piece, some things on another.

1) Name / origin / language

The name of the person may give a clue to the origin/ethnicity of the seal's owner. Alternatively, this information can be deduced by looking at the language of the seal's inscription. For example, the person may have a Hebrew, Syriac, Turkic, or Arabic name, but the inscription is in perfect Greek. In this category is placed the seal of a certain Solomon, pragmateutes (merchant), of the late 10th century, which shows a bird and a Christian invocation inscription.[10] Also the seals of Phouretzes, pragmateutes, dated in the late eleventh or early 12th century, with the image of the Theotokos on the obverse.[11] It is possible that Phouretzes was of Persian or Arabic origin. An interesting seal was issued by a certain Baianos, notarios (notary, lawyer; scribe): although it bears Christian symbols, the name shows an Asiatic origin, perhaps from the tribe of the Avars (we know of Avars with this particular name). What is most surprising, however, is the early date of this seal, probably in the first half of the 8th century.[12] It means that a foreigner – or a descendant of foreigners – had received a proper education in Byzantium, enabling him to work as a lawyer or a scribe. But there are other, more pompous cases, such as an unpublished 11th-century seal from the Dumbarton Oaks collection, which shows a Christian image on one side, accompanied by a Greek inscription, and on the other side inscriptions in Karshuni (Arabic language written in Syriac) giving the Hebrew/Christian name and patronymic of the owner, his place of origin (from a small settlement near Aleppo), as well as in Greek giving his occupation of καταλλάκτης (money changer).

2) Religious attitude (preference)

The religious attitude is related to the iconography on the seal, usually shown on the obverse. For example, we may find Christian or pagan symbols; iconoclastic or non-iconoclastic motifs; a preference for a particular holy figure or another motif, and so on. A significant example is the seal of Stephanos, anagnapharios (fuller, textile worker), dated in the first quarter of the 10th century, which shows two cypress trees.[13] This unusual motif is – rarely – attested on other seals, but the two trees or branches are always placed on either side of a human figure, while here they stand alone. The most common motifs, however, are those of the Christian cruciform invocative monogram, the cross, as well as images of the Theotokos or a saint. A good example is the early (6th century) seal of Iohannes, notarios, which shows Saints Peter and Paul holding a staff-cross in the middle.[14] It happens, however, that we also encounter some pagan motifs, especially in the early centuries: see, for example, the eagle and the star that decorate the seal of a certain Sirikios, physiologos (physician),[15] whose name could be Persian or Armenian.

3) Literacy

The level of literacy is also very helpful because it provides information about two people: the owner of the seal and/or the boulloterion maker hired by the professional in question. Some of the features we take into account when studying the inscription of a seal are whether the text is in meter, whether there are spelling mistakes, dialectal forms and idioms, etc. (see also below). In general, seals made by Byzantine craftsmen have short and simple inscriptions, except for the invocation, which usually only mentions the name and profession. Nevertheless, this small amount of evidence is enough to draw certain conclusions, especially when the specimens are studied in groups. Among the individual cases, it is worth mentioning Baianos (see above), whose name is misspelled (Βαηαιου, in the genitive, instead of the correct Βαϊανοῦ, although the name should have been in the dative (Βαϊανῷ), either because this is how he said or wrote it to the craftsman, or because the craftsman – scribe, unfamiliar with such an exotic name, heard it.

4) Wealth status

Last but not least, the seal can reveal some information about the wealth of its owner as well as the skills of the craftsman. For example, if the inscription is well written and carved, without mistakes, and/or if the decoration is well executed and rich in detail, it means that the owner had a good and skilled technician, i.e. an expensive technician. The opposite can also happen: if the seal looks very bad, with mistakes and not well executed work in general, the owner did not have enough money (or perhaps did not want to invest in a good technician). Let us compare two examples, both dating from the same period (late 11th/ early 12th centuries): the first belonged to a merchant named Ioannes; on the obverse there is a patriarchal cross with fleurons and a circular inscription. It is a common motif, in vogue since the early 10th century, and this one in particular is not even well executed.[16] The second seal, which belonged to the doctor Manouel Liparites, bears not only a metrical inscription but also the unusual phrase "Heed the example of this life" and shows a standing figure, looking up and raising his hands in prayer, surrounded by two seated figures, a goat and a snake.[17] The difference between these two specimens is striking: one follows an old motif and is poorly executed, the other bears a metrical inscription, an unusual and richly detailed image, as well as this didactic phrase. No wonder that the second craftsman needed much more time and effort to carve all this, and we can assume that the price for the work was higher.

Linguistics: language and idioms

Aside from the occasional spelling error or other peculiarity in the inscription, errors that can be attributed to either the owner or the craftsman, there are other elements in inscriptions that indicate variations in spelling or even evidence of local idioms. Several such examples have been discovered by scholars, especially in stone inscriptions. But as for inscriptions on seals, there is no study of the morphological, phonological, and other characteristics of medieval Greek.

Seal inscriptions, like stone inscriptions, usually, if not in most cases, reflect the language spoken in everyday life, without the special touch of medieval poets, historians, or other educated authors who, like today, spent time and effort to make their texts look more presentable,

more classical, more conservative, and, in their minds, more correct. Non-official (i.e. not state-sponsored) inscriptions, however, show us the language spoken in the streets and shops, in the homes and military camps, with all the mistakes of an uneducated person (either the owner of the seal or the craftsman, or even both), the idioms and different spellings. This is the language of the inscriptions on the seals of Byzantine professionals. There are four main categories, which will be explained below, not in any particular order. It goes without saying that whatever observations are made on the material in question (the seals issued by professionals), a comparison with samples from other groups of people with seals, such as clerics and monks, and low-ranking civil and military officials, will be made at a later stage.

1) Various forms of the same noun, e.g. μακελλάριος, μακελλάρης, μακελλίτης.

2) Various spellings of the same noun, e.g. πραγματευτής, πραγματεπτής, πραματευτής.

3) Phonetic substitution of Lambda for Rho, e.g. σαρδαμάριος instead of σαλδαμάριος.

4) Official and unofficial terms (?). Although in Antiquity the Greek word for merchant was έμπορος, in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages it was replaced by the word πραγματευτής, and it is only occasionally used – the same word or its derivatives – in some documents of a more official character.

5) Syntax. A very common phenomenon attested on seals of professionals is the use of certain cases or a combination of cases that are against the norm and certainly wrong from the grammatical point of view and the syntax of the Greek language. For example, instead of dative (invocation) – dative (name) – dative (occupation), they more than often use dative (invocation) – genitive (name) – genitive (occupation) or even another combination involving either nominative or accusative.

Freelancers or state-employees?

From the beginning, this research has inevitably led to a number of questions that have already been formulated, in one way or another, in previous works on the subject. I mentioned above the traditional scholarly view that there were no freelancers in Byzantium: everyone worked for the state.

Let us return to the previous questions: who needs seals in Byzantium and who can use seals in Byzantium. As the direct successor of the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire was naturally a state based primarily on an elaborate bureaucratic mechanism. Thus, after the emperor, the greatest need for seals came from the state itself and its thousands of officials, from high-ranking prefects and military commanders to lowly clerks and scribes. Then came the church and the various religious foundations and institutions. And finally, the nobility. It is understandable, however, that many professions require correspondence, and professionals need seals for this, for example, merchants, notaries, doctors, etc. There is no known law in Byzantium that says who can and who cannot own and use a boulloterion and seals. Nor is anything like this ever directly or indirectly implied in any source, at least none that has been discovered yet. Nevertheless, scholars have assumed in the past that only state officials and other persons, the church, and the aristocracy had the right to own a boulloterion. This is a misconception that can be refuted by a closer look at the sources themselves. Of course, it is true that not everyone needs a seal. But even if they did, another question would be who has the financial means to own and use a boulloterion. This financial aspect (also mentioned above) must not be neglected, and it must be remembered that although the materials themselves (lead, iron) may be cheap or easy to find, it is also a question of who and how the tools and disks are made, and the cost of acquiring the processed objects.

On the basic question of whether these professionals were freelancers or employed by the state: in Roman times, things were clearer about their status, and we know that they were freelancers. But in Byzantium the whole question becomes more complicated because of the limited sources and the intervention of the state in every aspect of the economy. It has long been known, probably since the discovery of the so-called *Book of the Eparch* in the late 19th century, that the state exercised considerable and strict control over every activity within its borders, and especially over transactions and activities related to the economy. Hence the question of whether the professionals were freelancers whose activities were supervised and to a greater or lesser extent controlled and restricted by the state, or whether they were themselves servants and officials employed by the state. This last question does not, of course, apply to all existing professions, and for this reason my research is limited to those attested on seals.

There are a few points we need to keep in mind: first, that although we know of four Taktika[18] and even more descriptions of the state mechanism and its employees in other texts, the professions in question are not mentioned in any of these sources; second, that the Byzantines were very fond of showing off with their honorific titles and, as we know very well, civil servants and state officials, as well as aristocrats, were very fond of displaying them on their seals. With very few exceptions (no more than five so far), the seals of the professionals that I have collected for my research do not show any honorific titles; third, that literary and official documents give us the idea that these people were not civil servants, but freelancers. To cite just a few examples, the Pandektes informs us of the salaries of private notaries; in the novella of 966, issued by Basil II, we learn of the merchants, natives and foreigners, who gather for the open markets; in private contracts and notarial deeds from southern Italy or other parts of the Empire, several professions are mentioned as being practiced by freelancers; through private letters exchanged between Jewish families, we learn that many Jewish merchants were active in the Byzantine city of Attaleia in the 1020s – and these could not have been state employees; the Emperor Leon VI advised his generals to take good care of the merchants because the state needed them. The evidence from these sources (and many others) will be discussed in detail in my forthcoming book.

Other questions of no less importance are whether state employees were allowed to have occupations in addition to their primary occupation, or whether the clergy were allowed to have such occupations. Textual sources as well as recent research have shown that there was no consistent legislation on these matters, although from time to time the state discouraged or even forbade certain categories of people from practicing secondary occupations at the same time as their primary ones. Last but not least, there is the question of the position of women.

The women

An essential and equally important topic related to professions in Byzantium is the place of women. Having discussed many seals issued by men, it is natural to wonder where women fit into all of this. Unfortunately, no seals by female professionals have yet been discovered. Considering the low percentage of seals made by women in general, this may or may not be a coincidence (perhaps we have not been lucky enough to

discover such pieces yet), but we have to work with what is available, which is not promising. Does the absence of seals mean that women were not allowed to do such work, or is it just a matter of time and luck to discover their seals? In fact, women in Rome and Byzantium were allowed to work because they were allowed by law to have their own property under special circumstances, for example, as widows. Famous is the case of Danielis, the very wealthy widow whose land holdings and wealth impressed even the emperor himself in the 850s; it is said that she even helped him financially.[19]

Moreover, we know from literary and epigraphic sources that women practiced professions mostly related to production and the market, but also medical ones, such as nurses and even doctors. On the other hand, it seems that, depending on their social status, they should not be engaged in professional activities. When Emperor Theophilos learned that the merchant ship that had so impressed him in the harbor belonged to his wife, the Empress, he flew into a rage, ordered the ship and all its cargo destroyed, and forbade the Empress to engage in shipping and trade, an activity that apparently amused her quite a bit, apart from the financial benefits. And yet the Empress was not the only woman involved in shipping.[20]

Be that as it may, apart from textual evidence and despite the absence of seals, we can see women working on reliefs and other images, such as those from 3rd-century Italy, where a woman is selling poultry (eggs and meat); in another, the man is cutting the meat while the woman does the accounting, and because of her seated position, clothing and hairstyle, it has been suggested that she was the owner of the business, not an employee.[21]

The variety of non-ecclesiastical occupations and professions held by women in Byzantium is reflected in Eleni Margarou's recent book (in Greek) entitled *Titles and professional names of women in Byzantium*.[22] The author has done a great job with the sources and has collected almost all known occupations and professions, which she has summarized in a table. Among the dozens of names, we will only mention γαλακτοπώλισσα (milk seller), ἐπιχειρηματίας (businesswoman), ἰάτραινα, ἰατρίνη, ἰατρομαῖα (doctor; gynecologist), καπήλισσα, ταβερναρία (tavern owner or tavern worker), κρεοπῶλις (meat seller), λαχανοπῶλις (vegetable seller; grocer), ναυκλήρισσα (ship owner), ξενοδόχος, πανδοχεύς, πανδόκισσα (innkeeper), πραγματεύτρια (merchant), τζαγκάρινα (shoemaker), χάλκισσα (coppersmith),

etc. Another important term denoting a female occupation, not attested in Margarou's book, is ἐργαστηριάρχισσα (the head of the workshop).[23]

The professions

Although not every known profession practiced in Byzantine times is attested on seals, we still count quite a large number of them. Apart from those listed below, I will only mention those of ξενοδόχος (innkeeper), βεστιοπράτης (clothing merchant), ταβουλλάριος (solicitor – see above), σηρικοπράτης / ὁλοσηρικοπράτης (silk merchant or silk worker), etc.

Chrysoglyptes (goldsmith)

It has long been known that the Byzantine state controlled the most precious metals and other goods (such as silk and porphyry), and of course gold was no exception. In this respect, there are no seals of freelancers working with gold. However, there are seals of two (so far) known chrysoglyptai. Both seals mention the honorific title of the person, and one of the inscriptions also mentions a second office (occupation) of these imperial (βασιλικός) chrysoglyptai, leaving no doubt that they worked for the state. Despite the fact that they are not freelancers, I have included them in my study for comparison with other professions working with metals.

The first seal was issued by a certain Ioannes, who used the image of St. John Chrysostom for the obverse, not only because he was his namesake, but also because he used the word for gold (χρυσός), alluding to his profession and art, but also to his honorific title: χρυσός – χρυσογλύπτης – Χρυσοτρίκλινον – Χρυσόστομος.[24] As for the second seal, it was issued by a certain Euthymios, who chose to portray Saint Euthymios, who bears the same name.[25] We see how people in the Middle Ages used their imagination in a very clever way to make their seals look as presentable and smart as possible, just as people do today with modern business and introduction cards.

Chalkoprates (coppersmith)

The next profession is the coppersmith or copper handler or copper merchant. A lead seal of Theophanes, chalkoprates, was discovered in Sudak, Crimea.[26] To my knowledge, this is the only published seal of this

profession. The chalkopratai in particular are not among the professions directly mentioned in the *Book of the Eparch*, perhaps because they were not considered as important as the others for the state economy in general. In the *Book*'s first paragraph on the argyropratai (see below), it is clearly stated that these dealers in precious metals and stones should not buy copper or other cheap materials that should be traded by "others". Obviously, these "others" are the chalkopratai.

Argyroprates (silversmith; jeweler; money lender)

The term argyroprates had three meanings that were somehow related, but they certainly referred to different professions. What is certain is that all three required a lot of communication with suppliers, partners and customers, and it is not surprising that these professionals used seals. The argyropratai, together with the merchants and the notaries/lawyers/solicitors, count the most specimens in my database. Some of these persons must have issued a lot of seals, because as many as four specimens per person have been recorded, and they come from different places in the Empire.

Some pieces only mention the invocation, the name and the profession of their owner, like the seal of Ioannes, argyroprates, servant of Theotokos, from the 7th century, from the library of the Romanian Academy, Orghidan collection 266/O.8091/L.266 [Figs. 1a and 1b].[27]

Figs. 1a and 1b. (photos by the author)

Surprisingly, we know of the seals of at least two clergymen, diakonoi, who were at the same time argyropratai. In this case, the term has the meaning of moneylender, an occupation that the state discouraged the clergy from practicing and later even prohibited by law. It seems, however, that in the 6th/7th century these diakonoi found a way to make money and even used seals to advertise their double (yet illegal) occupation. Let us note here that three seals issued by Paulos are known, and one of them was discovered on Mount Elaion in Israel.[28]

Other seals, or rather sealings of Byzantine argyropratai, seem to have served a different purpose: a rectangular lead plate, perhaps a former round disk that was once cut to change shape, bears on one side a cruciform invocative monogram of the Theotokos and the Hebrew name Mose (either in the genitive or dative, or even in the nominative if we consider the phonetics), and on the other side the name Thomas (either in the genitive or dative) and the occupation argyroprates.[29] This obscure inscription can have two meanings: a) it was the seal of Mose argyroprates, son of Thomas, or b) Mose and Thomas are two different people, without family ties, but business partners as argyropratai (besides, the fact that the lower part of the inscription is missing allows a reconstruction of the noun in plural). John Nesbitt was the first to draw attention to Byzantine seals bearing the names of two people, which he interpreted as partners in some kind of business.[30] The second option seems more plausible if we look at the second example, which is also rectangular, has one blank side, and on the other side we see the name Thomas and the occupation argyroprates.[31] Both pieces are dated between the last quarter of the 8th century and the first quarter of the 9th century. A closer look shows that the inscriptions mentioning Thomas / argyroprates are copies of each other, almost identical. This means that at some point Thomas used his own seal and identified himself as argyroprates. And since it is rather impossible to assume that the other inscription mentions Mose, the son of Thomas the argyroprates (the Byzantines used the title or occupation or office of their father or spouse or another close relative only when that person was someone important), it seems more plausible that Mose and Thomas were both argyropratai. It is also possible that the other side of the second specimen also had the monogram and Mose's name, but its surface was scratched clean for whatever reason. This hypothesis becomes even more plausible when we look at another seal that mentions Georgios and Ioannes, both argyropratai[32] and apparently business partners, as Nesbitt has convincingly described these pairs of people.

Ampelas (vine-grower, vine-dresser)

Although the word ampelas is mentioned in many literary sources, there is only one known lead seal belonging to a person with this occupation: he is Theodosios Alexopoulos, ampelas, from the 12th century.[33] This seal provides us with a lot of information, since it shows the name and surname of the person, the profession, as well as a certain level of literacy, since it bears a metrical inscription. Ampelas here is an occupation and not a surname (see below), which has already been mentioned.[34] It should also be noted that although in most Byzantine texts the word ampelas means the worker in a vineyard, in this case Theodosios Alexopoulos must have been the owner of the vineyard, producing grapes and/or wine – a worker would have not afforded a boulloterion, even if he needed it.

Saldamarios (grocer)

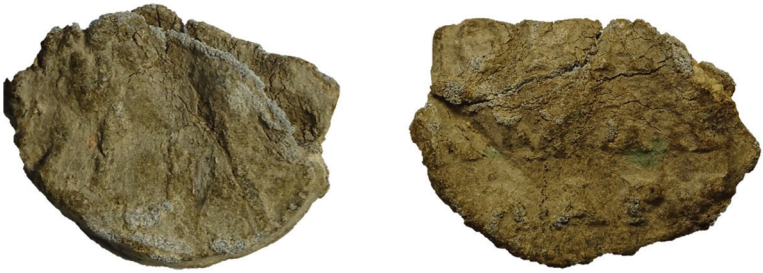
There is only one known seal of a saldamarios, a grocer, dated to the second half of the 10th century.[35] The saldamarioi are mentioned in the thirteenth chapter of the *Book of the Eparch*. They were allowed to have their shops at any place in Constantinople and to trade in almost any kind of food (except fresh meat), as well as other processed goods or wooden and metal things (with a few exceptions, such as soaps and perfumes, which were reserved for other trading professions).

Makellarios (butcher, fresh meat seller)

The fresh meat, which was not allowed to the saldamarios, was handled by the makellarios. This term had several meanings or its meaning changed according to the time. In Roman times there were many terms, each for a particular occupation with specific tasks. In Byzantine times, however, all of these old terms seem to have been abandoned, with the exception of makellarios. Although there is a lot to write about this profession, I will limit the presentation to two observations: a) that three out of six makellarioi in my database, all dated in the second half of the 10th century, chose to illustrate their seals with animals: a dog, a lion [Figs. 2a and 2b: Library of the Romanian Academy, Orghidan collection 332/O.8143/L.317], and a griffin.[36] This, of course, could be explained by the general tendency of people in that period to use animal figures on their seals, but the fact that half of the makellarioi I have discovered

so far chose this theme, perhaps points to another interpretation: that the images are related to their occupation with animals, that is, their seals worked again as visiting cards, advertising the owner's profession. b) There is a very interesting specimen, from the first half of the 11th century, discovered in Silistra and today kept in the Regional Historical Museum of Dobrich. On the obverse there is an image of St. Nikolaos, and on the reverse the inscription Nikolaos, basilikos (i.e. imperial) makellites, in the dative.[37] If the reading is correct, then this butcher worked for the palace or some other state institution, probably in Constantinople. Alternatively, he was not a butcher, but the person who handled the orders for meat at the palace or wherever he worked.

Figs. 2a and 2b (photos by the author)



Magkipos (baker)

Only one seal of a magkipos from the 10th century is known [Figs. 3a and 3b: Library of the Romanian Academy, Orghidan collection 95/O.7906/L.83]. The editor saw a letter R at the end of the second line, which he interpreted as basilikos (imperial), and therefore assumed that the seal should be registered together with other offices related to the palace.[38] Close examination of the specimen, as well as a high-quality photograph, shows that the letter is an N, which corresponds to the name in the accusative (Συμεῶναν μάγκιπα) [Fig. 4: detail].

Figs. 3a and 3b (photos by the author)

Fig. 4 (photo by the author)

Anagnapharios (fuller; textile worker)

The anagnapharioi – textile workers; cloth bleachers – are another occupation not mentioned in the *Book of the Eparch*. There are, however, brief mentions of them in other sources. The seal of Stephanos, which shows two cypress trees, has been presented above. Another seal of an Anagnapharios was issued in the first half of the 10th century by a certain Basileios, and on the obverse there is a duck and a stick with a bell on its back.[39] Constantine, who was active around the middle of the 10th century, chose a patriarchal cross for the obverse of his seal.[40]

Pragmateutes (merchant)

One of the most important professions for my research is that of the pragmateutes, the merchant, because of the large number of seals discovered in many places or kept in various museums and other collections. Two of these professionals, Solomon and Phouretzes, were introduced above. I have also already referred to the question of terminology and the use of the words pragmateutes and emporos. In fact, it seems that the first term was used almost exclusively among the professionals themselves, and it is only on very few inscriptions that we encounter the second term.

Another topic that will be discussed in detail in my forthcoming book are the seals of merchants with geographical names, as well as those with composite words, such as "kokkinopragmateutes" (the merchant of red pigments for painting textiles), an occupation closely related to other professionals, the oxybaphoi (purple dyers; these, however, were probably working exclusively for the state). Last but not least, special attention should be paid to the seal of a certain Nikolaos, whose surname was included in the inscription but has not survived due to the state of preservation of the specimen.[41] This Nikolaos was imperial spatharokandidatos and pragmateutes, that is, he had an honorific title that was usually given to people closely connected to the palace and the state administration in general, as well as to members of important families. Given the low status of this title in the mid-11th-century hierarchy, he may have been a former state employee who decided (for prestige?) to keep his title on his seals even after changing professions and becoming involved in merchandising. Alternatively, he could have been a state employee who was charged with buying or selling goods on behalf of the state. There is one factor that limits our choices: the fact that by this late period the term had lost any meaning other than that of a merchant, or, more generally, someone who buys and sells goods.

Mousikos (musician)

Although the word mousikos can be either an occupation or a family name (see below), there is a – unique – seal from the 6th century with two monograms which its editor interpreted as Marinos or Marianos (name) and mousikos (occupation).[42] Both words are in the genitive. If the interpretation of the second monogram is correct, this person could indeed have been a musician, since there were no family names in the 6th century.

Iatros, Physiologos, Physikos (medical doctor)

The medical doctors have issued some of the most beautiful seals in my database of specialists. Two of them (those of Sirikios and Manouel Liparites) have already been presented above. There were three terms for the physician: iatros, physiologos, and physikos, all of which are used in literary texts. On the seals, I have only come across the first two.

As with other professions, the question of whether these professionals were state or private physicians applies to this group as well. Furthermore, we do not know whether they worked in a hospital, which was usually attached to a monastery. Although there is no clear answer to this question, we can note that the doctors attached to the palace were called "basilikoi iatroi".

Nouns or names?

When one looks at nouns indicating occupations in a source, whether literary or epigraphic, the first automatic reaction is to think of the occupation itself. It happens, however, that over time people transform these appellative nouns into occupational names. This phenomenon, which occurs in almost every language, results in a large number of people having family names that are identical to the nouns describing their occupation or, most likely, that of an ancestor.

Recent research has shown that family names first appeared in Byzantium in the second half of the eighth and very early 9th centuries. Although most of these names appear to be nicknames attributed to iconoclasts by iconophiles, many of them eventually became family names.[43] Of course, occupational names are common in Byzantium, but they do not appear until the 11th century. The reasons for this significant delay between the appearance of family names and the spread of occupational names are probably to be found in the class structure combined with the nature of the sources from this period. It seems that the first people to adopt family names in Byzantium were members of prominent clans or distinguished individuals establishing new dynasties. It is understandable that these members of the upper class, not necessarily rich but certainly influential and involved in either politics or the military, did not practice humble occupations. The second reason is the nature, quality and quantity of the information we get from the original sources. No official records with lists of names (e.g. inhabitants of villages, taxpayers, members of guilds,

etc.) have survived from the 8th and 9th centuries, but there are many monastic documents from the 11th to 14th centuries that contain such lists of names. Moreover, historians, chroniclers and other writers of the early period were mainly interested in the protagonists of historical events. It is easy to guess that most of these people belonged to the palace and the people connected to it at the highest level, the highest military ranks, members of prominent families, and so on. Only occasionally are people of humble origins mentioned. A similar observation can be made for the hagiographic texts. Even if some lower-class citizens had already adopted surnames in the 8th and 9th centuries, the chances of reading about them in the (available) sources are still small.

Knowing that before – but certainly during – the 11th century, and of course later, it is possible to encounter an occupational (family) name, researchers must be very cautious if the source does not make it clear whether it is a noun or a name. For the sake of brevity, only a few Byzantine occupational names are listed here, with their direct or closest English equivalent family name in brackets: Ἀμαξᾶς and several similar ones (Carter, and possibly Cartwright / Wainwright), Βαρέλης/Βαρελλᾶς (Cooper), Ζωγράφος (Painter), Κεραμεὺς (Potter), Κηρουλάριος (Chandler), Μακελλάριος (Butcher), Μυρεψὸς (Spicer), Ξυλουργὸς (Sawyer; Wright), Οἰκοδόμος (Mason),[44] Πραγματευτὴς (merchant, trader),[45] Ῥάπτης (Taylor), Χαλκεὺς (Smith). Other Byzantine family names are Μουσικός (musician), Τραπεζίτης (banker; moneylender), etc.

In this respect, the material from earlier periods is easier and safer to handle. As for later centuries, however, in many cases it is difficult to say whether the word indicates a profession or a family name. Sometimes it happens that the inscription already contains a first name and a surname, so that the noun we are interested in most likely indicates a profession. In other cases, the structure of the inscription may help. Either way, the issue of recognizing and distinguishing the noun from the name must be treated with caution.

One noun equal to three nouns

Confusing a noun/occupation with a family name / occupational name may be a problem associated with the late period, but in the early centuries of Byzantine history there is a similar difficulty: it happens so that some

terms may have double or even triple meanings. A few examples will illustrate the aspects of this problem:

The noun πραγματευτὴς means both the person who takes care of a service, institution, foundation, etc., and the merchant, as a synonym of ἔμπορος. The first meaning is older, attested in Hellenistic and Roman times. Gradually, the second meaning became more common until it spread throughout the empire and the first meaning was finally abandoned. For inscriptions dating from the early centuries, however, scholars may still have to figure out which of the two meanings is hidden behind the noun.[46]

The μακελλάριος in Byzantium was both the butcher and the seller of meat. There were also other terms used to indicate the butcher's specialty with regard to the animals with which he dealt. In the post-Byzantine period, this noun (as well as its synonyms, σφαγέας and χασάπης) acquired another, quite different meaning in the Greek language: that of the bloodthirsty person, the murderer, which can be interpreted from the metaphorical use of the action of a professional butcher. The same use is attested in English. Another meaning of μακελλάριος in Greek is that of φρουρὸς (watchman), and this is difficult to explain.[47] What is certain is that it does not apply to the two synonyms mentioned above.

Ἀργυροπράτης was the silversmith, the jeweler in general, dealing with all precious metals and stones, but also the moneylender, an equivalent of ἀργυραμοιβὸς and τραπεζίτης, the banker.

Ἀμπελάς could be the owner of the vineyard, the worker in the vineyard, or someone involved in the trade of grapes without necessarily being the producer.

Epilogue

Despite the limitations of space, the number of questions, unresolved issues, and new ideas and approaches presented above shows how familiar and yet unfamiliar Byzantinists are with the professionals who worked within the Byzantine state. Sigillography has great potential, and it has already pointed in new directions that will reveal more aspects of the life of the Byzantine working class and ultimately contribute to the study of Byzantine social history.

Endnotes

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[2] All the links were last accessed and confirmed as working on 20 January 2025.

[3] Until the sixteenth century, what we now know as "Byzantine" was called "Roman". H. Wolf was the first to use the adjective "Byzantine", which was until then ascribed to people originating from Byzantion / Constantinople, in a broader sense, naming Byzantine every citizen of the (Eastern) Roman Empire.

[4] Nicole's publications have been reprinted, together with a useful introduction and commentary, in Dujčev 1970. See also: Christophilopoulos 1935 [2000]; Koder 1991; Kolias, Chrone 2010.

[5] Shandrovskaja 1999; Jordanov 2008; Seibt 2019; Stavrakos, Tsatsoulis 2019.

[6] A digital presentation of a Byzantine boulloterion, accompanied by photos of and information on the original, can be found here: https://harvardartmuseums.org/art/291105. Sometimes, for commercial seals, they were using an instrument with a single printing surface. An example of how to use this type of boulloterion in: Montinaro 2013, 372–374 and 420, plate II. Many seals of this type – one-sided only – have been discovered in Romania and published or re-published in Chiriac, Munteanu 2014, Chiriac, Munteanu 2023, and Paraschiv-Grigore 2020, where also an image of a pliers-like boulloterion in p. 24. It must be noted, however, that, in their great majority, such sealings do not reflect the activity of individuals / freelancers. Several moulds for blank discs have been discovered in Corinth, Greece, as well as in Bulgaria, with most of them kept at the museums of Veliki Preslav and Shumen. See, for example, Jordanov, Zhekova 2007, fig. 684.

[7] The same practice is being followed against iconographic seals or specimens showing only monograms or anonymous inscriptions: usually scholars neglect them, and publish only the very best pieces of a collection.

[8] Grégoire 1922, no. 308.

9 Inscription kept at the Museum of Veliki Preslav, Bulgaria. This inscription related to building activity, here the term has probably the first or the second meaning.

10 DO BZS.1951.31.5.3080; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.3080/view.

11 DO BZS.1951.31.5.3099; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.3099/view. DO BZS.1958.106.1464; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.1464. DO BZS.1958.106.1465; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.1465/view.

12 DO BZS.1955.1.731; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1955.1.731/view.

13 DO BZS.1955.1.4506; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1955.1.4506/view.

14 DO BZS.1951.31.5.1935; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.1935/view.

15 DO BZS.1958.106.4549; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.4549/view.

16 DO BZS.1958.106.778; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.778/view.

17 DO BZS.1951.31.5.406; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.406/view.

18 On the taktika, see Oikonomides 1972. The term taktikon has two meanings, so I make it clear that I am referring to the texts describing the hierarchy, not to the military manuals.

19 On Danielis, see Boeck 2015, 119-127, with references. A high quality image of her can be seen in the Madrid illuminated manuscript of Ioannes Skylitzes' work here: https://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/feminae/DetailsPage.aspx?Feminae ID=28764.

20 Mavroudi 2012, 73-74, with references and an alternative interpretation.

21 On such reliefs and female occupations mentioned in inscriptions, see Holleran 2013.

22 Margarou 2000.

23 Trapp 2001, 596.

24 Stavrakos, Tsatsoulis 2019.

25 DO BZS.1951.31.5.851; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.851/view.

26 Shandrovskaja 1999 [2019].

27 Laurent 1952, no. 266.

28 Paulos: a) Germer-Durand 1911, 173, no. 1; b) Schlumberger 1884, 440 and Konstantopoulos 1917, no. 244; c) Zacos, Veglery 1972, no. 962. Theodoros: Metcalf 2014, 976. On the clergymen, their side-occupations, and Byzantine legislation, see Papagianni 1983, 152–153.

29 Zacos, Veglery 1972, no. 2209B.

30 Nesbitt 1977.

31 DO BZS.1958.106.2024; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.2024/view.

32 DO BZS.1955.1.4520; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1955.1.4520/view.

33 DO BZS.1951.31.5.254; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.254/view.

34 Sometimes, the Byzantines were using on their seals two and even three family names. But this applies only to members of the aristocracy, who wished to emphasize on their glorious lineage.

35 DO BZS.1951.31.5.2339; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.2339/view.

36 Dog: a) DO BZS.1951.31.5.2339; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.2339/view; b) DO BZS.1951.31.5.3146; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.3146/view. Lion: a) ZACOS 1984, no. 933; b) LAURENT 1952, no. 317 [fig. 2]. Griffin: a) DO BZS.1947.2.1496; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1947.2.1496/view; b) DO BZS.1951.31.5.2285; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.2285/view.

37 Seibt 2019, 343, no. 3b, fig. 3.

38 Laurent 1952, no. 83.

39 DO BZS.1958.106.2677; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.2677/view. A similar type of bird with the stick and the bell more clearly visible: DO BZS.1951.31.5.2580; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.2580/view.

40 DO BZS.1947.2.418; see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1947.2.418/view.

41 Cheynet, Bulgurlu, Gokyildirim 2012, no. 11.7.

42 Koltsida-Makre 1996, no. 435.

43 On the origins of family names in Byzantium, see Patlagean 1984; Cheynet 1987; Stephenson 1994; Kazhdan 1997; Seibt 2002; Kountoura-Galaki 2004.

44 According to an alternative yet less popular theory, the name Mason derived from Thomas / Tommaso.

45 In this era, it is rather unlikely to encounter the term πραγματευτὴς with the meaning of caretaker, steward, which is reflected in the English family names Bailey and Stewart.

46 For example, in Feissel 2006, 20, no. 63; 47, no. 158.

47 On μακελλάριος, its various forms and meanings, see Demetrakos, 4441; Kriaras 1985, 289 (with the meaning of φρουρός); Caracausi 1990, 353; Trapp 2001, 962.

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