

EFI RAGIA

Social groups and social position in Byzantium: On the “Electronic database on the Social History of Byzantium, 6th-12th c.: Sources, Problems and Approaches”¹

(Lecture delivered at the *University of Bologna, Dipartimento di Beni Culturali*,
Ravenna, 8th April 2014)

The project “Electronic database on the Social History of Byzantium, 6th-12th c.: Sources, Problems and Approaches” was first submitted to the international contest run by the Greek Ministry of Education in the end of 2010. The contest targeted at sponsoring new scientists with scholarships funded exclusively by the European Social Fund. The project was approved by August 2011 and begun officially in April 2012 in the facilities of the host Institution, the National Hellenic Research Foundation, and specifically at the Institution for Historical Research, Department of Byzantine Research. The supervising researcher of the project is Dr. Maria Leontsini, whom I thank sincerely for her flawless collaboration, patience and understanding. I also thank prof. Anagnostakis, who accepted my research in his program, titled “Everyday and social life in Byzantium”, and whose opinion has been valuable for the development of the post-doctoral research.

My project was initially conceived as a research exploring relations among distinct social groups by incorporating information and data from various sources, such as texts, inscriptions, archaeology and numismatics and by taking into account the results of modern research on separate issues of Byzantine History. The idea to turn the research into an open access electronic database was instigated by the demand of the Ministry that the projects submitted to the contest would be evaluated for their incorporation of modern technology and for their impact on a wider audience. Through my teaching experience, I had also become aware by the time of submission of a need for access to information in Greek about the social history of Byzantium especially by undergraduate students and teachers. So without sacrificing the scientific part, it was decided that a database addressed to a wider public would

¹ This paper was written as part of the postdoctoral research project entitled “Electronic Database on the Social History of Byzantium from the 6th to the 12th Centuries: Sources, Problems and Approaches”, which was implemented within the framework of the Action «Supporting Postdoctoral Researchers» of the Operational Program "Education and Lifelong Learning" (Management Agency: General Secretariat for Research and Technology), and is co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Greek State. The program was realized at the IBR/IHR/NHRF from April 2012 through March 2015.

meet the demands of the contest, which in reality meant that a research would be split into small pieces of information; if, in the place of it, we imagined a book, these little pieces would constitute the substantiation of the theory.

In its initial conception, the material collected in the database was divided into two main parts, one holding the information collected from the sources (source entries, «κοινωνικές κατηγορίες»), and one that contains texts and analysis of particular topics (documentation, «τεκμηρίωση»). The large time span chosen for the research commanded that periods be defined in order to facilitate the handling of the material.

The periods that were chosen are as follows:

- a) Social Developments in the 6th Century
- b) The Age of Transformation, from the 7th to the end of the 8th Century
- c) The Solidification of a New Order, from the 9th Century to the 11th Century
- d) The Society of the Comnenoi: Towards an Aristocratic Regime, end of 11th century and the 12th century

Each period will be complemented with a text holding a brief analysis of its social developments. The basic entries, sources and documentation, are complemented by source references and bibliography.

This was the concept that was submitted to the Ministry for approval. When the time of implementation came, we had to think of practical issues, and in this we had the help of the web developer and of the collaborators at the National Documentation Center. The database acquired its own site with an easy to access URL address (<http://byzmettyhes.gr>), which contains the abbreviation of the name of the database. The developer also ensured that the contents of the database will come up in one of the first places in any Google search of byzantine social categories. The basic consideration that underlay the development of the database for me personally was that it had to work fast in order to upload a considerable number of entries without taking the trouble to connect each entry to the other elements of the database, for the sake of saving time. This roughly meant that all parts of the database had to be connected with each other from the making of an entry. In order to achieve this, the web developer worked from the very beginning with the source entries, since a source entry is the central unit of the database. After my own directions, the source entries were made to hold the source text, source reference and bibliographical references, and commentary. However, the first entries of that type showed that each text (source or commentary) contained data that were not strictly “social”, that would have to be explained for the visitor of the database, since we targeted at the wider audience. Thus a third section of the database was created, the data section (δεδομένα κειμένου), that can be accessed separately, but that, in order to be linked

to the source entries, had to be uploaded first. The data part contains information on termini technici, on persons, on texts, regions etc.

So in the end, the working process took the following course:

First, select the source entry. That, as I said before, comes from the narrative sources, epistles, seals and inscriptions or poetry. The entry is categorized by chronology –the source is normally placed in the period it belongs- and then comment on the text. Next comes distinguishing the social categories of the text and the associate social categories that may be implicated in it, and the data of both text and commentary. All this happens in an office document. The uploading process is exactly reverse. First the data have to be uploaded and saved separately in the database. Then comes the source entry with its separate elements. All these elements appear on screen after the entry has been saved in the database.

At this point I will explain how I worked with the sources in order to recognize easily what we see on screen. To implement this project, it was of capital importance to have a clear perspective of the social terminology that the Byzantines themselves used to describe their community. To achieve this, I selected four sources that are known for the interest their writers show regarding social developments. The first name that comes to mind is naturally Michael Psellos, who elaborated on the social evolution of his time like no other; second came the Novels of the Macedonian emperors on the small landed property of peasants and soldiers; and then Procopios' Secret History and John Lydus' text On Powers. These sources revealed a great number of terms normally used to describe the social position of people in Byzantium. The fact that there are no specific terms for social position, because social position was not legally defined, was something of a problem, because the Byzantines used many alternate terms for the same social category, e.g. the poor, who were designated in the sources as *ἄποροι*, *πένητες*, *πτωχοί*, but also as *ἀφανεῖς*, *ἄσημοι*, *ἄχρηστοι*, *ἀνώνυμοι*, *ἀγενεῖς*, *ἀργοί*, etc, each term sometimes, but not always, carrying with it particular connotations. This problem was solved by categorizing similar terms in one and the same category, thus creating groups of terms that relate to the same category; for some terms it became necessary to compose a category of opposites, such as *ἄδοξοι ἀδοξία ἐνδοξοι δόξα*, because the byzantine quill loved contrasts in texts (*δόξα* is not comprehended without the lack of it in a social distinction context). I admit that, on account of the ambiguity of the sources, a problem still exists regarding the groups of professionals, which may still change many times before I come to a final conclusion about their categorization.

Once selected from a source extract, the social terms are written in a particular field and are automatically listed in the social categories list. So far the catalogue contains

82 social categories. I preferred the term “social categories” (κοινωνικές κατηγορίες) instead of “social groups” because the list does not comprise only social groups, but also social terms and concepts that are important for the social description of a person or of a group, such as *τιμή* (honor), *τάξις* (order), *δυναστεία* (oppression), *ἐλευθερία* (freedom), *εὐπορία* (prosperity), etc.

Indexing the four sources mentioned earlier also revealed the name that we decided to give to the database: *μέτρον τύχης* (measure of fortune), is an expression used only once in the byzantine sources, specifically in a Novel of emperor Romanus Lecapenus, to designate the highest social level that one can achieve in his lifetime². Tyche is a well known concept in antiquity and has many similarities to the roman Fortuna. In Byzantium its role is to explain the developments and the sudden changes of fortune. When it relates to people it is used to explain the lack of complicity of the human will³. As such, the byzantine writers use the notion of *tyche* to denote those elements of social distinction that are not controlled, e.g. lineage and family, nationality, legal situation (free/captive/slave), the existence of a title or an office, or the lack of it. According to these perceptions, we find in the sources lots of types of “tyche”: *τύχη ἐλάσσων* (humble fortune), *τύχη ὀνόματος* (fortune of name, but also of “title”), *τύχη ὑψηλοτέρα* (higher fortune: noble), *τύχη εὐγενής* (noble fortune) etc. It is worth noting that normally –but not always- fortune is not associated to wealth, because wealth alone does not lead to social distinction in Byzantium. Only once the personal fortune of the emperor Justinian I is associated to the Hellenistic idea of *νόμος ἔμψυχος* (living law)⁴. The roman legislation preserved the tyche as criterion for sentencing a convict (in the Codex Justinianus and in the Basilica): punishment is imposed after one’s own fortune (*κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν τύχην*)⁵. Easiness accessing the database was a basic concern for me and for the web developer. On the left of the screen the visitor will see the basic three parts of the database: the entries (λήμματα) are divided by period (περίοδος) and by social category (κοινωνικές κατηγορίες). Choosing social category the visitor comes to the

² N. Svoronos, *Les nouvelles des empereurs Macédoniennes concernant la terre et les stratiotes*, éd. posthume P. Gounaridis, Athènes 1994, no 3.112-113.

³ ODB, 2131. C. Cupane, «Fortuna rota volvitur». Moira e Tyche nel carne nr. I, di Eugenio da Palermo, in: *Χρόνος συνήγορος*, Mélanges Andre Guillou, ed. Lisa Benou – Cristina Rognoni, Νέα Πώμη 8, 2011, (Roma 2012), 137-152.

⁴ *Corpus Iuris Civilis* vol. III: *Novellae*, ed. R. Schöll-G. Kroll, Berlin 1904, repr. Germany 1972, 507.8-10. H. Hunger, *Prooimion. Elemente der byzantinischen Kaiseridee in den Arengen der Urkunden*, WBS 1, Wien 1964, 117-119.

⁵ Basilica, I.1.4.3-7.

social classification and simply chooses the category he is interested in, and then chooses the period. In the next screen there appear the entries that have been attributed to the period chosen by the visitor, who sees the title and a couple of rows of the source entry, whereby he chooses the entry he wants. If the visitor selects to access the database by period, he may well prefer to read the composite social analysis before accessing the database, whereby access to the social categories is provided in this manner through the periods.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, a basic source entry is composed of the source extract, source reference, basic bibliography and a commentary of my own. The links appear on the right of the screen. They concern the other social categories of the text, associated categories that are implied but not mentioned in the extract, information data and documentation, and also associated source entries. By clicking on one of these links the visitor is either directed to his selection (categories/documentation), or a window opens with the information requested (data, associate entries). The part devoted to the documentation works in a similar manner: to the right of the screen there appear the data and the associated source entries, which open as windows on the main screen. Lastly, the data themselves form a catalogue and the text is not accompanied by any links. All these elements are provided with the possibility of printing, for which the format of Google Chrome has been selected. It is worth mentioning that the database works with any browser and that it is compatible with tablet technology as well –unfortunately tablet technology is has not yet included polytonic fonts.

I will not torment the audience more with the electronic construction of the database. Instead, I will go on with some of the basic conclusions of this research. From the very beginning I have to state that there are no particular words or terms in Byzantium that signify the “society” as a whole, as an ensemble of people who preserve different kinds of relations to each other. The Greek term is “κοινωνία”, which itself exists in the vocabulary of the ancient Greeks to denote relations of various types among people. But the term was ascribed different connotations of theological content by the Fathers of the Church in the fourth century (particularly by St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. John Chrysostom). Literally “κοινωνία” means sharing, participating in something. In the Novels of Justinian I it specifically refers to sharing in a crime or participating in a procedure⁶. With its legal meaning the term is not rare in middle and later Byzantium. Through the early Byzantium “κοινωνία” is used for those joining in a heresy, a meaning which is also found later, especially in Theodore

⁶ CIC III, 101.29, 611.6.

Studites. Thus *ὀρθόδοξος κοινωνία, κοινωνία αἰρετικῶν/εἰκονομάχων/ἑτεροδόξων* is particularly frequent in middle Byzantine texts⁷.

Another notion that does not exist in Byzantium is the notion of “social class”; the concept is totally modern and its definition even today depends on the circumstances to which it applies, therefore it may change from country to country (or even from region to region). The Greek term that would give the notion of “class” –also used today for this purpose- is the term “τάξις” and its derivative, “τάγμα”. In reality, however, these terms mean “order” and “ordered corps” respectively; they signify a situation in which everybody or everything has a particular position according to specific standards. With this specification, we understand that things become somewhat complicated, as these terms were used in the West to solidify, and to ideologically justify, social distinctions. The notion of “taxis” itself is fundamental in the conception of the perfect polity by Aristotle⁸. Proclus applied this idea to the heavenly world and claimed that the earthly world is unable to preserve the order⁹. This thought was thereafter taken over by pseudo-Dionysius, who perceived the *τάξις* as inherent of *ἱεραρχία* and hierarchy as a method of return towards God¹⁰. Pseudo-Dionysius holds a central position in the mentality of the medieval western world for the explanation of “social order”: he invented the word “hierarchy” as a notion that explains the arrangement of the world order, and indeed one that attributes a central position to the Church and its people, but as a philosophical system, his neo-platonic approach concerns someone’s identity within the world¹¹. Hierarchy as a “sacred

⁷ Theodori Studitae Epistulae, ed. G. Fatouros, CFHB 31, Berlin 1991, no 13.42, 48.247, 479.46, 539.27.

⁸ Aristotle, *Politica*, 1278b.8-11: *ἔστι δὲ πολιτεία πόλεως τάξις τῶν τε ἄλλων ἀρχῶν καὶ μάλιστα τῆς κυρίας πάντων. Κύριον μὲν γὰρ πανταχοῦ τὸ πολίτευμα τῆς πόλεως, πολίτευμα δ’ ἐστὶν ἡ πολιτεία.*

⁹ Proclus, *In Platonis rem publicam commentarii*, 146.23-147.1: *προσῆκει δὲ που τάξις μὲν τοῖς οὐρανίοις καὶ αὐτοπραγία ... ἄλλοτριπραγία δὲ καὶ ἀταξία προσῆκει τοῖς ἐπιγείοις· τὰ γὰρ γήινα οὐ πράττει τὰ ἑαυτῶν οὐδὲ τὴν τάξιν καθ’ αὐτὴν διασώζει τὴν πρὸς ἑαυτά.*

¹⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *De caelesti hierarchia*, 17.3-11: *ἔστι μὲν ἱεραρχία... τάξις ἱερὰ καὶ ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἐνέργεια πρὸς τὸ θεοειδές... ἀφομοιουμένη καὶ πρὸς τὰς... αὐτῆ θεόθεν ἐλλάμψεις ἀναλόγως ἐπὶ τὸ θεομίμητον ἀναγομένη... Σκοπὸς οὖν ἱεραρχίας ἐστὶν ἡ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοίωσις τε καὶ ἔνωσις...*

¹¹ ODB, 629-630· G. af Hällström, *From Chaos to Cosmos – Interpreting the Hierarchies of Pseudo-Dionysius*, in: *The Eastern Mediterranean in the Late Antique and Early Byzantine Periods*, ed. M. Gourdouba, L. Pietila-Castren, E. Tikkala, Helsinki 2004, 33-39· H.-G. Beck, *Η βυζαντινή χιλιετία*, μφ. Δ. Κούρτοβικ, Αθήνα 1990, 269-270· H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und*

order” (*τάξις ἑρὰ*) was the idea that clarified the dependence of one group from the other in the West and solidified the social classes, in particular the position of the bishops and of the feudal aristocracy. In Byzantium, however, the term is never used in that manner, even if Pseudo-Dionysius was well known to the Byzantines. Order, meaning *τάξις*, never came to signify social class.

From all that it follows also that we cannot speak about a “typical” –whatever that might mean– “tripartite division” of the Byzantine society, meaning a division of society into the upper class, the middle class and the poor. Indeed, tripartite divisions are theoretical constructs that have little to do with reality, even in the West, where they were greatly loved. A division of the world into three sections is a very ancient idea, but what we see in late antiquity and the middle ages is based on Plato, who distinguished among archons, guards (: the military) and the demiourgoi, the workers. Through neo-Platonism the tendency for tripartite divisions reached Pseudo-Dionysius, whose world is arranged in concentric circles composed of three elements, and thus it arrived in the West, where many theories on tripartite social divisions were created¹². What about Byzantium? –one may ask. We cannot be sure about tripartite divisions in Byzantium, because the two texts that come from the 6th c., the *De re strategica* and the *Dialogus de scientia politica* are not complete texts. The first mentions the farmers in the beginning, but we have no idea in what context did the author place them because the beginning of the text is missing, and the second roughly distinguishes among the *aristoi*, the *military* and the *civil orders*. Of the two texts, the Dialog is the more Platonizing. One more tripartite division is found in the *Geoponica* of the 10th c.: in that treatise there is word about the military, the priests and the farmers.

It is clear, in my opinion, that there are no concrete perceptions in Byzantium about society. We cannot talk about a “κοινωνία” in the modern sense, nor about “social classes” or orders, or about tripartite class divisions. The term that comes closer to meaning “κοινωνία” in Byzantium, is the term “πολιτεία”. This ancient term encompassed those groups of people involved in maintaining the harmony of the state, in helping it to function smoothly. But this conclusion has important consequences: polity, “society” and state coincide, an idea that derives from basic

theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich, München 1959, 348-349, 358, 366-367, 376-377, 437-438.

¹² On them see G. Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, Cambridge 1995.

Platonic and Aristotelian thought¹³. It becomes immediately apparent that those who did not belong to any of the constituent groups of a “πολιτεία” lived throughout their lives outside the Greek medieval bounds of the byzantine “society”, or, to put it correctly, “polity”. Moreover, those who did belong to a specific group were assigned a particular position and had a particular role within the context of a “polity”; their defining characteristics were not those of their “class” but those of their role. But roles changed and adapted throughout the byzantine history according to need and demand. Moreover, the relations among separate groups either depend on the qualities assumed by the groups in their effort to assert themselves, or on the qualities assigned to them by the state for different reasons. It is commonly accepted that Byzantium was an empire in which social vertical mobility was feasible and sometimes even easy. However, “social mobility” as defined today by sociology is primarily not vertical, but horizontal or diagonal; it concerns mostly relations among people or groups of the same or slightly different standing. In this context, the relations among separate groups are influenced exactly by those traits that each group maintained for itself or for other groups, and by those that were “adopted” by the polity for them. It becomes apparent that a “group” is by definition narrower than a “class” –indeed it can only be a small fraction of a class- and this explains why we observe so many rivalries among separate groups and why it is so hard to define a “class” in Byzantium¹⁴. For the profiles that are sketched are those of state dependent groups, not of classes; as such they are subject to change and they can even be constructed and be dissolved quite as easily as they appeared. What I am proclaiming here is that in any attempt to approach the byzantine society and its “social groups”, we must distinguish between the profiles projected by the state and those that are maintained and projected by the groups themselves.

It becomes apparent that the byzantine consideration of “society” derives from the antique political theories. For this reason we must be careful in our interpretations, because ancient philosophy approached society through the institutionalized city-state. The groups that are initially recognized as “social groups” acquired a

¹³ Aristotle in his *Politica A'*, 1252a.1-7, perceived the polity as an ensemble of social relations: *Ἐπειδὴ πᾶσαν πόλιν ὁρῶμεν κοινωνίαν τινὰ οὖσαν καὶ πᾶσαν κοινωνίαν ἀγαθοῦ τινος συνεστηκυῖαν (τοῦ γὰρ εἶναι δοκοῦντος ἀγαθοῦ χάριν πάντα πράττουσι πάντες), δῆλον ὡς πᾶσαι μὲν ἀγαθοῦ τινος στοχάζονται, μάλιστα δὲ καὶ τοῦ κυριωτάτου πάντων ἢ πασῶν κυριωτάτη καὶ πάσας περιέχουσα τὰς ἄλλας. Αὕτη δ' ἐστὶν ἡ καλουμένη πόλις καὶ ἡ κοινωνία ἡ πολιτικὴ.*

¹⁴ Cf. H.-G. Beck, *Konstantinopel. Zur Sozialgeschichte einer früh-mittelalterlichen Hauptstadt*, BZ 58, 1965, 11-45.

constitutional character through age-long constitutional practice during the late Roman times, they were, in Beck's interpretation, electoral corps of the Roman polity, such as the senate, the army and the *demoi* of Constantinople, and later on, the Church. The Anonymi of the 6th c. had this model in mind when they attempted to describe the "πολιτείας μέρη" (*constituencies of the polity*). Thus, it is no surprise that the author of *De re strategica* feels embarrassed by the existence of the people who do not belong to any city group, professional or other, and are "not engaged in any activity"; they constitute, in his own words, the "ἀργόν" meaning "the unoccupied" (my own translation). The author adds: οὐ πάντως καὶ ἡμῖν ἀρμόσει μέρος πολιτείας τοιοῦτον (*in my perception such a class of citizens in no way becomes us* –my own translation¹⁵). Apparently, the "ἀργοί" are prone to theft, beggary and other types of crimes, a position that is clearly influenced by Chrysostom. Later on the author explains that a similar group, the ἄχρηστοι, comprises those who are unable for any work, the old and the sick. The author of the *Dialog* on the other hand attributes to the city groups the term "τάγματα" (*orders*). He does not mean the supreme body of the empire, the senate, because that is clearly distinguished by the terms «ἄριστοι», «βουλή τῶν ἀρίστων», «τῶν ἀρίστων κατάλογος»¹⁶, and because the "τάγματα" are also qualified as "ἀστικά" or "συστήματα". Both treatises, however, are products of an educated milieu and projections of the upper classes. For this reason the author of the *Dialog* thinks that foreigners found eligible for the order of the ἄριστοι should constitute a separate corps next to the original ἄριστοι. The anonymous author of *De re strategica*, emphasizing on the honor received from the office, states that people in charge of charitable institutions for the ἄχρηστοι should consider that philanthropy reflects honor upon them¹⁷. However, even at the time of their writing political and "social" considerations of this type were expressions of a reality that was dying. Considering a "polity", meaning a "society", exclusively within the bounds of a city, a "polis", was inscribed in the long line of political and philosophical tradition of antiquity but had little to do with real conditions. By the beginning of the 7th century, the curial

¹⁵ The author of *De re strategica* appears embarrassed by the existence of these people within the frame of a constituted society, therefore I rejected Dennis' translation of this sentence, keeping only the translation of the phrase "class of citizens" for "μέρος πολιτείας". Also "class of the unoccupied" I think reflects better the meaning of the text instead of "leisure class" of Dennis. See *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, ed. G. Dennis, CFHB 25, Washington, DC, 1985.

¹⁶ Menae patricii cum Thoma referendatio *De scientia politica dialogus*, ed. C. M. Mazzuchi, Milano 2002, 20.2-3, 21.23.

¹⁷ Dennis, *Three treatises*, 18.90-93.

city corps had vanished; the largest cities of the empire were soon to fall in the hands of the Persians, followed by the Arabs; and the state had long appropriated the most important curial duties. To state it plainly, the city, the “polis”, is no longer a reference point for, or a source of, any kind of social distinction, the state is. If this is true for the 6th century, it is even more so for the 7th century.

An official approach to the perception of “society” is not really difficult to be detected in byzantine sources of the 6th c. In the Novels of Justinian I we find several social groups, but no overall assessment as to what constitutes society, other of course than the “Roman polity”. An official text of the Lateran Council (649) that contains the penalties imposed on heretics is more elucidating regarding the social divisions that the state recognized. Four large groups are mentioned along with the penalties that are deemed fitting for their status. The first is, as expected, the clergy of all grades, followed by the monks, a group that is normally not of equal standing in society because of its members’ deliberate retreat from the world. The second is the large group of the state servants: *εἰ δὲ ἀξίαν ἢ ζώνην ἢ στρατείαν ἔχοιεν, γυμνωθήσονται τούτων*. The translation of the terms used in this sentence varies: *ἀξία* may be interpreted as “title” or “function”, *ζώνη* as “title/function” but also as military service, *στρατεία* as “military service” as well as “any state service”. In any case, these terms denote the state dependent groups of dignitaries of any rank and those who provided their services either in the military or in the political and civil sector. The last group is the private persons, *ιδιώται*. In Byzantium the term *ιδιώτης* is conceived in a twofold manner: it may signify the person who leads a private life away from public affairs, but also the person who serves in the political sector of the administration. Here the first is meant; the *ιδιώται* are therefore distinguished into the *ἐπίσημοι* and the *ἀφανεῖς*. We understand that the *ἐπίσημοι* are private persons with assets; their wealth is confiscated in case they are found heretics. The *ἀφανεῖς* are the exact opposite. They are not marked for their wealth, therefore they remain “unknown”; if they are found heretics, they simply have to suffer corporal punishment and exile. The *Ecloga* confirms the analysis attempted here; witnesses admitted to the court are divided in four large categories: those with title/function/service (*ἀξίαν, στρατείαν*), those with a profession (*ἐπιτήδευμα*) and those with wealth (*εὐπορίαν*). People who lack any of these qualities are characterized as *ἄγνωστοι*, “unknown”, and are liable to torture in case their testimony at court is not found truthful¹⁸. This last stipulation

¹⁸ CIC III, no 90, and cf. *Ecloga*. Das Gesetzbuch Leons III. Und Konstantinos’ V., ed. L. Burgmann, FbRG 10, Frankfurt 1983, 14.1.

coming from the late Roman legislation is omitted in the Novel of the empress Irene regarding the witnesses of legal procedures¹⁹.

These are the most elaborate expositions of the categories of subjects that the state acknowledged; information collected from the source material after the eighth century confirms the scheme outlined here. Of note is the fact that “nobility”, *εὐγένεια*, has no place in it, and wealth, *πλοῦτος*, only holds a marginal role. The state divided its servants into those at the top of the administration who held title or office, into its soldiers and into those who provided any kind of service. The definitions of both groups, state servants and private persons, are encompassing: their members may be of noble birth or not, rich or poor, large or medium landowners, but even dependent farmers or professionals without any land at all. The real social section is found there, where a subject of the empire entered public service, or, to put it clearly, entered the state payroll or became eligible for some privilege in return for the provided service. He thereafter abandoned permanently his *ἀφάνεια* and his name was listed in a special catalogue (*κατάλογος*) because of the payment or the privilege he received. The vast majority of people that were not marked for their relation to the state were, after the text’s interpretation, *ἰδιῶται*, not distinguished for any social or economic reason; they were simply tax-payers.

Closing this brief presentation I would like to draw your attention to two texts that clarify further the position of the state regarding descend and wealth, verses self-projection of the upper classes who staffed the supreme military commands. In his *Tactica*, in an extract much discussed in the recent bibliography, the emperor Leo VI advises how to choose a general. The emperor wrote: “οὐ μὴν δὲ τὸν πλούσιον ἀποδοκιμάζομεν ὅτι πλούσιος” (*we do not repudiate/condemn the rich because he is rich*) and continued “ἐὰν δὲ προγόνων ἐστὶ λαμπρῶν καὶ περιδόξων ἀπόγονος ἀγαπᾶν μὲν δεῖ τοῦτο” (*if someone is an offspring of glorious and celebrated ancestors we should appreciate it*), but none of these traits is necessary for appointing somebody at the post of a *strategos*²⁰. To the contrary, the emperor claims that a general adorned only with his ancestry and not with his valor (*ἀρετῇ*) is an *ἄχρηστος* (*useless*). This is a grave/serious accusation that equates noble generals with no particular abilities on the battlefield with the group of the *ἄχρηστοι*,

¹⁹ L. Burgmann, *Die Novelle der Kaiserin Eirene*, FM 4, 1981, 20.54-56. In the Novella of Irene mentioned are the clerics (*ἱερεῖς*), archons (*ἄρχοντες*), the military (*στρατευόμενοι*), the decurions (*πολιτευόμενοι*), the wealthy and the professionals (*εὐπορίαν ἢ ἐπιτήδευμα ἔχοντες*). These are considered to live piously (*εὐσεβῶς δηλονότι καὶ ἐν εὐλαβείᾳ βιούντων*).

²⁰ *The Tactica of Leo the VI*, ed. G. Dennis, CFHB 49, Washington, DC, 2010, 22, 24, 26.

those that are of no use to the *polis* (and by extension to the state) because they are unable to provide any real services²¹. The emperor goes on to say that a *strategos* without valor will remain *ἄπρακτος* even if he is of noble birth, meaning that he should not expect to be honored with a function or a title. The crosswise schema that brings out the meaning of the words of Leo VI is quite accentuated, as the *στρατιώτης λιτὸς* (simple soldier with no function/title) is honored for his deeds, but the *strategos* coming from *προγόνων λαμπρῶν* is an *ἄπρακτος* because he has no bravery²². It is worth noting that the text relies on Onasander, exactly as the anonymous author of a *Tacticon* of the 10th c., who explicitly chose the rich for the supreme military command²³. Leo the VI maintained part of the vocabulary of Onasander and expanded the social aspect of his prototype in order to be recognisable to his contemporaries.

The second abstract comes from the middle of the 11th c. When the emperor Michael VI accused Isaakios Komnenos –in the words of Psellos- that “*he collected the money of the people and reduced his authority to a simple case not of glory, but of greed*”²⁴, -an accusation that bares resemblance to the opinions of Leo VI regarding the valor of the generals, Isaac Komnenos revolted. Psellos was then sent to the camp of Isaakios to propose a compromise: if he accepted to lay down arms, he would be honoured with the title of Caesar and thus he would succeed normally the emperor Michael VI upon death. In his effort to persuade Isaakios, Psellos used this argument: “*I reminded them of the scale of promotions, and accused [those who] surmounted the ranks, and commended the rational advance to the imperial function, because the order is such: because action comes first and then follows the theory, exactly as the man of action is first and then follows the man of theory, and exactly*

²¹ Cf. Das Strategikon des Maurikios, Hrg. G. Dennis, CFHB 17, Wien 1981, 342.3-8. The author of the *Strategikon* of Maurikios characterizes women, children and old people as *ἄχρηστοι*, who must be driven out of the city in case of a hostile siege. The measure targets at saving supplies for the soldiers and those who can defend the city.

²² On the terms *λιτὸς-ἄπρακτος* see N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles*, Paris 1972, 290.

²³ A. Dain, *Sylloge Tacticorum*, Paris 1938, 1.3.8, 1.37.16. Both texts follow the *Tacticon* of Onasander but the one published in the *Sylloge* actually gives the advice that the emperor Leo VI refrains from repeating.

²⁴ Michele Psello, *Imperatori di Bisanzio (Cronografia)*, Introduzione di Dario Del Corno, testo critico a cura di Salvatore Impellizzeri, commento di Ugo Criscuolo, Traduzione di Silvia Ronchey, Fondazione di Lorenzo Valla 1984, 2, 180.6-18: *...τὰ δὲ τῶν πολλῶν συλλέξαντα χρήματα, καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐσχηκότα οὐκ εὐκλείας, ἀλλ’ ἀπληστίας ὑπόθεσιν.*

as most and the best emperors were elevated to the imperial office from the rank of Caesar. Some of the attendants responded to my words saying 'this is the [order of] promotions of individuals, but he (:Isaakios) has already had the fortune (:tyche) of reigning' ”²⁵.

As you may observe in the abstract, Psellos attempted to present the imperial office as the crowning of a successful career of a public employee (!), and indeed he was very proud of his sophistry. In the abstract we find the notions of *taxis* and *tyche* and the group of *ιδιώται*, the private individuals. *Taxis* in this particular extract of Psellos relates to the inner hierarchy of the court and to the order followed in promotions, for example in the case of public employees, who might expect to reach the rank of logothetes, and in the case of the officers of the army, of whom it was not accustomed to reach the rank of strategos, because the generals came from the noble families of Byzantium. In the argument of Psellos, no particular significance for a promotion is attributed to one's nobility or wealth, thus no particular privilege is recognized to Isaakios Komnenos on account of his position. The perception of the people surrounding Komnenos was somewhat different –I remind the audience that in the tent of the aspiring emperor at that time were found John Komnenos the father of the future emperor Alexios I Komnenos, Katakalon Kekaumenos, Nikephoros Botaneiates the future emperor, and John Doukas, brother of the next emperor Constantine X Doukas and father in-law of Alexios I. Michael Psellos in the presence of the crème de la crème of the byzantine nobility dared equate them to the *ιδιώται*, which they immediately noticed. A first reading of their answer to Psellos leads to the obvious conclusion, that Isaakios had been already proclaimed emperor by the army, so it was unacceptable that he was expected to lay down the insignia of the imperial office. But reading through the lines we come to the conclusion that the supporters of Komnenos simply rejected that a man of the position of Komnenos, of noble birth and holding a supreme military command, was treated as an *ιδιώτης*, and was obliged, as if coming from absolute social obscurity, to rise through the ranks gradually, like any other public employee.

The example of Psellos, more than any other encapsulates the conflict between the military and the politikoi in the 11th c., and in a few words reveals the significance of divergent social group profiles in Byzantium, namely the significance of self-definition and of the definition “of the other”, which regulates the social relations and in some cases generates political developments, as it happened in the 11th c.

²⁵ Michael Psellos Chronographia 2, 27.28-29.

Let's sum it up. This presentation concerns the electronic database on the social history of Byzantium and the principles on which it depended regarding both its electronic and its research part. The conception of the byzantine society as an ensemble of separate social groups, not classes, responds to its own liquidity and mobility. As expected, the methodology chosen facilitates the research, because it targets not at an unclassified mass of human relations in Byzantium, but at specific social groups and to the position they acquired in Byzantium and to the position they were considered to have by other groups. Here a very small part of the research was presented, which related to the general consideration of the byzantine society, with some specific examples that justify this approach. The research included many social groups and hopefully it will produce good results in the near future.