

EFI RAGIA**The Geography of the provincial administration of the Byzantine Empire (ca 600-1200), Part I: the Warehouses¹**

(Lecture delivered at the *University of Bologna, Dipartimento di Storia, Culture, Civiltà*, Bologna, 10th 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.

The research subject concerning the institution of the “apothekai”, in English warehouses, of the Byzantine Empire, is for me personally an old subject, since it occupied a significant amount of my time already before the completion of my thesis on the Maeander Valley in west Asia Minor. The reason is simply that in the “darkest” times of the empire, between the 7th and the 8th c., the seals of the genikoi kommerkiarioi, who were in charge of the apothekai at that time, offered the only evidence on the provinces of the Maeander Valley, and indeed that evidence is spectacular. The overall number of seals saved concerning the imperial territory is of significant volume; for this reason in the book I commented only what was pertinent to the thesis, but already I had become aware that, if handled properly, it was a material that could yield noteworthy results on the manner in which the provincial

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.

administration changed in that period, exactly before the formation of the themes of the empire. Having said the magic words, “seals” and “themes” let me underline mostly for the students that are here with us today how important seals are for complementing the historical record with evidence relating to the evolution of institutions (titles, offices, services of the empire), to prosopographical surveys, to the political and administrative geography as well as to the ecclesiastical history of the empire. The results that the study of seals can provide is, I think, best demonstrated in the example of the seals of the *genikoi kommerkiarioi* and *vassilika kommerkia* of the 7th-8th c. and in that of the office holders of the late 10th-11th c., a period that is well documented but its sources show no particular interest in administrative evolutions (after the *Taktikon Escorial*) –in that case the material has been studied well by prof. Cheynet. So, my idea was to approach the seals of the *genikoi kommerkiarioi* from the point of view of geography, aiming at tracing the breakdown of the late Roman provinces and the emergence of the new thematic structure of the imperial territory. The project, with the support of prof. E. Chrysos, was submitted to the Central European University in Budapest in 2005 and the first part of the research was conducted there.

The study of the seals of *genikoi kommerkiarioi* and *vassilika kommerkia* is a tricky subject for several reasons: first, because the seals are practically “mute” and convey no information other than what we see on them; second, because they exceed 250 pieces, and they are not very similar to each other: the geographic names mentioned are those of provinces, cities, and regions, and also of themes, of which the most regular are those of provinces, but there are provinces very irregularly represented, provinces that are only mentioned once or twice, provinces that show a regular representation but then disappear and reappear many years later, there are also the curious seals of the “*andrapoda*” that span only through a couple of years; third, these seals are by themselves associated to the themes of the empire, through the first seal of “all the provinces of the Christ-loving *Armeniakon*” (717/8) followed by the seals of the other themes of the empire in the successor institution of the *vassilika kommerkia*. Last but not least, the terminology portrayed in the seal inscriptions is that of the administrative commercial sector of the empire (*kommerkia*, *genikoi kommerkiarioi*) sometimes combined with offices of the political and military sector, such as those of the *genikoi logothetai*, and the *logothetai tou stratiotikou*.

The theories that have been put forward to explain this institution, which spans over a period of more than one hundred years, do not agree with each other either in the general concept or in the details.

The oldest theory is that of commerce. One way or the other, the *genikoi kommerkiarioi* were in charge of some type of commercial activity, either relating to the general commerce and to the collection of commercial customs duties, or relating to specific products such as silk.

The second theory connects the warehouses with the army. After Henny and Haldon, the warehouses were points of concentration and redistribution of arms and weapons, possibly also other military supplies, for the army, to put it more correctly, for the army of the themes, the new military and peripheral administrative unit of the empire. This theory presupposes that neither institution exists without the other, so when we see warehouses, we may as well read “themes”. The fact that the first mention of the army of the *Armeniakoi* practically coincides with the beginning of the institution of the warehouses is suspiciously supportive of this construction. Treadgold’s approach is similar, but of quite different philosophy as it implicates also the distribution of landholdings to the soldiers.

The fourth approach interprets the warehouses as an institution serving the levy of regular taxes in kind –it is consequently connected to the *genikon logothesion*, the general ministry of finance of middle byzantine times- and to the concentration of the products in the warehouses. Thereafter one of the possibilities might well have been their use for supplying the army. In this theory, Brandes has directly associated the expansion of the warehouses with the thematic institution but denied that there was any logic in their geographic distribution. In this direction also, our host, prof. Consentino, has recently suggested that the institution may well be connected with the *synone* –a kind of compulsory purchase on account of the state- that was, however, not regularized and was implemented only in regions and at times that the tax was generally difficult to be collected otherwise. The mechanism as described by the professor is reversed compared to what we know about it so far.

I am aware that the audience may be interested in what I would have to suggest about the institution of the *apothekai*. But I will not proceed to any attempts to explain it, simply because I do not really care what it was, I only care about what the seals show and how they can help us to determine how the provincial administration changes. Nevertheless, this will not deter me from making a few remarks. What follows regards an appreciation of the theories on the warehouses that have been put forward so far, in relation to other phenomena which, when taken into account, appear to contradict these theories, or at least appear to create a series of new questions that need to be answered in order to accommodate this institution into the historical context.

Firstly, my long gone professor Oikonomides had remarked that the warehouses “flee the war zone”, meaning that they are moving westwards with time. This is not true. On the contrary, the warehouses in the end of the 7th c., remain exactly where they started, in the East, namely in the provinces of Armenia and Cappadocia, fearlessly confronting the Arabs all through the reigns of the emperors Constas II, Constantine IV and Justinian II. Whatever it was, the Byzantines were able to sustain the apothekai institution in the major war zones of the empire. In my opinion the hypothesis about their commercial role should be regarded with caution, because it contrasts sharply with the picture of constant warfare in the East. After this theory we would have to admit that, in spite of the severe byzantine-arab confrontations of the time, the state cared so much about its commerce –or about its silk for that matter– that it set up and expanded the institution all over the empire in the late seventh century. Moreover, no matter what the variations may be, I think that by now there is a more or less unanimous estimate of the Byzantinists that the civic and municipal environment and civilization of the empire was by the 7th c. severely damaged, it is therefore highly questionable which and how high urban needs in the midst of war would a large scale commerce meet, which would explain the territorial expansion of the institution. To this question I will return a little later with further remarks.

The same reservations more or less apply to the theory, according to which the institution was set up in order to facilitate the collection of taxes. With this particular distribution as it appears in maps 1 and 2 for the reigns of Constas II and Constantine IV, I tend to disagree with Brandes, on the basis of the objection that it makes no sense to set up an institution for collecting the taxes exactly in the provinces where the people were engaged with war and were probably not able to pay their yearly levies. The theory of prof. Consentino that it was not at all about a regular tax levied by the genikon logothesion but an irregular one, fits the pattern better, but then again we see that certain provinces such as Asia and Isauria, were heavily taxed with that irregular tax for a series of years, something that would have caused social discontent that would be difficult to handle. However, exactly because of that interpretation, one might be tempted to place in this particular context the reasons of the first dethronement of emperor Justinian II. If the warehouses served the collection of taxes, then Asia Minor and the islands were severely taxed, as map 3 makes clear.

The last theory, which connects the apothekai with the thematic institution, meaning that the apothekai were destined to facilitate the function of the thematic armies, makes us feel a little uneasy. The reason is that most researchers tended to believe that the institution of the themes was a once-and-for-all administrative reform that

took place either in the reign of Heraclius or in the reign of Constas II, which means that the seals, attesting to the thematic institution many years after their supposed creation, tell us a different story. This problem I think we can approach from a different perspective if we realize that there is no evidence more official than the seals -in the same category of reliable evidence I would place only the documents and the signatures in them, a good example of the 7th c. is the iussio of emperor Justinian II- because they are the advocates of a person's official authority and for this reason they are precise and not descriptive. From this perspective, the narrative texts such as the Chronography of Theophanes, in which the themes are mentioned more than once for the 7th c., are only secondary sources. The publication of the genikoi kommerkiarioi seals, not only that of Zacos-Veglery but also that of the Dumbarton Oaks collection, has in the recent years caused a re-evaluation of the entire material concerning the institution of the themes –mainly in Paris prof. Cheynet and Zuckerman are very skeptical and have moved the time of the creation of the themes in the 8th c. Nevertheless, the same school rejects the possibility that the warehouses provided supplies of any form to the army. The most recent publication regarding the issue is that of Federico Montinaro in the Travaux et Memoires of 2013, of which there is a comprehensive review in the introduction of C. Zuckerman, combined with a severe critique against J. Haldon. Zuckerman characterizes the view of Haldon that the genikoi kommerkiarioi were “*financial crisis managers*” as a “paroxysm”, and continues: “*it is Montinaro’s great merit to remind the reader that there is not the slightest evidence for any involvement by the kommerkiarioi in providing provisions for military forces on campaign or in supplying the city of Constantinople; neither did they show any attested interest in the movement of non-precious commodities. ... the kommerkiarioi dealt with trade, mostly high value-added long distance trade, supervising, administering, and, most importantly, taxing it. For the cash-strapped Byzantine government, they were the source of ready cash. This appreciation does not fit with the wide-spread belief that trade and coinage all but disappeared in the seventh and eighth century, precisely the summit of the kommerkiarioi’s activity. Whether this belief is as sound as it is common must, no doubt, be the question that needs asking*”.

This summary raises several issues. I will begin with the themes. We understand the themes as an institution which, at the peak of its expansion, in the late 9th and 10th c., has some particular characteristics: first, its territorial expansion: each theme is a province of the empire, the old provinces having long disappeared; second, its governor is the general, who administers a periphery, as well as a military corps; third, the soldiers are recruited from the landholders of each particular periphery. To

give you my opinion on this issue as clearly as possible, I will make a statement: from a research point of view, there is absolutely no reason to suppose that these separate elements of what we understand as “thematic institution” was the product of one reform. No emperor, not even the mighty Heraclius, would have dared abolish the old order with one stroke, re-designing the provincial administration from the beginning. Apart from the fact that there is absolutely no record of such a reform, the seals, as noticed earlier, tell us another story, specifically that the provinces were well in place until the late 730s. This means that by putting the names of the provinces on them, the Byzantines defined the exercise of authority of the seal owners within the borders of each province, and established their right to make use of the infrastructures and possibly also of the staff of those provinces. Taking this simple syllogism further it follows that we should also not expect that the institution of an army –ie the Thrakesion by Justinian II- meant the simultaneous subjection of specific territories to the authority of its general, or that the allocation of those provinces to one army –as in the example of the Armeniakoi in 717/8-, meant that all provinces of Asia Minor were provided with an army. Indeed, one of the mistakes of the traditionalist approach to the thematic institution is that it takes for granted that the withdrawal of the armies in the 7th c. from the eastern frontier after the advance of the Arabs resulted in their territorial settlement in specific provinces, which led to the conclusion that Asia Minor was divided into new territories corresponding to the “landing” of the armies; thereafter those territories were further subdivided in order to accommodate the new themes, i.e. the Thrakesion. This theory is simply to be discarded and the maps provided for example by Karayannopoulos and Treadgold are to be consulted with caution.

Now, I did not want to address in this presentation the problem of coin finds in Asia Minor, because it is a complicated and difficult problem, but, after the recent publication of Montinaro, a few remarks are in order: Hendy has remarked that the coins in Asia Minor stop when the seals of the kommerkiarioi begin, in the reign of Constat II, and has connected the phenomenon with the institution of the themes, meaning that, the soldiers being recruited among landholders, there was no need for their payment in cash, and so the coins almost vanish from all sites in west Asia Minor. The social category of soldiers is indeed the largest category of employees of the Byzantine state, and their yearly compensations were an important factor for coin circulation. In my opinion the transition from the system of the early byzantine times to that of the themes, in which the soldiers were compensated only when on campaign, constitutes one of the main mechanisms of social change in this time. We know that the state machine in the end of the 7th c. was significantly smaller than that

of the sixth century, which means that other state dependent groups (employees of various hierarchical status) also did not have the same role in the 7th c. as they had in the 6th. When the groups that are expected to spend, actually don't, because they are not in the same social and financial position any more, then there is a severe drop in monetary circulation, and that is what is attested in the excavations of sites in west Asia Minor. I do not claim that I have read all the existing archaeological material of Asia Minor, but at least for the region that was the research focus of my thesis it is certain from the coin publications of sites as Sardis, Didyma/Hieron, Priene, and Aphrodisias, that the coins become much scarcer after the 620s, and almost disappear after the 650's.

The observations that can be made regarding the position of Montinaro are even more, as the seals themselves indicate the questions: why, if indeed the purpose that the institution of the warehouses served was commerce, are the *vassilika kommerkia* associated with the *strategiai* (generalships) of the themes (of Hellas, of Thrakesion, or of the Kibyrraiotai), or with the *dioikeseis* (of Andros, or of Hellas)? What kind of connection can be established between commerce and a purely military institution or what kind of commerce is served based on an administrative division that we know served *land taxation*? If commerce was the question, why is it that the warehouse of Thessalonica begins to function only in 713? Why is it that of the two well-known places of import, Abydos and Trebizond, there is only one seal of Abydos, dated to the reign of Constat II, while Trebizond almost disappears from the seal catalogues after 692/3? These questions which, I underline, derive only from the study of seal inscriptions, do indicate that the interpretation of the warehouses is a multifarious problem: we need to explain the geographic pattern that appears on the maps, but also who was buying, who was selling and what kind of wares were exchanged, and why, in spite of all this alleged commerce, there is no coin in the regions that shared in the institution as early as 687, such as Asia, Caria, Lydia, that in the 7th c. were, I have to underline, the regions with about a millennium of established urban civilization. When these questions are answered in a convincing manner, we will be able to accept the theory on commerce without reservations.

My geographic examination of the seals of the *genikoi kommerkiarioi* commences with the reigns of the emperors Constat II and Constantine IV, which present common characteristics regarding the management of the institution that appears to have functioned mainly in the eastern provinces. Implicated were the provinces of Cappadocia, of Armenia I, II, and IV, the Pontic provinces of Paphlagonia and Helenopontus, of Honorias and of Galatia and the southeastern provinces of Isauria and Cilicia (both of them). Particular warehouses during those reigns were the

warehouses of Abydos, that only functioned once under Constatas II, and of Africa, Pylae and the Sangarios river (679/80), and of Sebastopolis (668-672/3) under Constantine IV. This diversification of the institution already in the first years of its function shows that it is flexible and adjusts according to the need that the state had to accommodate in a particular area or time. The fact that Abydos did not serve as base of the warehouses after its only seal, dated to 659-668, indicates that the apothekai were probably not serving trade, because Abydos was seat of a customs office. On the other hand, one may not escape noticing that at Pylae and Pythia were situated large imperial estates, as was the case also along the lower Sangarios River, that in addition held military installations (the camp of Malagina was in the area). And it doesn't end there, as the provinces of Bithynia, Honorias and Galatia were some of the provinces in which the old guards regiments were billeted, and where the troops of the Opsikion were stationed. But the most fascinating discovery of this time of severe byzantine-arab confrontations relates to the provinces of Honorias and Africa; their apothekai functioned in 673/4 and were managed by two persons, Mikkinas and Gregorios. Apparently, the warehouses of Africa and Honorias were the only ones that were probably engaged with providing supplies either for Constantinople itself or for the military fleet of Byzantium. I remind the audience that the Arabs set up naval bases for their fleets in ports of Cilicia, Lycia, Rhodes and Smyrna between 671 and 672, occupied Kyzikos in 672/3 and landed on Crete in 675. There is absolutely no evidence about the naval engagements between the Byzantines and the Arabs during the first blockade of Constantinople, but there are indications. After Theophanes, Constantine IV had ordered the construction of war ships in 671² and the Miracles of St. Demetrius relate that the emperor was engaged in war against the Arabs and could not dispose of his fleet to save Thessalonica from the Slavs³.

Under Justinian II the warehouses expanded to cover almost all of Asia Minor, the Islands and Crete. The most complicated problem of the warehouses' geographic distribution in the reign of Justinian II is that of the Armenian provinces. Careful consideration of the sigillographic and other evidence, such as the subscription lists of the Sixth and the Quinisextum Councils of the Church leads to the conclusion that the Justinianic province of Armenia I –or Armenia III as it was classified by emperor Maurice- had been dissolved into the coastal regions of Pontus with Trebizond and

² *Theophanis Chronographia* vol. I, ed. C. De Boor, Lipsiae 1883, 353.

³ P. Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de Saint Démétrius et la pénétration des Slaves dans les Balkans*, I: Le texte, Paris 1979, 213 (fourth miracle of the second collection).

Kerasous and the so-called Great Armenia (Megale Armenia) in the sources, around the cities of Koloneia and Kamacha. There is no real information about the reason of the division; my estimate is that it was triggered by the conquest of Theodosiupolis by the Arabs in 653. In any case, in the end of the 7th c. there is no functioning province of Armenia III, a fact that I have tried to depict on the map. What functions, and indeed rather steadily, is the warehouse of Trebizond and Kerasous, sometimes, but not always, with that of Lazica, and in one case with the name “littoral of Pontus”. These developments may well be associated with the so-called “ducatum of Chaldia”, attested in the *Taktikon Uspenskij* and in an epistle of Michael II preserved in Latin. The creation of a ducatum of Chaldia in these regions would not be a surprise no matter when it took place, because especially after the conquest of Theodosiupolis there would be an urgent need to block the enemy advances to the Sea of Pontus. I tend to believe that it took place after the disappearance of Trebizond and Lazica from the *genikoi kommerkiarioi* seals, which is observed in the early years of the reign of Leo III. However, I note that I have not yet come to a conclusion about this issue and there is a possibility that I will revise my opinion in the future.

The involvement of the province of Asia in the institutional developments of the late 7th c. is striking. The province is the only province of west Asia Minor for which we have an almost complete series of seals dating from 687 to 697. The western maritime front with the provinces of Asia, Caria and Lycia was involved in all types of *apothekai*, the simple warehouses, that of the “*andrapoda*”, and the *vassilika kommerkia*, and so far it appears that one type replaces the other year after year, meaning that we do not yet have two types of warehouses in the same year in the same province. The warehouses of the “*andrapoda*”, that I think is best translated as “prisoners” functioned in the western and central provinces of the peninsula. The seals, which begin in 693 and end in 697, confirm that particular ethnic groups were treated separately from the rest of the population in Byzantium, usually in order to facilitate their settlement. This seal series is connected in the bibliography with the episode of the annihilation of the Slavs settled in Bithynia by the emperor Justinian II. The pattern of settlement of the “*andrapoda*”, however, suggests that not only they were not executed –at least not all of them-, but they probably enjoyed the emperor’s trust for many years, since they were settled in key provinces, in Bithynia, Cilicia, Isauria and Cappadocia.

From the geographic point of view also noteworthy is the management of the maritime fronts under Justinian II, in particular of the province of the Islands (Nesoi). The warehouse of Nesoi only functioned once, in 687, to be dissolved immediately after that into its constituent components, meaning the *Kyklades* islands and the

Aegean Sea, a unit which appears much later (711) and is one of the novelties of the middle Byzantine times. Also at this time the islands of the eastern Aegean were attached to the warehouses of the west Asian provinces. A particular warehouse is that of the chersonese of Loryma, of great strategic significance since it commands access to the Aegean Sea from the East, on which also the ancient emporion of Fyskos is located. The picture of the "maritime" apothekai is completed with the apotheke of Crete that functioned in 688. These seals testify that the central administration had no hesitation when it needed to adjust the peripheries to the actual administrative department, the warehouses, for reasons of functionality. The apothekai of the Kyklades are further subdivided (a northern apotheke of Andros and a southern of the southern island ring functioned under Leo III). Of these units preserved in the *Taktikon Uspenskij* are the Aigaion Pelagos under a *droungarios*, and Crete under a general and archons, while the Kyklades islands are mentioned by Theophanes relating to the events of 726/7; at this point it appears that they were not elevated to thematic status but were probably incorporated in the theme of the Aigaion Pelagos.

Now, the map showing the distribution of the apothekai during the first reign of Justinian II is, I think, quite indicative regarding the changes that the last of the Heraklids brought to the administration. I will now turn your attention to the West, by underlying that what happened in the West was directly connected to the developments in the East. By 692 the caliph Abd al-Malik had consolidated his power within the caliphate and turned against Byzantium. The events led to the battle of Sebastopolis, in which the Arabs won a spectacular victory over the imperial forces that were under the command of Justinian II personally and of Leontios. Armenia defected almost immediately after that, Qayrawan was retaken (a single Arab source dates the event to 693/4) and the Arab forces were mobilized for an attack against Carthage. In Byzantium, this new situation triggered the institution of the themes of Hellas and Sicily, but it is worth noticing that in Armenia I and IV the warehouses functioned normally even though they were heavily stormed by the Arabs after 692. Theophanes places the conquest of Carthage in 697/8, but he describes several phases of the operations, that probably took place over a period of two years at least. The warehouse of Sicily, which functioned in 696/7 falls nicely into the context and was probably destined to provide supplies for the byzantine fleet that had been sent to Africa under the command of the patrician Ioannes. If we believe the narrative of Theophanes, Ioannes managed to recapture some of the forts, but when a powerful Arab fleet arrived, he withdrew to Crete and called for reinforcements. At this point the apotheke of Hellas was put to operation (698/9), but the army of Ioannes revolted

and expelled Leontios from the throne. In spite of all his anti-Justinianic propaganda, Leontios had delayed to deploy his forces against the Arabs in Carthage, while on the eastern front his failure to check the Arab raids was blatant. For these reasons Leontios lost favor with the army and was dethroned.

After the dethronement of Justinian II in 695 the state appears to be more moderate regarding the function of the *apothekai*. The warehouse of Asia after 697 functioned only once, in 713-715. The warehouses that are most stable are those of Constantinople and Mesembria, that begun operating already under Justinian. Thessalonica appears for the first time in 713 and operated steadily until 783/4. Leo III revived the institution and several of the measures of Justinian II, such as the *vassilika kommekia*, the units of Aigaion Pelagos, Crete and the Chersonese of Loryma that appears as “Kato Hexapolis” (a wider region that includes the straits between Kos, Rhodes and the coasts of Caria that was later assigned to the *Kibyrraiotai*), and intensified the operation of the warehouses in the Balkan provinces of the empire.

I will begin to comment the warehouses of the themes at this point with the one that operated in the Balkan provinces, and that is the warehouse of Thrace. This warehouse started functioning only after the 730s in the institution of the *vassilika kommerkia* and is probably to be associated with the army of Thrace. I remind the audience that the army of Thrace is mentioned in the *iussio* of the emperor Justinian II, dated to 687, but that it is difficult to trace not only its operations, but also its existence, since some researchers have connected the army of Thrace with that of the Thrakesion (notably R.-J. Lilie and T. Lounghis), which complicates any new approach to the problem. However, I think that dr. Leontsini has well established that the army of Thrace was nothing more than the personal army of the emperor, as this is attested also by Constantine VII in his *De Thematibus* and as it is deduced by the fact that the *ypostrategos* of Thrace participated in the Sixth Ecumenical Council – most natural, since at the head of this army was Constantine IV personally, for the operations against the Bulgars. Until the 730s, the only warehouses that operated and can be brought into association with the army of Thrace are those of Constantinople, Mesembria, Panion and Madytos, a fact that leads to the conclusion that the provincial civil administration of the Diocese of Thrace had been abolished quite early.

Turning your attention to the thematic institutions of Asia Minor, which are the oldest of the empire, I point to the assumption that, following the suggestions of M. Hendy, J. Haldon and W. Brandes, there exists a new army in west Asia Minor after 687, and that is the army of the Thrakesion. This army is first attested in 711 as Justinian II

relied unsuccessfully on one of its regiments. I repeat that the institution of an army at this point does not necessitate the abolishment of the late Roman provincial organization, therefore in west Asia Minor we still see the apothekai based on the provinces. Nevertheless, at about the same time, Theophanes makes mention of the “provinces of the general” of the Anatolikon theme while narrating the events around Amorion in 716. That the accommodation of the soldiers in the interior of the Asian peninsula in the end of the 7th c. resulted in an upgrading of the prestige of their commander, who came to be considered as the protector and probably as the commander of those regions appears normal. However, the first army that was established in certain provinces was not the army of the Anatolikoi, because the warehouses of Phrygia Pacatiana, Salutaria and Pisidia function normally in the 720s, but that of the Armeniakoi: in 717/8 operated the warehouse of “Koloneia and of all the provinces of the Christ-loving Armeniakon”, the warehouse of Koloneia and Kamacha and of Koloneia, Kamacha and Armenia IV having preceded in the years 702-704 and 713-715 respectively. After that point there are no warehouses either of the Cappadocian or the Armenian provinces, which may well indicate that their abolishment was an extreme measure taken in the face of, or following, the second siege of Constantinople by the Arabs. The development may also be explained by the fact that of the two generals that placed a serious claim to the throne in 716, Leo and Artabasdos, only the first ascended to it and so the establishment of the Armeniakon could very well be one of the concessions of Leo III to the general of the Armeniakon or to his Armenian supporters.

The sigillographic material somewhat unexpectedly at this point allowed my syllogism to be extended even further: if the settlement of the thematic armies in Asia Minor at some point led to the disappearance of the seals of the provinces, then this might very well be detected also in other cases, apart from the case of the Armeniakon. The seal of “Lycia, Pamphylia and the littoral of Isauria” of the year 719/20 already anticipated the institution of the new naval unit of the “strategia of Kibyrraiotai” (739/40); in between it was preceded by two more seals of Lycia and Pamphylia (719/20 and 722/3). In 736/7 the “vassilika kommerkia of the Anatolikoi” followed the last vassilika kommerkia of the provinces of Phrygia Salutaria and Pacatiana. The vassilika kommerkia of the strategia (generalship) of Hellas operated in 738, succeeding the kommerkia of the diocese of –I have to assume the province of– Hellas. Lastly and most importantly the vassilika kommerkia of Asia and Caria functioned for the last time in 738/9 and were followed by the vassilika kommerkia of the strategia of the Thrakesion in 741/2, the year in which also the kommerkia of Kato Hexapolis, meaning Rhodia Peraia with the islands of Kos and Rhodes, also

operated. It is a rare occasion that we may associate the operation of a warehouse/vassilika kommerkia with the events. In that year we know that the revolt of Artabasdos broke out against Constantine V; to deal with the revolt, the emperor relied on the co-operation of the Thrakesion and the Kibyrraiot theme, both of which are attested through the seals of their vassilika kommerkia, explicitly the Thrakesion and implicitly the Kibyrraiot through the seal of Kato Hexapolis-Rhodia Peraia. This I am suggesting with the reservation that I have not seen the thesis on the 8th c. of Michael Nichanian, referred to by prof. Cheynet, which, in his estimate, changes a lot our appreciation of the revolt of Artabasdos. The last case in the same category of seals is that of the Opsikion, the vassilika kommerkia of which are dated to 745/6. The small delay that is observed may well be attributed to the intervening revolt of Artabasdos, but there is also a good chance that some new seal will in the near future revise this picture of the Opsikion as well.

So, one of the most important observations of this research is perhaps that the late roman provincial administration was gradually abolished by the emperor Leo III. The geographic distribution of the warehouses/ vassilika kommerkia institution bears witness to the fact that Byzantium was not implementing the measures it took instantaneously all over its territories, but only there, where it was most needed and where it suited its purpose. In some cases it dismantled without reservations entire provinces to reconstitute them in the next year. There are many details in the function of the institution that can still be commented, and some suggestions I have already made in the three corresponding publications. A prosopographical survey of the persons that administered the warehouses might in the future produce an interesting outcome regarding the evolution of the central administration. Nevertheless, considering, as noted earlier, that the seals are “mute”, the thoughts that I unfolded here before you are only interpretations, suggestions, and remarks. The final conclusions rest with you.

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