

## Identity and Forced Labour in the Imperial Textile Workshops, 4<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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**Abstract:** Imperial silks were highly symbolic in the Byzantine world and were important conveyors of the imperial image. Despite this fact, the factories and workers that produced them have been little studied. This article attempts to remedy this gap in the academic literature by examining the sources of labour in the imperial textile factories from their inception in the fourth century until they disappear from the sources in the eleventh century. It proposes that forced labour was a key factor of these factories, and that this created an environment in which the workers developed a collective identity that gave them agency in the power politics of the state. It further suggests that the mode of production was implied by the material, embedding the imperial textile factories in the social fabric of Byzantine society.

**Keywords:** Labour, Silk, Imperial Factories, Textile Production, Identity, Slavery

Those also who were condemned either to labour under harsh conditions in mines, or to perform menial tasks at public works, let them exchange incessant toils for sweet leisure, and now live an easier life of freedom, undoing the infinite hardships of their labours in gentle relaxation. But if any have been deprived of their civil liberty and suffered public dishonour, then let them, with the gladness appropriate considering they have been parted by a long exile, take up again their former rank and make haste back to their native lands<sup>1</sup>.

In his retelling of Constantine's declaration following the defeat of Licinius in 324 which served to reverse punishments inflicted during the Christian persecutions, Eusebios painted a bleak picture of those who had found themselves thrust into penal servitude for the state. Constantine's sympathy was specifically directed to those forced from the ranks of the nobility<sup>2</sup>, whose degradation in performing 'menial tasks' was a fate unacceptable to their stature, rather than those more generally labouring 'under harsh conditions'. Nevertheless, he

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<sup>1</sup> Eusebios II 32, (ed. F. WINKELMANN, *Eusebius Werke 1/1: Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin*. Berlin 1975, 62), translated in A. CAMERON – S. G. HALL, *Life of Constantine*. Oxford 1999, 107.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebios II 34 (62 WINKELMANN).

provided a small window into a particular workforce that often gets overlooked; the labour exploited in the public works.

Studies of material culture often treat the identity and organisation of the producers as secondary to the significance of the items themselves<sup>3</sup>. They were, however, linked both economically and socially. Examining the multifaceted labour strategies exploited in relation to specific institutional contexts not only highlights important aspects of production and distribution of material goods, but can also demonstrate how labour underpinned societal ideologies, reflecting a range of internal cultural dynamics<sup>4</sup>. There have been several recent studies of labour within non-agrarian late Roman and Byzantine industries, illustrating the array of labour relations in particular production settings and how labour identities situated workers from both the private and public/imperial sectors within society<sup>5</sup>. At the heart of imperial production were the public works, including the mines, mints, and imperial textile workshops. This article explores how, as functions of the state and imperial services under the emperor, the labourers in the imperial textile workshops inhabited space within what John

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<sup>3</sup> A notable exception is S. BOND, *Currency and Control: Mint Workers in the Later Roman Empire*, in: *Work, Labour, and Professions in the Roman World*, ed. K. VERBOVEN – C. LAES. Leiden 2017, 227–245.

<sup>4</sup> Recent studies have highlighted the need to consider how the circulation of people, objects, and ideas impact labour organisation, and how labour at specific production sites ‘shape larger processes of production and accumulation but are simultaneously influenced by the position of that site in broader (local, regional and international) divisions of labor and along commodity chains’. C. G. DE VITO – J. SCHIEL – M. VAN ROSSUM, *From Bondage to Precariousness? New Perspectives on Labor and Social History*. *Journal of Social History* 54 (2020) 649–650.

<sup>5</sup> For example, H. FRIEDMAN, *Forced Labour, Mines, and Space: Exploring the Control of Mining Communities*, in: *TRAC 2008: Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Amsterdam 2008*, ed. M. DRIESSEN ET AL. Oxford 2009, 1–11; BOND, *Currency and Control*; S. G. BERNARD, *Workers in the Roman Imperial Building Industry*, in: *Work, Labour, and Professions in the Roman World*, ed. K. VERBOVEN – C. LAES. Leiden 2017, 62–86; V. AIELLO, *La condizione degli operai nelle manifatture imperiali: il caso dei fabbricenses*, in: *Forme di dipendenza nella società di transizione*, ed. A. PINZONE – E. CALIRI – R. ARCURI. Messina 2012, 273–285; J. M. DILLS, *Logistical considerations for the arms production industry in the Middle Byzantine Empire*. *BMGs* 44 (2020) 220–243; J. FABIANO, *Builders and Integrated Associations in Fourth-Century CE Rome: A New Interpretation of AE 1941, 68*. *Journal of Late Antiquity* 12 (2019) 65–87; F. VANNI, *Individual or collective? Stucco-workers in Middle and Late Byzantine construction sites, written sources and material evidence*, in: *Approaches to Societal Stratification in Byzantium: Dialogues Between Rich and Poor*, ed. A. C. KELLEY – F. VANNI. London forthcoming. C. FREU, *Les salaires de l'égypte romano-byzantine. Essai d'histoire économique*. Paris 2022, further examines free wage labour in a variety of settings through the Egyptian papyri.

Haldon calls the ‘symbolic universe’ of late Roman and Byzantine society<sup>6</sup>, concentrating on the fourth to tenth centuries<sup>7</sup>. Within this time span, the operations of the imperial textile workshops shifted and consolidated, providing a structured institutional framework with which to examine labour and power relations in the Mediterranean during the transition from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages<sup>8</sup>. I will therefore examine the diachronic evidence of the labourers in these workshops, their identity, and how that identity was expressed through an analysis of their legal status and symbolic associations of their products<sup>9</sup>.

Textile production was significant in pre-industrial economies, both in terms of scale and cultural impact<sup>10</sup>. From their inception, the imperial textile workshops were important to the inner workings of the empire. Founded in the early fourth century, probably under the tetrarchy as part of Diocletian’s (r. 284–305) economic reforms, they were separated into two jurisdictions. Those under the control of the *comes sacrarum largitionum* (the imperial largesses) were first established to address deficits in the private textile industry’s – and therefore administration’s – ability to provide the necessary supplies for the expanding army. The workshops under the *comes rerum privatarum*, on the other hand, produced textiles for the

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<sup>6</sup> Defined as ‘a product of social practice within a specific spatial and cultural environment, through which it is continuously reproduced.’ J. HALDON, *Res publica Byzantina? State formation and issues of identity in medieval east Rome*. *BMGS* 40 (2016) 10–11.

<sup>7</sup> The imperial textile factories are rarely found in sources after this point, and their fate after the sack of Constantinople is unclear. In his oration on Nicaea, delivered in 1290, Theodore Metochites seems to imply that while many of the functions of the state returned to Constantinople after 1261, Nicaea was still providing silk and fine textiles for the court. Metochites 18 (ed. C. FOSS, *Nicaea: A Byzantine Capital and Its Praises, with the speeches of Theodore Laskaris In Praise of the Great City of Nicaea* and Theodore Metochites *Nicene Oration*. Brookline 1996, 190-193). There is some question as to whether this was permanent or not. See K.-P. MATSCHKE, *Tuchproduktion und Tuchproduzenten in Thessalonike und in anderen Städten und Regionen des späten Byzanz*. *Byzantiaka* 9 (1989) 80-81; A. MUTHESIUS, *Studies in Silk in Byzantium*. London 2004, 192–194.

<sup>8</sup> See A. KALDELLIS, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*. Cambridge, MA 2015; A. KALDELLIS, *The Social Scope of Roman Identity in Byzantium: An Evidence-Based Approach*. *Symm* 27 (2017) 173–210 for medieval New Rome.

<sup>9</sup> For the connections between craft and power, and the similarities to between the control of craft and the control of long-distance trade in reinforcing power dynamics, see M. W. HELMS, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal*. Austin 1993.

<sup>10</sup> For example, J.-M. Carrié, *Vitalité de l'industrie textile à la fin de l'Antiquité: considérations économiques et technologiques*, *Antiquité Tardive* 12 (2005) 13–44; and the contributions in *Textile Trade and Distribution in Antiquity, Textilhandel und -distribution in der Antike*, ed. K. Droß-Krüpe. Wiesbaden 2014; *Textiles, Trade and Theories, From the Ancient Near East to the Mediterranean*, ed. K. Droß-Krüpe – M.-L. Nosch. Münster 2016.

emperor and his court<sup>11</sup>. At least initially, different workshops of the *comes sacrarum largitionum* were established to work with different fibres; the *linyfia* produced linen and the *gynaecea* (derived from the ancient Greek γυναικωνίτις [*gynaikōnitis*], the spaces reserved for women and ‘women’s tasks’) produced wool<sup>12</sup>. By the sixth century, however, administrative changes and a greater reliance on cash payments had altered how the state provided for the army<sup>13</sup>, and both the number and function of the state-owned workshops changed as a consequence. Production for the army shifted back to private workshops, and those state-run factories that remained were devoted to the manufacture of textiles for the emperor and his court, especially luxury silks, a change that gave a new significance to the workshops and their labourers<sup>14</sup>.

As will be seen, one consistent feature found in references to the workers within the imperial textile workshops was their low status. Sarah Bond has proposed that one of the ways late Roman emperors maintained the reputation of coinage was ‘through the publicized control of the status of mint workers themselves,’ which fortified a communal identity for these workers<sup>15</sup>. She further suggested that despite their enforced low status, the mint workers held social prestige through their association with imperial production. While there is less evidence for the imperial textile workshops, making it difficult to conclusively assign social roles, I

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<sup>11</sup> J. P. WILD, The Gynaeceum at Venta and its Context. *Latomus* 26 (1967) 651; J. P. WILD, The gynaecea, in: *Aspects of the Notitia Dignitatum* (ed. R. GOODBURN – P. BARTHOLOMEW). Oxford 1976, 52–54. By the 320s, the *vestis militaris* – originally an in-kind clothing for the military – had become an assessed cash tax, but the increasing demands of the military seem to have outstripped state procurement. A codex from the Hermopolite nome in Egypt, P.Col. 247, dated to either 324/5 or 325/6, is the most complete accounting of the *vestis militaris* yet found. *Vestis Militaris Codex* (ed. J. SHERIDAN, Columbia Papyri IX: The Vestis Militaris Codex. Atlanta 1998).

<sup>12</sup> WILD, The Gynaeceum at Venta, 649. Both Lactantius and Eusebios document them as places of penal servitude for men and women: Lactantius 21 (ed. J.L. CREED, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*. Oxford 1984, 32). Eusebios II 34 (62–63 WINKELMANN). Legislation relating to the *gynaecearii*, the term for the workers in the wool workshops, however, was normatively male.

<sup>13</sup> Soldiers were now responsible for their own clothing. J. HALDON, The Army and the Economy: The Allocation and Redistribution of Surplus Wealth in the Byzantine State. *Mediterranean Historical Review* 7 (1992) 141.

<sup>14</sup> A. MUTHESIUS, Imperial Identity: Byzantine Silks, Art, Autocracy, Theocracy, and the Image of Basileia, in: *The Routledge Handbook on Identity in Byzantium*, ed. M. E. STEWART – D. A. PARNELL – C. WHATELY. London 2022, 84.

<sup>15</sup> BOND, ‘Currency and Control’, 230.

argue that the regulation of labour within these workshops similarly reinforced a communal identity, enabling the labourers to exert collective agency<sup>16</sup>. These were not communities of choice; one of the defining characteristics of the imperial workshops was their reliance on various forms of coerced labour. The community was therefore artificially constructed by the state. However, it is through such artificial construction that we can detect this workforce in the sources, treated as a collective and as a collective able to act, however momentarily, to interrupt and threaten state hegemony.

I further suggest that their role as textile producers was crucial to their agency. Textiles, particularly silk, were both fiscally and symbolically important to the imperial power structure<sup>17</sup>, and I propose that the manufacturers became embedded in these structures by considering the economics and symbolism of imperial silk production. In particular, the implications of the continued use of forced labour over centuries will be analysed in relation to the symbolic social hierarchy and function of silk in imperial ideology, as the role of the emperor was transformed<sup>18</sup>. This article begins by examining unfree labour the workforce in the Late Roman imperial textile workshops in both narrative and legal texts. It then turns to the evidence concerning labour within the later Byzantine workshops, and introduce a secondary, but equally significant consideration: the role of gender rhetoric in the presentation of labour in the sources. This progression is framed within the context of the rising importance of

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<sup>16</sup> Here I also draw on Dimitris Krallis' use of 'community' in rural Greece as an avenue for political agency, as well as Nicholas Matheou's critical approach to hegemony and subaltern power dynamics. See D. KRALLIS, Popular Political Agency in Byzantium's Villages and Towns. *Symm* 28 (2018) 11–48; N. S. M. MATHEOU, Hegemony, Counterpower, and Global History: Medieval New Rome and Caucasia in a Critical Perspective, in: *Global Byzantium*, ed. L. BRUBAKER – R. DARLEY – D. REYNOLDS. London 2022, 208–236. The issue of identity in the private silk industry was dealt with in S. VRYONIS, Byzantine Δημοκρατία and the Guilds in the Eleventh Century. *DOP* 17 (1963) 287–314.

<sup>17</sup> This will be discussed in more depth later, but for an initial bibliography see MUTHESIUS, 'Imperial Identity'; J. GALLIKER, Terminology Associated with Silk in the Middle Byzantine Period (AD 843-1204), in: *Textile Terminologies from the Orient to the Mediterranean and Europe, 1000 BC to 1000 AD*, ed. S. GASPA – C. MICHEL – M.-L. NOSCH. Lincoln 2017, 346–373.

<sup>18</sup> The figure of the emperor transformed from head of state to embodying the state itself. J. SHEPARD, Courts in East and West, in: *The Medieval World*, ed. P. LINEHAN – J. L. NELSON – M. COSTAMBEYS. London 2018, 11–32. On the office of the emperor versus the person, see KALDELLIS, *The Roman Republic*, 1–3. I also use Haldon's definition of ideology as both a set of beliefs and social practices within certain socio-economic and cultural contexts used to construct a specific worldview. HALDON, *Res publica Byzantina?*, 9–11.

imperial silk production and concludes by reflecting on the role of silk manufacturers in Byzantine power politics.

### **Defining forced labour**

The most notable form of unfree labour in the Roman world was the institution of slavery. Slavery as a legal category designated an individual as property, ‘objects rather than subjects of law’<sup>19</sup>, lacking self-determination or agency – in law if not in practice – within a legislated relationship of dependency<sup>20</sup>. Ancient conceptions of legal, social, and economic status were not correlated, meaning there could be high levels of disparity within social groups, including slaves<sup>21</sup>. Consequently a slave’s economic status often depended on his or her occupational role, as well as their owner’s situation<sup>22</sup>. Social status could be even more complex. Roman law enshrined different legal positions for free and enslaved persons, but this did not carry over into everyday social interaction. While slaves were expected to be subservient to their owners, this expectation did not extend to those outside that legal relationship; slaves often worked alongside free persons without being placed in a subordinate position<sup>23</sup>. There were therefore few restrictions<sup>23</sup> on the kinds of work slaves could undertake, and it was not uncommon to find slaves in important economic and administrative occupations, including in imperial administration, businesses management, and craft production<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> J.-J. AUBERT, The legal capacity of public slaves in the Roman empire. *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 64 (2021) 21.

<sup>20</sup> Although this could be true of multiple forms of unfreedom. F. HOFMANN, Freiheit und Unfreiheit in der Sklaverei – Eine philosophische Analyse, in: *Sklaverei und Identitäten. Von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. A. BINSFELD – M. GHETTITA. Hildesheim 2021, 203; A. BINSFELD, “All human beings are either free or slave”? *Servi publici in Late Antiquity. Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 64 (2021) 32. On defining unfreedom, see A. RIO, *Slavery After Rome, 500-1100*. Oxford 2017, 10–12.

<sup>21</sup> E. RAGIA, Social Group Profiles in Byzantium: Some Considerations on Byzantine Perceptions about Social Class Distinctions. *Symm* 26 (2016) 312–314.

<sup>22</sup> Y. ROTMAN, Comparing Slavery: History and Anthropology, in: *Comparative Studies in the Humanities*, ed. G. G. STROUMSA. Jerusalem 2018, 93–94.

<sup>23</sup> ROTMAN, *Comparing Slavery*, 93–94.

<sup>24</sup> K. HARPER – W. SCHEIDEL, Roman Slavery and the Idea of “Slave Society,” in: *What is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective*, ed. N. LENSKI – C. M. CAMERON. Cambridge 2018, 101; K. HARPER, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275-425*. Cambridge 2011, 120–126.

There were also different kinds of slaves. The *servi publici*, maintained by the state and local municipalities, served a variety of functions from attending to officials to maintaining the aqueducts; their ranks also included skilled artisans<sup>25</sup>. In legal texts, they were frequently distinguished from, amongst others, the slaves working on the imperial estates (*servi fiscales*), the slaves of the imperial household (*servi Caesaris*), and of course, the slaves owned by private individuals. Each of these distinctions came with different privileges and places within the social hierarchy<sup>26</sup>. Slavery also did not necessarily indicate complete economic reliance; some slaves were probably paid for their work, and public slaves had the right to will away half of their *peculium* (assets accumulated) upon their deaths<sup>27</sup>. Public slavery seems to have declined in Rome and western provinces in the third and fourth centuries predating widespread changes to the institution<sup>28</sup>; the situation in the east, however, is unclear<sup>29</sup>.

While the use of slave labour was a ‘defining characteristic of elite status’, this was not because of the wealth it bestowed, which in practice was probably highly variable; the value of slave labour was principally social<sup>30</sup>. It reinforced the hierarchy that society was built on, a feature inherited by medieval society. While slavery continued into the Byzantine period, its scale and impact changed – particularly in agricultural production – and there is debate regarding when and how this came to be<sup>31</sup>. Regardless, there was a divergence between the

<sup>25</sup> N. LENSKI, *Servi Publici in Late Antiquity*, in: *Die Stadt in der Spätantike – Niedergang oder Wandel?*, ed. J.-U. KRAUSE – C. WITSCHEL. Stuttgart 2006, 335–357; AIELLO, *La condizione*, 282.

<sup>26</sup> A. WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt. Untersuchungen zur öffentlichen Sklaverei in den Städten des römischen Reiches*. Stuttgart 2004, 163–179; A. WEISS, *Check your privilege: reconsidering the social position of public slaves in cities of the Roman Empire*. *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 64 (2021) 8–20. Cf. F. LUCIANO, *Public Slaves in Rome: “Privileged” or Not?*. *The Classical Quarterly* 70 (2020) 368–384. Luciano argues for use of the phrase ‘distinctive’ rather than ‘privileged’.

<sup>27</sup> E. KOOPS, *The Practice of Manumission through Negotiated Conditions in Imperial Rome*, in: *Roman Law and Economics: Exchange, Ownership, and Disputes*, ed. G. DARI-MATTIACCI – D. P. KEHOE. Oxford 2020, 58; R. GAMAUF, *Slaves doing business: the role of Roman law in the economy of a Roman household*. *European Review of History* 16 (2009) 331–346; WEISS, *Check your privilege* 9–10.

<sup>28</sup> BINSFELD, *All Human Beings* 30; WEISS, *Check your privilege* 19–20; WEISS, *Sklave der Stadt* 189–190.

<sup>29</sup> Sources from the eastern empire impart less information on slavery. WEISS, *Check your privilege* 9.

<sup>30</sup> HARPER – SCHEIDEL, *Roman Slavery*, 99–101. On the negotiation of law and a slave’s role in society, see AUBERT, *Legal Capacity*.

<sup>31</sup> This has centred on the timing and nature of the decline in Late Roman slavery, and what came after. See, for example, HARPER, *Slavery* 38–60; C. WICKHAM, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800*. Oxford 2005, 259–265, 276–283; J. BANAJI, *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity: Gold, Labour, and*

east and west by the sixth century, the result of modifications to land tenure and the expansion of Christianity, although a lack of data makes it difficult to quantify the impact these have on the institution of slavery. Slaves in the Byzantine east are primarily found in sources as domestic servants, in the imperial palaces, and, as will be seen, the imperial workshops where they appear alongside other forms of forced labour<sup>32</sup>.

Both late Roman and Byzantine sources had specific language that designated an individual's status, but even categories of free-persons could be subjected to fiscal and physical restrictions that could result in forced labour<sup>33</sup>. This is reflected in the terminology; for example, while the Greek legal sources used δοῦλος/δούλη [*doulos/doulē*] and οἰκέτης/οἰκέτις [*oiketēs/oiketis*] to refer to slaves, elsewhere these terms were also used in reference to non-slaves in servile positions<sup>34</sup>. Such ambiguous terminology complicates the understanding of workers in the imperial textile workshops. The legal status of workers is not always made clear, and if these differences resulted in different treatment within the workshops (such as dictating manufacturing roles), it is not addressed in the sources. Likewise, there is silence on the use of wage-labour in the imperial workshops. Nonetheless, consideration of the skills needed for different production steps and comparison to the private silk industry may allow for a certain amount of speculation. With such uncertainty in mind, this article will use the term 'slave'

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Aristocratic Dominance. Oxford 2007; RIO, *Slavery After Rome*. Rotman, however, rejects the concept of decline. Y. ROTMAN, *Slaveries of the First Millennium*. Leeds 2021.

<sup>32</sup> G. PRINZING, *On Slaves and Slavery*, in: *The Byzantine World*, ed. P. STEPHENSON. London 2010, 93; N. LENSKI, *Slavery in the Byzantine Empire*, in: *The Cambridge World History of Slavery: Volume II, AD 500-AD 1420*, ed. C. PERRY ET AL. Cambridge 2021, 453–481. For the historiography of Byzantine slavery, see Y. ROTMAN, *Byzantine Slavery in the Mediterranean World*. Cambridge 2009, chap. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Rio defines the difference between 'free' and 'unfree' as juridical, using 'unfreedom' to encompass several different statuses; Rotman argues this is too vague, particularly in the Byzantine east which maintained legal definitions of slavery, and instead uses the term 'slaveries' to encompass the *de facto* (dependant because of circumstance) and *de jure* (dependent because of legal status) modes of enslavement that pervaded the post-Roman Mediterranean. RIO, *Slavery After Rome* 8; ROTMAN, *Slaveries*, 35–36, 63–64.

<sup>34</sup> ROTMAN, *Slaveries*, 67–68. For terminology, see ROTMAN, *Byzantine Slavery*, 82–83; LENSKI, *Servi Publici*, 357–359. Also D. PENNA, *The Role of Slaves in the Byzantine Economy, 10th-11th Centuries: Legal Aspects*, in: *Slavery in the Black Sea Region, c.900-1900: Forms of Unfreedom at the Intersection between Christianity and Islam*, ed. F. ROŞU. Leiden 2021, 70–71.



when the sources do, and ‘forced’ when referring to the diversity of coerced labour conditions within the imperial textile workshops.

### Late Antique sources on labour in the imperial textile workshop

As institutions, the imperial textile workshops are not well understood; they are referred to infrequently in texts, and none have been conclusively identified in the archaeological record<sup>35</sup>. The late fourth- or early fifth-century list of civic and military officials, the *Notitia Dignitatum*, records fifteen *gynaecea*, two *linyfia*, nine *bafia* (imperial dyeshops), and three *barbaricarii* (gold thread and embroidery workshops) under the *comes sacrarum largitionum*, and two *gynaecea* under the *comes rerum privatarum* in the west; such workshops were also referred to in the east, but without specifying how many or where<sup>36</sup>. In both the west and the east, the workshops were headed by the *procuratores*, probably an administrator with no practical knowledge of textile production<sup>37</sup>. While the locations of the workshops of the *comes sacrarum largitionum* seem to have been dictated by proximity to the armies in the provinces, administrative centres, and raw materials, the workshops producing for the emperor were located near imperial residences<sup>38</sup>, and there was probably at least one early *gynaeceum* of the *comes rerum privatarum* in Constantinople.

Late Antique writers in general did not make a point of discussing the conditions of labourers in the imperial works, but there was one group they showed great concern for: Christian penal conscripts. Eusebios praised Constantine for allowing the return of Christians who had been exiled during the Christian persecutions, paying restitution to those whose

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<sup>35</sup> It has been suggested that a structure in the circular harbour of Carthage may have been one. H. R. HURST, *Excavations at Carthage: The British Mission, Vol. II.1. The Circular Harbour, North Side: the site and finds other than pottery*. Oxford 1994, 69–76. However, Leone notes that there was no evidence for textile processing or production. A. LEONE, *Changing Townscapes in North Africa from Late Antiquity to the Arab Conquest*. Bari 2007, 80 n. 131.

<sup>36</sup> *Notitia Dignitatum in partibus Occidentis XI and XII, partibus Orientis XIII* (ed. O. SEECK. Berlin 1826, 150–152, 155, 36). For a study of the compilation of the western and eastern lists and their reliability, see M. KULIKOWSKI, *The Notitia Dignitatum as a Historical Source*. *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 49 (2000) 359–377.

<sup>37</sup> WILD, *The Gynaeceum at Venta*, 652.

<sup>38</sup> WILD, *The Gynaecea*, 53–54.

property had been seized, and freeing those who had been forced into imperial labour. As quoted above, this included those who had been made slaves, particularly those degraded by working in the state-owned textile workshops, a sentiment echoed by Sozomen<sup>39</sup>. Lactantius likewise wrote of large numbers of Christian noblewomen compelled to labour in the *gynaeeceae*<sup>40</sup>. But persecuted Christians were not the only type of penal convicts found in the imperial workshops. In 336, in a constitution limiting the ability of those in the senatorial class to confer privileged position on illegitimate children, Constantine ordered that the son of a Licinianus be reduced to the slave rank of his birth and sent to the imperial textile workshop in Carthage, presumably for trying to claim elevated status he was not entitled to<sup>41</sup>. John Chrysostom recorded another instance around 371 or 372 in which the wife of an official known as Theodore of Sicily, who had been executed for plotting against the emperor, was stripped of her status and forced to become a fiscal wool worker, a ταμιακός ἔριος [*tamiakos erios*]<sup>42</sup>. Forced labour in imperial workshops was also used as punishment for slaves, and lower-ranking people banished to the imperial workshops were probably reduced to slavery,<sup>43</sup> an illustration of the diverse experience within the workforce.

The relative ambiguity of references to the manufacture of textiles and their producers has meant that the line between the private and public workshops has often been blurred in academic literature. Few distinctions are made between free and unfree craftspeople, or those

<sup>39</sup> Eusebios II 20 (57 WINKELMANN); Sozomen I 8.3 (ed. J. BIDEZ, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, Livres I–II [SC 306]. Paris 1983, 140).

<sup>40</sup> Lactantius 21 (32 CREED).

<sup>41</sup> Codex Theodosianus IV 6.3 (ed. T. MOMMSEN – P. M. MEYER, *Theodosiani Libri XVI Cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis et Leges Novellae ad Theodosianum Pertinentes II*. Berlin 1905, 176). It has been argued that he was an illegitimate son of Licinius, but this is more likely a reference to another official. T. A. J. McGinn, *The Social Policy of Emperor Constantine in Codex Theodosianus 4.6.3*. *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 67 (1999) 62–63.

<sup>42</sup> Chrysostom Logos Eis Neōteran Chēreusasan 4 (ed. B. GRILLET – G.H. ETTLINGER, *À une jeune veuve*. Sur le mariage unique [SC 138]. Paris 1968, 134).

<sup>43</sup> J. HILLNER, *Prison, Punishment and Penance in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge 2015, 200–201; M. NAVARRA, *Ad gynaeecei ministerium deputari*. Il lavoro forzato nelle manifatture tessili imperiali. *Historia et Ius* 17 (2020) 19. On different forms of carceral punishment in Late Antiquity and societal responses, with a focus on imperial mines, see M. D. LARSEN, *Carceral Practices and Geographies in Roman North Africa*. *Studies in Late Antiquity* 3 (2019) 547–580.

in the private and public sectors. However, conflating these different types of workers erases the significance of what it meant to be a labourer in the imperial workshops<sup>44</sup>. This is most clear in discussions of the guild associations, the *collegia* or *corporata*, in the late Roman legal sources and the increasingly controlling measures imposed on certain types of workers<sup>45</sup>. Little information on how occupational guilds functioned is known, especially in relation to those producing for the state, but official documents of private guilds – such as member lists and charters – do survive, giving some insight into their internal workings<sup>46</sup>. As in later periods, the guilds enforced occupational regulations on their members while also protecting their business interests, and by the fourth century were being treated as units for tax collection by authorities<sup>47</sup>. They also appear to have served as a foundation for religious and social interactions, obscuring the lines between members’ economic and personal lives<sup>48</sup>. Where the state came into contact with these guilds can be partially reconstructed by a relatively small number of laws. Following the implementation of Diocletian’s reforms in the fourth century, control over certain productive industries became more centralised<sup>49</sup>; consequently enactments governing associations, compiled in the fifth-century *Codex Theodosianus* and reiterated in the

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<sup>44</sup> See C. FREU, *Professiones et artes*, metiers publics, metiers privés, in: Atti dell’Accademia Romanistica Constantiniana XXIII, ed. C. LORENZI – M. NAVARRA. Naples 2019, 81–105 for the importance of specific labourers in public contexts.

<sup>45</sup> On the function and diverse roles of guilds in late Roman society, see K. VERBOVEN, Guilds and Organisation of Urban Populations During the Principate, in: *Work, Labour, and Professions in the Roman World*, ed. K. VERBOVEN – C. LAES. Leiden 2016, 173–202; M. GIBBS, Trade Associations in Roman Egypt: Their raison d’être. *Ancient Society* 41 (2011) 291–315; J. S. KLOPPENBORG, Collegia and *Thiasoi*: Issues in Function, Taxonomy and Membership, in: *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. J. S. KLOPPENBORG – S. G. WILSON. London 1996, 16–30. In Byzantium, see G. C. MANIATIS, The guild system in Byzantium and medieval western Europe: a comparative analysis of organizational structures, regulatory mechanisms, and behavioral patterns. *Byz* 76 (2006) 463–570. For terminology, see P. F. VENTICINQUE, Honor Among Thieves: Craftsmen, Merchants, and Associations in Roman and Late Roman Egypt. Ann Arbor 2016, 8–10.

<sup>46</sup> See the documents contained in J. S. KLOPPENBORG – R. S. ASCOUGH, *Graeco-Roman Associations: Text, Translations, and Commentary, Volume I Attica, Central Greece, Macedonia, Thrace*. Berlin 2011; P. A. HARLAND, *Graeco-Roman Associations: Text, Translations, and Commentary, Volume II North Coast of the Black Sea, Asia Minor*. Berlin 2014; J. S. KLOPPENBORG, *Graeco-Roman Associations: Text, Translations, and Commentary, Volume III Ptolemaic and Early Roman Egypt*. Berlin 2020.

<sup>47</sup> J. LIU, *Collegia Centonariorum: The Guilds of Textile Dealers in the Roman West*. Leiden 2009, 179.

<sup>48</sup> See VERBOVEN, *Guilds and Organisation*; VENTICINQUE, *Honor Among Thieves* 10; P. F. VENTICINQUE, *Family Affairs: Guild Regulations and Family Relationships in Roman Egypt*. *GRBS* 50 (2010) 274–279.

<sup>49</sup> P. F. BANG, *Trade and Empire: In Search of Organizing Concepts for the Roman Economy*. *Past & Present* 195 (2007) 50.

sixth-century *Codex Justinianus*, can be found restricting the social and/or economic mobility of select segments of the workforce, including some textile workers.

The *Codex Theodosianus*, published in 438, was intended to compile all pieces of ‘general law’ (*generalitas*) enacted since the reign of Constantine, to ‘constitute the sole source of imperial law’<sup>50</sup>. All general laws were to be collected by commissioners, categorised, arranged chronologically, and edited before being published alongside two further codes from the reign of Diocletian; the second phase of the project intended for the three codes to be compiled and published with additional commentary, but this would not be achieved for nearly two centuries<sup>51</sup>. General laws had to meet certain criteria. They often took the form of edicts or contained a claim of ‘edictal’ power, and included speeches made to the senate, laws published throughout the provinces, and laws that were judged to be relevant to similar cases<sup>52</sup>. The decision of what to include ultimately fell to the commissioners. For guild associations, pieces of legislation addressed to specific guilds have often been interpreted as being relevant to all guilds, or at least similar associations beyond those addressed<sup>53</sup>. As a consequence, some laws imposing hereditary obligations and constraints on the status and movement of imperial workers have been understood as applying to the entire textile industry in modern scholarship, implying that restrictions on textile workers, regardless of status or setting, were common. Such readings, however, overlook the purpose of different forms of labour in different settings.

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<sup>50</sup> T. HONORÉ, *Law in the Crisis of Empire 379-455 AD: The Theodosian Dynasty and its Quaestors*. Oxford 1998, 124. For a bibliography of *generalitas*, see K. HARPER, *The SC Claudianum in the Codex Theodosianus: Social History and Legal Texts*. *Classical Quarterly* 60 (2010) 612, n. 11.

<sup>51</sup> HONORÉ, *Law in the Crisis*, 124–5.

<sup>52</sup> HARPER, *The SC Claudianum*, 614; HONORÉ, *Law in the Crisis*, 128–9. There is debate as to whether this also included obsolete laws, see HONORÉ, 142–50; B. SIRKS, ‘Did the published Theodosian Code include obsolete constitutions?’, *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* 89 (2021) 70–92.

<sup>53</sup> VENTICINQUE, *Honour Among Thieves*, 200–1. For example, see L. C. RUGGINI, *Le associazioni professionali nel mondo romano-bizantino*. Spoleto 1971; J.-M. CARRIÉ, *Les associations professionnelles à l’époque tardive: entre munus et convivialité*, in: *Humana sapit. Études d’Antiquité tardive offertes à Lellia Cracco Ruggini*, ed. J.-M. CARRIÉ – L. TESTA (Turnhout 2002) 309–332; G. DAGRON, *The Urban Economy, Seventh-Twelfth Centuries*, in: *The Economic History of Byzantium, From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. J.-M. CARRIÉ and L. TESTA. Washington, D.C. 2002, 405. Early regulations on *collegia* during the Principate do not focus on occupational roles. W. COTTER, *The Collegia and Roman Law: State Restrictions on Voluntary Associations*, 64 BCE–200 CE, in: *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. J. S. KLOPPENBORG – S. G. WILSON. London 1996, 74–89.

Much of the legislation placing controls on workers are addressed to two types of associations: those involved in public services, especially transportation and food production, and those in the imperial works, including the mines, mints, and textile workshops. For example, codes that designated the positions and obligations of a profession as hereditary were addressed to the textile workers in the imperial factories, bakers, shippers<sup>54</sup>, and *coloni*<sup>55</sup>. Within the laws referring to textile workers, their status was often made explicit; in several (although not all) the workers were referred to as slaves (*mancipia*) and the *gynaecium* as a slave-household (*familia*)<sup>56</sup>. A further law related specifically to those employed in public works under imperial control, enacted in 426 by Theodosius and Valentinian, outlined that a member of the imperial associations could only be released from their obligations and achieve their freedom (*liberari*) by finding an acceptable and pre-approved replacement<sup>57</sup>, implying if not legal slavery, something close. These labourers' social and economic positions were thus shaped by professions enforced by the state, a condition difficult to free oneself from regardless of legal status.

Further laws outlining marriage restrictions on (male) guild members and sanctioning free-women who married them further suggests a substantial portion of the imperial workforce held at least a position of 'slave-like dependence'<sup>58</sup>. These codes – condemning women, their

<sup>54</sup> Codex Theodosianus X 20.16, 13.5.1, XIII 5.3, XIV 3.3, and XIV 3.5 (564, 747–748, 773–774 MOMMSEN – MAYER). Shippers, though, were also exempt from other forms of compulsory service associated with inheritance. Codex Theodosianus XIII 5.2, XIII 5.5, and XIII 5.7 (747–748 MOMMSEN – MAYER). See L. DE SALVO, *Economia privata e pubblici servizi nell'Impero romano: i corpora naviculariorum*. Messina 1992; W. BROEKAERT, *Navicularii et Negotiantes: A Prosopographical Study of Roman Merchants and Shippers*. St. Katharinen, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Regulations relating to the *colonate* have been thoroughly analysed in A. J. B. SIRKS, *Did the Late Roman Government Try to Tie People to Their Profession or Status?*. *TYCHE* 8 (1993) 159–176; A. J. B. SIRKS, *The Colonate in Justinian's Reign*. *JRS* 98 (2008) 120–143. The distinction between *coloni* and slaves became increasingly blurred in Late Antiquity. P. SARRIS, *Aristocrats, Peasants, and the State in the Later Roman Empire*, in: *Der wiederkehrende Levisthan: Staatlichkeit und Staatswerdung in Spätantike und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. P. EICH – S. SCHMIDT-HOFNER – C. WIELAND. Heidelberg 2011, 379–80.

<sup>56</sup> Codex Theodosianus X 20.2, X 20.7, and X 20.9 (561, 562, 563 MOMMSEN – MAYER). Wild, *The Gynaecium at Venta*, 656.

<sup>57</sup> Codex Theodosianus X. 0.16 (564 MOMMSEN – MAYER).

<sup>58</sup> BINSFELD, *All Human Beings*, 36–7. Public slaves in imperial workshops are referred to in Codex Justinianus VI 1.8 (ed. F. H. BLUME – B. W. FRIER, *The Codex of Justinian: A New Annotated Translation*. Cambridge 2016, 1410).

children, and those who married their children to join the guild members ‘condition’ – were again addressed to those in imperial weaving workshops, mines, and mints, the bread makers, and mollusc fishers (*conchylileguli* or *murileguli*) who supplied the court with imperial purple (*purpura*)<sup>59</sup>. Similar, yet sometimes contradictory, legislation governed marriage between free-women and slaves, although unions with *servi publici* were often explicitly exempted<sup>60</sup>.

If these codes were intended to apply to all guilds, it would have meant that by the fourth century, the state was intervening in production on a massive scale throughout the empire, requiring an extensive bureaucratic infrastructure devoted solely to manufacturing oversight and enforcement. This was not the case<sup>61</sup>. Rather, the surviving evidence demonstrates that many private guild associations were, in fact, highly autonomous, including those for textile production<sup>62</sup>. Membership controls provide an example. Both the *Codex Theodosianus* and *Codex Justinianus* included regulations implying that guild membership in both the imperial and private guilds was compulsory and that members who tried to leave their associations could be forced to return<sup>63</sup>. Some were specifically addressed to those in the imperial works, but others appear to generically refer to guilds<sup>64</sup>. Philip Venticinque proposed that the language used, along with the absence of punitive measures, indicated that the laws were intended to mitigate attempts by members to shirk collective responsibilities, particularly

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<sup>59</sup> Codex Theodosianus X 19.15, X 20.1, X 20.3, X.20.5, X 20.10, and X 20.17 (560, 561–563, 565 MOMMSEN – MAYER). These also appear in the Codex Justinianus XI 7.7, XI 8.3, XI 8.7, XI 8.12, and XI 8.15 (2662, 2664–2666, 2668, 2670 BLUME – FRIER). Pharr translates *condicio* as ‘ignoble status’. C. PHARR, *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions*. Princeton 1952, *passim*.

<sup>60</sup> Codex Theodosianus IV 12.1–7 and IX 9.1 (189, 451–452 MOMMSEN – MAYER). See HARPER, *The SC Claudianum*; BINSFELD, *All Human Beings*, 33–6.

<sup>61</sup> Maniatis makes a similar argument for later Byzantine guilds. G. C. MANIATIS, *The Economic Institutions of the Byzantine State*, *Byz* 86 (2016) 205–259, at 244 n. 133.

<sup>62</sup> Sirks attributes generations of single families in the same profession to social pressures rather than state control. SIRKS, *The Late Roman Government*, 160–162.

<sup>63</sup> Codex Theodosianus XIV 7.1 (784–785 MOMMSEN – MAYER). VENTICINQUE, *Honour Among Thieves*, 203–204.

<sup>64</sup> Codex Theodosianus X 19.7, X 19.15, X 20.11, X 20.14 (558, 560–561, 563, 564 MOMMSEN – MAYER). These regulations also appear in the Codex Justinianus XI 7.7, XI 8.8, XI 8.11 (2662, 2666, 2668 BLUME – FRIER). In contrast, Codex Theodosianus XIV 7.1 and XIV.7.2 (784–785 MOMMSEN – MAYER) ordered guild members to be dragged back (*retrahere*).

tax obligations, rather than control guild membership<sup>65</sup>. The focus in these codes on birth status and place, the *origo*, could therefore illustrate a concern with maintaining local tax revenue, but one which was rarely enforced. Where there was concern regarding the maintenance of membership is within the private associations themselves.

This is illustrated in an Egyptian papyrus, P.Ryl. IV 654 (c. 302-309). A petition from an Oxyrhynchite weaver named Apollinarios, it details a conflict over his apprentice, Paul, who had been taken by a group of builders to work in their association. Venticinque argues that the petition shows that the guild (rather than the state) was concerned with maintaining its own membership ranks by forcing people to remain<sup>66</sup>, but the fact that Paul was an apprentice indicates that there were additional financial stakes at issue. Although this is not stated in the suit, surviving apprentice contracts show that master craftspeople made significant investments in apprentices, including time, wages, clothing, and food in exchange for increasingly specialised labour<sup>67</sup>; Apollinarios consequently would lose that investment if Paul was allowed to join the builders. He also referred to Paul's contributions to the ἀναβολικόν [*anabolikon*], a tax on producers of linen<sup>68</sup>. As this tax was assessed on the land used for flax cultivation rather than the number of linen workers, Paul's contribution would have lessened the tax burden on other members. This dispute therefore suggests that protecting the financial investments of members was as important as maintaining numbers to fulfil obligations. The codes may have been intended as a means for association members to protect their own financial interests, rather than as a tool of the state to ensure adequate capacities across the private sector.

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<sup>65</sup> VENTICINQUE, *Honour Among Thieves*, 207–210.

<sup>66</sup> VENTICINQUE, *Honour Among Thieves*, 210.

<sup>67</sup> For more on apprentice contracts, see K. R. BRADLEY, *Child Labour in the Roman World. Historical Reflections* 12 (1985) 319–322; M. BERGAMASCO, 'La διδασκαλία di PCol. inv. 164', *ZPE* 158 (2006) 207–212; V. VUOLANTO, *Children and Work. Strategies and Socialisation in the Roman and Late Antique Egypt*, in: *Agents and Objects: Children in Pre-Modern Europe*, ed. K. MUSTAKALLIO – J. HANSKA. Rome 2015, 99–102.

<sup>68</sup> J. A. SHERIDAN, *The Anabolikon*. *ZPE* 124 (1999) 211–217; I. S. MARÍN, *The Anabolikon Tax and the Study of the Linen Industry in Roman Egypt*, in: *Ancient Taxation: The Mechanics of Extraction in Comparative Perspective*, ed. J. VALK – I. S. MARÍN. New York 2021, 352–359.

In contrast, there were very real consequences for workers in the imperial services who attempted to leave, and for those who helped them. An edict in 372 levied a fine of three pounds of gold on any imperial weaver who fled their guild<sup>69</sup>. Fines were also imposed on those attempting to recruit fugitive workers<sup>70</sup>. For textile workers, this was initially also set at three pounds of gold, an amount that was increased to five pounds in 358; these fines were reiterated a number of times<sup>71</sup>. A further edict of 339 ordered a group of female textile labourers who had left their factories to become part of the Jewish community to be restored to the *gynaecium*<sup>72</sup>. The implication is there were ongoing tensions between the private and public sectors, but not all constitutions related to artisans imposed restrictions. Many not directly involved with state production actually gained privileges<sup>73</sup>. Legislations was clearly differentiating between the workers involved with state production and private producers. General laws that applied to one were therefore not intended to apply to the other.

Through the imposition of legally regulated status and state control over significant facets of the lives of imperial textile workers, along with their physical concentration at specific production sites, we begin to see the communal identities enabling them to exert both individual and collective agency. For example, the number of regulations dictating the status of women who married imperial labourers, and the number of times they were restated, indicates that loss of status was not a deterrent to free-women; such unions must have continued to take place. Further indication of the ability of imperial workers to overcome the stigma of their status comes from an inscription from Heraclea-Perinthus in Thrace. It records that

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<sup>69</sup> Codex Theodosianus X 20.6 (562 MOMMSEN – MAYER).

<sup>70</sup> For example, Codex Theodosianus X.19.6 (558 MOMMSEN – MAYER) required any ship captains caught transporting miners to Sardinia to pay five solidi per fugitive.

<sup>71</sup> Codex Theodosianus X 20.2, X 20.7, X 20.8, X 20.9 (561–563 MOMMSEN – MAYER). See also Codex Justinianus XI 8.5 and XI 8.6 (2664 BLUME – FRIER).

<sup>72</sup> Codex Theodosianus XVI 8.6 (888 MOMMSEN – MAYER). The status of the workers is not addressed, but they may have been slaves who attempted to marry out of the workshops. M. NAVARRA, *Tessere per condanna: donne ai lavori forzati*, *Diritto e Processo* (2018) 56–57.

<sup>73</sup> For example, Codex Theodosianus XIII 4.1, XIII 4.2, XIII 4.3, XIII 4.4 (745–747 MOMMSEN – MAYER); Codex Justinianus X 66.1, X 66.2, XII 20.4 (2626, 2628, 2879 BLUME – FRIER).



Aurelios Lustas ‘from the *gynaeceum*’ constructed a rock-cut tomb for his wife, children, and himself, and states that anyone who wished to inter another body in the tomb had to pay a fee to the *gynaeceum*<sup>74</sup>. What this means is unclear. Private guild associations often included funeral provision for their members through the collection of fees<sup>75</sup>. Could the *gynaeceum* have similarly contributed to the tomb? Or was Aurelios Lustas establishing a donation for fellow *gynaecarii*? The spending of wealth, especially on public buildings, was a well-established way to advance along the prestige hierarchy of Roman society, and as demonstrated by Alexander Weiss, could be extended to slaves<sup>76</sup>. This was not a public building, although it may have aided the *gynaeceum*, but its construction and invocation of the *gynaeceum* as part of Aurelios’ identity points to a communal conception of the imperial workshop, with its own internal hierarchy that extended beyond its occupational definition.

This communal identity also gave the imperial textile workers a means to challenge state hegemony, and ultimately, the emperor. The power of the late Roman state was based on the army, and the role of the imperial textile factories in keeping the army equipped gave them a particular importance in reinforcing the power of the emperor. The emperor, in exerting his power to provision the military through the *comes sacrarum largitionum*, bolstered the army’s dependency on him (a balance to his own reliance on the army). Such imperial connections may (or may not) have been reflected in the social position of the imperial textile workers, as Bond has argued it was for mint workers; in this case, the evidence is too scant. But their additional role in the production of the costume of imperial power, and in particular imperial purple, made them significant to the emperor himself<sup>77</sup>. The ground was laid for the economics of state production to become embedded in the power politics of the empire.

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<sup>74</sup> A. G. WOODHEAD, *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* XVI 417. Amsterdam 1959; WILD, *The Gynaeceum at Venta* 664.

<sup>75</sup> VENTICINQUE, *Family Affairs*, 274.

<sup>76</sup> WEISS, *Check your privilege*, 13–19.

<sup>77</sup> For the use of purple in the creation of imperial identity, see G. STEIGERWALD, *Das kaiserliche Purpurprivileg in spätrömischer und frühbyzantinischer Zeit*, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 33 (1990) 209–239.

This may shed light on repeated expressions of anxiety by elites regarding possible insurrection amongst the imperial textile workers. Ammianus Marcellinus recorded that during the reign of Constantius Gallus (r. 351–354) in the eastern provinces, a royal (purple) robe had been made in secret in the *gynaecium* in Tyre; although it was unclear who had ordered the robe, it emerged that the tribunes of the armouries had promised weapons in case a rebellion against Gallus broke out, and the governor of the province, Apollinaris, was siezed<sup>78</sup>. During the investigation, workers from the imperial dye workshops were arrested and tortured, and a letter from a man named Maras was discovered urging the foreman of the *gynaecium* in Tyre to work faster<sup>79</sup>. Likewise, Sozomen recounted that when the inhabitants of Kyzikos entreated the emperor Julian (r. 361–363) to restore their pagan temples, he refused the foreign Christians, ξένοις Χριστιανοῖς [*xenoi Christianois*], apparently travelling with him entry to the city as there were many Christians in the public wool workshops and mints, in case they were incited to rebel<sup>80</sup>. Gregory of Nazanzos' (329–390) funerary oration to Basil of Caesarea (330–379) described men from the arms factories and imperial weaving workshops taking part in sectarian conflicts, prone to violence due to the *παρρησία* [*parrēsia*], or freedom of action, that came with their position<sup>81</sup>. Restrictions, therefore, went beyond maintaining the workforce and enforcing hierarchies; there was also always the possibility workers from the imperial textile workshops could be enticed to join in a rebellion to aid an usurper and give him the trappings of legitimacy. Such associations between producers and legitimacy can be seen most explicitly in relation to the workshops producing silk and strengthened as that became their primary focus.

### **Silk production in imperial textile factories**

<sup>78</sup> Marcellinus XIV 7, 18–20 (ed. W. SEYFARTH, *Ammiani Marcellini Rerum Gestarum, libri qui supersunt*. Leipzig 1978, 21).

<sup>79</sup> Marcellinus XIV 9, 7 (26 SEYFARTH).

<sup>80</sup> Sozomen V 15, 4–6 (ed. J. BIDEZ – G.C. HANSEN, *Histoire Ecclésiastique, Livres V–VI* [SC 495]. Paris 2005, 160–162).

<sup>81</sup> Gregory of Nazanzos XLIII 57 (ed. J. BERNARDI, *Discours 42–43* SC 384. Paris 1992, 246).

The function of the imperial textile factories themselves gradually changed through the centuries. As provisioning of the army decentralised, the number of factories decreased and their significance was embodied by the manufacture of imperial silk in the East<sup>82</sup>. Silk was certainly not the most ubiquitous (or most economically significant) fabric, but its cultural importance was paramount after its introduction in Antiquity. The development of the Mediterranean silk industry even became subject to its own mythology<sup>83</sup>. Prokopios reported that during the reign of Justinian (r. 527-565), two monks arriving from the far east claimed they had learned the secrets of silk manufacture and the worms that produced the fibre. On Justinian's promise of great rewards, the monks returned to the country of Serinda (China) and brought back silkworm eggs, thereby ensuring Constantinople would no longer be reliant on rival Sassanian Persia for access to fine silks<sup>84</sup>. Later in the sixth century the historian Theophanes of Byzantium recorded a similar story, summarised in the ninth-century by the patriarch Photios; a Persian who had spent time in China visited Constantinople with silkworm eggs hidden in the hollow of his cane which he presented to Justinian, explaining the intricate process of sericulture<sup>85</sup>. Neither of these accounts is credible. Sericulture was already being practiced in Syria by the sixth century, as indicated by Chinese sources<sup>86</sup>. and the cultivation of silkworms was probably spreading gradually throughout the Byzantine empire by the time Justinian came to power<sup>87</sup>. Yet, the construction of a specific origin story underscores the important place silk held in Byzantine society.

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<sup>82</sup> There is little evidence that there was centralised textile production in the post-Roman West. This is also true for other materials, such as coinage. BOND, *Currency and Control*, 244.

<sup>83</sup> On the use of myth to explain the transfer of important technologies and knowledge, see L. HILAIRE-PEREZ – C. VERNA, Dissemination of Technical Knowledge in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era: New Approaches and Methodological Issues. *Technology and Culture* 47 (2006) 538.

<sup>84</sup> Prokopios, *De Bellis XVIII* 7 (ed. J. HAURY, *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia*. Leipzig 1962-1963, II, 515–517).

<sup>85</sup> Photios 64 (ed. R. HENRY, *Photius Bibliotheca* I. Paris 1959, I, 77-78; with extensive commentary in ed. N. BIANCHI – C. SCHIANO, *Fozio: Biblioteca*. Pisa 2019, 989–991). A new edition by Nigel Wilson is in press.

<sup>86</sup> A. MUTHESIUS, From Seed to Samite: Aspects of Byzantine Silk Production. *Textile History* 20 (1989) 137; A. MUTHESIUS, *Studies in Byzantine and Islamic Silk Weaving*. London 1995, 318–320.

<sup>87</sup> On the diachronic, multi-layered process of the spread of sericulture, see G. WU, Mapping Byzantine Sericulture in the Global Transfer of Technology. *Journal of Global History* preprint (2023) 1–17. The exact location of

Even before the introduction of sericulture, the state sought to control both the production and trade of silk to maintain the imperial prerogative and enforce social hierarchies.<sup>88</sup> Details of the organisation of imperial silk manufacture come from sporadic references to officials in texts and seals<sup>89</sup>, and while the crises of the seventh and eighth centuries led to a restructuring of the administrative state – centralising authority under the emperor<sup>90</sup> – parallels remained to late Roman production. The imperial silk workshops came under the authority of the εἰδικός [*eidikos*], corresponding to the late Roman *comites sacrarum largitionum*, while the responsibilities of the *procuratores* fell to the ἄρχοντες τῶν ἐργοδοσιῶν [*archontes tōn ergodisiōn*]<sup>91</sup>. The laws that sought to restrict access to silk, however, were probably ineffective, as suggested by the repeated edicts of successive administrations.

It is generally assumed that after the loss of territory during the seventh century the majority of imperial silk workshops were in Constantinople near the palace<sup>92</sup>. The only known

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Byzantine sericulture is unknown. See N. OIKONOMIDÈS, Silk Trade and Production in Byzantium from the Sixth to the Ninth Century: The Seals of *Kommerkiarioi*. *DOP* 40 (1986) 33–53; A. MUTHESIUS, Essential Processes, Looms, and Technical Aspects of the Production of Silk Textiles, in: *The Economic History of Byzantium from the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century* (ed. A. LAIOU). Washington, DC 2002, 151–152; D. JACOBY, Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West. *DOP* 58 (2004) 198–199; J. E. COOPER, The Possibility of Sericulture in Byzantine Cappadocia, in: *Discipuli dona ferentes: Glimpses of Byzantium in honour of Marlia Mundell Mango*, ed. T. PAPACOSTAS – M. PARANI. Turnhout 2017, 119–147.

<sup>88</sup> A. MUTHESIUS, Textiles and Dress in Byzantium, in: *Material Culture and Well-Being in Byzantium (400-1453)*, ed. M. GRÜNBART ET AL. Vienna 2007, 159; D. JACOBY, Silk Production, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. E. JEFFREYS – J. HALDON – R. CORMACK. Oxford 2008, 422. Zuckerman examined the cause and effect of Justinian's silk policies, relying on the veracity of Prokopios' account. C. ZUCKERMAN, Silk "Made in Byzantium": A Study of Economic Policies of Emperor Justinian. *TM* 17 (2013) 323–350. My thanks to Anthony Kaldellis for the reference. Similar controls were implemented in Persia and China. M. P. CANEPA, Textiles and Elite Tastes between the Mediterranean, Iran and Asia at the End of Antiquity, in: *Global Textile Encounters* (ed. M.-L. NOSCH – Z. FENG – L. VARADARAJAN). Oxford 2014, 2–3; X. LIU, Silk, Robes, and Relations Between Early Chinese Dynasties and Nomads Beyond the Great Wall, in: *Robes of Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. S. GORDON. New York 2001, 24–25.

<sup>89</sup> Galliker, Terminology Associated with Silk, 354–356. References to officials directly overseeing the imperial workshops are found from the second half of the seventh century (notably after the loss of the eastern provinces). E. J. COOPER – M. J. DECKER, *Life and Society in Byzantine Cappadocia*. London 2012, 241; N. OIKONOMIDÈS, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals*. Washington, D.C. 1985, 50–52. However, the roles of officials involved with silk remain subject of debate. See L. BRUBAKER – J. HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680-850: A History*. Cambridge 2011, 682–705.

<sup>90</sup> BRUBAKER – HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 792.

<sup>91</sup> R. S. LOPEZ, Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire. *Speculum* 20 (1945) 7.

<sup>92</sup> COOPER – DECKER, *Life and Society* 241; W. BRANDES, *Finanzverwaltung in Krisenzeiten: Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen Administration im 6.-9. Jahrhundert*. Frankfurt 2002, 405; T. K. THOMAS, "Ornaments of excellence" from "the miserable gains of commerce": Luxury Art and Byzantine Culture, in: *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition 7th-9th Century*, ed. H. C. EVANS – B. RATLIFF. New York 2012, 129.

reference to a location for one of these workshops appears on the elephant silk from Aachen Cathedral which includes an inscription stating it was produced during the period when ‘Peter was the *archon* of Zeuxippos’ [fig. 1], suggesting the Baths of Zeuxippos next to the Hippodrome had been converted into a silk factory sometime in the eighth century<sup>93</sup>. Silk production in private workshops also increased throughout the empire, particularly in the provinces<sup>94</sup>, and by the ninth century the imperial prerogative for certain silks was maintained through control of production processes rather than control of the raw materials<sup>95</sup>. Yet, elaborate silks continued to be used to reflect the pre-eminence of the imperial court and construct the imperial image.

Silk had numerous qualities that made it highly desirable; its fineness, colour saturation, and lustre all contributed to making it a sought-after luxury good. It also played a crucial role in the performance of political ideology. The ‘ideal of monarchy’ – shaped by Greek philosophy, the Roman legal tradition, and Christianity – was pervasive throughout Byzantine society, embedded in the collective imagination through the circulation and reproduction of both images and rituals<sup>96</sup>. The process of legitimisation relied on ceremonial that reinforced the relationship between the emperor and his subjects, of which the imperial image was an integral part<sup>97</sup>. Processions, investiture, and gift-giving, all of which involved silk, were

<sup>93</sup> A. MUTHESIUS, *Byzantine Silk Weaving: AD 400 to AD 1200*. Vienna 1997, 4.2, cat. no. M58.

<sup>94</sup> JACOBY, *Silk Production*, 22–23; JACOBY, *Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction: Byzantium, the Muslim World, and the Christian West*. *DOP* 58 (2004), 198–199. For bibliographies and a new evaluation of provincial silk production, see G. WU, *The myth of phocaicus: new evidence on the silk industry in Byzantine Central Greece*, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 36.1 (2021) 43–61; G. WU, *The silk industry around Naupaktos and its implications*, *BZ* 115.1 (2022) 351–66.

<sup>95</sup> This too was subject to variation. While the *Basilika* prohibited the non-imperial use of purple, Leo VI was more lenient in allowing its limited use. *Basilika* XIX 1.82 (ed. H. J. SCHELTEMA – N. VAN DER WAL, *Basilicorum Libri LX, Series A Volumen III Textus Librorum XVII–XXV*. Groningen 1960, 2508–2509); *Novellas Leonis* 80 (ed. S. TRŌIANOS, *Hoi Neares Leontos st’ tou Sophou*. Athens 2007, 238–240); J. GALLIKER, ‘Middle Byzantine Silk in Context: Integrating the Textual and Material Evidence’, Ph.D., University of Birmingham (2014), 72.

<sup>96</sup> P. MAGDALINO, *Basileia: The Idea of Monarchy in Byzantium, 600–1200*, in: *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*, ed. A. KALDELLIS – N. SINOSSOGLOU. Cambridge 2017, 575–576.

<sup>97</sup> Muthesius refers to the relationship between the emperor and God, but in discussions of image-making, Kaldellis’ argument for the relationship between the emperor and *politeia* is compelling. A. MUTHESIUS, *Studies in Byzantine, Islamic and Near Eastern Silk Weaving*. London 2008, 15. On the ‘imperial idea’ see KALDELLIS, *Byzantine Republic 173–198*. For the religious ideology of the court, see H. MAGUIRE, *The Heavenly Court, in: Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. MAGUIRE (Washington D.C. 1997) 247–258.

characterised by the ‘repetitive enactment of the Byzantine social order’<sup>98</sup>, intended to elicit intellectual and emotional responses reflecting the authoritative position of the emperor<sup>99</sup>.

Certain motifs – often borrowing the visual language of power from Greece, Rome and the Sasanian east – were used in these rituals to express both the secular and spiritual power of the emperor<sup>100</sup>. The eagle, for example, was mentioned several times in the *Book of Ceremonies* and recalled the Roman imperial emblem on legionary standards and were a frequently used symbol of authority<sup>101</sup>. Hunting scenes like that of the so-called Mozac Hunter Silk [fig. 2], depicting an imperial figure in jewelled costume on horseback spearing a lion, represented the power of the emperor over his enemies<sup>102</sup>. Imperial portraits could also symbolise imperial triumph, like a fragment in the Victoria and Albert Museum showing the haloed emperor driving a *quadriga* [fig. 3], signalling the supremacy of the emperor over others<sup>103</sup>. According to Theophanes, the investiture garments worn in 522 by Tzathios, the king of the Lazi, after he rebelled against the Persians were embroidered with images of Justin I (r. 518–527), visualising

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<sup>98</sup> P. PRASAD, Splendour, Vigour, and Legitimacy: The prefaces of the Book of Ceremonies (De cerimoniis) and Byzantine imperial theory, in: *The Emperor in the Byzantine World*, S. TOUGHER. Abingdon 2019, 235–47; A. CAMERON, The construction of court ritual: the Byzantine Book of Ceremonies, in: *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. D. CANNADINE – S. PRICE. Cambridge 1987, 106–36; M. MCCORMICK, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West*. Cambridge, MA 1990, chapt. 4–5. There is an extensive bibliography relating to the use of silk in diplomacy, gift exchange, court ceremony, and as a currency substitute, notably the many publications by Anna Muthesius and David Jacoby cited here. See also GALLIKER, *Middle Byzantine Silk in Context*, 44–62. On the wonder of the technical aspects pattern repetition in silks could inspire, see W. T. WOODFIN, *Repetition and Replication: Sacred and Secular Patterned Textiles*, in: *Experiencing Byzantium*, ed. C. NESBITT – M. JACKSON. Farnham 2013, 35–55. For the use of silk in processions, see L. BRUBAKER – C. WICKHAM, *Processions, Power, and Community Identity: East and West*, in: *Empires and Communities in the Post-Roman and Islamic World, c. 400-1000 CE*, ed. R. KRAMER – W. POHL. Oxford 2021, 149–53.

<sup>99</sup> MUTHESIUS, *Imperial Identity* 85–86

<sup>100</sup> A. MUTHESIUS, *Silk, Culture and Being in Byzantium: How Far did Precious Cloth Enrich “Memory” and Shape “Culture” Across the Empire (4th-15th Centuries)?*. *DChAE* 36 (2015) 352. Secular imagery that promoted imperial ideology became especially important during the period of iconoclasm. BRUBAKER – HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 337–340.

<sup>101</sup> H. C. EVANS – W. D. WIXOM, *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843-1261*. New York 1997, cat. no. 149, 224-226; A. MUTHESIUS, *Studies in Byzantine Silk*. London 2004, 228.

<sup>102</sup> S. WHITFIELD, *Silk, Slaves, and Stupas: Material Culture of the Silk Road*. Oakland 2018, 207–10; MUTHESIUS, *Byzantine Silk Weaving*, 68–9. For dating, see BRUBAKER – HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 225–226.

<sup>103</sup> A. WALKER, *The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.* Cambridge 2012, 25–26; W. T. WOODFIN, *Presents Given and Presence Subverted: The Cunegunda Choromantel in Bamber and the Ideology of Byzantine Textiles*. *Gesta* 47 (2008/1) 33–50.

Tzathios' subservience to the emperor<sup>104</sup>. Silk was therefore significant in imperial image-making.

Silk could also invoke the divine. Just as they were important in imperial costume, silks were significant in ecclesiastic vestments and church decoration<sup>105</sup>, often used to symbolise the liminal spaces between the physical and spiritual worlds<sup>106</sup>. Michael Psellos described the role of fine silks in revealing the icon in his *Discourse on the Miracle that Occurred in the Blachernae Church*; the icon (and its divine presence) was exposed as the covering was suddenly lifted, 'as if some breath of air gently moved it'<sup>107</sup>. Theophanes reported that plague in 745/6 was foreshadowed by the appearance of the cross on men's garments and the holy vestments, causing much distress amongst the population of Constantinople<sup>108</sup>. Although a later example, Manuel Holobolos' encomium to Michael VIII Palaiologos, probably written in 1265, included a speech made by Genoese diplomats at the conclusion of the Treaty of Nymphaion in 1261, in which they requested an image of the emperor as a form of protection for their city, further proof of the symbolic power of the imperial image:

Soothe the piercing love of this [city], through your image rendered on a cloth: for the form of the beloved is a great remedy for lovers. It will be a strong defense against our enemies, an averter against every plot, a powerful parapet for the city [Genoa] which is yours and ours, a strong tower and an adamantine wall to face the enemy<sup>109</sup>.

<sup>104</sup> Theophanes AM 6015 (ed. C. DE BOOR, *Theophanis Chronographia*. Leipzig 1883, 168).

<sup>105</sup> A. MUTHESIUS, *The Cult of Imperial and Ecclesiastical Silks in Byzantium*. *Textile History* 32 (2001) 36–47.

<sup>106</sup> M. M. FULGHUM, *Under Wraps: Byzantine Textiles as Major and Minor Arts*, *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 9.1 (2001) 27–31.

<sup>107</sup> Psellos X (ed. E. A. FISHER, *Michaelis Pselli Orationes Hagiographicae*. Stuttgart 1995, 205); translated in E. A. FISHER, *Discourse on the Miracle that Occurred in the Blachernai Church*, in: *Michael Psellos on Literature and Art: A Byzantine Perspective on Aesthetics*, ed. C. BARBER – S. PAPAIOANNOU. Notre Dame 2017, 312.

<sup>108</sup> Theophanes AM 6238 (423 DE BOOR).

<sup>109</sup> Manuel Holobolos (ed. M. TREU, *Manuelis Holoboli: Orationes I*. Potsdam 1906, 46); translated in C. J. HILSDALE, *The Imperial Image at the End of Exile: The Byzantine Embroidered Silk in Genoa and the Treaty of Nymphaion (1261)*, *DOP* 64 (2010) 164. Also C. J. HILSDALE, *Byzantine Art and Diplomacy in an Age of Decline*. Cambridge 2014, 3–4, 31–34, 44–50. On the dating of the text, see R. MACRIDES, *The New Constantine and the New Constantinople – 1261?*, *BMGS* 6 (1980) 16–20. .

In return they received the requested image of the emperor embroidered on two silk *pallioi* [fig. 4]<sup>110</sup>. Finally, in his *ekphrasis* to the Hagia Sophia Paul the Silentiary described how the silk alter clothes provided the imperial couple a means of physical connection with Mary and Christ, depicting them joining hands<sup>111</sup>. Silks, therefore, enabled and reflected several different types of power dynamics.

They also appear frequently in accounts of gifts accompanying diplomatic missions between courts, through which rulers competed to show their magnificence by gifting precious goods<sup>112</sup>. They were frequently exchanged to seal alliances and marriages, ransom prisoners, and instil goodwill with both local officials and foreign courts; Byzantine silks found in treasuries throughout Europe further attest to their circulation<sup>113</sup>. Silk was also seen as a distinct component of eastern cultural hegemony. When Liutprand of Cremona visited Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–969) on an embassy to propose marriage between Anna Porphyrogenita and the future Holy Roman Emperor Otto II (r. 973–983), he reported that during a dispute over title of Roman emperor, Otto was mocked for his native Frankish dress (skins rather than the silks) and Liutprand was told that it was right the Byzantines should surpass others in dress as they did in wealth and wisdom; as a further insult, five purple silk robes Liutprand had purchased were confiscated as he left<sup>114</sup>. Silk was part of the expression of both imperial and

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<sup>110</sup> For the apotropaic quality of textiles, see H. MAGUIRE, *Garments Pleasing to God: The Significance of Domestic Textile Design in the Early Byzantine Period*, *DOP* 44 (1990) 215–24.

<sup>111</sup> Paul the Silentiary 2.802–804 (ed. C. DE STEFANIO, *Paulus Silentiarius: Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae, Descriptio Ambonis*. Berlin 2011, 54); R. MACRIDES – P. MAGDALINO, *The architecture of ekphrasis: construction and context of Paul the Silentiary's poem on Hagia Sophia*, *BMGS* 12 (1988) 71.

<sup>112</sup> A. CUTLER, *Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and Related Economies*. *DOP* 55 (2001) 247; A. CUTLER, *Significant Gifts: Patterns of Exchange in Late Antique, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Diplomacy*. *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38 (2008) 79–101; A. CUTLER, *The Enduring Present: Gifts in Medieval Islam and Byzantium*, in: *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, ed. L. KOMAROFF. New Haven 2011, 80; W. T. WOODFIN, *Presents Given and Presence Subverted*.

<sup>113</sup> L. BRUBAKER, *The Elephant and the Ark: Cultural and Material Interchange across the Mediterranean in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries*. *DOP* 58 (2004) 175–195; JACOBY, *Silk Production* 423–424.

<sup>114</sup> Liutprand of Cremona, *Legatio* 53–54 (ed. P. CHIESA, *Antapodosis, Homelia Paschalis, Historia Ottonis, Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana*. Turnhout 1998, 210–211). The incident arose when Pope John XIII sent Nikephoros a letter calling him emperor of the Greeks rather than Romans.



cultural identity<sup>115</sup>. The taxes levied from its sale additionally contributed to the state coffers<sup>116</sup>, making silk both a visual and economic symbol of the emperor's power. The exclusivity of the types of fabrics produced in the imperial workshops, fabrics whose unsanctioned manufacture, sale, and – as Liutprand discovered – export were prohibited, reinforced the mystique of the emperor as the autocratic ruler whose image could not be imitated by his subjects<sup>117</sup>.

While information on silk weaving itself is fragmentary, the skill needed to consistently spin fine threads, prepare, and operate the looms, and create complex patterns required considerable training. Yet despite the skill needed to weave intricate motifs and the significant cultural importance placed on imperial silks, it was the materials – not the labour – that made silk so costly<sup>118</sup>. There are few sources that give us information on the wages for silk workers in later centuries, but Diocletian's *Edict of Maximum Prices* gives an indication of the economics of silk production in the fourth century<sup>119</sup>. Issued in 301, it contained pay information for weavers based on the types of fabrics they produced, as well as the maximum prices that could be charged for their products. A weaver of pure silk could earn a maximum wage of twenty-five *denarii* per day, the same as a weaver of part-silk. A weaver of patterned silk could expect up to forty *denarii*, the same amount a weaver of high-quality linen could be paid. A female weaver, however, earned only twelve *denarii* per day, 16 if she specialised in certain fabrics. As a point of comparison, a shepherd earned twenty *denarii* per day, while a

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<sup>115</sup> MUTHESIUS, *Imperial Identity*.

<sup>116</sup> MUTHESIUS, *Silk, Culture and Being in Byzantium*, 353.

<sup>117</sup> MUTHESIUS, *Imperial Identity*, 86.

<sup>118</sup> THOMAS, *Ornaments of excellence*, 128. Dyes, in particular, could contribute up to half the cost of a silk. MUTHESIUS, *Essential Processes*, 165–166. The looms required to weave intricate patterns were also expensive and required space to set up and operate. See MUTHESIUS, *Byzantine Silk Weaving* 19–24; J. P. WILD, *The Roman Horizontal Loom*. *AJA* 91 (1987) 459–471. For Byzantine weaving more generally, see G. WU, *How did Byzantines Weave? A Synthesis of Textual, Pictorial, Ethnographic, and Archaeological Evidence*. *GRBS* 61 (2021) 368–395.

<sup>119</sup> Even if the figures were inaccurate, Groen-Vallinga and Tacoma argue there was both an internal consistency and proportional correspondence between the *Edict* and the economic reality. M. J. GROEN-VALLINGA – L. E. TACOMA, *The Value of Labour: Diocletian's Prices Edict*, in: *Work, Labour and Professions in the Roman World* (ed. K. VERBOVEN – C. LAES). Leiden 2017, 105–106.

figure painter could earn up to 150 *denarii*<sup>120</sup>. The average silk weaver, therefore, was earning little more than an unskilled shepherd, and even the skilled patterned weavers were unable to earn anything close to the wage of a figure painter<sup>121</sup>.

Nor would they be able to afford the products of their labour; a pure silk *dalmaticomafortium* (a hooded garment with sleeves) cost up to 135,000 *denarii*<sup>122</sup>. It is possible there was another class of skilled silk weaver not addressed in the price list; the occupations collected in the *Edict* were incomplete and idiosyncratic at best. But the tight control on silk weavers would be consistent with an administration seeking to maintain imperial privilege of production of certain types of fabric, something replicated in the later centuries. The social role of weavers in Byzantine silk production will be returned to.

### Sources of the later imperial textile factories

Diocletian's *Edict* was published before the first references to the imperial textile factories appear in surviving sources, and it makes no distinction between free and unfree labour, although both were probably drawing some sort of wage<sup>123</sup>. The use of slave labour in particular allowed for the maintenance of a sustained skilled workforce through periods of uncertain demand<sup>124</sup>. This is perhaps the economic logic underpinning the early imperial textile factories, where the use of forced labour rather than long-term contracts would have given the state greater flexibility in meeting the needs of the army<sup>125</sup>, hence the multiple pieces of

<sup>120</sup> Edictum de Pretiis Rerum Venalium 7.9 (*pictor imaginarius*), 7.18 (*pastor*), 20.9-11 (*sericarius*), 20.12-13 (*gerdia*), 21.5 (*linteonus*) (ed. S. LAUFFER, *Diokletians Preisedikkt*. Berlin 1971, 118-119, 160-164).

<sup>121</sup> In their synthesis of wages and prices in the Byzantine period, Cécile Morrisson and Jean-Claude Cheynet found no information on weavers or silk workers, but concluded that skilled artisans could expect a wide range of wages depending on occupation. C. MORRISSON – J.-C. CHEYNET, *Prices and Wages in the Byzantine World*, in: *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. A. E. LAIOU. Washington D.C. 2002, 872, 864-867 (table 18).

<sup>122</sup> Edictum de Pretiis Rerum Venalium 19.16 (152 LAUFFER).

<sup>123</sup> GROEN-VALLINGA – TACOMA, 'Value of Labour', 112–113.

<sup>124</sup> A. ZUIDERHOEK, *Sorting Out Labour in the Roman Provinces: Some Reflections on Labour and Institutions in Asia Minor*, in: *Work, Labour, and Professions in the Roman World*, ed. K. VERBOVEN and C. LAES. Leiden 2017, 20–35; C. HAWKINS, *Contracts, Coercion, and the Boundaries of the Roman Artisanal Firm*, in: *Work, Labour, and Professions in the Roman World*, ed. K. VERBOVEN and C. LAES. Leiden 2017, 36–61.

<sup>125</sup> Hawkins enumerates the benefits in relation to private artisanal production, but I think it can also be applied to the imperial works. See HAWKINS, *Contracts, Coercion, and the Boundaries*, 57–61.

legislation placing restrictions on the workforce. This also seems true in the post-sixth-century imperial workshops<sup>126</sup>, suggested by the retention of certain codes related to the labourers in later legal texts. Only the ninth-century *Basilika*, a redaction of Justinian's *Corpus Iuris Civilis* compiled under Leo VI (r. 886–912) in sixty books<sup>127</sup>, refers to the imperial textile workshops. In book fifty-four, in a section also dealing with the imperial murex fishers, mint, and transport workers, the title refers to the γυναικειαρίων [*gynaikeiariōn*] and an official known as the προκουρατόρων τῶν γυναικῶν<sup>128</sup>, an archaic reference to the Roman *procuratores gynaecii* found in the *Notitia Dignitatum*.

Alexander Kazhdan believed the word γυναικείον [*gynaikeion*] had lost its association with the imperial textile workshops by the ninth century, and had reverted to meaning the space related to women<sup>129</sup>, Relying on R. S. Lopez's assertion that the workers in the Roman *gynaecia* were men<sup>130</sup>, he dismissed a reference in one of the sections to a 'woman assigned to the *gynaikeion*', and noting that there was no similar statute in the earlier legal codes suggested that the use of '*prokouratores*' was meaningless<sup>131</sup>. However, as in the Roman textile industry as a whole women were working in the *gynaecia*<sup>132</sup>, and during the *Basilika*'s codification process sections of the Justinianic corpus that were considered contradictory or no

<sup>126</sup> The use of forced labour was common in post-Roman textile production. In Carolingian aristocratic *gynaecia* slave women worked under the supervision of the women of the house. V. L. GARVER, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World*. Ithaca 2009, 227–228; E. ANDERSSON STRAND – S.-G. HELLER, *Production and Distribution*, in: *A Cultural History of Dress and Fashion in the Medieval Age*. ed. S.-G. HELLER. London 2016, 35–37. In the Islamic *tirāz* factories, forced labourers worked alongside those who earned a wage. M. SHATZMILLER, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World*. Leiden 1994, 244–6. Employment in these factories was not necessarily voluntary for free artisans either. A letter from the Cairo Geniza (T-S 8.106, AD 1040), written by a Cairene weaver living in Damascus who had been conscripted into the imperial textile workshop, described how his petitions to the caliph to be released from the workshop went unanswered. S. D. GOITEIN, *Petitions to Fatimid Caliphs from the Cairo Geniza*. *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 45 (1954) 32–33.

<sup>127</sup> Chitwood distinguishes between the sixty books promulgated under Leo and the later *Basilika*, which included 'extensive scholia that played a vital role in the text's interpretation.' Z. CHITWOOD, *Byzantine Legal Culture and the Roman Legal Tradition*, 867–1056. Cambridge 2017, 32–35, 177–178.

<sup>128</sup> *Basilika*, LIV 16 (ed. H. J. SCHELTEMA – N. VAN DER WAL, 2508–2509).

<sup>129</sup> A. P. KAZHDAN, *Gynaikeion*, in: *ODB* (ed. A. P. KAZHDAN ET AL.). Oxford 1991, 888–889.

<sup>130</sup> LOPEZ, *Silk Industry*, 6 n. 3. Lopez, however, takes the *Basilika* to mean it was women who worked in the ninth-century imperial textile workshops.

<sup>131</sup> *Basilika*, LIV 16.9 (2508 SCHELTEMA – VAN DER WAL).

<sup>132</sup> A. C. KELLEY, *Searching for Professional Women in the Mid to Late Roman Textile Industry, Past & Present* 258 (2023) 3–43.

longer relevant were supposed to be removed from the final text<sup>133</sup>. As Eleutheria Papagianni noted, while the ninth-century codes may not have been ‘a faithful reflection’ of contemporary concerns, the inclusion of laws addressing imperial works indicate that they ‘were not completely alien to the social and economic conditions of the time’<sup>134</sup>.

The other occupations discussed in the same section were also functions of the state, and the inclusion of murex fishers provided a link to the court’s textile production. In the earlier corpus, these occupations were also grouped together. A further statute within this section makes the status of at least some of these workers clear. Referring to a slave or captive (ἀνδράποδον [*andraprodon*]), it set a fine for anyone who concealed a fugitive from the imperial textile factories, just as the previous codes did<sup>135</sup>. The reference to the *prokouratores* is intriguing. In Rome the title was used for the official overseeing the fiscal administration of a province, imperial estates, imperial properties (including sites of production), and the acquisition of certain raw materials<sup>136</sup>; it does not appear to have been used after the sixth century in the east. Its possible use of the term was a later addition by a copyist, in reference to earlier texts like the *Notitia Dignitatum*. Book fifty-four of the *Basilika* was one of sixteen ‘lost’ books, known only through indices and testimonia, and the inclusion of the *prokouratorōn tōn gynaikōn* is not consistent across all indices<sup>137</sup>.

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<sup>133</sup> CHITWOOD, *Byzantine Legal Culture*, 33–34.

<sup>134</sup> E. PAPAGIANNI, *Byzantine Legislation on Economic Activity Relative to Social Class*, in: *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. A. E. LAIOU. Washington D.C. 2002, 1085.

<sup>135</sup> *Basilika*, LIV 16.6 (2509 SCHELTEMA – VAN DER WAL).

<sup>136</sup> P. A. BRUNT, *Roman Imperial Themes*. Oxford 1990, 8. For later examples, M. F. HENDY, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300–1450*. Cambridge 2008, 316, 383; A. E. LAIOU – C. MORRISSON, *The Byzantine Economy*. Cambridge 2007, 29.

<sup>137</sup> B. H. STOLTE, *New Praefatio*, in: *Basilica Online* (<https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/basilica-online>) accessed 20/06/2022. However, the inclusion of anachronistic titles is found in other texts as well. A. MOFFATT – M. TALL, *The Book of Ceremonies: with Greek edition of the Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae*. Canberra 2012, xxxii.

The *Basilika* is the only post-sixth century legal document to refer to the imperial textile factories<sup>138</sup>, although occasional mentions of these and other imperial workshops in additional sources suggest the section dealing with the imperial *gynaikeion* was still relevant. Theophanes recorded that an imperial embroidery factory in Constantinople burned down in 792<sup>139</sup>. A ninth- or tenth-century retelling of the foundation of the Hodegon Monastery, also in Constantinople, reported that at the time, the Palace of Marina was being used for imperial textile production<sup>140</sup>. Further sources attest to the use of forced labour in the imperial workshops (βασιλικὰ ἐργοδόσια [*basilica ergodosia*]), and the special character of the textiles produced in them.

Justinian put an end to the practice of penal servitude by prohibiting free-persons from being made slaves as punishment<sup>141</sup>, but forced labour continued. Theophanes noted that during the coronation of Constantine VI (r.780–797) as co-emperor to his father Leo IV (r. 775–780) in 775/6, all the people gave an oath of fidelity including, in descending order of importance, members of the themes, the Senate, the army, the rest of the citizens, and finally the labourers from the workshops (ἐργαστηρικῶν [*ergastērikōn*])<sup>142</sup>. P. A. Yannopoulos argued that the differentiation from the rest of the citizenry indicated a level of unfreedom<sup>143</sup>. In an apparent later reversal of Justinian’s prohibition, or perhaps a sign of the gradual loosening of adherence, Theodore of Stoudios (759-826) wrote sometime between 817-818 to a monk

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<sup>138</sup> For references to slavery in imperial legislation, although not necessarily in an imperial context, see ROTMAN, *Byzantine Slavery*, appendix B. For the application of these codes in later contexts, see H. KÖPSTEIN, *Sklaven in der “Peira”*, *FM IX* (1994).

<sup>139</sup> Theophanes AM 6285 (DE BOOR 469).

<sup>140</sup> Hodegoi (ed. C. ANGELIDI, *Un texte patrographique et édifiant: le «Discours Narratif» sur les Hodègoi*. *REB* 52 (1994) 145).

<sup>141</sup> *Novellae Constitutiones XXII.8* (ed. R. SCHOELL – W. KROLL, *Corpus Iuris Cvilis vol III, Novellae*. Berlin 1895, 151-152). Notably, this was not framed as an issue of status, but as a means of preserving marriages.

<sup>142</sup> Theophanes AM 6268 (DE BOOR 449).

<sup>143</sup> P. A. YANNOPOULOS, *La société profane dans l’empire byzantin des VIIe, VIIIe et IXe siècles*. Louvain 1975, 231.

named Arkadios who had been sentenced to weave in the workshops as an imperial slave for continuing to venerate icons after Leo V (r. 813-820) reinstated iconoclast policies<sup>144</sup>.

Other accounts suggest that private slaves could be acquired by the state and/or emperor. When laying out the governance for soap-makers, the Book of the Eparch, written under Leo VI in 911/912 as a list of regulations for private guilds, stated that private slaves could become public slaves if they were found breaching regulations<sup>145</sup>. In an apocryphal story contained within the *Vita Basilii*, the wealthy widow Danielis, perhaps an owner of a weaving workshop, is said to have given the emperor Basil many gifts including five hundred slaves, amongst whom were one hundred female σκιάστριαι [*skiastriai*]<sup>146</sup>. They were listed alongside several different textile types, also gifts, suggesting they may have been connected to cloth production, possibly as weavers or embroiderers<sup>147</sup>. There is no historical evidence for Danielis, but her story illustrates the rising reputation of other parts of the empire for textile production (in this case the Peloponnese)<sup>148</sup>, and suggests there may have been a prestige to ‘foreign’ slaves in the emperor’s workshops<sup>149</sup>. Military conquest continued to be a source of foreign labour for the imperial workshops. Al-Muqaddasi’s tenth-century description of

<sup>144</sup> Theodore of Stoudios 390 (ed. G. FATOUROS, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae* (CFHB 31.2). Berlin 1992, 541-542).

<sup>145</sup> To Eparchikon Biblion 7.9 (ed. J. KODER, *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen* (CFHB 33). Wein 1991, 118).

<sup>146</sup> *Vita Basilii* 74 (ed. I. ŠEVČENKO, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis continuati nomine fertur liber quo Vita Basilii Imperatoris amplectitur* (CFHB 42). Berlin 2011, 254-256).

<sup>147</sup> D. JACOBY, *Silk in Western Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade*. *BZ* 84/85 (1991) 458–9. Jacoby’s translation of the word σκιάστριαι has not been universally accepted. In his translation of the text, Ševčenko left the term untranslated: ŠEVČENKO, *Chronographiae quae Theophanis continuati*, 257.

<sup>148</sup> I. ANAGNOSTAKIS – A. KALDELLIS, *The Textual Sources for the Peloponnese, A.D. 582–959: Their Creative Engagement with Ancient Literature*. *GRBS* 54 (2014) 115–123; K. KOURELIS, *Wool and Rubble Walls*. *DOP* 73 (2019) 179–182.

<sup>149</sup> The prestige of foreign textile workers may have been a contributory factor to Roger II of Sicily’s raid on Thebes and Corinth in 1147 during which many male and female weavers were forcibly relocated to Palermo (probably to royal workshops), although, as Wickham points out, the initial reference to this event in Choniates makes clear the women were taken to be raped. Wickham also notes that despite commonly being referred to as silk weavers in scholarly literature, these were probably mostly linen weavers. C. WICKHAM, *The Donkey and the Boat*. Oxford 2023, 325–326. My thanks to Chris Wickham for sharing the relevant passages with me before print.

Constantinople (from an unknown source) included reference to captured Muslim slaves working in the imperial workshops, probably some in textile production<sup>150</sup>.

While these texts suggest that forced labour continued to be used after the sixth century, there are also indications it made up a significant proportion of the ‘imperial’ workforce. Certainly, slaves were numerous enough to warrant the notice of the emperor when, perhaps as a legacy of the Roman practice of *peculium*, Leo VI directed that the imperial slaves (*oiketēs*) be given the right to dispose of their own property during their lifetime and at death<sup>151</sup>, although he made no reference to textile workers specifically. The tenth-century historian Leo the Deacon wrote that early in the reign of John I Tzimiskes (r. 969-976), a conspirator in Leo Phokas’ rebellion approached the manager of the imperial weaving workshop (βασιλικὰ ἱστουργία [*basilika istourgia*]), and requested he gather the guild of weavers to join their cause<sup>152</sup>. This would not have been the first time a guild of imperial workers had staged a rebellion against the emperor; the *bellum monetariorum* of 271 in which the mint workers rebelled against the emperor Aurelian (r. 270–275) may have been the impetus for tightening of controls over mints and associations of mint workers<sup>153</sup>. And as discussed, texts reveal a genuine concern that the labourers of the imperial textile workshops would rebel in the late Roman period. The conspirators were ultimately betrayed, but the fact that the workers from the weaving workshop were sought out insinuate a significant oppressed workforce that might be eager to aid the rebellion. These references also suggest a similar communal identity of these workers identified in the late Roman workshops.

An ancillary consideration to the above passages is the relationship between the gendered rhetoric applied to the textile workshops and the status of the workers within them;

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<sup>150</sup> Al-Muqaddasi (ed. M. J. DE GOEJE, *Descriptio Imperii Moslemici (BGA 3)*. Leiden 1967, 147-148); JACOBY, *Silk Economics* 226.

<sup>151</sup> Novelllas Leonis 38 (148 S. TRŌIANOS).

<sup>152</sup> Leo the Deacon IX.4 (ed. C. B. HASE, *Leonis diaconi Caloensis Historiae libri decem (CSHB 11)*. Bonn 1828, 146–148).

<sup>153</sup> BOND, *Currency and Control*, 236–237.

accusations of femininity and sexual impropriety were sometimes used to degrade and denote servile condition<sup>154</sup>. Inverting gender rolls was a common device used to demean or ‘other’ in the ancient world, reflected (as seen earlier) by both Eusebios and Sozomen when they emphasised the humiliation Christian men endured in being turned into imperial slaves forced to perform textile (women’s) work<sup>155</sup>. Labour in the imperial textile factories was not limited to a single sex, although the factories were often portrayed as places for women. There is ample evidence that both men and women were active throughout the commercial textile industry during the Roman and Byzantine periods, despite the contradictory associations of domestic production with women and commercial production with men<sup>156</sup>. Sources on the imperial workshops are inconsistent in this regard. Lactantius’ description of the Christian persecutions noted that it was women, and specifically the *materfamilias*, who were sent to work in the imperial textile factories<sup>157</sup>. In Eusebios’ passages it was men who had been sent there, additionally humiliated by being forced to perform γυναικείους δ’ ἔργους, ‘women’s work’; Sozomen, describing the same event in the fifth century, wrote that Constantine restored them from this dishonour<sup>158</sup>.

The implication that male textile workers were humiliated and emasculated by performing effeminate tasks can also be seen in the treatise *Epitoma rei militaris* by Vegetius, written between the late fourth and early fifth centuries. In advocating for a return to a more traditional system of military staffing and warfare based on armies of Roman soldiers (rather than mercenaries-for-hire), Vegetius listed several professions that he considered undesirable to recruit from, including fishers, fowlers, confectioners or pastry cooks, linen weavers, and

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<sup>154</sup> NAVARRA, *Ad gynaecei ministerium deputari*, 8–9.

<sup>155</sup> Discussed in L. BRUBAKER, *Sex, lies and textuality: the Secret History of Prokopios and the rhetoric of gender in sixth-century Byzantium*, in: *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*, ed. L. BRUBAKER – J. M. H. SMITH. Cambridge 2004.

<sup>156</sup> See KELLEY, *Searching for Professional Women*.

<sup>157</sup> Lactantius 21 (32 CREED).

<sup>158</sup> Eusebios II 20 (57 WINKELMANN); Sozomen I 8 (140 BIDEZ).



those involved in the *gynaecea* (*omnesque qui aliquid tractasse videbuntur ad gynaecea*)<sup>159</sup>. The grouping of these particular professions has also been taken to mean that these were occupations most often performed by women. The use of *gynaecea* in this passage is usually translated as a reference to things having to do with women based on the connection to the locus commonly associated with women's tasks, but it could also refer specifically to men engaged in textile work within the state factories. Either way, Vegetius was dismissing men working in occupations associated with women as lacking the masculine virtue required of soldiers, and that included textile workers<sup>160</sup>; if the reference is specifically aimed at men in the state-owned factories, the interplay between their 'feminine' occupation and servile status may have also been a factor.

Later allusions to textile workshops sometimes included passages on the sexual morality, or lack thereof, exhibited by the workers in them, specifically the women. These references are more common in the post-Roman west where textile workshops were described as something akin to a brothel. For example, in the Carolingian *Capitulare Olonnense* of 822–823, it is warned that adulterous women should be kept out of the *gynaecea* as allowing them to enter would present them with the opportunity to have sex with more men<sup>161</sup>. But similar concerns appear in *the Basilika* as well, equally imbued with insinuations of sexual impropriety. The passage that referred to the women in the *gynaikeion*, levying a penalty against anyone who hid a worker from the imperial textile factories, also imposed a fine on anyone who 'corrupted' the women working in the state workshops<sup>162</sup>, implying the women could be vulnerable to sexual coercion. The inclusion of this code, not found in previous laws relating to the imperial workshops, implies that illicit sexual activity was a newer concern;

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<sup>159</sup> Vegetius I 7.1 (ed. M. D. REEVES, *Epitoma rei militaris*. Oxford 2004, 11).

<sup>160</sup> M. B. CHARLES, Unseemly Professions and Recruitment in Late Antiquity: Piscatores and Vegetius Epitoma 1.7.1-2. *The American Journal of Philology* 131 (2010) 104–105.

<sup>161</sup> *Capitulare Olonnense* 5 (ed. A. BORETIUS, *Capitularia Regum Francorum (MGH Capitularia 2.1)*. Hannover 1883, 317); GARVER, *Women and Aristocratic Culture*, 261.

<sup>162</sup> *Basilika* LIV 16.9 (2509 SCHELTEMA – VAN DER WAL); 'corrupted' was used in LOPEZ, *Silk Industry*, 6, n.3.

reflecting Roman acceptance that slaves could be subject to legal sexual exploitation<sup>163</sup>, it may be read as a comment on the vulnerability of those working in the imperial workshops due to their status.

The status of slaves as property meant slave women lacked sexual honour and were exempted from laws related to adultery; intercourse between a man and his female slave fell into the category of acceptable extramarital sex (πορνεία [*proneia*])<sup>164</sup>. The advent of Christianity did little to change the status quo; early Christian writers either did not include slave women in their invectives against objectionable sex, or in accepting such arrangements, portrayed slave women not as the victims of sexual coercion but as the embodiment of immorality<sup>165</sup>. The story of the slave woman Theodora, included in the vita of Basil the Younger, is an illustrative example; the disagreement amongst the angels and demons over whether her sexual encounters as a slave were considered *proneia* were based on whether her marriage was considered true, having not been performed by a priest<sup>166</sup>. The fault lay not with the men who took advantage of her position, but with Theodora for transgressing against both her master and her husband<sup>167</sup>. As female slaves, by virtue of their status, were unable to claim sexual virtue (*pudor*)<sup>168</sup>, activities that were associated with their occupations became tied to perceptions of supposed sexual impropriety and women in these roles were often associated with prostitutes<sup>169</sup>. The workers in the imperial factories were not in public-facing occupations,

<sup>163</sup> J. A. GLANCY, The Sexual Use of Slaves: A Response to Kyle Harper on Jewish and Christian Porneia. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134 (2015) 216–217.

<sup>164</sup> This is contrasted to taboo extramarital sex with a respectable (free) married woman (μοιχεία). T. A. J. MCGINN, The Legal Definition of Prostitute in Late Antiquity. *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 42 (1997) 90; K. HARPER, Porneia: The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131 (2011) 364, 379.

<sup>165</sup> OSIEK, Female Slaves, Porneia, and the Limits of Obedience, in: Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue, ed. D. L. BALCH – C. OSIEK. Cambridge 2003; GLANCY, Early Christianity, 150–151.

<sup>166</sup> Vita Sancti Basilii Iunioris II 33 (ed. D. F. SULLIVAN – A.-M. TALBOT – S. MCGARTH, The Life of Saint Basil the Younger. Washington, D.C. 2014, 238).

<sup>167</sup> Sacramental recognition of slave marriage did not become law in Byzantium until 1095 under Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081-1118). However, the development of marriage at a Christian institution did result in legislation against the splitting of families, and led to a legal focus in which slaves were recognised as humans rather than property, something also seen in Islamic law. ROTMAN, Comparing Slavery, 95.

<sup>168</sup> GLANCY, Early Christianity, 149.

<sup>169</sup> MCGINN, The Legal Definition, 107–108.

but allusions to sexual dishonour may reflect the intersection of the rhetoric of gender and status.

That textile production has historically been associated with the performance of femininity is well established<sup>170</sup>, but these associations do not seem to have actually been projected onto men in private production. There is ample evidence that private textile manufacture could be lucrative, resulting in extensive business networks and even political connections<sup>171</sup>. Rather, the use of gendered rhetoric specifically to refer to workers in the state-owned textile factories suggests that there was something about the condition of these workers that singled them out. Combined with the legal codes that circumscribed the movements and societal participation of people working specifically in the contexts of the imperial guilds, the use of derogatory language typically reserved for women and others perceived as lacking honour (slaves) for imperial textile workers further suggests the presence of forced labour and the artificial construction of a community. The few references in legal and narrative texts, as well as the language of ‘othering,’ imply a societal recognition of the imperial textile workers as a distinct group with a communal identity.

### **Conclusion: The social role of imperial textile workshops**

It is impossible to say what proportion of the workforce within the imperial textile factories would have been classed as forced labour, or how this may have changed over time. As in the private silk workshops, wage labourers (μισθοιοι [*misthioi*]), may have also been present working alongside the forced labourers, and seem to have been in a state of unfreedom themselves. In regulating the later private silk industry, the *Book of the Eparch* only mentioned

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<sup>170</sup> For a bibliography, see KELLEY, Professional Women.

<sup>171</sup> This is documented in several papyri archives from Egypt, such as those of Julios Apollinaris and Leonides, son of Theon. A. LUIJENDIJK, A New Testament Papyrus and Its Documentary Context: An Early Christian Writing Exercise from the Archive of Leonides (*P.Oxy. II 209/p10*). *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129 (2010) 583–587; E. M. HUSSELMAN, Two Archives from Karanis. *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 1 (1963) 3–5. Also see J. F. DRINKWATER, The Gallo-Roman woollen industry and the great debate: the Igel column revisited, in: *Economies Beyond Agriculture in the Classical World*, ed. D. J. MATTINGLY – J. SALMON). London 2001, 309–320.

the *misthioi*, who worked to fixed-term contracts, in relation to two professions, the silk merchants ( μεταξάριοι [*metaxopratoī*]), and the silk manufacturers ( σηρικάριοι [*sērikarioī*])<sup>172</sup>. One rule addressed to the *serikairoi*, prohibited the sale of either a *misthōtos* or *oiketēs* to foreigners, the penalty for which was the loss of a hand<sup>173</sup>, implying economic dependency. The concern with maintaining workers in the private sector, as in the imperial factories, may have been part of a larger attempt to restrict the knowledge required to produce the elaborate silks from leaving the workshops, and ultimately, the empire's borders. The *Book of the Eparch* further stated that private slaves were not allowed to perform certain steps in the production; Youval Rotman has speculated that this was intended to keep slaves from gaining certain production secrets that could be passed on to others<sup>174</sup>. This may have also been a measure to discourage attempts to lure imperial slaves away from the workshops.

As discussed, imperial silks were important conveyors of political messaging and imperial image-making. Yet, how the producers of these objects fit into the conception of the material, and the wider social system, or how the importance of the material was reflected in their identity, cannot be conclusively defined. In the same poem on the Hagia Sophia in which Paul the Silentiary described Justinian and Theodora joining hands with Christ and the *theotokos* in an image on an altar cloth, he also praised the awesome majesty of Christ's countenance on another. But he also made clear that it is no human hand responsible for the creation of the revered image; instead, his praise went to the silkworm (the βάρβαρος μύρμηξ [*barbaros myrmēx*], literally the barbarian ant)<sup>175</sup>. This illustrates an intriguing aspect of the study of labour in imperial silk production. Despite the many descriptions of, and accolades to,

<sup>172</sup> To Eparchikon Biblion VI 2-3, VIII.7, VIII.10 (96, 104, 106 KODER). This does not preclude the possibility that they also participated in other trades. ROTMAN, *Byzantine Slavery*, 97–98.

<sup>173</sup> To Eparchikon Biblion VIII 7 (104 KODER).

<sup>174</sup> To Eparchikon Biblion VII 5 (102 KODER); Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery*, 97–98.

<sup>175</sup> Paul the Silentiary 2.764–768 (52 DE STEFANIO).

the silks used in court and ecclesiastical rituals, the artisans – and their skills – were never discussed in relation to the material.

This is not the case for all media. Painters were frequently acclaimed for their skills in producing venerable images and were often compared to writers for their ability to communicate knowledge and memory, a clear acknowledgement of their skill and agency in both cultural and social production<sup>176</sup>. Mosaicists were also credited for the images they created. Returning to Paul the Silentiary, he noted the skill of the mosaicist ‘weaving’ (ὄφαινῶν [*yphainōn*]), the marble tesserae into images and compared it to painting<sup>177</sup>. Photios also portrayed mosaicists as painters, writing that the mosaic ceiling of the Nea Ekklesia, built by Basil I (r. 867–886) at the Great Palace, had been painted with tesserae and that the mosaicist, referred to as a painter (γραφεὺς [*grapheus*]), had created an accurate depiction of Christ<sup>178</sup>. Yet, while weaving imagery was often used as a metaphor for narrative construction in other media, as seen in Paul’s writing, weavers and embroiderers were rarely, if ever, mentioned in relation to their products.

While this could be representative of a hierarchy of Byzantine image-making, where those on silk were simply not considered as important as those that had been painted, this does not seem to be the case. Silks were crucial to the imperial image and had divine connotations. Another possibility is that the silence of the sources on the imperial textile workers was a consequence of the production process itself, and that the association of the imperial factory with the manufacture of imperial silks erased any concept of the individual. Could this be a reflection of the fact that at least some of the workers within the imperial factories were slaves?

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<sup>176</sup> L. BRUBAKER, *Image, meta-text and text in Byzantium*, in: *Herméneutique du texte d’histoire:orientation, interprétation et questions nouvelles*, ed. S. SATO. Tokyo 2009, 93–94. See also L. BRUBAKER, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium: Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*. Cambridge 1999; I. DRPIĆ, *Painter as scribe: artistic identity and the arts of graphē in late Byzantium*, *Word & Image* 29 (2013) 334–353; H. MAGUIRE, *Rhetoric and Artistry in Early Byzantium*, in: *Handbuch Rhetorik der Bildenden Künste*, ed. W. Brassat. Berlin 2017, 185–206.

<sup>177</sup> Paul the Silentiary 2.648–652, 2.607–611) (44–45, 42 DE STEFANIO).

<sup>178</sup> Photios X 6 (ed. B. LAOURDAS, *Photios: Homiliai*. Thessaloniki 1959, 102).

The rise of Christianity in the late Roman period had begun a process that resulted in many changes in social responses to slavery. Whereas slave ownership was once considered a mark of social standing, by at least the sixth century the institution of slavery was beginning to be viewed as a moral and spiritual failing, a contravention of both natural and divine law, even if a necessary one<sup>179</sup>. This raises the possibility that a reluctance to emphasise the role of the emperor in perpetuating slavery that may account for the frequent absence of the workers in the imperial textile factories in sources, particularly imperial ones. Or it could have merely been that these workers, whether slaves, convicts, prisoners, or otherwise forced labourers, or even those working for a wage, were assigned a collective marginalised identity that precluded them from being acknowledged in relation to a material as symbolically significant as silk.

The presence of both weavers and embroiderers, however, along with all others responsible for imperial silk manufacture, was of course implied by the objects themselves; these workers inhabited the space that Nicholas Matheou termed ‘historical dark matter,’ invisible in the sources but part of the structure that supported the ‘visible phenomena of hegemonic systems’<sup>180</sup>. Just as the reforms after the crises of the third century resulted in ‘a new imperial aristocracy of service’<sup>181</sup>, where even members of the nobility became constrained by their positions as ‘state servants’<sup>182</sup>, the consolidation of the emperor’s control over all aspects of the manufacture of imperial silks became part of the symbolic performance of power, alongside the rituals of its distribution. The mode of production both reflected and reinforced the social hierarchy. At the same time, the communal identity this fostered amongst

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<sup>179</sup> LENSKI, *Slavery in the Byzantine Empire*, 459–465, 477–478.

<sup>180</sup> MATHEOU, *Hegemony, Counterpower, and Global History*, 215.

<sup>181</sup> P. SARRIS, *Economy and Society in the Ages of Constantine*, in: *The Sons of Constantine and Julian*. ed. N. BAKER-BRIAN – S. TOUGHER (London 2020) 334.

<sup>182</sup> RAGIA, *Social Group Profiles*, 356–363, 370. For the court as a social group, see A. P. KAZHDAN – M. MCCORMICK, *The Social World of the Byzantine Court*, in: *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*. ed. H. MAGUIRE. Washington D.C. 1997, 167–197; P. MAGDALINO, *Court Society and Aristocracy*, in: *The Social History of Byzantium*, ed. J. HALDON. Chichester 2009, 212–232. On the transition from Late Roman to Byzantine elite systems and the concentration of power in Constantinople, see J. HALDON, *Social Elites, Wealth, and Power*, in: *The Social History of Byzantium*, ed. J. Haldon. Chichester 2009, 174–181.

the labourers in the imperial textile factories and their roles as producers of symbolic silks created an environment in which they both supported, but also had the power to disrupt, the hegemony of the court. This may be one reason why Leo Phokas attempted to enlist the imperial textile workers in his rebellion: their association with the usurper could have aided in the creation of legitimacy – as earlier emperors and officials seem to have feared –, a power they were apparently unwilling to wield in this case.

This is, of course, only speculative. However, in critically examining the labour within a single productive setting, the imperial textile factories, there are some general conclusions that can be made regarding labour relations and the wider social dynamics that became embedded in the physical manifestations of power. The role of imperial textile workers in the manufacture of such important objects, under the control of the emperor, made the imperial textile workers an integral part of the production and reproduction of the symbols of imperial authority, and brought them into the political sphere. While the imperial government was performed through court ceremonial, an expression of imperial ideology of which silk was such an important part, the act of production was also embedded in its re-enactment, reflecting wider social relationships. The use of forced labour created an environment in which workers, who by virtue of their status were deprived of active agency in the Byzantine social hierarchy, became a community with a collective identity that enabled action, both in their personal lives (for example, in marriage or the dispensation of property) and within the hegemonic system of the state. While the textile labourers were dependant on the state, and the emperor, the projection of imperial legitimacy also depended on them, entrenching the imperial textile workers in the internal power dynamics of the empire.

## Image List

Figure No.	Caption	Credit
Figure 1	Inscription on the imperial elephant silk from the reliquary of Charlemagne, 10 <sup>th</sup> century. Aachen, Domschatzkapper Inv.-Nr. T00131 GR30.	© Domschatzkapper, Aachen.
Figure 2	Hunter silk from the Abbey at Mozac, 9 <sup>th</sup> century. Lyon, Musée des Tissus MT 27386.	© Lyon, Musée des Tissus – Pierre Verrier.
Figure 3	Byzantine emperor on a <i>quadriga</i> , 700–900. London, Victoria and Albert Museum 762-1893.	© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
Figure 4	Michael VIII Palaiologos and Saint Laurence embroidered on silk, 13 <sup>th</sup> century. Genoa, Museo di Sant'Agostino.	Photo courtesy of Cecily Hilsdale.



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