The Second International Suna & İnan Kıraç Symposium on Mediterranean Civilizations

SHOPPING AND WEIGHING INSTRUMENTS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD AND BEYOND THROUGHOUT HISTORY

November 27-29, 2023 – AKMED / Antalya

PROCEEDINGS

Edited by
Oğuz TEKİN

KOÇ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
KOÇ UNIVERSITY PRESS

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PREFACE

Although studies and publications on weighing instruments have appeared sporadically from the late nineteenth century to the present, the project *Corpus Ponderum Antiquorum et Islamicorum* and the database titled *Pondera Online: An Online Database of Ancient and Byzantine Weights* have given new momentum to research in this field and led to a series of successive publications. Concurrent with these two innovative developments, annual workshops organized at the Université catholique de Louvain in the years following 2016 were followed by a symposium held in 2023 at Koç University AKMED (Antalya).

The present volume contains the papers presented at the 2023 symposium held at AKMED. With the inclusion of papers by two scholars who, despite being invited, were unable to attend the symposium due to illness, the book comprises a total of twenty-five contributions. The papers cover a long chronological span, beginning with Anatolia and Mesopotamia in the Bronze Age and extending to the Ottoman period. The main emphasis, however, lies on the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods.

While one aim of organizing the symposium and subsequently publishing the proceedings volume was to contribute to scholarship, another was to draw attention to research in this field and to raise awareness.

While one aim of organizing the symposium and subsequently publishing the proceedings volume was to contribute to scholarship, another was to draw attention to research in this field and to raise awareness. On this occasion, I am indebted to Remziye Boyraz Seyhan for the proofreading of the book prior to publication. Last but not least, I would like to express my thanks to Dumbarton Oaks for its financial support of the symposium.

Oğuz Tekin

Shopping in Late Byzantium (14-15th centuries) through Literary Texts

Siren ÇELİK*

Abstract

Despite the political and socio-economic decline the Byzantine Empire experienced in the 14th and 15th centuries, marketplaces remained vibrant in Constantinople. This paper will analyze the perceptions of marketplaces and shopping in several Late Byzantine literary texts; letters of Manuel Kalekas and Demetrios Kydones, and the *Satire of Katablattas*. Although many of these references have been treated merely as data supplementing the discussions of Late Byzantine trade, these texts were composed as literary artefacts and thus should be treated as such. While these rare mentions are valuable snippets of daily life, their inclusion by the authors did not stem from a desire to share their shopping experiences or to offer their audience information on the marketplaces. Instead, a close reading reveals that the references to marketplaces and shopping usually convey literary, political and moral messages.

Keywords: Late Byzantium, marketplace, shopping, Byzantine letters, Constantinople

The past decades have witnessed a surge in scholarship on the Late Byzantine economy and trade. Many excellent and in-depth studies have greatly advanced our understanding of Late Byzantine trade, and the overall picture that emerges is one of complexity and shifting dynamics.[1] In the 14th and 15th centuries, along with the plummeting of the political and military might of the Byzantine Empire, the state revenues and the state control over trade also declined. Late Byzantine trade increasingly came into the hands of Italians, especially the Venetians and Genoese. Byzantine aristocrats also ventured into trade and some formed trading partnerships with the Italians. Yet, although as befitting the capital of Byzantium, Constantinople's markets still had their fair share of foodstuffs, wine, high-quality textiles and other such items, their vibrancy faded over decades as the empire approached its fall in 1453.[2]

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1 The work of scholars such as Klaus-Peter Matschke, Nicholas Oikonomides, Michel Balard, Nevra Necipoğlu, Angeliki Laiou and David Jacoby has been instrumental in this regard. For instance, Necipoğlu 2009; Matschke 2002a ve 2002b, 771-806; Laiou 2002 and Oikonomides 1979 cited in this paper. I express my heartfelt thanks to Assoc. Prof. Suna Çağaptay and Assoc. Prof. Koray Durak for their suggestions and feedback on the paper.

2 Kiousopoulou 2011, 18-21; Agoritsas 2016, 98-99, 127-82; Matschke 2002a, 467-74; Oikonomides 1979, 98-107 and Mango-Mundell 2000, 205-7 for Late Byzantine markets.



Map of Constantinople by Cristoforo Buondelmonti, 15th century
(File: Map_of_Constantinople,_Buondelmonti.jpg).

This can also be traced in travellers' accounts who stress the lively trade and marketplaces of the neighbouring Genoese colony Pera, but in contrast, either omit or have little discussion of marketplaces in Constantinople.[3] The attitude of the travellers, like the pilgrims, is understandable as marketplaces were not of primary interest to them, but the silence is still noteworthy.[4] P. Tafur remarks on the slave trade in Kaffa and the clandestine crossbow sales in Sinop by the Turks, but merely mentions the sale of bread, fish and wine around Hagia Sophia, noting that people ate together at stone tables. However, he stresses the vibrancy of Pera's trade, that it was always full of ships and cargoes; he makes similar remarks for the Ottoman Bursa.[5] Clavijo, who notes the decay of various buildings and spaces in Constantinople, points out that warehouses and shops are along the shoreline of the Golden Horn, tellingly facing Pera.[6] In contrast, he lavishes praise on the shops and merchandise of Trebizond.[7] He mentions the busy maritime traffic to Turkish Skoutari, presumably for trade. The same observation is moreover found in Zosima's account, who also notes the beauty of Galata.[8] B. de la Broquière speaks of the port of Pera as the most beautiful and biggest he has seen, where he points out, a lot of trade with Turks also took place.[9] He takes note of the two bazaars in the Ottoman Bursa for silk and soap; in Hama and Larande, he shops for food and clothes.[10] In Constantinople, he makes no remarks about the goods available and while he notes the presence of merchants of many nations, he points out the Turks had their own superintendent for trade. Moreover, B. de la Broquière stresses the power of the Venetian *bailos* and his independence from the Byzantine emperor; in the overall emerging picture, the Byzantines have little authority.[11] Even Ibn Battuta, albeit praising the beauty of the colonnaded marketplaces of Constantinople and remarking that the sellers were women, passes over the merchandise on offer.[12] This stands in stark contrast to his detailed narrations of marketplaces and merchandise in many other cities such as Isparta, Denizli, Aksaray, Yenice and Kastamonu.[13] Nor does Ibn Battuta seem to have shopped in Constantinople despite being an avid customer in some other places.[14] However, like several other travellers' accounts, he extolls the markets of Pera, noting that they were colourful and rich, albeit also dirty.[15]

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[3] For a general evaluation of the travelers' accounts of the era and their reflections on the decline of Byzantium, Angold, 2002, 213-23. Oikonomides 1979, 35, points out the impression made by Pera on the travellers.

[4] The Russian pilgrim accounts of the 14th and 15th centuries do not refer to markets at all, the accounts are edited and translated in Majeska 1984. One exception is the anonymous account of Constantinople in this volume, in which the author makes a passing reference to the Basilike market. But, the reference is within the framework of locating a church, Majeska, 1984, 140, 353-54. Other travellers, Ghillebert de Lannoy, Cyriacus of Ancona and Cristoforo Buondelmonti are also not interested in markets. Johannes Schiltberger, who offers remarks on the merchants of Alexandria, is silent on the marketplaces in Constantinople or Pera. However, as he was a former Turkish captive, the emperor did not allow him to wander in the city lest the Turks catch him, Telfer 1879, 81.

[5] Letts 1926, 129-30, 141-42, 149. In Sinop, the Turks bury the crossbows they manufacture on the beach when they see ships as they are prohibited from selling them to the Christians. They do so once the ships are out of sight.

[6] Majeska, 1984, 353-54, points out that the area Clavijo speaks of is Basilike, where the primary markets were located.

[7] Le Strange 1928, 49, 62.

[8] Le Strange 1928, 49 and Majeska 1984, 190-91.

[9] Johnes 2019, 213-16.

[10] Johnes 2019, 155, 182, 209. Still, it must be stressed that the purchases he makes are either provisions such as food and wine, or clothing items so that he blends in with the Muslims.

[11] Johnes 2019, 230.

[12] Gibbs 1962, 504-5. Ibn Battuta also makes the intriguing remark that most of the sellers were women.

[13] Gibbs 1962, 406, 408-9, 412-13, 425, 428, 433, 435, 439-40.

[14] Gibbs 1962, 419, 425, 435, 439. As in the case of B. de la Broquière, Ibn Battuta also seems to have shopped for necessities like food and animals for transport, as well as two slaves. Moreover, he seems to have shopped only in Muslim cities. Yet, his lack of remarks on the merchandise in Constantinople is still poignant.

[15] Gibbs 1962, 505.

While many aspects of Late Byzantine trade and economy have benefited from excellent studies, the daily life at marketplaces and people's more mundane experiences concerning shopping have received less attention. Although with regards to the topography, we know that the shores of the Golden Horn were sites of commercial activity and that shops and markets were also scattered across the city, it is very difficult to gain an insight into the people's experiences in the marketplace, or their views on it.[16] This undoubtedly stems from the lack of sources that could illuminate such details. For instance, besides the silence of the above-mentioned traveller's accounts, there is no Late Byzantine equivalent of the 10th-century *Book of the Eparch*, or the 12th-century satire *Timarion* and the Ptochoprodromic poems. However, although nowhere as rich as the vignettes offered by these sources, some Late Byzantine literary texts still touch upon marketplaces, using the term *agora* to refer to them.

In this paper, I will endeavour to analyse the literary representation of marketplaces and shopping in some letters of Manuel Kalekas and Demetrios Kydones, and the *Satire of Katablattas*. Although many of these references to marketplaces have already been noted by scholars, they have been collected and employed merely as data that supplement the discussions of Late Byzantine trade.[17] However, these texts were composed as literary artefacts and thus should be treated as such; one should be wary of taking their references at face value or using them to 'extract' information about marketplaces.[18] While these rare mentions are valuable snippets of daily life, their inclusion by the authors did not stem from the mere desire to share their experiences about shopping or to provide their audience with information on the marketplaces. Instead, a close reading and literary analysis of these texts reveal that the authors' references to marketplaces and shopping usually convey literary, political and moral messages, thus fulfilling a literary function. In this paper, we will strive to discuss not just *what* the authors have to say about marketplaces and shopping, but also *how* and *why* they speak about them. All in all, a literary analysis of the related passages allows us not only to gain insights into Late Byzantine shopping and marketplaces but also to reach a richer interpretation.

The first letter to be discussed in this paper belongs to Manuel Kalekas, a Late Byzantine scholar and theologian.[19] The letter is addressed from Constantinople to Despot Theodore of Mistras and is dated to circa 1397. In a striking passage, M. Kalekas makes a poignant reference to the affairs of the marketplace:

> *…..what is indeed more precious than logoi? What is more beneficial and enduring than the profit (kerdos) from these? I myself pray that I remain among logoi during my entire life, even if the Romans now think more about the vegetables in the marketplace than logoi, they are drawn to the necessary things rather than loftier things because of misfortune…*[20]

---

16 For the Early and Middle Byzantine periods, Pitarakis, 2016, discusses the daily life in markets, especially through material culture, such as weights and amulets.

17 Dennis 2003, 401-11 lists the instances of daily life he encountered in D. Kydones' letters, including those that will be discussed in this paper. Oikonomides 1979, 98-99; Dagron 1995, 67-70; Matschke 2002a, 467 and 2002b, 775, use the passages to be discussed in this paper to supplement their discussions of Late Byzantine economy and trade.

18 For the pitfalls of extracting information from literary sources and how to analyse them through literary analysis Magdalino 1991 for the literary aspects of Byzantine letters, Mullett 1981; 1997, 1-30; 2008, 882-93.

19 Loenertz 1950, 16-46 for M. Kalekas' life and work.

20 Letter 16, ll. 17-31 in Loenertz 1950, 188-89, 'τί δέ τοῦ παρά τούτων ὠφειλιμώτερον ἢ διαρκέστερον κέρδος; ἐγὼ μὲν καί εὔχομαι τούτοις παρὰ πάντα τὸν βίον ἐμμένειν, εἰ καὶ νῦν Ῥωμαίοις τῶν ἐπ' ἀγορᾷ λαχάνων πλείων φροντὶς ἢ λόγων, τῆς δυστυχίας τούτους ἐπὶ τάναγκαῖα μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ σεμνότερα καθελκούσης…'

That the Byzantines, more specifically the citizens of Constantinople, should be concerned with the price and availability of vegetables in marketplaces around 1397, is not particularly surprising. Since 1394, Constantinople had been blockaded by the Ottomans and the supply of foodstuffs in the capital had become a severe problem— supplies were scarce and the prices steeply climbed up.[21] As such, M. Kalekas' statement reflects the current situation in the capital and highlights the misery of the population. Yet, this reference to people's preoccupation with the marketplace as opposed to *logoi*, that is, learning and literary matters, also functions as a literary motif.[22] In Byzantine literature, adhering to well-established *topos*, merchants, shop owners, artisans and in general, the people of the marketplace were often looked down upon.[23] The marketplace and shopping could be likewise associated with the base and mundane concerns.[24] In contrast, in the eyes of the Byzantine literati, *logoi* represented far loftier and praiseworthy notions. Thus, by contrasting the population's lack of interest in *logoi* and their preoccupation with the vegetables in the marketplace, M. Kalekas offers a veiled criticism of his contemporaries. As befits a man of intellectual and scholarly occupation, M. Kalekas firmly declares to his correspondent that his own interests and priorities lay with *logoi*.

Tellingly, while speaking about the incomparable benefit one derives from *logoi*, M. Kalekas uses the word *kerdos*, which could refer to both moral and economic profit, such as one made by a merchant. Again, the idea of a merchant's or seller's profit, *kerdos*, was another commonplace in Byzantine literature that could have negative connotations; authors could employ it to offer criticism or display their disdain for base, mundane things.[25] M. Kalekas seems to be subtly juxtaposing the moral benefit derived from *logoi* with the profit of the marketplace, highlighting his devotion to scholarly and literary matters as opposed to the indifference of the population. A close reading of the complete letter showcases M. Kalekas' desire to represent himself as an ideal scholar to his correspondent Despot Theodore, and this passage on the marketplace fits in very well with this goal of the letter. Finally, while complaining about the Byzantines' lack of interest in *logoi* and highlighting his devotion to literary matters, M. Kalekas also sympathises with them. That the people do not care much for *logoi*, he points out, is completely understandable as misfortune — the blockade— has compelled them to concentrate their thoughts on feeding themselves and their families, striving to survive. M. Kalekas thus implies that instead of the people themselves, circumstances are to be blamed for the situation. All in all, M. Kalekas does not insert this passage into his letter merely to speak about food shopping in the capital, but to convey literary and moral messages to his audience.

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21 Necipoğlu 2009, 149-83, for a detailed analysis of the economic situation in Constantinople during the blockade.

22 Another author to be discussed in this paper, D. Kydones, makes an almost identical remark in a letter, that the Romans paid more heed to the vegetables in the market than loftier things: '…Ῥωμαίοις πλείων τῶν ἐπ' ἀγορᾶς λαχάνων ἢ τῶν ὑψηλῶν θεορημάτων φροντίς.', Letter 235, ll. 71-72 in Loenertz 1951-1960, 2, 131-32. This letter dates to the 1380s and D. Kydones was also a teacher to M. Kalekas. They belonged to the same literary circles and Byzantine letters were often circulated beyond the intended recipient. Moreover, M. Kalekas was the copyist of a manuscript of D. Kydones' letters, commissioned by the author himself. Hatlie, 1996, 81. Thus, M. Kalekas might have had this letter and the remark about the vegetables in his mind while writing his own.

23 Laiou 2002, 1130; Matschke 2002b, 776; Oikonomides 1979, 114-15; 1997, 144-45, 161 for this attitude towards commerce and profit. A more specific study, Wade 2014, discusses the social perceptions of especially sea-merchants in Early and Middle Byzantium.

24 Tellingly, the term *agoraios* (market-frequenter) could denote a lower-class person by Byzantine authors, a usage that also had Classical precedent. Agoritsas 2016, 308 and Matschke and Tinnefeld, 2001, 62. Pitarakis 2016, 211, 217-20, discusses fraud as a primary fear in the Early and Middle Byzantine marketplace, thus highlighting the association of marketplaces with cheating and immoral behaviour. The author (Pitarakis 2016, 220) also points out the symbolism of a statue mentioned in the *Patria*; it was naked to symbolize the shamelessness of the sellers and buyers.

25 Laiou 2002, 1130; Oikonomides 1997, 145.

Another letter writer who connects the marketplace and shopping with the baser things in life is Demetrios Kydones, a prominent Late Byzantine author and statesman.[26] In a letter he wrote to a scribe of John VI Kantakouzenos, dated around 1352/53, he speaks about their mutual acquaintance, Tzykandyles.[27] D. Kydones muses how being overjoyed by the good fortunes of the emperor, Tzykandyles and the others will be feasting that night. However, D. Kydones imagines that Tzykandyles will be unusually concerned with the preparations for the feast: 'I think that Tzykandyles is now heading to the shops of the metal smiths, ordering pots, ladles and pestles…. I say that he is taking care of the utensils and other things related to the evening feasts…'[28] He thus proposes that their friend Tzykandyles will be personally heading to the metal smiths to order utensils and pots for the night. This enigmatic reference to the metal smiths in Constantinople could also be entirely fictional, and a close reading also reveals that it goes beyond a mere glimpse of daily life.[29] Instead, through his imaginary narration of Tzykandyles' shopping, D. Kydones here is subtly criticizing and making fun of him. Right after this narration, D. Kydones remarks that the reason Tzykandyles neglects to write to him must be his preoccupation with these utensils and pots. Complaining about the lack of letters from one's friends is a commonplace in Byzantine letter writing, as is the accusation of paying heed to mundane and base things at the expense of *logoi*.[30] Thus, D. Kydones implies that instead of immersing himself in *logoi* and penning letters for his friends as he is expected, Tzykandyles is now occupied with trivial matters such as pots and pans. Moreover, D. Kydones adds further humour to his complaint as Tzykandyles personally goes to the craftsman to order the utensils and nags them to be quick: a man of letters and high standing would not be expected to do the shopping for kitchenware at the marketplace — this was the task of the servants or women. As such, D. Kydones is resorting to humour here at the expense of Tzykandyles, subtly criticising him for neglecting to write.[31]

In a letter from Constantinople addressed to a friend, dated to the 1390s, D. Kydones again refers to the marketplace.[32] This time, he complains about the results of a severe winter storm:

> *…. I now use the marketplace only as a drugstore and cannot feed myself from there since all the tavern keepers (tōn kapēlōn) have gone down into holes and have put their deliverance before profit (kerdos); we are besieged by hunger rather than the cold.*[33]

---

[26] For D. Kydones' life and letters, see Ryder 2010, Tinnefeld 2010. His letters are edited in Loenertz 1951-1960. Tinnefeld 1981-2003, offers German translations of the letters, as well as brief commentaries.

[27] Letter 57 in Loenertz 1951-1960, 1, 89; Tinnefeld 1981-2003, no. 35, 1.1, 230-32. The same Tzykandyles figures in other letters of D. Kydones and is the subject of several more jokes. Letter 14 and 326 in Loenertz 1951-1960, 1, 42-43, 2, 256. Tzykandyles' first name was Manuel, and he was a correspondent of several other literati of the period, as well as perhaps having worked for Kantakouzenos as a secretary at some point, see the prosopographic entry in Trapp 1976-1995, 12, no. 28129.

[28] Letter 57, lines 12-15 in Loenertz 1951-1960, 1, 89, 'ὥστε καὶ τὸν Τζυκανδήλν νομίζω νῦν εἰς τὰς τῶν χρυσοχόων οἰκίας βαδίζοντα δοίδυκας αὐτοῖς ἐπιτάττειν καὶ τορύνας καὶ χὐτρας. φημὶ δὲ αὐτὸν καὶ βασανιστηρίων ἐπιμελήσεσθαι καὶ ἐπίπλων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα νυκτερινά…'

[29] D. Kydones' letter speaks of no specific location for these metal smiths — the remark could have been made in an entirely fictional context—but in earlier centuries goldsmiths occupied a section in the Mese between the Forum of Constantine and the Augusteion, while coppersmiths were in Chalkoprateia, Durak 2002, 170. It is possible that the situation continued under the Palaiologoi. But shops and workshops were scattered across Constantinople in Late Byzantium. The word employed by D. Kydones for the metalsmiths, *tōn chrusoxoōn* (τῶν χρυσοχόων), is also noteworthy as it means both goldsmith and metalsmith, perhaps used for further comical effect.

[30] See the works of Mullett cited above for this *topos*.

[31] For humour in Byzantine literary texts see Haldon 2002, 42-72, stressing humour as a cultural phenomenon and underlying that the Byzantines' sense of humour was distinct from our modern one.

[32] Letter 426 in Loenertz 1951-1960, I2, 380-81, Tinnefeld 1981-2003, no. 0426, 4, 201-4.

[33] Letter 426, ll. 11-15, '…ἡμεῖς δὲ τὴν ἀγορὰν μόνην ἔχοντες ἀποθήκην, εἶτ, ἐκεῖθεν οὐ δυνάμενοι τρέφεσθαι, τῶν καπήλων εἰς τοὺς χηραμοὺς καταδύντων καὶ πρὸ τοῦ κέρδους ποιουμένων τὴν σωτηρίαν, τῷ λιμῷ μᾶλλον ἢ τῷ ψύχει πολιορκούμεθα.'

This passage is a vibrant glimpse into the daily life of Constantinopolitans amidst hard winter conditions. Indeed, the food supply of the capital could, at times, be hindered by adverse weather.[34] D. Kydones also narrates that his servant, whom he had sent to the marketplace, barely managed to return due to the storm— and did so empty-handed. Tellingly, as befits a man of his status, D. Kydones does not shop for food himself but sends his servant.[35] Once more, this narration does not merely reflect daily life, but is interlaced with literary motifs. D. Kydones does not only complain about the lack of food, but he also emphasises that he is ill, and that malnourishment prolongs his recovery. Complaining about illness was also a *topos* (commonplace) in Byzantine letters and D. Kydones' letters frequently reference various ailments, so it is difficult to conclude whether he was ill, or merely exaggerating his situation to literary effect. He reinforces his illness by claiming that he is only able to use the marketplace as *apotheke* (ἀποθήκη), an apothecary. While this term could also denote a shop selling different kinds of supplies or a storehouse, here I chose to interpret it as an apothecary as D. Kydones stresses his illness and makes it clear that he could not get food from the marketplace.[36] By adding to his plight with his illness, D. Kydones seeks to elicit sympathy from his audience. Finally, D. Kydones also touches upon another literary motif: the eagerness of the tavernkeepers for profit (*kerdos*). He claims that the weather is so adverse that the tavernkeepers don't think about profit anymore as they usually do but instead focus on their safety. While complaining about their withdrawal from the marketplace, D. Kydones claims that the tavernkeepers went down into holes (*eis tous chēramous kataduntōn*, εἰς τοὺς χηραμοὺς καταδύντων), a statement that adds some humour and liveliness to the account. Perhaps, this also functions as a jibe against the tavernkeepers, whose disappearance was partially to blame for the malnourishment of the sick D. Kydones.

A well-known letter of D. Kydones dated to 1346, speaks at length about a marketplace in an unnamed Thracian city.[37] In this letter addressed to an unknown recipient, D. Kydones narrates his walk in the city on New Year's Eve. He claims that he had just started recovering from an illness and was furthermore distraught by recent personal losses and the dire circumstances of the empire —several of his relatives were either killed or captured. He thus felt downcast and lonely. During his stroll in the unnamed Thracian city, D. Kydones encounters many poignant scenes around and near the marketplace: the funeral of a man in his prime, a wagon accident, a disabled man driven away from his homeland by hunger and a woman wailing for her husband who had fallen captive. He even witnesses a man being dragged out of his house by some debtors amidst the cries of his wife:

> *…Near the marketplace, I saw a house filled with shouting, some men were looking for someone who was hiding and found him under the bed.… The man who was beating him kept yelling about money, reckoning about interest (tokos) and counting the months…*[38]

The man is later taken to court by his debtors. These instances narrated by D. Kydones are all fascinating snippets of daily life around a marketplace and its environs in a Late Byzantine city.

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34 For supply in Constantinople Van Dam 2022, 87-99, especially 97-99 for the late period.

35 Idly wandering in the marketplace or frequenting it could be frowned upon in literary texts Agoritsas 2016, 347, refers to a letter of the literati and teacher Theodore Hrytakenos in the 13th century, where he threatens his correspondent that he will let his students wander freely in the agora, implying that they might cause disturbance.

36 For the terms for various shops and their ambiguity, see Matschke 2002b, 778; Oikonomides 1979, 95-96.

37 Letter 5 in Loenertz 1951-1960, 1, 26-31, Tinnefeld 1981-2003, no. 15, 1.1, 146-53.

38 Letter 5, ll. 140-46; Loenertz 1951-1960, 1, 30, 'Καὶ πληθούσης ἀγορᾶς ὁρῶ τινας οἰκίαν μετὰ βοῆς εἰσιόντας. κρυπτόμενον δὲ ἄρα ἐζήτουν τινά. καὶ εὗρον ὑπὸ τὴν κλίνην. ὁ δὲ πώγων ἦν ἡ πρώτη λαβή... τἀργύριον δὲ ὁ κόπτων ἐβόα καὶ τόκους τινὰς ἐλογίζετο λαὶ μῆνας ἠρίθμει.'



FIG. 1 Fishermen, from a hunting treatise, 11th century
(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/99/Fànos.jpg).

However, as Byzantine letters could also have fictional aspects, one should not overlook the possibility that some of these events might not have happened on the same day, or that some could have been entirely fictional. D. Kydones here is not incorporating these encounters into his letter merely to share them with his audience, instead a close reading reveals that these also have literary functions. All these sombre sights D. Kydones witnesses around and near the marketplace reflect the downcast, despairing and lonely atmosphere of his letter— the sights mirror the mood projected by D. Kydones. They thus help strengthen the sombre tone of the letter, which D. Kydones concludes by remarking on the presence of evil in human lives. Moreover, these events D. Kydones narrates also reflect the dire political and socio-economic straits of the empire: people are separated from their families due to fighting, poverty is visible and misfortunes happen.[39] It is almost as if the marketplace and its environs function as a scene on which the misfortunes of Byzantine society unfold.

The following two cases will focus on the literary depictions of misuse of authority in the marketplace. In an oft-discussed letter, D. Kydones writes to the supervisor of the fishermen (τῷ τῆς ἁλιευτικῆς προστατοῦντι) and protests his misconduct:

> *…Upon seeing the prey/catch, you immediately pounce upon it like a big lion and yelling loudly, you auction off the fish like pirates selling slaves. You do not think it shameful at all that a man of high*

[39] It is unclear as to which fights/attacks D. Kydones is referring to here. The letter is dated to 1346, so he could be referring to some attacks by the Serbians, to the ongoing Byzantine civil war or perhaps to some Turkish raids in Thrace. Tinnefeld, 1981-2003, 1, 153.

standing (ton uparkhon) should descend to the level of a fishmonger, valuing (protimēsai) money more than the honour of the council (tēs para ton sunedriou timēs)…[40]

D. Kydones complains that because of the supervisor's heavy taxation of the fishermen, few of them now actually managed to sell their catch and did so at very high prices (fig. 1). The servants —again masters do not go shopping in person— sent to buy fish are scolded and punished by their masters for returning empty-handed; they are thought to be lazy for failing to make the purchase. Bosphorus, full of fish, now had become almost a dryland for the Constantinopolitans, and all were very aggrieved. That fish and seafood played a great role in the tables of the Constantinopolitans is evident from many written sources such as dietary texts and travellers' accounts. Such a scenario thus would have caused disturbance to many citizens, and in his letter, D. Kydones claims to be speaking not only for himself but for the citizens.[41] Moreover, D. Kydones stresses that he needs fish not just because he is fond of them, but also because he is ill; his physician has prescribed him a diet rich in fish for recovery.[42] As such, he adds further gravitas to his accusations against the supervisor; not only does he deprive fishermen of their income and the citizens of their fish, but also the sick like D. Kydones from means of recovery.[43] D. Kydones consequently seeks to elicit further sympathy from his audience.

D. Kydones remarkably accuses the supervisor of not only overtaxing the fishermen by confiscating many of their catches while collecting dues in kind but also of selling them personally in the marketplace. Indeed, in the Late Byzantine period, the fish industry in the capital was still vibrant and the state could derive a sizable revenue from its activities.[44] It has been debated by scholars whether the supervisor here was selling the fish for his own profit or whether he was selling them on behalf of the state, transforming the dues in kind into cash.[45] What is important for the present discussion is the implication that the money earned through this sale is dishonest, unlawful gain; extracted by the oppression of the fishermen. While a merchant's profit could indeed often have negative connotations in literary texts, a just profit was also be entirely acceptable in Byzantine economic ideology. Consequently, the notion of a just price and profit was prevalent for both the seller and the buyer. Overcharging, attempting to increase the price through hoarding or striving to pay less were considered shameful practices, and the profit made was not a just one.[46] This ideological stance can even be traced in the travellers' accounts of the 14th and 15th centuries. Clavjio refers to an area where those caught selling bread and meat

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[40] Letter 261 in Loenertz 1951-1960, 165-66. The letter has been dated to c. 1383? by the editor. Tinnefeld 1981-2003, no. 251, 3, 71-74. This letter has been often noted and commented upon by scholars, Dagron 1995, 67-68; Matschke 2002a, 487-88; 2002b, 775; Tinnefeld 1981-2003, 3, 71-74 and 2010, 113-14.

[41] Letter 261, ll. 26-30 in Loenertz 1951-1960, 166. 'σὺ δ' εὐθὺς τὴν θήραν ἰδὼν ἠὐτε λέων ἐχάρης μεγάλῳ ἐπὶ σώματι κύρσας, καὶ βοῇ χρώμενος ὥσπερ οἱ λησταὶ τὰ ἀνδράποδα τοὺς ἰχθύας κηρύττεις. αἰσχρὸν δὲ οὐδὲν τὸν ὕπαρχον ἐκ τῆς ἄντυγος εἰς τὸν ἰχθυοπῶλον καταβιβάσαι, καὶ τῆς παρὰ τοῦ συνεδρόυ τιμῆς τὸν ὀβολὸν προτιμῆσαι.'

[42] Fish and seafood were very popular with the Byzantines, especially the Constantinopolitans. Part of this popularity also stemmed from the fact that some seafood would be consumed during fasting periods, during which meat and dairy would be prohibited. According to Byzantine dietary texts, certain types of fish were considered as nourishing and prone to producing good humours, Dalby 2010, 145-49, 157. But it is difficult to determine whether D. Kydones indeed had received a dietary recommendation of fish to recover, or he restored to the *topos* of illness to underline his plight.

[43] Letter 261, ll. 1-7, 34-37, Loenertz 1951-1960, 165-66. Tinnefeld 2010, 113-14, notes that the letter is the format of *psogos* and that the appeal D. Kydones makes is represented as a collective one on behalf of the citizens.

[44] Dagron 1995, 67-68; Matschke 2002a and Agoritsas 2016, 206-7.

[45] Matchske 2002a, 487-88 and 2002b, 775; Tinnefeld 1981-2003, 3, 71-74 and 2010, 113-14 for discussions on the sale of fish by the supervisor.

[46] Laiou 2002, 1130-132, 1134-135, 1138; Oikonomides 1997, 145 and Agoritsas 2016, 218. Pitarakis 2016, 213, refers to dipinti from earlier periods with inscriptions speaking of *kerdos* (sale, profit) as God's grace.

with false weights are punished.[47] P. Tafur takes note of two statue groups, one of them being the so-called 'Just Judges'. According to the urban legends, one would put coins into the hands of the figures until the just price was reached, the rest would be rejected. The other statue is also connected with a similar story: two merchants cannot agree on the price of a horse and the statue closes its hands to indicate that the just price had been reached. The buyer, unhappy for not getting a cheaper bargain, chops off the hand in anger and as a divine punishment, the horse dies upon reaching home.[48] D. Kydones, too, criticizes the supervisor for not complying with the notion of a just profit; he overtaxes the fishermen and hinges upon their profit, the profit he obtains through the sale is also shameful.

Even the metaphor D. Kydones applies to the supervisor while describing his gathering of the catches of the fishermen serves to underline his misuse of authority and oppression: he attacks the catch like a roaring lion. The supervisor is represented as a wild, but symbolically 'high-ranking' beast against the oppressed fishermen, who metaphorically become his prey along with the confiscated fish. The other metaphor D. Kydones uses is also rather fitting: the supervisor acts like a pirate selling off his captured slaves, in this case, the fish. Finally, what is also significant for D. Kydones is the fact that the supervisor himself is now selling fish; since being a seller is considered a low-rank job, he has slighted his office and position as a man of importance. Even the expression D. Kydones employs to denote his 'descent' to a fishmonger (ἐκ τῆς ἄντυγος είς τὸν ἰχθυοπῶλον καταβιβάσαι) means to get down from a chariot to become a fishmonger, and stresses the supervisor's fall from dignity. The supervisor values money above the honour of his office, however, the case should have been the exact opposite: a man of rank would value honour and give little thought to money; it befitted merchants and shopkeepers to seek profit. As a result, he is hated by all of society (τὸ κοινῇ μισεῖσθαι) and the people will soon rise against him like the waves of a roaring sea— a very apt imagery for the letter.[49] All in all, D. Kydones protests the misuse of authority in the marketplace throughout his letter. He does not merely criticize the supervisor of the fishermen, but also represents him as a man unworthy of his position and standing through his colourful portrayal.

The final work to be discussed in this paper again deals with a case of misuse of authority in the marketplace. This is the *Satire of Katablattas*, an invective penned against a high-ranking judge by Ioannes Argyropoulos in the 1430s.[50] The judge in question, Katablattas, commits all sorts of wrongdoing throughout the text: he is vicious, unlearned, takes bribes, debases others, and misuses his office. Tellingly, a chief wrongdoing of Katablattas in the work is his literal looting of the marketplaces in Constantinople. Exiting through the small gate on the shore of the Golden Horn, he starts pillaging from there and does not stop until he arrives home.[51] The author offers a detailed and comical narrative of Katablattas' stroll in the marketplace; one by one, he visits the fish, vegetable, caviar, cheese and fruit sellers. This meticulous narration of the marketplace and shops, with many topographical references, has consequently received a lot of attention from scholars. The narrated organization of stalls and shops, grouped according to their merchandise, also seem to reflect the actual practice in Late Byzantine

47 Le Strange 1928, 48.

48 Letts 1926, 142, 149. Zosima also notes the same statue group, Majeska 1984, 186-87.

49 Letter 261, ll. 35-36, 39-43; Loenertz 1951-1960, 166.

50 Canivet and Oikonomides 1982-1983, 6-25 for an overview of the satire, the author, the personages and the work.

51 Canivet and Oikonomides 1982-1983, 53-54, the gate in question is the gate of the seawalls on the Golden Horn, located north of the Petrion Gate; it is either the gate of Dexiokratous or Saint Theodosios.

Constantinople.[52] At each stop, Katablattas fills his bag for free through threats or coaxing, he thus extracts food from the sellers by relying on his position as a high-ranking judge. In the vegetable sellers, the author singles out smelly vegetables like garlic and onions among Katablattas' spoils—perhaps to add to the comical effect. Then, Katablattas enters inside the walls through the imperial gate and heads to the butchers.[53] At the end of his 'tour', he has gathered fish, meat, cheese and fruits in his now bulging bag. His bag is now so big and voluminous that Katablattas is crushed under his cargo and stumbles, like Dionysios' slave Xanthias carrying his master's baggage in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Katablattas, the author, muses, can no longer look as chivalrous as he wishes to; he can no longer be a Bellerophon as his bag weighs him down. These mythological figures are very apt for the passage and help the author underscore the impropriety of Katablattas' behaviour. A man of high office, he aspires to and is expected to be chivalrous and lordly like the hero Bellerophon. Yet, his low behaviour and illicit dealings turn him into the slave Xanthias in the Aristophanic play, who was the stock character symbolizing servitude and ridicule.

Katablattas then visits the shops of artisans (τῶν τεχνιτῶν) and again engages in shameful and unbecoming behaviour, such as demanding a particular silver item as a gift.[54] He then stops at the pot-makers (χυτρεῦσι) and hides the pots he acquires under his clothes as he exits— the implication that he either is stealing them or that his bag is now full. In many other shops, too, whenever an item catches his fancy, Katablattas enquires about the price and then protests that it is too high, bargaining until the price is lowered. Then, he pretends to have forgotten his money bag at home and promises to pay the day after; as expected, the payment never comes. Not only does he object to the sellers' profit, but also does not even pay the discounted price. Meanwhile, he groans and complains about people's dishonesty, and the author underlines the irony of the situation.[55] A few passages later, the author also claims that whenever he wished to drink, Katablattas headed to the taverns in the Plateia, especially that of Goudeles, famous for its Cretan wine.[56] On account of his beard and countenance, the wine sellers take Katablattas to be a venerable man; he further appeals to their sympathy by pretending to be ill. He procures a goblet that is attached to his belt and is served with choice wines for a degustation, he keeps asking for refills as long as the wine seller is willing to do so. He also keeps going from one tavern to the other. When the time for payment comes**,** if asked for four silver coins, he either just gives two or pretends that he has forgotten money, promising to pay the day after. Thus, Katablattas also frauds the wine sellers like the food sellers and the artisans, denying them their lawful pay and profit. He does so by taking advantage of his dignified appearance as a man of position, inspiring respect at first. The tavernkeepers consequently resort to pretending to have closed shop upon seeing Katablattas' approach and manage to trick Katablattas the glutton or more accurately for the author, Katablattas the wine bag.

In the case of many other Byzantine satires, undoubtedly parts of the *Satire of the Katablattas* could be simply greatly exaggerated narratives of the events or even entirely fictional. Whether this marketplace narrative is fictional is not a question this present paper seeks to discuss. Once

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52 Canivet and Oikonomides 1982-1983, 53-56; Dagron 1995, 69-70 and Matschke 2002a, 467, 470-71; Oikonomides 1979, 98-99, discuss the topographical markings in the narrative.

53 Perhaps to be identified with Cubali Kapı, Canivet and Oikonomides 1982-1983, 53-56.

54 Canivet and Oikonomides 1982-1983, 56-59.

55 Canivet and Oikonomides 1982-1983, 58-59.

56 Canivet and Oikonomides 1982-1983, 66-69. This tavern of Goudeles in Plateia could perhaps be identical to the one run by a Goudeles, where the Genoese podesta bought his wine from in the 1390s, Necipoğlu 2007, 210.

more, what is important is the literary function of this marketplace narrative. The marketplace serves as a backdrop where Katablattas' misdoings occur and his misuse of authority becomes glaringly evident. While Katablattas' stroll in the marketplace undoubtedly also serves the purpose of entertaining the audience, it also symbolizes his abuse of authority. He takes advantage of socially weaker people such as food sellers, artisans and tavernkeepers, denying them their just profit— all by relying on his authority and prestige as a man of high office. The author further stresses his abuse through his satirical portrayal of Katablattas; a high-ranking judge canvassing the marketplace to do his own grocery 'shopping', haggling for prices, hiding the pots under his clothes, whisking out the goblet attached to his belt, and the bag he carries on his person for the foodstuffs he collects from various sellers. All the details not only lend further comical flavour to the tale but serve to stress Katablattas' lack of dignity and unfitness for such an office. As in the other cases discussed above, narratives of marketplace and shopping in this satire have literary functions in the text.

To conclude, these references to marketplaces and shopping in Late Byzantine literary texts are valuable snippets of daily life and may provide some insight into the markets and people's experiences. However, one must be cautious while supplementing scholarly discussions on marketplaces with these narratives. These texts were composed as literary artefacts, and their references to marketplaces and shopping usually fulfilled literary functions, conveying literary, moral and political meanings. M. Kalekas refers to the preoccupation of the populace with the vegetables in the marketplace to express disdain for mundane concerns, underlying own his commitment to *logoi*. Yet, through the same lines, he also sympathizes with the people who are compelled to strive for the necessities under adverse circumstances. D. Kydones employs marketplace narratives for various goals: to make fun of an acquaintance, elicit sympathy from his audience and criticize the misuse of authority. The marketplace passages in the *Satire of Katablattas* also serve similar purposes, they highlight the misuse of authority and further ridicule the main character. Ultimately, through close reading and literary analysis of the texts, scholars may reach a richer and multi-layered interpretation of these passages.

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