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*Preindustrial
Tanning
in Greece*

THE ETBA CULTURAL FOUNDATION
PELOPONNESE REGION, GENERAL SECRETARIAT

trade, shipping leather to and from Constantinople, Ragusa, Crete, the Black Sea (Tan, Feodosiya) and the markets of the West. In the late fourteenth century, when leather from Spain and North Africa began to flood on to the market, the leather of Romania (the Byzantine Empire, that is) which for centuries had met the needs of all those living between the Urals and the Atlantic ceased to constitute one of the pillars of the Byzantine economy.

Among the special uses of leather was the manufacture of parchment, which had been known in ancient times and continued to be used in Byzantium even after the introduction of paper. The skins of sheep, goats and even monkeys were specially prepared for use as writing material, and the production of parchment increased after the seventh century, when the Arabs captured Egypt and the supply of papyrus dried up. Parchment was expensive and rare, since only four leaves could be made from an entire animal skin, and it could only be acquired at certain times of the year—notably in the spring, when the lambs were slaughtered. The tanneries and leather-makers found in the major monastic centres would, of course, have met the practical needs of the monks (there are references to *pedilopoioi* and *hypodematorrhaphoi* who made sandals and shoes, and *skytodeusopoioi* who made other utilitarian items), but can also be presumed to have helped the copyists (*calligraphoi*) in the final preparation and use of their parchments. It now seems certain that the 'paper-makers' referred to in the Peloponnese in the tenth century actually made parchment. Patra, Corinth and Sparta in the Peloponnese of the mid-Byzantine period, all had dyeing-shops and tanneries where the local Jews were among those employed.

Ilias Anagnostakis

Tanning in Ottoman Times

In many towns, the place-name 'Tambakika' has survived down to the present day and is an indication that tanneries operated there during Ottoman times. As a rule, such places are next to water, large quantities of which were needed for tanning. The tanneries of Thessaloniki, most of which belonged to Turks, were close to the shore in front of the city walls, as Evliya Celëbi tells us; Cousinéry's account puts them near the ancient harbour and adds that the surrounding area was uninhabited for a considerable radius because the tanneries had polluted it. The tanneries of Ioannina stood on the west side of the lake, at Skala, while there is a theory that in earlier times they may have been close to the lakeside monastery of Our Lady of Dourachani. According to L. Zois, the governors of the island of Zakynthos had compelled the tanners to set up their premises close to the sea, despite the fact that for financial reasons they had wanted to be in the town itself.

The published legislative arrangements of the Sublime Porte determining the sums in tax to be paid on skins and hides of various qualities entering the urban centres to be sold show that there were tanneries within what is now Greece at Servia, Kastoria, Veroia, Sidirokastro, Serres, Xanthi, Komotini, Trikala, Larisa, Nafpaktos, various towns in the Peloponnese (Patra and Kalamata), and in the islands (Crete, Mytilene, Chios, Imbros and elsewhere). Ioannina, Larisa and Thessaloniki were centres for production as well as for the assembling of skins and hides. Ioannina and Larisa produced the famous *corduans du Levant*, which were shipped to the West through Thessaloniki or sent in caravans overland through Ragusa. Thessaloniki was the centre for the production of *loika*, goat skins dyed red. The skins of buffaloes and oxen from

Sofia, Varna and the Danubian Principalities were brought to Thessaloniki and exported – unprocessed – in large quantities to the West by the merchants of Venice, France and Ragusa. The remaining skins were processed on the spot for local consumption.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, Marseilles was the leather market of Europe, receiving shipments of the material from the ports of Smyrna, Constantinople, Alexandretta and Alexandria and even from Sardinia, England and Russia. Western and central Asia Minor and the Balkans provided skins to meet the needs of the European market until the early nineteenth century. Among the best-known centres of production in Asia Minor were Caesarea, Magnesia (= Manissa, which gave its name to a specific quality of leather) and Brusa. Trebizond, Sinope, Sampsounda and Smyrna were the places where these skins were gathered for export.

During the centuries of Ottoman rule, tanners used lime and dog droppings in processing leather and acorns, the bark and roots of kerm oak, and the leaves of the mastic tree – all high in tannin – for tanning. Oak, which was subject to high taxation and strict prohibitions on its export, was produced along the coastline of Asia Minor, on neighbouring islands such as Mytilene, and above all in the Peloponnese. Later, the use of oak was replaced by potash. For dye, acorn cups and logwood were used. The anonymous author of a memorandum composed in 1796 gives a very clear description of the manner of production of the yellow leather manufactured by the ten tanneries of Salona; production was as much as 40,000 skins per year.

Ottoman sources tell us that it was customary, in towns where there were tanneries, for all the skins of the area to be at the disposal of the tanners. In order to ensure that there was a sufficient quantity of skins which were as complete as possible, market regulations of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries refer in detail to the manner in which the skins were to be cleaned in the slaughterhouse before being passed on to the tanners. Slaughterers were warned by religious court decisions about the prohibition on the sale to other than local people of skins suitable for tanning until the local tanners had obtained the quantities they required. The tanners, too, were only allowed to sell their finished products to local craftsmen. They might sell any surpluses to merchants when the shoemakers, saddlers and other leather-workers of the town had sufficient stocks of the product. The sultans issued firmans forbidding the merchants to offer higher prices or to pay in advance.

There were also restrictions on the exporting of certain types of leather which were needed for military purposes – that is, to make saddles, uniforms, shoes, etc. Top-quality goatskin leather, called sahtiyân, was not allowed to cross the borders of the Ottoman Empire and was intended primarily for the requirements of the Palace. Ordinary leather from cows and oxen (gön) might be dealt in more freely and was used to make items for everyday use. The principal reason for the restrictions and prohibitions applied by the Sublime Porte to the export trade in leather was to make sure that the needs of the local market, of the Palace and the army, and of the capital were met. In



Tanner (désbağ).

the Ottoman Empire, leather—like grain, horses and military materials—was strictly controlled where its sale outside the boundaries of the Empire was concerned.

The tanners were among the most powerful guilds, and enjoyed numerous privileges. There were strong bonds between the guilds of Turkish tanners and the Dervish order of the Bektashis. The founder of the guild was believed to be *Ahi Evran*, who lived in the early fourteenth century. In miniatures from manuscripts, Bektashi dervishes are always shown with their bodies covered in skins and leather. In many towns in what is now Greece, Serres and Thessaloniki the guilds of Turkish tanners built mosques and tekedes. Christian guilds of tanners such as those of Kozani and many parts of Thrace took St Athanasius as their patron, since there was a tradition that he had been the first tanner to be blessed by Christ. In other places, such as Philippoupoli, the tanners believed themselves to be under the protection of Our Lady.

Evangelia Balta

The Use of Leather in Traditional Greek Clothing

In the Greek clothing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leather was used for shoes and belts.

In the farming and pastoral population, men and women wore shoes of the same kind. They were often made by the villagers themselves, out of pigskin or cowskin, and were held on the feet by laces wrapped round the entire shoe and then around the ankle and calf. These shoes were known as *tsarouchia*, *pinges*, *pintsi* or *tservoulia*. The laces were known as *tsarchoschina*, or—in *Limnos* alone—*lagares*. In their most highly-developed form, *tsarouchia* had long tassels and nailed soles, in

which case they were called *mastorika* or *prokadoures*. In the cities, *tsarouchia* were sold at special shops and were made in specific places, the best-known of which were *Ioannina*, *Thessaloniki*, *Veroia* and *Larisa*. *Tsarouchia* for special occasions were made of red and specially-prepared leather called *telatini*. Men also wore *kountoures*, which resembled low boots and could be worn with the heel trodden down, like slippers.

Women, had shop-bought black shoes for special occasions, called *videla* and made in styles that varied according to the season. In the Peloponnese, these were called *prokadoures*, too, since their soles were nailed. The *videla* worn by brides might be red, as at *Kefalovryso* in the *Argolid*, or two-tone, with red leather and black patent leather, as at *Oreini* near *Serres*. In Central Greece, the Peloponnese and *Evvoia* in the early twentieth century, it was the custom for brides to buy white footwear, even if this was no more than a pair of sandals. Also during the first half of the twentieth century, women often wore *potin* or *botinia*, boots of the Western type, which buttoned up the side with a long row of little buttons.

Kaklikia, *kipoutsia* and *kountoures* (*Salamina*, *Zaloufi*, *Skyros* and elsewhere) were the names given to a kind of female slipper made by special craftsmen with embroidered material attached to leather. On *Skyros*, these were also known as *gdores*. The women of Eastern *Rumelia* wore simple leather slippers which they called *sytta*. The Greeks of *Asia Minor* wore shoes of very thin leather, called *mestia*.

Since shoes were both expensive and hard to come by, they were often given as wedding presents. In Greek folklore, there is a familiar image of the country-woman walking barefoot beside the donkey her husband is riding, with her shoes hanging by their laces over her shoulder so as not to wear them out.

In the *Dodecanese*, *Crete* and *Cyprus*, the men wore