

Offikion (Archon Titles) of the Great Church of Christ

(By Ernest Villas, 1982; see also www.archons.org/archons/offikion.asp)

MEGAS LOGOTHETIS (The Grand Deputy)

This office can be compared to that of prime minister or secretary of state found in western nations today. In the Byzantine Empire, it was second only to that of the Imperial Magistrate and Court Counsel. Today, it is described in the Turkish language as the person who translates the official message of a newly-elected Patriarch to the government. During the Patriarchal Liturgy, he is stationed to the right of the Patriarchal throne and recites the Nicene Creed during the Liturgy.

MEGAS RHETOR (The Grand Orator)

This office had the responsibility of Christian education, and was bestowed upon those possessing a thorough theological background and a high degree of rhetorical skill. The Grand Orator, also known as the Master Orator, was in charge of a select group of Christian teachers chosen for their rhetorical skills, and known as lesser orators.

MEGAS HARTOPHYLAX (The Grand Archivist)

In the early Church, he was usually a deacon who was a permanent representative of the Bishop. He composed and prepared episcopal documents which he would also have the authority to sign in the absence of the Bishop. He read the minutes of the Holy Synod and was a source of current information on all Church matters. The Megas Hartophylax was assisted by a secretariat and was given the privilege of being seated next to the Metropolitans and preceding them in processions bearing a golden skull.

MEGAS PROTEKDIKOS (The Grand Counselor)

His office was assigned to protect and defend the rights of Church property and similar matters and was responsible for the welfare of the captives of the State, the slaves of the State, those seeking Church assistance on matters concerning their liberty, and those who sought personal sanctuary from the Church. Usually a priest, he made judgments on behalf of the Bishop and reported to the Bishop on these judgments.

MEGAS REFERENDARIOS (The Grand Liaison Officer)

His duties were to interpret and present all petitions of the Patriarchate to the political leaders of the State. As such, he was liaison or Patriarchal representative to the Emperor. During the coronation ceremony of a new Emperor he assisted with the imperial cloak or golden mantle. The corps of other Liaison Officers had similar duties, but on a less distinguished level. This Office was not exclusively given to the clergy but to the laity as well.

MEGAS PROTONOTARIOS (The Grand Notary)

This Office prepared and authenticated official documents including wills, ecclesiastical documents, marital disputes, and church estates. He was also given the honor of reading the Gospel in the Patriarchal Church on the Great Feast of Palm Sunday and was responsible for the corps of officials assigned to the fulfilling of these many duties. He was appointed from the ranks of priests, deacons or readers of the Church.

MEGAS IPOMNIMATOGRAFOS (The Grand Recorder) His duties were to serve the hierarchs and record proceedings during the election of bishops and to record memorandums and read them in the absence of the Grand Archivist. He supervised the corps of official Recorders who were appointed from the ranks of both the clergy and laity.

MEGAS DIKAIOPHYLAX (The Grand Jurist)

This Office was conferred on barristers or those with deep insight into the law and is similar to that of Grand Protekdikos. Other Patriarchates and autocephalous Churches also established this Office, and the writings of the Patriarch of Constantinople Kallistos I, in 1352, refer to the dual character of the Office, "The Honorable Dikaiophylax and Protekdikos" indicating their similarity and equality.

MEGAS NOMOPYLAX (The Grand Lawkeeper)

He was Director or Dean of the Laws School "Mangakis", Overseer of the law library, and Supervisor of the cultural curriculum in the education of legal counselors and notaries. (They could not enter their professions without his approval which was witnessed by an official diploma.) This title was conferred upon deacons of the Church of Saint Sophia, and later also extended to laymen.

MEGAS HIEROMNIMON (The Grand Overseer)

He supervised daily ecclesiastical functions similar to those performed in a local Church and was responsible for the codex of the Church, and was personal treasurer of the bishops. If he was a deacon he assisted the bishop

in the vesting of his ecclesiastical garments, and if a priest, he had the authority to consecrate a new church and anoint Church Readers. He also was appointed as the reader of the Gospel on Holy Monday.

MEGAS SKEVOPHYLAX (The Grand Sacristan)

This Official was responsible for the care of all things in the Patriarchal sacristy - the sacred vessels, clerical robes and other precious articles that were kept in the sacristy under proper protection. The Office was an important one in Constantinople as well as in other Patriarchates, autocephalous churches and various metropolitanates.

DIDASKALOS TOU EVANGELIOU (Teacher of the Gospels) The Teacher or Preacher of the Gospels interpreted in the New Testament Gospels. He was a "Theologian or Interpreter", an honor conferred upon priests and deacons which today is also bestowed upon laymen.

DIDASKALOS TOU APOSTOLOU (Teacher of the Epistles) This Office was also known as "First Teacher of the Epistles". He interpreted both the Epistles and the Act of the Apostles and did so both with the encouragement and authorization of the Bishop. This title was first bestowed only upon the clergy, but later was also conferred upon laymen.

HARTOULARIOS (Patriarchal Archivist)

These were members of the imperial corps of secretaries serving the archives, known as "Skrinia" and were similar to that of the "Keeper of Documents", paralleling the work done by modern archivists. Many departments of the Church had their own archives and thus there were various titles given to Archivists such as Vestiariou, Secreton, Sakeliou, etc.

HARTOPHYLAX (Hierarchal Secretary)

He was usually a clergyman and as chief secretary to the Bishop, served as a permanent representative of the Bishop and was authorized to sign certain Church documents. He also taught in the Church school and was a professor, a recorder of minutes and an archivist.

DIERMINEFS (Patriarchal Interpreter)

Both the Imperial Court and the Patriarchal Court required the use of skilled interpreters. Although most foreign emissaries and dignitaries usually spoke Greek, this Official was the interpreter for the Patriarch.

KASTRINSIOS (Patriarchal Chaplain)

The Kastrinsios was charged with military duties and was responsible for a military unit (similar to that of a captain of the guard). When the Office became ecclesiastical in nature, it was charged with the storage and safe keeping of ecclesiastical supplies and assisted in the vesting of the hierarch. He would also bestow the divine blessing upon the congregation by sprinkling from the randsistirion, and proclaim the arrival of His All Holiness, the Patriarch with "Evlogison Thespota" (Master Give the Blessing).

EXARCHOS (Exarch)

He represented the rights of the Patriarchate in monasteries and other Patriarchal institutions in different countries. The title could be given to metropolitan, bishop, other clergy, a monk or a layman. If bestowed upon a clergyman, he had the right to teach, counsel, establish churches, conduct ecclesiastical investigations, and nominate candidates for ordination. Exarchs from the ranks of the laity were dispatched to collect patriarchal contributions.

NOMOPHYLAX (Lawkeeper)

This Office supervised the legal library, guided the training of lawyers and notaries, and signed their graduation diplomas. He was also in charge of legal scholarships.

OSTIARIOS (Ostiary or Keeper of the Portals)

During the period of Christian persecution, the Ostarios would notify the Faithful of the clandestine place and time of divine worship. Later, he guarded the doors of the Church to prevent entry of any unfaithful and to prevent persons from leaving the Church before the service had concluded. He would hold the pastoral staff of the hierarch, and with it, guard the entrance of the Church during the election of a Bishop.

DIDASKALOS TOU GENOUS (Teacher of the People)

This Office was created in a later period in Church history, and bestowed upon educated and dedicated men who devoted their lives to the teaching and enlightenment of the people during the 400 year period of Ottoman subjugation.

DEPOUTATOS (Patriarchal Summoner)

His duties were to issue invitations to the Archons or Officers for audiences before the Patriarch and Bishops, to precede the Patriarch in processions, to lead the small and great entrances during the Liturgy, and to seat the congregants holding official titles and offices according to protocol. The Office of Depoutatos for the Church of Saint Sophia was bestowed upon the Byzantine Emperor himself during his coronation ceremony.

AKTOUARIOS (Recorder of the Court).

The Office had its origin in the Roman period and was charged with keeping minutes of the Roman Senate. Actuaries at the time functioned as a clerk of the Senate or as a recording secretary would today. The Byzantines retained and expanded this Office and the "Actuary of the State" also became an overseer of the army. During the last centuries of the Empire the Aktouarios came to be the doctor of the Imperial Court, or "Court Physician".

MIREPSOS (Overseer of the Holy Chrism)

He was and is still responsible for those in charge of the preparation of the Holy Chrism, the oil used for the Sacrament of Chrismation. The elaborate ceremony which surrounds the blessing of the Holy Chrism takes place on Great Thursday of Holy Week, after which the Chrism is dispatched from the Mother church in Constantinople to all Archdioceses and Metropolitanates. In previous centuries, it was sometimes sent to other Patriarchates and Autocephalous Churches as visible evidence of the unity of Orthodoxy and the Ecumenicity of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

ORPHANOTROPHOS (Commissioner for Orphans)

This office was established by the early Church and, before becoming Patriarch in 471, His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Akakios had previously held it. About the 14th century this had become an honorary title. It is conferred upon persons who are philanthropic and charitable in nature and as such, represents those who were dedicated to the welfare of the orphans of the Empire.

NOTARIOS (Patriarchal Notary)

The title comes from the Latin "Nota" which means the secretary of the Church. It is an ancient and distinguished title and was held by such persons as Athanasios the Great, St. Makrianos, and St. Martirios. They were specialized stenographers and recording secretaries for the holy Synod and recorded minutes and decisions and read their transcriptions at the meetings. The First Notary supervised the corps of Patriarchal Notaries.

EKDIKOS (Patriarchal Counselor)

He assisted the Bishop in his role as a protector of the weak against the powerful and was under the leadership of the Protekdikos and had similar duties. The headquarters of this Office was in the Protekdikeion of the Church of Saint Sophia.

PRIMIQUIROS (Lay Ecclesiarch)

He signed official church documents for: 1) Personal wills, 2) Papers of Agreement on various matters, 3) Certificates concerning transactions of properties and merchandise, and 4) Ecclesiastical documents of monastic oaths. His authority also permitted co-signing of Patriarchal and synodical documents. He was also the leader of the lower clergy and would chant with the corps of ecclesiastical Chanters during worship services. Today he bears the manoualion or candle during worship services in the Patriarchal Church.

It is apparent from the foregoing descriptions that Archons in the Byzantine Empire carried a heavy responsibility for the administration of both Church and State. In a parallel manner, Archons today carry a heavy responsibility of Church leadership, and in their private lives are proven leaders in the business and professional world, in education, the civic community and government. The action of Patriarch Athenagoras and the leadership of Archbishop Iakovos in uniting the Archons of the Archdiocese in a time of need for the Patriarchate has proven to be a wise decision, and will grow and expand as long as that need continues.

May God in His infinite wisdom continue to guide the Order of St. Andrew in its pathway of service to the Great Church of Christ and the Ecumenical Patriarchate from which we derive our spiritual roots and legacy as Christians of the Greek Orthodox tradition living in North and South America.