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A SOCIAL HISTORY OF
BYZANTIUM

EDITED BY JOHN HALDON



WILEY-BLACKWELL

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WILEY-BLACKWELL

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FOREWORD

When I was invited by Blackwell in 2005 to edit a collection on the social history of Byzantium I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to put together a set of contributions that would open up new ways of looking at Byzantium and its culture. With hindsight, I think my optimism in this regard entirely justified, but I underestimated how difficult it would be adequately to deal with all the possible topics that one might expect to find in such a collection. In the end, I have to confess that I have not succeeded in doing all the things I originally hoped – the coverage is incomplete, and perhaps inevitably so, given the range of possible questions we would like to ask and possible or actual topics or themes we would like to read about. We planned originally to have a chapter on art and society, or at least – that title being perhaps a little trite – on how Byzantines perceived, understood, and instrumentalized color and form and how these were deployed ideologically and symbolically; we planned likewise to have a chapter dealing specifically with marriage, kinship and identity. Sadly, both authors fell by the wayside as a result of circumstances beyond their control, and we were unable to replace them at short notice – understandable, given the challenge of dealing with such complex and difficult topics, although other contributors take up several of the issues which would otherwise have been addressed in these more specialist chapters. There are undoubtedly other topics that readers will expect to find in a book with the words “social history” in its title, and I can do no more than admit that our coverage is not as complete as I hoped or planned. It would have been good, for example, to have something more analytical and theoretically broad on the relationships between different social-economic groups, although most chapters do touch on that theme in some way. Likewise we could have included a chapter or two on specific groups outside the elite and aristocracy, the church, or the monastic world, yet nevertheless identifiable by their role, dress, beliefs, or otherwise – soldiers, for example, or religious minorities, such as Jews, or ethnic groups, and so forth. Broad and complex though such themes are, they deserve treatment.

Nevertheless, this is, I believe, an exciting and provocative collection which will encourage discussion across a wide range of subjects and, perhaps most importantly, one which will encourage scholars with very different expertise and interests to build bridges to others with different priorities and perspectives and contribute thereby to a more holistic appreciation of the complex social phenomenon we call “Byzantium.” It is in one sense very obvious, yet nevertheless worth underlining the fact that Byzantium was never a single, monotonic cultural system. Regional variations in time and space, differences of scale between town, countryside, and village or between and within province and locality, all nuanced and inflected the way things were and the way those who lived in Byzantium experienced and perceived their different worlds. It is perhaps inevitable that many such inflections are near impossible to grasp except by very crude means, and that generalizations, which conceal so many of these variations, will tend to dominate any attempt to understand the different phenomena the contributors to this volume address. We hope our readers will bear this in mind when engaging with the volume.

I am immensely grateful to the contributors to the volume. They all without exception were enthusiastic about the project, and if it succeeds in opening discussion and stimulating research, then it is due to their efforts. The editor’s instructions were relatively open-ended in respect of what each author was to write about – some have chosen to focus on description and clarification, others on analysis or the examination of current debates, others again have placed emphasis also on the methodological or theoretical issues with which one has to contend in addressing a particular theme, one or two on all of these. A single author would, of course, have produced a very different sort of book, with a set of common themes and a single guiding principle, and this book cannot be that. On the other hand, since I believe that we are not yet in a position to write a single-authored social history of the Byzantine world – and whether anyone can ever hope to achieve such an aim satisfactorily may be doubted – a collection such as this has certain merits, in particular that of showing how diverse the range of possible approaches to the social history of any period or any culture can be, yet at the same time how useful the juxtapositioning of such diverse approaches can be in encouraging discussion and in throwing up new questions and new approaches.

I should like to thank Palgrave Macmillan for permission to reproduce some of the maps from my *Atlas of Byzantine History*; and, of course the usual suspects in such enterprises: friends, colleagues with whom I have had discussion on various issues to do with my own chapters or the book as a whole – they know who they are; and last, but of course by no means least, my family, for their continued benevolent forbearance.

John Haldon
Princeton, June 2008

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>Annales ESC</i>	<i>Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisations</i>
AS	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i>
B	<i>Byzantion</i>
BCH	<i>Bulletin de correspondance Hellénique</i>
BF	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
BMGS	<i>Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies</i>
<i>ByzSlav</i>	<i>Byzantinoslavica</i>
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CahCM</i>	<i>Cahiers de civilisation médiévale</i>
CFHB	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
CSHB	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JÖB	<i>Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik</i>
JÖBG	<i>Jahrbuch der österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
OCP	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
MPG	<i>Patrologiae Cursus completus, series Graeco-Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne</i>
REA	<i>Revue des Études Arméniennes</i>
REB	<i>Revue des Études Byzantines</i>
REG	<i>Revue des Études Grecques</i>
RESEE	<i>Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes</i>
RH	<i>Revue Historique</i>
ROC	<i>Revue de l'Orient Chrétien</i>

<i>RSBN</i>	<i>Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici</i>
<i>TM</i>	<i>Travaux et Mémoires</i>
<i>VV</i>	<i>Vizantiyskii Vremmenik</i>
<i>ZRVI</i>	<i>Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta</i>

MAPS

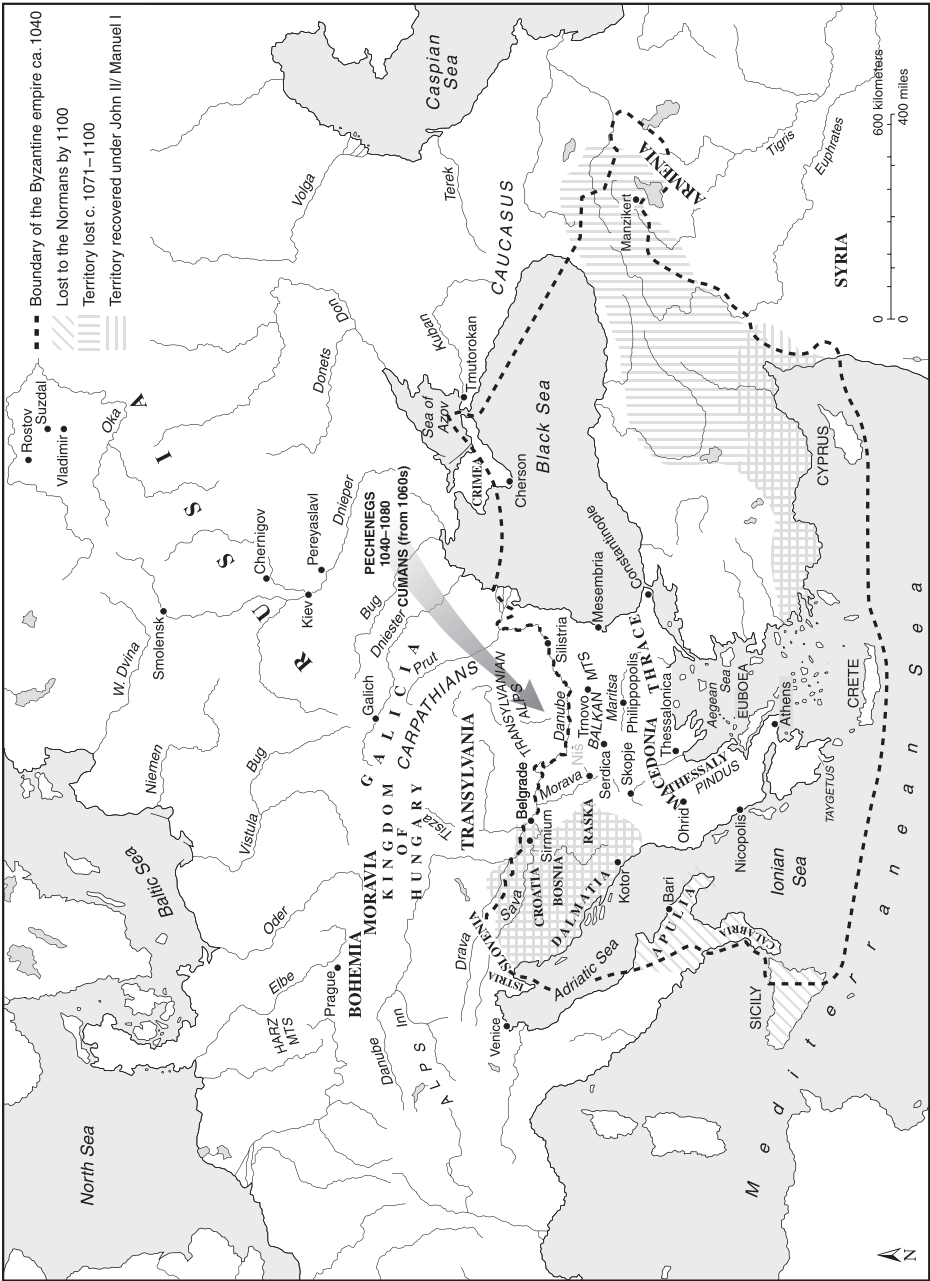
MAPS FOR CHAPTER 1



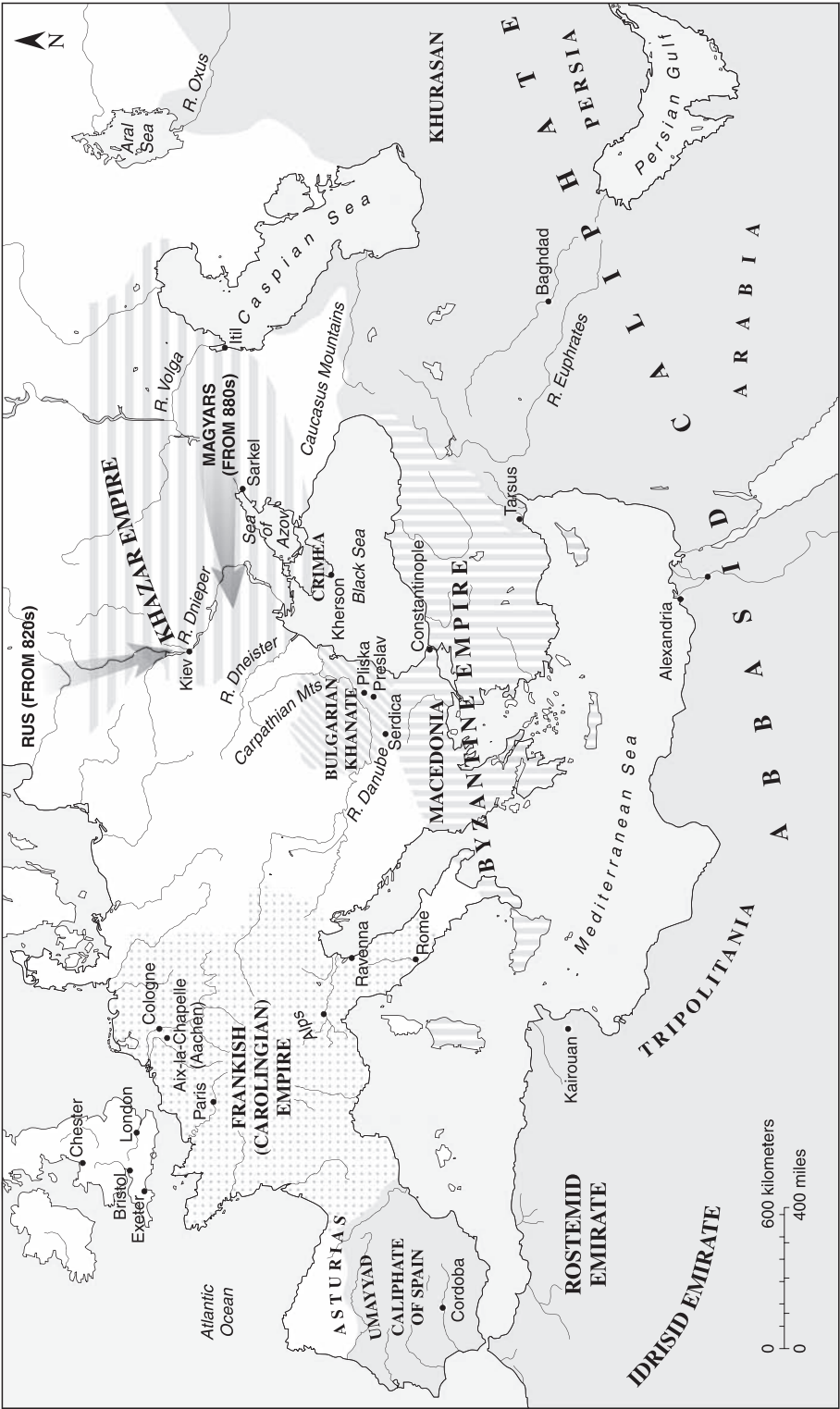
Map 1 The Roman empire, ca. 400 CE



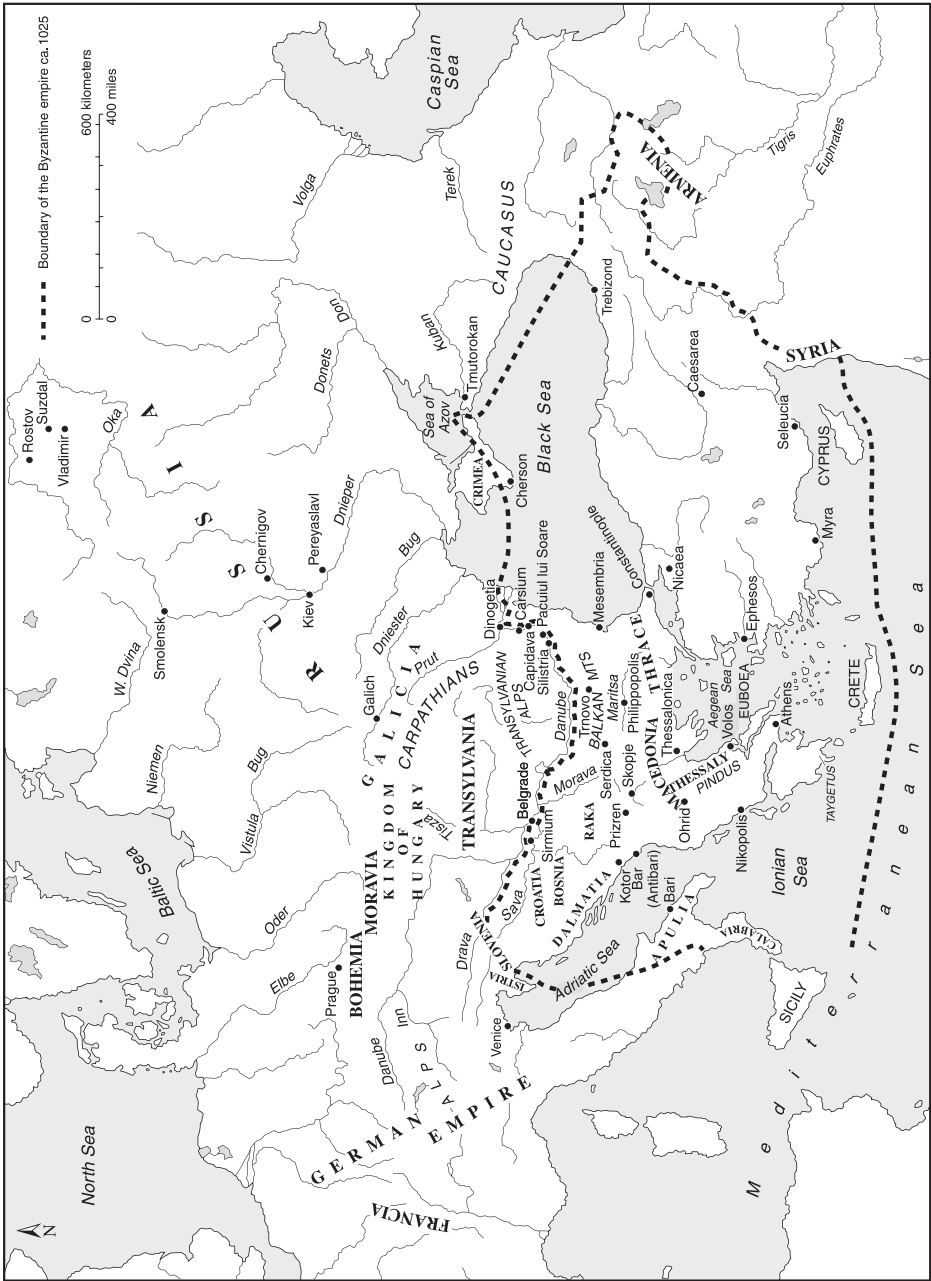
Map 2 The Byzantine empire, ca. 1050



Map 3 The Byzantine empire at the end of the 12th century

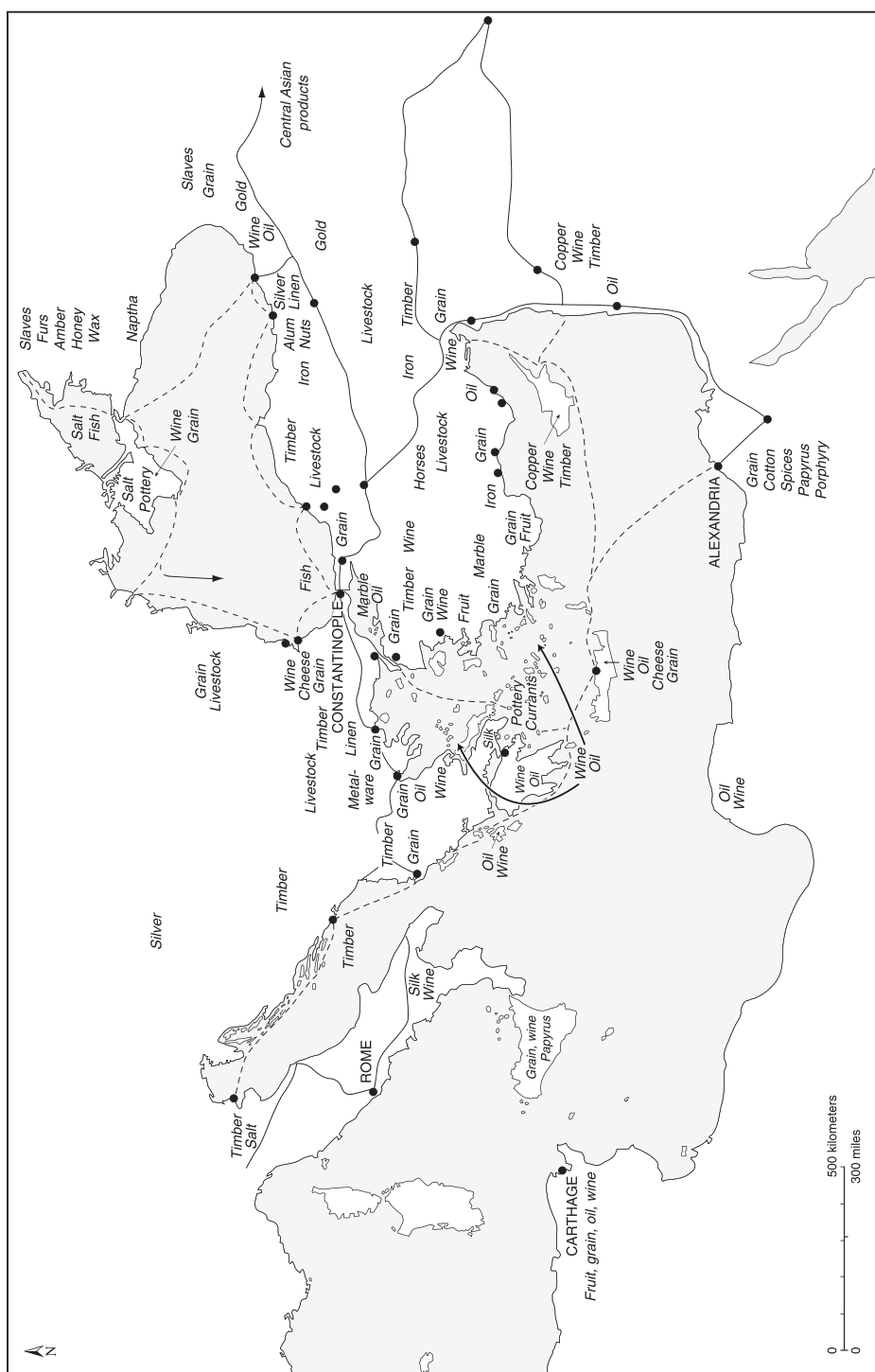


Map 4 The empire in its international context, ca. 850

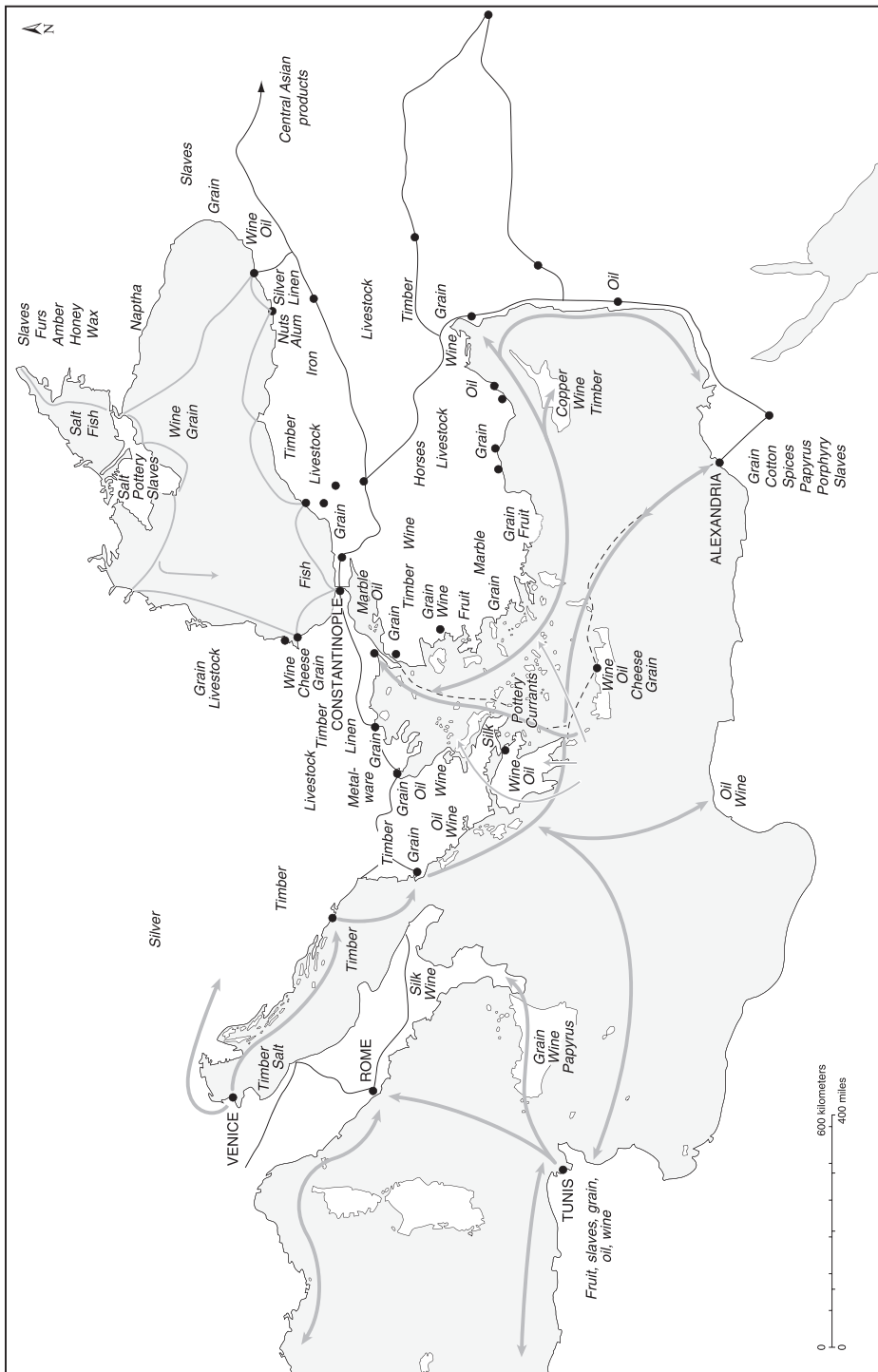


Map 5 The empire in its international context, ca. 1050

MAPS FOR CHAPTERS 5, 6, 7, 8, AND 9



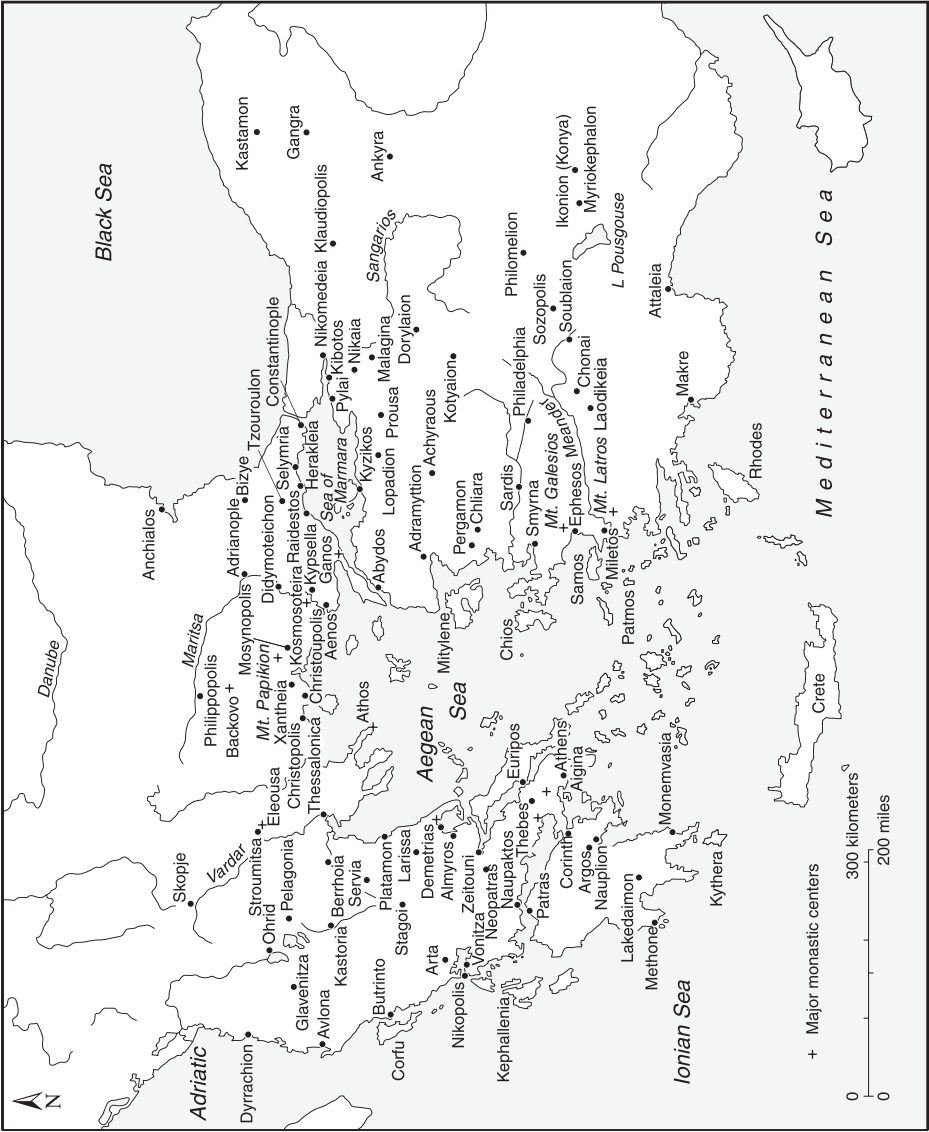
Map 6 Land use and resources in the 5th–7th century



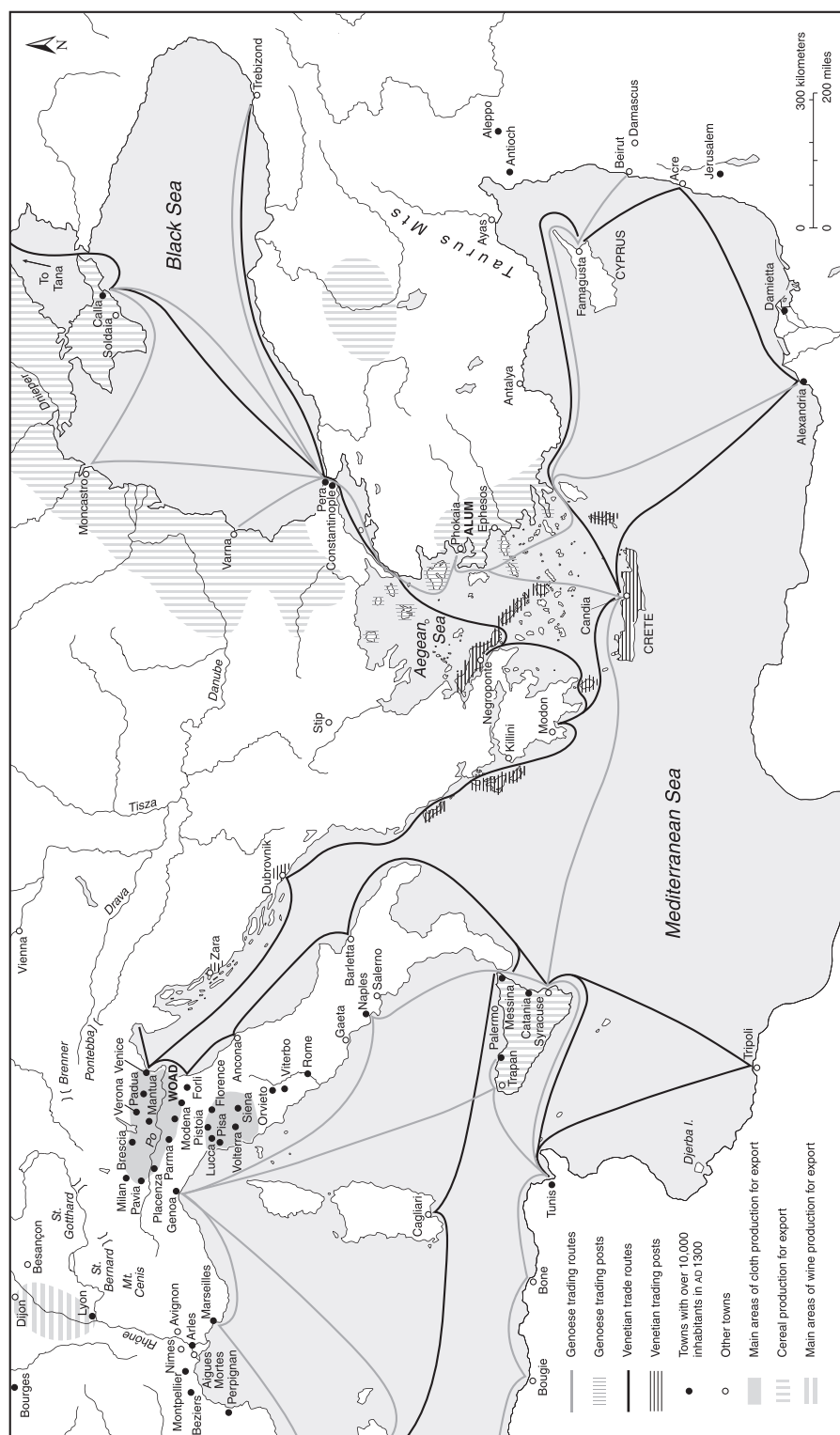
Map 7 Land use and resources in the middle Byzantine period



Map 8 Land use and resources in the later Byzantine period

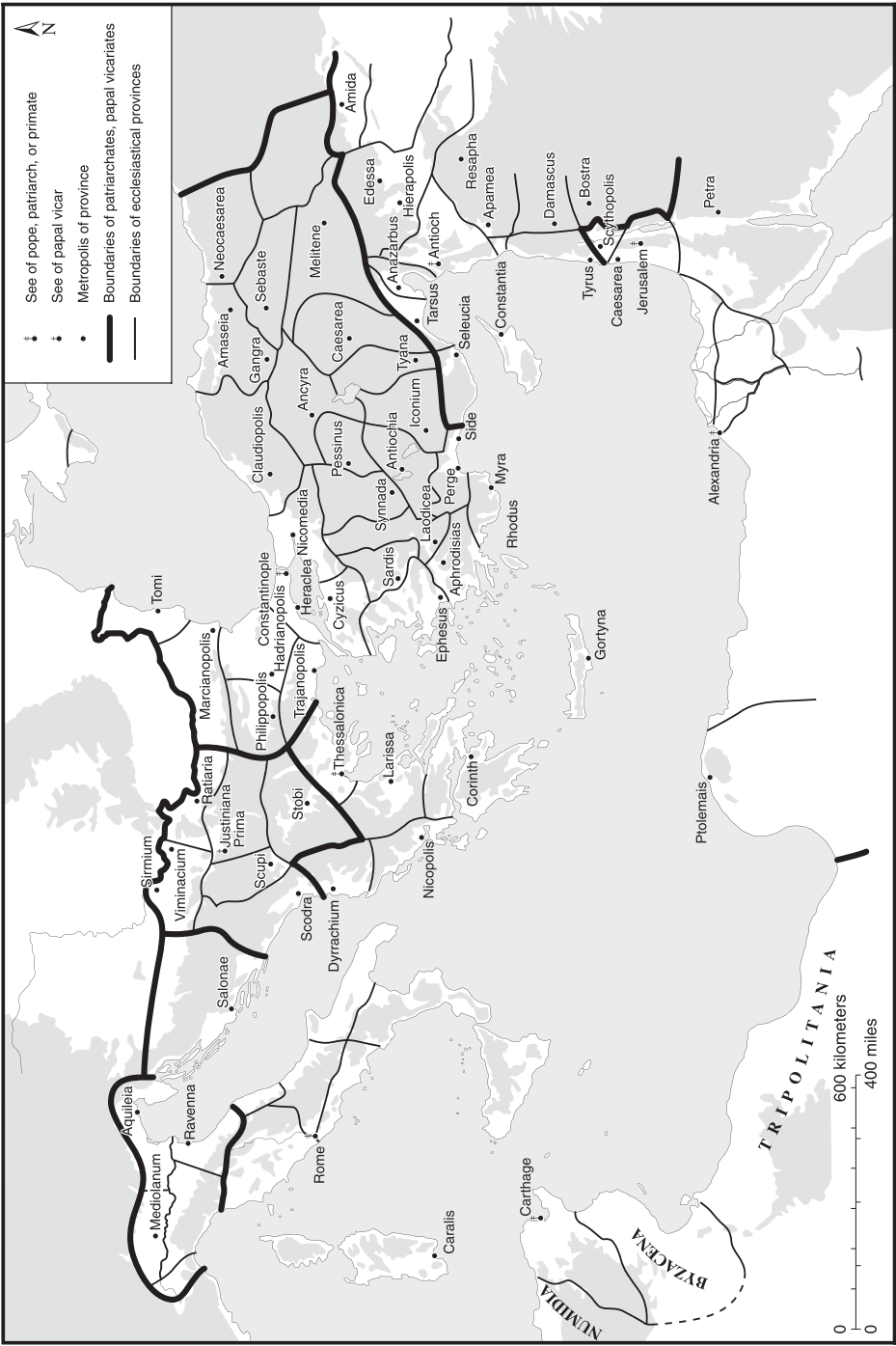


Map 9 Towns and monasteries in the later period

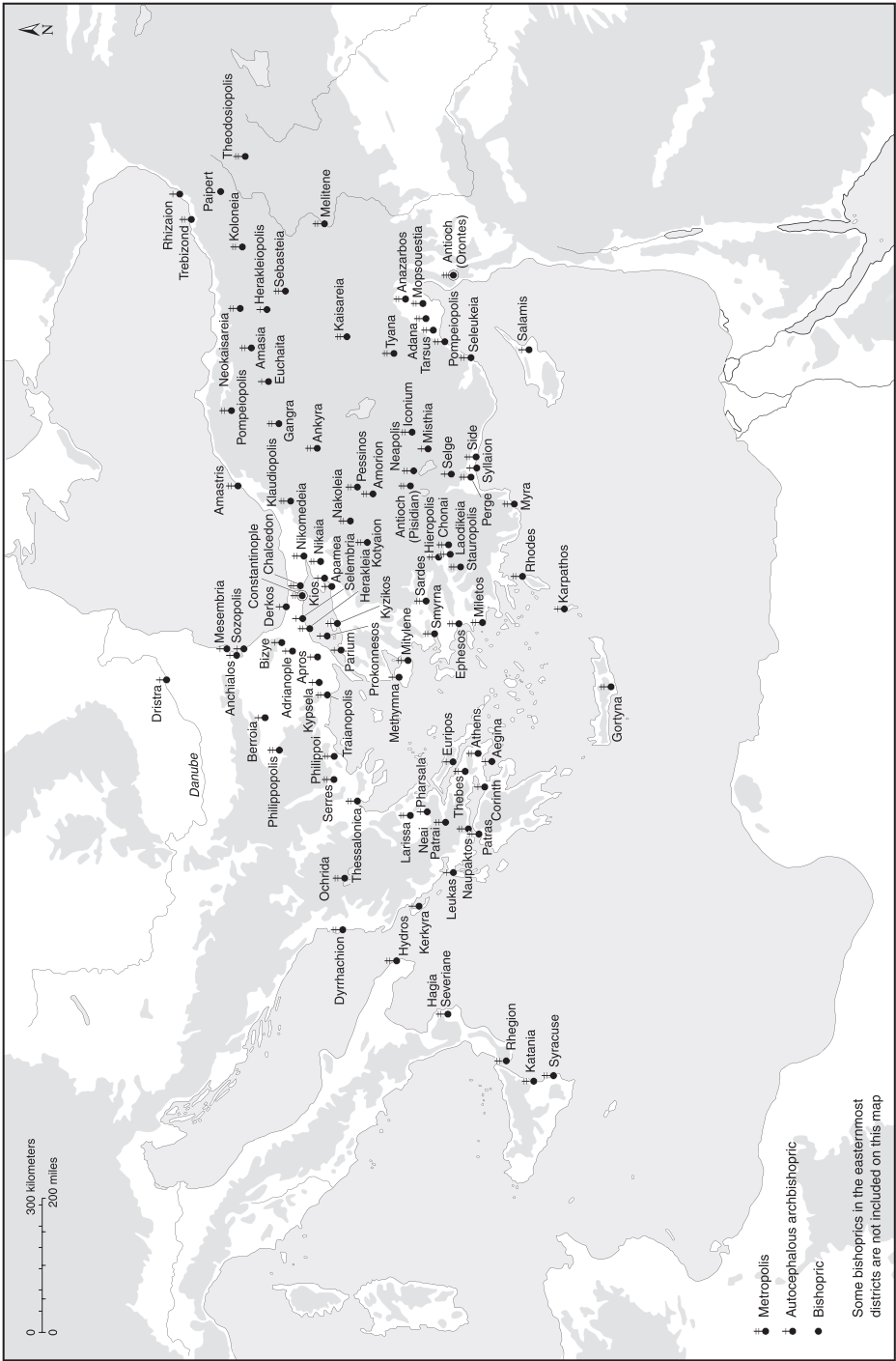


Map 10 International trade and commerce, 12th–14th centuries

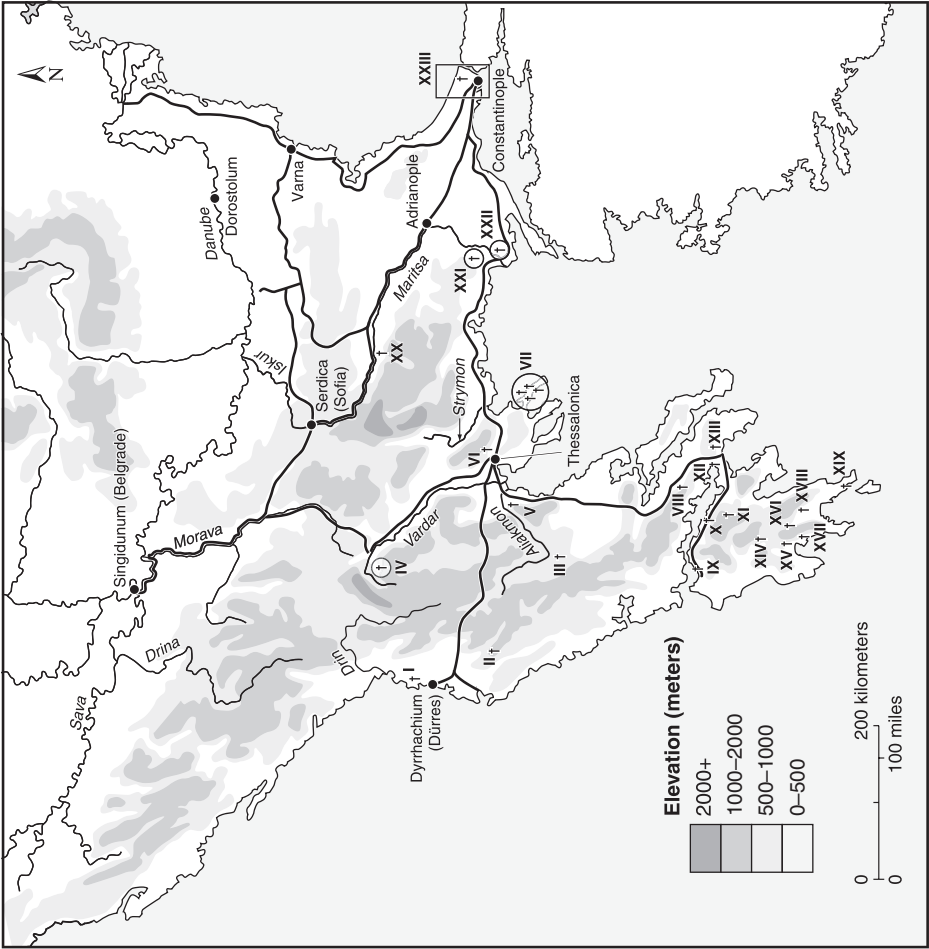
MAPS FOR CHAPTER 10



Map 11 Church administration in the late Roman and early Byzantine period

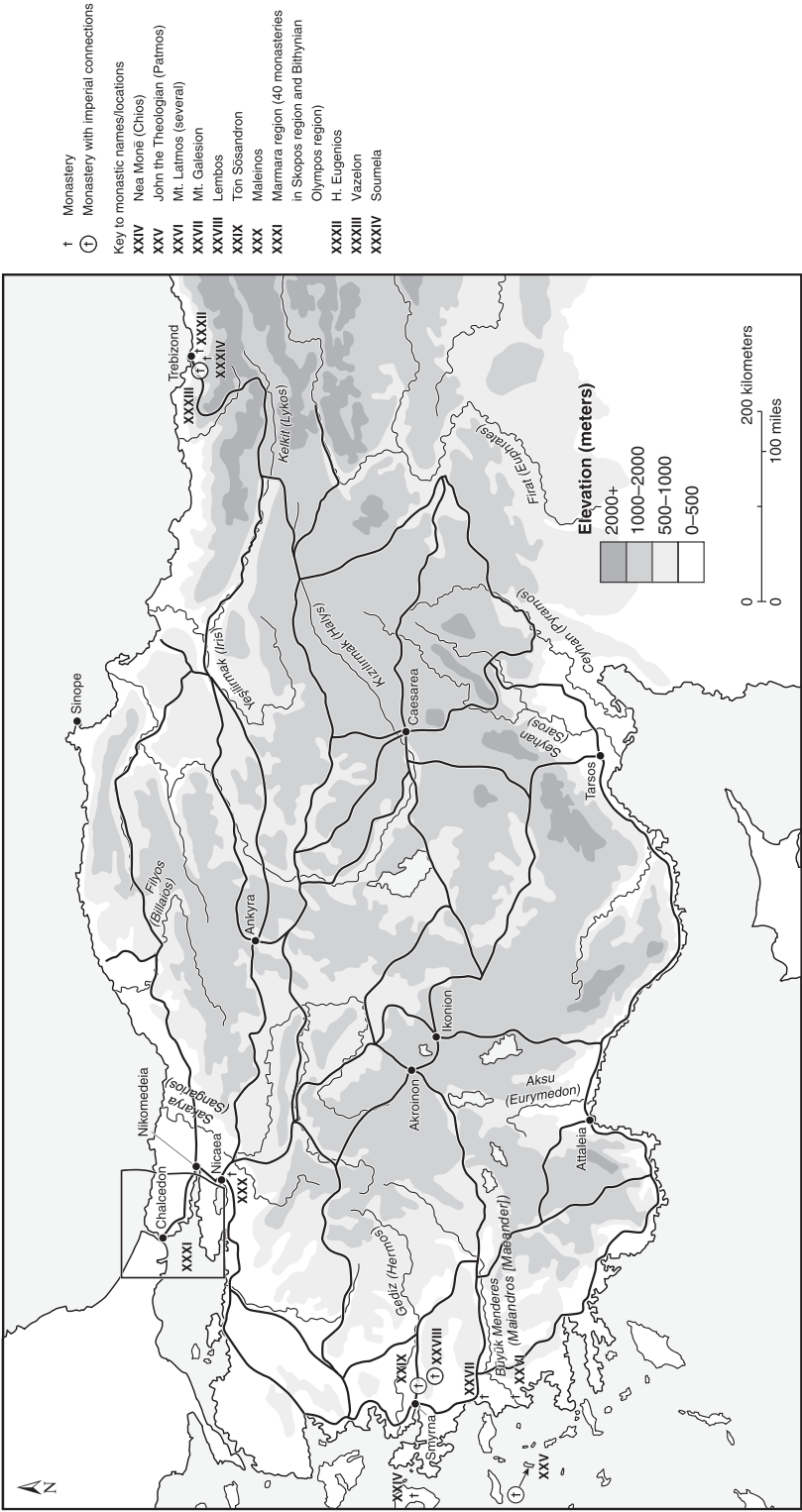


MAPS FOR CHAPTER 11

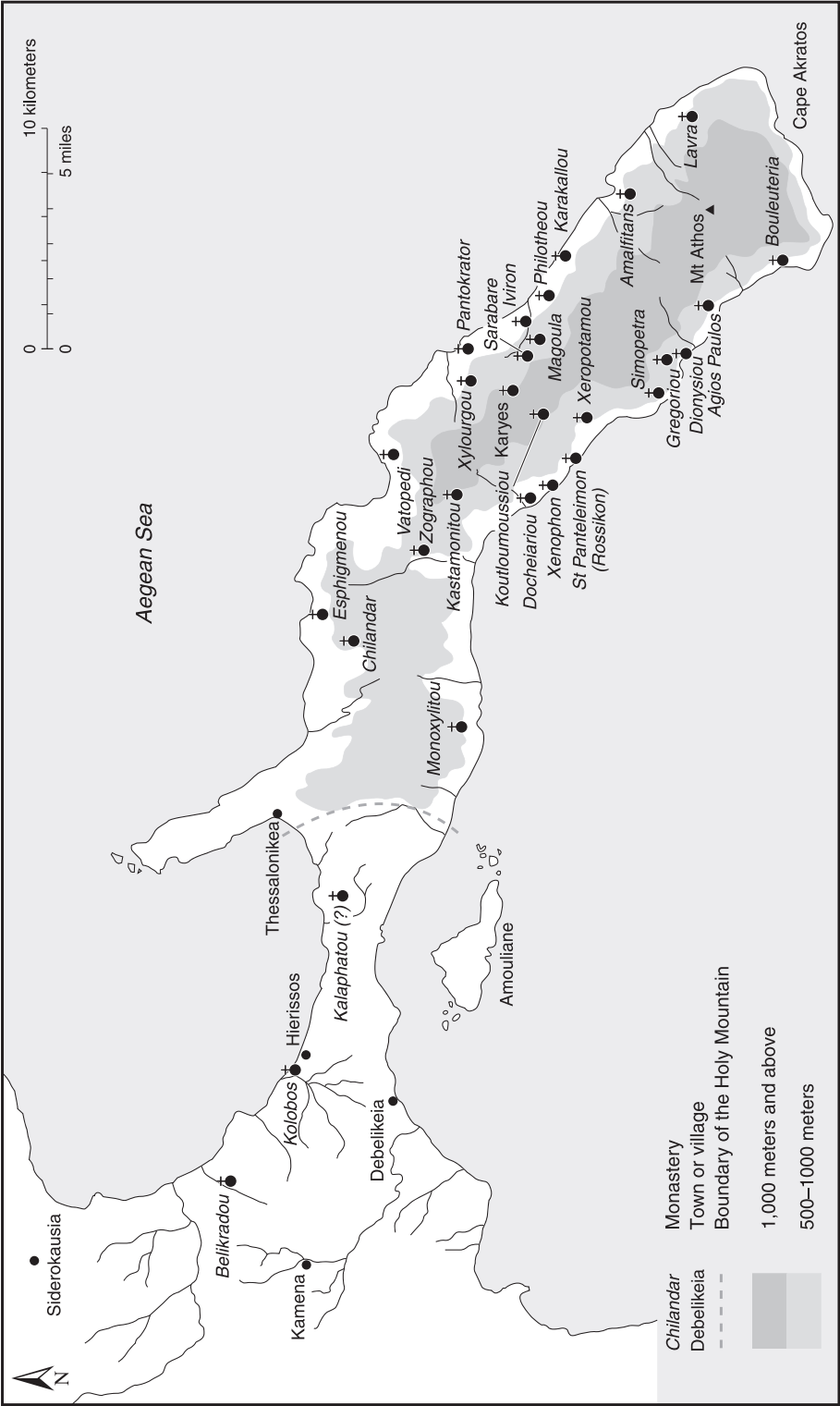


- † Monastery
⊕ Monastery with imperial connections
Key to monastic names/locations
- I Theotokos
 - II Pogoniane
 - III Meteora
 - IV Panteleemōn
 - V Nea Petra
 - VI Thessalonica (6 monasteries)
 - VII Mt. Athos (many)
 - VIII Hosios Loukas
 - IX Gerokomeiou
 - X Taxiarchōn
 - XI Mega Spelaton
 - XII Symbolōn
 - XIII Daphni
 - XIV Philosphōn
 - XV St. Theodore
 - XVI Mistras (several)
 - XVII Pantanassa
 - XVIII Brontochion
 - XIX H. Martha
 - XX Theotokos
 - XXI Theotokos Kosmosōteira
 - XXII Skalote
 - XXIII Constantinople region (over 20)

Map 13 Monasteries in the 9th century and afterwards in the west



Map 14 Monasteries in the 9th century and afterwards in the east



Map 15 Monasteries of Mt. Athos

1

TOWARDS A SOCIAL HISTORY OF BYZANTIUM

John Haldon

To a greater or lesser extent we are able to describe some quite important aspects of Byzantine society in some detail, although the coverage is admittedly rather patchy and incomplete in many areas. But if we ask the questions, what makes things work in the way they did? Why did certain changes occur at certain points in time? How did such-and-such a situation, and the ideas and concepts through which the Byzantines themselves could describe or attempt to describe it, come into being? – these are questions about causal and structural relationships which are rarely asked, and still more rarely answered satisfactorily. And these are the sorts of questions to which a social history approach might perhaps be able to offer some useful – descriptively as well as heuristically useful – answers.

That medieval eastern Roman society was hierarchically structured, in respect of access to wealth and resources, is obvious; and that medieval eastern Romans – Byzantines, in shorthand – were fully aware of the stratified nature of their social world, is equally apparent. Society was understood in both functional terms, in respect of the different roles attributed to different social groups, as well as in a more abstract way, as divided by a range of distinguishing features, among which the role of family and birth had varying significance over time. An anonymous (possibly sixth-century, perhaps later) writer remarks that “Just as in the human body you cannot find a part which has absolutely no function, so in a well-ordered commonwealth there should be no group of citizens which, although able to contribute to the public welfare, in fact does nothing.”¹ All these elements were mutually dependent, none could flourish without the other two. As a simile, the human body is in fact not a bad way to think about the structure of most pre-modern social formations, although of course it also embodies the ideological perception of the different roles ascribed to these elements in society. And it naturally enough subsumes a range of values about the cultural worth of the groups and individuals involved. As I have

¹ Dennis 1985: 10.

noted elsewhere,² societies are complex phenomena made up of sets of social practices, and these practices – ways of doing and behaving, determined by context, function and perceived needs – have the effect of both promoting the physical – biological – reproduction of groups and individuals, on the one hand, and creating institutional patterns of behaving through which systems of belief and social organization are maintained and reproduced on the other. Anthropology has shown that most societies quickly evolve hierarchies of access to resources, and that access by one group of individuals to more resources than others brings with it a consolidation of social power over others – regardless of the process through which selection occurred. At the same time, social groups evolve in relation to resources and in proportion to their ability to control and manipulate resources, and they structure their relationships through patterns of behavior which are in turn determined by concepts of person and identity. Hierarchization, the development of complex notions of status, social honor, rights, and privileges depending also on age and sex as well as wealth and access to resources, gendered roles and concepts determined in their turn by notions and theories about identities and the behavior appropriate to them are inevitable facets of all human social systems.

Study of the political, social, economic, and cultural history of the Byzantine world, defined both more broadly in terms of all those societies or social formations influenced by or within the territory of the Byzantine empire and its culture, as well as by the Byzantine imperial state itself, has become increasingly popular both in terms of mass informed readerships in Europe and North America as well as in respect of specialist study at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Most standard textbooks and specialist analyses contain sections on, or make frequent allusion to, the social structure of the Byzantine world at some point, and some deal specifically with topics such as “society” or “social structure” or “social relations between rich and poor,” for example, at some point in their account. But whereas a great deal of attention has recently been devoted to the economic aspects of later Roman and Byzantine history – the most telling examples are Michael Hendy’s *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300–1450* (Cambridge 1985), the recently published three-volume *The Economic History of Byzantium*, edited by Angeliki Laiou (Washington, DC 2002), Jairus Banaji’s *Agrarian Change in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2001), and several publications in French – very little has been published specifically on the social history of Byzantium, and more particularly, on the theoretical underpinnings of scholarly discussion in this field. The nearest that anyone has come, in fact, has been Peter Brown’s work on late Antiquity, which set the scene not only for a re-examination of the process of cultural transformation of the later Roman world between the third and eighth centuries CE, but which also critically re-evaluated the processes of change in their social and cultural context, with fundamental implications for how we understand what our sources – textual or archaeological – tell us about the first centuries of medieval Byzantium.³

² Haldon 2005b: 1f.

³ Brown 1971; 2003.

Individual studies proliferate – Franz Tinnefeld’s useful *Die frühbyzantinische Gesellschaft* (Munich 1977); the older and largely ignored book by D. Savramis, *Zur Soziologie des byzantinischen Mönchtums* (Leiden-Köln 1962); Evelynne Patlagean’s magisterial *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e–7e siècles* (Paris 1977); Jean-Claude Cheynet’s *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris 1990) or Michel Kaplan’s *Les hommes et la terre à Byzance du VI^e au XI^e siècles* (Paris 1992), and, for the later period, Angeliki Laiou’s *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire: A Social and Demographic Study* (Princeton 1977) – but with the exception of part of Patlagean’s structuralist introductory discussion these are strictly empirical works which set out careful and convincing analyses of the sources but draw conclusions based within a largely unstated set of assumptions about the nature and dynamic of medieval social and economic relations and how they should be envisaged. Works in Russian by scholars such as Alexander Kazhdan did attempt a more sociological approach, but this is vitiated both by the political-ideological context in which they were working and the fact that they remain for the most part untranslated (see, for example, *Social’nyj sostav gospodstvujuščego klassa v Vizantii XI–XII vv.* [The social structure of the Byzantine ruling class in the 11th and 12th centuries], Moscow 1974; K. V. Khvostova, ‘K voprosu o strukture pozdnevizantijskogo sel’skogo poselenija’ [Concerning the structure of late Byzantine rural communities] *Vizantijskij Vremennik*, 45 [1984] 3–19; and *Količestvennyj podhod k srednevekovej social’no-ekonomičeskoj istorii* [The quantitative approach to medieval socio-economic history], Moscow 1980, etc.). Of the older literature, Ostrogorsky’s work, such as *Quelques problèmes de l’histoire de la paysannerie byzantine* (Brussels 1956), or that of H. Köpstein, *Zur Sklaverei im ausgehenden Byzanz* (Berlin 1966), was concerned with specific issues such as how “feudal” Byzantine society was, or the extent to which slavery remained an important element in Byzantine society. By the same token Lemerle’s work on agrarian society, or Kazhdan’s on the élite and on urbanism, deal with specific issues and, while marking important interventions in the discussion about the structure of Byzantine economy and society, remain nonetheless within the confines of a specific set of questions beyond which they rarely attempt to go.⁴ I will come back to some of these broader questions below.

In the 1970s and 1980s some Russian and East German scholars undertook general social-historical discussions of aspects of Byzantine or late Roman history, and while some of these were well-conceived and useful in parts, they all suffered from the constraints of a post-Stalinist political, theoretical, and intellectual strait-jacket which stultified open discussion and radical theory.⁵ The volumes edited by Köpstein and Winkelmann, for example, were among the best of these: H. Köpstein, F. Winkelmann, eds., *Studien zum 7. Jahrhundert in Byzanz: Probleme der Herausbildung des Feudalismus* (BBA, 47. Berlin 1976); H. Köpstein, F. Winkelmann, eds.,

⁴ See, for example, Lemerle 1979; Kazhdan 1974; 1960.

⁵ E.g. Litavrin 1977; Kurbatov and Lebedeva 1984; Udál’cova and Osipova 1985; Lebedeva 1980. For a summary of the Soviet and western discussion over slavery and feudalism, see Haldon 1993: 70ff.

Studien zum 8. und 9. Jahrhundert in Byzanz (BBA 51. Berlin 1983); and F. Winkelmann, *Quellenstudien zur herrschenden Klasse von Byzanz im 8. und 9. Jahrhundert* (BBA 54. Berlin 1987). The much older works which deal with social history – such as those by Rostovtzeff or Tenney Frank – all deal with the Roman period and do not go much beyond the fifth century.

The list of single articles in journals or edited volumes which deal with particular social-historical topics is vast and cannot be adequately presented here – many of them will be cited in the chapters that follow, but they range widely in subject and value. Ch. Gizewski's short legal-sociological analysis of political opposition in the later Roman period, for example, offers useful insights from a neo-Weberian perspective on the role of violence and force in social and political conflicts; Eleonora Kountoura-Galaki's discussion of the role and structure of the clergy in the seventh–ninth centuries is an important contribution, while Telemachos Loungis' sketch of the main lines of Byzantine social development over the same period remains useful.⁶ Many of the contributions to *The Economic History of Byzantium* are by definition also social-historical in their relevance and often in their material and treatment. Some work has been done on notions of gender and the ways in which behavior and social practice both determined and provided the context for attitudes to women, men, and eunuchs, and some work has been done on the differences between the roles ascribed to men and women of varying social situation in the later Roman and Byzantine worlds. But no one has yet attempted any synthetic discussion of either particular aspects of Byzantine social history across the whole period or (and in the context of) any discussion about approaches to social history in a pre-modern society. More importantly, much of the specialist discussion, as is apparent from the examples cited above, is in languages not accessible either to the great majority of American and English students, or even to many in Europe, so that significant debate and historical insights often go ignored by entire cohorts of students at both undergraduate and graduate level, to say nothing of the wider interested public. *The Economic History of Byzantium*, mentioned already, goes some of the way to addressing some of the issues that a social history might want to examine. But it is in a specifically economic history context with a clearly economic history emphasis, and while there are very useful and important discussions by the editor of a number of theoretical issues which pertain to both social and economic historical analysis, there are still many important aspects of both theory and methodology, quite apart from actual analysis, which are relevant to social history and which remain untouched.⁷ It would seem that the time is ripe, therefore, for a preliminary survey discussion of the field which would set out some basic propositions for discussion, raise key theoretical and methodological issues, and attempt to provide answers to some of the more pressing or obvious problems.

What should a social history of Byzantium look like? Clearly, it should address important issues of social structure and ask questions about the ways in which

⁶ Gizewski 1988; and see the review by Haldon 1989; Kountoura-Galaki 1996; Loungis 1985.

⁷ Laiou 2002a–c.

society was articulated at different levels through cultural as well as economic activities; it should also look at the ways in which social relationships between economically as well as culturally distinct groups functioned, and how changes in those relationships generated changes in the overall workings of the society at large. It should as well look at the different levels or layers of society, on the one hand, and how they related to one another, through economic, political, and cultural means; but it should at the same time consider that vertical divisions and solidarities, involving systems of patronage, for example, or religious-ideological identities, could be every bit as important as, and in some contexts more important than economic barriers and solidarities or vested interests. And it should look at attitudes, identities, patterns of behavior, it should challenge assumptions about such identities and examine how they were constructed and under what conditions – particularly in respect of gender, but in respect of other socially and culturally defined roles and modes of social behavior. In addition, it needs to take account of the very considerable local and regional variations across both geographical space and in time which affected the way “society” worked, the way institutions and relationships were understood and perceived, and the way ideas were transmitted and realized in the practical forms of daily life at all levels. And finally, it should at least in some degree offer the possibility of theorizing Byzantine society in such a way as to make its workings accessible to non-specialists and of value to scholars who wish to draw broader connections and suggest higher-level parallels between what was happening within the Byzantine world and how it worked, and what was going on in neighboring or more distant social and cultural systems. In the following pages I will offer some thoughts on key aspects of what a social history might concern itself with, and suggest some avenues of approach which may be of use in thinking about the social history of the Byzantine world.

Let us begin by defining the terms of the debate. What do we mean by “social history”? The first point to make is that this volume will not be a sociology – that is to say, it has neither the sources nor the depth of material evidence from which to construct an account of society in the sort of rigorous and quantifiable detail to which we may be accustomed in reading contemporary sociological writing. Sociologists generally aim to analyze and explain specific social phenomena through the assembling and statistical analysis of various types of data in order to establish an overall picture of the ways in which different forms of social and cultural practice are linked to create what can be understood as a coherent and overarching system. In fact, sociology – the “science of society” – has fragmented into a number of linked specialist sub-disciplines, such as the sociologies of knowledge, of religion, of art; or of particular forms of social life – sociologies of bureaucracy, of education, of the military, as well as rural, urban, industrial, or political sociology; quite apart from the sociologies of language, or criminology, or the law. Individual chapters may well draw on some of these traditions and specialist areas, but the sort of evidence at our disposal renders a really sociological approach both hazardous and difficult. This social history will therefore be an examination of key facets of Byzantine society in an effort to see what role or function they had, how they evolved

and why, and how they were perceived and understood by those involved in them directly or indirectly.

We ought therefore to consider what the term “society” suggests, a common-sense term, but one which hides as much as it reveals. “Society” is one of the vaguest and most general terms in our vocabulary, and can be used to refer to almost anything from a group of hunter gatherers to a modern industrial state. In social anthropology the term tends to refer at the most basic level to a group which reproduces itself physically and culturally, sharing a body of customs and traditions about their social relationships, applying social sanctions of varying sorts to maintain the social order, and having also a relationship to the land across which or from which they derive sustenance, even if seasonally determined. Social system is an alternative that has also been used in order to emphasize the systemic nature of the relationships and the way they function to maintain the group, however extensive, as well as the better to understand what happens when things go wrong and the system breaks down. The term “social formation,” which is frequently used in historical materialist/Marxist discussion, suffers equally from a certain ambiguity in usage. On the one hand, it refers to ideal-typical sets of social-economic relationship dominated by specific modes of production, such as “feudal” or “capitalist” social formations; on the other, it is used to refer to specific historical societies, for example, the Byzantine or late Roman or colonial Indian social formations. Although some have argued that “social formation” is more analytically useful than “society” because it has both a more open-ended significance and because it implies in the word “formation” a complex of constituent elements, in the end the difference is one of semantics and I do not think that one is necessarily inferior to the other – both describe sets of social (and economic and cultural and political) relations together with the cultural and institutional contexts necessary to their material and ideological reproduction, and it seems to me that as long as this is borne in mind, there is little to choose between them. Indeed, as long as we define our terms and ensure that their functional value is made explicit, we can avoid pointless debates over semantics.⁸ In particular, any of these terms *should* imply not only complexity of structure – the *dialectical* or *emergent* nature of human social praxis is clearly central here – but also fluidity and short-term evolution and transformation. Both social formation and society imply socially embedded human activity and therefore process, change, transformation, and so on.

Societies or social systems have been classified under various headings, from those described in the nineteenth century as primitive, as opposed to modern, to those referred to as non-literate or literate. In Durkheim we find a distinction drawn between segmented and organic structures, where the first category describes societies in which the parts are merely a range of loosely connected or juxtaposed replicas of one another, and the second the societies which display complex differentiation, with organic relationships between the different elements. There are others, but the

⁸ Compare Godelier 1973: 62–9, on the “socio-economic formation.”

point is that they are all functional, that is, they serve a heuristic purpose in the terms of whichever debate or discussion generates them, intended to highlight and clarify particular types of relationship or institutional arrangement. In the end, a single universal definition is rather pointless, since each contributor to a given debate about a specific society will have their own particular questions to ask and their own research agenda. In this respect, therefore, we should not expect any contributor to this volume to do more than define the terms of their own set of questions and clarify the grounds on which they found their description and their analysis.

Any of the terms “society,” or “social formation,” conceal as much as they reveal, of course. It is clearly not possible to separate a social system or the individuals who constitute that system from the beliefs and the conceptual world which they inhabit and contribute to reproducing generation by generation, nor from the physical, material and aesthetic world that they inhabit. Yet in writing contributions for a social history of Byzantium, we inevitably engage with an attempt to take particular areas and treat them from the perspective of a specific set of questions, so that some injustice is done to the seamless reality of the cultural system as a whole. This introductory chapter is intended to remind the reader that the often very different approaches adopted by the contributors to the volume, on the one hand, and the artificial division of the subject “Byzantine society” into a number of separate topics, is simply a convenient heuristic: the overlaps and shared social and cultural spaces as well as the multiple functions of much social practice should remind us that we are, in the end, dealing with a whole which is far greater than the sum of the analytical parts, but which also has marginal areas which are as much part of Byzantine society as they may also be parts of, or associated with, a neighboring culture.

This is an important point, because the concept as well as the term “society” or “social system” is problematic from another point of view. It has been remarked that it can mislead us into thinking that a particular society is somehow entirely distinct from, separated from, the other societies around it.⁹ But this cannot be the case throughout most of history. To start with, even if there are, for example, religious-ideological boundaries, the people of different creeds on either side will inevitably have certain things in common, such as agrarian practices and domestic economic organization, for example, at least in situations where climate and seasonal factors are common to both. Thus Byzantine peasants in the Balkans in the eighth and ninth centuries were hardly very different in these respects from their Bulgar and Slav neighbors, nor can Byzantine peasants in southern or eastern Asia Minor have differed greatly in the seasonal practices which dominated their

⁹ For an eloquent statement of why this cannot be the case, with an alternative approach, see Mann 1986: 1–33. While I do not accept Mann’s four-part model of social power (ideological, economic, military, and political), each bearing equal constitutive value, his analysis and discussion nevertheless throws into high relief some of the problems faced by those who wish to pursue a historical sociology.

agrarian existences from similar communities on the other side of the political divide. Yet at a different level there were real and obvious differences – in habits of worship, in language and perhaps dress, the vocabulary and expression, and the instrumental value attributed to different positions within a set of kinship relations, and so forth. In other words, there are multiple, layered overlaps which cross over the political, religious, or linguistic divisions which we commonly identify as marking the boundaries of a given society, and we need to bear this in mind, especially when discussing, for example, such topics as the changing impact of religion on marriage, on local and customary legal practice, the seasonal patterns of social and economic life, and so forth. Such overlaps can play a role in perceptions, too – the well-known commonalities which are represented in the epic of Digenis Akrites between the Roman and Arab frontier lords, for example, in respect of notions of honor and social status, which set them apart from the more urbane and court-orientated worlds of Constantinople or Aleppo or Damascus or Baghdad.¹⁰

What we refer to as “Byzantine society,” therefore, must necessarily be understood in its widest sense, and as just one of a number of social systems which overlapped and intersected at various points, not just in terms of physical space – around the edges, so to speak – but also in terms of social practice, household organization, and so forth. Eastern Roman or Byzantine society grew up out of the late Roman world just as did the societies around it, in particular the social worlds of Italy and the Balkans and the Near and Middle East, and in consequence had evolved together, shared certain characteristics but diverged in many others, perceived itself as very different yet at the same time functioned in many respects in much the same way, and in which the relationship between human beings and their physical environment represented a constant, determining the patterns and seasonality of life from bottom to top.

The chapters in this volume will examine some of these facets, each selected because of its importance in helping make sense of the whole. Byzantines had an idea, a concept, of their world, although there were differences between different social and cultural groups as to what this entailed and how it was understood, so that a discussion of Byzantine perceptions of their world and how they represented it to themselves and to others is fundamental. Self-image is crucial to understanding how a social system works, because the ideas presented both for internal consumption as well as to the outside world offer invaluable insights into how people thought their world worked. Whether this relates to the attitudes of a particular social group and its values, or the ideas reflected in imperial and state propaganda intended to impress the outside world, they reflect and can to some extent explain how people behaved in their world and in accordance with the “rules” of society, implicit or explicit. Yet breaking through the surface presentation of social relationships to see what lies behind them is a complicated task, since it requires historians to do two things. First, they must be familiar enough with the language of the culture under examination and have some idea of the ways in which terms and vocabulary serve

¹⁰ See, for example, Magdalino 1989 and Pertusi 1971.

to reference a set of cultural codes which relates the writer to their own educational and literary/cultural tradition and the cultural capital in which they are invested, but which also permits them to express ideas about their world using a vocabulary very different from our own. Where we casually throw in terms drawn from day-to-day business or economic language to talk about politics, for example, Byzantines used the language and metaphors of the Fathers of the Church or the Old and New testaments or classical literature, although there were also plenty of “economic” terms that could be employed for specific purposes. Second, and following from this, historians need to be sensitive to the cultural logic of the society in question, to the fact that its understanding of itself and how it works will produce results in terms of social action which may not appear, or even be, either logical or productive to our way of thinking. Contributions dealing with representation and identity, for example, crucial components of the ways in which the literary and artistic culture of the Byzantine world functioned and has made an impression on outsiders, including ourselves, need to take this into account from the start.

This point might in turn lead to a discussion of how we can approach or apprehend the past, how we as historians both construct a version of a past through the generation of narratives built around various categories of evidence, on the one hand, and on the other how we validate different types of knowledge and how we permit ourselves to know something outside our own experiences and our own world. In short, what is the epistemological framework through which we construct knowledge as such, about anything? There is here an enormously complex debate, to which we cannot begin to do justice in this context, but which has occupied historians for generations. And although it rarely impinges on our own empirical practice as scholars of Byzantine society and culture, it is nevertheless relevant and, if our work is to be useful outside the confines of our own subjects, we ignore it at our peril.¹¹

We cannot, of course, get inside the minds of long-dead members of a historical society, no more in fact than we can get into the minds of our contemporaries. But grappling with the thought-world of a past culture is inevitably one of the things we have to try to do if we are to understand why things happened the way and at the time they did. How can we deal with the issue of the relationship between thinking and doing, between belief and praxis, for example? Historical data cannot offer the same types of answer as that available to sociology and psychology, but nevertheless general theories of mind and of cognition derived from these disciplines can be applied to the product of past human consciousness, as preserved in historical documents, for example, whether written sources or other types of artifact. The context may have changed, but the essentially cultural nature of human cognitive activity remains. One useful approach to the thought-world, the *mentalité*, of the Byzantine world, is to conceptualize it as a “symbolic universe” (perhaps equivalent to “Weltanschauung”), meaning the totality of cultural

¹¹ For some orientation, see Haldon 1984–5; 1986; 2002.

knowledge (both implicit knowledge as well as explicit knowledge)¹² and practice in a society or social formation, within which and through which regular everyday life is carried on. While the relationship between consciousness and practice must be understood as a dialectic through which individuals receive their subjective awareness of self and their personal environment, it also provides them with the conceptual apparatus through which they can in turn express what they know about the world, act back upon it, and yet at the same time sets limits to what they can know and how they can know, limits within which what we might call “the culturally possible” can be thought.

But by the same token a symbolic universe is itself the product of social practice, through which it is continuously reproduced. The activities carried on by individuals actively engaged in socially reproducing themselves – a technical way of saying “living out their daily routines” – and hence in reproducing the social relations of production and reproduction of their particular cultural system, along with its roles and social institutions, have the material cultural effect of reproducing the structural forms within which the same individuals are inscribed. This is for me also a useful way of thinking about the ways in which beliefs and ideas contribute to the make-up of individuals, because it retains a stronger emphasis on the individual’s constitutive function in a social-cultural context, and it at the same time permits us to see how shifts in perceptions, and in consequence of the way people act, might engender in turn broader shifts in social relationships, and thus bring about historical change.¹³

One way of getting at how people thought about their world and what they thought made things tick, or not, is to look at what socio-linguists call personal and collective narrative. Narrative in this sense is seen as a crucial element in the construction of social realities – perceived relationships and structures – within which humans socially reproduce themselves. Narrative, indeed, can be said to provide the link between consciousness and practice. By “narrative” is meant simply a series of linked clauses or statements with an evaluative – and therefore structuring – element, arranged in time to create a series of causally sequential events. Both the originating function of the narrative – provided by the context which provides the stimulus to produce the narrative – and the personal nature of its content affect its general coherence, so that an evaluative or interpretative aspect is a fundamental feature.¹⁴ The same basic definition can be extended to group or collective narratives, that is to say, to those narrative forms that express the experiences and perceptions of individuals in their aspect as members of a specific group. Although

¹² For this important distinction, see Sperber 1975.

¹³ I borrow “symbolic universe” from Berger and Luckmann 1967, esp. 110ff. (deriving in turn from Durkheim) and Schütz 1960. The phenomenology of Schütz and Berger and Luckmann, and the symbolic interactionism of G. H. Mead, seem to me to make good partners in the generation of a realist materialist theorization of the relationship between consciousness and practice, as the arguments of Goff 1980 might suggest.

¹⁴ See in particular Labov and Waletzky 1967: 12–44.

there is evidently a qualitative shift in the composition and effectivity of such collective narratives, their formal properties remain the same.¹⁵

Narratives are fictions because they are *reconstructions* of experience, they organize experience and memory temporally through language and in the process elaborate a relationship between the narrator and the events narrated.¹⁶ Thus narratives work essentially as a means of identifying the individual self within a social and cultural context, of providing a reality – they answer the question “who am I?”. As such, they also act as patterns for social action – future planning based on past experience. The symbolic universe is therefore the aggregate of social institutions and the beliefs and concepts associated with them, of the scripts and roles and narratives determining how people live out their relationships to the world around them. But narratives are always re-constructions of experience, they involve evaluation, and therefore there inheres within them the potential for change, for shifts in understanding roles and relationships and thus, crucially, for shifts in social practice. A change in the elements making up a narrative will entail a change in evaluation, and consequently a change in perceptions of the relationship between self (or group) and the world. And depending upon the order of magnitude of change in these elements, such changes can take any form, from the re-assessment of a relationship to an individual or an activity – and thus individualized and localized – to a re-assessment by a whole collectivity or group of their position in relation to other groups or individuals, institutions, sets of beliefs, and so forth. The narrative representation of “what has happened” is constructed within a cultural context which relies upon the stability of certain key symbolic elements and metaphors – institutions, situations, assumptions, and so forth. If these are removed or shaken the cohesion of the narrative is interrupted – it can no longer be constructed within the terms previously given, which must now be re-arranged to account for the dissonance or mismatch. And if we want to find the answer to the question “why did people change their way of doing things at this moment?,” then looking at their own narratives of the world and their place in it – assuming that such evidence exists, naturally – is a good place to start.

Narratives exist and function at multiple levels. There are narratives of personal identity which situate an individual in their kin and family context, or professional life, or social life – they intersect in the individual but they are available as a means of identifying and reinforcing identity for each of the roles within the bundle of roles each individual represents. Collective narratives similarly function to provide members of a group, however identified (by social and economic situation, by function, by creed, by race or by language, for example, to name but a few possibilities)

¹⁵ I leave to one side the use of the term “narrative” to refer to the imposition of form on the past, as argued by the “narrativist” tradition, most clearly by White 1978, even though the common element – evaluation through language and the construction of a specific “story” – is apparent. See Topolski 1981; and Mandelbaum 1980.

¹⁶ For narrative as organizing experience and perceptions, see Garfinkel 1967; Sperber 1975: 85–149; Goff 1980: 112–14.

with their own common markers in respect of behavior and expected attitudes.¹⁷ And there are metanarratives, political-ideological systems, for example, which offer larger-scale identities to those involved in them. But each of these can be disrupted by shifts in their conditions of existence, and this brings with it the potential for an imbalance which challenges peoples' assumptions and the predictable roles and patterns of their daily lives.

In such situations, there is generally a search to re-establish equilibrium: in order to maintain a sense of self – a secure identity – based on older narratives, for example, in order to avoid a situation of social *anomie*, to use Durkheim's concept,¹⁸ a re-ordering of the relevant narrative elements may be required, and such a re-ordering may take one of several forms. It might include action aimed at redressing the balance of elements considered affected; a re-evaluation of the self – or the group – in the structure of the narrative as a whole; or a minor re-adjustment of certain elements, intended to preserve the same general order of things. And in historically observable terms, this might be reflected or represented by changes in patterns of behavior of individuals or collectivities, expressed publicly through "political" means or violence, for example, although other possibilities also exist. Social action in this model is thus construed as culturally available re-action, based on personal and group narrative reconstructions of observed or perceived events and on feelings, that is to say, on the socially determined and culturally situated responses of individuals to shifts in any of the elements which make up their perceived or experienced world order. The emphasis on culturally situated is important, since the potential for action is inscribed within a specific set of social relations of production and reproduction.¹⁹ The facility of any individual to evaluate and to re-evaluate, to act and to react, is thus understood as embedded within, and as a consequence limited or circumscribed by, these relationships, which represent at once both the social-economic and the cultural instances of the social formation.

One way of elucidating the causal relationship between perception, reaction, and result, in consequence, is to see historical change – as in part at least the sum of actors' responses to a given set of circumstances – as representing the working out, through the medium of personal and collective narrative reconstruction rooted in the symbolic universe of a particular social and cultural formation, of perceptions and experiences of other changes within society, experiences which could not be understood or accommodated within the established narrative framework, and which demanded the relocation of certain elements. It seems to me that this offers a very specific link between agency and structure, and between structure and change, which is, after all, what the historian seeks to elucidate.

An important part of any social history is to examine the rules and codes that a society or culture generates to regulate relationships within and between groups

¹⁷ Aksu-Koç 1996.

¹⁸ Durkheim 1933.

¹⁹ By "social reproduction" I mean activities and practices which contribute to the constant renewal and regeneration of social relationships and thus the socio-cultural system as a whole.

and individuals, and the contingent roles and identities through which such codes are realized and implemented – or challenged. All social systems generate codes of conduct and systems of rules, however simple they might be, to govern social relationships, and these generally involve the exercise of some form of power, either directly and coercively or abstractly, through inherited patterns of managing certain events or structures. They also usually involve ways of ensuring both continuity and the maintenance of the social and cultural order, but they are as subject to change and modification over time as any other forms of human behavior. Patterns of inheritance, for example, differentiated Byzantine society sharply from medieval western European practice, resulting in a very different configuration of the social élite in the two regions, with important consequences for their cultural, economic, and political roles. Such rules exist both explicitly – in stated moral or legal codes, for example, which were written down and could be consulted, discussed, or amended; and in the form of social institutions such as the family and the kinship structures it embodies, on the one hand, or of codes of conduct for particular types of social relationship, such as those between soldiers and their officers, for example, or between people of different social status. The family is an especially important aspect, since it is primarily through the family and its attendant structures, including patterns for the transmission of property, control of reproduction, i.e. women, and the degrees of consanguinity which are permitted, that the basic building-blocks of social organization and culture are organized. Families are essentially groups of individuals united by the ties of marriage, blood, and/or adoption. The basic family unit, or nuclear family – husband, wife, and immature children – is more usually incorporated within or subordinated to a larger composite familial structure, including more than two generations, for example, which might include the parents of the husband or, less commonly, the wife, and referred to as an extended family. In Byzantine society it is clear that both forms co-existed, and that social and cultural context was an important factor in determining family structure.

But the family is but one element in a network of kinship relationships which played a crucial role in the ways in which Byzantines perceived their society and their role within it. Kinship is a social relationship based on real, putative, or fictive consanguinity, and plays a key role in respect of political, economic, and cultural identities and solidarities, to the extent that it directly impacts on the ways in which the state functioned, wealth was extracted, distributed, and consumed – a good example of this can be seen in Cheynet's exemplary analysis of the tensions and conflicts within and between different elements of the Byzantine social élite in the period from the tenth to the twelfth century, conflicts which directly determined the ways in which the state functioned, but which were at the same time deeply affected by issues of kin and family politics and rivalries.²⁰ In this respect Byzantine society is no different from other pre-industrial social systems, but naturally the specific modalities of kinship relations, family structure and the symbolic universe

²⁰ Cheynet 1990.

of which they were seen as fundamental elements are what concern us here, because it is through these historically and culturally specific forms that Byzantine society is given its particular color and texture. And it is likewise through these forms that Byzantines engaged with their world and acted upon it.

Understanding the family and kinship is, therefore, essential to understanding society as a whole, and this has necessarily to be accompanied by a discussion of the ways in which the law and the legal system, and the establishment of norms for dealing with the transmission of property, conflict situations, the regulation of public and private social relationships, and so forth, affected Byzantine society and were in turn affected by shifts and changes in the moral world, in particular as Byzantine Christianity and the church increased their influence over important elements of Roman law, especially those associated with marriage and inheritance. Yet this immediately brings with it a multiplicity of problems, if only because the generally accepted modern understanding of terms such as “law” and “legislation” tended in a medieval context to have somewhat, and often very, different significance. Imperial legislation aimed at both specific and generalizable decisions arising from particular moments, and at the production of general prescriptions about temporally and geographically specific issues. The *practice* of law, on the other hand – the process through which justice was achieved for the parties involved in litigation, for example – both rested on Roman tradition but was at the same time an intensely moral process, in which the concept of justice was itself determined by the framework of values generated and maintained by the symbolic universe. Indeed, the fact that the emperor was and always remained the final arbiter at all levels of decision-making and legal appeal has been seen as an illustration of the fragility of a normative legal system in the modern sense of the term, and of the fact that Roman law served largely as a palette from which “norms” could be made and unmade entirely in response to the pragmatic demands of either politics or contemporary morality, or both.²¹ In this respect, too, understanding the church as both an economic and a moral political force is an essential part of the story. The church was the formal, public representative of a specifically Byzantine world-view and thus wielded immeasurable influence ideologically as well as politically. But quite apart from the role of canon law in reflecting and moulding Byzantine views of the world and how it was understood (as well as the tension between secular Roman law and canon law), the social origins of the senior as well as lesser clergy also constitute a focal point for our approach, not only because they tell us about the ways in which social mobility worked through particular channels, but also because they can inform us about the ways in which social power was exercised. The church, through its bishops and their agents, was a major landlord, and the organization of its lands and the ways it spent its income can tell us about the economic structure of large estates, landlord–tenant relationships, and the exercise of social power more generally, quite apart from the issues associated with the church’s ideological power and authority.

²¹ See Fögen 1987; and Simon 1973; 1976: 102–16.

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of Byzantine history, perhaps given undue emphasis because conflict is frequently what interested the contemporary historians, chroniclers, and other commentators. Conflict at court, conflict between elite families and clans, disagreements and tensions or conflict between emperors and patriarchs, conflict between individuals before a court, conflict between provincial commanders and their armies, all conflict revolved around a struggle for power and influence, whether at court and over policy, over economic resources in the provinces, or over imperial religious policy and the perceptions ordinary people had about it. Power will, thus, be a crucial element in much of the discussion, and definitions of power, or how the notion might best be conceptualized, are therefore of central importance. Power has two aspects – the ways in which it could be wielded, and the ways in which it was represented and portrayed by those who wielded it or wished to give that impression. In much contemporary social history debate, power is generally understood as social power, as a generalized means to specific ends. Power is thus control over a variety of types of resource (wealth, people, knowledge), these resources then depending upon the areas of social life in which such ends are to be attained. Power can thus be exercised at a variety of levels – from the most personal (the exercise of power by one individual over another based on resources such as knowledge or the possibility of physical coercion) to the most public (political-military power exercised through authority over armies, police forces, food supplies, and so on). But in all these contexts, the exercise of power tends towards an end (even if, in the example of personal physical coercion, bullying, that end is psychological gratification).

From one perspective, then, “power” is the political and psychological expression of economic dominance (since resources are, in the end, an essentially economic category), although this element may not necessarily be obvious either to the modern commentator nor clearly be conceptualized as such by those who wield it – social relationships are generally represented in an ideological form that has no obvious single economic point of reference. Power is a product of the combination and articulation of human psychology, cultural forms, and economic context. And while it may be exercised in a relative autonomy from other structures in respect of its immediate *effects*, it does not spring out of nothing. Power, coercion, and ideology are forms or expressions of *praxis*, that is to say, of the socially determined way people in different contexts in a culture do things. They are modes through which particular sets of relationships can be maintained and reproduced. Power is central to social theory, but the struggle for, attainment, and exercise of power is about resources, and while it must by definition be understood as a reflection of the economics of society, it must also be seen as something that can be realized or implemented at the level of cultural and psychological resources.²²

Power, kinship structures, and the family, beliefs and their relationship to social praxis, systems of representation and identities, these are all fundamental aspects of our approach to the ways in which a society functions, how it regenerates itself

²² See Mann 1986: 6; Foucault 1979: 81ff.

generation after generation, and how it changes. But apart from these specific issues, there are broader social-historical questions which we might wish to ask, in order to situate Byzantium in its wider context. Answers to the question, “what sort of society was Byzantium at such-and-such a period?” (because it clearly changed and evolved over time, so that a single descriptive category may well not suffice), can really only be given once we have carried out the more detailed analysis of all these different facets, and many others. Yet there has been a long debate of a comparativist nature about how to characterize Byzantine society, a debate which in many ways has fallen into abeyance, but which needs perhaps to be revived if “Byzantium” is to be understood in the context of the history of European and Near Eastern societies over the period from 500 CE to 1453. Partly I would argue that this is necessary to avoid compartmentalizing Byzantium and closing it off from fruitful comparison with neighboring social and cultural systems – at one level in particular, that of the gendering of social roles and the unspoken assumptions that such a process reflects, the Roman or Byzantine world cannot be taken on its own, it must, in the end, be part of a larger and broader picture of the ways in which biology, culture, and social praxis interact across many cultural systems.²³ In addition, since we have already noted that no society exists in splendid isolation, looking for features which it has in common with, as well as which differentiate it from, neighboring societies is a useful, indeed essential, exercise in helping us understand “what makes Byzantine society tick.” A few words on earlier more traditional comparativist debates – carried on almost exclusively on the terrain of social wealth, political-ideological power, and political systems – might therefore be interesting and useful in this respect.

Byzantine society and state have received remarkably little attention from either comparative historians or state theorists, certainly when compared with the treatment afforded Rome, out of which Byzantium evolved. This situation seems to me to reflect the fact that historians and specialists of the Byzantine world have themselves been very reluctant to generalize from their work or to draw broader conclusions within a comparative context, so that their subject has remained fairly difficult of access to the non-specialist. The lack of synthesizing works by specialists in the field, which would put Byzantium into a longer-term comparative perspective, means that outsiders have tended, and still tend, to pass it over with little or no comment. Work by scholars such as Peter Brown and Alexander Kazhdan on aspects of the social-cultural history of the late Roman, Byzantine, and western medieval worlds,²⁴ by Chris Wickham on the evolution of society and economy across the European and Mediterranean worlds after the fifth century CE, or Alan Harvey and Michel Kaplan on the agrarian economics of Byzantium in their wider context, have begun to address the issues from a broader, comparative perspective.²⁵ But those working from such a broad standpoint have only recently begun, and mostly fairly superficially, to integrate the Byzantine world into their syntheses. A

²³ See Liz James’ chapter, below.

²⁴ Brown 1971; 1981; Kazhdan 1974.

²⁵ Wickham 2005; Kaplan 1992; Harvey 1989.

recent exception is the attempt to place Byzantine culture in a comparative and “civilizational” context as part of a critique of work on the “Byzantine” background to Balkan and eastern European history (Arnason 2000). But the first volume of Michael Mann’s admirable survey, *The Sources of Social Power* (1986), mentions Byzantium only briefly and problematically; the second volume of Runciman’s *A Treatise on Social Theory* (1989) is just as brief, although better in respect of the conclusions it draws. Most other comparativist surveys – for example, Tainter’s *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (1988) – barely pay lip-service to the Byzantine case. Perry Anderson’s *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (1974) pays serious attention to the East Roman context, but his very able treatment is vitiated for today’s reader in part by the fact that since the time of writing in the early 70s, a number of important advances have been made in understanding how the East Roman state evolved. Anderson was also working within an Anglo-Marxist framework in which he wanted to retain traditional notions of “mode of production,” and demonstrate that whereas western feudalism was the result of a synthesis of slave and primitive-communal (“Germanic”) modes, no such synthesis took place in the East and Balkans because of the conservatism of the Eastern Roman state superstructure. I do not think this conclusion is altogether incorrect, but it needs to be expressed in different terms to be of heuristic value. The main difficulty is that the framework of the discussion, which tends towards an illustration of the uniqueness of western social-economic evolution, does not really contribute towards a discussion of exploitation and power-relationships, the more so since Anderson does not really give adequate space to the internal dynamism of Byzantine culture and political-economic development. In addition, most of these debates are vitiated still by a perspective that tends, even if unintentionally, to present medieval Eastern Roman culture as stagnant and fossilized, thus further inhibiting any possibility of seeing the dynamic structures that underlay the apparently slow rates of change evident in some of the sources. In fact, as soon as one takes the full range of source materials into account, and most particularly the now rapidly increasing volume of archaeological data, such views become manifestly untenable.

The one area where the question, “What sort of society was Byzantium?” did receive a great deal of attention was that of the debates over the concept “feudalism,” and whether or not Byzantine society can ever be described under this rubric. Feudalism has now, of course, become a highly problematic, indeed contentious, concept, and recent scholarship has tended to avoid the term altogether,²⁶ certainly when discussing the Byzantine state, a tendency with which most Byzantinists, including the present writer, would sympathize. But in the earlier debates, Byzantium came to represent for many the classic example of a social formation which failed conspicuously to develop “full” feudal relations of production in the medieval period. This attitude was in part to be ascribed to the nature of the definition of feudalism employed, which related quite specifically to the political structures and institutional forms of western European society in the High Middle Ages. Most

²⁶ See, for example, Reynolds 1994.

western Byzantinists (the vast majority of them not being Marxists), for example, refused to concede that Byzantine society was ever feudal; or that, if it was, then only at the very end of its long history, from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries on, and only as a result of western, that is to say, external, influence. In contrast, and using a political-economic definition of the concept, Soviet and East European historians had traditionally split into two opposing parties or camps: those who saw “feudal” relations already in the later Roman period (from the fifth century, but most clearly from the seventh); and those who found evidence for such relations only after the tenth and eleventh centuries. At a later stage, there was a move towards accepting elements of the “Western” critique, and to push the development of “full” feudal relations forward into the thirteenth century and after. The premises upon which both approaches were based is open to criticism.²⁷

For the Western historian of the Byzantine world, feudalism was defined chiefly in terms not of the economic relationships which underlay the forms of the political structures of surplus distribution and power, but to the types of political/legal structures themselves – structures of vassalage, enfeoffment, and so on, together with the supporting elements of dependent tenant or serf peasantries, and the fragmentation of judicial and political authority and powers. In other words, and logically enough, Byzantium cannot be considered feudal because its institutional and superstructural appearance never approximated to the appearance of western European feudalism in the tenth century and after. Non-Marxist Western Byzantinists who did favor a feudal stage were usually constrained to place its inception in the eleventh century, with the appearance of *pronoia*, whereby the state granted the revenue from certain taxes or dues in particular regions or districts, and for limited periods, to individuals in return for (predominantly) military service.²⁸ But once again, the crucial determining factor for a feudal order was the secondary institution of *pronoia*, one variation of the many forms of the redistribution of surplus wealth by the state (initially), rather than any (economic) relation of production, a point which is now generally recognized.²⁹

Now these two approaches – the “legal/institutional” approach of the non-Marxist tradition and the political-economic approach of historical materialism – were not necessarily mutually exclusive, at least in respect of the fact that they were intended functionally to address different sets of questions (although they certainly represent distinct analytical and descriptive strategies). But in practice each party to the debate tended (often for manifestly political-ideological reasons) to ignore the functional value and analytical point of the definition employed by the other.

²⁷ The classic western statement is Lemerle 1979: 89, 115. For the later Soviet position, see Khvostova 1980.

²⁸ An argument elaborated by Ostrogorsky 1954, and later followed and developed by others. For a brief summary of part of the debate, see Anderson 1974: 279ff. It is important to note, however, that Ostrogorsky’s thesis was the foundation upon which the ideas of a number of Soviet scholars on this theme came to be based.

²⁹ See Cheynet 2006: 28–30.

The result was that the discussion became, on the whole, one in which deliberate obfuscation, misunderstanding, and a plethora of alternative and usually mutually exclusive definitions and usages littered the pages of historical journals. More importantly, and further complicating the issues, Marxists of varying theoretical colors often, and unwittingly, attempted to describe and discuss “feudal” societies by combining both economic (Marxist) and institutional (non-Marxist) criteria, in a way which was generally both confusing and analytically of little value to any discussion which attempts to do more than merely describe medieval and early modern societies in isolation.

Soviet and East European historiography up to the mid-1980s, nominally at least Marxist in its theoretical underpinnings, concentrated largely on the question of when Byzantine social relations became feudalized, for example, and this inevitably involved problematizing the ways in which the state and its institutions intervened at different levels of the social and economic formation. The two traditional positions, which were evident from the late 1950s, were represented most readily in the work of two scholars, Štaermann and Syuzyumov. In spite of their differences, both implicitly included in their definition of feudal relations of production also institutional and political organizational forms, which rendered their discussion extremely problematic from the point of view of feudal social relations as representing an economic mode of production.

Štaermann presented in many ways a Soviet precursor of Anderson’s thesis, which it pre-dated by many years: namely, that “feudalism” in the west was the result of a synthesis of the Roman “slave mode of production” with the barbarian tribalism or primitive communalism of the Germanic invaders. In contrast, the Balkans and Anatolia moved directly from the slave mode to the feudal mode, without external stimulus, as the developing relations of landlord–tenant subordination were subsumed within the state’s fiscal apparatus, so that the taxes raised by the state can in effect be seen as a centralized form of feudal rent.³⁰ Syuzyumov, in contrast, argued that this position denied the concept of revolutionary change altogether, erecting in its place a notion of mechanical synthesis. At the same time he argued that it broadened the concept of the feudal mode to include virtually all forms of dependency and rent-extraction, and rendered it as a result too general to be of any analytical value. Syuzyumov’s view was that synthesis of a sort did occur in the west, but only at a much later date; while in the east the strength of the institutions of the ancient state, its ability to extract taxes, and the destruction of the large landholding elite from the seventh century on, delayed the development of feudal relations of production until, in the tenth century, a new class of landed magnates had arisen to challenge the state’s interests in respect of the surpluses generated by the agricultural population of the empire. But their rise was itself

³⁰ For an analysis and fruitful discussion of the conflicting and alternative definitions of the term “feudalism,” and the tendency of protagonists of both approaches to obfuscate the issue by failing to recognize the different functions of, and criteria underlying, these variations of usage, see Perlin 1985. For Štaermann’s view, see Štaermann 1975.

promoted by the “war economy” of the imperial state, which succumbed to feudalism chiefly because of the debilitating effects of constant warfare and the requirements of defense.³¹ In other words, Syuzyumov considered Byzantine society to have represented a stable combination of forces and relations of production, a combination destabilized by *external* forces.³²

Even from a historical materialist perspective, this seemed a barely defensible view, at least in the stark form in which it was expressed by Syuzyumov, if only because the absence of any analysis (or suggestion) of internal contradiction and class conflict, however defined, deprived the description of any dynamic element. In contrast, indeed, another then-Soviet scholar, Alexander Kazhdan, argued that it was precisely the internal contradictions of Byzantine society that explained its particular characteristics, a result of the impasse which he saw between developing “feudal” relations and the economic and ideological structures of the ancient centralized state.³³ Kazhdan also argued that, while neither “feudal” nor ancient relations of production were able to assert themselves fully until after the eleventh century (when he argued that feudalism finally became dominant), the taxes extracted by the ancient state did constitute already a form of “centralized feudal rent”.³⁴

It is worth noting, finally, that – with the exception of the more recent work of Khvostova referred to already – the majority of Soviet scholars came to agree that the seventh century marked the end of the ancient world and the accompanying slave mode of production; that there followed a long period of pre- or proto-“feudal” development (as outlined by Kazhdan, for example), succeeded from the eleventh or twelfth century by the full development of “feudal” relations of production. Within this schema, the debate then concentrated in the 1970s and 1980s on the question of whether or not tax was the equivalent of “centralized feudal rent”; on the quantitative relationship between independent peasant cultivators and dependent tenants (whether of the church, state, or private landlords); and on the process of erosion of independent peasant holdings and peasant communities subject directly to the fisc, in favor of the expansion of large estates and the gradual “enservment” of this formerly free peasantry.³⁵ All seemed agreed on the crucial role of the state in the development of Byzantine “feudalism,” especially its role in patronizing and promoting what became by the tenth and eleventh century the aristocracy. All were likewise in agreement on the state’s ability to hold back the expansion of aristocratic landholding in the provinces – less through conscious

³¹ Syuzyumov 1973a: 3–18.

³² Syuzyumov 1976.

³³ Kazhdan 1968: 263ff. But for a critique of the “prime mover” theories, which underlies this purely internalized model of change, see McLennan 1986.

³⁴ Kazhdan 1956; and 1960.

³⁵ These views are best summarized in the work of Litavrin 1977. See also the survey of Kurbatov and Lebedeva 1984, which emphasizes both the importance of slavery in late ancient production (up to the seventh century) and the dominance of feudal relations of production from the later eleventh century. See also Udal’cova and Osipova 1985.

policy-making, than through the inertia of the state's institutional apparatuses of fiscal and military administration.³⁶ The final position was, in many ways, not too distant from that espoused by Anderson in his own survey.³⁷

There is little point here in reviewing the vast Soviet and East European literature of the years before 1988/9 concerned with these issues, largely because, even if many of the questions it dealt with remain important, the approach espoused, the historical-theoretical base within which they were framed, and much of the vocabulary employed by both Western and Eastern medievalists – in particular, terms such as “feudal” and “feudalism” – have become largely redundant, insofar as an overly rigid and dogmatic interpretational framework inevitably constrained and distorted the ways in which the evidence could be understood and interpreted, and as historians opted to abandon terms associated with particular ways of thinking about the human past.

So is it worth engaging in such broad comparativist discussion at all? Historians – including those who contribute to this volume – will continue to disagree with one another over this issue, and each will have their own reasons for whichever view they espouse. My own answer to the question is positive, for I would argue that the best way to make Byzantium comprehensible and interesting to a broader group of scholars is to situate it in a wider world and try to see what similarities and differences it displays, and at what level. By the same token, placing it in such a context compels us to look at Byzantine society as a whole and to try to make the connections between the various parts which specialist studies, essential though they are, often ignore or miss, necessarily so in many cases in view of their priorities and focus of interest.

Similarities and differences are not to be located merely in the appearances a particular social system presents – rather we need to look below the surface to try to locate both the social functions of particular relationships or institutions (how they contribute to the workings of society) and to see how their structural role fits into a larger whole. Structures are always multifunctional or, better, multi-effectual. Descent, marriage, and inheritance, for example, are regulated in all societies by kinship (whether or not this is represented through a particular set of religious and ideological institutions); and in all societies the relationship between human beings and the supernatural is regulated and explicated by religion of a greater or lesser degree of theoretical sophistication. Yet not all societies are dominated by either kinship or religious systems; and the explicit function of these regulatory systems alone, where they represent the dominant mode of public and private discourse, cannot in itself explain this pre-eminence: another function must also be in play. And this function must be that of a social relation (or set of relations) of production, that is to say, a set of relationships that contributes directly to the maintenance of the economic relationships which determine the way in which different

³⁶ See again Litavrin 1971, for a survey of views, with literature. Note in particular Syuzumov 1973a.

³⁷ Anderson 1974: 273ff.

socio-economic groups are associated. In this light, the forces of production – tools, land, livestock, and labor power – are also a relation of production, since they entail both the means of production and the ways in which production is carried on. These can certainly be described as “economic” relationships, yet in the great majority of pre-industrial societies this process – the labor process – is assured and reproduced precisely through sets of practices and social-institutional arrangements which have no such transparently “economic” appearance: kinship arrangements, family structures and a gendered division of labor, caste and lineage attributions, age-sets, or legal statuses, all representing particular forms of political organization, all functioning as a particular set of social relations of production. In other words, the fundamental point to bear in mind is not what social relations appear to be – politics, kinship, religion – but what their role is; or, if this is too teleological a formulation, what their effect is in the totality of social relationships.

Each individual member of a social formation occupies a range of different positions on the grid of social praxis. In other words, each combination of social practices or roles has a different effect. Such positions all possess two qualities: they contribute causally to the maintenance and reproduction of a number of sets of relationships with other members of the society; and they furnish the actor/bearer with a set of perceptions of self and, therefore, of the world. As discussed above, therefore, they facilitate the construction of narratives through which the world and the individuals within it can be understood and made sense of. But it is the modern analyst who has to decide which combinations of social relations causally contribute towards the breakdown or transformation of certain social and cultural practices, and how new practices (and where possible, why particular practices only) evolve. It seems to me that it is ruptures within the pattern of social reproductive practice – within the social relations of production and distribution of surpluses – rather than in the extension or contraction of power relations or shifts in patterns of belief (which are themselves constrained by, but may determine the phenomenal form of, the relations of production, the degree of surplus appropriation and the nature of its distribution) which are determinant.

Understanding how change occurs and why is a complicated matter. Sociological theory, which is often very descriptive in its implications, is of far less help in this respect than historical approaches to change, of course, or indeed the theories evolved by comparative social theorists. W. G. Runciman has developed a particularly useful way of approaching this issue, primarily from a neo-Darwinian sociological perspective in which societies are conceived of as a series of overlapping and intersecting processes, in which social praxis and institutions and state organizations respond to changing conditions through what he refers to as the “competitive selection” of practices – where certain ways of doing things or organizing relationships fail to respond adequately to changes in their circumstances, to increased pressure from a particular quarter, for example, then they will fail – to be either abandoned completely or to be transformed and transmuted in such a way that they can respond functionally to the changed context. This seems to me a fruitful way of understanding changes we might find reflected in our sources – whether

changes in the way things are described or accounted for or perceived, changes in the ways people respond to certain situations, including changes in such areas as administrative structures and organization, or changes in the way things are made or constructed or represented. More recently, social theorists and social historians, following some literary theorists, have begun to employ a vocabulary and a range of approaches drawn from what has been dubbed “complexity theory” – the science of “non-linear dynamics” – drawn in their turn from mathematics (for example, chaos theory), computer science, and the physical sciences. As applied to social science contexts, those who have deployed elements of complexity theory challenge the principles of linear explanation and causation, and accept that complete knowledge of given phenomena is impossible to achieve. They place emphasis instead on the randomness of causation, in which the interplay of multiple human actors with one another, within behavior-determining social and institutional contexts, and with the physical environment, generates “emergent” social praxis. Societies are thus seen as complex adaptive systems, and emphasis is placed on the unpredictability of possible outcomes (or, in historical terms, of knowing all the causal elements leading to a particular outcome). While there has been some misuse or misconstrual of the original mathematical and computer science notions, this nevertheless does serve to emphasize both the causal pluralism of social interaction and warns against simplistic linearity in historical explanation.³⁸

To return to the big picture, therefore: where does Byzantine society and economy, and the Byzantine state and political system, fit into the broader picture of European and Near Eastern social, economic, and political structures? What features are found in common with which other neighboring systems, and what features distinguish it from them? These are big issues, with wide implications, and in many respects belong to a different sort of social history, a comparative sociology of political systems, perhaps.³⁹ But they are still relevant, even if they cannot be addressed here, and all I can hope to do for the present is hint at some appropriate directions for discussion, and not necessarily within the framework set out by the contributions to this volume. To begin with we should underline the fact that such an exercise is primarily one of orientation, which helps to home in on some important issues and offers an approach to the questions we wish to ask. We can distinguish, for example, at least three temporal frameworks across which the generation of states and social systems may be understood – for the sake of argument they can be referred to as macro-, meso-, and micro-levels – depending on the sort of development we are concerned with. While these are not equivalents for Braudel’s long, medium, and short *durées*, they are similar in concept. The macro-level is well illustrated in recent work by Diamond, who posits very long-term evolutionary

³⁸ See Runciman 1989; and for a helpful appreciation, see Wickham 1991. For some perspectives on aspects of the appropriation of “complexity theory” by literary and social theorists, see Bricmont and Sokal 1998 (a strongly critical appraisal) and Plotnisky 2002 (critical of Bricmont and Sokal). For general introductions, see Lewin 1999 and Byrne 1998.

³⁹ See Bang and Bayly 2003; Trigger 2003; Steinmetz 1999; Doyle 1986.

pathways determined primarily by ecological conditions. Once a particular set of conditions has stimulated a particular set of responses in terms of demography, reproductive patterns, nutritional systems, and technologies, then micro-level shifts and causal relationships are determined in their effects entirely within that set of constraints. In this framework, once the appropriation of surpluses from nature reach a certain level, and this is combined with a certain density of settlement and ability to transmit coercive force, then states and empires become possible. Ecological and evolutionary pathways then lead to further increases in density, surplus, extraction, and concentration of coercive force, or not. On these grounds, the geography, flora, and fauna of the fertile crescent at the end of the last ice age (ca. 11,000 BCE) conferred specific advantages that gave the human societies that evolved there a permanent advantage over other areas which were unable to offer those conditions.⁴⁰ At this level of generality, of course, the value of specific data in terms of historical-political systems is merely that it should not contradict the evolutionary pathways thus sketched out, and it is of little help in determining the causal relationships behind the rise and fall of specific imperial formations within ecological regions.

At the meso-level of explanation, however, we can grapple with issues pertaining to specific cultural and social systems, and the way a particular trajectory of development evolved. Here, we are confronted with particular but broadly located cultural systems set within specific geo-political contexts (for example, the fertile crescent, the Indus Valley, the Eurasian steppe, the central and western European zone, the mountain and plateau regions of central and south America), associated with particular types of political structure. Such differences tend to reflect fairly straightforwardly geographical catchment areas – contrast China with its extensive cereal and rice culture, extensive power-relationships, vast manpower resources, and consequent assumptions about use and availability of labor etc., and the micro-cosmic systems of the southern Balkans, Asia Minor, and the Mediterranean basin; or again the Indian sub-continent with its contiguous zones of relatively open plain, semi-arid coastal and plateau regions, mountain, and forest.

Finally, at the micro-level, we need to differentiate within such a broad frame of reference to describe and then analyze local variations (in both time and space) affected by specific divergences in social praxis and fortuitous shifts in social relations instigated by issues of resource-availability, competition, and access to centers of production and distribution, density and rate of reproduction of population groups, and the contingent patterns of kinship, control of resources, and allocation of power and authority which are the products of those highly specific conditions. Yet in order to arrive at an understanding not just of the fact of change, but of its trajectory, we need to locate a dynamic or motor, we need to highlight for functional reasons of explanation and clarification specific relationships, which can then be related back to the actual causal sequences and structures which affect the social formations in question. This is where the detailed and critical analysis of specific

⁴⁰ Diamond 1997.

social institutions such as those included in this volume play a fundamental role, for only through such careful interrogation and description can we hope to assess the workings of the culture we are concerned with. The social historian, in attempting to determine the factors underlying change, however limited in scope, will be drawn back to those elements which constrain, limit, promote, or dissolve economic, political, legal, and cultural forms and practices.

In looking at the elements which unite and which differentiate social and political systems, a good starting point is to try to locate the structural constraints which determined how a particular formation evolved – for example, the ways their state structures worked, and the means through which their social élites maintained control over resources, whether human or material. In the case of the Byzantine state, along with many other pre-industrial or pre-modern state systems, these constraints are generally very clearly to be seen in the relationship between the state centre and the élite(s) upon whom it depends to manage its territories, administer its fiscal systems and armies, and so on. State élites have a powerful vested interest in the maintenance of those institutional relationships to which they owe their position, and conflict or tensions over the distribution of resources both within dominant élites, and between them and other elements in society, provide us with at least one dynamic element through which institutional and organizational change occurs, to the advantage of one group or another. And all pre-modern state formations share one particular characteristic that serves to differentiate them from simpler traditional societies or from modern industrial societies. This characteristic is the *direct* nature of *primary* surplus appropriation by the state and those acting on its behalf (through “tribute,” that is to say, taxation and other means of appropriating resources), and the results for the ways in which resources are then distributed and consumed – the “mode of surplus distribution” – which this brings with it.

First, the relationship between the ruler or ruling élite and those who actually appropriate surplus on their behalf always represents a source of tension or competition, if not conflict – other factors will determine the degree to which conflict actually takes place, if at all. In direct contrast with modern states grounded in capitalist economic relations, tributary state centers – courts, governments, or whatever – function *at the same level* of primary appropriation as their social-political élites, directly appropriating resources or social wealth through their access to various forms of non-economic coercion.⁴¹ Both thereby affect also the rate of exploitation and the conditions of resource creation among the peasant and/or pastoral economies they dominate. Second, in the case of such a state, therefore – a “tributary” state, in the terms of current debates – its power to extract resources in the form of tax/tribute is contingent upon its power to limit the economic and political strength of other competing social-economic groups, but more particularly

⁴¹ That is to say, their access to coercive pressure based ultimately on force or compulsion (whether enshrined in law, tradition, and custom, relationships of patronage, and so forth), as opposed to the economics of the commodified labor market.

other fractions of the dominant élite itself, upon whom it may also have come to depend for the carrying out of just such extractive functions. In pre-modern (i.e. pre-capitalist) economically differentiated societies dominated by such “tributary” production relations, the very existence of states thus means that the relations of surplus distribution are inherently fields for potential conflict, since the contradiction implicit in the institutional arrangements for resource distribution and consumption – essentially, between the state and the agents it must necessarily employ as intermediaries – cannot be avoided. In contrast, modern states only rarely come into direct conflict with the groups and individuals through whom capital is invested and generated, chiefly because these two elements clearly depend upon each other. Shifts in this relationship can be clarified through cyclical changes in the relative strengths of the two in time and space.⁴²

In contrast, tributary rulers and elites compete directly for control over the means of production, and hence the material basis for their autonomy, to the extent that one side may attempt (and even temporarily succeed) in destroying or so weakening the other that no further opposition is forthcoming. But in neither case does this involve a shift in the basic economic structure of society. What does change is the identity of those with the power to coerce. It is the *political structures and relationships through which surplus wealth is redistributed* which change. This has been brought out very clearly in a recent discussion of the evolution of tax in western medieval Europe up to the early thirteenth century.⁴³ In the case of Byzantium, it is also very apparent that the tensions which evolved between the center – or whichever group or faction controlled it – and those elements of the social-economic élite outside it, played an absolutely fundamental role in inflecting the politics and policies of the empire throughout its history; while the conflicts between competing elements of the élite likewise played a determining role. These are not the only key aspects, but they are central enough to provide some essential

⁴² In other words, in modern societies, in which capitalist economic relations dominate, tax is imposed upon, and is secondary to, the actual process of surplus appropriation – tax represents the chief mode of surplus *redistribution* available to states. In pre-capitalist, economically differentiated social formations (by which is meant socio-economic systems in which social groups can be distinguished on the basis of their access to and control over resources in land and people), not dominated by slavery and vestiges of any more communal or kin-based mode of surplus production and appropriation, tax and rent are the main forms of *surplus appropriation* – they represent the direct extraction of resources, whereas the distribution of such resources is achieved through secondary means associated with the method of direct appropriation.

⁴³ The ways in which feudal landlords could intervene directly in the production process, redefining the amount of surplus demanded and consequently affecting both the amount of labor time invested by the producers and the amount remaining to them as subsistence and as marketable or exchangeable surplus, has been well analyzed in Kula 1976. I would contend that tributary states act in just the same way, making the incidence of taxation (whether in kind, cash or labor, or all of these) a fundamental element in the rate of exploitation of the producing population. For a discussion of the relationship between modern states and their elites: Mandel 1968: 310–1, 498ff. On medieval states’ taxation, see Wickham 1997: 25–42.

clues as to how society worked and changed. A discussion of élites and their relationship to the state is, in consequence, an essential aspect of a social history.

Looking at such general traits as the economic relationship between center and élites is just one way of expanding the basis for comparative discussion about – in this case – Byzantium, because it enables us to construct models of state formations or social-economic systems which can then help in asking questions about other cultural and social systems and states. It encourages us to look behind the institutional and political forms that each society presents through its particular symbolic universe, and to locate explanations of change that incorporate both the general, or systemic, and the particular, or culture-specific. But there are other ways of approaching the issues, and while most of the chapters in this volume will take very specific features as the subject for their discussion, we should not forget that each of these elements is but one part of a greater whole, which has structural similarities as well as differences with neighboring or comparable social-political systems, and which can thus be drawn on, depending on the questions asked and the answers desired, to elucidate a wider set of issues about human social evolution and organization.

A social history of Byzantium, then, would appear to have two tasks. It should aim to elucidate specific social institutions – by which I mean social relationships and the practices associated with them, identities and roles and the assumptions determining their status and function, as well as “public” institutions of state and government – both in their structural contexts and diachronically, as they evolve and change. But at the same time it should try to situate such institutions in the whole of which they are part, to fit them together and try to understand the relationships of cause and effect which exist between them, in an effort not just to describe Byzantine society, but also to explain how it functioned and why it changed. This volume will deal chiefly with the first of these tasks, and we will be looking at the very specific institutional arrangements, values, and relationships which our documentary sources allow us a glimpse of. But it is only the first step in a much larger process, intended as much to ask questions as to answer them. If it serves as a starting point for discussion, then the contributors will be well rewarded for their work.

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2

MEN, WOMEN, EUNUCHS: GENDER, SEX, AND POWER

Liz James

Alexander Kazhdan's *People and Power in Byzantium. An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* was one of the first places where the work of this distinguished Russian scholar on the social history of Byzantium became available in English.¹ Kazhdan's sociological approach aimed to set *homo byzantinus* into his world and to explore his distinctiveness. It was a considerable departure from previous narrative and political histories of Byzantium. However, in 1982, *homo byzantinus*, "Byzantine man," meant just that: the male in Byzantine society; *femina byzantina* (or "woman," as she actually appears) gained six entries in Kazhdan's index. *People and Power* in fact indicated *men and male power*. But Kazhdan was not alone in taking "man" to stand for both "men" and "women" and for failing to appreciate that social distinctions needed to be drawn much more closely, that the life of a male peasant was not automatically the same as that of a female peasant, just as a male emperor and a female empress were not the same.² Nor was he the only one to see power as essentially a male preserve, defined in ways that meant it remained wielded and contested by emperors, aristocrats, soldiers, clergy, and a range of other men.

Since 1982 (and even before), work on medieval and Byzantine women has caused Kazhdan's vision of Byzantine society, characterized by its emphasis on society and class, to be developed and refined through gender-nuanced approaches to both "people" and "power."³ Now not only can we see class as a significant feature in Byzantine society but also gender as equally fundamental to the ways in which Byzantine society operated.

¹ Kazhdan and Constable 1982.

² One of the earliest criticisms of the 1991 *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, for example, was of the lack of women in it.

³ See Bennett 1989 and 1993, Gilchrist 1999, and Mosher Stuard 1992, for a discussion of these processes in history and again in medieval history.

WOMEN: LIFE HISTORIES

Early feminist studies in the 1970s established that the proper business of research into women was women, both individually and collectively, as far as their lives could be recovered. This derived in part from the agenda of political feminism, above all, from the dictum that the “personal is political.” The focus on the rediscovery of individual women and then on the nature of women’s lives was a methodology that came in the first instance from political, sociological feminism. Sociological methods demanded research on individual women or groups of women placed in their social setting; political sociological feminism asserted that women’s studies had a political agenda for change and called for women to be included in academic research as a subject of research, not as a variable within that research.⁴ Consequently, it was perhaps inevitable that academic feminism in Britain found its first home in, and has remained very much a product of, sociology.⁵

As a result of this emphasis, research concentrated, and still does center in fields such as sociology and human geography, on the experiences of women. This was translated in historical disciplines into the excavation of the lives of women, in literary disciplines into the reading of women writers and in art history into the discovery of women artists.⁶ As a result, much research into women in the 1970s and 1980s concentrated on the discovery of “lost” or overlooked women, both their lives and their creative output, and the incorporation of these into “the canon.” Prior to the late 1970s and the early 1980s, what studies there were of Byzantine women had also focused almost exclusively on biography, that is, the lives of individual women, and in particular on empresses. These dated as far back as Edward Gibbon’s portrayal of the sixth-century empress Theodora, based on the more lurid passages of Prokopios, and included a highly romanticized nineteenth-century study of the fifth-century empress Pulcheria, as well as Georgina Buckler’s scholarly study of Anna Komnene.⁷ Consequently, to add women to Byzantine studies, as feminist studies demanded, did not require any radical redefinition of methodology but, rather, an acceptance that such material was significant, a more problematic view. Steven Runciman, for one, paid lip-service to what he called “these days of female liberation” by looking at that “glamorous Athenian,” the eighth-century empress

⁴ Stanley and Wise 1993: 6–9. A further positive contribution from feminist sociology was the insistence that the researcher could not stand outside of the research: she/he should no longer construct her/himself as a detached objective observer and recorder. Bennett 1989: 251–72, esp. 259–66, suggests ways in which the study of history can be given this political focus by defining itself in terms of the exploration of patriarchy and the ways in which patriarchy has changed through time.

⁵ Stanley and Wise 1993: 2.

⁶ Examples of this search are given by Bennett 1989: 253–4, Frantzen 1993: 145, and Smith 2004: 9 and n. 20.

⁷ Gibbon 1856, Teetgen 1907 and Buckler 1929.

Eirene, at the “pious but pert” poetess Kassia, and at the unfortunate seventh-century empress Martina, of whose tongue-slitting he remarked that “it was perhaps the only way to stop her talking.”⁸

So, studies of Byzantine women tended simply to add them in (or not) to the historical mix of Byzantine Studies. The empirical corpus of knowledge was extended: where once there were no women, suddenly named women had a place in the historical record and a whole host of anonymous female artists, writers, saints, nobles, nuns, mothers, wives, widows, farmers, traders, whores were discovered.⁹ This was an approach that could readily be accepted by the patriarchal establishment, for it merely extended and refined traditional working procedures. It enabled feminist studies to become women’s studies; anyone could now legitimately “do” women, simply as an extension of *homo byzantinus*. Women’s history became a sub-set of history, not an integral element.¹⁰

Research on women’s life histories has never lost force in Byzantine studies. Studies of empresses still focus primarily on the biographical, though with increasing emphasis on setting these women into their social and cultural settings. Searches have been made for material about lower-class, less respectable women.¹¹ However, although looking for medieval and Byzantine women was vital in uncovering information that (male) scholars claimed did not exist, the methodology is one that works far better for periods where names and biographies survive; the closer to the present one is, the more evidence is available about actual women, including records of their own words about themselves. Consequently, this is not a method that works particularly well for Byzantine studies where so much evidence does not survive.¹²

Further, it is a methodology that tends to presume that research can uncover and describe reality for practical purposes. This is a problematic assumption when dealing with the present, but even more so when engaging with the past. It tends to overlook the nature of history, visual and written, as representational, as offering partial and motivated accounts predicted upon a number of other partial and motivated images and accounts which themselves have a complex relationship to the underlying events that the historical record represents. It is a methodology that can forget that the “facts” derived from these accounts are themselves stitched together by the preoccupations and intellectual concerns of the historian, or patron or artist, not those of “the past” itself. It opens itself to the risk of ahistoricity and anachronism (the sixth-century empress Theodora or Anna Komnene as proto-feminists,

⁸ For Eirene, see Runciman 1978; for Kassia and Martina, see Runciman 1984: 10–22.

⁹ Weyl Carr 1976.

¹⁰ This also opened women’s studies up to men, an area of considerable debate. See Frantzen 1993: 147–9 (a male perspective) and Bennett 1989: 253–5. For lack of integration of women’s history into history, see Nelson 1997: 168.

¹¹ Nicol 1994, Garland 1999, McClanan 2003; for lower-class women, Webb 1997 and Kalavrezou 2003.

¹² As those looking for lower class women frequently note. See for example Connor 2004.

for example). And it is fair to say that sociological feminist analyses – indeed feminist analyses generally – have not always recognized that the excavation of lost women has tended to place these women in a relatively untheorized “real” world.¹³

WOMEN: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORIES

However, as sociology (a relatively new academic discipline in the 1970s) itself changed and took on board different theoretical approaches, above all Marxism, so feminist research too altered. The lives of women were increasingly discussed through a structuralist-Marxist methodology, emphasizing class, economic position and legal realities, and then through phenomenological, ethnographic, and interactionist approaches.¹⁴ It was increasingly recognized that women needed to be set into their social, economic, and historic contexts – and that these were not automatically the same as men’s. Judith Herrin’s three avenues of approach outlined ways of identifying the position, activity, and authority of women in Byzantine society: the collection of chance references to female activity in (male) sources; the documentation of the ingenuity with which women exercised their limited legal rights; and the outlining of the significance of ecclesiastical institutions and Christian beliefs for women.¹⁵ All three avenues were concerned with collecting data about the “reality” of women’s lives but were also concerned with the ways in which this data could inform the socio-economic setting within which those lives were played out.

Increasingly, research explored the social standing of women, empresses, peasants, and whores alike, the legal positions of women, women’s economic roles, including trades, women’s relations to public life, women and monasticism, even women artists in Byzantium.¹⁶ It raised issues about marriage, sex, consent, and coercion.¹⁷ Feminist approaches to female mysticism raised a whole series of new questions and approaches to the study of religious women in both west and east.¹⁸ By bringing together questions about the nature of female sanctity with the socio-economic position of women, it became possible to ask why female saints were fasting visionaries rather than reforming bishops, reformed prostitutes rather than stylites, virgins rather than missionaries. Most recently, work in this contextual

¹³ See the discussion of this issue in Stanley and Wise 1993: 216–19. Also Scott 1986 and 1988.

¹⁴ For the development of feminist sociology and the debates over “correct” methodological practices, see Stanley and Wise 1993.

¹⁵ Herrin 1983: 167–89.

¹⁶ Beaucamp 1977, 1990 and 1992; Laiou 1981, 1985, and 1992; Herrin 1982 and 1983; Talbot 1985; Garland 1988; Thalia Gouma-Peterson’s *Bibliography on Women in Byzantium*, produced by Wooster College, Ohio, offered details of the bulk of material published on Byzantine women in the 1970s and 1980s.

¹⁷ Laiou 1993.

¹⁸ Walker Bynum 1987.

sphere has looked at the material culture of the “everyday life” of Byzantine women.¹⁹ The overall aim of all of this has been to illustrate the practical reality of women’s life in Byzantium, to consider what it meant to be a woman in Byzantium and, crucially, what the Byzantines themselves thought of women.²⁰ It is research that has made it clear just how different the lives of *homo byzantinus* and *femina byzantina* were.

As a result, it is clear that, in our terms, Byzantine society was both misogynist and patriarchal. Prevailing ideologies towards women regarded them as men’s inferiors, weak and untrustworthy, and ranked with children, the mentally deranged, and slaves as unfit to give public testimony. Women were said to be licentious temptresses, possessing an uncontrolled and uncontrollable sexuality, and their proper place was in the home, away from any form of public life.²¹ Men and male behavior constituted the norm and women’s roles were conditioned by this.

Women’s political, or “public,” life was severely restricted. They were permitted no place in the hierarchies of state, church, or the military. In the “private” sphere of the family, they were allowed a more active role for the single monogamous marriage was privileged by both state and church and the family born of marriage became an increasingly important social institution. The “good” woman was allotted four potential roles: virgin; wife; mother; widow. “Bad” women were those who did not conform in some way to these norms, prostitutes and their like being the most obvious example. Praise of the good wife and mother in the writings of Byzantine men implies an increase in the ideological status of these roles. As wives, mothers, and widows, women were responsible for the upbringing of children in their formative years.²² After motherhood, the next most important role of the woman, of whatever class, was household maintenance. This is perhaps related to the fact that women of all classes and backgrounds did possess important personal, economic, and property rights, guaranteed by law. A woman retained possession of her dowry, though her husband administered it, and could alienate inherited property; widows retained the right of ownership and administration of family property, including dowry goods.²³ They also had authority over their sons. Judicial acts reveal women appearing in courts to testify and plead successfully for divorce, for the resolution of property disputes, and for control over property. Daughters as well as sons had the right to share the inheritance of their parents and property was transferred along female lines.²⁴ Within the family, women were expected to be active in economic issues and the reality of women’s ownership of property is a key

¹⁹ Kalavrezou 2003, dealing with images of women, women in civic life, elite women, divine women, above all the Virgin, and women’s relationships with the Virgin, women at work and at home, marriage, adornment, and health.

²⁰ Galatariotou 1985; Brown 1988; Harvey 1990; Hill 1999.

²¹ Brown 1988.

²² Laiou 1992.

²³ Beaucamp 1977 and 1990; Laiou 1985.

²⁴ Beaucamp 1977 and 1990.

factor in understanding Byzantine family life. How far women were educated is unclear. Female literacy was not common and tended to be the preserve of the upper classes, however female writers remain exceptions: Kassia the hymnographer in the ninth century and Anna Komnene, the sole female historian from Byzantium, in the twelfth.

It became increasingly apparent that in this sort of society, women's roles changed over time and place, that the life of a fifth-century noble wife in Antioch was not the same experience as that of a twelfth-century noble wife in Constantinople. However, it also became clear that women's circumstances changed within their own life span: that a woman started out as a virgin and might move through all four acceptable role models in her own lifetime and that each would involve different socio-economic roles for her and those around her. This approach also provided added impetus to the study of individual women's lives as changing life courses could be mapped and analyzed.

GENDER

A further dimension to the study of women was introduced through the theorizing of gender. This shifted emphasis away from biological sex ("man" and "woman") to discussion of what it might mean to live as a man or live as a woman, and to ask what aspects made up qualities in a sociological and cultural sense that define "man" or "woman": in other words, considering questions of masculinity and femininity. As a tool for research, gender refers to the differences between men and women in terms of the differences created by societies rather than the biological difference of sex. In this way, it enables both women and men to be integrated into any subject; rather than treating "women" as a special category, we can look to understand the social construction of femaleness and maleness and of appropriate roles for the sexes.²⁵ With the use of gender as a category for analysis, it became possible not only to see differences between men and women's lives but also to begin to guess at the conceptual ideologies that governed these.

In this context, Catia Galatariotou's "Holy women and witches: aspects of Byzantine concepts of gender," published in 1988, is significant as one of the first pieces written about Byzantine women that engaged specifically with the concept of gender.²⁶ Galatariotou used the concept of gender in examining the writings of a specific man, the hermit monk Neophytos, who wrote for a specific enclosed male world. She demonstrated how he employed the concept "woman" to make ideological, above all religious, points, and she used Byzantine gender distinctions to understand Byzantine men and women and to explore the nature of patriarchy in twelfth-century Byzantium. Her article also brought to the fore increasingly

²⁵ For an important discussion of gender and its place in the early medieval world see Gilchrist 1999 and Smith 2004.

²⁶ Galatariotou 1985.

important issues about medieval sexuality, medieval sexual identities, and medieval discourses about the body, the flesh, and desire in the context of Byzantine Studies.

Joan Scott pushed the concept of gender still further by suggesting that we look beyond the social construction of gender to its meanings, above all as a metaphor for many human relations and activities. She defined gender as a “primary way of signifying power” for where women are not always be present in the historical record, gender is and can be used to explain something of these absences.²⁷ That which is absent can be used to define what is present and women’s absences can be as telling as their presence. In Byzantium, women could not, for example, be represented in the church hierarchy, so it is not possible to write about women bishops. However, their absence is a result of their gender: they could not be bishops because they were women. In this way, the concept of gender made it possible to look not just at women and their spheres of activity and not just at the social construction of masculinity and femininity, but to explore every field for the role and place occupied by “gender.”²⁸

The distinction between sex and gender is not straightforward. Judith Butler recognized gender as performative, and argued that each sex could take on and adopt qualities of the other, and that aspects seen as denoting masculinity or femininity could change over time and space and with setting. She argued that where gender had come to be seen as the expression of an inner, personal core, almost the spiritual equivalent to the simple biological sex, instead it should be seen as fabricated. Although male and female *might* be biologically determined, identity, as made-up rather than essential, means that each physical body can be the site for a number of different genders, for playing out different roles, for being masculine and feminine at different times – or even at the same time.²⁹

Thus, understanding the world of Byzantine women came to be about understanding not only how their biological sex affected their socio-economic position but also about how gender played a part in this and, furthermore, about how gender and sexuality were intimately entwined. Sex, the nature of sexuality, and the place of the physical body, notably the female body, dominate definitions of holiness, for example, in Late Antiquity and Byzantium. Ideologies of woman encompassed both sex and gender as it became clear how far beliefs about women’s inferiority were derived both from the Greco-Roman world and from the teachings of the Christian Church and, at a crude level, as it became clear how “feminine” characteristics were constructed to define women as second-rate or evil in contrast to “masculine” characteristics, defined *ipso facto* as positive.³⁰

²⁷ Scott 1988, esp. 2–4. On gender and history, see also Nicholson 1986, esp. chap.3, for an approach that tries to link gender theory with Marxism.

²⁸ Bennett 1989: 258 has pointed out some of the risks in this approach – the dangers of ignoring material reality, of intellectualizing the inequalities of the sexes.

²⁹ Butler 1990.

³⁰ Clark 1986; Martin and Cox Miller 2005.

Women's bodies were weak and inferior to men's, a fact well-known to Classical medicine, but those same bodies could lead men into temptation and damnation, through women's unbridled sexuality which had caused, among other things, the Fall of Man. Man's fall from Eden was also a result of woman's credulity (believing the serpent) and her susceptibility to temptation (by the serpent): both credulity and susceptibility were defined in Byzantium as feminine qualities. However, thanks to being created in God's image (a physical fact) and thanks to the redeeming actions of the Virgin Mary, women were also perceived by the church as spiritually equal to men. Because woman was the cause of Man's Fall and an ever-present source of temptation, her greatest menace was through her sexuality (both a physical and a gendered element) and the undermining thereby of masculine chastity and virtue (chastity and virtue itself being seen as masculine qualities in any case). Her body – her sex as woman – alone provided this danger, but linked to this were her feminine qualities (or qualities defined as feminine) which increased her threat. To overcome this perceived danger, a variety of female role models were sanctified by the early church: the virgin, the transvestite, the repentant whore, the woman denying her husband. These models argued both a rejection of (physical) sexuality and the taking-on of masculine qualities.³¹ However, since gender issues are rarely so straightforward, the femaleness of these saints was never completely denied: all were canonized as women.

Thus gender allows discussion beyond that of personalities and individuals to ask bigger questions about the ways in which the Byzantines structured their world through exploring language, social situations, and power.³² Language itself is used to mark out gender in its very construction and use in dealing with and describing abstract ideas and conceptions through gender.³³ Crucial in our understanding of the role of Byzantine women is that virtually all of our information about women in Byzantium comes through the filter of male sources, written or visual. Women tend to be spoken for rather than to speak for themselves and so their appearance in the historical record needs to be considered in this light. The so-called "linguistic turn" in gender studies has established that words that purport to be about women are, in fact, more informative about the men who wrote them, and the political and moral strategies they sought to promote, than about any actual women.³⁴ "Theodora the whore" is almost exclusively the creation of the historian Prokopios in his *Secret History* but this is how she remains in too many modern histories of the sixth century, despite the exposure of the *Secret History* as invective with a particular mission – the use of gender stereotypes to destroy reputations.³⁵

³¹ Galatariotou 1985, Patlagean 1976, Delierneux 1997; Cox Miller 2005.

³² See the articles in James 1997.

³³ Cameron 1990, 1994, and 1997; and most recently the approach advocated by Peltomaa 2005.

³⁴ See Clark 1998a and 1998b, Brubaker 2004.

³⁵ Realized 30 years ago by Fisher 1973, re-emphasized 20 years ago by Cameron 1985, again by Brubaker 2004.

Pulcheria the saintly fifth-century empress is equally a creation, this time of eighth-century sources, seeking to use an imperial woman for a very different purpose. Byzantine sources make visible certain aspects of women's lives, but this is a partial and biased picture that can only be understood in terms of male ideologies about women.³⁶

In Late Antiquity and Byzantium, Christianity above all is a site of gender constructions. Saints' lives tell us less about women saints and women's lives, and rather more about women as symbols. The Virgin Mary herself, as a gendered figure, is as much man-made symbol as she is Mother of God.³⁷ Hagiography depicts women according to its own purposes in certain ways and as performing certain actions, offering a cultural construction of "woman," enabling us to see that a holy woman is not the same as a holy man for reasons beyond those of biological sex. In hagiography (indeed in all Byzantine writings), men are worthier than women, monks are better than nuns. In hagiography, women either tempt or repent. If they do the latter, they often have to display masculine virtues as proof: Mary of Egypt moved from whore to ascetic, shedding her feminine qualities in both her physical appearance and her behavior.³⁸ The holy housewives of the Middle Byzantine period, such as St. Mary the Younger and Thomaïs of Lesbos, displayed a different form of gendered behavior, displaying extreme submission to male domination and extreme conformity to ideals about marriage.

Visual evidence is similarly affected by issues about gender. Byzantine images are, overwhelmingly, designed and created by men; they formulate and reflect a culture designed by men for women and for men; their images of women are men's images of women, a male response to women, and a male response to the relationship between men and women. The ways in which men and women are shown tell us about masculinity and femininity, and appropriate behavior for both men and women. The depiction on an ivory panel of Eve working a set of bellows as Adam hammers at the forge says little or nothing about whether women worked with men at smithing, but it keeps gender relations in their proper place as she, inevitably, retains her secondary position, kneeling to pump the fire as he makes something. It says a great deal about the use of these characters to remind the viewer of humanity's suffering and toil on earth (brought about through Eve, of course).³⁹ Icons are another case in point. There has been considerable discussion of the relationship between gender and icons: were women a significant force in Iconoclasm and particularly devoted to the use of icons in religious worship or is their appearance in the historical record at this point fictional, designed to make a point about the unnatural nature of events?⁴⁰

³⁶ Smythe 1997; Angelidi 1996 on Pulcheria and her changing reputation.

³⁷ Ashbrook Harvey 1990: 36–59. Patlagean 1976; Delierneux 1997. Also Castelli 1991.

³⁸ Cox Miller 2005.

³⁹ Evans and Wixom 1997: cat. no. 158; and see also the entry to 157.

⁴⁰ Herrin 1982; Cormack 1997; Herrin 2000.

MEN AND EUNUCHS

What is inevitable, however, is that the study of gender issues leads to the study of men and masculinity, the Subjects against whom women appear as Other. Indeed, when so many scholars are men, we should not be surprised at this shift; one of the risks in “doing gender” is that it means that women can again become invisible.

Nevertheless, understanding masculinity helps us to understand femininity and vice versa. Elizabeth Clark has demonstrated that Gregory of Nyssa’s account of his sister Macrina is actually all about Gregory and tells us next to nothing about Macrina. Similarly, Leslie Brubaker has shown how Prokopios’ portrait of Theodora is as much about Justinian as it is about her, illustrating that the gender stereotyping of the emperor cannot be separated from that of the empress.⁴¹ To see what the role of the emperor was and to perceive that as a masculine role makes it possible to have a better knowledge of the place of an empress. The emperor was the pinnacle of the Byzantine political structure and society. He was commander-in-chief of the army, head of the administration, foundation of the law, priest, and god.⁴² He commanded the army and usually led it in the field; he was the source of law and justice and issued edicts and made decisions; he appointed the officials of the empire who governed provinces and cities in his name; he had ultimate control of the finances of the state and issued coins; he dealt with foreign powers; he was priest and god. In other words, he was the supreme power in home and foreign affairs, in politics, war, religious matters, economic affairs, and the law. He was the ultimate court of appeal in every aspect of public life.

Yet when the emperor was incapacitated or died leaving an underage heir, he was replaced by a woman in the form of the empress and she became the head of state. Here, ideologies of masculine and feminine behavior apparently collide: the ideologies of the mother responsible for her son, the wife taking responsibility for her husband seem to override the exclusion of women from public life. Although, on one level, the roles of wife and mother, or sister, especially within Byzantium, were a private, domestic roles, the place of the empress, with her official title, her place in the ceremonies of state and her standing as consort made her part as wife public also. Gender roles caused gender boundaries to blur. The role of empress is a case where the official, hierarchical position within the state of “empress” constructed gender roles and perceptions as much as these constructed the role of the empress. There was a tension between the empress’s gender and her position, but it was a mutually interdependent tension informed by both sides. Politically, an

⁴¹ Clark 1998b; Brubaker 2004.

⁴² Studies on the governmental structure of the Roman empire and the place of the emperor are numerous, see, for example Millar 1977; fewer are devoted specifically to the Byzantine emperor. See also Hunger 1964, Kelly 1998 and 2004, Dagron 1996, and McCormick 1997.

empress's official standing gave her power but her operation of that power was limited, again, by her sex. "Empress" was a job for a woman but for a woman to do the job she was compelled to negotiate, not negate, her sex.⁴³

But what the positions of emperor and empress also reveal is that gender cannot be divorced from its social context. In the imperial system, personal influence mattered and empresses were those best placed to use it. That a class of aristocratic women might arise says more about the rise of an aristocracy than a rise of women.⁴⁴ The intersection of class/status and sex provide the fault-line along which it was possible for an empress, or indeed any woman in Byzantium, to act. An aristocratic woman, by virtue of her class, was superior to a working man. On the other hand, he was the descendent of Adam and she of Eve, which gave him immediate superiority. A holy woman might command emperors, as Irene of Chrysobalanton is recorded as doing, but was still, herself, not on a par with a holy man and was compelled to bow before the authority of the priest.

However, the historical study of men and masculinity is in its early stages.⁴⁵ This is particularly true in Byzantine studies. Although there are some important studies within Byzantium on the nature of Byzantine masculinity, dress codes, and male sexuality, we are still a long way short of a discussion of Byzantine masculinity and of understanding what made men male in Byzantium.⁴⁶ The *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* has no entry under "men"; there is still a sense that men are the norm and that the norm does not need to be explained in gendered terms: we have not sufficiently thought about what things were male and served to define masculinity.

Questions of gender in Byzantium are not restricted only to male and female. Eunuchs were a significant and ever-present part of Byzantine society, their role and significance debated by the Byzantines and modern scholars alike. They were born male but once castrated, what category did they fall into? The Byzantines' own writings about eunuchs show that they might be categorized as either male or female, with masculine or feminine qualities, and often both. Eunuchs could be described as effeminate and licentious (feminine qualities), but they could also be brave and chaste (masculine qualities). They were able to hold public office (and, indeed, castration was a good way to get on in public service) and command armies, but they were also renowned for their indolent, luxury-loving habits. What is clear is that, as with women, gender characteristics are used to make points. A bad eunuch is characterized as feminine, a good and/or saintly eunuch as masculine; and clearly eunuchs are seen as able to play out a variety of changing gender roles.⁴⁷

⁴³ James 2001.

⁴⁴ Hill 1999 in relation to Komnenian women.

⁴⁵ Stafford and Mulder-Bakker 2000.

⁴⁶ On masculinity, Barber 1997; on dress codes, Harlow 2004; on homosexuality in Byzantium, Boswell 1995, Smythe 1999, Tougher 1999. There is no Byzantine equivalent to Gleason 1994.

⁴⁷ Tougher 2004, concluding that eunuch saints are masculine.

Whether they represented a “third sex” to the Byzantines is an aspect hotly debated, especially when linked to questions about the nature and gender of angels, who were often portrayed in Byzantine art in similar fashion to eunuchs and could be mistaken the one for the other.⁴⁸ But the ambiguous nature of eunuchs means that they offer a way of understanding attitudes to both men and women, masculinity and femininity.

GENDER, SEX, AND POWER

Gender, sex, and power are intimately entwined in society. The Byzantines saw women's power as sexual beings over men as evil; much of their construction of gender relations can be seen as seeking ways to disempower the threat posed by women. As Julia Smith pointed out, gender makes women present everywhere in the gendered discourses that men used for power. The concept of gender can be used to explore the structures and systems which keep women in their place: in other words, patriarchy.⁴⁹ Gender is in essence about power relations: both the power relations of the past and the power relations inevitable in the writing of history.⁵⁰

Power itself is not gender-neutral. Traditionally, power is taken as the ability to produce an effect or achieve a result, as wielding authority and influencing international affairs.⁵¹ One definition of power, deriving from sociology again, suggests that society can be seen as made up of multiple overlapping power networks deriving from four fundamental sources of social power: ideological, economic, military, and political. Within these definitions, social power is the mastery of one's environment coupled with the ability to make other people do what you want, the capacity to organize and control people, materials, and territories. However, Pauline Stafford has shown convincingly that this is a masculine definition of power; that power and the nature of power is gendered and changes according to gender. She suggests that power for a medieval woman might be defined as the ability to act, to take part in events, to have a strategy and to pursue it, without necessarily succeeding, and to be in a position to influence others and to use their labors for one's own prestige.⁵² In other words, a medieval woman may be powerful and able to influence events, but may not succeed.

⁴⁸ Ringrose 2003, Tougher 1997, 2004, 2005; Keufler 2001; Peers 2001 on angels.

⁴⁹ Smith 2004. See also Bennett 1989: 260–6 who argues that patriarchy is an historical phenomenon, changing and existing in many forms and varieties; feminist historians need to look at how patriarchy has changed and survived over time and place and at the patriarchal ideologies and realities that have assured women that there is power and safety inside and danger beyond.

⁵⁰ Smith 2004 and Nelson 1997: 165.

⁵¹ My definition of power is derived from Mann 1986.

⁵² Stafford 1997b, esp. 8–13.

CASE STUDY – EIRENE, A POWERFUL WOMAN?

The case of the eighth-century empress Eirene makes it possible to trace how changing methodologies in the study of women have altered the ways in which Eirene has been seen and described, creating various histories of her reign. Eirene was the only woman to rule alone for an extended period of time in Byzantium. On the death of her husband, Leo V, in 780 she became regent for their son, Constantine VI. She held this position until 790, and again between 792 and 797, some 15 years in all. In 797, she blinded her son and ruled as sole empress for five years, before being toppled in a palace coup.⁵³ Her period of power lasted for some 20 years.

The *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* offers a straightforward and ostensibly objective biographical account of Eirene.⁵⁴ It describes what is known of the events of her life, with dates where available, it notes that she was the first female Byzantine autocrat, that she ruled through eunuch advisers, that she had limited military success (in part because she replaced “capable” Iconoclast generals with her own commanders), that she engaged in philanthropy, that her financial measures were popular but harmful. Steven Runciman’s biographical account of her concludes: “She was a prudent and tactful ruler . . . she was remarkably lenient to traitors and conspirators . . . I do not think that her administration was as bad as historians like to suggest. She did more good than harm to the empire; and I think that womanhood has no reason to be ashamed of this remarkable and glamorous Athenian.”⁵⁵ Romilly Jenkins’ summary of her reign is harsher but equally personalized: “[Eirene] was destined to rule, on and off, for twenty-two years after her husband’s death, and they were years of almost unrelieved disaster. She was, by any standards, medieval or modern, a bad woman; and, what was worse, an incapable and irresponsible prince.”⁵⁶

Accounts such as these fit the model of adding women *in to* the historical record, seeing everything in terms of personalities. Later versions of Eirene’s life set her into a wider socio-economic and political setting. Placing her in her setting has allowed discussions about widowhood and motherhood in Byzantium: widows were in a strong position and were allowed to act for their underage sons; by the same token, empress-widows were allowed to be regents for their sons. Consequently, Eirene’s ten-year regency can be seen as conforming to Byzantine custom and as perfectly natural for a woman. But beyond her regency, debate has raged about her assumption of power, centering on whether Eirene was a “female king.”⁵⁷ Did she use male titles? Was she a weak or a strong ruler, a successful or unsuccessful one – and here

⁵³ No monograph exists on Eirene. For details of her reign, see Jenkins 1966/1987: 92–104; Treadgold 1988: 60–126; Speck 1978; Lilie 1996. For a gendered perspective, see Herrin, 2001: chap. 2.

⁵⁴ Kazhdan et al. 1991: vol. 2.

⁵⁵ Runciman 1978: 117–18.

⁵⁶ Jenkins 1966: 90.

⁵⁷ E.g. Garland 1999.

scholarship has tended towards a negative judgment because she did not do well in her wars, because her financial measures were dubious and because she was an unfit mother. All, of these, of course, are non-feminine qualities.

Finally, discussing Eirene in the context of gender and gender roles has allowed for further discussion of the position of empress and the ways in which that office could allow a woman manipulate what her society perceived as female gender qualities in order to hold power in a society that gendered power as masculine.

Eirene can be seen to play out gender roles in a variety of ways. As regent, her position was fairly straightforward; custom and ideology allowed a mother to hold the reins of government or the household for her son. Equally, if an emperor were unable to carry out his duties, then his wife stepped in: no emperor ever had a regent who was not a female relative. This suggests a formalized role for the empress, an official access to political power that depended on her position, not her personality. In the absence of an imperial male (the only figure in the Byzantine political system who hierarchically outranked the empress) the office of empress was the most important in hierarchical terms. Civil government was in her hands: the empress-regent appointed and dismissed officials and had some control over taxes and the judiciary.

Nevertheless, the prevailing ideology of the inferiority of woman served to restrict her ability to act. To be successful, an empress-regent was obliged to be on good terms with her patriarch; those who were not had problems.⁵⁸ She also needed to have some form of control over the military and this was always an empress-regent's weakest point. Some got round it by marrying generals. Eirene appointed eunuchs, who, as castrated men, were unable to hold imperial power and presented a limited threat to the empress's authority. A eunuch was the one male unable to take Eirene's position from her for himself, the one male unable to become emperor, even further from the imperial purple than she as a woman was.⁵⁹ Eirene's tactic was the traditional imperial one, used by emperors, of employing male ministers (usually eunuchs) to run the empire. In her case, the use of eunuchs ensured her own grip on power since they could not usurp. By not seeming to act at all but by apparently deputing men to act for her, Eirene could rule. By not marrying, she gave no one man authority over her and with such authority, the power to rule the empire. Hierarchically, she outranked her officials. In this way, ideology could be satisfied, balance maintained. She wielded power as a woman, not by mutating her gender but by manipulating it.

Eirene's coins are interesting for the changing gender image they offer of her power.⁶⁰ The earliest gold coins show five figures: Constantine and Eirene together on the obverse; the family dynasty of Eirene's husband, his father, and grandfather on the reverse, images underlining imperial lineage and the relationship between empress and regent, further emphasized by the portrayal of Constantine as young

⁵⁸ For example, Theophano.

⁵⁹ For Eirene's use of eunuch generals, see Kaegi 1966: 62–4.

⁶⁰ For Eirene's coins, see Grierson 1973: 337–51 and plates XIII, XIV, XV.

and beardless. During her joint reign with Constantine, Eirene was portrayed on one face and Constantine on the other. When she was in the ascendant, her image appeared on the obverse; when he was in control, his image was placed on the obverse. Despite the fluctuations in power between the empress-regent and her son, she remained an effective partner in government throughout. On her own coins, she appeared on both sides, perhaps because of the problem of finding a suitable image to appear on the reverse that fitted a woman's position – her immediate predecessors as emperors had favored family images which were hardly suitable for Eirene in her position. On these coins she is titled in the feminine as *basilissa*. Interestingly, her image and imperial dress remain consistent throughout the entire period of her regency and sole rule, suggesting again that there was no need for change and reinforcing the point that she ruled as an empress, not an emperor.

We can also see from written Byzantine sources how they constructed Eirene's gender in different ways. Theophanes, writing in the eighth century, used her as a symbol of God's grace and his ability to operate through the weak and virtuous – a widow and an orphan child restoring correct faith to the empire and defeating Iconoclasm. In contrast, Iconoclasts denounced her restoration of icons as "female frivolity."⁶¹ Eventually, she became an Orthodox saint.⁶²

What then of the suggestion that Eirene ruled as a man? "It was," as Jenkins said, "undeniable that her body was female." To be seen as emperor and taken seriously as emperor, so the argument runs, Eirene had to be seen as a man, she had to occupy male space as a man – in other words, she had to gender herself or be gendered as masculine.⁶³ She had to maintain the traditions, the rituals, of male power. So we have the thesis that Eirene ruled as a "female king," as a man, the claim that she gave herself the male title of emperor, *basileus*, and was flattered by her ministers saying that she had the mind of a man.

Wallace-Hadrill saw queens as honorary men because of their links to power, authority, prestige, and honor.⁶⁴ In response, Stafford argued that queens did not become men because the title "king" was reserved for men alone. To suggest otherwise would be to suggest that the title "king" could be separated from the person of the king and thus filled by either sex.⁶⁵ Thus the public body of the ruling queen was not a king's body but a queen's, gendered feminine not masculine. The case of Eirene supports this view. The only evidence for Eirene using the male title *basileus* is limited to her signature as "emperor of the Romans" on a couple of legal documents and the use of *basileus* on one gold coin from Sicily.⁶⁶ If Eirene needed to construct herself as a man, as a *basileus*, then one might expect this title to feature

⁶¹ James 2001.

⁶² Treadgold 1982.

⁶³ See e.g. Jenkins 1966: 102–3. Kantorowicz 1957 is the classic study of the male body politic.

⁶⁴ Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 404.

⁶⁵ Stafford 1997b: 8–10.

⁶⁶ See discussion in James 2001; for the Sicilian solidus see Grierson 1982: 154. Grierson also notes (165–6) that the lettering on Sicilian gold coins is of a very poor quality, making attribution to reigns problematic.

on all of her official documentation, on all coins and seals. Instead she used the feminine form, *basilissa*, which was also the title which Byzantine historians of her reign use for her. This implies very strongly that *basilissa* was good enough for coins, those most public and widespread of imperial images and that it designated her authority well enough.⁶⁷ Eirene's titles make it clear she was gendered in language as well as actuality as a female ruler.

As an empress, Eirene can only be understood in gendered terms: as a woman and as someone who was not an emperor, playing out different gender roles in her desire to retain power. The ways in which Eirene managed to project herself into male ritual and the male definition of imperial majesty, the public display of the living ruler, offer the most immediate display of her delicate balancing act. Thinking about gender questions in the context of empresses suggests that within the misogynist structure of the Byzantine empire, empresses had to juggle two contradictory elements: their status as women and their position as rulers. They could be powerful but could never threaten masculinity; somehow sex and gender, female and femininity, had to become subservient to or redefined by position.

The study of gender allows the rigid distinctions between men and women to become more fluid. Roles can be played by both men and women and these same individuals can occupy different roles at different time. A female visionary may have powers over a layman that as a nun she does not possess in relation to her father-confessor; an imperial woman can be both powerful and powerless, depending upon the role she plays. The concept of gender allows us to consider not only the idea that women were devoted (or not) to icons but also at how this devotion was used by the Byzantines to construct a world view about God and the place of women, men, and art in society; not only the fact that some women chose to be virgins but that the symbol of virginity was a perceptual statement about the nature of the world and humanity's place within it; not only whether the empress Eirene was a good or a bad empress but what Byzantine (and modern) historians meant by saying this; not only that women in Byzantium were nuns, whores, traders, peasants, dancing girls, but how these roles were constructed and played out. Addressing gender also enables us to consider the cultural constructions of "woman" and "man" and attitudes about "correct" womanly and manly behavior. It enables us to explore power relations, for all expressions of gender identity come from the hegemonic masculinity of the ruling elite of the time and reflect the social form of that.⁶⁸ Without the concept of gender, *homo byzantinus* remains a misleading synecdoche within Byzantine society and we are left with less than half a story, for we do not even begin to question what men were and did in Byzantium. Gender is so implicit, so ever-present, in the discussion of how Byzantine society is organized – as implicit as class – that it should appear as a matter of course in all other contributions to this book; this chapter should simply serve as a coda to their discussions.

⁶⁷ Bensamner 1976: 279; also the discussion in Hill 1999: 108–14.

⁶⁸ Smith 2004.

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3

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND THE TRANSMISSION OF PROPERTY

Angeliki E. Laiou

THE PARAMETERS OF THE ISSUES

That family and the transmission of property are among the most important structuring elements of a society is a statement that needs little elaboration. The family, in the Byzantine empire and in most other medieval societies, is both a social and a biological unit based on consanguinity and marital affinity. It is a unit of reproduction of human resources, but also the framework in which the societization of children and the maintenance of the elderly took place. David Herlihy has added a new dimension, by describing the family as a moral unit and a moral universe, within which human relations are very different from those outside it.¹ The role of the family extends to production. In non-slave societies, the family, whether nuclear or extended, was at the base of the household, which was the unit of production of the majority of the population, that is, the peasantry. This is evident even in north-western Europe, where over the medieval period there was a tendency for economic exploitation to be carried out through tenant household production rather than through the cultivation of a large domanial reserve. In the southern European lands, the household, based on the family, has a clearer diachronic role in agrarian production.² This feature is perhaps most pronounced in the Byzantine lands, where the peasant household was the unit of production even at times when large estates were the prevalent form of organization.³ It is also the case that part of the artisanal production took place within the household, and that workshops along with the trades they served were transmitted through the generations. Certainly, there were large units of production, of silk, for example, or ceramics, but small family workshops were also common.

¹ Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: 72–3, with bibliography; Herlihy 1991: 1.

² Toubert 2004: 95ff; Contamine et al. 1993: 157ff, 225ff, 361ff.

³ Lefort 2002; Laiou 2002.

That family links are closely connected with the transmission of property in most societies is also an unsurprising statement. Certainly this was the case both in the Roman empire and in the Byzantine empire, heir to much of the Roman legal system. In fact, issues having to do with inheritance extend to kinship groups that are much larger than the immediate family, since in the Roman and Byzantine systems relatives up to and including the seventh degree of consanguinity (son or daughter of second cousins) could be called into the inheritance. The question of rights of inheritance was settled by jurists of the Roman and early Byzantine periods. Subsequently, the main interest focused on the definition of family and kinship as it affected marriage impediments.⁴ But the two were closely linked, so that the transmission of property has much to do with the notion of kinship and effective kinship (affinity, that is, relationship created by marriage, spiritual kinship, etc.), which can be and was manipulated to facilitate or impede the formation of marriage alliances and the concentration of property. The church was the first to take action in extending the rules regarding close marriages, but the state followed suit. Because of this fact, the development of practices concerning the transmission of property should be studied together with the effects of normative action taken by the state or the church in order to regulate marriage alliances. To some extent, and with the passage of time, norms were internalized. The transmission of property was in any case of interest to the state, which intervened in a number of ways, and which was even the residual heir of those who died childless, without identifiable heirs, and intestate.

Thus, the two most important normative powers, the state and the church, played a role that at particular times became very significant in the transmission of property. Family property consists not only of material goods but also of symbolic capital, such as social status and networks.⁵ In a society like the Byzantine one, in which state office was a source of revenue as well as the main marker of status, the transmission of goods becomes a complex and subtle matter, since material and symbolic capital may both complement and compensate for each other in the upper reaches of society.

Family structure makes a difference to forms of property transmission, and the reverse is also true. A patriarchal and patrilineal family will certainly privilege the male line, affecting both the way property is transmitted and the role and position of women. A society in which bilateral succession (inheritance by both male and female offspring) and partibility, that is, inheritance by all of the children, prevail would coincide with a prevalence of nuclear households and high nuptiality. Whether the household consists of nuclear or extended families, therefore, will depend in part on the mode of transmission of the parental property.

What is involved here is the present and future of productive resources, a matter of equal interest to peasant and aristocrat, although it remains to be seen whether the strategies adopted by different social and economic groups were similar or dif-

⁴ Pitsakis 2006.

⁵ Cheynet 1998.

ferent. In any case, the vital importance of the issues involved brought to the fore conflicting interests and purposes. Conflicting imperatives, too, are evident in Byzantine society, while for Byzantinists the interpretation of some of the issues has been fraught with controversy.

Conflicting imperatives regarding the transmission of property were created by the interests of the families involved, sometimes in opposition to each other, and by the differences between what the normative powers proclaimed and what was optimum or at least feasible in social and economic terms. Here are some of the conflicting imperatives.

Parents wanted to provide for their children, especially when these married and left the household. The Byzantine system of succession, based on partible inheritance, meant that all of the children inherited. This desire is in possible conflict with the needs of the older generation, for whom provision has to be made. Furthermore, and especially in times of demographic growth, providing for the children has the inherent danger of so diminishing the property that it becomes non-viable or economically weakened.

There was also a conflict between some normative rules and social needs. Roman law demanded partibility and, since the sixth century, exhibited a marked preference for equal inheritance.⁶ Thus, in the absence of a testament, all children, male and female, were to inherit equal portions of the parental property. It may be that Christianity played a role in the equal treatment of children. In the fourth century, St Basil of Caesarea preached that all children should inherit equally. Arguing by analogy, he spoke of the eagle, which has two offspring but raises only one, throwing the other out of the nest. And he continued: "Such are the parents who, claiming poverty, expose their babies, or those who treat their offspring most unequally in the distribution of property. It is just, however, that, as they gave each one life equally, so they should also provide them equally with the resources necessary for living."⁷ St. Basil's is a fine principle, and indeed it was broadly practiced in Byzantine society, albeit with significant modifications. However, if it were to be compulsory rather than admonitory, it would become problematic. For one thing, it would not work well with another tenet of Roman law, namely, the freedom of action on which a testament is theoretically based. Furthermore, it would make impossible any discretionary action concerning property arrangements at the time of marriage. But Byzantine matrimonial alliances, as we shall see, were a matter of strategy that sometimes necessitated unequal distribution.

Finally, there is a potential conflict between the needs of the children, or of others who had an interest in the property, namely, in some cases, the imperial treasury, and the needs of the individual, who might want to safeguard his or her salvation through donations to the church.⁸ That too was capable of solution, and a solution was found.

⁶ Beaucamp 1985: 199–200.

⁷ Homilia VIII in Hexaameron, *MPG* 29, 177–80.

⁸ Dagron 1998.

The disagreements among Byzantinists are to some degree the result of uneven source survival, specifically, the distribution of legal sources and narrative sources or private acts that show how things worked out in practice. For the period down to the seventh century, the survival of Greek papyri in Egypt allows us to study some aspects of social practice, which may then be compared to the abundant legislative sources of the sixth century.⁹ But Greek papyri peter out after the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs in 642. After that, and for more than 250 years, we have legislative sources for the subject at hand, but extremely limited information otherwise. Narratives, judicial decisions, and acts of practice survive starting with the early eleventh century, while for the late thirteenth to the fifteenth century we even have sources that are capable of statistical treatment and quantitative analysis, at least for some parts of the Byzantine empire. As a result of this state of the documentation, one of the topics discussed here, namely, the transmission of property, has been, in the first instance, the purview of jurists or legal historians. They make excellent use of the normative sources, and in the past they used to privilege normative rules. In the last few decades, however, the study of documents has increased, and these often give evidence for deviation from the rules. An ongoing discussion has to do with a possible disjunction between Roman legal norms and Greek or Hellenistic custom, on matters affecting the family and the transmission of property. The debate goes back to the late nineteenth century, when powerful statements were made about the existence of a substratum of ancient customs under the Roman law edifice. It goes on today, less as an overarching theory of law and custom and more as a disagreement on specific points and specific periods.¹⁰ Social circumstances or social needs were rarely taken into account in past scholarship. In recent years, historians as well as legal historians with an understanding of the importance of practice have done some interesting and important work.¹¹ These studies tend to be concentrated in the two periods for which extra-normative sources are extant, that is, the period through the seventh century and the period from the eleventh century onward. Unfortunately, there remains a considerable gap, covering the period which in many respects holds a profound interest for the social historian. For it was in the seventh through the tenth century that Byzantine society was transformed from a late Antique one to a medieval one, and it was in this same period that important social transformations took place that made this society first a relatively flat one with unusual equality, while by the end of the tenth century the ruling élite underwent a sea-change, as the aristocracy collectively increased its power and changed its structure, from a clan structure to a family structure. The gap, unfortunately, cannot be easily filled.

⁹ Beaucamp 1985.

¹⁰ On the debate, see Beaucamp 1998: 10–17; Dagron 1998: 82. Joëlle Beaucamp is among the historians who are critical of the view that there is a clash between Roman law and Greek custom – *ibid.* Dieter Simon (Simon 1986) is among the most eminent modern historians who speak of a conflict between two basic ideas, one a Greek and Hellenistic concept that privileges family decisions and remains strong in customary law, and the other a Roman one, that privileges individual decisions.

¹¹ See, for example, the work of D. Simon and the articles in Beaucamp and Dagron 1998.

The more recent generations of social historians and social legal historians, if I may so put it, have different interests from legal historians of the past.¹² But they do not agree among themselves on all points. There is a fairly sharp controversy regarding the important question of whether the dowry is a final arrangement or a temporary one, to be revisited and revised at the moment of death of the girl's parents.¹³ There has also been some considerable debate regarding the question of the rights of political and ecclesiastical powers over the inheritance of people dying without heirs and without a testament, and over the question, arising from the same early-fourteenth century source, whether different rules obtained for dependent peasants on the one hand and everyone else on the other.¹⁴ This is a matter of some significance, since it directly impinges not only on the question of variant practices among people of different status, but also upon the issue of whether, in the late Byzantine period, the state ruled on the matter of the transmission of property differently depending on the status of the affected individuals.

Family arrangements, family strategies, and modes of transmission of property tend to change slowly, especially in pre-industrial societies. That must be understood and taken into account, since these institutions are connected to other, equally conservative, social and economic arrangements: modes of cultivation and exploitation, mentalities and social constructs. Change there is, however. In the Byzantine empire, the precipitating factors of change were the state and the church, with their various and changing interests, and with the weight of normative force behind them. The state, for example, legislated differently when its intent was to preserve small peasant ownership, and differently when its primary concern was to curtail the economic and political power of the aristocracy.¹⁵ The church became involved primarily through the extension of marriage impediments between people already related by consanguinity or linked by affinity, issues which affected the transmission of property as well.¹⁶ The élites may be a factor for change, as they sought to manipulate or bypass the legislation thus in turn giving rise to further normative action. And the peasantry developed some strategies that differed from legal norms. This was also an agent of change, not so much in the normative universe as in the material one.

In this chapter I will focus on the period after the seventh century, with a few glances backward. Much of the discussion will of necessity be focused on the period from the eleventh century onward, given the state of the sources. But this is by the way. The main articulating principle of this chapter is the fact that issues regarding family structure and the transmission of property are never static. They are dynamic,

¹² It is regrettable that the ranks of those interested in Byzantine family history are being augmented by younger scholars only in a limited way. Gender history seems to have largely replaced family history in the work of young scholars. While both have merit, it would be a pity if one were to continue being privileged over the other.

¹³ Beaucamp 1998; Cheynet 1998; Laiou 1998; Lefort 1998; see *infra* pp. 64–7.

¹⁴ See, for example, Karpouzilos 1979; Nakos 1988; Tourtoglou 2000; Laiou 2000: 114–20.

¹⁵ See *infra*, pp. 63, 70–1.

¹⁶ Pitsakis 1985 and 2006.

and must be examined as such. Time is of the essence, both in the structure of the family and in the transmission of property. A family looks very different when it is at the initial stages and when it matures and children start to get married.¹⁷ Moreover, whatever the norms, all families, whether aristocratic or peasant, develop strategies in order to try to achieve the optimum for their family and their property, and this too is a dynamic process.¹⁸ The norms simply limit the degrees of freedom.

Finally, it must be stressed that we are very unequally informed about regional variation in the Byzantine empire. Moreover, the size of the state fluctuated very considerably between the 7th and the 15th centuries. It may be taken on faith that regional variations there were, just as there are in modern Greece, for example, even though its geographical extent is considerably smaller than that of the Byzantine empire through most of its history.¹⁹ Of course, modern Greece emerged with a Civil Code after at least four centuries of Ottoman occupation, during which time local customs flourished and diverged. Whether the diversion by area was less or greater in the Middle Ages we are unable to tell.

THE BYZANTINE FAMILY

It appears that the family as a social structure was strengthened between the fourth and the eighth centuries, through the combined action of church and state and perhaps because of the spontaneous action of individuals, although this latter point can be disputed. The strengthening came about through the support given to the institution of marriage and the legislation controlling it. The church, after an initial stance that favored virginity and asceticism, preached the importance of the marriage bond, the legitimate outlet for sexual needs and the means of having legitimate children. In the fourth-century canonical legislation, especially the canons of St. Basil of Caesarea, marriage even became a remedy for certain sexual crimes, heavily punished in Roman law, such as fornication and abduction.²⁰ The state, too, promoted marriage by making it available to everyone except slaves, and by progressively improving the status of lower-class women who cohabited with men, as well as that of concubines. This culminated in a provision of the law code that was seminal for family law, the *Ecloga* issued by the emperors Leo III and Constantine V (in 741), by which if a man introduced a woman into his house, had carnal relations with her, and entrusted her with the management of his household, he was considered to have contracted marriage with her.²¹

¹⁷ For the impact of time, see Bourdieu 1994: 5.

¹⁸ On the peasantry, see Kaplan 1992: 488.

¹⁹ Bresson 2006: 19, and see also various articles in Piault 1985.

²⁰ Laiou 1993: 130 ff.

²¹ *Ecloga* (Burgmann 1983): 2.6.

According to Evelyne Patlagean, the tightening of family bonds in the fourth through the seventh centuries coincides with the decline of the city and the ruralization of the empire, which led to social involution. This theory is based on the evidence for first-cousin marriages and uncle–niece marriages which, however, it must be noted, had been legal in the Roman empire, the first until 741 and the second until 342. The evidence is found in rural contexts and in far-away provinces such as Osroene and Mesopotamia, and thus it is difficult to see the connection of these practices with the decline of cities. However, the more general point made by Patlagean, that is, the suggestion that the importance accorded to the family meant the spreading of small groups of individuals that produced, shared, and distributed resources, remains valid.²²

As for the structure of the family, there is continuity in the fact that the family never seems to have been patriarchal or patrilineal in the Byzantine empire. That is, the father did not have the extensive rights of a Roman *pater familias* over the members of his household, nor was status or property transmitted only through the male line. It is certainly true that there existed diachronic ideological norms that made of the man the head of household, and also the person whose will should be respected by his wife and their children. In family life, it has been noted, the point of view projected by the sources is that of the man: thus, for example, the prescription regarding abstinence from sex before communion is addressed to the man, who should abstain from his wife, not to women.²³ Scholars have placed greater or lesser weight on these aspects of the question, and stressed variously the subordinate position of women within the family, or the possibilities that they had partly to bypass the norms.²⁴ It is also true that, in normal times, the man had the management of all family property, including his wife's dowry; only in case of grave mismanagement, carrying risk for the survival or well-being of family members, could the wife take over the administration of the family property. However, it was accepted in law and it occurred in practice that women could and did become heads of household when widowed, even in the presence of adult offspring in the household.²⁵ The *Ecloga* established extensive rights for the mother in terms of property ownership and the upbringing of children: she acquired the right to manage the entire family property on her own, with the obligation to bring up and marry off her children, with the appropriate marriage gifts.²⁶ As for patrilineality, it has already been indicated that Byzantine succession law and, I may add, practice, was based on bilateral succession, so that property traveled along both the male and the female line.

Unfortunately, while the legislation can be followed through the centuries, the material that pertains to practice becomes abundant only with the eleventh century and into the fifteenth. Changes doubtless took place between what may be

²² Patlagean 1977: 113–55.

²³ Beaucamp 2000a and 2000b; Laiou 1981.

²⁴ For an optimistic view see, for example, Laiou 1981; for a more pessimistic view, Herrin 1983 and Beaucamp 2000b.

²⁵ Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: 90–4.

²⁶ *Ecloga* 2.5.1.

considered two end-points, the eighth century and the fourteenth. The general statement, that the family was not patriarchal, I think remains true. But one may dimly discern some differences, due both to social class and to chronology. It would seem, for example, that, while the legal framework was more or less the same in the eighth and the eleventh centuries, élite women played a less important role before the late tenth century than they did later. It has been shown that women of the imperial family (but also some of the men, it is true) were discouraged from marriage by being cloistered.²⁷ A Novel of the Emperor Leo VI sought to regulate the transmission of property to women. An earlier law (Bas XI, 1, 76=C II, 3,15) had allowed parents to rescind their promise, made in marriage contracts, that the daughter who was getting married would receive, upon the father's death and by his testament, a part of the parental property equal to that of other children. In Novel 19, Leo VI (886–912) abrogated this law, arguing that one should not give a child a smaller portion than was stipulated in the marriage contracts, and indeed stressing the virtues of equal partible inheritance; he seems to be arguing that all paternal property should, upon his death, be equally distributed among his offspring.²⁸ While the Novel makes no distinction regarding the gender of the offspring in question, it is possible that the proximate cause of the legislation was connected to women's dowries or that the legislator was extending the category of offspring to whom the law applied to include both sons and daughters.²⁹ Some scholars think that the situation redressed by Leo VI would have left girls with less of a share in the parental property than had their brothers.³⁰ If this were so, then one might argue that among the élite, who would be in the first instance on the mind of the legislator, men had been favored in the transmission of property, although the emperor himself claims that the earlier law had not been followed in practice. All this is terribly vague and uncertain, but the general statement that aristocratic women were disadvantaged before the late 10th century may stand. In the centuries between the seventh and the early eleventh century, the Byzantine élite was for the most part a military one, with the exception of the officialdom of the central administration, housed in the Palace. Many of them had their estates in Asia Minor, where the frontier zones expanded and contracted until the mid-ninth century, and then expanded consistently, in the onward march of the Byzantine armies. Military values were prevalent, which almost certainly privileged the male offspring both in terms of prestige and in terms of inheritance. It is telling that we rarely learn the names of the female members of the great families.

²⁷ Patlagean 1984.

²⁸ The emperor presented legal arguments for this new disposition, but the most forceful argumentation was based on St. Basil's simile of the eagle: see *supra* p. 53. On the Novel, see Michaélidès-Nouaros 1937: 135 ff., who argues that it did not have much influence.

²⁹ It is noteworthy that a decision by the early eleventh-century judge Eustathios Romaïos, surviving as a gloss to Bas. XI,1,76, and making reference to Novel 19, is concerned exclusively with the inheritance rights of men. Furthermore, unlike the Novel, the case judged by Eustathios concerned not the entire property of the father but, rather, that part of it which remained after the marriage of one of the sons, and after the marriage gifts given to this son: Scholion 3 to Bas. XI, 1, 76.

³⁰ Beaucamp 1998: 16.

At some point, changes occurred in the strategies and the structure of the élite. Aristocratic families became closely linked to each other through multiple marriages,³¹ and matrimonial strategy became a fine art in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, by which time vast networks of aristocratic families had been created.³² Some genealogical excursions of the Byzantines themselves are useful in this connection. The genealogy of Basil I (867–886), created by his grandson Constantine VII, traces his parental ancestry to the ancient Arsacids through two Armenian princes, whose nobility is stressed without reference to any females. Later, in the late eighth century, one of their descendants married the daughter of Leo, an Armenian official resident in Constantinople, and their son, the father of Basil I, married a girl descended through her mother from both Alexander the Great and the first Christian emperor, Constantine I!³³ In this constructed genealogy a nameless woman, Basil's mother, is introduced to legitimate the peasant who eventually became an emperor; but her genealogy is clearly fictitious. In the genealogy of one of the half dozen most important aristocrats of the late tenth century, Michael Maleinos, women have more of a place, since their status is such that with their marriage to the males of the family they introduce imperial blood and connections.³⁴ In the twelfth century, the genealogies of members of the high, imperial aristocracy, both female and male, trace both lineages and give equal weight to the male and female ancestors. Indeed, at the very basis of the Komnenian dynasty lies the marriage of two offspring of the most powerful families of the day, Alexios (I) Komnenos (1081–1118) and Irene Doukaina. After that, the family was known by the combined name Komnenodoukai. In brief, certainly in the aristocracy from the eleventh century onward and until the end of the empire, women were transmitters of both lineage and property, and the Byzantine family of at least this segment of society was equal in terms of gender.

We know next to nothing about similar developments in the majority of the population, that is, the peasantry. When information becomes abundant, starting with the late thirteenth century, we do find, here too, that the family is not patriarchal.³⁵ It is true that the censor, because the information is contained in population censuses, starts with the head of household, statistically a male, and then

³¹ For example, the great aristocrat Michael Maleinos was an uncle of the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969); the mother of the emperor John I Tzimiskes (969–976) was a sister of Nikephoros Phokas, while Tzimiskes' first wife was sister to another great magnate, Bardas Skleros.

³² Laiou 1992: chap. 1.

³³ Theophanes Continuatus, ed. Im. Bekker, Bonn, 1838, 212–16.

³⁴ Gounaridis 2006: 273–4; Petit 1902: 550–1. Maleinos' mother had imperial blood, of sorts, being related to Romanos I Lekapenos (920–944) who himself had been of peasant stock. Maleinos' sister married Bardas, father of the future emperor Nikephoros II.

³⁵ Here I must correct some earlier statements of mine (Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: 78) that affirmed just the opposite. I had taken as indices of patriarchy the fact that marriages were mostly patrivirilocal or virilocal (in fact, neolocal, I now believe), that relationships and names were usually traced through the male line. I had, however, noted that while such was usually the case, descent through females did occur, and there were female heads of household. This latter fact is significant, while the indices I had used do not establish the existence of patriarchy properly speaking.

registers his wife, children, chattels etc., with the ignoble designation “(he) has,” but on the other hand a considerable proportion of the households (around 20%) is headed by widows, even though some of these households have resident adult males.³⁶ In this period we also have secure information that allows us to observe the structure of the household. The majority, over half and, in some areas, around 70 percent, consists of nuclear families, although it is important to notice that there are also vertically extended families, consisting of two nuclear families, parents and married child. That type of extended family, of course, is connected to the family cycle, since when the older generation dies the family becomes nuclear once again. Laterally extended households, which include two or more fraternal nuclear families, are significant in certain areas, especially those with a large admixture of people with Slavic names.³⁷ The importance of this will be discussed in connection with the transmission of family property. We retain, in any case, the prevalence of the nuclear family, which therefore is not at all tied to modernization or indeed to the “western” model of the family as has been argued by some demographers.³⁸ We admit also the role of the time factor, since the family is a live organism that becomes constantly reconfigured as children are born, get married, and older people die.

It is unfortunate that we do not have equally clear indications for the structure of the family and household in earlier periods. Nonetheless, some information, though anecdotal and sporadic for the most part, is available. Michel Kaplan has argued that the nuclear family predominated in the rural world between the fourth and the seventh centuries, being occasionally augmented by brothers and sisters; he finds virtually no co-resident uncles and aunts.³⁹ He notes that this nuclear family structure corresponds to the function of the family/household unit as a unit of production.⁴⁰ One may suppose that if that was indeed the case, there was some connection with demographic factors and with the land/labor ratio: for much of this period land was abundant compared to labor. Certainly, in the late 6th and 7th century there was a steep population decline and the demographic curve did not begin its upward trend until some time in the mid-eighth century.⁴¹ But even after that there was an abundance of land. In such conditions, it might not be necessary for families to pool resources. In times of demographic expansion, when too many children might threaten the well-being of the household, some children were encouraged to leave the village and the hearth to create their own plots (and households, presumably nuclear ones), on outlying lands that belonged to their family.

³⁶ Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: 89ff.

³⁷ Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: 78ff.

³⁸ Of course Peter Laslett (1969) long ago disproved the idea that the nuclear family is a modern phenomenon; but the “western” model, which does not include the Byzantine empire, remains.

³⁹ In the real population, however, there must have been some households that were vertically extended, comprising members of two or more generations.

⁴⁰ Kaplan 1992: 483–88.

⁴¹ Laiou and Morrisson 2007: ch. III.

This is precisely what an important document, the *Fiscal Treatise*, describes vividly.⁴²

In the period before the eleventh century, the prevalent form of social and economic organization in the countryside was the village, a fiscal unit to be sure but also, in most cases, equivalent to what we know as a village. Here, there was a considerable degree of economic and fiscal cooperation, and peasants owned arable land, which was no longer the case (exceptions aside) in the documents we have for the late thirteenth century and after. Perhaps it was unnecessary to resort to the additional intrafamily pooling of resources that extended families serve.

It is also unfortunate that the only information we have on the structure of the household, late though it is, comes only from the peasant milieu and we know nothing about the aristocracy or the urban classes more generally. I am certain, however, that this ignorance can be remedied to some degree by a systematic search into narrative and hagiographic sources.

THE TRANSMISSION OF PROPERTY

The law decreed and individuals normally desired that part at least of the patrimonial property devolve to the children: a minimum of $\frac{1}{3}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ of the material property was by law reserved to the children. And according to the law, in the absence of a testament, all children, male and female, should receive an equal share of the family property. These simple-sounding rules had many permutations, and were applied differently depending on chronology and perhaps social class. The matter is greatly complicated by the fact that there are actually two points at which the family property is divided: at the marriage of each child, and at the moment of death of the parent(s).⁴³ It has been argued that the most important stage in the division of patrimony is the first one, and that the testament is the last act, that confirms or upsets the earlier arrangements. At first glance, this would seem to affirm the discretionary power of the parent(s) at every strategic moment; however, each action decreases their degrees of freedom, since it must take into account all previous actions. It looks as if marriage contracts, incorporating the various acts of transmission, acquired greater importance with the passage of time.⁴⁴ If that is reality and not an accident of the survival of sources, then the patrimony was divided earlier in the family cycle and there was less of an effort to preserve the patrimony intact for the longest time possible, than if the major act of transmission had been effectuated in one's last will and testament. It also means that, since the children had already received their portion through their marriage contracts, the

⁴² Dölger 1927: 115. The generally accepted date of this text is tenth century; N. Oikonomidès has redated it to the twelfth: Oikonomidès 1996: 44–5.

⁴³ Simon 1986; Dagron 1998.

⁴⁴ Dagron 1998.

parent(s) had greater freedom in the disposition of the residual, which they could then use to provide for the salvation of their souls, or to create pious foundations etc.⁴⁵ Most importantly, it means that the distribution of property, where property there was, can best be seen as a set of strategic decisions, aimed at preserving or increasing the wealth and power of the family, especially the offspring, while preserving part of the patrimony for oneself. Therefore, the transmission of property and matrimonial strategies become intimately connected. That statement probably applies to many societies. It certainly applies to western medieval Europe; but where primogeniture obtained, matrimonial strategies affected the fate of the patrimony less than in societies with bilateral inheritance, where both males and females inherit.

These arguments, however, must not be taken to extremes nor be assumed to have been universal. One of the most interesting testaments of the Byzantine period is that of a man from Thessaloniki, named Theodore Karavas.⁴⁶ He was perhaps a merchant, and he had, at the moment he composed his will, rather significant property consisting of vineyards and urban real estate, to the tune of 977 gold coins. Karavas had fulfilled all his legal obligations to his children at the time of their marriage, and he had carefully kept account of their marriage contracts, and registered those dispositions in his will. Having done so, he was quite free to distribute the rest of his property in his testament: there were exiguous legacies to the church and to priests, some property to his son, quite considerable property to his godchildren, small legacies to two grandchildren as well as to nephews and blood legacies, with the bulk of his assets going to his second wife. It is quite clear that a considerable part of his estate was distributed by testament, at a time when, having met his legal obligations to his children, he was free to dispose of his property at his will, and did so.

In the Byzantine empire, the transmission of property at the point of marriage led in the first instance to fragmentation. Marriage itself might offer a remedy, if the marriage of close relatives to each other were permitted or encouraged, as it was in ancient Greece and Rome. Under the influence of Christianity, however, close marriages were forbidden, and between the late seventh and the twelfth centuries the prohibitions became extended to consanguinous relatives into the seventh degree and to some affines to the sixth degree. Thus, this particular remedy became increasingly difficult, indeed virtually impossible, to apply.

The aristocracy

In the absence of the simple solution of primogeniture, which to the Byzantines would have seemed unjust in the extreme, complex strategies were developed. Let

⁴⁵ Dagron 1998: 98–9.

⁴⁶ Živojinović et al. 1998: no. 30 (1314).

us first take the case of the aristocracy. Again, it is not easy to find information for the period of the black hole. Informed guesswork is therefore necessary. In the eighth, ninth, part of the tenth centuries, there are few stable, well-established aristocratic families extending over many generations.⁴⁷ The ruling class depended greatly on state office for its revenues and its social status. Therefore, social capital was quite as important as, if not more important than, material capital. Social capital was not strictly speaking inherited, since office was not inherited, except for the imperial office which, however, was very unstable in that period. Still, access to social capital was doubtless easier for already established families. Given how significant and lucrative office was, it is possible that keeping the patrimony intact in the hands of a single individual was less important than one might imagine. Besides, it was still possible to keep the patrimony within the larger family since it was still permitted, for example, to two brothers or sisters to marry two first cousins.

A turning point came with a patriarchal decision, the *Tomos* of Sisinnios in 997. The decree forbade the marriage of two brothers (or sisters) to two first cousins, and that of uncle and nephew with two sisters and its mirror-image, that of an aunt and her niece with two brothers. It was issued at the urging of the emperor, Basil II, and the impulse came from a specific marriage alliance that was contemplated or had already been made. The decree came just after the time when Basil had been bitterly contested by members of the great aristocratic families of Asia Minor, linked among themselves with family ties. There is no question in my mind that the emperor was aiming to put obstacles to the economic and political consolidation of such families, even though the Patriarch used different arguments in his decree. The decree, and its long evolution, has been discussed extensively with regard to marriage impediments, but it is equally important for the transmission of property. The desirability of the kind of close marriage forbidden by the Patriarch is proven by the fact that such marriages did occur within the imperial family in the late eleventh century, despite the prohibition. Nevertheless, after the decree, they could not be commonly practiced.

Jean-Claude Cheynet has studied the transmission of the patrimony in the aristocratic milieu in the period after the restriction of close marriages, that is, in the period from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. He finds that in this class, as in the society as a whole, property was transmitted to all of the children. When the great Asia Minor aristocrat, Michael Maleinos, died, his property was divided equally between his two sons, but it was reconstituted because the younger brother bought the share of the eldest. Maleinos' married daughter is not mentioned, but it is certain that she had received a dowry.⁴⁸ Aristocratic women could and did inherit land, but there is no way to tell whether they were favored or disfavored in relation to their brothers, or whether all the children received virtually equal

⁴⁷ On this period, see the interesting article by Brousselle 1999.

⁴⁸ Cheynet 1998: 64–5.

portions.⁴⁹ Of course, in this class testaments were usual, so there was a good deal of discretionary power on the part of the parents. Cheynet thinks it possible that aristocratic women received a large portion of their dowry in cash, jewels, and other movable goods. As he acknowledges, however, this is conjecture. The decisions of the judge Eustathios Romaïos, in the early eleventh century, which are incorporated in the *Peira* and which arise from an urban milieu consisting of aristocrats, usually not of the highest order, and a wealthy urban population, make it clear that in this milieu also property was transmitted to both men and women, although the details and strategies do not emerge clearly. Simply, the principle of bilateral inheritance is confirmed.⁵⁰

Another, and major, remedy to the dispersion of property and therefore to the impoverishment of the family down the generations is obvious but rarely enters the discussion. It has to do with marriage strategies. With every marriage there is certainly transmission of property both to the bride and to the groom, and there is, thus, a restructuring of some of the property of two families in the creation of the third. The corollary of the inheritance system is that the patrimony is fluid, and in order to follow its fate we have to look at it through three families across time. Here is where matrimonial strategies come in. A judicious marriage can ensure an excellent future for the offspring, as two families exchange material and social capital. A case in point, although the marriage never took place, is that of the eleventh-century savant and politician, Michael Psellos, who had promised his future son-in-law, as part of the dowry of Psellos' daughter, an imperial title that would yield an annual revenue, but most notably would ensure the groom's social position.⁵¹ A good marriage, indeed, itself becomes social capital, as it allows siblings to make better marriages with less expenditure in terms of marriage gifts. All of which suggests that pre-mortem inheritance, that is, the division of material goods among children while the parents were alive, was unequal among members of this class. This is observably the case among the lesser, provincial aristocracy in the Despotate of Epiros in the early thirteenth century.⁵² As different arrangements are made for various children of the same family, the process of property transmission becomes dynamic and flexible, much more so than a simple look at the laws would lead us to believe. There is consolidation of property and social capital in the new household, offsetting the fragmentation of the paternal landed property.

In the same connection, it seems to me that for members of this class the distribution of property at the time of marriage was final, unless, of course, the marriage was dissolved by divorce. Each matrimonial union required subtle strategies and negotiations, and complex arrangements, making renegotiation at a later point very

⁴⁹ A clear case of a woman owning non-dowry property is that of Maria Tzousmene, daughter of John II Komnenos, in the twelfth century: Acts of Zographou (Regel et al. 1907): no 5; cf. Acts of Xeropotamou (Bompaire 1964): no. 8 (ca. 1200).

⁵⁰ Beaucamp 1985.

⁵¹ Sathas 1876: 205.

⁵² Laiou 1998.

delicate indeed, and a factor of instability. There is considerable dispute among Byzantinists precisely on the point I have just made. The dispute, in summary, is as follows: whether indeed the disposition of property at the point of marriage was final, or whether it was an interim arrangement, to be revisited at the time of death of the parent(s), under the principle of equal distribution of property among all the children of a family. The burden of the law seems to be that the dowered children should “return” (collate) their dowry at that point, place it in the family pot, as it were, so that redistribution could take place. Some scholars think that this law was applied, certainly at various points in Byzantine history, and probably throughout.⁵³ Other scholars have argued strenuously that such was not the case: that the woman, specifically, either did not collate her dowry or was not allowed to do so, that is, was excluded from the succession. This has been described as a custom, sometimes a Greek custom, which prevailed over Roman law, a view espoused mostly by scholars of earlier generations.⁵⁴ Whether it is a Greek custom or not is a question I will not address in this discussion. The evidentiary material supporting one or another of the two positions, however, is of interest. The older position, perhaps because it is older, does not find much favor with most scholars today.⁵⁵ Yet one is hard put to find evidence for the “return” of the dowry. In the early period, that is, before the mid-seventh century, Joëlle Beaucamp, despite her profound knowledge of Egyptian papyri, finds no direct evidence, but nevertheless deduces that the dowry was, indeed, returned to become part of redistribution.⁵⁶ As far as the Constantinopolitan aristocracy in the period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries is concerned, there is, similarly, no evidence either way, and J.-Cl. Cheynet wisely draws the conclusion that the question cannot be answered.⁵⁷

For a later period, some conclusions may be drawn from documents of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: judicial decisions or opinions from the Patriarchal court in Constantinople, which judged cases of family law, and from the chancery of the Archbishop of Ochrid, Demetrios Chomatianos (he was archbishop from 1216/17 until his death, ca. 1236). The relevant cases implicate not the highest aristocracy but individuals from a range of social strata: members of the aristocracy from Constantinople, provincial aristocrats from Thessaloniki and Corfu, and people from the Despotate of Epiros whose status is unknown but was not particularly high.⁵⁸ Each case has its own peculiarities, but general conclusions may be reached. These suggest that in practice people had developed strategies for the distribution of property that were wise, aimed at serving the interests of different members of the family, and also at minimizing instability in the family and social

⁵³ Beaucamp 1998.

⁵⁴ On the earlier bibliography, see Beaucamp 1998:11–17.

⁵⁵ For the peasantry, see Lefort 1998: 176–7.

⁵⁶ Similarly, there is no evidence for the aristocracy in the period between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.

⁵⁷ Cheynet 1998: 61–2.

⁵⁸ Laiou 1998: see the cases in the Appendix; cf. Matses, 1961b: 73–8. On the Constantinopolitan aristocracy in the 14th c., see Macrides 1998: 184–5.

environment. It is clear that the dowry was not necessarily an equal part of the patrimonial property: it could be less or more, and the dowries of girls of the same family could also be unequal. The laws that mandated the possibility of the return of the dowry to the family for redistribution were known and acknowledged. Dowried women, therefore, were not excluded from the inheritance, and could press their claims. However, the legal and actual custom seems to have been for all children who had received marriage gifts, men and women alike, and had left the parental household (*exoproikoi*) to be considered as having no claim on the residual of parental property. That was to be distributed among the “heirs,” those who had not left the household along with their marriage gifts. The courts more or less recognized this custom when claims were brought by married children, and rendered decisions that either upheld it on grounds other than the ones recognized by the law, or made the application of the law very expensive for those who sought to have it applied. The customary disposition preserved for the parents a part of the property, so that they would not be destitute in their old age. It provided for the distribution of a portion of the property while the parents were alive, and the rest of it after their death, to be distributed among the “heirs.” And it avoided the huge disruption that redistribution of the property many years after the original arrangements would entail: a disruption that would affect marriages, would give rise to great disputes about the value of the original dowry and any increase in its value, and force a reevaluation of the parental property. Thus, social arrangements prevailed over legal norms, without the law having been abrogated.⁵⁹

As for the higher aristocracy, the only information we have regarding this issue comes from an area that was, at the time, outside the Byzantine empire, the Empire of Trebizond. There is a Novel of John II (1280–1297) or John IV (1429–1459/60) Grand Komnenos that regulates the matter of the property of out-marrying children. According to the emperor, an old, dormant law had recently been re-introduced, that provided for the collation of the property given to out-marrying children with the property available at the time of the parents’ death, the whole to be redistributed. With acuity, the emperor signals the social disruption thus created: the “destruction of numerous and great houses.” The dispositions of the new piece of legislation are a little complicated to describe in detail. In essence, what the emperor orders is that when a testament exists, its dispositions must be observed – the sanctity of the testament is affirmed. If there is no testament, the property will in principle be divided among the children still living in the parental household. Out-marrying daughters are absolutely forbidden to collate their dowry, but out-marrying sons are not excluded from collating their marriage gifts. This last provision is not as disruptive as the collation of the dowry would have been, since the man’s marriage gifts are more of a guarantee to his wife, and do not change hands while he is alive and the marriage lasts. The legislation in question obviously had local application only. But it seems simply to make into law what I think were informal arrangements, on the margins of the law, in the Byzantine territories. It is

⁵⁹ Laiou 1998.

not a piece of legislation that privileges men over women; it simply preserves the stability of property arrangements.⁶⁰

One other type of property distribution must be mentioned, although it probably is not within the spirit of a book on social history, but rather a matter related to political ideology and foreign relations. It concerns the dowry of members of the imperial family married abroad. In the days when the Byzantine empire was powerful, an imperial princess married abroad did not receive lands as her dowry, at least not extensive lands. Thus, when Manuel I married off his niece, Theodora, to Baldwin III, king of Jerusalem, he gave her a significant dowry, which consisted only of moveable goods and cash, and did not include land.⁶¹ This cannot be taken to mean that Byzantine aristocratic women did not receive land as part of their dowry, a thought that can only be entertained if one does not consider the consequences of giving Byzantine lands as dowry to a foreign prince. If all went well in the marriage, the offspring would inherit these lands, which would therefore pass into foreign hands; in the case of Theodora and Baldwin III, if the first son became king of Jerusalem, the Byzantine lands would become part of the territory of his kingdom. Whatever inroads western feudal thinking may have made into the Byzantine empire in the twelfth century,⁶² it had not led the Byzantines anywhere near even dreaming of the situation that obtained in France and England, for example, where the Plantagenet kings of England held large parts of France as fiefs from the kings of France. It must have been unthinkable for Manuel I to give lands as dowry to the bride of the king of Jerusalem. The same emperor gave to Renier of Montferat, upon the latter's marriage to Manuel's daughter Maria, what western sources call a "feudum" or "honor" or even "regnum Salonichi," but which in all probability would have been the revenues of the city and its environs, or, at most, the revenues of the theme of Thessaloniki.⁶³ In any case, Renier and Maria were expected to live in the Byzantine empire; little danger of alienation of property there. On the contrary, in the late thirteenth century, when the Byzantine empire was vulnerable on any number of fronts, the emperor Andronikos II (1282–1328) ceded to his new son-in-law, Stephen Urosh II Milyutin of Serbia, large parts of Macedonia as the dowry of the imperial princess Simonis who was given at a very young age to the middle-aged Serbian king as his bride (1299).⁶⁴ In essence, this was an official cession of lands that had been conquered by Milyutin. It is a comment on the Byzantine concept of the state in this late period that state lands could be given away as a dowry, as though they were private, patrimonial lands of the emperor. But here we are in the domain of foreign relations and acts under duress, which do not necessarily have explanatory power as to the normal system of property devolution.

⁶⁰ Novel in Zepos and Zepos 1931: I, 364–5.

⁶¹ Hendy 1985: 270, after William of Tyre.

⁶² On this, see Magdalino 1993: esp. 176–7, 248–9.

⁶³ For the sources, see Magdalino 1993: 100.

⁶⁴ Laiou 1972: 98–9.

The peasantry

We do not have a very clear view of the family structure or the transmission of property among the peasantry for the period before the eleventh century. As far as the structure of the family is concerned, the little that is known or can be reasonably proposed, has already been discussed. As for the transmission of property, it has been rightly observed that peasants in the eleventh century exhibited ingenuity in manipulating inheritance arrangements so as to achieve optimum conditions for the exploitation of family holdings.⁶⁵ For the rest, one has to work backward from our knowledge of affairs in the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. It is a process that historians would rather not undertake, for it has the inherent danger of privileging elements of continuity as opposed to elements of change which, after all, are what distinguishes various historical periods. Here, the medievalist can take solace from the reflections of Alain Bresson on Greek kinship: he argues that kinship in Greek societies is a palindrome, and that problems can be solved if we approach them both from the start and from the end, both from ancient and from modern Greek society. This is not so because social forms remain unchanged, but because at a deeper level a logic may be at work which creates similar forms at different times.⁶⁶ I think that this approach, cautiously used, can indeed give us a realistic idea of the situation before the sources become rich, as well as allow us to pinpoint certain plausible points of change.

Let us, then, look at the situation as it appears in the thirteenth through the first half of the fifteenth century. For the first part of that period, much of our information comes from the records of the monastery of Lembiotissa in Asia Minor, with their numerous acts of sale or donation that involve peasant families.⁶⁷ Acts of sale and donation may also be found, though in very significantly lower quantity, in Thessaly. Information of a different kind, relevant to questions of inheritance disputes that became so severe as to reach the court, is available for Epiros in the early thirteenth century, down to the 1230s. At the end of the thirteenth century we begin to get large sets of data, mostly from Macedonia, from the archives of the monasteries of Mt. Athos. These are richest for the period up to the early 1340s, and reappear in the early fifteenth century. The data they contain are so rich that they have been subjected to statistical analysis.⁶⁸

What follows is a summary of the picture as it emerges primarily from the Mt. Athos documentation. To a surprising degree, some important features of property transmission are similar in both the peasant milieu and the aristocratic one. There is no primogeniture among Byzantine peasants; although some examples can be adduced of preferential treatment of the elder brother, such may also be found among the aristocracy. The impact of state forms and the legal system upon the

⁶⁵ Kaplan 1992: 487–8.

⁶⁶ Bresson 2006: 22.

⁶⁷ Miklosich and Müller (1860–90): IV.

⁶⁸ Laiou-Thomadakis 1977 and Laiou 2002.

system of inheritance is observable in what happened in the Principality of Achaia, under western control after 1205. Here, Greek feudatories were allowed to practice partible inheritance, since, clearly, that had been their custom, based on law, before the Latin conquest. Western feudatories, on the contrary, practiced primogeniture. It seems that Greek serfs also held to the Byzantine way of partible inheritance among their heirs; but the *Assizes of Romania*, the feudal law code of Frankish Greece, tried to superimpose a western law that would make it impossible for more than one person to succeed to the holding. Whether that was successfully imposed or not is hard to discern. But we have here a clear indication of how political powers tried to intervene in the rules and customs of succession.

In Byzantine lands, dependent peasants, the class of peasantry for whom we have by far the most information, were more affected than other classes by the negative corollaries of equal partible inheritance to which they were certainly bound by law, since the incidence of testaments, which permitted discretionary disposition of part of the property, must have been exceedingly small. At the same time, as we have seen, the ownership of arable land among the dependent peasants of Mt. Athos was exiguous: they were tenants of monastic lands. So there was little arable land to be inherited and subdivided. There was, however, other immobile property: houses, vineyards, which were a very important resource, fruit trees and the land on which they stood, gardens, olive trees and groves. A study of the property composition of peasant households in Macedonian villages shows variegated patterns of property transmission. The underlying pattern, of which the others are deviations, is equal partible inheritance, with the girls receiving their portion primarily in the form of dowry.⁶⁹ The vagaries of the life-cycle, the death of siblings, for example, or even matrimonial strategies, make perfect equal partibility impossible, but it seems to have been the desideratum and to some considerable extent the practice. Deviations from equal access to the parental resources include occasional efforts to preserve the property, in its totality or for the greatest part, in the hands of a single individual. Preferential partible inheritance results in the concentration of most of the holding in the hands of one offspring, male or female. In very rare cases, one person inherits the entire holding, and the parents live with him or her until they die, and this continues through the generations. This type of inheritance, which has been called the stem family, was not common in Byzantium.⁷⁰ On the whole, then, among

⁶⁹ I cannot agree with Lefort 1998, who thinks that a few (three) cases indicate that women collated their dotal property with the parental one at the time of the parents' death, for redistribution of the total among all the heirs. None of these cases makes the point. The only one that on the surface seems to do so is *Lavra II* (Lemerle et al. 1970–82): no. 109, l. 521–523. On closer inspection, however, it turns out that it is unclear whether the marriage of Demetrios and Siligno took place before or after the death of her parents, which makes any conclusion as to the fate of the dowry uncertain.

⁷⁰ On the above, see Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: 197–203. For very similar patterns in modern Greece, with similar deviations from the (mandated) pattern of partible inheritance, see Friedl 1963: chap. 4; also, Saulnier-Thiercelin 1985: 54–60. Research published over the last 40 years has established that the stem family was also uncommon among peasants in western Europe, despite earlier opinions to the contrary. See, for example, Anderson 1995: 9–20.

Byzantine peasants, at least in the period for which information is available, equal or quasi-equal distribution of property was the norm, with some deviations. Officially, there was not here, as there was not among the aristocracy, any formal right attached to primogeniture. There are, however, situations in which an elder son has clearly received preferential treatment, having been better educated than his brothers and being in charge of the entire parental property, although he did so illegally, and probably by force of character and status.⁷¹

In both the peasantry and the aristocracy, the inheritance system was concomitant with a high degree of nuptiality, as anthropological theory would predict. Since resources were divided among all the children, and new households were started with a certain amount of property, it was possible for all the children of a family, or a large number of them, to contemplate marriage, something far less easy in societies where one heir acquires the bulk of the property. Among the peasantry, the existence of lands that could be cleared and cultivated further increased the possibilities available to new households, at least until a Malthusian impasse was reached, always a possibility in pre-industrial societies.⁷²

The most important way in which the fragmentation of holdings was held at bay was the ownership and exploitation of holdings by people who had their own households and who were related to each other. That phenomenon is certainly observable among the Macedonian peasantry in the fourteenth century.⁷³ The documentation from the Despotate of Epiros and Asia Minor, in the early thirteenth century, shows that similar arrangements existed also among the aristocracy and the peasantry in those regions. Indeed, one can trace the custom much earlier, to the eleventh century if not the tenth. An extraordinary document, whose date is unfortunately quite insecure, but which I believe to date to the eleventh century, throws light on several aspects of this phenomenon. It is a commentary on the Novel of Romanos I Lekapenos on preemption (traditional date: 922; alternative and probably better date: 928). The emperor, trying to stop the accumulation of land into the hands of powerful people through the purchase of land from the peasants, had established several degrees of preemption, that is, first rights, on the land that was to be sold. The first right of preemption goes to the *anamix sygkeimenoi syggeneis*, which I translate as “the relatives who are mixed in and whose property is intermingled,” i.e., those who are holding lands that are interspersed into each other. The second right goes to the partners who are similarly interconnected.⁷⁴ In interpreting the Novel, the commentary both changes it and provides an illustrative example of what the emperor had in mind when he used the term *anamix sygkeimenoi syggeneis*.⁷⁵ Here is an excerpt:

⁷¹ Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1909, no. 11.

⁷² A Malthusian impasse was reached in the very late 13th c.: Laiou and Morrisson 2007: chap. V.

⁷³ Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: 200ff and 80.

⁷⁴ Svoronos 1994: 62–3.

⁷⁵ The most important change comes in the second degree of preemption, where the commentator substitutes “similarly interconnected *relatives*” instead of partners. For the most recent edition and translation of the commentary, see Laiou 1992: 178–81, 150–1.

When someone sells immobile property . . . he must first offer it to the relatives who are mixed in and whose property is intermingled. . . . For example, my father and your father were brothers. Their own father died without a testament, and our parents did not divide their patrimonial goods [between them]. We, too, retained the holding undivided and intermingled, and we hold it in common. . . . And sometimes I cultivated one of the fields and you the other one; sometimes I cultivated the field you had cultivated the year before, while you worked on the one in which I had labored the previous year; or else, we cultivated the field together. . . . When one of us, holding this land in this way, wishes to sell his part of the undivided field, the other is preferred to all other buyers . . .⁷⁶

This intriguing text clearly refers to peasants – since it mentions the cultivation of the land. It establishes the relationship of first cousin, not brother, as the point at which the ancestral holding is still held and exploited without being divided, but also as the point at which the common exploitation might give out. Both the Novel and, much more clearly, the interpretation given by the commentary, aim at keeping the holding intact over three generations, and to facilitate its exploitation by a single individual subsequently. The legislation of Romanos I was not class-blind: it was issued for the benefit of the peasants, and it favored the common exploitation of peasant land.

What about practice? Documents from all the periods in which documentation exists make it perfectly clear that joint exploitation of property generally, but land more specifically, with benefits especially in terms of the more rational and efficient division of labor, existed both among the provincial aristocracy and among the peasantry in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is noteworthy that the boundaries of common exploitation and common ownership are placed at the level of first cousin. One is tempted to recall the Patriarchal decree of Sisinnios on marriage impediments, which had forbidden the marriage of two brothers to two first cousins, and therefore impeded, at the practical level, the pooling of resources or the economic cooperation between two groups that were already in close economic contact. I suggest, therefore, that we have two instances of powerful intervention of the state, albeit in oblique ways, into the strategies of the transmission of goods. For the peasants, the Novel of Romanos I Lekapenos made it easier to retain their holdings or part of their holdings undivided over three or possibly more generations. For the aristocracy, Basil II, through the Patriarch, sought to make the accumulation of economic power harder. Interestingly, however, in this matter too legislation could only go so far, and customary practices surfaced easily, giving the family bond greater claim on patrimonial land than any law prescribed. Already in the eleventh century kinship was affirmed as creating a more powerful claim to land than did any other kind of connection. And in the thirteenth century, a learned and wise jurist, Chomatianos, made it clear that in his court a family had the right to reconstruct its patrimonial lands, despite the fact that others might have a higher

⁷⁶ Svoronos 1994; Laiou 1992: 149–50.

claim according to the law on preemption.⁷⁷ Patrimonial property was the tangible form of the family bond.

CONCLUSION

Family structure and the transmission of property in the Byzantine empire follow a pattern whose principal traits are very similar to those described by David Herlihy for western Europe after the year 1000, and by anthropologists like Stanley Tambiah for North India.⁷⁸ The constitutive act, marriage, creates a family that is monogamous, is created by the consent of both parties, and has a property element consisting, commonly, of the bride's dowry and the bridegroom's marriage gift to her. These become the property of the new household, although the natal family of both bride and groom have residual claims on them. Descent is cognatic, and the family property is transmitted through bilateral inheritance, with a strong preference in law for equal inheritance, and a complex system of strategies developed on the ground in order to lend flexibility – and inequality – to the system. The effects of bilateral inheritance on the fragmentation of holdings cannot easily be given the remedy of re-concentration through close marriage, since that became increasingly difficult; common exploitation of patrimonial lands did provide a remedy. The nuclear family predominated for the entire period, as far as one can see, and is connected to the form of agricultural exploitation, which was based on the peasant family and household.

The values that flow from such a system are also common to similar situations in other parts of the world: the married woman is protected, and, having contributed a dowry, she is not expected to work outside the household; an ideological posture which cannot be practiced except among the wealthy.

The Byzantine case also has important specificities. These stem from the fact that there were not one but two normative powers trying to manipulate the transmission of property and therefore everything that results from it: the church and the state. The continuing survival of important tenets of Roman law, too, meant that there was a framework within which decisions, both those of the state and those of individuals, had to be formulated. The law changed, of course, but in whatever form it added its own complexities to the development of family and property relations over time. So there were many players, with their own interests and limitations, the conjunction of which gives fluidity and flexibility to what at first glance looks like a fairly stable system.

⁷⁷ Chomatianos 2006: no. 71. On this, see Papagianni 1992.

⁷⁸ Herlihy 1985: chap. 4; Tambiah 1989.

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4

THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF THE LAW

Bernard Stolte

INTRODUCTION

This social history will therefore be an examination of key facets of Byzantine society in an effort to see what role or function they had, how they evolved and why, and how they were perceived and understood by those involved in them directly or indirectly.

Thus the editor of the present volume in his introductory chapter.¹ Not only can the present writer not presume to be able to write a social history of Byzantine law, but legal scholarship in the field has predominantly concentrated on other aspects and our knowledge therefore shows vast lacunae.

To some extent the question of how the history of Byzantine law has been written in the past, and should be written in the future, has been debated in recent years, and in that debate the lack of a social history has been noted. For example, if I am not mistaken, historians of Byzantine law have been taken to task by Alexander Kazhdan in his plea for a new history of Byzantine law, precisely for neglecting to study those aspects which would have been included if they had set out to write such a social history. I find myself among those who have answered Kazhdan, and I stick to my guns, but not, I should like to emphasize, because I do not consider a social history of Byzantine law to be a desideratum.² On the contrary, I ardently wish someone would write it, someone with the right prerequisites. For me, however, it is at present only possible to say something along the lines of the statement quoted above, taking into account other points touched upon in the same introductory chapter.

¹ Above, pp. 5–6.

² For a review of trends and results in Byzantine legal historiography during the last decades, see Stolte 2005a; on Kazhdan's plea, *ibid.* 74, with references.

The most promising title in existing secondary literature is *Law and Society in Byzantium, Ninth–Twelfth Centuries*, a volume containing the papers of a Dumbarton Oaks Symposium in 1992.³ The restriction to the middle-Byzantine period is misleading: several authors, especially the legal historians, also treat the early centuries.

A few years earlier and in smaller compass, Marie Theres Fögen had dealt with the role of legislation in Byzantium.⁴ After a health-warning against approaching the subject with a modern concept of “Gesetz,” she analyzes Justinian’s and Leon’s Novels and the “legal dispositions” (“rechtliche Anordnungen”) of the Palaeologues in order to find an answer to one question: “What functions did the legal dispositions, that is, dispositions bearing on law, of Byzantine emperors have?” For Justinian’s Novels Fögen infers “an amazing similarity with the tasks of modern statutes.” Leo’s Novels, on the other hand, are more symbol than reality. The Palaeologue emperors, finally, take mostly individual measures, award privileges, in short, abandon attempts at legislation in the traditional sense of the word. This rough sketch, which hardly gives a fair representation of Fögen’s rich argument, will at least convey the impression of major changes in the function of legislation in Byzantium over the ages. Obviously, they have implications for our view of the connection between legislation and social reality.

From another perspective Dieter Simon had treated related questions in a much-quoted paper on “Rechtsfindung am byzantinischen Reichsgericht.”⁵ As will transpire from the following pages, I am greatly indebted to these works when I attempt to deal with law as a “key facet of Byzantine society,” where I will concentrate on the Byzantines’ own understanding of the relation between various laws. Before doing so, however, it may be useful to remind ourselves of the historiographical tradition of the history of Byzantine law and the nature of our sources.

BYZANTINE LAW OR ROMAN LAW?

This is not the question whether Byzantine law is Roman law, but rather whether historians of Byzantine law wish to write the history of Roman law with the help of Byzantine sources, or set out to write the history of the law of Byzantine society. The first has been done from the Renaissance onwards, in the Latin-speaking West where Roman law was part of the legal system and was taught at the universities, and where the value of Byzantine sources for reconstructing Justinianic Roman law was first discovered by the humanist scholars.⁶ Interest in Byzantine law was not inspired by interest in Byzantium, but by interest in Roman law; this interest was not historical, but philological-juridical; it is still a living historiographical tradition,

³ Laiou and Simon 1994.

⁴ Fögen 1987.

⁵ Simon 1973.

⁶ Troje 1971.

though an increasing lack of knowledge of Greek among romanists may lead to its demise. The second pursuit is relatively recent; it is, of course, of greater value to byzantinists than the first. Often it is followed by historians who wish to exploit legal sources in the widest sense to write the history of Byzantium, be it the social, economic, or other history, for which these legal sources may contain data. They often do, but need “decoding” in order to permit the interpretation of these data, and here the legal historian may be of help.⁷

BYZANTINE LAW: CIVIL LAW AND CANON LAW

It is a trite statement that Byzantium did not know a separation between church and state; as a consequence, there is no strict separation between secular and ecclesiastical legislative competence and jurisdiction. Byzantine law, therefore, is an inextricable amalgam of civil law and canon law.

Yet for our purpose civil law is more interesting than canon law, since the church, especially in the earlier period, was concentrating on its own business, that is, orthodox belief, discipline, and the organization of the church. Insofar as we have canon legislation, it hardly ever ventured outside those areas, whereas civil legislation covered a much wider field and included what we would consider to be typically ecclesiastical affairs. That the church courts were also dealing with non-ecclesiastical problems, and were doing so increasingly as time progressed, is significant in itself, and here they were applying civil law whenever this was deemed appropriate. For a study of the role and function of the law, however, a concentration on civil law seems to be more fruitful, and in the following paragraphs the emphasis will therefore be on civil or secular law.

THE SOURCES

Every historian has to grapple with the limitations of his sources.⁸ Sources towards the role and function of the law of Byzantium are (1) the normative, formal sources; (2) other legal sources, stemming from legal teaching and (3) in particular from legal practice; (4) “professional” reflections on the law; (5) non-legal sources.

Formal, normative sources

This is not the place to discuss when Byzantine law proper did begin, or perhaps one should say, when Roman law became Byzantine law, but it is clear that, wher-

⁷ Stolte 2005a and 2005b.

⁸ Surveys of legal sources in Pieler 1978; Van der Wal and Lokin 1985; Troianos 1999.

ever one places its inception, the emperor was the *fons omnis iuris*, and that, among the emperors, it is impossible to escape Justinian I (527–565). Not only did he codify Roman law in the *Digesta* and *Codex* and issue a great number of *novellae post Codicem constitutiones*, but his legislation remained “in force” for the entire duration of the Byzantine empire. True, it was translated, restated, abbreviated, in short, recycled a number of times, but it remained a point of orientation for subsequent emperors (and legislators generally, even beyond Byzantium). True, there was additional legislation by later emperors, but never again on the same scale. And, perhaps most significantly, never was a veritable recodification of Byzantine law made, that is, a codification which was the result of a review of Justinianic and later legislation, systematically reorganizing and updating Byzantine law according to the needs and views at a later point in time and formally abolishing previous legislation not included in such a recodification.

Insofar as an illustration is needed, the only systematic restatement of Byzantine law remotely coming within reach of being such a recodification is the *Basilica* of circa 900, but precisely as to “modernizing” Byzantine law, it does not even attempt any such thing. The *Basilica* are Justinianic Roman law in Greek excerpts and translations as far as necessary, the main innovation being that, when the same subject had been dealt with in the various parts of Justinian’s legislation, these are now brought together under “titles” listing the relevant provisions from Digest, Code, and Novels respectively. Despite the claim of *anakatharsis*, which suggests an overhaul in order to modernize, one finds many subjects still represented which cannot have had any practical significance, and insofar as a certain amount of Justinianic material was “purged,” this was mainly done by omitting, not by amending and replacing with more recent legislation. Legislation of emperors after Justinian was not included. The number of cases in which we find a “Leonic” interpolation after the fashion of Justinian’s interventions in older material is negligible as compared to what might reasonably have been expected if a true “modernization” had been intended. The conclusion, therefore, must be that no such aim was on the minds of Basil I and Leo VI.⁹

Our legislative sources, then, consist of, on the one hand, these timeless monuments, and on the other hand a series of imperial constitutions from 534 onwards, which are to be understood as *nearai diataxeis* or amendments to the Justinianic Code, but, as has been said, are never incorporated into the *Corpus iuris* or the *Basilica*. To complicate things, there are the shorter lawbooks such as the *Ecloga* in 741, and the *Prochiron* and *Eisagoge* at the end of the ninth century, and the place of which in the legal framework of legislation and codification seems difficult to describe in modern legal terms.¹⁰ They, too, contain predominantly Justinianic

⁹ That the *Basilica* finally were considered to constitute such a recodification is another matter; see on this below, p. 86, and on other aspects of the *Basilica*, *Subseciva Groningana* III (1989).

¹⁰ On the *Ecloga*, see Burgmann 1983; on *Prochiron* and *Eisagoge*, Schminck 1986 and Van Bochove 1996.

material. Or perhaps one should say, they essentially repeat Justinianic provisions and do not show clear signs of change.

Obviously, against this background, a glance at the formal sources of the law will convey a picture of stability if not stagnation. Students of the social history of Byzantine law therefore will try to look elsewhere, perhaps with the exception of the legislation of the Justinianic age: then, at least, that emperor's own constitutions offer some hope of directly reflecting the social conditions of the period.¹¹

Other legal sources: legal teaching

Under this heading one should think, first of all, of the mass of literature stemming from the classroom in the age of Justinian, and which we know for by far the greatest part from the *Basilica* and their scholia.¹² Two points should be made.

First, although they give us a fairly accurate idea of the ambitious law curriculum of the time and the intellectual level of legal teaching in practice, that curriculum clearly aimed at teaching a technical insight into the various parts of the legislation and their relations to one another. There are occasional references to legal practice, but they are too rare to admit more than a glimpse at what took place "in the real world."¹³ This is not to say that this was not considered important; in my view, it confirms the widespread belief that Justinianian's ambitions were set too high to make this "academic" curriculum viable in the long run, whereas a more practice-oriented programme might have been more successful.

Second, the fact that we know this literature mainly from the *Basilica* and their scholia means that, at the end of the ninth century, this literature was promoted to the status of formal law, thus confirming the informal status that it had increasingly gained from the moment Latin had been abandoned as the official language of the law. In practice, Greek must always have been prevalent in the eastern part of the empire.

While all this allows interesting inferences about the role of law in Byzantine history, it is not very helpful for writing a social history of Byzantine law.

Other legal sources: legal practice

This, of course, is the category which is most promising for our theme. But alas, whereas we are reasonably well-informed about legislation, our knowledge about legal practice is much scantier. In other words, we are poorly served when it comes to knowing what happened daily in the streets and in the court-rooms.

There is one important exception, and it concerns the early period. Here the Justinianic legislation is accompanied by the evidence of the papyri, many of them of the greatest value if one wishes to know what "really happened." After the seventh

¹¹ See below, p. 82.

¹² In addition to the histories of the sources (above, n. 8), see Scheltema 1970.

¹³ Cf. Stolte 1999.

century, however, this kind of source then becomes so much scarcer. Moreover, the area from which papyri have been preserved then is lost to the Byzantine empire. In addition to the restricted period for which we have the papyri, there is also the question of the representativeness of Egypt for the empire as a whole. Students of Late Antiquity are fairly positive nowadays, but doubts remain.

Although there is a lot of indirect evidence in the form of references to actual cases in non-legal sources such as literature, hagiography, and historiography, nothing comes as close to “real life” as the papyri, not even corpora such as the *Actes de l’Athos* or the *Patriarchatsregister von Konstantinopel*.¹⁴ The only exception is the *Peira*, which reports a systematic collection of cases dealt with by Eustathios Rhomaïos, judge at the Court of the Hippodrome in the second half of the eleventh century.¹⁵ Even here, though, we do not get first-hand information: the hand of the – not always very competent – reporter has selected the facts and legal considerations leading to the decision, regularly reducing the case to obscurity. Nevertheless the *Peira* deserves our closest attention, and I shall return to it below.

On balance, however, our information about legal practice is poor and problematic.

“Professional” reflections on the law

There is precious little literature in which the Byzantines reflected on the role of law in society. The preface to the *Eisagoge* might be considered an exception in that it includes the law in a theological-philosophical framework,¹⁶ but it is far from a social theory of the law. Other *prooimia* usually present the intention of the legislator, but rarely does he seem to wish to effect change in society.

Non-legal sources

Hagiography and historiography have already been mentioned, and recently our attention has been called to “literature,” *belles-lettres*.¹⁷ Generally speaking, all sources of information, be they literary, artistic, or archeological, should be brought to bear on any historical subject, including a social history of Byzantine law. The collection of essays edited by Laiou and Simon has already been mentioned.¹⁸ Unfortunately, Ruth Macrides was right when stating: “Byzantium, we can conclude, did not have a cultural obsession with the law. It may not have had even a professional obsession with the law.”¹⁹ Here Byzantium is different from Rome, to the detriment of the social historian of the law, who finds less references to exploit.

¹⁴ See Papagianni 2005.

¹⁵ See Oikonomidès 1986 with literature.

¹⁶ Aerts et al. 2001, with literature.

¹⁷ Macrides 2005: 145.

¹⁸ Laiou and Simon 1994.

¹⁹ Macrides 2005: 145.

To sum up, the sources which would enable us to write a social history of Byzantine law, or at least say something about the role and function of the law, are less numerous and more difficult to interpret than one would wish. Which does not mean that we cannot draw a rough picture.

FOURTH TO SEVENTH CENTURIES

There are various reasons to consider the fourth to early seventh centuries a distinctive period. Not only is it seen by some as Late Antiquity rather than as Byzantium, during which “Roman” traditions and social patterns are more likely to have been still extant, it is also, as we shall see, well-marked at the end by a change in the role of legislation.

The fourth is the earliest century one could call Byzantine. Although I would not advocate to make Byzantine law begin as early as that, there is an excellent reason to see it as the beginning of a distinctive period which lasted until the early seventh century. Marie Theres Fögen has pointed out that, from the fourth century onwards, imperial legislation permeates all aspects of life.²⁰ The innumerable subjects in which the emperor interfered through the vehicle of the imperial constitution make the *Codex Theodosianus* an outstanding source for historians, as has recently been noted by Fergus Millar.²¹ Justinian’s own constitutions, collected in the *Codex Justinianus repetitae praelectionis* of 529 and followed by his Novels, are another example of the same phenomenon: their frequency and varied content, and also the fact that the emperor was spurred to action not only by general concerns, but quite often by individual problems, are all indications that he wished to be seen as a restless carer of the people and considered legislation the proper channel for that care.

Was this care effective? Did it result in behavior in accordance with the emperor’s wishes? Do we have evidence which enables us to draw positive or negative conclusions on this point? Here the papyri are of some help. The honor of having evaluated this material systematically goes to Joëlle Beaucamp, whose two volumes on “le droit impérial” and “les pratiques sociales” are an exhaustive treatment of “le statut de la femme” in the fourth to seventh centuries.²² Hers is one of the rare works in which lawyers and historians are equally well served.

Against more pessimistic views, Joëlle Beaucamp has convincingly demonstrated that the Novels penetrated into daily practice as far as Egypt.²³ The abundant legislative activity of which they are proof shows the ideals strived for at government level,

²⁰ Fögen 1994: 54–61, esp. 60.

²¹ Millar 2006.

²² Beaucamp 1990–2; see also Beaucamp 2005.

²³ E.g., Beaucamp 2005: 33 ff., esp. 39–47. For a less positive view on this point, see Fögen 1987: 145.

and the concrete events eliciting these legislative acts connect these ideals with the problems as they were perceived.

Perhaps the “effectiveness” of the measures taken with these Novels, which cannot have been as negligible as sometimes has been asserted, is not the most important aspect. The fact that the early emperors paid attention to relatively minor matters and resorted to the promulgation of formal laws to remedy them surely points to the direct connection between law and social practices: in my view, a social history of Byzantine law should start from the hypothesis that, in the early Byzantine centuries, our legal sources should be considered representative of what actually happened.

By the seventh century things clearly were changing. The four Novels of Heraclius are the last manifestations of lawgiving in the Justinianic tradition, but cannot, as their most recent editor emphasizes, be considered to be a “Reformwerk”;²⁴ rather they are representative of interference at the highest level in sometimes minor matters that had been brought to the emperor’s attention.

It hardly needs saying that the emperor had other business to attend to. Under Heraclius, the empire barely managed to survive: the wars against the Avars, Persians, and later the Arabs all took a heavy toll. By Heraclius’ death in 641 the eastern provinces of Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia had been lost to the Arabs and Egypt fell in 642. Although these losses are not necessarily the reason why legislation faded into the background, one can imagine that the crisis and the struggle for survival demanded different priorities.

One immediate effect of the loss of the eastern provinces just mentioned is the severance of a direct link between legislation and papyri, or, to be precise, of the possibility to use the papyri as a standard to measure the effect of imperial legislation. Now that the Byzantine emperor no longer ruled over the desert, the documents preserved by its climatic condition cannot be expected to respond to any laws he might have issued. Interestingly, several papyri of the late seventh century and later are actually evidence that business went on as usual for a time, but these are of course not documents from Byzantine legal practice.

The central point to note seems to be that, after Heraclius at the latest, emperors no longer used legislation in the same all-pervasive way as their predecessors had done. Clearly this indicates a changing role of legislation, and perhaps also of law, in Byzantine society.

The function of the law in the seventh century has been explicitly treated by John Haldon in his book on *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*. Its subtitle is at least as significant: “The transformation of a culture.” To summarize briefly, Haldon argues that, despite the collapse of legal education and accessibility of legal literature, “[t]he ideological force of the concept of Roman law will hardly have been affected,” Roman law, that is, as a symbol of the Roman state.²⁵ I find myself in agreement with that view, which raises two points on which I should like to insist. First, the

²⁴ Konidares 1982: 106.

²⁵ Haldon 1990: 276–80, esp. 279.

function of Roman law of symbolizing the Roman state is clearly visible already long before. Indeed, the law's all-pervasiveness, noted by Fögen for the fourth century onwards, is no stranger to this function, and it is this function which has been constant during the thousand years of the Byzantine empire. Second, by the same token the omnipresence of law apparently strongly diminishes in the seventh century: that at least one may infer from the lack of imperial legislation, which surely cannot be explained as just a lack of sources. Just as this omnipresence points the social historian in the direction of the law for information about daily life in the fourth to seventh centuries, its disappearance warns him against taking too much for granted from the early seventh century onwards.

The seventh century is marked by another change: the rise of canon law and ecclesiastical jurisdiction at the expense of their secular counterparts. To some extent this has been a natural development. The crisis of the empire must have imperiled the regular activity of the secular courts, especially in the provinces where the pressure of the enemy was felt most. Bishops and other ecclesiastical dignitaries must have felt that pressure too, but their authority was less directly connected to the presence of the Byzantine army and administration and was supported by orthodox belief. Under these circumstances, formal and informal ecclesiastical jurisdiction tend to take over the role of the secular courts, a development which also favors the prestige of ecclesiastical authority and creates the possibility of formal and informal "legislation" by that authority.

At the end of the seventh century we see the clear results manifest themselves at the Council in Trullo or Quinisext Council of 690/691. On the one hand it issues a long series of canons, several of them testifying to the practical problems caused by the crisis; on the other hand, its second canon is the consolidation of a development, the beginnings of which are visible in the sixth century: increasing personal authority of leading church figures of the past, whose writings were put on a par with the formal decisions of councils, and who paved the way for contemporary figures to reach a comparable authority, such as Maximus Confessor and Anastasius of Sinai.²⁶

One is tempted to draw the conclusion that canon law simply filled the void left by secular law, and undoubtedly this is what happened to some extent. There is, however, more to it. Just as Justinian was to remain the legislator par excellence and subsequent legislation never was fully integrated in the form of a recodification of Byzantine secular law, a similar phenomenon may be observed in canon law. By the seventh century, the great age of the church councils was already long passed; the Council in Trullo was atypical in producing, 240 years after Chalcedon, the last extensive conciliar legislation of the Orthodox Church. Its canons took some time to be received into the standard collections, prominent among those the *Nomocanon of the Fourteen Titles*, which had been compiled circa 620; Maximus Confessor and Anastasius the Sinaite, for all their influence, never even were included among the fathers whose writings had been attributed that status. The development

²⁶ Cf. Stolte 2002.

of canon law, we may conclude, fits into the picture of the rise and fall of belief in legislation as a means of steering society, a belief that apparently dies in the seventh century. Byzantine legislation, secular as well as ecclesiastical, by then had found its definitive form. A normative basis had been built, which was going to serve as point of orientation for the future and apparently was considered to be of a different order from later civil and canon legislation.

FROM THE SEVENTH CENTURY ONWARDS

It may seem bold to suggest that we treat the eight centuries from the reign of Heraclius to the Fall of Constantinople as one period; yet this period shows some unity in what the role and function of the law no longer was. In the proto-Byzantine period, and *a fortiori* in Justinian's reign, we see a constant effort to respond by legislation to the exigencies of the day as the emperor saw them. Changing circumstances asked for a change of the law,²⁷ whatever the problem might be.

Technically, these changes were *nearai meta ton Kodika diataxeis*, "new constitutions after the [Justinianic] Code." The word *neara* remains in use for a very long time; from a cursory glance at the first volume of *Jus Graecoromanum* one learns that it is still used to indicate a law of Manuel Comnenus of 1166²⁸ and even a dubious one of uncertain paternity in 1306.²⁹ In Balsamon's commentary on the *Syntagma canonum* the word is frequent, and is used to denote late imperial laws, too. Since there is a wide variety in the ways imperial laws present themselves and in which they have been indicated in later transmission of their text, separately as well as in collections, it is only after a careful diplomatic and historical study that it would be possible to commit oneself to a definite most recent occurrence. To give one random example, in 922 we find a constitution to which the issuing emperors themselves refer in the text as *diataxis*, but which has been edited with an *inscriptio* containing the word *neara*. Interestingly, its first words are *Palaios nomos . . .*,³⁰ which in all probability is C. 4,38,14. Since the nineteenth book of the *Basilica* has been lost, we cannot be absolutely certain that it also included this "old law" where we might expect it, but at least all this leads to the relation between Justinianic law, the *Basilica*, and the series of laws issued by Byzantine emperors since Justinian, before and after the *Basilica*.

This is not the place to go into great detail. In existing secondary literature two lines of reasoning may be discerned which, as far as I can see, never have been confronted explicitly, but which are highly relevant for the present purpose. One is the traditional model of derogation familiar to the modern lawyer, the other empha-

²⁷ Cf. Lanata 1984.

²⁸ Zepos, Jus I, Coll. IV Nov. 68.

²⁹ Zepos, Jus I, Coll. V, Nov. 26 ("Andronici senioris"), with n. 2.

³⁰ Zepos, Jus I, Coll. III Nov. 2 with n. 2.

sizes those data in our Byzantine sources which are difficult to reconcile with that traditional view.

To begin with the traditional model: As *Romaioi*, the Byzantines were familiar with the classical Roman understanding of the relation between *leges*: new takes precedence of old. The chronological arrangement of the imperial constitutions in each title of the Theodosian and Justinianic Codes had been chosen in recognition of this principle *lex posterior derogat legi priori*,³¹ each new constitution setting aside an older one insofar as it regulates the same subject. The promulgation of the Code attributes exclusive binding force to what has been included and makes obsolete what has been left out. *Nearai meta ton Kodika diataxeis* set aside those parts of the Code that deal with the same subject. From this view, post-Justinianic legislation derogates from the *Corpus iuris civilis*. The *Basilica* generally do not incorporate these Novels between Justinian and Leo VI: this is not to say that these Novels were no longer binding, rather there are indications that the *Basilica* were not meant to set aside, but to facilitate the use of the “old legislation.” The co-existence of the *Basilica* and the older texts of Justinian’s legislation inevitably led to the question whether it was possible to invoke in a court of law a Justinianic provision not included in the *Basilica*, a question answered in the negative in the case of the episcopal see of Amisos and leading to the instruction of Balsamon to write a commentary on the *Nomocanon XIV Titulorum* to the purpose of ascertaining whether references in the Nomocanon to the Justinianic legislation were obsolete.³² Only through this decision did the *Basilica* become a codification, because only thus did they abrogate Justinianic provisions not included in the *Basilica*.³³ Balsamon went much farther than that: he also brought numerous post-*Basilica* constitutions to bear on the problem he had been instructed to deal with. There is in fact very little in his commentary that a modern lawyer would not recognize. In addition to the criterion of inclusion in the *Basilica*, Balsamon applied the standard of acceptance and rejection by customary law.³⁴

There is, however, an alternative view, for which it may suffice to bring together two findings of Fögen. In 1988 she convincingly interpreted Leo’s Novels as “kodifikationsbegleitende Legislation,”³⁵ and at the same time offered an explanation for the “häufige Nichtbefolgung” and “lückenhafte Durchsetzung” of these imperial decisions in the *Basilica*, ending with the hypothesis of a “prinzipielle Gleichwertigkeit vergangener und aktueller Gesetze” [in Byzantium]. Although heresy in the eyes of the ancient Roman jurist as well as of the modern lawyer, the hypothesis would help to solve a number of perplexities which confront the student of Byzantine law. Here perhaps the most important inferences are that, if correct, it would

³¹ Cf. *Dig.* 1,4,4 (Modestinus) = *Bas.* 2,6,5.

³² Stolte 1989.

³³ First noted by Scheltema 1967: 65–6.

³⁴ Simon 1985.

³⁵ Fögen 1989; for another purpose of part of Leo’s Novels see Troianos 1996, written with a “classical” derogatory model in mind.

explain why, after Justinian, no attempt at recodification in the modern sense of the word was undertaken in Byzantium and that we find references to passages of Justinianic laws not included in the *Basilica* after that collection had been compiled: no “old laws” were abrogated in the sense that they could no longer be invoked.

The non-lawyer may be bored by these technicalities, yet their understanding helps to elucidate the function of the law in Byzantium and to value the possibility of using legislation to write social history. Which of these two mutually excluding views is correct? I am afraid, both are. Numerous examples may be adduced to illustrate the application of the classical derogatory model; equally numerous examples may be found for a different view. The answer therefore must be that, from the seventh century onwards, the Byzantine view of the role and function of the law comprised both and therefore was different from ours, which is of course hardly surprising. From a modern, anachronistic, comparative point of view it is imprecise and unsharp and therefore an unreliable factor for the historian in determining the state of the law.

If we cannot be sure of the relation between older and more recent law, nor can we be certain of the application of either. This is the view that speaks in the result of an analysis of the *Peira* by Dieter Simon.³⁶ In this study of a collection of cases from the practice of the Constantinopolitan judge Eustathios Simon gives a number of examples where “the argument from statute [is] rejected” (20), or is not followed simply because it “is only one argument among others” (21): in other words, the idea that the judge is bound by the law (in the sense of codification, statutes, or precedent) had better be abandoned. To quote Simon’s last sentence:

Perhaps the opinion of the famous Psellos, a contemporary of Eustathios, was not so utterly mistaken after all when he maintained that, to become a good lawyer, it is entirely sufficient to make a thorough study of rhetoric.

Simon paints a rather bleak picture of the rationality of the Byzantine judge – one shudders when thinking of the lower courts – and although some voices have been raised in protest,³⁷ I have not found a radical refutation of his argument. The least one can say, therefore, is that the sources of Byzantine law do not yield a clear picture of how the Byzantines understood the role and function of legislation.

Before moving to the implications of this inference for our theme, a word on the relation between civil and canon law. In a society such as Byzantium we need not be surprised about a secular court applying canon law and vice versa, nor about a secular legislator interfering in the affairs of the church, as Justinian had done on a large scale. Interestingly, neither side elaborated the rules governing the relation between secular and canon law, least of all a model of derogation.³⁸ Although there

³⁶ Simon 1973 (quotations in my translation).

³⁷ E.g., Van der Wal and Lokin 1985: 135; for a somewhat different valuation of one of Simon’s examples see Stolte 1998: 274–5. For Simon persisting 13 years later, see Simon 1986: 195, n. 5.

³⁸ See, e.g., Troianos 1988, 1991, 1996.

is no shortage of examples in which the precedence of either might have played a role, the solution was always found outside the law. For a political decision in favor of either power a legal text could always be found in support.

BYZANTINE LAW AND THE WRITING OF (SOCIAL) HISTORY

These reflections on legislation in Byzantium lead to an assessment of the way the historian may exploit legal sources for the writing of social history. While we may expect, in the proto-Byzantine period, a direct relation between legislation and the way people behaved, at least in the expectations of the lawgiver, and therefore also expect a reaction of the lawgiver if these expectations are not fulfilled, we can be much less certain in later ages. True, later emperors may still have wished to influence society by legislation. True, legislation has other functions as well, and later these were perhaps dominant: not least among them the affirmation of imperial authority. But when the pace of legislation slows down, when the legislator seems to withdraw from certain areas of human activity and finally seems to abandon the notion of general regulation altogether, as has been demonstrated by Fögen,³⁹ obviously the possibility to “read” society from its legislation is seriously affected. What remains is existing legislation, and the timespan between its promulgation and a court-case in which it might (have to) be applied increases ever more. For a proper understanding of the role which this “old” legislation may have played, information about legal practice is indispensable. We have seen that such information is scarce, and that the exception to which most attention has been paid, the *Peira*, raises serious problems as to the role this legislation continued to play.

The image of Byzantine law has been dominated by its towering Justinianic legacy and the historiographical tradition created by that legacy, partly because of the cultural environment of that tradition (the study of Roman law), partly because of the simple fact that Byzantine legislative sources, especially the *Basilica*, happen to be most informative for those who are interested in Justinianic Roman law. The result is an image of stability and stagnation, and although that image, if it were correct, could of course be significant of the society thus characterized, there is at least one serious note to be placed in the margin.

The present author, writing from a western perspective, cannot avoid drawing a comparison with the history of that same Justinianic legacy in western, continental Europe. The story is well known. In the eleventh century the Justinianic legislation was “rediscovered” in Bologna and soon dominated, and for several centuries even monopolized, the legal curriculum of the law faculties. It continued to do so until the advent of the modern codifications in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was applied in legal practice, at first in isolated cases, later more frequently. The student took the Justinianic Digest and Code home in his luggage when return-

³⁹ Fögen 1987: esp. 157.

ing from his *peregrinatio academica*, sometimes literally, always mentally. He could not avoid bringing these law books to bear on actual cases in his home town, and a hierarchy of legal sources developed: first local law in whatever form had to be applied, and in its absence the lawyer had to resort to Roman law. In local statutes this rule was often laid down explicitly, but even if this was not the case, it was almost invariably followed. Recodification of the Justinianic legislation never took place. One can but marvel at the result: the study and practical application of a legislation already 500 years old is taken up again in the eleventh century and lives on for another seven centuries. Is this not similar to the continuous story of the Justinianic law books in Byzantine law?

In my view there is one crucial difference. In this western tradition, from the late Middle Ages onwards the law was in principle seen as a system, a system dominated by Roman law. Local law was made, found its place, and was interpreted within that system. True, many imperfections could be demonstrated and frequently a quotation from the Digest in an actual case today puzzles us as to its relevance. But the margins of the medieval manuscripts testify to the attempt to understand the Justinianic legislation as a seamless web and, still later, the authors of early modern Roman–Dutch law demonstrate the result of its application in practice. No western Psellos could expect to be taken seriously if he were to maintain the primacy of rhetoric in the field of law. And no one hints at stagnation on the grounds of the continuous teaching and application of Justinianic Roman law.

Libraries have been filled with studies of the Roman legal tradition in western Europe, its influence on local and later national law, always departing from Roman law as a system. Attempts to do so for Byzantine law have been by and large unsuccessful, because the Byzantines did not see their law as a similar seamless web, indebted to the Justinianic Roman legal system as they may have been. Sometimes they proceeded in a way immediately recognizable for the student of the western tradition, but more often they did not. In Byzantium the relation between the legal norm and social practice therefore is much looser, much less predictable, and because it is so much less predictable the social historian is, on the whole, not much helped by the normative collections of Byzantine law.

If I end on this somewhat pessimistic note, this is not to say that it would be impossible to write a social history of Byzantine law. Such a history, however, should take into account a certain one-sidedness of the sources, but especially a different understanding of the role of law and legislation on the part of the Byzantines themselves. Writing that history would be a difficult task, but someone who would try his hand at that task would be applauded by more colleagues than just the late Alexander Kahzdan.

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5

SOCIAL RELATIONS AND THE LAND: THE EARLY PERIOD

Peter Sarris

INTRODUCTION: THE SOURCES AND THEIR PROBLEMS

The early Byzantine era (taken, for the purposes of this chapter, to embrace the period from ca. AD 300–600) represents the one phase of Byzantine social history for which the Byzantinist can honestly claim to have both more detailed and more varied sources at his or her disposal than a Western late Roman or Medieval historian working on the same period. Although the historian of the Late Roman and post-Roman West has access to letter collections and literary works that reveal crucial aspects of social life, above all as lived by members of the élite (most notably the letters of Symmachus for the fourth century, the letters and poems of Sidonius Apollinaris for the fifth, and, for the sixth century, the state correspondence of the Ostrogothic Kingdom preserved in the *Variae* of Cassiodorus), the social historian of the East Roman empire has in abundance what historians of the Western world most conspicuously lack: access to collections of contemporary documentary sources that cast light on almost every aspect of the social spectrum.¹

This comparative *embarras de richesses* is entirely the result of the fact that for much of the history of the ancient and early medieval world, in both the East and the West, documents were written on papyrus, which tended to rot away in the humid and dank conditions that prevailed in much of Europe. Accordingly, very few papyri survive from the late Roman or early Medieval West.² Only with the more widespread introduction of parchment do documents begin to survive for the West in any number. The East Roman empire at this time, by contrast, continued to embrace Egypt, which was the home of papyrus (an indigenous grass, the fibrous

¹ See Symmachus, *Epistulae*; Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carmina* and *Epistolae*; Cassiodorus, *Variae*. For the implications of this distribution of evidence for the writing of economic history, see Sarris 2004.

² The significant exception is the collection edited by and published in Tjäder 1955–82 (*P. Ital.*).

inner pith of which was separated into strands, mashed together, and then dried into sheets before being used to write on), and where the dry sands of the region beyond the Nile Delta have preserved literally thousands of papyrological documents including private and official letters, prayers, estate accounts, legal contracts, wills, and petitions, that is to say, the life blood of social history as traditionally conceived.³ Significant collections of papyri have also been excavated elsewhere in the Eastern empire and are in the course of being edited and published.⁴ As a result, the social historian of Byzantium has every reason to heartily concur with the sixth-century Italian bureaucrat and scholar, Cassiodorus, in his eloquent panegyric to papyrus: "Papyrus, so smooth and so continuous, the snowy entrails of a green herb; papyrus which can be spread out to such a vast extent, and yet be folded up into so small a space; papyrus on whose white expanse the black characters look beautiful; papyrus which keeps the sweet harvest of the mind and restores it to the reader whenever he wishes to consult it; papyrus which is the faithful witness of all human actions, eloquent of the past, a sworn foe to oblivion."⁵

In addition to the testimony of the documentary papyri, the early Byzantine social historian also has access to other types of source more familiar to the Western early Medievalist. Like the historian of the late Roman and post-Roman West, the Byzantinist has access to important collections of legal texts that detail matters as diverse as the organization and condition of agricultural labor, the obligations incumbent upon landowners, and the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence in provincial social relations. Foremost amongst these legal collections are the *Theodosian Code* promulgated in 438 (which included Western constitutions), the *Justinianic Code*, the second recension of which was promulgated in 534, and the emperor Justinian's post-codificatory edicts and "new constitutions" (Latin *novellae constitutiones* – often referred to accordingly as Justinian's "Novels"). As in the late Roman and post-Roman West, important aspects of social relations also emerge from contemporary works of literature, above all the new literary *genre* of the "Saint's Life" that emerged in the East at the end of the fourth century, and which enjoyed ever greater popularity from the fifth century onwards.⁶ Likewise, as again in the West, archaeology is increasingly revealing much of the material context in which people lived their lives in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, and which framed their social existence.

Each one of these types of evidence poses different problems that are often repeated and debated – at length – in the secondary literature. The fact that papyri mainly survive from Egypt, for example, obviously carries with it certain implications. "How representative was Egypt at this time?" is a question which is as frequently repeated as it is impossible to answer given the absence of evidence for other regions.⁷ How one is meant to differentiate between the normative and

³ For an introduction, see Bagnall 1995.

⁴ See, for example, Koenen 1996.

⁵ Cassiodorus *Variae* XI.38: translated in Hodgkin 1886 (revised).

⁶ See Cameron 1998: 698–702.

⁷ For judicious handling of this question (and many others) see Wickham 2005: 22–6.

socially descriptive function of legal texts is an equally old chestnut to which no solution is offered here. Did provincials ask emperors to clarify what the law on a particular issue was because it was being broken, or just because they wanted to know whether the old laws were still in place? Logic would suggest the former, but not all have concurred.⁸ Likewise, considerable debate has raged in recent years over the extent to which the authors of “saints lives” distorted social reality in order to conform to the social expectations of their intended, primarily aristocratic, audience.⁹ That many did seems highly probable, but some may have done so rather more than others: the monastic author of the sixth-century *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, for example, would appear to have originally been of peasant stock. It may reasonably be asked how this might have affected his depiction of social relations?¹⁰ Lastly, archaeology is very useful for giving one a sense of the sophistication and scale of the late Roman and early Byzantine economy, but how one reads off social history from such evidence is far from straightforward.¹¹ Accordingly, archaeologists (and indeed many papyrologists) have often had an unnerving tendency to interpret their data in such a way as to make it conform to whatever line of historical interpretation or analysis is dominant or fashionable at the time of writing. This, at least, is less objectionable a *modus operandi* than the converse decision taken by other archaeologists to render their conclusions as incompatible with historical scholarship as possible, so as to establish the independence (as opposed to the auxiliary character) of their discipline, but it still adds little to the overall understanding of the social historian, unless he or she is aware of what the archaeologist concerned is up to, and so is able to distil data from analysis accordingly (itself an epistemologically fraught exercise).

Irrespective of the largesse of the Egyptian desert, the social historian of the early Byzantine world fortunately has too few sources available to get too hung up on any one of these particular methodological hooks. If the social history of Byzantium is to be written at all, it must be written on the basis of the primacy of practical reason and a pragmatic approach to the evidence. At the end of the day a decision must be made – and stuck to – whether to sail to Byzantium, or to ascend to a methodological Cloud-cuckoo-land that only leads one further away from life as it was actually lived by *homo byzantinus*.

PROPERTY AND POWER IN THE EARLY BYZANTINE EMPIRE

As in all pre-industrial societies, land in the early Byzantine world represented the main source of wealth and the primary focus for investment.¹² The chief department

⁸ See, for example, Harries 1999.

⁹ Sarris 2006a: 118–21.

¹⁰ Wickham 2005: 324 and 406.

¹¹ See discussion in Whittow 2003.

¹² For pre-industrial state formations in general and the varieties of social relations associated with them, see Crone 1989 and Haldon 1993.

of the Treasury, for example, (the “Praetorian Prefecture”) was wholly dependant on taxes levied on agricultural land and its cultivation.¹³ At the same time, the imperial authorities maintained an extensive network of crown and public estates from which the government derived – or sought to derive – a substantial rental income.¹⁴ Maintaining a steady flow of imperial revenue in the form of the land tax and the rents and dues expected from such crown estates was thus the over-riding domestic objective of imperial government. As the emperor Justinian famously declared in his edict on the governance of Egypt issued in 539, any interruption of such revenues threatened “the very cohesion of Our state itself.”¹⁵ Without sufficient income derived from the land, the state could support neither its own administrative structures nor the army on which it ultimately depended for its security and well-being.

Much the same was true for members of the imperial aristocracy, the civic élites of the empire, and the peasantry who formed the overwhelming majority of the population of the empire at this time: for all, landownership and access to the fruits of agriculture were the key to prosperity and survival. As the imperial bureaucrat, orator, and philosopher Themistius advised his audience in the mid-fourth century: “if it is affluence that you desire, [remember that] the poets sing of Ploutos [i.e. Wealth] as the child of Demeter [the goddess of agriculture].”¹⁶ Although there were, naturally, many types and varieties of “power” in the early Byzantine world – and some of the most spectacular displays of power described for us in our early Byzantine sources were exhibited by holy men, stylites, and saints who were frequently depicted as property-less – for the most part, the more land one had, the more powerful one was.¹⁷ Indeed it was precisely because this correlation generally held true that the holy man’s apparent refutation of it was regarded as so striking and anomalistic a phenomenon. As a result, the best and most productive land in the early Byzantine world, such as that found in the plains of Thrace, adjacent to the banks of the Euphrates, along the Palestinian littoral, and in the richly irrigated lands of Middle Egypt, tended to be the preserve of the socially and politically dominant classes and groups within the empire, above all members of the high imperial senatorial aristocracy, who, as we shall see, acquired estates on a vast scale.¹⁸ As the fourth-century Antiochene historian Ammianus Marcellinus wrote, members of the senatorial order of his day would “hold forth, unasked, on the immense extent of their family property, multiplying in the imagination the annual produce of their fertile lands, which extend, they boastfully declare, from farthest east to farthest west.”¹⁹ Whilst not all those who were powerful were great landowners, all great landowners were men of power.

¹³ See Jones 1964: II.769.

¹⁴ See Delmaire 1988.

¹⁵ Schöll and Kroll 1928 (Justinian, *Edict* 13, *proemium*, line 6 [in Justinian, *Nov.*]).

¹⁶ Themistius (Schenk et al. 1965–74), *Oratio* 30.

¹⁷ The classic study is Brown 1971.

¹⁸ See Sarris 2006a: 115–30.

¹⁹ Ammianus Marcellinus (Keydell 1975): *Res Gestae* 14.6.10.

At its core, this correlation between landownership and power operated on a primarily material axis. As we shall see, those who owned no land were obliged to work for those who did, on whom, as a result, they became dependent. If dependency was the characteristic condition of those who possessed little or no property, autonomy and self-sufficiency were the unique preserve of those who owned land on sufficiently wide a scale to be able to overcome the microregional variations in rainfall and climate that determined agricultural conditions in the Mediterranean and its appendages.²⁰ That is to say, given the unpredictability of returns even from agriculture in the pre-industrial Mediterranean, only those owning multiple properties across a region or regions were in a position to engage in sufficient “risk-spreading” activity to ensure that harvest-failure or crop-blight on one holding or estate could be off-set by the produce derived from another. In a society in which “food crisis was endemic,” only those blessed with this degree of security could afford the luxury of investing the profits of agriculture in the buying up of influence, favors, and status.²¹

The correlation between landownership and power was further reinforced, however, by the fact that, in the early Byzantine world, property rights were associated with specific public obligations and duties that brought the owners of land into ever closer contact with the representatives of the imperial government, a process which, ultimately, served to blur the distinction between private landowners and those who wielded authority in the emperor’s name.²² Significantly, the more land one owned, the closer one’s relationship with the imperial government was. This situation effectively offered great landowners the opportunity to harness the authority and prestige of the state to serve their own economic interests and to consolidate their own social ascendancy at a provincial or local level.

All landowners were subject to the fundamental public obligation of paying the imperial land tax due on the holding, property, or estate to which they had legal title, as well as the “poll tax” (Latin *capitatio*) reckoned on those who inhabited and worked it.²³ The collection of these fiscal revenues, however, was not, as in the Middle Byzantine empire, entrusted to a group of officials specifically sent out for the purpose from the imperial capital, but rather to those members of local society who were reckoned to possess enough landed property to be able to guarantee the fiscal dues expected from their neighbors should they default. Such landowners were obliged to become members (known in Latin as *curiales* and in Greek as *bouleutai* or *politeuomenoi*) of their local city council (Latin *curia*; Greek *boule*), which served as the administrative nodal point of the territory in which they lived. The property qualification for membership of the city council would appear to have

²⁰ See Horden and Purcell 2000. Only Egypt, with its annual Nile Flood, was able to operate with a higher (although not total) degree of certainty with respect to agricultural conditions.

²¹ Garnsey 1988: 271. See also Stathakopoulos 2004. For the crucial role played by money in purchasing influence and status, see Kelly 2004: 138–86.

²² See Gascoy 1985; note also the (substantial) modifications suggested in Sarris 2006a: 149–76.

²³ For the systematization of the land tax–poll tax arrangement, see Williams 1985.

varied from region to region, but a Western law of 439 which places it at land worth 300 *solidi* (approximately 38 hectares or some 94 acres) can perhaps be taken as indicative.²⁴

As well as the collection and transmission of taxes, *curiales* were responsible for the maintenance of civic amenities, and a host of public responsibilities such as the provisioning of the imperial postal system, and the billeting of imperial troops in their locality. Membership of the *curia* was associated with potentially onerous responsibilities, but it also brought with it elite status and a share of delegated imperial power and authority that could be turned to the landowner's advantage. It is clear, for example, that in the collection of taxes, *curiales* were entitled to call upon the aid of imperial troops stationed in their locality.²⁵ This was precisely the sort of relationship that ambitious city-councillors could deploy against their neighbors, rivals, and employees, suborning the troops to their own ends.²⁶ Indeed, it is instructive that in both 468 and again in 542 the imperial authorities were obliged to legislate against landowners' keeping of soldiers on their estates and using them for their own private purposes – a phenomenon also attested in the Egyptian papyri.²⁷

In spite of the property qualifications, there nevertheless existed great disparities of wealth within the ranks of the provincial *curiae* of the early Byzantine world, and there is evidence that as early as the middle of the fourth century the chief responsibilities and opportunities associated with curial service were coming to be dominated by an inner circle of especially wealthy families within each region known in the documentary papyri as the "leading officers" (Greek *propoliteuomenoi*) and in the legal sources as the "principal citizens" (Latin *principales*) of the city councils, some at least of whom can be seen to have taken advantage of their imperial connections to have had themselves appointed the administrators and tenants-in-chief of extensive stretches of crown estates located in the vicinity of their native cities.²⁸ Only the most irksome of responsibilities from which no profit might conceivably be derived are likely to have been left to their inferiors. By the late fifth and early sixth centuries, it would appear that many of the most important curial charges (above all those relating to the collection of taxes) were routinely assigned to these locally pre-dominant landowning households, in spite of the fact that many of those who stood at the head of such households no longer bore curial status, having been elevated to membership of the Senate in Constantinople in acknowledgement of

²⁴ Valentinian III, *Nov.* 3.4 (Mommesen 1905). See discussion in Jones 1964: 738–9.

²⁵ See Rathbone 1991: 21–2.

²⁶ See examples cited in Sarris 2006a: 162–75.

²⁷ *CJ (Codex Justinianus)*, 9.12.10 (Krüger 1929); Justinian, *Nov.* 116. See note 18 for direction towards the papyrological evidence.

²⁸ See de Ste Croix 1981: 471–2. Note the relationship between the Apion household in Egypt and estates belonging to the empress Eudocia in the vicinity of the Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus in the fifth century. These estates were initially administered by a member of the family on the empress's behalf. By the late sixth century parts of the property had come into the private ownership of the Apiones.

the services they had rendered to the state.²⁹ This development reflected the fact that members of the locally predominant families had seized upon a significant expansion in the centrally appointed imperial bureaucracy that had taken place in the fourth century, to provide their sons (at considerable expense) with the educational wherewithal required to enter central imperial service where they had carved out prestigious careers for themselves in the corridors of power in Constantinople and the gubernatorial palaces of the provinces.³⁰ Consequently, the more land a family owned, the more deeply it was likely to be implicated in the structures and administration of the early Byzantine state, both in the provinces and the imperial capital.

The distribution of landed wealth thus served to frame social relations in the early Byzantine world and became ever more bound up with questions of status. As we shall see, for example, membership of the upper echelons of the imperial élite was to become specifically associated with ownership of a particular type of agrarian property known as the *chôrion* – effectively a tied estate village. Likewise, the sixth-century historian (and, it should be noted, lawyer) Procopius could include in his *Secret History* an account of how:

Among the practicing lawyers at Caesarea was one Evangelus, a man who had made a considerable mark. The wind of Fortune had blown so favorably for him that he acquired property of many kinds, and had become the owner of much land. And later on he even bought a large coastal village called Porphyreon, for which he paid three *centenaria* of gold. When news of this transaction reached Justinian, he promptly sequestered the private property, giving the unfortunate man only a fraction of the price he had paid for it, and solemnly declaring that it would never be proper for a mere advocate like Evangelus to be the master of so large a town (Greek *kome*).³¹

Evangelus had acquired property beyond his rank, and was punished accordingly.

Not only the correlation between landownership and power, but also that between landownership and status would appear to have been so close, that, by the sixth century, it would be fair to argue that rank had largely become synonymous with what, in Marxist terms, would be defined as class: that is to say, one's relationship (above all in terms of ownership or non-ownership) to the "means of production" (in the Byzantine context, essentially meaning land).³² This picture emerges particularly clearly from the papyrological record for sixth-century Egypt, on the basis of which it is possible to delineate a clearly articulated class structure described in the sources specifically in terms of one's rights over and relationship to especially landed property. At the top end of the social spectrum, the Greek papyri reveal the existence of an upper stratum of magnates known as *geouchoi* ("landowners") who

²⁹ See Sarris 2006a: 177–99 and Laniado 2002.

³⁰ See Heather 1994 and, on the role of education, Kaster 1988.

³¹ Procopius, *Anecdota* 18–20 (Haury and Wirth 1962–4).

³² For definition of terms, see de Ste Croix 1981: 42–9.

often held sway over multiple estates across several regions.³³ In *P. Oxy.* LXX 4781, for example, a document dating from 525, the high-ranking Egyptian aristocrat Flavius Strategius Apion was addressed by one of his employees as “the most glorious and most extraordinary former *consul* and military commander, landowner here also in the splendid city of Oxyrhynchus,” indicating his possession of other estates elsewhere beyond the region of the Oxyrhynchite.³⁴ Below the level of the *geouchoi*, the papyri record the existence of a village-level élite (resident in large settlements termed *komai*, equivalent to that purchased by the unfortunate advocate Evangelus as recorded by Procopius), who describe themselves as the “men of property” (Greek *ktetores*) or, when petitioning the imperial authorities (and so as to distinguish themselves from their social superiors) the “small property owners” (*leptoktetores*).³⁵ Beneath the level of the *ktetores* we encounter lease-holders (Greek *misthotai*) – tenant farmers to whom the “men of property” frequently rented their land.³⁶ Lastly, we find “land laborers” (Greek *georgoi*), many, although not necessarily all, of whom appear to have been landless.³⁷

MODES OF ÉLITE LANDHOLDING AND THEIR SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

How did magnate *geouchoi* structure the landed properties off which they and their families lived, and what were the implications of this structuring of agrarian wealth for social relations in the early Byzantine world? From a comparative historical perspective, some historians have found it useful to differentiate between three relatively distinct ways in which great landowners and their estate administrators can be said to have organized agricultural production: namely, what, in historical materialist terms, would be described as the “slave mode,” the “feudal mode,” and the “agrarian capitalist” mode of production. Essentially, the distinction boils down to one of whether landowners were primarily reliant for the cultivation of their estates on unfree labor, tenant farmers, or wage laborers.³⁸ The operative phrase here is “relatively distinct”: naturally, in reality, the line of demarcation between these three “modes” was (and is) often rather more blurred than so starkly drawn a schema would suggest, and elements of all three could co-exist alongside one another on the properties of the same landowner.

³³ See Sarris 2006a: 81–95 and Banaji 2001: 134–70.

³⁴ *P. Oxy.* LXX 4781 lines 2–3 (Grenfell and Hunt 1898ff.).

³⁵ For the classic examination of this stratum within the society of early Byzantine Egypt, see MacCoull 1988.

³⁶ See Keenan 1980.

³⁷ Banaji 2001: 190–212 and Sarris 2006a: 99. That such *geōrgoi* could own land is suggested by *CJ* 11.48.20, Justinian, *Nov.* 128. 14, and 164.2; as also, possibly, by *P. Oxy.* LXX 4794 (discussing the *peculium* of the *colonus* – not necessarily, as the editor infers, land).

³⁸ See discussion in Wickham 2005: 259–61.

A case in point is provided by the extensive estates in the vicinity of the Middle Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus that belonged to the figure of Flavius Strategius Apion encountered above. The estates of the Apion family are amply attested in the papyrological record: many hundreds of papyri relating to the administration of these estates have been edited and published, and many more remain to be so.³⁹ As a result we have a relatively clear picture of how the agrarian properties of the Apion family were structured from the fifth century through to the seventh. Essentially, the Oxyrhynchite estates of the Apion family conformed to a bi-partite model that differentiated between land that was directly exploited by the household and its employees (known in Greek as the *autourgia*) and allotments known as *ktēmata* that were leased out to inhabitants of small villages that belonged to the estate which are described variously as *epoikia* or *choria*. The Apion family also owned property in larger villages (*kômai*) which it likewise put out on lease.⁴⁰

On the directly exploited part of the estate or *autourgia* we encounter bands of workers of an apparently servile condition described as *paidaria*, some of whom are likely to have been engaged in cultivation.⁴¹ The mainstay of labor on the *autourgia*, however, was seemingly provided by non-servile agricultural workers described (as seen earlier) simply as “land laborers” or *georgoi* who inhabited the Apion-owned *epoikia* and *choria*.⁴² These workers were rewarded with a wage, reckoned in cash, for their labor, and were also granted rental access to the allotments (*ktēmata*) associated with the estate properties beyond the *autourgia* – what might be thought of as a “wage in land.” Servile labor thus worked alongside free labor, and workers who received a wage also rented land off their employer: elements of the “slave,” “feudal,” and “agrarian capitalist modes” are thus attested cheek-by-jowl. Quite how one should categorize the Apion estates, therefore, in terms of the typology set out earlier is perhaps unclear. Insofar as it matters, however, it should be noted that the overwhelming proportion of the Apion family’s income from its landed properties in the vicinity of Oxyrhynchus would appear to have been derived from commodified production on the *autourgia* rather than from rents, and that the *autourgia* depended primarily upon wage labor.⁴³

Such questions are of largely theoretical interest. What matters most from the perspective of social relations in the early Byzantine world is the fact that the bi-partite structuring of estates that we encounter with respect to the Apion properties in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries is also recorded with respect to other great

³⁹ See Mazza 2001 and Sarris 2006a: 29–80. Subsequent to the publication of these studies a number of informative papyri relating to the Apion estates were published in *P. Oxy. LXX* and, at the time of writing, the publication of important documents relating to the genealogy of the Apion family are reported to be imminent (private communication with J. Banaji).

⁴⁰ See Sarris 2006a: 29–49, or, for a potted account, Sarris 2004.

⁴¹ For *paidaria* on the Apion estates, see *P. Oxy. XVI* 1921, *P. Oxy. XIX* 2244, *PSI VIII* 953, and *P. Princ. II* 96 (Johnson et al. 1931–42). That these were slaves is strongly suggested by *P. Oxy. LVIII* 3960 where they are contrasted with ‘free’ workers bound by contract.

⁴² See *P. Oxy. LV* 3804 and discussion in Sarris 2006a: 38.

⁴³ See the discussion of *P. Oxy. LV* 3804 in Sarris 2004: 285–6.

landowners attested in the papyri, and were clearly a feature of life elsewhere in the East Roman empire at this time.⁴⁴ Indeed, as noted earlier, it is significant that by the sixth century, elite status was specifically associated with ownership of the tied estate villages termed *choria* recorded in the papyri.⁴⁵ Procopius, for example, refers to great landowners as “the lords of the *choria*.”⁴⁶ The same phrase reappears in contemporary imperial legislation.⁴⁷ It would appear that the bipartite structuring of estates was – or, more accurately, had become – characteristic of the early Byzantine landed elite.

The reasons for this can be traced back to the dramatic expansion in the number of centrally appointed imperial bureaucratic and military posts that had occurred in the late Roman empire over the course of the fourth century. As we have seen, this bureaucratic expansion opened up new opportunities to members of the dominant families within the provincial *curiae* (the *principales* or *propoliteumonenoï*) of the Eastern (as well as the Western) provinces of the Roman world – enabling them to obtain official governmental posts that transformed their relationship with the central imperial authorities and from which they derived both wealth and prestige. These new-found sources of influence and power were used by members of the elite to further intensify their social and economic dominance at a provincial level, expanding their estates at the expense of both their fellow, less well connected, *curiales* and other members of local landed society. Crucially, this process of estate expansion coincided with the reform of the imperial currency and the widespread introduction of the Constantinian gold *solidus*. As a result, members of a rapidly emergent imperial aristocracy of service took advantage of the new monetary conditions, and contributed to and forged ahead with a more full-blown monetization of the economy, by adopting the economically highly rational bi-partite structuring of their estates encountered in the papyrological sources for the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries. Commodified production was concentrated on a directly managed estate *autourgia* which was primarily cultivated by the wage labor of the *georgoi* of the tied estate villages (the *epoikia* or *choria*).⁴⁸

On one level, the expansion of these bi-partite great estates was fueled by purely economic mechanisms: the ability of members of the new aristocracy of service, whose governmental stipends were increasingly reckoned and issued in coin, to buy out those less cash-rich than themselves.⁴⁹ Especially in relation to members of the peasantry, however (that is to say, those “free” members of society who worked the land – whether it belonged to them or to a landlord), the expansion was also fueled

⁴⁴ See Sarris 2006a: 115–30. Note especially 130.

⁴⁵ On the usage of *chôrion* to specifically designate estate villages rather than just villages in general (as the word later would) see Khazdan 1994: 66–88.

⁴⁶ Procopius, *Anecdota* 22.40.

⁴⁷ See Justinian, *Nov.* 157, 163, and 164.

⁴⁸ For fuller treatment, see Sarris 2006a: 177–99. For contemporary developments in the West, see Sarris 2004. A very different approach to Western developments is adopted by Wickham 2005, in response to which see Sarris 2006b.

⁴⁹ Banaji 2001: 52.

by associated social phenomena. Chief amongst these was the fact that, as has already been intimated, in a world such as that of the Mediterranean, in which returns from agriculture were uncertain, and in which, consequently, food-crisis was common, the acquisition of a wealthy and powerful patron who could see them and their families through the lean seasons (such as by offering them credit, for example) had always been a matter of some urgency from the perspective of the peasantry.⁵⁰ If that patron also had the power to intervene on behalf of the peasant and his family so as to alleviate their tax burden, so much the better.⁵¹ Members of the new imperial aristocracy, with their special access to the sources of imperial power, were well placed to do both.

The expansion of the great estates of the early Byzantine period was thus further catalyzed by an in-built gravitational pull towards the crystallization of vertical ties of dependence within Mediterranean society. Peasants had a natural tendency to seek out patrons, and the owners of the expanding great estates had an equally natural tendency to want to acquire as much good land as possible, as also to build up a pool of permanent labor resident on their tied estate villages. It should not surprise us, therefore, that from the 330s onwards we encounter a series of imperial laws recording not only landowners and imperial office holders buying up or otherwise acquiring the estates of their neighbors and social inferiors, but also peasants and peasant families fleeing to the estates of such men in search of patronage, employment, and protection.⁵²

This pattern of events potentially carried with it major implications for the imperial government, as the movement of labor in the countryside and the widespread transmission of property threatened to undermine the workings of the imperial fiscal system, which operated on the basis of taxpayers being registered in fiscal communities to which they and their property were tied, and for whose taxes the other members of that community were responsible should they abscond. It was for this reason that the imperial authorities repeatedly legislated against the flight of peasants to great estates. From the early fifth century, however, the imperial government attempted to re-impose some order on the situation and to reconcile the fiscal interests of the state with the economic interests of landowners, by re-designating the great estate as the legally registered fiscal community of those peasants and agricultural laborers who had been drawn onto it. Over the course of the fifth century, this arrangement took on ever more precise legal definition, such that the inhabitants of the great estates acquired the hereditary status of *coloni adscripticii* or, in Greek, *enapographoi georgoi* – “registered agricultural laborers” bound to

⁵⁰ As argued by Horden and Purcell 2000: 274–5. For the role of credit in estate expansion, see Sirks 2001.

⁵¹ See Wickham 2005: 143 and 528.

⁵² See, for example, in chronological order from AD 332 to 535, *CTh.* (*Codex Theodosianus*) 5.17.1; 11.24.1; 11.24.2; 5.17.2; *CJ* 11.51.1; 11.52.1; *CTh.* 11.24.3; 6.3.3; 11.24.4; 11.24.5; 13.17.1; 11.24.6; *CJ* 11.54.1; 11.54.2; Justinian, *Nov.* 17.13.

the land that they worked not only by private contract, but also by imperial command.⁵³

The implications of these events for the peasants themselves, however, were still more profound. Much is often made of the fact that the legal status of the *colonus adscripticius* of the early Byzantine great estate – and, in particular, the authority that the landowner exercised over him – took as its model the classical Roman law of persons and specifically, within that legal tradition, the relationship between master and slave. What this actually meant in practice, however, from the perspective of the *colonus* is far from clear.⁵⁴ The economic basis of the “adscript colonate,” however, did much to transform social relations in the countryside. Although there clearly had existed centrally administered great estates in the period before the fourth century, prior to the early Byzantine aristocratic expansion, most high-ranking landowners would appear to have been primarily reliant on the leasing out of their land to tenant farmers.⁵⁵ Such leases were often of relatively short duration, no doubt so as to provide tenants with an incentive to demonstrate their productivity and honesty (which, from the landlord’s perspective, often amounted to the same thing, especially if the rent consisted of a share of the crop).⁵⁶ Nevertheless, by virtue of the fact that such tenant farmers and their families directly occupied the land that they worked, they were in a relatively strong position to resist the demands of landlords: for they effectively possessed, even if they did not legally own, the means of agricultural production by which they subsisted.⁵⁷

The inhabitants of the *epoikia* and *choria* of the early Byzantine great estate, by contrast, found themselves in a far more precarious and insecure position. On the basis of the evidence of the Apion estates, for example, it would appear that agricultural laborers were moved between the estate properties according to the demands of the agricultural calendar and the internal requirements of the Apion household.⁵⁸ The very fact that the estate workforce was issued with a wage reckoned in coin would suggest that such land as they rented in the vicinity of the estate’s tied villages were not “subsistence-producing,” and may well have been deliberately kept at a size that ensured they were not.⁵⁹ As a result, the *georgoi* were obliged to sell their labor if they were to live, thereby intensifying their dependence on the landowner. Even such leases as they did enter into would appear to have frequently been

⁵³ For more detailed treatment, see Sarris 2006a: 149–76.

⁵⁴ For a maximalist reading of the slave–master analogy positing the demotion of *coloni* to a “semi-servile” status, see Jones 1964 and Sarris 2006a. For a minimalist reading, see Sirks 2001 who denies that there can be any such thing as a “semi-servile” status. In response, however, it is worth remembering the legal principle that underscored the institution of serfdom in the High Medieval West: namely that a serf was unfree with respect to his lord, but free with respect to society at large.

⁵⁵ For centrally administered estates in third-century Egypt, see Rathbone 1991. For the predominance of the leasing out of land on the part of curial landowners in the third century, however, see Banaji 2001: 101–33.

⁵⁶ See Rowlandson 1996: 327.

⁵⁷ Here I borrow the formulation used with respect to tenant farmers by Hilton 1975: 13.

⁵⁸ See *P. Oxy.* XVI 1859 and discussion in Sarris 2006a: 73–4.

⁵⁹ As argued with respect to great estates in early modern Poland by Kula 1976.

terminable at the will of the landlord or of his representatives.⁶⁰ The rise of the bipartite great estate thus heralded a major shift in the social balance of power in the countryside in favor of magnate *geouchoi*. This sense is very strongly conveyed by a number of petitions from *geôrgoi* to landowners that survive from the papyrological record. In one example, the head of the Apion family was informed by a *colonus adscripticius* by the name of Anoup that:

No injustice or wickedness has ever attached to the glorious household of my kind lord, but it is ever full of mercy and overflowing to supply the needs of others. On account of this, I the wretched slave of my good lord, wish to bring it to your lordship's knowledge by this present entreaty for mercy that I serve my kind lord as my fathers and forefathers did before me and pay the taxes every year. And by the will of God in the past eleventh and tenth fiscal indiction my cattle died, and I borrowed the not inconsiderable sum of fifteen *solidi* so as to be able to buy the same number of cattle. Yet when I approached my kind lord and asked for pity in my straits, those belonging to my lord refused to do my lord's bidding. For unless your pity extends to me, my lord, I cannot stay on my allotment and fulfil my services with regard to the properties of the estate. But I beseech and urge your lordship to command that mercy be shown to me because of the disaster that has overtaken me.⁶¹

In economic terms, prior to the death of his cattle, Anoup had clearly been far from impoverished: 15 *solidi* worth of cattle was a considerable capital sum. It should be noted, however, that according to the imperial legislation on *adscripticii*, control over such personal property ultimately belonged to the master, not the agricultural worker.⁶² Moreover, in terms of social relations, what is most striking is the chronic structural insecurity of Anoup's position. Even the advent of bubonic plague in the 540s, and the labor shortages it induced, only served to redress the social balance of power for a relatively brief period before sparking off a "seigneurial reaction" on the part of landowners and landowning institutions (such as the church and the crown, whose estates were structured after the same manner as those of the secular aristocracy) that successfully re-asserted their social and economic interests over those of the peasantry and other more humble members of society.⁶³ In spite of the impact of plague, social relations in the early Byzantine countryside continued to be primarily characterized by aristocratic dominance.

VILLAGE SOCIETY

Throughout the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, the imperial authorities were eager to attempt to bolster the cohesion of village society in the face of burgeoning

⁶⁰ See the example of *P. Oxy* XVI 1941.

⁶¹ *P. Oxy.* I 130 lines 5–19.

⁶² *CJ* 11.48.

⁶³ See discussion in Sarris 2006a: 223–7.

aristocratic influence and power.⁶⁴ The reason for this was simple: the less influential the landowner, the easier it was for the state to extract tax-revenues from him. In his edict on Egypt, for example, Justinian complained of the tendency of well-connected landowners to collect taxes from their employees, only then to hold onto them for their own purposes such that “they alone profited.”⁶⁵ Peasants, as we have seen, had a natural tendency to seek out the patronage of the powerful, and if they had to pay taxes it presumably made little difference to them whether those taxes ended up in the coffers of the state or in the pocket of their employer. Although members of the peasantry were willing and ready to resist the demands of great landowners when they had the opportunity and when it served their interests, they had little reason to align themselves with the state.⁶⁶ Rather, the imperial authorities’ great ally in the effort to maintain the independence of village society beyond the great estate were those small-holders – the *ktetores* and *leptoktetores* encountered earlier – who owned land but generally did not work it, and who constituted a sort of early Byzantine gentry.

Fortunately the papyri that survive for the sixth century from the Middle Egyptian village (*kome*) of Aphroditon enable us to view early Byzantine social relations from the perspective of a member of this class: a lawyer, notary, and amateur poet by the name of Dioscorus.⁶⁷ Dioscorus belonged to the indigenous upper stratum within Aphroditan society – the so-called “leading villagers” (*protokometai*) who represented Aphroditon to the outside world and who sought to regulate affairs within it, arbitrating in disputes and negotiating with the representatives of imperial power.⁶⁸ Dioscorus and his fellow *protokometai* were proud of their social standing, living, as one of the documents in the Dioscoran archive puts it, “like gentlemen, freely.”⁶⁹ At some point in the fifth century the village élite had extracted from the imperial authorities a privilege normally reserved for great landowners – the right to pay their taxes directly to the government without the intervention of the local city council (technically known as “self-collection” or *autopragia*).⁷⁰ This elicited considerable resentment on the part of members of the local landed aristocracy who were otherwise responsible for the collection of provincial taxes, and who used this fiscal duty imposed on them by the state as a weapon of social dominance over those for whom they bore responsibility.

Accordingly, during Dioscorus’ lifetime, a number of these aristocrats, such as the Count Theodosius in the 530s, a certain Sarapammon in the 540s, and the *geouchos* Julian in the 560s, sought to over-ride Aphroditon’s “autopract” status and exact payment from the settlement. Theodosius was said to have turned up in

⁶⁴ For an example of imperial legislation that sought to achieve this, see *CJ* 11.24.6.

⁶⁵ Justinian, *Edict* 13, *proem*.

⁶⁶ For examples of passive resistance to landowners on the part of peasants, see *P. Oxy.* XVI 2055 (peasants deserting an estate) and *P. Oxy.* XVI 1856 (peasants refusing to pay an estate overseer the dues to which they were liable).

⁶⁷ On whom see MacCoull 1988 and Fournet 1999.

⁶⁸ See, for example, the case discussed in Gagos and Van Minnen 1994.

⁶⁹ *P. Lond.* V 1674 (Kenyon and Bell 1893–1917).

⁷⁰ See *P. Cairo Masp.* I 67019 (Maspéro 1911–16).

Aphrodito, collected the village's taxes, and then just held onto them.⁷¹ In response to this, Dioscorus' father had traveled to Constantinople to petition the imperial authorities to intervene. In the 540s, Sarapammon's agents had murdered the village priest, Victor, and another inhabitant by the name of Heraclius. Sarapammon was put on trial, although we have no idea whether he was convicted.⁷² It may have been in response to this turn of events that Aphrodito was placed under the personal protection of the empress Theodora.⁷³ Theodora's death in 548, however, once again left the village vulnerable to the demands of local aristocrats and landowners. This time it was Dioscorus who journeyed to the imperial capital to petition the emperor. Justinian ordered the local governor to investigate Dioscorus' complaints against a landowner by the name of Julian, but no concrete action would appear to have ensued.⁷⁴ In the 560s, Dioscorus was still writing to the local governor, asking him to intervene against not only Julian, but also against Menas, overseer of the estate of a local aristocratic woman by the name of Patricia.⁷⁵

Two features of the struggle for mastery of Aphrodito as revealed in the papyri are particularly striking, and, once again, reveal the crucial role played by patronage and dependence in early Byzantine social relations. The first is that Dioscorus' attempts to preserve the fiscal autonomy of the settlement not only took the form of approaches to the imperial authorities, but also to members of other local aristocratic families, whom he attempted to mobilize against their peers and social analogues. So, for example, he wrote a number of highly sycophantic poems addressed to members of the household of Apa Dios ("a fair senatorial house guarded by God") to which the local governor belonged.⁷⁶ Essentially, Dioscorus was attempting to acquire the patronage of one aristocratic household so as to escape subjection to another.⁷⁷ Second, the efforts of *protokometai* such as Dioscorus and his father to fend off aristocratic control were undermined by social tensions within the village and the competing and conflicting ambitions of its inhabitants: in particular, those who were forced to look up to, and were no doubt bossed around by, the village élite. The murder of Heraclius in the 540s, for example, was carried out, on Sarapammon's orders, by a soldier by the name of Menas with the assistance of a band of village guild masters (*kephalaïotai*).⁷⁸ The clientele of the landowner Julian included a band of artisans and fishermen from the settlement, who swore to follow the orders of the headmen appointed over them for so long as the *geouchos* required.⁷⁹ The activities of shepherds and field-guards were a par-

⁷¹ *P. Cairo Masp.* I 67024.

⁷² Sarris 2006a: 106–8.

⁷³ *P. Cairo Masp.* III 67283.

⁷⁴ *P. Cairo Masp.* I 67024.

⁷⁵ See *P. Cairo Masp.* I 67002 and *P. Lond.* V 1674.

⁷⁶ *P. Cairo Masp.* I 67120 v F line 4.

⁷⁷ As argued at greater length in Sarris 2006a: 96–114.

⁷⁸ *P. Mich.* XIII 660 (Crawford 1955).

⁷⁹ Bell 1923: 43–8.

ticular source of tension.⁸⁰ For all the rhetoric contained in Dioscorus' petitions to the imperial authorities, there was little sign here of any organic solidarity on the part of the villagers in the face of unwelcome aristocratic intrusion.

Aphrodito was a large and prosperous village: with a population of some 7,000, and a total cultivated area of roughly 4,000 acres, we would probably be better off calling it a town.⁸¹ Yet it was clearly set in a landscape dominated by aristocratic landowners who played a major part in the village's day-to-day life, and who exerted constant pressure on its autonomy and independence. It has been estimated, for example, that in the early sixth century, two-thirds or so of the land around Aphrodito was owned by a single great landowner.⁸² In such circumstances, it is remarkable that the village remained independent at all. Indeed, to what extent Aphrodito's autonomy outlived Dioscorus (who died ca. 582) is uncertain. It is true that the papyri that survive relating to Aphrodito in the eighth century again record a society dominated by indigenous small-holders, but given that the Persian and Arab invasions of Egypt of the early seventh century had resulted in the extirpation of those members of the Byzantine aristocracy who had not fled before them, the settlement's subsequent freedom from aristocratic control is perhaps unsurprising.

SOCIAL TENSIONS AMONGST THE PEASANTRY

The primary causes of social tension in sixth-century Aphrodito would appear to have been the conflict between the ambitions of aristocrats on the one hand and the aspirations of *protokometai* on other, and the rivalries and animosities generated by social differentiation within the settlement. This picture is complemented by the testimony of the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* – a saint's life set in the province of Galatia on the Anatolian plateau in the early seventh century.⁸³ In economic terms, the Anatolian plateau of the early Byzantine empire was relatively isolated from the wider world, although the provincial capital of Galatia at Ancyra did serve as an important nodal point in the imperial road network.⁸⁴ Accordingly, it should not surprise us that the world of the Anatolian plateau was comparatively free from aristocratic influence and control, although there were evidently substantial aristocratic and imperial estates in the region of Cappadocia.⁸⁵ Members of the early Byzantine aristocracy, as we have seen, tended to concentrate on building up their property portfolios in the empire's most productive and fertile regions. As a result,

⁸⁰ Keenan 1985.

⁸¹ Zuckerman 2004.

⁸² Ibid. 43.

⁸³ Festugière 1970. For some of the problems posed by this and similar sources, see Sarris 2006a: 118–21.

⁸⁴ See Wickham 2005: 406.

⁸⁵ Justinian, *Nov.* 30.

in economically more marginal areas, such as inner Anatolia, or the fringes of the Negev Desert, peasant autonomy was rather more pronounced.

In regions such as these it was the pattern of accumulation within peasant communities that was probably the prime determinant of the level of social tension. The *Life of Theodore*, written by his disciple, George, depicts the holy man intervening to resolve such animosities and seeking to restore calm and tranquillity to social relations through his exorcisms and cures. The peasants of Galatia, as represented in the text, were more than ready to unite in the face of an external foe. In one episode, an armed confrontation took place between the inhabitants of a village and a leading citizen of the city of Anastasioupolis named Theodosius, who had arrived to collect rents on behalf of the church. "The peasants of the village," we are told, "were roused to uncontrollable anger; they all gathered together with a common purpose, armed themselves with various weapons and swords and catapults, and took up their stand outside the village to meet him, and threatened him [Theodosius] with death if he did not turn back and leave them. When he saw them all arrayed in this way for battle and surmising that he would get the worst of it, he left them and returned to Anastasioupolis."⁸⁶ In the absence of such an outside threat, however, jealousies and rivalries (metaphoricized as demonic possessions) were rife. The decision of a certain Eutolmios from the village of Sandos, for example, to enlarge his threshing floor (and thereby make more from his harvest) released a demon which had been trapped under a rock. As a result, his neighbors tried to burn his house down.⁸⁷ In the village of Eukraoi, an agricultural laborer named Timothy was spotted digging into a hill. His neighbors suspected him of hunting for hidden treasure. The demons he unwittingly released soon took possession of them, and they proceeded to burn down his grain store.⁸⁸ In the socially more homogenous world of rural Galatia, the prospect of newly acquired wealth threatened to destabilize the fragile equilibrium of village society: the ambitious had to be kept in their place.

CONCLUSION

Although zones of peasant autonomy clearly existed in the early Byzantine empire, in many areas the period from the fourth century to the early seventh witnessed a profound intensification of aristocratic dominance of social relations in general, and of agrarian social relations in particular. This aristocratic dominance was the result of a dynamic process of élite formation that had been catalyzed in the fourth century by a significant recasting of the administrative structures of the early Byzantine state, and by the monetary conditions in which that process of élite

⁸⁶ Festugière 1970: c. 76.

⁸⁷ Ibid. c. 114–15.

⁸⁸ Ibid. c. 116–17. For exemplary discussion of these episodes, see Wickham 2005: 406–11.

formation took place. From within the city councils of the empire, a new imperial aristocracy of service arose that dominated the offices of the state as surely as its members came to dominate the land.

It is clear, however, that in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, the Persian invasions of the early seventh century, and then the Islamic invasions of the 630s and 640s, first interrupted and then reversed this course of social development by wiping out, driving away, or dispossessing the upper echelons of the early Byzantine aristocracy. With the Persian invasion of Egypt, for example, the Apion family of Oxyrhynchus disappears from the papyrological record. In what remained of the Byzantine empire, where chronic military insecurity now transformed the context in which social relations were conducted, much the same is likely to have been true, albeit, perhaps, with some notable regional exceptions. The very fact that in the eighth century, for example, the decrees of the Second Council of Nicaea still refer to the centrally administered *autourgia* of ecclesiastical estates would suggest that not every aspect of the old social order was swept away by the advancing Islamic tide.⁸⁹ Some great estates clearly did survive the troubled years of the seventh century with their interests substantially intact, as, no doubt, did some great landowners, both private and institutional. It was only as military conditions stabilized, however, that such landowners would once more come to the fore of the historical record and would again begin to pose problems for the effective workings of the Byzantine state, a process that was to culminate in the “agrarian crisis” of the Middle Byzantine period.

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⁸⁹ See Sarris 2006a: 130.

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6

LAND AND POWER IN THE MIDDLE AND LATER PERIOD

Peter Frankopan

The middle and later periods in Byzantium are characterized by a vast corpus of sources which relate, directly or indirectly, to the relationship between land and power. Narrative histories, wills, tax registers, letters of one kind or another, land legislation, saints' lives, and monastic archives provide a rich and abundant seam of material to mine. Non-literary sources too yield a vast amount of information, allowing us to reach conclusions about key issues such as the exercise of authority by the emperor, by the state, and by individual magnates; about social change in this period; about monetarization of the economy in general and specific regions in particular; about the evolution of the provincial infrastructure; and indeed about individual regions, towns, and places in the empire between the eighth and fifteenth centuries.

The primary problem, of course, comes from trying to knit these together in a way which is coherent, sensible, and useful. For while there is a wealth of material, much of this can prove difficult to come to terms with. There are distinct and important regional differences in the sheer quantity and indeed nature of the evidence available for some regions than for others. For example, we are extremely well-served with information about Asia Minor in the thirteenth century and much less well for other areas at this time, which means that of course our picture of contemporary Byzantium may be geographically lop-sided.¹ A sudden burst of imperial law-making in the tenth century likewise presents problems of interpretation not least because it raises questions as to why successive emperors were passing legislation focusing on land and on property ownership, but why no similar efforts were made, or at least recorded, either for example in the ninth or the eleventh centuries.² Narrative historians and saints' lives are no easier to assess, with claims of imperial, regional, or divine intervention for good or for ill requiring a steady

¹ Laiou 2002b: 311ff.

² Lemerle 1979: 85–9; Magdalino 1994a; McGeer 2000.

critical hand.³ Meanwhile, while it is possible to extrapolate something from the sources about topics such as household size, population density, distribution and sizes of estates and of villages, infant mortality rates, and modalities of exchange, all of which have a key impact on interpretation of social relations, the data itself is compromised by the fact that it is unclear how far local conclusions, usually tightly chronologically defined, can be stretched through the region and period as a whole.⁴

Perhaps most important of all, however, are the dramatic socio-political, economic and indeed territorial changes which Byzantium went through in this period. The empire's dramatic expansion to the east in the tenth century, its even more sudden collapse in the 1070s and 1080s, the consolidation under the Komnenoi, and then the debacle of 1204 which splintered Byzantium into a series of successor states, and finally the ill-fated period of renewal between 1261–1453 (which itself saw considerable and dramatic development) brought with it a fundamental transformation of the mechanics of the state, of the value, importance, and attitude to land, of landownership in general and indeed of the nature of power. In this sense, then, the problems of treating a period of many centuries, across a vastly changing territorial entity, through multiple political regimes which had to deal with disparate internal and external threats means that there are difficulties in attempting to extrapolate a series of meaningful and nuanced conclusions about the relationship between land and power.

Nevertheless, it is clear that in Byzantium, at least at the level of the state, land *was* power. Control of land, of its tenants, and of its owners produced revenue for the empire and for the emperor. Regardless of how collection mechanisms changed in this period, or of the extent to which the size and nature of landholdings shifted in favor of increasingly wealthy and powerful families, the taxes produced by the land were the bedrock of the fiscal system.⁵ As such, land formed the basis of the Byzantine state insofar as it was the distribution of revenues collected from it which lay behind the military, behind social hierarchy and reward systems, and behind the functioning of the central administration. Taxation, furthermore, extended beyond simple dues on owners, since for significant periods of time, land brought with it obligations which were explicitly military, even if the meaning of these obligations and the way in which they were collected changed over time.⁶

It was not just that land itself underpinned Byzantium directly in this way, for indirectly too, it had a critical bearing on almost every aspect of society, from economic modalities, to diet, to disease, and to political stability. For what was produced from the land, whether in terms of crops or livestock had an essential bearing

³ Mullett 2002. For the problems of reading saints' lives, see Magdalino 1999.

⁴ See for example the wildly different household composition: Miklosich and Müller 1860–90: IV, 13f; VI, 215f.; Dölger 1948: 35–51. For a seminal survey here which sets out the problems here: Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: esp. 3–24. Also note Laiou 2005: 44f.

⁵ Oikonomidès 1991.

⁶ See for example, Haldon 1993.

on patterns of exchange and on social structure, again regardless of the period or of the region. Failure of a crop season had devastating effects on the economy and to judge from the law of Romanos I Lekapenos in 934 on provincial society.⁷ Repeated outbreaks of plague from 1347 onwards crippled what remained of Byzantium both because of the catastrophic demographic decline which ensued, but also because of the disastrous effect which the depopulation had on the productivity of the land.⁸ The ability of the state to respond to external pressure and threats too owed a great deal to the efficiency of revenue collection, which in itself depended primarily on stability in the rural economy which underpinned sustainable production from and investment in the land, and also the ability to meet tax obligations. The size and stability of the empire, therefore, had a direct impact on the power of the state not only within but also beyond its frontiers.

The more normal function of the land, beyond a source of revenue, then, was a source of produce which supplied the population of the empire, above all that of its towns, and principally the inhabitants of Constantinople itself. The infrastructure of the primary regions of agricultural production was geared in the first instance to the supply of the imperial capital.⁹ Provisioning the capital city with consistent quantities of food, and for that matter with a wide range of fresh foodstuffs, was a central feature of the Byzantine economy.¹⁰ Indeed, supply of provisions dictated the circulation of money and lay behind the monetization of the empire, both in terms of those areas and regions where payments were made in currency, and those in which they were not.¹¹ As such, then, the provisioning of the central point of Byzantium – that is, its densely populated and vibrant capital – drove not only patterns of commercial exchange but also social evolution and development and, evidently, the practice, execution, and nature of power in all its expressions, from political to cultural.

Land also affected social relations in Byzantium insofar as grants of land to individual magnates, generals, followers, and supporters of individual emperors marked a key expression of imperial authority in this period. From the awards of lands by Michael VII Doukas and then Alexios I Komnenos in the 1070s and early 1080s to Gregory Pakourianos as reward for loyalty and presumably to encourage future support, to the distribution of fertile and therefore economically valuable property to those close to Theodore Laskaris in the thirteenth century, the ability of the emperor to make grants of land served to enshrine political and social hierarchy – at least from the sovereign's point of view.¹² John Kantakouzenos is blunt in making the connection between the grant of land (and its income) as an incentivization scheme which enabled the emperor to reward his supporters.¹³

⁷ Zepos 1931: I, 205–14; Svoronos 1994: 79–92.

⁸ Laiou 2002b: 317, 364–9.

⁹ Magdalino 1995: esp. 40–3.

¹⁰ Koder 1995; Durlat 1995.

¹¹ Morrisson 1995; HENDY 1985.

¹² Gautier 1984: esp. 125–31; Glykatzi-Ahrweiler 1958.

¹³ Schopen and Niebuhr 1828–32: II, 81.

If the exercise of making grants of land (which often included exemption from taxation) serves as a graphic example of physical property being used deliberately as a tool of imperial authority, then so too does the converse here, for by choosing to reward, the emperor was also choosing, at least implicitly, to exclude others from this compensation structure. Land grants, therefore, should not be seen simply as positive expressions of power, then, but also as part of a wider mechanism of the central government or of the emperor himself regulating society in Byzantium.

In this respect, confiscations too had an important role to play. The dramatic seizure of lands belonging to individual magnates is something which occurs perhaps less frequently than we might expect – at least to judge from the sources. The case of Eustathios Maleinos, for example, whose very substantial lands were expropriated by Basil II at the turn of the eleventh century, even seems to be the exception, rather than the rule.¹⁴ As one scholar has pointed out, however, the threat of action was in itself almost as provocative as direct intervention itself, and in the case of Maleinos at least, the targeting of this individual and of his kinship group was centered in the first instance in settling of scores by Basil after the revolts which marked the first part of his reign.¹⁵

Confiscations were unpopular and obviously dangerous for the emperor to pull off. However, they evidently did take place. The father of Manuel Straboromanos, for example, had had his lands and properties taken away from him.¹⁶ So too did St. Cyril Phileotes, whose protestations fell on deaf ears in spite of his connections with the imperial family.¹⁷ The *Alexiad* meanwhile is filled with oblique references to the seizure of property by Alexios I Komnenos, normally in the context of coups or attempted coups against the emperor, at least some of which certainly seem to have offered the new sovereign a timely opportunity both to cripple his rivals and also to build up his own asset base.¹⁸ Certainly, some commentators see confiscations as a regular and important tool by which the center could and did express its authority over the land and more particularly, over landowners.¹⁹ It should be stressed, though, that in the later period in particular, the strength of the aristocracy became such that confiscations became rare and, if anything, self-defeating both because of the high political price which was attached, but also because the inter-marriages between the major families of the empire created a class whose interests and therefore fortunes were very closely linked.²⁰

¹⁴ For the confiscation of Maleinos' lands, Skylitzes (Thurn 1973): 340; Cheynet 1990: 213–15. For some comments on the scale of imperial expropriation, see Howard-Johnston 1995: 84f.

¹⁵ Holmes 2003: esp. 56–67. For the settling of scores by Basil II, see Morris 1976.

¹⁶ Gautier 1965: 183ff.

¹⁷ Sargologos 1964: 231ff.

¹⁸ See for example, *Alexiad* (Reinsch 2001): VIII.7.i; IX.8.iv; XII.6.iv. This evidently formed part of a wider policy in Alexios' reign of increasing the wealth of the state, as is clear from very major expropriations of land belonging to the monastery of Iviron: see Lefort et al. 1985–95: II, 28–31. On this, see Harvey 1993.

¹⁹ Cheynet 2003: 77f.

²⁰ Laiou 1973.

Policies and practices were in place too in order to preserve imperial power at the expense of the powerful – an anomalous group which should be understood to include magnates, aristocrats, and appointees to positions in the civilian and military establishments. Castles, for example, were specifically granted only for the lifetime of the tenant, after which point they returned to the crown.²¹ The *pronoia*, a form of grant introduced in the later eleventh century which awarded an individual land and tax revenues in return for military obligation, was likewise limited and was not hereditary, though this came under attack in the later period.²² And in a graphic demonstration of imperial power, Basil II explicitly established the right of the crown to intervene into any dispute or any matter relating to land ownership without any time restriction.²³ These measures were set in place to preserve the status quo in Byzantium, and were anchored on the question of private property and land ownership. The relationship, then, between land and power, at least from the top down, was unequivocal, at least in the middle period. And even though the ability of the emperor to re-apportion land clearly diminished in the two centuries before the fall of Constantinople in 1453, there was a consistency to attempts to see access and deprivation to land as a key way in which the emperor sought to apportion and delegate power throughout this period.²⁴

Of course, land grants and confiscations were only one way in which the hierarchies in the empire were controlled and modulated, for other rewards were on offer to outstanding individuals whose support was either considered worth rewarding, or simply too dangerous to ignore. Up to the reforms of the eleventh century, the emperor above all relied on a system of political, military, and bureaucratic appointments, using these to cement his own position.²⁵ Indeed, the actual reward rituals played a key part in the physical manifestation of emperor and his authority on an annual basis, with the ceremonial stressing the link between the sovereign and his appointees.²⁶

The nomination to a command position was graphic since these positions were clearly ranked, both in terms of precedence and importance, but also in terms of financial reward, or in some cases, financial opportunity, as in the case of the appointments of *strategoi* of themes principally in the western provinces. Some of those with commands in the East too, such as in Chaldia or Mesopotamia, either had reduced or minimal salaries, since they were explicitly expected to make these up through trade revenues.²⁷ The fact that many of the leading positions articulated and recorded in texts like the *Kletorologion* or the *Escorial Taktikon* were concerned with the provincial administration, military and civilian, meant that the impact of

²¹ Oikonomidès 1966.

²² Oikonomidès 1997: 213; 2002: 1042. Also Khvastova 1988; Kazhdan 1995.

²³ Zepos 1931: I, 263f.; Svoronos 1994: 201–17; Holmes 2003: 60.

²⁴ See for example Bartusis 1990.

²⁵ Lemerle 1967; Neville 2004: 14–31; Oikonomidès 1972: 22ff.; Laiou 1994.

²⁶ McCormick 1985; Cameron 1987. Cf. Bisson 1995.

²⁷ *De cerimoniis* (Reiske 1829): 697.

such appointments was immediate and occasionally definitive on the ground.²⁸ The *strategoi* and *krites*, the heads of the respective provincial authorities, had a specific remit to raise taxes from the land and to see that military and fiscal obligations were fulfilled.²⁹ In other words, then, the expression of imperial power in the form of the exhibition of *largesse*, of including and excluding in a controlled reward system, and of servicing an institutional framework of government, had important implications far beyond Constantinople itself.

The emperor of course had a vested interest in maintaining the existing social structures and at the very least of conserving his own position. In this way, the ceremonial of annual payments was an important way of maintaining the ritual of his authority. But he could and indeed occasionally did intervene in land disputes. We know of a number of appeals direct to the emperor, such as St. Luke, and Christodoulos of Patmos who successfully lobbied the sovereign or those close to the sovereign (in the latter case, his mother) to overrule their own appointees in the provinces.³⁰ Advice and re-assurance was also sought directly from the emperor in order to clarify the implications of his grants.³¹ Nor was it only holy men and monks who appealed successfully in this way, for some of the least enfranchised in Byzantium, such as the widow who appealed to the emperor Theophilos in a dispute over stolen goods which had clearly fallen on deaf ears locally, were also able to find support at the very highest level of all.³² Imperial power and dominance over the land and over landowners, then, was decisive, even in cases where the emperor sided with the less fortunate or with those who stood to lose from decisions previously made for the good of the center. The categorical authority of the emperor is summarized neatly, if desperately, by Symeon Metaphrastes in the tenth century, who noted mournfully that the *autokrator* could choose to take whatever land he wanted from whoever he wanted, albeit with notional compensation.³³

Essentially, however, the emperor had a limited direct interest in the provinces or in land, other than as a function of what the land could produce to re-enforce or strengthen his power and that of the Byzantine state. Apart from the fact that the emperors in this period rarely left Constantinople or in the later period, the primate cities in the successor states, other than for military campaigns, and very occasionally, for pilgrimage, engagement with the land was minimal.³⁴ Visibility of central government and indeed of the emperor in person was restricted to the

²⁸ Bury 1911; Oikonomides 1972: 81–235, 243–53, 263–77.

²⁹ Saradi 1995; Haldon 1979; 1993.

³⁰ Sophianos 1993: 160f.; Miklosich and Müller 1860–90: VI, 40–4, 57–8.

³¹ See for example the concern articulated by the community of the Lavra of St. Athanasios at the award of the revenues of Kassandra by the emperor Alexios I Komnenos to his brother Adrian. Lemerle et al. 1970–82: I.46.

³² *Theophanes continuatus* (Bekker 1825): 92–4; Miller 2003: 99–100.

³³ MPG, vol. 114, col. 1156a.

³⁴ For pilgrimage in the rural regions, with some examples of imperial visits to shrines in Anatolia, Foss 2002.

presence of the military, of tax inspectors, and of course, of the coinage – at least in regions which were monetarized – typically in locations with high population densities, such as towns and places with a strong military presence, such as the Danube region.³⁵ The produce and product of the land was another matter, and again systematic efforts were made in order to maximize these to their fullest.

The mechanics of control of the land worked in the first instance through the network of tax collection, which itself was regulated in the middle period by a land register which was updated every 30 years.³⁶ This was finally replaced with the reforms of Alexios I Komnenos known as the *Nea Logarike* which not only introduced a greatly simplified system, but which also moved from recording ownership of land (as the cadasters had done), to the creation of an inventory of property belonging to owners – a shift, in other words, away from the land and on to the individual.³⁷

But tax collection in Byzantium, inevitably, was often far from seamless, with serial complaints in the sources about over-zealous tax officials, officious inspectors, and abuses of power by those ordered to collect what was due from the land.³⁸ Praise of emperors who chose their administrators well, or of measures threatened against the corrupt also bear witness to the abuse of power and authority in the provinces.³⁹ According to Katakalon Kekaumenos, it was no coincidence that the wealthiest members of society and the owners of the palace of Constantinople were those who were involved with the financial management of the state and specifically of the provincial fisc.⁴⁰ While the complaints of Byzantine authors, especially in the eleventh century – a time which saw both demographic and economic boom – about taxation and about tax farming are rather predictable, the charges of corruption and of the mismanagement of the state do strike a chord when set against a context of increasing paralysis in the central government in this period no less than in the provincial administration.⁴¹

The problem, of course, came from the conflict of interests of the powerful against those of the state on the one hand, and those of the local inhabitants on the other. These conflicts were made more acute by the fact that the state, in the person of the emperor and as a socio-political entity itself had competing desires, with the demand for revenue, particularly in monetary form and eventually explicitly in high

³⁵ For the correlation of monetarization and the military by the Danube, Frankopan 1997.

³⁶ Oikonomidès 2002: 982; Neville 2001: 23ff.; Svoronos 1959: 57–63; Oikonomidès 1996b: 42–6.

³⁷ Morrisson 1979; Harvey 1996; Svoronos 1968.

³⁸ Saradi 1995: 179–84.

³⁹ Note then the corrective steps taken by Romanos I Lekapenos and Constantine VII in the early tenth century in response to precisely this problem, Zepos 1931: I, 242, 215. Manuel I's threats were rather more graphic: Zepos 1931: I, 389.

⁴⁰ Litavrin 1972: 196.

⁴¹ For example, Skylitzes (Thurn 1973): 404, 408–9, 422, 476; Attaleiates (Bekker 1853): 80. For the rapid growth in the eleventh century, above all see Harvey 1989: 47ff. For Byzantium's effective collapse in the later eleventh century, Cheynet 1990.

value coinage, in an uneasy balance with the desire for social cohesion and stability.⁴² The latter did not come at the expense of social mobility; indeed far from it, to judge from the number of families which emerged during the expansion of the economy in the tenth and above all in the eleventh centuries, and their accession both to positions of power and influence and to their visibility in the narrative histories. Indeed, texts like the *Taktika* talk warmly in terms of welcoming in new blood, rather than allowing established families to monopolize positions of importance at the court and in the infrastructure of the empire.⁴³ While the later period certainly saw a closing of the ranks insofar as the leading families became an increasingly tight-knit circle of individuals related by marriage, it is important to point out that newcomers could and did break through into the upper echelons of society, in terms of position and of landownership.⁴⁴

But the trade-off between gathering funds centrally and doing so in a way which was sustainable and bearable by the local population was not always a simple one. It comes as no surprise that on occasion this led to uprisings locally, where resistance to over-taxation lay at the heart of revolt. The Deljean uprising in the 1040s provides one such example; the spitting mob at Amaseia in the 1070s provides another; uprisings on Crete and Cyprus at the end of the eleventh century likely stemmed from an acute burden being placed on these islands by the center.⁴⁵ The disturbances around Bare in the later thirteenth century were caused by the refusal of its inhabitants to meet the financial obligations which they were committed to.⁴⁶ Expressions of local dissatisfaction are interesting in themselves in terms of allowing us to see that taxation and rent had to be calibrated against a level of productivity and yield which was sustainable. But they are also helpful in illustrating the fact that the tax regime was a core weakness of the Byzantine state.

For while there is no doubt that the advance of the Seljuk Turks and later of the Ottomans in Asia Minor and ultimately in the Western provinces resulted from a breakdown of the military capabilities of the empire and of the failure of leadership at its center, the administrative and fiscal organization of the provinces and of village communities lent itself to rapid collapse. Even if leading landowners were able to lead some form of resistance against aggressive neighbors – as seems the case in Asia Minor in the later eleventh century – it was preferable and easier to seek the allocation of new lands elsewhere in regions which were less precarious. One result was the large-scale re-distribution of magnates and magnate landholdings from the

⁴² Neville 2004: 99–103; Magdalino 1994a: 93–4; Morrison 2002: 942–4; Oikonomidès 2002: 995.

⁴³ *Leonis imperatoris tactica*, in MPG 107: cols. 672–1120 (also ed. Vári 1917–22): col. 688. According to the *Vita Basilii*, Constantine VII deliberately fostered social mobility during his reign, Theophanes continuatus (Bekker 1825): 221.

⁴⁴ Laiou 1973: 139–40.

⁴⁵ Skylitzes, 409–14; Attaleiates, 9–10; Gautier 1975: 189–93; Reinsch 2001: I. 2. v–vii. For Crete and Cyprus, Frankopan 2004.

⁴⁶ Miklosich and Müller 1860–90: IV, 255f. Also Kyritses and Smyrlis 2005: 445f.

East to the Western provinces from the 1070s onwards, a pattern which became most acute after the recovery of Constantinople in 1261.⁴⁷

From the sub-magnate level, that is to say that of the smaller landowners, dependent farmers, and members of village communities, regardless of whether these were in the form of loose structures spread over a wide distance (*ktesis*), or a more densely populated community (*chorion*), there can have been limited interest in the nature of political authority beyond the immediate issues of personal security, tax obligations, and perhaps religious freedom.⁴⁸ In addition, of course, local opposition to external pressure on the empire could have only limited effectiveness against a sustained and well-organized threat – particularly in the absence of central or local leadership and resources. The fact then that villages had a homogeneity which was re-inforced by marriage ties and by limited physical mobility, but which was formalized by collective responsibility for tax and by the fact that they were treated as specific tax entities, provided an identity for village communities.

In the case of the Turkish attacks on Asia Minor, of Norman efforts on the western flank in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, of the Latin conquests after 1204, or of Serbian expansion in the fourteenth century, there was little rationale and limited ability in opposing new regimes which were certainly no worse in terms of the tax burden they imposed, and more often, were considerably better. Ottoman taxation on a major part of Macedonia in the fourteenth century was barely half of what the Byzantines had been imposing before the territories had been lost.⁴⁹ The heavy burden of (over)taxation collected to fund the defense of Asia Minor was crippling, to judge from Kydones.⁵⁰ The collapse of revenues as a result of sustained civil wars in the mid-fourteenth century evidently had catastrophic consequences.⁵¹ The correlation of land and power, then, goes some way to explaining Byzantium's weaknesses, just as it lies behind its strength.

Nevertheless, the state took a proprietary interest in land in general terms, and its efforts to do so were both visible and constant through the regular visits of government agents, tax assessors and collectors and of course through the presence of the military – which could bring with it burdens which were not easy for the producing population to carry.⁵² It is worth stressing, however, that controls were in place to maintain elements of the agrarian economy and of the land itself for the primary benefit of the state. While the concept of Byzantium as a command economy raises many questions about the way in which such a system of government and trade was co-ordinated, and even if seminal texts like the *Book of the Eparch* which lend superficial credibility to such a notion are in need of serious

⁴⁷ Laiou 1973: 143ff.

⁴⁸ For the structure of provincial society and of village structure, Kaplan 1992: 89–134; Harvey 1989: 15ff.

⁴⁹ Oikonomidès 1986b.

⁵⁰ Cammelli 1930: 11.

⁵¹ See Kantakuzenos: Schopen and Niebuhr 1828–32: II, 789; III, 33.

⁵² See for example the complaints made to Symeon Magistros, in Lemerle et al. 1970–82: no. 31 (120–1). Also, Harvey 1995: 246.

revision, it is clear that in key areas, the state controlled land and its produce very carefully.⁵³

It monitored soil conditions and land quality not only regularly but explicitly, taxing according to a strict interpretation of productivity standards.⁵⁴ It supervised grain production and prices, fixing these centrally and maintaining a series of warehouses along the primary trade routes, especially in the Aegean, in order to ensure the major urban settlements, chief among them Constantinople, with a ready supply at a constant price.⁵⁵ It maintained livestock, both for military purposes with the breeding of horses and pack animals, but also for its own commercial benefit.⁵⁶ It controlled forestry and wood supplies; in other cases, it either monopolized trade and specific crafts, or at the very least monitored them carefully.⁵⁷ It introduced the concept of *klasma* land, that is, land which had lain unclaimed and un-worked for a period of 30 years, which it then sold on – thereby finding both a way of recycling the land and of boosting its revenues – and also putting in place a mechanism for managing this process.⁵⁸ With the expansion eastwards in the tenth century, it sought to retain the most fertile and productive lands for itself, rather than pass these on either by selling them or gifting them, by establishing crown lands or *kouratoria*, overseen by imperial stewards.⁵⁹

In this way, then, the state was an innovator as regards its attitude to and use of land, responding both to opportunities presented by conquest and also to servicing the contemporary needs of the state. Alexios I Komnenos was quick, for example, to build up effective control over productive regions in order to stabilize the state's revenues, and seemingly, its economy too, resulting first in the re-coinage of 1092 and then with a full overhaul of the land registry and of land ownership.⁶⁰ Theodore Laskaris likewise responded decisively to the reduced circumstances presented by the establishment of the empire on Nicaea, through progressive tax reforms, but also through a fundamental re-distribution of the lands which remained under imperial control.⁶¹ More important still was the drive towards improving agricultural productivity, and encouraging self-sufficiency which was undertaken by Laskaris' successor, John III Vatatzes, evidently with some success.⁶² Later commentators

⁵³ For the Book of the Eparch, Koder 1991. For an exegesis on Byzantium as a central economy, Kaplan 1992: 504ff.

⁵⁴ Neville 2004: 111–14; Lefort 1991b: 252f.

⁵⁵ Teall 1959; Cheynet 1999.

⁵⁶ Oikonomidès 1972: 338; Hendy 1985: 611; Lefort 2002: 263.

⁵⁷ Dunn 1993; Kazhdan 1993: 97ff.

⁵⁸ Kaplan 1992: 388–408, 440–4; Oikonomidès 1991: 321–37.

⁵⁹ Oikonomidès 1976: 137; Kaplan 1992: 316f.

⁶⁰ Zonaras (Büttner-Wobst 1897): 18. 22 (3, 743. 2). Also note the substantial confiscations in the first part of his reign from secular rivals and from monastic institutions, above, n. 18. For the re-coinage, Metcalf 1979: 104–7; for Alexios' fiscal policy, Oikonomidès 2002: 1030–1. For the prelude to the new fiscal regime, Harvey 1996: 167ff.

⁶¹ Glykatzi-Ahrweiler 1958; Bartusis 1990: 2.

⁶² Laiou 2002b: 314, 320.

like Plethon saw the inability of the state (in his case in the Morea and the Peloponnese) to be more self-sufficient to be the basis of its endemic weakness and of the crushing poverty which he saw to be a direct result.⁶³

Apart from the shift away from a cadaster system recording the land to a register recording the property belonging to individuals, the abandonment of the *roga* system, the effective replacement of the thematic structure of the provinces, the disappearance of the *strateia* as a specifically military obligation and tie to the land, and the introduction of concessions and exemptions such as the *pronoia* and *exkousseia*, served as very major alterations to the mechanics of the state and to the practical relationship between land and power.⁶⁴ Yet all these were effectively a means to an end, designed to maintain control over the land on the one hand, and over its owners on the other. Such measures then are as much reflections of social change in Byzantium as they are of economic vectors. Where Justinian II was able to have tax collectors and the rich tortured in the early ninth century in order to extract additional revenue and funds from them, by the middle period, the emperors had to rely on rather more subtle and sophisticated ways of managing Byzantium's material and human resources.⁶⁵ By the late centuries, conversely, the balance had shifted decisively in favor of the magnates and away from the emperor, with great swathes of territory effectively beyond imperial authority and control. It is not surprising, then, that this feature of late Byzantine society has been seen to have played a critical role not only in the collapse of the empire but also in the inherent weakness of the crown during the final stages.⁶⁶

Of course, the examination of the relationship of land and power from the top downwards threatens to skew analysis by assessing this purely in terms of the state and of its extraction of material resources and exploitation of production. The patterns of control were, however, replicated from levels below the emperor and the state, from magnates down to smaller peasant freeholders, with the disenfranchised at the bottom, chief among whom were those who were tied to the land by collective responsibility, military obligation, or inherited bondage for whom social and physical escape was difficult if not impossible.

With power and access to power came jockeying for position and attempt to win the favor of the emperor, and thereby either promotion (and access to wealth and status and often land), or other privileges and exemptions. According to Michael Attaleiates, in an aphorism which is as true today as it was in the mid-eleventh century, the definition of true freedom was the escape from taxation.⁶⁷ Attempts to get to such a position and to access the apparatus of power drove the social engine of Byzantium in the period before the Fourth Crusade. As early as

⁶³ Lambros 1930: III, 253–65. Also Woodhouse 1986: 92–107.

⁶⁴ Haldon 1993; Oikonomidès 1976: esp. 141–50; Lemerle 1967; Morrisson 1991; Harvey 1989: 46f.; Lemerle 1979: 173–5; Harvey 1990.

⁶⁵ Nikephoros (Mango 1990): cap. 39 (95); Theophanes (de Boor 1883/5): 367–9.

⁶⁶ Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: 48ff.

⁶⁷ Attaleiates, 284.

the tenth century, allegations of grand larceny were leveled at the *megas domestikos*, John Kurkuas, perhaps the greatest general of the middle Byzantine period, for expropriating newly conquered lands for himself and his followers at the expense of the state.⁶⁸ Not dissimilar to this were the efforts of Michael Psellos and Theophylact of Ohrid a century later to lobby those in positions of power both to promote themselves, and also to seek favors for their intimates and to secure them appointments in the provinces which were lucrative – favors for which they doubtless would expect to be repaid at a later date.⁶⁹ Even in the Komnenian period, traditionally viewed by modern scholars as a time when power was concentrated into the hands of the ruling dynasty, grants of land – often with exemptions attached – to non-family members was both common and regular.⁷⁰ Networking in order to gain a better position relative to the crown was a fundamental part of Byzantine society.⁷¹

In this way, therefore, it is worth questioning just how valuable land was and what role it played in the matrix of political and social power in Byzantium. There is much debate about the average size of landholdings, and rightly, concern about whether snapshots from one region in a certain period can be applied in meaningful way to others.⁷² However, attempts have been made to devise a broad and persuasive idea of what kind of yields and returns on capital land represented in average terms for a landowner.⁷³ Although estimates are inevitably loose (and rarely if ever take inflation into account), it is not difficult to conclude that owning land was in general a sensible financial decision, perhaps producing a 3.5 percent return on investment.⁷⁴

Data extrapolated from tax registers certainly suggests that land acquisition was financially prudent, as do documents such as the wills of Eustathios Boilas and Symbarios Pakourianos in the eleventh century.⁷⁵ Comments made by Michael Psellos likewise point firmly to the conclusion that owning and indeed developing land offered reasonable returns, and moreover suggest that there were profits to be made from working the land hard, and transforming unwelcoming terrain into productive estates which yielded both cash crops and/or rental

⁶⁸ Theophanes (de Boor 1883/5): 426, 429; Howard-Johnston 1995: 86–8. Also, Kaplan 1992: 316f.

⁶⁹ Psellos (Kurtz 1936–41): I, 50–2, 66, 77, 81–4, 99, 107, 140, 142, 150–2, 154, 162–3, 166, 171–2, 182, 221, 243, 247, 250–1; Theophylact of Ohrid: Gautier 1986. Also Mullett 1997: esp. 201ff.

⁷⁰ It is commonly stated that Trebizond was given to the Gabrades, e.g. Kazhdan and Wharton Epstein 1985: 53. The apparent award of Thessaloniki to Nikephoros Melissenos, who may or may not have been Alexios' brother-in-law at the time, is also perhaps problematic too, *Alexiad*, Reinsch 2001: II. 8. iii.; Frankopan 2006. Gregory Pakourianos was given lands by Alexios I Komnenos: Gautier 1984: 35ff., as was Leo Kephalas: Lemerle et al. 1970–82, nos. 44–5, 48–9, 60, and 65. Also Morris 1995; Magdalino 1993: 220–3.

⁷¹ Mullett 1988.

⁷² Svoronos 1956: 332; Kondov 1974: 101; Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: 70; Kaplan 1988: 222; Lefort 2002: 107f.

⁷³ Laiou 2002b: 352–64.

⁷⁴ Oikonomides 1991: 331; Neville 2004: 84f.

⁷⁵ Svoronos 1959; Vryonis 1957; Lefort et al. 1985–95: II, no. 44.

income.⁷⁶ Kekaumenos actively encouraged his son to invest in land too, particularly those with high rental yields, such as vineyards, gardens, and forests.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, it is also clear that at least in the middle period, while ownership of land evidently could and did produce a decent return, this was dwarfed by income which could be received from holding high positions of state. The income which Nikephoros Phokas would have received in the mid-tenth century by virtue of holding the rank of *magistros* and the command position of *domestikos* represented the equivalent notional landholding of more than a quarter of a million *modioi* – an area which is put into context by the maximum sizes of Athonite monasteries such as the Great Lavra and Iviron, which are thought to have owned 50,000 and 80,000 *modioi* of land respectively.⁷⁸ That is to say, in other words, that Phokas' income from the state was many times greater than what he can have earned from the land – whatever the size of his holdings and those of his family.

While the landholdings of magnates are often presumed to have been substantial in number and at least at the top end in size too, it is important to offer checks to both hypotheses. In the first instance, limitations of the source material can mask true patterns of the distribution of magnate estates. In the period before 900, for example, the cases of the widow Danelis and of Philaretos, father-in-law to Constantine VI, are regularly cited as examples of typical magnate landholdings, even though neither can surely be considered representative for the landowning class as a whole.⁷⁹ But there are other variables which should be recognized too. For example, we learn from the *Life* of St. Michael Maleinos that this individual renounced all his worldly possessions in order to follow a more pious life than that of many of his landowning peers. According to the *Vita*, Michael had inherited enormous amounts of land and livestock. This does not come as a surprise, given that the Maleinoi were one of the very wealthiest of all Byzantine aristocratic families in the middle period, and are famed as such in the secondary material. When Michael decided to withdraw from more normal life, his possessions were bought from him by his brother Constantine, with Michael duly giving the proceeds away. This logically suited the family itself which therefore retained ownership of domainal land.⁸⁰

If we assume that the price which Michael received was fair and a reasonable reflection of the value both of the land and of the livestock, then two things should surprise us here: firstly, that Constantine Maleinos should think that buying out his brother was the best use of his money – which points to an intrinsic (and high) value of land; and secondly, that he would have cash available to be able to meet this presumably substantial cost – which perhaps does not. Just how magnates were able to draw incomes and revenues from the land is central here.

⁷⁶ Psellos (Kurtz 1936–41): 2, 118.

⁷⁷ Kekaumenos (Litavrin 1972): 36.

⁷⁸ Cheynet 2000.

⁷⁹ Cheynet 2000: 284f.

⁸⁰ Laiou 1998: 404.

It goes without saying, of course, that those regions closest to major urban centers, and in particular those within easy reach of Constantinople, must have offered different financial returns, and by extension different social and political profiles for those belonging to owners based in more inaccessible lands, or for that matter in locations with limited approximative population densities. This is particularly important given that a significant element of magnate income came from rental income (either in cash or in kind) from tenant farmers, and, in the middle and later period, from the dependent peasantry.

While the shortcomings of the primary material make it difficult to reach conclusions which are entirely satisfactory, different regions and themes appear to have had different profiles – most likely for precisely these reasons.⁸¹ Clearly, estates which were well-located and above all close to transport routes allowing easy shipping of produce to Constantinople for the supply of the *oikos* on the one hand, and of the sale of surplus on the other, were simply more valuable than those located in less accessible locations.⁸² Similarly, lands which were tucked deep into the interior, away from logical secondary markets (with their necessary population base), and situated in areas which were either unmonetarized entirely or appear to have only very limited currency supply, must have experienced entirely different problems as well as different economic and social profiles, perhaps an obvious comment to make, but one which is seldom acknowledged by modern commentators.

Part of the problem, of course, is that the sources are either frustratingly silent about magnate estates, or what they tell us is obscure and open to interpretation. Certainly, some of the attributions of landed estates and their links to specific families and/or individuals can be optimistic and rely on a single comment about their home or provenance in the sources.⁸³

The questions of what was being produced on estates then, and more pertinently who they were being sold to, at what price (and how prices changed), and to what extent land formed a true basis of political power in Byzantium, rather than as a by-product, do not have straightforward answers. The will of Eustathios Boilas is of some help, insofar as this individual had cultivated difficult terrain with no substantial local markets to sell to, without the benefit of patronage of the emperor in terms of grants or exemption and held only the relatively low position of *proto-spatharios*.⁸⁴ As such, then, the value of what he left to his daughters provides at least some guide to relative levels of prosperity in secondary regions in the empire. But while what Boilas left was by no means negligible, it pales in comparison to the revenues paid out to members of the provincial administration, to the customs take

⁸¹ See for example Nicholas Oikonomidès' comments on the Thrakesion, Oikonomidès 1996: 124–5. Also, Neville 2004: 2–3; Hendy 1985: 135ff.

⁸² Magdalino 1993: 164–8; 1995: 37–43.

⁸³ Hendy 1985: 100ff.

⁸⁴ Vryonis 1957: 264–72; Lemerle 1977: 22. Cf. the efforts of Michael Maleinos, who transformed his lands from wasteland into something rather special: Petit 1903: 560.

at trade fairs, or to the daily revenues in major cities – even allowing for distortion in the case of the latter.

In this sense, then, the fact that it is possible to advance an alternative to the hypothesis of a powerful provincial aristocracy retaining power in middle Byzantium means that it is worth stepping back from the traditional concepts of civilian military and of rural versus urban. Time and again in the primary material, and across the range of diverse types of sources, power is defined not in terms of land, wealth, or control of production, but rather in terms of proximity to and access to imperial authority and above all favor. Complaints are rarely made about rapacious landlords, therefore, but rather, are made frequently about abuses of the government apparatus.⁸⁵ Indeed, this competing image is articulated directly and explicitly in one of the military manuals of the tenth century, which talks of power (and its misuse) solely in terms of officials appointed by the center, and not by local landowners.⁸⁶ While the legislation passed in this period evidently deals with a changing balance of power in the provinces, the most useful reading of the laws as a whole does not involve seeing expansive local landowners threatening the crown, but rather a struggle of the emperor seeking to stamp his authority over his own appointees. As such, the powerful, or *dynatoi*, whom the laws speak of, more naturally reflect those with official positions who were able to exploit these more successfully than intended.⁸⁷ More important than landownership, quite clearly, was access to power in the form of appointment by the emperor.⁸⁸

Indeed, a compelling case can be made that power in Byzantium at sub-imperial level before the start of the fourteenth century did not come from independently wealthy individuals or from families whose landownership and autonomy posed a threat to the emperor. Rather, power was anchored on the person of the emperor and his closest intimates. It was imperial favor which provided access, independence, status, and power. Lack of favor meant impotence, and hence unsurprisingly the fear of its withdrawal was acute indeed, as is clear from the case of a certain Pothos, *strategos* of Hellas in the tenth century, whose concern at losing his rank – and what the implications of this were – made him turn to St. Luke in desperation.⁸⁹ The reality of what removal from such positions meant is clear from other sources from this period.⁹⁰

That this was the case can be demonstrated by the fact that families such as the Phokades and the Maleinoi, who had been at the forefront of opposition to Basil II in the tenth century, were effectively shut down within the space of a generation, with no recourse and no platform from which to challenge imperial authority.⁹¹ In the eleventh century, likewise, family fortunes did not so much ebb and flow,

⁸⁵ Holmes 2003: esp. 42ff. Cf. Kaplan 1992: 399–43.

⁸⁶ Dagron 1986: 109ff.

⁸⁷ McGeer 2000: 26f.

⁸⁸ Cheynet 1991.

⁸⁹ Sophianos 1993: 199–201.

⁹⁰ Cheynet 1990: 213–27, 239–37.

⁹¹ Holmes 2003: 64–7; Cheynet 1986.

as peak and trough. Those who lost the trust of the emperor forfeited their position, their importance, and their power, with their children suffering after them. All rivals to Alexios Komnenos, for example, as well as their children, were ruthlessly sidelined and excluded from the apparatus of government. Supporters of previous regimes, such as the Diogenai and the Synadenoï, or more current challengers to Alexios, such as the Anemas and Antiokhoi, all lost their places in the imperial hierarchy. Even members of the emperor's immediate family who had let him down, as appears to be the case with both Adrian Komnenos and Nikephoros Melissenos, were written off and out of positions of any authority and received no benefits which other members of the kinship group reaped.⁹²

The examples of Adrian and Nikephoros serve as particularly telling examples, because of their relationship with the emperor, but also because both had been major beneficiaries of Alexios' *largesse* at the start of his reign, with the grant of the revenues of Kassandra in the case of the former, and the extraordinarily extravagant award of the entire revenues of Thessaloniki in the case of the latter – evidently, either a mistake on the part of Anna Komnene, or otherwise a sign of the profound importance of Melissenos' support to the Komnenoi coup in 1081.⁹³ Whatever the case, however, there is effectively little difference in the fact that Alexios could and did shut the door on his intimates and rivals, even if the method of doing so was different from those of the Macedonian emperors in the tenth century.

Of course, the hypothesis of a provincial aristocracy with wealth and autonomy deriving from landownership cannot be dismissed out of hand for clearly magnates really did own significant swathes of territory. Nevertheless, the direct correlation of magnate or aristocratic property and power is one which needs to be handled carefully. In the case of the extensive legislation in the tenth century, for example, which purports to deal, at least superficially, with the challenge posed by magnates increasing their holdings at the expense of the less fortunate and of taking advantage of the opportunity presented by circumstance, the deliberately vague definitions of precisely what constituted the *dynatoi* or the powerful and what was meant by the *penetes* or poor, can be construed in a context entirely divorced from the extension of landownership as sharp business practice by the rich exploiting the poor.⁹⁴

The laws are sometimes seen as part of a battle for manpower, with the expanding state keen above all to ensure the availability of men and military resources to fuel its efforts against the failing Abbasid Caliphate.⁹⁵ But if this is the case, the repeated provisions by successive emperors appearing to attack the same targets either suggests that previous legislation had not worked or that new threats kept prompting the central government to respond to them. Yet for all the idea that land was being mercilessly seized by canny property developers, it is hard to see precisely what landowners sought to gain from acquiring land which was populated by individuals who had substantial and hereditary military obligations to the state, and

⁹² Frankopan 2007: esp. 20–34.

⁹³ For the grant of the revenues of Kassandra, Lemerle et al. 1970–82: I, no. 46. For Melissenos and Thessaloniki, Alexiad, Reinsch 2001: II. 8. iii; Frankopan 2006: 163f.

⁹⁴ See Kaplan 1992: 414–43, 544–9; Lemerle 1979: 85–115. Cf. Harvey 1995: esp. 244–9.

⁹⁵ Howard-Johnston 1995: 76–80; Neville 2004: 8–9; Ostrogorsky 1947.

which was in any event, only useful and valuable if it could yield produce which had a market accessible and consumers who could pay for it.

The temptation then is to look at the legislation of the Macedonian emperors as having rather less to do with provincial society than it did with rhetoric and positioning of the sovereigns, keen to show themselves as protectors of the common man. In this respect, then, it is no accident that as estates began to consolidate and enlarge in the eleventh century, evidently at the expense of smaller tenant farmers, so too did the gap close between the emperor and his magnates.⁹⁶ By the 1070s, the number of those chancing their arm to take the throne or simply resisting the center by force had reached almost epic proportions.⁹⁷ It is tempting to suppose that all these individuals had serious financial backing, in the form of landed estates, inherited wealth, military retinues, and extended kinship groups.

The reality, though, is more prosaic. In the first instance, the local population was presumably amenable to uprisings insofar as it had limited interest in the wider political picture and was more concerned with conditions close to home. In this way, then, just as a local contender for the throne could galvanize support for his bid with relative ease, so too did such support evaporate under sustained pressure, or in the face of failure. Moreover, it is striking that from 1067 onwards, those who presented the most serious (and indeed the successful) challenges for the throne were not provincial landowners with substantial independent means, but rather those with military experience and pretensions: Roussel Balliol, Nikephoros Bryennios, Nikephoros Basilakios, Nikephoros Botaneiates, Alexios Komnenos, Constantine Humbertopoulos, Nikephoros Diogenes, Adrian Komnenos, Nikephoros Bryennios (the younger), and on into the later twelfth century with Isaac Komnenos, Andronikos Komnenos, Andronikos Doukas and so on. What these figures had in common was not a base in the countryside and substantial wealth from trading crops or livestock, or from rental of domanial estates to tenant farmers; what is clear from the presence of individuals of non-Byzantine origin in this list, and also from the fact that those whose revolts either originated in the provinces or at least took place there, significant local support was often attracted even though the protagonists had little familial connection with the regions in question. Roussel Balliol, for example, was able to galvanize considerable backing in central Asia Minor in the later eleventh century. Isaac Komnenos, likewise, a hundred years later, succeeded in achieving effective independence on Cyprus in spite of Komnenian family landholdings on this island being negligible.

Of course, this is not to say that landholdings and wealth were not conveyors of power, nor even that they were unimportant. Rather, other features and qualities, such as military reputation and prowess, or even simply suggestion of military ability, were key currencies in middle and late Byzantium. This is partly a reflection itself of imperial image-making, most highly pronounced in the reigns of Nikephoros II Phokas, John I Tzimiskes, and Basil II, as well as those of the

⁹⁶ Magdalino 1993: 160–71; Harvey 1989: 35ff.; Morris 1976; Oikonomidès 1986a.

⁹⁷ Cheynet 1990: 76–90.

Komnenoi, who deliberately accentuated the link between the throne and the army. This was done in a variety of ways, through personal leadership of the army, through ritual, and, strikingly, through art as well.⁹⁸ All shaped attitudes in society, where bravery, kinship, and military exploits which frame texts such as *Digenis Akrites* are reflections of portrayals of power at the very highest level of all in Byzantine society.⁹⁹

It comes as no surprise perhaps that the primary sources talk so little of personal wealth, inherited or self-made – even though both must have been on occasion in dramatic and impressive proportions. Attitudes towards power, then, as much as power itself, were key in defining social success and ultimately, played a role in a self-fulfilling cycle. While families like the Phokades, for example, may well have owned the great estates in Cappadocia that they are commonly presumed and assumed to have done (in spite of limited concrete evidence as to precisely where these were, what was grown or raised there, where it was sold and to whom and who tenanted their lands), their prominence and success in the tenth century owed a great deal to their ability to fill the highest ranks of the army.¹⁰⁰ As one member of the family took the senior command position, so were the status and importance of others raised – raising their own access further still.¹⁰¹ In this way, then, land-ownership should be seen as a route to economic power, certainly, but by no means a certain vector to military, political, or social status and prominence.

It should be stressed, nevertheless, that these attitudes softened, and that they often did so dramatically. As Attaleiates is at pains to point out, in the mid-eleventh century all too few young men were impressed by military affairs, and rather turned their attentions to more traditional middle-class interests, above all the law. But law in itself represented a critical if not the definitive context within which social relations played out and evolved. The legal relationship between landlord and *paroikoi*, just as much as that between the emperor and the magnates, provided the framework for geographic and social movement. In other words, then, the mechanics of the drafting of legal documents, of sealing agreements between individuals, and of dispute resolution, were essential to the development of Byzantine society, and to very real and concrete definitions and expressions of power in the empire.

Texts like the *Peira* or the collection of legal documents of Demetrios Chomatianos which deal primarily with low-level disputes in the form of case law are of vital significance in allowing us to understand the legal relationships between individuals and groups of individuals, as well as about the links, ties, and obligations of these to the land.¹⁰² These sources, alongside documents such as the Thebes Register and the extensive archives from Mt. Athos, illuminate the issue of economic expansion in rural society through recording the accumulation of

⁹⁸ Magdalino 1993: 413ff.; Parani 2003.

⁹⁹ Magdalino 1989; Kazhdan 1976; Cheynet 1990: 213–19, 223f, 227ff., 267–73; 2000: 38–42.

¹⁰⁰ Kaplan 1981.

¹⁰¹ Cheynet 1986.

¹⁰² Vryonis 1974: 279–84; Oikonomidès 1986c.

landholdings either by sub-magnate owners, that is to say, those of more modest means than those visible in the narrative histories, or by monastic institutions at their at their expense.

Sources such as these help us understand the essential conservatism of the Byzantine provinces. In part, this stemmed from the fact that collective taxation meant that there was effectively limited escape for members of a village or of a wider community which was classed for fiscal reasons as a single entity.¹⁰³ The fact that the transfer of obligation applied only to the head of the household meant, at least in theory, that there was a degree of physical freedom for younger individuals to relocate – even if this served to increase the financial liability on their families and communities.¹⁰⁴ And indeed, there is evidence to suggest a degree of fluidity to the labor force, albeit often patchy and implicit. Urbanization and the consequential rapid growth of urban centers in the middle period certainly, and to an extent after 1204 too, at least until the disastrous depopulation of the second half of the fourteenth century, provides one indication of this movement.¹⁰⁵ But it follows too that peasants, and specifically young men, must have moved either in search of employment or to meet specific demand.

However, the fact that Byzantine agriculture was, if not regressive, then at least static in terms of technological change, innovation, and above all productivity, naturally means that the consolidation of landownership was not so much driven by commercial as by other factors.¹⁰⁶ That is to say, the fact that agricultural yields appear to have been broadly the same, with the same tools and farming methods being used throughout the empire and throughout the middle and later period, provokes the conclusion that it was unlikely that one farm, for example, would be vastly better run than another, or that one would produce a significantly higher return than the next – even though according to one scholar, lands looked after by the landlord (rather than his steward) tended to perform better.¹⁰⁷ But by extension then, acquiring new lands offered limited opportunities for cost-saving or for additional revenue generation – something which is in fact recognized implicitly in the tax legislation where dues were set as constant on land of analogous quality.

In this way, then, it was not better standards of farming, or even the practices of highly acquisitive farmers which led to the consolidation of landed estates, but rather other socio-economic factors. Three have particular importance. Firstly, a rising population base logically meant that while supply remained constant, demand must have increased. It makes sense that this will have caused price rises for the produce, which must have had a knock-on effect for wider inflationary pressure.

¹⁰³ Oikonomidès 1996b: 24–151.

¹⁰⁴ Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: 142–57; Lefort 2002: 110f.

¹⁰⁵ Urban growth, Harvey 1989: 35–79; Lefort 2002: 267. For the effects of depopulation, Laiou 2002b: 315ff.

¹⁰⁶ Bryer 1979; 2002; Kazhdan and Kaplan 1994; Harvey 1989: 122–5; Kaplan 1992: 46ff.

¹⁰⁷ Magdalino 1995: 39. Cf. Lefort 2002: 293ff.

But of course, this also meant a greater return for landowners in real terms. In other words, demographic growth put pressure on the land, and made it more valuable. It does not take much to understand that its attractions from an investment point of view and as a sector which was likely to grow further must have had an immediate impact for those in a position to buy. This is certainly more credible than more gloomy hypotheses about the growth of landed estates in this period which are predicated on the crushing financial and physical exploitation of the peasantry.¹⁰⁸ Patterns of landownership in this period are instructive therefore insofar as they suggest that magnates (and for that matter institutions such as monasteries) did not simply seek to expand into neighboring properties, but were rather more discriminate about their acquisitions – which naturally underlines the growing value of land as a commodity in the tenth–twelfth centuries.¹⁰⁹

Secondly, state intervention in the distribution of lands, whether in the form of confiscations, or more obviously, of the granting of property and in particular the award of tax concessions, meant that inevitably some owners (and their holdings) held a competitive advantage over their neighbors. For while these exemptions may have been intended as rewards for service performed in Constantinople or on the battlefield and hence reflect political patronage of the central authority in Byzantium, they had important local implications, chief amongst which was the distortion of the market. This must have had a pronounced effect on the labor force, for it stands to reason that an estate which had a lower, negligible, or non-existent tax burden could afford to pay more to wage laborers, as well as being in a position to be able to offer better terms to tenants too.

The precise effects of the distortion of the market are not easy to track given the limitations of the source material. However, it was clearly a prime factor in the trend of consolidation of estates, something which was most pronounced in the eleventh and again in the fourteenth century. In both cases, then, the apparent growth in the size of the estates is itself a reflection of social change and political favor originating not in the provinces, but centrally. This dichotomy between Constantinople on the one hand and rural society on the other overlaps then in more ways than the role played by the provincial civil and military administrations. While it is evident that there could be and were local explanations for social stratification and social change, the state itself played a key role, indirectly and inadvertently, because of its repeated interventions in the distribution of land in Byzantium.

The picture of landownership is therefore obscured by factors which were local – such as quality of the soil and its productivity, and of course access to

¹⁰⁸ Kaplan 1992: 544–9; Ostrogorsky 1954.

¹⁰⁹ Note for example the scattered lands owned by Gregory Pakourianos, Gautier 1984: 125–31, and compare with those owned by the Pantokrator monastery in Constantinople, Gautier 1969. The Cadaster of Thebes likewise paints a picture of scattered landownership and importantly also of owners living some distance removed from properties which they owned, Svoronos 1959: 11–19.

urban centers and therefore markets – but also those which had their roots geographically distant as well as being agriculturally and economically removed. This of course complicates any paradigm of looking at rural society too, for there was an intrinsic instability with the land. One scholar has argued that the state essentially kept available a pool of land which it recycled through the centuries to the supporters of whichever emperor was in power, a hypothesis which is both neat and strikes a chord.¹¹⁰

Nevertheless, the reality of considering what the motivations were for seeking to own land in the first place, and of how easily (or otherwise) benefits could be extracted from it, also means that we should not ignore the reality on the ground. After all, a case has also been made that lower-level peasants, whether wage laborers, tenants, or those with obligations to the land, were not able to exploit the land as successfully as those higher up the social pyramid, essentially because they were unable to invest or even, for that matter, to consider investment from a financial, sociological, and even a metaphysical point of view.¹¹¹

We know that there were trade fairs in Byzantium, and indeed that some of these were substantial and impressive affairs, in terms of the number of people attending them, the goods which could be bought there, and also in terms of the take from taxes which were applied to sales.¹¹² However, large fairs must have been both seasonal and while regular, also infrequent – that is to say, taking place not a weekly and perhaps not even on a monthly basis. Where exchange and produce supported by the land – whether livestock or crops – took place and was lucrative, once again, was in the urban centers.

As cities grew, then so too must prices have risen for staple goods, and demand accelerated for luxury produce too. So land value was evidently more pronounced in periods of population growth, and obviously in areas where population densities were at their highest, was most sought after. In other words, then, the relationship between land and power even at a local level was not driven from the land itself, but rather was a response to demand and specifically to demand of the towns and cities in Byzantium. And as such, the opposite is also true, namely that population fall was accompanied by a fall in the price and value of land – something which can be demonstrated by the feudalization of Byzantine society in the later period. The surrendering of the peasantry to the landlords, for example, was a natural response to the circumstances created by a sudden collapse in the markets and by the ability and willingness of magnates such as the Argyropouloi in the early fifteenth century, who were able to use their financial muscle to acquire vast tracts of land in or shortly

¹¹⁰ Magdalino 1993: 168; Lefort 2002: 293.

¹¹¹ Svoronos 1976: 57–60; Kaplan 1992: esp. 500–20.

¹¹² Vryonis 1981; Kazhdan and Epstein 1985: 35f.; Bouras 1981: 626f.

before this time.¹¹³ Other examples can be given here too which support an argument linking the emergence of the effectively independent landowner with substantial resources with population decline – even if opportunities to sell produce directly or indirectly became more restricted.¹¹⁴ The fact that we find small micro-societies experiencing mini-booms, such as in Radolibos in western Macedonia, should not conceal the wider conclusion that stagnation and decline were the cause of the rise of magnate holdings, rather than their effect.¹¹⁵

Land was also a cultural expression of power, insofar as it was heavily idealized in this period. The *Geoponika*, for example, talks of the three constituents of the empire as consisting of the army, the clergy, and agriculture.¹¹⁶ The same text paints a vivid picture of an ideal country estate, with an emphasis placed on idyllic setting and high productivity.¹¹⁷ A wide range of texts bears witness to the range of interest in land, cultivated space, and gardens, in both rural and urban contexts.¹¹⁸ Dominance over nature through control of the landscape, just as activities like hunting which re-enforced man's authority over the natural world, were ways in which the aristocracy, the high priesthood, and the emperor could assert their position in society.¹¹⁹ This found its way into contemporary literature as well as into common practice.¹²⁰

The idea of land as desirable in these terms is something which can also be identified in the attitudes to the countryside as specifically divine space, whether in the form of specific pilgrimage destinations, or as somewhere where holy men would depart in search of inspiration, tranquillity and therefore, God. The correlation between the Byzantine saint and the rural environment has been made before, and eloquently so.¹²¹ Nevertheless, in the context of any discussion of power, it is useful to draw out that land represented more than the financial muscle of the state, a matrix of exploitation of resources and manpower by a social pyramid with the emperor at the top, magnates, smaller landowners, and free peasants below, with bonded labor and slaves at the bottom. For land also represented in some ways an antithesis to political power, at least in terms of the landscape and of the divine.

The relationship between the land and the built environment, between the rural and the man-made, operated on many levels, of course, and ultimately the ability

¹¹³ An idea of the scale of Argyropouloi landholdings and wealth comes from documents relating to a dispute centered on improvements done to land rented by members of this family from the monastery of Ivron: Lefort et al. 1985–95: IV nos. 97–8. Also here Matschke 1981: 160–75.

¹¹⁴ Laiou 1980–1: 188f.; Laiou-Thomadakis 1977: 62ff.

¹¹⁵ For Radolibos, Lefort 1991a; 1985; 1986.

¹¹⁶ *Geoponika* (Beckh 1895): *Prooimion*, 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., II.8.

¹¹⁸ Maguire 1987; Littlewood 1997.

¹¹⁹ Maguire 1994. For hunting, see Patlagean 1992; Littlewood 1992a.

¹²⁰ Littlewood 1992b.

¹²¹ For example, Brown 1971.

of magnates and farmers to dominate the countryside was itself an important cipher for human, physical power as much as it was for a sense of wonder. In this way, the ceremonial of the banquet, of feasting as an expression of imperial power in particular, but also of status across the social spectrum, provides an interesting approach too to attitudes both to the land and also to its produce. The banquet was a key part of the ritual designed to express *taxis* within the empire.¹²² It was also used deliberately to impress visitors to Constantinople, specifically those on diplomatic missions or with political remits, such as Liudprand of Cremona in the mid-tenth century, while Yahya of Antioch also talks of the role played by the feast in the imperial ritual.¹²³ The nemesis of Alexios I Komnenos, on the other hand, the Norman Bohemond, was wily enough to assume that food prepared in order to impress him had other, darker intentions.¹²⁴

The fruits of the land were then an expression of power given that provided an expression of man's control over nature. But produce was also an expression of social status and position. Interest in cooking, for example, evolved in this period, with Constantine VIII liking nothing better than to experiment with different sauces and condiments in the kitchen – at least according to Michael Psellos.¹²⁵ After his deposition and tonsure, Nikephoros III Botaneiates' principal complaint about his removal from the throne and his life as a monk was articulated solely in terms of his dissatisfaction with the limitations of the monastic diet.¹²⁶ Other sections of society too took an increasing interest in what they ate and of how food should be prepared. Treatises such as Symeon Seth's exposition on food or crude graffiti etched on latrine walls bear witness to a shift in attitudes to food, and therefore to the land and to agriculture.¹²⁷

In other words, although land underpinned the economy at an institutional and individual level, it also had a significance for the expression and articulation of power both in terms of control over nature, and also as a marker of social status. Landed estates were not only about producing a yield and a financial return, therefore, but also offered an opportunity to underline or even advance position in society. Indeed, the presentation and depiction of the powerful being linked to agriculture extended to those in the very highest positions in society. As in the case of Andronikos I Komnenos, for example, the emperor himself either chose or allowed himself to be depicted not in military dress, but rather clothed as a farm laborer, as at the Church of the Forty Martyrs no less.¹²⁸

The adoption of poses and the evolution of attitudes seeing working the land not as the preserve of the poorest in society but of the most powerful

¹²² McCormick 1986: ch. 4; 1985.

¹²³ Wright 1930: VI, viii.

¹²⁴ *Alexiad* (Reinsch 2001): X.11. iii–vii (318–20).

¹²⁵ *Chronographia* (Renauld 1926): II. vii.

¹²⁶ Reinsch 2001: III.1.i (87).

¹²⁷ Langkavel 1868. For an inscription praising the quality of good food (and its fundamental consequences), see the *Anthologia Palatina* (Paton 1925–7): 9, 642.

¹²⁸ Niketas Choniates (Van Dieten 1975): 332.

provides a telling shift in social mores in middle and late Byzantium. It is striking, for example, that contemporary commentators held that John III Vatatzes' policies towards rural reform, but also towards farming and above all agricultural self-sufficiency were the most striking of his achievements and the most significant aspect of his reign.¹²⁹ Of course, Vatatzes' pre-occupation with the land may have been eminently sensible given the economic and political pressures facing the empire of Nicaea in the wake of the fragmentation of 1204. However, it also represented an important articulation of self-reliance, and of the exploitation of the land which was itself idealized throughout this period.¹³⁰

But in the later centuries, while there were certainly regions and indeed periods which bear witness to local success, at least on a modest scale, the wider picture was crushing: a dramatically shrunken tax base, the increasing reliance on mercenary (and therefore expensive) armies, the political successes of the empire's neighbors – specifically the Serbs and the Ottomans – and, no less importantly, the wider development of international trade, which was not only held in an increasingly firm grip by the Italian city states, but which shifted decisively away from Byzantium and from Constantinople with the establishment of alternative trade routes and with the emergence of the western Mediterranean. All were crippling blows to any serious long-term prospects of the empire.¹³¹ The brief respite offered by the policies and successes of individual sovereigns – such as Andronikos II or Andronikos III – ultimately served only to delay the inevitable.¹³²

By the middle of the fourteenth century, the meaning, function, and value of land and its relationship to power had shifted, something which was made decisive following the devastating plague of 1347 and the regular outbreaks which followed.¹³³ The evidence from then on points relentlessly to severe depopulation and, above all, to the abandonment of the land.¹³⁴ The link between the two is, of course, central, for without a constant and growing demography, not only was production likely to be reduced because of a contraction of the labor force, but crucially, the collapse of markets, local, regional, and urban, meant that there was failure of demand.

The result was fundamental change in Byzantine society, both at provincial level, but also at the level of high politics, with what one scholar has called a process of feudalization. Ironically, then, the pressures on the economy above all led to the

¹²⁹ Nikephoros Gregoras (Van Dieten 1973): I, 42.

¹³⁰ See for example, Henny 1985: 565–8; Kaplan 1992: 493–520; Magdalino 1995: 37f.

¹³¹ On Serbian expansion in the fourteenth century, see Soulis 1984. For an introduction to the rise of the Ottomans, see Imber 1990.

¹³² On Andronikos II, see Laiou 1972; for Andronikos III, Nicol 1993: 167–85, esp. 183ff. Also here see Laiou 2002a: 23–38.

¹³³ On the repeated outbreaks of plague, see Schreiner 1975–9: 33/6, 8, 9, 12, 29, 36–7; 7/24. 9/41; 31/6; 89; also Laiou 2002b: 317.

¹³⁴ See esp. Laiou 2002b: 364ff.

shift in the nature and size of magnate landholdings, and in the relationship between landlord and dependents. One key by-product of this was a fragmentation of Byzantium which went beyond the dislocation of the core territories of the empire into constituent limbs; it also led to de facto autonomy for the magnates themselves, with all the implications this had for the crown's ability (or inability) to defend itself against threats from Byzantium's neighbors.

Land then had different meanings and different values in the middle and late periods in Byzantium. Its relationship to power in its various forms and meanings is predicated in the first instance by what we might constitute power itself to be. Although landowners were often powerful (at least so far as we can tell from the evidence), this was not always the case. Indeed, power flowed through a different axis until the final two centuries, with the emperor, rather than the land, the source of authority, wealth, and privilege. Imperial favor was more valuable in terms of patronage, but also, it seems, in simple financial terms too. This was true while the *roga* system of payments was in place, but it remained the case afterwards as well, with the disbursement of annual salaries being replaced with a more fluid and less formalized structure of land grants, tax concessions, and occasionally confiscations. All were intended to regulate society, and insofar as they worked effectively – coups and attempted coups notwithstanding – we should see this mechanism for what it was: namely a way of incentivizing, rewarding, or punishing those whose contributions to individual reigns were perceived as beneficial or prejudicial to the emperor's position and policies.

The ways in which this mechanism functioned changed considerably over the period between ca. 800–1453. Land as an expression of power on the one hand, and as a means of production on the other, in terms of provision of goods and supplies for the aristocratic *oikos* and more importantly for the provisioning of the cities of the empire, underpinned social relations in Byzantium. While the value of land from an economic and socio-political point of view could be correlated between what that land could produce and which markets it could reach, it had relevant to power in general terms as and when demand outstripped supply, and of course, insofar as it was well enough located geographically to exploit the opportunities which demographic growth presented.

In this way, then, there is a clear distinction in the relationship between the land and power in this period when taken as a whole, for the changes in the fortunes of the Byzantine empire were dramatic in this period. Unlike the late antique period where the powerful were not necessarily landed, but the landed were powerful, the middle and late periods saw something of a paradigm shift, with landowning in the former being a corollary to position and appointment by the emperor, while in the later period, a product of the paralysis and weakness of the center – that is to say, the development of the major estates and of a Byzantine nobility as opposed to an aristocracy, took place precisely because of the failure of the center. Thus, the relationship between the two inverted as a result of social change which was stimulated but not provoked by the land.

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THE PRODUCING POPULATION

Michel Kaplan

Attempts to make sense of the laboring population in Byzantium are faced with a major difficulty, one frequently encountered in the study of the medieval world. The workers themselves have left no written traces of their own. They appear instead only in documents of practical relevance, notably when peasants sell or bequeath their land to monasteries, as well as in the *praktika*, lists of *paroikoi* with their fiscal obligations conserved in the archives of such establishments. Among the narrative texts, only the lives of saints reflect a certain interest in the producers, but these sources do not emanate from the producers themselves and, in any case, they become rather scarce from the end of the eleventh century onwards. As for other works written for or by the aristocracy, who regarded the mass of the working population with considerable disdain, they rarely betray an interest in the producers. We might add that, for the cities, the imbalance between the written documentation on Constantinople as compared with that for other cities is considerable, whereas the situation is exactly the opposite when it comes to archeological evidence.

In this chapter, I will focus my attention on peasant farmers, artisans working in the villages, artisans who worked and produced goods and services in the cities, and those who kept shops in the same cities for retail commerce. I will, however, not be dealing with those engaged in productive activities in surroundings that specifically defined their social status: for example, the countless monks engaged in gardening, in a diverse array of artisan activities and, above all, in the *scriptoria*, where the fabrication of a very particular finished product – the manuscript – was a function over which they held a virtual monopoly. For them, it was the monastery that was the true social setting, and this is a social and cultural environment that will be dealt with in another chapter of this volume. In contrast, the natural distinction between city and countryside is essential, even if it does not command an absolute role, all the more so because small towns, intermediaries between cities and villages, were a remarkable phenomenon that endured throughout the entire life of the Byzantine empire.

THE PRODUCERS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The general setting

Agricultural techniques evolved very slowly over the course of the Byzantine period: stability was the rule. Byzantium inherited the relatively advanced level of technology of Roman agriculture, maintained by the aristocracy's marked interest in those works that compiled and adapted ancient treatises, like the *Geoponika*. But it is impossible to know to what extent the aristocrats who read such works actually passed such knowledge on to the producers who worked their lands. It is nonetheless striking to note that the number of peasants having the surname "smith" (*chalkeus*) increased dramatically from the thirteenth century onwards. This could be a consequence of the diffusion of family names derived from professions, but also a result of a spread in metal tools that was not unrelated to the increase in productivity.

Agricultural producers experienced the same fundamental stability: cereals and legumes largely dominated, not surprising given that agriculture was intended first to nourish those who practiced it. These same products equally held sway in urban diets. But, here too, certain changes are perceptible: if the interest in speculative breeding could be found above all on large properties, we see, notably in the fourteenth century, an increase in contracts for the lease of vineyards (Kaplan 2003). The development of Mediterranean commerce, which had opened the West to the products of Byzantine peasants, was the motor driving these changes.

In the fifth century, the Roman empire of the East that prefigured Byzantium was dominated by the splendor of its cities. These cities experienced a crisis that emerged in the fifth century, worsened in the following century, and became catastrophic at the start of the seventh century after a series of invasions – Slavs in the Balkans, and Persians, then Arabs, in the East. Even if Constantinople later recovered the magnificence it had enjoyed under Justinian, while cities like Thessaloniki and Trebizond became prosperous once again, many other cities remained nothing more than simple *kastra*.

The prosperity of the cities, above all in the East, offered opportunities to agricultural producers and contributed to the existence of a relatively enriched peasantry. The farmers lived in villages. Some were rather small, most often private villages belonging to a single master. Others were more important: veritable small towns endowed with certain urban functions and generally inhabited by small landowners. From the seventh century onwards, the village, called *chôrion*, became the basic unit of peasant society irrespective of the personal or economic condition of its members. But the small town did not disappear, as suggested by the appearance of the term *kômopolis*, contraction of the ancient *kômè* (any shared settlement that was not a city) and *polis*, the city. Moreover, the Athonite documents reveal that agglomerations qualifying as cities (*kastron*) – because they offered defense and

the rule of a bishop, like Hierissos, the bishopric situated at the entry of Athos – sheltered a population that was largely made up of peasants.

The social condition of rural producers depended of course on economic circumstances. All the recent studies indicate that Byzantium was consistent with what we know about the global economic situation or, at least, the Mediterranean one (Laiou and Morrisson 2007). A. Harvey has shown that a period of expansion extended from the ninth to the twelfth century (Harvey 1989). The most recent studies suggest that this expansion began earlier, at least from the middle of the eighth century and lasted, in spite of the dismemberment of the empire in 1204, until the thirteenth century (Laiou et al. 2002).¹ In sum, after a low conjuncture beginning in the sixth century at the time of the plague of Justinian and lasting until the beginning or the middle of the eighth century, economic growth continued until the thirteenth century. That which remained of Byzantium experienced the crisis of the fourteenth to the fifteenth centuries, and the empire disappeared just as the growth began anew.

The end of the ancient world

Until the reign of Heraclius, Byzantium still remained a part of the ancient world, and the rural producers must be understood in this framework.

The most delicate issue is that of the place of slaves in the rural workforce. Certainly, slaves did not disappear, and we find them still in the depths of the eleventh century. But the real question is to determine whether they were numerous and if they constituted an actual category of rural producers. The juridical category remained of course, and slaves can be found in imperial legislation along with the land. Justinian indicates their presence on ecclesiastical domains, which could neither alienate their “agricultural slaves” nor other properties. Slaves were also a part of the properties pledged by the ruined landholders in Thrace.² In archival documents it must be admitted that slaves are few, much fewer in any case than the other agricultural workers employed by the powerful, even if the question is not resolved for the region that is best documented, Egypt.³ The evidence drawn from archaeology is not much more convincing: a strong concentration of rather poor burials in proximity to a rich agricultural estate suggests it was used for slaves, but even that is still not entirely certain.

¹ Under Constantine V (741–755), according to Theophanes, we have, at the same time, the last outbreak of the plague, in 746, and the emperor’s decision to restore the principal aqueduct of Constantinople, an indication of the demographic revival of the capital. The same emperor demanded the payment of taxes in money rather than in kind. In the thirteenth century, the economic prosperity of the empire of Nicaea was such that (Laiou et al. 2002: 320–1) one part of the aristocracy saw no point in facing financial ruin in order to re-conquer the capital.

² References in Kaplan 1992b: 158–9 and n. 149–50, and Novel 32 of Justinian, from 535.

³ Gascou 2004: 423.

If the exploitation of vast expanses of land by groups of slaves herded like animals seems rare, slaves were, in any case, omnipresent in village society in the form of domestic slavery. For, as long as the sources of slavery were not depleted and the price of slaves was not exorbitant, the means of agricultural development used by all sorts of average farmers could include one or several slaves as a secondary workforce. Slaves were so well integrated into village society that emancipation was a constant reality, either through the freeing of slaves by purchase, who henceforth disposed freely of their own *peculium*, or by the generosity of a master, often in his will, or by marriage of a female slave with a freeman.

Several texts, especially normative ones, differentiate hardly at all between slaves and *coloni*, tied tenants, most probably because the civil or ecclesiastical legislation tried desperately to keep each category in its position. A monastery could not accept a slave without the consent of his master and had to return the slave within three years if he was reclaimed by his master. The same rules applied to the *coloni*. The question of the colonate in its different forms has been one of the most debated subjects in the history of Late Antiquity.⁴ Nevertheless, if we envisage the *coloni* in their capacities as rural workers, of which they formed a particularly important contingent, the situation becomes slightly less complex (Kaplan 1992b: 159–61).

A good portion of the property held by large private or public landowners (e.g., the lands of the fisc or the crown, the bishoprics) that were not exploited directly through slaves or paid laborers, as was rarely the case, were allocated to *coloni*. These *coloni* were freemen at the helm of independent agricultural development, comparable to that of a peasant landholder, a tenant, or an emphyteutic leaseholder. This evidence was at one point obscured by the debate concerning the *coloni* referred to as *adscripticii* (advanced in Eibach 1977). The first legal text that defines the *coloni adscripticii* is revealing:⁵ “Of the peasants [Latin *agricola*, Greek *georgos*], some are *adscripticii* and their earnings belong to their landlord; the others, after thirty years, become *coloni*, all the while remaining free with their own property; they are retained to work the land and supply the tax; this is in the interest of both the landholder and the peasants.” As early as 545, novel 128 of Justinian held that an *adscriptus colonus* could in fact become a landowner and a taxpayer. Nothing distinguished him any longer from an ordinary *colonus*. In short, the *colonus* was a tenant who, after passing the requisite 30 years, could neither abandon his land nor be chased off it, but who was at the same time an independent producer accountable for the payment of taxes. The majority of the properties of large landowners, therefore, was allocated to *coloni*, but this situation was itself evolving.

Two other contracts existed for those farmers that were not landowners: contracts of lease and *emphyteusis*. Note that the tenants and the emphyteutic leaseholders were not necessarily agricultural workers: a large landowner could rent an entire estate or a part of it in order to obtain revenue, leaving it up to the lessee to

⁴ See Carrié 1997.

⁵ This law of Anastasius known to us only through the *Basilika*, in Latin translation.

find workers: “No-one may be prevented from sub-letting to another the property that he had rented to develop.”

One segment of farmers were tenants, with a lease of a relatively short term (less than 30 years). If a tenant's heir could finish the contract, at the end of the term, the contract had to be renewed, at least tacitly. When the contract had been completed, the owner could change tenants or modify the rent. For Egypt, where we have access to an abundance of papyrological documentation, leases were generally paid off in kind and represent a quarter or a fifth of the contracts (Hermann 1957: 274–87). The contract of lease was more popular with small lessors than the larger ones.

The emphyteutic lease, which was preferred by the larger landholders of Egypt – public, ecclesiastical, and private alike (Gasco 1985) – was the exact opposite of the contract of lease. Such leases always covered a relatively long period of time: the entire life of the lessee, or even two or three generations, although it was not perpetual. It was also more favorable to the tenant than to the owner: the tenant could transfer it as a dowry or sell it. He was the owner of any improvements he carried out. He could not be ejected from the land unless he had gone three years without paying rent, or if he had not provided a receipt for taxes that could be requested from the landlord. With such rights, the tenant was well-protected by the law. One recognizes easily that such a tenancy was enticing: the Egyptian documentation reveals an abundance of *coloni* who obtained the transformation of their holdings into emphyteutic leases or sought to obtain such an arrangement elsewhere. Direct payment of taxes, the holding of land without a limitation of time, and the right to transmit and transfer: the holder of an emphyteutic lease became very close to the landowners who rubbed shoulders with each other in many a village.

As the Antiochian rhetorician Libanios wrote from the fourth century, “there exist large villages [*komai*, Latin *vicus*, which can also be translated as small towns], each belonging to many landlords.” Later, he specifies that “the landholders are numerous and each one possesses a small part,” in contrast to “those villages where the landholder is unique . . . and belong to various illustrious individuals.” This is the striking description of the distinction between villages held by farmer-owners and villages held by farmers that were not landholders. Certainly, the region of Antioch, like other parts of Syria, was privileged: the importance of its urban network offered important opportunities to its farmers. But for this province at least, the rather strong establishment of small and middle-propertyed peasantry is attested (Tate 1992); and this situation can be found in the majority of regions of the Eastern empire (Laiou et al. 2002: 177–83).

The excellent exploration carried out in the abandoned villages of Massif Calcaire east of Antioch offers a portrait of this society of small and middle producers.⁶ They lived in houses in which the ground floor was used to house animals, hold tools, and as a place of storage for the harvest. The first floor functioned as a living space for the nuclear family. The buildings were arranged around courts that were

⁶ A point of view reviewed by Tate 1997.

originally familial, the plots of land having become increasingly dense with demographic and economic expansion. A certain equality reigned between the houses and, therefore, between the families. The economic expansion experienced by the small producers manifested itself in better-constructed houses, of more substantial materials that required cranes and hoists for lifting, and the houses themselves became the object of decoration, the exemplification of a type of expenditure that demonstrates that the threshold of autarky has been surpassed.

We can, therefore, characterize the rural society of the Roman East in Late Antiquity as follows: the tillers of the soil were essentially free men who oversaw the exploitation of land over which they had complete responsibility – a task which they carried out primarily with their families, possibly with the employment of a slave or a couple of domestic servants and the permanent or temporary help of wage-earners. Some villages had a greater proportion of landowners, others of *coloni*. Over time these *coloni* tended to transform into emphyteutic lessees, and the distinction between owners and non-owners faded away.

Even so, the relative independence of rural workers was not without difficulties. The extracts of Libanios cited above come from his famous discourse on the institution of patronage. A part of the producers freed themselves partially from their landlords, who were generally members of the municipal aristocracy, the *curiales*. But the shadow of the patrons hung over them as it did over villages of landowners: the *patron*, a soldier or holder of a public function, used the power at his disposal to impose his patronage on the peasant farmer, a new form of subjection often realized in the form of a monetary payment. This was an oppressive social tendency: the novels of Justinian reforming the government of the provinces (535–536) like those of the novel of Tiberius II (578–582) on the imperial estates reveal such patrons openly acting with force at the head of bands of armed retainers and not hesitating to claim titles of property over the lands of others, not even exempting those of the crown. It is clear that the society of small and middle producers risked being transformed into a society of dependants, even if the patrons did not challenge the traditional methods of production. Imperial protection, guided by the need to protect fiscal resources, was itself illusory: Justinian was obliged to repeal his provincial reform less than ten years later. Nevertheless, the major changes that marked the end of the sixth century and the first half of the seventh century seemed to have been more damaging to the interests of those to whom we refer henceforth as “the powerful” than to the rural workforce.

The predominance of the independent peasantry

The period that runs from the seventh to the tenth century is almost unanimously characterized as the golden age of the Byzantine peasantry, whether one places the emphasis on ownership (Lemerle 1979) or on exploitation of the land (Harvey 1989; Kaplan 1992a; Lefort 2002). Nearly all the available sources – statutory texts, the lives of saints, archival documents – reveal the predominance of the village unit consisting of peasants, admittedly of different status and conditions, but largely

bound to each other in their relations with the fisc and their development of the land.

An important segment of these peasants were landholders. Of course, the legislation of the Macedonian emperors at the start of the tenth century sought to defend, above all, the large number of independent holdings (and, therefore, the level of exploitation of the land) and, to this end, it limited the possibility for a non-peasant to acquire them. Certainly, the law of Romanos Lekapenos of 928 targeted every "purchase, lease, or exchange" of any notable in a village where he was not already a landowner; but the same law also had the quasi-exclusive ownership of property in mind. It re-established the law of pre-emption as a fundamental means of protection, which identified a priority of purchase, thus its focus was on the transfer of property. When Theophanes founded his monastery of Megas Agros, he purchased the land from the villagers who had thus been its owners.

We have a good example of peasant ownership that was at the same time family development in the first act conserved in the archives of the monastery of Lavra. In 897, the widow of Demetrios Tzagastes and her seven children sold all of their land for 75 *nomismata* to the monastery of Saint Andrew of Peristerai, which later became a dependant of Lavra.⁷ Even though the amount of land sold is not indicated, the value corresponds to the typical value of a family plot in this period. The detail of the properties was typical too: some fields, a meadow, and perhaps a mill, a number of vineyards, some deserted and others cultivated by two sons, and the focus of the holding, comprising buildings standing around a court (*aule*), a press, and a well. The family gave an unspecified donation to a local church. It also freed its only slave with a legacy. Along with the land, the family also transferred to the monastery the obligation for paying its taxes. This was a typical example of a family operation owned by peasant proprietors, just at the moment that the family ceased to be the owners.

The preponderance of small-scale peasant proprietorship in this period also emerges in the juridical sources of the period of the Isaurian emperors (eighth century). The code promulgated by these emperors, the *Ekloge*, ignores the colonate but insists, apart from ownership, on the emphyteutic lease, which continued to exist in practice but which later disappears from the sources. Often attached to the *Ekloge* by the juridical and manuscript tradition, even if it probably dates from an earlier period,⁸ the Farmers' Law (*nomos georgikos*) was directed at small landowners, but it refers to all sorts of workers in the villages. Slaves continued to be present – as they were still in 897. Essentially, they were employed to pasture the animals, a task for which the village also utilized the services of a salaried oxherd, employed either by the village itself as a single entity, or by the contributions from each of those who entrusted an animal to him, gathered into what seemed like the village herd. Tenants were not absent: the Farmers' Law defined the contract for sharecropping (*morte*) with the rate of rent, set at one-tenth of the produce, to be paid to the

⁷ Lemerle et al. 1970: no. 1, 89–91.

⁸ Cf. Svoronos 1981.

landlord. Certain landlords did not have the means to work the land they owned, and they were forced to rent it to a worker with better tools in a shared contract, the lessee completing the production cycle and the harvest being divided into half. This sort of contract seems to have been drawn up on an annual basis.

All were a part of the ensemble of collective practices that occupied an important place for such rural communities. Ownership and, possibly, contracts of lease established a right to usage of the common properties, whether this was the fallow lands that served as routes of passage or lands better situated where one could, for example, establish a mill. Grazing was allowed on lands that were fallow or on the cultivated sections left after the harvest. On the other hand, the heart of each holding, the garden, was fiercely defended by ditches and fences: the base unit was clearly the family holding.

The *Life* of Philaretos the Merciful, written in the 820s by his grandson Nicetas, offers a good description of a rural family concern.⁹ Philaretos was a large landowner in Asia Minor who lived in the village where he had been born, Amnia in Paphlagonia. The *Life* is constructed following the model of Job: God concedes to Satan that the holy man be deprived of his properties to prove his faith. Philaretos finds himself in this manner reduced to the level of the lowest peasant, but it was his yoke of cattle that kept his family from starvation, so long as the cattle were not taken away. At this stage, Philaretos still maintained a couple of slaves, yet according to the text it was the head of the family himself who drove the plough, the basic instrument of the Byzantine farmer. This model family unit also emerges in the case of a poor peasant, endowed with nine children, a high number, intended to serve as an exemplum for the author, but a model which is confirmed by the Tzagastes family in 897. This father of the family was poor, but he had a plot of land. He had to borrow to purchase a pair of cattle that ultimately died in an accident, at which point Philaretos replaced his cattle without charge. This also reveals the limiting conditions for self-sufficiency where the Byzantine peasant agriculturalist is concerned. In this example, it was without doubt the peasant's rather large family that created the disequilibrium, so that agricultural production was threatened by indebtedness.

In the village of Amnia, not all were like this poor wretch at the limit of survival. According to Nicetas, the empress Irene, having decided to marry off her son Constantine VI, sent her functionaries across the empire in search of beautiful women to participate in a competition, the winner of which would be the new empress. As soon as the functionaries arrived at Amnia, they were welcomed by the notables of the village, who tried their best to dissuade them from being hosted by Philaretos. He still had his splendid residence, but nothing suitable for feeding his guests, and the villagers feared lest the imperial messengers, unhappy with their treatment, should take revenge on their village. As the functionaries suspected that Philaretos was trying to get out of his obligations, they carried on regardless. To avoid a catastrophe, the notables of the village came in secret bringing everything necessary to

⁹ Ryden 2002; cf. Auzépy 1993.

allow Philaretos to host the guests accordingly. The village notables, obviously farmers, but with properties which nonetheless offered a level of comfort beyond simple autarky, disposed of a surplus. The social palette, thus, was wide. And these well-off peasants were indebted to the powerful Philaretos.

This affluence could sometimes be measured, as we can see with Cyril Phileotes, who died in 1110 and whose *Life* was written a few years later by a monk of aristocratic origin. In his village of Philea, on the coast of the Black Sea about 50 kilometers from the capital, Cyril, represented as a poor wretch, was in fact a middling landowner who did not live by working his land. When his brother founded a monastery, he did so by restoring a ruined church that the family possessed. Becoming a holy man with a new name, Cyril received the visit of the emperor Alexios Komnenos, who inquired into the ownership of the land on which the monastery was built. We learn in this way that the family of Cyril held possession of a small number of cadastrally registered possessions. Retrospectively, this explains the episode in which Cyril discovers the workers charged with working the family vineyards doing nothing. The status and condition of these workers is not specified and we cannot determine it. Clearly, the author interpreted the story according to what he knew as a member of the aristocracy: wage-earners, or *paroikoi* paying a part of their rent in the form of work, we cannot say which. Cyril and his brother Michael were not of the aristocracy: they were middle landowners, just at the brink of the laboring population, but they were perfectly integrated into the village population of Philea.¹⁰

Small and middling ownership flourished thanks to the peasants who farmed their holdings themselves or employed a handful of wage-earners or tenants. These tenants also came from village society, and they emerged ultimately from the same social group. Nevertheless, large landowners still existed, even if these people are not well-known to us due to the lack of evidence, which leaves us ignorant of who worked and in what form. One of the clearest examples of continuity of substantial estates was that of the bishoprics, necessary to the maintenance of the bishop, of the clergy of the cathedral, and of those who served the public churches of the diocese. For those people, we have a few rare sources.

At the beginning of the period under study, we have the *Life* of Theodore of Sykeon. He died in 613 and his *Life* was written by one of his disciples and successors in an attempt to defend the monastery – founded by Theodore in a small village situated near the approaches to a bridge over the Sangarios – which was under threat because the emperor Heraclius had transferred Theodore's relics to Constantinople.¹¹ The popularity of Theodore in this region drove the population of the neighboring city, Anastasioupolis of Galatia, to elect him bishop, a post in which Theodore failed miserably and one in which he encountered many difficulties. The villages belonged, at least partly, to the cathedral, and Theodore engaged a dignitary of the city to raise the revenues: these villages were, thus, mostly rented out. The

¹⁰ Sargolagos 1964: respectively c. 21, 104–107, c. 47.1, 225–226 and c. 19, 99–101.

¹¹ Festugière 1970. Most recent article on this *Life*, Déroche 2004.

case was the same for the bishopric of the neighboring city of Iouliopolis, but it was the *oikonomos* who was charged, as was normal, with raising incomes in the villages.¹² In these same villages, we also find landowners, certain of whom were qualified as “notables of the village.” Tenants of the cathedral (*coloni*, contract tenants?) worked the land, therefore, side by side with the landowners.

A similar situation emerged two centuries later at Nicaea, as we learn from the correspondence of Ignatius the Deacon, who held the office of metropolitan bishop during the second iconoclasm (815–843).¹³ We learn from Ignatius, who had elsewhere the worst difficulties with his *oikonomos* and his administrative personnel in general, that the metropolis rented all its lands out, but that it was also the object of reclamations on the part of tenants who had abandoned their holdings. Nonetheless, affirmed Ignatius, he shared the fruits according to the Farmers’ Law, from which he explicitly cites one of the clauses evoked above. Even if these farmers were qualified as *paroikoi* (see below), as we shall see, there were also sharecroppers, who owed a rent of 10 percent. Nor do we know if entire villages were involved, or whether, as in the case of the villages of Anastasioupolis, the properties of the cathedral were dispersed in various villages and the tenants of the metropolis were interspersed with small landowners and other tenants benefiting from a more favorable contract.

Between Theodore’s time and that of Ignatius the Deacon the general situation of the empire was dramatically transformed at all levels and especially in fiscal and military organization. The principal focus of the tax system became the village (Oikonomidès 1996) and rested directly on the producing population, whether landowners or tenants (Lemerle 1979: 38; Kaplan 1992: 262). The interests of the imperial power lay in protecting the rural producers who provided it with its basic resources and who were, from a social point of view, its principal support. This was expressed clearly in the novel of Romanos Lekapenos of 934: “the great number of holdings is a source of abundance for the collection of taxes as well as the fulfilling of military obligations” (Kaplan 1992: 421–6).¹⁴ Earlier, in 928, Romanos Lekapenos had re-established the law of pre-emption, suppressed by Leon VI. The same policy of protecting small and mid-level peasant landholding continued until Basil II. In reality, however, the very laws themselves reveal where the real danger was: crushed by taxes, which had begun to increase in the eighth century to virtually double by the dawn of the eleventh century, the independent peasants preferred to place themselves under the protection of a powerful person, precisely what the legislation of the emperors of the Macedonian dynasty attempted to prevent. As a result, their social position was substantially altered.

The same legislation reveals the connection between peasant producers and the recruitment of soldiers (Haldon 1979; 1999: 259–60). The soldiers of the *themata*

¹² Festugière 1970: c. 75 and 76 (63–64) and c. 34 (30); cf. Kaplan 1992b: 145.

¹³ Mango and Efthymiadis 1997: letter no. 1 (28). Most recent commentary on tenants: Kaplan 2001a.

¹⁴ Svoronos 1994: 85.

were in effect partly made up of farmers; some were, voluntarily or not, registered in the military rolls. Service was hereditary and military equipment, like their pay, was a part of the family inheritance. The peasantry were not the only ones to serve, as is indicated by the *Life* of Luke the Stylite (tenth century). Enrolled in the army of his *thema*, where he served for many years before mounting his column, Luke was maintained by his family, contrary to the majority of his colleagues, who were maintained – poorly – by the state, and to whom the holy man distributed his rations generously. His parents owned substantial subterranean silos, which he emptied to the profit of the poor during a famine. They offered to buy him the bishopric of Sebaste, although he did not accept. People like Luke, in other words, were not modest peasant farmers. Others, in contrast, were so poor they had to be armed by a group of taxpayers who were jointly responsible for supporting a soldier. But there were also peasants who, between campaigns, returned to cultivate their lands. We encounter one in the *Life* of Philaretos, a peasant named Mousoulaios. The officers of the *thema* arrive for the annual muster and inspection of the equipment of the soldiers. Mousoulaios had lost his horse, and had nothing to replace it (a horse cost about 15 *nomismata*). He was one of those peasant farmers trapped in the shackles of autarky. Philaretos gave him his own horse. The Macedonian emperors attempted to protect these soldiers like other farmers: Constantine Porphyrogenitus in 947 set out to have their lands registered and to render them inalienable. But a later reform, promulgated by Nikephoros Phokas in 967, revealed that peasants no longer served in the army: the military obligation, the *strateia*, was already in the process of becoming a supplementary tax burdening the rural population. In losing their place in the army, these peasants saw their position in society substantially change, in the manner I have indicated in the preceding paragraph.

The paroikoi

These peasants, whom the Macedonians wished to prevent from leaving their lands, moved to the lands of the powerful to become *paroikoi*. This term is not a new one. We find it already in the legislation of Justinian, which sought to prohibit the granting of ecclesiastical lands under the right of *paroikoi*; even use of the name is prohibited. Even though Justinian did not describe the exact nature of the existing right, which he sought to put an end to, he did indicate that it was in effect a perpetual grant, in this case of ecclesiastical lands. It already concerned most probably agrarian holdings.

The *paroikoi* reappear in our sources at the start of the ninth century. The chronicler Theophanes accused Nikephoros I of having submitted the *paroikoi* of charitable establishments, imperial churches, and monasteries to the *kapnikon* (hearth tax). This family tax concerned farmers, in this case those who were established on imperial lands. This becomes evident when Theophanes accuses the emperor of having confiscated some of the lands of such institutions and attributing their taxes to the remaining tenants, thus increasing the tax burden on the properties which remained. The confiscated lands were clearly removed along with those who farmed

them, the *paroikoi*. As for the tenants of the metropolis of Nicaea under the episcopate of Ignatius the Deacon, who were sharecroppers as defined by the Farmers' Law, Ignatius also identified them as *paroikoi*.

The appearance of what can be identified as official *paroikoi*, in the sense that they figure in documents issued by public authorities, dates from the reign of Romanos Lekapenos (920–944). We find *paroikoi* in a judgment of the *magistros* Kosmas, the principal jurist of the emperor, who contributed to the redaction of the novels. The first grants of *paroikoi* to the monasteries of Chalkidiki, specifically Kolobou, Saint Andrew of Peristerai, and a monastery that later disappeared but was once called *tou Athonou*, seem to go back to reign of Romanos and to that of Constantine Prophyrogenitus (944–959). At the end of the tenth century, references to *paroikoi* as being the usual equivalent for peasants cultivating lands or pastures for monasteries become more numerous. When, in 991, the Athonite monks, led by their leader, the *prôtos*, gave to Lavra the land of Platys, to the northwest of the peninsula, they reserved there the right of passage for their *paroikoi*.¹⁵ In a judgment rendered in 995, a judge in Thessaloniki, at the demand of the villagers in Siderokausia, limited the encroachments taking place on the lands of these farmers by the peasants installed by the monastery of Iviron to develop the lands under the right of Kolobou: these were *paroikoi*.¹⁶ Gradually, during the eleventh century, while the purchase of lands by simple peasants dwindled, the monastic documents identify the workers who farmed their lands, or who were brought to the land for this purpose, exclusively as *paroikoi* or by other equivalent terms.

If one sets aside the *paroikoi* who worked the lands of the fisc, known as *demosiarioi* from the eleventh century, the others are qualified as “free,” in that they no longer had to pay anything to the functionaries of the fisc. Instead, they paid the tax through the intermediary of their landlord. Just as the concession of revenues of the fisc to people or institutions like monasteries became common practice by the end of the twelfth century, those rare peasants who remained proprietors of their land no longer paid directly to the fisc. They were, in this manner, assimilated into the *paroikoi*.

The convergence of their situation came as a result of an evolution of the basic status of the *paroikos*. At the start of the tenth century, a ruling of the *magistros* Kosmas established that the *paroikos* did not have a real right over the land: he could neither alienate nor transfer his right to the land or what he had built on it. On the other hand, a reading of the judgments of Eustathios Romaïos from the start of the eleventh century collected in the *Peira* reveals that from the time a *paroikos* had held his land for a duration of 30 years and had acquitted the *pakton*, not only could he no longer be chased from it, but he had the *despoteia*, the complete possession, and he could, then, legitimately leave it and even alienate his right to the land. Afterwards, notably in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the documents reflect clearly that many of the *paroikoi* held lands that had slipped out

¹⁵ Lemerle et al. 1970: no. 9, 120–2.

¹⁶ Lefort et al. 1985–95: no. 9, 160–3.

of their owners' control, for which they were inscribed in the tax registers, even if they paid the tax directly to a landowner (Laiou 1977: 142–81). This was especially the case for highly rentable properties such as vineyards, whether they were owners or tenants, according to a type of lease that was limited precisely at 29 years to avoid the right of the *paroikos*.¹⁷

In sum, therefore, from the end of the eleventh century almost all of those who worked an agrarian holding were *paroikoi*, except for those that were only vine growers and, therefore, often tenants. The *stasis* (holding) that they held was registered along with its means of production, that is to say the animals, especially the oxen, a form of exploitation inseparable from the land, without which it would produce nothing. The relative equality of juridical condition did not signify an economic equality, however, and peasants were classed and registered according to their productive potential.

The key element in this classification was the *zeugarion*, which corresponded to a technical reality, that of the scratch plough pulled by a pair of oxen, the ancient *jugum*, the only type of harness reflected in manuscript illuminations. The lists of *paroikoi* contained in the *praktika* received by the monasteries also attest to the presence of the *zeugaratoi*. However, they were neither the only nor, in general, the most numerous category. The most frequently encountered are the *boïdatoi*. The term is clearly formed from the word for ox, just as *zeugaratos* is formed from that for a yoke. In theory, a *boïdatos* possessed only one ox, and farmed thus a *boïdion*. With fewer resources again, we find the *aktemones* (who had nothing), also called *pezoi* (those on foot), sometimes *onikatoi*, a term that implies the possession of a donkey (Laiou 1977: 142–81; Lefort 2006: 407–12). In small numbers, we also find peasants qualified as *dizeugitai*, that is endowed with land with two teams of oxen. In any case, the possession of animals, which were owned by the peasants themselves, was at least as important as the quantity of land itself.

The social level of these peasants, closely related to the quantity of land farmed and to the number of animals possessed, has been the object of numerous debates. N. Svoronos,¹⁸ followed by A. Laiou (1977: 163), attributes to a *zeugaratos* a tenure of more than 150 *modioi* (or about 15 hectares). M. Kaplan (1992b: esp. 501–6) limits it to about 100 *modioi*. J. Lefort (2006: 411) tends towards 40 to 50 *modioi*, but calculates an average (ibid., 468–70) of 80 *modioi*. The tendency that we have evoked at the start of this chapter, one of economic growth, in productivity as well as prices, across the whole Mediterranean basin, suggests that the average holding that would secure the survival of a peasant family must have decreased in size at least until the end of the fourteenth century. The documents demonstrate in every case a constant relation between the taxes due and the size of the tenure: the *boïdatos* owed two times less than the *zeugaratos* and his holding was half, perhaps 60 percent, of that of the richer one. *Aktemones*, *pezoi* or *onikatoi* paid considerably less (about 6 times less than *zeugaratoi*) for a tenure of a smaller size, on which it

¹⁷ Kaplan 2003.

¹⁸ In a pioneering article: Svoronos 1956.

was virtually impossible to provide for a family's survival (cf. the study of the village of Radolibos in Lefort 1985). This statement merits nonetheless an important nuance: there is no document that permits us to measure the impact of the garden and small-scale animal husbandry that each peasant, even those of very limited means, maintained outside his house. This final element could prove decisive, even for the better-off peasants (Kaplan 1992b: 504): the garden was indispensable to the Byzantine agricultural holding.

Like the landowning peasants, the holding of the *paroikoi* was a family enterprise. The lists of *paroikoi* rarely suggest more than two generations on a single holding. In any case, they specify first the head of the property, sometimes with the name of the spouse, although the tenant might also be a widow. Family connections are in fact evident, because the tenant was often qualified as the son, brother, or relative of another peasant of the same village. Not surprisingly, village endogamy was very developed. Land could be passed down and marriage was, even at this modest level, a crucial strategy. But the keys to inheritance were not always clear. For example, in the village of Dobrobikeia, to the south of Mount Pangaia in eastern Macedonia, in the middle of the eleventh century, we find two children and a son-in-law of the same peasant, where one of the sons was a *boïdatos*, whereas the other son and the son-in-law were *aktemones*. In other words, the father had successfully conserved the totality of his modest holdings in favor of one of his sons. Neither his other son nor his daughter had succeeded in making a marriage that would endow them with a holding of the same size.

It is worth noting that, amongst the peasants, some were priests at the same time as farmers. The rather small number of clergy that served in public churches were the only ones to be maintained by the bishopric. All Byzantine villages were endowed with a church. The priests in charge were peasants like the others who, in addition to their work in the fields, served the church of the village.¹⁹ For example, in the list of *paroikoi* confirmed as belonging to Lavra in a document of 1181 in the village of Chostianes, all of whom were *zeugaratoi*, one finds the *papas* Dragites.²⁰ If we take the well-known survey of the village of Radolibos (Lefort 1985) that contains a list of *paroikoi* with their holdings, we find there not only the lands of the priests divided into their numerous holdings, but the holdings of priests or the sons of priests (Theodore and George, son of the priest Eustathios, one for 50 *modioi*, the other for 57 *modioi*; Demetrios and Peter, son of the *papas* John, one for 24 *modioi*; the priest Demetrios, for 20 *modioi*; Basil, son of the *papas* Chrisilias, for 26.5 *modioi*). We find therefore that the *papades* ranged from a *dizeugitès* (Eustathios) to *boïdatoi*. Peasants like the others, in fact, but never totally deprived of land, even though, at Dobrobikeia in 1104, the *papas* Michel was *aktemon*.

Nevertheless, this does not reveal to us the religious practices of the peasants. We can obtain a glimpse of these practices through a number of hagiographical accounts. But these texts provide a rather skewed perspective, because they concen-

¹⁹ Kaplan 1992a.

²⁰ Lemerle et al. 1970: no. 65, 337–41.

trate on the interventions of their heroes, the miracles they accomplished, somewhat removed, to say the least, from the day-to-day life of the peasants. For such a matter, we are directed to more basic evidence. The protobyzantine era witnessed a distinction between public churches (*katholikai*) and oratories. The first were founded by bishops and served by clergy who were not really resident. All the other places of worship, rather numerous at times,²¹ that are found in villages were simple oratories: the sermon and the sacraments could not be practiced without the authorization of the bishop and by the intervention of a cleric designated by him. This distinction faded gradually, and Leo VI finally put an end to it formally. Still, the distinction subsisted between the public churches and the others: in the eleventh century, in the Thracian village of Philea where Cyril lived there was a public church, whereas Cyril and his brother Michael possessed a ruined church on their land, which Michael made into a monastery. Generally speaking, the monasteries in the countryside attracted people, because they offered them an alternative of an entirely different sort to their mediocre village clergy.

The role of the holy man among the villagers was clarified many years ago by Peter Brown (1982).²² The *Life* of Theodore of Sykeon reveals how this Galatian ascetic at the end of the sixth century acted both as the conscience of the villagers and as an arbitrator in the conflicts of the villages near the monastery. A little later, the *Life* of Nicolas of Sion, founder of the monastery of the same name in close proximity to Myra in Lycia and subsequently ordained bishop of Pinara, describes how Nicholas made the rounds of the villages of the interior and their oratories and how his travels were routinely met with the sacrifice of an animal followed by a village feast. In Lycia as in Galatia, more than a serving priest (because he was never formally appointed to this office), the saint was a sort of spiritual animator of village communities. His presence sanctified the places of worship used by the peasants.²³

The rural artisans

The presence of artisans in the countryside was an ancient tradition. As such, in the seventh century, Theodore of Sykeon easily found a skilful blacksmith near his place of retreat in Galatia who forged the iron cage he needed. In the tenth century, the *Geoponika*, deeply inspired by ancient traditions, recommended that peasants have at their disposal on site the tools that they used in order to avoid having to go to the city: blacksmiths, carpenters, and potters.

It seems however that rural artisans made important advances in developing and diversifying themselves (Lefort 2006: 260–2 and 475–7), a phenomenon described by anthroponomy, which is becoming ever more productive.²⁴ In the decision of a

²¹ Harrison 1979.

²² Especially Brown 1971.

²³ Kaplan 1993.

²⁴ Lefort 1991.

functionary of the *thema* of Strymon and Thessaloniki in favor of Lavra dated 974, the monastery counted 32 *paroikoi*, which included a mason and a smith, two essential crafts. In the village of Dobrobikeia, while the census of the middle of the eleventh century does not reveal a single artisan, the *praktikon* of 1104 reveals a potter (*zeugaratos*), a carpenter (*aktemon*), a mason (*aktemon*), and a marble mason (*zeugaratos*) out of 28 *paroikoi*. Thereafter the number of surnames attributed to peasants indicating artisan occupation increases rapidly to a total of nearly 10 percent of the population. In addition, the diversity of these names increases: the village of Radolibos, according to a census of 1262, reveals a furrier and a tailor. In the first half of the fourteenth century, the documents reveal tailors in 17 of 40 villages studied, weavers in nine, and potters in seven. In the village of Radolibos in 1316, which counted 226 people, one finds seven potters, with workshops consisting of two or three artisans.

Nevertheless, these artisans were registered as tenants and remained thus, at least for some of the farmers. Some of them were *zeugaratoi*, at the head of an agricultural holding that necessitated work at all times. Artisan production was, in other words, a secondary occupation. Still, the increase in references between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries in documents of the same nature demonstrates a development in the rural artisanate to meet two complementary social necessities: a global increase in demand due to demographic growth and, in some respects, increases in the standard of living; and, demographic growth that heightened pressure on the land and contributed to the development of secondary jobs that were relatively lucrative. This secondary specialization emerged in agricultural activities, like viticulture, apiculture, and horticulture.

THE PRODUCERS OF THE CITIES

Byzantine cities evolved out of their late Roman predecessors. The aristocracy, with its greater purchasing power, lived in the cities and provided artisans and merchants with important opportunities. The urban network, especially in the East, was particularly dense. Even the middle-sized cities prided themselves on porticoed streets along which were gathered the stores of artisans and merchants. Moreover, the public authorities supported workshops for the production of important strategic goods like arms. From the fifth century these cities experienced a crisis, accentuated by the Justinian plague and the invasions of Slavs, Persians, and then Arabs: urban production was severely affected. But, from the eighth century, growth began again, first to the benefit of Constantinople, then to the cities of the provinces, particularly prosperous in the twelfth century. Artisanal production and commerce accompanied these changes. Already, however, the expansion of the West altered the balance, a change which the fall of Constantinople in 1204 and the break-up of the empire that followed it could only exacerbate. From then on, and at an increasingly rapid pace, what remained of Byzantium was transformed from a producer of finished

goods at a high value produced by its artisans and workers into a provider of raw materials and primary resources.

Artisans and shopkeepers

The richness of the archaeological evidence confirms the indications that can be gleaned from written documents. Cities maintained the collective facilities that allowed artisans and small shopkeepers to operate their workshops and shops. Most often, the artisans sold their products themselves along the forums and roads, most of which were lined with porticoes. In the majority of cases, the dimensions were relatively modest.²⁵ These enterprises provided provisions and necessary objects of daily life such as dishes, lighting, and ordinary clothes, but also objects that were, relatively at least, luxury goods, such as jewelry, perfume, and clothes for special occasions. They were small family enterprises. We can also find there both the tools necessary for the trades of the city as well as for the neighboring countryside. The recent excavations in the Theodosian port of Constantinople at Yeni Kapı have revealed a network of shops of the same sort, going back to the fifth century.

From the start, artisans and small merchants were organized in a guild system. Already in the time of Theodosius I, the law that established the Prefect of Constantinople placed all the guilds under his charge. The Egyptian papyri reveal that this system of guilds also existed in Egypt. It is likely that it also existed in most cities in the protobyzantine epoch. In the seventh century, the Miracles of Artemios, which took place in the church of Saint John the Baptist in Oxeia near the Domninos porticoes, one of the commercial streets of Constantinople that ran north-south, presented a good number of such occupations. They formed the backbone of the confraternity that organized and financed the vigil that took place every Saturday in this church and which included a procession in the quarter. The brotherhood had a treasury and the members wore costumes for the procession.

The guilds for Constantinople are well known in the tenth century thanks to the *Book of the Eparch* (Koder 1991, with the bibliography on the *Book*; Kaplan 2001b). The elaboration of these regulations was begun some time before this: the *Eisagoge* promulgated under Basil I speaks in general about the Eparch, and a small part of its contents is already found in certain novels of Leo VI. The *Book* restricts itself to codifying customs already existing for each trade. It covers many of the public service occupations related to imperial power (notaries, goldsmiths, money-changers, and the five silk trades), as well as those intended for the provisioning of the city with staple foodstuffs, to which we must add the horse-dealers and the trades related to construction. On the other hand, it ignores completely a number of trades that were absolutely essential to the capital of the empire: metallurgy, glass-making, which included mosaics, pottery, and a number of trades related to leather and textiles, without even mentioning armaments and naval construction.

²⁵ See the example of Sardis: Crawford 1990. For the example of a smaller city, cf. Russell 2002.

But we should note that a part of these latter trades corresponded rather to much more important enterprises than to those of small-scale artisans.

In addition to assuring fair practice, the *Book* regulates the social organization of the guilds, such as entry into the trade, the verification of qualifications, apprenticeship (where applicable), and the use of slaves and wage-earners if there were any. The existence of supervisors for the trades is also attested. For notaries, the *Book* defines the number of members and a veritable social organization including participation in ceremonies of incorporation and funerals.

For most artisans and small shopkeepers in Constantinople, the setting for their work was the *ergasterion*, which functioned simultaneously as the workshop of production and the shop for sale. Production – or storage for the merchants – took place at the back of the *ergasterion*; the *ergasterion* opened with a display onto the road. Some merchants did not have a store, but plied their trade on benches situated beneath the porticoes (Oikonomidès 1972). All the evidence suggests that these enterprises were of modest dimensions. The *ergasterion* was a small family enterprise: the master of the trade had his wife and children working there, at times perhaps a wage-earner, an apprentice or a slave. Most often, he only operated a single shop. He could open several shops of the same trade at a single time, but he would then have to operate these secondary *ergasteria* through the use of slaves, for which he would be liable in law (Oikonomidès 1972: 355–6).

What was the social level of such independent urban craftsmen or entrepreneurs? Their independence was relative: the majority of *ergasteria* belonged to members of the aristocracy or to ecclesiastical establishments. The limited evidence reveals, moreover, that an *ergasterion* cost many pounds of gold (Oikonomidès 1972), and rare were those who could afford to obtain one. They were, in general, tenants, and the rent placed a heavy burden on the costs of the enterprise. What is more, the *Book of the Eparch* punished any attempts to surreptitiously increase the rent of a competitor so as to increase his general costs. It is possible to attempt an estimate of the net revenues of a baker.²⁶ His business is described by the *Book of the Eparch* in order to prevent speculation on the price of bread, an essential product for the provisioning of the residents of the capital and one that was tied to the incidence of rebellion in the city. We also have an idea of rent, because the eleventh-century judge and historian Michael Attaliates possessed a property that he rented for 24 *nomismata*. Basically a baker earned from his work a net revenue of between 20 and 40 *nomismata*. This sum was more than enough to support his family. It represents about two to four times the salary of a worker with higher qualifications, but it did not allow for the purchase of a shop. The baker appears to be a typical example: Attaliates rented out a perfumer's shop for less than half this amount and a doctor's chamber for an average of only 5 *nomismata*. On the other hand, certain value-added trades for which the shops have been researched, such as that of silk, offered net revenues of a much higher value: a document of the tenth century reveals a

²⁶ Kaplan 2001b: 258–9.

merchant of raw silk who sold his own shop (or one of his shops), and thus was enabled to become a landowner (Oikonomidès 1972: 346–9).

Naturally, the social position of these producers was fluid, a function of their economic circumstances. In the tenth century the emperors stopped producing all of the silken textiles and clothes needed for internal and foreign political gifts. The departments charged with the management of gifts for foreign princes and the salaries of dignitaries henceforth dealt also with local artisans. This high demand targeted in theory four trades, carefully regulated by the *Book of the Eparch*. The *metaxopratai* traded the raw silk; the *katartarioi* in theory purified it; the *serikarioi* spun it, wove it, and produced clothes that the *vestiopratai* sold. To this were added the important silk-merchants of Syria, or the *prandiopratai*. In fact, this division of labor faded away to the benefit of the *metaxopratai* and the *serikarioi* who employed numerous wage earners.²⁷ The absence of external evidence about these trades makes it impossible to say when and how this development began, but all of them had to compete also with the artisans and craftsmen working in the households (*oikoi*) of wealthy notables.

An important segment of the *ergasteria* employed wage-earners, and we know a little about the condition of the silk-traders. It was prohibited to poach a worker from a competitor during the duration of the contract of work, which was normally for a month (Kaplan 2001b: 255). Unfortunately, the *Book of the Eparch* does not speak of salaried workers in other trades. The salary of a qualified worker was normally one *keration* per day, representing 10 to 12 *nomismata* per year according to the number of days worked. If he worked in a shop, the worker could make as much as 15 *nomismata*.²⁸ Such an income normally allowed for the maintenance of a family, in any case at least to feed them, because little is known about the lodgings of workers of this sort, regardless of their status. If the tenants of the *ergasteria* could live in the same building where they worked, for example on the first storey – the houses opening on the porticos were most often of two storeys – the workers must have lived in collective accommodation of wood or stone that probably had several storeys.²⁹

The slaves employed in the workshops were of varying condition. Some were placed by their masters at the head of the workshop; as such, they had wage-earners or other slaves under their command. This was the case, for example, for the goldsmiths, and we find slaves buying as much as a pound of refined ore – the same goes for weavers of silk. On the other hand, amongst the bankers or money-changers, slaves were not permitted to become the head of an enterprise. In contrast, other slaves were workers placed on the same level as wage-earners or apprentices and charged with unskilled tasks.³⁰ That said, even at the head of a

²⁷ Kaplan 1998 tends towards a predominance of the *serikarioi*; for Dagron 2002 it is on the contrary the *metaxopratai* that are in a position of importance.

²⁸ The evidence is in fact quite rare: cf. Cheynet and Morrisson 2002: 864–9, who draw similar conclusions.

²⁹ Magdalino 2002: 534.

³⁰ On slaves, see, with prudence, Rotman 2004.

workshop, the slave did have any of his own property, could not accumulate profit, and could not build up any savings (Rotman 2004: 147). Emancipation was certainly frequent in this period, but there are no specific examples for artisan slaves.

Some production took place in the houses (*oikoi*) of notables. The *Book of the Eparch* mentions this in a number of instances with regard to silk, but not for any other trade. These notables seemed to have used slaves, in the capital as well as in the provinces, but equally, they could employ wage-earners. Production also took place in industrial workshops, to which we will return.

Between the two, there emerges in the sources of the Palaeologue period, in the fourteenth century, a category of people qualified as *mesoi*, intermediaries between the rich (who were most often aristocrats), and the small artisans and shopkeepers. These were merchants and manufacturers of a certain degree of wealth, but without obtaining the level of the aristocrats, as is demonstrated in the “Dialogue between the rich and the poor” of Alexios Makrembolites.³¹ This new stratification in the urban population lasted only a short time: from the end of the fourteenth century, the aristocracy invested extensively in urban affairs (Oikonomidès 1979) and the *mesoi* disappeared.

*Industrial workers*³²

The emperor himself was the foremost of the large employers in three principal domains: armaments, trades related to gold and precious stones, and silk. For these last two categories, in the protobyzantine period, manufacturing was a near monopoly of imperial factories (*ergodosia*), at least in Constantinople. A number of slaves worked in these workshops. For the weaving of silk, the name of *gynaikia* to describe the establishments indicated clearly that the workers were women. After the seventh century, these workshops (Dagron 2002), of less importance by now, were concentrated largely in the palace or nearby. They continued to include an arms workshop (the *armamenton*), a workshop producing objects in gold (*chrysocheion*), and silk workshops – the latter are attested in the period of the *Book of the Eparch*, for example, although it is not clear how they functioned. While the emperor Leo VI had decreed the freedom of all imperial slaves, this sort of worker seems to have been excluded. In the case of wage-earners, they evidently returned to their own homes in the evening, but this then raises a question about the maintenance of manufacturing secrets. The detailed prohibitions made in regard to the *serikarioi* in the *Book of the Eparch* suggest that these workers already practiced manufacturing techniques for weaving silks that were, in theory at least, prohibited from export or handling by anyone outside the imperial court (*kekolumena*). Indeed, the *idikon*, which was without doubt responsible for those imperial workshops that remained, was supplied in part by these private workshops. Put simply, the imperial workshops were in the process of disappearing, an evolution that appeared to have been

³¹ Ševčenko 1960.

³² See also the important developments on this topic in Laiou and Morrison 2007.

completed by the end of the eleventh century: the emperor no longer gave gifts of silk clothes to foreign princes.

Private factories took over and prospered in countless other domains. In ceramics, goods of a low quality had always been produced locally, namely in villages. At the same time, glazed ceramics remained for a long time the monopoly of Constantinople. Workshops of a relatively modest size could satisfy this trade, which required rather developed skills, inasmuch as ceramics were equally relevant to the production of icons, the decoration of buildings, and even the surfacing of certain parts of churches. Some of these factories were concentrated in the quarter of the Strategion in Constantinople, where recent excavations have revealed the presence of a great number of ovens.

Production took on a more industrial form when it came to glass, which most importantly provided mosaic. Glass workshops of modest dimensions are attested, indicating the presence of glass objects in daily life (Henderson and Mango 1995: 346). But they are not enough to explain the production of the large decorated panes that decorated the windows of the monastery of the Pantokrator, for example, built around 1136, or the massive production of mosaics (and the evidence for semi-industrial production) (Cutler 2002), exported to Kiev for the cathedral of St Sophia, and also to Sicily. A part of the cargo of the shipwreck of the *Serce Limani* must have had as a destination an industrial glass factory in Constantinople (Henderson and Mango 1995: 344). There is no doubt that these factories must have employed a significant number of highly-qualified workers.

The situation is similar for metallurgy. The eleventh century witnessed the manufacture of great bronze doors, for example those ordered by the Amalfitans Mauro and his son Pantaleone for the cathedral of Amalfi, as well as for Monte Cassino, Saint Paul extra muros in Rome, and the church of Saint Angelo at Gargano, all in the space of 15 years.³³ The cathedral of Trani also possesses doors of the same manufactory. Given the importance of these doors, they must have been manufactured in large workshops. One of them carries the signature of a worker, an Armenian who signed in Syriac, and who was typical of the dozens of highly-qualified workers employed in the factories, that is to say a worker who migrated from the region of Antioch, then under Byzantine control, where there were many Armenians living among the Syrian population and hence speaking Syriac. We may deduce from this that we should perhaps not exclude the possibility of an industry of a similar type on the banks of the Orontes.

The twelfth century was marked by the appearance, at least in the sources, of factories in the cities of the provinces. Already, in the *Life* of Nikon Metanoeites, written at the beginning of the eleventh century, we find the hero chasing the Jews from Sparta and defeating John Aratos, an entrepreneur in textiles, who had employed them as workers.³⁴ These Jewish workers emerge again in Corinth and, above all, in Thebes, which had become an important city for silk by the twelfth

³³ Balard 1976.

³⁴ Sullivan 1987: c. 35 (120–4); Kaplan 1993: 90.

century, surpassing perhaps even Constantinople. The factories of Thebes employed male and female workers. In 1147, Roger II of Sicily seized these cities, their production, and also their workers, whom he transported to Palermo, to the royal manufactories. In the 1160s, Benjamin of Tudela wrote that the numbers of silk workers in the Jewish community of Thebes was considerable, estimated at as much as 2,000 people. In this period, while Thebes and Corinth were the two most productive cities, we also find factories, and therefore workers, at Patras, in Euboea, and at Thessaloniki. These factories were the property of local aristocrats and possibly of merchants (Jacoby 1991/2; 2001).

At a lower level and without an ethnic specialization of workers, we find far more factories for ceramics and glass in the cities of the provinces than for metalworking. Corinth was one of the major centers for the production of ceramics, one of the rare cities that obtained the same industrial level as the capital. For glass, workshops capable of manufacturing decorated windows for churches were found at Corinth as well, but also in the cities of Asia Minor, like Sardis or, further into the interior, Amorion (Henderson and Mango 1995: 343).

This social structure of production, derived from the co-existence of small family workshops producing for local use and provisioning with industrial workshops with their more specialized production, widespread throughout the Mediterranean basin, did not survive the events of 1204. As we have seen, what remained of the Byzantine empire, heavily exploited by the Italian cities, ceased to be the largest workshop of the world: the *mesoi* did not survive the changing milieu of the fourteenth century. Silk itself became secondary. All that survived were the small independent producers, those shopkeepers who worked with their families, and sometimes with a handful of workers, artisanal slavery having by that point definitively disappeared.

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8

SOCIAL ÉLITES, WEALTH, AND POWER

John Haldon

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS: ÉLITES AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Social stratification, awareness of social and cultural differences, and theorizing these differences is common to all complex social formations, and in many respects can be taken for granted. The medieval eastern Roman world is no different. Yet at the same time every society evolves particular forms through which these differences of degree are represented and explained within the framework of the particular symbolic universe¹ which defines and delimits that social system, and these forms can tell us both about the ways in which social interactions take place and about the dynamic of social change, as well as about the thought-world of the people who make up that society. In this chapter, I want briefly to review some of the salient characteristics of élite formation that typify the Byzantine world, and at the same time show how they changed and in turn contributed to changes in society as a whole across the period from the sixth to the fifteenth century.²

There have been some substantial studies of the later Roman senatorial élite, and similarly of the later middle Byzantine élite, especially for the tenth and eleventh centuries and after, but few general surveys of élite society in the broader context of Byzantine culture and in comparison with the élites of neighboring societies.³

¹ On this concept, see Ch 1, pp. 9ff.

² See also Paul Magdalino's chapter below, especially the section "Court aristocracy, court and aristocracy."

³ For the late Roman élite: Kurbatov 1971, which includes a still very useful discussion of the major sources and presents a sensible attempt to identify different groups; Jones 1964: 523–62; Overbeck 1973; Barnes 1974; Arnheim 1972. Several pages are devoted to the question in Stein 1949, and 1919, 161–86. For the relationship between élites and palatine hierarchy: Carney 1971; Heather 1994, with literature; Chekalova 1997, also with earlier Russian literature; and Settapani 2000. For the later Byzantine élite,

Before we embark on this short survey, however, let us begin with some attempt to define the terms of the debate.⁴ I think it can be taken for granted that, whatever specific period we are talking of, late Roman and Byzantine society can be understood from two different but complementary points of view. Firstly, we can take it on its own terms, as a hierarchical polity in which notions of poverty, honor (in the sense of social dignity and ancestral legitimacy), and piety intermingled to produce a particular set of descriptive terms, encapsulated in the vocabulary of the law and the notion of social “orders,” on the one hand, and on the other the moral universe of Christianity. In this context, being part of an *élite*, whether of a “power *élite*” (see below) at court or of a broader social and economic “upper class,” depended upon a set of variables which included one’s relationship to members of other families of *élite* status, imperial office and title, closeness to the emperor or palatine establishment, as well as to access to sources of wealth and to land.⁵ Secondly, we can look at it through the lens of a modern scientific vocabulary, an analytical language or heuristic framework which attempts to go beyond the perceptions and views of members of the society in question in order to locate the underlying social and economic relationships as well as the cultural values which made East Roman society what it was and which determined the limits within which people could understand their world.⁶ Such a framework should make it possible for the historian to explain why change occurred at particular times and with particular results – if, of course, it fails to achieve this, then it should be discarded! Whatever Byzantines themselves thought of their society, from an analytical perspective it was one in which clear distinctions existed, distinctions based on economic position, in turn determined by access to control over the means of production and distribution of wealth. Inheritance may or may not have played a key role in the process of transferring wealth from one generation to the next. How should we describe the people who occupy the upper strata from a collective point of view, in a way that brings out the structural differences between them and members of different groups, and what criteria should we use in arriving at our definition?

see Kazhdan 1997, and the review of the debate in Kazhdan and Ronchey 1997, 67–108; the articles in Angold 1984b; Stephenson 1994; and esp. three contributions by Cheynet: 2006c; 1996; and 1990, with more recent literature. See also Kazhdan and McCormick 1997; and Oikonomides 1997. The best starting point for any discussion of the middle Byzantine *élite* is now Cheynet 2006a, a collection of particularly insightful and important articles. I have not been able to consult the doctoral thesis of Brousselle 1986. For the provincial *élites* of the ninth–eleventh centuries, see Neville 2004. Other literature will be cited as it becomes relevant. On the seventh-century situation, the survey article by Ostrogorsky 1971 presents a somewhat simplified analysis; while Yannopoulos 1975 offers a survey of titles and offices and their social context. The best analytical account of the growth of the middle Byzantine bureaucratic *élite* is Winkelmann 1987; with Patlagean 1984; and for the transitional period from the sixth to eighth and ninth centuries, see Haldon 2005a; and Nicheanian 2004.

⁴ See Haldon 2005b.

⁵ The best discussion of this “system” for the later Roman period up to the seventh century is Patlagean 1977.

⁶ See Wickham 2005: 153–258.

Usually, the concept of “*élite*” is applied to the ruling group or an oligarchy, a minority who possess power in contrast to a majority who have no power, although at the same time social scientists have recognized that this element of society may be a special-interest group within a broader privileged stratum within society, a cultural and economic *élite*, for example, of whom only a limited number actually participate in political activity and thus “rule.” *Élites* are by definition numerically far smaller than those over whom they exercise power. But the members of such groups may be more or less aware of the different characteristics they share culturally or economically and politically. A good example is provided, for a later period, by the middle Byzantine “aristocracy” of the tenth–twelfth centuries. As we shall see, the members of this group, belonging to a series of families and extended clans which gradually came to monopolize key military and civilian posts in the state, only rarely acted in concert as a group before the twelfth century, were as much concerned with political–ideological status as with explicitly seeking economic power (although the two were hardly separable), were in constant and sometimes violent competition with one another for influence, and whose *élite* status was determined through the imperial court, access to the emperor, and the possession of an imperial office and accompanying title. This constellation or grouping certainly appears as a distinct element in Byzantine society, with clearly identified interests in the way the state worked, how it directed its internal and external politics, and how resources were extracted from the producing population.⁷

How an *élite* becomes a ruling *élite* is thus an important consideration, since the two may not necessarily be the same. Similarity of social and cultural background, and thus shared values and attitudes, a recognition of common interests and thus a willingness to work together, for example, are qualities which a cohesive ruling *élite* needs to be able to maintain its own interests and assure itself of the continuity and reproduction of its power and its power-base. These characteristics have been isolated as key functions of such an *élite*, alongside other important features, helpful in describing late Roman or Byzantine *élites*, and in differentiating between different levels of “*éliteness*.” The specific skills, for example, which may be monopolized by or transferred across the membership of such groups, from one generation to the next or through particular training processes, and the close relationships, both politically in respect of regular contact in respect of functions, or biologically through intermarriage, which grew up between the different family groups belonging to the *élite*. Further, the interchangeability of personnel in the leading positions of civil and military institutions has also been stressed.⁸

We should maintain a distinction, however, between the notion of ruling or power *élite*, and that of “ruling” or “dominant” class, or *élite* in general. The latter notion has historically been applied to an economically distinct group, whose access to and greater degree of control over the basic means of production in a society ensures their exercise of political power and implies also an increasing

⁷ See the exemplary study of Cheynet 1990, and below.

⁸ Wright Mills 1956.

exclusiveness and inaccessibility with respect to those with restricted or no such access at all. The definition of power *élite* requires, in contrast, that while remaining exclusive in its control of political authority, it needs to remain open to the influence of other groups and even recruit new personnel therefrom, in order to safeguard its dominant position. We can thus acknowledge that fundamentally economic relations play a key role, while at the same time recognizing that the networks of social power dependent upon such economic relations can continue to evolve in historically specific ways, and that economic power alone is insufficient to explain the various and often very different types of authority and power exercised by *élites*.

In this chapter I will use the term *élite* or dominant class on the one hand to refer to those who, broadly speaking, occupied a social and economic situation which either reflected, or ensured access to, senior positions in state and church, social esteem from their peers, the ability to transmit their social, economic, and cultural capital to their offspring, and the ability to control resources in terms of land and its products, manpower, and movable wealth. In view of the geographical extent of the Byzantine world, with the relatively high levels of regionalism which distinguished, for example, Thrace from Isauria, there were probably significant regional differences also between the local expression of *élite* culture of such people. Yet the common identity of those who were members of the imperial administration or church, and whose networks of connections generally also tied them to Constantinopolitan culture and values, meant that they can all clearly be distinguished from other socio-economically distinct groups – peasants, pastoralists, merchants, and so on.⁹ The term may thus reasonably be used to refer to a single over-arching set of broadly identifiable vested interests (even if riven by internal competition and factional rivalry), and a social-economic and political position, which differentiates those whom it describes quite clearly from the great majority of the population of the empire who worked to produce food and other products.

On the other hand, “*élite*” hides as much as it reveals. *Élites* are rarely monolithic – they usually comprise a number of separable elements or factions, distinguished by family and clan ties, by geographical location or origin, by political affiliation, by functional position in the state system of which they are a part. There are generally layers or levels of *élite* status and identity, involving also vertical as well as horizontal solidarities. All these elements have different values at different moments, so that there is generally a constantly fluctuating overlap of vested interests, identities, alliances, networks of patronage and influence, and so forth. We can see this very clearly in the example of the so-called senatorial *élite* of the later Roman world,

⁹ Similar, therefore, to the use of the term “order” by Finley 1973, esp. 45ff., or to “aristocracy” in Kazhdan 1974, *passim*. For some detailed observations on the nature and values of the social *élite* in the ninth–eleventh centuries, see Neville 2004. For discussion of strategies evolved to define and defend lineage interests and identities at an earlier period, but with general comparative relevance, see Settapani 2000; Cheynet 2006d.

and most particularly and clearly in Egypt, where some of the best documentation is to be found, or in the Byzantine provincial and metropolitan élite of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Awareness of élite status may take very different forms – in many cases competing elements of what we may identify, structurally, as an “élite,” sharing certain key characteristics in respect of access to and control over resources of one sort or another, may themselves perceive no such common markers, and see themselves rather as independent, autonomous groups in competition with other similar groups. Indeed, the development of an awareness of shared socio-economic status and political interests generally marks a crucial transformative stage in social evolution, politics, and the organization of resources. We need to be able to distinguish between different segments or elements of a social élite and between metropolitan, and provincial or regional élite society. They may overlap in many ways, since individuals can belong to more than one circle of contacts, for example, whether identified in terms of political, religious, or cultural markers. An apparently straightforward term is hence a term that conceals quite complex relationships: between private and institutional landowners and landholders, members of the imperial household, the imperial administration at court, the senior leaders of the armies, the provincial representatives of the government and armies, and so on.

In contrast to the term élite *tout court*, I will use the phrase “power élite” or “ruling group” to mean the leading fraction of the economically dominant social strata, those who shared a situation in respect of access to political/ideological power and influence, in particular at Constantinople and in the various branches of the imperial administration.¹⁰ The power élite may or may not be made up from members born into the dominant class, although by virtue of their position they can generally be assimilated to it. Nor, in the Byzantine case before the twelfth century, is it the case that they come from the same set of families over a long period. Different, competing factional groups, which changed their composition as their perceived interests and identities shifted, dominated the imperial court, and thus while a power élite in a generic sense maintained a monopoly on influence at court and over imperial policy, yet its composition was constantly changing. At the same time, however, such competing groups could also on occasion act in concert from the point of view of their political position, their immediate field of vested interests, and the ways in which those interests could be protected and preserved, whether explicitly or not. More importantly, individual emperors certainly favored their own direct and collateral kin and promoted their interests as well as those of the leading members of the establishment who remained most loyal to them. This had

¹⁰ Wright Mills 1956 (for the definition, and as applicable to a pre-modern social formation. Mills’ notion of a power élite has been regarded by more recent sociological research as too cohesive and organized to be applied to contemporary western democratic cultures, although its relevance to the analysis of more authoritarian or exclusivist systems of the exercise of power is admitted). See further Nadel 1956. For a broader discussion of networks of the distribution of power, and the ways in which different types of social and political élite are constituted, see the discussion in Mann 1986: esp. 27ff. Equivalent terms employed by Finley 1973, Kazhdan 1974, are respectively “status [group]” and inner “élite”; see also Cheynet 2006c: 16ff.

the effect of emphasizing the status and role of the inner or “power” élite, acting also as a springboard for the families of those who made up this group to acquire land and wealth through the further exploitation of state positions.¹¹

The social élite or dominant class in the broader sense is thus always a relatively complex phenomenon, with competing and overlapping status groups of provincial, metropolitan, state, and palatine interests, as the various sub-groups identified for the middle Byzantine period illustrate. Beck, for example, differentiated between service élite, aristocracy of office (not quite the same thing, since in the latter an element of trans-generational transference of power and position is assumed), provincial aristocracy, and (for the late Roman period, in one sense, and for the middle Byzantine period in a somewhat different sense) senatorial aristocracy.¹² The first type of grouping is, of course, very much broader and numerically larger than the second type; it is also less clearly defined, since many of those who might belong to it from one perspective – for example, that of cultural background and attached social status – may be rather marginal to the group in terms of their economic resources. Kazhdan likewise establishes a typology, but based on the system of ranks and precedence, on the one hand, and on functional or instrumental criteria, on the other – that is to say, on the roles described for or ascribed to individual members of the élite in the contemporary sources.¹³ We should in consequence bear constantly in mind the definitional problems suggested by the problem of identifying an “élite,” and the relative crudeness of reducing any social phenomenon to a catch-all label.

Finally, how we define and employ the term “élite” must depend upon the questions we want to ask and for which we seek answers: definitions are functional, and the greater the detail we require, the greater the specificity and exclusiveness of the answer.¹⁴ In this chapter, I am concerned with the secular élite in particular, and will leave to one side specific discussion of the ecclesiastical élite which in so many ways overlapped with it. We should bear in mind that an élite is such because it occupies a particular place, or set of related places, in a social system, and it acts in certain ways with certain consequences and effects. Élites thus have a structural role, that is to say, they are one element in a set of causal relationships. What they do, how they behave, in any given context, individually or severally, regardless of their intentions, and their own perceptions and understanding of what they do, directly affects other elements around them. The study of an élite through time is

¹¹ Cheynet 2006b: 4ff.; 2006c: 5–19 (review of Kazhdan and Ronchey 1997).

¹² See Beck 1965a and 1965b.

¹³ See Kazhdan and Ronchey 1997. See Cheynet 2006c for a critical review of this approach.

¹⁴ These definitions differ somewhat from those proposed by Kazhdan and McCormick 1997: 167, insofar as they prefer to restrict “élite” to mean “the upper crust of the aristocracy or ruling class.” Otherwise I would not wish to disagree with their definition of aristocracy as “a legally defined, theoretically hereditary stratum of society which bears certain privileges,” nor with “ruling class” as “a legally and economically diverse group wielding actual power.” In what follows, “élite” can be understood as the leading element of this “ruling class,” and power élite as that group gathered around the court and the ruler actually exercising imperially-bestowed authority and power.

thus also a key part of the study of change in a society. Even though this chapter takes the *élite* somewhat in isolation, it has to be borne in mind that this is for the sake of descriptive clarity. In the social life of the empire, they were not so readily separated out from the relationships through which they can be thus defined and described.

THE BYZANTINE ÉLITE: CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES, SEVENTH–FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

As I have noted already, *élite* society can be approached from two angles. First, we can examine their structural role in the social, economic, and political relations of society, their position with respect to control over resources; second, we can look at their culture, their self-image, their influence on art and patterns of patronage and investment, the psychology of *élite* society and its reflection in literature and so forth, and the ways in which members of the *élite* understood and described their position themselves. I will try to outline approaches to both of these in what follows.

State *élites* have a powerful vested interest in the maintenance of those institutional relationships to which they owe their position, and conflict or tensions over the distribution of resources both within dominant *élites*, and between them and other elements in society, provide us with at least one dynamic element through which institutional and organizational change occurs, to the advantage of one group or another. As I noted in the introduction, there is in all pre-modern, tributary state formations a systemic tension or contradiction between the interests of those running and dominating the state or court – “the state,” in one sense – and those at any given point who stand outside that immediate group of families, clans, or individuals. The history of the different elements which make up the Byzantine *élite* at any given time is therefore determined largely by the position they occupy in this framework, and what the options for them might have been with regard to securing their position (in terms of wealth, status, property, titles, and so forth), for their successors as well as for themselves individually. Being a member of the late Roman or Byzantine *élite* was never, in consequence, a fixed or determinate quantity – on the contrary, it was to occupy a position in complex set of social and cultural relationships, in which position, status, and income remained both negotiable and fragile. Members of *élites* generally attempt to achieve economic and social security for themselves and their immediate kin by investing wealth in land on the one hand, and in the court or palatine or administrative apparatus of their state on the other, the first as a means of securing a regular revenue to fund their activities and promote their interests, the second in order to maintain their access to power and resources. Byzantium was no different.

It is especially important to bear in mind the fact that in the context of both the later Roman as well as the Byzantine state, individuals saw service for the state as a

means to an end – for their own individual and family interests – at least as much as, if not more than as a form of public service to “the state” as an abstract entity or concept, although such a concept was part of the symbolic universe of the élite, and brought with it a sense of certain duties and responsibilities, as well as rights. Office and title were aspired to as part of the process of realizing such vested interests, even if being in the service of the emperor, at court or in the provinces, was in itself an esteemed and praiseworthy attainment.¹⁵ But while the administrative and military apparatus served the interests of the state, however conceived, it also needed to be paid or maintained in such a way and by such means as would secure its loyalty, or rather the loyalty of the individuals who comprised it. State salaries and privileges, which increased in quantity and scope with rank and title, were the chief means of securing such loyalty, and thus were seen as desirable objectives of social and political competition. While in one sense the East Roman state was undoubtedly understood as essential to the fortune of individual members of the élite, it was largely and understandably taken for granted, so that what we might perceive as short-sighted over-exploitation of resources or inter-clan fighting at certain moments would have been far less obviously seen as a threat to the empire’s continued existence. The factional competition and violence of the civil wars of the period from 1071 onwards provide a clear example. By the same token, the payment of enormous salaries on a yearly basis to the chief officers of the state was a pragmatic and taken-for-granted response to the need to secure the loyalty of these important and potentially dangerous individuals.¹⁶

The term “senatorial aristocracy” has been used to describe the late Roman élite up to the middle of the seventh century. This establishment, however, embodied a wide range of people of different economic statuses, and people not necessarily of similar social origins. The senatorial order, which represented the established landed and office-holding élite of the empire, had been enormously expanded during the fourth and fifth centuries. The emperor Constantine I began to employ senators in the administrative machinery of the state in great numbers, in contrast to Diocletian, who for political reasons had introduced a number of restrictions on the posts senators could fill.¹⁷ In the middle of the fourth century there were perhaps 300 senators belonging to the Senate of Constantinople, although it was constituted somewhat differently, in both its political and its economic structure, from the older Senate at Rome;¹⁸ by the end of the century there were as many as 2,000, a result of the creation by the emperors of ever more senators, and the tying of increasing numbers of posts to senatorial rank. One result of this was, inevitably, the devaluation of senatorial status, and the consequent establishment of new grades of higher status to compensate for this movement. All senators held the grade of *clarissimus*, which was hereditary; but a regrading in the later fourth century introduced two

¹⁵ See the discussion in Schuller 1975; and that in Gizewski 1988.

¹⁶ Oikonomidès 1989.

¹⁷ Heather 1994.

¹⁸ Zuckerman 1998: 130–5.

new levels – *illustris* and, below this, *spectabilis*. Only the first title was hereditary, the two senior ranks being tied to tenure of an imperial office or post in either military or civil service, although the title of *spectabilis* rapidly lost its status and was limited to fairly humble posts by the end of the fifth century. As grades internal to the ranks of *illustris* were introduced, according to whether the holder held an active post or not, and whether he was based at court or in the provinces, so the system became increasingly complex, since functional posts could also be awarded on an honorary and inactive basis.¹⁹

“Senatorial aristocracy” thus refers both to those who held the title *clarissimus* hereditarily – a considerable number by the sixth century – as well as to all those who were awarded the higher titles of *spectabilis* and *illustris*, neither of which was hereditary, although the children of those who held these titles were automatically graded as *clarissimi*. Many of these would have been fairly modest landowners, some may even have been in quite straitened economic circumstances, while a substantial number were certainly extremely wealthy and owned very substantial estates. During the sixth century, a further refinement of the grading system occurred, by which new titles – *magnificus* and *gloriosus* – replaced *illustris* at the higher levels, so that most key military and civil posts were of these ranks.²⁰ The term “senatorial aristocracy” included also those who held high office in Constantinople and the provinces, men who actually exercised state authority at various levels, and whose salaries enabled them – if they were not already from a wealthy background – to establish themselves as members of this economically powerful élite. Once a senatorial family had established itself through imperial service, of course, it had the resources to further the interests of its own junior members and to build up a clientele, so that successive generations were assured of their membership of both a social élite and the ruling establishment.²¹ But it never became an aristocracy of birth, since the emperors were always able to make new senators and fill posts with men whom they preferred, for whatever reason. The composition of the élite was extremely varied.²²

The late Roman élite, internally diverse and highly regionalized though it was, was also the bearer of late Roman literary culture and the guardian of the urban-centered cultural traditions of the earlier Roman and Hellenistic worlds.²³ But the dramatic changes of the seventh century – changes in the role of cities, the huge losses of imperial territory, the narrowing of cultural and ideological horizons which the Persian and especially the Arab wars ushered in – affected this in many ways.²⁴ Many of the hallmarks of late Roman culture vanish almost completely,

¹⁹ Jones 1964: 523–62; Overbeck 1973; Barnes 1974; and Arnheim 1972.

²⁰ Jones 1964: 529–35; Arsac 1969.

²¹ Näf 1995.

²² See now the detailed survey in Heather 1998; and for senatorial landowning, Kaplan 1992: 155ff., 169–83.

²³ See Cameron 1998; Morgan 1998.

²⁴ Brandes 1999; Brandes and Haldon 2000.

along with much of the cultural capital it carried with it. And although many of these transformative developments existed long before the seventh century, the crisis of that time brought things to a head and promoted the development of new structures and responses. As the relationships of power to land and to office within the ruling élite change, so the nature of literary culture, and the bearers of that culture, change considerably. The old senatorial establishment, with much of the literary cultural baggage associated with it, faded away during the seventh century, to be replaced by a service élite of heterogeneous ethnic, social, and cultural origins. The new élite incorporated many elements of the older establishment, especially in the metropolitan region and in the senior church hierarchy,²⁵ but élite culture underwent radical change. The major shifts in urban culture meant that wealthy provincials turned to Constantinople, the seat of empire and source of wealth, status, and power, and there they invested their social capital in order to become part of that system, although that might just as easily mean a post in their native territory. Only the church provided an alternative and equivalent career structure, but that also was centered in Constantinople. The emperor and the court became, more than ever before, the source of social advancement. And while there were many minor routes to power that were not directly pulled into that nexus, the imperial court nevertheless constituted the dominant mode of entry.

The new élite thus owed its origins to the period of turmoil and re-organization of state structures that occurred in the seventh century. The needs of the state in respect of finding persons competent to deal with both civil and military matters in the provinces in this period of crisis was a central consideration. The advantages an individual had over both local landlords and peasantry if he occupied a position of military or civil authority in the provinces were considerable – a monopoly of armed force, for example, the power to seize or confiscate food or other produce for the army, and so on. Persons appointed to such posts thus had every opportunity to further their own interests if they desired. Members of provincial élites hitherto overshadowed by local senators, or who had not been able to compete successfully at court but who had still been important in their own regions, now found themselves in a position to join state service and benefit therefrom. These tendencies are illustrated by the fact that many of the military commanders of the period appear to have been Armenians who took service with the empire, and this serves as a useful reminder that the government was looking for people with the appropriate skills and resources for the tasks in hand, for such men – usually from the middling or upper nobility of Armenia – often brought their own personal armed retinues with them, thus further strengthening both their value to Constantinople as well as their local power.²⁶ But what is particularly important is that the composition of both the Senate in Constantinople and of the state's leading officials changes. Although there had always been a place for “newcomers,” under imperial

²⁵ See Haldon 2005a: 220–1.

²⁶ Armenians were not the only “foreign” group to play a role: see Charanis 1961; 1959; Winkelmann 1987: 203–7; Gero 1985; also Ditten 1983. See also the comments of Cheynet 2006b: 12.

patronage, in the state establishment during the later Roman period, the greater proportion of non-Greek names, for example, of officials known from all types of source, is very striking from the 660s and after. There seems to have taken place a considerable change in the cultural and social origins of key personnel in the imperial establishment at all levels.

At the same time, the old system of senatorial dignities and titles (the *clarissimi*, the *spectabiles*, and the *illustres*) seems to drop out of use, only the leading category of the *illustres* group, referred to as *gloriosi* (*endoxos* or *endoxotatos* in Greek) retaining any significance. Titles that no longer corresponded to social or political realities become irrelevant, disappearing entirely or being fossilized at a lower level of the system of ranks and status. By the end of the seventh century a re-structuring of the whole system of titles and precedence had taken place, in which the importance of titles and posts dependent directly upon imperial service in the palace and at court increases, to the disadvantage of older titles associated in one way or another with the senatorial order. Power was concentrated and focused more than ever before on the figure of the emperor and in the imperial palace, while the older, much more pluralistic system of rank, privilege, wealth, and power disappears.

One effect of these changes was to make “senatorial” titles and epithets part of the common system of titles based on service in the palace and at court. Their survival as “senatorial” grades was still recognized in the ninth and tenth centuries.²⁷ The conclusion must be that, if senatorial grades had been reduced to one aspect of an otherwise entirely imperial and palatine hierarchy of ranks, and the older titles marking out membership of the senatorial order in the late Roman sense had fallen out of use, then the senatorial order as such no longer existed. “Senators” were now imperially appointed – there was no longer a hereditary *clarissimate* – which in turn may suggest that the socio-economic and cultural elements which had constituted the older senatorial order in all its diversity no longer existed or, at the least, was no longer able to dominate the state and government. The Senate in Constantinople – which continued to wield influence because it included high-ranking state officials²⁸ – thus no longer embodied the economic or political interests of a broad stratum of landowners, an aristocracy of privilege whose urban-based municipal culture was also the *élite* culture of the late Roman world.

This does not mean that in the period from the middle of the seventh to the middle of the ninth century there were no wealthy, large-scale landowners; nor that their vested interests were unrepresented in the activities and politics of the ruling *élite* at Constantinople.²⁹ On the contrary, there is just enough evidence to suggest that many leading families in the capital retained their properties, wealth and, in consequence, influence and access to the court through the seventh and into the eighth century and beyond; and that many of the important “new” families or

²⁷ Winkelmann 1985, for a detailed analysis: 28–42, 48f.

²⁸ Beck 1966.

²⁹ See, e.g., Kaplan 2006d: 185f. and 202ff., on the vast wealth in land, slaves, and specie of the widow Danelis in the later ninth century.

individuals of uncertain background who come to dominate the army and civil administration of the empire during the eighth century and afterwards came from well-off provincial families who had remained relatively invisible in the sources of the preceding centuries.³⁰ But this element in society seems no longer to have dominated the state in the way it had previously, although lack of clear evidence for continuity at the upper levels of society make any firm conclusions difficult. Service at court and imperial sponsorship was now far more important to social and economic advancement. The collective political-cultural strength of the late Roman senatorial élite had lain in its monopoly of high civil office in particular, the civil magistracies, governorships, judicial posts, and so forth, in both the provinces and in Constantinople. Many of these disappeared or were reduced in status and importance as a result of the changes in the role of cities and in fiscal and military administration that occurred over the period from ca. 640–650 on, a process which involved a re-concentration of supervisory authority in the hands of the emperor and a few close advisers, and a focus on service at court for promotion and advancement.³¹

The incorporation of senatorial titles into a single imperial hierarchy appears to develop in parallel with the disappearance of the senatorial establishment and the system of grades that were its outward mark of identification. A more court-centered, imperial “meritocracy” evolved, in which members of the old establishment competed on more or less equivalent terms, depending upon competence and patronage and connections. In the situation of sporadic near-crisis which characterized the empire’s administration from the middle of the seventh century until the 720s, the culture of the old establishment was increasingly marginalized, a factor reflected most obviously in the reduction in the production of many genres of non-religious literature and other shifts in the cultural pattern of the period. As the importance of the court increased, so that of the senatorial order waned, as those who belonged to it came to depend more and more upon the court for their status. Birth and lineage clearly remained significant social markers, but there seems to have been no commonly employed vocabulary to describe persons of wealth and power.³²

The result of all these changes was not simply that the dominance of the older aristocracy was broken. It was that the new “pseudo-meritocratic” service élite depended, at least in its formative period, entirely upon the emperor. The shrinkage of the empire territorially, the centralization of fiscal administration, the effective disappearance of cities as intermediaries, socially and economically, between the provinces and Constantinople, were all part of this shift in emphasis. It gave the imperial system a new lease of life, which was to last until the eleventh century.

The Byzantine imperial court and the government defined their interests relatively narrowly – to protect the empire’s territorial integrity, maintain an effective

³⁰ Haldon 2005a: 216–19, 229–31; Cheynet 2006b: 10, 21ff.

³¹ Kaplan 1992: 310–26; and 1981.

³² See Cheynet 2006b: 2ff.

fiscal apparatus through which resources could be extracted for this purpose, maintain the imperial household, and maintain an international diplomatic network which likewise contributed to the preservation of the state. They were less interested in local society and economy – they achieved their aims pretty efficiently and successfully, but stopped short of taking an active interest in provincial affairs. Indeed, central administration was relatively apathetic and ignorant in this respect and, in the context of the ability of members of provincial élites to exercise influence, created a great deal of political space within which local affairs could be manipulated.³³

But the government – the state – was at no time a neutral observer and manager of the empire's resources. The imperial administration in the Byzantine world was embodied in individuals who occupied a multiplicity of social roles. On the one hand, as members of the state establishment bearing imperial titles, they were regarded as, and understood themselves as, members of the imperial household. On the other hand, they had roles in their own households and families – as heads of family, as landlords, as brothers or fathers or sons, and so forth. This meant the imperial system was highly flexible and malleable, since the people who made it up were members of frequently extensive networks of clientage and patronage, connected by family interest as well as local identities to a wide range of intersecting circles of influence. At the same time, prominent provincials could make use of personal connections at the capital among people who outranked the local state officials in respect of access to the emperor or one of his senior confidants. Friendship, social obligation, and gift-giving were common forms of putting pressure on people or obligating them in some way, locally as well as at the capital. Social power was thus embodied in a series of overlapping networks, and is reflected in the vested interests and actions of various individuals and groups as they seek to negotiate their ways through these relationships. Social power was exercised to secure and improve one's situation in respect of the center and the imperial household, in respect of one's family situation, and one's position in a hierarchy of associations with other individuals similarly connected and with access to greater or lesser sets of resources.³⁴ What this meant in practical terms was that for members of the Byzantine élite it was their position in a network of relationships dominated by their household and kin, and the prestige of court and imperial posts, which framed their actions and determined how they interacted with others in the different social contexts in which they found themselves.³⁵ The point is underlined by the ways in which emperors too – the most successful members of the power élite – surrounded themselves with relatives or associates of their families, and by the ways in which those outside this charmed circle strove to gain admittance.³⁶ This was hardly less

³³ This point is well brought out in Neville 2004: 99–135; see also the survey by Cheynet 2003b.

³⁴ What is known of the history of various clans and families illustrates these points: see Cheynet 2003a; and in particular Krsmanović 2001; Cheynet 1990: 261–301; Vlyssidou 2001; and especially the careful study by Winkelmann 1987: 143–219.

³⁵ Magdalino 1984; Neville 2004: 85–93; Cheynet 2006b: 32–6 for the tenth–eleventh centuries.

³⁶ Cheynet 2006b: 13–14.

true of outsiders who aspired to enter this élite at whatever level – most wealthy households maintained some servants and retainers, the wealthier sometimes considerable bodies of servants and armed retainers, and joining the ranks of such a retinue which, among the very powerful, was organized along the same lines as the imperial palace, could offer many advantages to someone who aspired to greater things – the stories of Leo, Michael, and Thomas in the retinue of Bardanes Tourkos and later Nikephoros I, or of Basil I, among several, are illustrative, although it should be emphasized that none of these three were in fact of humble origins.³⁷

However complex the actual forms of such networks, the importance of maintaining one's position in the imperial system and of retaining the approval of the emperor and his immediate household and advisers was always paramount to the sense of social worth and honor of members of the Byzantine élite in both the capital and the provinces. This gave the emperor a clear advantage in neutralizing competition for control over resources.³⁸ One outcome of the changes during the seventh century traced above was that up to the later tenth and mid-eleventh centuries, Byzantines identified no "aristocracy" as such – they described their world in terms of those with state positions, the middling and private citizens or subjects of the emperor, and the poor, or in terms of those who held a palatine rank or state position, and the rest.³⁹ But they certainly had a sense of "noble lineage" or "good birth," and a "good" or "well-born" family was recognized as a desirable asset: Leo VI noted that good birth was as appropriate a qualification for military command as merit and ability, and evidence from the centuries preceding this suggests that the notion of noble birth retained considerable social value.⁴⁰ The prosopography of the major office- and title-holders of the empire across the seventh to ninth centuries has shown how some of these networks functioned in practice. In particular, it has shown that the central authority managed to maintain a remarkably firm hand on the élite, rotating even the most powerful senior military officials on a fairly regular basis, able to isolate malcontents or potential threats and have them neutralized (exile, execution, imprisonment) and, time and again, to ward off challenges to central authority by rebellious provincials.⁴¹ And this promoted the continuing vitality of the palatine hierarchy and the system of precedence from which social status, privilege, and access to power and wealth flowed. The general Katakalon

³⁷ Beck 1965b; Winkelmann 1987: 75ff. For Leo, Michael, and Thomas, see Winkelmann 1987: 77f.; Lilie, Ludwig, Pratsch, Rochow et al. 1999–2002: nos. 4244, 4989, 8459; Martindale 2000: Leo 15, Michael 7, Thomas 7; Cheynet 2006b: 12 and notes; 31–5. For Basil I: Winkelmann 1987: 79ff.

³⁸ See Kazhdan and McCormick 1997: 168–72, 195–7.

³⁹ Theophanes (de Boor 1883/5): 467.33, 475.24, 487.22 (Mango and. Scott 1997: 643, 654, 668); Theophanes continuatus (Bekker 1825), 149.19f. For the absence of lineage and family identity as significant social markers before the middle of the ninth century, see Guiland 1948; 1953; and for a brief discussion of the concept "aristocracy" as it appears in the modern literature on the Byzantine élite, see Antonopoulou 2002.

⁴⁰ Leo, *Tactica*, ii, 225; iv, 3 (ed. Vári 1917–22); comment by Cheynet 2006b: 17 and n. 66, *pace* Antonopoulou 1993: 153–9. See in general Cheynet 2006b: 5ff. and sources.

⁴¹ Winkelmann 1987: 99–142.

Kekaumenos was praised, reportedly, by the emperor Michael VI, himself a former senior government official, for achieving his success and high rank by his own merit and not by virtue of family connections, reinforcing the impression that lineage and “good birth” were in fact well-established as markers of social distinction.⁴²

By the eleventh century there had evolved a substantial provincial aristocracy in the Byzantine world, as those who held state positions and who had invested a portion of their wealth in property in their native districts, for example, married into other wealthy families and inherited land and other property, and were able to transmit this wealth to successive generations and at the same time to secure positions at court and in the army and administration through the exercise of patronage, connections, marriage and, just as importantly, the education available to those who could afford to acquire it.⁴³ Some of the best-known élite clans – the Phokas, Maleinos, Doukas, and other families – owed their success and wealth to this process, and exemplify in their particular history the ways in which local provincial military leaders evolved into leading aristocrats who could dominate both court and province.⁴⁴ Access to élite status and position remained open to those of more humble origins, but it was certainly becoming increasingly difficult by the later eleventh century. Yet still, in spite of the potential for such an élite to reduce its dependency on the court and palace (through the acquisition of economic resources in land independent of the court and the emperors), it remained to the very end firmly anchored in the palatine hierarchy, the values and self-esteem of individuals and families determined always by their position within the system of court titles, ranks, and administrative or military offices, and closeness to the throne; while the emperors were still able to exploit this situation to advance the careers of those of less privileged background who came to their attention. The system of yearly salaries or *rogai* paid to those who had invested a lump sum in return for certain titles and the social status they brought is an ample illustration of this (up to the later eleventh century, at least), for the return on such investments was often very small indeed and may often have meant an absolute loss, if measured in purely financial returns, to the investor.⁴⁵ But as an investment in status and esteem the purchase of such titles clearly brought very considerable benefits and was widely practiced. This *ideological* identity of interests between those who joined or who were born into the social élite, and the palace, thus generated what we might call a systemic impasse, where in the end neither court nor élite could free themselves from one another, and where the élite could never assert an identity independent of the court in the way which western aristocracies were able to do.

⁴² Skylitzes (Thurn 1973): 483.13f.

⁴³ Hendy 1985: 100–7 for some magnate lands, their extent, origins and their location; Cheynet 2006b: 7–12. For aristocratic property and its transmission, in particular through women, see Kaplan 2006d.

⁴⁴ See in particular Kaplan 1981 on this.

⁴⁵ See Lemerle 1967; Oikonomidès 1997: 205; Neville 2004: 25–31. This system broke down in the second half of the eleventh century, however – see below.

The structural tensions thus generated showed themselves in the political life of the empire in terms of the relationship between individuals or groups of magnates and their kin, and the imperial government, court, or individual emperor. As the élite became gradually less *economically* dependent on the court, and as it began to develop an awareness of its interests – reflected by an increasing use of family names and an awareness of social status, tradition, and expectations from the later eighth, but more clearly from the early tenth century onwards – so there began to appear also a real structural tension between the economic interests of this increasingly independent, but internally fractured élite, dominating as it did at least certain key sectors of the machinery of the state, on the one hand, and the fiscal interests of the state itself and of the particular power élite or dominant faction which directed it at any given moment, on the other hand. This tension can be seen in the efforts of both parties, reflected in imperial legislation in particular, to maintain or increase its access to the surplus that could be appropriated from the producing population. Should that surplus go to the landed power-élite and magnates, as rent, or to the state (and thus, of course, indirectly, to the power élite of the moment) as taxes and other impositions?

We must be careful not to oversimplify. For “the élite” was not a single or monolithic group, but consisted, as we have said, of a range of competing and sometimes hostile families, clans, and individuals, each with specific cultural and political origins and allegiances. Each of these elements acted in its own perceived best interests, not as members of any co-ordinated body, and certainly not with any sense of common identity except at the level of peer respect and worth; in addition, the range of people identified in imperial legislation as “the powerful,” those who presented an actual or potential challenge to the imperial government for resources, was very wide and, in purely economic terms, represented people from very disparate positions in society – indeed, it has been noted that it represented a relationship of relative power and wealth rather than a distinct social grouping.⁴⁶ What they did have in common was an imperial position or rank, and therewith also an income derived from imperial service – whether as a *scholarios* in the *tagmata* or guards regiments at Constantinople, at one level, or as a senior fiscal administrator and title-holder at Constantinople or in the provinces, at another. And this returns us to the point that it was primarily at and through the court, the imperial palace, and in the presence of the emperor, that social rank was conferred and wealth acquired. This might be further inflected or nuanced by notions of family and lineage and so forth. Emperors were well aware, however, of the crucial importance of membership of and participation in the imperial system: Basil II notes in one of his legislative acts that wealth, in terms of coin and land and other forms of property, came from imperial titles and administrative office.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the body of people who, in the imperial legislation of the tenth century, are collectively referred to as “the powerful” did constitute, from a

⁴⁶ Morris 1976; Neville 2004: 68–9, 79ff.

⁴⁷ Zepos and Zepos 1931: i, 417, 486.

structural perspective, a focus of competition for resources in landed wealth and, perhaps more significantly, for the state, more dangerously, in manpower, whether or not they were aware of their position in this respect. In particular, senior provincial officers who acquired lands and thereby some authority and patronage over the occupants of such lands, who might at the same time be the source of soldiers for provincial armies, were an obvious threat. The emperors tried to limit the length of service of individual officers in particular regions to avoid the development of such personal ties of dependence and loyalty, and as noted already, in the eighth and throughout much of the ninth century appear to have been fairly successful in this respect.⁴⁸ Basil II's policies in particular have been picked out as exemplifying this tension and the strategies available to emperors to address the problems they perceived.⁴⁹ During the eleventh century, and following the eventual failure of draconian legislation on the part of rulers such as Basil II, they seem to have been less able to maintain such a firm control, and their leading officials were more often than not also among those who were most likely to compete with the court for control over manpower and wealth. This is where the contradiction becomes most apparent – to preserve their own authority over resources the emperors issued legislation, which they then expected to be enforced by members of the very social élite against whose interests the legislation was in part directed. Naturally, they tried to select individuals whose immediate interests were closely allied to those of the ruling emperor, and thus generally from among those factions or families closest to them and most dependent upon them, but the point remains valid.

The parties to this struggle were conscious of this contradiction at the level of political vested interests, but differentiating between “the state” and the social élite of the empire is to create an artificial separation between the two, since they overlapped in so many ways. It was to the emperor and the concept of the orthodox Roman *politeia* that individuals gave their loyalty. And while it was the emperor who recruited members to the élite, promoting the careers of individuals from a wide range of social backgrounds and thus inhibiting the development of a closed and aristocratic élite, the court was dependent upon the élite for all its chief civil and military functionaries, regardless of the distinct family and patronage factions that existed, each of which attempted constantly to use the state against their particular rivals, not only at the highest level of power-politics but also in provincial and local political competition.⁵⁰ In the course of the later eleventh century, a partial solution was for the emperors to concede revenue extraction to those upon whom it depended. As the tensions between the different poles of authority and power intensified, what had been a systemic paradox and potential opposition became open and political, yet doubly complicated by the factional rivalries between clans. The other part of the resolution was then the seizure of the state by the representatives of a particular faction of the ruling élite, and the establishment of a more

⁴⁸ Survey of the evidence in Winkelmann 1985: 72–140; 1987: 99–142.

⁴⁹ Cheynet 2006e.

⁵⁰ Neville 2004: 136–64.

openly dynastic and aristocratic system of administration, dependent upon a precarious network of clan alliances and patronage supported by the leading magnate families.⁵¹ As the historian Zonaras remarks of the system established by the Komnenoi, the emperor Alexios distributed state positions and state lands and the income derived therefrom among his kin and relatives by marriage, with the result that the Komnenos clan became the wealthiest family in the empire.⁵²

While by no means united ideologically, constituent elements of this group, made up of a number of dominant families with their clients and retinues throughout the provinces as well as in the central administration, eventually came into open conflict with those elements which dominated the state apparatus at Constantinople at given moments, especially during the first three-quarters of the eleventh century. This conflict was prefigured in the tenth century by the temporary dominance exercised over the imperial court by members of particularly influential clans, such as the Phokas family. But factional rivalry prevented any longer-term ascendancy at this point, and the exploitation of that rivalry by Basil II and his successor Constantine VIII permitted the emperors to destroy this particular threat to their own dynasty and power.⁵³ The clash between the bureaucratic faction which dominated policy during the brief reign of the emperor Michael VI (1056–1057), and the leaders of the Anatolian armies, all members or associates of well-established “military” clans, a clash which resulted in the rebellion led by Isaac Komnenos and Katakalon Kekaumenos and the deposition of Michael, reflected a more dangerous development from the point of view of the ruler.⁵⁴ And it is, ironically, clearly reflected in the fate of Isaac I: as soon as he was on the imperial throne and confronted by the issues of resource control and expenditure from the perspective of the government, he began to legislate to re-establish imperial control, only to suffer a similar fate himself as the vested interests of the élites at both Constantinople and in the provinces allied together to cast him out.⁵⁵ Nevertheless the relations within and between the different elements which made up these groups remained fluid and subject to constant change, so that it is impossible to speak of clearly identifiable or long-term political solidarities. It is true that, by the middle of the eleventh century, contemporary commentators were speaking in terms of identifiable “military” (provincial) and “civil” (Constantinopolitan) factions, although it has been shown very clearly how much even this perspective was the product of a very particular and relatively short-term situation. The so-called military faction was identified with the great magnates of Asia Minor, an élite of birth, the metropolitan group with the central bureaucracy, to a degree at least an élite based on office and direct and regular access to the imperial household.⁵⁶

⁵¹ As a good example of this see Cheynet 2003a.

⁵² Zonaras (Büttner-Wobst 1897): 767. 2–10. This whole process is analyzed in Kazhdan and Ronchey 1997.

⁵³ Howard-Johnston 1995.

⁵⁴ See Cheynet 1990: 191–8; 337–48 with sources and literature.

⁵⁵ See Attaleiates (Bekker 1853): 60–2; and esp. Zonaras (Büttner-Wobst 1897): 667–8.

⁵⁶ Cheynet 2006c: 16–19.

This does not mean that the latter did not also possess or invest in landed property in the provinces; nor that the demarcation between the two groups was not always very fluid and subject to a wide range of conjunctural pressures, factional alliances, and individual personalities – indeed, interests were represented and embodied precisely in individual family histories and individual careers.⁵⁷ Competition for power and influence took place within the context of a patrimonial political structure, dominated by the formal hierarchies and system of honors and status of the imperial state, and between rival clans and families. While landed wealth played without doubt a crucial role in the consolidation of magnate autonomy, families and individuals invested also very heavily in the imperial system itself: posts and sinecures, state “pensions,” often amounting to considerable yearly incomes in gold and precious cloths, as well as thesaurized coin, jewelry, plate, and so on. All members of the dominant social class, as well as their clients, invested and accrued wealth in this way. While many families thus consolidated their position economically over a number of generations through the acquisition of lands, equally large numbers seem to have possessed relatively little landed wealth, and were in consequence much more directly dependent upon the state or, more specifically, the particular ruler and palatine faction of the moment. We will discuss this further below.⁵⁸

Such persons may be described, in fact, as clients of the state itself, and formed thus an important group of interests at the capital and in the palace. And it must be stressed that even the more independent magnates – both individuals and clans – depended for titles, honors and, to a certain extent (depending upon distance from the capital, relationships with local society and similar factors) social status and respect on this bureaucratic, imperial system. In the tenth century there was still no real aristocracy, even if there were a number of élite families who remained consistently important in the state’s affairs, military and civil; and the emperors were still able to isolate dangerous individuals and families and deal with them, make and break senior officers, bring in people of humble origins or outsiders to fulfil key roles in their governments. And eunuchs played a significant role as well, even if it is also the case that several of these did also favor their own relatives’ economic and political interests, and thus cannot be said to be either genealogically or culturally deracinated or independent of the pattern of vested interests of members of the élite. Indeed, the significant positions achieved by many eunuchs is a clear illustration of the relative openness of the establishment and of the centrality of imperial patronage and choice, and at the same time of the absence of any consolidated élite groups at court or in government administration in general. Only during the later eleventh and especially during the twelfth century does the rise to power of the military aristocracy of the Komnenian era lead to the exclusion of eunuchs, among other groups, from the highest positions.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Cheynet 1990: 191–8; 2006b: 11.

⁵⁸ The best analysis of these relationships and the factional strife within the élite is Cheynet 1990.

⁵⁹ See Spadaro 2006; Cosentino 2006, both with further literature and valuable discussion. See also Sideris 2002; Tougher 1997; and Ringrose 1994. Older literature: Kazhdan 1973; Seibt 1978: 145; Winkelmann 1985: 66.

This was still, in many respects, a pseudo-meritocratic regime, in which connections, patronage, talent, and opportunity played as important and sometimes a much more important role than birth. Symeon the New Theologian, writing in the early years of the eleventh century, noted that the élite fell into two groups – those who were present at court, who accompanied the emperor on campaign, devoted themselves to imperial service; and those who dwelt on their own lands, stayed at home in luxury. The former were the *archontes*, one of the generic terms used for those in power and authority, and hence for the social élite.⁶⁰ Only during the later eleventh and twelfth centuries did some of these families acquire sufficient wealth and resources on a secure enough basis to become, potentially at least, more independent of the court and its system of titles and precedence. And it was the successful rise to imperial power of one of them, the Komnenoi, and the system of clan and dynastic alliances they employed to cement their position, that facilitated and speeded up the process of aristocratization that accompanied this.⁶¹

The growth in the power of the élite had been stimulated by two developments in the period from the middle of the tenth to the middle of the twelfth century. In the first place, the sources show the increasing subordination of the peasantry to both private landlords and, from the later eleventh century, to holders of state revenue concessions. This long-term process was hastened by the occurrence of a series of natural disasters affecting harvests in the first half of the tenth century, and exposed peasant smallholders in particular to pressure to convert their lands into tenancies in return for support through difficult periods. While the government enacted a number of laws to restrict the alienation of such lands to “the powerful” (a loose term denoting most of those with the resources to buy up land, and thus not necessarily signifying the very wealthy alone), success was very limited, and in the end, and in spite of draconian measures enacted by the emperor Basil II, the state began to lose control of the fiscal resources which such independent producers represented.⁶² The peasantry, while they became increasingly liable to the depredations and encroachments of the big landowners and magnates (especially in the tenth century), as well as those who were also the tenants of large landlords, were all still subject to the fisc, that is to say, they were taxed directly (although some estate owners, particularly monastic or ecclesiastical, were exempted as a special privilege by certain emperors).⁶³ At the same time the rapaciousness of some imperial officials, anxious to exploit their own positions, further exacerbated the problem of over-taxation, and the situation was further complicated by the fact that provincial landlords might also be the centrally-appointed representatives of the state, responsible for various fiscal duties, for example. The contradictions inherent in such a situation are graphically brought out in the ways through which provincial peasant producers were exploited by such officials, a

⁶⁰ See Darrouzès 1967: 106.

⁶¹ See Cheynet 1990: 339–77.

⁶² Morris 1976; Howard-Johnston 1995.

⁶³ A process summed up in Harvey 1989: 35–79.

situation made very apparent in the letters of archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid for the late eleventh century.⁶⁴

In the second place, from the later eleventh century the state conceded the right to receive the revenues from certain public (i.e. fiscal, or taxed) districts; or of certain imperial estates, and their tenants, along with part or all of the rents and taxes raised from them. Such grants – known as grants of *pronoia* – were made for a variety of reasons to individuals by the emperors, chiefly as an administrative and political tool designed to bind potentially antagonistic individuals or clans to the imperial family. They took the form of personal grants from the ruler, who represented the state in the institutional sense; and while there was also a more general meaning of the term *pronoia*, the most usual involved *pronoia* grants in return for military service. In order to maintain the loyalty of many magnates, emperors also granted increasing numbers of tax exemptions to individuals, who in turn benefited from the fixed rates of taxation in a context of rapid price inflation and devaluation of the gold currency. With the expansion of magnate landholding, a process of alienation of the state's fiscal and juridical rights set in, although the extent to which the institution of *pronoia* contributed to this before the thirteenth century is open to doubt: such grants only seem to have become generalized from the middle of the twelfth century as a means of supporting soldiers, and many of them were very small – not major estates designed to support a mounted soldier and his retinue, but quite small revenues intended to maintain a soldier for a limited period.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, through obtaining fiscal exemptions of varying sorts, landlords – both secular and monastic – were able to keep a larger proportion of the revenues extracted from their peasant producers for themselves, as rent, while the government's hold on the remaining fiscal land of the empire was constantly challenged by the provincial élite.⁶⁶ This had important consequences, for, in conjunction with developments in the way the government recruited and financed its armies during the later tenth and early eleventh century, it meant that the overall burden placed upon the peasant producers grew considerably.⁶⁷ In the period before the changes of the later tenth century, it is likely that this burden was fairly evenly distributed across the rural population of the provinces, and that, although the transit of imperial forces did involve unusually heavy demands on the communities closest to the routes used by military detachments, such demands were neither frequent nor regular.

The divergence between the interests of those members of the landed and office-holding establishment outside the court power élite, and the central authority (or the “state” as a political entity) and its allies, which begins to make itself felt during the later tenth and eleventh centuries, was resolved from the time of Alexios I and until the end of the twelfth century by the transformation of the empire under the

⁶⁴ See Gautier 1986, esp. nos. 12, 17, 19, 21, 24, 26, 31, 55, 61, 85, 96, 98; and see also Herrin 1975.

⁶⁵ The extent of grants of *pronoia* before the later twelfth century is still unclear. See Ahrweiler 1980; Khvostova 1988; Magdalino 1993: 172, 175–6, 231–3; and esp. Cheynet 2006b: 28–30.

⁶⁶ Harvey 1989: 68–9, 91ff.

⁶⁷ Harvey 1989: 35–79, 102ff.

Komnenos dynasty into what was, in effect, a gigantic family estate. While the process may well have begun to take form under the Doukai in the 1070s,⁶⁸ the Komnenoi ruled through a network of magnates, relatives, and patronage that expanded rapidly during the twelfth century and, in uniting the vested interests of the dominant social-economic élite with those of a ruling family, re-united also the interests of the former with those of a centralized empire. This can be viewed from one perspective as a “papering over.” But from another angle it was an efficacious way of recognizing a very different set of circumstances and of creating the space for the development of new solidarities and networks of patronage, which enabled the state to survive as a powerful eastern Mediterranean entity until the very end of the twelfth century.

The factional politics that led to these developments, in particular over who would control Constantinople and sit on the throne, become particularly apparent in the squabbles and civil wars that followed the defeat of Romanos IV by the Seljuks in 1071, a situation resolved only by the seizure of power by Alexios I in 1081. By the same period, the élite had crystallized into a multi-factional aristocracy of birth, with a few very powerful families at the top, and a number of subordinate and collateral clans and families dependent upon them, often with strongly regional affiliations and identities. Under the Komnenoi, the imperial family and its immediate associates monopolized military and higher civil offices, while the older families who had been its former rivals dominated the bureaucratic machinery of the state, leaving local affairs and provincial administration to members of the local élites, who had benefited from the economic stability of the tenth and eleventh centuries and the revival of urban economies.⁶⁹

Yet even with this aristocratization, vertical mobility remained quite usual, because the absolute authority of the emperor at court made palatine service at once both highly desirable and remunerative, as well as insecure and potentially dangerous. Personal service on the emperor and proximity to him on a day-to-day basis meant influence and power. It also encouraged rivalry from competitors.⁷⁰ The rise to power and influence, and the fall from grace, of senior courtiers and palatine officers, whether well-connected outside the court or not, is a commonplace throughout Byzantine history, until the very end. There are many examples: in the seventh century the fate of those who failed to succeed in carrying out some of the policies of Justinian II;⁷¹ in the eighth century the revolt of Artavasdos is itself an indication of the potential threat perceived by that great ally of Leo III in the succession to the throne of his younger brother-in-law Constantine V; the discovery of a plot against Constantine V in 765–766 and the subsequent punishment of several senior military and civil officials and their clients at court;⁷² under Eirene

⁶⁸ Cheynet 2006b: 5.

⁶⁹ Cheynet 1990: 413ff.; Magdalino 1993: 18–227; Kazhdan 1984.

⁷⁰ Kazhdan and McCormick 1997: 176–85, 189–95.

⁷¹ Ostrogorsky 1968: 142–3.

⁷² Rochow 1991: 144–59, 191–2, 204–5; and Rochow 1994.

the competition between the eunuchs Theoktistos and Staurakios;⁷³ the *vita Basilii*, however much elements may have been pro-Macedonian propaganda, reveals a court full of factional rivalries and jostling for position;⁷⁴ the rise to power and subsequent removal from authority of Basil the *parakoimomenos* in the 980s;⁷⁵ and so on – up to and beyond the case of Theodore Styppeiotes and his disgrace through the plotting of his rival John Kamateros at the court of Manuel I.⁷⁶

But the structure and history of “élite society” is more complex than the importance of the great magnate clans would suggest. Below the clans and families who came to dominate the imperial system during the tenth and eleventh century stood a much larger number of lower-ranking but still “powerful” families and individuals, people who invested in the middling hierarchy of state and army, but who were also closely associated with the society and economy of their home districts and towns. From the later seventh and eighth centuries, the fiscal system had been focused on the village community, so that the revival of urban centers from the later ninth century onwards meant the appearance of a series of important towns which remained more-or-less independent of the imperial administration, except that they served as administrative bases and residences for the various local and visiting imperial officials whose business lay in the provinces. The local élites, who more and more preferred to live in their district town rather than on their estates (if they had ever dwelt outside the local towns, something which the lack of evidence on this issue makes impossible to decide), had a free hand in the running of such towns, in the governance and administration of which they, together with the local bishop and senior clergy, constituted the chief elements. The bishop, in fact, was generally a key member of this élite, and often had family connections with the middling and higher aristocracy of the town and its hinterland. Indeed, just as it seems likely that the bishop had remained throughout the period from the sixth to tenth century a major figure in local urban life, so it is just as likely that local élite families were likewise important figures, although we hear very little of them in the sources. The revival of local agriculture, increasing monetization of exchange, increased market activity, all contributed to an improvement in their situation and a higher political as well as economic profile as they were able to take advantage of stable economic circumstances to invest in agriculture as well as markets.⁷⁷ This group of largely middling landlords supplied also many of the local state officials in both the civil and military administration, so that the interests of the families who were thus represented could be furthered with little real opposition. Indeed, the term used to describe them – *archontes*, a term which may be loosely translated as “lords” – meant also an official or holder of an imperial post of some sort, and

⁷³ Lilie, 1996: 102f., 279–91. See also for a general survey of stability and instability at court and in the imperial administrative establishment more widely, Winkelmann 1987: 98–142.

⁷⁴ Ostrogorsky 1968: 232ff.; Vlysidou 1991: esp. 96ff.

⁷⁵ Brokaar 1972.

⁷⁶ Kresten 1978; Magdalino 1993: 198–200, 254–6.

⁷⁷ See Neville 2004: 83ff.; Harvey 1989: 207ff., 226ff.; Angold 1984c: 236–53; Cheynet 2006c: 21–3.

points to their origins. Their income came from both land as well as from town property – the recovery of urban markets and economies meant that town properties increased in value, with the result that substantial incomes could be drawn from urban rents and the commercial activities that may have been associated with many of them.⁷⁸

The emergence during the eleventh century of provincial urban élites who had the interests of their own town, as much as a career at Constantinople, as the center of local society and economic activity, created a new element in the pattern of relations between capital and provinces. It meant that local interests could now be represented more vocally than hitherto, and also created a basis for opposition to the activities of fiscal officials sent from the imperial capital. The development of ties of patronage and dependence between these archontic families and their tenants and clients reinforced these local solidarities, generating an additional barrier between both central government and the major aristocratic families, and local tax payers. But the relative apathy about non-fiscal provincial matters on the part of the government meant that a high degree of local autonomy was the norm, with prominent households or groups of allied families able to exercise influence through their networks of patronage and contacts at the capital and in the central administration.⁷⁹ As a result, when the central administration did attempt to get more involved – either in changing fiscal rates or in other respects – the possibility of armed opposition to government officials also arose. One or two examples of local revolts which were clearly inspired by popular or communal hostility to imperial fiscal policy are recorded in the sources. A good example is the rebellion, during the reign of Constantine X (1059–1067), of the townspeople of Larissa, a small *kastron* in Thessaly in Greece. Led by their *archontes*, they wished to protest against the imposition of extra taxes by Constantinopolitan officials. Even though one of these local lords, a certain Nikoulitzas Delphinas, tried to warn the emperor, he was ignored, and eventually ended up at the head of the rebels. The revolt ended peacefully, by negotiation, but signaled an important change in the relationship between Constantinople and the provinces.⁸⁰

New elements were introduced into the élite during the middle years of the eleventh century as emperors such as Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055) and his immediate successors opened senatorial membership, and thus access to senior state positions and titles, to individuals from hitherto excluded groups such as merchants and lower-ranking administrative personnel. This was partly to boost the state's income, since the titles thus awarded had to be paid for; and it may also have served factional political aims, creating a body of venal dependents on the emperor who would support him against other factions at court and at

⁷⁸ For the local “gentry” and their relationship to the expanding urban and rural economy in the eleventh century and after, see esp. Angold 1984c; Neville 2004: 66–98; also Harvey 1989: 261; Magdalino 1993: 150–6.

⁷⁹ Neville 2004: 39ff.; Angold 1984c; also Cheynet 2003b.

⁸⁰ See Harvey 1989: 113–15; Hendy 1985: 297.

Constantinople. Since some of these newcomers also held imperial posts as tax-collectors or similar in the provinces, it also impacted upon the ways in which the state collected revenues and is associated with the increasing farming of revenue contracts and oppressive exploitation of rural taxpayers.⁸¹ But it changed the composition of the metropolitan, civil élite – much to the chagrin of some contemporary observers⁸² – and had important consequences for the structure of the élite as a whole. It contributed likewise to an inflation of titles and the need to generate new strata within the existing hierarchy to accommodate the changes, a tendency exacerbated by the declining value of the devalued imperial gold coinage – since imperial *rogai* were paid in a depreciating currency, the élite and the palace generated more and more senior titles with correspondingly higher *rogai* attached to them as a means of safeguarding their income and investment.⁸³ At the same time, as the eleventh century drew to a close, the upper strata of the metropolitan, predominantly “civil” establishment and the provincial, largely “military” families became increasingly differentiated, with the Komnenos clan favoring a select group of leading military landowning clans, more-or-less closed to newcomers, and actively discouraging the social advancement of people of middling origins. The shift is accompanied by a downgrading of what had by this time become designated as “senatorial” – which is to say, “civil” – titles, and the creation of new “imperial” titles founded less on functional attributes than on connections to the imperial family. It also appears to have entailed the exclusion, to a greater or lesser extent, of both eunuchs, who had played a significant role in élite and palatine politics from the seventh until the middle of the eleventh century, and of foreigners, especially in the army. Vertical mobility, while remaining possible primarily as a result of imperial sponsorship and patronage, becomes less possible; and while there were certainly a few individual exceptions, the civil élite also suffered in status and esteem.⁸⁴

From the middle of the twelfth century at the latest – at the height of what has been dubbed “the Komnenian system” – the élite of the empire can truly be said to be dominated by this militarized aristocracy of birth. In contrast with the earlier period, when relatives of emperors occupied very few senior posts, it has been noted that almost 90 percent of senior military positions were held by the Komnenoi or their relatives and kin during the reign of Manuel I.⁸⁵ And although strong and politically-sensitive rulers like Manuel I Komnenos were able to maintain imperial authority very effectively through manipulating the different interests of these families and by using outsiders, it is also clear that while individuals from outside this class can be brought in and raised up to positions of power by an emperor or a senior patron at court, the dominance of the major families, through a combination

⁸¹ See Lemerle 1977: 287–93; 1967: 84–90; Hendy 1985: 570–82.

⁸² E.g. Michael Attaleiates’ contemptuous remarks: Bekker 1853: 275.12–19.

⁸³ Weiß 1973; Hohlweg 1965: 34–9; and esp. Cheynet 1983.

⁸⁴ For these tendencies, see Kazhdan 1974; and the detailed analysis of the Komnenian system in Magdalino 1993: 180–92; also Lemerle 1977: 309ff.

⁸⁵ Kazhdan and McCormick 1997: 170; Magdalino 1993: 186–8.

of dynastic alliance and a near-monopoly on key positions, could no longer be challenged. The results of the Fourth Crusade and the recovery of Constantinople in 1261 merely reinforced these tendencies. Imperially-bestowed titles and posts, presence at court, and membership of the palatine system in general remained a *sine qua non* of social life for anyone in the élite or who aspired to join it, and incorporated all the major routes to achieving high social status.

ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND INCOME

The élite drew its wealth from three possible sources: from rent derived from the exploitation of agriculture and pastoral farming; from involvement in commerce and trade or production of goods; and from service at court and in the imperial administration.⁸⁶ Of these there can be no doubt that the last-named provided, throughout most of the history of the empire, the greatest portion of élite incomes for a significant number of individuals, at least in realizable liquid assets such as gold coin. Throughout the eighth and ninth centuries the evidence suggests that most members of the élite, with the exception of a few important families in the metropolitan area, depended largely if not entirely on the very considerable sums they received in the form of salaries in gold coin and precious silks, and that the acquisition of land was on the whole of secondary importance *from an economic perspective*. This tendency was encouraged by the fact that for much of this period substantial districts even in the well-defended inner provinces were subject to hostile and economically disruptive activity, so that the returns on investment in land were not always promising. The general Tatzates, who fled to the Arabs in 781 as a result of conflict at court, is reported to have taken his wife and “all his property,” a substantial sum, since as a senior commander he will have been in receipt of some tens of pounds of gold coin annually, but apparently not including land.⁸⁷ The emperor Nikephoros I rewarded Michael (later Michael II) and Leo (later Leo V) for betraying Bardanes Tourkos with senior military posts and the grant of some imperial estates.⁸⁸ The annual salary attached to senior military and civil positions ranged from 10 to as much as 40 lbs of gold, in coin, per annum, so that very substantial fortunes in liquid assets could be amassed over a relatively short period. Liudprand of Cremona remarked on the vast sums carried off by various senior officials on the occasion of the annual payment of state salaries before Easter, many of whom needed the assistance of servants to take their gold away. Those of the rank of *magistros* received 24 lbs of gold coin, *patrikioi* received 12 lbs of gold each,

⁸⁶ See the surveys of Cheynet 2006d and 2006e; and for the court, see chapter 9 below.

⁸⁷ Theoph.(de Boor 1883/5), 456. 22f. (trans. Mango and Scott 1997: 629).

⁸⁸ Theoph. cont. (Bekker 1825): 9. 10–12 (although Genesios, ed. Lesmüller-Werner and Thurn 1978: 8. 53f. does not mention the estates). For the management of imperial estates and the role and social position of their curators, see esp. Kaplan 2006c.

and so on down to the lowest-ranking, who received just 1 lb of gold coin. Whether or not Liudprand's figures are accurate, a list of salaries for imperial military governors gives similar indications of the size of such incomes, although we should also bear in mind that the thematic *strategoi* of Asia Minor and the southern Balkan territories, who received *rogai* or salaries ranging from 10 lbs to 40 lbs in gold coin per annum had also to pay for their retainues and households from this sum.⁸⁹ Positions of responsibility in the state apparatus were regularly and unremarkably exploited to the advantage of their holders – Theodore of Studion remarks on the fact that his uncle Plato, while still in his post of imperial *zygostates* (responsible for controlling weights and measures and the purity of the gold coinage), exploited his position in order to amass very considerable wealth, and clearly does not see this as in any way immoral or corrupt – it was the natural and reasonable behavior of such an official.⁹⁰ From the early tenth century the sale of honorific titles was regularized, but eventually became too expensive to maintain – the situation became so bad that under Alexios I the *roga* attached to imperial honorific titles was abolished.⁹¹ A number of senior positions in both eastern and western *themata* were paid directly out of the income of the *thema* in question, either from local commercial taxes or through “customary” levies of one sort or another, and there was plenty of room for exploitation of such positions, given the various other “customary” obligations imposed by the administration on the taxpaying population.⁹² In the eleventh century the magnate and *kouropalates* Smbat Pakourianos, who held properties with an annual rental take of between 3 and 4 lbs in gold, left a fortune of over 340 lbs, most of which must have derived from his state service and not from his lands, although other wills of the eleventh century point to landed estates as a major element in the property of magnates, even if the rental income derived from land was not always impressive.

Land might in theory be a more secure, and more permanent, resource for a family, although – as with the estates of Eustathios Maleinos under Basil II, or Basil the *parakoimomenos* (chamberlain) under John I – confiscation at imperial hands was always a possibility. The Phokas and Skleros families lost much or all of their landed wealth to confiscation.⁹³ Land was always a valuable acquisition, as long as it could be held onto. Exploitation of the opportunities opened by high office in the provinces became a severe problem in the middle and later eleventh century, as the emperors began to sell hitherto non-purchasable posts and as their holders began to maximize what they could extract through their positions. Tax-farming,

⁸⁹ Liudprand (Becker 1915): 157.29–158.34 (Wright 1930: vi, 10 [155f.]). For the schedule of salaries issued to the various military commanders of the empire in the early tenth century, see *De Cer.*, (Reiske 1829): 696f., with the discussion in Oikonomidès 1997: 202–3.

⁹⁰ Theod. Stud., Or. xi. 7 (*Laudatio S. Platonis Hegumeni*, in: *AS April*. I, xlvi–liv; PG 99, 804A–849A [BHG 1553 (= *Oratio funebris a Theodoro Studita*)]).

⁹¹ Oikonomidès 1997: 207–8.

⁹² See Brandes 1983; Oikonomidès 1996a: 114f. For the range of impositions through which a provincial administrator or governor could increase his income, see Oikonomidès 1996b: 86–105.

⁹³ See Hendy 1985: 103–6, 209–14 with sources.

although by no means unusual before this time, appears now to have become a major source of revenue for individuals who took on such contracts as well as a major source of fiscal oppression of the peasantry and small-scale landowners who did not have the patronage or political connections at court to offer effective resistance.⁹⁴ But land could also be exploited on a less permanent basis as the result of a non-transmissible imperial gift made to an individual for a limited period only, in the form of a *charistikion*, which permitted the holder to administer and derive often substantial incomes from imperially-granted estates, for example, for a specified period of tenure. Yet the continued exercise by the rulers of their prerogatives over both public and imperial lands, and their power to confiscate, meant that even apparently secure titles to landed wealth were always potentially under threat, and thus insecure.⁹⁵

As we have seen, therefore, the service élite of the late Roman and Byzantine worlds, while characterized often as a landed élite, was in fact always dependent on more than just land, and indeed at certain periods landed wealth may have played a very small role. Wealth in general terms was extracted predominantly from agricultural production, appropriated as rent paid in a variety of forms to private landlords (including the state, the church,⁹⁶ and monasteries),⁹⁷ and as tax by the state. It was redistributed both through local market exchange and through the disbursements (in cash and in kind) of the central government to the army, bureaucracy, and holders of state titles and pensions. The social élite, both great magnates and local gentry or *archontes*, derived status from the possession of land, but even more so from membership of the imperial system, which was the *sine qua non* for any sort of social esteem.⁹⁸ But from the time of Alexios I, who supported his regime through substantial lifetime or shorter-term grants of state fiscal lands and revenues to individuals of the imperial kin and permitted the extension of a tax-farming system on a more general level across the empire's territories, landed income came to play a somewhat more significant role as it became much more obviously the source of income for those granted such concessions, even if they only rarely became permanent or hereditary. Under his successors John II and Manuel, revenue concessions in *pronoia* were used on a large scale to support the army, again emphasizing the direct association between land and income, again even though such grants were restricted to a lifetime or less.⁹⁹

In contrast, the wealth which the members of this élite would expect to derive from trade and commerce, both during the earlier period of its evolution and in the tenth and eleventh centuries was, in comparison with that derived through rents

⁹⁴ Oikonomidès 1997: 208–11, with examples; Hendy 1985: 204.

⁹⁵ See Cheynet 2006d: 33; 1991; Oikonomidès 1996c; Kaplan 2006b.

⁹⁶ For a good discussion of church lands and wealth, see Kaplan 2006f.

⁹⁷ On monastic landholding and wealth, see Kaplan 2006b, and esp. 2006e; Morris 1985.

⁹⁸ For the system of titles and precedence, and the ways in which the court functioned as the hub of the social universe, see Magdalino 1997; and Kazhdan and McCormick 1997.

⁹⁹ Magdalino 1993: 160–71; Oikonomidès 1997: 211–13; Cheynet 2006b: 28ff.

and state positions, far less socially significant, even if it may not have been economically negligible.¹⁰⁰ During the fifth and sixth centuries it seems that commercial activities, in particular the regular sale of agrarian goods produced specifically to meet local and medium- or long-distance market demands, formed an important element of élite incomes – this can certainly be shown for Egyptian estates, for example, and is highly probable for those in other parts of the empire, including Asia Minor.¹⁰¹ This may well have continued to be the case, where economic conditions allowed, thereafter. Yet importantly, members of the élite who were actually recognized as such, those who received state *rogai*, for example, were prohibited from investing in commerce or from earning more than a certain percentage by investment, restrictions which, even if difficult to enforce and not necessarily strictly observed, nevertheless acted as substantial inhibitors on élite commercial and industrial involvement and at least indicates the lowly status ascribed to such activity for the élite.¹⁰² At the same time, there was a longstanding tradition that the upper strata of society – the Senate in the sixth century, the *archontes* in the twelfth century and after – should simply not be involved in trade and commerce at all.¹⁰³ Again, while the evidence for the considerable and successful involvement of members of the social élite in cities in the late Roman period and in general in the Byzantine period from at least the ninth century is in fact considerable, this is an important point in respect of the “public” and formal value system of the Byzantine élite and the effects of this in terms of their own economic behavior.

There can be no doubt that merchants were an active and significant element in urban economies by the eleventh century, playing an important role in the distribution of locally produced commodities. Some of them were very wealthy, although the evidence is slender.¹⁰⁴ Commercial profit, while frowned upon as potentially a reflection of an immoral exploitation of the poor and weak, and while limited in some respects by notions of “just” and “unjust” profit or gain, was perfectly acceptable, even by theologians.¹⁰⁵ The position of merchants in the process of wealth redistribution as a whole is difficult to gauge, but it cannot have been insignificant, however much the state, at Constantinople and in its metropolitan hinterland, tried to regulate affairs. Yet importantly, they played no role *in ideological terms* in the

¹⁰⁰ See the remarks of Harvey 1989: 226ff.; Oikonomidès 1997: 206f.; Hendy 1985: 561–8. For élite investment and involvement in commerce, see Dagron 2002: 427–9, 442f.; Papagianni 2002.

¹⁰¹ Banaji 2006.

¹⁰² Gerolymatou 2002: 77–8.

¹⁰³ See Papagianni 2002: 1083f.; Gofas 2002; Laiou 1991; 2002a.

¹⁰⁴ The entrepreneur Maurex who helped Alexios Komnenos with troops from his private retinue during the reign of Michael VII seems, according to Bryennios, to have been a private person: Nicephorus Bryennios (Gautier 1975): ii, 26, 27. But if he is to be identified with the Michael Maurex attested on seals for the same period, as seems very likely (*pace* Hendy 1985: 240 n. 111), then his fortune will probably have derived at least as much from state service as from trade or other activities. See Seibt 1978: 168–71.

¹⁰⁵ Laiou 2002b: 1130–6.

maintenance of the empire and in the social order as it was understood.¹⁰⁶ The upper levels of the social élite were supposed to have little interest in their activities, except as suppliers of luxury items on the one hand, and as a means of selling off the surpluses from their own estates in local towns or regular fairs, or the capital, on the other. And even here, the evidence makes it clear that it was more often than not the landlords' own agents who did the selling and buying, rather than independent middlemen.¹⁰⁷ Thus, while there existed a relatively active, albeit more or less entirely inwardly directed commerce, and while there were substantial numbers of merchants and traders and bankers to conduct it, commerce was regarded as marginal, in spite of its actual importance for the redistribution of goods and services within the empire as well as between Byzantium and its neighbors.¹⁰⁸ The interests of merchants were subordinate to the relationship between the political and ideological structure of the central imperial state on the one hand, and to the perceived interests of the social-economic élite on the other. Given the particular problems faced by Byzantine rulers both before 1081 and after the Komnenian reorganization of central government and fiscal administration, this relationship, with its political and cultural/ideological concomitants, rendered an interest in commerce politically and culturally marginal.

It is important to emphasize the fact that this attitude was conditioned by the particular evolutionary trajectory of Byzantine society and state structures over several centuries. It clearly cannot mean that interest in trade and commerce did not exist.¹⁰⁹ It does mean that, for those at the top of the social scale, such activities were perceived as both economically unimportant and socially and culturally demeaning; while for those who were involved in trade it brought no social advancement and, for the most part, no great social wealth. It is perhaps symptomatic that, while there is every reason to think that there existed a flourishing and successful

¹⁰⁶ In the tenth century, for example, descriptions of the political economy of the empire entirely ignored the role of trade: see, for example, the *Tactica* of the emperor Leo VI (Vari 1917–22): xi, 11. Kekaumenos, in the later eleventh century, ignores the role of commerce and merchants entirely in his *Strategikon*. Even in the sixth century commerce was ranked sixth in importance, before wholesalers, and after the priesthood, the law, councils, the state fiscal system, and technicians, according to the opening chapters of a treatise on strategy: Dennis 1985: I, 2 (12). For later Roman attitudes to commerce and banking, see Hendy 1985: 242ff.

¹⁰⁷ See Svoronos 1976: esp. 65ff. (although his conclusion that there was an economic decline during the eleventh century is now generally rejected); Harvey 1989: 238–41 and Hendy 1985: 567 discuss the direct disposal by major producers of agricultural surpluses of their produce and the exclusion of middlemen. See also the discussion of Angold 1984c: 239–40. The direct nature of sales of agricultural surplus, specially grain, is illustrated in Attaleiates' account of the failed imperial attempt to establish a monopoly on sales at the port of Rhaidestos in the 1070s: see Attaleiates (Bekker 1853): 201–4 and the discussion of Harvey 1989: 236–7. Even Isaac Komnenos, the uncle of the emperor Manuel I, whose estates were granted exemptions for 12 small ships, engaged in commerce primarily, it seems, as a means of selling off the surplus of his own properties: see Angold 1984a: 255.

¹⁰⁸ Oikonomides 1993; Laiou 2002a.

¹⁰⁹ Harvey 1989: 225–43; Magdalino 1993: 156–60; Gerolymatou 2002; and references above.

merchant class in the Byzantine empire during much of the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries and after, little is known about it.¹¹⁰ And whatever its position with regard to internal trade, there is no evidence that it actively colonized trade routes and markets outside the limits of the immediate political influence of the empire, except possibly in the brief period from the 1030s to 1080s when merchants and commerce attained a slightly higher status than had been usual under emperors who needed to build up a metropolitan political base. Even in the Black Sea, it was state policy that protected Byzantine commerce, not merchants themselves.¹¹¹ There may well have been an *élite* among merchants, yet merchants as such were not perceived as in any way a part of the social *élite*.

Why this should have been the case is not difficult to see. To begin with, there seems no reason to doubt that the fiscal interests of the state, through direct or indirect means, were clearly disadvantageous to the non-state sector: private merchants, bankers, shipping and so on.¹¹² But it is in this respect that the longer-term historical background must be borne in mind.¹¹³ For by the eleventh century the Byzantine state embodied a particular set of inter-related institutional ways and means of regulating the extraction, distribution, and consumption of resources. This involved in particular what can be characterized as a strongly internalized relationship between consumption and agricultural production, in which the export of finished goods (luxury and non-luxury), the flow of internal commerce between provincial centers, as well as between the provinces and Constantinople, and the movement of raw materials and livestock, were determined to a large extent by three inter-related factors: the demands of the state apparatus (army and fisc) for raw and finished materials and provisions; the state's need for cash revenues (in the form of customs dues and taxes, quite apart from taxes raised from agricultural production) to support mercenary forces and the imperial court;¹¹⁴ and the demands of the imperial capital itself, which dominated regional trade in the western Black Sea and northwest Asia Minor, north Aegean, and south Balkans. What this meant in terms of merchant and shipping activities is that the pattern of supply and demand in the later eleventh and twelfth centuries (and for some centuries prior to that time) was heavily slanted towards Constantinople, which was a gross importer of consumables, and an exporter of demands. This pattern became even more accentuated after the loss of central Anatolia to Seljuk and Türkmen conquerors in the 1070s and 1080s.¹¹⁵ It also meant that trade in the Byzantine world was, for Byzantines, a predominantly inward-looking business: from the provinces to

¹¹⁰ See Harvey 1989: 235–6 on fairs and markets; also Laiou 1990; Hendy 1989: 22–3; Lilie 1984: 285f., 291; for the Balkans, see esp. the important surveys of Ferluga 1987 and 1988.

¹¹¹ See Hendy 1985: 570–90. For Byzantine control over entry to the Black Sea, see the detailed discussion in Lilie 1984: 136–44.

¹¹² Oikonomidès 2002.

¹¹³ See the survey by Laiou 2002c.

¹¹⁴ See Haldon 1992.

¹¹⁵ Harvey 1989: 208f.; Hendy 1989: 19; and 1985: 561ff. for further discussion and literature.

Constantinople, from non-Byzantine regions within the geo-political orbit of the empire to Constantinople and, on a smaller and more localized scale – as far as the numismatic evidence suggests, at any rate – between the provinces.¹¹⁶

On the other hand it is also true that, while state-dominated trade may have had an inhibiting effect in some respects, it may also have encouraged trade and commerce along the routes most exploited by the state itself, precisely because private entrepreneurial activity can take advantage of state shipping and transportation. This is certainly the case for some routes in the later Roman period, for example, particularly between North Africa and Italy, or Egypt and Constantinople. It may also have been true of certain Balkan trading connections.¹¹⁷ There is some evidence that trade across the borders of the state could be considerable: Basil II's threat to impose an embargo on the export of Byzantine agricultural produce to northern Syria in the last years of the tenth century was enough to extract a favorable political and economic deal out of the Fatimid rulers of the region.¹¹⁸ And it has also been argued that long-distance trade by Byzantine merchants before 1204 must have been substantial, given the number of trading ports around the Black Sea, for example, from which Italians were excluded before the Fourth Crusade.¹¹⁹

So, while the material evidence of coins and pottery, as well as the evidence of texts, shows that there was a widespread network of commerce within the empire as well as across its borders, which must have generated considerable wealth for those who were involved in it, it remains the case that commercial and entrepreneurial activity appear to have brought no socially recognized rewards in terms of status and office. The ways in which fiscal resources were assessed, collected, and distributed generated a particular set of administrative-bureaucratic procedures, so that a whole institutional-managerial apparatus evolved, socially and ideologically legitimated and realized in the imperial system of precedence. The close relationship between fiscal apparatus and military organization, especially in respect of the fiscal mechanisms through which troops and state officials in general could be supported, is the dominant feature.¹²⁰ It left little room at the level of production and distribution of wealth for outwardly-directed commercial activity or enterprise. Even when the state farmed fiscal contracts, the opportunities for private entrepreneurial

¹¹⁶ See, for the Balkans, for example, esp. Ferluga 1988; in general for the "Constantinople effect," Hendy 1985: 435–7.

¹¹⁷ See Wickham 1988. The clauses of the Byzantine–Bulgar treaty of 715–718 nicely illustrate the nature of state control: not only was trade permitted by each side on condition that certain political arrangements were respected (such as the return of deserters and traitors on demand of their own government/ruler); licences were issued to those merchants permitted to cross the border, and any trader without such a pass was liable to have his goods confiscated. See Theophanes (de Boor 1883/5): 497 (Mango and Scott 1997: 681) (for 812/3). While the stipulations reflect the mutual suspicion of erstwhile enemies, similar treaties were renewed on several occasions throughout the eighth and ninth centuries. See Ferluga 1988: 163f.

¹¹⁸ Farag 1980.

¹¹⁹ Lilie 1984: 285–9.

¹²⁰ See in particular Haldon 1993, esp. 11ff.

activity were limited, not just by state intervention, but by social convention: what one did with newly-acquired wealth was not invest in independent commercial enterprise, as far as the evidence seems to tell us, but rather in the state apparatus.¹²¹ Titles, imperial sinecures or actual offices, and court positions, were first on the list of priorities. And although land and the rent accruing from landed property (in addition to the ideologically positive realization of self-sufficiency) were important considerations, it is clear that imperial titles and pensions were just as fundamental to the economic position of the power élite. Investment in commerce was marginalized.¹²²

This marks a crucial difference from the Italian maritime merchant cities with which the Byzantines did business in the later eleventh and twelfth centuries, especially Venice, Genoa, and Pisa. To begin with, while the major trading cities possessed an agricultural hinterland from which most members of the urban élite derived an income, leading elements of the élites of these cities were at the same time businessmen whose wealth and political power was often dependent as much on commerce as on rents.¹²³ This was especially true of Venice which, through its position as part of the eastern empire, had been able to secure some commercial advantages already in the late tenth century. Its particularly privileged position within the empire, and the early evolution of its maritime and commercial aspect, is in large part due to this, and to the fact that it played in effect the role of a specialist insider, rather than a competing outsider.¹²⁴ But other cities evolved powerful commercially minded élites too, partly a result of their naval strength (in 1016, for example, a combined Pisan–Genoese fleet defeated Muslim ships off Sardinia and

¹²¹ How the tax- and contract-farmers of the seventh and eighth centuries – especially the *kommerkiaroi* – employed their wealth is impossible to say, although it is clear from their titulature and *Curricula vitae*, as far as they can be reconstructed, that advancement within the imperial service must have been absolutely crucial to their status and social position. See Winkelmann 1985: 135–7; and Haldon 1997: 233ff. with references. Certainly there is plenty of evidence by the tenth century for a healthy market in imperial titles and honoraria: see Lemerle 1967.

¹²² The anonymous writer of the late eleventh-century *Logos Nouthetikos pros basilean* insists upon the dangers inherent in granting dignities and honors to foreigners, for example, which devalues them for both Romans and outsiders: see §8f. (Wassiliewsky and Jernstedt 1896: 95f.). The strength of the notion of self-sufficiency, the history of which goes back to the ancient world, is also evident in the *Stratēgikon* of Kekaumenos, §88 (Wassiliewsky and Jernstedt 1896: 36). See the discussion in Magdalino 1989; and for lack of commercial interest on the part of the dominant élite, Hendy 1985: 567–9.

¹²³ See, for example, Lopez 1937.

¹²⁴ See Hussey 1966: 251–74 for a useful survey of the origins and evolution of Venetian power; also Postan and Rich 1952: 327–36; Martin 1988; and for general accounts, Nicol 1988. The classic and much-quoted example of aristocratic enterprise is of the *doge* Giustiniano Partecipazio, whose will as early as 829 refers to numerous overseas commercial ventures. See Lopez and Raymond 1955: 38–41 (transl. and commentary). The integration of Venetian commerce within the framework of the Byzantine state's control over exchange is well-demonstrated by the efforts of the Byzantine ruler to forbid Venetian trade with state enemies – in 971, for example, the Doge was forbidden to sell on wood from the Balkans, as well as finished goods and weapons, to the Saracens (although the order suggests that this trade was already well-established).

¹²⁵ Postan and Rich 1952: 345–6; Lopez 1937; 1938; Bianchi and Poleggi 1980.

proceeded to occupy the island); their interest in the eastern Mediterranean was particularly enhanced as a result of the naval support they were able to offer the First Crusade and the ensuing privileges they were granted in the Latin territories.¹²⁵ As they evolved during the eleventh and into the twelfth century, the city-states themselves, increasingly politically independent of larger political powers, dominated by such merchant aristocrats and their clients, came to have a vested interest in the maintenance and promotion of as lucrative and advantageous a commerce as possible, so that the economic and political interests of the leading and middling elements were identical with the interests of the city, its political identity, and its independence of outside interference.¹²⁶ Investment in ships, in commercial loans, in political alliances with economic benefits, were thus the business of the “state” as well as of private individuals, and indeed the ruling councils of cities in many cases insisted on maintaining a supervisory, if not always managerial, eye on private business enterprise.¹²⁷ State/communal and private enterprise were inseparable. The evidence for this co-operation is overwhelming, whatever exceptions we might point to. Beginning on a very humble scale with the Venetian–Byzantine treaties of 992 and 1082, greatly stimulated by the results of the first and later crusades, but especially from the later twelfth century, the city governments which represented the interests of their merchant élites and investors negotiated with Byzantine or other rulers – including Muslims – in the east Mediterranean basin for concessions on their commercial activities, activities which were in their turn the basis of these cities’ economic – and therefore their political – power.¹²⁸

The economic and political well-being of the city as state was thus to a large extent coterminous with that of the social élite and its dependants, the two inextricably bound together through the myriad market relationships which successful commercial investments generated in the home context.¹²⁹ This is graphically demonstrated in the Venetian expedition against Byzantium of 1171–1172, which achieved little and, in spite of its superiority in respect of the Byzantine imperial fleet, finally abandoned the Aegean, representing a potentially very serious blow to Venetian commercial interests and thus the interests of the Venetian élite. The Doge was commander of the expedition, and his assassination shortly after his return

¹²⁶ Postan and Rich 1952: 339–40.

¹²⁷ Commissions were despatched from Venice to deal with legal issues arising within the Venetian communities, for example. See Angold 1984a: 200.

¹²⁸ For the most useful general survey see Lilie 1984: 319, who notes the dependence of Venice on its eastern (Byzantine) commercial network, in contrast to the western orientation of Pisa and Genoa before the First Crusade; see also Martin 1988; and for general discussion Hyde 1973 and Abulafia 1987.

¹²⁹ I do not wish to underplay the political or social-economic divisions within the Italian maritime cities, which were at times heavily polarized around particular conflicting factional interests and demands. On the other hand, the structural convergence of interests between the élites on the one hand and the prosperity and political well-being of the cities as corporate bodies seems to me undeniable, and generally accepted.

¹³⁰ Lilie 1984: 493–4.

underlines Venetian attitudes to the relationship between commerce, the well-being of the state, and the position of the ruling élite.¹³⁰ The concordance of private and state concerns is equally clear from an analysis of the relative importance of economic issues, on the one hand (with their political implications), and purely international political concerns, on the other, for Venice and the empire respectively. For as has been convincingly argued, while the emperors were primarily interested in the political (including naval) benefits to be had by alliance with Venice (obtained through concessions on trade), Venice in its turn was keen to maximize its trading privileges, thus cementing its political position in northern Italy and the prevailing social and political structures within the commune. Similar considerations determined Genoese and Pisan relations with the empire.¹³¹ The Byzantine state, in contrast, played no role at all in promoting indigenous enterprise (as far as can be ascertained), whether for political or economic reasons, and viewed commerce as simply another minor source of state income.¹³² And this was precisely because, as noted above, commercial activity was both seen as, and was in reality from a structural point of view, quite marginal to the society, political system, and *Weltanschauung* in which it was rooted.

The answer to the question, why did the Byzantine élite never explicitly involve itself on a major scale in commerce is, therefore, not to be given in terms of the numbers of Italian traders (for the evidence suggests that, during much of the twelfth century, they were relatively few);¹³³ nor again in terms of a purely ideologically based distaste or lack of interest in such activity. Nor again is this development to be seen as simply a failure of an archaic and statist political-economic system to respond to new conditions, both in respect of international commercial relations as well as internal economic growth.¹³⁴ On the contrary, there did exist a relatively active, albeit more or less entirely inwardly directed commerce, and a merchant "class" to conduct it. But their interests were subordinate to the relationship between the political and ideological structure of the central imperial state on the one hand, and to the perceived interests of the élite on the other, a pragmatic concern with admission to and promotion within the imperial palatine hierarchy and with the privileges and power which this entailed. Given the particular problems faced by Byzantine rulers both before 1081 and after the Komnenian reorganization of central government and fiscal administration, this relationship, with its political and cultural/ideological concomitants, rendered an interest in commerce both economically and politically quite irrelevant. While this may at times have been a conscious or willed rejection, it is important to understand that it was conditioned

¹³¹ Lilie 1984: esp. 607–10. On the nature and dynamic of Venetian communal and aristocratic society, see Lane 1973: esp. 91–101; for the events of 1171–1172, see below.

¹³² Although not unimportant: as Lilie's analysis shows, the Byzantine government tried constantly to minimize the concessions it had to grant the Venetians, and later Genoese and Pisans, during the twelfth century in return for their political support: 1984: esp. 103–15.

¹³³ See Lilie 1984: 290–302; Hendy 1985: 590–602.

¹³⁴ Lemerle 1977: 309; and to a degree even Hendy 1989: 21, 48.

¹³⁵ Laiou 1980–1: 193–5.

by the particular evolutionary trajectory of Byzantine society and state structures over several centuries. This does not mean that interest in trade and commerce did not exist. But it does mean that, for those at the top of the social pyramid, it was perceived as both economically unimportant and socially and culturally demeaning; while for those who were involved in trade it brought no social advancement and, for the most part, no great social wealth. There are no Byzantine merchant aristocrats in the period before the Fourth Crusade.

The events of 1204 finally did shatter the old order. After 1261 a re-constituted central imperial state was revived, but it inhabited a very different world indeed, not simply in terms of the well-established political presence of western powers in the east Mediterranean and Aegean regions, but also in terms of its ability to maintain itself. A reduced income derived from the appropriation of surplus through taxes on land on a much smaller, and constantly shrinking, territorial base; the fragmentation of territory and political authority; and the lack of a serious naval power with which to defend its interests, all figure prominently. Income derived from taxes on commerce played a proportionately larger role in real terms as well as in the eyes of the central government. Yet the traditional élite, with few exceptions, was still based on the income from land; while the state itself was unable to compete with Italian and other commercial capital and shipping. There was indeed an attempt in the mid-fourteenth century, under John VI, to exploit the political situation in the Black Sea at the expense of the Genoese and to bolster the position of Byzantine merchants by reducing dues payable at the port of Constantinople, so that they could compete equally with those imposed upon the majority of Italian traders, and thus promote an increase in imperial revenue. But Genoese military and naval power soon restored the situation to the empire's disadvantage.¹³⁵ The emperor's plan reveals the importance of revenues of this sort to the much-reduced empire; but by this time it was too late effectively to change the pattern which had evolved, although a number of Byzantine aristocrats had begun to take an active interest in commerce.¹³⁶ On the whole, and with a few exceptions, "Byzantines" or "Greeks" played a generally subordinate role to Italians, as very small-scale entrepreneurs, as middlemen, and as wholesalers; rarely as bankers or major investors, still more rarely in major commercial contracts. And as has also been argued, the market demands of Italian-borne commerce began also to influence the patterns of production within the empire. The Byzantine state itself no longer had any effective role in managing or directing the production of wealth, and although its élite were absorbed economically, if not culturally, into a wider eastern European or Balkan dominant class in the course of the last century or so of the empire's life, it nevertheless remained closely tied to the imperial court and the principles upon which its self-identity and esteem had always been based.¹³⁷ As before, land continued to play a key role in élite fortunes, but was still subject in the end to imperial authority,

¹³⁶ Laiou 1980–1: 199–205.

¹³⁷ Laiou 1980–1: 189–98.

whether through the award or donations of lands and revenues or through confiscation. The continued structural dependence of the social élite of the empire on the court and on the emperor's support thus gave the Byzantine élite a very different character and complexion from their western and northern European counterparts.

The social élite of the Byzantine world was, by definition, also the group which commanded both wealth and social and political power, and determined the main lines of cultural development in respect of élite literature and material culture. The competition between its members and the factional vested interests they represented was throughout a key structuring element in Byzantine court and provincial politics, just as the efforts of those who belonged to it to secure wealth in the form of imperial positions, or landed property, affected the political relations of the distribution of wealth as well as the social and economic relationships between producers and landlords or landowners. The secular élite was not the only player in this area, of course: the imperial household, the church, and monasteries also represented other sets of vested interests, sometimes working in parallel, sometimes in conflict one with another, and similarly played a role in this complex network of relationships. As the social élite of the empire evolved through several different phases between the sixth and fifteenth centuries, the perceived interests and therefore the political behavior of its members likewise varied and changed. Yet there was no straightforward linear evolution – the complexity of the internal structure of the élite in its broader sense, with clan, family, and factional rivalries playing a key role, with the imperial family and dynastic politics intervening to determine its fate at particular moments, such factors also provided a framework or set of constraints within which such politics and family relationships were effective and could function.

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COURT SOCIETY AND ARISTOCRACY

Paul Magdalino

Of all the groupings – professional or domestic, functional or geographical – that made up Byzantine society, none was more important for its collective identity and cohesion than the imperial court. It was the only unit, apart from the church, that connected to all the others, and it had a single focus in a way that the church did not, since the Byzantine church was the sum of its individual bishoprics, of which the patriarchal Great Church of Constantinople was only the most important. There were thousands of households, hundreds of villages, dozens of towns in addition to the “Ruling City” that dwarfed them all, an equal number of cathedral churches, and at least as many monasteries, but there was only one imperial court – at least until the fragmentation of the empire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which completed the transition from a centralized Byzantine state to a polycentric Byzantine world. The court was also the apex of the two main professional segments of the state, the military and the bureaucracy. As the place where they met, within the framework of one of the medieval world’s greatest and most ancient cities, it was what made Byzantium unique. At the same time, it was the structural feature that Byzantium had most in common with other pre-modern states, and the one to which other contemporary states could relate most easily, overriding religious, linguistic, and cultural differences through the reciprocal protocol of ceremonial display and gift exchange. Court culture was constantly imported and exported, reinforcing the structural similarities between court societies.

As much as, if not more than, other royal courts from Cordoba to Beijing, that of the Byzantine emperor was society’s main hub for the concentration and redistribution of wealth, the performance and communication of government business, decision-making and dispute-settlement, the interface between rulers and ruled, social mobility both upward and downward, the group consciousness of the élite and their competition for individual status within the group. Court society was characterized by a culture of ordered ritual and hierarchy, snobbery and exclusiveness, luxury and display, delight in the rare and exotic, envy and intrigue, favor and

disgrace, service and adulation of the ruler who was by turns conspicuous and concealed. The court imposed a horizontally radial and vertically graded structure on Byzantine society, like the painted dome of a Byzantine church, where Christ is at the still center of concentric, descending orders of attendant beings, ranked according to their status in the celestial hierarchy.¹ The main treatise on Byzantine court ceremonial, compiled on the orders of the emperor Constantine VII between 945 and 959, opens by expressing the wish that the earthly court may imitate the heavens in the order and harmony of its movements.² The reality was perhaps less tidy and systematic, and certainly more full of conflict, than the ceremonial treatises suggest. But the ideal was genuine enough, because it expressed the profound conviction, fundamental to the Byzantine sense of identity, that the emperor was “co-ruler” with Christ and the saints, responsible for the earthly department of the Kingdom of God.³

The terms for court (Greek *aulê* – Latin *aula*) and palace (*palation*) were largely interchangeable, so the short definition of court society is that it was the sum of the people who lived in or frequented the imperial palace.⁴ For most of the period from the foundation of Constantinople in 330 to the conquest of the city by the Fourth Crusade in 1204, the main palace in question was the Great Palace, a vast complex of buildings, courtyards, staircases, and passages that sprawled downhill on a series of terraces from the Hippodrome (now the At-Meidanı in Istanbul) to the sea of Marmara.⁵ The complex was altered and added to almost continually from its creation by Constantine I to the late twelfth century. From the sixth century onwards, all the known additions were made to the lower, southern part, and by the tenth century this lower palace, known as the Boukoleon, had become the main residential and reception area of the imperial household, the old fourth and fifth-century buildings on the upper levels being reserved for special ceremonial occasions and the palace guard units, quartered near the main entrance. The Great Palace remained the seat of government until 1204, but it was never the sole imperial residence. The emperors spent time, especially in summer, at a number of suburban palaces; when they went on campaign, they took a portable palace with them,⁶ and more permanent structures were available in some provincial cities for rare imperial visits.⁷ By the end of the eleventh century, the preferred imperial residence was the palace extending up the hill above the Blachernae church in the northwestern corner of Constantinople.⁸ The Blachernae Palace became the main seat of government after 1204. It was never as large as the Great Palace, but it seems to have formed a similar

¹ Demus 1948: 14 ff.

² Constantine Porphyrogenitus (Vogt 1967): 1–2.

³ Magdalino 2003: 251–4.

⁴ McCormick 2000; Kazhdan and McCormick 1997.

⁵ Müller-Wiener 1977: 25–37; Featherstone 2006.

⁶ Haldon 1990b: 102–9.

⁷ E.g. Adrianople, Mosynopolis, Thessalonica.

⁸ Müller-Wiener 1977: 223–4.

terraced complex of throne-rooms and apartments linked by galleries and courtyards.⁹ Both palaces were fortified. From the end of the seventh century, the entire Great Palace complex had a perimeter wall entered by three main gates, and almost three centuries later, the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969) enclosed the Boukoleon Palace in another set of fortifications, which also had three entry points.¹⁰ The Blachernae Palace is less well documented, in this as in other respects, but it was clearly protected on the western side by the land wall of the city, and fortified on the other sides, with gates to the north and the south. Court society thus moved in a conspicuously enclosed and protected environment, to which access was strictly limited and controlled.

The permanent residents of the palace were the emperor and his nuclear family, their household staff, the palace guards, and certain people who were kept in the palace more or less under duress: political prisoners, conscripted laborers who worked in government workshops, and – probably – the “hostage” children of foreign rulers.¹¹ The clergy who served the palace chapels were also provided with lodgings for the days when they were on duty.¹² All other members of the court, including the close relatives of the imperial couple, lived in their own homes, and were admitted to the palace day by day according to their functions, which involved either attending on the emperor in assemblies and ceremonies, or staffing the various overlapping departments of government: judicial tribunals, financial offices, treasuries, and the secretariat that dealt with petitions, requests, communications, and foreign diplomacy.

The most complete picture of the society to which the court opened its doors is provided by a treatise of 899 detailing the seating order at imperial banquets.¹³ Between Christmas and Epiphany 12 dinners were organized in the ancient hall known as the Triclinium (*triklinos*) of the Nineteen Couches, so-called because the diners ate reclining in the Roman style. The hall accommodated 228 guests, 12 per couch with its adjacent table, plus the emperor, who occupied “high table” with 12 high-ranking “friends.” The Byzantine imperial equivalent of the office Christmas party thus allowed the emperor to issue 2,500 invitations to people who were dependent on him. The Christmas guest list in the treatise of 899 indeed reflects an effort to be inclusive. It included the middle ranks of the bureaucracy, who were invited twice, the staff of the city prefect, and the officers of all the military units stationed in and around the capital: the four élite regiments (*tagmata*), the navy, and the urban militia. One banquet catered entirely to monks of metropolitan monasteries, with their 12 abbots sitting at high table. The so-called “hairy banquet” entertained various groups of barbarians in the emperor’s service. Other special groups of foreigners were represented on the first day: two high-ranking Bulgarian

⁹ Magdalino 2007: XII.

¹⁰ Mango 1997; Bolognesi Recchi-Franceschini and Featherstone 2002.

¹¹ Shepard 2006.

¹² Theophanes Continuatus (Bekker 1838b): 38; Kazhdan and McCormick 1997: 186.

¹³ *Kletorologion* of Philotheos (Oikonomidès 1972): 164–85; Kazhdan and McCormick 1997: 176.

“friends” sat with the emperor, while their retainers occupied a lower table, close to the two tables reserved for Arab captives. On another day, the eunuchs who ran the imperial household and treasuries sat at high table, while the rest of the tables were occupied by poor men in possession of tokens (*sphragidia*) qualifying them for welfare. This was in addition to the table for 12 reserved for the poor at all the other banquets. The penultimate banquet brought together the support staff of the imperial palace, the officers of the city militia, the public doctors, and the administrators of hospitals and old-age homes. The final dinner on Epiphany was for the patriarch, 12 senior bishops, the cathedral clergy of the patriarchate, and the priests and deacons who served the palace chapels.

The Christmas dinner list of 899 is the most generous estimate of court society that appears in Byzantine sources. The tradition it reflects was certainly an old one, possibly as old as the banqueting hall itself, which can have dated from no later than the early fifth century. However, we do not know what happened to the tradition after the last allusion to it in a text of ca. 1040,¹⁴ and it is unlikely that it survived the changes of the late eleventh century, which led, as we shall see, to a drastic reduction in the space, the personnel, and the expenditure of the imperial establishment, and a narrowing of the social base of the imperial dynastic regime. In any case, it is clear that the only thing that all the people on the guest list had in common was their economic dependence on the emperor, which did not necessarily mean belonging to the court on a permanent or regular basis. This was most obviously true of the poor, the monks, the Arab prisoners, the Bulgarian retainers, and the lower ranking officers of the tagmatic regiments, the city militias, and the municipal administration. By contrast, the guests at high table, the twice-invited civil servants and the palace clergy and support staff were insiders to the palace, as were many of the barbarians, since we know that the guard units who manned the palace gates were composed of foreign recruits.

At the same time, the guest lists of 899, though inclusive, contain some notable omissions. While the leaders of the two main circus factions, the Blues and the Greens, officially represented the city populace at high table on two occasions, their subordinates received no invitations, and neither did the officers of the city guilds. Despite the public importance of their activity, they were clearly excluded from the emperor’s dining room. The closest they got to it was on the rare occasions when they acclaimed him in liminal palace areas, or danced for him at lunch.¹⁵ This placed them on the same level as the regular palace performers who provided entertainment at dinner but were not allowed a place at table with the other lowly palace personnel. The most striking omission in the lists is that of women and children. Yet there were clearly “page boys” (*agouroi*, *archontogennemata*) at court, although they rarely emerge from anonymity,¹⁶ and there is ample evidence that while the wives of court dignitaries normally waited for their husbands at home, they also

¹⁴ Michael Psellos (Littlewood 1985): 46.

¹⁵ Constantine Porphyrogenitus (Vogt 1967): Book I, chapters 1–2, 47–63, 72–3.

¹⁶ Haldon 1990b: 226.

formed a separate court, which met in the parts of the palace reserved to the empress and her household of maidservants and eunuchs.¹⁷ Their hierarchy mirrored that of their husbands from whom they derived their titles, with the single exception of the *zoste patrikia*, the “belted female patrician” who was invested in a separate ceremony. Contact between the male and female courts is barely documented, apart from the relationship between emperor and empress, and even here we do not know whether the imperial couple regularly shared the same bed. There are some indications, however, that the segregation apparent in the ninth and tenth-century sources was breaking down in the twelfth century, when empresses accompanied emperors on campaign and women were present at imperial meals.

Byzantine court society, like Byzantine society as a whole, was deeply, one might even say obsessively hierarchical. It is no accident that the main evidence for it comes from ceremonial texts whose major concern is with the order and sequence of personnel; three of them, indeed, are essentially ranking lists.¹⁸ Differences in status, denoted by different titles, were reflected in all manner of other gradations. These were made most visible in the orchestration of court ceremonial: in the clothing worn by each dignitary and in his positioning during processions, banquets, receptions, and audiences. But status was not just cosmetic: it also represented a point on a scale of power and social responsibility, and it carried corresponding material rewards, in the form of salaries, pensions, tax breaks, and opportunities for bribery and corruption. Status was individual, and fostered keen competition between individuals; it was also collective, and the court was one such collectivity. Inclusion in the court was in itself an enviable mark of status, because exclusion literally meant “rustication,” reduction to the status of a *paganos*. A place at court was the surest, if not quite the sole, means of securing aristocratic status.

A classic formulation of what this status meant and how it was achieved is provided by the eleventh-century civil servant and historian, Michael Attaleiates, in his autobiographical introduction to the foundation document he composed for his religious establishment, comprising a small monastery in Constantinople and a hospice at Raidestos, a port town to the west of the capital.¹⁹ Attaleiates came from a provincial place that he does not specify, but which, to judge from his name, must have been the city of Attaleia, modern Antalya, on the south coast of Asia Minor. His family obviously had the means and the connections to put him through an education in Constantinople, as well as providing him with a landed inheritance that in the event he divided among his sisters. Nevertheless, it was his education in “the metropolis of culture” that made Attaleiates what he was satisfied to be: a senior judge, well salaried and propertied, with the high court ranks of *anthypatos* and *patrikios* that entitled their holders to dine at high table in imperial banquets. As he put it, he had been blessed by God “so as to become a member of the senate, in spite of my humble and foreign background, and to be enrolled among the élite

¹⁷ Kazhdan and McCormick 1997: 182–7.

¹⁸ Oikonomidès 1972.

¹⁹ Gautier 1981: 18–20; trans. Thomas and Constantinides Hero 2000: 333.

of the senators (whom the language of old used to call ‘aristocrats’), and among the most illustrious of the civic judges, and to pride myself on public honours.” One was either born to this élite status, or one could acquire it by talent, diligence, and luck or divine providence. There were possibly more openings for newcomers in the eleventh century than there had been or would be at other times, and Attaleiates was fairly specialized in his devotion to the law. Yet the social trajectory he describes, from provincial landowner to court élite via an education and a bureaucratic career, was structurally inherent in the system. John the Lydian and Tribonian had followed it in the sixth century,²⁰ and another historian, Niketas Choniates, would follow it in the twelfth, his surname likewise reflecting his regional origins from Chonai in Phrygia.²¹ Rising through the ranks of the military was a parallel option, though one more likely to be pursued outside Constantinople, and, in Attaleiates’ day, by a foreigner.

Two other points in Attaleiates’ social self-presentation deserve attention, because they are basic to understanding the relationship between court and aristocracy in Byzantium. Firstly, he talks about rising not in the court but in the Senate. While this undoubtedly reflects his personal and civilian preference for describing Byzantine imperial institutions in terms of the ancient Roman tradition with which he, as a lawyer, was particularly familiar, it also represents the constitutional reality of Byzantium’s continuous existence from the Eastern Roman empire of Late Antiquity. The Senate had been the social élite of the Roman empire, as of the Roman republic before Augustus. In Rome, it had been predominantly an hereditary body, whose status had been based on enormous inherited landed wealth – and continued to be so until the middle of the sixth century, well after the abolition of the Western Roman empire. In Constantinople, the extension of the Roman Senate established by Constantine, and subsequently constituted as a separate, eastern body by his son Constantius II, was essentially a service élite, whose members depended less on their inherited means than on the rewards of participation in government and proximity to the emperor.²² The Byzantine Senate was thus largely identical with the imperial court, and the classical names by which it was known – mainly *synkletos* (literally “convocation”), less frequently *boule* (council) or *gerousia* (“assembly of elders,” the Greek equivalent of Latin *senatus*) – are used with what often seems like meaningless inconsistency. Most frequently they apply indiscriminately to the entire assembly of dignitaries attending on the emperor, but at times they clearly refer to civilian as opposed to military officials, and at others they exclude the emperor’s relatives. Some sections of ceremonial texts even restrict the term *synkletos* to the holders of those titles, like consul (*hypatos*), that had been exclusively senatorial in ancient Rome. The distinction between the Senate and the senatorial order in Byzantium creates yet further uncertainty. Nevertheless, the persistence of senatorial terminology in Byzantine sources to the very end of the empire is significant.

²⁰ Maas 1992; Honoré 1978.

²¹ Van Dieten 1971.

²² Haldon 1990a: 160–72; Heather 1998.

It signifies a concern to preserve an important dimension of the Byzantine state's Roman identity, to identify its aristocracy, and its court, with the "Reigning City" of New Rome. The Senate was essential to the reality and the image of the empire as a state, a *res publica* or *politeia*, that was more than a household domain or a tribal chieftaincy. Its presence gave at least an aura of public consensus and legitimacy to the emperor's decisions, and, together with the church, it ensured continuity of the state between the death or deposition of one ruler and the installation of his successor. Convened by and presided over by the emperor or his deputy, the Senate was at least a consultative and judicial, and often a deliberative body. Constituted as the Senate, moreover, the court aristocracy had a collective identity through a horizontal bond that was more than the sum of the vertical, personal ties of service binding each individual to the emperor. Senators also enjoyed, from Roman times, a distinct legal status that carried certain privileges, such as exemption from judicial torture and the requirement to testify in court, in addition to imposing restrictions, for example on the rate of interest they could charge and on the class of people they could marry. In the twelfth century, the emperor Manuel I invoked the laws forbidding "dishonorable" marriages in order to prevent lesser bureaucrats from marrying imperial relatives.²³

The other point of interest arising from Attaleiates' evocation of his own social status is his use of the word "aristocrats" (*aristokratikoi*) to describe the class which he entered by being "enrolled among the élite of the senators." Thus, somewhat surprisingly in view of the Greek origin of the word, Attaleiates is in fact the only Byzantine author to call the aristocracy the aristocracy,²⁴ and he signals his eccentricity by noting that the term came from "the language of old" (*palaaios logos*). Other authors refer to "those in rank," "the glorious," "the illustrious," "the notables"; imperial legislation of the tenth century famously divided society into the "powerful" (*dynatoi*) and the "poor."²⁵ The most common expression, which persisted from antiquity into Modern Greek and comes closest to the English idea of the "ruling class," was simply *archontes*, meaning both "rulers" and "magistrates." Byzantine avoidance of the term "aristocracy" has even cast doubt upon the validity of its usage in modern scholarship. This seems excessive: the Byzantines did not have single words for "diplomacy" and "courtier," but the phenomena are not modern or western inventions, and their existence could be postulated in any monarchical state even where specific evidence is lacking – which is certainly not the case in Byzantium. So it is with "aristocracy." It can certainly be true that modern terms for modern institutions, or for those specific to a particular past time and place (e.g. "salon" and "mandarin"), come laden with connotations that are at best colorfully opaque and at worst downright misleading. They are particularly insidious when they correspond etymologically to terms in the culture being studied.

²³ Magdalino 1993: 211, 213.

²⁴ Also in his historical work (Pérez Martín 2002): 40, where he divides the city populace into *aristokratikoi* and *demotikoi* (common people).

²⁵ Morris 1976.

In this respect, the rarity of “aristocracy” and its cognates in Byzantine social terminology is a strong recommendation for applying it to Byzantium. It is certainly less inappropriate than “nobility,” the obvious English alternative, which properly describes the social élite of the “anciens régimes” of late medieval and early modern Europe, although it has become equally at home in studies of ancient Greece and Rome.

COURT ARISTOCRACY, COURT AND ARISTOCRACY

Yet the court was not all aristocracy, and there was more to the aristocracy than the court. What differentiated the court aristocracy from the rest of court society, and how decisive exactly was the court for the functioning of those components that define an aristocracy in any society: rank, power, wealth, kinship, and lineage?

The fundamental ancient polarization between freedom and slavery carried into the Middle Ages, both eastern and western; notions of honor and nobility persisted, and continued to be informed by the perception that the occupations which made up the “service sector” of society were inherently vile, because they were dangerous, disagreeable, or undignified, because they excluded leisure pursuits like literature and hunting, and because they inevitably tended to be performed by slaves and ex-slaves. The aristocrat in principle did not serve, but demanded and commanded the services of others. The dividing line at court would therefore seem to have been between working “at the palace” and “in the palace,” between those who were invited there and those who were employed, those who conspicuously participated in ceremonial and those who humbly waited on them, amused them, or ministered behind the scenes. In the case of the army of laboring menials who were needed to make the palace run – the entertainers, cooks, cleaners, handymen, gardeners, grooms, and gamekeepers – the division can be assumed without argument, although it is completely invisible in the sources. But for the rest of court society, the simple distinction between servants and served is subject to two serious qualifications, neither of them exclusive to Byzantium, although the Byzantine variants were distinctive.

The first is that many of those who served the emperor were themselves heads of households in urban or suburban *oikoi* which, in architectural form, costly décor, and staffing were microcosms of the imperial palace.²⁶

The second is that in a pyramidal structure of power and social patronage, the persons with the easiest and most frequent access to the monarch at the top are the menials in his household: the people who put him to bed and wake him up, serve him at table, prepare his bath and dress him – and by extension look after his clothes and his most treasured personal possessions. Such servants not only have no screen between themselves and the source of all power, but they themselves form a very

²⁶ Magdalino 1991: no. II.

effective screen to all others, including the monarch's close relatives and chief public ministers. They therefore occupy key positions of trust, whence power, and ultimately status. In the Late Roman empire and its Byzantine continuation, the imperial household was run by the eunuchs of the Bedchamber (Latin *cubiculum*, Greek *kouboukleion*).²⁷

Eunuchs as domestic servants had featured large in the Acheminid, Parthian, and Sassanian monarchies of Persia; their adoption in Rome is traditionally associated with the Tetrarchy of Diocletian and his supposed transformation of the imperial regime from a civic Principate to an oriental-style Dominate, with a more elaborate court ritual that elevated the emperor into a semi-divine figure resplendent in gold and jeweled insignia. The credit may rather belong to Constantine, but either way, a eunuch-staffed imperial household was an integral, and very prominent feature of palace society from the foundation of Constantinople. The social and political importance of the palace eunuchs, headed by the *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, is clear from the resentment that they aroused, as expressed in the abuse with which they are regularly mentioned in sources from the fourth to the eleventh century, their socially-engineered disability being treated as an automatic cause of moral degeneracy. Several *praepositi* in the fourth and fifth centuries – Eusebius, Eutropius, Lausus, Antiochus, Chrysaphius, Urbicius – rose to dominate the bureaucracy and state finances, and to exercise decisive influence on imperial policy and appointments. From 963 to 985 the state was effectively run by the *parakoimomenos* Basil, the castrated illegitimate son of Romanos I, and from 1034 to 1042 even greater power was wielded by the eunuch John the Orphanotrophos, who engineered his brother's and his nephew's succession to the throne. These were only the most prominent individuals; a series of eunuch advisers, administrators, and even generals are recorded throughout the period, and the chief finance minister, the *sakellarios*, was normally appointed from the Bedchamber staff. Their careers are not just individual success stories, but reflect the importance of the emperor's – and the empress's – households as a social group. And it was their rapid social mobility as a group that largely explains the resentment against palace eunuchs. The individuals we know about in the fourth to sixth centuries seem to have come as slaves from Persia and the Caucasus. This form of recruitment, though more likely from other areas, cannot have disappeared entirely in later centuries, when Byzantium, like other Mediterranean powers, tapped into and maintained a flourishing slave trade. But domestic production was already under way in 423, when it is recorded that after a crop failure in Paphlagonia, in northern Asia Minor, the local people castrated their sons to sell as slaves.²⁸ Despite renewed legislation by Justinian (Novel 142 of 558) to forbid the castration of Roman citizens, Paphlagonia remained a major supplier, and by the ninth century the provision of eunuchs for court service was a mainstay of the local economy, with locals raising male children expressly for this purpose. Three leading court eunuchs of the tenth and eleventh

²⁷ See in general Tougher 2002; Ringrose 2003.

²⁸ Cedrenus (Bekker 1838a): I, 590.

centuries were Paphlagonians: Constantine under Leo VI; Joseph Bringas under Constantine VII; and the above-mentioned John the Orphanotrophos, who grew up in the household of Basil II before playing a decisive role in the fortunes of Basil's successors.²⁹

Because they were initially of servile origin, and also because they were not considered complete human beings, eunuchs had certain restrictions on their status: they could not become emperor or hold certain other titles in the hierarchy, and they could not adopt children until Leo VI changed the law at the beginning of the tenth century. But a number of court titles were open to them, including, most importantly in the ninth and tenth centuries, those of *patrikios* and *protospatharios*, and as we have seen, the 12 most senior household eunuchs sat on high table with the emperor at one of the Christmas banquets. In some ways, the titled eunuchs of the Bedchamber were the court aristocracy par excellence, since they were the only dignitaries, apart from the core imperial family, who permanently inhabited the palace and surrounded the imperial persons. Their wealth derived exclusively from their service to the emperor. Their very sexlessness gave them a kind of ethereal superiority, which both imperial and religious ideology found attractive: flitting about the palace in their white robes and with their gold rods, ushering, beckoning, and delivering messages, they resembled the bodiless angels surrounding the throne of God. Angels in heaven were accordingly depicted as eunuchs, although archangels out of heaven were depicted in imperial attire, perhaps symbolic of the way in which eunuch envoys were meant to personify imperial authority outside the palace. The celibacy of eunuchs gave them a natural affinity with the monastic life; a number of eunuch monasteries are known,³⁰ and court eunuchs were munificent patrons of monasticism and the associated art and literature, all the more so because they did not have the same family obligations as their "bearded" senatorial colleagues. Indeed, those who originated as barbarian slaves can have had hardly any next of kin within the empire. Things were clearly different with the court eunuchs of provincial origin, who seem to have been castrated for the express purpose of improving their families' fortunes. One can assume that they used their positions not only to send money to their relatives, but also to advance the careers of their parents, siblings, and nephews. This was clearly the case with John the Orphanotrophos, and similar if less spectacular patronage can be seen at work in other Paphlagonian families, like that of the future Symeon the New Theologian, enrolled in the Bedchamber thanks to his uncle who served there, and that of the future emperor Michael Bringas, who must have owed his post in the Military Bureau (*stratitikon*) to a connection established in an earlier generation by the eunuch Joseph Bringas, the only other known bearer of his surname.

Thus the service personnel of the imperial household were not marginal or inferior to the court aristocracy, but represented that aristocracy in its purest form. This is evident in the later evolution of their titles and roles. Eunuchs continued to staff

²⁹ Magdalino 1998.

³⁰ Tougher 2006.

the imperial household until the very end of the empire, but they figure much less prominently in sources of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and, from the end of the eleventh, certain household roles were being performed, at least on ceremonial occasions, by members of the imperial family: Head of the Wardrobe (*proto-vestiarios*); Butler (*epi tes trapezes*); Seneschal (*epikernes*). This was symptomatic of the greater emphasis on kinship and lineage that came to characterize the imperial regime under the Komnenoi and Palaiologoi, and it paralleled, or perhaps even consciously echoed, a similar evolution in the “feudal” monarchies of the medieval west. The similarity shows that the structure and dynamics of court society, at least in the Roman and Christian tradition, inherently relied on an inversion of the traditional polarity between honorable free status and degrading servitude.

This is the second difficulty in trying to define the court aristocracy in terms of a distinction between servants and served. In a social milieu where all serve the monarch, and serving him personally is a means to, and becomes a mark of, superior status, where does one draw the line between honorable and dishonorable service, or between service and servitude? The question is complicated by the fact that in Byzantium all public officials and title holders, with the exception of the emperor’s close relatives, described themselves as his “slaves” (*douloi*). The usage consciously echoed religious practice, whereby all Christians were regarded as the slaves of God, and were designated as such, individually and by name, in the formula spoken by the priest every time they received communion: “The *doulos* (feminine *doule*) of God X receives the Body and Blood . . .”. Since it was axiomatic that all Christians enjoyed equal opportunity before God, and since the analogy between service to God and service to the emperor was deeply ingrained in the Byzantine conception of religious duty, the implications for court society were not lost on rulers or ruled. The reign of Justinian I was a defining moment, which the historical record defines, characteristically for Byzantium, in terms of court ceremonial and attendance. In his vitriolic *Anecdota*, Procopius of Caesarea concludes his denunciation of Justinian’s innovations with an account of how both Justinian and Theodora required the senators to prostrate themselves on the floor when entering the imperial presence. They also insisted on being addressed as *Despotes* and *Despoina* (“Master” and “Mistress”), and on all other government officials being referred to as “slaves.” Procopius connects this development with increased, enforced attendance at court: “and whereas in former times very few persons entered the Palace, and that too with difficulty,” under Justinian and Theodora, “both magistrates and all others remained constantly in the Palace.” Formerly, magistrates had worked at home, but now “these rulers . . . compelled everybody to dance attendance upon them in most servile fashion.”³¹ The *Anecdota* is notoriously overstated, yet the terminology and the ceremonial acts it presents are instantly recognizable from later Byzantine sources. It undoubtedly reflects a tension that Justinian was increasing between hierarchy of status and equality of service at court. The logic of the situation was that some servants were more equal than others, and

³¹ Procopius, *Anecdota*: 30.21–31 (354–9) (Dewing 1935).

this is exactly the conclusion drawn by Symeon the New Theologian writing around the year 1000, when the system that Procopius describes under construction had been in place for almost 500 years. Symeon uses the inequality of the court hierarchy on earth to illustrate the unequal levels of service to God that result from failure to seize the equal opportunities available to all:³²

Who, would we say, are those who truly serve the earthly emperor? Those who spend their time in their own houses, or those who follow him everywhere? Those who reside on their estates, or those who are enrolled in the army? Those who fall to enjoying themselves at home in a life of dissipation, or those who perform heroic feats, receive wounds and inflict them on the enemy in turn, rescuing their fellow slaves and putting the enemy to shame? The goldsmiths and coppersmiths and masons who are always working and yet barely manage to provide for their own and their families' bodily needs, or the generals and chiliarchs and other officers and the retinues [*laoi*] commanded by them? Is it not obvious that the latter rather than the former are those who truly serve the earthly emperor? For the coppersmith and the goldsmith and the builder, if they do a piece of work for the emperor, receive the agreed wage from his underlings and return home like strangers and outsiders, neither seeing the emperor nor having any acquaintance of friendship with him. But the generals and officers are all acquaintances, even friends, of the emperor, and so, through them, are the retinues subordinate to each.

Despite its religious message, this is a precise social description of the court aristocracy from a writer who had served at court, and it rings true in the context of other evidence, even down to its more questionable details. It is interesting and revealing in several particulars: (1) it excludes not only the tradesmen who maintain the material environment of the palace, but also the "gentry" who can afford – or are obliged – to opt out of service; (2) service is treated as military service, perhaps because this is assumed to be superior, or perhaps because palace and household service is tacitly included as being by definition in the emperor's presence; (3) it includes not only those superior military officers who serve the emperor directly, but also their "men" who serve in their retinues; (4) "true" service involves acquaintance and even friendship with the emperor, both for the commanders and for their subordinates. In the strict sense, the picture corresponds to the list of officers who accompany the emperor on campaign;³³ in a wider sense, it is the guest list for Christmas dinner minus the poor, the clergy, and the foreigners. It confirms that the court aristocracy around the year 1000 was functionally and ideologically an aristocracy of service, which included the whole of court society apart from the menials who were dismissed when they had done their jobs and received their wages. The difference in status between the service aristocracy and the rest of society was more significant than differences in rank within the service system. At the same time, in being inclusive, Symeon registers a distinction, corresponding to the

³² Darrouzès 1967: 70.

³³ Haldon 1990b.

difference between high table and the other tables in the guest lists, between imperial servants and their servants, between imperial friends and imperial acquaintances. Later centuries would accentuate these differences in rank within the court aristocracy, and the differences in titles, wealth, and lineage that they involved.

RANK, TITLE, AND OFFICE

Ranking at court was determined by titles and offices. In the Later Roman empire, the title of *clarissimus*, which conferred senatorial rank until the sixth century, could be inherited. Otherwise, all public titles and offices were bestowed by the emperor, even if the lower ones were procured by higher-ranking intermediary patrons. The names of titles and offices, and the exact functions of the latter, changed considerably over the period from 330 to 1453, as did the relationship between title and office. In the early and middle periods, they tended to form parallel hierarchies, one of honors without specified functions, and the other of specific administrative and military duties. In this situation, it was normal, though not invariable, to hold both title and office, with the same honorific title being held by several people, and functional offices being specific to individuals. Each dignity thus tended to form a status band, within which individual ranks were graded according to the scale of office functions. However, it was always possible to hold a dignity without a formal office, and vice-versa. In the last three centuries of Byzantium, dignities and offices increasingly merged into a single ranking list, from which individuals held single titles, or more rarely a cumulation of titles, that might or might not carry a regular function. By this time, however, another hierarchy was formally operating, that of kinship to the reigning emperor.

The Byzantine system of honors and duties originated in the fourth century with the creation of a Senate in Constantinople, and its expansion to include the senior members of a rapidly expanding bureaucracy in the eastern provinces.³⁴ Holding high office, as a prefect, an army commander, or a palatine minister, thus qualified provincials of the curial class (the families represented on local town councils), or even lower, for the title of *clarissimus*. Eventually high office holders came to form, within the ranks of the *clarissimi*, an inner, graded élite distinguished by the more elevated titles of *spectabilis*, and *illustris*, with the top *illustres* being further distinguished as *gloriosi*. In addition, there were the ancient annual consulship, now more a dignity than an office, and the patriciate, revived by Constantine. The duties that went with all these positions required some appearance at court, which intensified, as we have seen, under Justinian, and often involved residence in Constantinople. However, provincial governorships and frontier commands were exercised far from the capital in an empire that was still territorially vast. Tenures were usually, moreover, of short duration, giving ex-office holders the option of retiring to their native

³⁴ Heather 1998.

cities as titled and influential *honorati*, where together with the *cohortales*, the officers on the staffs of the local prefectures and military units, they constituted an aristocracy that was both court oriented and locally rooted. At the same time, not all those who remained at court and lived in Constantinople lost interest in their provincial roots.³⁵ This aristocracy played an important part in holding the empire together, until most of it fell away under the impact of invasions in the late sixth century and throughout the seventh. By then, gravitation to Constantinople had become the only option for those who possessed or desired imperial court titles.

The loss of vast territories in Africa and the East, the insecurity and often ruin of urban life in the Balkans and Asia Minor, and the increased militarization of rural society in response to the invasion threat led to far-reaching changes in both the social base and the administrative structure of the imperial court.³⁶ The Late Roman system of titles and offices went into a state of flux which continued to function but did not take clear shape until the ninth century, when protocol lists and seals document the emergence of two new parallel hierarchies, the honorific “dignities by award” (*axiai dia brabeiou*) and the functional “dignities by word” (*axiai di logou*).³⁷ The former were conferred in formal investment ceremonies and the latter by letters of appointment. The main change in the honorific list was the disappearance of the old senatorial grades based on epithets and their replacement by titles of offices which had lost their original functions. Such, at the top of the scale, was the old ministerial title of *magistros*; further down, that of *protospatharios*, which now marked the lower limit of the “senate,” had formerly applied to the chief of a corps of eunuch bodyguards. The hierarchy of offices was marked by the appearance of new military commands, both in the provinces (the *strategoi* of the *themata*) and at the center (the *domestikoi* of the *tagmata*), and by the elevation of former bureaucratic subordinates, the *logothetai* and *chartoularioi*, to ministerial status. Two basic principles applied: (1) military commanders ranked above civilian ministers, and those holding eastern commands were senior to their western colleagues; (2) among holders of the same honorific title, those with offices ranked senior to those without, and eunuchs had precedence over the *barbatoi* (bearded men). Honorific titles brought a salary (*roga*), and certain of them could be purchased for large cash payments as a combination of social and financial investment.³⁸

This system continued to operate with further refinements – new titles to honor specific individuals, new offices as the provincial command structure continued to evolve – until the late eleventh century. There was an increasing tendency for individuals to accumulate several titles and offices, and for titles to proliferate at the provincial level. A well-documented and probably typical example of a provincial dignity is the *protospatharios* Boilas, known from his testament that he drew up

³⁵ Sarris 2006.

³⁶ Haldon 1990a.

³⁷ *Kletorologion* of Philotheos (Oikonomidès 1972).

³⁸ Oikonomidès 1997.

in 1059.³⁹ He was a Cappadocian who never visited Constantinople, and spent his whole career in the service of a higher court dignitary, which enabled him, though largely through his own efforts, to leave his two daughters a modest landed estate on the eastern frontier. Boilas belonged to the last generation in which the title of *protospatharios* meant something. By the end of the eleventh century, it had dropped off the honors list, along with *magistros*, *patrikios*, and many others. Like the coinage in which their attendant salaries were paid, they had become devalued through inflated distribution by insecure emperors buying support against their internal and external enemies.⁴⁰

The inflation was brought to an end by Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118), who needed both to reduce expenditure and to privilege the influential families on whom he counted, notably his own, with titles that reflected their share in the exercise of power.⁴¹ Thus while phasing out the older titles, he implemented a new scale of dignities based on the epithet *sebastos*. This, the Greek equivalent of Latin *augustus*, had originally been reserved exclusively to the emperor, until, from the mid-eleventh century, it was used to honor certain exceptional individuals, including Alexios himself before he seized the throne. By extending it, in various gradations, to his extended family and to a few foreign princes, such as the Doge of Venice and the Armenian warlord Philaretos in Cilicia, Alexios created, within a generation, a new court élite. This included all the top military commanders and some civilian ministers, but office was less crucial than title, which depended on proximity, mainly through kinship, to the emperor. The *sebastos* title added in effect a new, Komnenian, top tier to the court aristocracy over and above the traditional, senatorial aristocracy of service. This, however, continued to exist under Alexios and his successors, who legislated to maintain the integrity of senatorial status, and made up for the redundancy of most old titles, partly by extending one or two that remained (*nobelissimos*, *curopalates*, both of Latin origin), and partly by reviving the late antique senatorial ranks of *illustris* and *gloriosus*, amplified in their Greek form with prefixes and suffixes as *megalepiphanestatos* and *megalodoxotatos*. The *sebastos* title was also subject to amplification, which reached its limit in the late twelfth century with *panhypersebastohypertatos* (“all-super, most exalted *sebastos*”). By this time, the proliferation of the new court élite was again causing title inflation. Already in the reign of Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180), the *sebastoi* had been pushed down the hierarchy by the emperor’s uncles, nephews, cousins, and *gambroi* (husbands of his sisters, nieces, and female cousins), who needed no titulature other than their kinship. In 1187, there were about 1,000 aristocrats present at court for Isaac II Angelos to muster against the rebel Alexios Branas – they obviously did not include those of the élite who had taken Branas’ side (Chon. 384).⁴² It is therefore perhaps not so surprising or shocking that the next emperor, Alexios III, raised

³⁹ Lemerle 1977:15–63; Vryonis 1957; Magdalino 1991: no. II, 98.

⁴⁰ Cheynet 2006: no. VI.

⁴¹ Magdalino 1993: chap. 3.

⁴² Van Dieten 1975: 384.

money by making the *sebastos* title available to merchants and foreigners (Chon. 484).⁴³ There was no further attempt to revalue the system by inventing a new top titlature for the court élite. The fragmentation of the empire following the Fourth Crusade, which was only partially and briefly reversed in 1261, left no room, or need, for systematic reform. Office, kinship, and family name were sufficient markers of court status. The late fourteenth-century ceremonial treatise known as Pseudo-Kodinos, the first and the last of its kind in Byzantium since the tenth century, lists a single hierarchy of *offikia*, which probably reflects, in essence, the ranking system that had prevailed since 1204, long before these offices had lost all but their ceremonial function. Lower down the aristocratic scale, the retainers of the senior dignitaries often held important administrative posts, but were rarely titled after the eleventh century: socially each was identified as the “man” (*anthropos*), “familiar” (*oikeios*), “servant” (*oiketes*), or, more rarely, the “subordinate” (*hypotagatos*) of a magnate whom he referred to as “lord” (*authentēs*). Service at this level could easily be perceived as dishonorable drudgery.⁴⁴

WEALTH, INCOME, AND LAND

It is accepted, on the basis of reliable but impressionistic evidence, that the court aristocracy was by far the wealthiest section of Byzantine secular society, and that most of its income derived from the exploitation of agricultural and pastoral land. What proportion of the empire’s exploitable land they actually owned, with the right to transmit it by sale or bequest, at any one time is impossible to estimate, as is the proportion of their income that they derived from their private property. There were clearly enormous variations within the aristocracy. At one extreme, the household eunuchs depended entirely on the salaries, fees, and gifts they received in their role as the emperor’s “screen.” At the other extreme, it was apparently possible to live a comfortable, even affluent life on an inherited provincial estate, with no ties to the court beyond a modest title and a highly placed friend. If we are to believe the sources, two prosperous provincial landowners of the eighth and ninth centuries, Philaretos in Asia Minor and the widow Danielis in the Peloponnese,⁴⁵ lacked even these remote court connections before each became personally connected, the former with Constantine VI and the latter with the future Basil I. In the eleventh century, Kekaumenos⁴⁶ and, as we have seen, St Symeon the New Theologian, both envisage comfortable self-sufficiency as a theoretical option. However, it was difficult to increase wealth outside government service, and difficult, without inside connections, to maintain inherited property against the often arbitrary

⁴³ Van Dieten 1975: 484.

⁴⁴ Kazhdan and Ronchey 1997: 187–90; Magdalino 1993: 189–90, 337–52.

⁴⁵ Philaretos: Rydén 2002; Danielis: Bekker 1838b: 226–8, 316–21; Hendy 1985: 206–8.

⁴⁶ Wassiliewsky and Jernstedt 1896/1965: 36.

demands of fiscal officials and the often violent encroachment of rival claimants and predatory neighbors. These perennial facts of life in Byzantium, as indeed in all pre-democratic centralized states, together with the evidence for individuals, suggest that most court aristocrats fell around the middle of the range between the totally “kept” eunuchs and the totally self-sufficient country gentlemen: in other words, they topped up the income from their estates, and maintained or increased the level of their holdings, with privileges granted by the emperor and resources mediated via the court from taxation or rents from state land.⁴⁷

There were naturally fluctuations over time, the most significant being that which accompanied the disappearance of the Late Roman senatorial titles. From the fourth to the sixth century, the Senate of Constantinople, although collectively possessed of less hereditary real estate than its Roman parent, included some individuals, like the Roman noblewoman Anicia Juliana and the Egyptian Apions, whose income from their enormous family domains dwarfed anything they could have gained in government service. In the following two centuries of invasion and upheaval, we lose track of the senatorial families, and the only estates that can be assumed to have continued in senatorial ownership are the domains (*proasteia*) around the Sea of Marmara and in Aegean Thrace that are sporadically mentioned in the sources, often because they were donated to or converted into monasteries. These *proasteia* in the hinterland of Constantinople await systematic study, but one does not have the impression that they were vast *latifundia*, or that they were all transmitted by unbroken hereditary succession; indeed, the significant number that bear family names of the ninth and tenth centuries suggest that they passed through at least one phase of reversion to the state, by confiscation or intestacy, before being granted out again to imperial favorites. Aristocratic houses in Constantinople were subject to similar recycling. Imperial gifts are also most likely to have been at the origin of the large landholdings that certain military families – notably those of Phokas, Maleinos, Doukas, Argyros, Skleros – accumulated in central and eastern Asia Minor from the ninth to the eleventh century. Their ability to increase their holdings by purchase came partly from their court salaries, and partly from their service in the empire’s increasingly successful wars against the Arabs: both salaries and the spoils of war could be enormous.⁴⁸ Tenth-century imperial legislation to limit the buying out of peasant small-holders was thus directed not at landed magnates independent of court patronage, but at men with court titles who had become powerful (*dynatoi*) in imperial service.⁴⁹ And while the civil wars that pitted the two leading families of Asia Minor, the Phokades and the Skleroi, against each other from 976 to 989, may have marked the climax of a systematic aristocratic accumulation of land, they were fought for control of the palace, and they were fought through the exercise of military commands in the court list of “dignities by word.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Cheynet 2006: no. IV.

⁴⁸ E.g. Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, VI, 10 (Bekker 1915: 158); Martin-Hisard 1991: 91.

⁴⁹ Morris 1976.

⁵⁰ Holmes 2005.

The court was equally if not more directly involved in the next major concentration of wealth in aristocratic hands, that which accompanied the creation of the *sebastos* élite by Alexios I after 1081. Literary and documentary evidence shows that Alexios bestowed enormous resources, both in land and in the revenues from state land, on his relatives and certain of his servants that literally allowed them to live like kings.⁵¹ These grants, and those made by subsequent emperors, were at the origins of the huge landed fortunes that persisted through all the changes of dynasty and titulature as long as the empire still had territory attached to it. One such fortune, which must have been the last of its kind, is described by its owner, John Kantakouzenos: when he assumed power at Didymoteichon in 1341, his movable wealth that was seized by the regency government of John V consisted of the following: countless amounts of money deposited in Constantinople and other cities, 50,000 head of cattle, 1,000 pairs of plough oxen, 2,500 mares, 200 camels, 300 mules, 500 asses, 50,000 pigs, 70,000 sheep, and innumerable quantities of grain.⁵² Most of the land which yielded these assets had no doubt come to Kantakouzenos from his parents, but it was inseparable from the status at the very center and apex of court society that he considered his birthright. It was all part of the nobility (*eugeneia*) by which the Byzantine aristocracy set such store in its declining years, and of which Kantakouzenos was the ultimate spokesman.

FAMILY, KINSHIP, AND LINEAGE

It is repeatedly emphasized that nobility, *eugeneia*, was not a juridical status in Byzantium, that the nobility did not constitute an “estate of the realm.” However, as we have seen, Byzantium did retain from Rome the legal concept of senatorial status and privilege, along with the assumption that the children of senators were well born (*eugeneis*), and that although titled rank, like the imperial office itself, was not hereditary, to be next of descending kin was a qualification to be next in line. There was never a time when kinship and lineage did not count for the court aristocracy, although insistence was not strong until the eleventh century, and lineages are hard to trace before the appearance of surnames from the late eighth century.⁵³ The main problem is that of knowing how families conserved lineages over the centuries, especially in view of the church’s legislation, backed by authoritarian emperors, to prevent marriage among kinsmen and multiple marriages between the same two kin groups.⁵⁴ We can only surmise that neither title and office-holding nor hereditary real estate was sufficient in itself to maintain aristocratic status and lifestyle from generation to generation.

⁵¹ Hendy 1985: 85–9.

⁵² John Kantakouzenos, ed. Schopen 1831: 184–5.

⁵³ Basic is Cheynet 2006: nos. I and III.

⁵⁴ Patlagean 2007: 85ff.

Around 900, the emperor Leo VI assumed that a general would normally be of good birth.⁵⁵ Two centuries later, there was no other option, as first the Doukas emperors and then the Komnenoi grafted aristocratic kinship and lineage values on to the imperial office itself. Degree of kinship to the reigning emperor became a mark of rank, and descent from a Doukas or Komnenos emperor or his sibling became the ultimate hallmark of nobility, signaled by adding the names Komnenos or Doukas to one's patronymic family name. As the thirteenth century progressed, other names joined the string, the most important being those of Angelos, Branas, Raoul, Kantakouzenos, Tarchaneiotes and, of course, Palaiologos, the name of the ruling dynasty in the last two centuries of Byzantium.⁵⁶ There can be no doubt that this nomenclature designated a noble class. Notarial usage of the thirteenth century distinguished the "Komnenian aristocrats" (*archontes Komnenoi*), who were to be addressed as "most noble" (*paneugenestatoi*), from all other *archontes*, addressed either by the titles of their functions or, at the provincial level, with the epithet *megalodoxotatos*, "most glorious" – the ultimate degradation of the title that had designated the inner élite, the *gloriosi*, of the Late Roman senatorial order. The division between a higher and a lower court aristocracy had always existed; we saw it in the Christmas dinner lists of 899, in the distinction between high table guests and others. But then the division was not so clear in terms of name and lineage, and it was not expressed with the emphasis on social disparity that we find in writers from the twelfth century onwards. For them, people below the "Komnenian aristocracy" were either "middling" (*mesoi*), or "obscure," "undistinguished," "insignificant," "not of the well born." Yet some of these people bore names which had long been associated with title and office, and, in certain cases, with high military command before the eleventh century.⁵⁷

This was not quite the chivalric court society of western Europe. But it had similar values.

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⁵⁵ Vari 1917: 27–9.

⁵⁶ D.M. Nicol, in Angold 1984.

⁵⁷ Magdalino 1991: no. I; Kazhdan and Ronchey 1997.

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CHURCH AND SOCIETY: ICONOCLASM AND AFTER

Michael Angold

If you ask about your change, you will receive a discourse about the Begotten and the Unbegotten; if you want to know the price of a loaf of bread, you will be told that the Father is greater than the Son; and if you are in urgent need of a bath, you will be assured that the Son proceeds from nothing.

With these words the Cappadocian Father Gregory of Nyssa¹ has helped to shape an enduring commonplace about Byzantium: that religious controversy was its political process and involved the whole society from highest to lowest, women included. Like all commonplaces it contains some truth, but exactly how much? The iconoclast controversy² of the eighth and ninth centuries provides a good test case, because popular opinion at first sight seems more or less equally divided between those who opposed the veneration of icons and those who supported it. Famously, its immediate cause was popular agitation in Anatolia against the veneration of icons, which was blamed for failures against Islam. The patriarch of the day Germanos I (715–30) instructed two Anatolian bishops to put an end to criticism of icons in their dioceses, but he reckoned without the emperor Leo III (718–41), who was a former commander of the army of the Anatolics. Whether as a matter of conviction or of expediency the emperor preferred to support popular opposition to icons. He demonstrated where his loyalties lay, by substituting a cross for the image of Christ on the obverse of the gold coinage. He also removed the icon of Christ over the ceremonial entrance into the imperial palace in Constantinople and replaced it with a cross. Tradition had it that this action produced a furore, as the people of Constantinople, women to the fore, sought to prevent the soldiers from tearing down the icon. This turns out to be a much later fabrication.³ It was designed to counter the success of Leo III and his son Con-

¹ See Gibbon 1897: III, app. 9.

² See now Brubaker and Haldon 2008.

³ Auzépy 1990: 445–92.

stantine V (741–75) in winning over the people of Constantinople to their policy on icons, which was graphically demonstrated in the Hippodrome, where opponents of the regime were sacrificed to the anger of the assembled populace. Supporters of images, or iconodules as they are called, had to escape from Constantinople, often to the periphery of the empire or even beyond its frontiers to Rome and Jerusalem.

The ban on veneration of images soon turned into an attack on monks, who became the main target of Constantine V's regime. In some areas, monasteries and nunneries were dissolved, their properties escheating to the state, while the ex-monks and nuns were forced into matrimony. Monks represented a powerful, but subversive, element in society. They had become a law unto themselves, beyond the control of the bishops, who uniformly supported the policies of the emperor Constantine V. Monks were competitors for popular support. Their repression may well have been a way of strengthening the imperial hold over popular opinion.⁴ Despite this within 12 years of Constantine V's death the Second Council of Nicaea (787) restored the veneration of images as an essential of Orthodoxy. There does not seem to have been a massive swing in public opinion against iconoclasm, judging by the many bishops, who were reluctant to abandon their views on images.⁵ The latter were persuaded to drop their opposition by the argument that iconoclasm had cut off the Church of Constantinople from the other patriarchates, which had not followed the iconoclast line. They also came under pressure from the empress Irene (785–802), who – whether as a matter of expediency or of conviction – was using the question of images as a way of establishing herself in power. Her attempts to buy the support of the capital do not seem to have worked, since the restoration of iconoclasm in 815 by Leo V (813–20) owed much to renewed agitation against icons by the populace.⁶ Nor is it clear that there was any popular enthusiasm for the ending of iconoclasm in 843, which was the work of a clique within the palace led by the empress Theodora, widow of the last iconoclast emperor Theophilus (829–42). To judge by the stories that circulated after his death the latter was a popular figure, renowned for his passion for justice.⁷

This is to present the defeat of iconoclasm as an example of the flouting of popular opinion and practice, but that is not how it was remembered. Quite the contrary, it was remembered as a vindication of public support for the veneration of images, which had been suppressed by a series of iconoclast emperors. It becomes one of the commonplaces of Byzantine studies that icons lay at the heart of lay piety, as may indeed have become the case. But this only occurred gradually in the years after 843, as the iconodule version of events came to be accepted as canonical. Its basic premise was that at all times images had popular support. No doubt there

⁴ Brown 1973: 1–34.

⁵ Auzépy 1988: 5–21.

⁶ Herrin 2001: 83–92, 114–15.

⁷ Mango 1977: 133–40.

were people like the jailer's wife celebrated in the *Life* of St. Stephen the Younger, who did risk their lives by keeping icons.⁸ There were others, such as Philaretos, an impoverished Paphlagonian landowner, for whom images were a matter of indifference. His *Life* is a unique survival from the period,⁹ which celebrates the spiritual achievements of a pious layman, rather than those of a monk or ascetic. It is not an "iconoclast" life, as such, but it reveals a family life which did not revolve around icons, contrary to the impression purveyed by iconodule texts.¹⁰

The Second Council of Nicaea gave monks the opportunity to re-educate society and to claim for themselves a position as the spiritual élite, whose actions had preserved the purity of Orthodoxy. Pre-eminent among them was Theodore of Stoudios, who turned his monastery of Stoudios into the exemplar of Byzantine monasticism. Though remembered as a defender of images his major contribution was to articulate the ideal of monks forming a spiritual élite within society. During second iconoclasm Theodore of Stoudios was sent into exile in Anatolia, from where he wrote incessantly orchestrating opposition to iconoclasm. He effectively created an underground church dedicated to resistance to an iconoclast regime, but it was not one where popular opinion had much weight, for monastic opposition to second iconoclasm, including that of the Holy Mountains of Asia Minor, appears to have relied heavily on support from within the Byzantine élite.¹¹ Popular opinion had little or no bearing on the empress Theodora's decision in 843 to liquidate iconoclasm. It was more that political weakness pointed to a policy of reconciliation within the church. This meant getting rid of its most formidable opponent, the iconoclast patriarch John Grammatikos (837?–43), whom she replaced with the courtier monk Methodios (843–47). A hastily assembled local council then gave its approval to her actions and reinstated the Second Council of Nicaea. The uncertainties surrounding these events are apparent from the fact that in 861 the Patriarch Photios called another council to confirm the liquidation of iconoclasm.¹² By that time the iconodule myth of popular opposition to iconoclasm was beginning to take root, as popular suspicion of images faded with the gradual acceptance of the iconodule argument that far from being idolatrous the veneration of images bore witness to the reality of the incarnation.

It took time in the years following 843 for this message to sink in, but eventually images became an intrinsic part of Byzantine piety, helped by the institution of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Soon to become one of the great festivals of the Orthodox year, it was an annual celebration of the victory over iconoclasm. It was a reminder that religious controversy involved society; that in the end popular participation was an important safeguard of the purity of the faith, however erratic in practice this might have been.

⁸ Auzépy 1997: 158–60.

⁹ Rydén 2002.

¹⁰ Ševčenko 1977: 126–7.

¹¹ Alexander 1977: 238–64.

¹² Dvornik 1953: 77–80; Karlin-Hayter 2006: 55–74.

THE CHURCH AND LAY SOCIETY

The iconoclast controversy created an enduring myth of a popular basis to Orthodoxy. If this meant that from time to time there was popular intervention in religious controversy, the reality was that the élite made the decisions. Despite considerable social mobility Byzantium was a society where respect for hierarchy was deeply embedded. It preserved the distinction between *potens* and *pauper* inherited from Roman law. The former exercised authority and belonged to the élite; the latter did not. As the historian Niketas Choniates demonstrates all too clearly, members of the élite were suspicious and contemptuous of popular participation in either religious or political matters, because it was a challenge to their claim to be the “Guardians of Orthodoxy.”¹³ In other words, the popular basis to Orthodoxy was always contentious. The church hierarchy belonged to the élite; society at large did not. The day-to-day relationship between church and society at Byzantium depended on how effectively the former was able to impose its authority, while at the same time catering to the spiritual needs of the latter, which might on occasion include a willingness to accommodate popular beliefs and customs.

The scope of ecclesiastical authority relied on an organization, which by medieval standards, but not by modern, was remarkably effective. This is the case even for Constantinople, which with a population oscillating around the half a million mark was not easy to control. The center of its religious and ceremonial life was the patriarchal church of St. Sophia. There were many other imposing churches and monasteries, which were noted for charitable work and drew crowds on great festivals. If the parish system was rudimentary with four or five churches serving the whole city, Constantinople nevertheless suffered from an overprovision of religious establishments, which made for rich but somewhat chaotic arrangements.

In the provinces the ecclesiastical organization revolved in the first instance around the metropolitan bishop, who had in most cases a number of suffragan bishops. By and large the metropolitan dioceses went back to late antiquity, but there were adjustments which took into account the increasing importance of new or growing centers. The main method of adaptation to change came at the level of the suffragan bishops, where it was relatively easy to create new dioceses. Continuity – at least until the time of the Turkish invasions of the eleventh and twelfth centuries – was more marked in the Anatolian provinces than in the European, where from the late sixth century the “Slav invasions” limited ecclesiastical organization to one or two major centers, such as Thessaloniki and Athens. But from the ninth century, as order was gradually restored, it re-emerged somewhat changed, but not unrecognizably so. Though not so thick on the ground as in Anatolia, there was still a very heavy concentration of small bishoprics in the European provinces. In this Byzantine ecclesiastical organization resembled southern Italy, rather than northern Europe. The small size of the bishoprics made the development of a parish system

¹³ Angold 2005: 55–6.

less necessary. The pastoral needs of an area were met by the episcopal organization, which included priests attached either to the cathedral or to outlying churches.

Greece is the only area of the Byzantine empire where enough medieval churches survive to allow even impressionistically an idea of the provision in bricks and mortar for the religious needs of the inhabitants. The first thing to note is how few of the surviving churches date from before the eleventh century. One of those few is the church of Skripou near Orchomenos in Boeotia. It is a large clumsy church founded in 873/874 by an imperial dignitary, who held land in the region.¹⁴ One might suppose that it was intended to serve the needs of those settled on his estates and that it represents the early stages of the re-establishment of ecclesiastical organization in the area. This was more or less complete by the early eleventh century, when in addition to the usual scattering of churches there were a number of impressive monasteries, some of which have virtually no history, beyond the fabric of the church itself; the monastery of Daphni outside Athens is a case in point, but its church can be dated to the eleventh century, as is the church of the neighboring monastery of Hosios Meletios, about which more is known. It was founded in the late eleventh century by a “holy man” with help from the local governor and was clearly supported by the local élite. More remote and more imposing is the monastery of Hosios Loukas in the mountains beyond Thebes. Originally, the last resting place of the hermit Luke the Younger (†953), it was soon transformed into a monastery designed to preserve his memory. To the original monastery church was added – probably in 1011 – the present *katholikon*. Because of its scale and sumptuous decoration it is often supposed that it was an imperial foundation, but such evidence as there is suggests that the necessary funds came from leading families of the provincial capital, Thebes, with whom the monastery maintained close relations.¹⁵

By the eleventh century Greece was quite capable of supporting impressive monasteries, but in some ways more striking were the large numbers of smaller churches and chapels dating from this period in cities such as Athens, Arta, and Kastoria. To judge by surviving inscriptions their founders were local notables. The Greek countryside equally boasts a succession of well-built churches dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, such as Merbaka and Chonika in the Argolid. Almost certainly because it is so remote the Mani has preserved a surprisingly large number of churches and chapels dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹⁶ As elsewhere in Greece this spate of church building left a Christian imprint on the landscape. The church also appropriated monuments of the classical past. At Athens it was natural that the Parthenon was now a cathedral dedicated to the Mother of God and housing a wonder-working icon painted by St. Luke, while the Propylaea served as the archbishop’s palace. The extensive use of classical spolia in the external decoration of the late twelfth-century Athenian church of the Gorgoepokoos (Little

¹⁴ Mango 1986: 116–18.

¹⁵ Chatzidakis 1969: 127–50; Oikonomidès 1992: 245–55.

¹⁶ Megaw 1931–2: 90–130; 1932–3: 137–62. Cf. Ousterhout 2006: II, 753–4.

Metropolis) suggests that the classical past had lost its ability to disturb. Monasteries around Athens occupied the site of ancient sanctuaries. At the source of the Illissos on the slopes of Mount Hymettos the monastery of Kaisariani stood on the site of a sanctuary of Aphrodite and on the Sacred Way a monastery appropriately called Daphni replaced a sanctuary of Apollo. If not exactly on the site of Delphi the monastery of Hosios Loukas, as a center of pilgrimage, performed a similar function in a Christian society.

But to a man versed in the classical past, such as Michael Choniates, who came to Athens in 1182 as archbishop, the ancient monuments were reminders of what had been lost and only underlined the barbarism of the present inhabitants. Michael Choniates was in some ways fairly typical of the bishops appointed to important sees in the twelfth century.¹⁷ He had received a thorough education in the schools of Constantinople and had then entered patriarchal service, which eventually led on to his bishopric. He was different in that he was not born into the Constantinopolitan élite, which by the twelfth century provided a high proportion of the officials serving in the imperial and patriarchal administrations.¹⁸ At its center there was a core of well-known families, which had served church and state over many generations. But Michael Choniates and his brother, the historian Niketas, came from the Anatolian border town of Chonai. Thanks to the support of their godfather, the bishop of Chonai, they were sent to Constantinople for their education. The accent on education meant that to a limited extent imperial or patriarchal service was a career open to talents. Despite their obscure provincial background the Choniates brothers soon found themselves close to the center of the social nexus, which supported the church and the imperial administration. It helped to have the support of the Tornikes family, which though of Georgian origin was by the late eleventh century based at Thebes. The family sent its sons to Constantinople for their education. They would go on to occupy high position both in the imperial administration and in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Take George Tornikes, for example. Having Theophylaktos of Bulgaria as an uncle was a decided advantage for a career in the patriarchal church, which culminated in the office of *hypomnematographos*, deputy to the chartophylax. George was then appointed metropolitan bishop of Ephesos, having first turned down the church of Corinth on the grounds that it was not wealthy enough. Before demitting office in the church of St. Sophia he tried to ensure that a member of his family replaced him "so that there is a scion of our family in the Great Church to carry on the tradition after us."¹⁹ It was very common in the twelfth century for nephews of bishops to gain entry to the patriarchal administration, just as it was for bishops to be recruited from the ranks of the patriarchal officers and clergy. Again to take the example of the Tornikes family it provided metropolitan bishops for both Old and New Patras at the end of the twelfth century. It might be thought that this was no more than a reflection of their

¹⁷ Kolovou 2001: 1–8.

¹⁸ Angold 1993: 17–24.

¹⁹ Darrouzès 1970: 115.15–17.

powerful standing locally, but the bishops in question had first served in the patriarchal administration. In somewhat similar fashion John Apokaukos followed his uncle Constantine Manasses as bishop of Naupaktos, having first served as a patriarchal notary.²⁰ In other words, service in the patriarchal administration became an essential first step for high ecclesiastical office.

Periodically, the metropolitan bishops would return to Constantinople to attend the patriarchal synod. They thus performed a vital role linking capital and provinces. They were able to use their influence to protect local interests. As archbishop of Athens Michael Choniates pulled all the strings he could at Constantinople in order to alleviate the tax burden on his flock. But very often bishops were resented as outsiders and agents of Constantinople. Initially, they faced local hostility, but rarely did it end in being lashed to a stake and beaten senseless, as happened to a twelfth-century bishop of Dristra on the Danube.²¹ In the end, most metropolitan bishops mastered the situation, even if, as in the case of Eustathios of Thessalonica, they needed the support of the imperial authorities from time to time.²² They had above all to come to terms with their cathedral clergy, who were anxious to preserve their traditional privileges. Not until he had disciplined his *sakellarios*, who saw himself as the repository of the traditions of the church of Athens, was Michael Choniates able to establish his ascendancy over Athens. In some cases bishops might be drawn from the cathedral clergy, which was a way of avoiding such friction. Demetrios Chomatianos, for example, had been chartophylax of the church of Bulgaria before becoming archbishop in 1216.²³ Even more remarkable at first sight was a thirteenth-century metropolitan bishop of Smyrna, who had previously been a simple notary of the church of Smyrna. But this may be less strange than at first appears, because proximity to the Laskarid residence of Nymphaion made Smyrna something of an exception. During the period of exile (1204–1261) several distinguished Constantinopolitan families acquired land in the vicinity and provided many of the officers of the church of Smyrna, which corresponds to the general rule that a large proportion of cathedral clergy was recruited from prominent local families, who could never be disregarded.²⁴ On occasion, they were strong enough to back the candidature of one of their members as bishop. To counterbalance their influence bishops relied on their household. This consisted of relatives, usually nephews, and a variety of protégés, some from Constantinople, some local. Michael Choniates' favorite was George Bardanes, the son of the bishop of Karystos on the island of Euboea. He received his education from Choniates, who made him an officer in the church of Athens. Eventually, Choniates helped him to obtain the see of Corfu. Another metropolitan bishop, John Apokaukos of Naupaktos, made a point of taking young boys, often orphans, into his household and educating them

²⁰ Lampropoulos 1988.

²¹ Shepard 1979: 191–239.

²² Magdalino 2002: 225–38.

²³ Prinzing 2002: 3–45.

²⁴ Ahrweiler 1965: 100–21.

for the priesthood. Apokaukos acted as their spiritual father. Through them he was able to build up links with his suffragan bishops and to cement his authority in his diocese. He was even known to pass them on to his suffragans on the understanding that they would finish their education. His links with his godsons sometimes undermined the harmony of his relations with his suffragans. A long-standing quarrel that Apokaukos had with the bishop of Arta had its origins in the former's defense of members of the Arta clergy, who happened to be his godsons. He admitted that he was in the wrong, because the clergy in question had given him the loyalty that should properly have gone to the bishop of Arta. This did not prevent him from bringing pressure to bear on the bishop through some of the leading figures of Arta, who were also his godsons.²⁵ Given the importance within Byzantine society of the spiritual father²⁶ it is unlikely that Apokaukos was the only prelate who used his godsons to build up an effective network of authority. Nor can he have been the only bishop who trained and educated young men for the priesthood.

These were informal sources of influence. In purely formal terms the major impact a bishop had on the society of his diocese was through the episcopal court. It would seem that the business coming before the ecclesiastical courts grew from the eleventh century. Cases of murder or manslaughter, for example, often went to the church courts because they were considered spiritual offenses. By the middle of the twelfth century competition from ecclesiastical courts was worrying emperor Manuel I Comnenus. He deplored what he considered the abuse of the right of asylum in the patriarchal church of St. Sophia. Under the existing law murderers were able to seek asylum in the church of St. Sophia. Having performed an appropriate penance they were then to become monks and spend the rest of their lives in a monastery. The emperor noted that their presence often made life impossible for the other monks. In any case there were many who, having made a false confession and having received absolution, returned home to commit more crimes. To prevent this the emperor insisted that once a criminal had received absolution from the ecclesiastical authorities he should then be turned over to the emperor or to the prefect of the city. It is most unlikely that this measure to tighten up on the law of asylum had anything more than a temporary effect, for at the end of the twelfth century the official in charge of asylum cases, the *protekdikos*, was promoted to the upper ranks of the officers of the patriarchal church. This surely reflected the growing importance of asylum.²⁷ The imperial government may have been concerned with tightening up on procedures, because of the way the right of asylum was open to abuse, but an even stronger impression is of the humanity of the justice given in the ecclesiastical courts.

The growing number of cases involving murder and manslaughter coming before the *protekdikos* of St. Sophia was paralleled by the numbers of such cases treated by the episcopal courts. But the bulk of the business before these courts concerned

²⁵ Angold 1995: 225–9.

²⁶ Macrides 1987: 139–62.

²⁷ Macrides 1984: 156–204; 1985: 137–68; 1988: 509–14.

marriage and family law. Because so much property was a family matter or tied up in a marriage, disputes over property and succession often went before a bishop. By the fourteenth century when we have the patriarchal register even cases of commercial law were coming before the ecclesiastical courts. This is a reflection of the way that the church was able to compensate for the growing weakness of the state. Litigants had a certain amount of latitude over taking their case to either a civil or an ecclesiastical court, but the latter had certain advantages, which were most obvious in the provinces. At its most basic Byzantine law relied on sworn testimony, but this was best given before the local bishop or at the very least before a priest. If the ecclesiastical courts had few sanctions beyond purely moral ones, such as the imposition of penance and, more extreme, of excommunication, these still had a powerful effect. To stand outside the door of your local church and beg your neighbors' forgiveness was a humiliation that was best avoided. In the end, most cases ended in some compromise reached out of court by the parties concerned. The umbrella of the bishop's moral authority was often a far more effective instrument than the coercive power of the state. While imperial governors came and went, bishops often stayed at their posts for 20 years or more and, if at all competent, were able to establish an ascendancy over their diocese. In the few cases where we can judge bishops showed a realism and a humanity in their judgments, which will have commended themselves to many litigants. Conventional wisdom saw them "as a refuge for orphans, victims of injustice, and the defenceless."²⁸ There was a great deal of truth in this description. Women, in particular, sought redress from the episcopal court, rather than try their luck at a civil court or an imperial tribunal. Either directly or indirectly cases involving the rights of women constituted a very large proportion of the litigation that came before the episcopal courts. But the sympathy with which these courts often treated women makes this less surprising. Bishops were willing to dissolve marriages which wives found unbearable, even though this was strictly against canon law. In one such case, a wife guilty of adultery found the punishments waived on the grounds that she had been reduced to poverty, which for a woman is sufficient punishment.²⁹

Understandably, the clergy took their cases to the episcopal court. Among a bishop's main responsibilities was his clergy, who were to be protected against undue pressure from the imperial administration and local landowners alike. But there must have been those clergy who felt they needed protection against their bishop. Very often the clergy became *de facto* dependents of their bishop because they were settled on land belonging to the bishopric. As one bishop put it, "after the manner of serfs they were bound against their will to the soil."³⁰ This created an anomaly because it came into conflict with the free status of the priesthood. This inconsistency was only underlined by a measure of Manuel I Comnenus (1143–1180), which granted tax exemption to priests, since tax exemption was equated in

²⁸ Prinzing 2002: 287.25–26.

²⁹ Angold 1988: 179–94; Karlin-Hayter 1990: 87–105.

³⁰ Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1909: 26.12–13.

a rough and ready way with free status. In next to no time the emperor found himself face to face with a plague of priests, all claiming exemption from taxation. The imperial administration was therefore forced to make a register of priests. Only those registered were to enjoy exempt status. This was the signal for the regularization of relations between a bishop and his clergy. Different solutions emerged. Unique but still instructive were the arrangements on the island of Corfu, where the clergy of the city formed an autonomous college, known as the "Sacred Band" with a fixed membership of 32. Its members were exempted from the payment of tax and the metropolitan bishop of Corfu could only discipline them for spiritual failings. Another college of 33 priests served the rest of the island. They enjoyed tax exemption on their property up to a sum of six *nomismata*. Rates of taxation varied over the years, but it is safe to say that a holding paying six *nomismata* in tax was substantial. Only sons of existing members of the colleges were eligible to join. The governor of Corfu had no right to introduce outsiders. Perhaps a more common solution was the one reached in an Epirot diocese, where there was a legal agreement dividing the church lands between the bishop and his clergy. When the bishop failed to honor this agreement he received a dressing down from his metropolitan John Apokaukos, who was equally worried by events in another of his suffragan bishoprics. There the ruler had imposed a son of the previous bishop with instructions that his other sons should equally be entitled to share in the revenues of the bishopric. Apokaukos protested that a bishop's first responsibility was to his clergy and insisted that special holdings should be reserved to support the clergy.³¹ However slowly, the position of the clergy was improving from the mid-twelfth century.

At Corfu the clergy formed one of the élite groups on the island. This was probably exceptional, but elsewhere too you find priestly dynasties; even on one occasion a priest who had taken over a village and terrorized its inhabitants.³² This all anticipates the dominant position of priests in Greek society under the *Tourkokratia*.³³

One can only state and bewail the fact that so little information has survived about ecclesiastical finances. Bishops controlled landed property, but episcopal estates do not seem to have matched either monastic or lay estates in size. In the late eleventh century there was a crisis of episcopal revenues, because of the way church land had passed into the hands of lay patrons. Partial compensation for this loss of revenue came in the form of the *kanonikon* – the dues paid annually to the bishop by clergy and laity alike. It was fixed in the mid-eleventh century at a notional rate of one *nomisma* (gold) and two *miliaresia* (silver) together with some payments in kind for a village of 30 households; smaller villages to pay proportionately less. But it soon reverted to being a customary payment, which seems to have been shared with the local priest.³⁴ Bishop and priest could ill afford to lose these payments, as a case that came before the archbishop of Ohrid Demetrios Choma-

³¹ Papagianne 1986: 186–216; Angold 1995: 232–9.

³² Prinzing 2002: 316–17.

³³ Petmézas 1996: 470–549, esp. 523–32.

³⁴ Papagianne 1986: 248–56.

tianos illustrates. The bishop of Butrinto on the mainland opposite Corfu explained to the court that the Vlach inhabitants of one of the villages in his diocese had always worshipped in the village church and had paid their dues to the local priest, but recently the village had passed into the ownership of a monastery, which now insisted that the Vlachs attend the monastery church and pay their dues to the monastery. The bishop was also at loggerheads with the head of an important Thessalian family over another village, where the latter had established his residence. He had built a new church with the same dedication as the old and forced the villagers to worship in his church, so that he could collect their dues.³⁵ These instances underline the pressures faced by individual bishops from a combination of monasteries and lay landowners. Of the two, monasteries were seen as the greater threat to episcopal control over the ecclesiastical organization of the diocese.

THE CHURCH AND MONASTERIES

Eustathios of Thessalonika was virulent in his denunciation of the monks and monasteries he found in his diocese. He denounced them as competitors, claiming that monks held bishops in contempt: "they reckon that if there were no bishops, they would be everything in the world and the only people to whom churches would be subject would be those dressed all over in black."³⁶ He presented monasteries as essentially business enterprises intent on building up their estates and maximizing profits. He realized how closely intertwined monasticism was with lay society. It was to monks that the laity turned for their confessors. Confession was not as well regulated in Byzantium as it was to become in the West, where confession once a year became obligatory and the confessional became a weapon of moral and spiritual control. In Byzantium confession was optional. Canon law insisted that it should be made to a priest or a bishop, but in practice it was monks who heard confession. Nor was it necessarily even to monks who had been ordained (*hieromonachoi*). Loss of control over confession was an affront to episcopal authority that was felt particularly hard in the twelfth century.³⁷

Byzantine monasticism was neither so chaotic nor so materialistic as Eustathios presented it. If it had no regular orders and no authoritative monastic rule, it did have Holy Mountains, such as Olympos, Auxentios, Galesion, and Latmos in Anatolia, and Ganos, Athos, and later Meteora in Europe. These were well organized and maintained a degree of separation from the secular world.³⁸ Even Eustathios held up the great monasteries of Constantinople as an example that the monasteries within his own diocese should follow. He illustrates the good order they kept with

³⁵ Prinzing 2002: 266–73.

³⁶ Tafel 1832: 262.12–15.

³⁷ Gautier 1969: 183–7.

³⁸ Morris 1995: 1–142.

an anecdote about Manuel I Comnenus, who wanted to organize a party on the spur of the moment in the season before Lent. His servants went to a nearby monastery, which was able to provide everything, down to black and red caviar.³⁹ Though this was not the point of the story, it underlines the role that monasteries had in the economic and commercial life of Constantinople. They owned wharfs along the Golden Horn at Constantinople where they received the produce from far-flung estates. It is not recorded whether they were ship-owners, in the manner of some Athonite monasteries and of the monastery of Patmos, but they controlled a large part of the retail market of the capital. Monks would work the streets selling vegetables and fish from door to door. By the twelfth century bakeries and bath-houses were attached to monasteries in Constantinople.⁴⁰

Monasteries served all kinds of different purposes. It was quite usual to confine miscreants and murderers in monasteries. Adulteresses might be condemned to a life in a nunnery, as a form of discipline. Disappointed wives were encouraged to go on retreat to a nunnery, where their husbands were allowed visiting rights, in the hope of reconciliation. But far more usually, as they approached old age husbands and wives would enter the monastic life in order to prepare themselves for death. You did not necessarily have to take monastic vows before retiring to a monastery. You could invest in an *adelphaton* or corrody in a monastery or nunnery of your choosing. Against a sum of money or the cession of property monasteries would undertake to care for members of the laity in their old age. First attested in the eleventh century this institution continued down to the end of the empire and beyond. They were always enormously popular with the laity. Beneficiaries could either take up residence within the monastery or nunnery or they could be cared for outside the monastic precincts. It was an arrangement, like lay patronage of monasteries, which was open to criticism, because it opened the way to a secularization of monastic life.⁴¹ But that was the beauty of monasticism. It catered to the practical needs of lay society. Hospitals and alms-houses were attached to monasteries. Central to Byzantine life was charity, which was very largely the work of the monasteries. It was monasteries too which saw to the building and upkeep of bridges.

We know most about imperial and aristocratic monastic foundations, which seem to have been at the heart of the articulation of aristocratic life. They served a variety of purposes. As important as any was their role as a family shrine. At one level they preserved the family history through the commemoration of its different members. At another they could be turned into trusts to protect the family's wealth. Great care was taken to specify how rights of patronage over a family monastery would descend. It comes as no surprise that Anna Comnena described the domestic regime that her grandmother Anna Dalassena introduced as having the effect of turning the imperial palace into a monastery. Its denizens now kept regular hours

³⁹ Tafel 1832: 230–1.

⁴⁰ Angold 1997: 279.

⁴¹ Talbot 1984: 276–8; Thomas 1987: 207–13, 232–8, 255–8.

with prayers and hymns at set times. Monastic order provided the pious with a guide to the running of the household. Anna Comnena remembered her mother Irene Doukaina reading aloud from Maximos the Confessor during meals.⁴² This pattern will have been repeated down the social scale. Scattered throughout the empire were scores of small, ephemeral monasteries founded by well-to-do peasants or successful craftsmen, such as the metalworker, who founded the monastery of the Theotokos Skoteine near Philadelphia, where his brothers and sons joined him. It was essentially an expression of family piety, which might also be satisfied by the foundation of small chapels.⁴³ Monasticism permeated the life of the laity at all levels of society, but in doing so had to adapt itself to its different contours, thus providing an ideal vehicle for the expression of lay piety.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE AND THE PATTERNS OF DAILY LIFE

The Orthodox Church provided the framework in which lives were lived. Church festivals marked out the rhythm of the year and church services the stages of life. For most the church was an inescapable part of their lives, but few in any conventional sense were good Christians. Regular church attendance was for the pious. Few came forward to take the sacraments, even on the great feasts of the year. For some this was a matter of humility before so great a mystery and for others a matter of indifference.⁴⁴ It is often suggested that this was a function of the liturgy, which underlined the distance separating the clergy from the laity. With the curtailing of those processional elements, which had allowed for the direct participation of the laity, the latter increasingly became interested spectators. The planning of the church altered to meet the new liturgical arrangements. The large basilicas, which could accommodate processions, gave way to smaller centrally planned domed churches, which heightened the impact of the liturgy as theater. Increasingly, the sanctuary was separated physically from the nave by a screen. At first, it was relatively simple, but became more elaborate until it rendered invisible the mysteries enacted around the altar, except when the chancel doors were thrown open to reveal the priest. The exclusivity of the priesthood was further underlined by the way communion in both kinds was normally reserved to the clergy; the laity were encouraged to communicate only at Easter and other great feasts. Frequent communion by the laity was cause for censure. Normally, members of the laity contented themselves with taking away at the end of the liturgy some of the communion bread. However, it is easy from a modern perspective to underestimate the power of the Byzantine liturgy. It had become both a commemoration and a re-enactment

⁴² *Alexiad* (Reinsch 2001): III, viii. 2–3, 105–6; V, ix. 3, 165–6.

⁴³ Angold 1995: 293–4.

⁴⁴ Taft 2000: 103–32.

of Christ's life. It was essentially a dramatic performance, which made palpable the message of Christianity. The secrecy of much of the ritual, as with the silent prayers delivered by the priest, only enhanced the importance of the mystery, as did the church's insistence that the laity should prepare itself properly for attendance at the liturgy.⁴⁵

The solemnity of the liturgy had the effect of heightening the importance of those rites that applied specifically to the individual, such as the churching of a mother after giving birth, baptism, marriage, and death. The laity could also participate more directly in the life of the church through vigils and in pilgrimage, which were often part of the same experience. Jerusalem did not hold quite the same attraction for the Byzantine laity as it did for their western counterparts. The crusades were partly to blame, because they disrupted travel from Byzantium to the Holy Land.⁴⁶ This did not mean that pilgrimage was a less important part of religious life in Byzantium, only that the shrines visited tended to be closer to home. It was also because Constantinople was the New Jerusalem, where many of the most precious relics, in particular of the Passion, had been collected over many centuries.⁴⁷ The importance of its many shrines becomes clear from the accounts of Russian and Latin pilgrims. While in the West pilgrimage was understood as a journey, in Byzantium it was usually termed veneration (*proskynesis*). The accent was less on the difficulties of the journey; more on the act of veneration, which was the purpose of the journey. There were a thousand and one reasons to undertake a journey to a shrine. There were shrines that were famed for their healing powers, such as those of St. Artemios and of Sts. Kosmas and Damian at Constantinople, where the ancient practice of incubation, or sleeping in the shrine in the hope of a miraculous vision or cure, continued to be practiced.⁴⁸ This increasingly merged with the vigil, which was a normal part of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage might be undertaken as part of a vow. For example, in the early thirteenth century a notable of the Thessalian town of Servia made a vow that he would not marry off his daughter until she had reached the canonical age for marriage and had made a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Demetrios at Thessalonika, some hundred miles away.⁴⁹ It sounds as though he saw this pilgrimage as a way of consecrating her coming of age. The shrine of St. Demetrios was one of the best known within the Byzantine world. By the eleventh century it had become famous for the way his coffin gave off myrrh. This was taken away by pilgrims in little lead flasks and was supposed to have healing properties.⁵⁰ But the feast day of the saint on October 26 was also the occasion of a week-long fair held outside the city on the banks of the River Vardar. This connection of feast day

⁴⁵ Wybrew 1989: 129–71; Gerstel 2006: 103–23; Gerstel and Talbot 2006: 79–100.

⁴⁶ E.g. Papadopoulos-Kerameus 1891–8: II, 361–2.

⁴⁷ Flusin 2001: 20–31; Durand and Flusin 2004.

⁴⁸ Crisafalli 1997. See Talbot 2002: 153–73.

⁴⁹ Prinzing 2002: 66–7.

⁵⁰ Bakirtzis 2002: 175–92.

and fair was a feature of medieval life, where pilgrimage and business could be combined.⁵¹

Pilgrimage was not only made to shrines that had preserved the relics of some great saint; it could also be made to the abode of a holy man. Crowds flocked to St. Lazaros of Galesion in the eleventh century to hear the words of wisdom, which he dispensed from the top of his pillar.⁵² He was in a sense a living icon. Wonderworking icons were also the objects of both veneration and pilgrimage.⁵³ At Sozopolis in Asia Minor there was a wonderworking image of the Mother of God, which sprinkled myrrh on those who came to pay their respects.⁵⁴ Some of the most famous icons were regularly processed through the streets and they became the focus of confraternities, who were responsible for organizing the ritual surrounding the icon. The best known is the icon of the Hodegetria at Constantinople, where a confraternity is attested from the eleventh century to the end of the empire. Its members were responsible for parading it through the streets of the capital every Tuesday.⁵⁵ From the very end of the empire comes a description from the pen of the Castilian traveler Pero Tafur. The icon was painted on stone and enormously heavy, but “every Tuesday some twenty men dressed from head to foot in red linen capes meet. Only those of their lineage can perform the following ritual. After a great procession one by one each of those so clad picks it up as though it scarcely weighed an ounce. Each in turn places it on his shoulder and the whole company leaves the church singing for a great square, where the bearer walks with it from one end to the other, and fifty times round the square.” Pero Tafur noted that during the procession members of the clergy touched it with strands of raw cotton and distributed them to the bystanders.⁵⁶

Unlike in the West few confraternities are attested for Byzantium, and where they are they are connected with icons. A chance survival has preserved the statutes of a confraternity founded at Thebes in 1048, which had grown up around an icon of the Mother of God known as the Naupaktiotissa, because of its connection with the nunnery of the “Women of Naupaktos” at Thebes.⁵⁷ This document does not preserve the original statutes, but was a reworking of the early twelfth century, made necessary by the deterioration of the original. The signatures appended to the document preserve a list of the membership, as it existed in the early twelfth century. It is, as might be expected, predominantly male. The fact that there were as many as three women among the membership comes as a surprise. One of them had married into the powerful Kamateros family, which had estates around Thebes. Of the 49

⁵¹ Vryonis 1981: 196–226.

⁵² Greenfield 2002: 213–41. Cf. Galatariotou 1991.

⁵³ Carr 2002: 75–92.

⁵⁴ Festugière 1970: 108.13–20.

⁵⁵ Angelidi and Papamastorakis 2000: 373–87.

⁵⁶ Pero Tafur 1934: 133.

⁵⁷ Nesbitt and Wijta 1975: 360–84; Baun 2007: 371–85.

members 14 were priests, four monks, and there were two readers, the lowest of the clerical ranks. In other words, the church was extremely well represented in the ranks of the confraternity, so much so that the first to sign were two monks in holy orders (*hieromonachoi*), one from the monastery of Daphni outside Athens and the other from the monastery of Hagia Photeine. The confraternity was therefore embedded in the local ecclesiastical world. This is made very clear by the commemorations enjoined on the confraternity. Alongside the emperors and patriarch, its members commemorated the bishop of Thebes, the abbots of Hosios Loukas, past and present, and the abess of the Naupaktiotissa. There were clearly strong ties to the monastery of Hosios Loukas, which was the most prestigious monastery in the vicinity of Thebes. It seems more than likely that its late abbot Theodore Leobachos, from a powerful Theban family – the only one on the commemoration list who is mentioned by name – had a leading role to play in the creation of the confraternity.⁵⁸ Of the 29 lay members of the confraternity one or two bore the names of distinguished local families. The first layman to sign was Christopher Kapsenos, who has been identified very plausibly with a government agent operating in the Greek islands in the late 1080s. The stated purpose of the brotherhood was to honor the icon, which had its main resting place in a church of St. Michael attached to the nunnery. Each member had the responsibility of serving the icon for a month at a time. This meant housing it, it would appear, in a church of his or her choosing and organizing the performance of the liturgy twice a week on Wednesdays and Fridays. Once a year the members of the confraternity would meet to take communion together. Binding them together was a strong sense of moral and spiritual purpose. They were expected to offer mutual support to any of their fellow members who were in danger of falling into bad habits, or worse, of leaving the confraternity. They were also expected to pray for those of their membership who were sick and to ensure a decent burial and an appropriate commemoration when death came. It can only be pure speculation that there were other purposes behind the confraternity; that, for example, it had some connection with Thebes's well-known manufacture of silk. Its stated purpose was as an expression of pious solidarity around an icon.

ORTHODOXY AND DISSENT

In practical terms monasticism did much to ensure that church and society at Byzantium were in tune with one another. The laity adapted Orthodoxy to its needs and shaped religious life in a way that shocked purists. The twelfth-century canon lawyer Theodore Balsamon was constantly being surprised by the reality of religious life, which seemed far removed from the norms of canon law. Popular festivals with their roots in the pagan past continued to be celebrated, such as the Calends and

⁵⁸ See Oikonomidès 1992: 248.

Broumalia. Condemnation by the church made little difference. The origins of these festivals were long forgotten. The Broumalia had celebrated Dionysius. In the Byzantine period it merely became the occasion for the distribution of imperial largesse and the celebration of friendship. Even so stern a figure as Eustathios of Thessalonika could see nothing wrong with the celebration of the Calends. He approved of the custom of exchanging presents. It was a way of wiping the slate clean and starting afresh. He has nothing to say about the festivities occurring during the 12 days of Christmas. In the churches there were all sorts of mummary, in which, to the dismay of many churchmen, clergy might take part. This seems to have been transferred in the later middle ages to *Apokreo*, the carnival before Lent, which had qualified ecclesiastical approval. Perhaps the most interesting survival was the Rosalia, which coincided with Whitsun week. Gangs of youths would go around playing games and demanding presents, but originally it had been a festival of the dead. It is difficult to believe that this connection had been entirely lost by the Byzantines, because of their belief that the souls of the dead were freed from Hades on the Sunday before Lent and returned on Whitsunday, which was the beginning of the Rosalia. There was also a belief that you needed to sacrifice doves on the graves of the dead to help release the dead. When questioned about this custom a twelfth-century bishop agreed that it was harmless enough, as long as it was understood not as a sacrifice, but as preparation for a meal in honor of the dead. That priests were responsible for killing the doves did not elicit comment, but it reveals that whatever the strictures of canon law priests were often complicit in local customs. Beliefs about death reveal how ancestral ideas continued to co-exist with Christian teachings. Death personified as *Charos* was seen as the enemy of mankind and the beauties of the natural world. He sent the dead to the shades of Hades. Such ideas continued to be tolerated, because the Orthodox Church never evolved very definite ideas about the afterlife. It rejected the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, on the grounds that this was to presume knowledge reserved to God and not available to mere mortals. Official agnosticism gave free rein to popular imagination, which found expression in a series of apocalypses, recently explored by Jane Baun. They presented the afterlife as a unity, in much the same way as happens in the depiction of the Last Judgment, where a special area is set aside for the punishment of sinners. In the *Apocalypse of Anastasia* there is even a special zone for the élite in keeping with the conventional division of Byzantine society into the powerful and the poor. The powerful found themselves being punished for their unjust exercise of authority or in the case of the emperor John Tzimiskes (969–976) for the treacherous murder of his predecessor Nikephoros Phokas (963–969). These apocalypses served a pastoral purpose. They singled out sins – often of a sexual nature – that were most likely to disrupt peasant communities, but more important was their aim of focusing local society on the priest, whence the emphasis on his responsibilities to his flock. The apocalypses were all the more convincing for the way they presented the afterlife as the imperial palace writ large. It is dominated by the figure of God, who in good imperial fashion is a remote and terrifying figure who scarcely appears. The only hope for a sinner, who came as a petitioner, was the support of a powerful

intercessor, pre-eminently in the form of the Mother of God. She was able to cut through the bureaucracy – another example of symbolic inversion – represented by recording angels or by the demons who manned the “Tollgates of the Upper Air” (*telonia*). According to popular mythology the dead would have to give them an account of their lives and on that basis would be assigned a place either in Hell or in the bosom of Abraham.⁵⁹ Along with such notions about the afterlife the church was also willing to tolerate a popular belief in the scarcely Christian figure of the Gello, who hovered over the new-born child, always ready to snatch life away.⁶⁰

To all appearances the Orthodox Church offered lay society exactly what it wanted: spiritual guidance and the hope of salvation combined with a tolerant spirit and material advantages. But at odds with this assessment is the existence at Byzantium of popular dualist heresy, which reflected a sense of alienation from the official church. Though Byzantine dualism had links to the Paulicians – a dualist sect who came to prominence along Byzantium’s eastern frontier from the eighth century – its bedrock lay in dissenting groups, usually known as *Euchitai*, which formed around religious leaders and adopted a quasi-monastic organization. At first sight, these groups do not seem that different to those that clustered round “holy men” throughout Byzantine history. What made the authorities suspicious was their reluctance to work within the official ecclesiastical framework and their emphasis on prayer as a means of reaching a state of purification. In this they resembled, at least superficially, Byzantine mystics, who also aroused official suspicion, as the career of Symeon known as the “New Theologian” (†1022) shows all too clearly.⁶¹ His teaching about the divine light inaugurated a new wave of Byzantine mysticism, which was part of the religious ferment of the time, in the same way as the spread of dualist heresy. But there was no direct connection between them, even if there was bound to be a degree of mutual awareness.

The transformation of dissenting groups into a dualist movement initially took place in the tenth century outside the frontiers of the Byzantine empire in Bulgaria. The Bulgarians had all the expectations of a newly converted people, but were soon brought face to face with the inconsistencies of the new faith. The social teaching of Christianity with its insistence on “Blessed are the meek” seems at odds with the hierarchical reality of institutional Christianity, which seemed to exalt the proud. A contemporary described the Bogomils as “lamb-like, gentle and humble and quiet.”⁶² Their teachings seem to have been primarily an attempt to recover the ideal of the Apostolic Church, which is in line with the aims of most “reformation” movements within Christianity.⁶³ They saw the power of priests and rulers as a barrier to achieving this. Such a stance alarmed the Bulgarian authorities, which

⁵⁹ Angold 1995: 441–67; Constan 2006: 139–44, but see now Baun 2007: 138–51.

⁶⁰ See Hartnup 2004: 85–172, who deals with the question in far greater depth than Patera 2006–7: 311–27.

⁶¹ See Alfeyev 2000.

⁶² Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 116.

⁶³ See Obolensky 1948; Loos 1974.

denounced them as dualists. Their main fault was to emphasize an enduring weakness of Christianity: the gap between the apostolic ideal and the reality of an established church. It also played on the contradiction between an intellectual Christianity, which is close to being a philosophical system, and popular Christianity with its emphasis on the victory of good over evil as a necessary condition for salvation. The moment that lay piety sought independent expression, it almost inevitably took on a dualist form.

The authorities found it difficult to differentiate between Bogomilism and perfectly legitimate expressions of lay piety, because both could take the form of following a "holy man." The establishment of a dualist community in Constantinople from around the mid-eleventh century was the work of Basil known as the Bogomil. He effected the dress and demeanor of a monk. He built up a following and, it was claimed, appointed 12 "apostles" to aid in the dissemination of his teachings.⁶⁴ His condemnation around the year 1100 as a Bogomil is a highpoint of Anna Comnena's *Alexiad*. It is in all respects a bizarre episode. The emperor Alexius Comnenus and his brother Isaac questioned him on the pretext that they too wished to become his followers, while a stenographer concealed behind a curtain took down his words. Later Euthymios Zigabenos drew up a dossier of Bogomil beliefs, in which general expositions jostle with testimony given by Basil himself.⁶⁵ While the former contain much official rationalization, the latter has the ring of truth. Basil was obsessed with demons. He condemned the material world as infested with evil, so churches, crosses, icons were all the haunts of demons. Because of their power, which was tolerated by God the Father, demons were to be placated rather than opposed. Basil insisted that the Fathers of the Church had been led astray by demons. Basil accused John Chrysostom of falsifying the Gospels. Underlying such an accusation was a belief that the true faith had been corrupted. Basil was seeking to recover the purity of the faith. He rejected most of the Old Testament, accepting only the Psalter and the 16 prophets. Despite fears over the falsification of the Gospels, they accepted the four gospels together with the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelations. He rejected the sacraments and the liturgy, contenting himself with the Lord's prayer. He was opposed to baptism by water, preferring the baptism in the spirit. This involved placing the gospel of St. John on the neophyte's head and invoking the Holy Spirit. It was an initiation right, not unlike the blessing a spiritual father bestowed on a disciple.

Basil's own testimony convicts him of dualism. He was duly burnt on Alexius Comnenus's orders in the Hippodrome. It was a dramatic gesture designed to destroy the sect. Alexius Comnenus originally intended to burn a large number of his followers, but desisted in the face of popular indignation.⁶⁶ There were also those who expected Basil to be beamed up to heaven in the midst of the flames.⁶⁷ The

⁶⁴ *Alexiad* (Reinsch 2001): XV, viii, 3: I, 486.55–6.

⁶⁵ Hamilton and Hamilton 1998: 181–204.

⁶⁶ *Alexiad* (Reinsch 2001): XV, ix, 5: I, 490.8–11.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*: XV, x, 4: I, 492–3.

strength of his popularity comes as a surprise. It shows that many in all walks of life had taken his piety and his message at face value and accepted him as yet another “holy man” sent to reprove a sinful generation. But Basil was no ordinary “holy man.” He was well educated – a doctor with access to court circles, who dabbled in esoteric knowledge. He was exactly the person to turn the staple message of repentance and the victory of good over evil presented by the “holy man” into a dualist set of beliefs. The conditions existing in Constantinople in the last decades of the eleventh century were propitious for the transformation of a popular following into a heretical community. The Turkish advance into western Asia Minor combined with coups and civil wars destabilized the Byzantine establishment. Alexius Comnenus’s seizure of power in 1081, if anything, made matters worse. His regime became the target of bitter criticism, while his use of show trials for heresy to cower opposition came close to discrediting Orthodoxy.⁶⁸ There were no longer the old certainties. These were conditions that would have increased the attraction of Basil the Bogomil’s teachings, especially as he insisted that he was teaching the path of true Orthodoxy. In more tranquil times the authorities might have been less alarmed by Basil’s activities. But they seemed to indicate that the church was losing control of society. It was the patriarch Nicholas Grammatikos (1084–1111), who was the first to react. He clamped down on the festivities over Christmas, which threatened to turn the church of St. Sophia “into places of business and a den of thieves and the holy festivals into outrageous gatherings.” The patriarch was trying to draw a clearer boundary between the sacred and the profane. Critics of Alexius Comnenus’s regime blamed the secularization of the church for present difficulties. The patriarch’s major innovation was to create an order of preachers attached to St. Sophia, which had the task of tackling the problem of heresy head on. This measure received imperial approval in 1107 at a time when the danger in Constantinople from the Bogomils was receding.⁶⁹ The work of Nicholas Grammatikos provided the foundations of measures taken by other twelfth-century patriarchs, which were designed to put an end to popular festivities. It is unlikely to have been entirely successful, but it was symptomatic of a desire on the part of the church to impose greater discipline on society.⁷⁰

That the threat from Basil the Bogomil was something more than a figment of the official imagination finds confirmation in the success of Bogomil missionaries in western Europe⁷¹ and in the persistence of dissident communities in Byzantium itself. However, his importance lies more in the way that at a time of extreme vulnerability for Byzantine society – at a time too of religious and intellectual ferment – he was able to give expression to permanent features of lay piety: a belief in the power of evil as a barrier to salvation and in the need for repentance combined with a reverence for holy men. In doing so, he offered a religious experience in which

⁶⁸ Browning 1975: 3–23.

⁶⁹ Gautier 1975: 179–85.

⁷⁰ Angold 1995: 464–7.

⁷¹ Hamilton et al. 2004: 56–98.

all could participate directly. In addition, by denying legitimacy to vested authority he articulated the contradiction which lies at the heart of Christianity between its egalitarian social teaching and its institutionalization of hierarchy. It was this more than anything else that worried the Byzantine establishment, but it found little resonance in society at large.

Over the twelfth century the Byzantine Church recovered its stability in the face of another apparent threat: that of the Latin Church. The anti-Latin propaganda put out by the church stoked popular fury against the Latins, who were supposed to have designs on Constantinople.⁷² Manuel I Comnenus's attempts from the middle of his reign to reach a rapprochement with the papacy foundered on popular opposition. As an Italian adviser to the emperor noted at the time, Latins were being "pointed out in the streets of the capital as objects of hatred and detestation."⁷³ In 1182 Andronicus I Comnenus's seizure of power climaxed in a massacre of the Latin inhabitants of Constantinople. The murder of a Roman cardinal underlines the role played by religious hatred. In many ways the loss of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade in 1204 turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophesy. It was a far worse blow to Byzantine self-esteem than the loss of much of Anatolia to the Turks at the end of the eleventh century. But paradoxically it had the effect of strengthening the hold of the church on Byzantine society, as the defense of Orthodoxy against the Latins became central to the Byzantine sense of identity. Attempts by emperors, such as Michael VIII Palaiologos (1259–1282), to bring about reconciliation with the papacy only united society against them. Those members of the élite who sympathized with the Latins were treated as traitors. By the end of the Byzantine era there was a greater convergence of church and society than ever before. Western travelers described Constantinople as though it were a museum of religiosity, overrun by monks and clerics.⁷⁴ But there were those who found this atmosphere stifling and stultifying and sought escape by converting to Islam, by emigrating to Italy, or, in the case of Gemistos Plethon, by retreating into nostalgia for the classical past.

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⁷² Kolbaba 2000: 1–32; 2006: 199–214; Chadwick 2003.

⁷³ Dondaine 1952: 126.

⁷⁴ Angold 2002: 213–32.

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A MONASTIC WORLD

Alice-Mary Talbot

The root meaning of *monachos*, the Greek word for monk, is one who lives alone, and indeed an eremitic lifestyle was espoused by the first Christians who sought sanctuary in the Egyptian or Judean desert from the demands of family life and the pressures and temptations of the village or city. These early fourth-century hermits, however, attracted followers, and often ended up establishing loose clusters of cells, the so-called *laurae*. Soon, in Upper Egypt, Pachomios (ca. 290–346) founded very large monasteries, which developed into *koinobia* where the monks engaged in communal prayer and manual labor, both agricultural and artisanal. These monastic houses owned substantial landed properties, were economically self-sufficient, and operated in accordance with a Rule laid down by their founder.

Basil of Caesarea (ca. 329–379), who lived a generation after Pachomios, played a leading role in developing monasticism in Anatolia; his *Long* and *Short Rules* gave preference to the cenobitic (communal) life over the eremitic, and emphasized the role that monasteries should play within society. Basil argued that monastic houses should be located in cities as well as in the countryside, and stressed the importance of supporting the urban population through charitable activity.¹ His ideas about monasticism, sometimes termed the “Basilian rule,” were to underlie all subsequent Byzantine monastic foundation documents.

By the fifth century monasteries were an urban as well as a rural phenomenon, with particularly large numbers being established in Constantinople and its environs. Female convents were more likely to be founded in cities, deemed safer than isolated sites in the countryside. Some monasteries were grouped on “holy mountains,” such as Bithynian Olympos and Mt. Athos which began to receive their first monks in the eighth and ninth centuries. Monasteries became major landowners, despite the efforts of some emperors to restrict their acquisitions. This chapter will

¹ Basil, *Short Rules*: nos. 100, 181, 284, 302 (Clarke 1925: 268, 297, 338–9, 346).

explore the many ways in which fully developed Byzantine monasticism was inextricably involved with society.

It is one of the paradoxes of Byzantine civilization that the monasteries that were established to enable Christian ascetics to renounce the material values and kinship bonds of the secular world soon became a microcosm of Byzantine social structure. This becomes readily apparent from a perusal of the 60 or so surviving rules (*typika*) of the seventh–fifteenth centuries which present the normative ideals of monastic communities, but reflect their inherent tensions and realities as well.² There were no monastic orders in the Byzantine East, like the Benedictines and Cistercians of the medieval West, but individual monasteries, each with its own set of regulations, although many of the *typika* were based on the same eleventh-century Constantinopolitan model. Hence prescriptions for monastic life varied from one house to another, with different degrees of strictness, but having certain features in common.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF MONASTIC LIFE: A MIRROR OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD

In principle monasteries were egalitarian, and the social differences of the outside world were to be left behind at the entrance gate. As Giles Constable has written, however, “It was in practice impossible to exclude entirely the social distinctions and attitudes that permeated secular society, in which most monks and nuns had been raised.”³ Out of practical necessity monastic organization was hierarchical, with the superior and his/her chief officials at the top. As we shall see in the next section, the monastic community was also patterned on familial structure, with the abbot or abbess as parent and the monks and nuns as their spiritual children. Monastics were divided into two groups, the better educated and literate ones who chanted the monastic offices, and the less educated who performed menial duties within the monastery and in the gardens and fields outside; it goes without saying that levels of literacy and education tended to reflect the social origins of the community members. This hierarchy can be seen clearly in the rules for precedence in seating in the refectory (reminiscent of the rules for seating at banquets at the imperial court), which placed the abbot and leading officials at a head table, while the other monks sat at separate tables, normally with preferential seating for priests and deacons. Inevitably there were quarrels and complaints about seating assignments; those guilty of such behavior were assigned to the lowest place or made to wait on table.⁴

² English translations of all these documents have been usefully assembled in the five volumes of Thomas and Hero 2000.

³ Thomas and Hero 2000: 1, xix.

⁴ For a study of rules of precedence in the refectory, see Talbot 2007.

There is as yet no special study of the social composition of monastic communities, but it seems to have been mixed, with recruits from all walks of life. There is no doubt that many monks and nuns were of humble background; one example is St. Neophytos the Recluse, who evidently came from a family of farmers, and was illiterate when he arrived at the Cypriot monastery of St. John Chrysostom at Koutsovendi. He was initially assigned to tend the vineyard, but eventually learned his letters and rose to become *ekklesiarches* and later the founder of his own monastery near Paphos. His brother John also ascended through the monastic ranks to become steward and then superior at Koutsovendi.⁵ Their careers show how upward social mobility was possible in the cloister as well as in the outside world. Likewise the future St. Ioannikios tended swine as a boy before taking the habit,⁶ and the monk Gregory, who founded the monastery of Boreine in western Anatolia, had worked as an artisan who collected his own wood to burn charcoal.⁷ As will be detailed later, monasteries provided a refuge for many poor or otherwise disadvantaged people who were able to assure their physical maintenance in exchange for taking monastic vows.

Monastic regulation and practice varied with regard to the entrance of slaves into monasteries, although in general monastic reformers forbade their presence. As early a text as the fourth-century *Long Rules* of Basil of Caesarea stated that slaves should not be accepted as postulants,⁸ while in the ninth century Theodore of Stoudios explicitly forbade both agricultural and personal slaves, stating that slaveholding is permissible only for laymen, and must be renounced, like marriage, upon adoption of the monastic habit.⁹ His prohibition was repeated by Athanasios of Athos, in his tenth-century rule for the Great Lavra on the Holy Mountain.¹⁰ Both men stressed that monks themselves should perform manual labor, and not relegate it to slaves. Likewise, in the thirteenth century Michael VIII strongly condemned slavery in his rule for his monastery on Mt. St. Auxentios, calling slavery "harmful and oppressive."¹¹ On the other hand, the convent of Kecharitomene permitted women of the imperial family to bring slaves with them when they took vows.¹²

At the other extreme of the spectrum were the wealthy, who also aspired to monastic life, often at a relatively advanced age and especially after being widowed. Monastic rules could be relaxed for the nobility, in the realization that it was difficult for them to make a radical change in their life style when middle-aged or elderly. Thus aristocrats and members of the imperial family were sometimes permitted to bring their own servants, live in private apartments, absent themselves

⁵ See Galatariotou 1991: 13–18.

⁶ *Life* of Ioannikios by Sabas, ch. 2, AASS Nov. 2.1: 333C.

⁷ Gregory: (35) Skoteine, ch. 2; Thomas and Hero 2000: 3, 1180.

⁸ Basil of Caesarea, *Long Rules*, ch. 11 (transl. Clarke 1925: 172–3).

⁹ Theodore of Stoudios, Testament; Thomas and Hero 2000: 1, 71, 76, and 77.

¹⁰ Athanasios of Athos, ch. 31; Thomas and Hero 2000: 1, 259.

¹¹ Mt. Auxentios, ch. 2; Thomas and Hero 2000: 3, 1218.

¹² Kecharitomene, ch. 4; Thomas and Hero 2000: 2, 670.

from communal meals, and eat their own specially prepared food.¹³ Practice varied, but wealthy postulants were not always required to get rid of all their personal property upon entrance to the monastery; they might retain title to landed estates or to items such as icons.¹⁴ Routinely, however, they made generous gifts to the monastery upon renouncing secular life. In an effort to keep monastic houses open to people of all classes mandatory entrance gifts were normally prohibited, but in the event “voluntary” gifts were routinely accepted or even eagerly anticipated.¹⁵

Food, drink, and clothing were supposed to be the same for all, but the amount of attention devoted to such matters in the *typika* indicates that those more highly placed in the monastic pecking order or those of wealthy background had access to better food. Thus in the words of a *typikon* of ca. 1300, some nuns are said to claim the right to a more luxurious diet “because of pride in ancestry perhaps or advanced education or supposed superior virtue, or the privilege of age, or because of a contribution of money or property.”¹⁶ Inequalities in monastic food are also described by satires such as the lengthy poem of Ptochoprodromos that contrasts the gourmet food and wine upon which the abbot and his friends gorge themselves with the rotten fish, dry bread, and sour wine apportioned to lowly novices.¹⁷

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN MONASTICS AND LAY SOCIETY

Another paradox of Byzantine monasticism was that monks and nuns, who had vowed to withdraw from the secular world, remained inextricably entwined with virtually all aspects of Byzantine society. One of the basic social divisions was between lay and monastic individuals, who were distinguished from each other by marital status, their clothing, and the tonsure; they were also separated by the imposing walls that surrounded monasteries and by strict gatekeepers, and by the rule of enclosure that supposedly kept monks and nuns within the cloister, and discouraged laypeople, especially of the opposite sex, from entering. Rules of enclosure were not rigidly enforced, however, so that nuns and, to a greater extent, monks had numerous reasons to go outside the walls, normally with the explicit permission of the superior. Among these reasons were various aspects of monastic business (e.g., supervision of estates, especially at harvest time, purchase of provi-

¹³ See the index to Thomas and Hero 2000: 5, 1981–2, under “privileges, aristocratic.”

¹⁴ Although Irene Choumnaina, for example, gave away much of her property upon taking vows at the age of 16, she retained ownership of certain estates into advanced middle age: see Hero 1985: 144 n. 70. On ownership of icons, see, for example, the case of the nun Euphrosyne in Oikonomides 1991: 40.

¹⁵ See index entries for “entrance gifts/offerings” in Thomas and Hero 2000: 5, 897.

¹⁶ Lips, ch. 29; Thomas and Hero 2000: 3, 1274.

¹⁷ See Eideneier 1991: no. IV. See also Talbot 2007.

sions, sale of surplus produce), attendance at tribunals or the synod, pilgrimage, consultation of physicians, and the visitation of dying relatives.¹⁸

Even when monastics remained within the cloister, however, their interactions with laypeople were multiple in their variety. (1) In middle and upper class families it was normal for one or more of the children to take the monastic habit. Many Byzantines were tonsured as teenagers, others entered monasteries at a later stage in life, after widowhood for example. Yet others took monastic vows on their deathbed in the hope of improving their chances for salvation. Thus it was common for a Byzantine layperson to have a relative who was cloistered or to expect to join a monastery him or herself in later years. (2) Monasteries provided spiritual services for lay congregants as well as for their own residents. The laity often used monks at nearby monasteries as their confessors and spiritual advisers, and attended services at monastic churches. Laypeople enjoyed the celebration of feast days at local monasteries, went on pilgrimage to monastic shrines near and far, and might seek healing from the relics of a saint deposited in the monastic church. (3) Provision of social and charitable services was another important function of monastic houses. Poor people flocked to monastery gates to receive alms and distributions of bread, wine, and leftover food. Large monasteries often included old age homes, hospitals, and/or hostels for travelers. (4) Monasteries also played a significant role in Byzantine economic life as major owners of agricultural lands and urban properties. Countless Byzantine peasants farmed fields or vineyards owned by monasteries, while others worked as hired laborers on monastic lands. (5) Finally, monasteries stimulated patronage and production of the arts and ecclesiastical literature. The wealthy commissioned the foundation of monasteries, paid for their decoration with monumental frescoes or mosaics, and ordered liturgical vessels and vestments for the sanctuary. In return they expected to be buried within the monastic church, and to benefit from the monks' perpetual prayers for their salvation. Many theological, hagiographic, and hymnographic texts were composed by monks, and monastic scriptoria played an essential role in the copying of manuscripts in the age before printing became available.

Monasteries and the family

Characteristic of Byzantine monasticism is the close yet sometimes conflicted relationship between monasteries and the family. On the one hand, taking of monastic vows involved the rejection of one's relatives, since aspiring monks and nuns were enjoined to leave behind all earthly bonds, following Jesus Christ's injunction in Luke 14:26: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and children and brothers and sisters . . . he cannot be my disciple." Saints' lives are replete with stories of teenagers running away from home, often on the eve of

¹⁸ See, for example, Talbot 1996c: 72–3.

their marriage, abandoning their parents and siblings in order to enter monastic life and take vows of celibacy. Marriage to Christ was to substitute for actual matrimony, and the procreation of children and continuation of the family lineage, normally paramount goals in Byzantine society, were foregone. Alternatively, husbands and wives might part after their children were grown in order to enter separate monasteries, and on occasion widowed mothers expressed the desire to take the veil, even though their children were still young. In theory the monastery was to replace the biological family with a spiritual one, reflected in the terminology for monks and nuns, called brothers and sisters, and the superiors, called mothers and fathers.

In fact, however, such total renunciation of kinship ties was characteristic only of the most saintly monks and nuns, and many monastics retained connections with family members. Sometimes relatives lived in the same monastery, uncle and nephew, brothers, sisters, mother and daughter, father and son, a situation that could lead to problems with favoritism and special treatment. This was especially true of the family of the founder, which had privileged status within the monastery, and might live in separate apartments with servants, and eat better food. As we shall see later, these family members often had the right of burial within the monastic church, and were commemorated by the monks or nuns on the anniversary of their death. Monastic rules varied with regard to visitation of relatives: stricter regulations discouraged any contact at all, while more lenient rules permitted relatives of the same sex to enjoy each other's company at stated intervals. Interaction with the opposite sex was normally restricted to the gatehouse, although sometimes a nun could leave the convent to visit her parents if they were gravely ill. Even in monasteries that normally restricted access to members of the opposite sex, relatives of family members buried in the monastic complex could visit to pray on behalf of the deceased.

Spiritual services

Monasteries served not only their own professed brethren, but also the outside community. Some Byzantines regularly attended services at monastic rather than parish churches, and developed close relations with the monks or nuns. Some made their confession to a spiritual father at a monastery and received his absolution and blessing, while others visited monasteries to seek spiritual, as well as practical, advice.¹⁹ Such motivation for visitation to a monastery can be readily seen in the eleventh-century *vita* of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion, a monastic superior (*hegoumenos*) who was also a holy man and stylite, residing atop a lofty pillar abutting the church. A steady stream of visitors made their way up the barren mountainside to tell the

¹⁹ See, e.g., *Life of Lazaros* (Greenfield 2000): ch. 93, p. 183, ch. 96, p. 187, ch. 117, p. 206, ch. 118, p. 208.

holy man their secrets, and ease their consciences. Lazaros would recommend appropriate penances, and offer advice about future conduct and spiritual comfort. As his biographer recounts, "Who would be able to tell in detail . . . how those who had fallen into various sins obtained appropriate [spiritual] healing from him in a most discriminating fashion?"²⁰

Pious Byzantines would also visit living holy men and women in monasteries or the relics of saints housed in monastic churches to pray for the birth of a child or the recovery of a loved one, or to be cured from various afflictions including possession by demonic spirits, the usual explanation of manifestations of mental illness. They might spend the night in incubation next to saints' tombs, kiss their reliquary, or pray to wonder-working icons. Often they would take away with them flasks of holy water or bits of hallowed earth for use at home or to share with friends and relatives. Sometimes beneficiaries of faith healing or their relatives would develop a special relationship with the monastery where the miracle had taken place, even playing a role in the promotion of the saint's cult. Such was the case of a man from Thessalonike named Theodotos, who lived near the convent of St. Theodora at the very end of the ninth century. He and his wife had lost all four of their children at a young age, and despaired of having a child live to maturity. They promised God to dedicate their next child to monastic life, and named their new infant daughter Theopiste after the abbess of the convent. When the baby fell very ill at the age of one year, the parents resolved to hand her over to the convent in fulfillment of their vow, and indeed the baby recovered, thanks to Theodotos' prayers to the relics of the abbess' mother, Theodora, who had herself died the previous year. As a result of his daughter's miraculous survival, Theodotos became a fervent patron of the convent and the newly burgeoning cult of Theodora's relics, persuading friends to seek healing at her shrine, and himself spending many hours at her tomb in solitary prayer. Eventually he collaborated with Theodora's daughter, the abbess of the convent, in arranging for the translation of Theodora's relics from a communal burial place to her own sarcophagus where her relics could be more easily available to the faithful.²¹

In addition to such individual displays of devotion to a monastic cult one can find groups of laymen, secular priests, and monks who formed confraternities linked with monasteries. The purpose of such organizations included veneration of and care for a particular icon belonging to the monastery and mutual assistance, especially the provision of funeral services for members. We are best informed about a confraternity that operated in the region of Thebes whose twelfth-century typikon has been preserved. It is signed by 49 members, lay, clerical, and monastic, including three laywomen. Its primary goal was to ensure the appropriate veneration of an icon of the Virgin belonging to the Convent of the Women from Naupaktos, located somewhere in or near Thebes. Each month the confraternity organized the processional transfer of the icon to a different local church, and one

²⁰ *Life of Lazaros* (Greenfield 2000): ch. 124, p. 212. In general see Greenfield 2002: esp. 222–9.

²¹ *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike* (Talbot 1996b): 213, 219–20, 228–30.

member took responsibility for the “maintenance” of the icon for the next 30 days, probably seeing that candles and/or oil lamps were kept burning in front of the image. They also sponsored the commemoration of temporal and spiritual authorities, including the abbesses of the convent and their own members, living or dead. If members of the confraternity fell ill, their brethren would offer prayers on their behalf; if they died, their brethren arranged their funeral services and commemorative services on the third, ninth, and fortieth day after their demise, as well as annually on the anniversary of their death.²²

Similar confraternities are also attested in Constantinople, in the tenth century, for example, at the Pege monastery, where a certain Stephen Katzator, healed of a painful hip problem after drinking holy water at the Virgin’s sacred spring, signed a document pledging that he would henceforth be “a servant of the Virgin,” and soon became the head of the lay brethren who arranged for the procession of her icon.²³ In the Palaiologan era a group of laymen garbed in special red garments ceremoniously removed the enormously heavy Hodegetria icon every Tuesday from the Hodegon monastery and paraded it through the streets past crowds of the faithful seeking cures of their illnesses and afflictions.²⁴

The local populace would also make pilgrimage to monasteries on special feast days, to enjoy the splendid liturgy and the company of friends. Often such feast days were the occasion of markets or fairs, called *panegyreis*, which attracted large crowds of vendors and purchasers.²⁵ There was a recreational aspect as well to such visitation of monasteries. The biographer of Gregory Palamas recounts how Gregory’s parents would take all their children, even toddlers, along with them to listen to sermons by monks. On one occasion they took a boat up the Bosphoros to visit an ascetic at the monastery of St. Phokas; en route his father caught a fish with his bare hands to take as a present to the holy man.²⁶ Excursions to rural monasteries afforded the opportunity to enjoy the beauties of nature, as we are told in a fourteenth-century account of a visit to the shrine of St. Prokopios near Trebizond. A woman called Barbara “cherished what one might call a divine and boundless affection for the famous church of the . . . great martyr Prokopios and the surrounding area. Westerly winds come from the so called Mountain of Mithras which rises above, and especially in spring people come there and enjoy the flowers and plants and take great delight in the sight of their bloom and in the thick grass.”²⁷

Perhaps the spiritual service that was most highly treasured by pious laymen was the prayers of the monks for the salvation of one’s soul. As can be seen throughout this chapter, this was the motivation for all sorts of gifts to monasteries, from land to precious liturgical vessels. In exchange for such gifts, carefully recorded in monas-

²² Nesbitt and Wiita 1975; Oikonomides 1991; and Horden 1986, for other examples.

²³ “De sacris aedibus deque miraculis Deiparae ad Fontem,” AASS Nov. III: 888BC, ch. 41.

²⁴ Majeska 1984: 362–66.

²⁵ On *panegyreis*, see Vryonis 1981.

²⁶ Philotheos Kokkinos, *Logos on Palamas*, ch. 7 (Tsames 1985: 433–5).

²⁷ Rosenqvist 1996: 268–71.

tic registers, the donors would be commemorated in various ways, both before and after death. At a minimum, such memorial services (*mnemosyna*) were celebrated on the anniversary of the day of the donor's demise; the more generous the contribution, the more frequent the services. Additionally on such occasions the church was illuminated with extra lighting, special meals were served in the refectory, and lavish distributions of food were made to the poor at the monastery gate. Typical is the provision made in the monastic rule of the early fourteenth-century convent of the Virgin of Sure Hope in Constantinople. The foundress, Theodora Synadene, specifies the commemoration of her nephew, John Komnenos Doukas Angelos Branas Palaiologos, every August 8 with seven liturgies, two extra candelabra, and special food for the nuns. Furthermore, each Thursday of the year an offering of consecrated bread is to be made on his behalf, and once a year four measures of wine are to be distributed to the needy at the gate, "since he was generous at the time of his death, and made large donations to the convent," consisting of a bejeweled icon of the Mother of God, another icon of her Dormition, and two veils adorned with pearls. He also donated a vineyard and a house to pay for the lighting of the lamp at his tomb.²⁸

Charitable and social services

As the empire Christianized, charitable activities that had been the responsibility of the state, such as the free distribution of bread to the poor, increasingly were taken over by the church, and in particular monasteries. Urban monasteries played a particularly important philanthropic role, inasmuch as they were located in the midst of an often needy population, but as we shall see rural monasteries also provided essential social services.

As described above, monasteries often took the place of the nuclear family. This can be seen especially clearly when they furnished services that a family was unable to provide, most often the maintenance of disadvantaged members of society who found refuge in a monastic haven. First of all, some of those seeking entrance to a monastery did so more out of compulsion than a true vocation. Such would be maidens unmarriageable because of the lack of a dowry or a disfigurement, people suffering from mental illness, and especially poor widows and widowers without families to look after them in their old age. Within the monastic precincts those in need were assured spiritual comfort, housing, regular meals, nursing care, burial, and prayers for their salvation.²⁹

It was not always necessary to take monastic vows to acquire support in one's old age. A common practice was the purchase of a kind of annuity, called an *adelphaton*, either with a cash payment or the donation of property, which ensured a

²⁸ *Bebaia Elpis*, ch. 142; Thomas and Hero 2000: 4, 1562.

²⁹ For more detailed studies, see Talbot 1985a and 1985b.

regular allotment of durable staples, such as wheat, oil, wine, and legumes; some contracts provided clothing and firewood in addition. The holders of these annuities could live either inside or outside the monastery, according to their personal preference.³⁰ Other eleemosynary activities might entail donations of money for the ransom of prisoners, care of orphans, and provision of dowries for poor maidens.³¹

Some monasteries included in their mission the care of the indigent in old age homes, hospitals, and poorhouses. The old age home at the Kosmosoteira monastery in Pherrai, for example, could accommodate 36 patients, both monks and laymen. It provided for all the needs of the elderly, including food (bread, wine, and cooked dishes), regular changes of bedding, dishes, clothing, a resident doctor, a blazing fire, baths as necessary, church services, and burial.³² The well-documented hospital at the imperial Pantokrator monastery in Constantinople, founded in the twelfth century, had beds for 50 lay patients, assigned to five wards for different illnesses and afflictions. The sick people were given ample bedding and clothing, and were treated by a professional staff, including doctors, surgeons, orderlies, and pharmacists.³³ Also in Constantinople was the poorhouse of Attaleiates, associated with his monastery. Each Sunday it distributed bread at its gate, while 18 widows or indigent old men received annual allotments of 12 measures of wheat. Its refectory fed six poor men daily, "each receiving a piece of bread, and as an accompaniment they should have either meat or fish or cheese, or dried or fresh vegetables which have been boiled . . . and each one of them should receive four *folleis* (bronze coins)."³⁴

The rules of many monasteries prescribed regular distributions of food, alms, and clothing to the poor at the main gate, with more lavish allocations on patronal feast days or the anniversary of the death of the founder. Thus at the Kosmosoteira in Pherrai, dedicated to the Virgin, 100 needy individuals were to receive a loaf of bread, a measure of wine, and six small coins on August 15, the feast of her Dormition. After the death of its founder, Isaac Komnenos, the poor were to be fed even more generously on this feast day, with boiled beans, bean soup, fish, or cheese.³⁵ At the Evergetis monastery in Constantinople old tunics and shoes were also distributed to the needy.³⁶

A few monasteries discriminated against women, however, in the distribution of food, taking their lead from the model typikon of Evergetis. Here women were not permitted to receive the food, wine, and legumes handed out at the gate on a daily basis, for fear of encouraging them to frequent the monastery entrance and cause temptation for the monks. Women were, however, permitted to receive food on

³⁰ Smyrlis 2006: 138–45, with previous bibliography.

³¹ See, e.g., Auxentios, ch. 9; Thomas and Hero 2000: 3, 1226–7.

³² Kosmosoteira, ch. 70; Thomas and Hero 2000: 2, 830–2.

³³ Pantokrator, ch. 36–55; Thomas and Hero 2000: 2, 757–65.

³⁴ Attaleiates, ch. 18; Thomas and Hero 2000: 1, 342.

³⁵ Kosmosoteira, ch. 10; Thomas and Hero 2000: 2, 803.

³⁶ Evergetis, ch. 38; Thomas and Hero 2000: 2, 495.

occasional feast days such as the Dormition of the Virgin.³⁷ At the rural Meteora monasteries in Thessaly the restriction was even more stark: "A woman . . . should not be given anything to eat, even if she happens to be dying of hunger."³⁸

Particularly useful for travelers were monastic hostels which furnished accommodations in rural locations where inns were few and far between. They offered a safe refuge from the perils of the road, providing a bed and food. Thus in the eleventh century the Pakourianos monastery, at Bačkovó in present-day Bulgaria, ran three hospices in different places. At Stenimachos it provided travelers and the poor with grain, wine, legumes, and fresh vegetables. It had both a built-in stove and a portable stove, and the services of a peasant to carry wood and water. Normally stays were restricted to three days.³⁹

Monasteries also assisted travelers (and of course local inhabitants as well) by constructing defensive towers in the countryside, and occasionally by building and maintaining roads and bridges. A tower that survives near ancient Olynthos on the Chalkidike peninsula was constructed by the Athonite monastery of Docheiariou in 1373, around the time it acquired the surrounding land as a monastic estate. The western wall of the tower, that originally had six stories, still preserves the brick monogram of the monastery. Slobodan Ćurčić argues that such towers may have been intended to guard monastic estates, and could also serve as places of refuge for lay laborers at times of crisis.⁴⁰ At Kosmosoteira in the twelfth century Isaac Komnenos had constructed a bridge "of massive stones" over a marsh for the convenience of wayfarers, and declared that the monastery was to be responsible for its upkeep and its replacement if necessary.⁴¹ Isaac also abolished the tolls previously levied on travelers along the nearby highway.⁴² In Lakedaimonia (southern Peloponnesos) a small monastery called Nea Gephyra ("New Bridge") was established in the same century specifically to protect and maintain a bridge over the River Eurotas; a little church was erected on the left side of the bridge, and a monumental stone inscription recorded the monk Nikodemos' contribution to the ease of travel.⁴³ Rural monasteries, which were typically surrounded with walls, also served as places of refuge during enemy invasions, or housed local populace beset by famine conditions. Thus, during the spring famine of 1308 entire families from Hierissos sought sanctuary at the Athonite monastery of Vatopedi, where they could be fed; this is one of the very rare instances where women were admitted to the Holy Mountain.⁴⁴

³⁷ Evergetis, ch. 38; Thomas and Hero 2000: 2, 495–6.

³⁸ Meteora, ch. 7; Thomas and Hero 2000: 4, 1460.

³⁹ Pakourianos, ch. 29; Thomas and Hero 2000: 2, 549.

⁴⁰ Ćurčić and Hadjistryphonos 1997: 213, 220–1; despite its title (*Secular Medieval Architecture in the Balkans 1300–1500 and its Preservation*), the volume does contain examples of monastic structures. See also Bakirtzis 2004, who alludes to the role of some towers as "a sacred landmark of monastic property."

⁴¹ Kosmosoteira, ch. 67; Thomas and Hero 2000: 2, 827–8.

⁴² Kosmosoteira, ch. 114; Thomas and Hero 2000: 2, 848.

⁴³ Nea Gephyra; Thomas and Hero 2000: 1, 296.

⁴⁴ *Vatopedi* (Bompaire et al. 2001): no. 43.

It should also be mentioned that sometimes positions were reversed and it was laypeople who came to the assistance of a poverty-stricken monastery, bringing donations of food or special treats for the monks, like honeycomb.⁴⁵ Or local inhabitants might contribute their services at the time of construction projects at a monastery. Thus, supporters of St. Lazaros helped him establish one of his early monasteries by hacking a road to its mountainous site through hard rock, and by building a chapel and cells for the monks.⁴⁶

It should be noted, however, that in general Byzantine monasteries did not play a major role as educational institutions, in contrast to some of their counterparts in the medieval West. Many typika specifically forbade the instruction of lay children, out of fear that they would disrupt the peace and quiet of the monastic precincts, or provide sexual temptation.⁴⁷ A few monasteries did permit the teaching of children who intended to take the habit or be ordained to the priesthood, but at Bačkovo the young students were relegated to a separate facility where classes were taught by an elderly priest.⁴⁸ At the Stoudios a school building was also added in the tenth century at some distance from the core of the monastery.⁴⁹

Monastic schools seem to have been intended especially for orphan children, who were often raised and educated in monasteries. Basil the Great had set a precedent for this by establishing a monastery school in Caesarea that provided instruction for orphaned children as well as those with parents. There were separate facilities for boys and girls, and for children of different ages. It was assumed that most of the boys would become monks, but some of them were trained in arts and crafts, and they were given free choice of their future vocation once they reached the age of reason.⁵⁰ Later on monastic schools for orphans are attested in Constantinople under Alexios I Komnenos, and at the Kecharitomene convent founded by his wife Irene.⁵¹

The economic role of monasteries

Acquisition of properties

The growth of monastic properties in the middle and late Byzantine eras is well attested. Monasteries steadily acquired vast rural estates (which included pastures and livestock, arable fields, orchards, olive groves, vineyards, water mills, fishponds,

⁴⁵ *Life of Lazaros*, ch. 56, 65 (Greenfield 2000).

⁴⁶ *Life of Lazaros*, ch. 11 (Greenfield 2000: 89).

⁴⁷ See e.g., Neophytos, ch. 9 (Thomas and Hero 2000: 4, 1353); Meteora, ch. 6 (Thomas and Hero 2000: 4, 1460); Bebaia Elpis, ch. 148 (Thomas and Hero 2000: 4, 1564).

⁴⁸ Pakourianos, ch. 31 (Thomas and Hero 2000: 2, 550–1).

⁴⁹ Miller 2003: 127–8.

⁵⁰ See Miller 2003: 114–20.

⁵¹ Miller 2003: 128, 132.

and salt pans), as well as urban houses and workshops, both as the result of generous donations by lay supporters and a carefully calculated program of land acquisition. Occasionally there were efforts by the state to curtail this monastic accumulation of land, as can be seen in the Novel issued in 964 by Nikephoros II Phokas prohibiting land donations for the purpose of establishing new monasteries.⁵² He criticized “the hours upon hours they hasten to acquire thousands of acres of land, lavish buildings, herds of horses, cattle, camels and other beasts beyond counting . . . with the result that monastic practices are in no way different from worldly life, bloated with cares.”⁵³ Under pressure from the church, however, this legislation was rescinded by his successor John I Tzimiskes (969–976). Similarly in the mid-twelfth century Manuel I Komnenos’ law forbidding new acquisitions of property by Constantinopolitan monasteries was annulled after his death. Thereafter there were no further such attempts to limit the growth of monastic property.⁵⁴

A recent monograph on monastic wealth and landholdings has provided a more nuanced study of the subject, demonstrating that the acquisition of property by monasteries was counterbalanced by losses as well: (1) the assignment of monasteries and their properties to laymen called *charistikiarioi* on a conditional basis for one or more generations, ostensibly to provide better financial management of institutions in decline; (2) confiscations by the state, especially to provide loyal military men with lands handed out as *pronoiai*, that is, grants of tax revenues and rents paid by tenant farmers; (3) the loss of estates as the result of enemy invasions and conquests of Byzantine territory, by Turks, Serbs, and Latins. Or sometimes small monasteries in decline were assigned to larger, more prosperous monastic houses, which thus expanded their property holdings; in such cases, however, there was overall no net change in the extent of lands under monastic control.⁵⁵

Since the lands of Athonite monasteries were for the most part in regions which remained under Byzantine control well into the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, they were least affected by enemy invasions; the major monasteries in particular seemed to maintain a steady rate of expansion, except for the difficult decades of the early thirteenth century after the Fourth Crusade. We are particularly well informed about the holdings of these monasteries thanks to their recently published archives which include many acts of donation and sale by private individuals. These shed light on the varied motivations which persuaded laypeople to transfer their properties to monastic institutions, and reveal the close intertwining of monasteries and their lay patrons, neighboring property holders, and tenant farmers.

No reason is given for many of the simple sales transactions, and often one can only speculate on the motives that led landowners to dispose of their property to a monastery: perhaps the need for ready cash, the impracticability of cultivating a

⁵² For the most recent discussion and an English translation of this novel, see McGeer 2000: 21–5, 90–6.

⁵³ McGeer 2000.

⁵⁴ Smyrlis 2006: 175–6.

⁵⁵ Smyrlis 2006: 166–82.

distant field, or the lack of capital to plant a vineyard. Some of the Athonite documents do, however, provide explicit reasons for the sale of property, such as the absence of heirs.⁵⁶ We learn also of a widow who needed money to ransom her son who had been captured by the Arabs.⁵⁷

Not all these sales were entirely voluntary; monasteries exerted particular pressure on laypeople to sell (or donate) lands contiguous to properties already in their possession, so as to consolidate agrarian estates or building complexes.⁵⁸ Monasteries, which in some ways acted as financial institutions because of the amounts of capital at their disposal, also could foreclose on mortgages; thus a family from Thessalonike, unable to pay off a 50 *hyperper* loan from the Chilandar monastery for which it had put up three houses as collateral, was forced after two years to sell the houses to Chilandar for an additional 90 *hyperpers*. The buildings were in poor shape, and the monastery had already rebuilt some of the walls that were in danger of collapse.⁵⁹ We read of other vendors who were forced to sell their properties out of financial desperation: in 1112 a woman whose husband was unable to support the family on account of successive crop failures had to sell an estate to Docheiariou, while in the early fourteenth century three individuals from Hierissos, just outside the boundary of Mt. Athos, found themselves with no alternative but to sell fields to Vatopedi because of a spring famine following crop failure.⁶⁰ On the one hand, the monastery was bailing out its neighbors who were in financial straits, but one also wonders if the vendors received a fair price. Later in the same century a certain Anna sold part of her dowry property to Docheiariou because it had been devastated in the aftermath of the Serbian occupation and was now abandoned; the document implies that Docheiariou would have the wherewithal to restore the land and make it suitable for cultivation.⁶¹ Evidently monasteries also acted as banks, where money could be safely deposited; in the early fourteenth century a couple who sold land to Chilandar asked the monks to keep half of the purchase price until such time as their daughter should marry and would need the money as a dowry.⁶²

Many pious Byzantines decided to donate rather than sell properties to monasteries. This was normally an explicit *quid pro quo* arrangement, with the donors receiving some sort of tangible or spiritual benefit from their gifts. Most common were the so-called *psychika*, that is, gifts made in exchange for the monks' commemoration of the donors and/or their relatives after their deaths. Donors' names would be entered in a *brebion* or inventory, and prayers on behalf of their salvation would be made on the anniversary of their demise. In the case of particularly generous contributions weekly commemorations could be arranged, such as singing a

⁵⁶ *Chilandar* (Živojinović et al. 2001): no. 53, a. 1320.

⁵⁷ *Iviron* (Lefort et al. 1985–95): no. 16, a. 1010.

⁵⁸ Cf., e.g., *Chilandar*: no. 98, a. 1324; *Xeropotamou* (Bompaire 1964): no. 26.

⁵⁹ *Chilandar*: no. 99, a., 1324; no. 112, a. 1327; no. 142, a. 1355.

⁶⁰ *Docheiariou* (Oikonomidès 1984): no. 3, a. 1112; *Vatopedi*: no. 43, VI–VIII.

⁶¹ *Docheiariou*: no. 42, a. 1373.

⁶² *Chilandar*: no. 118, a. 1329; for further discussion, see Smyrlis 2006: 104–5.

prayer to the Virgin each Monday at Vespers, and saying the liturgy in honor of the donor on Tuesdays, special prayers during Matins and Vespers services on Saturdays, or even daily commemoration.⁶³ The expectation was that such memorial prayers would be made in perpetuity, or as long as the monastery continued in existence. The feasts and charitable food distribution that accompanied the anniversary celebrations were sometimes lavish, requiring in one case an outlay of 100 measures of wheat, 100 measures of wine, and ten sheep.⁶⁴

Other donors contracted to receive the *adelphata*, or annual pensions already mentioned above in the section on charitable services; the value of the contribution in this case varied, but often was 100 gold coins, or the equivalent in houses, vineyards, or fields. The pension most often took the form of foodstuffs, an annual allowance of wheat, oil, and wine, with the occasional addition of dry legumes and cheese.⁶⁵ The provision of *adelphata* can be viewed either as a social service, assuring lifelong maintenance for the elderly, or as a potential money-making proposition for the monastery, if the beneficiaries died soon after their donation. It has been suggested that monasteries may have imitated the practices of modern-day life insurance actuaries in estimating the probable remaining lifespan of beneficiaries, and demanding payments or donations in proportion.⁶⁶

Yet others made contributions in exchange for admission to the monastery, care in their old age, or burial within the monastic church.⁶⁷ Some impoverished or elderly donors turned to monasteries to maintain properties whose upkeep they were unable to afford. Such was the situation of a Thessalonian woman named Maria who owned a church of the Forty Martyrs which had fallen into disrepair due to rain and vandalism by neighbors, and had turned into a refuse dump. Since she had been reduced to poverty by difficult times and could find no patron to help her, she sought assistance from the Athonite monastery of Dionysiou. Her act of donation was made on condition that the abbot of Dionysiou see to the restoration of the building and try to turn it into a monastery; she also requested her own commemoration and that of her parents in perpetuity.⁶⁸ It was possible as well to combine the sale and gift of property, by selling property to a monastery at below the market price, a type of transaction which also ensured the prayers of the monastic community for the remission of one's sins and spiritual salvation.⁶⁹

As might be expected, gifts of ancestral property to sometimes distant monasteries did not always meet with the approval of the donors' families, as we learn both from the Athonite archives and the acts of provincial ecclesiastical courts. For

⁶³ *Xeropotamou*: no. 30 a. 1445; *Docheiariou*: no. 58, a. 1419; *Iviron*: no. 81, a. 1324; *Lavra* (Lemerle et al. 1970–82): II, no. 98, a. 1304.

⁶⁴ *Iviron* II: no. 47, a. 1098.

⁶⁵ *Esphigmenou* (Lefort 1973): no. 29, a. 1388; *Chilandar*: no. 143, a. 1355.

⁶⁶ Smyrlis 2006: 138–45, esp. 142 and 145.

⁶⁷ *Esphigmenou*: no. 29, a. 1388; *Lavra* II, no. 78, a. 1285.

⁶⁸ *Dionysiou* (Oikonomidès 1968): no. 19, a. 1420. A number of Athonite acts mention how monasteries had improved properties that they received by gift or sale.

⁶⁹ E.g., *Xeropotamou* no. 16; *Iviron*, no. 26, a. 1042.

example an unpublished act of Vatopedi describes the tension that arose between siblings when the sister gave a mill to the monastery in exchange for commemorative services. Her brother, angered by her giving away family property, demanded that the monks return the mill and had his sister's name erased from the *brebion*, or list of names for commemoration!⁷⁰ On another occasion a man named Kalos complained to a court that his father's generosity had left him destitute. He noted that when his father died, he left his sole possession, a vineyard, to a monastery, bequeathing to his son only a wooden wine vat and some household objects. Now the son was left poverty-stricken, while the monks were obtaining revenues from the grape harvest. The provincial judge restored the vineyard to the young man, ruling that the father should have first made provision for the well-being of his children, and then he could bequeath the rest of his money wherever he wanted.⁷¹

Management of monastic estates

The operation and management of monastic estates, often widely scattered at some distance from the monastery, necessitated much interaction with laypeople. The chief financial manager of a monastery was usually the *oikonomos* or steward. At male houses the *oikonomos* would be either a monk or layman who supervised local lay superintendents (*pronoetai*). Nunneries most often resorted to lay financial management, but some convents did choose a nun to serve as steward; she might leave the convent to perform her duties. Most of the labor on monastic estates was provided by tenant farmers (*paroikoi*) who paid rent in cash or as a portion of the crop. Less often *paroikoi* were required to donate their labor, or the work was done by the monks themselves or by hired laborers (*misthioi*). Monasteries also hired lay shepherds to tend their flocks.⁷²

Trade and commerce

In recent years greater scholarly attention has been paid to the role of monasteries in trade and commerce. Although some emperors in the tenth and eleventh centuries demonstrated concern that large-scale trade was not an appropriate activity for spiritual institutions, and sought to limit monasteries to the small-scale commerce necessary for the provisioning of their monks, the production of surpluses, especially of wine, inevitably led to the acquisition of large ships and profit-making enterprise. The typikon of Constantine IX Monomachos in 1045 commented that the Protaton in Karyes, the Athonite administrative capital, had become a market instead of a *lavra*!⁷³ The increasing availability of the archives from Mt. Athos has shed light on the commercial activities especially of the major monasteries such as

⁷⁰ Grumel 1936–47: *RegPatr* 6, no. 2990, a. 1395.

⁷¹ Chomatenos (Prinzing 2002): no. 24, p. 94.

⁷² Smyrlis 2002.

⁷³ *Protaton* (Papachryssanthou 1975): no. 8.133.

Lavra, Iveron, and Vatopedi, which owned ships to transport surplus commodities, particularly wine, to Constantinople and other ports. The major monasteries received a number of fiscal privileges and tax exemptions which further increased their profits.⁷⁴

Recent survey work in the region of Rhaidestos and underwater archaeology in the Sea of Marmara has revealed much new information on the apparent economic involvement of the monasteries on Mt. Ganos in the production of wine and the amphorae in which they were transported. A number of amphora kilns have been found in a village on the nearby coast in a wine-producing region, and it has been assumed that these potteries were owned and managed by the Ganos monasteries. The same type of amphorae have been found in large quantities in shipwrecks off the island of Prokonnesos, suggesting the wide-scale transport of wine amphorae from the Ganos region to Constantinople and beyond. The scale of the trade is demonstrated by Dr. Günsenin's estimate that one of the wrecked ships may have carried a cargo of more than 20,000 amphorae!⁷⁵

Monasteries as patrons, producers, and preservers of arts and letters

A final area of investigation will be the cultural role of monasteries, as consumers, producers, and preservers of works of art and literature.

Architecture and liturgical arts

Monasteries both sponsored and produced works of art and architecture, interacting closely with lay patrons who in fact ordered and paid for many of the commissions. At the time of the initial foundation of a monastic house, the essential components – church, refectory, cells – might be built by the monks themselves, by members of the nearby lay community, or by itinerant workmen, depending upon the location of the monastery and its financial assets. If a wealthy patron was involved, then he or she might commission the construction or restoration of an elegantly designed and executed church and other monastic buildings. We tend to forget that many of the most famous Byzantine churches in Constantinople, for example, such as the Chora, Pammakaristos, Pantokrator, and Lips, were once the *katholika* or principal churches of monastic complexes whose functional buildings have long since disappeared due to the ravages of time. Aristocratic patrons with the necessary means were anxious to sponsor the construction or renovation of monastic churches, where they themselves and members of their families might be buried and commemorated after death in the prayers of the resident monks or nuns.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Živojinović 1991.

⁷⁵ Günsenin 1998 and 2002.

It was of course also a mark of social prestige to have one's name associated with a major monastery.⁷⁶ Some patrons, like the late thirteenth-century great logothete George Akropolites, took an intense personal interest in supervising the ongoing construction project, unflagging in his commitment even when the costs rose above the original estimate. It is noteworthy that George found it necessary to decrease the amount of money he had planned to bequeath to his son Constantine, on account of the cost overrun at the monastery, but fortunately Constantine shared in his father's devotion to the project and did not protest.⁷⁷

Such patrons and their relatives frequently also commissioned the manufacture of deluxe liturgical objects to adorn the church and enhance the material wealth of the monastery. These objects might be donated in fulfillment of a vow after healing from an illness or the conception and safe delivery of a child, or most commonly in explicit exchange for prayers during one's lifetime and posthumous commemoration. To take only one example, in the early fourteenth century Isaac Komnenos Doukas Tornikes and his wife made a generous offering to the convent of the Virgin of the Sure Hope that included "an icon of the bust of my all-holy Mother of God, decorated with three red precious stones and pearls." They were to be rewarded with seven liturgies on the anniversary of Isaac's death, with two extra candelabra providing lavish illumination.⁷⁸ Such donations were registered in an inventory or in a *synodikon* that listed the appropriate day of commemoration and the item donated.⁷⁹

In order to ensure a permanent record of their gift donors might arrange to have the object inscribed with their name and the reason for their donation (e.g., "in fulfillment of a vow," "for the sake of good health," "for the sake of salvation"), or even ask a poet to compose an epigram spelling out the circumstances of the object's presentation to the monastic church. These poems might be painted directly on the icon or engraved on a silver-gilt frame, liturgical vessel, or reliquary. Typical are the epigrams written by a fourteenth-century poet, Manuel Philes, for various works of art offered to the Pege monastery (located just outside the walls of Constantinople) by donors grateful for cures at the shrine's holy spring: relief from severe headache, a paralyzed arm, hemorrhage, dropsy, or the recovery of a severely ill infant.⁸⁰

Some liturgical objects, especially unadorned manuscripts, were produced within the monastery, and certain monastic houses such as Stoudios and Hodegon acquired particular reputations for the work of their scriptoria. There is evidence as well for the creation of icons and illuminated manuscripts at Stoudios, the monastery of St.

⁷⁶ On architectural patronage of Palaiologan monasteries, see Kidonopoulos 1994, and Talbot 2001b.

⁷⁷ See Akropolites, ch. 2–5; Thomas and Hero 2000: 4, 1378–9.

⁷⁸ Bebaia Elpis, ch. 140; Thomas and Hero 2000: 4, 1561–2.

⁷⁹ See, for example the eleventh-century *synodikon* of the Athonite monastery of Iveron (Lefort et al. 1985–95): 2, 4–17.

⁸⁰ Talbot 1994: 147–61.

Catherine on Mt. Sinai, and the monastic houses of Mt. Athos. Recent fieldwork in Bulgaria has revealed the presence of workshops for the carving of bone and stone, the manufacture of ornamented ceramic tiles, bookbinding, and the like. Most monasteries were too small, however, to accommodate the specialized artists and artisans needed for the production of painted miniatures and icons, liturgical vessels and vestments, and ordered these objects from lay workshops.⁸¹

These works of art were either on permanent or temporary display in the *katholikon*, or used within the daily monastic offices and celebration of the eucharistic liturgy. Icons would be rotated on and off icon stands in accordance with the celebration of the feast days of the saints, Christ and the Virgin, and lamps and candlesticks added or subtracted depending upon the importance of the service. Liturgical books and objects not in use were held in safekeeping in the church sacristy. These items were not only viewed as sacred works of art, but as inalienable assets of the monastery, to be sold only in case of dire necessity.⁸² Reliquaries and miracle-working icons were also prized as objects which attracted pilgrims, thus further enhancing the revenues of the monastery.⁸³

Monasteries as loci of manuscript production and composition of ecclesiastical literature

Monks played an essential role in the transmission of knowledge in Byzantium as a result of their copying of manuscripts, either as individual producers or as members of highly organized scriptoria as at the Stoudios monastery in Constantinople.⁸⁴ It has been estimated that in the tenth–twelfth centuries monks copied somewhere between 42 and 50 percent of all the manuscripts being produced in the Byzantine world.⁸⁵ These codices were destined both for internal use within the monastery – in services and for private reading in cell and library – and for lay purchasers in the outside world. Monastic libraries were among the major repositories of books in the Byzantine world, and were consulted by outside readers as well as their own monks. Their holdings were primarily theological and liturgical, but secular works, even romances, are not unknown.⁸⁶

No less important was the work of compilation and original composition and scholarship that was pursued within monastic precincts. Much of the enormous oeuvre of hagiography, homiletics, and hymnography that has come down to us was composed by monks, and we also owe to them works on canon law, liturgy, and doctrinal exegesis. We should not forget that even more secular works were

⁸¹ On this question see Talbot 2000: 22–7, with previous bibliography.

⁸² Talbot 2000: 31–4.

⁸³ Smyrlis 2006: 101–4.

⁸⁴ See Ševčenko and Mango 1975, especially chapters by Nigel Wilson, Jean Irigoin, and Cyril Mango.

⁸⁵ See Cutler 1981.

⁸⁶ See the indices of Thomas and Hero 2000: 5, 1861–9.

produced in monasteries: Theophanes the Confessor wrote his *Chronographia* at the Bithynian monastery of Megas Agros, while the princess Anna Komnene wrote her biography of her father, the *Alexiad*, while living in retirement in the convent of Kecharitomene.

CONCLUSION

Investigation of several spheres of Byzantine life has demonstrated the myriad ways in which the everyday activities of laymen were intertwined with those of their monastic neighbors. Most Byzantines had friends and relatives residing in monasteries, or themselves planned to take the habit either in their youth or in later years. They might attend services at the local monastic church on a regular basis, visit on special feast days, or make pilgrimage to a nearby or distant shrine to seek miraculous healing or petition for assistance for loved ones in distress. If poor they could seek food and alms at the monastery gate, find care at the monastic hospital or old age home, or work as tenant farmers on lands owned by a monastic house. If of more comfortable circumstances Byzantines might obtain from monasteries pensions for their old age, care in their retirement and/or posthumous commemoration in return for donations. The wealthy might found monasteries, commission new church buildings or restore old ones, and make major donations of real estate and deluxe works of art in the expectation of burial within the *katholikon* and perpetual commemoration in the prayers of the monks or nuns.

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GLOSSARY OF BYZANTINE AND MEDIEVAL TERMS

<i>Adelphaton</i>	A type of annuity administered by monasteries which provided (elderly) laity with a regular allotment of food and other necessities in exchange for an initial cash payment or donation of property
<i>Aktemon</i>	A peasant with no property, no oxen or plough
<i>Annona</i>	In the late Roman period, military rations issued from taxation collected in kind; Gk. <i>synonê</i>
<i>Apotheke</i>	A state depository for various goods and materials; in the 7 th –9 th centuries the warehouse, and the district to which it pertained, under the control of a <i>kommerkiarios</i>
<i>Archontes</i>	Holders of imperial titles or offices; provincial land-holding élite dominating towns
<i>Augustus</i>	Senior emperor of a group, either a college of rulers (e.g. the tetrarchy) or within a single family
<i>Autokrator</i>	Greek equivalent of the Latin <i>imperator</i> , emperor, used especially after the 7 th century to emphasize the emperor's autonomous and God-granted rule
<i>Basileus</i>	Formal title of the Byzantine emperor from the 7 th century
<i>Boidatos</i>	A peasant farmer with one ox, generally paying only 50% of the tax owed by a <i>zeugaratos</i>
<i>Book of the Eparch</i>	A regulatory guide issued by the office of the governor of Constantinople in the late 9 th or early 10 th century
<i>Brebion</i>	An inventory or list of lands, monastic furnishings or donors to be commemorated
<i>Caesar/kaisar</i>	During the tetrarchy, a subordinate ruler under the authority of the <i>Augustus</i> ; thereafter used of a junior

	emperor, and from the 7 th century also the highest court dignity, normally limited to the emperor's sons, but exceptionally granted to another
<i>Capitatio-iugatio</i>	A formula relating land to labor power for the assessment of taxation, 4 th –7 th centuries
<i>Charistikiarios</i>	A person or institution that was granted administrative responsibilities over a monastery for a restricted period of time
<i>Chôrion</i>	A village; in technical usage, a fiscal unit
<i>Civitas</i>	Gk. <i>Polis</i> , "city," understood as a self-governing unit with its own territory and administration; the basic fiscal administrative district into the 7 th century
<i>Clarissimus</i>	Lowest grade of senatorial rank
<i>Codex Justinianus</i>	Codification of Roman law produced at the beginning of the reign of Justinian I, and the basis for all later Byzantine law
<i>Colonus</i>	Peasant tenant cultivator; some <i>coloni</i> were bound to the land they farmed, others retained their freedom of movement
<i>Confraternity</i>	A group of laymen, clerics, and monks linked to monasteries and formed to honor particularly celebrated icons and provide mutual assistance
<i>Curia/curiales</i>	Town council and councillors, governing body of a city
<i>Demes</i>	Chariot-racing fan clubs, sometimes acting as foci of political/religious violence or protest
<i>Demosion</i>	The fisc, and by derivation also a public tax (often used of the land-tax)
<i>Despotes</i>	High imperial title in the later Byzantine period, generally reserved for members of the ruling dynasty; or designation for the ruler of a semi-independent imperial territory
<i>Diocese</i>	Lat. <i>dioecesa</i> , Gk. <i>Dioikêsis</i> , an administrative unit consisting of several provinces; from the 4 th century the episcopal administrative unit of the church
<i>Dioiketes</i>	Fiscal administrator responsible for the land-tax, usually in a single diocese, from the 7 th century
<i>Dizeugites</i>	A peasant with two yokes of oxen
<i>Dromos</i>	<i>Cursus publicus</i> – the public postal, transport, and relay system
<i>Dynatos</i>	Literally, a "powerful person," so described because of his position in the military or administrative establishment of the state

<i>Doux</i>	Originally in the later Roman period a commander of a military unit; commander of a unit of <i>limitanei</i> , or garrison troops; in the middle and later Byzantine period the title <i>doux</i> was re-introduced as a high military rank
<i>Ecloga</i>	"Selections" from Roman law, interpreted in the light of its own time and codified as a handbook of Roman law during the reign of Leo III (717–741). The basic Byzantine law-book until the time of the emperor Basil I (867–886)
<i>Ekklesiarches</i>	The sacristan of a church, responsible for preparing for services by setting out the appropriate liturgical vessels and books, as well as the lamps and candles needed for illumination
<i>Emphyteutic lease</i>	Lease by which the tenant paid a fixed rent (in kind or cash), the terms of which were transferable and were often held in perpetuity and hereditarily
<i>Ergasterion</i>	A workshop, also functioning as a shop
<i>Ergodosia</i>	Imperial factory or workshop
<i>Eunuch</i>	Castrated male who could occupy any position in the imperial system; some offices were restricted to eunuchs alone. Eunuchs often received special preference since they were legally barred from imperial office and were therefore regarded as trustworthy subordinates by the emperors
<i>Farmers' Law</i>	See <i>Nomos georgikos</i>
<i>Follis</i>	Low value copper coin worth 40 <i>nummi</i> : there were 288 to the gold <i>solidus</i> or <i>nomisma</i>
<i>Gasmouloi</i>	Originally persons of mixed Greek and Latin race, paid as mercenaries
<i>Genikon (sekretion)</i>	The general treasury and main fiscal department of government after the 7 th century
<i>Geoponika</i>	Ancient agronomical treatises
<i>Gloriosus</i>	Gk. <i>endoxos</i> , high-ranking senatorial title introduced by Justinian
<i>Hegoumenos</i>	The superior of a monastery
<i>Hesychasm</i>	Late Byzantine mystical approach to prayer and meditation, especially popular in monastic circles
<i>Hexagram</i>	Silver coin introduced by Heraclius, lit. "six grams," 12 to a <i>nomisma</i> . Although issued in large quantities under Heraclius and Constans II, its use dwindled until production ceased in the early 8 th century
<i>Hieromonachos</i>	A monk in priestly orders

<i>Hyperpyron</i>	The highest value gold coin from the reform of Alexius I Comnenus
<i>Iconoclast</i>	An opponent of image veneration
<i>Iconodule</i> (or <i>Iconophile</i>)	A supporter of the veneration of images
<i>Idikon</i> (or <i>eidikon</i>)	An imperial fiscal department and associated warehouse(s)
<i>Iconoclasm</i>	Rejection of the honoring of sacred images as a form of idolatry. Condemned as a heresy at the Council of Nicaea in 787, and again in 843
<i>Illustis</i>	Until the middle of the 6 th century the highest grade of senatorial rank
<i>Incubation</i>	The practice of spending the night in proximity to the relics of a saint in the hope of attaining a miraculous cure
<i>Kapnikon</i>	Tax on “hearths” or households, introduced probably during the later 7 th or 8 th century
<i>Kastron</i>	“Fortress,” but after the 7 th century also used to mean “town” or “city”
<i>Katholikon</i>	The principal church of a monastery
<i>Kekolymena</i>	“Prohibited” goods, usually high-quality silks, strictly regulated by the imperial court
<i>Kephale</i>	Provincial military and civil governor, in charge of a <i>katepanikion</i> , a military-administrative district, in the 14 th –15 th centuries
<i>Kleisoura</i>	Small frontier command; district along/behind the frontier (esp. later 8 th –10 th centuries)
<i>Koinobion</i>	A type of monastery which emphasized a communal lifestyle, including attendance at church services and meals in the refectory
<i>Kome</i>	A village settlement
<i>Kommerkiarioi</i>	Fiscal officials responsible for state-supervised commerce and the taxes thereon. During the 7 th and 8 th centuries had a much expanded role in the fiscal system and (probably) the supplying of the armies; from the middle of the 8 th century reverted to chiefly commercial functions
<i>Komopolis</i>	A small town-like settlement
<i>Kourator</i>	The manager or steward of an imperial estate or group of estates
<i>Kouratoria</i>	Imperial estates or lands managed by a <i>kourator</i>
<i>Laura</i>	A type of monastery in which monks lived as solitaries during the week, but assembled on weekends for the celebration of the liturgy and a communal meal
<i>Logariastes</i>	Chief fiscal officer following the reforms of Alexius I

<i>Logothetes</i>	Fiscal official, lit. "accountant"; from the 7 th century all the main fiscal bureaux were placed under such officials, who were often very high-ranking
<i>Metochion</i>	A subordinate or daughter monastery under the authority of a larger or more powerful monastic house
<i>Miliaresion</i>	Lat. <i>milliarensis</i> , a silver coin worth one twelfth of a <i>solidus/nomisma</i> . Originally struck at 72 to the pound, from the 7 th –11 th centuries used of the basic silver coin, struck at varying rates from 144 to 108 to the pound, especially of the reformed silver coin introduced under Leo III. Production ceased under Alexius I, but the term continued in use as a money of account
<i>Misthios</i>	Hired laborer
<i>Mnemosyna</i>	Commemorative services celebrated on the anniversary of the death of a donor to a church or monastery
<i>Modios</i>	A unit of measure: of area, usually equated with about 1/10 ha.; of weight; and of volume. There were several different <i>modioi</i> , including the <i>annonikos modios</i> , calculated at 26.6 Roman pounds (@ 320g:pound, i.e. 18.75 lbs avoirdupois/8.7 kg); and the "imperial," or <i>basilikos modios</i> , of 40 Roman pounds (28.2 lbs/12.8 kg)
<i>Mortê</i>	A sharecropping contract, or the rent derived therefrom
<i>Nomisma</i>	Lat. <i>solidus</i> , the gold coin introduced by Constantine I which remained the basis for the Byzantine precious metal coinage until the Latin conquest in 1204. Weighing 4.5g, it was reckoned at 24 <i>keratia</i> , a unit of account (carat), and its fractions were 12 silver <i>hexagrams</i> or <i>milliaresia</i> and 288 copper <i>folleis</i> . From the middle of the 11 th century increasingly depreciated, it was reformed by Alexios I, and more commonly known thereafter as the <i>nomisma hyperpyron</i> or simply <i>hyperpyron</i>
<i>Nomos Georgikos</i>	The "Farmers' Law," a practical legal handbook regulating agrarian community relations, property issues and so forth, derived largely from the <i>Codex Iustinianus</i> , and dated variously from the 7 th to the early 10 th century. Usually regarded as a later 7 th -century or 8 th -century compilation
<i>Oikonomos</i>	The financial officer of a large church monastery, responsible for the management of its landed properties and other assets; the term could also be used of the bailiff or manager of a secular estate
<i>Oikos</i>	A (family) household, a family unit or clan, by extension a household-based fiscal unit, or an estate

<i>Panegyris</i>	A market or fair held on the annual celebration of a saint's feast day
<i>Paroikos</i>	Peasant tenant on private or state land, paying rent as well as tax. Byzantine equivalent of <i>colonus</i>
<i>Polis</i>	See <i>Civitas</i>
<i>Praetorian Prefecture</i>	The largest administrative unit of the empire from the time of Constantine I, under a praetorian prefect (originally a commander of the praetorian guard). Each prefecture was divided into dioceses, then provinces, and had its own fiscal administrative and judicial structure
<i>Praktikon</i>	Document drawn up by fiscal officials listing obligations of tenants on an estate or estates
<i>Prokathêmenos</i>	Town/fortress governor of the Komnene period
<i>Pronoia</i>	Attribution of fiscal revenues, usually to a soldier in return for military service. Appears first on a limited basis in the 12 th century; eventually included lifelong and heritable grants
<i>Prosalentai</i>	Oarsmen in the imperial ships who appear to have been given lands in certain coastal regions and islands to support their service
<i>Prôtonotarios</i>	Chief fiscal administrator of a theme from ca. 820–mid-11 th century
<i>Psychika</i>	Gifts made to monasteries in exchange for the monks' commemoration of the donors and/or their relatives after their deaths
<i>Res privata</i>	Imperial treasury, originating in emperor's private finances. Subsumed during the 7 th century into the department of imperial estates
<i>Roga</i>	Originally a salary paid monthly, quarterly, or annually; from at least the 9 th century also a court pension attached to various ranks and titular posts, awarded in return for a substantial down-payment
<i>Scriptorium</i>	A writing bureau or clerical copying establishment, usually associated with a monastery, or with the imperial court
<i>Stasis</i>	A landholding, a fiscally-identifiable property
<i>Strateia</i>	(1) State military service, but generally used of any state service whether military or not (2) Service in the army (3) The obligation to support a soldier/a property whose tenant/owner was subject to such an obligation
<i>Strategos</i>	A general; in Byzantine times usually the governor of a military district or <i>thema</i> , and commander of its soldiers

<i>Stratiotes</i>	A soldier; by derivation from the 10 th century a holder of “military” land, subject to the obligation to support a soldier
<i>Stratitikon logothesion</i>	Fiscal department which dealt with recruitment, muster-rolls, and military pay from the 7 th century
<i>Stylite</i>	A type of monk who mortified his body by living atop a column or pillar
<i>Synodikon</i>	An inventory in a church or monastery that registered items donated and the commemoration day of the donor
<i>Synonê</i>	Until the later 7 th century = <i>coemptio</i> , compulsory purchase, also applied to the <i>annona</i> . Thereafter applied to part of the land-tax
<i>Tagmata</i>	(1) Elite field units recruited by Constantine V. They formed the core of imperial field armies until the eleventh century (2) Any full-time “mercenary” unit – used especially of foreign mercenary troops in the 10 th –12 th centuries
<i>Thelematarioi</i>	“Volunteers,” soldiers/watchmen who served on the basis of grants of land given by the emperors, in the region of Constantinople
<i>Thema</i>	A “theme,” from the early 9 th century the technical term for the district across which soldiers were quartered, and from which they were recruited; an administrative unit; the army based in such a region. Before this such regions were known simply as “commands” – <i>stratêgiai</i>
<i>Typikon</i>	Document setting out the rules and regulations for the administration of a monastic community
<i>Tzakones</i> (or <i>Lakones</i>)	From the southern Peloponnese, they served as light-armed troops
<i>Zeugaratos</i>	A peasant farmer with a pair of oxen
<i>Zeugarion</i>	A yoke of oxen and plough, or an area of land that can be tilled by a yoke

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