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THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE BYZANTINE COUNTRYSIDE IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE XTH CENTURY

The Xth century is a period of social transformation in the Byzantine empire. According to the prevailing theory, the population of the provinces, mainly made up of small landowners, was then undergoing a change, due to the proliferation of big estates of aristocratic families or of ecclesiastical institutions: in their insatiable desire to increase their domains and their revenues, the “powerful” Byzantines put pressure upon their neighbours in order to acquire their land—preferably land that was already cultivated and did not require investments in order to become productive. From their side, the small landowners who decided to sell, had little choice but to stay on the same piece of land and cultivate it as _paroikoi_, i.e. as dependent tenant peasants. The catastrophic winter of 927/28 abruptly accelerated this process.

Becoming the _paroikos_ of a big landowner was not necessarily a bad arrangement for a peasant, at least in the short run. Lay and ecclesiastic landowners protected their men in all manner of adversity, and sometimes

offered them reasonably good working conditions thanks to their fiscal privileges. But this transformation of the peasantry had important consequences for the State finances: it meant that the independent taxpayers, who used to pay up all their taxes in the past, were now sheltered by the big landowners’ privileges, and did not pay them any more. The decrease of the fiscal revenue was felt in Constantinople and the Xth century emperors issued a series of novellae, the purpose of which was to stop the wealthy from acquiring land belonging to the free small peasantry. The fact that many laws have subsequently been issued on the same subject, shows that the legislation did not attain its goal right away. And we do not know to which point the small free property system was corroded and the State revenues had fallen at the beginnings of this legislative effort against the big landowners. The present paper is concerned with this last question.

In the technical vocabulary of the times, landowners were defined either as ‘powerful’ (dynatoi) or as ‘poor’ (penetes). But the line drawn between them was not always clear, as both terms have a qualitative connotation originating from different principles. The best definition that I know, is that dynatos is the person who, thanks to his social position and/or his clout and/or his relations, can intimidate the others.

Another distinction between these two social groups was inspired by fiscal criteria and might appear as clearer. It was based on the fiscal concept of chorion (village), an agglomeration of small landowners, with some communal property and common responsibility for acquitting the village’s fiscal obligations. This last aspect of fiscal solidarity was fundamental, in spite of the fact that the taxes of villagers were calculated individually according to what each of them possessed, and that there was little communal activity.

2. This I tried to show in Η Πίεση περί παροίκων, Άφηγημα στον Νίκο Σβόρονο I, Rethymno 1986, 232-241.

3. We now have a new edition of these novellae: N. Svoronos, Les nouvelles des empereurs macedoniens concernant la terre et les stratiotes, ed. posthume par P. Gournaridis, Athens 1994; as it often happens with posthumus publications, it presents several shortcomings: see L. Burgmann, Editio per testamentum, Rechtshistorisches Journal 13, 1994, 455-479.

4. Svoronos, Les nouvelles, 70, 71 (no 2).
except when facing the tax collector. The chorion was thus a fiscal unit of substantial dimensions, no doubt composed essentially by pentetes - a unit composed of many individuals, all good taxpayers, with whom the fiscus would deal collectively.

By rejuvenating and better defining the traditional preemption rights, the 10th century emperors tried to impede the powerful from acquiring property inside the village communities. One term used to qualify these wealthy landowners, was that of ‘powerful persons’ prosopod, i.e. individuals whose domains were large enough to be considered as separate fiscal units. It is obvious that any fiscal ‘prosopon’ had to be a dynatos, i.e. a land owning individual or institution, such as a monastery.

It is important to note that in all this effort to ensure the regular collection of taxes, the 10th century governments seem not to have seriously envisaged – and, even less, tried – to diminish or cancel the fiscal privileges and other advantages of the dynatos, as if they were an inevitable fact of life. They have only tried to protect the ‘good taxpayers’ by keeping them inside their villages and away from the powerful’s domains and protection. The 10th century legislation was motivated by narrowly fiscal – and not social – considerations.

In this context, one has to estimate that the fiscal obligations of the powerful should have been more lenient than those of the poor, not in absolute figures, but as a proportion of the total revenue. Let me explain what I mean.

Powerful and poor had to pay the basic land tax, the demosion, which was calculated for all according to the same rates and was directly proportionate to the value of the taxed property. No-one could escape from this obligation, except if he could obtain a special privilege, called logismion, and liberating him from the payment of the basic land tax. But until the second half of the 11th century, this privilege was granted rather sparingly.

5 The limited extent of communal activities in the Byzantine villages is rightly stressed by Kaplan, Hommes et terre 211 ff.
6 E.g. Svoronos, Les nouvelles, n°2, 1, 77, 86-87.
7 The basic land tax normally amounted to 1/24th of the fiscal value of the taxed property and was increased by the addition of some surtaxes called patakolouthes etc.
and mostly to ecclesiastical institutions. Thus one may assume that as far as the demosion is concerned, powerful and poor were taxed proportionately to their properties.

But there were also the side taxes, obligations and corvées, which were neither equally distributed nor exacted from all. The powerful were, by definition, not submitted to the degrading ones. On the other hand, they were struck by some extraordinary taxes (such as the monprosopon that we shall see below) which were expensive per se, but relatively light in relation to their properties. In other words, the powerful were undertaxed as far as their secondary obligations were concerned.

Also they could obtain an exkousseia, i.e. an exemption from some or all secondary taxes. This privilege was granted more easily than the logismos. But in the texts that we are going to discuss below, tax exemption is irrelevant as we will be discussing powerful landowners who did not escape from their secondary taxes but paid them in full.

We shall focus on some texts describing an extraordinary contribution imposed on the Peloponnesian army and the Peloponnesian dynatoi in the Xth century and try to establish the relative importance of each of these groups and of the peasants that depended from them. The ultimate purpose will be to evaluate the relative importance of the dependent peasantry in the Peloponnese and to compare this conclusion with what we know from the Thrakesion in Asia Minor at approximately the same time.

The Testimony of Constantine Porphyrogenetos

Our basic information comes from a well-known text of Constantine Porphyrogenetos8. The events described are dated under the reign of

8. CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENETOS. De Administrando Imperio. ed. Gy. Moravcsik - R. J. H. Jenkins, ch. 51, l. 199-204 and ch. 52. The texts that I am going to use infra have been discussed recently by W. TREADGOLD, The Army in the Works of Constantine Porphyrogenetos, Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoeellenici 29, 1992, 77-162, esp. 99-100 and 125-127. Treadgold's approach and conclusions are completely different from mine, so much so that I do not need discussing the many points of disagreement, except whenever my argument is directly concerned.
Romanos I Lakapenos (920-944), at the time when the protospatharios John Proteuon was strategos in the Peloponnesos: this officer is known from other texts of the same treatise concerning a revolt of the Melingoi and Ezeritai Slavs, events that have been variously dated: early 921 was proposed by Jenkins and others before him\(^9\), 934 by S. Runciman, and 935 by G. Litavrin who partly followed B. Feriančić\(^10\). All are uncertain; the latter seems to me more likely, but does not carry conviction. In any case, this detail has no importance for our argument.

We learn that emperor Romanos Lakapenos intended to have the Peloponnesians participate to a [one-season] campaign in Byzantine Italy, in the theme of Longobardia. The Peloponnesians opted against the campaign, and proposed to give [instead] a thousand equipped horses and one hundred pounds in gold coins (i.e. 7,200 nomismata), and this they supplied with great readiness.

To collect the above, contributions at fixed rates were exacted from almost all the \textit{prosopa} of the Peloponnesos (with some, I believe insignificant, exceptions, see infra) and from all the ‘soldiers’ of the Peloponnesian army. The \textit{prosopa} provided the horses. The two metropolitans of Corinth and of Patras gave four horses each, the bishops and the monasteries two horses each, and the monasteries without means, one horse between two. The contributions of the lay \textit{dynatoi} were fixed according to the precedence of titles that each held and which were obviously thought to correspond to a certain economic situation: the \textit{protospatharioi} gave three horses each; the \textit{spatharokandidatoi}, two horses each; and the \textit{spatharioi} and \textit{stratores}, one horse each.

Cash was collected from the whole ‘army’ of the Peloponnesos. Each ‘soldier’ contributed five nomismata in respect to this campaign; from those absolutely without means (\textit{pantelos aporoi}), five nomismata from every two were exacted. This made up the total of 7,200 gold coins.


The Peloponnesian Soldiers and their contributions

Although presented here as an extraordinary arrangement, the soldiers’ cash contribution is in fact a well-known procedure. We know of a similar example from the accounts of the campaign against Crete in the year 949: we are told that eight hundred soldiers of the theme of the Thrakesion (Western Asia Minor) contributed four gold coins each for not participating to the campaign; 41 pounds and 32 nomismata (or 2,984 nomismata) were thus collected, part of which (24 pounds and 56 nomismata) was used to pay the salaries of 705 Armenian officers and soldiers of the theme of Charpezikion, who actually went to Crete. We can assume that a similar arrangement was also made in the case of the Peloponnesos: the soldiers paid cash to avoid the hardships of the campaign, and with the money that was thus collected, other, less discriminating and, probably, less expensive soldiers were hired for the actual campaign.

There is one more detail worth pointing to. The total amount of 2,984 nomismata of the Thrakesion could be collected from 800 men only if part of them, 108, were also classified as ‘completely without means’ and paid half as much as the others. This would mean that 13.5% of the soldiers of the Thrakesion were ‘without means’.

In both cases we have the application, on a large scale, of the basic procedure of the strateia. The soldier farmer, holding land permanently registered as military, had the obligation to maintain a horse and an armour and to make himself available to the army whenever needed; in the IXth century, the soldier-farmer was called for actual service once every four

11. CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENNETOS, De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae (Bonn), 666-667. I see no reason to imagine, against all evidence, that the Charpezikion soldiers were members of the Banu Habib tribe, as hypothesized by TREADGOLD, The Army, 128 ff.

12. I have pointed to this discrepancy and gave the explanation in: N. OIKONOMIDES, Actes de Dionysiou, Paris 1968, 39. The discrepancy is ignored by TREADGOLD, The Army, 127, who keeps imagining a Thrakesion of ca 10,000 soldiers.
years\textsuperscript{13}. When on campaign, he also received a salary. As a compensation for the acquisition and maintenance of his military equipment, he and his land were exempted from all secondary contributions and corvées, that burdened the non-soldiers. The military obligation, attached to the land, not to the person, was hereditary\textsuperscript{14}.

Now, whenever it was impossible for the holder of a military lot to accomplish personally the military service (as in the case of the widow of the soldier), a compensatory payment of about 4-6 gold coins (or 2-3 coins in case of soldiers without means) was required\textsuperscript{15}. Thus, in both cases, of the Peloponnese and of the Thrakesion, we have the principle of the compensatory payment applied at a large scale, motivated not from an objective need, but from the preference of the stratiotai and the acceptance of their proposal by the authorities\textsuperscript{16}.

It is reasonable to assume that if the military service was conceived in such a fiscal mentality, there must have been an evaluation of what a ‘fair’


\textsuperscript{14} The relationship between possession of land and military service has been put to doubt by Martha Grigoroiu-Ioannidou, \textit{Les biens militaires et le recrutement a Byzance. Essai de determiner et interpreter le rapport entre les biens militaires et le recrutement}, \textit{Bisantina} 12, 1992, 215-226.

\textsuperscript{15} Actes de Dionysiou, 39.

\textsuperscript{16} In earlier times, under Leo VI (886-912), compensatory payment for not participating to a campaign was accepted selectively, from individual soldiers who chose to do so, while the rest of their theme actually went with the army: \textit{De Administrando Imperio}, ch. 51, 1, 192-198. In the case of the Peloponnese (sometime between 970 and 944), this was a collective decision of the whole theme. In that of the Thrakesion (949), one has the impression that payment from the soldiers of the Thrakesion was exacted from the authorities—\textit{at least}, nothing in the text shows that the soldiers had any opportunity to express their will on this subject. It is interesting to follow how the \textit{adaeratio} of the military service was imposing itself from the selective free choice, to the collective free choice and then to the obligation imposed from above. But the examples that we have are very few and not always clear; thus I would prefer to avoid any general conclusion.
or ‘typical’ military holding would be —what holding would combine in an optimum way the right revenue for its soldier-owner and the best protection of the interests of the fiscus. To put it differently: on one hand, the state was losing revenue because of the partial tax exemption granted to stratiotic lands and had all interest to diminish these losses to the degree possible; on the other hand, the state acknowledged that the stratiotes needed sufficient revenue, in order to survive and be properly equipped. As the income derived from the tax exemption was in principle proportionate to the value (and, consequently, to the revenue) of the properties held by the stratiotes, the question would be to define what quantity of property would be sufficient to create a well-off soldier without abandoning to him more fiscal revenue than what was really necessary.

The question has been asked in similar terms by the Byzantines; efforts have been made to define what a ‘normal’ stratiotic holding, a stratiotikos oikos, should be. In a novella dating from 947 (?) Constantine Porphyrogenetos established officially that the strateia of a horseman, i.e. of a typical thematic soldier, should preferably be worth 4 pounds of gold (or 288 nomismata) in real estate: this would have been the ‘right quantity’ (dikaios posotes)\(^17\). Another text of the Porphyrogenetos, not official in character, considers that the properties worth four pounds were a minimum for the horseman and that the right figure would rather be five pounds (360 nomismata)\(^18\). But it seems that the official figure always remained at 4 pounds, as this is still the figure quoted by Nikephoros Phokas (963-969)\(^19\). We shall use the ‘legally confirmed’ figure of four pounds for our calculations that follow.

It must be stressed right away, though, that this value of 288 gold coins for the property of a soldier-farmer was not mandatory and that individual properties may have varied considerably. But as these variations could go both ways, I consider the figure 288 as an average.

\(^17\) SVORONOS, *Les novelles*, 118, 119.
\(^18\) *De Cerimoniis* (Bonn), 695.
\(^19\) SVORONOS, *Les novelles*, 176. Nikephoros Phokas brought that figure up to 12 pounds to finance his heavily armoured cavalry.
Now, the real estate of such a value could consist of all kinds of land, of sharply varying productivity: arable, vineyards, gardens, etc. But we assume that land submitted to intensive cultivation and, consequently, more productive, had a higher fiscal value. By fiscal value I mean the one that was used to evaluate the properties in view of imposing them. According to a fiscal handbook of the Xth c., one should count one nomisma for one modios of land of first quality. Starting from that figure, we can build some hypotheses on the assumption that we have imaginary properties consisting uniquely of first quality land. In this case, a soldier would have possessed, as an average, 288 modioi. But one must stress that this is a very hypothetical example and that in reality the production of a military lot was much more varied. Although certainly inexact, we keep the above scheme for the sake of clarity in the calculations.

Two hundred eighty eight modioi is a considerable quantity of arable. We know that the estimations of the surface that could be cultivated in Byzantine times by one pair of oxen during one year varied considerably, between 83 and 213 modioi. It has been proposed that as an average, one should count around 140 modioi per zeugara. Thus the land of a stratiotes corresponded roughly to two zeugara, and needed two manned pairs of oxen in order to be cultivated properly. In other words, a stratiotes was normally sustained by the work of two well-off farmer families, his own and another one that worked on his land, probably of a relative, but may be of a salaried worker or even of a paroikos. But this was certainly not applied with uniformity; on the contrary, we know of some examples of soldiers who seem

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20 J. EFFORT and al., Geometries du fisc byzantin, Paris 1991, 62 (for the date, see 34-35)

21 E. SCHILBACH, Byzantinsche Metrologie, Munich 1970, 68-70

22 Leo VI insists that a stratotikos oikos must be an affluent unit, able to ensure the agricultural production while the soldier will be away on campaign, see LEMERLIF, Agrarian History, 141. Two eighth century texts envisage clearly that a military household is composed of properties held by two brothers, only one of whom is the soldier of my analysis in Middle-Byzantine Provincial Recruits, 130 ff.
to have been fending for themselves and their own family without the support of a larger oikos\textsuperscript{23}.

In what follows, we shall base our calculations on fiscal rather than on demographic criteria. Our basic unit will be the nuclear family possessing a pair of oxen and cultivating the corresponding land—the peasant zeugaratos. Now we know that from the economic and fiscal point of view, one zeugaratos was the equivalent of two families of boïdatoi (who possessed only one ox) or of four families of aktemones (with no oxen)\textsuperscript{24}. So, theoretically, two boïdatoi could have replaced one zeugaratos with no major difference from the fiscal point of view, but with a major difference from the demographic point of view, as there would be two families instead of one. This is a weakness of our calculations that one should constantly keep in mind, whenever we mention, infra, peasants as ‘zeugaratoi or the equivalent’. Because we are talking fiscal units, not demographic ones.

The passage of the De Administrando Imperio that we are studying has been used to estimate the total number of soldiers of the Peloponnesos, who provided the 7,200 gold coins. The reasoning goes as follows: if they were all affluent and paid 5 nomismata each, they would number 1,440 men; if they were all poor, they would number 2,880; and the figure of ca 2,000 soldiers has been proposed as something close to reality. I think that this last figure should be rejected right away, as it would mean that the Peloponnesos had only 880 well-off soldiers as opposed to 1,120 indigent\textsuperscript{2}. The figure that seems to me more likely, would be an army of 1,500-1,600 men, out of whom 120-320, i.e. a 8-20%, would have been indigent. This would show a

\textsuperscript{23} This would have been, for example, the case of the soldier Mousoullos, from the Life of St. Philaretos: when left without a horse at the time of the campaign, he turns to a neighbour for help; obviously he did not expect much help from his own household. See M.-H. FOURMY and M. LEROY, La Vie de saint Philarete, Byzantion 9, 1934, 125-127.

\textsuperscript{24} SCHILBACH, Metrologie, 256

\textsuperscript{25} The figure of 2,000 (1,120 poor and 880 not very poor) is accepted by TREADGOLD, The Army, 99, because of the quasi magic importance that he attributes to the (completely unfounded) hypothesis that: every theme or tagma had an even number of thousand men.
situation similar to the one prevailing in the Thrakesion, where the percentage of indigent soldiers would have been 13.5%.\textsuperscript{26}

There is another way to handle these figures. If a full-revenue soldier had an average property of 288 nomismata, one can postulate that a poor one, contributing half that amount, would have, as an average, half the above property and be supported by one zeugarion. It is hard to imagine a cavalry soldier poorer than that, as we know that those who became completely destitute, were removed from the regular cavalry and became irregulars ('rustlers', apelatai) or were assigned to garrisons as footsoldiers\textsuperscript{27}. Moreover, we know what was considered the threshold to legal 'poverty', aporia: an immovable property worth less than 50 gold coins\textsuperscript{28}. The soldiers without means of the \textit{De Administrando} text should be placed, in my opinion, well above this level of legal poverty, supported by only one family, possibly –but not necessarily– possessing a zeugarion.

This being so, I would tend to estimate that for every contribution of 5 gold coins, one should count two zeugaratoi families and consequently that the Peloponnesian army was supported by ca 2,880 'zeugaratoi or the equivalent'.

\textit{The Peloponnesian aristocrats and their contributions}

We turn now to the collection of horses. It is presented in the text as something resulting from a special arrangement made for the occasion; yet we know that it was the application of a routine fiscal practice, called the \textit{monoprosopon}, i.e. a contribution exacted only from wealthy taxpayers–fiscal prosopa. Again in the accounts of the expedition against Crete of 911, we find an entry specifying that, to provide the army with the necessary

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Supra}, p. 108 and \textit{infra}, p. 122.

\textsuperscript{27} \textsc{Lemerle}, \textit{Agrarian History}, 135. The term \textit{apelates} has been recently commented upon by Lisa \textsc{Béno}, \textit{Les apélates: Des rebelles ou des malfaiteurs?} in: Marie Theres \textsc{Fögen} (ed.), \textit{Ordnung und Aufruhr im Mittelalter}, Jus Commune, Sonderheft 70, Frankfurt 1995, 287-299.

\textsuperscript{28} \textsc{Svoronos}, \textit{Les novelles}, 100. This is a traditional definition of poverty, \textit{aporia}: see \textsc{Lemerle}, \textit{Agrarian History}, 99, note 1.
horses, the government envisaged resorting to the collection of monoprosopi in the theme of the Anatolikos (απο εκθέσεως μονοπροσωπών εν τῷ θεματι τῶν Ἀνατολίων). Also, contributions in horses and mules were regularly exacted, as sportulae, from high state officials, metropolitans, archbishop and monasteries on the occasion of imperial campaigns, but the rates were different from those mentioned in our text.

We have in this passage the list of the wealthy landowners of the Peloponnnesos —of all the prosopa that were liable to participate to the contribution. One has the impression that this list must be exhaustive, as the prosopa that have not contributed are dutifully reported. Thus one must conclude that holders of higher titles, such as patrikios or magistros, did not exist then in the Peloponnnesos: in any case, the top officers or administrators of the theme that are attested until the middle of the Xth c. have no high title than the one of protospatharios.

In order to describe the lay aristocrats, our text enumerates the holders of titles called ‘imperial’ or ‘of the retinue’ (προελευσιμαιοι), of military origin and having originally meant personal servants of the emperor: protospatharios, spatharokandidatos, spatharios and stratarios. In this list are included any holders of ‘senatorial’ titles (such as dishypatos, hypato vestitor, silentiarios, apo eparchon), no doubt because such dignitaries d

29 De Cerimonis (Bonn), 658 For a general presentation of the obligation, see Helene Giyatzich-Ahrwiler, Recherches sur l'administration de l'empire byzantin au IXe-XIIe siècles, BCHM, 1960, 5, note 7

30 De Cerimonis (Bonn), 459-461 = J. Haldon, Constantine Porphyrogennetos: Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions, Vienna 1990, 98f

31 There is a sharp difference, on this point, with the situation on the eastern frontier, where we find, at approximately the same time, an Armenian chieftain, Melias, bearing the titles of patrikios (ca 916) and, later, of magistros (De Administrando Imperio ch 50, 1 162, 166). But the Peloponnnesos, in spite of the threat of the Slavs, was rather well protected while the east lived in a context of constant war, the high titles came as a compensation for military exploits against the Arabs

32 The protospatharios, spatharokandidatos, spatharios appear to be members of provincial authorities in a document issued in 892 by Symmachios, strategos of Macedon Thrace, Cephalonia and Longobardia. Trinchera, Syllabus graecarum membranarum Naples 1865, n° 3
not exist in the Peloponnesos. Among the holders of imperial titles (i.e. protospatharioi, etc.) three categories, the ploimoi, the konchyleutai and the chartopoioi, were exempted from the obligation to provide horses. The reasons of this exception are not difficult to guess.

(a) Ploimoi are men serving in the navy. We know that the Peloponnesos maintained in the Xth c. a flotilla of at least four warships (chelandia) that policed the sea. It is obvious that the officers of the navy were not concerned by the campaign of the army in Italy and thus were not touched by the levy of horses.

(b) Konchyleutai are the purple-fishers. Such an occupation is normal for the shores of the Peloponnesos, known to produce purple since Antiquity. As the main, if not the only, consumer of purple was the palace and the imperial workshops, we can assume that the title holders, in whose properties purple fishing (or purple farming) was performed, had benefitted of a special exemption in their quality of furnishers of the court.

(c) Chartopoioi are in my opinion paper makers (or in the opinion of Jenkins, parchment makers). As an important consumer of paper was undoubtedly the imperial palace (the earliest known imperial documents are all written on paper), the chartopoioi could also be considered as furnishers of the court and benefit from the same exemption as the purple fishers.

Be that as it may, it seems certain that the title holders exempted from the levy of horses must not have been too many – taking into consideration their occupations, I would say, not more than a dozen.

Let us now turn to the census of the Peloponnesian aristocrats who actually gave horses.

1. We have two metropolitans, of Corinth and of Patras, who gave four horses each. This is the largest contribution attested, showing how economically important the metropolitans were. The bishops gave only two horses.

34. N. OIKONOMIDÉS, Ο Βίος τοῦ ἀγίου Θεοδώρου Κυθήρων (10ος αἰ.), Τρίτον Πανιώνιον Συνεδρίου: Πρακτικά, Athens 1967, 277.
35. I have exposed how I understand these chartopoioi in: Le support matériel des documents byzantins, La Paléographie grecque et byzantine, Colloques internationaux du CNRS 559, Paris 1977, 395 ff.
each; they were probably eleven in the Peloponnesos at the time of the levy\textsuperscript{36}, so they have provided 22 horses. The hierarchy of the clergy provided a total of 30 horses.

2. Then come the protospatharioi, with three horses each. We do not know how many protospatharioi lived in Xth century Peloponnesos. But they must not have been very many. From another text of the \textit{De Administrando Imperio}, which happens to date few years after the mandate of John Proteus in the Peloponnesos, we can see that the protospatharioi were the cream of the local authorities\textsuperscript{37} and collaborated directly with the strategos of the theme, who was also a protospatharios: when appointed strategos of the Peloponnesos, the protospatharios Bardas Platypodes, together with some local protospatharioi and other title holders, who were his partisans provoked fierce quarrels and disputes and managed to expel from the Peloponnesos the protospatharios Leon Agelastos —quarrels that considerably weakened the defenses of the theme\textsuperscript{38}. It is obvious that this was a case of political infight at the top of the Peloponnesian society: some protospatharioi gained the strategos on their side and sent to exile their opponent, another protospatharios, Leo Agelastos, who obviously had also his own partisans. Even if we assume that there may have also been some protospatharioi who remained neutral, their total number must have been very small —ten to twenty, in all and for all, probably less, certainly not more. Thus the protospatharioi, at the rate of 3 horses each, must have provided another 30 horses.

\textsuperscript{36} To estimate the number of bishops, I have used J. \textit{Darrouzes}, \textit{Notitiae episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae}, Paris 1981. \textit{Notitia} n° 7 (dated between 901-907) mentions five peloponnesian bishoprics for Corinth (Damaia, Argos Monembasia, Zemaina, Maine), and six for Patras (Lakedaimonia, Methone, Korone Bolaina, Moreas, Heilos). \textit{Notitia} n° 9 of the tortois or tities of the Xth century, add: Kythera to Corinth and omits Moreas from Patras. Both mention a total of 1 peloponnesian bishoprics for the two metropoleis. We do not count here the islan bishoprics of Zakynthos and Kephalandia, suffragan to Corinth, but belonging to the theme of Kephalandia.

\textsuperscript{37} The very high social status of the protospatharioi in the Peloponnesos is also indirectly attested by Arethas: \textit{Arethas}, \textit{Scripta minora}, I, ed. L. G. \textit{Westerink}, Leipzig 1968, 230.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{De Administrando Imperio}, ch. 50, l. 54-66.
3. I assume also that the contribution of the utterly poor monasteries must not have been very substantial. I would guess, with no conviction, that they would not be accountable for more than 30 horses, which would mean that there were less than 60 utterly poor monasteries in the Peloponnese.

The above figures, except for the one of the bishops, are arbitrary but cannot, I think, be very far from reality. The rest of the horses must have been provided by well-off monasteries or by spatharokandidatoi (2 horses each), or by spatharioi and stratores (1 horse each). We do not know how to break down that figure. If we say that the spatharokandidatoi were more than double the protospatharioi, and that the spatharioi and stratores were, each, more than double the spatharokandidatoi, we would have 20-40 spatharokandidatoi accounting for 40-80 horses, and 80-160 spatharioi and stratores accounting for an equal number of horses. In toto, the lay magnates and notables of the Peloponnese would have provided 150-300 horses; if one adds the 30 horses of the bishops and another 30 of the poor monasteries, one arrives to the estimate that the Peloponnese of the Xth c. must have had no less than 320 well-off monasteries. And this is a very high figure.

No matter. All this is arbitrary and each of the above figures is subject to change at a whim. But the total number is not, and this imposes a general and incontrovertible conclusion: in Xth century Peloponnese, the lay or ecclesiastic aristocratic prosopa numbered anywhere between 500 and 1,000, according to my arbitrary calculations, they were ca 600. This figure, compared to the 1,500 of the whole thematic army, shows a relationship of 1 lay or ecclesiastic aristocrat to 2.5 stratiota. This seems quite disproportionate, yet it is certainly close to reality.

What is even more important, is to estimate what the contributors of horses represented as economic power. We have seen that in our text there is a tendency to distribute the fiscal burden according to the contributor’s wealth and, probably, possibilities. Now, we know that each horse had a considerable value in the Xth century. In the Peri basilikon taxeidion, it is specified that a horse (ιππάριον) levied for the army was worth 12

39. A first survey of monasticism in the mediaeval Peloponnese is to be found in Anna LAMPROPOULOU, Ο ασκητισμός στην Πελοπόννησο κατά την μέση βυζαντινή περίοδο, Athens 1994.
nomismata. Consequently, we can fairly say that the contribution of a horse was ca $2\frac{1}{2}$ times heavier than the five nomismata given by a well-off stratiotes, 5 times heavier than the contribution of a poor stratiotes.

Now, we have estimated supra that in order to keep his status, a poor stratiotes must have been himself a ‘zeugaratos or the equivalent,’ that he worked with his family, and that the well-off stratiotes must have had double that. If we assumed that the fiscal burden was distributed with absolute equity and proportionately to the properties of the taxpayer, we should imagine that the Peloponnesian prosopa, lay and ecclesiast, who provided 1,000 horses had an economic basis equivalent to at least 5,000 ‘zeugaratoi or the equivalent’, certainly much more, since, as they were aristocrats, they had to rely on tenant workforce, i.e. on paroikoi, and did not work their land themselves.

I think that we can fairly go much further, if we keep in mind that the ‘powerful’ were undertaxed in comparison with the average taxpayer. This is openly said in the legislation of the Xth century. But beyond this statement, we have some more precise information.

We shall not insist on the major athonite monasteries that we know from their archives, such as Lavra and Iviron. Already in the second half of the Xth c. they were mighty economic organizations and they became even more mighty in the XIth c. But even the occasional information that we have about Xth c. monasteries is quite impressive. The monastery of St. Andrew of Peristerai, that will later be absorbed by Lavra, possessed many domains and received in a single donation 100 paroikoi. Things are even more impressive when looking at the institutions that were absorbed by the monastery of Iviron before 979/80: (a) The monastery of Abbakoum in Kassandra possessed 8,500 modioi of land plus several non measured domains. (b) The monastery of Leontia in Thessalonica, the domains of which were exempted from all extraordinary taxation and corvee, received the

40. De Cerimonis (Bonn), 459 = HALDON, Three Treatises, 98.
41. E.g. cf. SVORONOS, Les novelles, 85 (n° 3, 1. 69 ff): The many small taxpayers guarantee the payment of the fiscal revenue and provide the necessary soldiers; all this is due to disappear, if the properties pass to the hands of the ‘powerful’.
right to collect the taxes of 36 peasant households and possessed several non-measured domains. (c) The monastery of Polygyros, founded and endowed by the *protospatharios* Demetrios Pteleotes, was also exempted from all extraordinary taxation and corvee, had received a gift of 20 *paroikoi*, and possessed three domains measuring 50,000, 700, and 4,500 modioi respectively. (d) The monastery of Kolovou possessed more than 5,500 modioi of land in Hierissos and another 9,000 modioi in the Strymon region.

There is no reason to bring more examples. It is clear that Xth c. well-off monasteries were wealthy institutions, worth many times the properties that were considered as normal for one *strateia*.

What about lay aristocrats? For the *protospatharioi*, we already have an idea with the properties that Demetrios Pteleotes gave to the monastery that he founded (*supra*, c). We also know some details about the estates of the *protospatharios* Eustathios Boillas, who wrote his will somewhere at the eastern frontier of the empire in 1059. He was quite wealthy: he possessed a considerable number of domains, the total value of which is unknown. We know the value of only one part of his real estate, the part that he gave as dowry to his two daughters and as an endowment to his church of the Virgin tou Salem: this part was worth 70 pounds of gold (5,040 gold coins). Here again this partial figure is a far cry from the 288 coins of the property of soldiers (17.5 times more). Now, to this one should add the value of his other domains and of his numerous slaves[^43]. It is clear that the *protospatharios* Boillas, who lived at a time when the prestige of his title had diminished considerably compared to what it was in the IXth and Xth c., was worth manyfold what regular cavalry soldiers were. It is only natural that such important landowners needed to employ *kouratores* to ensure the proper administration of their properties[^44]. Also, such extensive properties ensured for them a very substantial income, certainly much higher than the yearly roga that they received from the emperor (72 nomismata for a *protospatharios*). We do not know how Boillas’ wealth was created, but we

know for sure that in 1059 it was invested on landed property almost exclusively.\(^{45}\)

Moreover, the activity of IXth-Xth c. dynatoi as patrons of art in the provinces, shows that a real gap separated them from the well-off soldiers. Protospatharioi were the founders of such churches as Skripou in Boeotia (874)\(^{46}\), the church of Vesaïna in Thessaly (Xth c.),\(^{47}\) the Panagia ton Chalkeon of Thessalonica (1028)\(^{48}\), the Karaba§ Kilise in Cappadocia (1060)\(^{49}\), all major foundations, requiring large outlays of cash. A spatharokandidatos was the founder of Hagioi Theodoroi at Athens (1049)\(^{50}\), and the church of St. Gregory in Thbes was the work of a kandidatos (872)\(^{51}\), a dignitary of lower rank than those mentioned in the text concerning the levy of horses. A droungarios, thematic officer without any honorific title was the founder of St. John Mangoutis in Athens (871)\(^{52}\).

It is obvious that all these title holders fared at an economic level much higher than what would suggest their contribution to the levy of horses. The protospatharioi, providing 3 horses each, incurred the equivalent of a total expenditure of 36 nomismata, the spatharokandidatoi the equivalent of 2-

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45. I have tried to show elsewhere that investment in real estate was the best opportunity offered to the Byzantine aristocrats, who were excluded by law from all commercial transactions. See N. OIKONOMIDÈS, Η έπενουοη ακίνητα γήρω ατό 1000, Τα Ιστορικά! 7, 1987, 15-26.
50. V. LAURENT, Nicolas Kalomaloï et l’église des Saints Théodore à Athènes Έλληνικά 7, 1934, 72-82.
52. A. XYNGOPULOS, Εἰκοτηρίων τῶν μεσαιωνικῶν μνημείων 1. Ἀθηναίων, Νέον Αρχαίων, 2, Athens 1929, fig. 88. A certain Nicholas Droungarios (or droungarios?) founded a church in Kerkyra in 1074/5; because of the date, the editor of the inscription considers the wor droungarios to be a family name; this is probable, but not sure; Cf. P. VOCOTOPOULOS, Η Αρχαία Αθήνα CA 21, 1971, 152-153.
nomismata, the *spatharioi* and *stratores* 12 nomismata. An expenditure similar in value would have been undertaken by soldiers supported by 15 or 10 or 5 ‘*zeugaratoi* or the equivalent’ farmer units. But this is of course unrealistically low, especially if one thinks that these gentlemen provided real horses and consequently were expected to have quite large stables in order to be able to give away 1-3 animals.

We turn again to guesswork. Taking into consideration all the above parallels, I think that a very conservative estimate would be that the properties of the lay or ecclesiastic aristocrats of the Peloponnesos must have been, as an average, at least three times more important than the value of their contribution would indicate. Which would mean that the Peloponnesian *prosopa* must have been supported by *paroikoi* who numbered at least 15,000 ‘*zeugaratoi* or the equivalent’, may be considerably more.

This means that in Xth century Peloponnesos, the total value of land possessed by the *prosopa*, and the total number of dependent peasants that worked for them, were at least five times larger than those of the Peloponnesian army53. It can also be considered as probable that the number of monks (say, ten per affluent monastery) was considerably higher than that of the soldiers—but no figures can be proposed in this respect because of the hypothetical and very fragile character of all our calculations54.

There are some sectors of the population that remain completely out of the above picture: the farmers who owned their land but had nothing to do with the military, the free landowners; and the *paroikoi* who rented land from the fiscus, either as *paroikoi* of the demosion, or as *paroikoi* of imperial domains, such as the various *episkepseis* or *kouratorciai*. It is probable that the first group was more important than all the others but no closer estimates are possible.


Thus we realize that in mid-Xth c. Peloponnnesos, the dependent peasants working on domains of local magnates were much more numerous than the free peasants who served in the army and those who supported them. The number of the paroikoi was certainly very important in Xth c. Peloponnnesos. The system of small landownership was largely corroded, and it will be even more corroded in the late-Xth c., when, official complaints appear about the metropolis of Patras, which had taken over the properties of many soldiers and prejudiced all the region’s penetes\(^55\).

Comparison with the Thrakesion

It is useful to compare the above calculations with what we know of the army of the Thrakesion in 949, at a date reasonably close to ours\(^56\). We have seen that the Thrakesion had then 800 stratiotai, out of whom 13.5% were indigent. There were another 150 officers and professional soldiers and 600 Armenian soldiers guarding the coastline (the Armenians of Priene? or an imported contingent?). This makes a total army 1,550 strong, a figure quite close to the figure that we proposed for the Peloponnnesos\(^57\). But this number breaks down quite differently, since only half of the Thrakesion was made up of soldier-farmers, the rest being filled up with professionals, members of a poor (or imported) minority.

It is certain that the Thrakesion, with its several alluvial plains, was by far more fertile than the hilly Peloponnnesos. So one must reject right away the idea that this difference in the number of soldier farmers might be due to a difference in population or to a less efficient implantation of the institution of military holdings. On the contrary, one has every reason to believe that

56. De Cerimomis (Bonn), 666-667.
57. The strength of the various Byzantine provincial armies that are mentioned here seem to me by far more reliable (because based on Byzantine technical texts) and also more realistic than those provided by the Arabic sources and taken at face value by W. Treadgold, Notes on the Numbers and Organization of the Ninth-Century Byzantine Army, Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies 21, 1980, 269-288 and IDem, The Army (above, note 8).
the Thrakesion was more populated than the Peloponnesos, and at least equally well organized. But we know that the Thrakesion, because of its fertility, was the region par excellence, where wealthy Constantinopolitans and wealthy Constantinopolitan and other institutions had their properties.

This being so, there is another explanation to be proposed for this discrepancy. The social evolution being more advanced in the Thrakesion than in the poorer Peloponnesos, the corrosion of the small landownership system was much more advanced. One third or half the soldier farmers of the Thrakesion had already been transformed into paroikoi and had to be replaced by mercenaries on a permanent basis in order to guarantee the security of the theme. And if this was so for the soldiers, one must assume that it was so for all small landowners. One has the impression that in the Thrakesion the paroikoi must have constituted the majority of the population.

Conclusion

The texts of Constantine Porphyrogenetos provide us with snapshots of the social composition of two provinces at a time coinciding with the development of the imperial legislation meant to protect the small landowners from the greedy powerful. If the calculations contained in this paper are correct, one can say that in the Xth c. the free small landowners were on the way of becoming—if they had not already become—a minority in the Byzantine countryside. In other words, when the legislation to protect them started being issued, it was too late to legislate. One can understand better the concern of Romanos I in 934 about the need for ‘military contributions’ and the gloomy comment of Constantine VII (947?) about the ‘army being sick’. The structure of the provincial society, including the military, had already irrevocably changed; the legislation was a desperate rearguard action.

58. SVORONOS, Les novelles, 85 (nº 3), 118 (nº 5).