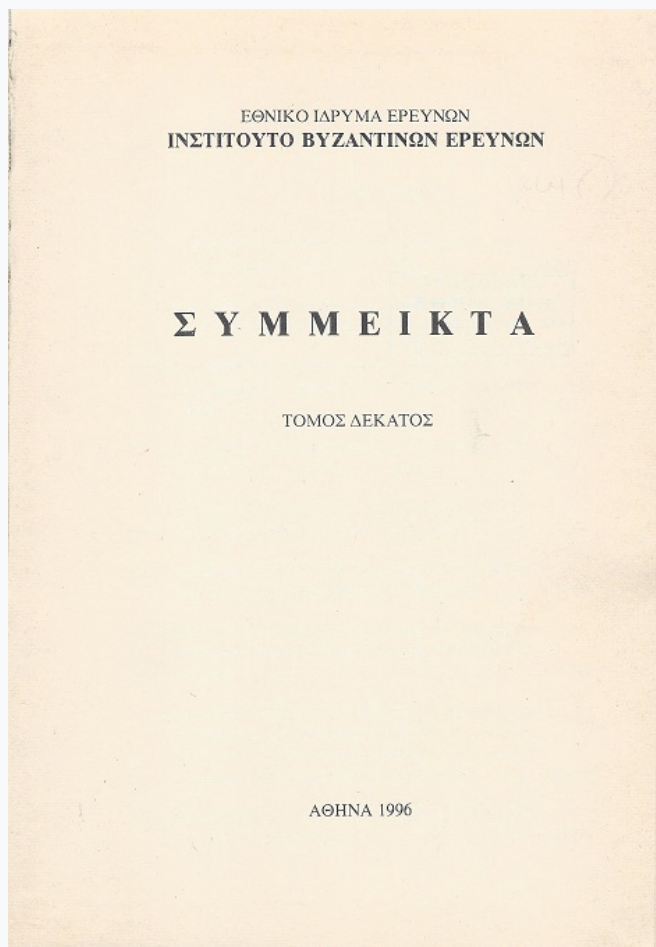


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### The Social Structure of the Byzantine Countryside in the First Half of the Xth Century

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N. OIKONOMIDES

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<sup>1</sup>.

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

1. The bibliography concerning the agrarian problem in Byzantium is vast. I would quote the classical analysis of the main sources by P. LEMERLE, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium from the Origins to the Twelfth Century*, Galway 1979, and the important book by G. LITAVRIN, *Vizantijskoe obščestvo i gosudarstvo v X-XI vv.*, Moscow 1977; the important recent books of A. HARVEY, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200*, Cambridge 1989, and of M. KAPLAN, *Les hommes et la terre à Byzance du VIe au XIe siècle*, Paris 1992; and the even more recent and provocative article of A. KAZHDAN, State, Feudal and Private Economy in Byzantium, *DOP* 47, 1993, 83-100.

offered them reasonably good working conditions thanks to their fiscal privileges<sup>2</sup>. 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<sup>3</sup>. 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<sup>4</sup>.

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 *Ἡ Πεῖρα περὶ παρούζων, Ἀγέρομα στὸν Νῆσο Σβορῶνο* I, Rethymno 1986, 232-241.

3. We now have a new edition of these novellae: N. SVORONOS, *Les nouvelles des empereurs macédoniens concernant la terre et les stratiotes*, éd. posthume par P. GOUNARIDIS, Athens 1994; as it often happens with posthumous publications, it presents several shortcomings: see L. BURGMANN, *Editio per testamentum, Rechtshistorisches Journal* 13, 1994, 455-479.

4. SVORONOS, *Les nouvelles*, 70, 71 (n° 2).

except when facing the tax collector<sup>5</sup>. The *chorion* was thus a fiscal unit of substantial dimensions, no doubt composed essentially by *penetes* –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 Xth 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’ *prosopa*<sup>6</sup>, 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 XIth century governments seem not to have seriously envisaged –and, even less, tried– to diminish or cancel the fiscal privileges and other advantages of the *dynatoi*, 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 Xth 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<sup>7</sup>. No-one could escape from this obligation, except if he could obtain a special privilege, called *logisimon*, and liberating him from the payment of the basic land tax. But until the second half of the XIth 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, 177, 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 *parakolouthemata*.

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 corvees, 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 *monoprosopon* 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 *logisimon*. 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 Peloponnesos 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 Porphyrogenetos<sup>8</sup>. The events described are dated under the reign of

8. CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *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 Porphyrogenitus, *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 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<sup>9</sup>, 934 by S. Runciman, and 935 by G. Litavrin who partly followed B. Ferjančić<sup>10</sup>. 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 *prosopa* of the Peloponnesos (with some, I believe insignificant, exceptions, see *infra*) and from all the 'soldiers' of the Peloponnesian army. The *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 *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 *protospatharioi* gave three horses each; the *spatharokandidatoi*, two horses each; and the *spatharioi* and *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 (*pantelos aporoî*), five nomismata from every two were exacted. This made up the total of 7.200 gold coins.

9. CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS, *De Administrando Imperio* II, Commentary, London 1962, 204.

10. KONSTANTIN BAGRJANARODNYJ, *Ob upravlennii imperiej*, Moscow 1989, 436-437.

*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<sup>11</sup>. 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<sup>12</sup>. 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<sup>13</sup>. 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 corvees, that burdened the non-soldiers. The military obligation, attached to the land, not to the person, was hereditary<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup>. Thus, in both cases, of the Peloponnesos 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<sup>16</sup>.

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'

13. I have discussed the pertinent texts in: Middle-Byzantine Provincial Recruits: Salary and Armament, *Gonimos. Neoplatonic and Byzantine Studies presented to L. G. Westerink at 75*, Buffalo, N. Y. 1988, 121-136; a general study of the question with bibliographical indications but holding to the author's previous points of view, in: J. HALDON, Military Service, Military Lands and the Status of Soldiers. Current Problems and Interpretations, *DOP* 47, 1993, 1-67; on the contrary, new points of view that will certainly generate discussions, are proposed by KAPLAN, *Hommes et terre*, 231-255.

14. The relationship between possession of land and military service has been put to doubt by Martha GREGORIOU-IOANNIDOU, Les biens militaires et le recrutement a Byzance. Essai de determiner et interpreter le rapport entre les biens militaires et le recrutement, *Βυζαντιακα* 12, 1992, 215-226.

15. *Actes de Dionysiou*, 39.

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: *De Administrando Imperio*, ch. 51, l. 192-198. In the case of the Peloponnesos (sometime between 920 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 –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 *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 a 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 *stratitikos 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' (*dikaia posotes*)<sup>17</sup>. 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)<sup>18</sup>. But it seems that the official figure always remained at 4 pounds, as this is still the figure quoted by Nikephoros Phokas (963-969)<sup>19</sup>. 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 nouvelles*, 118, 119.

18. *De Cerimoniis* (Bonn), 695.

19. SVORONOS, *Les nouvelles*, 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<sup>20</sup>. 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 modios. 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 modios 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 modios. It has been proposed that as an average, one should count around 140 modios per *zeugarion*<sup>21</sup>. Thus the land of a *stratiotes* corresponded roughly to two *zeugaria*, 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*<sup>22</sup>. But this was certainly not applied with uniformity, on the contrary we know of some examples of soldiers who seem

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

21 E. SCHILBACH, *Byzantinische Metrologie*, Munich 1970, 68-70

22 Leo VI insists that a *stratiotikos oikos* must be an affluent unit, able to ensure the agricultural production while the soldier will be away on campaign, see LEMERLE, *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. cf. 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*<sup>23</sup>.

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 *boïdatoι* (who possessed only one ox) or of four families of *aktemones* (with no oxen)<sup>24</sup>. So, theoretically, two *boïdatoι* 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 ‘*zeugaratoι* 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 2880; 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<sup>25</sup>. 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

23 This would have been, for example, the case of the soldier Mousoulios, 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.

24 SCHILBACH, *Metrologie*, 256

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%<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, we know what was considered the threshold to legal 'poverty', *aporia*: an immovable property worth less than 50 gold coins<sup>28</sup>. The soldiers without means of the *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'.

#### *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 *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

26. *Supra*, p. 108 and *infra*, p. 122.

27. LEMERLE, *Agrarian History*, 135. The term *apelates* has been recently commented upon by Lisa BÉNOU, *Les apélates: Des rebelles ou des malfaiteurs?* in: Marie Theres FÖGEN (ed.), *Ordnung und Aufruhr im Mittelalter*, Jus Commune, Sonderheft 70, Frankfurt 1995, 287-299.

28. SVORONOS, *Les nouvelles*, 100. This is a traditional definition of poverty, *aporia*: see LEMERLE, *Agrarian History*, 99, note 1.

horses, the government envisaged resorting to the collection of *monoprosopa* in the theme of the Anatolikai (απο εκθεσεως μονοπροσωπων εν τῷ θεματι τῶν Ἀνατολικῶν)<sup>29</sup>. 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<sup>30</sup>.

We have in this passage the list of the wealthy landowners of the Peloponnesos –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 Peloponnesos: in any case, the top officers or administrators of the theme that are attested until the middle of the Xth c. have no higher title than the one of *protospatharios*<sup>31</sup>.

In order to describe the lay aristocrats, our text enumerates the holders of titles called ‘imperial’ or ‘of the retinue’ (προελευσιμαῖοι), of military origin and having originally meant personal servants of the emperor: *protospatharioi*, *spatharokandidatoi*, *spatharioi* and *stratores*<sup>32</sup>. In this list are not included any holders of ‘senatorial’ titles (such as *dishypatos*, *hypato vestitor*, *silentarios*, *apo eparchon*), no doubt because such dignitaries did

29 *De Cerimoniis* (Bonn), 658. For a general presentation of the obligation, see Helene GUYGATZI-AHRWILER, Recherches sur l’administration de l’empire byzantin au IXe-XIe siècles, *BCH* 84, 1960, 5, note 7.

30 *De Cerimoniis* (Bonn), 459-461 = J. HALDON, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus 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, l. 162, 166). But the Peloponnesos, 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 to Melias as a compensation for military exploits against the Arabs.

32 The *protospatharioi*, *spatharokandidatoi*, *spatharioi* appear to be members of provincial authorities in a document issued in 892 by Symbaticius, *strategos* of Macedonia, Thrace, Cephalonia and Longobardia. TRINCHERA, *Syllabus graecarum membranarum* (Naples 1865), n° 3.

not exist in the Peloponnesos<sup>33</sup>. 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 flottilla of at least four warships (*chelandia*) that policed the sea<sup>34</sup>. 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<sup>35</sup>.

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

33. N. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles*, Paris 1972, 99 and note 57.

34. N. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, 'Ο Βίος τοῦ ἁγίου Θεοδώρου Κυθήρων (10ος αἰ.), *Τρίτον Πανόλιον Συνέδριον. 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<sup>36</sup>, 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 *De Administrando Imperio*, which happens to date few years after the mandate of John Proteuon in the Peloponnesos, we can see that the *protospatharioi* were the cream of the local authorities<sup>37</sup> 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<sup>38</sup>. 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 30-60 horses.

36. To estimate the number of bishops, I have used J. DARROUZES, *Notitiae episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, Paris 1981. *Notitia* n° 7 (dated between 901-907) mentions five peloponnesian bishoprics for Corinth (Damalas, Argos Monembasia, Zemani, Maini), and six for Patras (Lakedaimonia, Methone, Korone Bolaina, Moreas, Helos). *Notitia* n° 9 of the forties or fifties of the Xth century, adds Kythera to Corinth and omits Moreas from Patras. Both mention a total of 11 peloponnesian bishoprics for the two metropoleis.- We do not count here the island bishoprics of Zakynthos and Kephallonia, suffragan to Corinth, but belonging to the theme of Kephallonia.

37. The very high social status of the *protospatharioi* in the Peloponnesos is also indirectly attested by Arethas: ARETHAS, *Scripta minora*, I, ed. L. G. WESTERINK, Leipzig 1968, 230.

38. *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 Peloponnesos.

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 Peloponnesos 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 Peloponnesos of the Xth c. must have had no less than 320 well-off monasteries. And this is a very high figure<sup>39</sup>.

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 Peloponnesos, 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 *stratiotai*. 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 (ἵππάρχιον) levied for the army was worth 12

39. A first survey of monasticism in the mediaeval Peloponnesos is to be found in Anna LAMPROPOULOU, *Ὁ ἀσκητισμὸς στὴν Πελοπόννησο κατὰ τὴν μέση βυζαντινὴ περίοδο*, Athens 1994.



nomismata<sup>40</sup>. Consequently, we can fairly say that the contribution of a horse was ca 2½ 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 ecclesiastic, 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<sup>41</sup>. 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*<sup>42</sup>. 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 Cerimoniis* (Bonn), 459 = HALDON, *Three Treatises*, 98.

41. E.g. cf. SVORONOS, *Les nouvelles*, 85 (n° 3, l. 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'.

42. *Actes de Lavra I*, ed. P. LEMERLE, A. GUILLOU, N. SVORONOS, Denise PAPACHRYSSANTHOU, Paris 1970, 58.

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 Boilas, 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<sup>43</sup>. It is clear that the *protospatharios* Boilas, 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<sup>44</sup>. 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 Boilas' wealth was created, but we

43. P. LEMERLE, *Cinq études sur le XIe siècle byzantin*. Paris 1977, 15-63.

44. V. LAURENT, *La Vie merveilleuse de Saint Pierre d'Atroa*, Brussels 1956, 177.

know for sure that in 1059 it was invested on landed property almost exclusively<sup>45</sup>.

Moreover, the activity of IXth-XIth 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)<sup>46</sup>, the church of Vesaina in Thessaly (Xth c.)<sup>47</sup>, the Panagia ton Chalkeon of Thessalonica (1028)<sup>48</sup>, the Karabaş Kilise in Cappadocia (1060)<sup>49</sup>, all major foundations, requiring large outlays of cash. A *spatharokandidatos* was the founder of Hagioi Theodoroi at Athens (1049)<sup>50</sup>, and the church of St. Gregory in Thebes was the work of a *kandidatos* (872)<sup>51</sup>, 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)<sup>52</sup>.

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 24

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. OIKONOMIDES, 'Η επένδυση σε ακίνητα γύρω στο έτος 1000, *Τὰ Ιστορικά* 7, 1987, 15-26.

46. N. OIKONOMIDES, Pour une nouvelle lecture des inscriptions de Skripou en Béotie, *TM* 12, 1994, 479-493.

47. Anna AVRAMEA, Inventaires en vue d'un recueil des inscriptions historiques de Byzance IV. Inscriptions de Thessalie, *TM* 10, 1987, 368-369.

48. J.-M. SPIESER, Inventaires en vue d'un recueil des inscriptions historiques de Byzance I. Les inscriptions de Thessalonique, *TM* 5, 1973, 163, 164.

49. G. de JÉRPHANION, *Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce* II, Paris 1942, 334.

50. V. LAURENT, Nicolas Kalomalos et l'église des Saints Théodore à Athènes *Έλληνικά* 7, 1934, 72-82.

51. G. A. SOHRIΟΥ, 'Ο ἐν Θήβαις βυζαντινὸς ναὸς Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου *Αρχαιολογική Έφημερίς* 1924, 1-26.

52. A. ΧΥΝΓΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *Εύρετήριον τῶν μεσαιωνικῶν μνημείων* I. Ἀθηνῶν, fasc 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 word droungarios to be a family name; this is probable, but not sure; Cf. P. VOCOTΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, in *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 army<sup>53</sup>. 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 calculations<sup>54</sup>.

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 *kouratoreiai*. It is probable that the first group was more important than all the others but no closer estimates are possible.

53. The dramatic increase of dependent peasantry is also reflected in the legislation. See Helga KÖPSTEIN, Zur Veränderung der Agrarverhältnisse in Byzanz vom 6. zum 10. Jh., in: Helga KÖPSTEIN (ed.), *Besonderheiten der byzantinischen Feudalentwicklung*, Berlin 1983, 69-76.

54. J. Lefort has already pointed to the considerable importance of monastic real estate in the Xth century: J. LEFORT, N. OIKONOMIDÉS, Denise PAPACHRYSSANTHOU, *Actes d'Iviron I*, Paris 1985, 31.

Thus we realize that in mid-Xth c. Peloponnesos, 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. Peloponnesos. 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*<sup>55</sup>.

#### *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<sup>56</sup>. 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 Peloponnesos<sup>57</sup>. 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 Peloponnesos. 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

55. *Epistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle*. ed. J. DARROUZÈS, Paris 1960, 102.

56. *De Cerimoniis* (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 Porphyrogennetos 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’<sup>58</sup>. The structure of the provincial society, including the military, had already irrevocably changed; the legislation was a desperate rearguard action.

58. SVORONOS, *Les nouvelles*, 85 (n° 3), 118 (n° 5).

