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## Rural Producers and Markets: Aspects of the Archaeological and Historiographic Problem\*

In view of the current interest in patterns and levels of consumption in the Byzantine world, hence in aspects of the question of levels of material well-being experienced there, and in view of the fact that the better-known historical evidence for these makes strong reference to urban milieux and elite institutions (such as pious foundations), it is important not to neglect a broader underlying problem, namely the extent to which the mass of the population, that is the rural population, produced successfully enough to avoid that poverty (or “inelasticity”, to use Evelyne Patlagean’s term) in which they are often assumed to have lived. In one way or another this problem has not been neglected by Byzantinists, and the problem of urban milieux has found a place both in general works and works on Byzantine economic history<sup>1</sup>. There is also some recognition that at least some groups (communities and economic strata) of Byzantine peasants prospered given stable political and legal conditions and (one should add) stable climatic conditions<sup>2</sup>. One could say that a first part of the general question about the prosperity of the rural population has already become: what proportions of it could have enjoyed prosperity (however defined) and with what degrees of stability? This remains a very hard set of questions to answer. Most of the kinds of evidence, both historical and, necessarily and increasingly, archaeological, that one must now use to review the problem are still ambiguous, and certain assumptions have to be explicitly made when interpreting them. There could also never be one answer. The nature of the answer would vary according to the region being examined and the subdivisions of the Byzantine era being examined<sup>3</sup>.

For practical reasons I shall mostly refer to one major region, Macedonia, firstly because, for the Middle and Late Byzantine periods, the characteristics of its rural economy are by far the best documented in the Byzantine world, and, in the written sources, are becoming ever more so<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, Early Byzantine Macedonia’s rural economy, although not documented in the same way, is, one could argue, nevertheless becoming amenable to discussion in view of the great advances being made in the recording of rural archaeological sites of all kinds (not that its remaining urban sites are in any way irrelevant). The challenge of exploring the economic condition of the rural majority over the long term need not therefore be avoided. That task, on one level, is in fact in hand, although slightly “obscured” by the interdisciplinary framework (truly multi-period, and drawing on the findings of the environmental sciences and ethnography) within which it is conducted, and although not yet achieved for Macedonia. This level of analysis (“obscured” bibliographically by being conducted under various unfamiliar headings) is that of the relationship between economic outcomes, as represented by material-cultural remains, and the “constant” (but of course constantly variable)

\* This text was completed before I had access to the extremely important *The Economic History of Byzantium. From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century, I–III (DOS XXXIX)*, ed. A. E. LAIOU. Washington, D.C. 2002, a work which contains its own critique of the historiography of the Byzantine economy. While it will be obvious that I agree with much of that critique there is much scope for disagreement with principal contributors’ collective ideas concerning the economy from the seventh century onwards (cf. for instance A. DUNN, Review Article. *Speculum* 80 [2005] 616–22).

<sup>1</sup> For a general work, C. MANGO, *Byzantium. The Empire of New Rome*. London 1979, 39–43; for a work of economic history, E. PATLAGEAN, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale: Byzance 4<sup>e</sup>–7<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris 1977, ch. 5, 156–235.

<sup>2</sup> For the climatic regime see A. DUNN, *The exploitation of woodland and scrubland in the Byzantine world*. *BMGS* 16 (1992) 252–3; J. KODER, *Climatic change in the fifth and sixth centuries?* In: *The sixth century. End or beginning*, eds. P. ALLEN – E. JEFFREYS. Brisbane 1996, 270–85; I. TELELIS, *Medieval Warm Period and the beginning of the Little Ice Age in the Eastern Mediterranean*, in: *Byzanz als Raum. Zu Methoden und Inhalten der historischen Geographie des östlichen Mittelmeerraumes*, eds. K. BELKE et al. (*VTIB* 7). Wien 2000, 223–43.

<sup>3</sup> PATLAGEAN, *Pauvreté*, for example is explicitly concerned with Syria, Palestine, and Anatolia in the early Byzantine period.

<sup>4</sup> See principally *Archives de l’Athos, I – XXI*. Paris 1970–2001.

factors being explored by ecologists, geomorphologists, palynologists, ethnologists, and others<sup>5</sup>. But the level of a concerted confrontation between models generated within that dialogue and current historical understandings of the Byzantine rural economy has yet to constitute a field of endeavour (unless perhaps for our early period alone, for some areas east of Antioch)<sup>6</sup>. Macedonia offers a wealth of historical, archaeological, and ethnographic material which has not yet been analysed within the framework of large-scale interdisciplinary projects<sup>7</sup>. But this same wealth allows us to conduct a “sondage” in which to at least explore the problems and prospects of a new history of the rural majority. The general historiographic context is the problematic one of building upon recent progress that is taking us beyond comparisons between earlier and later official and legal institutions and their functions in the economic sphere, and thus moving further towards more practical assessments of the economic circumstances experienced by rural producers<sup>8</sup>.

The unavoidable and immutable difference between the nature of the available evidence (historical *versus* archaeological) for subdivisions of the Byzantine era in Macedonia, which would also be a feature of the study of almost all provinces or regions, nevertheless must be briefly addressed. Facilitating the comparison between substantive conditions in the early and later periods in the countryside is further complicated by the clear fact that the subdivisions of the Byzantine era differ from each other *archaeologically* in the countryside in some important respects. In this situation, if Macedonia currently presents a challenge which it shares with only a very small group of regions (i.e., how to integrate Early Byzantine archaeology with later historical archives), the prospects for the comparative study of rural conditions over the long term for that great majority of regions for which archaeology will provide the only long-term evidence are potentially daunting. Any solution to the problems (in practice, on the ground, intertwined) of comparing conditions in the earlier and later periods, and of integrating interdisciplinary surveys and history, will have to involve the transposability of results. That is to say: approximately measurable sets of relationships (regional, subregional) between environmental conditions, settlement patterns, and their material cultural attributes, will have to be contrasted, and, wherever there are co-incidences between zones of interdisciplinary survey and archival documentation of the countryside, the results of the confrontation of data be used, with care, to evaluate the survey-derived evidence from historically undocumented regions. Such a confrontation of materials, followed by a transposability-test, is not yet feasible however<sup>9</sup>. If we consider regions to the south of Macedonia where many large-scale interdisciplinary surveys have already been conducted, the reasons why the earlier and later Byzantine evidence from (for example) Macedonia cannot yet be integrated within a single comparative framework should become clear.

The comparative material available for the earlier and later periods at the regional or Byzantine provincial level continues to be very inconsistent (perhaps only in the short term however) because, besides the virtual absence of Late Roman-to-Early Byzantine documents dealing with the Greek countryside<sup>10</sup>, the chronologically detailed findings of large-scale multi-period intensive surveys either await publication, or (for Southern Keos, Melos, and Aitolia, for instance) simply have not identified enough material from the Byzantine era to illuminate the long-term Byzantine dimension of the problem<sup>11</sup>. One such publication has so far illuminated

<sup>5</sup> Representative of this level would be: M. JAMESON – C. RUNNELS – T. VON ANDEL, *A Greek countryside: the Southern Argolid from Prehistory to the present day*. Stanford 1994.

<sup>6</sup> There have been methodological false dawns, symbolized by C. RENFREW – M. WAGSTAFF (eds.), *An island polity: the archaeology of exploitation in Melos*. Cambridge 1982.

<sup>7</sup> The multi-period interdisciplinary Strymon Delta Survey, in eastern Macedonia, does not deal with villages and agricultural landscapes as such: A. DUNN, *Loca of maritime traffic in the Strymon Delta (IV–XVIII cc.): commercial, fiscal, and manorial*, in: *Οι Σέρρες και η περιοχή τους από την αρχαία στη μεταβυζαντινή κοινωνία*. Thessalonica 1999, I 339–60.

<sup>8</sup> This complex challenge could be said to have first been truly faced only in the 1970s, in the work of PATLAGEAN (as cited) and in those of KONDOV, LEFORT, and LAIOU, although there had already been other breakthroughs, for which see below.

<sup>9</sup> A partial foretaste of the application of such an idea, principally to regions of Greece, but without reference to Byzantine archives, and so in the bibliographically obscured category, can be found in J. BINTLIFF, *Regional survey, demography, and the rise of complex societies in the Ancient Aegean: core-periphery, Neo-Malthusian, and other interpretive models*. *Journal of Field Archaeology* 24 (1997) 1–38.

<sup>10</sup> The cadastral inscriptions of Thera are exceptional. See G. KIOURTZIAN, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques chrétiennes des Cyclades de la fin du IIIe au VIIe siècle après J.-C.* (*Travaux et mémoires du Centre de Recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, Monographies* 12). Paris 2000, 212–43.

<sup>11</sup> This is not to question the value of either preliminary reports or of such provisional syntheses as T. VAN ANDEL – C. RUNNELS, *Beyond the Acropolis. A rural Greek past*. Stanford 1987 (for the Southern Argolid Survey), and J. DAVIS (ed.), *Sandy Pylos. An archaeological history from Nestor to Navarino*. Texas 1998 (for the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project).

the comparison between the subdivisions of the Byzantine era on a micro-regional scale however<sup>12</sup>. And, on the basis of preliminary reports, some of the larger Greek projects have unquestionably documented subdivisions of the Byzantine era in such a way as to illuminate the long-term problems outlined. Certain of their provisional findings concerning changing settlement-totals and access to fine wares are already useful<sup>13</sup>. But no attempt can be made here to contextualise this “sondage” of the Macedonian material (Early Byzantine archaeological; Middle-to-Late Byzantine textual) in the way that the subject ultimately requires.

What the recording of the archaeology of historic (Greater) Macedonia now reveals (but not as a result of intensive surveys) is several complementary aspects of an Early Byzantine phase of rural settlement which suggest long periods of economic stability based on sustainable combinations of agriculture, pastoralism, and, probably, of artisanal production across a variable but broad “front”. We find: in upland areas distributions of rural *refugia*, walled villages, and settled forts (or forts with attached settlements) which together indicate that the typical distance between organized communities was about 4km above the fertile plains. In fertile plains a similar distribution is now emerging at the level of large villages which can in two areas (the Plains of Philippi and Pella) be traced back to Roman *vici*, whilst between these villages (e.g., in the Plain of Pella) more detailed recording reveals farmsteads and perhaps *villae*, or centres of redistribution and exchange (e.g., in the Strymon Delta). The level of occupation of the plains of Macedonia at least equals that of the Roman era whilst the occupancy of the uplands by nucleated communities far surpasses that of the Roman era (when many upland sites were abandoned)<sup>14</sup>. Just as significant from the present perspective however is the remarkable evidence for the construction of professionally decorated churches with lime mortar-bonded walls at identified upland and lowland rural settlements, or at distributions which indicate their close association with as-yet unpublished or unidentified rural settlements. Preliminary publications of some of these clearly indicate two or three “waves” of construction in the fifth and sixth centuries<sup>15</sup>.

The intensity of rural church-construction recalls in significant respects archaeological discoveries in the uplands of Lycia and Cilicia, and the total record recalls in significant respects the archaeology of the uplands of Syria, the parallels in all three regions being Early Byzantine. In Syria too, it will be recalled, there is a high degree of continuity with Roman rural settlements, “waves” of expansion during the Early Byzantine period (up to the estimated limits of then-possible exploitation of such areas), and “waves” of monumental church-building in the countryside<sup>16</sup>. Georges Tate could argue that the constructional and occupational histories of the famous houses, and of the churches, indicate sustained periods of economic success<sup>17</sup>. Church-building will often have been the work of the most successful inhabitants, but could also be a collective undertaking<sup>18</sup>. Many of the inhabitants, it is argued, were enjoying the fruits of a successful and multi-faceted engagement with regional and long-distance exchange networks (whatever they owed to the administration or, perhaps, landlords)<sup>19</sup>. Archaeological enquiries of different kinds in Greece, the southern Balkans, Anatolia, and Syria, all including significant areas of perceived “marginal” land, therefore require us to seriously question the received opinion, sometimes argued, sometimes no more than an unsupported generalization, that the Early Byzantine farmer lived constantly in or on the edge of poverty<sup>20</sup>, and in a state of chron-

<sup>12</sup> C. MEE – H. FORBES (eds.), *A rough and rocky place; the landscape and settlement history of the Methana Peninsula, Greece*. Liverpool 1999 (ch. 8 onwards).

<sup>13</sup> For an example of progress see J. BINTLIFF, *Reconstructing the Byzantine countryside: new approaches from landscape archaeology*, in: *Byzanz als Raum* (as in n. 2) 57–63.

<sup>14</sup> A. DUNN, *The problem of the Early Byzantine rural settlement in eastern and northern Macedonia*, in: *Les villages byzantins dans l'Empire byzantin (IV<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, eds. J. LEFORT – C. MORRISSON – J.-P. SODINI (*Réalités byzantines* 11). Paris 2005, 267–78.

<sup>15</sup> DUNN, *Problem*. See I. MIKULČIĆ, *Frühchristlicher Kirchenbau in der S.R. Makedonien*, in: *XXXIII Corso di cultura sull' arte ravennate e bizantina*. Ravenna 1986, 221–51 and I. PAPANGELOS, *Η Χαλκιδική κατά τους μέσους χρόνους*, in: *Η ιστορία της Χαλκιδικής*. Thessalonica 1998, 77–111, for two of the most significant data-bases.

<sup>16</sup> G. TATE, *Les campagnes de la Syrie du Nord à l'époque proto-byzantine*, in: *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantin*, I. Paris 1989, 63–77.

<sup>17</sup> TATE, *Campagnes* 69–75.

<sup>18</sup> See PATLAGEAN, *Pauvreté*, 245, for an epigraphic record of the latter.

<sup>19</sup> M. DECKER, *Food for an empire: wine and oil production in North Syria*, in: *Economy and exchange in the East Mediterranean during Late Antiquity*, eds. S. KINGSLEY – M. DECKER. Oxford 2001, 69–86.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance A. H. M. JONES, *The Later Roman Empire*. Oxford 1964, 810–2, 817–20; PATLAGEAN, *Pauvreté*, 423–32; J. DURLIAT, *Les conditions du commerce au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in: *The sixth century: production, distribution and demand*, eds. R. HODGES – W. BOWDEN (*The Transformation of the Roman World* 3). Leiden 1998, 90.

ic malnutrition<sup>21</sup>. Aspects of this pessimistic view have already been seriously questioned without recourse to archaeology<sup>22</sup>, but the problems posed by the genres of some of the texts upon which the pessimists have relied, once recognized, look set to be addressed sooner or later within a totally new framework.

The discussion of the condition of the Byzantine farmer after the end of Antiquity is not yet in the same relationship of productive confrontation with archaeology, but will undoubtedly enter one as soon as the major intensive surveys are published (See above). Preliminary reports and micro-regional studies for instance already indicate that, by the twelfth century, farmers were increasingly consumers of glazed and otherwise decorated pottery<sup>23</sup>. As in the Early Byzantine period, rural demographic growth (marked by the re-occupation of land of secondary quality) is accompanied by increased investment in higher-status objects, whether for communal or private use, contradicting the inference that growth must have been accompanied by declining rural household-incomes<sup>24</sup>. The discussion of the practical economic conditions experienced by later Byzantine farmers has meanwhile been somewhat restrained, despite the great variety of relevant documents that are preserved, by that pessimism (already mentioned) about Byzantine agriculture and even about pastoralism, and by some of the preferred lines of enquiry. It is necessary for present purposes to at least identify these; secondly, show how the Macedonian archives are already enabling scholars to correct that pessimism; and finally indicate why the process of revision need by no means have yet reached its limits.

To take the first point, the crucial Middle and Late Byzantine documentation was, until recently, fed straight into long-running debates conducted at the level of “the empire”, debates principally about the changing legal statuses and *de facto* statuses of different categories of Byzantine peasant; about also the changing status of the rural community; and about the increasing economic weight of the landed aristocracy and church in the Middle and Late periods<sup>25</sup>. Now obviously these analyses were both necessary and valuable, but it could be argued that a history of the rural economy as such was not the real product of studies of these kinds. In fact the historiography that has been focused upon the significance of evolving legal and fiscal categories of peasant grows more complex, but the real economic significance of these categories for the population itself is no clearer. However, some articles or elements of broader studies have, since the 1950s (in the west), beginning with those of Nikos Svoronos, genuinely argued about the economy of the Byzantine rural household, naturally making some use of the Macedonian evidence. These arguments immediately led those concerned to look at Byzantine data about the size of peasant households’ ploughlands, and about what different tax- and rental demands implied about yields and surpluses, and to look at these variables in the light of data from Greece, Turkey, and Bulgaria, using early twentieth-century records of entirely traditional Eastern Mediterranean or Balkan agricultural regimes<sup>26</sup>.

Everyone would agree that this approach constituted methodological progress. But the conclusions reached about grain yields (sowing-to-harvesting ratios and net surpluses) were always on the pessimistic side, and were not set within comprehensive assessments of the peasant household economy. The arguments have distinguished now between yields for different grains (e.g., the higher-yielding barley and oat), but the focus has remained upon wheat, with a preference being expressed by scholars for a normally low yield of 1:3 to 1:5<sup>27</sup>. This approach does not take proper account however of regions that were famous for their wheat-surpluses (such as Thessaly), but for which Byzantine archival documents are few and far between. There is for

<sup>21</sup> A. GUILLOU, *La civilization byzantine*. Paris 1974, 245.

<sup>22</sup> M. KAPLAN, *Les hommes et la terre à Byzance du VI<sup>e</sup> au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (*Byzantina Sorbonensia* 10). Paris 1992, 375–87.

<sup>23</sup> Representative of this work are: P. ARMSTRONG, *Some Byzantine and later settlements in Eastern Phokis*. *ABSA* 84 (1989) 2–47; J. VROOM, *Medieval and post-medieval pottery from a site in Boeotia: a case study of post-classical archaeology in Greece*. *ABSA* 93 (1998) 513–46.

<sup>24</sup> For renewed demographic growth (but not for any inference of pauperisation) see J. LEFORT, *Population et peuplement en Macédoine orientale, IX<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in: *Hommes et richesses dans l’Empire byzantin, II*. Paris 1991, 63–82.

<sup>25</sup> Byzantinists will need no reminding of such works as: G. OSTROGORSKY, *Pour l’histoire de la féodalité Byzantine*. Brussels 1954; *idem*, *Quelques problèmes d’histoire de la paysannerie Byzantine*, Brussels 1956; P. LEMERLE, *The agrarian history of Byzantium from the origins to the twelfth century*. Galway 1979.

<sup>26</sup> N. SVORONOS, *Recherches sur le cadastre byzantin et la fiscalité aux XI<sup>e</sup> et XII<sup>e</sup> siècles: le Cadastre de Thèbes*. *BCH* 83 (1959) 1–145.

<sup>27</sup> See principally SVORONOS, *Recherches*; N. KONDOV, *Über den wahrscheinlichen Weizenertrag auf der Balkanhalbinsel im Mittelalter*. *Études Balkaniques* 1974/1, 97–109; J. LEFORT, *Radolivos: population et paysage*. *TM* 9 (1985) 193–234; M. KAPLAN, *L’économie paysanne dans l’Empire byzantin du V<sup>ème</sup> au X<sup>ème</sup> siècle*. *Klio* 68 (1986) 198–232; N. OIKONOMIDÈS, *Terres du fisc et*



instance good ethnographic evidence for Ottoman Thessaly of wheat-yields reaching 1:10<sup>28</sup>. At a level of 1:3 historians have of course felt justified in evoking any number of factors, environmental, demographic, and fiscal, to argue that most Byzantine peasants' units of production were fundamentally unviable. This then seems to explain the known takeover of many peasant freeholds by the elite during the Middle-to-Late Byzantine period, but does not explain how peasants then managed to pay the same, if not more, to the elite in rents than they had payed to the state. The supposed unviability of the typical unit of production also poses many problems for the interpretation of other trends in Byzantine economic history and in Byzantine rural archaeology (See above). Finally, even though there are now two formidable, overlapping, and contradictory, histories of the Early-to-Middle, and Middle, Byzantine rural economies, the viability of the typical peasant's unit of production remains mysterious<sup>29</sup>. The pessimistic one of this "pair" is based upon a preference for consistently low sowing-to-yield ratios (1:3) and the peasant household's general inelasticity or unviability<sup>30</sup>. The case was also made in a preliminary series of partly theoretical articles<sup>31</sup>. The optimistic work (by Alan Harvey) judiciously avoids, as far as possible, the decades-long argument about sowing-to-yield ratios; instead accumulating all kinds of evidence of "economic expansion in the Byzantine empire" (the title of the work), evidence which is not deployed to confront head-on the models of non-viability. Although a great deal has been achieved therefore by historians of the Byzantine rural economy, avenues of enquiry which could reconcile the contradictions both between historians and between historical evidence and the kinds of archaeological evidence evoked above await further exploration.

Byzantinists have sometimes expressed perplexity that the largely autonomous familial unit of production was the structural basis of all Byzantine estates, aristocratic, ecclesiastical, imperial, and fiscal, by the sixth century and throughout the Middle and Late periods, as though, implicitly, some form of serfdom (imposed inconsistently by the Franks) or of slavery (rare) would have guaranteed greater economic growth, and therefore greater general prosperity. This has created a paradox at the heart of Byzantine economic and therefore political history. Since other economic historians can argue, with no difficulty, that the rural economy dominated the Byzantine economy<sup>32</sup>, and we therefore should accept that on the peasant household-unit rested largely the fate of the economy, models of unviable units of production pose huge problems for the interpretation of other enquiries, based on archaeology, numismatics, and some texts, which have, since the 1980s, stressed the scale and growth of trade in agricultural products, trade at the level of the village, and long-term demographic growth during the Middle and Late periods<sup>33</sup>. To these sources and studies one should now add a significant body of environmental data, associated with radiocarbon dates, from northern Greece, southern Greece, and Anatolia, which also strongly suggests levels of population, agriculture, and pastoralism, rising from the ninth or tenth century onwards<sup>34</sup>. Given all the problems that peasants are known to have faced, and over which they had little or no control, these growth trends cannot be explained unless Byzantine peasant households in most of the fiscal categories into which they were divided (only one of which was labeled "poor" or "landless") were basically economically viable barring major mishaps. Those who have written recently from the pessimistic viewpoint (Patlagean and Kaplan for instance) concede that there was *demographic* growth, but only within the framework of productive stagnation. Although this is theoretically possible (One only has to remember parts of the Third World today) there is no need to be so pessimistic about medieval Byzantium.

Another possible interpretation of the evidence for rising trade from the ninth century onwards would be that both landowners and the administration were exacting more from the rural population, the evidence for

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revenus de la terre aux X<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècles, in: V. KRAVARI – J. LEFORT – C. MORRISSON (eds.), *Hommes et richesses dans l'Empire byzantin*. Paris 1991, II 321–37; KAPLAN, *Hommes*, 80–4.

<sup>28</sup> P. GARNSEY, Thessaly and the grain supply of Rome during the second century B.C. *JRS* 74 (1984) 41.

<sup>29</sup> KAPLAN, *Hommes*; A. HARVEY, *Economic expansion in the Byzantine empire 900–1200*. Cambridge 1989.

<sup>30</sup> KAPLAN, *Hommes*, ch. X.

<sup>31</sup> KAPLAN, *Hommes*; IDEM, Pour un modèle économique de l'exploitation agricole byzantine. *Problèmes de méthode et premiers résultats. Histoire et Mesure* 3 (1988) 221–34.

<sup>32</sup> M. HENDY, *Studies in the Byzantine monetary economy c. 300–1450*. Cambridge 1985.

<sup>33</sup> The pessimistic interpretation of texts led historians, before HARVEY, to impose *oliganthropie chronique* (e.g., KAPLAN, *Hommes* 82) upon the Byzantine landscape which archaeology would now seriously challenge.

<sup>34</sup> DUNN, *Exploitation* 243–53.

which Kaplan stresses<sup>35</sup>. There is evidence for two increases in taxation of the land between the eighth and late eleventh centuries, but Treadgold and Harvey, in arguments to which Kaplan did not allude, concluded that these were tax-rises which took advantage of growth in the rural economy, and which did not impede further growth in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries<sup>36</sup>. Some of Treadgold's arguments are controversial, but Harvey's are reasonable: arguments about towns, markets, monetisation, demography, and intense elite interest in the acquisition of property from peasants and from the state in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. There are of course well-documented episodes of instability and unviability (for instance in the tenth century), but these were not the norm. The problem is in part to correct the impression created by these well-documented episodes. The implication of Alan Harvey's work would be that there was a normal viability and that it had something to do with markets, but the peasant producers themselves tend to be rather absent from these and other discussions of Mid-to-Late Byzantine markets and trade, discussions which are dominated by references to landowners (who are easier to trace as agents of redistribution and exchange).

The basis or bases of the viability of most households as effective units of production, rather than as fiscally defined units of taxation, are therefore what require further analysis, despite recent progress. It is understandable that the principal subjects of analysis have been wheat production (which, it is usually argued, was for consumption, storage, seedcorn, and taxes and rental payments), but also now viticulture and olive growing. It is recognized that (as in the Early Byzantine period) some peasants were in a position to cultivate the vine and the olive for commercial gain<sup>37</sup>. But this means that the focus has tended to be upon what a modern northern European is empirically aware of: the so-called Mediterranean Triad (that is, the vine, wheat, and the olive). If however we consider a real and comparatively well-documented region such as Macedonia, we soon find that the "Mediterranean Triad" was inoperative in Byzantine times, on account of the landscape, the climate, and the state of plant-husbandry (See below). The under-development of Byzantine regional studies as such<sup>38</sup>, a reduced interest in agriculture beyond the "Triad", and a lack of awareness of traditional or pre-industrial landscapes and of their traditional importance, has meant that concrete alternative models which would connect the Byzantine rural household's economy to its physical region, but also to the archaeological evidence for markets, have not been forthcoming. The "Triad" is effectively reduced to two in Byzantine Macedonia (except along most of its coastline and in a few sheltered localities), thanks to John Nesbitt's research on Byzantine olive cultivation<sup>39</sup>. And it could be shown that the remaining "Duo", the vine and wheat, barley and other grains, could never have dominated the pre-modern landscapes of this region<sup>40</sup>. There is therefore a challenge to see how the landscapes of a region which was not untypical of much of the Mid-to-Late Byzantine world were exploited, and (ultimately) how successfully for the actual exploiters.

One of the keys to the viability of the household economy will have been its access to the whole landscape, not simply its access to zones devoted to the "Macedonian Duo". In this attempt to understand how (but not why) a kind of pessimism has pervaded the study of the rural majority, it is necessary at this point to summarise the way that some Byzantinists have actually conveyed to their readers very misleading and, significantly for our theme, very pessimistic, images of Byzantine landscapes, which re-inforce discreetly the ideas of a largely unviable unit of production, and of an empire on a different trajectory from Western Europe, that was merely "managing" its own decline. Alexander Kazhdan, whose works have been influential in the west through revisions and translations, presented in two of them a wholly misleading tableau of the Byzantine environment, of which there were many echoes in works as recent as Kaplan's. For Kazhdan this environment consisted of mountains "with tiny valleys" in between. Byzantium also lacked water. "It seldom rained, and as there were no great rivers the construction of an irrigation system was not possible". He states "that

<sup>35</sup> KAPLAN, *Hommes*, ch. XI.

<sup>36</sup> W. TREADGOLD, *The Byzantine state finances in the eighth and ninth centuries*. New York 1982, 51–65, 86–90; HARVEY, *Expansion*, ch. 4–6.

<sup>37</sup> See for instance N. KONDOV, *Produktionsorganisatorische Verschiebungen bei dem Weinbau in der ersten Hälfte des XIV. Jahrhunderts im Gebiet des unteren Strymons*. *Études Balkaniques* 1973/1, 67–76.

<sup>38</sup> Not to be confused as to substance with such important preparatory projects as the *Tabula Imperii Romani* and *Tabula Imperii Byzantini*.

<sup>39</sup> J. NESBITT, *Mechanisms of agricultural production on estates of the Byzantine Praktika* (Ph.D). University of Wisconsin 1972, 8–11.

<sup>40</sup> See P. BELLIER et al., *Paysages de Macédoine, leurs caractères, leur évolution à travers les documents et les récits des voyageurs*. Paris 1986, ch. 1 (B. GEYER).

Byzantine agriculture could not develop”<sup>41</sup>. All of this is nonsense. André Guillou divides all Byzantine landscapes into “fertile” and “infertile”, and then describes at great length a typology of landscapes most of which fall into his “infertile” category. A largely “infertile”, and implicitly unexploitable, Byzantine world is thereby conjured up<sup>42</sup>. Kaplan, in his very important work, also manages to conjure up a consistently pessimistic set of images of the economic possibilities of most Byzantine landscapes<sup>43</sup>. To take just one aspect, this presentation obscures the fact that the then-undrained lowlands (typical of Macedonia), which the author regards as a problem, were excellent for the pasture of cattle, horses, sheep, and mules. The great rarity of references to meadowland is not therefore proof of the rarity of meadowland (as the author supposes), but indicates, as for certain other resources, that the administration retained more or less direct control of most of it. Scholars assert too that there was “a comparative scarcity of wood”, or, in trying to evaluate Byzantine sylvan resources, dismiss “the bare hills of Greece” as economically valueless, ideas or images which can be disproved<sup>44</sup>. All of these generalizations about Byzantine landscapes, rivers, meadowlands, woodland, and pasture-land, are extremely misleading and have conveyed the idea of a Byzantine economic desert.

By contrast the fiscal historian Michael Hendy has offered an extended analysis of the origins of significant surpluses in relation to the distribution of soldiers’ holdings, imperial estates and lands, and large aristocratic estates. Although he focused upon the Mediterranean Triad too, he plotted some of the known surpluses of pasture-lands and forests, thereby implicitly contradicting many of the assumptions of other economic historians<sup>45</sup>. There is a lot missing from the author’s schematic mapping of rural surpluses (whether for Macedonia or more generally). But his study pointed the way towards an understanding of the economic significance of the whole environment for the rural producer. In a typical region such as Macedonia therefore, consisting as it did of a great patchwork of woodlands, scrublands, wetlands, and open lowlands, every feature would have been intensely exploited, by the Byzantine as by the Early Modern peasant, to produce a vast array of marketable goods, both primary and secondary. There is scattered but reasonable evidence for the traffic in these products. The implication of archival, legal, and some literary sources, is of the openness of these vast uncultivated landscapes to the enterprising rural producer upon payment of access charges, charges which could not have been prohibitive.

Regarding woodland and scrubland, one could discuss timber, firewood, pitch, resin, charcoal, dyes, leather-tanning, cattle-food, and wild game, the extraction of which was fundamentally the business of rural households<sup>46</sup>. One of the clearest examples of peasants’ successful exploitation of these environments, although its investigator did not link it to woodland and scrubland, is Kondov’s study showing that one third of the households in a probably typical village on the edge of eastern Macedonia’s vast woodlands (on the west side of the lower Strymon valley) kept herds of pigs large enough for commerce, about 20 pigs per household<sup>47</sup>. Ferjančić has identified evidence of this scale of pig-rearing in many other villages<sup>48</sup>, and widespread rearing of sheep and goats by Macedonia’s peasant farmers on a commercial scale, a scale which necessitated access to the publicly administered *incultum*. And this is only to refer to sedentary pastoralism. The transhumant pastoralism described by some post-Byzantine travelers, both Western and Ottoman, could help to explain the references to Byzantine Macedonia as a centre for the exportation of leather, wool, ham, tallow, and cheeses, the markets for which, again, one does not have to assume were dominated by landowners selling surpluses that they controlled personally. If estates contained little or no domanial land then most landowners could not have dominated such markets except by using the public *incultum* too. Balkan pastoralism, with its mass movements of free individuals, has not been taken into account when scholars argue that

<sup>41</sup> A. KAZHDAN, *Byzanz und seine Kultur*. Berlin 1973, 43–58; A. KAZHDAN – G. CONSTABLE, *People and power in Byzantium*. Washington, D.C. 1982, 38.

<sup>42</sup> GUILLOU, *Civilization byzantine* 15–80.

<sup>43</sup> KAPLAN, *Hommes*, ch. I.

<sup>44</sup> For the imagined scarcity (which of course was a feature of discrete areas), Wood and woodworking, *ODB* III 2204.

<sup>45</sup> HENDY, *Studies*, ch. I.

<sup>46</sup> DUNN, *Exploitation*, 275–96; IDEM, *The control and exploitation of the arboreal resources of the Late Byzantine and Frankish Aegean*, in: *L’uomo e la foresta secc. XIII–XVIII*, ed. S. CAVACIOCCHI. Prato 1996, 479–96.

<sup>47</sup> N. KONDOV, *Das Dorf Gradec. Die demographisch-wirtschaftliche Gestalt eines Dorfes aus dem Gebiet des unteren Strymon vom Anfang des 14. Jahrhunderts*. *Études Balkaniques* 1977/3, 83–5.

<sup>48</sup> B. FERJANČIĆ, *Stočarstvo na posedima svetogorskih manastira u srednjem veku*. *ZRVI* 32 (1993) 97, 99, 104, 124.

the typical Byzantine peasant, in Macedonia and other regions, had rarely enough sheep, cattle, or pigs, to have been engaged in the marketing of them and their products<sup>49</sup>.

Turning to another of the great “forgotten landscapes”, it can be calculated that wetlands, or lakes and marshes, covered at least 12% of Eastern Macedonia in summer, rising to about 20% in the winter and spring. The majority were drained in the 1920s and 1930s. If these areas were rich in fish, which Late Ottoman financial records show them to have been, then they, and the region’s slow-moving rivers (many of them great, *contra* Kazhdan) constituted major economic resources for the numerous surrounding villages, and not only in terms of wild or bred fish. There was summer- and winter-grazing, hunting, the trapping of fowl, and vast reedbeds that were treated as economic assets in themselves, whilst the rivers and lakes served as waterways. A recent study referred to the wetlands of Eastern Macedonia as regions “which had scarcely any attraction”, despite referring to herding and fishing, thus echoing older views of the Byzantine economic landscape<sup>50</sup>. But their economic attraction is clearly revealed by the fourteen headings (at least) under which the Middle-to-Late Byzantine administration drew revenues from the exploitation of these landscapes. Clearly both the administration and peasants saw great economic possibilities in wetlands<sup>51</sup>. As with the exploitation of woodland, scrubland, and also of open uplands, so with wetlands and rivers, the exploiters were the peasantry, paying access charges to the state, or eventually to some landowners. We find references to the peasants’ fishponds, fish-traps, ditches called *aulakia*, *strougai*, or *kharadrai*, for fishbreeding, and references to the villagers’ mercantile pontoons (*platai*). We find references to the freshwater fishmarket of the principal city of southeastern Macedonia, Serres, and to the prodigious fish-consumption of the great city of Thessalonica, much of which would have been supplied by the rural population (though Thessalonica had its own fishing industry too). We also find references to the proximity of saltpans to lagunal fisheries, which suggests that salted fish, which was an important part of the Byzantine diet, could have been a product provided by the peasant fishermen. Again the access charges could not have been prohibitive<sup>52</sup>.

Without attempting to be exhaustive therefore, the case can be made, in opposition to the standard models of the unviable Byzantine peasant-unit of production, that most peasant households, i.e. most people, were quite viable barring major accidents, provided that they did not attempt to conform to some modern historians’ stereotype of the practice of the “Mediterranean Triad”, which in Macedonia they clearly could not do, but did not need to either, given the wealth of resources around them. It is far more useful in general, for most regions of the Byzantine world, to explore what has been felicitously called “the Mediterranean Trio”, namely: “diversify, store, and redistribute”<sup>53</sup>. In Macedonia therefore rural producers would have been involved in the exploitation of one or more of the great “uncultivated” economic landscapes, all of which were accessible to nearly all villages owing to the tortuous topography of the region, besides necessarily cultivating possible aspects of the Triad. Diversification, storage, and redistribution brought the producer into contact, across a broad range of activities, with local or regional markets. If wheat, as has often been argued, was not something that it was in the economic interests of many peasants to grow commercially (and the arguments are quite good)<sup>54</sup>, almost everything else that they could produce, and particularly that they could extract from or generate in, the *incultum*, it was definitely in their interests to commercialise. It would rarely have been a question, in these spheres of extraction and production, of gluts (hence low prices) and dearths, more one of steady levels of demand and supply. In many large regions of the Byzantine empire, such as most of Macedonia, which are transitional between the Mediterranean and the Continental climatic zones, peasant households probably could have guaranteed themselves steady incomes. They could have successfully exploited some of the resources of these landscapes. This idea contradicts the view of many Byzantinists, who called such

<sup>49</sup> M. GYÓNI, Les Vlaques du Mont Athos au début du XII siècle. *Études Slaves et Roumaines* 1 (1948) 30–42; IDEM, La transhumance des Vlaques balkaniques au moyen âge. *Byzantinobulgarica* 12 (1951) 29–42.

<sup>50</sup> B. GEYER, Paysages de Macédoine, ch. I, 106–8.

<sup>51</sup> A. DUNN, The Plain of Philippi and the exploitation and control of wetlands in Byzantine Macedonia, in: Η Δράμα και η περιοχή της. Ιστορία και πολιτισμός (forthcoming).

<sup>52</sup> A. DUNN, From polis to kastron in southern Macedonia: Amphipolis, Khrysoupolis, and the Strymon Delta, in: Archéologie des espaces agraires méditerranéennes au Moyen Âge (*Castrum* 5). Madrid – Rome 1997, 411–2; IDEM, Loci of maritime traffic in the Strymon Delta 342–3, 349; IDEM, Plain of Philippi (forthcoming).

<sup>53</sup> P. HORDEN – N. PURCELL, The corrupting sea. A study of Mediterranean history. Oxford 2000, ch. VI.

<sup>54</sup> Selectively: GARNSEY, Thessaly; J. DURLIAT, Conditions 92–3.



landscapes “infertile”, desert-like, and of little interest. Relating the Middle-to-Late Byzantine texts to the landscape also helps us to think about the Early Byzantine archaeological evidence for a relatively intensive occupation of the *incultum*, apparently, throughout the empire. A moderately optimistic view of the Byzantine rural household economy, Early Middle, and Late, if it continues to be supported by archives and archaeology, and is eventually refined at their interface, will be an interesting revision of Byzantine history.

