

# Agrarian History and the Labour Organisation of Byzantine Large Estates

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## Introduction

ALTHOUGH THE EMERGENCE and consolidation of the new provincial aristocracies of late antiquity meant a considerable development of large estates and their exploitation as jointly owned consolidated holdings, not much has been written about the organisation of estates. Indeed, till today the only focused monograph is a study published in 1931.<sup>1</sup> Jean Gascou's thesis showed little interest in the internal administration and labour arrangements of the large estates, and his basic argument was in any case hostile to such a perspective, since the estates, for him, were essentially public institutions, with the aristocracy working largely within a fiscal regime.<sup>2</sup> Kaplan's recent book systematically avoids Egypt, and bases its survey of the earlier centuries (sixth–seventh) on a kind of source material that can tell us little about the actual functioning of estates.<sup>3</sup> This is all the more surprising, as the new estates reflect the characteristics of the late empire in a particularly lucid form, from the social origins and character of their owners to the managerial options they preferred, and the extraordinary sense of submission they imposed on a labour force which was, after all, both free and structured and controlled essentially through contracts. Papyri from Egypt reflect a better image of these processes than any other body of evidence, as they stem directly from the operations of rural economy, but

<sup>1</sup> Hardy (1931).

<sup>2</sup> Gascou (1985).

<sup>3</sup> Kaplan (1992).

their dispersed and difficult character is possibly one reason for the neglect of aristocratic economy. However, the most important reason is probably the influence of minimalist views of the ancient economy—the idea that pre-capitalist classes lacked both sophistication and basic economic rationalism, and that large landowners, in particular, were simply *rentiers*, with no interest in labour processes or the broader organisation of production.<sup>4</sup>

My interest in this paper is in the status of the peasantry in the late antique world, which very roughly spans the period from the fourth to the seventh centuries. This was an epoch of rapid social change, of new cultural dynamisms, and of a large-scale restructuring of both economic and political life.<sup>5</sup> For generations, however, the vitality and innovation of this period (a *post-classical* one) were simply ignored, and these pre- or proto-medieval centuries were seen as an age of unrelieved gloom and decay. When this sweeping orthodoxy was later relaxed, the assumptions scholars had made about the agrarian life of the period were merely inverted and, consequently, one is left today with two contradictory models which no longer seem particularly useful (see below). Neither of these models is tenable, as each fails to capture the peculiarity (and sophistication) of late antique economy and culture, which, with their deep-rooted and multiplex hierarchies, were nonetheless more fluid and democratic than the world from which they emerged. The parochial and human slaveries of the classical world were superseded by more metaphysical subordinations—servility to the emperor and to God, but both assumed freely by subjects conscious of themselves as loyal and/or devout individuals. At the economic level, more and more labour-power was repulsed from the fabric of the old economy and absorbed in the creative environment of monasteries<sup>6</sup> and large estates. Jördens' work shows that there was a long-term expansion of wage employment,<sup>7</sup> and Susan Harvey's study of asceticism emphasises its profound links with the growing insecurities of a world repeatedly ravaged by warfare and scarcity.<sup>8</sup> These wider or deeper contexts are naturally presupposed here, but they are important, for the economy of the late empire is at one level incomprehensible without them.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Goffart (1974), 76 for a remarkably forthright statement of this view.

<sup>5</sup> Brown (1971) is still the best general introduction. Millar (1993) is a remarkable account of the cultural complexities of the Near East. On the demography of the east Mediterranean countryside, Tate (1992) is now fundamental. For Egypt see Bowman (1996).

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Tchalenko (1953–1958), I, 20, on the Syrian monasteries, '...chaque monastère constitue une entreprise agricole autonome, très vaste, et très bien organisée'; also Wilfong, below, ch. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Jördens (1990).

<sup>8</sup> Harvey (1990). There is more than metaphorical irony in the fact that the first monastery founded in Egypt occupied the site of an abandoned village, cf. *S. Pachomii Vitae Graecae, Vita prima*, 54, referring to the site as a 'deserted village called Pabau', see Halkin (1932), 36.

### A Historiography of Abstractions

When a recent study of Egypt in the fourth to early fifth centuries gives historians the option of choosing between the 'feudalism' of the large estates and the 'unchanging centrality of the small family farm',<sup>9</sup> the contrast is badly conceived, for feudal economies of a purer type have always presupposed what one historian calls the 'primacy of peasant economy'.<sup>10</sup> Bagnall clearly did not intend agrarian historians to choose between peasant proprietorship and tenancy, for these could easily have co-existed, as they frequently have done,<sup>11</sup> but between statuses — were peasants free or were they bound to large estates? That they may have been both free and worked for large estates, is not an option he considers, for he, like the traditionalists whose conclusions he rejects, automatically identifies large estates with the exercise of coercion. To reject the idea of widespread or universal coercion, he feels he must reject the view that large estates were an important element in the rural economy of the late empire. Thus *Gutswirtschaft* and *Grundherrschaft* are both effectively swept away in one massive sweep of iconoclasm, and the issue of how large estates were actually organised is left in limbo.

There has, of course, been a long tradition of defining the peasants working on such estates as 'serfs', influenced, clearly, by the general conception of the colonate as an essentially medieval or feudal type of institution which coerced an unwilling peasantry into service on the large estates. The assumption here should be that landlords extracted labour by force, but in fact proponents of this view do not see 'serfdom' in terms of the actual organisation of labour but as a more diffuse or abstract juridical relation. The economic forms in which estates exploited these juridical serfs (the so-called *coloni*) were the usual types of tenancy. As Clausen put it, the '*colonus* is revealed by the Codes as a small tenant whose most noticeable characteristic was his legal attachment to the soil. He cultivated his own land . . . As a payment for the use of the land he owed a yearly rental to the landlord. The rent was ordinarily paid in kind.'<sup>12</sup> The legal evidence, however, and the problems of its historical interpretation were too complex to sustain such lucid simplicities, and the thesis of a late Roman serfdom was largely given up.<sup>13</sup> The post-war revisionism was led by Johnson and West in an influential work published in the 1940s. They rejected the view that the peasants who worked on the large estates were serfs of some kind. 'The law did not bind the tenant to the soil . . . We suggest that the *enapographoi*

<sup>9</sup> Bagnall (1993), 115.

<sup>10</sup> See Confino's review of Kolchin, Confino (1990), 1119ff., esp. 1126–7.

<sup>11</sup> For centuries Persia had both peasant proprietors and crop-sharing peasants, but they were, on the whole, quite distinct groups, see Lambton (1953).

<sup>12</sup> Clausen (1925), 23–4.

<sup>13</sup> It is still argued, with some rigour, by de Ste Croix (1981), 244ff.

*georgoi* were free tenants.<sup>14</sup> Since 'free' clearly refers to the lack of any definite legal restrictions on the mobility of the peasantry, one or two qualifications might be useful. The juridical status of the so-called 'tenants' is no indication of how much pressure landlords actually applied to secure the submission or even complete dependence of their work-forces, and certainly not proof that they did not apply such pressure.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, they themselves admit that the 'position of the tenant seems to deteriorate in the sixth century'.<sup>16</sup> This was especially true of sharecroppers. Thus the legal freedom enjoyed by the Byzantine tenantry was no guarantee that their actual economic conditions might not deteriorate and make them more vulnerable to domination by landowners. However, it is worth retaining the idea that the 'tenants' recruited by large landowners were free peasants, for this tends to discredit the notion that they in particular depended on either servile or semi-servile labour of the sort that sustained production on the estates of the Russian *pomeshchiki*.<sup>17</sup>

One consequence is obvious: whichever view one adopts of the freedom or lack of freedom of the late antique peasantry, the majority of scholars seem to concur in the belief that large-estate peasants, the peasants of the Apiones,<sup>1</sup> for example, were small tenants, and that estates parcellised their land into small-holdings which were then leased out for payments in cash and/or kind.<sup>18</sup> With the exception of Mickwitz, I am not aware of a single dissenting view in this matter.<sup>19</sup> This consensus is even more impressive when we consider that both Johnson and West and Jean Gascou took the trouble to note that no leases actually survive in the relatively abundant documentation of the Apion estate.<sup>20</sup>

It is the aim of this paper to reject this view and substitute a more complex model. I shall argue that the organisation of the Byzantine large estate was fundamentally similar to the organisation of Egyptian large estates in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To be able to establish this, however, we have to do several things: (1) look at the terminology for rural classes without making apparently commonsense assumptions as to who the *georgoi* were likely to have been (they are normally thought of as 'peasants' but the issue is who or what was a 'peasant' in the late antique context?); (2) re-argue the case for perma-

<sup>14</sup> Johnson and West (1949), 31.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Jones (1964), 817 ('it was at the demand of landlords that the system was maintained and extended'), and now see the new letter of Augustine, *Ep.* 24\*.1, asking whether landowners had the right to transform their *coloni* into slaves.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson and West (1949), 77.

<sup>17</sup> Kolchin (1987).

<sup>18</sup> For this view of the Apion peasantry, cf. Banaji (1997a), n. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Mickwitz (1932), esp. 141ff. Jördens (1992), 269 is also against the mainstream in referring to the 'Eigenwirtschaft des Grundherren'.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson and West (1949), 60, 'Although no contracts are preserved between Apion and his tenants...'; Gascou (1985), 9, n.9, 'Je ne connais chez les Apions que deux cas, à vrai dire douteux, de location' (emphasis mine).

ment labour; (3) pay more attention to the details of our evidence, referring especially to a few recently published papyri; and (4) 'correlate' all this evidence with whatever one has begun to learn about the organisation of estates in the more recent period, relying mainly on the work of Roger Owen and Alan Richards, and the sources they have used.<sup>21</sup>

### Rural Stratification: *Geouchountes*, *Ktetoires* and *Ergatai*

In his recent book, *The Pasha's Peasants*, Kenneth Cuno has drawn attention to the 'existence of a highly stratified rural society before 1800'.<sup>22</sup> The gap between the smallholding and landless strata and the wealthy peasantry increased in the course of the nineteenth century,<sup>23</sup> but it is clear that it pre-existed the reforms of Muhammad 'Ali. In general, this stratification may be summed up by referring broadly to the wealthier peasant stratum, smallholders, and the landless. Clearly, much of the fiscal proletarianisation which Baer describes as characteristic of the regimes of Sa'id and Isma'il was borne overwhelmingly by the middle group, those described as smallholders.<sup>24</sup> Of course, above these various groups were the large landowners drawn mainly from the ruling family, high officials, army officers, wealthy merchants, and the land companies controlled by foreign and local investors.<sup>25</sup>

Now, similar divisions characterise the late antique rural situation in Egypt. The Egyptian peasantry of the sixth century was a deeply stratified mass, with divisions which broadly correspond to the three tiers mentioned above. The papyri from Aphrodito show that villages (*komai*) were run by a small circle of the leading village families,<sup>26</sup> who described themselves as *ktetoires* or *syntelestai*. 'Ktetor' was the term most often used for small and middling landowners who stood between the aristocracy and the mass of the more humble peasantry, regardless of whether they were urban or village-based.<sup>27</sup> The aristocracy, a purely urban class, were *geouchountes* by contrast with these middling landowners,<sup>28</sup> and better structured and more elaborately graded than their nascent

<sup>21</sup> See below, esp. n.90

<sup>22</sup> Cuno (1992), 199, cf. also 148 ('Eighteenth-century peasant society was highly stratified.'). 67, 85, and Cuno (1984).

<sup>23</sup> Cuno (1992), 148.

<sup>24</sup> Baer (1962), 29ff.

<sup>25</sup> Baer (1962), 39ff.

<sup>26</sup> The expression is apt and used by Cuno (1992), 67.

<sup>27</sup> *P.Cairo Masp.* II 67130.4 (557), I 67110.8–11 (565), *P.Vatic.Aphrod.* 1.6–7 (598), *P.Cairo Masp.* III 67283 II (before 9.11.547), *P.Amst.* I 85 (6th–7th century), and *P.Oxy.* XVI 2058.36 (6th century), all involve the village-based landed group, mostly owners of medium-sized properties, such as Flavius Dioscorus or the descendants of Apa Sourous, founder of a monastery which amassed a considerable amount of property locally.

<sup>28</sup> The terms *geouchon* and *ktetor* appear together in *P.Strasb.* I 40 (569), lines 7, 15, with *BL* 1.406, and it is certain that they designate different classes of landowners.

counterparts of the nineteenth century. What is significant, however, is that the leading village families, a group with all the characteristics of a wealthy peasant stratum,<sup>29</sup> never called themselves *georgoi*, and this despite their largely Coptic cultural affinities with the rest of the 'peasantry'. Even the more substantial lessees described themselves as *misthotai* rather than *georgoi*.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, these lessees hired labourers whom they ordinarily referred to as '*georgoi*'.<sup>31</sup> The implication of all this is that the *georgoi* were not primarily a landed class, or, more accurately, not seen as one, which explains why they were in fact frequently counterposed (in imperial legislation, literary sources, etc.)<sup>32</sup> to the class of landowners as a group defined less by their ownership of land or other resources than by their physical labour on it, whether as smallholders, lessees, or rural labourers. Finally, it is possible to find documents where the *georgoi* and the *ergatai* are distinct categories,<sup>33</sup> reflecting situations where smallholders or lessees or permanent workers were distinguished from casual labourers. '*Ergates*' was the normal term for a casual worker, agricultural or other, but in late antiquity it came to be used of permanent labourers as well.<sup>34</sup> Since the most common way of referring to full-time workers was actually *georgos*, it was possible for these terms (*georgos/ergates*) to acquire broadly similar connotations, as in a Novel of Justinian I which defines a particular category of *georgoi* we shall be concerned with as *oiketores ton chorion kai ton agron ergatai*, i.e., rural workers permanently resident on estates.<sup>35</sup>

### The Case for Permanent Labour

The argument for permanent labour flows directly from this. The assertion that 'hired labourers seem very rarely to have been employed on a permanent

<sup>29</sup> Cuno (1980), 253, 'wealthy peasant stratum'.

<sup>30</sup> *P.Vatic.Aphrod.* 1 (598).

<sup>31</sup> *P.Mich.* XIII 666.15-16 (512 or 527). τὴν πᾶσαν ἐργασίαν ποιήσασθαι ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων μου γεωργῶν, 'to get the whole job done with my own *georgoi*'; *P.Vatic.Aphrod.* 1.18, ἰδίοις μου κτήνεσιν καὶ γεωργοῖς, 'with my own cattle and *georgoi*'. *P.Cairo Masp.* III 67300.10-11 (526 or 527), *P.Michael.* 46.12 (559), *P.Hamb.* I 68.11-12 (549/50 or 564/5), *P.Apoll.* 57.1-2

<sup>32</sup> Procopius, *HA* 23.16. τοῖς τε κυρίοις καὶ τοῖς γεωργοῖς; 26.17ff., γεωργούς τε καὶ χωρίων κτήτορας καὶ κυρίους; Nov.Justin II, I a' (*Jus Graecoromanum*, t.1, p.2) (566), ὥστε οὐδὲ γεωργοί, οὐδὲ μισθοῦται, οὐτὲ ἐμψυτευτάι, οὐτὲ μὴν οἱ κεκτημένοι εἰσπροχθήσονται κτλ.; Nov.Tiberius, 11 a' (*Jus Graecoromanum*, t.1, p.18) (575), τὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ παροντος δωρεάν, δι' ἧς concedimus γεωργοῖς τε καὶ συντελεσταῖς ἅπανσι (ταῦτόν δὲ ἐστὶν εἰπεῖν τοῖς τῶν χωρίων κυρίοις) *integrum unum canonem*, etc.

<sup>33</sup> *SPP* X 251(b) (7th century, prob. 626), lines 4ff., cash wages for casual labourers paid through a *georgos*: from a large Fayyum estate. *P.Apoll.* 98.21, disbursement of foodgrains τῷ γεωργῷ (καὶ) τοῖς ἐργ(ά)ταις).

<sup>34</sup> See notes 35, 52 below, and cf. *P.Ross.-Georg.* V 71 (? 8th century), from the Fayyum. esp. Γνω(σ)ίς ἐργ(α)τῶν φυγ(όν)των τῆς οὐσί(α)ς Πκομ. 'list of workers who have fled from the estate at Pkom'.

<sup>35</sup> Nov.Justinian I, 162.2 (*Corpus Iuris Civilis*, 3.748).

basis<sup>36</sup> is not supported by the evidence of the papyri.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, there are at least three levels at which one might respond to this or to the view that permanent labour was not used because it was inefficient.<sup>38</sup> First, there is Egyptian evidence from other periods of the country's agrarian history. Then there is the general evidence of agrarian historians, which shows that permanent labour was the structural basis of large-estate agriculture in numerous and diverse historical settings until the agrarian restructuring of the late nineteenth century and the massive casualisation of rural labour markets.<sup>39</sup> Two Chinese historians who have dealt with the organisation of large estates in late imperial China use the term 'managerial landlords' to describe landowners who based their production on the work of long-term labourers.<sup>40</sup> I shall retain this phrase as an apt description of the Egyptian aristocracy of the fifth to seventh centuries. Finally, there is the evidence, sporadic though it may appear, of the papyri themselves, which ranges from the third to the seventh centuries.

I shall concentrate for the moment on levels one and three. In *Feudalism in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and the Lebanon* Poliak describes the peasantry dominated by the Mamluk houses of the eighteenth century as 'permanent tenants' of the *multazims*.<sup>41</sup> All the references are to al-Jabartī's chronicles. However, the term which he seems to translate in this way, *muzāri'un*, simply has the more general meaning of 'peasants' or 'farmers',<sup>42</sup> and al-Jabartī frequently refers to 'their peasants' when he describes the domination of the *multazims*. That peasants (*fallāhīn*) in the *iltizam* system were 'permanent tenants' thus seems to be a description not of the way the labour-process was organised but of their juridical or quasi-judicial status, and it is therefore worth ignoring this passage. Lancret is in fact much more informative about the way the *multazims* organised production on their *usya* lands, and mentions leases to the village shaykhs, paid labour, and forced labour as the chief methods used to exploit such land.<sup>43</sup> It is unlikely that these were sharply contrasting systems of production, for each of these methods must have involved some degree of coercion. The fact is that

<sup>36</sup> Jones (1964), 792f.

<sup>37</sup> See Banaji (1997b) for similar arguments.

<sup>38</sup> Bagnall (1993), 121, ignoring the recent literature on inter-seasonal labour-tying arrangements.

<sup>39</sup> This is even more true if plantation capitalism, serf estates, etc. are seen as based on forms of permanent labour, but even otherwise, see Richards (1979), and much of the work on Mexico, Chile, Peru, Prussia, China, and so on.

<sup>40</sup> Jing Su and Luo Lun (1959), studying Shandong c.1900.

<sup>41</sup> Poliak (1939), 72.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., Wehr (1952), I, 341, مزارع, *muzāri'*, 'Landmann', 'Landwirt', 'Ackerbauer', 'Farmer'.

<sup>43</sup> Lancret (1809), 243 (cf. *DE*<sup>2</sup> XI, 481ff.) About the second of the three methods, he says, 'Dans le second cas, le moultezim a, dans chacun de ses villages, deux hommes principaux chargés de la culture et de la récolte de ses terres d'ousyeh: l'un est khaouly, ou surveillant; l'autre est oukyl, ou procurer. Le khaouly, de concert avec le cheykh, distribue la terre aux divers fellâh, selon leurs besoins ou leurs demandes. C'est lui, ou tout autre homme de confiance, qui est dépositaire des fonds nécessaires au paiement des fellâh' (*DE*<sup>2</sup> XI, p.482).

exploitation by the multazims, whether on their own land or on peasant land (*ard al-filāha*) created a general impression that the Egyptian peasantry of the neo-Mamluk period was a highly vulnerable and destitute group. For instance, when Volney wrote that 'the peasants are hired labourers to whom no more is left than barely suffices to sustain life',<sup>44</sup> he surely could not have meant that paid labour in some formal sense was the regular form in which peasant labour was exploited, but only that, whatever the particular form of exploitation, the peasants were as good as labourers. More specific evidence is found, again, in Girard, who investigated the costs of production in rice-growing in the province of Damietta. Girard refers to 'les ouvriers attachés pendant l'année aux travaux de l'exploitation' and distinguishes them from 'les journaliers' who were clearly casual labourers employed in weeding, transplanting, and cleaning of canals.<sup>45</sup> In short, there is certainly some evidence for the use of permanent paid labour in the period before the full development of the 'izba system, though its actual extent and precise forms remain unknown. Perhaps the most valuable contribution of the late Ottoman sources is simply the general impression they convey of peasants who could be treated, and seen by others, as labourers, that is, of a peasantry without the resources, legal or material, to withstand coercion into 'coerced wage' or 'serf' labour. The sharecroppers mentioned by Poliak (again on the basis of al-Jabartī) would undoubtedly have belonged to this category, being mostly labourers paid in kind.<sup>46</sup>

Again, the ancient evidence is largely concordant with this. As I noted earlier, Egyptian and other ancient sources tend not to treat the *georgoi* as a landed class but as a class living by its labour on the land. On the other hand, the question of permanent labour concerns the more specific issue of whether and how frequently such 'peasants' worked as full-time rural labourers on large estates with the resources (in land, grain, and cash) to employ them on this basis. Rathbone's study of the Fayyum estate of Appianus shows that at least some third-century large estates used the system of permanent labour, though his work also suggests that in terms of actual labour inputs, such estates remained massively dependent on the supply of casual workers.<sup>47</sup> Mexican wheat estates of the late nineteenth century tend to confirm this pattern, showing that estates with resident work-forces consistently required large numbers of seasonal labourers.<sup>48</sup> Mertens characterises such haciendas as 'wage labour enterprises',<sup>49</sup> and in a

<sup>44</sup> Volney (1787), I, 188 ('Les paysans y sont des manoeuvres à gages, à qui l'on ne laisse pour vivre que ce qu'il faut pour ne pas mourir').

<sup>45</sup> Girard (1799-1800), 237, 239, and in his general survey in vol.2 of the *DE*, *État Moderne*, II, 578f., cf. Cuno (1980), 255.

<sup>46</sup> Poliak (1939), 72, noting that they could be evicted at any time.

<sup>47</sup> Rathbone (1991), ch. 3 and 149ff.

<sup>48</sup> Mertens (1983), 194ff.

<sup>49</sup> Mertens (1983), 195, 'Die Haciendas arbeiteten als Lohnarbeitsbetriebe'.



strict sense the same description might be used of the Appianus estate. The significant point here is that the formation of an aristocracy did not preclude, and may even have stimulated, patterns of labour use dependent largely on wage labour. The next piece of evidence is also from the third century, this time from the estates of Calpurnia Heraclia, who came from an extremely wealthy Alexandrian family.<sup>50</sup> In *P.Oxy.* XLII 3048, dated 17–18 March 246, we have an absolutely unique snapshot of the labour force of a large aristocratic estate in the mid-third century. Five groups are listed, two at managerial and three at work-force level. Of the non-managerial categories, it is clear that the mainstay of her estates were the *georgoi*. They, however, were not tenants (in the ordinary sense), as the document specifically tells us that the *georgoi*, like other sections of the labour force, received monthly salaries (*meniaiαι syntaxeis*) in grain.<sup>51</sup>

Moving into the fourth century, we have one document, the quarterly accounts of a fairly large estate at Hermonthis for one quarter in the year 338.<sup>52</sup> Here the disbursements listed in col.xv show that wheat rations of 2 *artabas* per month were paid to a group of workers called *ergatai*. They were probably permanent labourers, as twenty are named individually for the month of Pharmouthi, and the payments must have been at least partly designed to sustain the family's consumption. The more specialised workers on this estate were called *opsoniastai*, *opsonia* being regular wage payments in cash or kind. From the fifth century (possibly) a short account from the Hermopolite nome carries a heading which may be translated as 'Account of the wheat (disbursed as) wages of our *georgoi* for the 12th indiction'.<sup>53</sup> These labourers<sup>54</sup> were certainly permanent, as their wages are said to be for the whole year, although the amounts vary. Finally, a much later account from the archive of Papas, pagarch of Edfu, disbursed 132 *artabas* of barley *hyper misthou georgon*.<sup>55</sup> Divided by a standard ration of 12 *artabas*, this would yield a full-time labour force of eleven workers (*georgoi*). The least this establishes is that rural wage labourers were used in Egypt not

<sup>50</sup> Her father, C. Calpurnius Aurelius Theon, was a 'former member of the Museum' and himself the son, probably, of another Alexandrian landowner, Calpurnius Aurelius Horion, who turns up in early third-century documents, see *P.Oxy.* L 3564.1n.

<sup>51</sup> *P.Oxy.* XLII 3048 (246) ll.19–21, ἀπό δὲ τῶν προκ[ειμ]ένων δίδονται μηνιαῖαι συντάξεις πραγματευταῖς τε καὶ φροντισταῖς[ς καὶ] γεωργοῖς καὶ παιδαρτοῖς καὶ καταμηνεῖς, 'Out of the above-mentioned [amounts], monthly allowances are given to the general managers, local managers, labourers, boys and monthly paid'. The other non-managerial groups were thus *paidaria*, 'boys', probably the sons of the *georgoi*, and more specialised workers whose wages were calculated on a monthly basis and who were therefore called *katamenioi*. *Paidarion* is often taken to mean 'slave' but in *SPP* XX 222 (6th/7th century), cf. *BL* 1.421, the *paidaria* are clearly the sons of peasants or rural labourers.

<sup>52</sup> *P.Lips.* 97 (338).

<sup>53</sup> *P.Amh.* II 155 (5th century).

<sup>54</sup> They are so described by the editor.

<sup>55</sup> *P.Apoll.* 98.38.

just on a casual or seasonal basis but as permanent or resident work-forces. The next issue is whether we can determine a form of exploitation (a labour system) characteristic of the deployment of these workers.

Certainly, the most fascinating section of the Appianus labour force are the *epoikiotai*.<sup>56</sup> They are described by Rathbone as 'tenant labourers' or 'tenants with labour dues',<sup>57</sup> and their crucial function seems to have been the supply of peak-season labour at lower wage rates, for a payment determined partly in cash and partly in the form of accommodation on the estate. Whereas casual workers were paid 4 drachmas a day for harvest work, these labourers received the substantially lower wage of 2 drachmas 6 obols.<sup>58</sup> In the growing literature on labour tenancy, the usual term for such workers is labour tenants.<sup>59</sup> Another large third-century estate that made systematic use of labour tenancy was the *ousia* of Valerius Titianianus at Theadelphia in the Fayyum. This was a large wine-producing operation owned by a former high official who was part of the Alexandrian aristocracy.<sup>60</sup> Accounts for the year 239 show that his estate extracted part of its labour supply by charging a rent for accommodation on the estate, in the settlements called *epoikia*, and computing part of the rent in labour days (*ergatai*).<sup>61</sup> Since the basic rent included twelve days of labour every half-year, the estate obviously used this system to secure 'a substantial quantity of free casual labour from its tenants'.<sup>62</sup> However, at the imputed wage of 2 drachmas there was no difference in the rates paid to these workers and to ordinary day-labourers. These two examples show that large landowners were consciously structuring their supplies of labour in forms that gave them maximum flexibility, and that forms of labour tenancy were certainly in use by the third century.

### Restructuring in the Later Empire

It is doubtful if the Alexandrian aristocracy of the third century ever completely succeeded in forming a coherent and stable class. Their purely economic influence was in any case limited, as much of the land was controlled by the municipal landed families who ran the town councils in the different districts or nomes of Egypt. In this largely municipal milieu, only the bigger landowners could have replicated the forms of management characteristic of the Alexandrian

<sup>56</sup> Literally, 'people from the *epoikia*', on which see below, p. 206f.

<sup>57</sup> Rathbone (1991), 146, 150, 182-3.

<sup>58</sup> Rathbone (1991), 159, cf. the *terrasgueros* or cash tenants on Mexican estates, Mertens (1983), 119.

<sup>59</sup> See Bradford (1987); Keegan (1987); Kanogo (1987); Loveman (1976); and most recently, Jacobsen (1993).

<sup>60</sup> On his background see Gilliam (1974).

<sup>61</sup> *P.Mich.* 620 (239-40). The accommodation consisted of single and double rooms (*kellai*).

<sup>62</sup> Rathbone (1991), 178.

families. The majority undoubtedly relied on leasing as the dominant method of management, recruiting lessees from the considerable mass of landless or near-landless peasants for whom tenancy was a regular form of employment. In fact, it was this stratum of municipal landholders which would eventually suffer a near eclipse, as their properties were relentlessly sundered in the process of subdivision, and the deeper dynamisms of the late empire (economic, social, political) unleashed a prolonged restructuring of agrarian society, with the emergence of new landowning groups, such as the nascent aristocratic families of the fifth century, the Church, the monasteries, and the middling bureaucracy of the provincial towns.<sup>63</sup> Above these groups were the massive possessions of the imperial household (including the estates of various members of the imperial family) organised in the *Domus Divina*,<sup>64</sup> and below them, in the villages (*komai*), a rich peasantry who are remarkable counterparts of the village shaykhs of the nineteenth century. Thus the agrarian landscape was both stratified and complex, and of course there is no reason to suppose that the forms of agrarian management characteristic of the élite aristocracy were found at most other levels—other than the *Domus Divina* itself. Emerging ‘from the upper ranks of the services’, as Ostrogorsky in fact wrote of the Byzantine aristocracy of a later period,<sup>65</sup> the new landed aristocracy comprised mostly high officials, who, like the Russian *pomeshchiki* of the later eighteenth century,<sup>66</sup> were great believers in the careful management and bureaucratic administration of their properties, influenced no doubt by their imperial background. These, then, were directly managed properties, with owners investing heavily in the ‘infrastructure of administration’. By contrast, leasing was widespread on most other types of properties, though by itself the term conceals a great variety of content, both as to the type and duration of the lease and the type of lessee. In the countryside around Hermopolis, much of the land was leased to *georgoi* who resided in the town itself; the lessors were affluent middle-class landowners, many of them women, or ecclesiastical holders, such as the Holy Church of the Resurrection, whose lands were situated to the east of the town and leased out in tiny parcels (1–2 *arouras*) for durations of two years.<sup>67</sup> In the village of Aphrodito further south, middle-class landholders dealt with a similar stratum of peasants, though we also have leases of substantial farms (or ‘gardens’) to a group of obviously wealthier lessees.<sup>68</sup> Church and monastic properties were often exploited on perpetual leases, and the holders of these were again likely to be substantial lessees or persons of the

<sup>63</sup> I have analysed these social changes in more detail in Banaji (1992).

<sup>64</sup> Delmaire (1989).

<sup>65</sup> Ostrogorsky (1971), 7.

<sup>66</sup> Confino (1963).

<sup>67</sup> *P.Strasb.* V 470 (497), 472 (533 or 534), 473 (537), 475 (6th century), with Bureth’s introduction, p. 205ff.

<sup>68</sup> See n.31 above, and see Keenan (1984), (1985).

aristocracy.<sup>69</sup> Finally, some large estates were leased out to commercial farmers, who were probably similar to the Italian *massari* of more recent times.<sup>70</sup>

It should be clear, then, that the argument which follows is not intended to characterise the agrarian economy as a whole but only the organisation of aristocratic estates administered in the complex and bureaucratic forms characteristic of the sixth and seventh centuries. Nor should the contrast between direct management and leasing be exaggerated, both because the more humble lessees were often simply labourers and the lease more like a labour contract (this was especially true of sharecroppers), and because 'tenancy' could be integrated into a regime of direct management, as I shall now try to show.

### The New Estates

In his monograph *The Large Estates of Byzantine Egypt*, Hardy says almost nothing about leasing, although curiously his account of the Apion estate assumes that it was organised on the basis of rents extracted from a peasantry which, while bound to the soil,<sup>71</sup> nonetheless leased its land from the proprietors. In a similar vein, the Italian scholar Segrè could write, 'The conditions under which the *coloni* rented the estates [sic] from the managers . . . are rather obscure. Tenancy at will is frequent in the leases of the fifth and sixth centuries. Apparently the *coloni adscripticii* remained on the estates for generations and cultivated the soil under rather permanent conditions'.<sup>72</sup> To add to the confusion, Segrè then went on to draw an analogy with Mexican estates and described the colonate, in more general terms, as a 'form of organisation of agricultural labour'. The sheer incongruousness of these accounts should have warned later scholars that something was seriously wrong, and that it might be worth probing the organisation of estates with fewer preconceptions. It is worth noting, however, that the first editors of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri thought that the *georgoi* working on large sixth-century estates were labourers (of some sort), for 'labourers' was how they usually translated '*georgoi*'.<sup>73</sup>

The Oxyrhynchite material relates predominantly to large and very large estates. Unfortunately, it is easier to form some impression of how the aristocracy was structured in what was then a fairly dynamic part of Middle Egypt, capital of the province of Arcadia, than to know how the different layers organ-

<sup>69</sup> *P.Lond.* II 483 (p.323ff.) (615 or 616); *P.Cairo Masp.* III 67299 (6th century); *SB* XII 10805 (7th century); *P.Lond.* III 1072(b) (p. 274) (6th century), with *BL* 1.299, and for the date *BL* 9.138.

<sup>70</sup> *P.Merton* I 49 (7th century) is certainly a lease of this sort; for the *massari*, cf. Snowden (1986).

<sup>71</sup> Hardy (1931), 75 ('The fundamental fact about the condition of *coloni* was that they were bound to the soil').

<sup>72</sup> Segrè (1947), 122.

<sup>73</sup> *P.Oxy.* I 135.15 (p.210, 212), 136.18 (p.216), XVI 1842 (p.25), 1894.15 (p.108), 1896.13 (p.111), 1900.11 (p.119), etc.

ised estates which clearly differed greatly in size.<sup>74</sup> The overwhelming bulk of the evidence derives from a single estate, that of the Apion family, though of course important isolated documents survive from other aristocratic, ecclesiastical; and medium-sized properties. By contrast, the Fayyum material is much more dispersed, and the evidence less easy to reconstruct.

The new aristocratic estates which emerged in the main part of the fifth century to reach their 'classical' form in the sixth, were called *oikoi* ('houses') to emphasise their structured and permanent character. From the Apion Archive it is certain that these estates were held in joint ownership and thus immune to the devastating fragmentation of partible inheritance.<sup>75</sup> At the economic level, the most important fact about them is their considerable integration into monetary economy and their ability to generate substantial revenues in gold.<sup>76</sup> Finally, irrigation was widespread on the new estates,<sup>77</sup> and hired labour was used extensively.<sup>78</sup> The rapid diffusion of water-wheels in the countryside of the later fifth and sixth centuries reflects the willingness of owners to make substantial investments in the spread of summer irrigation and implies a larger Byzantine legacy in the agricultural revolution of the Islamic period than Watson seems to allow for.<sup>79</sup> In particular, the stimulus of an expanding wine industry encouraged producers to structure these investments carefully. For example, in the Apion Archive, the average turnover of an axle was put at seven years, and the issue of spares administered from a central office in Oxyrhynchus.<sup>80</sup>

The implicit rationalism of the new estates would no doubt have extended to their deployment of labour. The Apion Archive contains a series of accounts listing receipts in cash and kind, and at first sight this type of accounting seems like strong evidence in favour of the theory that estates based their revenues on the leasing of land to small tenants. But a closer scrutiny of the accounts suggests that insofar as the estate drew revenues from rent payments, the bulk of these revenues derived from the payments of substantial-looking tenants who

<sup>74</sup> *P.Oxy.* XVI 2020, 2040, from the 580s and 560s respectively.

<sup>75</sup> The Apion properties are attested from some time before 460 to the year 620, when the Oxyrhynchite was under Persian occupation and Flavius Apion III known to be dead, giving a span of over 160 years. See, however, *P.Oxy.* LXIII 4389, which could push the beginning of the archive back to 439, if the Strategius who appears in there is the aristocrat who turns up in mid-fifth-century documents as managing the Oxyrhynchite estates of Aelia Eudocia, wife of Theodosius II, i.e. the father of Flavius Apion I. (I am grateful to John Rea for having allowed me access to this and other documents in *P.Oxy.* LXIII in advance of publication.)

<sup>76</sup> For the background see Banaji (1996) and (1994).

<sup>77</sup> *P.Oxy.* XIX 2239.14, τὰς γεονηκὰς μηχανάς, see nn.104, 105 below, and cf. the appearance of a new kind of accounting on fifth-century estates, *P.Med.* I<sup>2</sup> 64 (441), *P.Oxy.* XXXIV 2724 (469), XVI 1899 (476), 1982 (497).

<sup>78</sup> *SPP* III 86; *P.Oxy.* XVI 1911.157–159 (with *BL* 9.191), 1913.16–18, 19, 21–23, XVIII 2195.134–136; *SB* VI 9284 (553); *P.Grenf.* I 58 (561); also n.116 below.

<sup>79</sup> Watson (1983), esp. 104 and 191, n.15, substantially the same view as in Watson (1974).

<sup>80</sup> *P.Oxy.* I 137.23, XVI 1911.160–162.

bear a certain resemblance to the better-off *arrendatarios* on Mexican haciendas of the early nineteenth century.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the analogy of these haciendas shows that estates which drew part of their income from cash rents, for example, might still be predominantly based on the exploitation of permanent labourers.<sup>82</sup>

The crucial fact about the Apion holdings is that the basic constituents of the estate were not villages but the smaller settlements known as *epoikia*. Since these are a decisive clue to the organisation of labour, they seem like an obvious starting-point for the argument. The *epoikia* were privately owned settlements, unlike villages, and were mostly controlled by the largest landowners, including the estates of the *Domus Divina*.<sup>83</sup> The regime of direct management was structured around the *epoikia*, and consequently they had a largely 'industrial' character in the sense that their sole function was the concentration of groups of workers in residential sites in close proximity to the fields where they actually worked. Now this has been a universal feature of large estates of a certain kind, and one imagines that accommodation on these estates would have had a certain similarity to the *bohíos* in the larger, geometrically structured, sugar plantations of Cuba,<sup>84</sup> or the *galpones*, barracks or dormitories, of the north coast plantations in Peru,<sup>85</sup> or the *calpanerías* on Mexican haciendas where resident workers were housed in shacks (*chozas*).<sup>86</sup> Of course, at another level, the more obvious analogy is with Egypt itself in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and I shall deal with this below. The unit of accommodation was the *kellion* (room?), and in one Apion account the implication seems to be that some settlements were built to a standard model of 100 rooms (*kellia*).<sup>87</sup> Peasants residing in such settlements were described—in the Oxyrhynchite anyway—as 'registered' employees of the estate,<sup>88</sup> meaning that the estate paid their taxes. The *epoikia* contained arable, orchards, and vineyards, and there are repeated references to *mechanai* watering various types of fields. They were heavily supervised, and the bulk of the peasants residing in them seem to have been partly

<sup>81</sup> This is shown by an analysis of accounts such as *P.Oxy.* XVIII 2195 (576–7), XIX 2243(a) (590), and LV 3804 (566). The exercise consists in stratifying payments into levels, expressing wheat in cash or vice versa, and then seeing how much of the gross revenue from individual settlements is accounted for by the largest payments (defined, say, as rents of 4 solidi or more). For the *arrendatarios*, see Brading (1978), 74, 110 ('substantial farmers'); his cut-off point seems to be a rent of 30 pesos = c.46 bushels (of maize).

<sup>82</sup> On the combination of these forms see also Hoppe and Langton (1994), 116, 121.

<sup>83</sup> *P.Oxy.* L 3585.4 (before 20.10.460); *P.Med.* I<sup>2</sup> 64.4; *P.Oxy.* L 3582.3 (442).

<sup>84</sup> Moreno Fragnals (1978), II, 66–75.

<sup>85</sup> Gonzales (1985), 97, 148.

<sup>86</sup> Nickel (1988), 308f., 419.

<sup>87</sup> *P.Oxy.* XVI 1917.56, 98. Lozach (1935), 254, refers to 'l'esprit industriel, presque mathématique, que revêt cette exploitation', about the newer 'izbahs in the reclaimed areas of the northern Delta.

<sup>88</sup> I.e. *Enapographoi georgoi*.

or even very largely dependent on wage employment,<sup>89</sup> that is, to have been mostly landless workers, though some families could afford to rent substantial holdings.

To historians familiar with the agrarian history of the nineteenth century, these privately owned settlements bear an obvious resemblance to the *'izbahs*—so striking, indeed, that the homology is worth pursuing in more detail. This, I want to argue, lies in a set of labour arrangements which gave owners both flexibility and control.<sup>90</sup> One of the earliest references is from the 1870s, by M<sup>c</sup>Coan, who was editor of the *Levant Herald*, and wrote of the 'estates of the large owners, the wealthier Pashas and Beys' that they either employed 'mourabain' (*murābi' un*), labourers who were paid a share of the crop (usually a fourth) or were worked by 'sub-letting small plots of ground at a fixed rental of so many days' field labour per feddan'.<sup>91</sup> In other words, the evolution of the new private estates had already generalised a kind of labour tenancy, with owners using the labour of 'tenants' as labourers rather than tenants. In 1898, Nour Ed-Din described this system a bit more fully, explaining that owners attracted labour by offering workers substantially reduced rents, whose actual payment was then adjusted against any wages they earned, the important point being that the 'tenant' was entirely at the owner's disposal (as a wage labourer).<sup>92</sup> Nour Ed-Din also described another group of workers who were generally paid a one-fifth share of most crops as wages, and often depended on consumption loans.<sup>93</sup> In 1901, Nahas published a slightly more detailed account of these arrangements in a chapter of his thesis, and was the first to emphasise a crucial feature of the system, namely, that in hiring workers on this basis, landowners had access to the labour of women and children as well.<sup>94</sup> Contracts were verbal, labour intensely supervised, and the volume of labour adjusted to the requirements of

<sup>89</sup> *P.Köln* II 102 = *SB* XII 11239 (418); *P.Cairo Masp.* I 67093 (553) γεωργὸς μισθωτῆς ἀπὸ ἐποικ[ί]ο(υ) Ψινο(υ); *P.Oxy.* I 134 (569); *BGU* IV 1039.3–5 (Byz.); *SPP* III 86; *P.Flor.* I 70 (see n.116); *SB* XVI 13016 (638); and cf. *PSI* III 165.2 (546?) τοῖς ἐργαταῖς διαφόρων ἐποικτων, 'to the labourers from the various *epoikia*'.

<sup>90</sup> Roger Owen and Alan Richards have valuable descriptions of the *'izbah* system in various publications, see especially, Richards (1978), (1979), 500–4, Owen (1981a), (1981b), 146–8, 228–230; Richards (1982), 58–68, 172–4; (1993), 96–8.

<sup>91</sup> M<sup>c</sup>Coan (1877), 183.

<sup>92</sup> Nour Ed-Din (1898), 5–6. The passage is worth reproducing: '3° Chaque ouvrier peut recevoir en location de un à deux feddans, suivant ses moyens et ses aptitudes au travail. Cette location est réduite de 50% sur le prix normal du fermage. Ainsi le feddan, qui se loue d'ordinaire 500 P.E. (130 fr.) par an, lui est loué 250 P.E. (65 fr.). Cette remise de moitié constitue son salaire. Au prix de cet avantage, l'ouvrier est, pendant l'année de fermage, à l'entière disposition du propriétaire, qui, en cas de nécessité, peut l'employer à la journée à raison de 1 à 2 P.E. (50 centimes). Le montant du salaire à lui dû est imputé sur le prix du fermage qu'il paie.'

<sup>93</sup> Nour Ed-Din (1898), 5, saying that they were usually paid a quarter-share of the maize crop, which was their staple.

<sup>94</sup> Nahas (1901), 134, 137–8, 140.

the estate.<sup>95</sup> Nahas noted that in assigning subsistence plots, landowners took account of the size of the tenant household, and that the latter in turn contracted 'to furnish a specific number of workers' as potential wage labourers, with the usual adjustment of wages against rent.<sup>96</sup> Nahas described these groups as workers permanently attached to the estate by contrast with the less privileged and more miserable migrant labourers who were drawn chiefly from Upper Egypt. It was also his impression that labour exploited on this basis was less costly than the alternative system of paying workers in a share of the crop, despite the considerable enforcement costs of what he called 'veritable brigades' of supervisors.<sup>97</sup> This, of course, is contrary to the thinking of most economists on this issue.<sup>98</sup>

To sum up: the details of these arrangements would have varied from one estate to the next,<sup>99</sup> but, in essentials, large landowners recruited workers by paying them either in a share of the crop or under some type of labour tenancy. In either case, the *fallāh* was simply a wage labourer.

### The Labour Organisation of Sixth-Century Estates

To return to the Byzantine evidence, the model offered by the 'izbahs can and does help to elucidate the corresponding organisation of labour on the sixth-century estates. Two recently published papyri are of special interest here, though I shall start by recalling the general characteristics of the labour force on large properties in late antiquity. As I noted earlier, our only explicit definition of the kind of peasants who were called *enapographoi georgoi* treats this kind of labour force as resident on estates and as mere labourers.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, this Novel and a great deal of other legislation was concerned specifically with problems arising out of claims over the progeny of such resident labourers, thus implying that it was not uncommon for workers to reside on estates from one generation to the next, as for example on nineteenth-century Mexican haciendas studied by Bazant.<sup>101</sup> In fact, this is shown by two documents of the Apion Archive, with

<sup>95</sup> Nahas (1901), 134, 141, 142.

<sup>96</sup> Nahas (1901), 141, esp. 'A chaque famille d'ouvriers, le propriétaire donne un ou plusieurs fed-daus de terre en fermage, en tenant compte du nombre des personnes qui composent cette famille; elle s'engage, en revanche, à fournir un nombre déterminé d'ouvriers qui devront, quand ils en seront requis, aller travailler le champ propre du propriétaire.'

<sup>97</sup> Nahas (1901), 142, 'En somme, l'exploitation à la journée exige plus de surveillance et un personnel dirigeant plus nombreux. Mais elle est souvent employée parce que, quand il s'agit de vastes domaines, elle est moins coûteuse que le travail à la part, en raison même de l'étendue du domaine.'

<sup>98</sup> E.g. see Majid (1994), for a discussion of supervision constraints and rationales for sharecropping.

<sup>99</sup> See Owen (1981b), 229–30 for other examples.

<sup>100</sup> See p. 198 above, on Justinian's Novel 162.

<sup>101</sup> Bazant (1975), 163, noting that on the hacienda de Bocas, in 1872, most *peones* were sons of the *peones* of 1852.



the *georgoi* stating in both that they had served the Apions or resided in their *ktema* (that is, the *epoikion*) *ek pateron kai progonon* ('from the time of our fathers and our ancestors').<sup>102</sup> Thus the labour on these estates was to a large extent resident. Secondly, it was also intensively supervised. In *P.Oxy.* XIX 2239 (598) the aristocrat Flavius John recruited an *epikeimenos* or field boss to take charge of general supervision of his *georgoi*.<sup>103</sup> The new manager, Jeremias, undertook to 'employ every care and efficiency in the cultivation of your estate with regard alike to the new plantation and to the large estate plants. Furthermore, I acknowledge also that I will cause all the labourers of your honour in every place and every holding of the same estate to sow the irrigated fields of the estate (*speirai tas geouchikas mechanas*),<sup>104</sup> to plant acacias, and to be ready to show every zeal in bringing your landed estates into better condition.'<sup>105</sup> Finally, it is clear that some or even many of the *georgoi* attached to large estates had livestock of their own,<sup>106</sup> and I suggest that this may have been the main factor which compelled them into forms of labour tenancy, as with the Kikuyu squatters employed by white settlers on plantations and estates in the Rift Valley Province of the White Highlands in Kenya.<sup>107</sup>

What, then, of the actual deployment of these workers? Estate labour forces included many groups of specialist workers, maintenance staff, such as the carpenters who kept the *mechanai* in repair or actually fabricated them, using acacia wood supplied or bought from the estate, millstone cutters, smiths, stone masons, etc., but few contracts are preserved and it is likely that their employment was not characterised by a standard type of contract. These workers reflected the workings of a free labour market, with agreements signed for specific jobs,<sup>108</sup> or lifetime contracts, such as one with a millstone cutter who even got the estate to agree that it would pay a substantial fine if his employment was

<sup>102</sup> *P.Oxy.* I 130.9 (563/564, contrast *BL* 8.232), 'I have been in [your] service as my fathers and forefathers were', *PSI* I 58.7 (566–568). This was not a peculiarity of the east Mediterranean, for Nov. Justin II, 6 (*Jus Graecoromanum*, t.1, p.10) (570) tries to stop *coloni* from 'abandoning the estates in which they were born' (*non posse eos dimittere praedia, in quibus nati sunt*) and describes these birthplaces as the 'settlements' (*vici*) where they were born, clearly meaning estate settlements. The reference is to 'Africana provincia', which means most of what is today Tunisia.

<sup>103</sup> The substantial salary he was paid shows that this sort of general supervisor was at a much higher level than the minor supervisory staff of such estates, similar in fact to the *mayordomo* on the Cortés plantation studied by Barrett (1970) or the *khawli* mentioned by Lancret (n. 43).

<sup>104</sup> I have added 'irrigated' to the translation.

<sup>105</sup> *P.Oxy.* XIX 2239.11–16. In l.12 one should probably read εἰς τέ τὰ [σ]ὺν [θ(εῶ)] νέφουτα. The abbreviation is rare but found in *P.Oxy.* LVIII 3942.29 (606), and much more frequently in 7th-century documents from the Fayyum, e.g., *BGU* II 675.1; *SPP* VIII 1044.1, 1048.1.

<sup>106</sup> The best indication of this is *P.Oxy.* XVI 1913.4–5, where at the end of l.4 the photograph clearly shows κτήνων, not κτημάτων. Possession of livestock is also implied in *P.Oxy.* I 130 (n.102), XVI 1912.148, 150, XVIII 2195.140.

<sup>107</sup> Kanogo (1987), 23.

<sup>108</sup> *P.Oxy.* I 134 (569), contract for transport of stones.

unreasonably terminated!<sup>109</sup> However, the remarks which follow do not apply to these workers, obviously, but to the main groups of the labour force, such as *georgoi*, *ampelourgoi*, and *pomaritai*.

The system emerges especially clearly in *P.Oxy.* I 192 and 206, at one level, and *P.Wash. Univ.* II 102, at another. In their 'descripta' form in Volume I of *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (pp. 242–3), *P.Oxy.* 192, 194, and 206 were all described as 'loans', and in the first two of these documents, the 'loans' were said to be 'for' a *mechane*, whatever that might mean. It is now clear, however, that the term actually used in *P.Oxy.* 192 and *P.Oxy.* 206 (and almost certainly also in 194, which has still not been fully transcribed), is *prochreia*<sup>110</sup> which, more precisely, is an advance of wages.<sup>111</sup> Thus all three contracts deal with wage advances, paid, as it happens, in *solidi*. Secondly, in both *P.Oxy.* 192 and *P.Oxy.* 206, the recipients of these cash advances are *georgoi*, and closer attention to the way they are described can allow us to make these documents a key to the interpretation of the labour system on the whole estate. For in *P.Oxy.* 192 the worker Aurelius Apasion is called *enapographos georgos*, the term used for the vast majority of *georgoi* resident in the *epoikia*, and was himself from the *epoikion* of Kineas. In his receipt the advance is associated with his responsibilities for an irrigated farm (*mechane*) called 'Western'.<sup>112</sup> In *P.Oxy.* I 206, some seven decades earlier, the worker John, from the *epoikion* of Leon, is described as 'georgos of the *mechane* called Small Peso and of the *mechane* of Path (?)'.<sup>113</sup> The expression 'georgos mechanes' is crucial, as we have at least two other documents—among the longest in the Apion Archive—with the same or a similar expression. The first of these, *P.Oxy.* XIX 2244, repeatedly describes labourers from the various *epoikia* by the term *georgos mechanes*, meaning the worker assigned to such and such irrigated farm (and even refers to John son of Paleus from the *epoikion* of Leon, the worker in *P.Oxy.* I 206, though assigned to a different *mechane*),<sup>114</sup> while *P.Oxy.* XVIII 2197, dealing with the consumption of bricks on the estate, refers repeatedly to the farms themselves (*mechanai*) as 'under' or '(in the care) of' such and such *georgos*, meaning the plot assigned

<sup>109</sup> *P.Oxy.* LI 3641 (544). esp. lines 17–19.

<sup>110</sup> *P.Oxy.* I 192.8–9 (600/615), *P.Oxy.* I 206.2 (535), both published in Montserrat, Fantoni, and Robinson (1994), 56f., 70f., but still described as 'loans'.

<sup>111</sup> For the proper sense of *prochreia* in employment contracts and job-related documents such as *P.Oxy.* I 192 etc., see Jördens (1990), 277ff., esp. 283, 'προχρεῖα auch die übliche Bezeichnung eines normalen Lohnvorschusses ist', and Jördens (1988), esp. 165.

<sup>112</sup> *P.Oxy.* I 192.2–6, 8–10, esp. λόγ(ω) [προ]χρείας τῆς ὑπ' ἐμὲ γεουχ(ικῆν) [μη]χανήν, 'by way of the advance (received for) the estate's irrigated farm (which is) under my charge'.

<sup>113</sup> *P.Oxy.* I 206.1, 'Ἰωάννη ἀπὸ ἐποικ(ίου) Λέοντος γεωρ(γῶ) τῆς τε μηχ(ανῆς) καλουμ(ένης) Μικρ(οῦ) Πέσω κτλ. John's full name was John son of Paleus.

<sup>114</sup> *P.Oxy.* XIX 2244.34, 'Ἰωάννη πῶπιαλεοῦτος ἀπὸ ἐποικ(ίου) Λέοντος γεωρ(γῶ) μηχ(ανῆς) τοῦ νέου λάκκου κτλ. Thus the sixth indiction of *P.Oxy.* 2244 is either 527/8, 542/3, or 557/8, most probably the second of these dates.

to this or that individual. Thus *P.Oxy.* I 206 can be generalised to a large section of the Apion labour force through these more detailed documents and the system of work allocation they imply. The strong implication is that *georgoi* or other agricultural labourers such as those tending gardens<sup>115</sup> or vineyards were assigned to individual irrigated plots or farms (or gardens or vineyards), or vice versa, usually paid cash wages (in the prevalent gold currency), and entitled to advances out of them. That these advances (*prochreiai*) were in fact wage payments is especially clear from a Hermopolite document dated 627, where the concluding formula is the standard clause promising to pay back the advance should the employee abandon or cut short his or her assignment.<sup>116</sup>

It is likely, though we cannot prove it, that advances of the sort found in *P.Oxy.* I 192 were recorded in accounts pertaining to individual labourers, on the pattern described by Rathbone for the Appianus estate.<sup>117</sup> Three of the many 'water-wheel receipts' in the Apion Archive refer to the *pittakia* of individual employees (*enapographoi georgoi*),<sup>118</sup> and these, I suggest, were employees' individual accounts with the estate.<sup>119</sup> The wider analogy here is with the systems of wage accounting which characterised the Mexican haciendas till well into the twentieth century, a general term for which might be *ajustes de cuentas* or account adjustments.<sup>120</sup>

At another level entirely, *P.Wash.Univ.* II 102 shows individual settlements supplying an agreed number of workers for sowing operations on the *autourgia* of the Apion estate.<sup>121</sup> It is possible that in this document the term *ergates* simply meant casual labourer and that the casual labour supply was normally organised through the *epoikia*, which acted as labour brokers. It is equally possible, however, that the reference was to services required from permanent labourers, and that it did not particularly matter which families or individual family members were finally sent out into the fields. The fact that workers living in these

<sup>115</sup> Cf. *P.Amh.* II 149 (6th century), which shows the same relationship at work in the case of a gardener (*kepouros*) vis-à-vis the garden assigned to him. This man, Aurelius Anoup, was also from an estate settlement, was a 'registered' employee, and received his wages in cash. The expression *grammateion prochreias* (1.18) recurs in a series of receipts in *P.Oxy.* LVIII 3943–3946, showing that advance payment of wages was standard on the estate.

<sup>116</sup> *P.Flor.* I 70 (27.11.627), esp. 10ff, with *BL* 8.125 for the date proposed by Harrauer (not 'Arab. Zeit', as in *BL* 1.145). Cf. *P.Köln* II 102 (n.89), and *P.Graec.Vindob.* 26252 = *SB* VI 9284.8–9, *λόγος προχρείας τῆς ἀλφειας τοῦ κτη[μια]τος καλου[μένου] τοῦ Βάνου*, and the clause in lines 11–12; correctly described by Gerstinger as 'Vorschubquittung für Arbeitslohn'.

<sup>117</sup> Rathbone (1991), 112, 319, etc.

<sup>118</sup> *P.Oxy.* I 137.19 (584), XVI 1988.23ff (587), 1989.17ff. (590), called *entagia* here (for the equivalence of these terms, see *P.Oxy.* LVIII 3958.25–6n.).

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Preisigke, *Wörterbuch*, 1.311, s.v. πρῶτικον, 1 e) Abrechnungsbuch, Kontobuch.

<sup>120</sup> Carmen Velázquez (1983); Nickel (1991); and cf. Van Young (1981), 255.

<sup>121</sup> *P.Wash.Univ.* II 102 is certainly from the Apion estate; of the six places mentioned, two (Nike and Maiouma) were Apion settlements, cf. *SB* XII 11231 = *P.Oxy.* XVI 1986 descr. (549), *P.Oxy.* LVIII 3952 (before 29.8.610), XIX 2244.14, 16, for Nike, and VI 999 (616/7) for Maiouma.

settlements were normally paid wages (in cash and/or kind) makes it more attractive to conceptualise this exaction of labour on the 'izbah model (as an exchange of labour against wages) and not simply as forced labour. Much of this is speculation, of course, and apart from straining at the limits of our knowledge, documents like *P.Wash.Univ. II 102* emphasise the important methodological point that, in ancient history above all, the interpretation of individual items of evidence depends crucially on our building a larger and workable model of how estates actually functioned, and of the kinds of labour regimes and systems they evolved.

## Conclusion

In *L'habitat rural en Égypte* Lozach and Hug describe a complex defined by cash crops, irrigation, the formation of large properties, and the concentration of workers in dispersed settlements controlled by the estates. For them, this landscape was a product of the evolving agrarian capitalism of the late nineteenth century, with its formation of large privately held estates and the spread of perennial irrigation.<sup>122</sup> I have suggested, however, that this pattern was at least partially replicated in the history of the sixth-century estates. It is of course likely that the reordering of labour relationships in the Egyptian countryside of the nineteenth century, with large landowners orchestrating campaigns *against* the corvée and the 'izbahs materialising new methods of labour control, reflected the spread of summer irrigation and a new set of labour requirements on estates subject to the rationalising imperatives of nineteenth-century capitalism.<sup>123</sup> Nonetheless, in a longer perspective, these changes appear less revolutionary than they might otherwise seem. For example, in *Colonising Egypt* Timothy Mitchell has argued that the 'izbah's 'regime of spatial confinement, discipline and supervision' was emblematic of the much larger emergence of new mechanisms of power, a new 'principle' of order, through which a quintessentially modern state (and its colonial agencies) pursued the systematic dissolution and synthetic *retotalisation* of societies and communities unstructured by the geometries of capital.<sup>124</sup> All of these are valuable and even obvious perspectives on the changes in the nineteenth century which reintegrated Egypt into a more modern world economy shaped by the evolution of British industrial capital.<sup>125</sup> But, at a deeper level, they contain a major problem, or at least a paradox. If the 'izbahs were in some sense the revival or re-enactment of social forms, methods of

<sup>122</sup> Lozach and Hug (1930), 195ff., esp. 204, 'La dispersion par 'ezbahs . . . est le produit de l'irrigation pérenne, de la grosse propriété et du capitalisme agraire' (in the section written by Hug).

<sup>123</sup> See especially Brown (1994).

<sup>124</sup> Mitchell (1988), 43, 92, and *passim*.

<sup>125</sup> Owen (1969).

organisation characteristic of Egyptian large estates in earlier centuries and, above all, in the period marked by the greatest development of private land-ownership prior to the nineteenth century (namely, the fifth to seventh centuries), then surely we must, again in some sense, extend these characterisations to the rural society of the sixth century and see in the large estates of that period a curious prefiguration of something intrinsically modern. Agriculture was history's first theatre of capitalism but because our notions of the latter have been irreducibly shaped by modern large-scale industry and the profound analysis that Marx developed in *Capital*, we only seem to be able to grasp the history of agrarian capitalism through a sort of palimpsest. The whole debate between the 'primitivists' and the 'modernists' is essentially a misunderstanding caused by this fact, for what the primitivists clearly do is measure economic behaviour by the revised edition of capitalism, so to speak.

Secondly, it is also worth emphasising that the Egyptian peasantry in particular has a strangely elusive quality. Our only detailed study, in English, of the agrarian structure of a country in the Middle East draws a useful distinction between peasant proprietors, crop-sharing peasants, and landless labourers.<sup>126</sup> Even more interestingly, Lambton also pointed out, 'The vast majority of the peasant population of Persia is . . . composed not of peasant proprietors, who are a small minority, but of crop-sharing peasants or tenants and "landless" labourers', and noted that the sharecroppers 'too, strictly speaking, are landless.' Ancient historians who have dealt with Egypt have been too ready to assume that the situation Lambton seemed to see as characteristic of the Persian countryside, at least in the recent period, could not have been true of Egypt in antiquity, and that a large and stable class of 'peasant proprietors' existed which was not drastically undermined even by the renewed expansion of large estates in late antiquity. However, this assumption has little basis in the evidence and seems to rest on what one might call terminological impressionism. I have suggested in this paper that the Egyptian peasantry was a less stable group than this convention assumes, that there was more landlessness in the ancient countryside than we seem willing to allow for, and finally that the organisation of the large estates could well have reflected this fact.

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<sup>126</sup> Lambton (1953), 295.

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