AN ANALYSIS OF THE BYZANTINE PEASANTRY THROUGH ELEVENTH- AND TWELFTH-CENTURY NARRATIVE SOURCES

CAHİT METE OĞUZ

BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

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Cahit Mete Oğuz

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The thesis of Cahit Mete Oğuz

has been approved by:

Prof. Nevra Necipoğlu
(Thesis Advisor) _____

Assoc. Prof. Koray Durak _____

Assoc. Prof. Murat Keçiş
(External Member) _____

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ABSTRACT

An Analysis of the Byzantine Peasantry through Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Narrative Sources

The Byzantine peasantry has been traditionally analyzed through documentary sources and material evidence. This study attempts to complement the existing scholarship on the peasantry by showing how a perception-based, socio-cultural angle can be provided through the utilization of Byzantine narrative sources from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The peasant voice is completely absent from these sources and, therefore, must be reached through deduction, close-reading and literary analysis techniques. In addition to furnishing us with much direct information on the peasants' lifestyle, their economic and legal interactions with different actors, as well as their utilization and victimization through military matters, these sources also highlight the elite, educated and also quite urban perception of the peasantry. These narratives contain a delicate blend of marginalizing the peasantry, while also praising and defending them due to the acknowledgement that they are vital in the maintenance of the empire. A strong case is made for the collective importance attributed to the peasantry, through their function as a vast manpower pool for the agrarian economy and military machine; yet, as individuals, they remain obscure and invisible. The relative homogeneity among the selected authors' views concerning the peasantry, which is also mirrored and enforced by military doctrines, legal documents and imperial orders of the time, indicates that their individual views are part of a broader socio-cultural expression.

ÖZET

Bizans Köylülerinin On Birinci ve On İkinci Yüzyıl Anlatısal Kaynaklar üzerinden Analizi

Bizans köylüleri geleneksel olarak belgesel ve materyal kaynaklar kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın amacı yukarıda bahsedilen çalışmalara, on birinci ve on ikinci yüzyıl Bizans anlatısal kaynakları kullanılarak, daha algı odaklı, sosyo-kültürel bir bakış açısının getirilebileceğini göstermektir. Anlatısal kaynaklarda köylülerin kendi bakış açısı hiç bulunmadığı için, bunun yakın okuma, tümdengelim ve edebi analiz teknikleri kullanılarak açığa çıkarılması gerekmektedir. Söz konusu kaynaklar köylülerin yaşam tarzını, farklı kesimlerle olan ekonomik ve hukuksal ilişkilerini ve askeri meselelerde kullanılma ve mağdur olma durumların yansıtmanın yanı sıra, aynı zamanda elit, eğitim görmüş, kentli kesim tarafından nasıl algılandıklarını da göstermektedir. Bu kaynaklar köylüleri son derece hassas bir ötekileştirme, övgü ve savunma üçgeni çevrçevesinde ele almaktadır. Köylülere, imparatorluğun ekonomik ve askeri gücü için engin bir iş gücü havuzu oluşturduklarından dolayı, topluca atfedilen önem son derece belirgindir, ancak birey olarak önemsiz ve öteki olarak yansıtılmaktadırlar. Bu çalışmanın ele aldığı farklı yazarlarca onaylanan ve aynı dönemin askeri doktrinleri ve hukuksal kaynakları tarafından da desteklenen görüşler arasındaki görece benzerlikler, bu kişisel görüşlerin aslında daha geniş bir sosyo-kültürel ifadenin parçası olduklarına işaret etmektedir.

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To my beloved grandparents,

Tom and Dorothy Eastop

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction

Byzantine village life has generally been studied by modern scholarship from an official viewpoint, through utilization of administrative and documentary source material.[1] While this material allows for the construction of much statistical data on the peasantry and the broader countryside, it lacks the crucially subjective and 'informal' details which are necessary for understanding the sociocultural world of the peasantry and their relationship with other segments of the population. This study focuses on the Byzantine peasantry from the ninth through the twelfth century,[2] and illustrates the range of information that can be gleaned from narrative texts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries with regard to the peasant lifestyle and the interactions of the peasantry with the Byzantine state and with other social groups through social, economic, legal, administrative and military channels.[3] Narrative accounts, despite often being quite subjective, are vital reconstructions of experience/reality, which can be carefully mined for concealed information.[4] It is precisely this subjectivity

[1] Important scholars who have worked extensively on the Byzantine peasantry and rural economy include George Ostrogorsky, Paul Lemerle, Michel Kaplan, Alexander Kazhdan, Angeliki Laiou, Jacques Lefort and Alan Harvey.

[2] Specifically, from the mid-ninth century to the very end of the twelfth century (around the year 1204 – the fall of Constantinople – which is where Choniates' narrative ends) and with brief digressions on the broader peasantry outside of strictly Byzantine lands.

[3] Other literary sources, such as hagiographies, also contain important information pertaining to the peasantry and the organization of the Byzantine countryside. Despite this, the scope of this study has been limited to an analysis of narrative histories to provide a uniformity to the analysis platform. Nonetheless, I would like to acknowledge that other forms of literary material also pose great potential for possible future expansions of the present study.

[4] John Haldon has recently underlined the importance of narrative texts in historiography. Despite being blends of fiction and fact, they are constructions of social reality and, thus, allow much unseeming information to be recovered from them. Haldon described them as memory accounts frozen in time temporarily through the tool of language. Haldon, "Towards a Social History of Byzantium," 10-12.

which the present study makes great use of.[5] The authors under analysis, arranged in a roughly chronological fashion, consist of Michael Psellos, Michael Attaleiates, John Skylitzes, Anna Komnene, Eustathios of Thessaloniki, John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates. Written in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the histories of these authors display a unique Byzantine hindsight towards explaining the causes of various political, military and economic transformations Byzantium underwent in the preceding centuries and their own contemporary times. As literary works, these texts also serve to highlight the perception of the Byzantine peasantry, in all of its aspects, by their well-educated and city-dwelling authors. The information contained within and perceptions unveiled from these texts can be broadly divided into three main categories: those associated with peasant lifestyle (agrarian work, diet, housing, clothing, mobility, popular culture, language etc.), those associated with non-military interactions which other segments of Byzantine society, such as the state or private landholders, had with the peasantry (mainly represented through taxation and legal cases) and, finally, military based interactions associated with the peasantry, related to the provisioning, supplying and accommodation of soldiers, peasant conscription and usage, warfare, banditry and resettlement policies. The presence of the Byzantine central government was quite limited in village society, being restricted to military and taxation related interactions, and also being visible through the limited coin circulation.[6] As a result, what little interest the peasantry had in the nature of political authority was channeled through such immediately pressing issues of tax obligations,

[5] Narrative sources have several advantages when compared to documentary sources. They often overlap and describe the same events or people, allowing a comparative picture to be constructed. They feature different motivations for being composed, thereby exhibiting different viewpoints (not being solely from an institutional or state-centered view). Their subjectivity allows an analysis of the perception and representation of different social segments and occurrences. The broad range of criticisms, complaints and praises which they often include further help aid the deconstruction of important information pertaining to their mindset and socio-cultural world.
[6] Frankopan, "Land and Power in the Middle and Later Period," 117-118.

religious freedom and security. The opposite was also true; the peasantry had no say in the functioning of the empire or any other aspect of decision-making.[7] This makes descriptions of these interaction channels highly important for purposes of gaining a deeper understanding of peasant society. Information relating directly to the peasant lifestyle and their socio-cultural world is relatively scarce within these texts, yet, there is a range of information associated with the economic links which villages held with landholders and the state. Different tax policies, legal incidents and economic schemes, which occasionally also pertain to the peasantry, are quite well documented by these authors as they constituted an important component of their idea of what should be featured in a 'history' work. Even more so than this, military events and all associated relevant incidents (such as recruitment, provisioning, banditry etc.) appear to constitute the main pillar of what was deemed worthy of being included in a history work. As a result of this, despite being featured in only a fraction of the total, direct or indirect references to the peasantry and their lives within a military context are relatively abundant within these texts. In addition to simply mining the relevant information and presenting it as such, this study attempts to analyze the thought process behind indirect references and other such allusions relating to the peasantry. In this way, the relationship between the elite, urban populace (represented by the authors) and the peasantry is deconstructed as much as possible. The resulting information yields important hints as to how the peasantry was perceived by these authors and why certain episodes are narrated in specific ways relating to their language, style and content (or lack of).

[7] There were exceptions to this, but they are important and notable precisely because they are exceptional situations. Joining the army, peasants could advance socially upwards by being involved in rebellions and other forms of 'political' action, or they could join the retinue of a powerful landholder and thereby improve their social status. For more information, see the discussion in John Haldon, *Byzantium a History*, Chapter 6: Byzantine Society.

The subjects of this study are the peasants themselves. On the surface this appears as a segment which could be easily isolated and dissected from within these narratives, considering that the peasantry represented the overwhelming majority of the populace. Yet, things become complicated due to the relative obscurity with which our authors approach the peasants, combined with the wide range of differing terminology and classical allusions that are deployed in reference to them. Exact definitions of what the peasantry actually constitutes vary drastically, which, when confined within the boundaries of the English language, are often simplified beyond recognition.[8] In these middle Byzantine texts, arguably representing the apex of Byzantine Atticism, many different words are used interchangeably to refer to peasants; such as soil-tiller (γεωργός), country-dweller (χωρίτης), field-dweller (ἄγροικος), rustic (ἀγρότερος), harvester (θεριστής) and goat-hair cloak wearing (σισυροφόρος), a term associated with being rustic and poor. Broader terms are also used, which sometimes also include the peasants (which has to be assessed in each case separately), such as lowly (χθαμαλός), uneducated (ἰδίωτις), invisible (ἀφανέστατος), weak/unimportant (φλαῦρος), pitiable (οἰκτρός), lowly (ταπεινός), used as the opposite of powerful (δυνατός), common (κοινός), poor (ἀγύρτης). It does not stop here either; official state classifications were also quite numerous being based on factors such as animal-ownership.[9] Because every term has a separate underlying linguistic root and implication, they need to be deconstructed in their original language so as not to lose their true subtleties within the simplified surface translations.

[8] Kazhdan, "The Peasantry," 43-44.
[9] Animal-ownership was a reflection of land-cultivation capabilities, as it was the oxen that would pull the plow. Terms such as as *zeugarion* (owning two-oxen), *boidatos* (owning one ox) and *aktemones/pezoi* (on foot, owning no animals) were used in official classifications. For a longer discussion on this, see Laiou, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire,* 142.

Definitions of villages and other rural settlements were even vaguer than the peasantry.[10] Even contemporaries such as Anna Komnene herself appear to be unsure of this. In the *Alexiad* she refers to a settlement called *Tzouroulos* (Τζουρουλός), in Thrace, using several different words. She initially states that it is a townlet (πολίχνη), which implies that it is a small town.[11] Slightly later she calls the same place a κώμῃ, generally designating a village.[12] Further on she refers to the place with the word πόλις, implying it is a city.[13] The confusion that Anna exhibits by using these words interchangeably proves that the line between a village and a town was actually blurred even by contemporary definitions.[14] Other words such garrison (φρούριον) are also often used to refer to villages. An added difficulty in this case stems from the fact that these authors frequently refer to villages in a military context, by mentioning how the army of one side encamped there, which often leads to actual villages being dismissed as 'camps' or 'garrisons' for the army. The natural existence of these places as rural settlements is not really an important identity from the perspective of the authors. Instead, these places take on an identity associated with their function within the narrative, either as military supply and encampment

[10] The difference between a small town and a village is somewhat vague in the Middle Ages. Some largely agricultural settlements contained over a thousand inhabitants, whereas some 'urban' settlements contained less than a few hundred houses, so there is a sort of overlap. The main definition accepted due to this is that a 'town' commonly has many people engaged in non-agricultural professions, whereas a village is primarily associated with agricultural activities forming the mainstay. This issue is further discussed in Dyer and Giles, "Introduction," 1-7. Harvey has shown how small towns and large villages were especially hard to separate as both featured farmers who would also be engaged in artisanal activities. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200,* 208.

[11] Komnene, *Alexias, 2.4.6*; Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 81. "τὴν ἐπιοῦσαν ἐμεμαθήκει τὸ στράτευμα καταλαβεῖν τὴν Τζουρουλόν (πολίχνιον δὲ τοῦτο περί που τὴν Θρᾴκην κείμενον)" - "following this he learned of the army seizing *Tzouroulos* (a townlet in the vicinity of Thrace)." (my own translation).

[12] Komnene, *Alexias*, 2.6.3; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 87. "Καὶ φθάσας σὺν τούτοις εἰς Τζουρουλόν (κώμη δὲ καὶ αὕτη Θρᾳκική)" – "having arrived with the rest to *Tzouroulos* (a village of Thrace)." (my own translation).

[13] Komnene, *Alexias,* 7.11.1; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 242. "Καὶ οἱ μὲν ἦσαν ἔξωθεν τὴν πόλιν ταύτην κυκλώσαντες·" – "They went free from the encircling of the city (*Tzouroulos*)." (my own translation).

[14] For more information see Alan Harvey's discussion. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 - 1200*, 200.

areas, or as economic taxation units. Legal terminology of the Macedonian period often uses the term *chorion* (χωρίον) which is generally taken to mean "village community" rather than simply the physical village.[15] Yet, following the Komnenian period, with the eroding of the *chorion* as a countryside unit, this word appears to take on a more generalized meaning, simply referring to villages in general.[16] The difficulty stemming from the multitude of words (that appear to change meaning over time) which could be referring to a village as a physical, administrative and fiscal unit, all with somewhat different implications, adds an additional challenge to the comprehension of these narrative texts.

The historiography of Byzantine social history, until quite recently, viewed the 'periphery' as being inferior to the 'core' (the urban centers).[17] This resulted in the countryside receiving far less attention from scholarship compared to urban centers. Another reason for the relative lack of attention given to the countryside and its inhabitants is due to the problematic and outdated focus around the concept of an "empire".[18] Despite this, there are several important works dealing with different aspects of the Byzantine peasantry. Initially, interest in the rural economy of

[15] All of the fourteen land legislations of the Macedonian emperors utilize this specific phrase to refer to the village communities. McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*.
[16] Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium*, 37.
[17] Varinlioğlu, "Living in a Marginal Environment: Rural Habitat and Landscape in Southeastern Isauria," 288.
[18] Many history works are titled 'The Byzantine Empire', or somehow feature the word 'Empire' in their title. This word immediately serves to create an imperial focus for the work, and it also creates a focus around the Constantinopolitan society, culture, and even arts. When narrating events on an 'Empire', scholars necessarily have to dwell extensively on the imperial center itself, and the countryside is relegated to an 'outsider' status, with the result that peasants are not the subjects of these works with titles featuring the word 'Empire'. When texts on the subject of 'The Byzantine Empire' claim as their primary subjects the imperial polity and the city-dwelling culture, the question that needs to be asked is, under what term will the peasantry be studied? A new type of conception is required which does not automatically allude to the centrality of the 'Empire' status of Byzantine lands. Relatively recently scholars such as Kazhdan have attempted to counter this trend by not using the word 'Empire' but instead using different titles for their works. Kazhdan has underlined how in many modern histories of the Byzantine Empire the subjects analyzed are overwhelmingly the 'elite' city-dwelling subjects, the aristocracy and the clergy. For a larger discussion, see Kazhdan and Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine*, 21.

Byzantium was largely dominated by Russian scholars who were pioneered by Fyodor Uspensky in the 1920's.[19] In the 1950's George Ostrogorsky acted as the second pioneer of the field with works such as his *History of the Byzantine State* (1956), which formed the backbone of Byzantine studies for years to come.[20] Ostrogorsky's influence also affected the field through fierce debates on the concept of a "Byzantine feudalism", which, while currently appearing redundant, had the benefit of drawing attention to the field of agrarian history.[21] Following the Annales School's influence on modern historiography during the 1960's, a new wave of Byzantinists emerged, who were focused on the rural economy and society of Byzantium. Angeliki Laiou's *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire: A Social and Demographic Study* (1977) was a groundbreaking work, being a first attempt at analyzing the demography of the peasantry together with its social and economic interactions. Paul Lemerle's *The Agrarian History of Byzantium from the Origins to the Twelfth Century: The Sources and Problems* (1979) truly expanded studies on the rural economy of Byzantium in the Western hemisphere. The general picture Lemerle drew, disputed the feudalism claims of figures such as Ostrogorsky and focused on a variety of extant documentary sources pertaining to the countryside to chart its transformation from the fourth to the twelfth century. This work has a strongly state-centered view, focusing on the institutional, legal and economic history of the countryside, while largely ignoring the individuality of the inhabitants. Alexander Kazhdan was an exceptionally important scholar in redirecting the focus

[19] Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium,* vii. Some examples of these Russian scholars working on the agrarian history of Byzantium were A. Jakovenko, F. Uspensky, V.G. Vasilievksy and B.A. Panchenko.
[20] While the original publication was in German, there has been an English translation and several new editions of this phenomenal work.
[21] Such as his works *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine* (1954) and *Quelques problèmes d'histoire de la paysannerie byzantine* (1956).

of Byzantinists from the state to individuals through his works such as *People and Power in Byzantium* (1982). Kazhdan's book chapter titled "The Peasantry" (1996) is focused on the physical reality of peasant life, going categorically over their conditions of life, housing, clothing, diet and spiritual life – which had a direct influence on the categorization employed in the second chapter of the present study. This focus on individuals is also manifested in works such as *Les hommes et la terre à Byzance du VIe au XIe siècle* (1992) by Michel Kaplan. Scholars such as Alan Harvey, Jacques Lefort and Angeliki Laiou were influential in charting a new course for the demographic and economic history of Byzantium, which 'corrected' the older views of figures such as Ostrogorsky and Lemerle. Alan Harvey's *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200* (1989) most probably features the word 'expansion' in its title to allude to this new perspective. Jacques Lefort's numerous works on the rural economy of the middle-Byzantine period also further analyze and contextualize the documentary sources which older historians such as Ostrogorsky and Lemerle discussed in their works, while mostly agreeing with Harvey and Laiou.[22] The monumental, three volume *Economic History of Byzantium* (2002), compiled and edited by Laiou, which contains entries by a range of prominent scholars, serves as the most comprehensive modern work on the subject. The more recent (2007) work by Laiou and Cécile Morrisson, titled *The Byzantine Economy*, compiles a shortened and slightly revised handbook for the field.[23] Even more recently, book chapters specifically on the peasantry were published by

[22] Two examples of which are Lefort, "The Rural Economy, Seventh-Twelfth Centuries," 231-310; Lefort, "Rural Economy and Social Relations in the Countryside," 101-113. The agreement among these scholar is a very generalized one based on the overall demographic growth of the empire between the period from the late-eighth to the twelfth century.

[23] While the *E.H.B.* features articles from many different scholars on a very broad range of subjects, *The Byzantine Economy* is co-written by only two authors. This means that while the *E.H.B.* is more detailed and comprehensive, the latter provides a more easy-to-read and uniform narrative with the chapters being organically connected to each other. Works such as the latter serve to broaden the reader base of the Byzantine field, as it is comprehensible to any interested, non-specialist reader.

Angeliki Laiou, such as her entries on Byzantine villages and peasant donations.[24] In recent years there is also an increased interest in combining material evidence with rural social history, an important example of which is Sharon Gerstel's work titled *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium: Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography* (2015). Additionally, regional studies are increasing which utilize archaeological data to better understand the village landscape, such as Gunder Varinlioglu's work on Isauria.[25] While narrative sources have been included in the analysis of many of the abovementioned works (especially of Kazhdan, who quite often utilizes Choniates), an overall picture has not been deducted solely from such sources. This study attempts to add to the historiography of the Byzantine peasantry by illustrating how narrative sources can be carefully mined for information pertaining to the peasantry, their lifestyle, legal and economic interactions, association with military events and, furthermore, how the peasants are perceived by the authors discussing them.

1.2 The Byzantine Countryside: A Historical Outline

A brief foreword on the socioeconomic history of the Byzantine countryside is necessary to fully conceptualize and comprehend the present study. Firstly, it must be underlined that the main principle of any largely agrarian state is to ensure the continued cultivation of land, as it is what produces the tax-payments which constitute the backbone of the economy. Hence, as in all pre-industrial societies,

[24] Laiou, "The Byzantine Village (5th – 14th Century)," 31-54; Laiou, "The Peasant as the Donor (13th – 14th Centuries)," 107-124.
[25] Varinlioglu, "Living in a Marginal Environment: Rural Habitat and Landscape in Southeastern Isauria," 287-317. Another example is the work of Yizgar Hirschfeld on Palestinian villages. Hirschfeld, "Farms and Villages in Byzantine Palestine," 33-71.

manpower was the most important economic resource for Byzantium.[26] The Byzantine economy underwent a last wave of flourishing as part of the late-antique framework in the early-sixth century, during which rural settlements have been shown to have markedly increased and a demographic blossoming experienced.[27] This was followed by a long period of demographic decline from the mid-sixth to the late-eighth century, sometimes referred to as the 'dark ages' of Byzantium. One influential factor in this was the devastating effects of recurring plagues starting with the great plague of 541-42 and continuing until the 740s.[28] This was compounded by a wave of highly disruptive earthquakes, long-lasting wars and a climactic cold period of severe winters and drought, resulting in famine, general impoverishment and a great reduction in population.[29] This demographic and economic outline, widely accepted by current scholarship, serves as a 'correction' of the older historiography on this period.[30]

The most important source for the demography and economy of the countryside during the period from the seventh to the ninth century is the *Farmer's Law* (Γεωργικός Νόμος), usually dated to the late seventh or early eighth century.[31]

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[26] Laiou, "The Human Resources," 47. This is one reason why the demographic and economic situation of the empire often strongly correlate with each other.
[27] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 24-25.
[28] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 268; Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 38. An important turning point for the demographic and economic wellbeing of the empire was the great plague of 541-42, also referred to as the *Justinianic Plague*. The plague also cyclically returned in 558 and 573-74. It has been estimated that this plague resulted in an approximately 30 percent reduction in population.
[29] These wars were those against the Goths in Italy (535-55), the Persian wars of (540-45, 572-91 and 605-28) and the wars with the Arabs which began in 636, all the while Avars and Slavs were raiding the countryside territories of the empire. Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 39.
[30] Figures such as Ostrogorsky and Lemerle argued for a demographic booming during the period from the seventh to the ninth centuries. This population increase was explained by massive waves of Slavs entering Byzantine territory (an incident recently shown to have been highly exaggerated). The details of this 'older view' can be found in Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium*, 48-50.
[31] The *Farmer's Law*, also known as the *Rural Code*, consists of 85 articles. These deal with the relations between peasants and their lands, as well as issues associated with fields, animals, mills, accidents, disputes and theft. For an English translation of the *Farmer's Law,* see Ashburner, *The Farmer's Law*.

One of the most central aspects of this source is its lack of any mention of large landowners or dependent peasants *(paroikoi)*, instead dealing solely with the village commune *(chorion)* inhabited by free peasants *(georgoi)*.[32] This has sparked intense debate among scholars, with the general conclusion being that while great property undoubtedly did exist, the emphasis of the *Farmer's Law* on small and medium property indicates that the free, landowning peasantry made up the largest segment of the countryside during this period.[33] The *georgoi* held an improved status in comparison to the *coloni* of the late-Roman period, being able to own and manage land (such as selling or exchanging it) as well as move and sell products freely.[34] This improvement in peasant status is generally attributed to the scarcity in manpower of the seventh and eighth centuries. Another important point made by the *Farmer's Law* (and reiterated by the *Fiscal Treatise* of the tenth century) concerns the collective responsibility of villagers for tax payments. In the case of default, due to the death or fleeing away of a villager, the remaining inhabitants were held responsible for the former's fiscal obligations.[35] This would continue for a certain period of time, after which the land would be declared "ownerless" and redistributed among the remaining inhabitants, once again becoming individual property.[36] This is

[32] Free peasants (*georgoi*) refer to the small, property-owning peasantry who (collectively) paid taxes directly to the state. Yet, it should be noted that, free but landless peasants also existed. Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 68.
[33] Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium*, 57. It is important to note that not all regions of the empire were the same, great property was not uniformly distributed. Central Asia Minor has been identified as one of the regions in which great landowners possibly retained their strength between the seventh and ninth centuries, and beyond.
[34] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 68; Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200*, 16.
[35] This would commonly occur during enemy invasion or natural disasters which could easily devastate countryside regions, resulting in peasants fleeing their lands. It has been identified that the remaining peasantry were often significantly overburdened by the collective fiscal responsibility left over to them. This would, in turn, result in them also defaulting on their tax payments or abandoning these lands. This was one of the primary issues which tenth-century emperors would try to solve, as the continued tillage of land was paramount for the economy of the empire. For a more detailed discussion on this, see Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 283; Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium*, 78-81.
[36] Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium*, 45.

highly important, as during later periods, from about the tenth century onwards, this abandoned land would quite often, instead of being redistributed to the free peasantry, be detached and granted to great landowners, thereby slowly eroding away the free village commune. The *Farmer's Law*, thanks to its vivid description of village life, also provides a glimpse at the topography and composition of the village. The *chorion* is defined as usually existing in clusters of several nearby villages, commonly located near roads and sources of water (such as a stream), and having territorial limits inside of which gardens, pasture land and vineyards could exist. The crop fields and woodland zones were usually located outside of this territory.[37]

The period from the ninth to the eleventh century, coincided with a persistent population growth, which had begun around the late-eighth century, implied through the fact that villages grew in both size and number.[38] The main drivers of this growth were the increased security and stability in the countryside through the omnipresence of the military and the restoration of a dense network of strongholds and small towns which acted in unison with their rural hinterlands.[39] Alongside this, there was near continuous territorial expansion during the tenth-century, which culminated in the reign of Basil II (r. 976-1025).[40] This period, commonly referred to as the Macedonian era, is more abundant in source material pertaining to the rural

[37] Laiou, "The Byzantine Village (5th-14th Centuries)," 39.
[38] This demographic growth is identified as beginning in the 740s and is indicated in sources showing that both the average population of individual villages increased, as well as an overall increase in the number of villages. For more details and a regional breakdown of this recovery, see Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 44-47, 92. This demographic growth has been generally accepted by a wide range of recent scholarship, including Alan Harvey, Warren Treadgold and Jacques Lefort. Lefort's treatment of the topic can be found in Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 267-71.
[39] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 269.
[40] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 44.

economy.[41] One of the most important of these, the *Fiscal Treatise*,[42] dated to around the late-tenth century, only recognizes the free peasantry as its object. This is seen as a clear indication of the importance and demographic abundance of this group. Policy-wise this period was primarily characterized by the diligent protection of the peasantry by the Macedonian dynasty, illustrated through a total of fourteen land legislations issued by several different emperors, aimed at defending the "poor" from the "powerful" (*dynatoi*).[43] One of the main problems of the countryside was that large landowners (especially in Anatolia), since approximately the ninth century, were repeatedly acquiring and adding to their estates[44] the lands of small landowning peasants from village communities.[45] Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (r. 920-944) responded to this by formulating the first of these novels around the year 922, which re-established the pre-emption rule (*protimesis*), according to which peasants wishing to sell their land had to notify the whole village commune, who had the right of first purchase or refusal, before it could be alienated to an outsider.[46] This was an attempt at protecting the territorial integrity of villages against the "powerful" (*dynatoi*). Unfortunately, the *dynatoi* were able to find many ways to sidestep the law

[41] While for the previous era the only substantial source was the *Farmer's Law*, during the ninth to eleventh centuries legal texts and documents (such as the *Peira)* begin appearing, as well as imperial novels, *praktika*, and also the *Fiscal Treatise*.
[42] Unlike the *Farmer's Law*, which only discussed the *chorion*, the *Fiscal Treatise* recognizes four types of rural settlement; the *chorion, agridion, proasteia* and *ktesis.* The *chorion* was the standard concentrated settlement, the *agridion* was a farmstead located further away, the *proasteion* was an estate manned by laborers and the *ktesis* was a form of quite dispersed settlement (compared to the *chorion*). McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors,* 9.
[43] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors,* 7-8.
[44] These estates generally originated as small pieces of private land located along the margins of village territories, founded by monks or lay people. The lands were often acquired by sale from the state from lands which formerly belonged to village inhabitants who had died without heirs. For example, the founding of the estate of Lavra at Kassandra was purchased like this in 941. For a longer discussion on this, see Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 272-273.
[45] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 282.
[46] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperor*s, 38-39.

of pre-emption.[47] Following the devastating effects of the great famine of 927-928,[48] many peasants were obliged to sell or desert their lands to great landowners, resulting in a more severe legislation being issued in the year 934 by Romanos I.[49] This time, the *dynatoi* were completely prohibited from acquiring any property in village communes and any sale which had taken place before the famine was nullified, with these properties being returned to their original owners. This novel is also noteworthy as it explicitly states that the fiscal and military wellbeing of the entire empire rested on the stability and protection of the rural populace.[50] Furthermore, the "powerful" are described as being a direct threat to this stability, as they were profiting from the devastation wrought onto the peasantry by the famine.[51] Similar policies to protect the peasantry against the encroachment of landlords were continued up until the early-eleventh century, resulting in the Macedonian period being referred to as the golden age of the Byzantine peasantry by many scholars.[52] A further example of this was the redefining of the *allelengyon* tax by Basil II, decreeing that the "powerful" (*dynatoi)* were from then on obliged to pay the taxes of

[47] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperor*s, 13.
[48] Skylitzes describes this great famine (λιμὸς μέγας) and plague (ἀκρίς) as being so terribly severe that there were not enough living people left to carry and bury the dead. Additionally, he describes how both the crops and the population (τὰ πλήθη καὶ τοὺς καρπούς) were destroyed and mentions that the famine was worse than any preceding it (τοὺς πώποτε γενομένους ὑπερβαλλόμενος). Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 222; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 215.
[49] A translation and discussion of the novel of 934 by Romanos I Lekapenos is presented in McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 49-61.
[50] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 54-55. The novel starts of in an emotional fashion with the statement; "If God, our Creator and Savior, Who made us emperor, rises in retribution how will the poor man, who awaits only the eyes of the emperor intercession, be neglected and altogether forgotten by us?" Furthermore, it is noted that wellbeing of the "poor" are crucial for the state; "We have considered it advantageous that now no longer will anyone be deprived of his own properties, nor will a poor man suffer oppression, and that this advantage is beneficial to the common good, acceptable to God, profitable to the treasury, and useful to the state."
[51] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 55. The powerful are described as being evil; "All evils contrive to evade the grip of laws and edicts and to regard the inescapable eye of divine justice as of no account, these measures, ejecting and excising the crafty workings of the will of the evildoers, have as a result now warranted more secure and rigorous codification." The fact that the *dynatoi* were profiting off the famine is mentioned in the following page.
[52] Kaplan, "The Producing Population," 148. Michel Kaplan discusses how the period from the seventh to the tenth century has been referred to as the golden age of the Byzantine peasantry by a variety of scholars including Alan Harvey, Alexander Kazhdan and Jacques Lefort.

villagers who had defaulted, died or fled.[53] In this manner, Basil II tried to thwart the efforts of great landowners, who were attempting to evade the many fiscal responsibilities which traditional *chorion* communities were already responsible for.[54] This led to protest from great landowners, primarily the church itself, which eventually pressured Romanos III Argyros (r. 1028-1034) to abolish this measure.[55] Large ecclesiastical properties were arguably the greatest threat to the peasantry of this period, which is illustrated through a novel of Basil II, dating to 996, that mentions how a large number of *chorion* communities were disappearing and suffering due to the encroachment of monasteries.[56] The growing power of large landowners was presaged in such developments from the tenth century onwards, which led to the erosion of village communities through the expansion and domination of the estate in the countryside.[57] This was not a uniform trend, being more pronounced in certain areas compared to others.[58] The falling apart of the Macedonian policies are easily visible in the eleventh-century legal document called the *Peira,*[59] which shows how open seizures of peasant properties were taking place by the *dynatoi*.[60] The ineffectiveness of these policies can also be inferred through

[53] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 347; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 329. The specific passage is; "…τὰς τῶν ἀπολωλότων ταπεινῶν συντελείας τελεῖσqαι παρὰ τῶν δυνατῶν," which can be translated as, "the taxes of dead lowborns (are) to be paid by the powerful" (my own translation). The *allelengyon* is further discussed in section 3.1.1 of the present study.
[54] Basil II also prevented many cases of a whole village being dominated and purchases by a single powerful villager and turned into his estate, by restoring lands to the poorer peasants. He also granted the poorest, landless peasants (*πένητες)* the right to repurchase the lands that they had been forced to sell off to large landholders for survival. For more information on this case, see Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200*, 37-39.
[55] Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium,* 79.
[56] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 283.
[57] Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 47.
[58] Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 40-42. The most influential and powerful landholders were located in the Anatolian plateau due to it being very suitable for large-scale animal grazing which was one of the primary pools of wealth for these magnates. Especially the themes of Anatolikon, Cappadocia and Paphlagonia have been identified as regions well-suited for large-scale ranching exploitation.
[59] The *Peira* (meaning "experience" in Greek) is a compilation of 75 legal texts and treatises by the Byzantine judge Eustathios Rhomaios (ca. 975-1034), arranged according to subject. It is a very popular work among historians of the legal aspects of Byzantium.
[60] Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 44.

the sheer number of legislations which are passed by different emperors in close succession.

Despite all of the efforts of the Macedonian emperors, eventually, the systematic detachment of lands from the free peasantry, accompanied with progressive land grants and tax exemptions, resulted in a profound transformation of the Byzantine countryside. From the mid-eleventh century onwards, large landowners, including especially the church, had vastly increased their power and lands by repeatedly finding ways to evade or become exempt from fiscal obligations and liabilities (*exkousseia*), even including the basic land tax.[61] All of this land required manpower to till, which resulted in the landowning, free peasantry slowly being overtaken by the dependent peasantry *(paroikoi),* belonging to both the state and private landowners, as the most dominant category of the rural population.[62] In other words, the small landowning peasantry was slowly replaced by tenant-farmers and peasants in various forms of dependence known as *paroikoi*. The eleventh- and twelfth-century period is also characterized by an intensification of the population growth which had continued throughout the Macedonian period.

The military organization of the empire was also in a state of constant transformation. With the advent of the Arab threat in the seventh century, the theme system was introduced as a defensive response. By the eighth century, this system transformed into one where land was handed out in return for military manpower, who had to be fully self-equipped. Fear of rebellions eventually led to the main themes being split-up into numerous smaller areas throughout the eighth and ninth

[61] Especially the substantial increase in ecclesiastical property and influence is an important feature of the Komnenian period. The *Lavra* monastery, with the huge swaths of land that it controlled, is a good example of the extent which the economic ventures of such ecclesiastical landholdings took. For a larger discussion on the Lavra and its growth in power, see Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium,* 214.
[62] Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 35.

centuries and also prompted Constantine V (r. 741-775) to establish a professional army in the capital, called the *tagmata*.[63] As a result, the army consisted of two main components; the *tagmata*, professional soldiers funded by the state who were based in the capital, and the *themata,* the much larger group of soldiers located in the provinces.[64] By the late-eleventh century, with the many military defeats, the theme system was slowly disintegrating and collapsing.[65] This military breakdown of the empire was an influential factor in the collapse of the fiscal organization of the provinces and it also aided the disintegration of village communities.[66] Militarily, under the guidance of Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081-1118), this resulted in an increased reliance on foreign mercenaries and also the implementation of the new *pronoia*[67] system, which was characteristic of the twelfth century and onwards.[68] A *pronoia* grant, during the twelfth-century, was given for life to an individual (most commonly to a soldier or military commander, but also to aristocrats) by an imperial official and it rendered upon the receiver the taxes and services which the properties

[63] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 78.
[64] Aside from these two main segments, other smaller, elite units also existed, such as mercenary regiments who were generally foreigners. Quite famous among these was the Varangian Guard unit, which existed from approximately the tenth to the fourteenth century. The unit was an elite imperial guard, stationed in Constantinople, composed mainly of Germanic (Viking, Anglo-Saxon) and Slavic (Rus) foreign elements. Both John Kinnamos and Anna Komnene refer to these people as being "axe-bearers", something which must have appeared quite 'barbaric' and different from the sword and spear wielding Byzantine perspective. Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 16; Komnene, The Alexiad, 95.
[65] The Pechenegs' successful onslaught of the eleventh century, the Norman conquest of Italy in 1071 and capture of Thessaloniki in 1185, the infamous Seljuq victory at Manzikert in 1071 and then again at Myriokephalon in 1176 are all examples of such foreign calamities which reached their culmination point with the fall of Constantinople in 1204 to the Fourth Crusade. For a longer discussion of these issues, see Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,"* 24.
[66] Frankopan, "Land and Power in the Middle and Later Period), 119.
[67] The word *pronoia* is a common Greek word literally meaning 'care' or 'foresight'. Following approximately the eleventh century, the word is attributed a more technical meaning in documentary material, based off its institutional implications. For more information on the origins of the word *pronoia* see, Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia,* 12-13.
[68] Compared to the earlier *theme* system this period was very different. Instead of land being handed out in exchange for military manpower, which was the basis of a large native army, now, soldiers were being granted revenue sources and feeling less inclined to fight, leaving Byzantine warfare largely in the hands of foreign and mercenary elements. Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium,* 241.

and *paroikoi* of the land would have normally owed to the state.[69] This was done in return for their military services to the state. It must be underlined that technically the land still belonged to the state. This system was originally implemented as a means to pay the many foreign mercenaries which were characteristic of this period.[70] As opposed to the peasant-soldiers of the *theme* system, *pronoia* holders were quite privileged individuals, not paying taxes and receiving their own taxes and rent-revenue from their dependent peasants.[71] This resulted in *pronoia* soldiers becoming the masters of the peasants, gaining the tax revenue which was normally intended for the state (a topic also discussed by Choniates).[72] This weakened the military as soldiers began seeing it as an easy economic outlet, which is illustrated through the surging numbers of voluntary recruits to the army by especially urban commoners, who were seeking an easy revenue source.[73]

Overall the transformation of the countryside had a variety of consequences for the peasantry. The view of older scholarship, such as that of George Ostrogorsky, was that these transformations reduced the Byzantine peasantry to serfdom and impoverishment and resulted in the economic decline of the state. The currently accepted model is that while a greater exploitation of the peasantry did occur, it also

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[69] Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia,* 88, 355-56. *Pronoia* grants were handed out through documents called either a *prostagmata* or an *orismos*. Once this was delivered to a provincial official, a new *praktikon* would be created for the *pronoia*-holder. The *pronoia*-holder could then go with this document to the physical area where his assigned *paroikoi*, rights and properties were and take over their command. The properties which were granted could be imperial properties (*proasteia, zeuglateion, ktemata),* properties of the treasury (*demosion*) or ownerless properties (*exaleimmata*). The base property tax (*telos*) of these properties was automatically granted alongside the properties. Each *paroikos* would owe a property tax which was the main financial element of the *pronoia* grant. For more information on the contents of the grant, see Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia,* 379-390.

[70] Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium,* 226.

[71] Laiou, "Political History: An Outline," 23.

[72] This issue is described and criticized extensively by Choniates, which is discussed in chapter 3.1.3 of this study. For the specific passage, see Choniates, *Historia*, 208; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 118-119.

[73] Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium*, 233. These recruits came from the urban working populace and included those such as tailors, cobblers, smiths, brick makers and stable-boys.

brought about a general increase in per capita income for the peasantry, which was tied to a general rise in the standard of living.[74] This general elevation of wellbeing, despite appearing contradictory, happened alongside an increase in inequality levels, as wealth accumulated in the hands of the *dynatoi*.[75] The expansion of markets resulted in the cash-crop producing assets of the peasantry gaining value, making them economically better off than their ninth-century counterparts, regardless of their increased exploitation and vulnerability.[76] Jacques Lefort by constructing a hypothetical model for an eleventh-century peasant household, calculated that a *zeugaratos* (peasant with a pair of oxen) would attain a definite surplus whether or not he was a landowner.[77] Overall, the *paroikoi* (dependent peasants) are treated more favorably by recent scholarship. For the free peasantry, selling their land to become a *paroikos* appears to be a rational choice due to the better protection offered by landlords against both crop-failures and hostile intruders, as well as sparing them tax-collector abuses.[78] On top of this, recent scholarship indicates that *paroikoi* also benefitted from the tax exemptions and immunities (*exkousseia*) of their estate owners by sharing the privileges.[79] These *exkousseia* were rapidly increasing from the eleventh century onwards. Other positive outcomes of this transformation have been identified as; more rational usage of resources, more efficient cultivation,

[74] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 105, 108. Tenant-farmers of the eleventh century were not worse off than the free, landowning peasantry of the ninth century, nor were they impoverished or near starvation (as older scholarship suggested).
[75] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 106.
[76] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 111; Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 283.
[77] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 301-302. The surplus was less for a peasant renting the land, but, nonetheless, it was present in both cases. The calculations that Lefort does are for a cereal cultivating peasant household. Lefort's model assumes a much smaller plot size and therefore, increased efficiency compared to a similar model proposed by Michel Kaplan, who reached less optimistic results. The results of Lefort's model, being the more recent and updated one, are accepted by other scholars, such as Angeliki Laiou, as the more correct calculation. Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 108.
[78] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 106.
[79] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 106.

increased productivity and a rise in population.[80] More efficient cultivation stemmed from the fact that large landowners were able to support their peasantry in way that the state or the traditional village community could not match.[81] This resulted in far more comprehensive farming. The population rise of the eleventh and twelfth centuries has been confirmed by many other scholars as being one of the most important factors in the transformation of the Byzantine countryside in this period.[82] The scarcity of manpower which had elevated the peasant status during the seventh and eighth centuries was significantly reversed with the population boom of the Komnenian period, which is a factor in the increased exploitation of the peasantry. Taken in conjunction with the eroding of village solidarities and independence,[83] weakening of state control over the fiscal and military mechanisms of the countryside, in addition to new hardships for peasants in certain regions,[84] it is clear that the overall transformation of the countryside was a complex process, with a range of effects, both positive and negative, for the actors involved. The Byzantine authors of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were by no means ignorant to these broader happenings, which they often criticize extensively. Choniates' repeated

[80] Angeliki Laiou, "The Byzantine Village (5th – 14th Centuries)," 43.
[81] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 283.
[82] Population growth during the period from the ninth to the twelfth centuries has been noted by Warren Treadgold, Jacques Lefort and Alan Harvey. Harvey's work is very useful in sketching the reasons and results of this demographic transformation in detail. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200*. Lefort argued that the population increase resulted in an increased demand for food, housing material and clothing, therefore providing a production demand boost. This massive agricultural demand led to a dramatic increase in the lands under cultivation, which in turn fundamentally changed the rural economy of this period. For more discussion on this issue, see Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 267-73.
[83] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 237. Lefort has argued that the village and the estate both complemented and also opposed each other. The estate was important as villagers were able to secure employment on its lands as dependent peasants (*paroikoi)*. Over time this relationship became more one-sided with the village being reduced simply to a place of inhabitation, while the estate took over the management of the economic and administrative duties.
[84] Alan Harvey has discussed how the large-scale pasture farming activities of the powerful landholders would have created conflict with peasant producers in the fertile regions around the Anatalion plateau as these regions would be required for winter pasturage by these landholders. Harvey has noted that in these regions this would result in the very fast subordination of the peasant farmers to these powerful individuals. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200*, 41.

allusions to the debasement and corruption of the tax-collection system in the twelfth century, which he compares to the much better functioning and managed tenth century period, is a good example of this.

The replacement of the communal village economy by a mainly domanial economy has spawned intense debates among scholars about the extent of feudalism and the concept of serfdom in the Byzantine countryside. This debate was traditionally centered on two main positions: the institutional approach (or non-Marxist approach) which regarded Western feudalism as vastly different from the Byzantine case due its different legal-institutional framework consisting of vassalage and fealty bonds, and the political-economic (Marxist) approach, held mainly by Soviet historians, identifying a definitive case of feudalism based off the economic traits of the post-eleventh century Byzantine countryside (especially focusing on the *pronoia* institution).[85] One of the leading advocates for a Byzantine feudalism and serfdom case was Ostrogorsky, who, despite not being a Marxist, argued that when the landowning 'free peasantry' declined, the increasing number of dependent peasants working on estates as *paroikoi* constituted a serf category, who became impoverished.[86] According to him, the *pronoia* was the Byzantine equivalent of the western European fief.[87] This argument has generally been rejected by more recent scholarship, as the differences between Western European serfs and Byzantine *paroikoi* have been shown to be quite numerous, with the latter enjoying many legal

[85] Soviet scholarship generally accepted that the origins of a Byzantine feudalism began in the seventh century, with some arguing even earlier roots, connecting the late-Roman *colonus* with the Byzantine *paroikos*. Haldon, "The Social History of Byzantium," 18; Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200*, 9-12.

[86] Ostrogorsky's discussion on this issue can be found in two of his important works: Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine*; Ostrogorsky, *Quelques problèmes d'histoire de la paysannerie byzantine*. Ostrogorsky's general argument dictated that when the peasantry was impoverished and reduced to serfdom, the state economy also declined.

[87] Important features associated with the fief, such as vassalage and oaths of fealty, did not exist in the case of the *pronoia*. A longer discussion on the historiography surrounding this argument can be found in Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200*, 6-12.

rights which the former lacked.[88] Additionally the idea that *paroikoi* were legally bound to the land (argued by Ostrogorsky) has been rebuked through the usage of documents such as those showing cases of *paroikoi* with only fiscal obligations, meaning that nothing was preventing them from living elsewhere.[89] Some recent scholars, such as John Haldon, have actually expressed positive responses towards a possible feudalism debate concerning Byzantium as it helps situate the field amongst wider Medieval history allowing it to become comprehensible and interesting to a broader selection of scholars.[90] Such broad discussions could help alleviate the relative isolation which the Byzantine field has traditionally suffered from.[91]

1.3 The Sources

A brief description of the backgrounds and general attitudes of the authors under analysis is necessary to better situate some of their comments. These authors need to be seen in light of the larger corpus of Byzantine historiography, which, by providing a nearly continuous account of political, diplomatic and military details, supplant the

[88] *Paroikoi* enjoyed many rights which serfs did not. Such as important legal protections giving them limited land possession rights through a rule which allowed peasants who had settled on a piece of land for 30 or 40 years to not be able to be evicted. *Paroikoi* also generally owned their own animals and other movable property as well as owing many secondary charges and taxes to their landlords. From the twelfth-century onwards, *paroikoi* also began actually owning small parcels of land. Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia,* 135; Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 238.
[89] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 239.
[90] Haldon, "The Social History of Byzantium," 21.
[91] Byzantium has traditionally been a niche corner of Medieval history, receiving very little attention over the past centuries (in comparison with other regions). One important reason for this is the lack of any national historiography in adopting Byzantium as part of its identity. Despite the more recent Greek interest in Byzantium, in Turkey, the country sitting on the largest area of former Byzantine territory, interest and exposure to Byzantium is kept at a minimum. The marginalization and vilification of Byzantium by Enlightenment scholars such as Edward Gibbon also aided this trend, with broader public interest being channeled towards Western Roman history and Medieval European history. Suggestions to situate Byzantium in broader contexts, such as the suggestion of Haldon, could somewhat aid this situation.

lack of any extant imperial archives for Byzantium.[92] A common point for all the authors under discussion is that they were all quite well-educated and versed in classical literature, thereby constituting part of an urban/elite social segment. Despite mostly being associated with the civil bureaucracy, the diverging occupational backgrounds and careers of these authors set them apart from each other and appear to have heavily influenced their commentary. Of those born in the eleventh century, going chronologically, Michael Psellos went from being a provincial judge to eventually becoming imperial secretary of the chancellery and close adviser to emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042-1055).[93] Following a brief monastic retirement, Psellos returned to the imperial court, where he continued to serve in various positions until his death in the 1070s. Michael Attaleiates was a prominent member of the judicial system in Constantinople, with the result that his narrative is comparatively rich in episodes pertaining to legal incidents and their details.[94] As a military judge under Romanos IV Diogenes (r. 1068-1071) he was present at the battle of Manzikert in 1071 and afterwards served under Michael VII Doukas (r. 1071-1078).[95] Furthermore, through a monastic foundation document of Attaleiates, called the *Diataxis*, we are informed of his numerous properties around Thrace

[92] Kaldellis, "The Corpus of Byzantine Historiography," 211.
[93] Psellos, born in 1018 in Constantinople, was a tremendously learned and prolific scholar, he wrote numerous works and also held a leading position at the school of philosophy in Constantinople. For his biography and family history, see Kaldellis, *Mother and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellos,* 3-16. For further scholarship on Psellos in general, see Kaldellis, *The Argument of Psellos' Chronographia;* Barber and Jenkins, *Reading Michael Psellos*; Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium;* Lauritzen, *The Depiction of Character in the Chronographia of Michael Psellos*.
[94] Attaleiates, born around 1025 in the region of Attaleia (Antalya), after receiving a decent education in Constantinople, achieved great status and wealth as a public servant of the empire. For further scholarship on Attaleiates, see Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline*; Krallis, "Attaleiates as a Reader of Psellos," 167-91; Kazhdan, "The Social Views of Michael Attaleiates," 23-86.
[95] Attaleiates narrative features a detailed explanation as to the causes of the defeat at Manzikert, and contrary to much other contemporary scholarship, such as Psellos, he is quite apologetic towards Romanos IV himself, instead painting the emperor as a victim of plot by the Doukas family. Attaleiates, *The History,* 100.

(especially Rhaidestos) including farmlands, which appear to have influenced his opinions on certain economic policies.[96] John Skylitzes, despite being scarcely mentioned in sources, has been identified as *droungarios* of the watch (*tes biglai)* during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos, which meant that he was the primary magistrate of the judicial tribune of Constantinople.[97] Anna Komnene, on top of being the daughter of emperor Alexios I Komnenos, was also a prolific scholar and physician, in charge of the hospital and orphanage of Constantinople.[98] Of those born in the twelfth century, Eustathios of Thessaloniki was archbishop of Thessaloniki from 1176 until the capture of the city in 1185 by the Normans.[99] He was taken hostage by the Normans, but, after their defeat by Isaac II Angelos (r. 1185-1195), he maintained his position as archbishop of Thessaloniki until his death around 1195.[100] His narration of the capture of his city by "barbarians" and his subsequent escape journey results in his narrative having a very lively tone. John Kinnamos is known to have worked in the imperial court as a secretary under Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143-

[96] The most notable policy which Attaleiates discusses in response to his own personal properties is the setting up of the *phoundax* institution in Rhaidestos by Nikephoritzes the *Logothete* during the reign of Michael VII (r. 1071-1078), which monopolized the grain trade entering the capital from the entire Thracian region by diverting it through a single institution and exacting large sums of money from those participating under the pretext of customs payments. This incident is discussed in detail in chapter 3.1.2 of this study.

[97] Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, ix-xii. Skylitzes, born around 1050, has an obscure social background, but a good education was probably what facilitated his social advancement –a feature also seen in the cases of Attaleiates and Psellos. He was a younger colleague to Attaleiates. For further scholarship on Skylitzes, see Boeck, *Imagining the Byzantine Past: The Perception of History in the Illustrated Manuscripts of Skylitzes and Manasses*; Laiou, "Imperial Marriages and their Critics in the Eleventh Century," 165-176; Lounghis, "The Byzantine Historians on Politics and People from 1042 to 1081," 381-403.

[98] Anna Komnene, born in 1083, was a princess and thus has a unique background in comparison to our other authors who are often part of the civil bureaucracy. For further scholarship on Anna Komnene, see Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian;* Gouma-Peterson, *Anna Komnene and her Times;* Buckler, *Anna Comnena: A Study*; Thomas, "Anna Comnena's Account of the First Crusade," 269-312; Neville, "Lamentation, History and Female Authorship in Komnene's *Alexiad*," 192-218.

[99] Eustathios was born around 1115 and was educated in Constantinople before starting his ecclesiastical career. For further scholarship on Eustathios, see Magdalino, "Eustathios of Thessalonica," 225-238; Pontani et al., *Reading Eustathios of Thessaloniki*; Stone, "Eustathios of Thessaloniki and St. Nikephoros of Antioch: Hagiography for a Political End," 416-431.

[100] Eustathios may have left Thessaloniki around 1191 but returned shortly afterwards to resume his ecclesiastical position until his death.

1180), his duties were associated with diplomatic missions and military movements.[101] Niketas Choniates' career was destined for the imperial administration after his first-born brother, Michael Choniates, had been set aside for an ecclesiastical career – as was the elite Byzantine norm.[102] Initially, Choniates served as a provincial tax official in the region of Paphlagonia. He continued to ascend the bureaucratic ladder, and it has been established that he served as imperial undersecretary in 1183 when Andronikos I Komnenos (r. 1183-1185) took over the throne.[103] After a brief pause, Choniates continued as imperial secretary under Isaac II Angelos (1185-1195) and was also appointed head of the public treasury in 1188/9. Later on, Choniates appears to have held governorship and tax assessor positions (ἀπογραφεύς) in the region of Philippopolis.[104] The highest peak of his career was his appointment as *logothetes ton sekreton* (which was synonymous with *megas logothetes* in the twelfth century) in the mid 1190s. Thus, his narrative appears quite well-informed on issues relating to taxation and state finances in addition to the functioning of the provincial administration. These unique backgrounds and careers played an important part in fashioning the perspectives of each individual author, as will be discussed throughout this work.

The narratives span a range of timescales across the ninth to twelfth century period and have certain distinguishing traits which influence their content,

[101] Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 2. Kinnamos was born sometime after the year 1143. For further scholarship on Kinnamos, see Ljubarskij, *John Kinnamos as a Writer*; Magdalino, "Aspects of Twelfth-Century Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*," 326-346; Kaldellis, "Byzantine Information-Gathering Behind the Veil of Silence," 26-43; Stephenson, "John Cinnamus, John II Comnenus and the Hungarian Campaign of 1127-1129," 177-187.
[102] Choniates was born sometime between 1150 and 1160 in the provincial town of Chonai, which is where his nickname 'Choniates' comes from. For further scholarship on Choniates, see Simpson, *Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study*; Simpson, "Before and After 1204: The Version of Niketas Choniates' "Historia"," 189-221; Simpson and Efthymiadis, *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and Writer*; Magdalino, "Aspects of Twelfth-Century Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*," 326-346.
[103] Simpson, *Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study*, 15.
[104] Choniates describes himself using the word ἀπογραφή, meaning tax collector/official. Choniates, *Historia*, 402; Magoulias, 221.

composition and differing perspectives (sometimes of the same events). Psellos' *Chronographia* covers the history of the empire between the years 976 and 1078, in other words, from the reign of Basil II in the tenth century, to the reign of Michael VII Doukas in the eleventh. This was most probably meant to continue the *Historia* of Leo the Deacon which ended around the year 976. One of Psellos' primary motivations in composing his *Chronographia* was to show the wrongdoings of previous emperors. He pays comparatively less attention to military and provincial details, instead focusing mainly on Constantinople and associated cultural, religious and political issues. The details he gives of military encounters and strategies are often very uninformed and are not areas in which he truly shines, which makes him very different from the traditional model of Byzantine historiography. On the other hand, his character portraits are exceptionally detailed and vivid, going into the details of the emperors' leisure activities and thought-world. His position as court philosopher was no doubt influential in providing him with a corpus of court memoirs to embellish his work with. Another distinguishing feature of Psellos is his transparency and attempt at being unbiased, or at least going to great lengths to present himself as such.[105]

Attaleiates' *Historia* covers the period from 1034 to 1079, ending shortly before the ascension of Alexios I Komnenos.[106] His narrative appears to have an overarching, teleological purpose of finding an explanation for the political/military decline of the Byzantine state in the eleventh century, something which he explicitly states in the first pages of his work. For example, he describes the 'barbarian'

[105] There are numerous instances where Psellos mentions that he will attempt to be unbiased in his explanations; these are usually followed by negative remarks and criticisms of certain emperors. Several examples are his treatment of Constantine VIII, Michael VI and especially Constantine IX.
[106] It ends with a lengthy encomium to Nikephoros III Botaneiates, to whom Attaleiates dedicated his work.

invasions (Seljuq invasions) of the late-eleventh century as being divine punishment for the straying away from true Christian Orthodoxy.[107] His background as a military judge, combined with the properties he owned in Thrace, appear to have personally influenced his opinions on the administrative functioning of the provinces. It is also known that Attaleiates founded a monastery (visible in the *Diataxis* document) for the purpose of protecting his properties from taxation.[108]

Skylitzes' *Synopsis historion*, unlike the other works featured here, is a chronicle, rather than a history. He intended to continue the long-reaching Byzantine historic chronicle tradition by continuing the work of Theophanes, who had covered the period until the year 813. As a consequence, Skylitzes' work covers the long period between the years 811 and 1057. Skylitzes appears to criticize and disagree with many historians who wrote about the ninth and tenth centuries before himself, which is an important reason for his ambition to rewrite the history of this period, resulting in his lengthy account. The *Synopsis*, which primarily focuses on military and administrative matters, features a similar outlook as that of Attaleiates' *Historia*, representing hostile invasions and military defeats as divine punishment for Byzantium. Thus, he seeks to explain the recent decline in his own contemporary, eleventh-century Byzantium. Due to the sheer breadth and scope of the work, passages indirectly referring to the peasantry in it are relatively numerous.

Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* is Anna's attempt at finishing the work of her husband, Nikephoros Bryennios, who had written a history focusing on the 1070s and including only the early part of Alexios I's career. Therefore, Anna's narrative covers the years between 1080 and 1118, the latter being the end of her father's reign. The *Alexiad* is somewhat different from the other works used in the present

[107] Magdalino, *Aspects of 12th Century Byzantine Kaiserkritik*, 331-32.
[108] Kaldellis, "The Corpus of Byzantine Historiography," 212.

study due to its obviously biased nature. The laudatory tone Anna takes with respect to her father's changes/innovations to many state practices contrasts sharply with the criticisms of historians such as Niketas Choniates and John Zonaras for the exact same issues. Being the only female author in this list, together with her uniqueness in providing a Byzantine perspective to the events of the First Crusade, gives her account an added importance when compared to the other narratives. It is also important to note that Anna's main purpose for composing this work has been commonly thought to be that of asserting herself into history after losing the throne to her brother John II and being forced into monastic exile, so, in a way, for the literary fame.[109]

Eustathios' account of the Norman capture of Thessaloniki is mainly focused on the sack of the city and the suffering of its inhabitants, with brief digressions on the period from 1180 to 1185. His work is focused on a single event and its immediate aftermath and makes extensive use of his own eyewitness observations and sufferings. Therefore, his narrative is quite emotional and full of vivid descriptions associated with this single incident and its handling. Especially sections concerning Eustathios' escape journey through villages and open country are important for the purposes of the present study. The motivation for Eustathios' composition of this work appears to be the justification of his own actions during this crisis.[110]

[109] Anna had married Nikephoros Bryennios in 1097 and had ambitions to persuade her father, Alexios Komnenos, to disinherit his son John, so that Anna's husband Nikephoros could take the throne. This plot, which was also supported by her mother, the empress Irene, was discovered and nullified. Anna was forced to retire to an isolated convent (the Kecharitomene monastery), where she took up the writing of the *Alexiad*. Anna's ambition to seize the throne for her husband has been recently disputed by Leonora Neville in her work, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian* (2016). Neville also disputes Anna's forced retirement to the Kecharitomene monastery. Neville, *Anna Komnene*, 133-140.

[110] Kaldellis, "The Corpus of Byzantine Historiography," 213.

Kinnamos' *Historia* continues Anna Komnene's *Alexiad,* taking off from the year 1118, where Anna had left off, and continuing until the year 1176. As a result, Kinnamos' narrative covers the long reigns of John II and Manuel I of the Komnenian dynasty. His primary focus is on the reign of Manuel I and his account of Manuel contrasts sharply with Choniates' quite negative portrayal. Kinnamos, being slightly older than Choniates, witnessed more of the events of this period firsthand, in comparison to Choniates, who was not in the bureaucracy until around the reign of Manuel's son Alexios II. Kinnamos, who was the court historian of his time, appears to be more supportive of Manuel I's foreign and domestic policies, which has aroused suspicion of increased bias in his narrative among older historians, such as Edward Gibbon, who opted to read only Choniates for the details of Manuel I's reign.[111] Yet, his work is vital in completing the overall picture, as relative impartiality can only be achieved by cross-reading the two.

Choniates, the only author to write in the post-1204 era and therefore to have the benefit of hindsight with regard to it,[112] covered the period from 1118 to 1207. As a result, Choniates' chronicle (especially the longer *version a*) features a more critical tone towards many emperors and segments of society compared to the other works used in this study.[113] Having witnessed the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade in 1204 and escaped to Nicaea to finish his chronicle under the Lascarids,

[111] Edward Gibbon's (1737-1794) extremely negative portrayal of Byzantium in the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was somewhat based off Choniates' critical condemnations of Manuel Komnenos' reign, while he largely ignored Kinnamos' more balanced narrative on the same period. Had he also consulted Kinnamos, a different picture may have been painted of figures such as Manuel I Komnenos.

[112] Choniates wrote the longer *version a* of his chronicle in Nicaea under the Lascarids after the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade in 1204.

[113] The main social segments/stereotypes which are repeatedly criticized and blamed for the demise of the empire are: money squandering and incompetent emperors, corrupt tax-collectors, overly wealthy, pleasure-seeking clergy and especially monks, foreign barbarians infiltrating the military and the drunken mob of Constantinople. For more information on Choniates' general outlook, see Simpson and Efthymiadis, *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*, 32-33.

Choniates had plenty of time to reminisce on the recent events. This results in his narrative featuring extensive criticism towards certain figures, whose policies Choniates has identified as the reason for the decaying and weakening of the state, thereby attempting to explain the eventual demise of the empire in 1204. His style is witty, critical and features abundant usage of irony, contrasting sharply with Anna Komnene's more naïve laudations. These authors quite often make use of the works of each other. For example, despite heavily relying on oral and eyewitness accounts, Choniates still makes extensive use of John Kinnamos and Eustathios of Thessaloniki's works.[114] His narrative even features a highly praise-filled description of Eustathios' actions during the Norman siege of Thessaloniki in 1185.[115] It is also clear that the temporal spans of these narratives quite often overlap, which is very useful as it allows us to read them together to obtain a more accurate representation of events. A good example of this is the possibility to cross-read Kinnamos' and Choniates' narratives for the twelfth century.

All of these authors wrote in a relatively "high-language", which was representative of Attic Greek and featured many classicizing elements. It is important to note that this language was far removed from the vernacular speech of the common masses, to the point of being nearly incomprehensible by them due to its elaborate and antiquated style. Obviously, there was a range of individual styles within this generalized framework. Out of all these authors, it is Kinnamos and to a lesser extent Skylitzes whose classicizing education appears to be the least pronounced. Compared to the very complex, artful language of Psellos, Anna Komnene or Choniates, the texts of Skylitzes and Kinnamos are relatively easier to

[114] Efthymiadis, *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*, 27-29.
[115] Choniates, *Historia,* 306-311; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 169-173. Choniates describes Eustathios as doing everything he could to help alleviate the suffering which befell Thessaloniki and repeatedly praises his character.

comprehend with simpler sentence structures and vocabulary. Another general feature of this language was the massive amount of direct quotations from classical and Christian authors contained within them, which was something these eleventh and twelfth century authors loved to parade.[116] This was especially pronounced in the post-eleventh century period, when an interest in the Roman past truly started to flourish in Byzantine high circles.[117] It is important to remember that Byzantine literary tastes were very different from today's standards. Instead of originality, redeployment of classical passages under the authority of tradition was more highly valued.[118] Each author was trying to place themselves within the ongoing tradition of Byzantine historiography, stretching far back to antiquity, and, as a result, the same complicated, Atticizing style was repeatedly employed without much innovation.[119] As a result, from today's perspective these narratives can appear unoriginal and overly complicated, despite those specific attributes being the valued norms of their own times.

The passages in these narratives which directly or indirectly relate to the peasantry are often steeped in classicizing allusions and literary construction which usually do not represent the authors' own views or even the reality of the situation. Moreover, the individual motivations of each author often cloud over their judgement on certain issues. If an emperor is to be slandered/criticized, for example, any beneficial policies towards the peasantry also risk being lumped together with the general evilness being portrayed. Anna Komnene, for example, has an overarching aim of glorifying her father, and therefore her explanations of certain

[116] Hunger, "On the Imitation (Mimesis) of Antiquity," 30.
[117] This was partly connected to the decline in the prospects of the empire which resulted in a turn to the "glorious past times". For a larger discussion on this issue, see Markopoulos, "Roman Antiquarianism: Aspects of the Roman Past in the *Middle* Byzantine Period."
[118] Horrocks, *Greek a History of Language and its Speakers*, 155.
[119] Kaldellis, "The Corpus of Byzantine Historiography," 217.

events (especially military events, which are generally more related to the 'honor' of an emperor) raise doubts over their factual accuracy. Eulogy often takes priority over accurate depictions of military events.[120] Attaleiates, for example, presents a very sympathetic attitude towards the defeat of Romanos IV Diogenes in 1071, which is very different from Psellos' narration of the same event, in which the Doukas family is greatly praised instead.[121] Choniates on the other hand is concerned with showing the faults of administration which led to God withdrawing his favor from Byzantium, which results in a very anti-Komnenian viewpoint (contrasting sharply with Anna Komnene's version).[122] For such reasons, taking everything that these authors say at face value results in a very skewed picture of events (including rural society), but, because the peasants' own voice is completely absent from any form of written source, an in-depth analysis of this material helps shed light on an often-neglected aspect of peasant studies.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This study is categorically divided into three main chapter headings, dealing respectively with the peasants' lifestyle, economic and legal interactions, and relationship with military provisioning and warfare. Chapter two deals with peasants as individuals, as opposed to their functioning as a group for taxation and military purposes. The lifestyle of the peasantry is discussed through an analysis of their

[120] Birkenmeier, *The Development of the Komnenian Army,* 6.
[121] Attaleiates, *The History,* 100. Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 364-66. Psellos, Attaleiates is very apologetic of Romanos IV and the insider deception he becomes the victim of during the battle of 1071 against the Turks. He also describes the Byzantine army as truly lacking training and proper supplies. This contrasts with Psellos' much more negative portrayal of Romanos IV Diogenes, attributing the disaster at Manzikert largely to Romanos himself. This is also linked with Psellos quite laudatory description of the Doukas family who took the throne from Romanos.
[122] Birkenmeier, *The Development of the Komnenian Army*, 18-19.

conditions of existence and its perception by the authors. The agricultural lifestyle is discussed in the context of its strict seasonality and arduous physicality with important digressions made to portray the importance attributed to agriculture by the Byzantine psyche. Following this, the physical reality of the peasants is elaborated through a discussion of their housing, clothing, diet and communications. These sections feature an examination of village production methods for settlements, clothing and food in the context of their aim of self-sufficiency, while also providing insights towards elite opinions on such an existence. The peasant mindset is also briefly touched upon through a discussion of popular culture and belief in Byzantine villages. As all of this information is filtered through an educated/elite mindset before reaching us, the final part of this chapter consists of a detailed analysis of the perception of the peasant lifestyle by the authors. This analysis includes a linguistic elaboration on certain word choices made by the authors, a discussion on cases of upwards social mobility and certain behavioral patterns which are associated with the peasantry.

Chapter three is concerned with the economic and legal standing of the peasantry. To contextualize this chapter the particular mindsets behind fiscal policies are discussed from the perspective of both the receivers and the tax-payers. The issue of whether rural taxation would be preferred in kind or cash is elaborated through specific examples pertaining to both of the actors in this one-way transaction, while also showing how it could easily lead to rebellions. Following this, a long section is dedicated to the details of village taxation, with a focus on specific tax policies which were implemented during the period under narration (such as the *allelengyon* and *aerikon* taxes). The effects of extraordinary taxes on the rural populace are discussed, especially within the context of the generalized struggle between large

landowners and the state, which was an encounter with the free peasantry as its primary object. Furthermore, the personal opinions of the authors on such rural economic policies are touched upon. The next section deals with the primary mediators of taxation; i.e., tax-collectors. Incidents of tax-collector abuse against the peasantry are outlined through a discussion of specific examples in which false fiscal charges were being exacted by these individuals. Incidents of non-state actors taking over this network are also briefly discussed. Next, the way in which emperors dealt with the corruption of the tax-collection network are illustrated, with the opinions of the authors indicating a common perspective on such matters. This section also outlines the transformation of the taxation system through an elaboration of a reference to the "gifts of *paroikoi*" located in Choniates' narrative and a further possible mention of the early *pronoia* system from Attaleiates' text. The final section of the third chapter deals with legal system and its relationship with the peasantry. The personal opinions of Attaleiates and Choniates are discussed over several excerpts showing how the judicial system was skewed against the poor, including the peasantry (or strongly in favor of the *dynatoi*). This is shown through examples of land-disputes, taxation problems, theft and the *phoundax* issue. Finally, a discussion is provided on how emperors handled and interfered with the legal system and its outcomes.

Chapter four focuses on the peasantry in relation with military events. Military encounters make up the primary component of what was considered worthy of Byzantine historiography and, as a consequence, details associated with the interaction between such events and the peasantry are relatively abundant. In the first section the issue of peasant displacement due to hostile invaders or plundering marauders is elaborated through specific examples, and the means of

warning/preventing such incidents are illustrated. These are contextualized with references to several military manuals of the period, which show the norms of the Byzantine mindset towards warfare. The importance of frontline villages in the defensive response of the empire is analyzed through several examples, which also show the imperial means of bolstering such regions. The next section deals with how the army was supplied and accommodated by rural localities on their journey to and from the frontlines. Certain extraordinary cases are elaborated to show the extent that this "forced requisitioning" could take. Following this, parallels are drawn with the Byzantine treatment of foreign territories and the villages located within. Moving on, a discussion is featured on villages accommodating the emperor himself, with an emphasis on the effects and the psychology associated with such incidents. The next section focuses on the conscription and voluntary recruitment of the peasantry by both the imperial polity and hostile, non-state actors. The ability of rebellious leaders such as Thomas the Slav, Leo Tornikios and Alexios Branas in raising large armies in a short period of time is analyzed with a focus on the peasant mindset and their reasons for cooperation. Following this, the direct military roles of the peasants themselves are discussed through the utility of their agricultural tools, wagons and boats, in addition to providing extra manpower. The next section elaborates the effects, frequency, seasonality and geographic distribution of plundering episodes concerning rural localities. Questions of accessibility versus safety are examined, with added emphasis on warning mechanisms and brief digressions on Byzantine self-plundering. Finally, the resettlement of prisoners of war over dispersed rural areas are discussed with a focus on the effects of such practices on the social fabric of village communities.

The general picture emerging from a detailed analysis of these narratives is indicative of a definite importance attributed to the peasantry, mainly due to their collective representation of the wellbeing of the overall agrarian economy. This collectivity is specifically manifested over two of the major interaction channels in which the peasantry comes to life within these narratives; being a large taxable revenue pool for the state treasury (and other landholders' wealth) and a massive manpower reserve for military purposes. This collectivity attributed to the peasantry was also enforced by state interactions with the peasantry, such as the village being a single taxable unit for economic purposes, and legal cases also often taking the entire village as its subjects – topics which are elaborated throughout this study. This results in the peasants having no real identity as individuals in Byzantine textual sources, but, instead existing as part of a larger segment. This in turn translates into a largely expendable attitude being taken by our authors towards the livelihood and wellbeing of individual peasant households. The peasant is represented as the outsider in all of these narratives, being pushed out onto the margins of civilized society, yet ironically being crucial in the maintenance of that society.

CHAPTER 2

THE PEASANTRY AND THEIR LIFESTYLE

2.1 Information on the lifestyle of the peasantry

2.1.1 Agricultural Lifestyle

The vast majority of the Byzantine peasantry was involved in either farming or animal pasturing. These were the two most stable occupations and constituted the backbone of the entire Byzantine economy, as it was an overwhelmingly agrarian one. The importance attributed to agriculture is illustrated by the preface of the *Geoponika*, a tenth-century compilation work on agricultural practices,[123] which begins by describing how the state consists of three elements; the army, clergy and agriculture.[124] Moreover, it states that out of these, the latter is best able to support human life, which is a generalized understanding embedded in the Byzantine psyche.

First and foremost, the physicality and labor-intensity of agricultural work must be underlined, especially when compared against the lifestyles of the elite authors themselves. Toiling in fields all day, being exposed to the elements, was a very intense activity. This issue was further aggravated by the fact the Byzantine countryside is quite hilly and stony when compared to other regions (such as the northern European plain).[125] This resulted in, aside from peasant self-sufficiency, large landowners often resorting to even more labor-intensive activities such as viticulture or olive growing as they would yield better results than crop-fields on such terrain. The favoring of labor-intensive agriculture meant even more toiling for

[123] The *Geoponika* was a farming manual, compiled under the guidance of Constantine VII Porphyrogennitos (r. 913-959), which consisted of a variety of ancient texts on different aspects of agriculture, viticulture and animal husbandry.
[124] Dalby, *Geoponika,* 53.
[125] Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 8.

the dependent peasantry. The tools operated by the peasantry (detailed by the *Farmer's Law*)[126] would also be quite physically demanding, which has been confirmed through examinations of the recovered bones of peasants. These studies show that repetitive tasks such as lifting, carrying and squatting (all associated with field work) created great deformities and wearing-out in the peasants' bones.[127] As a result of the arduous nature of agrarian work, in most peasant households, women would also help out with agricultural field work, especially during the seasonal high-points. Pasturing was also a very physical activity, taking on a seasonal character too. The *Life of St. Paul of Latros*, from the tenth century, contains a phrase stating that peasants sometimes left their villages and lived with the animals for the whole grazing season.[128] It has also been argued that the middle Byzantine peasantry was up against an increased amount of physical work when compared to Western Europe. This is mainly due to the heavy plough with a mouldboard largely having taken over agricultural production in the West, while in Byzantium, due to the differences in soil and climate, the harder to use sole-ard plough was generally still utilized.[129] It should also be noted that the average life expectancy for those surviving their first year was only around 33 years, albeit this estimate is for the fourteenth century.[130]

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[126] These tools are the spade (*lisgon*), the two-pronged hoe (*dikella*), the knife *(klaudeuterion*), the sickle (*drepanon)* and the axe (*pelekys*). These are further detailed in the *Farmer's Law* (Νόμος Γεωργικός). Ashburner, *Farmer's Law,* ch. 22.

[127] Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 95.

[128] Kazhdan, "The Peasantry," 54.

[129] Even though the plough with the heavy moldboard was a very important and fundamental invention for western Europe, it is not really suited for the Byzantine lands. Because the heavy plough is best suited for very wet areas with heavy soil which requires deep tillage. Byzantine lands were generally drier, and the light sole-ard plough, which was the most widely used, was perfect for the job of scratching the surface rather than digging too deep pointlessly. The soil in the Byzantine case benefits best from light and frequent ploughing. The sole-ard plough has the added advantage of being much easier to manufacture and significantly cheaper. Both the Geoponika and the *Farmer's Law* are good sources for general Byzantine agricultural practices. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200,* 122-123.

[130] Laiou has stated that during fourteenth century the life expectancy was about 22 years at birth, 33 years for those who survived their first year and 47.5 years for those who made it to the age of 5. These figures are based on the Macedonian region. Laiou, "The Human Resources," 52.

The texts under analysis provide several relevant passages on how agricultural life was manifested. Several anecdotes by Skylitzes concerning the childhood of the future emperor Basil I (r. 867-886) provide an interesting glimpse at such issues. First of all it must be noted that, despite many sources indicating that Basil was of quite modest, agrarian origins,[131] Skylitzes attempts to legitimize Basil's noble origins by tracing his lineage on his father's side to the distinguished Arsacids of Armenia, and connects his mother's side to Constantine the Great by explaining how Basil's father married the daughter of a noble woman "said to be descendant" from Constantine the Great, which eventually yielded the future Basil I.[132] This fictitious treatment of Basil[133] elucidates Skylitzes' attempts at attributing a noble origin to the future emperor, for whom a simple agrarian origin appeared insufficient. In one specific episode, relating to the young Basil I, Skylitzes implies the inadequacy of an agricultural life. We are told that the young Basil decided to set out for the capital due to the agricultural (γεωργία) lifestyle being insufficient to support a sufficient livelihood.[134] The specific word Skylitzes uses is derived from γεωργός, which means 'soil-tiller/farmer'. This is interesting as Skylitzes appears to be subconsciously affirming Basil's peasant-origins by mentioning how he left his mother and agrarian field work behind to go to the capital, despite concealing it in his lineage-tracing sections. What constitutes a livelihood no doubt differs greatly between different social segments. In this case, as with all cases throughout this

[131] Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 118 (Footnote 11). It is generally taken that Basil I was of quite modest, agrarian origins from the Armenian region. Wortley's treatment of this subject features several articles discussing Basil's origins. Of these, an anonymous poem found in Markopoulos' work clearly shows Basil's modest origins; Markopoulos, "An Anonymous Laudatory Poem in Honor of Basil I," 225-32.
[132] Constantine VI is described as having given a daughter in marriage to this family, who would eventually become the grandmother of Basil I. The son of this marriage is described as yielding Basil I's father. Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 115-16; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 116-17.
[133] According to Wortley, this origin is quite fictitiously attributed to Basil I by Skylitzes, especially considering the amount of other evidence indicating Basil I's relatively humble agrarian origins. Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 118 (Footnote 11).
[134] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 119; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 120.

work, we are being guided by the mindset of the author in deciding whether someone's life is tolerable or not. These two episodes, therefore, appear to be Skylitzes' rendition of how Basil was actually destined for far greater things than a simple, agrarian life. Writing in the eleventh century with the benefit of hindsight, it is easy for Skylitzes to say that for Basil a traditional peasant life would not cut it, and that it would not be adequate for his true potential. While this passage, on the surface, appears to imply that the entire agricultural population was living in subpar conditions, inadequate for purposes of supporting a decent livelihood, it is more likely to be simply an instrument in Skylitzes' panegyric style towards Basil I. Furthermore, a few pages later Skylitzes announces that the entire populace of the empire rejoiced at Basil being crowned emperor (in the year 842), because they wanted a man like Basil who knew the hardships "suffered by the common people at the hands of the powerful" (οἷα πάσχουσιν ὑπὸ τῶν δυνατωτέρων οἱ ταπεινότεροι).[135] This snippet is quite ironic as it skillfully appears to turn Basil's agrarian origins into a positive asset by showing how the general populace, including the peasantry, rejoiced at being ruled by someone of their own. This is despite the fact that Skylitzes had previously argued for Basil's relatively noble origins, connecting him to the Arsacids and Constantine. While this could be indicative of Basil's identity being placed by Skylitzes into a category representative of a provincial *dynatoi*, the fact that Basil is represented as being knowledgeable of the hardships suffered by the common people alludes to his humbler origins. In this case, Skylitzes has arguably made a slip in his fictitious construction of Basil, by describing a possibly true reaction that the common populace gave towards the crowning of someone closer to themselves. In any case, the positivity that Skylitzes

[135] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 130; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 129.

attaches to Basil's awareness of the hardships of peasant/commoner life is quite interesting, considering the many negative connotations attached to words associated with the peasantry.[136] The above sentence also appears to enforce a binary distinction amongst the population by using together the complementary-opposite words powerful (δυνατός) and lowly/poor (ταπεινός).[137] These terms are part of the generalized Byzantine legal terminology, appearing frequently in documents such as those associated with land legislations. As our authors were well versed in such official terminology, these terms appear quite frequently in their own narratives too. These two terms were based more on social status and rank rather than on the economic wealth of the individual. The *dynatoi* were well connected individuals of decent rank (in the civil, military or ecclesiastical bureaucracies), able to intimidate/threaten those of lower rank and, in a fiscal-sense, were quite often large land-holders.[138] The *tapeinos* (also referred to as *ptochoi* and *penetes)* constituted anyone who was not part of the civil, military or ecclesiastical bureaucracy (without a proper social rank), who were generally poor. These individuals either did not directly own any property or were a peasant small-holders – and, as a result, were not exempt from the range of secondary tax charges that the *dynatoi* enjoyed.[139] The fact that this legal terminology affected the specific words deployed by our authors, suggests that rather than being indicative of their own personal views on the peasantry, these words had become part of the literary norm of the period. As such, the word *tapeinos,* which Skylitzes uses, was most probably not meant to belittle the

[136] This issue will be analyzed in detail in chapter 2.2.
[137] "οἷα πάσχουσιν ὑπὸ τῶν δυνατωτέρων οἱ ταπεινότεροι" Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 130; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 129.
[138] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 26.
[139] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 26-27.

social or economic standing of the common populace, yet, still, the meaning is inherent in the word itself.

Another anecdote narrated by Skylitzes, again relating to Basil's childhood, sheds light on the more specific hardships of agrarian field work. While narrating how Basil was destined to become great, Skylitzes mentions an episode relating to agrarian life. He describes how, in the summer, Basil's parents would go out into the crop-fields to urge and pressure the peasants (in this case described as θεριστής, meaning 'harvesters') into working vigorously and efficiently (ἔργον ἐντείνοντες), in a way goading them like animals.[140] They did this despite the fact that it was the "height of summer" (θέρους ἦν ἀκμή). Furthermore, in this same anecdote, Basil's parents have to craft a shelter/tent (σκῆνος) for their child as it is unbearably hot (θάλπος), and the "sun is so bright/burning" (φλέγοιτο τοῦ ἡλίου).[141] Later, we are told, that the sun managed to circumvent the tent and shine its rays on the young Basil, but, just as the child was going to burn from the heat, a huge eagle appeared and spread its wings thereby blocking the sun and protecting Basil.[142] According to Skylitzes this omen was a sure sign of Basil's glorious destiny. The importance of this excerpt lies not with the specific fate of Basil though, but more in the description of the toiling peasants themselves. These farmers, being goaded on by their overseers, must have been in a very hot and exhausted state on such a summer's day, considering that even those not doing any work could not stand the heat – such as Basil and his parents. This passage provides a few clues towards how landholders would oversee the activities of the farmers in the fields, monitoring their work, even during the hot summer months. The *Geoponika* also confirms the importance of

[140] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 118; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 120.
[141] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 118; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 120.
[142] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 119; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 120.

overseeing field-work by stating that the presence of a master would ensure that field-work was done efficiently without any slacking.[143] Furthermore, an excerpt from Varro featured in the *Geoponika* alludes to the high physical demand of field-work by explaining that a master should select male individuals who were young and physically durable to till his fields.[144] Arduous and difficult work was standard procedure in the lives of the peasantry, an idea that is also enforced by the nonchalant attitude with which Skylitzes narrated the above event. It is clear that there was no respite from open field work during the summer due to the necessity of conforming carefully to the agrarian calendar of when to plant, sow and harvest different crops and plants. If the correct timeline was missed it could easily result in a crop-failure. The agrarian lifestyle was, therefore, a very seasonal and regimented type of existence, which is easily exemplified through the third book of the *Geoponika,* which shows the complexity and care with which the agrarian seasonal calendar had to be followed. The third book, compiled from the works of Varro and Sextus Quintilii,[145] is divided into separate chapter headings for each month of the year which subsequently detail exactly what crop to plant, harvest and sow in each case with meticulous detail.[146] The fact that a tenth-century compilation is able to use sources dating from over a millennium ago shows the relative lack of innovation associated with agricultural practices and lifestyle. This is something which probably imbued the mindset of the peasantry in quite a conservative way. The importance of

[143] Dalby, *Geoponika,* Book 2,1.
[144] Dalby, *Geoponika,* Book 2,2.
[145] Dalby, *Geoponika,* 46-47. Varro was a Roman polymath and statesman from the first century BC who wrote a handbook on farming. Sextus Quintilius was a Roman politician of the second century AD who wrote on farming issues.
[146] Dalby, *Geoponika*, Book 3,1-15.

seasonality in agriculture is further demonstrated through many agriculturally important dates being associated with important saints.[147]

Two relevant episodes, from Skylitzes' and Psellos' narratives respectively, help typify both the importance attributed to agriculture and the literary manifestation of its praising. The first episode, narrated by Skylitzes, dates from the reign of either Theophilos (r. 829-842) or Michael III (r. 842-867), and concerns a figure commonly known as Leo the Mathematician, who was the archbishop of Thessaloniki and also a prominent philosopher. Leo was a tremendously learned scholarly person, whom Skylitzes describes as having mastered all academic disciplines.[148] It is through this scholarly interaction channel which Skylitzes explains how Leo helped out the farming populace. We are told that Leo, analyzing the stars (ἄστρον), gave accurate predictions to the peasantry about when to plant their seeds (σπέρματα) and reap them, as they were suffering from a terrible famine.[149] According to Skylitzes this enabled the peasants to reap great harvests from their crops, which lasted for many years. In this passage we have a very learned, high-ranking individual of the clergy, being presented as more knowledgeable about farming than the actual farmers themselves, whose entire livelihood depended on it. While possible, this scenario does not seem very likely. The fact that a supposed famine is prevented with Leo's words implies that prior to this the farmers did not know when to plant seeds and reap them – which is quite unlikely as it is their life's job. This passage appears to exist for the purpose of

[147] For example, the feasts days of George and Demetrios, which was the 23rd of April and the 26th of October, represented the times when animal herders should switch to summer and winter pastures respectively. These dates also represented the times of sowing for certain crops which had to begin around mid-April for maximum yield. This issue is further discussed by Sharon Gerstel; Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium,* 111, 118.
[148] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 101; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 102. Skylitzes' narrative features four pages (101-105) in which he describes Leo the Mathematician. This is quite a long digression, showing Skylitzes' admiration and respect for the man.
[149] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 104; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 105.

showing how Leo used his vast knowledge for good causes, representing the importance of scientific knowledge in agrarian issues. The fact that the 'miracle' described in this case comes from a natural source, that of Leo, and not a divine intervention, makes it remarkably different from traditional Byzantine miracle stories. Keeping its literary purpose in mind, this scenario is probably not entirely factually accurate. Nonetheless, it still demonstrates both the importance of seasonality in the agrarian crop-growing calendar and also highlights the importance attributed to agriculture by portraying even an archbishop helping out with the seasonal harvest. A very similar argument is also made by Psellos concerning Romanos III (r. 1028-1034), whom he describes as running his own estates so perfectly that he was able to forestall the seasons and reap great benefits from his crops.[150] Psellos further elaborates that, thanks to this, Romanos was able to lay off many of his dependent peasants (γεωργικόν) from his estates. This passage, similar to Skylitzes' episode concerning Leo the Mathematician, evokes the idea that a high-ranking individual (the emperor in this case) knew more about agriculture and its seasonal calendar than the actual peasants, an idea once again bordering on the edge of plausibility. Additionally, the fact that Psellos narrates this passage in a highly laudatory tone can be taken to show his lack of sympathies for the farmers of Romanos' estates who he mentions were dispensed with. There is no further mention of what became of these farm-workers, presumably they would have been forced to relocate and become wage-laborers elsewhere – a highly disruptive occurrence in itself.

The narratives of Anna Komnene, Eustathios of Thessaloniki and Niketas Choniates all contain excerpts which enforce the idea that physical strength in a

[150] Psellos, *The History,* 168; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 247.

leader was greatly admired by the peasantry, which is comparable to Skylitzes' description of how the populace liked Basil I due to his humble/agrarian origins. Physical strength was directly associated with field-work and, therefore, served to create an organic bond between the farming populace and the leaders they looked up to. Anna Komnene narrates how the peasantry (and also the military class) greatly admired "physical strength" (μεγέθει σώματος) and "arm power" (κράτει βραχιόνων) in an emperor and were not so concerned with his soul or virtue.[151] The exact term she uses is ἀγροικικὸν, which specifically means somebody living in the field (ἀγρός), referring to the peasants. Further confirmation of this trend comes from Choniates' description of a pretender referred to as the false-Alexios II, someone who was pretending to be Manuel I Komnenos' (r. 1143-1180) son Alexios II to gain the throne around the year 1185 (the real Alexios II had been murdered earlier, in 1183).[152] Choniates explains how the common multitude and the rural populace (πολλοῖς καὶ ἀγροτέροις) adored this false-Alexios due to his impressive sight and stature.[153] A very similar description of the same person is also given by Eustathios of Thessaloniki, even using a derivative of the same word that Anna had used; ἀγροτικὸν. He mentions how the young pretender-emperor Alexios had a very "sturdy physical appearance" (πλάσιν σώματος εὐπαγῆ), something which was greatly admired by the rural, field-dwelling folk.[154] Thus, we have words with the same root (ἀγρός), meaning "field", being used by all three of these authors in passages describing how these field-dwellers greatly looked up to physical strength

[151] Komnene, *Alexias, 1.7.2;* Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 47.
[152] Choniates, *Historia,* 420-22; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 231-32. False-Alexios was able to raise an army due to his physical resemblance to the deceased Alexios II and his father Manuel I Komnenos. Choniates appears to admire this man's capability in fooling so many people as he narrates this episode. Eventually he was killed by a certain priest, according to Choniates, but not before raising a large army and ravaging the provinces around Western Anatolia.
[153] Choniates, *Historia,* 421; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 232.
[154] Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, 60-61. καθ' ἣν μάλιστα τὸ ἀγροτικὸν εὐδοκίμως ἔχει – meaning "the peasants have great admiration" (own translation).

in a leader. Seeing the exact same idea across multiple narratives and considering that it does not appear to be a literary enhancement construction, indicates that the peasantry really did greatly value and look-up to physical strength. This notion is directly connected to the importance attributed to physicality by the peasantry due to its centrality in all agricultural work. Seeing such attributes in an emperor probably made the peasants feel more secure that the emperor would not neglect them. Incidentally, physical strength on one occasion is also attributed to the commoners of Thessaloniki by Eustathios, though the example in this case appears more as a comparison with the wealthy individuals of the city and therefore does not undermine the general association between farmers and physicality.[155]

The primary objective of any small peasant household (and the general agrarian lifestyle) was to achieve *autarkeia* (self-sufficiency).[156] Self-sufficiency was an obvious benchmark as it allowed for families to exist in areas far removed from markets, where many villages were located. It has been established that, aside from extreme circumstances such as famines, the average peasant household was able to produce enough to sustain itself on a subsistence level.[157] This self-sufficiency was not just associated with food, but also included being self-sufficient in all other areas of life; such as clothing, fuel and construction materials.[158] This ideal of not relying

[155] Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, 76-77. Eustathios describes how when the elite, wealthy people of the city were trying to flee away, they would pay the commoners (δημοτικός) to help them carry their belongings, because, the commoners had manual skills and were strong enough to fight and haul things (ὅσοι δεξιοὶ τὰς χεῖρας καὶ βριαροὶ ῥάβδον τε κατενεγκεῖν καὶ λίθον μακρὰν ἀφεῖναι – literally translated as; "right hands great enough to both carry great sticks/spears and to send great stones"). The dichotomy that this phrase fashions suggests that the wealthier individuals were less able (or less willing) to fight, defend themselves or do any sort of physical work.
[156] The idea of self-sufficiency is viewed as being a virtue in other textual sources too, for example, Alan Harvey exemplifies this through the life of Luke the Stylite, in which self-sufficiency is presented as being an ideal existence. For more information on this, see Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200,* 121.
[157] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 17.
[158] Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200,* 180-82. It is known that Byzantine villages often exhibited basic textile production to create simple peasant clothes. See pages 180-82, for Harvey's discussion on peasant foodstuff and related self-sufficiency practices. He concludes that in bad years the peasantry may have had to resort to markets and trading with landlords

on external factors was also materialized in the presumably widespread usage of the hand-mill by the Byzantine peasantry. The hand-mill allowed a peasant to personally grind his own grain without having to resort to markets or pay a tax on a water-mill (as the hand-mill was an untaxable household item).[159] The notion of self-sufficiency was embedded in the Byzantine psyche as one of the primary elements of a decent livelihood and, therefore, needs to be kept in mind when trying to conceive of the agrarian lifestyle.

Despite agricultural farmers being representative of vulgarity and simplicity (analyzed in detail in chapter 2.2), in the Byzantine mindset they were seen as honest and decent folk, especially when compared to lowly professions such as trading and banking (a topic fully discussed in the Appendix). This enabled the peasantry to achieve a virtuous existence in the eyes of the elite mindset, exemplified through the importance attributed to agriculture in these texts. Psellos, for example, features great praise for Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042-1055) being very enthusiastic about landscaping; that is the clearing of trees and leveling of terrain to create more fertile land.[160] Psellos makes this statement at the end of a passage dedicated to Constantine IX's devotion to amusements and recreational parks. This could suggest that this phrase is alluding to a garden-area close to the capital. But, the word "λειμών" used in this sentence indicates that Psellos is specifying a meadow or field, rather than a garden, which is also how Sewter has chosen to translate the passage ("a fertile, productive field").[161] What complicates this passage is Psellos' emphasis on the tree-

to supplant their insufficiency. But, this was notable precisely due to its somewhat extraordinary nature.

[159] This idea resulted in the Byzantine peasantry remaining more technologically conservative in comparison to western Europe, yet it can be argued to have aided the self-sufficiency which in the case of the former was plagued further by seigneurial constraints. For more information on the effects of the hand-mill, see Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200,* 132.

[160] Psellos, *The History,* 167-68; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 246.

[161] Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 246.

planting activities of Constantine IX, which could easily also apply to a garden in Constantinople (and would also appear to make more sense). The somewhat ambiguous nature of this episode makes it tough to pinpoint the extent of Constantine IX's interests in anything larger than a garden, yet, this excerpt still hints at the importance of planting fruit-bearing trees and transforming barren land into fertile fields. This is no doubt a metaphor aimed at elevating the panegyric tone of Psellos' descriptions, but, still it shows that agricultural activity was seen as a highly legitimate and important activity. Byzantine texts occasionally feature phrases using agricultural metaphors in a highly positive manner, such as Psellos' usage of how one should plant seeds of kindness to be able to sow the fruits of gratitude.[162] The metaphoric phrase "οὔτε θερίζων, ὅσα μὴ αὐτὸς ἔσπειρεν" which can be translated as "reaping less than he sowed" which Psellos uses to describe and praise the economic frugality of Constantine X Doukas with regard to state finances,[163] is another example of the centrality of agriculture even in literary customs.

Furthermore, returning once again to the preface of the *Geoponika*, compiled about a century earlier than this episode, agriculture was described as being the "staff of human life", constituting the most important element of any state, even more so than the army or the clergy.[164] A similar statement is also made in the 934 land legislation of Romanos I Lekapenos, which described the peasantry as constituting the backbone of the economic and military wellbeing of the empire and adamantly urged their protection:

[162] This example is again found in Psellos' treatment of Constantine IX. He mentions how the emperor did not plant seeds of kindness and, therefore, could not sow the fruits of gratitude. Psellos, *The History,* 166; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 244.
[163] Psellos, *The History,* 233.
[164] Dalby, *Geoponika,* 53.

> We have considered it advantageous that now no longer will anyone be deprived of his own properties, nor will a poor man suffer oppression, and that this advantage is beneficial to the common good, acceptable to God, profitable to the treasury, and useful to the state.[165]

Such examples served to elevate agrarian production to a high standard in the Byzantine mindset of the middle period, especially in comparison to other revenue-yielding ventures, such as trade and banking, which would gain precedence only after the mid-fourteenth century developments which shrank the empire's territories a great deal.[166]

Another indication of the centrality attributed to the agrarian economy is that whenever fertile land lay bare, emperors would strongly press for its cultivation. For example, Skylitzes describes how, in the year 1032, a grave famine and associated pestilence terribly afflicted the farmers of the regions of Cappadocia, Paphlagonia and Armeniakon. This resulted in these farmers fleeing their homes and migrating elsewhere. But, when emperor Romanos III heard of this, he ordered them to go back to their homes, even providing them with some money and supplies to do so.[167] The complete abandonment of several agriculturally important themes was not acceptable from the imperial viewpoint, as the granaries and cities depended on it. The importance of the overall agrarian economy, which had to supply Constantinople too, was seen as being far more important than the grievances that would be dealt on a few peasants by sending them back to these devastated areas. Romanos' reaction to the abandonment of these important agricultural themes must be seen in light of the

[165] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 55.
[166] Matschke, "Commerce, Trade, Markets and Money, Thirteenth-Fifteenth Centuries," 806.
[167] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 386; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 364.

general Byzantine concern with keeping as much land tilled as possible, as the tax revenue derived from these areas constituted the primary economic activity of the state.

The importance attributed to agriculture can be yet further illustrated through a counter-example provided by Kinnamos. According to him the Turks were "not yet trained in agriculture" (οὔπω γὰρ γεηπονικοῖς), but instead only drank milk (γάλακτος) and ate meat/flesh (κρέας) and were always "scattered across vast plains" (σποράδες τε ἀνὰ τὸ πεδίον), being "encamped there" (ἐσκηνημένοι ταύτῃ).[168] Living a nomadic lifestyle such as this is seen as very primitive from Kinnamos' perspective, especially the lack of agricultural knowledge garners his scathing remarks which is especially channeled through his contempt at their savage diet and living arrangements. This snippet provides yet further evidence for the importance attributed to agricultural production by our authors, as its absence, truly implies savageness in their minds.

2.1.2 Peasant housing and clothing

Climate related hardships were much more pronounced in the lives of the peasantry and this was, as a result, an often alluded to feature of peasant lifestyle in these texts. Choniates, for example, describes the terrible hardships of the countryside winter weather when the "doors of houses were blocked/binded shut" (θύρας οικημάτων ἐπιζυγώσασα) with snow.[169] and Eustathios mentions how during winter villagers were forced to crawl into their dwellings like hiding in a cave.[170] The difficulties

[168] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 9; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 17.
[169] Choniates, *Historia,* 398; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 219.
[170] This passage is translated from one of Eustathios' writings (Opusc 86.) by Kazhdan and Epstein in their work, Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 48.

associated with cold winters were not limited to just problems in heating one's home and self,[171] but, this was one of the most fundamental troubles. Anna Komnene, for example, explains the harshness of the climate in certain regions of the empire, and she seems genuinely impressed as to how people survived in these areas.[172] This passage by Anna is not specifically directed towards the peasantry, yet, the generalized awe that Anna exhibits concerning the ability of people surviving in these areas can be extended to many rural localities, such as villages located in high altitudes. By depicting the grim reality of such affairs, these authors appear to hold a sense of admiration for the ways in which the peasantry managed to cope with such weather-related difficulties. One way that peasants coped with the cold was by constantly feeding firewood into hearths, a result of which was that uncultivated, woodland areas became vitally important for villages as sources of this wood. Without this fuel survival would be close to impossible, though occasionally animal manure would also be supplanted as fuel if sufficiently available.[173] Recent scholarship has shown that wood and forest exploitation formed an important component of the local village economy.[174]

Combating the elements was a factor which heavily influenced the housing and living arrangements of the peasantry. This was manifested in how the average peasant household would stay in one room together with their cattle, both to protect

[171] Cold winters also resulted in difficulties associated with protecting the fields from long lasting frost which could easily disrupt the yield and result in famine. It must be underlined that especially field agriculture, but also animal herding, are quite weather dependent, seasonal activities.
[172] Komnene, *Alexias,* 4.3.3; Komnene, The Alexiad, 140.
[173] One way in which a lack of firewood could be supplemented was with burning animal manure instead. It is known that especially in parts of the Anatolian plateau, where wood can be scarce, this was a common practice during winter due to it being an easily accessible source of fuel. For more information, see Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200*, 128. Information on manure can also be found in the *Geoponika*, which uses excerpts from Quintilii, several pages of which are devoted exclusively to the analysis of the manure of different animals, how to use them and their different attributes. *Geoponika,* Book 2,21.
[174] Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 46.

the animals, and also for the warmth the animals provided against the cold winter weathers. Peasant housing was often extremely rudimentary and had to be built big enough to accommodate all animals and humans of the property,[175] an idea which has been supported by archaeological evidence (which is unfortunately quite sparse).[176] The sparsity of such evidence enforces the idea that peasant housing must have been constructed of simple materials.[177] Materials used would be locally available in the vicinity of the village. Wood was generally the main material used in combination with earth, clay and straw.[178] More endurable materials such as stone were not preferred, unfortunately for archaeological purposes, due to the difficulties in obtaining them. This resulted in these peasant lots being easily either translocated or ploughed over in later dates. Skylitzes' describes how many villages (πολλὰ χωρία) and their inhabitants in the Thrakesion theme perished in an earthquake dating from the year 927, together with "many churches".[179] Considering the relative sparsity of churches in comparison to actual village housing,[180] the inclusion of "many churches" in this sentence by Skylitzes is most probably a literary tool serving to juxtapose religion/piety against the wrath of nature and increase the intensity of emotions which this phrase evoked. In the highly pious Byzantine mindset, the fact that forces of nature destroyed many houses of God created an added sense of devastation and also served to imply that this was divine punishment

[175] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, Seventh - Twelfth Centuries," 245. Lefort has argued, based on tenth- and twelfth-century sources, that peasant housing was rudimentary enough that peasants could take it down and rebuild it elsewhere if necessary.
[176] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, Seventh - Twelfth Centuries," 244-46. Lefort features an extensive discussion on such evidence and what they imply.
[177] Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 10. Kazhdan also discusses this issue in his article on the peasantry. He mentions that scholarship is not very well informed about rural housing as it is both poorly documented in texts and difficult to identify in excavations that have so far been conducted. Kazhdan, "The Peasantry," 58.
[178] Especially monastic sources allude to the makeshift nature of peasant housing. For more information see, Kazhdan, "The Peasantry," 58.
[179] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 221; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 214.
[180] In general Byzantine villages contained one central structure acting as a place of worship, such a church – a topic which is explored in greater detail in chapter 2.1.5.

for the people. Nonetheless, this sentence clearly shows the lack of endurance which village structures exhibited against earthquakes. In another, similar episode, Skylitzes describes how a violent hail storm from the year 1034 destroyed many houses (οἰκίας πεσεῖν), churches[181] and also overturned crop fields and trees.[182] This phrase is preceded by Skylitzes justifying such calamities as divine punishment sent by God for the meddling of Empress Zoe (the daughter of Constantine VIII) in the crowning of Michael IV (r. 1034-1041). Despite their explanations being through divine intervention, nonetheless, these two anecdotes indicate that peasant housing must have been quite vulnerable to the forces of nature, due to its lack of durability. Such simple constructions, quite obviously, were not best suited at fending off the effects of other weather events such as floods or cold winters either. Cold weather could be partially mitigated by the proper positioning of houses. An excerpt from Didymos in the *Geoponika* describes that houses should be constructed facing either South or East, with East being the most preferable as it allowed for the dry East wind and the sun's heat to warm the interior of the building, without exposing the house to the damp Southern winds too much.[183] Especially areas sloping towards the West are described as being the unhealthiest locations.[184]

The issue of peasant housing is more directly touched upon in a few other passages from these texts. For example, during his escape journey from Thessaloniki, Eustathios describes how he was forced to sleep on a simple layer of straw/hay

[181] The usage of the word church in this instance is, once again, most probably a literary exaggeration. This time though, the word "most" is lacking from this episode and therefore could be more plausible. A few churches as well as many houses could have easily collapsed in a violent hailstorm.
[182] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 393; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 371.
[183] Dalby, *Geoponika,* 2,3. The author of this passage, Didymos, was an obscure Greek farming writer of which not much is known. He should not be confused with Didymos Chalcenterus of the 1st century BC.
[184] So that they receive none of the Eastern sun or the dry East blowing winds. The fact that this ancient Greek advice is still applicable is obvious from its inclusion in this farming compilation from the tenth century.

(χόρτος) in a tiny, inhospitable (ἄμικτος) house.[185] Eustathios is most probably exaggerating the conditions of his escape in this passage to increase the sense of grimness associated with his "intense" get away. Nonetheless, the idea that he slept on a layer of straw sounds indicative of peasant sleeping arrangements as attested elsewhere. This episode is also a good example of unnatural elite/commoner contact taking place, leading to the former properly witnessing the latter's lifestyle, perhaps for the first time. Kinnamos' narrative has a very memorable passage related to this topic in which he narrates how after Andronikos Komnenos, the rebellious cousin of emperor Manuel I and future emperor, escapes from prison (sometime in the year 1165) a group of peasants, near the Sangarios (Sakarya) river, recognize him due to his appearance.[186] Following this, the peasants (ἀγροιώτης) surround Andronikos, capture him, restrain him and take him with them to Byzantium – presumably to claim a reward for their great service to the empire. The entire passage begins by describing how Andronikos, due to the cold weather, had entered a wretched/miserable, little hut (λυπρός δωμάτιον) which belonged to these peasants. These word choices are indicative of Kinnamos' scathing attitude towards the dwelling conditions of the peasantry. The word λυπρός, which he uses, implies something so poor and simple that it is distressing. Leaving aside the literary hyperboles which imbue these two descriptions with exaggerated negativity, it is still obvious that figures such as Eustathios and Kinnamos found the peasant living arrangements to be quite rudimentary and simplistic. A somewhat parallel description is given by Attaleiates about commoner housing conditions in the

[185] Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, 110-111.
[186] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 232; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 175.

capital.[187] Furthermore, the living conditions of peripheral, foreign populations are filled with even more obscure and biased descriptions.[188]

The issue of peasant clothing is another difficult-to-study sub-field of peasant studies and not surprisingly the texts under analysis are not too abundant with such references either. Noble attire, on the other hand, is much better documented in the case of Byzantium.[189] Visual depictions of peasant clothing are clouded with mystery due to difficulties in determining their accuracy, as they often depict obsolete or classical/antiquated clothing customs.[190] It is likely that peasant clothing would have mostly been produced locally in villages and very rarely acquired from urban markets.[191] The narrative sources under analysis provide us with a few important clues towards peasant attire. For instance, in one case, Anna Komnene frowns upon the arguably quite common rural clothing consisting of a tattered goat's skin, worn in this case by a common soldier, which she refers to as σισυροφορῶν, meaning goat-hair cloak bearing (which comes from σισύρα, meaning a goat-hair cloak).[192] The fact that common soldiers and also the peasantry would wear these goat-hair cloaks, or at least are represented as such by our authors, is a feature present in Psellos'

[187] Attaleiates, *The History*, 136-37. He describes how some of the rabble who had been caught after rebelling against Constantine Doukas were placed in miserable huts as there was no room left in the prisons. These little huts are most probably referring to the dwellings of the commoners of Constantinople.
[188] A good example of this is Psellos' treatment of the Pechenegs. During his quite long digression on the Pechenegs, Psellos describes how they live like snakes in primitive huts located in deep ravines and inhospitable cliffs ("ὥσπερ ὄφεις φάραγξι βαθείαις καὶ κρημνοῖς ἀποτόμοις"). The Pechenegs in this passage are probably not very representative of the reality as Psellos' entire description is heavily imbued with political ideology, well exemplified through his usage of harsh phrases such as ὥσπερ ὄφεις (like snakes) to refer to them in this excerpt. Psellos, *The History,* 223; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 318-19.
[189] Peasant clothing is a field which we are not very well informed on. Noble clothing and attire, on the other hand, is relatively well documented and therefore we have a better understanding of it compared to peasant clothing. Nonetheless the few examples which will be sketched in this study aim at showing how literary sources give us a certain understanding of rural clothing.
[190] Kazhdan, "The Peasantry," 60-61. One example of this is that in visual depictions of people in Byzantine art, people are hardly ever seen wearing trousers, whereas written source material mentions such attire.
[191] Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200*, 185.
[192] Komnene, *Alexiad*, 296.

narrative too. While discussing the eroding of government positions by the inclusion of commoners and people of humble origins, a trend which is often highlighted by our authors for the eleventh and twelfth century period,[193] Psellos also uses the same phrase, "*sisuroforos"*. He mentions that because now citizenship is open to everybody, there are ex-slaves of barbarian origin and people who formerly bore goat-hair cloaks (σισυροφόρος) in government positions.[194] In this case Psellos is using this word to fashion a dichotomy between rural folk and city folk, with the wearing of a goat-hair cloak being representative of a rural life. This usage strongly suggests that these items were common clothing items for the peasantry, who constituted the majority of rural society. The fact that two separate authors use the same specific phrase, suggests that its usage could be taken as being a metaphor representative of simple/rustic clothing items, things which would have been easily produced in village localities. More detailed and specific information on peasant clothing can be found in Choniates' narrative while he is describing the portrait of Andronikos I Komnenos (r. 1183-1185), placed near the gate of the church of the Forty Martyrs in Constantinople, which this emperor had restored. Andronikos intended to use this church as his mausoleum and had a large panel depicting himself placed outside its northern Gates.[195] What is interesting is the context of the depiction. Choniates states that the emperor was depicted as a much-enduring laborer (πόλυτλας ἐργατικός) to convey a sense of populism. This depiction consisted of a large turquoise shirt slit down to the buttocks to allow for better movement, and also

[193] A further criticism about this issue is provided by both Attaleiates and Psellos. Attaleiates describes how during Nikephoros Botaneiates' reign, the senate contained a "myriad of men" in quite a negative tone, indicating his unhappiness with the eroding of social rank in the senate. Attaleiates, *The History*, 500-501. Similarly, Psellos describes with contempt how Constantine X had removed the distinction between manual workers and those of the senate, thereby allowing "people of the marketplace" to flood the senate. Psellos, *The History,* 105; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 170.
[194] Psellos, *The History,* 151; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers,* 226.
[195] Simpson, "Niketas Choniates: A Historiographical Study," 164.

white workman's boots (λευκός κρηπίς), both of which are suitable for fieldwork.[196] This is one of the seldom found sources of information which provides relative detail as to what the peasantry would have actually dressed like. The fact that the utility of the clothing is emphasized appears to confirm is legitimacy, as field-work would obviously require relatively mobile and endurable attire. This idea bodes well with other source material, such as several *praktika*[197] of the fourteenth century, which suggest that most peasant clothing was produced locally in their own villages.[198] Such self-sufficient clothing would be produced with utility as the primary motivator rather than style or appearance, resulting in practical items such as long tunics, buttoned caftans and leather footwear being common items of peasant attire, as identified by scholarship.[199] Not owning any shoes (i.e. being barefoot) also appears to be fairly common amongst the peasantry, a fact which is confirmed by a description from Leo VI's *Taktika.*[200] There also existed an important difference in mentality towards clothing between the peasantry and our authors. For the more elite population clothing was seen as a very important distinguishing factor of one's rank in society. An interesting episode on this issue is narrated by Zonaras, pertaining to a much older time period, as he describes how Emperor Julian (r. 361-363) sent for a barber (κουρεύς), but upon viewing the expensively (πολυτελής) dressed court barber said that he wanted a barber not a senator, thereby sending him away.[201] In this example Zonaras is depicting the emperor as being displeased with the attire of

[196] Choniates, *Historia,* 332; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 183.
[197] *Praktika* were Byzantine tax-inventories which listed the tax name, family, size and livestock of a property. They were created for the purpose of taxation, specifically for tax-collectors to be able to assess the correct tax amount to be paid. For more information, see Kazhdan and Constable, "People and Power in Byzantium," 168.
[198] Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200,* 185.
[199] Parani, "Fabrics and Clothing," 61.
[200] Dennis, *Three Byzantine Treatises,* 213. In a military tactic which required the soldiers to dress up as peasants, the explanation for dressing up as peasants also notes that the soldiers should go barefoot, which indicates that for peasants not owning shoes was a fairly common occurrence.
[201] Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, 35; Zonaras, *The History,* 162.

the barber not reflecting his proper position in society. Similar to how Julian is also uncomfortable that the palace cooks (μάγειρος) were dressed in "magnificent clothes" (ἐσθῆτι λαμπροτέρᾳ), and therefore sent for his own cook instead, who was dressed more modestly, 'like an actual cook'.[202] The idea that social segments should be distinguishable through their attire appears to be an embedded psychology in the imperial Byzantine mindset. The peasantry, with their simple and practical clothing, belonged towards the very bottom of this hierarchy. Incidentally, while for the agricultural populace utility and practicality are the main qualities which are representative of their attire, for nomadic, peripheral people the savageness of their appearance is the main quality emphasized. This is visualized through how Psellos mentions that the people of the Taurus (probably the Scythians) "look very scary and fierce in shape and in appearance,"[203] which alludes to their clothing being seen as savage.

2.1.3 Peasant Diet

The diet of the peasantry, which can be most generally described as consisting of the famous Byzantine triptych of bread, wine and olive-oil,[204] is another part of the conditions of agrarian life which these texts are informative about. In addition to informing us both about what the peasantry consumed, they are also indicative of

[202] Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, 35; Zonaras, *The History,* 162.
[203] Psellos, *The History,* 199; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 289. "φοβεροὶ καὶ τοῖς εἴδεσι καὶ τοῖς σχήμασιν, ἄμφω μὲν γλαυκιῶντεσ."
[204] Generalized descriptions of the peasant diet are quite abundant in scholarship. For example, see Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 45-46. The staple diet of most rural localities consisted of the famous Byzantine triptych of bread, wine and olive-oil. This was especially pronounced in areas with a Mediterranean climate, and in areas near to water sources it would be complemented with fish. In more mountainous areas this would change to incorporate more nomadic elements and a greater portion of animal products. Bee-keeping was also fairly common as was wine production/consumption.

how this compared to what the authors themselves were used to eating and drinking. Anna Komnene, for example, describes the unsuitable nature of a 'dangerous diet' (ἀπρόσφορος σίτησις) based on millet (κέγχρος), which she claims could cause dysentery and coeliac.[205] Millet is known to have generally been cultivated only as animal fodder, but in difficult times, such as famines, it was substituted by the rural population in place of wheat.[206] Therefore, it is quite understandable that Anna Komnene, who had probably never been reduced to having to eat millet, describes the practice as being quite dangerous. Another important issue pertains to the consumption of vegetables. It has been archaeologically established that individual peasant properties would, whenever possible, have their own small garden lots to grow vegetables.[207] The *Geoponika* also notes the importance of small vegetable gardens by mentioning how having a small patch of vegetables growing in proximity to one's house was important for health reasons.[208] A multitude of other articles in book 12 of the *Geoponika* also depict the medicinal importance of a wide variety of local vegetables.[209] A small patch of self-grown vegetables could greatly enrich the bland diet of a peasant, while also providing a safety-net in times of crop failures or other disasters. Interestingly, the elite Byzantines thought of vegetables as being

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[205] Komnene, *Alexias*, 13.2.4; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 400. "Προσεπετέθη δὲ τῷ βαρβαρικῷ τούτῳ στρατεύματι καὶ κοιλιακή τις διάθεσις τὸ μὲν δοκεῖν ἀπό τινος ἀπροσφόρου σιτήσεως, φημὶ δὴ τῆς κέγχρου." The context of this passage is the description of how the Norman commander Bohemond's (leader of the First Crusade and founder of the kingdom in Antioch) army was dying from dysentery which Anna says was "supposedly" caused by a diet of millet, yet, she says the real reason was God's wrath.

[206] It has been argued that the composition of grain-fields cultivated by a village would be dependent on the size of the animal herd that was maintained. For a large herd, with more animals to feed, a greater portion of land would be allocated to cultivate millet, oats, barley and rye, whereas the lack of many animals would be more suggestive of heavily wheat-oriented farming. Especially near market areas, such as towns, a greater concentration on wheat existed as it was more marketable. For more information, see Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200*, 126.

[207] Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 46.

[208] Dalby, *Geoponika,* 12,2.

[209] Dalby, *Geoponika,* 12,16-41. Especially the entry on cabbage is quite extensive, indicating that this vegetable must have been quite common in Byzantine lands. We are informed of a multitude of medicinal uses of cabbages, such as supposedly curing jaundice, splenetic illnesses, bites of pests, leprosy, mouth ulcers, tonsil sores and insomnia.

unhealthy. For example, Choniates, at one point, sympathizes with the poor people who are constantly forced to eat vegetables (λάχανον), describing them as being pale (ὕπωχρος) and corpse-like (νεκρώδης).[210] In the same context he also takes pity on people who are forced to consume only bunches of grapes (βότρυς), which are often stolen from nearby vineyards.[211] This issue is further elaborated through Psellos' 'warnings on vegetables'.[212] The idea that vegetables would make a person sick is very interesting when compared with today's very positive take on vegetables.[213] The underlying logic in the arguments of Choniates and Psellos is that vegetables, just like millet, would only be eaten when food seen as more superior, such as meat and wheat-products, would not be available. Such cases were obviously more common in villages, where self-sufficiency and potentially long distances to markets meant that whatever was present would be consumed. The issue of peasant garden plots is further touched upon by Choniates during a brief anecdote he relates about John Kamateros, Logothete of the dromos to Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143-1180). One day, Kamateros, while sitting on a river bank in some countryside location, spots a "small field of beans" (κυάμων γήδιον) on the other side of it. As he is quite hungry, he eagerly swims towards this little field, devours as many as he can eat and fills several sacks with these beans to take away with him.[214] The specific word Choniates uses, γήδιον, implies that this field was a small patch of land, most probably not providing food to some great landholder, but to the ones who cultivated it (i.e. the peasants) themselves. The fact that Choniates narrates in quite an impressive tone

[210] Choniates, *Historia,* 304; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 168.
[211] Choniates, *Historia,* 304; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 168.
[212] Koder, "Stew and Salted Meat," 67.
[213] This is a very interesting idea considering that in today's world the exact opposite is generally accepted; that vegetables are a very healthy part of any diet. Dark green vegetables and salads in today's world are quite representative of healthy eating in general.
[214] Choniates, *Historia,* 114-15; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 65.

how Kamateros "consumed whole fields" (ὅλας ἀρούρας κατεδαπάνα), could be because beans, being a vegetable, were seen as quite lowly and therefore, a Logothete eating so many would obviously appear quite daring. On a side note, the violation of the property rights of this small, private field is an issue that Choniates does not comment on. It is also interesting that this episode is preceded by a similar passage in which Kamateros supposedly drank one and a half gallons of wine in one go. This could also indicate that the episode about beans may have served to further highlight Kamateros' general gluttony.

The quality and composition of bread is another component of peasant dietary habits which differed greatly from its urban counterpart. Information on this issue can be found in Eustathios' narrative as he explains his daring escape journey from Thessaloniki during the Norman siege of 1185. During his long and arduous escape journey, Eustathios describes how he had to go for eight days without any proper bread (ἄρτον ἀκραιφνῆ), but instead had to make do with bran bread (πιτύρων) baked in ashes.[215] The exact same complaint and description is also featured in Nikephoros Gregoras' narrative dating from the fourteenth century; he complains that he was forced to eat terrible bread which had been cooked in the ashes by peasant households.[216] The concept of being baked in ashes appears to be a quality indicative of village bread-making. Returning to Eustathios' narrative, the author also explains that he was very upset that he had not had any wine (οἶνος) during his eight-day escape journey, and he explains how he was, at one point, given a liquid claiming to be wine which was extremely foul. The quality of wine would differ greatly among social layers. It is known that wine, mixed with warm water, was

[215] Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, 110-111.
[216] This excerpt is found in Nikephoros Gregoras' *Chronicle* which Kazhdan has a brief discussion on in his article; Kazhdan, "The Peasantry," 49.

quite common among the general populace, although it was often hard to distinguish wine from vinegar.[217] Nonetheless, alcohol was vitally important in pre-industrial societies, as it was one way to ensure the safety of what was being drank, in addition to the common method of boiling water before consuming it.

While not providing too much information on the details of peasant diet, these passages show that vegetables, inferior crops such as millet, bran-bread and vinegar-like wine were consumed by the peasantry. Furthermore, the way in which Anna Komnene, Psellos, Choniates and Eustathios narrate these incidents suggests that the elite populace did not prefer to consume these items. This is best seen in light of the importance attributed to high quality food by the elite members of society, a case well demonstrated by Psellos' description of Constantine VIII (r. 1025-1028). According to Psellos the emperor was an expert at preparing a variety of rich sauces and exquisite dishes in the kitchen, things which really excited the palate.[218] That an emperor is involved in cooking and gastronomy is suggestive of the importance attributed to high quality food by the elite and imperial subjects of the empire. The notion that the elite (and therefore our authors too) did not consume such substances is also visible in Choniates' remark that commoners often consume a substance called ζωμός - a sort of broth/soup - in the common tongue.[219] This instance, while not referring specifically to the peasantry, highlights the general discrepancy between the dietary customs of different segments of society; for Choniates the concept of broth/soup appears quite foreign.

The quality of drinking water was also a non-uniform issue among villages and cities. From these texts it is easily gathered that according to our authors the

[217] Koder, "The Food Supply of Constantinople in the Middles Ages," 117
[218] Psellos, *The History,* 23; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 57.
[219] Choniates, *Historia,* 57; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 34.

water in Constantinople was seen as being of decent quality as they often complain about the water in other localities. For example, Anna Komnene appears quite impressed as she describes the water supply of a rural area called Aretai, outside of Constantinople, as always flowing very clear and decent ("διειδὲς ὕδωρ καὶ πότιμον ἔχων ῥέον ἀεί").[220] This comment is indicative that the water in some rural areas was perceived as being quite bad, though, how much this reflected reality is questionable. The difficulty in obtaining drinkable water in rural localities meant that water storage was a very important factor in village locations and planning; many are known to have contained public cisterns for this purpose.[221] Psellos also alludes to the importance of clean water through his many metaphors which often juxtapose "clean, fresh-water" against salty-water or brine. Littlewood has identified that in Psellos' allusions pure freshwater represents the Christian doctrine whereas brine represents the heretic pagans.[222] Despite (or perhaps because of) the clear importance attributed to proper water access, the destruction of a provincial region's water supply is often hailed as a successful military tactic by authors such as Choniates, Anna Komnene and Zonaras.[223] Cutting off a region's water-supply was obviously an easier and much quicker method for ensuring surrender than forcing it into starvation, as thirst is a quicker killer of mankind than starvation.

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[220] Komnene, *Alexias,* 2.8.5; Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 94.
[221] Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium,* 41.
[222] Littlewood, "Imagery in the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellos," 15. This duality of freshwater-brine is a metaphor that goes all the way back to Plato and shows Psellos' admiration and love of Platonic metaphors and thoughts.
[223] This issue will be further explored in chapter 4, which is focused on military events and their relationship with the peasantry. One good example is provided by Choniates as he describes the siege of Didymoteichon in 1206. He explains how the river which supplies water to the population living there is altered (μεταφέρειν τὸν ποταμὸν) to prevent the water supply from reaching the people. Choniates further explains that the goal of this tactic was to conquer and leave Thrace in a condition where it would be inhabited only by wild animals (θηρίοις ἀνεικέναι μόνοις αὐτὴν εἰς ἐνοίκησιν). Choniates, *Historia,* 632; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 346. Such tactics are also visible in much older time periods. Zonaras' account features a clause describing the Persians using the exact same tactic during the siege of Nisibis. He describes how the inhabitants were squeezed by thirst (δίψει πιεζόμενοι) so that they might mutiny and surrender the city out of distress. Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, 60; Zonaras*, The History,* 173.

One final comment that can be made about dietary comparisons is to show that the agrarian populace was still seen as consuming a more civilized diet than foreign, peripheral (and often nomadic) populations. This point can be easily illustrated through Attaleiates' descriptions about the Pechenegs consuming foul/dirty food (μυσαρός τροφή),[224] and Psellos exaggerating this further by claiming that the Pechenegs often quelled their thirst (τὴν δίψαν οὕτως ἰῶνται) by substituting/utilizing their blood for water (ὡς ὕδατι τῷ αἵματι χρώμενοι), which was done by cutting open their own horses from the veins (φλέβας) and drinking the blood.[225] Following this he says that they ate these horses by hardly cooking them.[226] These comments show that being from a non-agricultural tradition merited the harshest condemnation of dietary customs from our authors (which is similar to Kinnamos' treatment of the nomadic Turks that lacked agricultural knowledge, discussed earlier).

Famine incidents are quite abundant in the narratives under analysis and would have a large effect on what the peasantry could consume. Considering that even the shortest narrative covers about a century and many of them overlap, when reading them, one tends to be misled by the persistence of such famine cases. Nonetheless, such incidents were part of reality and their effects were especially pronounced in self-sufficient village localities. Cities and towns often had granaries and stockpiles filled with extra crops/supplies in case of such incidents or could resort to markets and trading, whereas villages would immediately begin to suffer from such incidents. Most often famine cases were precipitated by bad weather which resulted in widespread crop failure. Skylitzes, for example, describes how the

[224] Attaleiates, *The History*, 52-53.
[225] "εἰ δ' οὖν, ἵππου ἕκαστος ἀποβὰς ἐξαιματοῦσι τούτους, σιδήρῳ τὰς φλέβας ὑναστομώσαντες, καὶ τὴν δίψαν οὕτως ἰῶνται, ὡς ὕδατι τῷ αἵματι χρώμενοι." Psellos, *The History,* 222.
[226] Psellos, *The History,* 223; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 319.

famously harsh winter of the year 927-928 resulted in a great famine (λιμὸς μέγας) and plague (ἀκρίς) across the whole Balkan region, reducing the "crops/fruits and the population" (τὰ πλήθη καὶ τοὺς καρπούς).[227] He further elaborates that the winter was truly unendurable (χειμών ἀφόρητος), and that the resulting terrible famine was "worse than any preceding it" (τοὺς πώποτε γενομένους ὑπερβαλλόμενος). This, he adds, resulted in so many people dying that not enough living people were left to carry and bury them.[228] All of this appears to occur despite emperor Romanos Lekapenos's great efforts to alleviate the famine by sending aid. The exaggerated depiction of mass unburied graveyards must be thought of in context of the literary customs of writing about plagues,[229] a feature which Skylitzes, like all well-educated authors, was following. The famine of 927-928 is the famously harsh one which resulted in Romanos I issuing his decree to prevent the acquisition of peasant property by large landowners through his novel dated to 934.[230] Due to the famine many peasants were in desperation and either sold their land off or abandoned it, to

[227] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 222; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 215.
[228] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 222; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 215. "ὡς μὴ δύνασθαι τοὺς ζῶντας ἐκκομίζειν τοὺς τεθνεῶτας."
[229] Skylitzes' plague description is, like all Byzantine plague descriptions, reminiscent of Thucydides' description of the Plague of Athens during the time of Pericles. Therefore, this description needs to be seen in the framework of classical allusions which further complicate issues for us modern readers by clouding the reality in a veil of obscurity. The idea that the plague was more severe than any before it is the most easily borrowed theme from the Periclean plague of Thucydides and therefore probably did not fully reflect the real situation. The fact that the generally accepted literary method of mentioning a plague is to stress its severity and the great loss of life which it creates gives us a glimpse at the well-established Byzantine literary tradition's general concerns and mindset. Plague descriptions become more acceptable, well written and 'literary' if these factors are exaggerated. The suffering of the populace, be it rural or urban, is being used as a tool the inspire horror and awe in the educated elite Byzantine's, who would have been the target audience of such texts. Further examples of such classicizing plague descriptions can be found in other Byzantine authors such as Prokopios or Kantakouzenos, whose depictions often seem to appear suspiciously similar to Thucydides and his description of the plague in Athens in the Periclean time. This results in us, as modern readers, being unable to learn much about the realities of the middle Byzantine plagues, as they appear to be hidden among the ancient rhetorical practices employed. Nonetheless, it can be said with a fair amount of certainty that a devastating plague did ravage the Byzantine countryside in the year that Skylitzes mentions, albeit perhaps not the 'worst plague ever seen'.
[230] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 49-51. This novel completely banned the acquisition of any property from village communes (*chorion*) by the "powerful" (*dynatoi*). Furthermore, any property acquired before the famine was to be returned to its original owner. This novel was quite a severe one, aimed at protecting the free, landowning peasantry from the encroachments of the *dynatoi*.

the benefit of the *dynatoi*. This event in a way was a precursor of a series of land legislations by the Macedonian emperors to prevent the obliteration of the small landowning peasantry by the great property owners.

Several other famine incidents are also narrated by Skylitzes, which demonstrate the harshness of such conditions. In the year 1032, for example, Skylitzes describes how the inhabitants of the themes of Cappadocia, Paphlagonia and Armeniakon were forced to flee their homelands and migrate elsewhere due to the severity of the famine.[231] Just two years later, in the year 1034, another famine struck through a hail violent storm which "broke down all kinds of trees" (τὰ δένδρα κάρπιμά τε καὶ ἄκαρπα) and uprooted crops (λήιον) and vines (ἄμπελος) of a rural region outside of Constantinople, resulting in famine.[232] Such famine incidents would induce cases such as those outlined above, in which the peasantry were forced to eat the so-called inferior grain, generally cultivated as animal fodder, such as millet (as narrated by Anna Komnene), as the alternative would be starvation. In one particularly severe case, Skylitzes takes care to note that both the "livestock animals drowned" (ἀποπνιγῆαι σχεδὸν πάντα τὰ ζῷα) and "the crops were uprooted" (τοὺς καταβληθέντας καρποὺς τῇ γῇ),[233] leaving the peasantry on the brink of starvation. Famine incidents could stem from drought or warfare and would often be accompanied by epidemics and plagues which would wreak havoc over the countryside. Interestingly, while such cases are documented for the eleventh century, there are no known famine incidents dating from the twelfth century, which is

[231] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 386; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 364. "ἐποίκους τὰς πατρίδας καταλιπόντας μετοικίαν ζητεῖν."
[232] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 398; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis,* 371.
[233] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 377; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 356. In this incident the cause of the famine is widespread flooding resulting from continuous rain from October (Ὀκτωβρίῳ) to March (Μάρτιος), which, according to Skylitzes, resulted in rivers flooding over and tree-hollows turning into seas (τῶν ποταμῶν ὑπερχυθεντων καὶ τῶν κοίλων πελαγισάντων).

possibly explainable through milder meteorological conditions during the latter.[234] Aside from weather effects, rural localities often also had to endure famine cases associated with military events. The common tactic of starving the hinterland of a city to force it into submission was quite often also employed by the Byzantine army. The effect of such tactics on villages will be further discussed in chapter four.

2.1.4 Rural travel and communication

The issue of travel, mobility and communications between villages and across the Byzantine countryside was quite a complex issue, especially considering that the limits of the empire's territories in the middle Byzantine period, while fluctuating constantly, consisted of areas which today make up more than a dozen independent nations.[235] Another issue complicating travel conditions was the numerous mountain ranges and large rivers which cut right across the empire's vast rural landscape, one result being that the main travel routes of the empire were determined by the locations of mountain-passes and river-crossings. The main, properly maintained arteries of transportation were generally those associated with military campaign routes and were directly linked to Constantinople (such as the *Via Egnatia*[236] and the so-called *Military Road*).[237] Skylitzes provides a detailed description of the travel route of the Byzantine army under the command of Nikephoros Ouranos (Basil II's famous general), which illustrates the main communication artery across the

[234] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 269.
[235] McCormick, "Byzantium on the Move: Imagining a Communications History," 3.
[236] The *Via Egnatia* was a long-distance road that ran from the Golden Gate of Constantinople to Dyrrachion and from there onwards to Aulona. For more information, see Belke, "Roads and Travel in Macedonia and Thrace in the Middle and Late Byzantine Period," 73.
[237] Belke, "Roads and Travel in Macedonia and Thrace in the Middle and Late Byzantine Period," 74. The so-called *Military Road* was another long-distance road that began in Constantinople and ran across the Balkans passing through Adrianople, Sofia and Belgrade. This was the primary route for any army campaigning in the West.

Balkans.[238] Other than such main arteries, most rural transportation was across paths which were often nothing more than goat-tracks, if they existed at all.[239] Sources show that Byzantine villages often existed in clusters of several, which would be relatively well-connected to other villages (especially studies of the Macedonian countryside indicate this).[240]

In comparison to the earlier periods (such as the sixth century), the sources of the middle Byzantine period feature much fewer references to the renovation or construction of bridges and roads.[241] This indicates that inter-village transportation would be largely self-maintained. Additionally, villages did not always have the luxury of being located near main-roads, one reason being that factors associated with warfare and raiding (which will be further discussed in chapter four) resulted in villages often being positioned in harder to reach areas to reduce the chance of marauders, bandits or enemy armies chancing upon them. It has been shown by recent scholarship that in times of instability and raiding (especially during the period from the sixth to the ninth century) many villages abandoned fertile areas close to roads in favor of harder to access, mountainous areas.[242] This situation was

[238] Skylitzes explains how Ouranos and his army as navigated the Olympos mountains (ὑπώρεια) to reach the fortress-town of Larissa. Then from there the army was forced-marched (ὁδοιπορι᾽ συντόνῳ) through Thessaly, going by the plains of Pharsala (Φαρσαλίας πεδίον) and the Apidanos River (Ἀπιδανὸν ποταμόν).[238] From there Ouranos and his army continue through the Aetolian Mountains (ὄρη τῶν Αἰτωλῶν) and the Pindos range, to finally reach Bulgaria. Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 341; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 324.

[239] Using an extensive range of travel letters, Belke shows that the only overland road that was kept in an acceptable state was the *Via Egnatia.* Most other so-called roads are in a sorry state. For more information, see Belke, "Roads and Travel in Macedonia and Thrace in the Middle and Late Byzantine Period," 85.

[240] Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 36. Sources such as the Fiscal Treatise of the tenth century clearly show that villages (referred to as *chorion*) existed in clusters of several nearby units. This is in opposition to the rarer and also more dispersed settlement known as the *ktesis*.

[241] This is especially prominent in the many references to the renovation and construction of bridges and roads in Justinian's reign (which is visible in Prokopios' *Buildings* text). A more detailed discussion on this is featured in, Avramea, "Land and Sea Communications, Fourth-Fifteenth Centuries," 62.

[242] Especially between the 6th and 10th centuries the Empire was in a near constant state of warfare, and this fact manifests itself in village life by lots of villages from this period appearing to have been located in hard to access areas, away from the fertile river plains which were better suited for

somewhat reversed in the more stable tenth and early-eleventh centuries, but nonetheless, many settlements remained in hard to access areas. The idea was not necessarily to be hidden/unknown location-wise, but to be in such a position that the treacherous journey up goat-tracks into a mountainous region would outweigh the benefits of the potential plunder in the village. This is all the more understandable considering that most villages were not identified with walls or any sort of defensive mechanism. The drawbacks of this would be that the less fertile soil and the harsher climate would make survival more difficult, yet it was obviously a fair trade for the peasantry.

Due to the lack of any direct descriptions or references that the texts under analysis contain concerning travel and communications amongst villages, such conditions can be inferred through more generalized examples. One of the most discussed details of geography/travel in these historic accounts is that of the infamous mountain passes of Anatolia and the Balkans regions, which provided key transportation routes through narrow and easy-to-capture choke points. These routes are generally described in contexts associated with military transportation, as peasant transportation is not an issue which merits any specific mention by these authors. Psellos describes these passes as being quite a daring journey.[243] Similarly, Skylitzes, in context of the Roman campaign against Samuel of Bulgaria under the reign of Basil II, explains that the Roman army would "enter Bulgaria through the mountain passes along the Rhodope Mountains and the river Hebro,"[244] a difficult route (δυσχωρία) with many narrow passes and valleys to traverse, which could easily be

agriculture. Towards the Middle Byzantine we have a slow transition of villages appearing next to roads, and fertile areas once again. For more information, see Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 40-42.
[243] Psellos, *The History,* 256; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 362. Psellos describes the mountain passes near Cilicia as being tortuous and terribly difficult to traverse.
[244] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 330; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 313. "εἰσερχόμενος δὲ ἐν Βουλγαρίᾳ διὰ τῆς παρὰ τῇ 'Ροδόπῃ καὶ τῷ ποταμῷ Εὔρῳ."

points of ambush. This description further aids the idea that places close to actual operating roads were more dangerous than remote locations. The lack of properly maintained roads and the difficulty of mountainous terrain is further exemplified by two other excerpts from Skylitzes. He describes how the Roman army commander Nikephoros Xiphias (a general during the reign of Basil II) approached Bulgaria using the narrow paths going up the steep Valasitza mountain (ὑψηλότερον ὄρος), which were not even proper paths (ἀνοδία).[245] Similarly, another general of Basil II, Theophylact Botaneiates, is again described as navigating his army across arduous mountain paths (the Stroumbitza Mountains in this case).[246] The above passages show us that even a large army, which would be difficult to goad along narrow paths (also illustrated by a passage in Eustathios' narrative),[247] was forced to resort to mountain paths and other difficult terrain to reach their goal. If even the travel of an imperial army, which would have fewer worries of small-scale bandit attacks, is described in such peril, it can be inferred that unarmed villagers traveling across any length of countryside were under grave danger from the elements and from potential hostility. It can also be inferred that most village paths were probably not very well maintained or even defined, as even a large army is described as having to utilize quite primitive pathways.

The weather was also a factor which would severely limit any sort of communication, especially in the deep winter months. Interestingly, Kinnamos explains that travel through the roads of Serbia was easiest during the autumn season

[245] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 349; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 331.
[246] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 350; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 332.
[247] Eustathios of Thessaloniki's narrative features an interesting story which highlights how difficult it was to travel quickly with a large army. His story is about Andronikos' march towards Constantinople with quite a small army. Eustathios describes how Andronikos purposefully delayed his trip, taking a very long time to advance close to the city, as this gave the impression that the size of his army was making his travels more difficult ("μεθοδεύων τῇ σχολῇ δοκεῖν βαρὺς εἰς ὁδὸν εἶναι διὰ τὸ πολὺ τοῦ στρατοῦ"). Eustathios notes that this was not the real case though, it was just an act to fool the capital. Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, 30-31.

as the trees had already shed their leaves, making the road much more accessible.[248] For us modern readers, whom the season/weather rarely has any sort of effect on travel conditions and possibilities, it is easy to forget how in the Middle Ages such effects were much more pronounced. This passage by Kinnamos reminds us of the dense foliage that could easily cover roads and make them more dangerous and difficult to traverse, hence his statement that the autumn season, when leaves had largely fallen, was an easier time to travel. Difficulties associated with such seasonal phenomena meant that the shipping of agrarian produce to central granaries or town stockpiles would could easily be disrupted. The condition of the road-networks has been identified by Decker as being one of the most overlooked mechanisms which controlled agricultural production.[249] Especially in the period under discussion the condition of such roads was not best suited for the hauling of large quantities of goods overland.

2.1.5 Popular Culture and Belief

The broad geography covered by the empire makes generalized descriptions of popular culture quite difficult. Archaeological evidence indicates that most Byzantine villages had some sort of structure which acted as a church (or place of worship of some sorts) and which formed the topographic center and focal point of the entire settlement.[250] This structure would generally be dedicated to a certain saint (quite often saints with relevance such as *polykarpos*, meaning "lots of grain", would

[248] Kinnamos, *Epitome Historiarum*, 104; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 83-84.
[249] Decker, "Agriculture and Agricultural Technology," 398.
[250] Documentary evidence for priests in the countryside also aids the archaeological proof on this matter. For more information, see Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 48.

be selected) and serve to unite the belief systems of the villagers.[251] Outside the 'safe' boundaries of the village, the world was seen as being gloomy and wild with dark forests and terrible demons lurking in every corner. Shrines, icons and other religious forces were seen as preventing this 'evil' from entering the village.[252] It has been archaeologically noted that most village boundaries were marked by stones, so it was also a physical boundary.[253] As such, from today's perspective, the Byzantine peasant had quite a superstitious worldview. This superstition, combined with the relative remoteness of some villages and the hardships of life, often spawned local religious practices. Laiou has shown that popular culture, in general, had a communal character, which indicates more social cohesion in such villages than was previously assumed.[254] Religious orthodoxy was generally less strictly enforced in rural areas, sometimes even bordering on paganism. Despite this, the superstitious worldview of the peasantry has been further represented by a study of Laiou, which illustrates the relative abundance of peasant donations to churches/monasteries for purposes of safeguarding one's spiritual and physical existence.[255] Another good example is found from outside the corpus of authors selected in this study, specifically the writings of Theodore Balsamon (a twelfth-century canonist). He wrote that the festivals organized by the peasantry often became so lewd that women had to flee to prevent themselves from being assaulted by other participants.

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[251] Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 29, 66.
[252] Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium*, 30.
[253] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, Seventh - Twelfth Centuries," 279.
[254] Laiou, "The Peasant as the Donor (13th – 14th Centuries)," 107-113. Angeliki Laiou analyzes several documentary sources to try and identify exactly what prompted peasants to donate to churches and monasteries in the 13th and 14th centuries. The sources she utilizes for this study include lots of monastery documents, but also things such as inscriptions of peasant donors. Church documents, on the other hand, appear to be lacking in comparison to the plethora of monastic documentary evidence on donations. These documents make it clear that donations were a significant portion of the monasteries' and churches' income. To what extent were these donations coerced, and forced onto the peasantry? Laiou states that at least some donations were made truly out of piety and a desire to be on God's good side, and also to get their name inscribed and be remembered forever. From this study it is visible that the Byzantine village, at least in the later periods, had a sort of social cohesion.
[255] Laiou, "The Peasant as the Donor (13th – 14th Centuries)," 117-19.

Furthermore, he describes the whole event as being very anti-Christian and then complains further about other pagan influenced practices that were taking place widely in such countryside localities (such as fortune-telling festivals).[256] This is not surprising as there exists ample evidence indicating that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, popular culture had begun to change.[257] It became less officially enforced with practices such as the carnival, which involved much greater public participation, gaining precedence.[258]

As they are generally written for the point of criticism, the texts under analysis feature a heavily filtered view on such issues, presenting us with remote localities full of heretic practices. Skylitzes, for example, while mentioning that Michael II (r. 820-829) was from the area around upper Phrygia (Φρυγίαν), which is around Amorion ('Αμώριον), touches upon the religious demography of the area in quite a negative tone. He describes the people living there as being very impious (ἀσεβής) and says that they belonged to strange religious sects.[259] The word "impious" is central in this clause, as it indicates how non-Orthodox practices proliferated in certain rural areas. The specific clause Skylitzes uses appears to be a blanket term to describe the area as being significantly divergent from the doctrine of Christianity enforced by Constantinople. From the Constantinopolitan perspective such dilutions of the true faith were seen as being unacceptable and garnered heavy

[256] Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 82.
[257] Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 83. Traditional Roman horse racing and circus shows were generally abandoned in place of more lewd amusements such as the carnival, especially in rural areas.
[258] The Medieval carnival, as described by Bob Scribner, was basically a "world turned upside down" as it consisted of a reversing of the natural order of things for fun. Everyone went into a mad frenzy in which gender roles, social roles and many other norms were ignored and often purposefully altered. These types of things were viewed with a negative light from the perspective of the deeply Christian writers of this period, both in the Latin West and the Byzantine East. For more information, see Scribner, "Reformation, Carnival and the World Turned Upside-Down," 303-29.
[259] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 25; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis,* 28. In the same clause Skylitzes also mentions that many Jews and Athinganoi also dwelled in this region during the ninth century.

criticism. To what extent pagan practices survived in a given area was heavily influenced by how accessible a region it was geographically speaking. In very hard to reach areas, such as the Rhodope mountains or the Pindus range, state authority was severely limited. This resulted in paganism and heresy surviving to an extent where it would have been impossible in the lowlands which had greater connections and interactions with the wider world and the imperial, Orthodox center (which would actively enforce Orthodoxy).[260] Despite such divergences, religion was still one of the main unifying factors across the territories of the empire, helping the creation of a "Byzantine" identity. This population-belief linkage was not exclusive to the Byzantine case either. The connection between the general populace of the Balkans and their own belief system is illustrated by Skylitzes. He describes how, in the year 864, the common populace of the whole Bulgarian region, when they heard of their emperor, Boris I, converting to Orthodox Christianity, rejected his rule and rebelled against him.[261] This was also a highly pivotal moment in Byzantine history, showing the widespread extent of Byzantine cultural/religious influence even outside its sovereign territory.[262]

In cases of peripheral, foreign populations, the tolerance of the state was much less pronounced compared to its relatively relaxed policies towards the "Christian" peasantry. This can be demonstrated through Skylitzes' discussion on the imperial policy directed against the Manicheans,[263] Psellos' digression on the

[260] Haldon, *Byzantium a History*, Chapter 3.
[261] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 91; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 91.
[262] This incident is a very important moment, marking the start of the Christianization of Bulgaria. It was the result of a contest between the Franks and the Byzantines to enforce upon Bulgaria their own respective version of Christianity. Eventually, under the rule of Michael III, the Bulgarian ruler Boris I was coerced into converting to Christianity for a variety of diplomatic reasons. This is an example of the widespread cultural/religious influence of the Byzantine outside its own borders.
[263] Skylitzes describes the horrific treatment which the Manicheans of the East underwent. They were tortured, murdered and their property was seized by the state. Later on, in his *Synopsis,* he justifies the resettlement of the Manicheans in a remote wilderness due to them spreading their vile and corrupt religion (μυσαρᾶς θρησκεία) in the eastern provinces. Being the "other" in terms of religious belief

Pechenegs and their belief system,[264] and Skylitzes' discussion about Romanos I Lekapenos' illegitimate son Basil's Scythian origins.[265] These comments are obviously also heavily tainted with political bias, in addition to religious dislike. A passage by Skylitzes explaining how the famous general Bardas Skleros refused to command a barbarian army and instead requested the drafting of Roman inmates, further shows the extent to which the dislike of foreign populations could be manifested.[266] While most late-Byzantine literature indicates a profound dislike/hatred of the Catholic faith, this appears somewhat less pronounced in the pre-1204 period, to which all of these texts (with the notable exception of Choniates) belong.[267]

garnered little sympathy from these eleventh- and twelfth-century Orthodox Christian authors. They show little to no sympathy for such populations. Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 92; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 93, 273.

[264] Psellos' long digression on the Pechenegs also contains information on the belief system and customs of these people. He describes them as a treacherous mass of people who worship no deity and therefore have nothing that acts as a restraining influence over their actions - which appears to be one of the important social roles of religion according to Psellos. The digression concludes with Isaac Komnenos marching against these barbarians with the purpose of wiping them out. The very negative light in which Psellos has painted them, therefore, serves as an excellent legitimizing cause to eliminate these 'savages' and serves to justify all actions of warfare against them. Psellos, *The History,* 222-23; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 318-19.

[265] Skylitzes mentions that Basil Lekapenos (also known as Basil Parakoimomenos) was often called a Scythian and a barbarian (Σκύθην καὶ βάρβαρον) due to his mother being from the northern Balkan region. (He originated from the Macedonian peasantry). This fact was, apparently, often used as a negative remark against him. Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 286; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 272.

[266] According to Skylitzes, the general Bardas Skleros refused to even lead an army composed of Arabs and Saracens, saying that it would not be appropriate. Instead he commands the nearby prisons of the East (φυλακή) be searched for Romans, so that they can be released and equipped/armed with weapons so that he can lead them onwards. "στρατεύματα μέντοι λαβεῖν Ἀράβων ἢ Σαρακηνῶν ἢ ἑτέρων ἐθνῶν τῶν τῷ Χοσρόῃ ὑποκειμένων οὐδ' ὅλως ἠνέσχετο, τὰς δὲ φυλακὰς τῶν ἐν Συρίᾳ πόλεων ἀναζητῆσαι ἠξίωσε, καί τοὺς ἐν αὐταῖς κρατουμένους Ῥωμαίους ἐξαγαγείν καὶ καθοπλίσαι." Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 334; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 316. Even proto-nationalist tendencies could perhaps be argued for this case. An imprisoned criminal of a Roman is still seen as being better in a Roman army than an Arab or Saracen individual. Eventually we are told that three thousand people were released from prisons in the East for this purpose.

[267] A good example of this is Kinnamos' scathing remark about how the German crusaders were slaughtering people of the same religion. Kinnamos, *Epitome Historiarum*, 74; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 63. In this excerpt, Kinnamos is rejecting to differ too much between the Orthodox-Catholic divide which had become particularly defined after the Great Schism of 1054, instead referring to both sides as the "same religion".

2.2 The perception of peasant lifestyle

The perception of the peasantry by the texts under analysis is a difficult issue due to several reasons; the plurality of terms which could be referring to the peasantry, the difficulties associated with extrapolating discussions about the common/vulgar populace on the peasantry, and the classical literary structures utilized by the authors, which often appear to substitute their real opinions. Each of these issues will be discussed to attempt an overall conclusion pertaining to the general views directed against peasants and their lifestyle. An overall picture pertaining to the reception of peasant life can already be perceived in the examples provided above. Several aspects of peasant life are described in a slightly undervalued way by our authors, mainly due to cultural barriers which created such an understanding. For example, Skylitzes does not appear to appreciate the value of achieving self-sufficiency as a peasant,[268] Eustathios is overly critical of peasant housing due to their difference from his own surrounding,[269] Kinnamos appears to exaggerate the misery of peasant living conditions,[270] Psellos and Anna Komnene both belittle the functional and easy-to-obtain attire of a goat-hair cloak (σισυροφόρος),[271] and Choniates and Anna Komnene describe the peasant diet with hints of disdain.[272] In all of these cases the authors are unable to penetrate into the actual mindset of the peasantry, instead using their own surroundings as a comparison platform. This automatically makes the

[268] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 119; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis,* 120. This passage has been discussed in detail in section 2.1.1.
[269] Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, 110-111. This passage has been discussed in detail in section 2.1.2.
[270] Kinnamos, *Epitome Historiarum*, 232; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 175. This passage has been discussed in detail in section 2.1.2.
[271] Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 296; Psellos, *The History,* 151; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 226. These passages have been discussed in detail in section 2.1.2.
[272] Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 278; Choniates, *Historia,* 304; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 168. This passage has been discussed in detail in section 2.1.3.

situation of the peasantry look very terrible and does not necessarily reflect the actual reality, an issue which requires great care to properly comprehend.

The various Greek words which can be directly translated into English as "peasant",[273] are often utilized in a somewhat derogatory manner. The mentality associated with such references is sometimes based on social rank, something highly valued by our authors. This is well exemplified by Psellos' definition of what constitutes the most important attribute of self-respect; "superior standing and rank in society".[274] This understanding automatically relegates the vast majority of the population, mainly composed of the peasantry, to a comparatively inferior standing. One direct utilization of the word peasant (χωρίτης) occurs in Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*, as she describes how the word 'peasant' is used as a derogatory term by one of the noblemen in Alexios' audience, referring to the emperor "sitting down like a peasant while the generals/leaders have to stand up beside him" (Ιδε, ποῖος χωρίτης κάθηται μόνος παρισταμένων αὐτῷ τοιούτων ἡγεμόνων).[275] The word used here serves to highlight the lack of a decent education and upbringing which the peasantry are representative of, resulting in them being perceived as not having proper manners and being unable to act in civility. A similar usage of the word peasant is demonstrated by Skylitzes. While referring to how the Empress Theodora spoke out of place, Skylitzes uses the adjective ἀγροικικῶς, which is derived from the word ἄγροικος which means 'field-dweller' – referring to the peasantry.[276] Here, again, we see the peasantry being representative of not knowing how to properly behave and

[273] Some of these are; γεωργός (literally meaning soil-tiller), χωρίτης (country-dwellers), ἄγροικος (field-dwellers), ἀγρότερος (rustic), θεριστής (harvesters), σισυροφόρος (goat-hair cloak wearing – a term associated with being rustic and poor).
[274] Psellos, *The History,* 56; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 103. This passage is directed at explaining Michael IV's ancestry.
[275] Komnene, *Alexias,* 10.10.6; Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 325.
[276] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 53; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 55.

speak. The one-sided nature of these literary sources becomes especially pronounced in such situations. The peasants are being judged by a set of norms which were not representative of their own norms. Why and how would a peasant know the customs and practices associated with being in the presence of an emperor or speaking in a highly cultured manner? Unfortunately, due to the lack of literacy among peasants, the only sources dealing with them are basing their comments on a comparative platform that would have been completely foreign to the peasantry. Incidentally, such allusions are still a common usage of the word "peasant" in many modern languages, such as English and Turkish.

On the issue of language, an interesting feature of Byzantine Greek is that the word ἄγριος, meaning "wild/untamed" is derived from the word ἀγρός, meaning "field/farm". Such word mutations result in seemingly numerous indirect references to the untamed nature of the peasantry. For example, Skylitzes describes the Russians as a savage (ἀνήμερος) and untamed (ἄγριος) Scythian race who live to the "North of the Taurus mountains" (περί τὸν ἀρκτῷον Ταῦρον).[277] In this case farmers are being equated with a savage, foreign race of people, whom Skylitzes probably does not have much factual/direct information on. The most ironic thing is that the Scythians are elsewhere described as being nomadic, so having nothing to do with fields or farm work of any sort. This case is not indicative of the generalized perception of the peasantry, but more an extension of the linguistics under discussion. Nonetheless, words are not formed and used in isolation from the people writing and therefore represent some of the underlying currents which connected the peasantry with an untamed/wild nature. This is not surprising considering the untamed nature of the peasant lifestyle outlined above (especially when compared to

[277] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 107; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 108.

city-life); such as very physical field work, rudimentary housing, sleeping with livestock for warmth and the increased risk of famine and starvation. The linkage with being untamed can be better understood through the relationship with nature. For the peasantry the forces of nature, such as the climate, were less controlled/tamed, while city-life was representative of a relative taming of such external factors through better protection and provisioning. The word ἄγριος can be easily contrasted with the word ἀστεῖος, literally meaning "from the town (ἄστυ)", but generally used in the meaning of civility and elegance (similar to English/Latin).[278] For example, during his anecdote on Thomas the Slav,[279] Skylitzes describes the former's background as being from "insignificant parents" (ἀσήμων γονέων), poor (πενιχρῶν) and of "barbaric origin" (γένος βαρβάρων).[280] Furthermore, Skylitzes is quite surprised that Thomas spoke well (εὐπροσήγορος), in a civilized way (ἀστεῖος), and had a decent appearance.[281] The fact that the word ἀστεῖος, derived from the word for town, is used to imply civility and elegance indicates that these qualities were associated with urban settings, which creates a direct counterpart to the above discussed usage of the word ἄγριος.

In some cases, the peasant background of certain figures was used against them, which is visualized by Skylitzes' and Psellos' treatment of Michael IV (r. 1034-1041). Skylitzes describes how Empress Zoe (wife of Romanos III Argyros) had fallen demonically in love with Michael, who was working in the imperial palace.[282] Together they contrived and wickedly murdered emperor Romanos III.

[278] "Civil" which is the root of the words civilization/civility in English, is derived from the Latin word "civilis" which is related to the word "civitas" meaning city and "civis" meaning citizen. This shows that such associations must have been pretty natural as they are featured in more than one language.
[279] Thomas the Slav was a Byzantine general of the early ninth century, mostly known for having started a large rebellion against the imperial rule of emperor Michael II (r. 820-829).
[280] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 29; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 32.
[281] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 30; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 34.
[282] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 390; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 368.

Subsequently, despite much outside protest, Zoe managed to secure the crowning of Michael IV as emperor by bribing the patriarch with 50 pounds of gold.[283] Then, Skylitzes goes on a long ramble about the divine punishment that God sent upon the Byzantines as a result of such blasphemous acts. For example, locusts swarms which devastated the fields of the Thrakesion theme are shown as being punishment for transgressing away (παράβασιν) from God's commands (θεοῦ ἐντολῶν) and for the desecration of the emperor Romanos (γενόμενον ἀνόσιον εἴς τε τὸν βασιλέα Ῥωμανὸν).[284] The interesting part in the way Skylitzes narrates all of this is that his harshest criticisms of Michael IV (aside from the murder act) are centered on him being from a humble and vulgar origin.[285] It is known that Michael IV originated from a peasant family in Paphlagonia. Skylitzes shows quite clearly that, in his opinion (which he also gives as the opinion of many other prominent figures of the time, such as Constantine Dalassenos),[286] such a person was not suitable for rulership. This view contrasts with Skylitzes' previous treatment of Basil I, whose humble origins were used as a means of connecting him to the broader populace. Psellos also touches upon the inferior/humble origins (ἔξ ἐλάσσων) of Michael IV in his own rendition of these events. He mentions how Michael's father was from an insignificant and unheard-of family, coming from some totally deserted (πανέρημος), far away (ἐσχατιά) region of the world.[287] The specific word Psellos uses, ἀφανέστατος, literally implies that Michael's paternal ancestry was completely invisible and obscure, which is obviously a literary hyperbole. The exaggerated

[283] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 391; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 369.
[284] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 394-95; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 372.
[285] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 393; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 370.
[286] Skylitzes mentions that Constantine Dalassenos, a prominent aristocrat and general of the eleventh century, protested against the crowning of Michael IV especially due to his peasant origins. It is known that Constantine himself had eyes on the throne, and eventually he was imprisoned during Michael IV's reign.
[287] Psellos, *The History,* 55; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers,* 103.

nature of this claim is further illustrated by the fact that the word is used as a superlative. In reality, Paphlagonia, which is located between Bithynia and Pontus, is not such a remote region as Psellos implies. In this passage Psellos appears to use Michael IV's peasant origins as a weapon of condemnation. The treatment of Michael by both Psellos and Skylitzes appears to be quite similar and is lent added justification by being shown as representative of a general aristocratic contempt towards Michael's crowning. What is interesting is that Skylitzes specifically mentions that most people simply accepted Michael without protest.[288] It is difficult to judge the extent of public acceptance, or elite disapproval, of Michael's crowning in an accurate manner, yet, the fact that both these authors are on the same side shows that the educated/elite populace were probably on the same page. Zonaras' *Epitome* also contains one case of a nearly identical flow of logic. The passage, while describing a period pertaining to the reign of Maximinus (r. 308-313) from the fourth century, was written in the early-twelfth century and therefore serves to highlight Zonaras' perceptions. He features very scathing remarks about Maximinus due to him originally being a sheep-herder and then later ascending the social ladder by becoming a soldier and then an emperor.[289] The concept of such vast upwards social mobility (a pastoral peasant becoming an emperor) appears to be sufficient enough to garner the criticisms of Zonaras. All these excerpts show that extensive upwards social mobility, especially out of peasant origins, was used as a means to blame the shortcomings of certain figures. Being of peasant origin did not outright garner condemnation, a fact exemplified by Skylitzes' laudatory treatment of Basil I's peasant background, but in cases where a critical stance was to be taken about a certain emperor it was easily utilized as a means of attacking and belittling him.

[288] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 392; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 370.
[289] Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum,* 574; Zonaras, *The History,* 42.

Not all references to the peasantry are tainted with such arguably negative allusions. Especially passages discussing agriculture and the hardships associated with it are full of praise and amazement as to its conduct. Aside from the repeated mention of how important agriculture is for the maintenance of city-life and the entire empire, the physicality associated with it garners the most extensive coverage. For example, Skylitzes' narrative about the young Basil I visiting a field,[290] while highlighting the physical hardships associated with fieldwork, also evokes quite a positive reaction from Skylitzes. He appears to be quite impressed by their ability to work under such conditions. The passages of Anna Komnene, Choniates and Eustathios who all used to same word, ἀγροικικὸν, to refer to the peasantry, all exhibited the same kind of perception towards them.[291] The main theme in these excerpts was the physicality of field-work and how it imbued the mindset of the peasantry to value such features. It is not surprising that people working the fields would view physical strength as being a more important feature than somebody not utilizing their full physical potential such as Anna Komnene, Choniates or Eustathios would have seen it.

Aside from the direct references to peasants and their lifestyle featured above, the narratives also feature a range of indirect allusions to the peasantry. One extended way of inferring information pertaining to the peasantry is to look at the authors' views of terms such as common (κοινός), lowly (χθαμαλός), uneducated (ἰδίωτις), invisible (ἀφανέστατος), beggar (ἀγύρτης), weak/unimportant (φλαῦρος), pitiable (οἰκτρός) and lowly (ταπεινός), used as the opposite of powerful (δυνατός).

[290] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 118; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 120. This passage has been discussed in detail in section 2.1.1.
[291] Komnene, *Alexias, 1.7.2;* Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 47; Choniates, *Historia,* 421; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 232; Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, 60-61. All of these passages have been discussed in detail in section 2.1.1.

Such words refer to the common populace in general, including urban and rural society, unlike the more specific terms analyzed above, which referred exclusively to the peasantry. Yet they merit a brief discussion due to their natural connection with the perception of different segments of society, including the peasantry. Many of these comments are featured within descriptions on the background of certain figures. Some examples are; Choniates' treatment of John Axouch (a high-ranking bureaucrat under John II Komnenos who was of Turkish origin),[292] and Skylitzes' treatment of John Lazares using the word ἀγυρτός, meaning beggar and the phrase "not being worthy of mention" (μηδενὸς ἄξιον λόγου).[293] A flow of logic parallel to Psellos' and Zonaras' treatment of emperors of peasant origin is manifested in such cases, only with a much broader spectrum. The idea that a person of humble origins could attain high-rank and bring his uncultivated, simple and primitive views to the elite circles which these authors also belong to, appears to be a permanent fear embedded in the psyche of the latter.

Another channel of commentary is exhibited in numerous passages concerning the vulgar language of commoners. Some examples are; Anna Komnene's description of a song being sung by the Byzantine soldiers as being in the "dialect of the unlearned" (ἰδιώτιδι διηρμοσμένον),[294] Anna's mention of the vocabulary differences of the "common tongue" (ἰδιῶτις γλῶττα) from her own,[295]

[292] Choniates describes how people appeared to like John Axuch, despite his lowly origins. Lowly origins were such a large barrier that Choniates appears quite impressed that this man was loved by the people despite his humble background. "ἀτὰρ τὸ εὐγενὲς τῆς γνώμης καί ἐλευθέριον τὸ μὴ ἔχον οὕτω τοῦ γένους τὰ πολλὰ συνεσκίαζε καί ποθεινὸν παρὰ πᾶσι τὸν Ἄξούχ ἀπειργάζετο." Choniates, *Historia,* 10; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 8.

[293] This man, who obviously was not actually a beggar, is being described with such adjectives by Skylitzes to use his background as a platform to criticize him. The social mobility which John Lazares undergoes thanks to his personal, very close friendship with emperor John II Komnenos, has obviously deeply troubled Skylitzes. Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 194; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 189.

[294] Komnene, *Alexias,* 12.6.5; Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 385.

[295] Anna refers to how the uneducated people call mountain-passes differently from the educated populace. Here she uses the phrase (ἅπερ κλεισούρας ἡ ἰδιῶτις οἶδε γλῶττα καλεῖν). Komnene, *Alexias,* 10.2.4; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 297. Sewter has translated as being 'ordinary people'. I do not

Choniates' references to the different terminology utilized by the commoners (κοινή),[296] Kinnamos' attribution of a different term utilized for the word "scab" by the uneducated (ἰδιῶτις),[297] similarly his condemnation of the commoners referring to a camp as a trench instead,[298] Psellos' description of how the common multitude called Constantine IX as εὐεργέτης (well-doer) while he referred to the emperor as μονόμαχος,[299] Attaleiates' insistence that what the common people refer to as the Pechenegs should be called Scythians instead,[300] and Kinnamos' lament that the people now call Heraklea by the vulgar name of Pelagonia.[301] In the numerous examples summarized above, the dichotomy that is presented is mainly enforced by the gaping chasm separating the vulgar *koine* Greek of the masses and the increasingly complicated Atticizing Greek enforced by the educated figures, which was especially pronounced in this period. Words such as uneducated (ἰδιῶτις) and

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think the phrase 'ordinary people' does justice to the implications of this specific sentence. While the people Anna is referring to are ordinary in the sense that they make up the vast majority of the population, they are not seen as being ordinary in the sense of being normal. For these elite authors norms belong to their own sociocultural background and many qualities and ideas associated with the rural multitude, as a result, constitute an extraordinary and therefore quite negative divergence from these norms. In this case, when looking at the phrasing choices of Anna it is clear that she attributes a deeper meaning to this portion of society (which includes the peasantry); the fact that they are the uncultivated and cultureless segment. This is evoked by her conscious choice of the word ἰδιῶτις, meaning 'uneducated', used to refer to the common multitude.

[296] In this instance Choniates refers to this different terminology using the phrase; "ἡ κοινή καί πάνδημος φράσις". Choniates, *Historia*, 126; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 72. It appears that he is implying its vulgarity and simplicity.

[297] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 24; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 28. "ὃν ἐκδηρὰν οἱ πολλοὶ ἰδιωτικῶς ὀνομάζουσι." In this instance Kinnamos is using the same word ἰδιῶτις, meaning uneducated, to refer to the general common, non-elite populace.

[298] Kinnamos explains how the uneducated masses (οἱ πολλοί ἰδιωτίζοντες) vulgarly refer to Desa's camp (Δεσὲ χάρακα) as a 'trench' (ταφρεία) instead. Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 214; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 162.

[299] Psellos, *The History,* 215; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 309. μονόμαχος, which was Constantine IX's family name, is an adjective meaning 'the one who fights alone'.

[300] Attaleiates, *History*, 52-53. This example is closely tied to the classicizing terminology employed by these authors, it was part of the literary custom. Attaleiates describes the Scythians by noting that the common people call them Pechenegs (Σκύθαι δέ, Πατζινάκους οἶδεν ὁ δημώδης λόγος καλεῖν). Attaleiates knows that the general populace uses this nomenclature, yet, again we witness that the elite minority are unable to give up their classical terminology.

[301] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 127; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 100. Kinnamos appears quite sad when he explains how the Romans now call Heraklea by the different, vulgar name of Pelagonia. By the today's norms it is almost an established fact that the inhabitants of a place should have the primary say in what that place is to be called. Whereas in this case Kinnamos is insisting on an outdated vocabulary due to his classicizing education.

common (κοινή), while not specifically directed against the peasantry, obviously also include them as their objects. These examples serve to highlight the increasing distance between the commoners and the elite subjects of the empire which was further exasperated by classicizing, archaic language norms. This is an issue which contrasts sharply with episodes of apparent humility exhibited by our authors.[302] This whole idea is also tied into the general lack of literacy among the peasantry. It has been proposed that at least 30 percent of the rural populace must have had at least an elementary degree of literacy and numeracy.[303] This is indicated through a fiscal document decreed by Basil I in the year 867, which states that fractional number should be written in full form so that the peasantry could understand it (*agroikoi*).[304] Obviously such capabilities were far removed from the high levels of complex literary abilities exhibited by the authors of our narratives, and especially the widely differing terminology among these groups, as illustrated, became an outlet of contempt directed against the peasantry.

These narratives also feature many passages with a general disdain directed towards common or poor people. Such comments complement the existing discussion on the perception of the peasantry by serving as supporting material to understand the partitioning of society which existed in the minds of the authors. A few key examples are; Skylitzes' several implications that poor people cannot pose a

[302] For example, in one instance Psellos describes how emperor Komnenos left the study of learning/rhetoric (φιλολογέω) to the lesser folk such as himself and other ordinary people (ἰδιώτης). Psellos, *The History,* 212; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 305. Here Psellos seems to be grouping himself with these lesser folks in a show of humility towards the emperor. Without a doubt this is a literary device aimed at complementing his great several-pages-long panegyric towards Isaac Komnenos. In reality, from his other comments, it is clear that Psellos was not, and did not view himself as, part of the common or lowly populace. This is an example of the true meaning of Psellos' humility and apparent humbleness being distorted by the devices of literary rhetoric and customs, which he clearly loved to show off.
[303] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 19-20.
[304] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 20.

threat to imperial authority,[305] a similar treatment of low-born commoners by Choniates using the word φλαῦρος (weak/unimportant),[306] Eustathios' description of how noblemen and the vulgar multitude were forced to mix[307] and his explanation that commoners have no fear as they have nothing to lose,[308] Psellos' description of city registers now also containing the unimportant (ἀγενής) multitude,[309] Attaleiates' usage of the word φιλόπτωχον (a word derived from φιλό + πτωχον literally meaning a "lover of the poor") to describe Constantine X Doukas (r. 1059-1067),[310] and Skylitzes' criticism of the ruler of Iberia, Pankratios, for transferring his loyalty to a commoner.[311] These examples show how being lowly or common was quite often

[305] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 217; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 210-11. Skylitzes describes how when provincial revolt leaders Adrian Chaldos and Tatzates the Armenian captured a fortress called Paiperte, they decide to blind all of the important men and take their property (ἀποτυφλώσας καὶ τὰς οὐσίας δημεύσας), but let the unimportant poor people go free (τοὺς δὲ πενιχροὺς καὶ ἀσήμους ἀθῴους κελεύσας), allowing them to do as they pleased. Obviously, no threat from such insignificant people was possible in the minds of these generals. Another example is when Skylitzes describes in shock how a rebel army destroyed the houses of not only the powerful/elite, but also those of the pitiable commoners (οἰκτρός). Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 258; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 248. This is shocking for him because the pitiable masses do not pose a threat therefore do not warrant destruction.

[306] Choniates, *Historia,* 389-90; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 214. Choniates provides a similar story when he explains how the lowborn commoners (φλαῦρος) found their properties completely untouched when they returned from aiding a rebel army, whereas more influential/wealthy individuals were in danger of being barred and losing all of their property. The word φλαῦρος literally means weak/unimportant, it is noteworthy that Choniates selects this very scathing word to refer to these people. The main reason for this difference is the fact that the former did not pose a legitimate threat to the imperial polity in the eyes of the emperor, whereas he had to be wearisome of the latter.

[307] Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, 54-55. Eustathios explains that the emperor forced many high ranking, distinguished men to join the vulgar multitudes (εἰ τοσούτους καὶ τοιούτους λογάδας, τοὺς μὲν ἀπήγαγεν εἰς τοὺς πλείονας).

[308] Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, 42-43. Eustathios mentions how commoners (κοινός) are less frightened by threats as they have no property to be worried about losing (οὓς οὐδεν τι ἐκφοβεῖ διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν πρᾶγμα).

[309] Psellos, *The History,* 150; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 225. Psellos states that in proper cities the registers record the names of not only noble citizens but also of the common masses. The specific word he uses here is ἀγενής which basically means somebody of no decent background or family – which is no doubt most people in such cities.

[310] Attaleiates, *Historia*, 138-39. Attaleiates describes the emperor as being very good towards the poor people using the word φιλόπτωχον, literally meaning a "lover of the poor.". Here it is understood that the emperor was quite compassionate against commoners/peasants in general. The fact that the emperor's compassion is emphasized suggests that not many emperors were seen as being so lenient towards poor people.

[311] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 448; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 421. While referring to the disloyalty of Pankratios, chieftain of Iberia, Skylitzes mentions that he had betrayed the Romans by transferring his support to "a commoner, a slave and a rebel." (ἀνδρὶ ἰδιώτῃ καὶ δούλῳ καὶ ἀποστάτῃ). Out of these three words, the latter two δοῦλος (slave) and ἀποστάτης (deserter/rebel) are clearly negative adjectives, placed to discriminate against this non-Roman person. The fact that ἰδιώτης (common) is grouped together with these two derogatory words indicates that being a commoner was

indicative in itself of a certain stereotypical treatment by these authors. The references above are often not exclusive to the peasantry and sometimes do not even include them, yet they deserved a brief mention to highlight the psyche surrounding the Byzantine elite. The examples pertaining directly to the peasantry are better appreciated and understood with the benefit conferred upon us through the hindsight gained by realizing the elite perception of what 'being a commoner' or 'being of lowly origin' implied. Psellos' and Skylitzes' episodes of disdain towards Michael IV's peasant origin, for example, appear well fitting for a mindset that was used to enforcing strict social barriers through dichotomies such as noble/unimportant or elite/common.

viewed with significant negative disdain. It may be too far to argue that being a commoner was seen as being close to a rebel or a slave, yet nonetheless the sentence structure suggests such a usage.

CHAPTER 3

THE ECONOMIC AND LEGAL STANDING OF THE PEASANTRY

3.1 Village taxation

Rural taxation was not a uniform or simple matter, it was complicated by the fact that some villagers were landowners and paid tax directly to the state, others worked in estates under a powerful landholder as *paroikoi*[312] and paid rent taxes (*telos)* to them.[313] While *paroikoi* paid on average about twice as much rent tax compared to 'independent' peasants, they gained many advantages from being protected by a powerful landowner, which was very important in rural areas where state power was often difficult to project,[314] in addition to certain other rights.[315] On top of this binary distinction in the land taxes, there were also numerous exceptions and other taxes levied on the peasantry depending on their official category and property listings (including their livestock listings).[316] Additionally, in some cases the dependent peasantry also had corvée labor services (*angareiai*) which they owed to their landholders.[317] Furthermore, as many of our authors allude to (which will be

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[312] The word "*paroikoi"* refers to the dependent peasantry who worked the lands or pastures of a landowner. The first usage of the technical sense of the term *paroikoi* to designate the dependent peasantry is dated to the tenth century from a judicial document ordered by the *magistros* Kosmas who served under the reign of emperor Romanos Lekapenos. These first grants of *paroikoi* appear to have been given to several monastic foundations. From the eleventh century onwards, the word becomes much more commonly featured in documentary material. For more discussion on this issue, see Kaplan, "The Producing Population," 154.

[313] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, Seventh - Twelfth Centuries," 237.

[314] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, Seventh - Twelfth Centuries," 238.

[315] One of the most fundamental of these 'rights' was that concerning land settlement. From the tenth century or so onwards, it was decreed that if a *paroikos* had settled a piece of land for at least 30 years then the landowner was not allowed to expel him from the land - he had basic living rights. This issue is noted through the *Peira*. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200,* 45.

[316] On top of the base property tax (*telos*) there were also numerous other taxes which could be levied on the peasantry of *paroikoi* status. Some examples of which are the *mandriatikon* tax collected from animal-pens, the *choirodekateia* or 'pig-tithe', the *melissoennomion* which was a bee-pasturage tax, more general livestock taxes such as the *opheleia* and taxes associated with fairs and other events. Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia,* 390-93.

[317] Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia,* 394. This was commonly 12 days of labor service per year.

analyzed shortly), there were often extraordinary additional taxes levied in times of crisis or social disruption. All of these complications meant that tax assessment and extraction was a fairly delicate procedure. Taxation revenue was a tremendously important source of income for the state treasury and this added to the delicacy of the issue. It was imposed on villages in a collective fashion, meaning the entire village was seen as a single fiscal unit from the official administrative point of view.[318] This resulted in a collective responsibility for the payment of taxes, which is a very foreign concept from today's quite individualistic Western society's perspective. The collective payment of taxes is of paramount importance to understanding the village community as an organic entity. Whether or not this tax was received in cash or kind was primarily driven by the provision requirements of Constantinople and was usually assessed separately for different regions[319] – an issue which will be analyzed through the texts.

3.1.1 General views of taxation and its mechanisms

The state and large landholders, the latter who had gained increased power and lands during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, were in a perpetual struggle to reap the benefits of the agricultural revenue derived from the Empire's vast landscape. This 'land-tax' was a major source of income for each of these respective actors. A fitting starting point for this chapter would be to understand the perception of this land-tax by both the land-holders/state and the peasantry; the two main actors in such

[318] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 281.
[319] Frankopan, "Land and Power in the Middle and Later Period," 114. Frankopan underlines that the provisioning of the capital was the central pillar of the Byzantine economy, it dictated matters of commercial exchange, social evolution, economic development, taxation, the expression of power in political and cultural spheres and much more.

transactions. The former can be demonstrated through a simple glance at the terminology associated with tax revenue. Anna Komnene, for example, uses the phrase "profit/fruit shares" (καιρός μέρος) to refer to this tax revenue.[320] The fact that Anna uses the word fruit/profit (καιρός) to mention this tax income implies that it was seen as a sort of reward for the landowner, rather than a bland legal transaction. This reward mechanism serves to justify the landowner receiving this income for the management and protection of his properties. It psychologically turns the whole dichotomy around; instead of the peasants paying an obligatory tax, it appears as if the landowner is receiving the rightful fruits of his landowning privileges. It softens the psychological burden on the peasantry from the perspectives of the tax-receivers. This reference, which Anna Komnene makes in context of a large estate, also shows the importance that large landholders would place on the protection of *their* peasantry from other potential sources of exploitation; such as the state or the military. The second point-of-view, that of the peasantry, represents the other side of this economic and administrative duality. Attaleiates, for instance, describes tax-burdens as being the most troublesome worry of the common populace, saying how their absence really meant true freedom for the people.[321] His actual argument goes along the lines that Nikephoros Botaneiates, to whom his work appears to be dedicated in a very panegyric style, put an end to people's tax debts and therefore truly made them into free Roman citizens. The fact that taxation is depicted as the primary enslaver of the people is very telling of the numerous troubles that are associated with its implementation, management and collection, all of which would profoundly affect the reception of this activity by the peasantry. For

[320] Komnene, *Alexias,* 1.11.2; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 54. Anna makes this statement in context of describing how Gulielmus Mascabeles, ruler of a great amount of land near the region of Lombardy, was, according to Anna, deriving a "rich income" from these lands.
[321] Attaleiates, *Historia*, 516-17.

the peasantry and broader common populace, obligatory tax payments were seen as a nuisance which hindered their freedom and burdened their lives.

One major issue was whether this tax would be collected in cash or kind. Several sources that span across the middle Byzantine period indicate that the state resorted to requisitioning tax payments in kind during times of cash shortage,[322] a practice adopted since the fourth century, especially during times when military supplies were needed.[323] John Haldon, analyzing sources such as the *Farmer's Law*, concluded that, in such cases, the extraordinary requisitioning of payments in kind would be implemented as a replacement to the main land-tax (as opposed to the numerous secondary tax charges).[324] Under normal circumstances the state preferred tax payments in cash and this is a factor which definitely influenced the peasantry.[325] This practice would force peasants to go to markets to sell a portion of their produce solely for the purpose of obtaining cash to pay taxes, which was obviously a great hindrance. Local village economies were almost exclusively based on barter and did not involve much coin circulation. Considering the self-sufficient economic life of most of the peasantry, it is understandable why this inconvenient practice, implemented exclusively for tax-payment, would not be preferred.[326] In fact, this tax payment has been identified as one of the only reasons that gold/silver ever circulated in the countryside.[327] Skylitzes provides an example of peasant reactions towards tax-payments in cash through his discussion on the subjugation of Bulgaria

[322] An important source, dating from the eighth century, is the *Farmer's Law* (Νόμος Γεωργικός). It shows that in times of cash shortages the state would often requisition the greater part of rural taxes in kind, rather than cash. Ashburner, *Farmer's Law,* 32.
[323] Haldon, "*Synone:* Reconsidering a Problematic Term of Middle Byzantine Fiscal History," 153. It is known that this practice became less widespread after the eleventh century.
[324] Haldon, "*Synone:* Reconsidering a Problematic Term of Middle Byzantine Fiscal History," 131-32.
[325] While under normal non-crisis situations this was the case, it was also a largely individual and regional issue. Depending on the region under question and the supply/demand situation in the capital, the land tax was requested in either cash or kind, despite the objection of the peasantry.
[326] Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 - 1200*, 80.
[327] Lefort, "Rural Economy and Social Relations in the Countryside," 110.

by Basil II (r. 976-1025). Following the decisive Battle of Kleidion (1014), in which Basil II famously blinded the surviving Bulgarian troops, the First Bulgarian Empire effectively ceased to exist, and in 1018 was officially subjugated by Byzantium.[328] According to Skylitzes, Basil II did not want to disrupt the existing harmony of this newly conquered region, so as to not cause an uprising; therefore, he decided to simply reinforce the tax scheme that the Bulgarian emperor Samuel was previously administering on the Bulgarian people, which consisted of taxation in kind. The description Skylitzes gives of this practice is that each person possessing a pair of oxen was to give a certain amount of grain, millet and wine as part of the public tax.[329] Skylitzes continues to recount that, despite Basil's initial forbearance, in later years, under the guidance of John the Orphanotrophos,[330] Bulgarian lands were eventually decreed to pay tax in cash instead of kind, which resulted in widespread rebellions across the countryside. These rebellions materialized in the great Bulgarian uprising dating from the year 1040 (during the reign of Michael IV), which was implemented under the pretext of this taxation issue. This rebellion was part of a series of uprisings (1040-41, 1070s and 1080s), which were contained with great difficulty by Byzantium. From this excerpt, concerning the newly subjugated Bulgarian countryside, it is easily inferred that the peasantry much preferred tax payments in kind. This is quite understandable considering the relative difficulties that especially some villages would have faced in obtaining this coinage. It is not surprising that the peasants would rebel at the thought of having to travel to markets,

[328] This subjugation would continue until the year 1185 during which the Second Bulgarian Empire was established following a great rebellion.
[329] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 412; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 387.
[330] John the Orphanotrophos was the head of the court eunuchs during Romanos III's reign (r. 1028-1034). During the reign of Michael IV, John further increased his influence at court. After Michael IV's death, John had eyes on the throne, but his ambitions were thwarted as he was eventually blinded and sent away. Kazhdan, "Orphanotrophos," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1070.

often through difficult, arduous means to obtain the necessary currency to pay their taxes to a state centered far away from themselves (both physically and mentally). Yet, the entire infrastructure of the empire was geared towards linking the regions of agricultural production with the supply chains of the capital.[331] From the perspective of the imperial treasury, tax payments in coinage were often seen as being more valuable, mainly due to the greater flexibility of money. A very slick play on words by Attaleiates serves to illustrate the importance of money in the Byzantine psyche; "τὸ ὄνομα τῶν χρημάτων χρῆσιν ἅμα παρυπεμφαίνει καὶ χρησιμότητα".[332] This phrase can be translated as, "the word 'money' is also from a similar root as 'usefulness' and 'utility'".[333] Here Attaleiates is using the fact that the root of the Greek word for money is the same as use/utility, thereby alluding to the notion that money can go a long way in accomplishing anything and helping those in need, which is the context of the passage.[334] In light of the above, it should be clear that the relative lack of coin circulation in the countryside and the state-enforced necessity to obtain it solely for tax payments, constituted one of the main struggles between the two primary actors involved in such interactions.

3.1.2 Village taxation and extraordinary measures

One of the most central challenges in running an empire based on agricultural revenue was the maintenance of the delicate balance between bearable yet

[331] Frankopan, "Land and Power in the Middle and Later Period," 114. The provisioning of the capital was of utmost importance and it constituted the main artery of economic activity.
[332] Attaleiates, *Historia*, 150-51.
[333] This is my own translation.
[334] This phrase is located at the end of a paragraph in which he criticizes the stinginess of emperor Constantine X Doukas. He mentions that even without a direct, pressing necessity a little financial help can do a large amount of good. Here he is alluding to the fact that the emperor, according to Attaleiates, should be helping the financial situation of his subjects.

sustainable tax measures; to be bearable and to not push the peasantry to rebellion/banditry, yet to be able to sustain the imperial treasury against all possible expenses. The case from Skylitzes featured above, concerning the Bulgarian peasantry, shows an uprising which took place due to this balance being upset. Skylitzes describes the reasoning behind it as such; the rural populace of Bulgaria decided to rebel against the Roman administration, trying to throw its yoke off, due to the greed and cruelty of its tax measures.[335] Basil's initial careful treatment of these lands also illustrates how the imperial polity would take care not to encourage such incidents. Many other examples from these texts suffice to show how precarious the issue of taxation could be. The accounts of especially Skylitzes, Attaleiates and Choniates stand out with the highly detailed and informed nature with which they discuss different tax policies aimed at the peasantry and their respective outcomes, which merits a detailed analysis.

Often times the criticisms of these authors are manifested through descriptions of new, extraordinary taxes being introduced onto the populace. Skylitzes, for example, describes two very specific cases; the *aerikon* tax introduced in the mid-eleventh century and the reformed *allelengyon* tax introduced in the early-eleventh century. The first example is provided by Skylitzes during his description of a "new public tax" (δημοσίων τελεσμάτων), introduced during the reign of Michael IV Paphlagonian (r. 1034-1041), specifically targeted at villages, called the *aerikon* (ἀερικον). This tax, like most Byzantine laws, took the whole village as a single unit. It decreed that each village (χωρίων) should pay a number of gold pieces according to its ability.[336] Despite being introduced during the reign of Michael IV, Skylitzes explicitly states that it was John the Orphanotrophos, the de-facto ruler of the empire

[335] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 412; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 387.
[336] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 404; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 381.

in this period, who was behind the introduction of this extra fiscal measure. Skylitzes describes this new tax as being a shameful (αἰσχρός) and disgraceful act (αἰσχύνη) designed to generate income for the imperial coffers. Incidentally, the *aerikon* tax is known to have existed as far back as the sixth century as Prokopios also alludes to it in his writings. Though in this case, narrated by Skylitzes, concerning the eleventh century, it appears to have been increased significantly. The critical attitude with which Skylitzes describes this extraordinary tax implies his disdain towards harsher tax measures being used to supplement lavish imperial expenses.[337] The peasantry was at the mercy of the whims and needs of the imperial treasury, especially when things took a sour turn across imperial territories.

A second example of criticisms associated with extraordinary fiscal measures is provided by Skylitzes while he discusses how the *allelengyon* (ἀλληλέγγυον) tax was revised by Basil II. The *allelengyon* was traditionally a tax which was basically a fiscal manifestation of the communal responsibility of villages, by obliging members of the same community to be responsible for the tax deficits of anyone who died, defaulted or fled.[338] By distributing the individual tax burdens of empty land or defaulting inhabitants over the entire community, the state was able to ensure that there was no disruption in tax payments it received during such incidents.[339] However, we are told by Skylitzes that Basil II made an ordinance in the year 1004 that landowners were from then on obliged to pay the taxes of commoners/peasants who had died.[340] This was meant to exempt the poor from such extraordinary

[337] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 404; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 381. Skylitzes mentions that this tax was a "shameful way to generate additional income". Here his criticisms are mainly directed towards John the Orphanotrophos.
[338] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 112.
[339] Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium,* 79.
[340] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 347; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 329. ("…τὰς τῶν ἀπολωλότων ταπεινῶν συντελείας τελεῖσqαι παρὰ τῶν δυνατῶν.")

burdens and also combat the growing power of landowners in the early-eleventh century. This tax was one of the many fiscal obligations which large property owners, including the church, were finding ways of evading and becoming exempt from.[341] Basil II's policy was a hard blow to their ambitions. Unsurprisingly, a few pages later, Skylitzes mentions that Romanos III, when he became emperor, "eliminated this *allelengyon* tax" (ἐξέκοψε δέ καί τέλεον ἀπερρίζωσε τό ἀλληλέγγυον).[342] Furthermore, he describes how Romanos III (r. 1028-1034) also excused all unpaid taxes and private debts. This is not surprising as the revised version of the *allelengyon* was met with great protest from large landowners, especially including the church, which Romanos III eventually felt obliged to give in to. In this passage Skylitzes uses the word ταπεινῶν, meaning 'low-life' or 'poor' when referring to these commoners/peasants. It is a word which Skylitzes often uses in his text to create a direct contrast with the word δυνατός, meaning 'powerful', which usually accompanies it, as in this case too. This anecdote is a concrete example of a policy, which, while indirectly relating to the peasantry, is more directly influential in increasing the fiscal burdens on large landholders by decreeing that they would from then on be obliged to pay extra taxes for their deceased or defaulting *paroikoi*.

The *allelengyon* policy of Basil II needs to be viewed in light of the generalized Macedonian dynastic policies towards protecting the free peasantry against the growing power of large landholders. These policies can be thought of properly beginning with the novel promulgated by Romanos Lekapenos in the year 934. This novel, introduced in response to the severe winter and famine of 927-928, was aimed at protecting the village commune by decreeing that the sale of land being

[341] Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium,* 79.
[342] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 375; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 354.

detached from a *chorion* could only take place after the inhabitants had already declined to purchase it.[343] In this way, priority was given to the maintenance of the free village community. Another example of such policies is a law known as "Novel 996", which was one of Basil II's most intense decrees aimed at protecting the free, landowning peasantry from the encroachment of the "powerful".[344] Promulgated in the year 996 this law decreed that poor persons were entitled to reclaim, without any payment, any land not rightfully owned by the "powerful".[345] This ownership was then made increasingly difficult for the large landowners by abolishment of the forty-year time limit guaranteeing possession rights over a piece of land and also decreeing that any land ownership dating from the after the famine of 927-928 was speculative. One important way to combat the growing power of large-landholders was to use the state's legal power by attempting to undermine the tax exemptions which certain landholders were enjoying. This was implemented in the redefining of the *allenlengyon* measure, described above. By adding to the fiscal burden of these landholders, Basil II was indirectly aiming towards the maintenance of the free, small-property owning peasantry who would pay their taxes directly to state officials. Skylitzes describes this law as preventing the powerful from augmenting their power/lands by swallowing up villages and adding them to their properties – in effect protecting these villages as independent entities.[346]

Both the *aerikon* and *allelengyon* tax, described above, concern the implementation of additional tax measures by the imperial polity, both of which

[343] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 38-39.
[344] Whether this was a forgery or not appears to be much disputed among scholarship. In a long discussion on this issue, John Philip Thomas, concludes that it most probably was authentic. In his paper he gives both sides of the argument (for example, prominent figures such as Dölger and Lemerle argued for its fake nature while Kazhdan and Charanis accepted its authenticity). Thomas, "A Disputed Novel of Basil II."
[345] McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 111-13.
[346] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 340; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 323.

Skylitzes views very negatively. Despite the fact that the second example is directed towards actually easing the situation of the peasantry, Skylitzes is still quite critical of it (visualized by his panegyric account of Romanos III's removal of this tax). This could be partly due to Skylitzes writing his chronicle in the late-eleventh century, a time in which large landholders had truly blossomed, especially with the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081-1118). This situation may have imbued Skylitzes with a certain political obligation towards defending the rights of such powerful, aristocratic land holders and obliged him to slander any efforts to weaken them. Or perhaps, it may have evoked a sense of pointlessness towards Basil II's protective measures, considering that Skylitzes, with the benefit of hindsight, knew that in the long run Macedonian efforts were futile in preventing the rise of such large landholders. Interestingly, Psellos, who wrote in a slightly earlier period, features great praise for Isaac Komnenos' (r. 1057-1059) attempts at curbing the growing power of large landholders by confiscating donations handed out by previous emperors and also by greatly limiting the funds made available to the Church.[347] His description here evokes the idea that Isaac Komnenos was trying to turn around the bad policies of previous emperors who had allowed such landholders to increase their power and holdings to such an unacceptable extent. These policies garnered the hate of especially ecclesiastical circles who tried to discredit the emperor. Despite his very laudatory tone concerning Isaac's actions, Psellos comes to the conclusion that had Isaac implemented these reforms in a slower and more careful, step-by-step manner, they would probably have garnered less hatred from his surroundings and would have been long-lasting.[348] The diverging views of Skylitzes and Psellos

[347] Psellos, *The History,* 217-18; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers,* 311-12. Psellos' view of Isaac Komnenos appears to be quite positive in general. He describes Isaac as trying to correct the errors of previous emperors who had all exhausted the imperial treasury on their personal expenses.
[348] Psellos, *The History,* 219; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 313.

concerning whether or not large landholders should have been combatted is partially explainable through both the political climate of the slightly earlier time in which Psellos was writing, and their separate backgrounds and surroundings.

One final example from Skylitzes' corpus of tax-criticism is worthy of mention due to its exceptionally harsh condemnation. During his description of Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963-969), Skylitzes describes the emperor as treating his subjects very atrociously by imposing additional taxes (προσθήκη συντέλεια) and also by forcing the requisition of supplies from friendly countryside territories during the many military ventures he went on.[349] Skylitzes goes as far as accusing Nikephoros of plundering (λεηλασία) his own countryside and also standing by as his soldiers "committing thousands of confiscations."[350] Skylitzes' description of Nikephoros II is so negative that he even describes him as taking pleasure in all the atrocities he caused on his subjects. These examples show the harsh language which Skylitzes employs when discussing policies which he does not approve of, such as accusing an emperor of plundering his own countryside and overburdening the peasantry. This view is again echoed by Skylitzes in his description of how Constantine IX (r 1042-1055) engaged in all sorts of lowly commercial ventures, in addition to exacting extra-ordinary taxation, to remedy the fact that the state treasury was empty due to his personal extravagances.[351] The notion of balancing out pointless personal spending by imposing additional tax measures on the populace appears to be a fairly common complaint which these authors make concerning different emperors.

[349] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 274-75; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 262.
[350] Military related issues such as the requisitioning of supplies from the peasantry will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
[351] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 476; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 444. This particular episode is further discussed in chapter 3.1.3, as it also pertains to the issue of corrupt tax collectors.

Attaleiates gives a more technical description of the unfair nature of extraordinary rural taxation, this time concerned with the reign of Constantine X Doukas (r. 1059-1067). Attaleiates describes how the emperor burdened the provinces with new, "increased taxes" (φορολογικὰς ἐπαυξήσεις), despite the provinces already being deeply troubled by "barbarian attacks/inroads" (καταδρομὰς βαρβαρικὰς).[352] He also takes care to note that Constantine X was especially stingy with money and extra zealous in the collection of taxes. Taken together with his previous claims concerning money,[353] this episode shows that Attaleiates is quite disturbed by the fact that the already depressed provincial regions were being milked dry with such extra taxes. According to his logic, the exact opposite should be happening; the emperor should have been alleviating the burden on the devastated provincial regions by relaxing the taxes or sending other sorts of financial aid. Attaleiates further describes that there was widespread complaint (γογγυσμός) from many people who were forced to pay sums they did not owe to the treasury.[354] Such criticisms are not isolated in Attaleiates' narrative, perhaps due to his judicial background, his descriptions are especially concerned with showing the unfairness of certain policies.

A similar example can be found in Attaleiates' treatment of the *logothete* Nikephoros (also known as Nikephoritzes – "little Nikephoros") who was *doux* of Antioch at the time of the event being narrated (towards the end of the reign of Constantine IX – probably around 1067). Attaleiates harshly criticizes Nikephoros for burdening the entire region around Antioch with "unreasonable extra fiscal

[352] Attaleiates, *Historia*, 140-41.
[353] His claims that money can help alleviate bad conditions, and that it never does any bad to help those in need – which alluded to the idea that emperors should be helping all their subjects. See chapter 3.2; Attaleiates, *Historia*, 516-17.
[354] Attaleiates, *Historia*, 140-41.

exactions" (ἀπαιτήσεσι παραλόγοις καὶ ἀπηνέσιν ἐπιφοραῖς).[355] Nikephoros appears as one of the most vilified individuals in Attaleiates' narrative, which is especially prominent during his long, ten-page ramble on the *phoundax* institution, which was also implemented under the guidance of the former. This passage constitutes one of the most central episodes in which an extraordinary policy associated with the rural economy is described. The *phoundax* (φουνδάκος) institution was set up under the reign of emperor Michael VII (r. 1071-1078) in the region of Rhaidestos to serve as an imperial granary and drop-off point for all grain (especially wheat) trade entering the capital. Attaleiates' description of the *phoundax* has been analyzed by a large number of scholars as it sheds light on key aspects of the Byzantine economy which documentary sources do not feature, while also serving as a good example of negative imperial meddling in the agrarian system. It is especially useful in tracing the movement of grain from the producers to the consumers.[356] According to Attaleiates the *phoundax* was an institution created by the state to monopolize (μονοπώλιον) the grain trade entering the capital by forcing everyone to buy from designated grain-merchants (σιτοκάπηλος).[357] The *phoundax* was sort of like a trading-quarter located in Rhaidestos.[358] The chief architect of this policy was Nikephoros, who was at this time serving as *logothetes tou dromou* (chief minister) under Michael VII. Attaleiates describes the institutions as an evil happening set up by the Nikephoros as he was a very vile person. He further describes how *phoundax* officials harassed the 'poor merchants (ἔμπορος) and farmers' (γεωργός), and furthermore no one was able to stand up to them because 'they were backed by the

[355] Attaleiates, *Historia*, 328-39.
[356] Magdalino, "The Grain Supply of Constantinople, Ninth-Twelfth Centuries," 40-41.
[357] Attaleiates, *The History*, 369.
[358] The *phoundax*, established in Raidestos (near modern Tekirdağ), was a trading quarter for all purposes. Its name comes from the Latin/Italian *fondako,* or *fundak* in Arabic.

power of the *logothetes* (λογοθέτης)'.[359] The *logothete*, literally meaning "one who accounts/calculates", generally designated a high administrative title such as an imperial secretary, though many different extensions of this office existed.[360] This specific comment also highlights the skewed nature of the judicial system, a topic which will be further analyzed in the next section. In this passage Attaleiates appears sympathetic to the peasants and commoners' lack of legal power even when the price of grain had increased by eighteen-fold (the price of grain went from 1/18 of a *nomisma* to 1 *nomisma* per *modios)*. Before the *phoundax* was set up the peasants would have sold their grain in the *katatopia* for a small fee (a market toll).[361]

The *phoundax* is a good example of the increasing exploitation and monopolization of the agrarian economy by the imperial polity and the great houses of Constantinople during this period.[362] It also must be remembered that Michael VII's reign, which began just after the events of 1071,[363] highlighted a period of acute fiscal and military crisis. The defeat at Manzikert resulted in the power and influence of the imperial center waning over a significant part of its agricultural tax base; especially the Anatolian and Armenian provinces. This may have provided additional impetus towards the necessity of such extraordinary measures in the years immediately following it, as a means to balance-out the emptying treasury. It is

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[359] Attaleiates, *The History*, 371.

[360] Some of these titles are as follows:

- μέγας λογοθέτης – 'Grand Logothete", acted as an imperial secretary.
- λογοθέτης τοῦ δρόμου – "Logothete of the Postal Office", acted as the emperor's chief minister.
- λογοθέτης τοῦ γενικοῦ – acted as the general financial secretary.
- λογοθέτης τοῦ στρατιωτικοῦ - "Logothete of the Army", responsible for the finances of the army.
- λογοθέτης τοῦ πραιτωρίου – "Logothete of the Praetorium", acted as the two helpers of the Eparch of Constantinople, with judicial duties.
- λογοθέτης τῶν οἰκιακῶν – "Logothete of the Household", had responsibilities in the palace.

[361] Magdalino, "The Grain Supply of Constantinople, Ninth-Twelfth Centuries," 41-42.

[362] Magdalino, "The Grain Supply of Constantinople, Ninth-Twelfth Centuries," 38.

[363] The Battle of Manzikert, fought in 1071 between the Byzantine Empire and the Seljuq Turks, highlights a key date in the history of the Byzantine Empire.

interesting that Attaleiates is so firmly against the imperial discourse towards exploiting agricultural land. This most probably stems from the fact the *phoundax* would have been affecting his own properties and farmlands which were also in Raidestos. In the *Historia* Attaleiates complains about his own estates being plundered, which is another example of his personal concerns.[364] Attaleiates' *Diataxis*, which was a foundational document for a monastery he founded in Constantinople (connected to a poorhouse in Raidestos), is important in properly comprehending the author's concerns and mindset.[365] Especially the *chrysobull*[366] attached at the end of the document alludes to many of Attaleiates' personal concerns for his properties. It his underlined that Attaleiates' *paroikoi* (the dependent peasants living on his land) should not be harassed, and that they should not be burdened with increased taxation or forced services.[367] Furthermore, his lands are to be spared the passage of the imperial retinue and the army, the animals and peasants are not to be subject to additional corveé labor (*angareiai),*[368] they cannot be forced to surrender animals, or make any sort of extra payment for provisioning the army or constructing roads and fortresses. They are also exempt from providing clothing or wood for the army.[369] This passage is very interesting as it highlights the manner in which the peasantry would be obliged to serve a passing army, providing clothing and wood, in addition to food and fodder.[370] This document also explains Attaleiates' sudden

[364] Attaleiates, *The History,* 455.
[365] Attaleiates' *Diataxis* is part of a group of texts, that have been analyzed by scholars such as Lemerle, that prove that lay persons could also own extensive property. Several other examples of such texts that Lefort provides are the will of Eustathios Boilos and the *Typikon* of Gregory Pakourianos. Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 293.
[366] An imperial order/grant authenticated with a gold seal.
[367] Attaleiates, "Diataxis," 352.
[368] Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia*, 486. Bartusis has a detailed description of the obligations of dependent peasants. One of these categories is *angareiai* (corveé labor) which was commonly twelve days of labor service per year. It was obligatory service for which there was no payment issued, it could be due to the pronoia holder by his respective *paroikoi*, or in other arrangements it could be due directly to the state.
[369] Attaleiates, "Diataxis," 365-366.
[370] This issue is covered fully in chapter 4.

excited defense of the peasantry on the issue of the *phoundax*; wealthy individuals who owned land in the countryside would derive a rich income from these properties every year and would not want it hindered. The fact that the properties listed in the *Diataxis* as belonging to Attaleiates are located in the region of Raidestos, precisely the same place as where the grain monopolizing *phoundax* had been set up, is quite indicative as to the added personal nature of Attaleiates' criticisms of the issue. He would not want his own income disrupted or hindered due to this new policy, similar to the way in which he is trying to exempt his dependent peasants from having to serve the army in any way (as seen in the *Diataxis*). Considering the bountiful income which Attaleiates would be deriving from his own lands (which Anna Komnene had described as the 'fruits of the land'), it is not surprising that he is very critical of the *phoundax* institution which posed an additional burden to his finances and also to the peasantry. The *Diataxis,* by providing such extensive exemptions, also illustrates the close interactions which Attaleiates held with the administrations of Michael VII and also Nikephoros III.[371]

All of the examples discussed in this section indicate a common theme of scathing directed against any sort of extra-ordinary fiscal burden being imposed on the peasantry and broader populace, especially if implemented to offset the fiscal drainage resulting from pointless expenditures. Like both Skylitzes and Attaleiates, Choniates is also quite critical of the overburdening of the provincial population under badly implemented tax policies. Choniates' opinions are especially valuable compared to our other authors, as he was, no doubt, more informed about tax-related subjects due to his personal involvement in such issues. It is known that Choniates worked as a government official. In the *Historia* he describes himself as the governor

[371] Attaleiates, *The History,* xi.

(ἀρχή) of the region of Philippopolis and also an *apographe* (ἀπογραφεύς) which means that he had official property registration and tax-collection responsibilities.[372] This implies that he must have been well versed with the details of imperial tax collection, which may be one reason for his unusually diligent commentary on such issues.

Choniates appears to have a generally quite favorable view of the pre-twelfth century Byzantine taxation system. At one point he refers to the "customary burdenless tax" (άνεπαχθή διατάξαιτό σφισι φόρον), which never exceeds the peasants' limits.[373] Magoulias has translated this passage as a 'light tax',[374] but the word burdenless (άνεπαχθής) is more powerful than this, it truly implies a completely burden-free tax on these villages. The true connotation is very unrealistic, it is highly unlikely that the peasants themselves felt their taxes were so 'burdenless'. Choniates' take on the situation here is either extreme naivety, or, more probably, an attempted praise of the traditional Byzantine economic/tax policy in comparison with the more recent meddling conducted by the numerous emperors which he is highly critical of. It appears highly likely that this passage is further aimed at explaining how the system was functioning quite decently, according to Choniates, in the eleventh century, but then it was gradually disrupted and spoiled by the more recent emperors, whose reigns he is narrating. The key implication of this passage, by mentioning the burdenless nature of the traditional Byzantine land tax, is to indicate that, over time, this tax was significantly increased to become an unbearably heavy burden on provincial society, including the peasantry. This makes up one of Choniates' main criticisms of more recent emperors. Keeping in mind the inability of

[372] Choniates, *Historia*, 402; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 221.
[373] Choniates, *Historia*, 495-496.
[374] Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 273.

the Macedonian emperors in controlling the rise of large-landholders, who, in turn, dominated the agrarian economy with their estates during the Komnenian period, Choniates definitely has a point. It appears ambiguous whether or not Choniates was actually lamenting the erosion of the free peasantry who paid their taxes directly to state officials. Having imperial tax-collection responsibilities perhaps may have imbued Choniates with negative reactions towards non-state actors who collected taxes, such as great property owners. This is also confirmed by Choniates' extremely negative description of the *pronoia* system, whereby soldiers became the 'tax-collectors'.[375] Incidentally, this passage also illustrates how the taxational duties of frontline villages were sometimes seamlessly transferred among the victorious polities - each being aware of the other's taxation system. The idea that the Byzantine provincial tax requirements had gotten quite burdensome in the late-twelfth century is also enforced by Choniates' quite favorable description concerning Andronikos I (r. 1183-1185).[376] He explains how Andronikos relaxed the fiscal burdens on the provinces, resulting in a "population growth in the provinces" (πλείους ἐπαρχίαι πρὸς πληθυσμὸν), while also preventing tax-collectors from abusing the countryside, alongside an improvement and relaxation of the conditions of life for the rural folk.[377] Furthermore, we are told that Andronikos punished the "greed of the powerful" and prevented large landholders from seizing the properties of others. This whole episode is narrated by Choniates in context of showing how there is no wrong that cannot be corrected by a proper emperor (a fact which he

[375] Choniates' view of the *pronoia* system is analyzed in detail in section 3.1.3 of this study.
[376] Choniates' favorable view of Andronikos lasts until about page 338, after which we are told about Andronikos' slow descent into wickedness, cruelty and other wrongdoings – especially concerning harsh punishments. Choniates, *Historia,* 338; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 195.
[377] Choniates, *Historia,* 325-26; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 179.

inserts into a speech of Andronikos himself),[378] which no doubt alludes to the wrongdoings of Manuel I Komnenos (according to Choniates).

The issue of dissecting Choniates' true ideas becomes further complicated due to his teleological aim of trying to explain the decline of the Byzantine polity (which lead to the events of 1204). Choniates' treatment of Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143-1180) is an exemplary treatment of bad fiscal policies being used as a scapegoat to try and explain the catastrophic events of 1204. He harshly slanders Manuel I's policies by describing how the emperor was in effect plundering his own population through the implementation of "extraordinary/unaccustomed taxes" (φόροις ἀσυνήθεσιν).[379] Choniates appears especially defensive about the fact that these taxes were out of the ordinary, which he explicitly stresses. He further describes how corrupt tax-farmers, much hated by the peasantry, were sent out to turn uncultivated land (νέωμα) into arable fields (ἄρουρα) and increase taxes/spoil (δασμός).[380] This policy was aimed at increasing the agrarian revenue derived from the land, as uncultivated land yielded nothing. Choniates then describes, in a very critical tone, how most of this revenue was subsequently spent on lavish endowments to ecclesiastical entities and to the Latins. The critical nature of Choniates' narration is easily felt in the way he starts off his description with the phrase; "which I will not hide" (ὡς μετεδίωκεν ἀποκρύψομαι). The fact that Choniates feels unable to 'hide' this information from his audience strongly suggests that it was something shameful and wrong in his view. This passage needs to be seen in conjunction with Choniates' overall extensive criticisms of Manuel I (and several other figures), which was

[378] Choniates, *Historia,* 327; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 180.
[379] Choniates, *Historia,* 203; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 115.
[380] Choniates, *Historia,* 204. "Τὸ δ' ουν των δασμών έπιτεταμένον ούδ' αυτός ώς μετεδίωκεν άποκρύψομαι. άλλ' ούδ' ότι αί άρχαί δημοσιώναις προυβέ | βληντο, παραδράμοιμι, ώσπερ καί τό ποθεῖν νεώματα εν άρούραις και τω εαυτού άρότρω διασχίζειν αύλακας, έξ ών αύτω άδρομεγέθης άνέβλαστεν άσταχυς."

manifested over a wide range of charges/offenses,[381] as he was writing the longer, *version a* of his history in the aftermath of the fall of Constantinople.[382] Being the only one of the authors under discussion to have the benefit of hindsight, Choniates' treatment of certain emperors appears quite different from the others. This difference is manifested through Choniates' less stereotypical narrative, more critical and outvoiced outlook and intense subjective arguments.[383] This is especially visible in his treatment of Manuel I, which when compared to the treatment afforded to Manuel by Kinnamos or Eustathios,[384] for example, appears significantly harsher. Choniates' criticism of Manuel spending the state treasury on benefits to the Church and the Latins overshadows his commentary on the fact that Manuel was trying to increase agricultural revenue by utilizing once-barren lands. This episode is narrated in

[381] In one case, Choniates is quite critical of Manuel I Komnenos' generosity towards lowly classes, which he identifies as eunuchs, chamberlains and those of 'foreign-language' – referring to the Latins. He describes these people as swimming in a river of money due to the emperor's completely over-the-top generosity towards them, which Choniates' highly critical of. This passage is interesting as it highlights both an interesting bias against the 'lowly classes' and also against foreigners, especially Latins, while at the same time showing Choniates' opinions of how public funds should be properly spent. Choniates, *Historia,* 204; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 116. Choniates' harsh words towards Manuel I Komnenos do not stop with these two examples either. In another case, after having ranted on about Manuel's incompetency, Choniates begins slandering the imperial office in general. He describes how typical emperors, such as Manuel, were always against providence, annoyed God by acting very impiously, wasted and squandered public revenues on their personal luxury and treated their own free citizens as slaves. Choniates, *Historia,* 143; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 81. Similar accusations have also been identified in Zonaras' narrative concerning the financial policies of Alexios I Komnenos. Magdalino has a detailed analysis of Zonaras' accusations against Alexios that the latter was using public resources to further his own private ventures; Magdalino, "Aspects of 12th Century Byzantine Kaiserkritik," 329.

[382] It has been identified by scholarship that, Choniates, in his post-1204 revised edition *version a Historia*, is extensively critical of Manuel Komnenos, while in the earlier *version b* these sections appear to be absent; they have been retrospectively added during Choniates' exile years, written from Nicaea. Simpson and Efthymiadis, *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer*, 17. Conventional *kaiserkritik* issues such as oppressive fiscal policies, neglect of the military and preferential treatment towards barbarians/foreigners are found almost exclusively in *version a* of Choniates' *Historia.* This is the version which was written after 1204, with the benefit of hindsight, while Choniates was in exile at Nicaea. In this version is stance is much more critical for obvious reasons, as he is looking for ways to explain the eventual demise which he has witnessed.

[383] Magdalino, "Aspects of 12th Century Byzantine Kaiserkritik," 327-28.

[384] In Eustathios narrative Manuel Komnenos is portrayed in an extremely panegyric style, depicted as a "warrior-emperor", being almost representative of the "perfect" emperor. He is depicted as being in the field together with his soldiers, not fearing anything, hardly sleeping or eating and always helping his subjects. This issue is further analyzed in Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 113.

context of "corrupt tax officials" which indicates Choniates' negative outlook towards it, despite the policy appearing harmless in theory.

The general idea resonating across the numerous narratives under analysis strongly suggests that the economic policies of emperors closer to their own lifetime were viewed with greater criticality, perhaps due to the overarching aims of attempting to explain the recent pitfalls of eleventh century Byzantium. This, in turn, translates into the appearance of lighter tax policies being implemented towards the peasantry in the earlier periods of the ninth and tenth centuries, within these narratives. This fact appears to be in agreement with the larger scholarship on this period, in which this period is often referred to as the golden age of the Byzantine peasantry. Basil I (r. 867-886), for example, is portrayed in an exceptionally favorable light. Skylitzes explains in a very praise-worthy fashion, how throughout Basil I's entire reign there was no new tax evaluation in any of the themes. He concludes by saying that this meant that the entire empire remained unburdened (ἀδιάπρακτος) and therefore relatively free.[385] Wortley has translated this passage as meaning that the entire empire remained untaxed. Looking at Skylitzes' word choices the more accurate rendition appears to be that this policy resulted in less burden over the people (λαός). The fact that the reduction or complete elimination of land taxes associated with the peasantry was shown by these authors as being a positive development raises interesting questions. It is clear that these authors are aware of the hardships imposed on the peasantry by such fiscal obligations, and they appear to take the side of the peasantry in such cases. What is important to note is that they are defending the peasants' rights through their descriptions and treatments of different emperors, meaning that their defense or criticism of different imperial

[385] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 167; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis,* 161.

tax policies appears to be linked to their praising or slandering of the administration which had implemented these policies. This problematic aspect of analysis is well exemplified in Attaleiates' treatment of Nikephoros III Botaneiates' economic policies, whom the former dedicated his work to,[386] although there are diverging views among scholarship as to its authenticity.[387] Attaleiates describes Botaneiates' reign with exaggerated metaphors, such as "fountains of gold gushing from the land", making it less valuable for factual purposes, but, more so for its literary qualities. This view is also evoked in the assessments of much earlier time-periods, such as that by Zonaras in his *Epitome*, which serve to show the continuity and permanence of such issues. He describes two such incidents from the fourth century: how the population of Antioch and its environs rioted due to "new taxes imposed on the region" (φόρων ἐπιταχθέντων νέων),[388] and how the people reacted against Maxentius' terrible tax oppressions.[389] The general trend in all the above examples, which creates a common continuity between these narrative histories, is that they have imbued their descriptions with a defensive tone against the peasantry. Negative adjectives are used to describe harsh tax measures,[390] oppressive policies and

[386] The last part of his narrative features an exceptionally exaggerated passage of praise directed at Nikephoros III Botaniates' economic policies. This is all the more understandable due to the text being written during his reign. His descriptions are a true literary masterpiece, evoking rivers flowing with treasures and endless fountains of gold gushing from the land watering the entire populace with great richness, all due to Botaniates' great generosity and profuse goodness. Attaleiates, *The History,* 498-99.

[387] While panegyric elements appear very strong, some scholars, such as Alexander Kazhdan, have argued that Attaleiates' comments may actually be genuine. Kazhdan, "The social views of Michael Attaleiates," 29-30. Whether intent-wise these comments are genuine or not does not change the indisputable presence of a certain positive bias towards the then ruling emperor himself.

[388] Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, 89; Zonaras, *The History,* 186. In this passage Zonaras says that the population, gathering in the market-place of Antioch, decided to topple over the statue of the former Empress – a symbol of imperial power. The emperor, being very enraged at this atrocious action, harshly punished the citizen of Antioch by abrogating their legal rights. Furthermore, we are told that, Antioch was subjugated to its neighbor Laodicea, as a form of punishment. All of this shows the extent of the actions and harshness to which emperors would resort to protect their tax income being unhampered.

[389] Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum,* 620; Zonaras, *The History,* 68.

[390] Skylitzes even feels comfortable in acting quite understandably towards the Bulgarians who revolted against Byzantine rule.

emperors who neglected their subjects. The agrarian economy is recognized as being of great importance to the well-being of the empire (and the authors themselves), and this appears to have fueled the excited defense of the peasantry which is occasionally visible in these narratives. The fact that taxation issues are utilized as a means of criticizing the administrative policies which lead to the decline of Byzantium should not discourage us from accepting their truthfulness. Many other criticism avenues could have been selected by these authors, but, the uniformity with which Macedonian policies (specifically those up until the end of Basil II's reign) are positively compared against post-Macedonian policies indicates a common thought pattern.[391] The tax-collectors themselves were also frequently under the spotlight, usually in a negative manner, which is the next major issue to be discussed.

3.1.3 Tax-collectors, corruption and imperial grants

The issue of taxation was all the more complicated and problematized by tax collectors who frequently went rogue by exacting extra payments. The individuals who assessed and physically collected the taxes are referred to with many different terms in these texts, such as πράκτωρ, φορολόγος or ἀπογραφεύς. The overall picture of the system is that it functioned relatively well if not for the occasional mismanagement by certain emperors, the effects of severe external disruptions or the problems associated with collection. Tax collectors were of exceptional importance as they provided the critical link in appropriating the vast countryside revenue, one of the state treasury's main suppliers. In a sense, they were the middlemen, tasked with facilitating the one-way exchange between the provincial populace and the state

[391] There are exceptions to this general trend, such as Isaac I Komnenos generally being portrayed quite positively.

itself. It is not surprising, then, that these tax-collectors were often the weakest link in this system, being a significant liability to the secure collection of tax revenue. Emperors would often have to personally deal with such issues, as they were not simple matters. These narratives are quite abundant with excerpts where tax-collectors are depicted as abusing their power and being very over-zealous. In context of the post-eleventh century period this is quite understandable, as it was a period of demographic and economic booming, making it more susceptible to corruption and, thus, straining the state's taxation mechanisms. The narrative of Choniates, due to his personal background as an *apographe* (ἀπογραφεύς), is the most informative about such issues.

In one example Choniates explains how emperor Andronikos I (r. 1183-85) dealt very harshly with any tax-collectors (φορολόγος) who were reported to have been abusing their powers towards the people. Eventually, we are told, Andronikos "called back all public officials" (τῶν τοῦ δημοσίου τελεστῶν) to completely stop the torment and abuse which these tax-collectors (πρακτόρων) were levying on the populace.[392] Choniates states that these tax-collectors were abusing their power by adding fabricated, extra taxes to the burdens of the provinces, thus "they were consuming the people as if they were loaves of bread."[393] The verb κατεσθίω literally means "to devour" and is usually associated with wild animals, which really increases the severity of this clause. This metaphor Choniates uses adds great weight to the extent of the abuse suffered by the peasantry at the hands of these 'evil' tax-collectors. Choniates' personal background as an *apographeus* (ἀπογραφεύς) (tax and property registration official), as he himself states it, no doubt affected his

[392] Choniates, *Historia,* 326; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 179. This episode was briefly discussed with its broader context in the previous section (chapter 3.1.2).
[393] Choniates, *Historia,* 326; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 179. "οἱ ἐν βρώσει ἄρτου τὸν ὑποπίπτοντα λεὼν κατεσθίοντες."

opinions in this case. On top of being highly informed in such matters he was also able to moralize over the misadministration of such issues. His words resonate with exceptional viciousness towards the corrupt nature of these tax collectors who were milking the provinces dry. The imposition of additional, unofficial (non-state confirmed) taxes was a common problem associated with the numerous intermediaries in the tax-collection mechanisms of the provinces. This episode also evokes the idea that tax-collectors (and everything) had gotten more and more corrupt towards the late-twelfth century, in comparison to the earlier periods – an idea frequently embodied in Choniates' narrative.

Skylitzes also alludes to tax-collector abuse and corruption by utilizing an example based in Bulgaria around the year 894. He describes how Symeon,[394] ruler of Bulgaria, broke off his treaty with the Romans due to greedy customs-officers (τελώνης) and tax-officials mistreating the poor Bulgarians by forcing on them "heavy tax payments and custom duties" (βαρέα εἰσπραττόμενοι).[395] This was done as so; all goods coming into Constantinople from Bulgaria were forcefully rerouted through Thessaloniki, where a eunuch named Mousikos had set up a profit-making enterprise with his connections. This led to the Bulgarians complaining to Symeon who took it as a cause to complain to emperor Leo VI. Eventually, we are told, this issue led to warfare between the Bulgars and the Romans due to Leo VI ignoring Symeon's pleas to end this corruption (Skylitzes also mentions that Symeon was looking for such a pretext for war anyway). As a result, the Byzantine-Bulgarian war, which would last two years (894-896), began, and was defended against with great difficulty. Skylitzes describes how the emperor had to convince the Turks and the

[394] Symeon I was ruler of Bulgaria between 893-927. It was under his reign that the territories of Bulgaria reached its greatest extent.
[395] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 175-76; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 169-70.

Hungarians to cross the Danube and attack the Bulgarians – as the Byzantine army was engaged elsewhere and could not defend the North, which was being devastated by Symeon's army.[396] This example has some parallels with the *phoundax* institution set up by Nikephoritzes under the reign of Michael VII (which was discussed in context of Attaleiates' description of it). In both cases goods coming into the capital were rerouted through a central spot where heavy taxes were levied for a few select individuals to make profit; in Rhaidestos for the case of the *phoundax*, in Thessaloniki for the case discussed here. While the consequences of these two cases differ greatly, the attitudes of contempt with which our authors narrate such profit-making enterprises are quite similar.

A further example, again provided by Skylitzes, highlights the extent of imperial corruption in tax issues. This episode is featured during Skylitzes' description of the extra-ordinary tax burdens which, we are told, Constantine IX (r. 1042-1055) was imposing on the populace. Additionally, we are told, the emperor was appointing "impious, criminal men" as tax collectors, who were in turn helping him generate great income from this venture.[397] This episode is a clear case of imperially constructed corruption taking place. Additionally, a different, exploitable loophole in the tax-collection system is demonstrated by another of Skylitzes' discussions. He describes how judges (κριτής) were levying extra taxes (φορολογούντων) on the countryside populace (ἐγχώριοι) in a very harsh manner. Furthermore, Skylitzes is very critical that the emperor did not prevent such evil acts.[398] He makes this brief statement in context of explaining the bad practices

[396] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 176; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 171. According to Skylitzes this was done by sending a patrician named Niketas Skleros (the Skleros family was a prominent family of Armenian origin) to talk with the Turks and Hungarians and persuade them, which he managed to do.
[397] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 476; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 444.
[398] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 408-9; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 384.

which presaged the forthcoming divine punishments during the reign of Michael IV the Paphlagonian (r. 1034-1041). Some of the resulting catastrophes that Skylitzes is alluding to are most probably the Serbian and Bulgarian uprisings of the year 1040 which resulted in key cities such as Dyrrhachium being temporarily lost and great swaths of Balkan territories being overrun.[399] The Bulgarian uprising was implemented by the Bulgars, supposedly, due to the Byzantine insistence (spearheaded by John the Orphanotrophos) on taxing the Bulgars in cash rather than in kind, as Samuel had previously done (this issue has been analyzed in chapter 3.1.1).[400] These cases all highlight the difficulties involved in controlling a tax network of such a vast size, especially considering the mountainous and difficult-to-travel Anatolian and Macedonian countryside's.

Choniates' narrative features extensive criticism on the so-called 'barbarization' of the tax-collection network of the provinces. During the reign of Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143-1180), we are told that Roman officials were paired with barbarians to draw up and create tax assessments of the provinces and then were to deliver the sealed moneybags to the emperor himself.[401] Choniates explains how this system did not function because the native Romans became disgruntled due to being paired with barbarians and, therefore, started to steal most of the tax revenue for their personal usage, while bringing only a tiny amount back to the emperor. In this instance, Choniates appears to be justifying the behavior of the Roman tax-collectors by vilifying the foreign elements which had been placed in the system under the orders of Manuel Komnenos. Being a part of this system himself, as part of

[399] Skylitzes narrates the massive Bulgarian revolt two paragraphs after discussing the bad omens which pointed towards such happenings. Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 409-13; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 384-88.
[400] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 412; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 387.
[401] Choniates, *Historia,* 204; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 116.

his long career, make Choniates' comments on this all the more relevant. This entire passage is filled with accusations; Choniates also explains how Manuel appointed these foreign elements to the highest offices and even as judges. These "foreign-language" people are described by Choniates as being contacts of the palace eunuchs and chamberlains who speak broken Greek and mumbled their speech in a semi-incoherent manner, which is contrasted against those with knowledge of the glorious Hellenic language.[402] In this case the barbarization of the tax network is represented by our author through an educational framework; Choniates appears to acknowledge these people's Roman identity, but is still unsatisfied with their lack of cultivated speech and quite different cultural backgrounds. The tax collection system has been repeatedly criticized by our authors as being quite corrupt during the twelfth century, this calls into question the extent that the issue which Choniates complains about really had an effect on the already deteriorating system. It may have had minimal impact and was perhaps utilized as an additional way for Choniates to explain the demise of the empire (in 1204) due to such "terrible policies". Nonetheless, this passage illustrates that certain reforms and novelties pertaining to the tax-collection network did occur in this period, which indicates that those in power acknowledged its deterioration to some extent.

Another central issue, especially during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, consisted of determining who exactly would receive this tax revenue. Most of the cases under analysis so far have consisted of the imperial treasury being the eventual receiver of this revenue. In reality, in addition to the possibility of paying taxes to the state, there were two other important possibilities for peasants; landholders

[402] Choniates, *Historia,* 204; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 116. Choniates describes that Manuel was unable to resist these people's requests and he succumbed to them, thereby granting them offices and titles.

(including *pronoia* grant holders) with tax-revenue rights and also hostile powers. Choniates' narrative features an important reference to what many scholars have called the 'gifts of *paroikoi*', one of the first mentions of the *pronoia* system.[403] This matter is relevant for this discussion as it resulted in soldiers becoming the de-facto tax-collectors of the new system.[404] In this famous passage Choniates is quite critical of this new system, which he says Manuel I had begun to implement. He is critical that the traditional payment of the soldiers, which was cash, was being discontinued in place of a new system called 'gifts of *paroikoi'* (τῶν παροίκων δωρεαῖς).[405] According to Choniates this new practice lead to mismanagement of the provincial taxation system and the military. He describes that because of this practice the "people of the provinces" (τῶν ἐπαρχιῶν οἰκήτορες) were "suffering terribly" (πεπόνθασι τὰ οἰκτρότατα), at hands of the soldiers, instead of simply paying taxes to tax-collectors like they used to.[406] It can be inferred from this that Choniates was strongly against such revenue rights being granted to soldiers (and perhaps also landholders). He makes it appear as if the system brought by Manuel I was also much worse for the peasantry, a debatable argument. It is a well-established fact that rural folk disliked imperial tax-collectors and there are many accounts of them

[403] Ostrogorsky initially interpreted this text decades ago, identifying it as a reference to *pronoia*. More recently Mark C. Bartusis, in his monumental work on *pronoia* has further analyzed this text and even created his own "corrected" translated of this passage in the book. According to Bartusis this passage features all of the important components associated with *pronoia* grants; an imperial grant given by an official to soldiers, real property, dependent peasants who pay taxes. The only missing piece of information appears to be any mention that these grants were given for a lifetime. For more information, see Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia*, 64-66.
[404] Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia*, 112-122. The *pronoia* system is known to have been relatively new in the late-twelfth century. The first attested usage of the exact term *pronoia* (in its technical-fiscal meaning) in a document is contained within the Typikon for the Pantokrator Monastery in Constantinople, which dates from 1136. Even though this is the earliest mention of the exact word, there are known to have been earlier grants under the reign of Alexios I Komnenos. His reign is generally accepted as being the period when these grants first started to have been handed out to soldiers in particular.
[405] Choniates, *Historia*, 208; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 118.
[406] Choniates, *Historia*, 208; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 118. "οἱ τὸν δημόσιον πάλαι δεσπότην λαχόντες τῶν ἐπαρχιῶν οἰκήτορες ὑπὸ τῆς στρατιωτικῆς ἁπληστίας πεπόνθασι τὰ οἰκτρότατα…"

exploiting their assignments by levying additional, made-up taxes and arbitrary payments on the peasantry (as seen above). Whether or not the new system, in which the peasants were effectively paying their taxes directly to soldiers and other landholders, really worsened the corruption and negativity associated with tax-collection is unclear. Choniates comments, therefore, need to be read in light of his post-1204 negative attitude towards the policies of Manuel I; any major policy change becomes the target of Choniates' attempts at finding a reason for the eventual fall of the empire. Choniates further elaborates that this change in policy resulted in everyone enlisting in the army, even many people leaving their actual professions and occupations to enlist due to the rewards associated with it. Furthermore, Choniates describes how this policy eventually lead to the suffering of the provinces (ἐπαρχίαι) under enemy/foreign (ἀλλοφύλων) plundering raids due to the army being so disorderly, and he also mentions that these soldiers even plundered their own territory.[407] This episode, which has been identified as representing the origins of the *pronoia* grant system, illustrates the intense debate around tax-collection rights and those directly responsible for it.

Attaleiates, writing in a much earlier period, also features a much-debated passage which is possibly a criticism of the early *pronoia* system.[408] Attaleiates criticizes emperor Michael VII Doukas for giving too much authority to the *Logothete* Nikephoritzes,[409] who in turn was handing out gifts and *pronoia* grants to

[407] Choniates, *Historia*, 209; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, 119.
[408] This usage of the word *pronoia* is hotly debated by scholarship as it is quite an early incident, dating from the eleventh century (more than a century before Choniates). Older scholars such as Uspensky took this case as being the first technical usage of the word *pronoia*. More recently, Bartusis has concluded that this cannot be seen in a strictly technical sense and that the usage here most probably is the more common meaning of the word, which is 'care' or 'solicitude'.
[409] Nikephoritzes was the chief minister of Michael VII and has already been discussed in the previous section due to his involvement in masterminding the *phoundax* institution and other harsh tax policies which he implemented.

anyone he wished.[410] This excerpt creates the understanding that Attaleiates was against such grants, as he saw it in the same framework as the arbitration of power. Anna Komnene's opinion of such grants appears to contradict the negative views of Choniates and Attaleiates. Her narrative, which is undeniably and for obvious reasons filled with praise for her father, Alexios I, features a clause in which she praises the emperor's lenient treatment of Romanos Diogenes' son, Nikephoros. We are told that Alexios granted him the island of Cyprus, presumably making him ruler.[411] Anna implies that this policy (which was a large imperial land grant) was implemented to prevent these 'powerful' individuals from rebelling, so in a sense to satisfy them. An identical logic is manifested in Anna's description of how Alexios managed to get Bohemond's men to rebel against him during the siege of Larissa in the 1082-83 season; Alexios sent them great gifts and promised them property donations so that they would have an incentive to defect over.[412] This specific episode is narrated after the Normans under Bohemond had already inflicted great losses to the Byzantines in Macedonia and Thessaly, and it shows how cunning Alexios' strategic thinking could be in times of necessity. The positive correlation which Anna's narrative enforces with respect to property donation/ownership is further enforced by her description of Alexios preventing the seizure of property from convicted landholders. Two figures, the Armenian Ariebes and the Kelt Humbertopoulos, were convicted so as to be exiled and their properties seized. Yet, Alexios, we are told, did not support such a "harsh" decision.[413] In these excerpts we

[410] Attaleiates, *The History,* 358-59.
[411] Komnene, *Alexias,* 9.6.3; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 281. Anna also takes care to note that anyone else would have seen Nikephoros as a threat and locked them up, but because Alexios was so great he acted in a very noble fashion.
[412] Komnene, *Alexias,* 13.4.1-5; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 407. Bohemond was leader of the First Crusade and subsequently was prominent in the uprising of Norman barons against Byzantine rule.
[413] Komnene, *Alexias,* 8.7.1; Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 262.

see both the granting/donating of properties being utilized as a political tool and also the defense of existing landholders by Anna Komnene. Despite the endless panegyric elements and literary super-structures which she utilizes,[414] Anna's narrative appears quite consistent with regard to the protection of large-landholdings. Choniates' narrative, in comparison to the other two, has the benefit of hindsight, in which he is more aware of the future damages which such land concessions and payments had created when conferred upon the already powerful magnates and landlords of the provinces. This may partially address the very different perspectives between the two, but, Anna's panegyric attitude towards Alexios' policies probably has a bigger role.

The second possible issue about the eventual receiver of tax revenue was the case of hostile actors taking over this network. Skylitzes' explanation of how Thomas the Slav managed this in the ninth century provides a good example. He describes how Thomas had seized control of the entire network of "public tax-collectors" (δημόσιος πράκτωρ) of all the eastern provinces. Thanks to this, "Thomas was receiving all the taxes of the public collectors upon himself."[415] Thomas managed this thanks to the defection of many provincial tax-collectors aligning themselves with his cause.[416] This rebellion resulted in widespread devastation and military losses across a vast swath of Byzantine territory.[417] Theoretically, just

[414] Anna is most probably not blinded by her awe towards her father, but instead feels obliged to praise his individual actions, the same way in which Choniates takes on a very positive attitude towards Isaac Komnenos. Anna's praises even feature extensive classical references, such as likening Alexios to Alexander the Great. The reference to Alexander the Great is in; Komnene, *Alexias*, 15.7.8. Additionally, Anna also frequently uses other classical metaphors when discussing the great military victories of her father. In one such case (Komnene, *Alexias,* 1.7.3) she uses metaphors of the struggles between the Gods and Typhon to allude to the battles of Alexios. This issue is further discussed by Herbert Hunger; Hunger, *On the Imitation (Mimesis) of Antiquity,* 27.

[415] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 30. Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 34. "οὗτος τοίνυν ὁ Θωμᾶς πᾶσαν τὴν ἕω παραλαβὼν καὶ τοὺς τῶν δημοσίων πράκτορας φόρων ὑφ' ἑαυτὸν." Wortley notes that his appropriation of such fiscal resources was an important factor in the degree of success that his revolt achieved.

[416] Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780-842*, 228-29.

[417] The military details of this rebellion are discussed in chapter 4.4.

looking at the issue of tax-collection, from the perspective of the peasants who payed these taxes, there probably would not be much change in their lives. Which actor eventually received their taxes, be it the state, a *pronoia* holder or a rebel, probably had quite a minimal impact on their lives. For the state, though, this meant all the difference in the world; a rogue agent taxing the provinces was obviously seen as being totally unacceptable. One identifiable difference stemming from whom the peasants paid their taxes to was that being under a landholder allowed *paroikoi* to enjoy the benefits of possibility being protected by their landholders, as they were a revenue-base and therefore important for them, a situation which was balanced out by the tax burden being greater than it was for the free peasantry.[418] The second issue, paying taxes to hostile or rebel powers, could also be a redundant issue. In cases as those depicted about Thomas the Slav, and also confirmed by the seamless transition of Basil I continuing to tax the Bulgarians the same way as Symeon had been doing (as discussed in 3.2), the eventual receiver of their tax-payment did not really change much for the peasantry.

Part of the generally quite disdainful attitude towards tax-officials is demonstrated in Psellos' usage of the word harbor-tax gatherer (ἐλλιμενίζω) as a negative metaphor for particularly annoying behavior.[419] This suggests that Psellos acknowledged the association made between payments to the state (i.e. taxation) and common distress. The terminology used in this case is very interesting for the purposes of this study; the fact that tax collectors, although of a harbor tax (but nonetheless a tax), were used as a negative word to describe annoying activities, suggests that the practice of gathering taxes was seen with disdain. This attribution is not surprising considering the harassment frequently alluded to in these passages,

[418] Lefort, "The Rural Economy," 238.
[419] Psellos, *The History,* 86; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 144.

such as tax-collectors enforcing extra, non-existent payments from the peasantry. Obviously, this would be done under the name of 'taxation', giving the word a negative reputation associated with corruption. Putting ourselves in the position of a Medieval peasant it is not difficult to imagine that tax-collectors, appearing out of the blue, would be viewed with great suspicion as their legitimacy would be very questionable. No doubt the forging of an imperial document or official mark, designating such an official, would not be too complicated. Fooling a mostly illiterate population would not be too hard compared to today's standards. The only interaction which most peasants would have had with the state was through the collection and assessment of such taxes, done by the so-called 'tax-officials' of the state (or possibly of other allegiances). This resulted in them being representative of an undesirable meddling in the agrarian life of a large part of the empire's populace.

3.2 Peasants, law and the judicial system

The Byzantine village formed an administrative, judicial and fiscal unity for official purposes. The legal manifestation of this was that in a broad variety of cases, the village was taken as a single organic unit, even in seemingly unrelated instances such as local divorce cases. These divorce cases involved not only the two direct participants of the ordeal, but the neighbors and the rest of the village also had a say, which exemplifies the extent of the community spirit in Byzantine villages.[420] This is all part of the wider collective psyche involved in village life; the village functioned as a cohesive entity in times of emergencies and social events, and the villagers, led

[420] Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 49-50. Angeliki Laiou comes to this conclusion in context of thirteenth century Macedonian villages. She utilizes legal documents from the Despotate of Epiros (located in Macedonia) and gives specific examples, one of which consists of the many neighbors of a local couple who were seeking divorce giving testimony before the local bishop.

by their elders, would participate in feasts and litanies too.[421] Recent scholarship has acknowledged the cohesion and harmony which village localities exhibited, despite the lack of official legal frameworks.[422] Of the narratives under analysis, especially Attaleiates' account features relatively informative digressions on legal matters associated with the peasantry. Similar to how Choniates, being a ἀπογραφεύς, features extensive comments on tax policies, Attaleiates features more passages concerned with judicial matters most probably due to his background as an imperial judge. Passages from Attaleiates, Choniates, Psellos and Kinnamos all illustrate different aspects of the judicial system, concerning areas such as; the legal relationship with the peasantry, imperial meddling in the legal system, the punishment system and general lawlessness and corruption.

A very lengthy passage illustrating the skewed nature of the legal system against the peasantry is given by Attaleiates concerning the reign of Isaac I Komnenos (r. 1057-1059). We are informed that the emperor confiscated some land from a monastery for various reasons, and this action freed those who tilled the neighboring fields (ἀγρογείτων) from the oppression of the monastery - as it appears the monastery was forcing the farmers to surrender their lands to them.[423] Attaleiates describes the monks as being very greedy (ἀπληστία), and also criticizes the law system for being skewed against the farmers; they had no chance of winning any

[421] Kazhdan, "The Peasantry," 62.
[422] This view, initially advocated by Alexander Kazhdan, has more recently been lent additional support from the works of Angeliki Laiou. In her 2008 article on the Byzantine peasantry she concluded that "Byzantine villages appear to have more cohesion and structure than most historians, to some degree including myself in the past – although I have repented since then – have acknowledged. Laiou, "The Peasant as the Donor (13th – 14th Centuries)," 119. Laiou further stated that; "The examination of the Byzantine village as a social unit will, no doubt, continue to engage scholarship in the future." Angeliki Laiou, "The Byzantine Village," 47. This is an area that Laiou has identified as being a particularly resourceful one which necessitates more work to be done on it. She underlines that especially village solidarities and the mechanisms which keep village communities functioning as a cohesive social unit are important areas of research.
[423] Attaleiates, *The History,* 112.

disputes against the powerful monastery.[424] It is not surprising that the farmers did not stand a chance in court - they were not even treated as individual subjects by the system. At the risk of being slightly anachronistic, I would like to argue that being taxed and legally represented in a largely communal fashion somewhat hindered the individual legal rights of the peasants. The above passage has quite a reliable foundation keeping in mind that Attaleiates had studied law and served in the empire's judicial system for many years. In this passage it is clear that Attaleiates is critical of the fact that the peasantry and general common folk were doomed to lose in the court system against powerful landholders, such as monasteries. His explanation is that this is so because of the skewed law system, which is a very harsh comment coming from someone involved in the judicial system at such a high rank. This commentary, showing Isaac I Komnenos' harsh policy directed against combatting the growing influence of ecclesiastical properties, appears to complement Skylitzes' laudatory discussion of the same exact policy.[425] Both Skylitzes and Attaleiates describe this policy of Isaac Komnenos in a very positive light, with Attaleiates giving a judicial perspective to the matters which the emperor was trying to sort out. The fact that Attaleiates is able to criticize the overall functioning of law in such a way shows that he had certain diverging views with the accepted practice of law. This is illustrated perfectly through his comments on the *phoundax* that had been set up in Rhaidestos (which has been discussed). While describing how *phoundax* officials harassed the 'poor merchants (ἔμπορος) and farmers' (γεωργός), Attaleiates explicitly states that no one was able to stand up to these officials because

[424] Attaleiates, *The History,* 113.
[425] This issue has been discussed in chapter 3.1.2. Skylitzes mentioned how Isaac had garnered the hatred of ecclesiastical circles due to his harsh measures directed against curbing their power and landholdings.

'they were backed by the power of the *logothetes* (λογοθέτης)'.[426] This is a direct criticism of the biased nature of the judicial system, whereby officials of the *phoundax* were basically exempt from answering to any of the abuses they committed against the farmers or merchants who were forced to run their produce through them. This criticism is all the more interesting considering Attaleiates' personal closeness to the administration of the time.

In addition to illustrating the skewed nature of the judicial system, Attaleiates' narrative also features a commentary on the punishment system, within a legal scope. Attaleiates greatly praises emperor Constantine X Doukas (r. 1059-1067) for not being too prone to hand out physical/bodily punishments (σῶμα κολαστικοῦ).[427] He describes the emperor as being good-natured and modest, including the above as an example of such behavior. Despite being a prominent judge Attaleiates appears to be critical of the harsh nature of certain Byzantine legal practices, visible in his condemnation of bloody punishments (κόλασιν δί αἵματος), which he reiterates slightly later on once more.[428] In a somewhat contradictory manner, Attaleiates slanders Constantine X for exercising supreme power over the "judicial system" (ἐξουσίαν δικαστικὸν).[429] This phrase in located in a sentence filled with other sorts of accusations against the emperor, implying that Attaleiates was not happy with the emperor's arbitrary domination of the law system. He further continues to describe that many people were unhappy about the convictions who were done illegally (καταδικαζομένων οὐ νομικῶς), out of the bounds of the judicial framework.[430] Being a judge obviously had an influence on Attaleiates'

[426] Attaleiates, *The History,* 371.
[427] Attaleiates, *The History,* 138-39.
[428] Attaleiates, *The History*, 139.
[429] Attaleiates, *The History*, 140-41.
[430] Attaleiates, *The History*, 140-41.

righteousness and these legal failings are one of the main reasons that he accuses Constantine X as failing terribly at his post as an emperor, as he had failed the "public welfare" (κοινὸν ὄφελος).[431] For Attaleiates the often quite subjective and biased nature of the judicial system, combined with individual emperors often dominating its functioning, appear to be the main criticism points which he explicitly underlines. He seems to be especially defensive of the general populace (visible in the excerpts above), including the peasantry, due to their disadvantageous standings in the judicial system, which Attaleiates saw as a fundamental problem.

Choniates, in contrast to Attaleiates, gives a much more positive account of the Byzantine law system, which he discusses in context of Andronikos I's reign (r. 1183-85). He describes how Andronikos would listen equally to commoners of lowly origin (χθαμαλός) and to "wealthy, powerful individuals" (πλούτῳ σεμνὸν).[432] Not differentiating between any two men, Andronikos would dispense objective justice – according to Choniates. He then proceeds to narrate a specific case where the country folk actually won a case. In this incident, brought to Andronikos by a group of rustics (ἀγροικίας τινὲς), a wealthy man known as Theodore Dadibrenos is said to have taken supplies from a group of peasants and then departed without paying them back. Then, we are told, Andronikos actually found Dadibrenos guilty and, on top of sentencing him to twelve lashes, also ordered the "officials of the imperial fisc" (χρυσώνων τῶν βασιλικῶν) to pay the peasants' (ἀγροτέρων) expenses (ἀναλωμάτων) many times in excess.[433] This case is very interesting as it is one of the few instances in these narratives where the author takes an active stance with the peasantry/commoners against some injustice committed on them by an individual of

[431] Attaleiates, *The History*, 142-43.
[432] Choniates, *Historia*, 330; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 182.
[433] Choniates, *Historia*, 330; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 182.

higher status. Keeping in mind Choniates' generally very praiseworthy and laudatory tone towards certain emperors, such as Andronikos, we must be skeptical when analyzing the implications of this story. There is a good chance that this narrative is meant to show what a just emperor Andronikos was, even against the poor peasantry from remote locations. In a sense the peasantry could be being used as a literary tool to enhance the awe the reader feels against this terribly just emperor who is protecting his flock with great care. In the general picture enforced also by documentary material, Attaleiates' lamentations about the hardships endured by commoners on the receiving end of the judicial system sounds like a more realistic depiction of the real events. Choniates' narration seems more steeped in panegyric elements than Attaleiates' argument, an idea which is further enforced by the latter's extensive involvement in the system that he is criticizing. Nonetheless, both show us glimpses towards how the law was perceived as functioning towards the peasantry. In both cases the idea of the equality and impartiality of the law system is enforced; in Attaleiates' case through criticizing its lack, in Choniates' case through praising its enforcement by showing that the peasants managed to win a case against a wealthy individual. Documentary sources indicate that such victories did exist for the peasantry, especially in the ninth-tenth century period, but these cases remained isolated and should not be blown out of proportion. The general trend remained that the peasantry would begin such trials against landholders or state-officials with a significant disadvantage. Therefore, such isolated cases of peasant legal victories often suggest a larger political game was at play, and such cases probably had more outside involvement than the mere participants of each side.

Psellos' narrative features great praise for Isaac I Komnenos (r. 1057-1059), whom Attaleiates had also praised for preventing monastic landholders from abusing

their peasantry. Psellos, mentions how the emperor, acknowledging his ignorance on matters of law, would leave legal matters to the judges and legal experts themselves.[434] After the judges had come to a conclusion, Isaac would, according to Psellos, always reinforce their decision, backing it up as if he also thought the same way from the beginning. From Psellos' perspective this was a sly move on the emperor's behalf as he was hiding his ignorance on such issues by appearing to always be thinking the same as the professional judges were. The very fact that Psellos is mentioning such an issue during his long-rambling panegyric is indicative of the fact that many emperors must have taken judicial matters into their own initiative and completely ignored the judges and legal experts, thereby skewing the entire system. Otherwise, the fact that Isaac I was not doing this would not be something worthy of praise or mention. This is not surprising, it is a known fact that, especially towards the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the judicial system was increasing corrupt and skewed in favor of imperial politics, often through the indirect control of the emperor. Psellos' stance here is identical to what Attaleiates was lamenting about; the arbitration of judicial power by the emperor and high ranking civil servants. The similarity of such lamentations, written in a very similar period, from two authors with quite different formations and backgrounds, suggests that this was a commonly voiced concern among the informed and mindful individuals of Constantinopolitan high circles.

Finally, Kinnamos' narrative also features an interesting digression on the judicial system. He describes Manuel I's lenient treatment towards Andronikos Komnenos around the year 1167, by explaining how the emperor gave Andronikos the "rights to the taxes of Cyprus" (Κύπρον αὐτῷ φορολογεῖσθαι ἔδωκεν), which

[434] Psellos, *The History,* 212; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 305-6.

according to Kinnamos, was a pretty lucrative (ἄφθονος) deal.[435] Unfortunately it appears that Andronikos was not satisfied with these offers and disobeyed the emperor by "taking the empress' sister (Philippa of Antioch) as his wife" (Αὐγούστης κασιγνήτην γυναῖκα ἐγγυητὴν ἐποιήσατο). Kinnamos mentions that such a thing was not permitted by law (νόμιμος), showing us his knowledge of Roman law and also appearing to support the law. The tale continues still further. We are told that Andronikos abandoned his wife for no reason and fled to Palestine "taking with him a great deal of wealth which belonged to the emperor" (χρήματα τῶν βασιλέως πλεῖστα συνεπαγόμενος) and which the latter had gained through the "taxation of the lands of Cilicia and Cyprus" (Κιλικίας τε αὐτῆς καὶ τῆς Κυπρίων ἐκπεφορολόγηκε γῆς).[436] It is also worthy of note that Kinnamos refers to all of this taxation revenue which belongs to the imperial coffers as belonging to the emperor himself. In this case Kinnamos seems to be reinforcing the emperor equals empire understanding. Kinnamos is acting similar to an imperial pawn both by describing the empire's treasury as being the personal property of the emperor and also by greatly supporting the overall law system in question. A very different attitude from the more critical stance exhibited by Attaleiates and Psellos, despite the different context.

In the passages analyzed above, from the works of Attaleiates, Choniates, Psellos and Kinnamos, different aspects of the legal system, the Byzantine judicial understanding and its relationship with the peasantry has been discussed. Especially Attaleiates' more informed comments highlight the difficulties the peasantry faced with their legal associations; the *logothetes* backing up *phoundax* officials against the farmers, resulting in them having no chance of winning their cases; and also, the fact

[435] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 250; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 188.
[436] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 250; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 188.

that monastic landholders were able to abuse their peasantry, because, once again, the latter had no chance of winning a court case against the former (exemplified by both Attaleiates and Psellos). Furthermore, Attaleiates' indirect condemnation of arbitrary physical punishments, combined with Choniates and Kinnamos' generalized descriptions of lawlessness[437] provides a good overall picture of the condition of rural judicial matters within the eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine Empire and additionally serve to highlight the tumultuous relationship it had with the peasantry.

[437] On the start of Alexios I Komnenos' reign, Choniates mentions that barbarian nations were viewing the Byzantines with great contempt due to the general lawless, evil practices which kept taking place, such as the constant rising up of men against each other. Choniates' commentary here appears to be alluding to the whole eleventh century until Alexios. Choniates, *Historia*, 453; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 249.

CHAPTER 4

THE PEASANTRY AND MILITARY EVENTS

Warfare was a fairly regular affair during the Middle Byzantine period and is a topic worthy of analysis due to the wide amount of information regarding the countryside which is specifically associated with military situations. Military engagements arose due to external and internal factors alike. Some of the most notable internal rebellions which our authors cover are those of Thomas the Slav in the 820's,[438] Bardas Skleros in 976,[439] George Maniakes in 1042,[440] Leo Tornikios in 1047,[441] and Alexios Branas in 1186.[442] These men were all former military generals/commanders, who turned rogue, believing they could claim the throne. Externally, the ninth century period was largely dominated by engagements with the Arabs of the Abbasid caliphate, while towards the tenth century two new formidable opponents presented challenges to Byzantium: the Bulgarians and the Kievan Rus. The repeated victories of the Bulgarians under Symeon during the early-tenth century undermined Byzantine dominance in the Balkans. Basil II finally subdued and temporarily eliminated the Bulgarian threat in the years 1014-1018.[443] This period was also characterized by a series of engagements with the Kievan Rus, who were partially subdued with the Christianization of the Russians in the late-tenth

[438] Thomas the Slav was a Byzantine military commander who conducted a widespread revolt in the years 821-23 against emperor Michael II the Amorian.
[439] Bardas Skleros was a Byzantine general who engineered a large rebellion against Basil II between the years 976-979.
[440] George Maniakes was a prominent Byzantine general who rebelled against the reign of Constantine IX in the year 1042.
[441] Leo Tornikios was a Byzantine general and nobleman, who later rebelled against his uncle, emperor Constantine IX Monomachos.
[442] Alexios Branas was a Byzantine military commander and nobleman who rebelled against emperor Isaac II Angelos in 1187.
[443] Following the Battle of Kleidion in 1014, the Bulgarian army was largely obliterated. This resulted in the Bulgarians eventually collapsing in the year 1018. This marked the fall of the First Bulgarian Empire, which would be revived again in the year 1185 following a wide-scale rebellion.

century. In the second half of the eleventh century, following the Great Schism of 1054, the Normans became a formidable opponent of Byzantium (under Robert Guiscard), slowly advancing through Byzantine Italy and further into the Balkans.[444] In the mid-eleventh century, another exceptionally potent new enemy appeared; the Seljuq Turks. Following the disastrous defeat at Manzikert in 1071, Byzantine control over Asia Minor was irretrievably shaken. From this period onwards, Byzantium generally controlled only the coastal regions with the largely mountainous central and southern parts of Anatolia being in a state of near-anarchy.[445] The late-eleventh century period was also characterized by the beginning of the Crusades and increasing hostility between the Latin West (Italians, Normans, Franks) and Byzantium. Especially the period between 1071-1092 was also characterized by repeated incursions by nomadic raiders (such as the Pechenegs) who pillaged Byzantine territories – especially in the Balkans.[446] The Pechenegs were finally defeated by Alexios I in 1091 and eliminated as a threat by his successor, John II.[447] In the twelfth century the Hungarians also emerged as a potent new threat which had to be dealt with by John II and Manuel I often through marriage alliances and diplomacy.[448] The security of the countryside is the primary concern of the present study, as its subject is the peasantry. It has been argued by modern scholarship that the eleventh- and twelfth-century period was characterized by increasing countryside security measures under large landowners who had taken over the defensive role of the state in many regions.[449] Finally, it must be noted that

[444] Laiou, "Political History: An Outline," 20.
[445] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy,* 95.
[446] Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy,* 95.
[447] Laiou, "Political History: An Outline," 21.
[448] Laiou, "Political History: An Outline," 21.
[449] Estate owners erected tower, walls and other security measures to protect their *paroikoi* and lands. Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy,* 95.

the second half of the twelfth century was a period of military crisis with many defeats, territorial shrinkages and nomadic invasions, which authors such as Choniates and Kinnamos frequently allude to.

In the most generalized Byzantine state philosophy, warfare was condemned,[450] but this did not prevent the fact that the Empire frequently found itself embroiled in warfare in order to achieve peace.[451] Our authors, in general, continue to echo this broadly anti-war attitude. This is represented through their occasional condemnation of pointless wars based on weak pretexts.[452] Yet, being knowledgeable about military events is worthy of great praise in these narratives, probably explainable by the increased presence of military commanders who became emperor in the period under discussion; such as Isaac I Komnenos or Alexios I Komnenos. Psellos, for example, describes Isaac I as being aware of the causes of the Roman Empire's terrible state, and the prospering of its neighbors, due to his experience as commander-in-chief of the army (something which he says some previous emperors lacked).[453] The relationship of the peasantry with military events can be thought of over several important interaction channels; the peasantry being caught up in warfare and fleeing their villages or suffering, the conscription and utilization of the peasantry in the army, the peasants' role of supplying, provisioning and accommodating the army, resettlement issues and forced migrations, and the adverse effects of non-state hostile invaders, such as bandits or rebellious soldiers. These

[450] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 275.
[451] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society,* 13.
[452] Psellos, *The History,* 28; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 66. The pretext for imperial warfare is sometimes portrayed as being very weak and selfish by our authors. Psellos, for example, describes how emperor Romanos III, seeking fame, decided to organize a massive expedition against the barbarians of the east without any real provocation. Psellos continues to describe the extensive conscription process which swelled the ranks of the army in preparation of this expedition, which no doubt resulted in many young men being slaughtered to bring fame to the emperor.
[453] Psellos, *The History,* 217-18; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 311-12. Isaac Komnenos had been the commander of the Anatolian army between 1042 and 1057. This provided, according to Psellos, a suitable background for him to ascend and become emperor.

effects were especially pronounced during the turbulent Komnenian period. It is obvious that the rural commoner, i.e. peasant, was by far the largest segment of the total population of the empire. It is therefore not surprising that peasants would constitute an important part of the army, by being conscripted and utilized in times of necessity. The transit of the army through the provinces, which was another major issue, would impose heavy burdens on the rural population mainly due to its supplying.[454] During the tenth century the army consisted of two main components; the *tagmata*, professional soldiers funded by the state who were based in the capital, and the *themata,* the much larger group of soldiers located in the provinces. This system slowly eroded into the Komnenian period, with an increasing number of mercenary elements in the army,[455] and the *tagmata* gaining a semi-autonomous character.[456] This was further exacerbated by the financial issues which resulted in many frontline soldiers being discharged from military duties for a small tax.[457] The increased presence of *pronoia* grants given to soldiers also resulted in them often abandoning warfare and settling down to farm the revenue of their allocated properties. All of this resulted in a profound transformation of the military system during the Komnenian period, which is visualized through a professional core army, composed of foreign elements and tied to Constantinople, and highly centrifugal mercenary elements who were hired during times of warfare. Additionally, the eleventh- and twelfth-century period was a time of heavy enemy raiding and plundering of especially the Macedonian and Anatolian countryside's.[458] All of these

[454] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society,* 147.
[455] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society,* 225, 276.
[456] Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army 284-1081*, 214.
[457] The absence of the troops of the border themes became very apparent in the eleventh century as especially Turks found it easy to penetrate into Byzantine territory. For more information, see Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army 284-1081, 216.*
[458] Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine*, 343. Ostrogorsky describes how especially the middle period of the eleventh century is a period of extensive Turkoman raiding. And he elaborates that these

issues will be analyzed throughout this chapter, with an emphasis on the textual sources under analysis and the specific links and interactions channels between such issues and the peasantry.

4.1 Peasant displacement and frontline villages

When faced with the prospect of being in the vicinity of a pitched battle between two large armies, most village inhabitants would be compelled to resort to the only means available to them; fleeing for their lives. The sources under analysis attest to the fact that when hostile forces were approaching villagers would quite often flee to more protected areas, such as up a mountain, or to a fortified place, such as a nearby walled settlement. This is quite understandable considering that most Byzantine villages did not contain walls or any other sort of deterrent fortification. A chilling example of the savageness of warfare is narrated by Anna Komnene's description of the massive Scythian advance into the Byzantine Danube territories during the spring of 1087. She describes how the villagers, all around the district near Pamphilon, were fleeing in complete terror to the cities (πόλεις) and strongholds (φρούρια) when they heard of this imminent enemy invasion.[459] The phrase she uses here is "κωμοπόλεις τῶν παρακειμένων χωρῶν", which implies that these fleeing people inhabited villages and small towns of different sizes (κωμοπόλεις – "village-town"). It is easily inferred that these areas were not protected and were quite vulnerable to the Scythians descending on them. This specific episode narrated by Anna is an example

Turkoman raiders also constituted one of the biggest menaces to the Byzantine countryside during the Komnenian Period.

[459] Komnene, *Alexias,* 7.1.1; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 217. "Ὁρῶντες δὲ τοὺς περὶ τὰς κωμοπόλεις τῶν παρακειμένων χωρῶν πρὸς τὰς πόλεις καὶ τὰ φρούρια συνελαυνομένους διὰ πτοίαν πολλὴν ἀπάραντες τοῦ οὑτωσὶ καλουμένου Παμφύλου…"

of what would happen when the peasants had gotten a forewarning of an imminent invasion; they were fleeing prior to the actual arrival of the Scythians. Without such a warning, the consequences might have been significantly worse. The tenth century *Treatise on Guerilla Warfare* shows how the army was tasked with helping villagers fall back towards a well-defended stronghold with all of their livestock and movable property and enough supplies for four months.[460] Other documents show that villagers would sometimes flee for considerable distances to reach an estate, as estates offered better protection.[461]

Similar sackings in Thrace from the year 1187 are narrated by Choniates, concerning the Vlachs who were also recruiting *Cuman* mercenaries to plunder and destroy the countryside.[462] It is important to note that these engagements in the Balkans was part of the broader Byzantine political break-down in this region. With the establishment of the Second Bulgarian Empire in 1185, newly empowered Bulgarian elements began penetrating into Thracian territories, while Byzantium also had to deal with the Norman threat (such as the sack of Thessaloniki in 1185) and also the internal rebellion of Alexios Branas in 1186. With so many hostile invaders, the Macedonian and Thracian countryside's were in an especially vulnerable and dangerous state during these years. Nomadic elements, such as the Scythians/Cumans were also a nuisance due to their readiness in joining up with the Bulgarians. The Cumans of the twelfth century have been identified by scholarship as having no specific long-term goal other than robbery and pillaging, which reduced

[460] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 277.
[461] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 277-278. This case also shows that the peasants continued paying the taxes of their hereditary village, showing that they definitely intended to return once it was safe again.
[462] Choniates, *Historia*, 394; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 217. The Vlachs, in this case, are referring to the Bulgarians of the newly formed Bulgarian Empire. The word *Cumans* appears to be a more contemporary version of the standard word "Scythians" to refer to these nomadic raiders.

their threat level in the Byzantine imperial mindset.[463] While for the countryside they constituted a great menace, unfortunately for the peasantry, the focus of the already over-extended Byzantine military lay with elements harboring larger political ambitions. Still, the importance of the Cumans lay more in their prominent featuring as mercenaries in engagements between the Bulgarians, Byzantines and Latins – which could make or break empires.[464]

The fate which befell villages which were caught up in an actual military engagement would be quite grim, an issue which our authors are not very concerned with, exemplified by Choniates' treatment of the village of Χάρακα.[465] Similarly, Attaleiates narrates how 'people of the fields' (ὑπαίθριος) gathered all their stuff (ἐφοδιάζειν) and fled to the gates of the nearby town in Thrace when they heard of the rebel army of Leo Tornikios approaching in 1047.[466] It is obvious that rebellious leaders rallying soldiers to their cause in a large-scale manner, such as Leo Tornikios,[467] posed a similar danger to provincial society as the descending of a massive Scythian horde did. This is because the identities of the belligerents in a war were not as important from the perspective of the peasantry, compared to their treatment of the latter.

The fleeing of villagers is especially understandable considering the 'rules' of warfare in Byzantine military treatises. Nikephoros Ouranos' *Taktika* (the famous

[463] Vasary, *Cumans and Tatars*, 56. In these years seasonal Cuman/Scythian raids appear to have been occurring nearly every year.
[464] Vasary, *Cumans and Tatars*, 56. The Cumans have been recognized as being vital in the founding of the Second Bulgarian Empire by the Vlakho-Bulgarians in the year 1185. This event was catalyzed by Cuman help in aiding these rebels in toppling Byzantine rule in the region and establishing their own.
[465] Choniates describes how a full-scale battle takes place in the vicinity of a village called Χάρακα, with no further mention of the village. Choniates, *Historia*, 245; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 138.
[466] Attaleiates, *The History,* 39.
[467] Leo Tornikios (Λέων Τορνίκιος) was a Byzantine general of Armenian origin, who, in the year of 1047, decided to rebel against his uncle, emperor Constantine IX Monomachos, by raising a large army from the countryside regions of Thrace. The uprising was important as it resulted in the siege of Constantinople by Leo and his army during the same year. Eventually, towards the end of the year 1047, his army dispersed/deserted, and he was captured.

general of Basil II, in the early-eleventh century) describes that to starve out a fortified town the army should destroy the crops and harvests of its hinterland so that most of the populace of the region is suppressed by starvation and forced to move away, hence isolating the town.[468] The reciprocity and similarity in tactics by enemy forces can also be inferred, and can therefore be applied, in a broad fashion, to their treatment of Byzantine territory. This implies that, for example, in the episode narrated by Anna Komnene relating to 1187, the capture of the town of Pamphilon could have involved the complete desolation of its entire hinterland, including all fields and small villages. Furthermore, Ouranos' *Taktika* continues, "on your way through hostile territory you should set fire to the regions and their settlements and burn all dwellings, crops, and pastures".[469] It is important to remember, therefore, that such actions constituted the 'military norm'. On defense of the military establishment, it must be noted that warnings and preventive evacuation measures were often taken to ensure the safety of the agrarian populace. In such cases, rather than actually fleeing in terror, the peasantry would be encouraged to seek refuge in fortified areas, at least until the danger subsided. One such example is narrated by Skylitzes, during reign of Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042-1055), as the Byzantine army was engaging Turkish forces in northeastern Anatolia in the year 1049. Skylitzes describes how the commander of the Roman army, upon reaching a large plain called Outrou (a plain near today's Erzurum), ordered "all the local, rural population, including even the children" (πάντα πρότερον τὸν ἀγρότην λαὸν καὶ παῖδας καὶ πᾶν), to quickly relocate to within the fortified positions (ὀχύρωμα) that had been established.[470] This large plain was a likely location for a large engagement

[468] McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*, 155.
[469] McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*, 147.
[470] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 450; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 423.

and the Byzantines wanted to preserve the agrarian populace in this region from becoming pointless victims during possible aggression.

Needless to say, frontline villages bore the brunt of the burden of warfare and raiding. As a result, the state had to be careful not to overburden the populations of these frontline regions or they could harbor rebellious activities. This resulted in these frontier regions sometimes not being taxed.[471] The idea of being "on the frontline" was quite a fluid concept, which would fluctuate due to the constant border alterations between polities in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. As political borders moved, the villagers lying in these regions could suddenly find themselves 'on the front' and in immediate danger of being raided by enemies or utilized by the Roman army for defense, which would result in a significantly negative transformation of their lives. A further complication with the terms 'frontline' or 'border' are the relative nonexistence of their physical manifestations. There were not well-defined borders, just broad areas which existed within the framework of the imperial state's territorial imaginations. Nonetheless, the first 'Roman' elements that hostile forces came into contact with, coming from the dark reaches of different foreign lands, would in all probability be small frontline villages. Therefore, these settlements were vitally important in the defensive reaction of the entire military structure, they could serve as a forewarning. Attaleiates, for example, notes that, during the 1060's, the frontier villages and small towns (πολίχνια) along the Eastern border (around the city of Ani, in Armenia – today's Kars region) were arranged such that they served as a "defensive bulwark/fortification" (χαράκωμα μέγας) against the "Nephthalite Huns" (Turks) wishing to invade from Iberia (the Caucasus region, around modern

[471] Madgearu, *Byzantine Military Organization of the Danube, 10th-12th Centuries*, 143.

Georgia), thereby averting (ἀποτροπή) them.[472] These areas were often staging areas of small skirmishes, as this comment also alludes to. The importance of such villages resulted in them being actively reinforced by the imperial center. For instance, Choniates narrates how, around the late-1160's, Manuel I Komnenos fortified many villages (κώμη) along the Asian frontier of the empire by building walls (τεῖχος) around them, and in this way also protected the vast horse-breeding plains (ἱππήλατος πεδίον) of the region behind them.[473] This protection was aimed against the Turks, who, according to Choniates had been ravaging the countryside mercilessly. Choniates further describes how this allowed these regions to swell in population once again, as prior to this protection the villages had been nearly deserted with everyone settling in the fortified cities instead. A different passage from Choniates' narrative is indicative that walls were probably fairly common in villages and towns located near frontline regions. During a detailed explanation of the Turkish campaign around Philomilion, Choniates, while referring to some villages in the region, specifically mentions that they were unwalled.[474] The fact that Choniates explicitly states this strongly suggests that in the region around Philomilion, at least, the norm was to contain walls. This contrasts sharply with the general idea that most Byzantine villages would be unwalled, but, appears feasible, as frontline villages would represent a small fraction of the total. This idea also bodes with the abovementioned description given by Attaleiates of how frontier villages served as a defensive bulwark against Eastern invaders – serving such a

[472] Attaleiates, *The History,* 146-147. "The cities, town and settlements were arranged so that they served as a defensive bulwark against those disposed barbarians intending to invade from Iberia, averting them" (my own translation).
[473] Choniates, *Historia,* 150; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 85. The specific regions/cities that Choniates mentions in this passage are Asia, Chiara, Pergamon and Atramyttion.
[474] Choniates, *Historia* 495; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 272.

purpose would necessitate the inclusion of some sort of defensive mechanism, such as walls.

4.2 The peasants' role in supplying and provisioning

The Byzantine countryside was quite vast and distances to frontline regions could be lengthy and arduous. Villages and small settlements along the route of the army were important in its supplying and provisioning, which is why populated fertile routes would be preferred during military movements. It has been calculated that the grain-supply wagon of the army could not have carried enough for the entire army, and that the rest must have been collected en route from the countryside.[475] The lack of such provisioning could destroy an army, and is often narrated as a tactic utilized by the Byzantine polity against its enemies.[476] Under normal circumstances, ideally, to prevent the total devastation of villages, the entire army would not march en masse in friendly territory, but it would split up, thereby lowering the burden imposed on the local rural population.[477] Military doctrines show that this provisioning was forced and organized, but ideally not in the form of pillaging. A Byzantine military treatise called Περὶ Παραδρομῆς (*"On Skirmishing"* – also referred to by scholarship as *De Velitatione Bellica*), dating from the tenth century, features a clause stating that whenever possible the army should occupy villages and carry there as little

[475] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society,* Appendix 2, Appendix 3. Haldon has a detailed analysis on this issue.
[476] Psellos, for example, describes how Basil II, instead of engaging the rebel Sclerus in open warfare, decided to prevent him from freely using the roads (τὰς τῶν ὁδῶν ἀποτειχίζων ἐλευθερίας), and in this way Sclerus' supplies were disrupted, and his convoys were impounded. This resulted in the rebel army not receiving adequate supplies and slowly disintegrating. This would result in the dispersion of an army without any military casualties on the Byzantine side, which was a strongly desirable result. Psellos, *The History,* 12; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers,* 41.
[477] Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society,* Appendix 2, Appendix 3. In sparsely populated regions the number of pack animals carrying supplies would serve as a limiting factor in the maximum size of the army.

supplies as possible, so as to exploit the resources there.[478] Another military treatise, the *Taktika* of Leo VI, again dating from the tenth century, features clauses that urged generals to prevent their own troops from pillaging and raiding friendly countryside territories. It also explicitly states whenever the army was to pass through cultivated land, they were required to pass carefully and in a supervised manner.[479] This was obviously very hard to enforce, which is probably one reason for its inclusion in such a manual. Kinnamos, for example, describes how it was very common for groups of soldiers to break rank and plunder nearby gardens (κῆπος) containing fruit when they had been on campaign for a long time.[480] This point illustrates the difficulty of containing a large mass of armed, tired and hungry men from not just reaching out and taking things from the largely unarmed peasantry. Leo VI's *Taktika* features some specific numbers to further contextualize the situation; one pack-animal was to accompany every 16 soldiers with supplies for three to four days, and cavalry were to carry their own.[481] Considering the potentially much longer marches across the vast Byzantine landscape, it was expected that troops would forage for their needs. Similar difficulties also existed when the army was not actually engaged in warfare. From the eleventh century onwards, the provincial military units and increasing numbers of mercenaries were no longer able to support themselves and would therefore require provisions from local communities and landlords even during times of peace.[482]

[478] Dennis, *Three Byzantine Treatises: Text, Translation and Notes*, 165.
[479] Dennis, *The Taktika of Leo VI: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, 155-159.
[480] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 18; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 23.
[481] Haldon, "Roads and Communication in the Byzantine Empire: Wagons, Horses and Supplies," 147.
[482] Haldon, *Byzantium a History*, Chapter 5. Haldon, looking at monastic charters and exemptions, shows that from around the year 1040 onward the provisioning and billeting of foreign mercenaries and other provincial soldiers were dependent on local landlords and small communities.

The writings of Kinnamos, Anna Komnene and Choniates contain excerpts which highlight different aspects of how villages would supply military units. Two specific cases from the narratives of Kinnamos and Anna Komnene highlight the practice of requisitioning the wagons/carts of the peasantry. In the first case, Kinnamos explains how emperor Manuel I Komnenos ordered an unspeakably large quantity (ἀμύθητος τι πλῆθος) of oxen (βοῦς) and carts (ἅμαξα) to be "taken from the villages around Thrace" (κατὰ Θρᾴκην ἐκέλευεν ἐλαύνειν χωρίων) for purposes of furnishing the army on their campaign.[483] The context of this passage is Manuel I's great effort to create an alliance and a solid army against the threat posed by the Turks under Kilic Arslan. Furthermore, we are told that officials were sent as far away as Palestine to recruit mercenary troops and that the emperor was eager to conscript soldiers from everywhere. The orders given by the emperor, in which the livestock and carts of the peasants were taken, would no doubt occur in quite a coerced manner. Especially the word choices which Kinnamos utilizes show that he was aware of the devastation which such practices created in countryside localities. Considering the largely self-sufficient peasant lifestyle, this would be a burdensome practice for their economic livelihood. The *Alexiad* also features a case in which the wagons/carts (ἅμαξα) of the peasants are utilized, this time in quite a novel manner, from the Scythian wars of the year 1091. We are told that emperor Alexios Komnenos took the wagons of villagers, whom Anna refers to as inhabitants (οἰκήτωρ), of the small-town (πολίχνιον) of *Tzouroulos*. Alexios then proceeds to use these wagons as defensive weapons by dismantling the wheels (τροχός) and axles (ἄξων) and placing them just outside the walls, whereby they would be rolled down a

[483] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 199; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 151.

hill crashing down onto the enemy below.[484] No doubt these wagons were completely destroyed in the process, and it is highly unlikely that the villagers would reimbursed by any means. The frontline village of *Tzouroulos* was not just used in requisitioning provisions, but also prepared for defense as it would become the stage for a military engagement. Villages were often utilized in defensive ways, such as this, to aid the army. Choniates' description of grove-trees and gardens being demolished to create siege equipment,[485] and Anna Komnene's explanation of how the Byzantine army would dig trenches (τάφρος) through the countryside vineyards (ἀμπελών),[486] no doubt completely disrupting the local economy, are some other examples of such practices.

When the Byzantine military was on a campaign, the system of provisioning the army from the land did not change, in fact it intensified (as visible in the from the *Taktika* of Leo VI). This issue is well exemplified by the 1166 campaign, led by the Byzantine general Leo Vatatzes, against the Hungarians. Kinnamos describes how Leo Vatatzes, after winning the battle and taking many captives, "returned to the emperor with a large number of animals including cattle and horses he had taken from the countryside regions (in Hungary)."[487] All of these animals, which belonged to the peasantry of the Hungarian plains, were forcefully requisitioned by the Byzantine army. In a different case, Skylitzes provides more detailed information on the extent and necessity of foraging the countryside during military situations. His explanation is centered on the Russian army foraging the Danube region during the

[484] Komnene, *Alexias,* 7.11.2; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 243-44. "Αναλαβόμενος τὰς τῶν οἰκητόρων ἁμάξας καὶ ταύτας ἀφελὼν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐπικραββάτων τούς τε τροχοὺς καὶ τοὺς ἄξονας ἄνω κατέσχε κᾆθ' οὕτως ἔξω τοῦ τείχους ἐπὶ τῶν κρηδέμνων ἐφεξῆς ἀπαιωρεῖ διά τινων καλῳδίων ἐναποδεσμουμένων ταῖς ἐπάλξεσι τῶν τειχῶν".
[485] Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 93.
[486] Komnene, *Alexias,* 5.4.1; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 163.
[487] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 260; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 196. "πρὸς δὲ καὶ ζώων ἀγέλας ἵππων τε καὶ ἄλλων παντοδαπῶν ἐκεῖθεν ἐλάσας ἐπὶ βασιλέα ἦλθεν."

eleventh century. On a terrible rainy and cold night, the Russian army, besieged by the Romans, sent out a party of two thousand soldiers to go out on a foraging mission (ἐπισιτισμός) to gather whatever sort of grain (σῖτος), such as millet (κέγχρος), and other provisions they could seize.[488] The explicit statement that two thousand soldiers were sent out to forage, highlights the grandness in scale of such foraging raids. This was necessary for the soldiers' survival, but it would also, no doubt, result in the death and devastation of many peasant households in the vicinity. Such provisions taken forcefully from the households who contained them would furnish the soldiers and allow their survival, while perhaps killing off the livelihood of those they were stolen from (if the inhabitants were not killed outright in the seizing process). This forced exchange of goods is portrayed by authors such as Skylitzes as being something normal and therefore quite obvious; on an individual basis each soldier was more "valuable" than the agricultural producers. The mindset in such military provisioning was that the more important and urgently necessary group should receive the limited supplies.

The period beginning in the late-eleventh century was also representative of another kind of military movement through Byzantine lands; that of the crusading Westerners. Representing more centrifugal elements than military units directly tied to the state, these crusaders increasingly blurred the line between requisitioning supplies and outright pillaging. Anna Komnene's famous defense of her father's attempts at containing the armies of the First Crusade from pillaging Byzantine lands serves as a good example of the difficulties faced. She explains how it was expected that the Crusaders might start plundering Byzantine territory, due to their disorganized and rabble-like composition. Therefore, we are told, Alexios I

[488] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 433; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 407.

Komnenos instructed certain leaders to covertly follow the crusaders and if they decided to make any foraging incursions, to prevent this with force.[489] Yet, a few pages later, Anna describes the extreme violence with which the Crusaders pillaged the countryside, as if with 'complete license'.[490] Kinnamos also narrates similar struggles from a slightly later time period, this time with regard to the Second Crusade. He explains how the barbarians (the Crusaders) were plundering the territory around Dacia and arbitrarily confiscating goods (ὤνιος) from market traders (ἔμπορος), all the while killing anyone who dared to resist them.[491] A few pages later Kinnamos describes how the crusading Germans were mercilessly "butchering the cattle belonging to the countryside folk" (βοσκήματα συνέκοπτον ἀφειδῶς) and killing all who resisted.[492] The fact that the peasants' cattle were slaughtered without compensation, implies that much plunder and ravaging of their territories was also underway. The Crusading armies were, in effect, not much different than any other hostile marauders or bandits. Yet, according to Kinnamos, still, the Roman imperial polity did not engage in open warfare for fear of provoking a Latin retaliation.[493] Instead, other measures were taken, such as the organization of rural fairs and large markets in the countryside to help supply the passing Crusaders.[494] Furthermore, Kinnamos explains that the emperor (Manuel I) was extremely wary of provoking the crusaders, as he was skeptical that their real concern was not Palestine, but instead Byzantine territories. He did not want to give them a direct cause to

[489] Komnene, *Alexias*, 11.3.1-5.
[490] Komnene, *Alexias,* 11.4.1-5; Komnene*, The Alexiad,* 311. Anna Komnene describes the Crusaders in an especially scathing manner. She describes how they were extremely violent, cutting babies into pieces and impaling them over wooden spits to roast over a fire. She also describes the Scythians as being adjacent to Byzantine territory feeling that they had the right to plunder the Byzantine countryside with 'complete license'. See Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 218.
[491] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 70-71; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 60.
[492] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 72-73; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 62-63.
[493] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 72-73; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 62-63.
[494] Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200,* 236.

legitimize such potential diversions. This fear is identical to the reasons given by Anna for her father's reluctance to receive and police the First Crusade in too strict a manner. Kinnamos' narrative also contains numerous other passages evoking the brutality of Western entities.[495] Choniates' narrative also features a similar episode in which a foreign, Western army was to pass through imperial domains. We are told that in the year 1188, emperor Isaac II Angelos arranged for King Frederick and his army to pass through Byzantine lands on their way to Palestine. The agreement consisted of the Byzantine countryside supplying Frederick's army with abundant provisions so that his army was left with no reason to plunder the countryside. Frederick's army was "not to harm any settlements of any sizes."[496] These three passages from Anna Komnene, Kinnamos and Choniates highlight the increased difficulties in containing a disorganized or foreign-originating entity from pillaging. This difficulty would be especially pronounced for mercenary elements and any hired-troops, which were particularly prone to such actions. The increased presence of such mercenaries and crusaders in the Byzantine countryside territory during the eleventh and twelfth centuries must have severely disrupted the local village economies of certain logistically important regions in the Balkans and Southern Anatolia.

4.3 Villages accommodating the imperial retinue

[495] A good example is when Kinnamos alludes to the brutality of Western nations (δυσμικός ἔθνος) by explaining how Roger II (count of Sicily) was pillaging/foraging (ἐμβολή) Roman lands, including Corinth, Euboea and Boeotian Thebes in the years 1147-1148. Furthermore, he explains how due to the bulk of the Roman army being elsewhere the invaders were allowed to roam and attack these regions freely. Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 92; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 76.
[496] Choniates, *Historia*, 402; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 221. "μηδέν τι δράσας έσεϊται κακόν, ου πόλιν, οὐ κώμην, οὐ φρούριον, ου πολίχνιον."

In the *Diataxis* Attaleiates underlines that his *paroikoi* should not be harassed and that his properties should be spared the passage of the imperial retinue.[497] The simple fact that Attaleiates took certain measures to make his own holdings exempt from accommodating the imperial retinue is a strong indicator that it was a difficult and strongly disliked activity by landholders. Such a retinue, accompanied by military protection, would impose a large burden on the villages or properties it passed through, and could cause great physical disruption. One such example is narrated by Anna Komnene, pertaining to the late-eleventh century wars against the Scythians, when she describes how in the village of *Tzouroulos* (in Thrace) a huge entrenchment (τάφρος) was dug out (διορύσσω) so that the imperial tent (βασιλικός σκῆνος) and all the baggage could be accommodated (καὶ τὰς σκευὰς ἁπάσας εἴσω τούτου κατέθετο).[498] In another case, the disruption caused by the imperial retinue is not specifically mentioned by Anna, such as when she describes how Alexios Komnenos and the imperial guard were encamped again in the same village (*Tzouroulos)* during a much earlier time period.[499] This reference is just a passing remark about Alexios' journey towards the Balkans and does not shed much light on the effects of such practices, but, it does show that villages quite often served such a role. There is at least one decade between these two incidents narrated by Anna, in which the same village is chosen as a stopping point during the journey of the imperial retinue and the army. This is indicative that there were preferred villages/areas which would repeatedly serve in this fashion. This idea is also confirmed by Attaleiates' references to a village called '*Nea Kome*' as being "able to

[497] Attaleiates, "Diataxis," 352.
[498] Komnene, *Alexias*, 7.11.1; Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 242.
[499] Komnene, *Alexias,* 2.6.3; Komnene, *The Alexiad*, 87. "Καὶ φθάσας σὺν τούτοις εἰς Τζουρουλόν (κώμη δὲ καὶ αὕτη Θρᾳκική) διασῴζεται κἀκεῖσε τυχαίως τῷ ἐξ ἐπιταγῆς τοῦ δομεστίκου καταλαβόντι στρατεύματι ἡνώθησαν ἅπαντες."

accommodate the imperial guard and retinue" ("οὐδ' ἐν Νεακώμῃ χωρίῳ τινὶ χωρητικῷ βασιλικῆς δορυφορίας ἢ ὑπατείας").[500] This phrase suggests that being able to accommodate the imperial retinue was not something many villages were capable of doing, as it was something that merited mention. In a further case narrated by Kinnamos, we are told that the villagers (ἐγχώριος) of a village (χωρίον) "called Rhitzion by its own inhabitants" (Ῥιτζίον πρὸς τῶν ἐγχωρίων κεκλημένον), were entertaining and accommodating the emperor.[501] In this case the context appears to be more than simple accommodation, but instead actually putting on a ceremonic display for the presence of the imperial retinue.

During such military campaigns and other travel incidents it was not only villages who could accommodate the imperial retinue, in fact the preferred lodgings would probably not be small villages, but instead the properties of an aristocratic or wealthy individual. Skylitzes provides us with certain clues as to how certain well established, important people would accommodate the imperial army as it was traveling across the countryside. He narrates how, around the year 996, as the imperial retinue was trekking through Cappadocia (on its return to Constantinople from the East), a magister called Eustathios Maleinos "took in the whole cohort as his guests without envy or grudge and provided them with ample provisions without asking for anything in return."[502] The adjective ἀφθόνω, meaning ungrudgingly, used in this case, serves to illustrate the relative ease with which large landholders could house the emperor in comparison to villages. The villages which did accommodate the emperor were not always associated with travel and military routes, in one case, for example, we are told by Kinnamos that the emperor "went to a village near

[500] Attaleiates, *The History,* 262-263.
[501] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 194; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 148.
[502] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 340; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 322. "ἐυ τοῖς οἰκείοις ὑπεδέξαντο πανστρατί, πᾶσαν αὐτῷ τε καὶ τῷ στρατεύματι ἀφθόνως παρεσχηκὼς χορηγίαν."

Byzantium" (ἐγγυς Βυζαντίῳ χωρίων ἐξῆλθε) for relaxation purposes, as the empire at that moment was at peace.[503] This final snippet illustrates that in times of peace, small rural settlements were seen as relaxing destinations for a brief respite from the chaos of politics and palace-life.

An interesting point for the purpose of this study is the sociocultural connotations of this type of imperial-rural contact. According to Attaleiates, as the imperial retinue passed through these villages the emperor was acclaimed as equal to a god.[504] From the perspective of the villagers, this was probably a one-off chance to witness the grandeur of the imperial spectacle and military prowess. These divine acclamations, which Attaleiates mentions that the villagers were obliged to articulate, no doubt served to increase the psychological barriers which separated the peasantry from the imperial elite. Such a psychology, evoking a sense of awe and grandeur, may have acted as a restraining force on rebellious individuals. What is ironic is that after emperors had been deposed, they were sometimes paraded through villages in monkish garb and on top of a pack animal to humiliate them. Attaleiates continues his story by explaining that the same villagers who acclaimed Diogenes a god then saw him "strapped to a wretched pack animal, in a monkish state" (ὁ Διογένης εὐτελεῖ τῷ ὑποζυγίῳ καὶ μοναχικῷ καταστήματι) and blinded in humiliation.[505] Such an experience must have been interesting for the common folk, seeing the superficiality of imperial relations, as they witnessed important people's fortunes changing like the wind. In the Byzantine case this superficiality was exacerbated by the lack of a strict imperial dynasty, meaning many simultaneous claims to the throne

[503] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 202; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 154. This comment is located at the very start of the fifth book in Kinnamos *Historia*, it describes Manuel Komnenos relaxing immediately following the seizing of hostilities against the Cumans and the Turks in the year 1161.
[504] Attaleiates, *The History*, 318-319.
[505] Attaleiates, *The History*, 318-319.

often existed. The abundance of powerful individuals who claimed themselves emperor and attempted to seize the throne, often with great popular support, is a consequence of this. This also resulted in the occurrence of episodes such as the eventual fate of Romanos Diogenes. Unfortunately, this form of direct imperial-peasant contact waned towards the later Middle Ages. From the eleventh century onward emperors became increasingly detached from the lands of the empire, rarely leaving Constantinople and other prime cities.[506] As imperial engagement with the land was so minimal, the direct, physical contact channels between most of the peasantry and the imperial polity could only take place indirectly, through the mediation of other avenues.

4.4 Conscription and utilization of the peasantry in military matters

The peasantry, which made up the vast majority of the population of the empire,[507] not surprisingly, comprised a significant part of the military, which was mainly implemented through conscription or volunteering. It is known that especially during the eleventh and twelfth centuries the peasantry was frequently where troops were recruited from, particularly the fruitful Danube and Thracian regions.[508] A good example of the extent of normalization that conscription had achieved in the 'elite' viewpoint is the simple, blunt sentence which Skylitzes wrote describing how Michael III (r. 842-867) quickly raised an army of forty thousand men from the Thracian and Macedonian regions during the mid-ninth century.[509] Existing armies

[506] Frankopan, "Land and Power in the Middle and Later Period," 117.
[507] The total population of the empire has been estimated at about 19 million under the reign of Basil II. Laiou and Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy*, 16.
[508] Madgearu, *Byzantine Military Organization of the Danube, 10th-12th Centuries*, 143.
[509] "…συναγηοχὼς ἔκ τε Θρᾳκῶν καὶ Μακεδόνων περὶ τὰς τέσσαρας μυριάδας ἔξεισι κατ' αὐτοῦ." Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 99; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 100.

were easily bolstered from rural areas, as joining the army was not such a bad prospect for many peasants. Kinnamos, for example, discusses how during the twelfth century Manuel I dispatched his general, known as Paphlagonia Michael, with instructions to bolster his army by assembling soldiers from the nearby villages (χωρίων) around the Pontic region.[510]

In other cases, we are told, such instructions were not even necessary, as the rural populace would come flocking to join prominent military individuals. Psellos, for example, describes how multitudes (πολλοί) of all ages came rushing from the countryside regions to join the army of the brave commander called George Maniakes, a prominent Byzantine general from the mid-eleventh century, who was revolting at this time.[511] The verb he uses to describe this motion is συρρέω, meaning flowing together, which implies a stream of men flowing to join this army. In other occasions the rural populace appears to have needed a slightly bigger impetus for joining an army. In one such case Psellos describes how Leo Tornikios, the well-known revolt leader, devised a cunning plan to get the multitudes to join his cause as he did not have enough money to pay people to do so. He sent out messengers in all directions to lie to the people telling them that the emperor was dead, and that Theodora had now chosen Leo Tornikios as her second husband.[512] According to Psellos, such an imperial legitimization seems to have helped Leo Tornikios recruit a large number of followers in a short span of time. Skylitzes also describes this same exact event, offering an interesting platform of comparison. He explains Leo Tornikios as subverting the entire countryside by recruiting all the unemployed

[510] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 281; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 219.
[511] Psellos, *The History,* 125; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 195. George Maniakes was rebelling against the reign of Constantine IX in 1042. He is a prominent figure in mid-eleventh century Byzantine history. He is also known to have owned large amounts land in Anatolia.
[512] Psellos, *The History,* 136; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 208-209.

soldiers (ἐσχόλαζον στρατιώτης) and everyone else who enjoyed plunder (λεηλασία) and robbery (ἁρπαγή).[513] Skylitzes' account is slightly harsher than Psellos, he paints the army of Tornikios as being composed of plunderers and robbers. It can be argued that Skylitzes is implying that people of decent composition would not join a rebellious leader's army, as he is making the assumption that anyone who joined such an ignoble cause could be after nothing but personal gain through plunder and robbery. Nonetheless, both these accounts highlight the relative ease with which Leo Tornikios was able to unite a vast army from the countryside. This is also mirrored by Skylitzes' explanation of how Thomas the Slav began his rebellion in the ninth century. Thomas was a prominent general who decided to rebel against the reign of Michael II (r. 820-829). To do so, according to Skylitzes, he recruited a massive force from the countryside of the Anatolikon theme; every man capable of holding a weapon was recruited. The reasoning which Skylitzes gives is that some came for the prospect of booty, while many were obliged to join by force.[514] The prospect of booty and plunder was no doubt a strong motivator in such recruitment cases. Skylitzes further continues describing the struggle between Thomas and Michael II for the loyalty of the countryside; each side wanted to recruit the same demographic groups. We are told that, Michael II, anticipating an attack on a rural locality, decided to first confirm the loyalty of the small towns and garrisons in the region and proceeded to recruit them to his cause.[515] As an overall conclusion of this civil war, Skylitzes explains that it resulted in a great loss of life and subsequent depopulation across the whole Empire.[516] This episode shows the importance of keeping the countryside regions loyal to the throne, as the reverse could result in figures such as

[513] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 439; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 413.
[514] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 30; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 33.
[515] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 33; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 36.
[516] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 29; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis,* 32.

Thomas the Slav or Leo Tornikios amassing a great deal of prospect-hungry peasant followers. This idea is exemplary of the collective importance attributed to the peasantry by the imperial polity and influential individuals. The peasants are representative of a massive manpower pool which the state, or rebellious leaders, could exploit and utilize for their own political/military agendas. The situation of the peasantry was obviously not explicit to the Byzantine case either, this utilitarian attitude towards the peasantry was manifested in many Medieval European polities. Skylitzes, for example, describes how in the early-eleventh century, the son of the Bulgar emperor incited the surrounding countryside, gradually raising an army with the purpose of toppling his own father.[517] The phrase 'inciting' does not reveal the exact nature of how such coercive recruiting took place, but the prospect of booty is quite probable.

Aside from being conscripted into the actual army, the non-professional, civilian peasantry was also often obliged to participate in military encounters. Several cases from these narratives show the peasants being used both as informants/spies due to their local knowledge of certain areas and also their utilization as 'cannon-fodder' in actual encounters. The former case stems from the peasants knowing the local topography of areas they inhabited in much better detail than the actual military generals or emperors. Anna, for example, describes how her father, Alexios I, in context of the wars against the Latins, once summoned a native elder of a village in Macedonia and questioned him on the details of the topography of the region. ("Μετακαλεσάμενος οὖν τηνικαῦτά τινα τῶν γερόντων Λαρισσαίων ἐπυνθάνετο περὶ τῆς τοῦ τόπου θέσεως").[518] In this case Alexios is grilling the peasant to gain a positional advantage by utilizing the terrain in the upcoming,

[517] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 360; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 341.
[518] Komnene, *Alexias,* 5.5.5; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 168.

expected battle.[519] Anna also explain how the enemy, Bohemond I of Antioch, was having villagers (inhabitants of the πολίχνη of Arbanus) explain to him the secret shortcuts (ἀτραπός) of the region.[520] In this case the peasants became part of the information war between these two political entities; their value stems from their ability to provide such local knowledge. A similar example from an earlier period is narrated by Skylitzes. He describes how in the ninth century Basil I summoned over several peasants (νομεύς- in this case the peasants summoned are more specifically animal herders) to question them about the truth of the capture of Syracuse by the *Hagarenes* (Arabs), which had traveled from mouth to mouth and had reached them.[521] This shows the importance of frontline villages as being places where external, far away news would first reach the borders of the empire. A further issue was, obviously, the issue of language. Peasants would sometimes be useful because they could understand the local tongue and could therefore help translate or interrogate a captive. An interesting episode relating to this issue is narrated by Skylitzes in context of the *Saracen* (Arab) attack on the city of Edessa dating to 1038. He describes how an Armenian peasant was utilized in a military situation thanks to his ability to understand the Saracen language. The beggar was sent near the Saracen garrison and managed to overhear a discussion about military positions, whence he quickly ran back to the Roman commander to report his findings.[522]

The second direct manner in which peasants could be useful was to actually participate in warfare with their own means. For example, Skylitzes describes how the Turkish commander, during the 1054 war against the Byzantines, centered around the region of Armenia, ordered a multitude of people (λαοῦ πλήσας) to

[519] The context of this episode is the 1083 battle against the Latins (specifically Bohemond).
[520] Komnene, *Alexias*, 13.5.2; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 408.
[521] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 159; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 153.
[522] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 404; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 380.

assemble with pitchforks (δίκελλα) and other agricultural tools (γεωργικὰ ὄργανα) as weapons, to be able to guard the "wheeled siege equipment called *lesai"* (λέσας τὰς τοιαύτας ὀνομάζουσι μηχανάς) which were going to be used in a siege.[523] In other cases we see peasants utilized in a sort of 'cannon fodder' type of function, simply adding manpower to the army with primitive weapons, such as when Anna Komnene narrates to us how countrymen (ἀγρότης) together with their own wagons (ἴδιος ἅμαξα) were ordered to take up positions beside a river, in preparation for its defense (during the 1088 war against the Scythians).[524] In this case the peasants appear to have been utilized merely for the sake of increasing numbers, not because of their actual military capabilities. Choniates also makes various statements associated with the direct military utilization of the peasantry.

An interesting case pertaining to the military utilization of peasants/commoners occurs in context of the rebellion of Alexios Branas against the reign of Isaac II Angelos in the year 1187.[525] We are told that Branas managed to win over the allegiance of the populace around the Propontis, and subsequently "armed these peasants with slings, and bows" (οί μέν σφενδόναις ώπλίσαντο, οί δέ τόξα καί γωρυτόν άνέλαβον), and made them convert "their fish-hunting boats" (Ιχθύων âγpav παρ' αυτών ναυπηγούμενα) into warships, by "covering them on each side with thick planks" (σανίσι παχείαις έκατέρωθεν).[526] Hence, according to Choniates, the peasants were transformed into "fierce" warriors" and utilized in the battle. In this case the peasants are valuable due to their fishing boats being

[523] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 463; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 433.
[524] Komnene, *Alexias,* 7.9.8; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 240. "...ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὺς δὴ τοὺς ἀγρότας μετὰ τῶν ἰδίων ἁμαξῶν παρεκελεύσατο θᾶττον ἐξεληλυθότας παρὰ τῷ χείλει τοῦ ποταμοῦ καταστῆναι."
[525] This rebellion ended badly for Alexios Branas who, according to Choniates, was killed during the battle and his decapitated head was used as a football in the capital.
[526] Choniates, *Historia,* 380; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 209. "όθεν τά προς Ιχθύων âγpav παρ' αυτών ναυπηγούμενα σκάφη ε!ς πολεμιστήρίους συνεκρότησαν ούτοι ναϋς, σανίσι παχείαις έκατέρωθεν αύτά διειληφότες, καί οί μέν σφενδόναις ώπλίσαντο, οί δέ τόξα καί γωρυτόν άνέλαβον."

important in amphibious transportation – as the destination of Branas' ambition was the throne, in Constantinople. A few pages later, after the defeat of Branas' rebellion, Choniates describes how the emperor did something unexpected; he allowed citizens to go and maltreat the commoners living along Propontis, as a punishment for their defection over to Branas.[527] Furthermore, we are told that 'liquid fire' was hurled at the settlements in this region which resulted in a huge fire that completely destroyed the region – which was truly harsh punishment for these poor peasants. Despite most probably not having much freedom during Branas' requisitioning of their service, these poor fishermen and other local people are blamed and punished in utmost severity.

The utilization of the peasantry in different scenarios is also alluded to in military manuals, showing their legitimacy. For example, an anonymous tenth century military treatise illustrates an interesting way in which peasants could be utilized in military tactics. The tactic required that the soldiers mix in with the peasantry of a village, even dress like them too, and then attempt to deceive the enemy into ignoring them for being peasants and thus infiltrate a desired village and storm it by surprise.[528] This tactic, unfortunately, largely disregarded the fate of the actual peasants who were forced to participate in this strategy. Overall, the above examples show that the peasants could be militarily valuable due to their local topographic knowledge, foreign language skills, providing water transportation or simply as extra manpower. This is aside from the vast amount who would actually be conscripted into an army.

[527] Choniates, *Historia,* 391; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 215.
[528] Dennis, *Three Byzantine Treatises,* 213.

4.5 Plundering and ravaging of the countryside

Fitting in with the tradition of ancient historiography, Byzantine authors predominantly narrate incidents relating to warfare. A large component of this consists of accounts of raiding and plundering of countryside areas by different entities, which are the most frequently narrated events of all. For example, Psellos describes the year 1055 as being an exceptionally great year because there was no plundering or marauding by barbarians in Roman territory, and no open warfare either.[529] This comment serves as a strong indicator that the plundering of the Byzantine countryside was an extremely common eventuality, so much so that its one-year absence merited great praise. Firstly, it is important to understand the timeframe of such events. The overwhelming majority of cases involving the plundering/raiding of villages, when identifiable, appear to take place within the 'campaigning season'; from late-spring to early-autumn. This fact is also confirmed by the authors themselves. Anna Komnene, for example, explains how barbarian raids (προνομή) over Byzantine territories would mainly occur in a seasonal fashion; during summer (θέρος) and autumn (φθινόπωρον) raiding would commence, but in the winter (χειμών) the barbarians would generally retreat with all their booty.[530] The seasonality of an agrarian life has already been stressed repeatedly, the added factor of dangerous raiders mostly posing a threat during specific seasons, would further add to this phenomenon. The villagers in these regions would no doubt adapt themselves to this seasonality, knowing when to expect hostile invaders, and take appropriate precautions.

During the timeframe under analysis the main antagonists of such raids were 'barbaric' foreigners, such as the Scyths, Turks, Arabs or Bulgars, and the main

[529] Psellos, *The History,* 181; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 262.
[530] Komnene, *Alexias,* 7.2.2; Komnene, *The Alexiad,* 218.

settings were usually frontline/border villages. Just taking Skylitzes narrative on its own, is enough to illustrate the commonality of such plundering episodes during the Macedonian period. In the space of a few pages, Skylitzes describes how the Armenians regularly plundered the border villages of the empire[531] and also how the Saracens raided the areas close to them in the same way.[532] He further comments on the Saracens elsewhere, by explaining how they would often raid villages (κώμη) and seize the peasants inhabiting (ἐνοικοῦντες) them.[533] He also describes how the Bulgars often ravaged and set fire to the Macedonian and Thracian countryside's.[534] These episodes are all described with great ferocity, such as the case from the year 813, when the Bulgarians under their leader Krum, burned and devastated the entire Thracian countryside, including important granary-towns such as Rhaidestos.[535] Frequent plundering and raiding also occurred during the Komnenian period, which is well exemplified through several excerpts from Choniates' *Historia*. He highlights the scorched-earth tactic of crop-burning from two separate anecdotes pertaining to this period. In the first case, dating from the 1175-76 season, we are told that a fierce contest for the control of the fertile plains around the Dorylaion region was waging between the Roman army and the Turks. It appears that this region was vital in provisioning the Roman army as it campaigned, yet at that moment the Turks were utilizing its great plains to graze their cattle and horses. When the Turks were forced to retreat, they eventually resorted to a scorched-earth tactic by proceeding to burn all of the fertile plains and fields in the vicinity so that the Roman army would not be

[531] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 135; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 134.
[532] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 145; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 143.
[533] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 108; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 109.
[534] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 218; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 211.
[535] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 18; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 15.

able to procure adequate supplies for survival.[536] Choniates describes this event as being something positive, as "Manuel wanted to rebuild Dorylaion" (θελήσας οὖν τὸ Δορύλεον ἀνακτίσαι), thereby provoking the Turks into war. On the next page we are informed that Manuel I did in fact rebuild this town.[537] The fate of the local farmers and herdsmen are not mentioned by Choniates, following such a devastation they probably were not in good shape. These intense military land-denial tactics resulted in great swaths of lands being unusable for many years, destroying the livelihood of the local inhabitants. A second example of such tactics comes from Choniates' description of the misadventures of false-Alexios, the pretender of Manuel I's son Alexios who had actually died earlier. Choniates says that this figure had acquired the nickname καυσαλώνης, which literally means 'crop-burner', – coming from καίω (to burn) plus ἄλων (field/plantation) – as a result of his constant maltreating and burning of crop fields.[538] The burning of fields was an exceptionally disturbing incident for the peasantry, potentially much worse than being pillaged, as it would force migration due to the lack of tillable soil.

Plundering episodes are not spread out uniformly across the countryside territories of the empire, some areas appear to pose a greater risk. Kinnamos, for example, narrates the geographic distribution of plundering as being positively correlated with water access. While describing how Demetrius Branas and his fleet would plunder (ληίζομαι) coastal regions around Antioch in the year 1145,[539] he implies that areas near bodies of water which ships could pass, such as the sea or rivers, were always at increased risk of being harassed by hostile armies or bands of

[536] Choniates, *Historia,* 176-77; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 99-100. "παρεδίδοσαν δὲ καὶ πυρὶ τοὺς καρποὺς καὶ τὰς σκηνὰς ἐνεπίμπρων"
[537] Choniates, *Historia,* 177; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 100.
[538] Choniates, *Historia,* 421; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 232. "μάλιστα δὲ τὰς ἄλωνας ἐλυμαίνετο, ὅθεν καὶ καυσαλώνης ἐπεκέκλητο."
[539] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 35; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 36.

marauders. The narratives under analysis are also abundant with many other pillaging stories relating to countryside areas, several examples of which are; the *emir* of Tarsus sending regular foraging parties to the village (κώμη) of Herakleos,[540] and the regular Pecheneg raids during the reign of Constantine IX (r. 1042-1055), which consisted of them savagely (ἄνοικτος) pillaging the Thracian and Macedonian regions of the empire, while slaughtering even new-born babies (θηλάζοντα νήπιος).[541] The fate of the Macedonian countryside appears the same even in narratives with subjects stretching centuries back to late-antiquity such as Zonaras' *Epitome*.[542]

How were the peasants to protect themselves from such devastating incidents? One interesting way is described by Skylitzes. He explains how the news of incoming raids would be delivered across the countryside (ultimately aimed at the capital) via a "succession of signal-fires" (διαδοχὴν πυρσεύοντες), whereby villagers who got the news would flee to nearby walled settlements or fortresses, thus escaping from the skirmishers.[543] The exact word he uses for where the peasants would flee to is "τειχήρης", meaning 'surrounded by walls'. This shows the paramount importance of walls against such raiding parties, something which, unfortunately, most villages lacked. In other occasions villages were sometimes protected from their associated city with the help of an imperial army. In context of

[540] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 240; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 232.
[541] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 472; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 440.
[542] Zonaras describes how the Scythians were ravaging the Thracian and Macedonian countryside territories and Emperor Valens has to set out with the entire army to put a stop to the plundering (λῃζόμενος). Zonaras then further describes how these Scythians would plunder mercilessly and set houses on fire, even leading to the death of Valens in one of these buildings. Following the death of the emperor, Zonaras narrates that the Scythians got even bolder and began ravaging Thrace and its environs even more savagely. In a previous section of the narrative Zonaras is pretty impressed that one specific band of Scythians managed to continue their plundering activities all the way through Lake Maeotis (Sea of Azov) and into the Euxine sea (Black Sea). Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum,* 77; Zonaras, *The History,* 51, 180-183.
[543] "καὶ οὕτως κατὰ διαδοχὴν πυρσεύοντες γνῶσιν ἐν ἀκαρεῖ παρεῖχον τῷ βασιλεῖ, καὶ οἱ τῶν χωρῶν κάτοικοι πυνθανόμενοι τειχήρεις ἐγίνοντο καὶ τὰς ἐκδρομὰς διεδίδρασκον." Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 108.

the Pecheneg raids from the year 1050, Skylitzes describes that the army commander Bryennios[544] was appointed to Adrianople with the purpose of protecting the villages in the nearby countryside.[545] In a similar example, from the year 1047, we are told that under the command of Michael Iassites the Byzantine army was tasked with the purpose of protecting villages instead of directly engaging the rebel army of Leo Tornikios.[546] These examples show how the imperial polity would sometimes oversee the defense of their hinterlands and thereby aid in the protection of villages from foreign enemies and marauders. Yet another way of protection was for villages and other small, unprotected rural settlements to be located in hard to access region, far away from the fertile plains which were more likely travel routes for marauders and foreign armies. Military manuals from the tenth century also allude to this. The anonymous tenth century Skirmishing manual, for example, describes how in such a case the inhabitants of the countryside and their flocks should be sent to hard to access regions - up rugged mountains.[547] The *Geoponika,* dating from the same period, has an entry by *Didymos* on where a farm should be situated, the answer given is unsurprisingly that the buildings should be on a relatively high site for protection purposes.[548] The fact that this clause is situated in this compilation work suggests its applicability for the Byzantine period too. Emigrating from frontline regions and dangerous spots was also a means of escape, albeit slightly difficult to implement. Attaleiates, for example, describes how during the mid-eleventh century

[544] This Bryennios is the first notable member from this important family which originated from Adrianople. His great grandson, Nikephoros Bryennios, would eventually marry Anna Komnene.
[545] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 472; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 440.
[546] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 441; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 416.
[547] Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises,* 221.
[548] Dalby, *Geoponika,* 2,3.

all the inhabitants of Europe, seeing that there was no way of escaping constant barbarian raids, were thinking of emigrating to safer areas.[549]

On a slightly different note, the psychological reasoning behind the narration of so many plundering, and field-burning cases should be addressed. The word choices and phrasing selections of the discussed passages evoke a sense of fascination on behalf of the authors. This appears to stem from the fact that the perpetrators are 'barbaric' (often also nomadic) people, such as the Scythians, who inspire a sense of awe in the authors due to their savage nature. The effect of this is that the savageness of plunder episodes in these narratives, for all we know, could be augmented significantly to fit in with the expected norms from such people.[550] The peasantry themselves, as a subject, do not offer anything particularly interesting to the authors, instead the antagonists are what make episodes of plunder/pillaging more enjoyable in a literary sense, or at least this appears to be the way in which these narrations are constructed by the authors.

The Byzantine army itself was in no way innocent of plundering and ravaging the countryside's of regions beyond its own sovereign territories. Such episodes are sparsely featured in these narratives, compared to plundering by forces hostile to Constantinople, yet they do exist. This discussion is best demonstrated through zooming in on the treatment of the Byzantine army by Kinnamos. On several occasions Kinnamos describes the brutal episodes of pillaging which the Byzantine army or associated auxiliary forces conducted during the twelfth century, under the reigns of John II and Manuel I. In one example, while describing the Byzantine army pillaging everything in its path during the campaign in Hungary, Kinnamos alludes

[549] Attaleiates, *The History,* 152-153.
[550] Such as Skylitzes' description of how the Scythians would impale new-born babies on spikes during such raids. Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 472; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 440.

to the merciless nature of this venture by using the phrase, "Οὐννικὴν ἐπάτουν", literally meaning that they were treading Hungary under foot.[551] A further episode from Manuel I's Hungarian campaign shows how the army would compensate for animals, such as oxen and horses, which fell during these campaigns; they were simply "acquired" from enemy territory. The specific example Kinnamos gives consists of Manuel I's campaign in Hungary during which the fallen horses (ἵππος) and cattle/oxen (ὑποζύγιον) were substituted from animals "taken from the whole countryside" (ἀντεκομίσαντο αὐτοχθόνων).[552] The general military idea was that once the defensive bulwark of a region fell (such as a fortified town or a castle), all of its hinterland was automatically subject to foraging and plundering due to the lack of any remaining organized defense. This is exemplified by Kinnamos in his description of how after attacking Serbia and capturing the important fortress of Rhason, the Roman army decided to "pillage everything" (ἐληΐσατο πάντα) laying in its near vicinity, its hinterland.[553] An even more excessively narrated example of imperial plundering comes from Kinnamos' description of the 1166 Hungarian campaign conducted under General Leo Vatatzes. We are told that after the army had passed through long stretches of rugged and desolated (ἐρῆμος) regions, they finally entered the plains of Hungary. Here they found many villages that were extremely populous (κώμαις τε πολυανθρωποτάταις), within which they proceeded to "slay many people" (ἀνθρώπων πολλοὺς ἔκτειναν) and take great quantities of bounty (λάφυρα) through their endless plundering.[554] In this example it is clear that villages would be targeted for provisions, often by very violent means, by the Byzantine

[551] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 114; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 91.
[552] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 134; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 105. "ἱππων μέντεοι καὶ ὑποζυγίων τῶν πεσόντων ζωοὺς ἐκ τῶν τοῖς Οὔννοις ἀντεκομίσαντο αὐτοχθόνων."
[553] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 102; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 83.
[554] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 261; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 196.

army during its incursions into foreign territories. The distinction between Byzantine villages and "other" villages was always quite narrow, in one case this differentiation appears to be nearly completely absent. Kinnamos describes how, during the winter of 1159-1160, the Byzantine army, upon reaching a village called Sarapata Mylonos[555] by its inhabitants (located near the Meander river) started foraging/pillaging for supplies.[556] The actual peasants themselves probably had not changed much since the recent Turkish conquest. Despite this, they are mercilessly 'foraged' by the opposing side due to certain artificially erected 'borders'. In effect this meant that the army was effectively plundering its own former territories. All of the abovementioned examples suffice to show the amount of disruption which the plundering of villages and burning of crop-fields and pastures would create for the agrarian populace. On top of being directly life-threatening, such actions would also hinder the long-term economy of these regions. This would often make these devastated areas uninhabitable and force the villagers to migrate elsewhere, an issue repeatedly narrated by our authors.

4.6 Resettling policies and enforced rural migrations

Another warfare-related issue which disrupted and altered the social fabric of the Byzantine countryside was the imperial policy of resettling conquered 'enemy' populations in it. Such policies would, for obvious reasons, profoundly affect the lives of the villagers involved. These movements would take on the form of

[555] Işın Demirkent has located this area as being around the Sandıklı plains. Demirkent, *Ioannes Kinnamos'un Historia'sı*, 143.
[556] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 196; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 149. "ἐπὶ χῶρόν τέ τινα Σαράπατα Μύλωνος πρὸς τῶν ἐγχωρίων ὠνομασμένον ἐλθὼν ἐκεῖσεν λοιπὸν προνομεύιν ἤρξατο."

populations transfers, implemented through forced migrations. Often these policies appear to be executed for purposes of nullifying the threat that a certain group/ethnicity posed by dispersing them across the Byzantine countryside and severing their link with possible dissident forces. Choniates describes the Byzantine tradition with regard to the Turks as consisting of the dispersed settling of the defeated Turkish population across numerous Byzantine villages. He also gives a good explanation as to the reason for this tactic; after the Turk prisoners (αιχμαλώτων) were dispersed and settled across Roman villages, eventually they would start to "forget/neglect their fatherlands" (πατρίδος άφήκε μνήσασθαι).[557] It was a process of assimilation which over time 'Romanized' these so-called barbarians so that they did not have any motivation to ever again take up arms against Constantinople. Seeing this from the perspective of the Byzantine villagers, which were already living in these areas, it must have been a highly tumultuous experience to have imperially placed foreign subjects settled in their villages. It would no doubt result in social and cultural upheaval as these villages were close-knit social communities (an issue which has been stressed in chapter two). This strategy appears to be quite a stable incident. Choniates mentions how the same idea was utilized regarding the Pechenegs from the early-twelfth century. We are told that after a major Roman victory over the *Patzinaks* (Pechenegs), the captives of the latter were very numerous and were assigned to settle down together in villages (κώμη) in the Western Roman lands.[558] Choniates then feels the obligation to mention that these villages still exist, despite writing his work less than a century after this event. One reason for this extra comment could be the ferocity and savageness generally

[557] Choniates, *Historia,* 495; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 272.
[558] Choniates, *Historia,* 16; Choniates, *O City of Byzantium,* 11. "ώς έκ τούτου καί κώμας συνοικισθήναι καθ' έσπέριόν τινα λήξιν 'Ρωμαϊκήν, ών καί εισέτι σμικρά ούχί πάνυ έμπυρεύματα σώζονται,".

attributed to the largely nomadic Pechenegs/Scythians populations,[559] which could have been seen as a grave threat to the social composition and well-being of a small, peaceful Byzantine village. Skylitzes also describes a very similar event, but from a century or so earlier. He mentions how in the year 1048, after a victorious battle against the Pechenegs, the Byzantine policy was to disperse them abroad (διασκεδάννυμι) over the "deserted plains of Bulgaria" (ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις τῆς Βουλγαρίας), thereby resettling them into a sparsely populated area.[560] Furthermore, Skylitzes adds, that this policy was implemented to be able tax these people and generate additional income/payment (φόρος) for the imperial coffers. Here Skylitzes is highlighting the dual benefits of such forced migration policies. Firstly, by severing their ties with their organic communities such peripheral populations were subdued, thereby being less likely to ever raise arms against Byzantium again. Secondly, unmanned fertile land (which was always something bad) could be tilled by these people and then their agrarian revenue could be taxed. The fact that

[559] The works under analysis occasionally feature geographic/anthropological digressions on different populations, one major group of which was the Scythians, also referred to as the Pechenegs (and also as the Patzinaks). Psellos' digression on the Pechenegs is a good example of this overall attitude. He starts off his digressions by simple saying that he will now begin discussing the 'barbarians of the east' (ἑῷος βάρβαρος). He explains how these people used to be called Mysians (οὓς Μυσοὺς μὲν ὁ πάλαι χρόνος ὠνόμαζεν) and that they dwell in areas divided from the Roman Empire by the Danube river, referred to as Ister (Ἴστρος) by the Romans. He then goes on to a lengthy description of their military habits; that they wear no armor of any type (ἀλλ' οὐδε θώρακας ἀμφιέννυνται, οὐδε κνημῖδας περίκεινται, οὐδε λόφων τισί τὰς κεφαλὰς κατασφαλίζονται), carry no shields (ἀσπὶς δὲ αὐτοῖς οὐδ' ἡτισοῦν ἐν χερσὶν, οὔτ' ἐπιμήκης ὁποίας δή φασι τὰς 'Αργολικὰς, οὔτε περιφερὴς, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ξίφη περιζώννυνται), are not divided into battalions (Οὐ διαιροῦνται δὲ κατὰ λόχους), and fight in an unorganized fashion (οὐδὲ τις αὐτοὺς ἐπιστήμη στρατηγικὴ προάγει εἰς πόλεμον). All of these are very different from the Roman style, which Psellos is taking as the norm. He seems surprised that tactical terms such as right flank or left flank mean nothing to the Patzinaks as they are so barbaric and disorderly, so much so that they do not even attempt to defend their camps according Psellos. According to him during battle they shout barbaric noises while mercilessly slaughtering their foes in a savage fashion, and when they are losing they disperse and flee in random directions into strange places and then mysteriously somehow regroup. Psellos then begins describing the dietary customs of these people, which has been discussed in chapter two. Psellos, *The History,* 221-23; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 241-32. Zonaras, in his *Epitome*, describes the Scythians as being a people which consisted of a multitude of overwhelming numbers. For Zonaras, one of the most striking features of these northern barbarians appears to be their sheer numbers. Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum,* 590; Zonaras, *The History,* 51.

[560] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum,* 460; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 430.

Skylitzes specifically mentions that these people were resettled in a deserted area (ἐρῆμος), shows how the state was trying to increase its cultivated (and hence taxable) lands. Such policies were not new, it is known that emperors of the seventh and eighth centuries, which was a period of population decline, also frequently deported inhabitants to depopulated areas to fill up empty spaces within the agrarian network.[561] One example of which is the settlement of Slavs in the region of Bithynia on two occasions in 689 and 763, primarily to use as a military recruitment base against the Arabs.[562] Several other examples from these texts illustrate how common imperial resettlement policies had become in later centuries. Kinnamos, for example, describes two additional cases of captive resettlement from the twelfth century period. In one case, dating from the year 1159, we are told that Manuel Komnenos, after rescuing many captive Romans (δεσμώτης Ῥωμαίων) from the town of Philomilion (Akşehir), decided to resettle them into a certain townlet of Bithynia (known as Pylai).[563] The exact word Kinnamos uses for the place is πολίχνη, which implies that it is a small town or a large village. The general ambiguity is not too surprising considering the somewhat obscure definition between a town and a village in this period. The second case pertains to Manuel I's Hungarian campaign dating from the year 1149. Kinnamos describes how after the fortress of Rhason fell to the Roman army, endless numbers of captives were captured – including soldiers, commoners and those of 'knightly class'. These captives, which had reached a huge number, were then resettled across the "region of Sardika and other Roman lands".[564]

[561] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 268.
[562] Lefort, "The Rural Economy, 7th-12th Centuries," 268. The fact that Slavs are settled in Bithynia indicates that even an area so close to the capital was quite depopulated in this period, an idea which further aids the demographic outline sketched by modern scholarship, including Lefort, Laiou and Harvey.
[563] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 194; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 147
[564] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 103; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 83.

How would events fare after such resettlement policies? One source of information is Kinnamos' description of a region in Southern Anatolia, during the twelfth century, where he describes how Turks and Romans lived side-by-side for quite a long duration. He explains how the Romans living in the vicinity of Lake Pousgouse (Beyşehir Gölü) had been together with the Turks for so long that they were now united in their views with the Turks, and therefore they did not allow the Roman imperial polity passage through the lake and moats – which resulted in conflict.[565] Here we see the reverse of what the state was aiming for; the Romans had been "assimilated" with respect to their political standings to align with the Turks in the region. This anecdote needs to be situated within the context of the eastward expansion of Turkic populations following the late-eleventh century military developments. In all probability the Turks which Kinnamos is describing had been situated in that region for at least several decades, which was a result of the Anatolian countryside's social fabric being transformed with the loss of Byzantine state influence across much of its Eastern and Southern regions.

In all the cases described above the forced resettlement anecdotes have concerned defeated enemies or other 'outsiders'. Other, 'inside' forced migrations also existed. Skylitzes, for example, describes how in the ninth century, Basil I realized that a newly built provincial town needed more inhabitants, and to remedy this he decided to bring in people from the environs of Herakleia in the Pontos region, forcing them to live in this completely different place.[566] This idea in this case was identical to the logic behind the resettlement of the Pecheneg captives in the year 1048, which was narrated by Skylitzes and discussed above. The main aim was to have all fertile areas properly manned, so as to maximize tax revenue and agrarian

[565] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 22; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 26.
[566] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 150; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis,* 146.

produce in the empire's territories. This could be achieved by pacifying and resettling conquered enemies across such barren regions or by simple enforcing migrations across friendly territories to balance out perceived population inequalities, both of which are illustrated by our authors. The added benefit of severing one's connection with his homeland, which resulted in increased subjugation, would greatly aid the process of incorporating new people and lands into the empire's sovereign territory. As such, these resettlement issues were mainly concerned with rural localities, mainly focusing on small towns and villages. As a result of which these areas would be profoundly affected, both the social fabric would be significantly altered, and the cultural/political composition would inevitably change. The case, discussed above, in which Romans become friendlier towards their neighboring Turks than to the imperial polity, shows the extent of cultural and social diffusion between different population segments. This could and did occur without specifically enforced Byzantine migration policies, but, nonetheless, such policies served to increase the likelihood and effect of such episodes.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The agricultural lifestyle of the peasantry was full of hardships. These included; the physicality of field work, the hilly/stony nature of the Byzantine landscape which made landholders prefer labor-intensive activities such as viticulture or olive-cultivation over crop-growing, the precise seasonality of field activities in the agrarian calendar (visible in the Geoponika) and the abundance and harshness of famine cases over rural localities. The physicality of peasant-life was also manifested in the way the rural populace greatly admired physical strength in a leader.[567] The self-sufficient housing materials, clothing and diet of the peasantry was also far-removed from the norms of the authors narrating these episodes. Housing was assembled from locally available materials (such as wood), which were not very durable and well insulated, making heating an important issue during the winter months. Clothing was generally focused on utility and consisted of goat-hair cloaks, long tunics and work-boots (although being barefoot was also common), while the peasant diet was quite bland and simple, enriched only by local varieties which differed across regions and was viewed with disdain by our authors. The remote nature of many village localities (often for safety reasons) and the vast size of the empire made travel and communication quite difficult – with village networks often being linked through simple goat-tracks. Popular culture and beliefs were far-removed from the strict religious Orthodoxy enforced in the capital and included pagan-influenced practices such as carnival festivals. Peasant life was very superstitious with each village being centered around a place of worship (often a

[567] The discussion of Anna Komnene, Choniates and Eustathios feature the direct same implication concerning the physicality admired by the peasantry. This is analyzed in section 2.1.1.

church building) and being marked with boundary stones and shrines to keep the evil "outside-world" at bay. Agriculture was viewed with immense importance (especially when compared against other ventures such as trade or banking) by the Byzantine mindset, due to it constituting the main component of the entire economy – yet it was also seen as lacking proper future prospects from an individual perspective (especially considering the importance of rank and standing in society among the elite psyche, which is often a means of criticism employed by our authors of certain figures – such as Michael IV). The vulgar *koine* language of the commoners also contrasted sharply with the Atticizing language employed by our authors, serves as another barrier separating these two segments.

Taxation was one of the main interaction channels between the state and the peasants. The passages in these texts are often concerned with the generalized struggle between the state and large landholders for the control of this revenue mechanism. The village was taken as a single fiscal unit for tax purposes and was often collectively represented in legal cases, eliminating any individuality that villagers would possess. From the perspective of the receiver, this tax was seen as being a reward, while for the peasantry, it was the bane of their existence, their primary enslaver. There was also general discontent among the peasantry for taxation in cash (which the state preferred due to the flexibility of cash compared to kind), due to the lack of coin circulation among the countryside and the difficulty in going to markets to raise such coinage – which sometimes resulted in rebellion/conflict. Maintaining the delicate balance between bearable, yet sustainable tax measures was a very important job – which was often complicated by the corrupt nature of tax-collectors who would exact extra payments from the countryside. Numerous tax measures (such as the *aerikon* tax or the *allelengyon* tax) and broader policies (such

as the *phoundax* institution) are described and their effects on the peasantry narrated by our authors. These issues indicate that during the eleventh and especially the twelfth century there was a general trend of trying to increase tax revenue to offset the recent calamities of the empire by adding extra fiscal burdens onto the peasantry. This is exemplified through the authors' much more lenient and positive description of ninth/tenth century tax schemes (such as that of Basil I and Basil II) when compared to their harsh criticisms of more recent regimes (such as that of the late-eleventh century emperors). The legal system is shown through many examples to be unfairly skewed against commoners/peasants, with powerful individuals being backed up by offices and not answering properly for their crimes. Emperors often ignoring legal experts and personally exerting influence over the law system also added to this corruption.

The fact that most villages lacked walls or other defensive mechanisms to thwart hostile attacks is attested to through many different indirect allusions in these texts. This meant that villagers would ideally flee to fortified garrisons or walled towns when faced with an imminent invasion. The most vulnerable areas were frontline villages (emperors would try to protect and reinforce these regions to act as a defensive bulwark), which was a very fluid concept in itself due to the relative abstractness of the idea of borders. Military manuals of the time indicate that war tactics in this period often involved the destruction of countryside regions for purposes of land-denial, which devastated and displaced the peasantry in such circumstances. The long and arduous journey to and from the frontlines meant that the countryside would supply and accommodate armies. This was quite a chaotic procedure which needed to be closely supervised to prevent arbitrary plundering of villages by soldiers (which was much harder to control for mercenary elements in the

army). The imperial retinue itself would also be accommodated in villages, providing us with a rare glimpse at one of the closest interactions the peasantry would have with the imperial spectacle. The peasantry, constituting the overwhelming majority of the populace, was the primary manpower pool from which armies would be conscripted and assembled (both by the state and by rebellious leaders) – many examples from the texts suffice to show the ease with which massive armies could be gathered from fruitful regions. Peasants were also useful due to their local topographical knowledge and language skills (acting as spies), or to simply add extra manpower to an army (by participating using their agricultural tools as weapons). One of the primary motivators for the peasantry to participate in warfare was the prospect of plunder, booty and better prospects in life, although forced recruitment and coercion were also commonplace. Plundering incidents involving rural localities are the most abundant excerpts pertaining to villages narrated in these texts. These cases involve both Byzantine villages being targeted by hostile actors and foreign villages being plundered by the Byzantine army, which indicates that it was the military norm of the period. This also shows the parallels which the peasantry across arbitrary borders had with each other, which included more similarities than they had with their own respective urban/elite segments. There was also a definite correlation between the accessibility of a region (both over land and water) and its chances of being raided. After warfare subsided, the resettling of prisoners and conquered populations would help nullify their future threat to the empire and facilitate their assimilation (such as the policies implemented on the Turks and Pechenegs in the twelfth century). Such practices would also alter the social fabric of many rural localities. Emperors also often pushed to increase agrarian yield by landscaping and by settling people in untilled land. The abundance of both forced and voluntary

mobility indicates that the demography of the empire was quite fluid during this period.

Geographic variations definitely existed among the Byzantine peasantry. For excerpts associated with more generalized topics such as peasant lifestyle or rural taxation, specific regions are usually not identifiable.[568] In such cases this study conforms to the argument accepted by scholars such as Angeliki Laiou, that the Byzantine peasantry was quite uniform across most of its regions, with notable exceptions existing only for mountainous areas, such as central Anatolia.[569] Despite this, the geographic distribution of examples utilized in chapter four of this study can be identified as they often pertain to specific routes, wars or incidents. A total of 33 cases permit the identification of locations from chapter four; 20 of them are from areas West of Constantinople, while 13 are from areas to the East. The vast majority of cases appear to come from areas which are either on the frontier or were somehow repeatedly disrupted by rebel armies, external enemies or the supplying of the army. Of those from the West, 15 of them concern the Thracian countryside, while 5 concern areas further North, towards the Danube. The main antagonists in these passages are the Scythians, Pechenegs, Latins, Bulgarians and Hungarians. The episodes from the east are all from within Asia Minor, most of them being from the Eastern frontiers of the empire, and the primary external antagonists are the Turks. This layout illustrates how the outer territories of the empire receive more attention from the authors for military associated matters, the reasons being quite obvious. This geographic distribution is generally balanced out in the other two main chapters

[568] These passages usually mention that a certain emperor increased the taxes "over the provinces", therefore not allowing any regional variation in its comprehension.
[569] In these areas the influence of large-landholders was both more pronounced and began increasing at an earlier time. Furthermore, these regions are more concentrated on animal husbandry than agriculture due to climate and terrain differences. This creates a difference between the peasantry inhabiting such regions and the more fertile regions.

of this study, in which areas closer to Constantinople also receive sufficient attention.[570]

A strong case has been made for the collective importance attributed to the peasantry through their representation as the most important revenue source for the largely agrarian imperial economy. In the narratives of these authors the peasants appear as mere pawns, but *their* pawns, so the peasants do have a certain value, which is represented collectively and in an expendable fashion. As Magdalino neatly put it (2000), "All Byzantines were Romaioi, but Constantinopolitans were more Byzantine than the rest" (p. 151). Extending the logic of this Constantinople-centered worldview, it is clear that the rural commoners (i.e. peasants), who were not even city-dwellers, were seen as being outsiders and not fully qualifying as actual Byzantine citizens. This issue is clearly demonstrated through the difficulty which our authors exhibit in trying to reconcile the peasant origins of certain figures who undergo extensive social mobility (such as Skylitzes' treatment of Basil I – which is full of inconsistencies and factual inaccuracies). Vast social mobility is generally greeted quite negatively and is often used to undermine the reputation of certain individuals (such as Skylitzes' and Psellos' treatment of Michael IV, Choniates' treatment of John Axouch, Skylitzes' description of John Lazares).[571] Despite this, peasants are recognized as being vitally important for the economy and military prowess of the empire and are exalted as honest producers. This notion is illustrated in the numerous passages describing how different emperors or officials tried to increase agrarian output. The repeatedly emphasized idea of alleviating the tax-burden of the peasantry also indicates such an understanding. Increased taxes,

[570] For example, see section 2.1.2 in which both Eustathios' and Kinnamos' descriptions of peasant housing concern incidents which clearly occurred not too far from the capital – definitely not anywhere near the traditional frontier zones of the empire.
[571] All of these cases are discussed in section 2.2.

especially over rural areas, combined with other corrupt harassment of villagers, are vilified, while the vast village network of the empire is seen as vital in the maintenance of the army, both in times of peace and during warfare. Despite the fact that these texts clearly show how the peasantry of all polities, in a universal fashion, would prefer tax payments in kind, the state preferred payments in cash under most normal circumstances. The added difficulty which this created in the barter-economy of Medieval village-life is largely overlooked by our authors, who often evoke the city-centric idea that money should be collected and utilized. The physicality associated with agricultural work combined with the harsh living conditions of the peasantry (clothing, housing, diet etc.) is perceived and represented both with a sense of awe and apparent simplicity. For example, the utilitarian clothing of the peasantry is seen with a sense of admiration and respect for their labor (visible through Andronikos' portrait in which he is dressed as a farmer)[572] and is also a reason for contempt and stereotyping (seen in Anna Komnene's and Psellos' usage of the term *sisuroforos,* meaning goat-hair cloak wearing, while referring to commoners). The law system is criticized as being skewed against the peasantry and commoners, indicating a solidarity against such landholder-state/peasant inequalities by these authors. From all military examples it is clear that especially certain rural regions were repeatedly targets of raiding, plundering and larger-scale foreign invasions in the period under analysis. The lack of walls that most villages had, serves as a defining factor in their identity, resulting in most villagers fleeing (or being devastated) during any sort of hostile action, despite warning system and the imperial polity actively trying to protect these frontline regions. As a result, cases of peasant migrations appear quite common, which, when combined with the relative

[572] The portrait, which was placed near the gate of the church of the Forty Martyrs in Constantinople, is discussed in section 2.1.2.

abundance of state-enforced resettlement policies (done for purposes of nullifying/assimilating captives and also for keeping tillable land from being unmanned), shows that the demography of the empire was quite volatile during this period.

Aside from being representative of the agrarian workforce of the empire, the peasantry, representing the great majority of the total population, was also a massive manpower pool which was utilized by the state and other charismatic generals during times of turbulence. This utilization appears to be most commonly manifested through coercive measures resulting in the peasantry joining up in the span of a short time to create a large army, which would also sometimes happen voluntarily too. Despite technically holding the largest amount of power/influence as a group, the peasantry was only able to mobilize as a force with the leadership of an emperor/leader by banding into such an army. The frequency of rebellions ending with the toppling of an emperor in Byzantine history shows the importance attributed to these 'lowly' segments of the population – which included the peasantry as well as the urban commoners. The apparent lack of sympathy which the peasantry has garnered in these narratives, especially concerned with military situations, is visibly enhanced (and perhaps even created) by the military doctrines of the period. These texts, which have been discussed in the relevant sections, imply that it is better to hurt an enemy by deceit, raiding or hunger, rather than engaging in a pitched battle. This often meant the reduction of the agricultural hinterland of a fortified position, resulting in the peasantry and crop-fields being the primary target in many encounters – especially in siege situations. Considering that Byzantine history is littered with cases of internal rebellions and squabbling, this often meant that these military doctrines would be advocating the destruction of the empire's own peasantry

and agrarian landscape. In effect the peasantry would be punished for participating on the "wrong" side of an arbitrary struggle for power between two individuals, even though they would not have had any choice as forced recruitment and coercion is commonly attested to in these narratives. Basically, whichever side lost, the poor foot soldiers of that side, which were the common people, would be punishable. A perfect example of this is the rebellion of Alexios Branas against the reign of Isaac II Angelos in the year 1187 (discussed in chapter 4.4), which ended with the peasantry along the shores of the Propontis, who had supported Branas, being obliterated with "liquid fire". Scorched earth tactics were also frequently implemented in Medieval warfare (described in Byzantine military manuals), denying the enemy usage of the provisions of a certain land by burning/destroying it. With such attitudes in mind, it is not surprising that historical stories primarily concerned with narrating military encounters should have little sympathy for individual peasants.

Overall, the narratives appear to defend the peasantry based on taxation and legal interactions; increased taxes on the countryside are criticized and the biased nature of the legal system is described as problematic. This implies that the authors generally thought that such burdens on the peasantry should be alleviated and not increased for frivolous reasons such as the personal extravagances of emperors. Despite this, a military based defense of the peasantry does not seem to exist. The hardships suffered by the peasantry during the supplying of the army, episodes warfare and its many outcomes are normalized and not though as being fundamentally problematic (which appears to contrast with their attitudes on tax and law-based issues). Furthermore, the individuality of peasants are suppressed in the mindset of the authors through the strongly negative outlook towards upward social mobility. Such an outlook implies that each individual peasant ought to remain as

part of the general undefined manpower pool, continuing to till the land and man the army. Furthermore, the fact that peasant lifestyle is seen as somewhat inferior and that the peasantry is represented as being unable to unite for a cause without external intervention (such as the influence of a charismatic rebellious general) further aids lack of individual worth attributed to this large segment of the populace. Thus, the elite view of the peasantry appears to be a somewhat romantic one, the peasantry is idealized as representing an honest workforce (contrasting with other professions) who are recognized as being necessary for the authors' own existence, yet their lifestyle and individual worth is largely ignored, slandered and alienated.

On the surface there exists a simple dichotomy separating the toiling farming populace from the elite, yet, this is complicated by the increased difficulty in separating the urban/rural division from the lowly/powerful divide. Often times the urban poor are also lumped together with the peasantry in constituting components of broader terms such as; common (κοινός), lowly (ταπεινός), uneducated (ἰδίωτις). In the majority of cases the lowly/powerful divide, which was primarily a social, rank-based division, appears more pronounced than the urban/rural divide and this results in the urban poor generally sharing a similar fate as the peasantry in respect to their perception by our elite authors. Aside from their clothing, housing and diet, the peasantry is also stereotyped and viewed with contempt based on their lack of an education (manifested through differences in language – vulgar *koine* versus an increasingly Atticized Greek), inability to behave with civility, non-Orthodox practices and customs, and also their spatial distance to all things viewed as 'civilized'. Part of this attitude stems from non-personal issues which cannot be psychologically deconstructed, such as the classicizing norms of literature. The authors under analysis mentality wise appear much closer to the imperial viewpoint

than they are to the vast majority of the common populace living in the countryside. One reason for this is no doubt the Constantinopolitan 'elite' education they have received, which has mentality imbued them with a very different mindset from the average rural inhabitant. The importance in remembering that all of these works are literary works, not factual accounts, is all the more easily visualized following a literary deconstruction of certain commonly appearing passages (such as exaggerated descriptions of famines/plagues and other natural disasters – which all seem to resemble each other and other more ancient descriptions). Despite having its own unique character, Byzantine historiography was part of the broader literary-intellectual trend of its period. The farmers of the empire being oppressed in their relationship with the center was not something newly represented in the historiography of this period, older sources such as Procopius also allude to a multitude of similar treatments and use similar rhetorical structures when discussing them.[573]

The narrative histories analyzed within the scope of this study appear to be in agreement over a wide spectrum of subjects. The most basic of these is their descriptions and perceptions of peasant language, housing, clothing, diet and its differences with their own.[574] Furthermore, there is a generalized consensus about the relative frequency and negative morality of tax-collector abuse in the countryside. More specifically though there is an agreement on issues such as upward social mobility and being of peasant origin, visualized through Skylitzes' and

[573] Procopius, *The Secret History*, 261. Procopius in his 'Secret History, describes how farmers of the Bithynia and Phrygia regions are obliged to transport and sell their grain at Constantinople for exceptionally low prices, due to the insufficiency of the grain fleet supplying the city. Procopius also mentions that these farmers were well accustomed to such treatment, which was commonly called 'requisition'.

[574] Confirmation on the admiration of physicality by the peasantry exhibited by Anna Komnene, Choniates and Eustathios is an example of this.

Psellos' treatment of Michael IV. Policy-wise, ninth-tenth century tax-policies are generally favorably compared against their later counterparts. Skylitzes and Choniates both describe the Macedonian era as featuring quite 'burdenless' taxes over provincial areas, while especially Basil I and Basil II are described very positively as appearing lenient in their treatment of the peasantry.[575] Contrasting with this, Skylitzes describes the many extra-ordinary taxes (such as the *aerikon*) implemented on the countryside by John the Orphanatrophos (during Michael IV's reign) and similar policies by Constantine IX, including the appointment of 'criminal men' as tax-officials. Attaleiates slanders Constantine X's and Michael VII for their exactions of extra-ordinary fiscal measures on the provinces, while Choniates describes the mid-eleventh century as being full of 'lawless practices', in addition to his critical discussion on the extra fiscal measures implemented by Manuel I (including the 'barbarization' of the tax-collector network). Furthermore, the legal system is shown to have worked in favor of the *dynatoi* and against the peasantry (Choniates, Attaleiates) and the meddling of emperors in this system is criticized (Psellos, Attaleiates). Another common theme across these narratives is also the extreme marginalization of nomadic/foreign populations (much more so than the Byzantine peasantry).

Despite all of this, there were certain areas in which the views of these authors markedly contrasted with each other. One important example is the issue surrounding the rise of large-landowners and policies directed against combatting their rise. Both Psellos (through his praise of Isaac I's policies) and Choniates (through his insistence that the state ought to receive tax revenue instead of other actors during his discussion on the "gifts of *paroikoi*") see the rise of large

[575] These issues are discussed in chapters 3.1.1 and 3.1.2.

countryside estates as something quite negative. On the other hand, Skylitzes (through his praising of Romanos III's removal of the *allelengyon* tax – which was directed against the *dynatoi*), and Anna Komnene (through her praising of Alexios I's land grants to powerful individuals) appear to hold a more positive view towards the rise of large landownership in the countryside. Aside from this major division, smaller disagreements also existed. For example, Choniates and Skylitzes appear to have quite favorable views imperial resettlement policies, whereas Kinnamos holds a more negative view, illustrated through his description of a case where such a policy ended badly for Byzantium. A more generalized contrast also exists between the portrayal of Manuel I by three of these authors. Choniates hold an exceptionally critical view of the emperor, Kinnamos' view is less critical than Choniates, exhibiting more of a balanced outlook, while Eustathios' description of Manuel I is extremely praise-filled and laudatory, contrasting sharply with both the others. Internal contradictions also occasionally present themselves, whereby within a single narrative seemingly different views are presented. One of the most notable of these is the different attitudes which Skylitzes exhibits concerning the peasant-origins of Basil I and Michael IV. While Basil I's humble background is used as a tool to enhance his credibility as an emperor, Michael IV's similar origins are used as a mechanism to attack and discredit him from holding the imperial office. This contradiction stems from the fact that Skylitzes' account of Basil I is very positive (visualized through his invention of a fictitious noble background for Basil), while his depiction of Michael IV is tainted with criticisms, primarily due to the deceptive regicide plot which brought the latter to the throne. Still, this does not change the fact that Skylitzes appears to have fallen victim to his own political outlook by contradicting himself during his discussion of their rise out of obscurity.

On top of analyzing the generalized perception and reception of the peasantry from the eyes of the state, landholders, prominent military leaders and our authors, this study also aids the discussion on the social history of the peasantry by showing that a different perspective on certain issues which are traditionally analyzed mainly from fiscal inventory lists and material evidence is possible through the usage of literary source material. For example, despite being quite limited, descriptions of peasant housing and clothing provide an extra source of information to complement the relatively scarce amount of material evidence on this issue. The rudimentary and simplistic nature of peasant housing is attested through the repeated discussion of their demise at the mercy of natural disasters, they are described as wretched/miserable little huts by both Kinnamos and Eustathios, the latter who also described how they slept on a layer of straw.[576] The clothing of peasants is described as being locally produced and emphasizing utility over style or appearance. The term goat-hair cloak wearing is used frequently and in Andronikos' Portrait as a farmer, described by Choniates, we see concrete evidence of how the farming populace dressed. We are also informed that social rank and clothing was strictly correlated and stepping outside of such boundaries was not always socially acceptable. Such examples illustrate the manner in which literary sources can add an extra dimension to many subjects usually analyzed through other source materials. Especially dualities, perceptions and the relationship between different population segments are all social/cultural issues better studied through the usage of literary material, which is a social construction in itself. This study has attempted to show the existence of retrievable data concerning peasant society and its reception contained within narrative histories, which would, in the future, benefit from being expanded to

[576] These issues are discussed in chapter 2.1.2.

include the vast range of other types of literary material which exist within the Byzantine literary spectrum, thereby creating an even broader picture.

APPENDIX

THE ECONOMIC PSYCHE OF THE BYZANTINE ELITE

All of the above developments need to be seen within the general understanding that tax-collection and the general organization of the rural economy was done in a very decentralized way compared to more modern periods. Centrifugal elements such as rogue tax-collectors or aristocrats who tried to monopolize or disrupt a certain component of the rural economy, were seen in a significantly negative light by these authors. Exploiting the people who tilled the land through such means was seen as being a very lowly way of making profits. This is also tied to the general Byzantine understanding that trading was a profession suitable only for those of lowly origin as it was not an honest way of making profits, it was seen as being particularly demeaning,[577] whereas agricultural work (and animal husbandry) was shown great respect for being the primary driver of the economy of the entire Empire.[578] This is an interesting notion considering that it has been shown that foreign trade, especially Italian, was very beneficial for the Byzantine economy until at least the reign of Andronikos I,[579] but perceptions of trade are beyond the focus of this study.

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[577] Haldon, *Byzantium a History*, Chapter 5.

[578] The idea that trade was a lowly act is mostly portrayed by the elite/imperial classes. However, as this was the generalized trend, most Byzantine authors – regardless of their social origin – also presented a fairly negative view of trading. The Byzantine elite were known to, until at least the fourteenth century, practice self-sufficiency and not engage in any commercial ventures. (After the fourteenth century, though, the aristocracy became increasingly active in trading and banking ventures, mainly due to the contraction of the land area of the empire meaning that agricultural revenue was not enough to sustain them. Although it has been identified that as far back as the eleventh century trading was picking up legitimacy among the higher class, but the elite authors who wrote about such matters chose to overlook this. For more information, see Jacoby, "The Byzantine Outsider in Trade," 130-31.

[579] During the eleventh and twelfth centuries this trade appears to have been quite beneficial for the Byzantine economy. Furthermore, landowners, which were increasing in this period, appear to have conducted a lot of trading with Italian merchants in particular, selling goods such as grain, meat and wine. More information on this issue can be found in; Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 174-77.

Despite all the prejudice directed towards them, the peasantry remained honest producers in the eyes of the elite. This resulted in any references to commercial activities automatically being tainted with a negative bias, resulting in a probable exaggeration of the amount of lying, harassing and cheating that was going on in such ventures.[580] This is important because the decline of the independent peasantry and the rise of large estates is directly linked with an increase in trade/commerce across the countryside, and is therefore an important and new feature of the period under analysis.[581] Nonetheless, the idea of middlemen involved in the transportation of products is well documented in the middle period too and was often facilitated by monasteries or other great landholders which resulted in the procedure being quite commercialized – and hence depicted quite negatively by our commentators. This is also increasingly visible in their attitudes towards the Italians. Especially Anna Komnene, Kinnamos and Choniates' narratives feature extremely negative descriptions of the Italians and their commercial ventures. Kinnamos' treatment of the Venetians is worthy of mention as it sums up the overall attitude of the elite Byzantine mindset. Kinnamos calls the Venetians corrupt, rude, dishonest and lowly.[582] One of the words he uses, βωμόλοχος, literally refers to someone who steals food from the altar like a beggar, here Kinnamos is using it to show the Venetians' lowly, dishonest nature. The fact that Kinnamos uses a word that implies

[580] Jacoby, "The Byzantine Outsider in Trade," 131.
[581] When the majority of the countryside was composed of independent peasants, commercial activity was quite slow and small-scale. This is mainly due to the fact that small independent peasant households lived a largely self-sufficient existence and did not partake in much commercial activity, which was used almost exclusively for the purposes of raising cash for tax payment purposes – not a particularly bountiful venture. In contrast, when the large landholders began to dominate the rural landscape, much greater movement of goods, bigger trade ventures and greater capital acquisitions began to circulate across the Byzantine countryside. This is mainly due to the greater resources available to such powerful individuals. For more information, see Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire 900 – 1200,* 80-81.
[582] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 280; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 209-10. Kinnamos further elaborates that this uncouth character of the Venetians is one of the reasons that Manuel Komnenos committed all the Venetians who lived in Byzantion in to prisons and confiscated their property around the year 1171.

stealing something that one does not rightfully have a claim to is very indicative of the general Byzantine, elite mindset towards people who are viewed as traders/merchants. Kinnamos also calls them ἀνελεύθερος, which means they are not free, or in a materialist sense that they are very stingy with money. Furthermore, he uses the word ἀπειροκαλία, which means someone who cannot appreciate the fine/good things in life, so someone who is very vulgar and uncouth. He ascribes their vulgarity to the fact they are generally all sailors (ναυτικός), which in Kinnamos' mind is a valid explanation for their uncouth nature. Kinnamos also seems very personally offended that of all the other foreign and Byzantine merchants it is only the Venetians who are exempt from paying commercial tithes – referred to as a "tenth" (μόνοι τε τῶν ἁπάντων διὰ τοῦτο τὰς κατ' ἐμπορίαν δεκάτας οὐδενι Ῥωμαίων ἐξ ἐκείνου παρέσχοντο).[583] He is also skeptical of the space assigned to them which he says the common multitude call the *embolon* (ὃν Ἔμβολον ὀνομάζουσιν οἱ πολλοί).[584] He goes on to blame Alexios I Komnenos' 1081 decision for starting this whole 'trend'. He seems especially distressed that this tax exemption resulted in them gaining increased influence in the region and subsequently made them very boastful and rude towards the Roman population. He says that the Venetians treated citizens like slaves, even if they were of high, revered ranks such as that of *sebastos* (...σεβαστότητι ἐφρόνει κἂν ἐπὶ μεῖζόν τι προῆκε τῶν παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις σεμνῶν). All of this negativity towards the Venetians traders stems from two root causes, the fact that they are foreign (Latin) and that they are merchants by trade. The importance attributed to collecting the honest and rightful agrarian

[583] Kinnamos, *Epitome*, 280-81; Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 210.
[584] An *Embolon* is known to have been a place where traders would have stored their goods and also conducted commercial transactions. It was not like a bazaar, but more like an exchange house instead. The word *Embolon* soon acquired a greater meaning and became known amongst the general populace to refer to the entire Venetian quarter as a whole. Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 257.

revenue of the Byzantine lands becomes all the more obvious when seen in light of the negativity associated with many other means of revenue accumulation in the Byzantine psyche.

The most general aspect of Byzantine *kaiserkritik*, as seen within narratives such as those under analysis, is the slandering of lavish imperial expenses, especially while public matters are subsequently neglected, and the treasury emptied.[585] Psellos, whose narrative is surprisingly transparent,[586] is quite critical of several emperors due to their mismanagement of such affairs. These consist of; Romanos III and his decision to cut public funding as a means to recover his personal lavish and wasteful expenditures,[587] the sisters Zoe and Theodora and their spending of state money on their own personal, frivolous luxuries,[588] Constantine Monomachos squandering endless funds on pointless, lavish church projects (an issue which Psellos narrates with the metaphor "gold flowing from the public treasury like a river/spring gushing and foaming in abundance" (ὁ δὲ χρυσὸς ἀπὸ τῶν δημοσίων ταμιείων ὥσπερ ἐξ ἀφθόνων πηγῶν καχλάζοντι ἐπέρρει τῷ ῥεύματι),[589] and finally "the emperors before Isaac Komnenos" emptying out the imperial treasury to satisfy their extravagant projects and luxuries.[590] Being consistent with the above, in a directly opposite

[585] Such as Skylitzes' discussion on Constantine IX (discussed in section 3.1.2).
[586] Out of all of these authors Psellos is the one who pays most attention to his methodology by laying out many of his historiographical arguments. When he starts describing an emperor he generally takes the time to explain that he will be conducting this analysis without bias in any particular direction. Psellos, *The History,* 12; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 21. He also justified that his account is the most accurate one because, unlike other chroniclers, he was personally present during many events. Such as those during the reign of Michael IV, which Psellos mentions he was present for and that he also acquired information from many confidential people associated directly with the emperor. Psellos, *The History,* 60; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 108.
[587] Psellos, *The History,* 34; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 73.
[588] Psellos, *The History,* 117; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 186.
[589] Psellos, *The History,* 172; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 250-51. This metaphor by Psellos is quite similar to one which has already been discussed by Attaleiates. During his panegyric episode on Nikephoros Botaniates' reign, Attaleiates mentioned that "rivers were flowing with treasures and endless fountains of gold were gushing from the lands". Attaleiates, *The History,* 498-99.
[590] Psellos, *The History,* 217; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 311. This is most probably referring to the actions of Theodora.

manner, Psellos features great praise for Basil II and Constantine X Doukas. The former whom he describes as always being on the battlefield with the army and therefore not having any time to spend all the wealth he had accumulated on personal things, which resulted in the empire becoming richer,[591] and the latter whom is mentioned as not using the state funds which he himself had reaped.[592] From such numerous examples it is obvious that the personal usage of state finances is seen very negatively by Psellos. Considering that this revenue was mainly derived from the land tax exacted on the peasantry this can be taken as an indirect defense of the rights of the common populace, as not using the state funds for personal reasons implies that they should, according to Psellos, be spent on public welfare. That emperors should personally be involved with their own subjects and not be detached in their ivory towers is a well entertained theme in these narratives. Skylitzes, for example, praises the emperor Theophilos for walking around the marketplace (ἀγορά) and personally inspecting the wares/goods (ὤνιος) and asking the tradesmen the price of each item (ἠρωτα γοῦν περὶ ἑκάστου τῶν πιπρασκομένων),[593] while Psellos is very critical of Constantine VIII neglecting his administrative duties and focusing on games.[594] This all feeds into the general idea that emperors were expected to be involved with their populace and work to further the general welfare of the empire.

[591] Psellos, *The History,* 16; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 45.
[592] "…οὔτε ἀπειροκάλως τοῖς ἀναλώμασι χρώμενος, οὔτε θερίζων, ὅσα μὴ αὐτὸς ἔσπειρεν." Psellos, *The History,* 233; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 332.
[593] Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, 51; Skylitzes, *The Synopsis*, 53. The wares he was inspecting were comprised of edible items (βρωτός), drinks (ποτός) and clothing (ἀμφίασις). Skylitzes describes the emperor as doing this for the sake of the common good.
[594] Psellos, *The History,* 24; Psellos, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 58. Psellos is often quite critical of certain emperors neglecting their administrative duties. One such example is his harsh commentary on the addiction for dice games (κύβος) and draughts (πεσσός) which he accuses Constantine VIII of harboring. Psellos mentions that he would even make important ambassadors wait for him to finish his dice games.

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