Radboud Universiteit

“Raising the Standard of Revolt”
Class Struggle in Xth and XIth century Byzantine Revolts

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Werkstuk ter afronding van de Masteropleiding Geschiedenis
aan de Faculteit der Letteren
van de Radboud Universiteit te Nijmegen
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Woordaantal: 15.725
29 Maart 2025

Hierbij verklaar en verzeker ik, Mo Quirijnen, dat voorliggende eindwerkstuk getiteld: ‘Raising the Standard of Revolt: Class Struggle in Xth and XIth century Byzantine Revolts’ zelfstandig door mij is opgesteld, dat geen andere bronnen en hulpmiddelen dan die door mij zijn vermeld zijn gebruikt en dat de passages in het werk waarvan de woordelijke inhoud of betekenis uit andere werken — ook elektronische media — is genomen door bronvermelding als ontlening kenbaar gemaakt worden.

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Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been a longer road than anticipated. Despite all the obstacles that presented itself along the way, the end result is something I am both proud of and have learned immensely from. I would like to thank my supervisor dr. Sven Meeder for his sound advice and willingness to make sense of my chaotic first drafts. Furthermore I would like to thank my parents for supporting me in my fascination with medieval history, despite the improbable job prospects. Lastly I would like to thank all the friends, compatriots and comrades, all of whom are too many to list, who helped me through this process with stimulating conversations and unwavering support.

Introduction

"As he was travelling through Cappadocia the magister Eustathios Maleinos received [the emperor] and the entire army as his guests, giving him and his men whatever they needed without counting the cost. As though he approved of this and was praising him, the emperor took him to the capital with him but would not allow him to return afterwards. He made generous provision for his needs but held onto him as though he were raising a wild beast in a cage until he reached the end of his life. And when he died, all his property was appropriated by the state"[1]

The above passage describes how the Byzantine emperor Basil II on his way back from a campaign in the east captured the aristocrat Eusthatios Maleinos. Maleinos shortly before this had been a central part of the uprising by the former Domestic of the Schools Bardas Phokas to take the throne from Basil.[2] The magister had been one of the strongest allies of Phokas and the revolt had even been planned on his estate. Besides being a thorn in the emperor's side, Maleinos was also the owner of vast amounts of land. John Wortley speculates that Maleinos was maybe the richest man in the Byzantine empire at this point.[3] The fact that he was able to feed the emperor's army without needing compensation also speaks to this. Basil taking him captive was not just an act of retribution, but also a matter of security. If he was able to feed the imperial army, Maleinos would be just as able to support another revolt. Taking his property would ensure that no heirs could have the same powerful position as Maleinos, whilst also contributing to the state treasury.

Bardas Phokas was not the only aristocrat to revolt during this period. The tenth and eleventh centuries were a time of social unrest for Byzantium. According to Jean Claude Cheynet, there is evidence of 223 revolts between 963 and 1210, with a large number of local revolts probably remaining unrecorded.[4] Many revolts amounted to large scale civil wars that could last several years, such as with the aforementioned revolt of Bardas or the revolt of Isaak Komnenos. At the same time, we can also see a change in the social structure of

[1] John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057*, John Wortley ed. et trans. (Cambridge 2010) 322-323.
[2] The Domestic of the Schools was the highest military leader in the Byzantine empire. Bardas was not the first of the Phokas family to hold this title, with his uncle and grandfather preceding him.
[3] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 323.
[4] A full overview of all revolts and the available documentation can be found in Jean Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963-1210)* (Paris 1990) 20-156.

Byzantine society in this period. The ownership of land became more important and wealthy individuals and institutions started accumulating land, buying entire villages or sometimes even taking them by force.[5] That members of the aristocracy were revolting in increasing measure when they accumulated more and more land does not seem coincidental and might be indicative of a causal relationship. My aim with this thesis will be to analyse this relationship.

Previous authors have also made the connection between the changing social situation and revolts in this period. For a long time, this question was mostly discussed in context of the broader discussion of whether Byzantium was a feudal society.[6] The dominant view was that of George Ostrogorsky, who stated that from the tenth century onwards the empire became increasingly feudalized. The aristocracy gained power and took control, which led to a decline of the state, harsher exploitation of the peasantry, and an economic crisis. Ostrogorsky states that this ultimately led to the decline of the Byzantine empire.[7] This view has been criticized by multiple authors, chief among them Paul Lemerle. In *The Agrarian History of the Byzantine Empire*, Lemerle argues that there is much more continuity after the sixth century than Ostrogorsky gives credit for and that estates and thus the aristocracy did not disappear from the countryside. Beyond that, he refuses the categorization of Byzantium as a feudal society, stating that many of the judicial and military characteristics of feudalism simply are not present.[8] Both Ostrogorsky and Lemerle, and many authors along with them, still saw the tenth century as the start of an economic crisis and a broader decline that led to the crisis created by the Fourth Crusade. Alan Harvey has since shown that the tenth until the twelfth century marked a period of demographic and economic expansion for the Byzantine empire, making the narrative of 'feudalisation' leading to a decline even more improbable.[9]

[5] For a short overview of this change in land ownership see Kostis Smyrlis, 'Social Change in the Countryside of Eleventh Century Byzantium' in James Howard-Johnston ed., *Social Change in Town and Country in Eleventh-century Byzantium* (Oxford 2020) 63-67.
[6] Although the question of Byzantium's feudal nature was hotly debated in the west, researchers in the Soviet Union mostly agreed that it was a feudal society but did not agree on when it made the transition to feudalism. Although the analysis made by Soviet researchers could bear some insight, my proficiency with Russian is unfortunately not high enough to take these into account. For a short overview of Soviet historiography with regards to Byzantium, see: John Haldon, 'The feudalism debate once more: The case of Byzantium', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 17:1 (1989) 7-9.
[7] Ostrogorsky has developed this view most coherently in George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (Oxford, 1968), 272-350. See also George Ostrogorsky, 'Observations on the Aristocracy in Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 25:1 (1971), 1-32 for more specific thoughts of Ostrogorsky on the role of the aristocracy. For a broader discussion of the historiography of the feudalism debate see Alan Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200* (Cambridge 1989), 7-12.
[8] Paul Lemerle, *The agrarian history of Byzantium: from the origins to the twelfth century; the sources and problems* (Galway 1979) 57, 89, 115, 201.
[9] Harvey, *Economic Expansion*, 8-9, 244-268.

Lemerle's criticism, combined with Harvey's argument of economic expansion and the broader paradigm shift with regards to the term feudalism, meant the debate slowly died down in the 1980's.[10] Before, the Middle Byzantine revolts and civil wars, especially in the eleventh century, were seen as being a part of a broader narrative of Byzantine decline. With the decline of popularity of this narrative, we also see a decrease in interest for the history of Byzantine revolts in general, as well as linking to them any socio-economic causes. Instead, the pendulum seems to have swung the other way and there are now multiple authors questioning whether we can even attribute these revolts to a growing landowning class.[11] This appears to be part of a larger trend in the historiography of medieval revolts, where less emphasis is placed on any possible socio-economic causes of revolts.[12] With regards to other areas in Europe, research seems to have shifted towards analyzing the cultural aspects of medieval revolts. Unfortunately, this shift seems to have had less effect in Byzantine scholarship and there have been very few studies dedicated to analyzing Byzantine revolts or their internal dynamics.[13]

One of the few extensive studies into Byzantine revolts remains Cheynet's *Pouvoir et*

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[10] The concept of feudalism has been critiqued by multiple medievalists for being too rigid, schematic, and being applied universally without a concrete basis. Especially the conceptualisation of medieval society as a rigid system of lords and vassals has been critiqued for providing a bad guide to medieval realities. One of the seminal critiques of the concept remains Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford 1994). For a short overview of the historiography see Richard Abels, 'The Historiography of a Construct: "Feudalism" and the Medieval Historian', *History Compass*, 7:3 (2009) 1008–1031. While most medieval historians now avoid the term or use some variation of it (i.e. speaking of a plural "feudalisms"), within Marxist circles the debate is still ongoing, even when discussing Byzantium. See for example the very recently published Chris Wickham, 'How did the Feudal Economy Work? The economic logic of medieval societies', *Past and Present*, 251:1 (2021) 3-40.

[11] Michael Angold has questioned whether we can even speak of an aristocracy, deeming the term too vague to denote anything in Michael Angold, 'Introduction' in Michael Angold ed., *The Byzantine Aristocracy. IX to XIII Centuries* (Oxford 1984). Peter Frankopan has questioned whether land can even be linked to power in a concrete way, stating instead that power came from proximity to the emperor in Peter Frankopan, 'Land and Power in the Middle and Later Period' in John Haldon ed., *The Social History of Byzantium*. Jean Claude Cheynet has nuanced this, seeing the contradiction in the aristocracy gaining most of their income from the court, whilst also trying to remain independent from it in Jean Claude Cheynet, 'The Byzantine Aristocracy (8th-13th Centuries) in Jean Claude Cheynet, *The Military Function of the Byzantine Aristocracy* (New York 2006).

[12]For an overview, see Jan Dumolyn, Wouter Ryckbosch, Mathijs Speecke, 'Did inequality produce medieval revolt? The material position and political agency of textile workers during the Flemish Revolt of 1379–1385', *Social History*, 46:4 (2021), 372–375.

[13] There have been a few sporadic studies analyzing Byzantine revolts on their own merit. Most of them have been concerned with analyzing a specific case study, such as Peter Frankopan, 'Challenges to Imperial Authority in Byzantium : Revolts on Crete and Cyprus at the end of the 11th Century', *Byzantion*, 74:1 (2004) 382-402 and Roman Shliakhtin, 'Alexios, Emperor of the Diasporas?: The Komnenian Revolt of 1081 and Foreign Military Groups in Byzantium' in Georg Christ, Patrick Sänger & Mike Carr ed., *Military Diaspora's: Building of Empire in the Middle East and Europe 550 BCE-1500 CE* (London 2022). Some other studies have only concerned themselves with aspects of revolts., such as Jean Claude Cheynet, 'Provincial Rebellions as an Indicator of Byzantine 'Identity' (Tenth–Twelfth Centuries)' in Yannis Stouraitis ed., *Identities and Ideologies in the Medieval East Roman World* (Edinburgh 2022).

contestations à Byzance (963-1210). With this monograph, Cheynet gives us a political analysis of many important aspects about the prominent Byzantine families, their power, and their politics. Although Cheynet's work remains an important centre point in the limited historiography of Byzantine revolts, he has been rightfully criticized for focusing only on the role of the aristocracy. Anthony Kaldellis states that Cheynet only dedicates three pages to the role of the general populace in revolts.[14] In his groundbreaking work *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome*, Kaldelis attempts to analyse the role of public opinion and non-elite people in Byzantine revolts. He grants a much larger role to the power of the public and sees revolts as instrumental in this, stating that: "civil wars and other challenges were a form of election".[15] While Kaldelis makes an interesting point about the political form of the Byzantine revolt, his analysis does not touch upon the question of why people rose up in revolt and he does not link it to any broader societal changes.

The aim of this thesis will be to analyse how the changes in landownership shaped the revolts we see during the tenth and eleventh century, taking into account both the changing positions of peasants and landlords. Instead of understanding these revolts as part of a larger narrative, as we have seen in the historiography, it is my intention to analyse them in their own right, with regards to their own dynamics and specificities. To get a better grasp on the socio-economic aspects and backgrounds of Byzantine revolts, I will be analysing them as an expression of class struggle. This will hopefully help us to gain a better understanding of the relations of different social groups participating in revolts, as well as get a sense of why these different groups were breaking out in revolt in the first place. Class, as both a social and economic category, allows us to make a concrete connection between the economic changes and the social unrest of this period.

Chapter 1 will lay down the theoretical framework I will be employing in this thesis, expanding on what exactly is meant by class as a category, how it fits into a medieval context, and how I will be using it. In Chapter 2, we will look at the economic changes of the Byzantine empire during this period, looking at the changing ownership of land and what this did to the organisation of labor. On the basis of this we will draw some broader conclusions on class relations and tensions in Byzantium during this time. In Chapter 3 we will analyse multiple revolts ranging from 963 to 1057 to look at why different classes broke out in revolt and how class relations played out in revolts..

[14] Anthony Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge 2015) 125-126.
[15] Ibidem, 138.

Chapter 1: Theory of Class Struggle

The goal of this chapter will be twofold: 1) to establish a theoretical framework which has the heuristic value of allowing us to analyse the causality of collective social action in medieval societies, Byzantium specifically, and 2) to argue for the analytical value of this framework. In order to analyse the class struggle in the Byzantine Empire, our examination will be founded on Marxist theoretical principles and concepts. This extends to the concept of class that we will be employing, something of which there are many alternatives besides the Marxist variety. Beyond just class, we will be analyzing the broader social relations through which production takes place and the way the labor process is organised and surplus labor is appropriated. A greater understanding of the dynamics of this holistic totality will hopefully give us greater insight in the 'why' of collective social action, specifically in the form of revolts and riots.

Before we can dive into how to employ these concepts in concrete analysis, it behooves us to answer a more urgent question: why Marxism? As multiple authors have pointed out, the popularity of Marxism has taken a dive in the historiography since the 1980's.[16] Even the history of medieval revolts, where Marxist analysis used to be dominant, has since mostly focused on the cultural forms and representations in revolts rather than the issue of determining socio-economic causality.[17] In his article 'Memories of Underdevelopment: What Has Marxism Done for Medieval History, and What Can It Still Do?' medievalist Chris Wickham argues that Marxism has made a retreat in the field of history, with a 'flattening of the ideological charge of debate' as a result.[18] According to Wickham, this has led to a trend of theoretical pluralism in which multiple causal factors are determined without a hierarchy of causality being established.[19] Wickham states that this has

[16] Both W.G. Runciman and Chris Wickham, authors from different theoretical backgrounds, give this view in their contributions to Chris Wickham ed., *Marxist History-writing for the twenty-first century* (Oxford 2008). In his contribution, Eric Hobsbawm gives a brief overview of the oscillating interest in Marxist historical writing, tying it to the political movements of the time. These authors however only touch on the role of Marxism in western historiography. For an overview that gives a more global view see Edward Wang & George G. Iggers ed., *Marxist Historiographies: A Global Perspective* (New York 2016).

[17] For a brief overview of the recent historiography of Medieval revolts , see Justine Firnhaber-Baker's introduction in Justine Firnhaber-Baker & Dirk Shcoenaers ed., *The Routledge History Handbook of Medieval Revolt* (London 2016). Dumolyn et al. give a similar historiographical overview in their argument to return to socio-economic analysis when studying medieval revolts. See Dumolyn et al., 'Did inequality produce medieval revolt?', 372–405.

[18] Chris Wickham, 'Memories of Underdevelopment: What Has Marxism Done for Medieval History, and What Can It Still Do?' in Chris Wickham ed., *Marxist History-writing for the twenty-first century* (Oxford 2008), 32.

[19] Wickham, 'Memories of Underdevelopment', 36. The same observation has been made by Rigby, although he states that is a positive development that should be embraced. See Stephen Rigby, 'Historical Materialism,

led to a diminishing of theoretical discussion like the ones we saw a few decades ago, such as the Brenner debate. Eric Hobsbawm, in a short article published in the same volume, argues for a return to Marxist analysis in history as well, though not just for its stimulating value in historical debate. According to Hobsbawm, a recent trend in history has been that:

"Methodologically, the major negative development has been the construction of a set of barriers between what happened or happens in history and our capacity to observe and understand it, by denying that there is any reality that is objectively there and not constructed by the observer for different and changing purposes, or by arguing that we can never penetrate beyond the limitations of language, i.e. of the concepts which.are the only way in which we can talk about the world, the past included. Though not necessarily relativist, the so-called 'history of representations' '...'' lends itself to finessing the problem of what happened and why. Relativism in itself eliminates the question whether there are patterns and regularities in the past about which historians can make meaningful statements."[20]

This postmodernist approach to history, as Hobsbawm puts it, is not without its merits and he recognizes that many valuable contributions have come from trends such as the cultural and linguistic turn. The problem lies in that it denies the capacity of historians to make statements about the objective nature of social structures and their transformation. This way of thinking is founded on the philosophical concept of anti-universalism, which Hobsbawm describes as 'my truth is as valid as yours, whatever the evidence'.[21] This leads us to not consider what happened, but just the differing perspectives on events. Hobsbawm sees Marxism as the antidote to this way of thinking, since it strives to see history as 'an indivisible web in which all human activities are interconnected.'[22] Instead of looking at individual experiences and perspectives in isolation, Marxist historians aim to see the connections between things as they are, both causal and otherwise.

Both Wickham and Hobsbawm present strong arguments for the heuristic value in Marxist analysis. One does not have to subscribe to Marxist principles, to see the positive effects Marxism has had on writing history, especially in medieval studies. Rigby has argued that this is decidedly clear in the study of medieval England, looking at Marxist authors such as Eugene Kosminsky, Rodney Hilton, Zvi Ravi, and Robbert Brenner who are regarded as

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Social Structure, and Social Change in the Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 34:3 (2004) 511-512.

[20] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Marxist Historiography Today', 183-184 in Wickham, *Marxist History-Writing*.

[21] Ibidem, 184.

[22] Ibidem, 186.

classics today.[23] Wickham has gone as far as to argue that the Marxist paradigm is still dominant in our view of the Middle Ages, citing the fact most Marxist works and statements are rarely seen as fully controversial in the analysis of medieval societies, with controversies mostly pertaining to the exclusion of other causal factors. According to Wickham Marxism has left a decisive stamp within medieval studies on the field of peasant studies and peasant revolts.[24] Although Marxist historians were not the only ones studying the rural economy and peasant-landlord relation, their unique contribution was to analyze the link between 'the internal structure of the feudal mode of production, and the dynamic role of class conflict as a driving force in economic development'.[25] Wickham's claim that Marxism has been a dominant paradigm remains a bit strong for me, but he does effectively show that Marxism was not only very influential, but also valuable as an analytical tool.

As argued, one of the main heuristic values of Marxist analysis, remains that it provides a framework to analyse society in its holistic complexity. Instead of viewing every aspect of society in its isolation, Marxism attempts to analyse the social whole. As Hobsbawm put it: "economics alone can never fully account for all economic phenomena, nor political theory for all political phenomena '....' In each concrete instance the problem lies in the interaction of all these".[26] Although there are of course arguments that can be raised against Marxist analysis, discussing these in full both does not fit the scope of this thesis and has been done much more elegantly already by other authors.[27] Furthermore, I'm inclined to agree with Hobsbawm when he states that the popularity, as well as the recent decline, of Marxist analysis has always been tied to political developments rather than theoretical arguments.[28]

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[23] Rigby, 'Historical Materialism', 498.
[24] Wickham, 'Memories of Underdevelopment', 36-40.
[25] Ibidem, 36-40. As we shall see, Wickham would later expand on the importance of this dynamic in another influential article.
[26] Hobsbawm, 'Marxist Historiography Today', 187.
[27] Much of Wickham's article in *Marxist History Writing* is dedicated to a defense of Marxism's analytical value for studying the middle ages, in which he tackles multiple points of critique often leveled against Marxist analysis. For a defense of Marxist thought and specifically its materialist philosophy, see Leonard Jackson, *The Dematerialistion of Karl Marx*: *Literature and Marxist theory* (London 1994). Although Jackson focuses on literary studies, much of his analysis is relevant to the rest of the humanities. For a more epistemological defense of Marxist thought see Maxwell Omaboe & Eromosele Eric Usifoh, 'Falsifactionism: In Defence of the Scientific status of Marxism' in Oseni Taiwo Afisi ed., *Karl Popper and Africa: Knowledge, Politics, and Development* (Lagos 2021). For a defense of the decolonial critiques of Marxist thought, see Michael Nassem Smith, 'The Limits of Postcolonial Critique of Marxism' in Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gathseni & Morgan Ndlovu ed., *Marxism and Decolonization in the 21st Century: Living Theories and True Ideas* (London 2021). I have omitted G.A. Cohen's famous book on Marxist thought, since it is more a defence of analytical Marxism, than Marxist thought in general.
[28] Hobsbawm, 'Marxist Historiography Today', 180.

My hope is that any sceptics will be ausaged by the analysis presented in the rest of this thesis.

1.1: The Marxist concept of Class

In Marxist analysis, class takes a central role. In its technical definition, class is a collective social grouping based on a shared socio-economic position. According to sociologist Erik O. Wright, the Marxist concept of class differs from other conceptions in three ways. Firstly, marxist class conceptions are relational, not gradual. Someone's class is determined by the relation they have to other classes, to the labor process, and to the means of production. This differs from gradual class concepts, in that there is no 'upper' 'middle' or 'lower' class through which one can move by acquiring more wealth or property.[29] Secondly, they analyse the broader social relations. Marxist class concepts concern not just the social groups it tries to determine, but tries to say something about the broader social organization of economic relations. We can not talk about class in Marxism, without also talking about the social relations through which production takes place.[30] Finally, they are determined by relations of production, not by relations of exchange. What differs Marxist class concepts from (Neo-)Weberian concepts of class is that in a Marxist framework classes are not determined by their position on the market, but their position in production. This difference is subtle, but has far-reaching consequences.[31]

Due to these three aspects, and the interaction between them, Marxist class analysis is able to analyse not just how economic relations determine class, but also the, often antagonistic, relations between different classes. According to economist John Milos, the value of Marxist class analysis is precisely that it manages to look at the social aspect of economic relations, without overdetermination on either side. As he puts it:

"the valuable element in Marxist theory of classes lies in the fact that it constitutes a system of analysis of the entire social reality: it is neither subjectivist (reducing classes to conscious action) nor "economistic" (it doesn't "attribute" the classes to the economy; it doesn't consider that they are defined by exclusively economic criteria). By adhering to the analysis

[29] Erik O. Wright, 'Varieties of Marxist Conceptions of Class Structure', *Politics & Society*, 9:3 (1980) 323-4.
[30] Ibidem, 325.
[31] Ibidem, 326.

of total (economic, political, ideological) power relations, the Marxist theory of classes therefore '...' points the way toward a genuine economic sociology."[32]

In Marxist theory, classes are neither a fully economic, nor a fully social or political category. They are constituted precisely because of the interaction between the economic and the social, and through this gain their political dimension. Following Milos, this remains its added value when compared to both classical and neoclassical economic theories, since the former only considers class as an economic category and the latter rarely features class at all.[33]

So what determines class? It is both the relation someone has to the means of production, such as land or machinery, and the relations between different social groups in the production process.[34] In the medieval context, someone belongs to the peasant class because they are a direct producer of the land and mainly produce for their own subsistence. The landlord's class position is determined by the fact that they appropriate the surplus labor of the farmer by taking a part of their produce.[35] This appropriation can take many forms, either through ownership, legal rights, or forceful coercion. The underlying economic relation of surplus labor appropriation however remains the same. When an appropriating class is dependent on the exploitation of a producing class, there is an irreconcilable class conflict at the basis of their economic relation. This conflict can take many economic, ideological, or political forms, but is class struggle in all its expressions.

The social and economic ties that determine the labor process and class formations are what we call the relations of production. In different historical contexts we find multiple sets of production relations that in turn determinate different class formations. There existed merchants and commodity production in ancient Greece, as there is still slavery until this day. Despite recognizing the plurality of different production relations, Marxist theory states that in any given society a specific type of social relation of production becomes dominant, either through sheer numbers or importance to broader society.[36] This is what determines the mode

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[32] John Milos, 'Social Classes in Classical and Marxist Political Economy', *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 59:2 (2000) 302.
[33] Ibidem, 301-302.
[34] Rigby, 'Historical Materialism', 477.
[35] I will be using the term 'landlord' as a catch-all term for any individual or entity that owned land or had the right to appropriate the surplus labor of peasants. I will only distinguish between different entities when talking about a specific social grouping, such as the aristocracy,
[36] There exist Marxist theoreticians who argue for the idea of 'modal combination', the idea that multiple modes of production can exist and determine a society at the same time. This idea has been conceptually linked to the structuralist concept of 'social formation'. As my aim is only to describe class antagonism and struggle, the theoretical debate surrounding this bears little relation to the contents of the present analysis. For an explanation

of production, such as for example feudalism.

Although this thesis will employ analysis from a historical materialist perspective, my purpose is decidedly not to rethread the feudalism debate. Not only would a coherent analysis of whether Byzantium is a feudal society be a master thesis in itself, it also is not necessary for the aim of this thesis. Historical materialist analysis does not dictate that we pre-establish a mode of production when analyzing a society and fill in the pieces from there. Instead, every analysis should start by looking at the real social relations concerning production in any given society and how these influence the rest of society.

1.2: The difference between Tax and Rent

How to conceptualize the relations of production in a medieval society has remained a point of discussion and is inextricably tied to how surplus is appropriated. Authors such as Jairus Banaji, Wickham or John Haldon have debated whether tax levied on peasants by a medieval state is, in an economic sense, the same as rent levied by a landlord on these same peasants. The consequences of this debate reach far. Some authors, among which Marx himself, see western feudalism as fundamentally economically different from the economic systems we see in the east, mainly because of the role of a central tax-levying state.[37] When analyzing the class conflicts in the Byzantine Empire, where by the tenth century we find both a growing landed aristocracy and a large tax dependent state, the question how we should conceptualize tax and rent within the broader relations of production becomes very relevant.

Some historians argue that tax is not only legally distinct from rent, but that it is also a different economic form of appropriation.[38] While the combination of direct producers and means of production is the same as with rent, the difference lies in how and by whom surplus

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of this idea and its link to the concept of 'social formation', see: Tony Burns, 'Marx and the Concept of a Social Formation', *Historical Materialism*, 32:3 (2024) 158-187.

[37] At one point, Marx used the term Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) to distinguish the economic systems in the east from the west. He defined it as a society in which a despotic state appropriates surplus from largely authartik village communities. He contrasted these seemingly classless despotic states with feudal societies in Western Europe whose dynamic of class struggle and free cities eventually led to the rise of capitalism. The concept of the AMP has been rejected almost universally, some authors have either argued in defence of the Asiatic Mode of Production or replaced it by the Tributary Mode of Production. For an overview of Marx's use of the concept and its position in recent historiography, including critiques and refutations, see Bruce McFarlane, Steve Cooper, & Miomir Jaksic, 'The Asiatic Mode of Production: A new phoenix? (Part 1)', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 35:3 (2005), 283–318. For authors employing the concept of the tributary mode of production, see below.

[38] The most famous and influential of these is by now Jairus Banaji. His view is most eloquently formulated in Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation* (Leiden 2010). Chris Wickham has at one point also defended this view in Chris Wickham, 'The Uniqueness of the East', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 12:2 (1985) 166-196.

labor is taken. Instead of a landlord, appropriation happens by a social group who controls the tax system, also known as the state class. This class is however removed from the labor process itself and has no control over the organisation of labor itself. This view has been called the Tributary Mode of Production, and has been put forward, with slight variations, by authors such as Wickham, Banaji, Haldon, and Samir Amin.[39] One of the explanatory values, according to both Wickham and Banaji, is that it accounts for the conflicts between the state and any aristocratic classes, which we find in many medieval societies, since these constitute two different classes with different class interests.[40]

Recently however Wickham has changed his stance. In his 2021 article 'How did the Feudal Economy Work? The economic logic of medieval societies' he argues that rent and tax are legally distinct forms of the same economic relation. Those levying tax are landlords as well, but operating through the legal rights of the state apparatus.[41] Haldon has since come to the same conclusion, critiquing both his former self and Banaji for analyzing relations of production solely through which form appropriation takes, thereby confusing economic and political categories.[42] According to Haldon we should not just define the relation of production as exploitation, but:

"what is important is the effective control exercised by the economically dominant class, whether or not this involved actual ownership enshrined in legal terms (and whether or not this elite is embodied in and represented entirely through a state)"[43]

Both Wickham and Haldon agree that whether surplus labor is mostly appropriated through tax or rent, this changes nothing in how we should analyze the relations of production and the classes they determine. Haldon adds that even when we do not make the economic distinction between tax and rent, the conflicts that arise between the state and parts of a landlord class can still be explained. He argues that instead we can see these conflicts as part of a structural tension between these two groups that arises from both wanting to appropriate the same

[39] See Banaji, *Theory as History* and Wickham, 'Uniqueness of the East'. Haldon's views on the Tributary mode of Production are best represented in John Haldon, *The Tributary Mode of Production* (London 1993). For Amin's conception see Samir Amin, 'Modes of Production, History and Unequal Development', *Science & Society*, 49:2 (1985) 194-207.
[40] Wickham, 'Uniqueness of the East, 185-186 & Banaji, *Theory as History*, 23-40.
[41] Wickham, 'How did the Feudal Economy Work?', 3-40.
[42] John Haldon, 'Theories of Practice: Marxist History-Writing and Complexity', *Historical Materialism*, 21:4 (2013) 41, 47-48.
[43] Haldon, 'Theories of Practice', 48.

surplus labor.[44] In this sense, the state and aristocracy, instead of being two distinct classes, represent two factions of the same class, with historically contingent and sometimes opposed interests.

In this discussion, it is interesting to note that both Haldon and Wickham have stepped back from their original position of seeing tax as its own form of appropriation. Both deliver strong arguments against their former position and Banaji. Wickham especially shows us that by not separating tax and rent on an economic level, we get a much more dynamic analysis of the economic logic of medieval societies and how class struggle influenced their economic development.[45] On a heuristic level, there is a lot to be said for not separating the two. Furthermore, the weak point in this conception of the tributary mode of production remains that the state is seen as a class in itself. Especially in cases like Byzantine society where, as we shall see, the landed aristocracy was also firmly integrated in the state through all sorts of functions and positions, this class distinction remains somewhat unconvincing. The nail in the coffin is that the tributary mode of production says nothing about production and the labor process itself. It maintains the same basic combination of direct producers and means of production (peasants + land), while only stating that it differs from feudalism in its level of tenurial control. This however seems like a gradual difference and not a relational one, which would not justify the separation of tax and rent in a marxist framework.

[44] Ibidem, 60-64.
[45] Wickham, 'How did the Feudal Economy Work?', 13-15, 35-40.

Chapter 2: Land, Labor, and Class

In the *Peira,* a collection of judicial cases compiled in the eleventh century, there is a description of a case in which a group of farmers accused Romanus Skleros, a *protospatharios* from a wealthy family, of stealing their land.[46] They claimed that they had been forced to give him the land under coercion and threat of force. In doing so, Romanus had been aided by the local judge. Romanus, of course, claimed the sale was legitimate.[47] Possessing land was important, both for peasants and the aristocracy. Romanus would not have used force and risked a possible lawsuit if the land was not in some way profitable or strategic for him. The villagers, in their turn, would not have travelled all the way to the capital if they had not relied on this land for their own subsistence and survival. Even more so, they probably would not have risked angering a *protaspatharios* and a nephew of the current emperor, if there was no urgency or necessity to regain their land.[48]

Again, land was important in the Byzantine Empire. This statement might seem obvious, but I believe it to be axiomatic as well. As Alan Harvey has argued: "the Byzantine social formation consisted overwhelmingly of peasants producers".[49] Most of the labor power in Byzantine society was used in agricultural production, mainly because of the little technological innovation in this field. Agricultural activity consisted mostly of cereal farming, with pastoralism and viticulture also playing a large role in the rural economy.[50] The requirements were relatively simple, with most of the work being done either by a hand plough or ploughs pulled by oxen.[51] The two elements of production that were both the most important and hardest to acquire were labor power, in the form of peasant labor, and land suitable for production.[52]

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[46] A *protospatharios* is a title in the Byzantine society roughly translating to bodyguard. Usually a protospatharios was a highly placed individual, who worked directly with the *strategos*, the commander of a theme (region).

[47] Eustathios Rhomaios, *Hē peira = Die Peira: ein juristisches Lehrbuch des 11. Jahrhunderts aus Konstantinopel, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar, Glossa,* Dieter Simon and Diether Reinsch ed. et trans. (Berlin, 2023), 409-411.

[48] Romanus Skleros was the nephew of Constantine IX Monomachus.

[49] Harvey, *Economic Expansion*, 1.

[50] Harvey, *Economic Expansion*, 1-2.

[51] For a full analysis of the means of production see Anthony Bryer, 'The Means of Agricultural Production: Muscle and Tools' in Angeliki E. Laiou ed., *The Economic History of Byzantium:From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Washington 2002).

[52] Michael Hendy has made a deeper analysis of the availability of arable land in the Balkans and Anatolia. See Michael Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300–1450*, (Cambridge, 1985), 21-68.

The goal of this chapter is to analyze how the changes in land ownership during the tenth and eleventh century subsequently affected the positions and relations of the different social classes. Class, as we discussed last chapter, is determined by the position one has in the social relations of production. In an agricultural context, like the Byzantine Empire, class was determined by a) whether they owned land and b) if they worked the land and if so, how their surplus labor was appropriated. A smallholding farmer who only produced enough for his own subsistence and had to hand over a substantial amount of his surplus labor through tax, belonged to the peasant class. Someone who owned vast tracts of land, which they either rented out or had farmers work there on their behalf, and lived off the appropriated labor of others, belonged to the class of landlords. Of course, not everyone was either a peasant or a large land magnate. There were smiths, doctors, merchants, priests, and many more. Even within the Byzantine peasantry, we can see differences between tenant farmers, land-holding farmers, and wage laborers.[53]

This chapter will mostly consist of synthetic analysis of previously written scholarship, while I attempt to draw attention back to what I believe to be the economic center of Byzantine society: the relationship between land, labor, and how surplus is appropriated. There will of course be direct analysis of primary sources as well, which makes it necessary to somewhat reflect on the sources used to analyse the social-economic history of Byzantium. The origins of the various historiographical debates previously discussed in the introduction, can partially be found in the scarcity of clear, representative, and falsifiable source material. Because of this, scholars have mostly relied on legislative sources for information, such as the various *novelles* by the tenth century emperors against large land magnates. Various authors have however shown that we should not forget that the emperors had their own political agenda in writing these and that it might have been part of an effort to curtail the growing power of their rivals.[54] Although there are not very many of them, administrative documents have also been instrumental in shaping our view of Byzantine land ownership. Especially testaments by members of the aristocracy, *typika* of monasteries founded by wealthy individuals, and cadastres of villages or cities, such as the cadastre of Thebes, are of fundamental importance.[55]

[53] Because the changes in landownership had the biggest effect on landholding and tenant farmers, the analysis in this chapter will focus mostly on them. This does not mean that wage laborers or slaves were not important or absent from the Byzantine countryside, but their positions changed less drastically and thus they are not the center of this analysis.

[54] This criticism has been made early on and eloquently by Rosemary Morris. See Rosemary Morris, 'The Powerful and the Poor in Tenth-Century Byzantium: Law and Reality', *Past & Present*, 73:1 (1976) 3-27.

[55] Many of these were found in the Athonite archives, in which a wealth of documents still goes undiscovered or untranslated.

A glaring omission in the above summary, which is by no means complete, is the use of archaeological sources.[56] Scholars of Byzantine economic history have long relied on written sources, neglecting the archeological work being done. Only recently have historians started integrating archeological sources in their research.[57] As we shall see, this has fundamentally altered some important conclusions regarding the rural economy, the continuity of estates, and the role of villages. There are of course exceptions to this, one being Michael Hendy, who already used archaeological research in his seminal analysis on the monetary economy of Byzantium.[58]

As I said before, I believe understanding the changing ownership of land during this time to be axiomatic in the analysis of other aspects of Byzantine society: if we understand this core social relation, we can come to a deeper understanding of both the class composition and various tensions within the Byzantine Empire, which will allow us to analyze the class struggle present in the revolts of this period.

2.1: How Labor was Appropriated in the Byzantine Countryside

Before we can see how the accumulation of land by large landowners changed class relations, we first need to establish what the position of peasants was and how this would change. Even though most of the Byzantine countryside consisted of farmers working the land, how their labor was organized and how their surplus labor was appropriated could differ greatly. Firstly, there were land holding peasants. These farmers owned the land they worked, which meant they did not have to pay rent or owed dues to any larger landlord. However they still had to pay taxes to the state, based on the amount of land they farmed.[59] Some land also came with a military obligation, meaning the owner of the land had to send someone to serve in the thematic army to serve when called upon.[60] This obligation could sometimes be paid off, for

[56] Another rich source of analysis that is yet to be tapped is hagiography. Especially in studies of other regions it has proving a valuable source for analyzing the daily lives of peasants. I know of no studies in the Byzantine context making use of this. For a broader discussion of the sources for analyzing peasant society, see Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford, 2005), 383-385.
[57] For a recent overview of Byzantine archeological work and its standing, see Michael J. Decker, 'The current state of Byzantine archeology', *History Compass*, 16:9 (2018) 1-8.
[58] Hendy, *The Monetary Economy of Byzantium*, 4-12.
[59] Nikolas Oikonomides, 'The Role of the Byzantine State in the Economy' in Laiou et al., *Economic History*, 980-983.
[60]Oikonomides has argued that the obligation for military service was based on the ownership of land. Haldon has modified this view by stating that landbound military obligation was only codified in the tenth century, but

example when a widow owned the land and had no son to send.[61]

Secondly there were tenant farmers. They farmed land belonging to a landlord, for which they had to pay rent. This rent could be paid in kind, in coin, or through labour services. A form of tenant farming that was specific to Byzantium were *paroikoi*. These tenant farmers were irremovable and they had a hereditary obligation to work the land. This form of labor relation existed already before the tenth century in a monastic context, but became widespread over the course of the tenth and eleventh century.[62] Oikonomides has argued that already during the tenth century a majority of farmers in some themes had become *paroikoi*.[63]

Both landholding and tenant farmers, although their position of land ownership was different, had to give away part of their produce. The landholding peasant was forced to pay tax, while the tenant farmer had to pay rent. I am inclined to agree with Wickham's analysis that although the institutional form is different, the appropriation of surplus labor through tax or rent is economically the same. In the Byzantine Empire, as well as other medieval societies, both were 'peasants having to give their products to lords, with the implicit threat of force.'[64] Some scholars have speculated that peasants working one estates were akin to a reduction of serfdom.[65] Jacques Lefort however has argued that this is not accurate and the quality of life or mobility could not have been much worse for peasants working on an estate. Lefort has shown through calculations that on average the rent burden was only slightly higher for tenant farmers. This difference is negligible according to Lefort, arguing that we would not have seen farmers fleeing their land to become *paroikoi* on an estate otherwise during the tenth and eleventh centuries.[66]

Wickham argues that the real difference between peasants paying tax on land they

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probably on the basis of a longer standing tradition. For the discussion and Haldon's conclusion, see John Haldon, 'Military Service, Military Lands and the Status of Soldiers. Current Problems and Interpretations', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* 47:1, 1993, 32-40. For Oikonomides' orignial thesis see: Nikolas Oikonomides, 'Middle Byzantine Provincial Recruits: Salary and Armament' in J. Duffy and J. Peradotto ed., *Gonimos: Neoplatonic and Byzantine Studies presented to Leendert G. Westerink at 75* (Buffalo, 1988) 135-136.

[61] Oikonomides discusses exemptions to military obligations in Nikolas Oikonomides, 'The social structure of the Byzantine countryside in the first half of the Xth century', *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 10:1 (1996) 110-111.

[62] One of the most important analyses of the position of *paroikoi* remains Lemerle, *The agrarian history of Byzantium*, 166-187. For a quick overview of the position of *paroikoi* see Alexander Kahzdan, 'State, Feudal, and Private Economy in Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* , 47:1 (1993) 83-100. Since Lemerle has been published, some new insights have come to light that blur the distinction between landholding farmers and *paroikoi*, especially from the twelfth century onward. For an overview, see Jacques Lefort, 'The Rural Economy: Seventh-Twelfth Centuries' in Laiou, *Economic History*, 236-240.

[63] Oikonomides, 'The social structure of the Byzantine countryside', 114-125.

[64] Wickham, 'Memories of Underdevelopment', 13-14.

[65] For an overview see Lefort, 'Rural Economy', 238-240..

[66] Ibidem, 239, 299-306.

own or paying rent to use the land, is the level of domanial control employed by landlords. He states that peasants, as the people who worked the land controlled the production process, this control could be challenged by the lord they rented from. Wickham states that a recurring method of challenging the control held by peasants was landlords forcing them to work on land directly exploited by the lord themselves.[67] To analyse whether there was such a stark difference in domanial control for Byzantine peasants, we need to look at how labor was organized.

In the Byzantine countryside we find two ways of organizing agricultural production: the estate and the village. A village was usually a collection of small holdings and tenant farmers. They were all tied together through a collective obligation to pay tax. This also meant that members of the village had to pay tax for plots of land that had been abandoned, either through flight or a lack of heirs.[68] The estate on the other hand forms the basis for domanial production and was usually owned by a wealthy villager or a large land magnate. The owner could choose to cultivate his land directly by employing *paroikoi*, slaves, wage laborers to work the land or to rent it out to tenants or *paroikoi*.[69] The goal of domanial production was to provide for the entourage and household of the owner, whilst also providing an income. Estate owners of course also had to pay tax over the land they owned, but often could get exemptions for some of the secondary taxes.[70]

The relation someone had to the land they worked defined the structure they would perform their labor in. Usually, landholding and tenant farmers lived and worked in a village structure, whilst slaves and *paroikoi* were usually beholden to working on an estate. Wage laborers could work in either context and usually both. What daily life on an estate or in a village looked like remains unclear to us, especially considering the regional differences there could have been. However we do have sources that indicate the level of domanial control was much higher on estates. Landlords often hired managers for their estates who would oversee production and make sure dues were paid. They also took an active interest in enriching their estates and ensuring high yields.[71] The *Geoponika*, a tenth century compilation of ancient agricultural texts, advised landowners how to work the land in the best way possible, but also how to organise their labor the most efficiently.[72] The text has been speculated to be popular

[67] Wickham, 'Memories of Underdevelopment', 39-40.
[68] Lefort, 'The Rural Economy', 279-283.
[69] Ibidem, 240-240, 283-284.
[70] Oikonomides, 'Role of the Byzantine State', 1024.
[71] Lefort, 'The Rural Economy', 291.
[72] *Geoponika : farm work : a modern translation [from the Greek] of the Roman and Byzantine farming handbook*, Andrew Dalby ed. and trans., (Totnes 2011) 69, 98-102.

for its time, since over 50 manuscripts remain.[73] We also find similar advice in other texts, such as in the *Consilia et Narrationes*, in which the author advises provincial estate owners to enrich their estate with mills and other investments.[74]

2.2: The Expansion of Estates in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

From the tenth century onwards, landlords seemed to be increasing their domanial control by accumulating land. By the end of the eleventh century, estates were the dominant form of labor organisation, but the question remains whether this really was a radical change. The prevailing hypothesis used to be that between the seventh, and ninth century most of the agricultural production of Byzantium was done by land holding peasants in the context of the village. Starting from the tenth century landlords collected more and more land, which they turned into estates. This process only intensified by the eleventh century.[75] Because of a lack of other sources, much of this hypothesis was based on the analysis of two collections of legal documents: the *Farmer's Law*, a document detailing the legal protections free peasants gained, and the land legislation of the tenth century emperors, which aims to protect the landownership of peasants from the *dynatoi*, roughly translated as the powerful. The lack of estate farming before the tenth century has been questioned by multiple authors since then.[76] As stated before, the use of legal sources as the primary source for society economic history has been questioned.[77] Legal documents are of course not direct reflections of reality. We do not know how the laws described were implemented or whether the situation as described in a charter is representative of reality. The problem especially with using the *Farmer's Law* as the primary source for analyzing the early Byzantine rural economy is that it is notoriously

[73] More information on the philological history of the *Geoponika* can be found in Robert Rodgers, 'Kêpopoiïa: Garden-Making and Garden Culture in the Greek Geoponica' in Andrew Littlewood et al. ed., *Byzantine Garden Culture* (Washington 2002) 159-175.
[74] Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes* (SAWS edition, 2013), Charlotte Roueché ed. and trans., https://ancientwisdoms.ac.uk/library/kekaumenos-consilia-et-narrationes/index.html. (Last accessed on 29th of March 2025), 36.10-36.21.
[75] Variations of this hypothesis have been put forward by multiple authors. One of the more recent examples is Mark Witthow's claim that between the eighth and tenth century, Byzantium was a farmer's world. For this hypothesis see Mark Whittow, 'Early Medieval Byzantium and the End of the Ancient World', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 9:1 (2009) 134-153.
[76] For a short overview, see Peter Sarris, 'Large Estates and the Peasantry in Byzantium c. 600-1100', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 90:2 (2012), 429-431, 438-439. As discussed in the introduction, Lemerle is of course one of the main authors in this.
[77] Morris, 'The Powerful and Poor', 3-27.

difficult to date the document. Most estimates have put its origin somewhere in the eighth century, but this has proven hard to verify.[78]

Due to the analysis of narrative sources and archeological material, we know that estate farming was a somewhat regular practice before the tenth century. Peter Sarris argues that there is much more continuity in the way rural production was organized between the late antique and middle Byzantine period.[79] In this he agrees Paul Magdalino, who shown by analyzing the names of estates that there are multiple estates from before the tenth century, with some dating back to the Augustan period.[80] According to Sarris we can also clearly find evidence in narrative sources for the existence of estates in Western Anatolia. This was an important and relatively safe region during the seventh and eighth century, because of its distance from the tumultuous borders.[81] In addition, Sarris argues by using archeological evidence, that there were also large estates still in use in the eastern parts of Anatolia during the eighth and ninth century, specifically in the theme of Capadocia. Because of the proximity of this region to the caliphate and the threat of raids that was ever present in the east, one of the longer standing assumptions has been that of a total collapse of any agricultural structure. Sarris argues that the presence of large estates, similar to the ones described in later eleventh century sources, with a core military function as well, shows there is more continuity than often assumed.[82]

Sarris's conclusion is supported by Jean Claude Cheynet, who argues that we can especially see a continuity in Bythina, a theme near Constantinople. Here many members of the Constantinopalian aristocracy owned estates, mostly because of its relative safety and its proximity to the capital.[83] From the second half of the eight century onward we can also see an increase in the amount of monasteries founded in this region. Cheynet argues that this is the result of aristocratic estates being turned into monasteries, a practice quite common during most periods.[84] A very prominent example of this happening is found in the eleventh century with the holdings of Gregory Pakournias, a general and ally of Alexios I, being turned into a monastic foundation.[85] Beyond just the existence of estate farming, we can also

[78] Ibidem, 439-441.
[79] Ibidem, 438-442, 447-449.
[80] Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos 1143-1180* (Cambridge 1993) 168.
[81] Sarris, 'Large Estates', 435-437.
[82] Ibidem, 441-442.
[83] Jean Claude Cheynet, 'The Byzantine Aristocracy in the 10th-12th Centuries: A Review of the Book by A. Kazhdan and S. Ronchey' in Cheynet, *Military Function*, 69-70.
[84] Ibidem, 70.
[85] Michael Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy 300-1450* (Cambridge 1985) 212-216.

already find evidence in the sources for large land magnates. Two famous examples of estate-owning aristocracy from the ninth century are the saint Philaretos, who is mentioned as having 48 estates in his possession, and the widow Danielis, who left 80 estates as well as much wealth to the emperor according to the *Vita Basilii*.[86] Even while we cannot take these fantastical cases as examples of the concentration of land leading up to the tenth century, they still tell us something very important: it was not seen as unusual for a person to own multiple estates.[87] Although the sheer volume of estates mentioned in the stories of Philaretos and Danielis might not be accomplished during this time, large landowners would not be included in these stories if they did not have their counterparts in reality.

Still, this does not mean that estate farming was a widespread phenomenon. Lefort argues that because of the low demand for agricultural product before the tenth century, it is very likely the village was still the dominant social structure in the countryside during this time. Even where estates were present, they were often situated within the confines of the village and the two structures existed side by side for many centuries.[88] Lefort has argued that the village and the estate, while in tension, also supplemented each other.[89]

It is clear from both textual and archeological evidence that there existed estates and a landed aristocracy who owned them before the tenth century. We find exaggerated examples of what these would have looked like in the cases of Philaretos and Danielis. Still, it is not a coincidence that it is only during the tenth century that laws start being put into place that protect land-holding peasants and prohibit their lands from being bought up. Although we have little evidence of precisely how dominant the village structure was before the tenth century, the fact that multiple sources in the tenth century emphasize their worry of it disappearing speaks to its predominance. To take an example from a piece of land legislation written by emperor Romanos I Lekpanos somewhere in the first half of the tenth century:

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[86] See Nicetas, *The Life of St Philaretos the Merciful Written by His Grandson Niketas: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Indices,* Lennart Rydén ed. et trans., (Upsalla 2002) 1 and *Chronographiae quae Theophanis Continuati nomine fertur liber quo Vita Basilii imperatoris amplectitur*, Ihor Ševčenko ed. et trans., (Berlin 2011) 236.

[87] The veracity of these stories has been critiqued by some. Ilias Anagnostakis has even gone so far as to call in to question whether Danielis existed at all, claiming her role is an invention to mirror the role of the Queen of Sheba in the story of King Solomon. See Ilias Anagnostakis and Anthony Kaldellis, 'The Textual Sources for the Peloponnese, A.D. 582–959: Their Creative Engagement with Ancient Literature', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 54: 1 (2014) 117-123.

[88] Lefort, 'Rural Economy', 275-279, 283, 285-288.

[89] Ibidem, 310.

"The number of holdings (*katoikeseis*) is shown to be linked to the abundance of food, to the payment of taxes, and to the fulfillment of military obligations, all of which would be lacking if this great number absconded."[90]

The peasant smallholding formed the basis for not only the income of the state, but also the thematic army of the Empire. The obligations that were tied to the land of land holding peasants allowed the state to function.[91] Although estates, both those owned by the church and lay aristocracy, did owe taxes, these were usually about 25% less, because of exemptions from hefty secondary taxes.[92] Especially the lack of military obligation in estate farming harmed the state, since the empire relied heavily on peasant soldiers to fight in the various military campaigns they were involved in.[93]

What changed in the tenth century that land became desirable to larger landowners? The predominant theory is that from the tenth century until the twelfth centuries the Byzantine Empire experienced a strong period of demographic growth. This was set on by both the stability of the empire in this time and the acquisition of new areas that could be colonized. The growth in population, which was accompanied by a growth of people who didn't work the land, led to an increased demand for agricultural produce. Land became more valuable, simply because there was much more need for what was produced on the land. Large landowners started looking for more land, especially land which was already ready for production.[94] This demographic growth was accompanied by a period of increased economic prosperity as well, which lasted until the twelfth century.[95] Another reason land became an interesting investment in this period is military in origin. From the tenth century onwards, the borders of the Byzantine Empire started stabilizing and a relative peace was achieved in some areas. Not only that, but new territories were gained as well. Before this, it was somewhat risky to invest in anything that you could not easily take with you, especially in the less stable regions. With relative security, it became much more interesting to acquire land and invest in it, enriching it with mills and other enhancements.[96]

While land was valuable, there was also a lot of opportunity for large landowners to

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[90] Translation taken from Lemerle, *Agrarian History*, 97.
[91] Haldon, 'Military Service', 33-34.
[92] Oikonomides, 'Role of the Byzantine State', 996-997, 1024.See also Cheynet, 'Byzantine Aristocracy', 27-28.
[93] Ibidem, 982, 997.
[94] Frankopan, 'Land and Power' in Haldon, *Social History,* 130-131. See also Lefort, 'The Rural Economy', 267-271.
[95] That this period was one of economic expansion was first shown by Harvey. He also linked this explicitly to the increase of land accumulation. See Harvey, *Economic Expansion*, 47-67, 78-79.
[96] Lefort, 'The Rural Economy', 290-291.

acquire more land during this period of economic expansion. There are several cases of entire villages, with all the associated land, being bought by large landowners. In the will of Eustathius Boilas, a *protospatharios* from the eleventh century, it lists several villages under his property, some of which he mentions buying whole.[97] Gregory Pakournias was also listed as having at least twelve villages as part of his property.[98] Sometimes a piece of land or even entire villages were abandoned, either due to raids, a lack of heirs, or peasant flight. Land that was unused for more than 30 years was considered *klasma* and taken by the state, either to be given a new owner or to be cultivated by the state itself as crown land (*kouratoria*).[99] This threatened the unity of the village but did lower the tax burden for the inhabitants. Sometimes the state or corrupt officials ignored the 30-year rule, taking the land earlier in order to profit from the land.[100]

There were also several cases of coerced sale or even outright theft. Larger landowners, especially if they had military positions, used the threat of violence to take the land or force a sale. At the start of this chapter, we already listed the example from the *Peira* in which Romanus Sclerus (allegedly) forced peasants to sell their lands in order to grow his own wealth.[101] There are also other examples from the *Peira* of peasants and even monks being imprisoned and their land being taken. It was not just farmers who could be victims of this.[102] Eustathius Boilas laments in his will that four pieces of land were stolen from him by the Apocapes family, stating that he was forced to sell and had not even received payment for some.[103] Here we have an example of a member of the lower aristocracy (Boilas) being targeted by a family that held powerful positions in the region that Boilas owned land in. Michael Apocapes, who took three estates, was *doux* in this region and thus held military command. Basil, his son, who forced Boilas to sell one estate, was *magistros*, a high placed aristocrat.

This process, which started in the tenth century, culminated in the eleventh century with the estate becoming the dominant organisational structure.[104] Although the sources are still scarce on this topic, we know that numerous villages had been sold, taken or abandoned by their occupants, mostly to flee from the tax pressure. A survey of the Athonite archive has shown

[97] Eusthatios Boilas, 'Will of Eusthathius Boilas' in S. Vryonis ed. et trans., 'The will of a provincial magnate Eustathius Boilas (1059)', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 11:1 (1957), 266.
[98] Hendy, *Monetary Economy*, 214.
[99] Lefort, 'The Rural Economy', 281-283
[100] Ibidem, 288.
[101] Rhomaios, *Peira*, 409-411.
[102] Ibidem, 67, 101-103, 189, 621.
[103] Boilas, 'Will of Eusthatios Boilas', 266.
[104] Lefort, 'The Rural Economy', 285-290.

that multiple villages that held commune status in the tenth century had become the property of the state in the eleventh. All of these were turned into estates, either for the state, the aristocracy or for a monastery.[105]

This transformation of the village into the estate coincided with land-holding peasants becoming *paroikoi*. Oikonomides has calculated that already during the tenth century a majority of the peasants in the themes of Peloponnesos and Thrakesion had become *paroikoi* on large estates.[106] Whilst the accuracy of the numbers Oikonnomides produces is hard to verify, he does showcase that a large amount of the producing population no longer owned the land they worked. As stated before, this does not mean that the quality of life radically changed for these peasants. It however did change the social relations they found themselves in. Instead of a collective tax burden to the state, the peasant and his family now had to pay their own dues to a private owner. The link to the landlord became much more direct and, as shown before, landlords had the opportunity to increase their control over the production process.

2.3: Changing Class Relations

Due to the changes in land ownership, class relations also changed. We have already seen what the transformation in the tenth and eleventh century meant for peasants. To gain a clearer view of this process, we need to look not only at who worked the land but also who owned it. There are three different social groups, which are not always distinguishable from each other, competing for land in this period: the church, the state and the aristocracy. This last group was very diverse, ranging from local leaders owning a few estates who were mostly active in nearby cities to large provincial *strategoi* amassing land, gold, and military power on a grand scale.[107] There is of course a sizable difference between these two and a wide range of positions in between. As we have already seen with the case of Eustathius Boilas, this was also not a coherent and united group, with a fair amount of infighting and internal targeting happening.

With the aristocracy of Byzantium the question in what sense they were reliant on

[105] Lefort, 'The Rural Economy', 289.
[106] Oikonomides, 'The social structure of the Byzantine countryside', 120-125.
[107] *Strategoi* was the term used for military commanders, especially those in charge of a certain theme.

land for their income and power has been the subject of debate.[108] Cheynet has identified three main sources of income for the aristocracy. Of course there was the land they owned themselves, which was hereditary and which they could improve upon. The average income someone could gain from acquiring a piece of land was about a 3.5% return on their investment.[109] Beyond what they owned privately, there was also the land that could be gifted by the emperor as a token of recognition or when someone was given a certain position. This land was usually given for the duration of a lifetime, after which it was returned to the state.[110] In the later half of the eleventh century and beyond it also became common to gift someone the income for a certain region or from an imperial estate.[111] The final source of income was through positions at court, which came with a *rogai*, a set income. The provincial commanders, such as the *strategoi*, received the highest amounts, namely 40 pounds of gold.[112] Liudprand of Cremona, in his description of visiting the Byzantine court during the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, describes how the *strategoi* had to have multiple servants help him carry his salary from the emperor.[113] Next to the positions that had to be filled, some titles could be bought, such as *magistros*. These did not come with any function, but promised esteem and some income. Oikonomides has calculated that the return on investment would be around 2.31-3.47%. If one paid extra however, the return rate could be increased to 9%. [114]

Most authors are in agreement that the largest income could be gained from holding a position at court. Cheynet has stated that in order to equal the amount of money one could get from being a *strategoi*, they would need to own 160.000 *modioi* of land. mFor comparison, the largest monastery, Iviron, which is believed to be an outlier, owned 80.000 *modioi* of land.[115] On the basis of this Peter Frankopan has argued that the aristocracy was dependent on their position at court for income and that power mainly takes the shape of access and favor with the emperor. Land, since it granted significantly less income, did not grant the same

[108] Although they disagree on the importance of land ownership for the aristocracy, Haldon, Cheynet, Frankopan, and Oikonomides all seem to be in agreement on state positions were the most profitable for the aristocracy.. For Haldon see John Haldon, 'Social Elites, Wealth and Power' in John Haldon ed., *The Social History of Byzantium*, 193-195. For the rest of the authors, see the works cited in this section.
[109] Cheynet,'Byzantine Aristocracy', 24-26.
[110] Ibidem, 23-24.
[111] Nicolas Oikonomides, 'Title and Income at Byzantine Court' in Henry Maguire ed., *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (Washington 2004) 209-210.
[112] Cheynet, 'Byzantine Aristocracy', 24-25.
[113] Liudprand of Cremona, 'Retribution' in *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona (Medieval Texts in Translation)*, Paolo Squatriti ed. et trans., (Washington 2007) 200-202.
[114] Oikonomides, 'Title and Income', 205.
[115] Cheynet, 'Byzantine Aristocracy', 24-25.

power.[116]

Whilst Frankopan makes an interesting point regarding the importance of access to the emperor, he somewhat underestimates the importance of land ownership. As Oikonomides points out, much of the income that came with a position had to be spent on expenses that came with the office, such as hiring servants, standard bearers, and a retinue.[117] Furthermore, the income the aristocracy did gain from these positions was usually invested back into land as well. Since the aristocracy was barred from participating in trade or investing in merchants, land was one of the few options of investment open to them.[118] We should also keep in mind that the positions at court were limited and not available to everyone. Whilst it might be a very important source of income for someone from a large provincial aristocratic family, a lot of the lower aristocracy usually could not aspire to positions that had a salary as large as the *strategoi*. Kekaumenos, who is usually read as an example of this lower provincial aristocracy, also states in *Consilia et Narrationes*, that land is the most sensible thing to invest in.[119]

Whilst the income from land thus may not have been the largest revenue stream for someone in the aristocracy, it did grant two things they could not gain somewhere else. Firstly, owning land granted members of the aristocracy income that was independent from the court and the emperor, with whom their interests did not always align. This not only meant they could use it to further their own interest, but their subsistence was also less fickle and dependent on the favor of the emperor.[120] There are numerous examples of land gifts and positions being taken away prematurely, especially after a succession or coup.[121] It should be noted that there are cases as well of private wealth being taken away by the emperor. This however only seemed to be used as a measure in extreme circumstances, such as after the rebellions during Basil II's reign.[122] Beyond just relative independence, land also granted something else: manpower. On the lands the aristocracy owned worked numerous peasants, most of them *paroikoi*. Unlike with land holding farmers, being a *paroikoi* did not come with any military obligation. However, that does not mean that the *paroikoi* would not help their lord. Kekaumenos describes that in the case of a revolt, the people on the estate should take up weapons and be led into combat by the master of the estate. In the same chapter, he states that when one

[116] Frankopan, 'Land and Power', 123-130.
[117] Oikonomides, 'Title and Income', 204.
[118] Haldon, 'Social Elites', 195-197.
[119] Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes*, 36.10-36.21, 40.03-40.31.
[120] Haldon, 'Social Elites', 174-175.
[121] Frankopan, 'Land and Power', 114-116.
[122] Ibidem, 115-116.

cannot get to safety whilst a revolt is happening, one should participate in it to keep the estate safe.[123] It is not far fetched to assume this counts for the *paroikoi* working on the estate as well.

A social group that was closely linked to the aristocracy in terms of land ownership was the church. Ecclesiastical land was mainly held through monasteries, which were also actively acquiring land in this period. Looking at the *typikon* of Gregory Pakournias, it states directly that any leftover income was to be used on buying more land.[124] Other *typika* often contained similar sentences.[125] Monasteries were also some of the biggest landowners in this period. The biggest were the monastic orders of Mt. Athos, Lavra and Iviron. At their height, they held 50.000 *modioi* and 80.000 *modioi* respectively.[126] A number of monasteries were founded by members of the aristocracy. Pakournias is a great example of this, but there are many others as well. It could be possible that aristocratic landowners established monasteries in order to benefit from lower tax burdens, since ecclesiastical foundations could gain certain tax exemptions.[127] Of course there might have been ideological, political, or spiritual reasons as well for the widespread founding of monasteries by aristocrats. Unfortunately there has not yet been much research into the land ownership of the Byzantine church in their connection with the aristocracy.[128]

Whilst the church was a large landowner as well through their connection with the aristocracy, the Byzantine state itself was on another level. Oikonomides has argued that consistently the biggest landowner was the state itself.[129] The state had a multitude of properties that were given to officials for a lifetime or for the duration of their office. Beyond that, the emperor himself owned multiple palaces, estates, fortresses, etc. However, the property of the state also expanded during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Whilst conquering territory in Asia Minor, a lot of the land was transformed into crown land. These lands were cultivated directly by the state through *paroikoi*.[130] Not only new lands but also

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[123] Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes*, 64.15-65.08.
[124] Hendy, *Monetary Economy*, 212-216.
[125] Konstantinos Smyrlis has pointed out that this became more common with the turn of the eleventh century. For his analysis of what evidence we can gain from *typika* about estate management, see Konstantinos Smyrlis, 'The Management of Monastic Estates: The Evidence of the Typika', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* 56:1 (2002), 245-261.
[126] Cheynet, 'Byzantine Aristocracy', 24-25.
[127] Ibidem, 27-28.
[128] Haldon has excluded the church from his analysis of Byzantine aristocracy and landownership as well in Haldon, 'Social Elites'.
[129] Oikonomides, 'Role of the State', 1005.
[130] James Howard-Johnston, 'Crown lands and the defence of imperial authority in the tenth and eleventh centuries', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 21:1 (1995) 88-97.

existing villages were transformed into imperial estates. Take for example the villages mentioned in the Iviron survey before. A large part of these would have been *klasma* lands. It is good to note that the state probably sold part of these lands to the aristocracy or monasteries.

Lefort has even argued that due to the income of these crown lands, the state became less reliant on taxes by the eleventh century.[131] Combined with the fact starting with Nikephoros II Phocas, the military obligation held by peasants was more and more turned into a financial one, because the state needed resources more than manpower, this meant that the land holding peasants became less and less the cornerstone of the state.[132] Instead owning and working the land directly became more and more important for the Byzantine state. Through founding imperial estates and having these worked by *paroikoi*, the state could provide for itself and had a greater available pool of land to gift to the aristocracy in exchange for support. Just like the tenth century land legislation, we could see this shift as a reaction to the land accumulation by the aristocracy. Because the amount of taxable land holding peasants became smaller and smaller, the state started accumulating land as well to secure its income.

Conclusion

As we can see, during the tenth century and onwards, land ownership in Byzantine society changed fundamentally, which in turn affected how labor was organized and ultimately class relations as well. By the eleventh century estate farming had become the dominant way of organising the production process, meaning many farmers now worked as *paroikoi*, either on land they rented or on the estate of a landlord. As Lefort has calculated, this probably did not significantly worsen the quality of life for these peasants, but it did increase the level of control landlords had over the production process. The relationship with their landlord became much more direct. Instead of a state that did not involve itself much in the production process, we find aristocrats who take an active role improving the land and appointing managers to oversee the production process.

[131] Lefort, Rural Economy, 287-289.
[132] Haldon discusses this development and the reasons why in the context of a broader discussion about military service and land. While Haldon points out that it does not mean that people did not still have a military obligation, it does show that the state was less dependent on this for manpower. See Haldon, ‘Military service’, 37-41.

The state, the aristocracy, and monasteries were all increasing their land holdings in this period. This means that all of them were competing for the means of appropriating surplus labor from the peasants class. The state, through its right to tax the peasantry as well as being one of the biggest landholders, could take the largest share of this surplus labor. A large part of this surplus was handed out to parts of the aristocracy in order to gain their support and to employ them in the functioning of the state. As Frankopan has pointed out, a large part of how this was distributed was through access to the emperor and gaining his favor. Parts of the aristocracy in turn were also dependent on their income from the state, since it paid much more than land. However, because titles and land gifts from the state were not hereditary and important positions were only granted for four years, the position an aristocrat held was very fickle and constantly dependent on their standing at court. The loss of favor or a change of emperor could have drastic consequences. As certain aristocratic families became more important in the tenth century, such as the Skleros or Phokades, this became especially problematic for them, since a loss of court favor could mean the downfall of their family.

Because of this precarious relation, there existed a structural tension between the state and its aristocracy. Paradoxically, the aristocracy was the state, but in a fundamental way, its interests were not always aligned with the state. On the one hand, members of the aristocracy acted in the interest of the state and fulfilled functions because they were dependent on the favors granted by the emperor. On the other, this position was fragile and limited the aristocracy's economic autonomy. This tension, already present before the tenth century, was sharpened because of the land accumulation by the aristocracy. This not only threatened the surplus appropriation of the state, but also granted the aristocracy wealth independent from the state and a more powerful position in the provinces. This led to aristocratic families with vast tracts of land who held influential positions, such as the Phokades. Haldon has analyzed the same tension in theoretical terms and describes the result of this tension as such:

"[When] the members of such service elites '...' [are] able by one means or another to acquire resources independent of the centre, and can thus be transformed into a major competitor for control of resources, competition manifested in struggles over control of the appropriation, distribution and redistribution of surpluses extracted as fiscal revenue in one form or another."[133]

[133]Haldon, 'Theories of Practice', 61.

As we shall see next chapter, this competition manifested itself in open and active struggles multiple times during this period.

Chapter 3: The Economic Causes of Byzantine Revolts

Revolts mark periods of instability and chaos. Authority is challenged and supplanted. A typical Byzantine revolt saw houses being looted, villages burned, monasteries sacked, entire cities besieged, and citizens murdering each other, on the battlefield or in the streets. Even though a revolt almost certainly spelt violence and death for numerous people, the writings of provincial aristocrat Kekaumenos suggest they had almost become commonplace by the eleventh century. In *Consilia et Narrationes* he dedicates an entire chapter to talking about how the owner of an estate should react when a revolt breaks out and whether one should join.[134] That Kekaumenos feels the need to discuss this so thoroughly signifies that it was a recurring phenomenon that a landowner was expected to deal with. This is confirmed by the research of Cheynet, who states that between 963 and 1210 there is evidence of about 223 revolts in this period.[135] It is probable that this number is omitting a large amount of local revolts, which would have been frequent but not important enough for chroniclers to include.

As discussed in the last chapter, during the tenth and eleventh century there was a shift in land ownership. Both the state and the aristocracy were amassing large amounts of land, which led to tensions between the two. As we shall see in this chapter, these tensions regularly brewed over in large scale revolts, with provincial aristocrats attempting to take the throne for themselves. My aim is not to imply that only structural economic tensions were to blame for the wave of revolts we see in this period. Economic motives for revolts are only a larger piece of a puzzle made up of ideological and political pieces as well. The goal of this chapter will be to contribute to this puzzle by making clear what socio-economic factors contributed to Byzantine revolts. I will do this by analyzing revolts as a form of violent, open class struggle, highlighting the differing roles and interests of classes during these revolts.

To do this, I will make a distinction between aristocratic -and popular revolts. Aristocratic revolts were uprisings which were instigated and led by members of the aristocracy rebelling for their own interests and usually following forms already known to them. In the Byzantine context, these revolts most often took the shape of military

[134] Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes,* 64.15-76.15.
[135] A full overview of all revolts and the available documentation can be found in Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 20-156.

campaigns, in which a rebel army tried to supplant the state. Popular revolts on the other hand included mass participation of peasants and other workers rising up for their own interests, subsequently also following their own repertoires of revolt. The distinction between these types of revolts is mainly heuristic, allowing us to analyze the dynamic of different class interests in play during a revolt. The soldiers following a rebel general were generally peasants choosing to go along with the revolt of an aristocrat. It was also not uncommon for popular revolts to have leaders from the elite.[136]

The scope of the chapter will be limited to revolts starting with the revolt of Nikephoros Phokas in 963 and ending with the revolt of Isaak Komnenos in 1057. The main sources that we have to study revolts in this period are chronicles, either written by eyewitnesses or later historians. Medieval chronicles, especially when we are unable to verify them with other types of sources, present a challenge. They are almost always written in an elite context with a political goal in mind, whether explicit or implicit. Beyond that, even when dealing with eyewitness reports, we have to be aware of the biases and beliefs of our author. Often what is not said can be just as telling as what is said.[137]

A large part of this chapter will rest upon the use of Byzantine chronicles written during this time or shortly after. Chronicles of non-Byzantine origin have also been excluded, such as Matthew of Edessa or Yahya of Antioch. Although they are a valuable source in contrasting and comparing the Byzantine chronicles, they rarely discuss the revolts happening across the empire and did not have access to the same events or sources as chronicles produced at the Byzantine court. The chronicles we will be using are *The History* of Leo the Deacon, *the Chronographia* by Michael Psellos*, the History* by Michael Attaleiates, and *the Synopsis of Histories* by John Skylitzes. All of these were produced by individuals who at one point held a high position at court, with varying goals in their production. Beyond this we will also be analysing the descriptions of revolts given by Kekaumenos in his *Consilia et Narrationes*.

[136] An overview of the historiography dealing with elite leadership in popular revolts can be found in Justine Smithuis, 'Popular movements and elite leadership: exploring a late medieval conundrum in cities of the Low Countries and Germany' in Firnhaber-Baker & Schoenaer, *Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, 221-222.
[137] For an example on how to use chronicles as a source for non-elite collective action see Myles Lavan, 'Writing Revolt in the Early Roman Empire' in Firnhaber-Baker & Shcoenaers, *Handbook of Medieval Revolt*, 19-21, 34-36.

3.1: Aristocratic Revolts

Large scale aristocratic revolts in the Byzantine Empire often followed a clear pattern. First a rebel would have himself proclaimed as emperor by his troops. In order to strengthen the legitimacy of his claim, the would-be emperor often adorned himself with imperial symbols. After this, the rebel would act as if he was already emperor. In order to secure alliances within the aristocracy, he promised titles and gifts of land as if he was already in charge.[138] Often they would also start raising money from the surrounding area as if they were collecting taxes. This was necessary for upkeep of their army and to secure the loyalty of members of the aristocracy, but it also served as a test of loyalty. Any village or city that refused to pay tribute would be raided or besieged. The threat of violence was always present in the collecting of tax by a rebel army. The rebel army often continued to collect tribute or raid the surrounding area while they marched on the capital.[139]

The emperor often responded by first trying to solve the situation diplomatically, promising many titles and gifts to the rebels in order to get them to give up their claim.[140] When Isaak Komnenos' rebel army was close to Constantinople, the emperor offered him the title of *caesar*, with the promise that would be next in line for the throne.[141] Stopping the rebellion with military force was of course costly, resulting in the loss of lives and resources. It was also risky, because even if they were defeated, a faction of the aristocracy would still be dissatisfied with the outcome and might break out in revolt again. By offering them gifts and rewards, a faction might be much more easily pacified. Even Basil II, known for his ruthlessness in quelling rebellion, would often send out diplomatic envoys first.[142]

In descriptions of revolts it is a recurring motif that aristocrats declare themselves emperor in order to defend themselves or their position. In Leo the Deacon's description of the revolt of Nikephoros Phokas, he states that Nikephoros rebelled out of desperation and in order to keep

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[138] Leo the Deacon, *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, Anne-Marie Talbot & Dennis F. Sullivan ed. et trans. (Washington 2005) 128, 163. Michael Psellos, *The Chronographia*, Edgar R. A. Sewter ed. et trans. (London 1966) 223-224. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 279, 318.
[139] Michael Atteleiates, *The History*, Anthony Kaldellis & Dimitris Krallis ed. et trans. (Cambridge 2012) 225, Psellos, *Chronographia*, 155, 212, Leo the Deacon, *History*, 165-167, 215-216. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 300-301, 458. Cities were besieged as well if they did not submit willingly, in order to protect the rebels from any attack in their backline
[140] Leo the Deacon, *History*, 166. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 247, 279, 301, 304, 308, 458-459.
[141] Psellos, *Chronographia*, 223-224. *Caesar* was an honorary title often given to direct relatives of the emperor and signified a powerful position at court.
[142] He did so both with the revolt of Bardas Phokas and Bardas Skleros. See Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 310-311, 319-321.

his position.[143] According to Leo, when Nikephoros learned that emperor Romanus II had died and the *parakoimomenos* Jopseph Bringas had become the defacto ruler:

"[Nikephoros] was extremely agitated, distressed first by one thought, then by another. For '...' he was suspicious of the power of Joseph, a eunuch of great influence at the imperial palace (for he was the proud bearer of the title of parakoimomenos), who was ill-disposed toward Nikephoros."[144]

It is only after discovering a plot by Bringas that Nikephoros rushed to declare himself emperor. We find a similar reasoning in Leo's description of the first revolt of Bardas Phokas. After his uncle Nikephoros Phokas had been murdered in 969 the throne was taken by John Tzismiskes. Leo tells us that subsequently most of the Phokas family lost their positions and some were exiled to live in a certain territory. Bardas himself, who held the title of *doux* before, had to resign and was forced to reside in Ammasei, a long way from the Phokades base of power in Cappadocia.[145] In Leo's description, Bardas states that he revolted because he seeks justice for the murder of his uncle, but also because the throne should rightfully be his.[146] John Skylitzes echoes this when he has Bardas say:

"Rather should you have pity and compassion for me in my misfortune, for my father was kouropalates, my grandfather caesar, my uncle emperor, and I, who was myself once duke and numbered among the highest in the land – I am now fallen to the ultimate degree of calamity and disgrace"[147]

In both Skylitzes and Leo's description the central motive for Bardas Phokas's first revolt is the loss of position for both him and his family following the coup by John Tzimiskes. It is interesting that here both Leo and Skylitzes base themselves upon a source in favour of Tzimiskes, with Skylitzes most likely paraphrasing Leo. Even then some sympathy is awarded to Bardas and his removal from the grace of the emperor.

Beyond the Phokades, there were of course other aristocratic families who revolted to maintain their position as well. George Maniakes, the *katepan* of the Italian theme, revolted

[143] Leo the Deacon, *History*, 87-91. Skylitzes mentions this version as well. see Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 246-247.
[144] Leo the Deacon, *History*, 84.
[145] Ibidem, 145-146.
[146] Ibidem, 165.
[147]Skylitzes, *Synopsis,* 281.

in 1042 due to a conflict he had with Romanus Skleros, a powerful aristocrat and nephew of the emperor. According to Stylizes, Skleros had been raiding Maniakes' villages, pillaging his estates, and even 'desecrated his marriage bed'.[148] Since similar accounts can be found in the *Peira* of Romanus Skleros being accused of taking land and raiding villages, it is likely that Skylitzes' retelling here is accurate.[149] Skylitzes describes that not only did the emperor not help him protect his lands but that at Romanus's initiative Maniakes was removed from his position as *katepan*. This ultimately caused him to revolt and march his army from Italy towards the capital. [150]

Maniakes' revolt seems to be motivated by both a desire to keep his title and property, but also a way to ensure he would not end up imprisoned. Maniakes had been wronged by the emperor in multiple ways, first by Michael IV imprisoning him and then by Constantine IX refusing to reward him, letting Skleros raid his lands, and taking away his position.[151] He clearly was not in favour at court or had the aristocratic network necessary to improve his position. Beyond that, there was the real possibility that he could be imprisoned again by a state that seemed to favour others over him. In order for Maniakes to safeguard his freedom, his estates and his position, he saw no other choice but to revolt and take the throne himself.

As we concluded in the last chapter, the state controlled the largest amount of land in the empire, a fiscal system which collected an enormous amount of taxes, and a military power to protect and expand both of these. Through this, the largest amount of surplus labor was appropriated by the state. This amalgamation of wealth found its way to the aristocracy controlling the state through high paying positions, expensive gifts, and land grants. State positions were one of the best ways for the aristocracy of enriching oneself and gaining land, but dependent on their favour at court. In the revolts we just discussed, we can see when members of the aristocracy were threatened with losing their positions, and thus the access they had to appropriating this surplus labor, they would rise up in revolt and try to take the

[148] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 402-403.
[149] Rhomaios, *Peira*, 409-411.
[150] Psellos's account differs somewhat, stating that Constantine IX did not in any way honour or reward Maniakes, even though he had succeeded in retaking the Italian theme. This caused distrust in Maniakes since he had already been wronged by previous emperors as well. The difference between Psellos's description and that of Skylitzes is somewhat strange, but Psellos's focus is firmly on events in Constantinople, since that is what he had the most access to. Combined with the fact that Psellos is writing very much in favour of Constantine IX, who had been his patron for years, might explain him leaving the more unsavoury dealings of Constantine's family. The uproar caused by Constantine IX introducing his mistress to court is also left out by Psellos. For Psellos' account see Psellos, *Chronographia*, 142-147.
[151] For Maniakes previous imprisonment see Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 381-383 and Attaleiates, *The History,* 11-13. For him not getting rewarded by Constantine IX, see Psellos, *Chronographia*, 143-144.

throne.

Revolts were however not only a common recourse for the aristocracy in order to defend the positions they already had, but also a way of expanding their share of the surplus appropriation. For example, the revolt of Isaak Komnenos began only after Isaak and multiple other military commanders were refused any new titles or positions by Michael VI. This is usually contrasted in the chronicles, especially by Psellos, with Michael VI being on the other hand very generous to the aristocratic faction that stimulated his rise to the throne.[152] Isaak and the other aristocrats, after realizing that they were not in favor with the current emperor, decided to gather their armies and rise up in revolt.

Bardas Phokas started his second revolt with similar reasoning. After his revolt against John Tzimiskes had failed, Bardas had been exiled. He was brought back as a military commander by Basil II to quell the revolt of Bardas Skleros. After succeeding in this, Bardas Phokas received a high position at court, with all the rewards befitting his station.[153] According to Psellos, this would not last long:

"Phokas, after receiving high honours when he first returned to Byzantium, later found himself neglected. His ambitions appeared to be once more slipping from his grasp. This kind of treatment, in his opinion, was undeserved. So, disgruntled, he broke away in revolt '...' with the greater part of the army ranged beside him against Basil"[154]

Psellos does not specify what ambitions of Phokas were being unfilled, but implies he was trying to climb the ranks of the court and first could 'rank himself among the personal friends of the emperor'.[155] This favourable position did not seem to last long and if we are to believe Psellos in his claim that 'the greater part of the army ranged beside him', multiple aristocrats who held military positions were not content either with their position under Basil II.[156] According to Skylitzes, the event that instigated the revolt was when Basil set out in a campaign against the Bulgars, but he led the army himself instead of taking any military commanders with him. Bardas Phokas and other important officials felt slighted, stating that the emperor was 'not even according them the respect due to a mercenary.'[157] A successful

[152] Psellos, *Chronographia,* 209-211, Attaleiates, *The History,* 95-97, Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 450-452.
[153] Psellos, *Chronographia,* 13-15.
[154] Psellos, *Chronographia,* 15.
[155] Ibidem, 15.
[156] Ibidem, 15.
[157] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 314-315. Leo describes the same event, but gives no motivation for the revolt of Phokas.

campaign was of course a very profitable affair. Military commanders and their soldiers could gain enormous wealth through the plunder of enemy villages and cities, a part of which they could keep for themselves.[158] Beyond just plunder, there was also the expectation of honours and rewards when they eventually succeeded, such as grants of land and titles.

Both Isaak Komnenos and Bardas Phokas no longer saw serving the court as a legitimate option of growing their own wealth or gaining more land through rewards for their service. In both instances no small number of people joined their revolts either. Isaak received the support of several high ranking military commanders. Bardas had 'the greater part of the army' supporting him. Although a revolt seems drastic, taking control of the state was one of the best ways for a faction or family to ensure that the state would pursue their interests. Because Skleros had family sitting on the throne, he was somewhat free to take land from others, even other members of the aristocracy.[159] When Michael IV ascended to the throne, he gave his brothers high positions from which they could enrich themselves, leaving both Psellos and Attaleiates to describe them as extremely wealthy.[160] This also means revolts didn't always have to be carried out until the end, but could be used as a measure to renegotiate the balance of power. Both Bardas Skleros and Isaak Komnenos, when offered certain honours and rewards, were willing to lay down their arms and halt the rebellion.[161] A revolt in itself could be enough for members of the aristocracy to rearrange their position and their subsequent access to the means of appropriation.

Beyond the motives of the instigators of a revolt, it is also good to briefly reflect on the motives of those who chose to follow them. Part of the reason aristocratic revolts could raise entire armies was because of the military positions its leaders commonly had. Multiple rebels discussed above held the highest military positions possible and had entire armies at their command.[162] Unfortunately, we do not know what inspired individual soldiers to follow a rebel emperor. Whether it was through loyalty to a commander, because he had the means to pay, or by coercion, is not discernable. The sources seem to imply that rebel armies

[158] We find numerous descriptions of individuals profiting from plunder in this time. See for example Leo the Deacon, *History,* 75, 79, 80, 122.
[159] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 402-403.
[160] Psellos, *Chronographia*, 60-63. Attaleiates, *The History,* 17-19.
[161] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 320-321, Psellos, *Chronographia*, 22,-23, 215-226.
[162] Many of the rebel leaders held the title of Domestic of the East/West before they broke out into revolt, which would have given them authority over much of the Byzantine military. This list includes Nikephoros Phocas, Bardas Phocas, Bardas Skleros, and others. We also see many rebels who held the title *strategoi* or *doux*, such as George Maniakes or Leo Tornikios.

functioned very similarly to the regular imperial armies. The fact that would-be emperors would take multiple steps to legitimize their claim seems to support this.[163] However, we might find a similar dynamic here in the 'tax-raising' rebel armies would do, where they forced villages to either pay or be raided.

The same might have been true for local elites. Kekaumenos, in his advice to provincial aristocrats, signifies that people living in a region might be forced to join a revolt:

"If someone should revolt, and declare himself emperor, don't enter into his plot but leave him. If you should be able to fight and overthrow him '...' but if you are not able to fight him, leave him - '...' But if perhaps, because of your household, you don't dare flee, be with (the rebel), but let your mind be (inclined) towards the Emperor"*[164]*

Kekaumenos describes joining the revolt as a last resort for those who are unable to fight against the rebels or do not wish their household to be harmed. If an aristocrat did not wish their estates to be plundered, they had to declare support for the rebel, even if this meant going against the emperor. Of course, besides the stick, there might have also been a carrot. The sources describe multiple instances of rebel leaders promising rewards or gifts to their followers in order to gain their loyalty. Komnenos for example refused to give up his revolt, unless the rewards he had promised to his fellow aristocrats would still come to pass. They probably would not have accepted the surrender, unless their specific interests were also fulfilled.[165] However, it is hard to imagine that such promises were made to every peasant who joined a rebel army. It would be interesting to analyze the role of local lords and the use of their networks in strengthening a revolt. It is not inconceivable that farmers and *paroikoi* would follow their local landlord when they chose to join a revolt. More research is needed however to make any definitive claims in this matter.

3.2: Popular Revolts

Not many examples of popular revolts exist in the period we have chosen to study. This is partially, as Cheynet also stated, because most local revolts were not of interest to chroniclers

[163] It was standard practice for would-be-emperors to wear imperial insignia to legitimize their position. See for example Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 301-302, 315, 451.
[164] Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes*, 64.15-64.24.
[165] Psellos, *Chronographia,* 224.

and therefore not recorded. However, even then, the fact that we also find almost no larger scale popular and urban revolts is interesting. We will get back to this at the end of the chapter. Let us first look at the popular revolts that do appear in the sources.

Almost all of the recorded popular revolts seem to have some economic motive, mostly against the state. We find multiple popular revolts against either over-taxation or bad governance. Skylitzes describes the city of Antioch rising up in revolt against the tax collector Salibas because his demands were deemed excessive. When Niketas, the brother of emperor Michael IV, was appointed *doux* to resolve the situation, he seemed to mostly blame the wealthy citizens for this revolt, arresting eleven of them.[166] Of course it is also possible that Niketas used the revolt as an excuse to break the power of the Antiochian elite and arrest part of them. A similar event happened in Nicopolis. In the most detailed extant account, Skylitzes describes how the tax collector John Koutzomytes was 'torn limb from limb' for his oppressive tax collection. The city continued its revolt by joining the Bulgarian side in a war for independence that Bulgarian aristocrats had started in the same year.[167] It is unlikely that Nicopolis joined the larger war out of a desire for Bulgarian autonomy, but probably to either escape retaliation by the empire or further taxation.

There is of course also evidence of popular revolts without a direct economic demand. Some of these happened in the context of larger aristocratic revolts. When Nikephoros Phokas marched on Constantinople, the people started rioting and took the city in order to grant Phokas entrance.[168] A similar occurrence happened when Isaak Komnenos was camped outside Constantinople, with a part of the urban populace rising up to depose Michael VI.[169] Both of these revolts were however led, and probably instigated as well, by a member of the elite. [170] Even when the demands or causes of a revolt were not directly economic, we can however often still see elements of economic discontentment in the actions of the revolt. When a riot broke out against Michael V, Skylitzes describes that when the rebels breached the palace they also looted the offices and tore up the tax rolls.[171] Psellos describes that during the revolt, the mansions belonging to Michael V's relatives and friends were destroyed and looted, with the contents of the mansion being sold on the street.[172] Attaleiates describes this

[166] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 372-374.
[167] Skylitzes, *Synopsis,* 386-387. For more information on the various conflicts with the Bulgarians and their struggle with the Byzantine empire see Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan frontier: A political study of the Northern Balkans, 900-1204* (Cambridge 2000), specifically chapter 2.
[168] Leo the Deacon, *History,* 95-97.
[169] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 462-465.
[170] Leo the Deacon, *History*, 97. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 464.
[171] Skylitzes, *Synopsis,* 394.
[172] Psellos, *Chronographia,* 100.

as well, identifying the looting with some sort of social justice being enacted by the people, when he says that the houses were 'emptied out [from] the riches stored inside, the fruits of much injustice and the groans of the poor'.[173] Although Attaleiates is probably adding some of his own analysis here, his comments do fit with the general pattern we see. The looting and destruction of aristocratic mansions is not uncommon in descriptions of revolts in Constantinople. Similar scenes were described during the revolt when Nikephoras Phokas was acclaimed as emperor.[174] Leo the Deacon tells us that John Tzimiskes, immediately after seizing power, had heralds sent out in the street threatening punishment to anyone who would use the regime-change as an excuse for plundering.[175]

Most recorded cases of popular revolt have either a direct economic demand or seem to contain some actions born out of economic discontentment. These revolts however receive barely any attention in the sources, making it hard for us to draw any conclusion about the composition or internal dynamics of the revolts. One of the few detailed descriptions of a local revolt can be found in Kekaumenos' *Consillia et Narrationes*. In his book, Kekaumenos recounts how his relative Nikoulitzas was forced to lead a local rebellion in the theme of Hellas.[176] The account is most likely written by Nikoulitzas himself to clear himself from any suspicion of rebellion. Nikoulitzas was a provincial aristocrat who owned an estate in Larissa and seemed influential in the area. A diverse group, composed of aristocrats and people from Larissa as well as a local tribe of Vlachs, was planning a revolt against the high taxation.[177] They wanted Nikoulitzas to lead it, their reasoning being:

"If we choose to do anything without him, we certainly won't be able to complete our plot; but if we choose to kill him, even so we won't be able to accomplish anything, and we are liable to be badly treated by him - for he has men, and his own people, and the fortress and the land obey him in whatever he says. But let us reveal to him what we have decided"[178]

Nikoulitzas is portrayed as the key to the success of their plot. Later in the text he is explicitly asked to lead the revolt.[179] This might have been due to the influence he held as a local lord

[173] Attaleiates, *the History*, 25.
[174] Leo the Deacon, *History*, 95-97.
[175] Ibidem, 144.
[176] Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes*, 66.19-73.26
[177] Ibidem, 67.15, 69.09-69.10. Vlachs were a nomadic people living in the Balkans. For more information see: Stephenson, *Balkan Frontier,* 288-294.
[178] Ibidem, 68.04-68.09.
[179] Ibidem, 68.23-68.26.

and *protospatharios*, the rebels possibly believing that Nikoulitzas leading their revolt would legitimize it and allow more to join. However, the group who approached him already included some aristocratic elements, such as John Gremianetes, who is a former *protospatharios* as well.[180] Important is also that Nikoulitzas is described as having control over men, his own people, the fortress and the land. From this description it seems as if a key reason was that Nikoulitzas had the resources and manpower necessary to actually support a revolt.

Once the revolt was underway, Nikoulitzas presented himself as a reluctant participant, having to be forced to join so that 'their entire land should not be ruined and destroyed, and the people slaughtered and enslaved'[181]. The text describes him as both taking military command of the revolt, but also taking a mediating role when talking with the emperor. Although Nikoulitzas' communication with the emperor is portrayed as him staying loyal to the throne, it could also be read as him negotiating on behalf of the local people.[182] In the text it is described that Nikoulitzas has spent time at court and even talked with the emperor himself multiple times, which would make him the best option as a negotiator. Even before the revolt broke out, he was already warning the emperor of unrest and asking him to lower the taxes.[183]

In a context where there are so few popular revolts, it is interesting that peasants turn to the aristocracy to lead them. Elite leadership of popular revolts is however not a rare phenomenon. It was common enough that many authors assumed that peasants were often unable to organize themselves in collective action, needing an elite figure to lead.[184] This view has since been corrected. Justine Smithuis has argued that instead we should view it as a pragmatic relationship that is contractual in nature: the lower classes were perfectly capable of organizing themselves, but formed partnerships with fractions of the elites based on common interest in order to strengthen their revolt. [185]

This begs the question whether factions of the aristocracy and peasants had common interests in their revolts against the Byzantine state. When taxes were raised in a certain region, this affected both the landlords and the landholding peasantry. Their class interests would align at that moment against state interests. *Paroikoi* however were not taxed directly.

[180] Ibidem, 68.10-68.12.
[181] Ibidem, 69.26-69.29.
[182] Ibidem, 66.19-67.05, 70.07-70.18, 70.19-71.12.
[183] Ibidem, 66.19-67.05.
[184] Smithuis, 'Elite Leadership', 220-221.
[185] Ibidem, 221-222.

They might have felt the tax raises indirectly, with aristocrats raising the rent so their own surplus appropriation would stay the same during a tax raise. It would be interesting if landlords were able to convince the *paroikoi* to join in the revolt against the state, even if in actuality they were the ones raising the rent. Then again they might have been coerced to join through threat of force or loss of privileges. According to Smithuis, groups that were weaker or less politically developed could fall into a relationship of clientelism when working together with the aristocracy.[186] Unfortunately, we have no sources that can give us any definitive answers.

What is more interesting is that we find no evidence of revolts against aristocrats who were not part of the state. The revolts we do have evidence for were against tax collectors or over-taxation. The only exception is the revolt against Michael V, but this was still a revolt against the state and had elements against taxation as well.[187] It is of course possible that any revolts against specific landlords were very much local affairs and thus not recorded by chroniclers. Still, it seems strange that if there was a peasant revolt against any of the larger aristocratic families this would not have been mentioned anywhere. That they were never mentioned in any of the major sources must at least have meant that they were not frequent or large enough to constitute a social problem.

The lack of collective action against the aristocracy is especially interesting considering the amount of land they were accumulating. As we have concluded, the tenth century in Byzantium marked the start of an increase of domanial control for landlords. Wickham has shown that in other medieval societies the erosion of peasant political/economical autonomy has led to resistance, including revolts.[188] The Stellinga uprising in 841 is a clear example of this.[189] The only major European exception according to Wickham is England, for which he can thus far offer no explanation.[190] It is very interesting that Byzantium seems to be an exception as well. A difference might lie in the continuity of the state in Byzantine context. Whereas the expansion of domanial control in other parts of Europe often meant the erasure of customary practices through codified law, the Byzantine state ensured the endurance and application of the legal system. This also offered peasants

[186] Ibidem, 231.
[187] Skylitzes, *Synopsis,* 395.
[188] Chris Wickham, ´Looking forward: peasant revolts in Europe, 600–1200´ in Firnhaber-Baker & Schoenaer, *Handbook for Medieval Revolt*, 162-164.
[189] Wickham, 'Looking forward', 159. For more information on the Stellinga revolts, see: Eric J. Goldberg, 'Popular Revolt, Dynastic Politics, and Aristocratic Factionalism in the Early Middle Ages: The Saxon Stellinga Reconsidered', Speculum , 70:3 (1995) 467-501.
[190] Wikcham, 'Looking forward', 164.

other ways to challenge the increasing domanial control of aristocrats without resorting to open revolt. As we have seen in the *Peira*, peasants could and would challenge aristocrats in court when their land was unrightfully taken by landlords like Romanus Skleros.[191] This offered other venues than revolt for peasants to channel their class struggle.

Still, we cannot say for certain why there was a lack of revolts against the aristocracy during this time, even though revolting was part of a known repertoire for peasants when it came to resisting the state. Supplementing the economic analysis given above with more research into the ideological and political motives for this lack of revolt would be necessary. The specifics of the dynamic between aristocrats and peasants both during and outside of revolts would be also need to be studied further before we can come closer to definitive answers, but we find the beginning of an answer here

[191] Rhomaius, *Peira,* 409-411.

Conclusion

During the tenth and eleventh century, land ownership in the Byzantine empire changed. Land accumulation became more and more important for the state, the church, and the aristocracy. This land was mostly taken from landholding peasants, who more and more were transformed into *paroikoi*, tenant farmers with an obligation to work the land. This does not mean that the mode of appropriation changed or even how exploited they were. Instead of tax they were now paying rent and in all probability, this was not much more than they were used to paying. Following Wickham, we can see that what fundamentally changed for peasants was the level of control over the production process landlords had. With the estate becoming the prevalent form of labor organisation, landlords exercised more and more domanial control.

The other major consequence of the accumulation of land was the increasing tension between the state and the aristocracy. Through being the biggest landowner and having the right to levy taxes, a majority of the surplus labor of the peasantry was accumulated by the state. The largest form of income for the aristocracy was the share of this surplus labor they received through service to the state. With the aristocracy taking more and more land, they gained a source of income that was independent of the state, allowing them to strengthen themselves independently of state interests. We see this very clearly with the rise of large landowning aristocratic families such as Phokas, Skleros, and Maleinos.

This tension gained an open character in the large aristocratic revolts we see in this period. When we look at the sources, we see that the main reason for the aristocracy to break out in revolt was either to prevent the loss of their position or even to expand it. As stated before, the state had access to the largest amount of appropriated surplus labor, which meant that when members of the aristocracy were not in favor at court, they had to find other ways of gaining access to this. Revolts functioned as a way of either gaining control over the state or even just renegotiating the balance of power.

While we see many aristocratic revolts in this period, there is barely any evidence of popular revolts. The ones that are recorded all seem to have some economic motives, with most of them being against tax collectors and overtaxation. In these revolts, we often see that the lower classes work together with the aristocracy and that there is even elite leadership in popular revolts, such as with Nikoulitzas of Larissa. Whether this is because of a shared

interest, coercion, or some form of clientelism probably differed per situation and any general trends remain unclear to us. The fact that there is (to my knowledge) no evidence of popular revolts aimed against the aristocracy is even more interesting, especially with this class restricting peasant economic autonomy in this period. A possible cause might be found in the continuity of the state in this period or in the fact that other avenues of class struggle remained open to the peasantry, but more research is needed here as well.

Even though some questions remain open to us, we can infer that the changes in landownership during this period had their effects on the class relations in the Byzantine empire, and thus led to increased forms of class struggle in the form of revolts. By analyzing the economic causes of these revolts through a Marxist lens, we have been able to examine how the social relations of productions changed and in turn how this change affected the various groups involved in the production process. One of the main advantages of a Marxist class analysis is that it recognizes that while class relations are fundamentally economic in origin, they are social relations which also have their play in other aspects of society. By viewing economic changes in the context of their totality within society, we do not artificially detach them from political and societal changes.

To however get a full view of the weight of what caused people to revolt (or not), we need to analyze all pieces of the puzzle. To evoke the words of Hobsbawm again: "economics alone can never fully account for all economic phenomena, nor political theory for all political phenomena '...' In each concrete instance the problem lies in the interaction of all these".[192] Further research is needed in how the changing class relations had their effect on the politics of Byzantium. Even moreso, we need a stronger view of the relationship between the aristocracy and the peasantry than I have been able to give here to get more definitive answers. What the dynamic was like between a local landlord and both landholding peasants and *paroikoi* on a daily level remains unknown to us. Although the sources known to us on this are scarce, there still remains a wealth of opportunity in further archeological endeavours and additional survey's of the Athonite archives.

[192] Hobsbawm, 'Marxist Historiography Today', 187.

Appendix I: Revolts between 963 and 1057[193]

963: The revolt of Nikephoros Phokas against Joseph Bringas.[194]

970: The revolt of Bardas Phokas against John Tzimiskes.[195]

987: The revolt of Bardas Skleros against Basil II.[196]

989: The revolt of Bardas Phokas and Bardas Skleros against Basil II.[197]

1022: The revolt of Nikephoros Xiphias and Nikephoros Phokas against Basil II. [198]

1034: Revolt in Antioch against a tax collector.[199]

1040: Revolt in Nicopolis against a tax collector.[200]

1042: Popular revolt in Constantinople against Michael V.[201]

1042: The revolt of George Maniakes revolts against Constantine IX.[202]

1047: The revolt of Leo Tornikios against Constantine IX.[203]

1057: The revolt of Isaak Komnenos against Michael VI.[204]

1065: The revolt of Larissa against high taxation.[205]

[193] This is not a complete list, but only includes all the revolts I studied as part of my analysis.
[194] Leo the Deacon, *History*, 84-94. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 245-249.
[195] Leo the Deacon, *History*, 162-173. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 278-281.
[196] Leo the Deacon, *History*, 212-213. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 299-312. Psellos, *Chronographia*, 13-15.
[197] Leo the Deacon, *History*, 215-217. Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 313-321. Psellos, *Chronographia*, 15-19.
[198] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 346-347. Nikephoros Phokas was the son of Bardas Phokas.
[199] Ibidem, 372-374.
[200] Ibidem, 386-387.
[201] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 391-396. Psellos, *Chronographia*, 97-102. Attaleiates, *The History*, 19-28.
[202] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 402-403. Psellos, *Chronographia*, 142-146. Attaleiates, *The History*, 31.
[203] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 413-416. Psellos, *Chronographia*, 152-164. Attaleiates, *The History*, 37-51.
[204] Skylitzes, *Synopsis*, 451-465. Psellos, *Chronographia*, 219-230. Attaleiates, *The History*, 97-107.
[205] Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes*, 66.19-73.26.

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