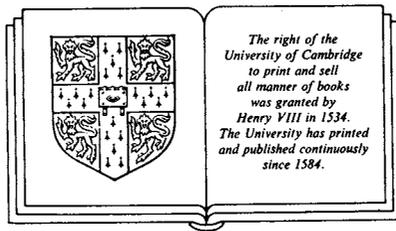


*Economic expansion in the
Byzantine empire*
900–1200

ALAN HARVEY



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Introduction

The Byzantine social formation¹ consisted overwhelmingly of peasant producers. The fundamental characteristic of the peasantry is that the family is the most important unit of production and it has effective control (but not necessarily ownership) of the means of production. Peasant families are usually associated in larger groups with certain collective interests which may vary from one society to another. The family forms a socio-economic unit and depends mainly on the labour of its own members. Additional labourers, when necessary, are usually obtained from the same community and belong to the same social class. The familial units produce mainly for their own subsistence. Some artisanal activity may occur in the village, but it is still a household activity and these artisans are derived from the peasantry and usually combine their industrial activity with agriculture. They produce for consumption within the village, not exchange outside the village.² Peasant producers formed the economic base of Byzantine society. Their own requirements were not restricted to consumption needs, but included the storage of sufficient seed for next year's crop and the provision of food for livestock. They also had to replace their instruments of production whenever necessary. Peasant production depended on a

¹ This term is used to refer to a specific, historical combination of modes of production organised under the dominance of one of them; see P. Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London, 1974), p. 22 n. 6; M. Godelier, *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 18, 63–9; and J. F. Haldon, 'Some Considerations on Byzantine Society and Economy in the Seventh Century', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 10 (1985), pp. 101–2 n. 61. See also B. Hindess and P. Q. Hirst, *Pre-capitalist Modes of Production* (London, 1975), pp. 13–15. F. Favory, 'Validité des concepts marxistes pour une théorie des sociétés de l'Antiquité. Le modèle impérial romain', *Klio*, 63 (1981), pp. 313–30, uses the term in a completely different sense.

² R. H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), p. 13; D. Thorner, 'Peasant Economy as a Category in Economic History', in T. Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 202–18.

balance between needs and a distaste for manual labour which restricts the intensity of agricultural production (at least when land is not in short supply). Once enough is being produced to satisfy needs there is little incentive to extend cultivation further, unless pressure is put on the peasant community by some outside authority to alienate part of its produce. The production of a surplus was essential for economic development (although on its own insufficient for this purpose). In Byzantium the surplus was expropriated by political coercion and it supported the imperial bureaucracy, the army, the church and secular landowners.³

The state played the major part in expropriating surplus wealth from the direct producers. Its revenues, as in the late Roman period, were largely based on a very comprehensive system of land-taxation, where land was graded according to its quality and use and the tax-payment fixed accordingly. The tax-registers of every fiscal unit were revised regularly. The system was inherited from the later Roman empire and, in spite of subsequent alterations, it reflects a large measure of administrative continuity.⁴ A large part of the superstructural apparatus of Byzantium had been carried over from the Roman empire. This was the fundamental difference between Byzantium and the medieval west, where the breakdown of Roman institutions was more extensive. Constantinople remained the major centre of consumption in the empire owing to the demands of the imperial court and the administrative hierarchies of church and state. The state was responsible for all issues of money, which it coined to meet its administrative and military expenses. It reclaimed the gold coinage through taxation. So the state left its own clear imprint on monetary and commercial activity.⁵

In these respects continuity between late Antiquity and the Middle Ages is apparent. Nevertheless, the extent of continuity should not be exaggerated. Some important changes in social organisation did take place. The cities had been centres of local government, exacting revenues for themselves and the state from their territories. This

³ For the concept of the surplus, see E. R. Wolf, *Peasants* (New Jersey, 1966), pp. 4–10; and M. Godelier, *Rationality and Irrationality in Economics* (London, 1972), pp. 270–4. See also B. Kerblay, 'Chayanov and the Theory of Peasantry as a Specific Type of Economy', in Shanin (ed.), *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, pp. 150–60.

⁴ For the technical aspects of Byzantine taxation, see Dölger, *Beiträge*; and Svoronos, 'Recherches sur le cadastre byzantin', pp. 1–145.

⁵ M. F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300–1450* (Cambridge, 1985).

institutional link between the cities and their rural areas was ruptured, resulting in a decline in the importance of the cities in social and economic terms. Some retained a certain importance owing to the administrative role attributed to them by the state and the church. Others had no real importance except as a fortified centre for the inhabitants of the region and perhaps as a local centre for petty commodity exchange on a very small scale.⁶

Although there was only a partial breakdown of the institutions of Antiquity, the change was enough to permit the slow rise of a new aristocracy. A new system of provincial administration, based on the themes, unified civil and military authority and gave great powers to the generals in command of these administrative units. Gradually, through service to the state, a powerful provincial officer class was able to build up its economic, social and military power to such an extent that it became a centrifugal force undermining the territorial and jurisdictional unity of the empire. No longer based in the classical urban centres of western Asia Minor, its strength lay in the rugged interior of the peninsula.⁷ The other source of wealth for the aristocracy was service in the central administration in Constantinople. Traditionally, the course of Byzantine history has been seen in terms of the struggle between these two opposing factions in the aristocracy, civil and military, for control of the state; this conflict reached its climax in the eleventh century, culminating in the triumph of the military faction through the seizure of power by the Komnenoi.⁸ This is a great oversimplification and there has been a justified reaction against it recently.⁹ Certainly, there is no clear dichotomy between the two groups, but the distinction does have a certain amount of validity. One group derived their power from service in the capital and could bring influence to bear on the emperor more easily, but had less scope for action independent of the state. The provincial magnates had greater *de*

⁶ Haldon, 'Some Considerations on Byzantine Society and Economy in the Seventh Century', pp. 75–112.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 94–5; G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 2nd English edn, trans. J. M. Hussey (Oxford, 1968), p. 96.

⁸ Ostrogorsky, *History*, pp. 320–50; S. Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1971), pp. 70–7.

⁹ G. Weiss, *Oströmische Beamte im Spiegel der Schriften des Michael Psellos* (Munich, 1973), pp. 90–7; P. Lemerle, *Cinq études sur le XI^e siècle byzantin* (Paris, 1977), p. 258. The term 'aristocracy' is used more for convenience than with any precise technical content; see the introduction to M. Angold (ed.), *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX to XIIIth Centuries* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 1–9.

facto autonomy of action. There was, of course, much blurring and overlapping between the two groups owing to familial and social connections, which made it difficult for the state to take effective measures to restrict the economic and social power of the magnates. The emperor always needed their political and military support, which was based firmly on their economic strength, and the aristocracy needed the benefits which could accrue from imperial favour. So there was a community of interest between the emperor and the aristocracy, but underlying this were the centrifugal tendencies inherent in the economic strength and social authority of the aristocracy.

Landowners received the advantages of imperial benevolence not only through gains made from service in the administration, but from grants of land and fiscal privileges. Even where the state conceded the fiscal revenues of an estate to a landowner, it still exercised an important function in establishing the payments to be made by the peasants to the landowner. The comprehensiveness of the state's fiscal apparatus asserted itself even when the state was abandoning its taxes from a property. Fiscal officials drew up the *praktikon*, the register detailing the peasants' obligations, and handed it over to the landowner. The *praktikon* was revised at regular intervals by the state's officials to take into account any changes in the number and wealth of the peasants or in the fiscal privileges of the landowner.¹⁰ So one uniform fiscal system was in operation and the revenues were divided between the state, the lay aristocracy and the church.¹¹ It should be stressed that most fiscal privileges were not all-embracing and even privileged landowners usually still owed a tax-payment to the state.

An important consideration is whether there were any fundamental distinctions between the properties of secular and ecclesiastical landowners. The latter had greater stability. They were not subject to division among heirs (a subject about which little is known) and they were less seriously affected by (but not totally immune from) the vicissitudes of political intrigue. Otherwise there was probably little fundamental difference between the two categories of landed property. Surviving documents relating to lay estates show no real differences from monastic estates in the way in which the properties were exploited. An important factor was the uniformity of the state's fiscal

¹⁰ For the technical procedure, see Dölger, *Beiträge*, pp. 100–1; and Svoronos, 'Recherches sur le cadastre byzantin', pp. 60–2.

¹¹ E. Patlagean, "'Économie paysanne" et "féodalité byzantine"', *Annales ESC*, 30 (1975), pp. 1371–96.

system, which ensured that the same range of obligations was imposed on the peasants on both secular and ecclesiastical land. The scope of the privileges which landowners received from the state depended on the influence they were able to exert at Constantinople, and the division between secular and ecclesiastical properties was irrelevant in this respect.¹² There is no reason to think that economic and demographic trends on ecclesiastical estates were any different from those on lay estates. This is particularly important owing to the preeminent position of the documents from monastic archives in the surviving source material. It suggests that conclusions drawn from monastic documents reflect economic trends in general.¹³

The range of obligations which the state transferred to privileged landowners was wide and included rents in cash and kind and labour services. Usually, the state retained rights to certain obligations, while transferring others to the landowner. An important consequence of the state's role in this procedure was that the rents and other obligations then owed to the landowner had been devised for the convenience of the state to expedite the proper functioning of the administration. The state was mainly interested in cash revenues paid in gold. It exacted payments in kind to maintain its officials in the performance of their duties in the provinces and to ensure the army's food supply. Labour services were enforced for military reasons (work on fortifications) and to keep the state's network of communications in good repair. Agricultural labour services were never a great concern of the state. Consequently, there was an institutional restraint on the enforcement of extensive labour services performed by dependent peasants on their landowners' properties. Byzantium never witnessed large-scale demesne farming by compulsory labour services.

The position of independent peasant farmers in this social formation has been the subject of controversy.¹⁴ They had full rights of landownership as long as they made their fiscal payments to the state. Their economic position was sometimes insecure, at the mercy of

¹² For these privileged properties, see below, p. 71.

¹³ See also A. E. Laiou-Thomadakis, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire. A Social and Demographic Study* (Princeton, 1977), p. 12. For the close social contacts between monastic leaders and members of the aristocracy, see R. Morris, 'The Political Saint of the Eleventh Century', in S. Hackel (ed.), *The Byzantine Saint* (Studies Supplementary to Sobornost 5) (London, 1981), pp. 43–50.

¹⁴ G. Ostrogorsky, *Quelques problèmes d'histoire de la paysannerie byzantine* (Brussels, 1956); P. Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium from the Origins to the Twelfth Century. The Sources and Problems* (Galway, 1979).

harvest failures and the excesses of the state's fiscal machinery. The state's requirement that taxes be paid in high-value gold coins must have been a problem for many peasant communities, helping to intensify differences in wealth among the villagers. There was always a tendency for independent peasants to be subordinated to large landowners, but the speed of this process should not be exaggerated. The state's need of the support of powerful individuals and institutions led it to attribute landless peasants to these landowners as *paroikoi* (dependent peasants); consequently, as the population increased, *paroikoi* of either the state or of private landowners made up a larger proportion of the peasantry. When peasants were subsumed under landowners, the state, through its role in the attribution of revenues to landowners, was responsible for the rigorous legal coercion on the peasantry to alienate part of its produce to the landowner. The latter did not have to rely on his own, often considerable power, as he also had the backing of the state. The independent peasantry was gradually squeezed between the state and powerful landowners. Although the state did take legal measures to prevent independent peasants from being bought out or forced out by large landowners, the relative importance of communities of independent producers tended to decline, because they were unable to acquire new land and bring it under cultivation as rapidly as larger landowners.

How to define the social structure of Byzantium has been the source of endless controversy. The traditional dividing-line has been between those historians who apply the term 'feudalism' to Byzantium and those who resolutely deny its validity.¹⁵ Ostrogorsky has attempted to define Byzantine feudalism in terms comparable to those of traditional western historiography. He regards the *pronoia* as a Byzantine equivalent of the fief, and it was only with the widespread adoption of this institution by Alexios I (so he claims) that Byzantine society became fully feudalised.¹⁶ There are several problems with this interpretation. The similarities between the *pronoia* and the fief are very superficial. Many important features associated with the fief, such as vassalage and the oath of fealty, did not occur with the *pronoia*, which was a simple attribution of fiscal revenues and, perhaps, temporary ownership of the

¹⁵ The standard work on Byzantine feudalism is G. Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine* (Brussels, 1954). Lemerle has always taken the opposite view with great vigour; see *Cinq études*, pp. 186–7.

¹⁶ Ostrogorsky, *History*, pp. 371–2; Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine*, pp. 26ff. For the development of this institution, see below, p. 72.

land in return for military service. The major objection to Ostrogorsky's interpretation is that the *pronoia* was a much more marginal phenomenon in Byzantium than the fief in western Europe. Leading aristocrats did not hold their land by *pronoia*. The pyramid effect of subinfeudation was absent in Byzantium, although there is evidence for the existence of aristocratic retinues. The *pronoia* grant involved only fiscal revenues, not jurisdictional rights over *paroikoi*. Its impact on Byzantine society was much less than that of the fief in western Europe.

The historians who see feudalism in the traditional, narrow sense which characterises discussion of the subject among most western medievalists, understandably deny the concept any validity in relation to Byzantium. However, the value of such a rigid, narrow concept of feudalism is strictly limited because it leaves out of sight the overwhelming mass of the population in any feudal society, and its use as an analytical category is therefore restricted. It is preferable to adopt a wider definition of the term. Feudalism will be regarded as a mode of production consisting of the forces of production (the material basis of the productive process) and the relations of production (the relations between landowners and peasantry). In feudalism the bulk of the direct producers, who were peasant farmers, were subordinated to a landowning aristocracy. Although the peasant household and the village community were the base of feudalism, they were not specific to it. The essential factor was the exploitative relationship between landowners and dependent peasants by which the surplus labour of the peasantry was transferred to the landowners in the form of rents in cash or kind or through the performance of labour services. The essential feature of this relationship was the political coercion which the landowner could exert on the peasant household to ensure that he received the payments. As the peasantry actually had control of the means of production (except in cases where labour services were exacted by the landowner), the landowners had to exercise some sort of compulsion to expropriate surplus produce.¹⁷

How far does this definition of feudalism correspond to conditions in Byzantium? Clearly, surplus labour extracted by the state to provide for the imperial court, a centralised bureaucracy and a large army cannot be considered in this light. Some historians have tended to confuse the

¹⁷ R. H. Hilton (ed.), *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London, 1976), p. 30; R. H. Hilton, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-industrial Europe: A Crisis of Feudalism', *Past and Present*, 80 (1978), pp. 3-19.

appropriation of rent by the state with feudalism,¹⁸ but this reduces feudalism to such a vague concept that it has little analytical value. The definition of feudalism outlined above has more relevance for the estates of members of the aristocracy or the monasteries, about whose lands we are relatively well informed. Where the state conceded extensive fiscal claims to landowners, the latter must have exercised some sort of coercion over the peasantry, but this is not well documented. This conflict between the centralised state and feudalism was a distinctive feature of Byzantine history. The development of feudalism was restricted by the survival of the state apparatus of late Antiquity, but it did eventually become a formidable threat to the integrity of the centralised state.

These issues have provoked much debate and controversy among historians. Ostrogorsky represents the old orthodoxy which has been subjected to telling criticisms in recent years. In his view Byzantium survived the crisis of the seventh and eighth centuries owing to the greater importance of communities of independent peasants in this period and to the formation of a new category of military lands – peasant farms with an obligation to provide a soldier for the state. The peasantry is represented as the backbone of the state.¹⁹ Certainly, peasant farmers were more easily controlled by the state than powerful aristocratic clans, making it easier for the state to exercise its authority. But there was little differentiation in economic activity. These peasants were primarily engaged in subsistence farming and were involved in commerce only on a very limited scale to obtain the cash required for their tax-payments. Consequently, there was little economic vitality in the early Middle Ages.

Ostrogorsky's judgement on the process of feudalisation is negative. By the tenth century the rise of feudal magnates threatened the social balance which Byzantium had achieved in the early Middle Ages. The subordination of previously free peasants to large landowners undermined the authority of the central government and consequently much of Asia Minor was lost to the Seljuk Turks in the eleventh century.²⁰ He even goes so far as to claim that the independent peasant largely

¹⁸ L. E. Havlik, 'The Genesis of Feudalism and the Slav Peoples', in V. Vavrinek (ed.), *Beiträge zur byzantinischen Geschichte im 9.–11. Jahrhundert* (Prague, 1978), pp. 133–4. The contrast between state tax-raising and the extraction of rent by landowners, representing two different economic systems, has been strongly emphasised by C. J. Wickham, 'The Uniqueness of the East', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 12, parts 2–3 (1985), pp. 166–96.

¹⁹ Ostrogorsky, *History*, pp. 133–4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 272–350.

disappeared, leaving only *paroikoi* belonging either to the state or to feudal landowners.²¹ Not only is this an unwise assertion given the limited nature of the surviving source material, but the distinction between an independent peasant and a *paroikos* of the state is never clearly established. Ostrogorsky represents feudalisation as a process of decadence.²²

Other historians, who have not followed Ostrogorsky's use of the concept of feudalism, agree with him in retaining the eleventh century as a critical turning-point in Byzantine history. The interpretations of Lemerle and Svoronos have been modified somewhat to place greater emphasis on the later decades of the eleventh century. Originally, both regarded that century as a period of demographic decline and Svoronos presented a very pessimistic picture of a decrease in agricultural production.²³ Subsequently, he conceded that there is some evidence of expansion in the urban economy, but he is reluctant to admit any similar trend in the rural economy. He concludes that during the course of the eleventh century whatever expansion there might have been came to an end and stagnation prevailed.²⁴ His conclusions complement those of Lemerle, who sees the first part of the eleventh century as a time of expansion. He emphasises the innovative role of ministers such as Nikephoritzes and the greater activity of the senate in politics during the century, but he sees the accession of Alexios Komnenos as marking a definitive end to such expansion and as the reply of an aristocratic conservatism. As he himself admits, such conclusions have to be examined in the light of evidence relating to the rural economy. He raises the possibility of a decline in production caused by the extension of large estates.²⁵

Much discussion in the eastern European literature on Byzantine agrarian history has centred around the specific characteristics of Byzantine feudalism and the extent to which it is comparable with feudalism in western Europe.²⁶ Generally, Soviet scholars place the

²¹ Ostrogorsky, *Quelques problèmes*, pp. 22–4.

²² Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine*, p. 92.

²³ N. Svoronos, 'Société et organisation intérieure dans l'empire byzantin au XI^e siècle: les principaux problèmes', in *Proceedings of the XIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Oxford 1966* (London, 1967), pp. 384–9. Lemerle, *The Agrarian History*, p. 188 n. 2.

²⁴ N. Svoronos, 'Remarques sur les structures économiques de l'empire byzantin au XI^e siècle', *Travaux et Mémoires*, 6 (1976), pp. 62–3.

²⁵ Lemerle, *Cinq études*, pp. 251–312, esp. p. 310.

²⁶ In particular the important contribution of H. Köpstein, 'Zu den Agrarverhältnissen', in F. Winkelmann et al., *Byzanz im 7. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1978), pp. 1–72. See also

origin of Byzantine feudalism in the seventh century. An exception is Lipsic, who regards the late Roman colonate as a sort of 'proto-feudalism'.²⁷ The major problem with her approach is that the *coloni* were bound to the soil by the state in order to secure its own fiscal revenues, creating a sharp distinction between the *colonus* and the dependent peasant under feudalism. She also stresses the importance of the Slav invasions, which supposedly provided the manpower to consolidate communities of independent peasants and to bring new land into cultivation.²⁸ For Sjuzjumov and others Byzantine feudalism originated in the free peasant communities, but was definitely established only in the tenth and eleventh centuries.²⁹ Sjuzjumov stresses the importance of the growth of commercial and artisanal activities, linking this question with the extension of feudal social relations. He connects economic developments too closely with the political fortunes of the state, and the presentation of the eleventh century as one of economic decline as well as political crisis is open to question.³⁰ An exception is Kazhdan, who was the first historian to regard the early medieval period as one of profound urban decline in Byzantium, with a subsequent revival in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. He represents the seventh century as the critical period for the evolution of medieval society. The disappearance of the ancient

V. Hrochova, 'La place de Byzance dans la typologie du féodalisme européen', in Vavrinek (ed.), *Beiträge*, pp. 31–45. K.-P. Matschke, 'Sozialschichten und Geisteshaltungen', *XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress. Akten, Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 31/1 (1981), pp. 189–212. Most of the Soviet literature is inaccessible to me, but some has been translated. See *Le Féodalisme à Byzance. Problèmes du mode de production de l'empire byzantin, Recherches Internationales à la Lumière du Marxisme*, 79 (1974). See also Z. V. Udal'cova and K. V. Chvostová, 'Les structures sociales et économiques dans la Basse-Byzance', *XVI Internationaler Byzantinistenkongress. Akten, Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 31/1 (1981), pp. 131–47; and G. G. Litavrin, 'Zur Lage der byzantinischen Bauernschaft im 10.–11. Jh. Strittige Fragen', in Vavrinek (ed.), *Beiträge*, pp. 47–70. For summaries of Soviet work, see A. P. Kazhdan, 'La byzantinologie soviétique en 1974–75', *Byzantion*, 49 (1979), pp. 506–53 and preceding volumes; I. Sorlin, 'Les recherches soviétiques sur l'histoire byzantine de 1945 à 1962', *Travaux et Mémoires*, 2 (1967), pp. 489–564; and I. Sorlin, 'Publications soviétiques sur le XI^e siècle', *Travaux et Mémoires*, 6 (1976), pp. 367–98.

²⁷ E. Lipchits, 'La fin du régime esclavagiste et le début du féodalisme à Byzance', *Le Féodalisme à Byzance*, p. 27.

²⁸ E. Lipchits, 'La ville et le village à Byzance du VI^e siècle jusqu'à la première moitié du IX^e siècle', *Le Féodalisme à Byzance*, p. 52.

²⁹ Sorlin, 'Les recherches soviétiques sur l'histoire byzantine de 1945 à 1962', p. 497. Z. Oudaltsova, 'À propos de la genèse du féodalisme à Byzance', *Le Féodalisme à Byzance*, pp. 37–9.

³⁰ M. I. Siouzioumov, 'Le village et la ville à Byzance aux IX^e–X^e siècles', *Le Féodalisme à Byzance*, pp. 65–74.

urban life-style had already begun, but it was accelerated by the contraction of towns and the increased importance of a barter economy from the middle of the seventh century. The Byzantine social structure also became more simplified. Dependent peasants became fewer and, owing to urban decline and the reduced importance of the provincial aristocracy, there was no significant intermediate level between the bureaucratic elite of the capital and the bulk of the population, mainly independent peasants. He also produces some evidence to contradict the view that the Komnenian period was a time of steady decline and includes literary evidence that agriculture might have been more prosperous in the twelfth century. Evidence of craft production suggests that by the twelfth century Constantinople no longer held a monopoly in the production of goods, especially silk. There appears to have been an economic shift away from Constantinople to the provinces, even though the capital still retained control of the manufacture of many luxury goods. This did not produce a new urban economy or ideology. Cautious attitudes to markets persisted and, in contrast to the west, provincial towns failed to develop their own identity, but were dominated by local magnates and administrators. Kazhdan also emphasises the concentration of power by the Komnenoi and a small group of related families through their monopolisation of military commands, and he considers their restructuring of the aristocracy as a new development closer to the feudal model of the west.³¹

The interpretation of some Soviet scholars show too much confidence in the existence of feudalism as early as the seventh century. Although it was certainly a time of fundamental transformation, emphasis on the importance of communities of independent peasants is incompatible with a definition of feudalism which is based on the subordination of peasant producers to private landowners. Some historians have used

³¹ See the publications in English of A. P. Kazhdan and G. Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium. An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1982); A. P. Kazhdan, in collaboration with S. Franklin, *Studies on Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 23–86; A. P. Kazhdan and A. W. Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, 1985), pp. 1–73; A. P. Kazhdan and A. Cutler, 'Continuity and Discontinuity in Byzantine History', *Byzantion*, 52 (1982), pp. 429–78. See also his critical assessment of the work of Litavrin and Lemerle, 'Remarques sur le XI^e siècle byzantin à propos d'un livre récent de Paul Lemerle', *Byzantion*, 49 (1979), pp. 491–503. In his later work he uses a definition of feudalism which is closer to the traditional usage of western historiography and is in contrast to his earlier work, which is summarised by Sorlin, 'Les recherches soviétiques sur l'histoire byzantin de 1945 à 1962', pp. 489–565 *passim*; and Sorlin, 'Publications soviétiques sur la XI^e siècle', pp. 367–80.

the concept 'centralised feudal rent' to account for the role of the state in expropriating surplus labour.³² Although the superficial form in which the surplus was appropriated did not differ whether the state or a feudal landowner was the beneficiary, it made a fundamental difference to the social structure. The state's role in fixing the level of payments made by the peasantry to landowners and in restricting the privileges of the latter was one aspect of the conflict between the centralised state, which survived from Antiquity, and the developing feudal social relations.

These problems need to be examined with a rigorous interrogation of the source material, but it will be useful first to consider in general terms how much scope this social formation gave for economic expansion. It must have had a largely restrictive influence. The major productive unit was the peasant household with a limited capability for making improvements to the land. Peasant communities probably achieved a certain amount through drainage and irrigation, but the most important method of producing more was simply to increase the area under cultivation. These considerations apply also to large properties, because they were divided up mainly among peasant cultivators. However, it is possible that the expansion of feudal estates did have some beneficial effects on Byzantine agriculture. Technological innovations were absent, but an equally important consideration is whether the potential of the land was more effectively exploited within the limits of the technology available to the Byzantines. The capacity of large landowners to bring extensive tracts of new land under cultivation quickly has already been mentioned. They also had the resources to effect large-scale irrigation works and to spend large sums on viticulture and arboriculture, which did not bring returns for several years. These improvements added to the revenues from agriculture, but the most important way of increasing feudal revenues was simply to acquire more peasant cultivators.

The development of towns and trade was closely linked to the

³² Sorlin, 'Les recherches soviétiques sur l'histoire byzantin de 1945 à 1962', p. 502; Sorlin, 'Publications soviétiques sur le XI^e siècle', pp. 376-7; Oudaltsova, 'À propos de la genèse du féodalisme à Byzance', pp. 42-3. This concept has also been used by Soviet historians working on the absolutist state of early modern Europe, which followed upon the crisis of medieval feudalism and is represented as a renewal of feudal domination; see P. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1974), pp. 15-42, esp. p. 35. Whatever value the concept has in analysing this historical situation, it is of very dubious utility when applied to the Byzantine state, whose apparatus for surplus expropriation was a direct continuation from the later Roman empire.

condition of the rural economy. The degree of occupational specialisation in towns depended first on the production of a large enough surplus by the rural population to support the urban population. The market for urban goods was closely linked to trends in the rural economy. The consumers of high-value luxury goods were the officials of the state and church and wealthy landowners. If revenues from the land were increasing, more could be spent on urban products. Therefore, an increase in agricultural production would have led to an increased ability to provision towns, greater activity in urban markets and an upsurge in commodity production. The discussion of the internal dynamic of the Byzantine social formation – its capacity for economic expansion – has to take into account the extent of, and the limitations to, urban growth. The fortunes of the towns offer a very clear reflection of developments in the economy as a whole.