

are drawn on and of the twentieth century scholars G. Ostrogorsky, Steven Obolensky, K. M. Setton, D. M. Nicol, A. Bon, J. Longnon, P. W. Topping, F. Thiret, and D. Zakyntinos. The bibliographical sources show a conscientious and responsible scholar at work.

The period covered by *Mediaeval Greece* is not one that is well known, even to Greek historians. It is a period that needs to be better understood in order for the student of Greece to understand better what led up to and what happened to Greece during the Ottoman period, and what the impact of that history has been on modern Greece.

Colgate University  
Hamilton, New York

JOHN E. REXINE

Angeliki E. Laiou-Thomadakis, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire: a Social and Demographic Study*. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1977, pp. xiv and 332, 3 maps, 2 graphs, 46 tables + 2 appendices.

It is certain that this study of the economy, society and demography of rural Macedonia in the fourteenth century will generate much debate for some years to come. For Prof. Laiou has not written a "safe" book — a monograph of guarded character and modest aims; rather, she has undertaken to analyze and assess virtually every major aspect of peasant life, including such formidable topics as the legal status of the *paroikos* (i.e., dependent peasant), peasant/landlord relationships, the size of peasant holdings, the quality of rural life, the size of the peasant family, the size of village population, movements of population, sex ratios, and death rates. In a word, the book is comprehensive and represents the most ambitious study of its kind. Each subject is thoughtfully considered and argued in detail. Prof. Laiou's powers of analysis are considerable and most evident when she focuses on a single document and validates her position on a fine point of interpretation, particularly in the area of law. Hence, in my opinion, the most satisfactory section in this book is Chapter V, where the author discusses the *paroikos* as a legal entity. The result is one of the most lucid expositions in print of the peasantry's attachment to the soil, their rights of inheritance, their rights of alienation of property, and their obligations for taxes and rent.

Less satisfactory is conceptualization and the manner in which evidence is handled when arriving at broad conclusions. Prof. Laiou's book has scope, but it is not broadness of vision that determines a study's true sweep; it is the character and quality of the evidence. The fact is that the sources for a study of the countryside in the late Byzantine period are of a limited type. Surviving land charters are almost exclusively monastic and hence the peasant society to which Prof. Laiou alludes in her title is in reality only one segment of this society, the villages in possession of the Athos monasteries. No hard data survives concerning crown land or estates of lay landlords and, as a result, it is pure surmise whether the course of events on monastic lands is an accurate reflection of conditions obtaining elsewhere. But apparently for Prof. Laiou no problem exists. One simply extrapolates and applies, without qualification, conclusions concerning monastic properties to the whole of Macedonia. Thus, after carefully charting the population of a group of *monastic* villages and showing that their population tended to be relatively stable between 1300-1320 and then suffered decline between 1320-1340, Prof. Laiou concludes (p. 266) that "the villages" —and here from context she seems

to mean "Macedonian" villages— "were poorer and smaller than they had been in the beginning of the fourteenth century". Without forewarning the author crosses over the line between what we can observe of monastic properties and what is unknown concerning lay holdings. In sum, the conclusion involves a large leap in logic.

Prof. Laiou asserts that population declined due to falling birth rates and out-migration. Undoubtedly she is correct that a portion of this out-migration is attributable to "invasions and instability..." which "often caused a movement of peasants not only into safer rural areas but also into fortified towns" (p. 263). A problem with this book is that causation tends to be one-dimensional; for it stresses convulsions in the political sphere, such as the Catalan invasions, as the reason for out-migration. The fact is no historian controls enough factors to be able to discern with precision the cause of any perceived migration of population in land charters. In any given instance, for example, agricultural considerations, such as flooding, soil exhaustion or over-grazing, might just as well have been the underlying cause of population contraction. In addition, it should be noted that it is rarely possible to trace peasants who left monastic estates. Therefore one can not be certain if migrating peasants or their households moved a great distance from a monastic village or only a few miles down (the road, with the result that the population of the district in which the monastic village was located suffered no real population decline. Prof. Laiou does not give consideration to the possibility that peasants left monastic estates and settled on nearby lay estates, where they may have enjoyed better terms for their exploitation of the soil. It is clear that Macedonia contained much cultivable land; only labor was in short supply and hence one may assume that there was competition for this labor. Since Prof. Laiou conceives of the Macedonian peasant as "oppressed" and the victim of "economic exploitation" (p. 278), there is no allowance for the notion that peasants moved elsewhere because they could upgrade the quality of their life.

A major feature of this book its use of statistics and in the first chapter Prof. Laiou describes the source material upon which she drew to compile her sample (mainly *praktika* or fiscal enregistrements) and lists information which she coded. This is all very well, but it would have been useful if the author had discussed in this section sample entries and enlightened the reader as to her interpretation of the evidence. For example, one would like to know how certain the author is that she can trace a family and its members from one fiscal enregistrement to another.

In conclusion, more *praktika* will be published in this decade and undoubtedly Prof. Laiou's book will be joined in the not too distant future by other studies involving statistical measurement. In the interim I suggest that researchers in this field should meet and openly debate, perhaps in the forum of a symposium, their views on the interpretation of *praktika* and their understanding of the potential and limitations of *praktika* for tracing the history of peasant society and demography of the countryside in the late Byzantine period. Prof. Laiou's book provides a good an excellent starting point for such discussion.

Gennadius Library,  
Athens, Greece

JOHN W. NESBITT