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Angeliki E. Laiou-Thomadakis, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire: A Social and Demographic Study*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. Pp. vii, 332. Index, Bibliography, Appendices, Graphs, Maps, Tables. Hardcover.

While historiography was one of the most developed genres of Byzantine literature, it has often been noted that such works have a strong bias toward the person of the Emperor and the court. From this bias, political historians have been able to construct a detailed picture of personalities, power struggles and military affairs in Constantinople. Social and economic historians, meanwhile, have been left to infer a great deal about conditions in the countryside from the random comments made by historians whose eyes were riveted to the Emperor. Even where inferences about social conditions can be made, precision and, indeed, proof are often lacking because of the absence of tax, census, and land-title records, which provide the raw material for judgments on such conditions. The dearth of such raw data is of course a function of the Empire's collapse and the long subjugation by the Turks. Record keeping disappeared in the face of conquest and the material was lost.

Angeliki Laiou-Thomadakis has taken an important step in correcting some of the imbalance of late Byzantine writers. Her subject is peasant life in the remnants of the Empire during the first half of the fourteenth century. Ironically, she is able to deal with this topic in some detail and subject her information to statistical study, precisely because of the Empire's decline. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Byzantine centralism gave way to a form of feudalism and the great landlords of the period kept their own records. Of these records, those belonging to the monasteries—the greatest of the landlords—have survived in the possession of the Orthodox Church. Laiou-Thomadakis examines in detail the *apographe* or assessments of property made by Macedonian monasteries in 1300-01, 1316-18, 1320-21, and 1338-41, using both published and unpublished material from Mt. Athos. The assessments consist of *praktika* or detailed inventories of all the possessions of the monasteries, of the peasant families, the land, vineyards, orchards, and animals, and tabulations of the taxes and fees due. The main sample consisted of 1547 cases fed into a computer after each had been broken down into 63 variables including age, sex, and status of family members, and the size and condition of various possessions.

Laiou-Thomadakis is quick to point out that this is not the first time such materials have been subjected to computer study; indeed, the fourteenth century appears to be the most easily quantified period in

Byzantine history, thanks to the monastic records. In this work, however, she seeks to expand the scope of such studies from purely fiscal matters to a whole range of questions on demography and social conditions. The actual mathematics involved consists primarily of correlations between thousands of separate variables, seeking to determine the composition of villages by age, sex, and kinship ties, the amount and quality of peasant land, and the mobility of the population. The precise answers to such questions are too complicated to review, resting as they do on a series of 48 graphs and tables. In general, however, the picture is not different from that which analyses of historical texts have already provided, illustrating as it does an era of population decline, reduced standards of living, loss of personal freedom, and increased feudal pressures. The importance of this work is not that it provides us with a radically new interpretation of the period, but rather that it takes us beyond the realm of generalities and toward conclusions based on detailed evidence.

The weight of these data, however, somewhat disrupts the flow of the text. The author is especially careful to justify her assumptions in organizing the statistics and to explain her methodology. As a result, her conclusions are fragmented, interspersed as they are with technical matters. The title of the book is therefore somewhat misleading in that the work is essentially organized data upon which to base an integrated account of peasant life in the fourteenth century using the full range of literary source material and taking advantage of comparisons with western medieval information. Laiou-Thomadakis' text does not itself accomplish a unified view of this sort. Nevertheless, while it is possible that individual assumptions and results may be questioned after further analysis, there is no question that this work provides a substantial supplement to the surviving textual material of the fourteenth century. As such, it is likely to be cited often in ensuing histories of the period as a fundamental key to rural conditions during the period of Byzantine decline.

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