

FARMING IN THE ANCIENT GREEK WORLD: HOW SHOULD THE SMALL FREE PRODUCERS BE DEFINED?*

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Abstract

In recent studies on the rural world in ancient Greece the application of the notion of peasant to the rural homestead has received several objections. Some scholars have preferred to use the notion of farmer to characterise the family smallholding. In this paper I first review these standpoints, and then reconsider the evidence concerning the Greek words *georgos* and *autourgos* and also concerning the patterns of settlement and agricultural systems produced by archaeological surveys. Finally, I offer my own view based on a model of multiple social and economic situations in which Greek smallholders could be involved along the family life cycle.

Introduction

In recent times, the study of the rural world in ancient Greece has acquired an extraordinary relevance.¹ This has allowed a more complete understanding of Greek agriculturalists.² But the definition of their social situation has become a controversial subject. To some extent, the discussion of the agrarian basis of the *polis* has been linked to this matter, especially in English-language studies. Several debates have finally progressed throughout the notions of peasant and of farmer. It is not a mere question of names but a problem of definition of the social class and of the type of productive unit being analysed. Starting from a review of different positions, in this article I will offer an interpretation of Hellenic cultivators and of certain factors related to the working of the rural *oikos*.³

Greek agriculturalists: peasants or farmers?

The peasant is often defined as a small self-sufficient producer who employs family labour to work a mixed farm. Living in little rural communities and a specific traditional culture constitute other aspects of his specific situation. Agrarian societies often present social differentiations and involve several rapports between cultivators and the landed gentry. So, another important element is that peasants must transfer a

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¹ See Cartledge 1993; 1995; Gallego 2001; 2003.

² In this paper I only consider the agrarian units of production based fundamentally on family labour, leaving aside the landed estates that could exploit different types of labour force. On the other hand, in this article the notions of householder, small producer, small freeholder, smallholder, as well as those of agriculturalist, countryman, cultivator, farmhand, grower, will be taken as equivalent with a merely descriptive purpose. The conceptual attention will only be centred on the notions of farmer and of peasant.

³ On the *oikos* cf. Pesando 1987; Nevett 1999. See also Ault & Nevett 2005.

regular surplus to the ruling elite.⁴ This is partly the picture of ancient *paysans* by Claude Mossé, who also maintains the idea that Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Virgil's *Georgics* reflect the common characteristics of peasant life in classical antiquity.⁵

Moses Finley and Geoffrey de Ste. Croix seem to agree with this perspective and conceptualise the small rural producers as peasants. But beyond this coincidence both authors show substantial differences around a significant issue. In Finley's view, ancient peasants were generally free landowners who received effective protection against exploitation by means of citizen rights. Their inclusion as full members of the political body made them an exception with regard to other cultivators who were broadly exploited.⁶ On the other hand, Ste. Croix proposes that citizen rights did not constitute a significant obstacle against the extraction of surplus from ancient peasants. Beyond different economic situations (freeholder, lessee, tenant, etc.), the common condition was the exploitation of peasants through debts, taxes, military recruitment, labour services, etc.⁷

In his research of ancient Roman peasants, Peter Garnsey compares the Greek situation with the Roman one, remarking the "great exception" of Attic peasants. For the Roman situation, the author has proposed the existence of an underlying mechanism of the imperial expansion according to which peasant-soldiers were later installed in new lands as farmers. Besides this, he has pointed out that most of the peasants lived in the countryside, not in town, and that owner-cultivators, tenant-farmers and day-labourers constituted three overlapping categories, which provided the necessary labour force to landed estates in combination with chattel-slaves.⁸ Although Garnsey uses the notions of peasant and of farmer, in fact he assimilates the latter to the former. In later works on famine and food supply, Garnsey has reconsidered these questions, also adopting the ideas provided by peasant studies. In his vision, the peasant is apart from the entrepreneurial farmer and from the primitive cultivator.⁹ Despite noticing it is a pipedream to speak of a "typical ancient peasant," he adopts the most common definition: the peasant is a small rural producer with simple equipment who utilises family labour to produce the stuffs for his own subsistence as well as for those who hold the political and/or economic powers.¹⁰

So, one of the main contributions made by Finley, Garnsey and Ste. Croix consisted in the adoption for ancient history of concepts such as peasant economy, elaborated in the field of other social sciences.¹¹ Thomas Gallant also assumes this notion of peasant economy to analyse the small Greek householders: because they constituted a part of a wider society, they employed domestic labour to produce their own subsistence, and they transferred an important surplus to maintain other social statuses. But the Greek peasantry was not a one-piece group: a fluctuating line separated the

⁴ Redfield 1956; Wolf 1966; Powell 1972; Shanin 1973–74; Worsley 1981.

⁵ Mossé 1966: Part II, Ch. 1.

⁶ Finley 1999 [1st ed. 1973]: Ch. 4.

⁷ Ste. Croix 1981: 208–26.

⁸ Garnsey 1976; 1979; 1980 = Garnsey 1998: 91–105, 107–31, 134–48, respectively.

⁹ Garnsey 1988: 43–48; cf. 1999: 23–28.

¹⁰ See Shanin 1972: Ch. 2.

¹¹ See for instance Chayanov 1986 [1st ed. 1966]; Galeski 1972; Shanin (ed.) 1971; Shanin 1971.

rich peasant from the poor one, and in a while the former could become the latter and vice versa.¹²

Another aspect is the relationship between agriculturalists and the market. In his analysis of the world of Hesiod, Paul Millett has rigorously elaborated the link between peasants and trade, appropriately criticising the interpretations that consider the Boiotian poet as an aristocrat. He has also indicated that the definition of peasant proposed by sociologists and anthropologists is based on the study of contemporary or recent circumstances. In these cases, peasant communities appear as part-societies in which market-oriented production has an essential role. But in ancient Greece, small producers were not fully integrated into a developed market. In this sense, Hesiod allows us to understand the working of a peasant village built on a coherent system of values and institutions, such as *oikos* autonomy, autarky, and the obligatory nature of reciprocity, which delimited concrete patterns of exchange within the village.¹³

About this point, Josiah Ober indicates that “most of Attica was farmed by smallholders, families of peasants who worked plots averaging 9–13 acres (40–60 plethra) on a subsistence basis. A very limited amount of grain was produced for the city market; the bulk of Attic grain was consumed by those who produced it.”¹⁴ In this context, he can alternate the words farmer and peasant, although he only includes the former but not the latter in the analytic index. Stephen Hodkinson, who makes a repeated use of farmer, presents a similar fluctuation. But he characterises the *polis* as a self-governed community in which the inclusion of peasants into the citizen body gave them an undeniable political force. It was a world dominated by the ethics of household autarky and inhabited thoroughly by citizen-peasants dedicated to a mixed farming, in which the trade infrastructure beyond the local level was relatively underdeveloped.¹⁵

Robin Osborne agrees with these descriptions but not with the conceptualisations. Farmers can coincide with peasants due to the low technological level, the link between farm and family, an economy depending on agriculture, and probably the immediate use of family labour. But farmers are neither exploited nor dominated by external agents, nor are they in possession of a distinctive traditional culture. They establish neither a clear separation between city and country, nor an explicit recognition of the division between small and large proprietors.¹⁶ However, in a later study Osborne refers to the agrarian foundation of the *polis* using the expression “the peasant basis of society.”¹⁷ In spite of this he has recently argued again, in relation to Hesiod, that it makes no sense to classify his situation by means of modern categories like that of peasant, since many of its defining features are absent.¹⁸ On the other hand, Signe Isager and Jens Skydsgaard also adopt an ambiguous approach, albeit for other reasons: the Greek world was a set of communities constituted by peasants. But there were exceptional city-states that were not essentially populated by them, like Athens or Corinth, where ways of earning a living other than agriculture did exist. So, the

¹² Gallant 1991: 4–5.

¹³ Millett 1984; cf. 1991: 28–39, 45–52, 74–75.

¹⁴ Ober 1985: 21; cf. 1996: 135–38.

¹⁵ Hodkinson 1988: 57.

¹⁶ Osborne 1985a: 142 and n. 47.

¹⁷ Osborne 1987: 13.

¹⁸ Osborne 1996: 145–46.

peasant pattern can be applied to most of the small *poleis*, but it is incompatible with the knowledge we have of the largest ones.¹⁹

Recently, Anthony Edwards has examined the nature of Hesiod's village, proposing that it cannot be defined as a peasant community due to its independence with respect to external powers. The author agrees with Millett concerning agriculture, household autonomy and reciprocity, but dissents with him about the use of the notion of peasant. To maintain this, Edwards specifically adopts the classical view of peasant that we have seen before,²⁰ and consequently states that Hesiod's village "is a world that remains unhierarchized and unregimented by the *polis* system, by the need to supply a *basileus* or an elite with a surplus."²¹ But as is known, Hesiod's situation is often used to maintain that the development of the *polis* implied the subordination of smallholders to the city-state organisation and their exploitation by the wealthy landlords,²² as David Tandy has suggested it in a recent work.²³ Evidently, the problem remains the same: what kind of concepts must we employ to explain the issue?

On the other hand, several scholars have fully accepted the concept of farmer, although in different ways. Michael Jameson applies the notion of farmer because the ancient Greek language had no term for "peasant". Consequently, it should be constantly amended when it is used for the Greco-Roman world to distinguish ancient populations from those of the medieval and modern ages.²⁴ But as Ellen Wood has argued, the adjustment in the definition of peasant is a consequence of its application to, for instance, the specific situation of agriculturalists in the Athenian democracy compared with other peasant societies. Attic smallholders' citizenship reduced the necessity to intensify labour because it limited the surplus extraction in a way unknown to other agrarian formations. Thus, it would be necessary to re-examine the definition of peasant as a cultivator who depends on certain rights on land and on family labour for his subsistence, but who is ruled and exploited by external powers in the framework of a wider social system. Athenian peasants (and possibly most of Greek agriculturalists) were exempt from payments and exactions which were common in most of peasant societies.²⁵ But this debate between Jameson and Wood has gone beyond the question of farmer or peasant categories. Indeed, a fundamental issue in their arguments has been the use of slave labour inside the small farmsteads. For Jameson, the employment of some slaves gave the Attic farmer the option of political and military participation without neglecting production.²⁶ For Wood, since the

¹⁹ Isager & Skydsgaard 1992: 113–14. Cartledge 1993: 132, 134, points out that the term "peasant" can be useful if it refers to a countryman, since most ancient Greeks lived in and from the countryside. Cartledge criticises Isager & Skydsgaard 1992 because they indicate that Athens was different from other *poleis* concerning the economic importance of agriculture and landed wealth.

²⁰ Edwards 2004: 5, 163. See Redfield 1956: 23–40.

²¹ Edwards 2004: 166.

²² E.g. Will 1957: 12–24; Detienne 1963: 15–27. See also Austin & Vidal-Naquet 1972: 74–77; Fernández Ubiña 1977: 86–91; Gschnitzer 1981: 49–56; Mossé 1984: 97–99; Perysinakis 1986. Will had argued a line of continuity between the Boiotian situation in Hesiod's times and the situation of Athens before Solon that he solved by means of his reforms. On this see Wood 1988: 89–98.

²³ Tandy 2001; cf. 1997: 203–27.

²⁴ Jameson 1992: 136 and n. 3; cf. 1994.

²⁵ Wood 1983: 8–9; 1988: 51–63.

²⁶ Jameson 1977/78; 1992: 142–45; see Hanson 1992; 1995: 63–70, 129–30.

Athenian peasant was neither subjected nor exploited, he could dedicate his extra time to non-economic activities.²⁷

Alison Burford also rejects the term peasant bearing in mind the arguments previously examined. Nevertheless, she recognises that the idea of peasant can be helpful to describe psychological attitudes of different social groups in ancient Greece.²⁸ On the other hand, Victor Hanson resolutely assumes the notion of farmer and argues that the *polis* was essentially founded on free farmers, whose horizons were hard work, competition, the *ethos* of an intensive agriculture, family needs and a valuable production to trade. Regarding landlords and peasants, farmers constituted a new class of self-employed owners who were responsible for their own survival and participated in sophisticated market systems. Hanson lists eleven reasons in favour of the application of the notion of farmer to ancient Greek agriculturalists: 1) they did not have debts with the rich; 2) they owned money; 3) they paid no rents or taxes; 4) they marketed surpluses; 5) they had equal political rights; 6) they volunteered for the army; 7) they were responsible for their own social status; 8) they possessed slaves; 9) they were not separated from the elite by the size or nature of their farms; 10) they had clear rights on their farms, reserves, slaves and weapons; 11) they could carry out changes in agricultural techniques. Finally, the author concludes that “it is nearly impossible to envision Greek homestead farmers as systematically being exploited by outsiders, or in possession of a distinct cultural tradition of victimization,” pointing out two cardinal aspects of the usual definition of peasant that he believes inadequate for the analysis of Greek growers.²⁹

In a French context, Marie-Claire Amouretti indicates that the Greek model does not fit into sociological categories such as primitive society, peasant society or industrial society: “Ce qui caractérise l’insertion du mode de vie agricole dans la société générale, c’est l’intermédiaire de la polis. Communauté de citoyens, celle-ci leur réserve le droit de propriété comme le droit politique. Ces cités de petite taille ont défendu leurs frontières et limité de ce fait la cohérence d’une société paysanne.”³⁰ Once again, this leads us to the particular position of the ancient Greek agriculturalists compared with the usual subordination of most peasants. In this sense, it is not a problem to adapt the analytical categories according to the Greek specific conditions, and not only the notion of peasant but also that of farmer have to be revised for the study of ancient Greece. Actually, the notion of farmer has acquired a precise meaning in connection with the modern family farm which appears as a market-oriented economy rather than as a subsistence one.³¹ It is clear that analytic approaches adopted by the scholars determine their explanations about Greek smallholders. If the operative

²⁷ Wood 1983; 1988: 42–80.

²⁸ Burford 1993: 85–86, 172. As Burford says (pp. 86–87), Hesiod can be considered as the one that most thoroughly expresses the interest of all the householders that own land, while Homer on occasions can show in his heroes some attitudes characteristic of a peasant mentality. See Finley 1999 [1st ed. 1973]: 108. But, in the historical context of fifth- and fourth-century Athens, these supposed “peasant” attitudes of landlords have been correctly rejected by Osborne 1991: 136–42.

²⁹ Hanson 1995: 95–108. The author is the most enthusiastic in the use of the notion of farmer for the analysis of Greek agriculturalists. He even compares (pp. 1–22) the Hellenic countrymen with the American agriculturalists; see also Hanson 1996.

³⁰ Amouretti 1986: 199.

³¹ On this issue see Galeski 1971: 122; cf. 1972: Ch. 1–3, and Ch. 6–7. For the ancient world, this question has been pointed out by Finley 1999 [1st ed. 1973]: 105, as well as by Wood 1983: 8.

definitions contributed by sociologists, anthropologists and others are transformed into canonical and rigid ones, probably little scope will be left to analyse Hellenic cultivators with the category of peasant. But as Finley and Wood have pointed out, the idea of peasants not submitted to exploitation because of their incorporation as full citizens of the political community is an impressive alternative.

In sum, the problem of these debates is not only the conceptualisation of free agriculturalists but also the explanation of their position in the social structure. Three positions seem to stand out from the previous remarks. The first one ascertains the existence of peasants in relation to landlords but maintains that in the Greek *polis* the former were not exploited by the latter, and this constituted her *differentia specifica*.³² The second position also uses the category of peasant, but it points out that many peasants had to pay rents or taxes to landlords or the state, as in many other agrarian societies.³³ In opposition to the first one, this vision is centred in the *long durée* process that goes beyond the Greek *polis* period. The third perspective highlights that the small Greek freeholders were farmers who constituted a separate class in relation to the absentee landlords and the peasants who had to supply the former with a surplus.³⁴

The choice of one category or another has possibly been affected by the political situation as well as by intellectual guidelines. As is known, a series of Alexander Chayanov's works on peasant economy was published for the first time in the western world during the 1960s (first in English, but soon after in other languages). This could clarify why during the 1970s and until the middle 1980s the notion of peasant was widely used as a means of renewing the methodological approaches to agrarian societies. But from the mid-1980s and during the 1990s the criticisms of this notion resulted from the widespread use of the concept of farmer. This was perhaps an effect of the abandonment of Marxist positions derived from the failure of the socialist world and of the confinement of the notion of peasant to explain only the situation of rural exploited populations.³⁵

Greek smallholding's rationality: towards a multiple model

What happens if we change the conceptual starting point that all the scholars have assumed up to this moment? Indeed, in order to accept or to reject the notion of peasant, and in consequence to adopt or to discard the notion of farmer, the common starting point is the definition offered at the beginning of this paper. But new studies and methodological contributions can lead us through new paths, such as Frank Ellis' strictly economic definition.³⁶ According to him, it is not necessary to think of the peasantry as a class completely exploited by the landlords or the state. His definition claims that peasants are a part of a wider economic system, and for that reason their economic behaviour as small agricultural producers depends on how the wider system

³² Finley 1999 [1st ed. 1973]: 96; Wood 1983: 8–9; 1988: 53–54.

³³ Ste. Croix 1981: 210–11; Garnsey 1988: 45–47; 1999: 25–26; Gallant 1991: 4.

³⁴ Jameson 1992: 142–45; 1994; Burford 1993: 83–88, 167–72, 182–86; Hanson 1995: 105–20.

³⁵ The use of the concept of peasant by Donlan 1973 and that of farmer by Donlan 1997 maybe could be an example of these changes. But there are scholars who have continued using "peasant" from the mid-1980s and during the 1990s, e.g. Morris 1987; 1991; 1994; 1996; 2000.

³⁶ Ellis 1993 [1st ed. 1988]: 3–16, 276–77; see Netting 1993, with Martinez-Alier 1995.

works for them. It allows the peasants certain self-sufficiency for survival which can on occasion be important to explain their economic behaviour. It emphasises that peasant production takes place in a context of factor markets and of product markets not fully formed; these “imperfect” markets will impact differently on the relative autonomy of small rural producers, as well as on the type of economic choices they make. It is useful to distinguish peasants from agricultural capitalist enterprises that use wage labour, as well as from commercial family farms that operate in a context of fully formed factor and product markets. It gives a strategic perspective to agricultural policies often interested in accelerating the transition from peasant to commercial family farms by improving the working of markets, increasing the use of bought supplies and removing the social and economic restrictions that distinguish the peasants from other economic actors in a market-driven system. But if it is only possible to speak of farmer when the family agricultural economy is fully integrated into a completely developed market, then this notion can only be used in the context of a capitalist economy. In that case, the notion of farmer must be amended according to the Greek agriculturalists’ situation. A way of advancing on this issue is to go back to the available evidence, especially that which allows us to consider the small independent rural producer who possessed a farm based on family labour.

Burford has gathered an important part of the literary sources related to this matter, and her analysis underlines a point to keep in mind.³⁷ The Greek word *georgos* — which she associates with the notion of farmer — presents ambiguous and contrasting meanings: an agriculturalist that farms his own land, and a cultivator that works for another. Sometimes the term *georgos* is applied also to the slaves.³⁸ For Burford, the term *autourgos* is the best to represent the citizen-farmer position in the Greek world. Indeed, the word *georgos* could simply mean a farm property-owner, as can be deduced from Aristotle’s *Politics*:³⁹

“For the purpose of making the people an agricultural community (*georgon ton demon*), not only were some of the laws that were enacted in many states in early times entirely serviceable, prohibiting the ownership of more than a certain amount of land (*gen metrou tinos*) under any conditions or else of more than a certain amount lying between a certain place and the citadel or city ...”

Despite these ambiguities, Aristophanes uses the term *georgos* to identify a countryman who cultivates the land by himself, albeit sometimes assisted by a slave, as happens with Trygaeus in *Peace* and Chremylus in *Wealth*. But this did not take them away from the group that had to work with their own hands; rather they belonged to the same social class as those who, due to poverty, were only able to keep an ox that functioned as a servant.⁴⁰ In *Peace*, the virtue of these cultivators is openly glorified,

³⁷ Burford 1993: 15, 167–72.

³⁸ See Amouretti 1986: 212, 214, 216.

³⁹ Aristotle, *Politics* 1319a 6–10 (Aristotle in 23 volumes. Vol. 21 translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1944 [Loeb Classical Library]). See also Demosthenes 18.41; 19.314; Finley 1985 [1st ed. 1952]: 258 (n. 98).

⁴⁰ Such is the commentary to Hesiod (*Works and Days* 405) that can be read in Aristotle (*Politics* 1252b 12). But the possession of an ox could on occasion be an inconvenience for the farmhand who depended on himself for his subsistence.

and it is clearly highlighted that their virtue derives from their dedication to work.⁴¹ Aristophanes also shows that the smallholders carried out the farming tasks by themselves (orchards, vineyards and figs in this case) using their own farm implements.⁴²

This representation allows us to associate the *georgos* with another figure that defines more clearly the class position of the Hellenic agriculturalists. The term *autourgos* applied to the independent producer undoubtedly indicates that he subsists by his own work. The Greek sources present us several indications about this, even though at times the description of the *autourgos* acquires a negative connotation. Xenophon sets the *autourgos* together with the *georgos* (who could be a landed knight, as it happens with Ischomachus) because both combine the best conditions for being a citizen and a soldier, due to the physical strength they acquire labouring the land with their own hands.⁴³ The rural *autourgos* faces permanent difficulties that he has to solve adding more and more of his own work. In this sense, the *autourgos* appears as a paradigmatic character that confronts the poverty with dignity, a kind of austerity that tempers the spirit of the best soldiers. This is clearly what derives from the picture we find in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. Although in this case the term is applied to the Persians, it is evident that what is being reflected is the Greek mental image regarding the *autourgos*. In Cyrus' words, those who cultivate the land by themselves are the best bodyguards, since they have to struggle with an inclement land and their own poverty.⁴⁴ Pheraulus reaffirms these conditions when he describes his father's way of life, which he has had to adopt:⁴⁵

"Rich, indeed!; nay rather, as everybody knows, one of those who lived by the labour of their hands. To be sure, my father, who supported us by hard labour and close economy on his own part (*autos ergazomenos*), managed to give me the education of the boys; but when I became a young man, he could not support me in idleness, and so he took me off to the farm and put me to work. And there, as long as he lived, I, in turn, supported him by digging and planting a very little plot of ground. It was really not such a very bad plot of ground, but, on the contrary, the most honest; for all the seed that it received it returned fairly and honestly, and yet with no very great amount of interest. And sometimes, in a fit of generosity, it would even return to me twice as much as it received."

Euripides has a high respect for the *autourgos*, since he is the only one disposed to defend the land, is sensible in political affairs and practises an irreproachable way of life.⁴⁶ Aristotle also offers us a positive image of this group, which he locates among those who are appreciated for their generosity, courage and equity; this would be the

⁴¹ Aristophanes, *Peace* 508, 511, 588, 603.

⁴² *Ibid.* 550–59. See also Aristophanes, *Wealth* 223, 903; Lysias 20.33; Isaeus 9.18.

⁴³ Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 5.4.

⁴⁴ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 7.5.67–68.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 8.3.37–38 (*Xenophon. Cyropaedia. Books V–VIII*, translated by Walter Miller. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1914 [Loeb Classical Library]). Menander (*Georgos* 34–39) points out a similar point: "I don't think anyone at all farms land more pious than this is! Myrtle it bears, and splendid ivy and so many flowers. And if it's sown with other crops, it gives a true and fair return — not in excess, but just the right amount." (*Menander. The plays and fragments*, translated with notes by Maurice Balme with an introduction by Peter Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [Oxford World's Classics]); see also Menander, *Dyscolus* 369–70. Polybius (4.21.1) is in accord with Xenophon about the characteristics of *autourgia*.

⁴⁶ Euripides, *Orestes* 918–22; cf. *Electra* 35–38.

distinctiveness of all those who do not live at the expense of others but by their own work, especially people who farm the land by the labour of their hands.⁴⁷ For Plato, the people (*demos*) are also identified with those who survive on their own labour (*autourgoi*) and who are politically quiet (*apragmones*) without possessing much property. But when the people are assembled, it is the most numerous and sovereign in the democracy.⁴⁸

In Pericles' words, according to Thucydides, the concept of *autourgos* applied to the Peloponnesians acquires a pejorative connotation.⁴⁹ However, the features attributed to the Peloponnesian *autourgoi* are coincident with the characterisation that we have already seen: people with scarce wealth who live by the labour of their hands and whose capacity to serve in the army and participate in military operations is subordinated to the agrarian economic logic; infantrymen who are not very willing to be absent from their territory, who prefer to develop brief campaigns, who contribute their own resources for the war (the hoplite's weapons) and who combat committing their own bodies.⁵⁰

How should the class position of these *georgoi ourgoi* be interpreted from a conceptual point of view? Although the testimonies underline the farm's autonomous character and the value of the cultivator's own labour, this says nothing about a marketable surplus production. Rather, it seems to insinuate that we are dealing with a subsistence agricultural system. However, Hesiod⁵¹ and Aristophanes⁵² pointed out that growers regularly exchanged products in the market.⁵³ In view of this question, it is now convenient to return to the explanations of the scholars and to examine some of their arguments.

Leaving aside all those who underline the exploitation of ancient householders, the most remarkable fact is the coincident statement on the existence of a large class of independent growers not obliged to supply a regular surplus. At first, this idea has been developed for the Athenian case, but it is now being applied to the Greek world during the late Archaic and Classical period.⁵⁴ In this framework, as we have

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1381a 21–25.

⁴⁸ Plato, *Republic* 565a. On the *autourgos* and democratic *polis*, see Carter 1986: 76–98.

⁴⁹ Thucydides 1.141.3–5.

⁵⁰ For Burford 1993: 170, the statement should be limited with reference to the Spartans, because according to another passage of Thucydides (3.15.2), they made the preparations for the war with great decision, while their allies acted with more parsimony because they were not interested or because they were in the harvest. The situation of the Peloponnesian *autourgoi* was perhaps a result of their dependency on the resources of their own land, while, according to what Pericles points out soon after in the same speech, the Athenians had abundant lands in the islands and in the continent (under the cleruchy system). See Thucydides 1.143.4–5, with the remarks of Burford 1993: 258 (n. 5), and of Strauss 1987: 52 and n. 59, who sees the *autourgoi* as “farmers of their own land.” On cleruchies, see Salomon 1997.

⁵¹ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 618–32, 643–94.

⁵² Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 32–36, 723–25, 818–19, 836–41, 909–25; *Wasps* 170; *Knights* 316–18; *Assembly-women* 817–21.

⁵³ As Thorner 1971: 207, says: “We are sure to go astray if we try to conceive of peasant economies as exclusively ‘subsistence’-oriented and suspect capitalism wherever the peasants show evidence of being ‘market’-oriented. It is much sounder to take it for granted, as a starting point, that for ages peasant economies have had a double orientation towards both. In this way, much fruitless discussion about the nature of so-called ‘subsistence’ economies can be avoided.”

⁵⁴ See for instance Hanson 1995. Even Ste. Croix 1981: 213, 225, 285–89, who set peasants inside the exploited class, should recognise that Greek democracy meant for the small producer a true protection against exploitation. For Garnsey 1976: 222 = 1998: 93, this was a “great exception.”

already seen, the relative austerity of the Attic countrymen who worked for themselves has led to the notion that they were peasants depending on subsistence agriculture. On the contrary, it has been also affirmed that they would not be peasants but farmers, since they lacked a specific traditional culture. But their relative austerity should not deceive us. The testimonies of Aristophanes already examined point out that the Attic *georgos* could combine various kinds of cultivation, which supposes a way of intensifying production. In agreement with this Aristophanic representation we find in the *Palatine Anthology* the following description of different agrarian tasks:⁵⁵

“Dear Earth, take to your breast the old Amyntichus, and remember his many toils for your sake. In you he always firmly set the stem of the olive tree, and decorated you with the vines of Bacchus. He made you abundantly fruitful with grain, and drawing out the channels of water he made you rich in vegetables and fruit. So in return lie gently round his aged head, and dress yourself in flowers of spring.”

Some authors have pointed out that this farming strategy was in fact able to produce beyond family subsistence needs, that is, to produce for the markets.⁵⁶ It would be an intensive cultivation system combining crops of cereals, olive trees, vines, pulses, vegetables and fruit trees, with less time devoted to fallow and more attention to soil improvement (manure, weeding, terraces building and maintenance), with a few animals, a high input of hand labour, and good water supply.⁵⁷ This system would imply a profit-maximisation logic but in a context of “incomplete or imperfect markets.”⁵⁸ However, other authors have proposed that the intensive agriculture based on polycropping and intercropping was the result of a risk-minimisation strategy of the small agrarian producers.⁵⁹ But as Ellis demonstrates, risk aversion and profit-maximisation are twin logics based on decision-making process, that is, individual choices with the objective of maximising personal “welfare” or “happiness.”⁶⁰

Archaeological survey of the agrarian landscapes and settlement patterns in ancient Greece has allowed reviewing different aspects of these ancient agricultural practices.⁶¹ This has made possible a reconsideration of literary and epigraphic evidence. In my view, there are three main factors to consider. In the first place, the distribution of the land in regular and relatively equal plots has been verified throughout the Greek world (and especially in colonial regions).⁶² Secondly, the fragmentation of land holdings would have made possible the control of several ecological niches and

⁵⁵ *Palatine Anthology* 7.321 (I quote the English translation from Burford 1993: 14). The account of Laertes’ farm (Homer, *Odyssey* 1.188–93; 24.205–12) presents several coincidences. See also the list of products cultivated in the Alkinoos’ farm (*ibid.* 7.112–30).

⁵⁶ Jameson 1994: 56–58; Hanson 1995: 47–89.

⁵⁷ On orchards with water supply see Homer, *Iliad* 5.87–92; 21.257–62, 346–47.

⁵⁸ Ellis 1993 [1st ed. 1988]: 10, 76, 153–56; Netting 1993: 155–56, 261–94.

⁵⁹ Garnsey 1988: 48–55; 1999: 22–42; Gallant 1991: 34–59.

⁶⁰ Ellis 1993 [1st ed. 1988]: 90, 279; cf. 65–145.

⁶¹ The following pages are based on Gallego 2004; 2005: 34–41; 2007.

⁶² On the distribution of the land throughout the Greek world see Finley 1985 [1st ed. 1952]: 58–59; Graham 1964: 59; Asheri 1971; Lepore 1973: 25; Martin 1973: 103; Pečirka 1973; Andreyev 1974; Burford 1977/78: 168–70; 1993: 67–69; Boyd & Jameson 1981: 327, 336; Carter 1981; 1990: 425–30; Saprykin 1994: 73–94; Hanson 1995: 186–89, 194–95. Now see McInerney 2004: 22–26.

a better organisation to deal with subsistence risks.⁶³ Thirdly, the operation of an intensive agro-pastoral family farm would be based on the Mediterranean triad crops (cereal, vine, olive) supplemented by pulses, garden vegetables, fruit trees and animal husbandry.⁶⁴ All this would allow obtaining a higher productivity to feed a larger population in territories that could often require the construction of terraces or trenches.⁶⁵

This characterisation of the agro-pastoral farm would seem to show the autonomy of the domestic economy, which could be related to certain patterns of residence of the Greek cultivators. The buildings that archaeological surveys have found in the Greek countryside have been considered a possible indication of these patterns. Were those buildings applied only to storage? Or did the agriculturalists use them to live in their own farms? The problem is to establish if farmers lived scattered in isolated farms or grouped in villages — or in the urban centres of small cities — from where they walked each morning to their farms.

The sources are not conclusive, which has made it possible to maintain two conflicting explanations from the same case. In effect, the study of Attic patterns of residence has been used to suggest that nucleated settlements were an essential feature, with the exception of the deme of Atene where isolated farmhouses were the rule.⁶⁶ On the contrary, this case has been used to indicate the relevance of isolated rural dwellings.⁶⁷ The epigraphic and literary texts, many of them referred to Athens, have also been analysed to affirm the primacy of isolated homesteads in the Attic countryside and to establish in this context the exact meaning of terms like *khōrion*, *oikia* and *agros*.⁶⁸ Nicholas Jones has reviewed the Attic case, underlining that patterns of settlement were focused on scattered farmhouses and associated with an individualistic behaviour, a higher productivity and production for the market.⁶⁹ He has analysed the specific meaning of the words *khōrion* and *oikia*, land and building, considering for this the evidence provided by the *poletai* records of public sales, the *rationes centesimarum*, leases, security *horoi*, which would prove this pattern of isolated residence.⁷⁰

On the other hand, the presence of a tower (*pyrgos*) has occasionally been considered as evidence of an isolated farmstead, but it could only be interpreted in this way if it is possible to verify the function and location of the house: the tower could be used to protect agricultural supplies, farming equipment, and even people.⁷¹ Besides this, archaeological surveys of different Greek regions have expanded our

⁶³ Garnsey 1988: 48–49; Gallant 1991: 41–45. See for instance Sophocles, *Trachiniai* 32–33; Aristotle, *Politics* 1330a 9–18. For comparative perspectives see Forbes 1976; cf. Bentley 1987.

⁶⁴ On the intensive mixed farming see Jameson 1977/78; Halstead 1981; 1987; 1989; Halstead & Jones 1989; Gallant 1982; 1991: 46–57; Garnsey 1988: 49–50, 93–94; Hodkinson 1988; Burford 1993: 67–77; Hanson 1995: 50, 91–126. For criticisms see Isager & Skydsgaard 1992: 108–14; Edwards 2004: 127–56.

⁶⁵ Foxhall 1996; see also Provansal 1990.

⁶⁶ Osborne 1985a: 17–42, 190–95; 1985b; 1992. See for instance Lysias 12. Cf. Semple 1931: 539; Finley 1985 [1st ed. 1952]: 62; 1983: 82, 85 (n. 39); Pečirka 1973: 133–37; Humphreys 1978: 130–35; Gallant 1982: 118–19; Donlan 1985: 301–302; Morris 1987: 5; Wood 1988: 102.

⁶⁷ Lohmann 1992.

⁶⁸ Roy 1988; 1996; Langdon 1991. See for instance Demosthenes 55; Euripides, *Electra*.

⁶⁹ Jones 2004: 17–47. See also Nevett 2005; Nagle 2006: 68 (n. 97), 71–72 and nn. 112–113.

⁷⁰ On *rationes centesimarum* see Lewis 1973, and especially the commented edition by Lambert 1997. On leases see Brunet, Rougemont & Rousset 1998, with examples and commentaries. On *horoi* see Finley (1985 [1st ed. 1952]), with a new introduction by Millett 1985.

⁷¹ Jameson 1990: 101–103; Jameson, Rannels & van Andel 1994: 248; cf. Morris 2001; 2005.

perspective on rural settlements. Many of these sites have been judged as isolated farmhouses which would be derived from a demographic growth and would be associated with an intensive farming linked to the market.⁷² But also in these cases scholarly visions have been controversial.⁷³

All these issues are significant because they are related to the working of agricultural systems. As Osborne has pointed out, residence on isolated farms allowed exploiting compact land plots with a more varied labour force, but it could be more risky. On the other hand, living in nucleated villages supposed a fragmented holding in which the landscape was worked less efficiently, since the closest lots received more attention than the distant ones, but with a more regular yield in most years.⁷⁴ But once again, the evidence is not conclusive. As Garnsey has said: "The pattern of rural settlement is relevant to land use but thus far has proved difficult to recover. Farmers cannot be pinned down in the archaeological record to dispersed farmsteads. Recent archaeological surveys have uncovered evidence of scattered buildings, but their function is disputed. They are unlikely to include many ordinary peasant farmhouses, which would not have survived the ravages of time. In any case, the argument for the prevalence of intensive farming does not depend on farmers residing on their properties rather than in nearby nucleated settlements."⁷⁵

So, the question is not to privilege one rural settlement pattern over another, even though there were examples in which the nucleated residence was more extended than the isolated one, and vice versa. It is clear that the information for each case is essential; but even so it is necessary to recognise the significance of the interpretations and hypotheses proposed by researchers. Therefore, in a general view, a mix of both isolated and nucleated models seems to better explain the testimonies and the different explanations suggested.⁷⁶ And it seems clear to me that intensive agriculture was possible in both contexts.

⁷² On Metapontum see Adamesteanu 1973; Carter 1981; cf. 1990: 408–12; on Melos, Renfrew & Wagstaff 1982: 246–63; on Boeotia, Bintliff & Snodgrass 1985: 139–45; 1988: 60–68; on Chios, Lambrinoudakis 1986; on Thasos, Osborne 1986; on the Argolid, van Andel & Runnels 1987: 158–65; Jameson, Runnels & van Andel 1994: 248–52, 375–94; cf. Acheson 1997: 171–78; on Karytsia, Keller & Wallace 1988; on Delos, Brunet 1990; on northern Keos, Cherry, Davis & Mantzourani 1991: 285–98; on Leukas, Dousougli & Morris 1994; Morris 2001; 2005; on Olynthus, Nevett 1999: 36–37, 83–85, 95–98, 151–52. See also Jameson 1990: 94–95; Bintliff 1994; 1997; Hanson 1995: 50–60, 127–78; and recently Whitley 2001: 376–99; Corvisier 2004; Hansen 2004; Bintliff 2006a; 2006b.

⁷³ See Osborne 1987: 53–74, who has proposed that the settlement in nucleated villages was the widespread pattern in mainland Greece, whereas the residence on isolated farms was the prevalent feature in Aegean islands. But as has been stated by Cherry, Davis & Mantzourani 1991: 327–47, the isolated residence on the farm was not the main pattern in the small *polis* of Koressos in northern Keos, but the nucleated dwelling in the urban centre. And the same affirmation is made by Osborne himself, in Cherry, Davis & Mantzourani 1991: 319–25, in his analysis of the epigraphic evidence from the *polis* of Kartheia, also located in the Cycladic island of Keos.

⁷⁴ Osborne 1987: 68–70.

⁷⁵ Garnsey 1988: 94.

⁷⁶ On the coexistence of different patterns of settlement see van Andel & Runnels 1987: 164–68; Jameson 1990: 93–95, 103; 1994: 61 (n. 33); Isager & Skydsgaard 1992: 67–82.

Conclusions

What conclusions can we draw from the issues previously examined? Initially, no model can be assumed to be exhaustive when it is applied to the rural structure of the Greek *polis*, because it is a fantasy to establish a typical Greek peasant or farmer.⁷⁷ Hence, from the eighth to the fourth centuries B.C. it is necessary to consider a range of situations from the small poor freeholder, who produced for his family needs and could employ himself as a day-labourer,⁷⁸ to the relatively prosperous cultivator with a few slaves who produced some specialised goods and could usually be integrated into a market system.⁷⁹ However, throughout this spectrum, the distinctive feature was the absence of a recurrent exploitation because of the incorporation of the Greek *georgoi* into the civic community with full political, institutional and military rights: the agriculturalists did not have to produce a regular surplus for the social and/or political elites.

Finally, I would like to suggest a model based on Shanin's study on the twentieth-century Russian peasantry.⁸⁰ But this model is also based on the contributions on the rural world in ancient Greece that we have analysed in this article. First of all, it is possible to point out a difference between larger and smaller households in accordance with the farm size and the number of family members, namely all those who eat or have eaten from the same food.⁸¹ The owners of a few slaves who worked together with family members considered their slaves as parts of the household, even though they had sometimes to sell them.⁸² Secondly, the differentiation between larger and smaller households is not a fixed and irreversible situation but a function of the domestic life cycle: formation with the marriage, children's birth, maturity of the descendants and the death of the older members. More lands can be worked when the family is growing up, and the opposite occurs when it declines.⁸³ But this should not be interpreted as the absence of disparities between rich and poor cultivators. In a larger context, those differences were related to, on the one hand, centrifugal forces caused by partition of the prosperous households and, on the other hand, the fusion or extinction of the poor ones. So, the differentiation and levelling of farmsteads were tendencies which were balanced through multidirectional and cyclical household movements. These phases lead us to modify the fixed image that only explains the extremes of the social spectrum; that is, the poor cultivator that supplemented his

⁷⁷ See Garnsey 1988: 47.

⁷⁸ Jameson 1994: 61–62, quoting the statement made by Osborne 1985b: 127: "for the poor we simply have no evidence." See also Hodkinson 1988: 39; Foxhall 1992: 157.

⁷⁹ As Jameson 1994: 58, has pointed out: "The impression one receives at present, and so far we cannot go much beyond impressions, is of more substantial farmers who aim at producing significantly more than their families' subsistence needs."

⁸⁰ Shanin 1972: Ch. 4–6.

⁸¹ Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b 12–14. See also Chayanov 1986 [1st ed. 1966]: 54. Gallant 1991 outlines that life cycle depends on the different ages that the domestic unit goes through: the farm can be bigger or smaller according to these stages. But since in ancient Greece there was not a redistributive commune like the Russian *mir*, parcelling, fragmentation, gift, dowry, sale or lease became the mechanisms by means of which households were able to incorporate the necessary lands to achieve a balance between means and needs.

⁸² Gallant 1991: 11–12, 30–33, 127–28.

⁸³ See Chayanov 1986 [1st ed. 1966]: Ch. 1; Gallant 1991: 17–30.

income employing himself as a day-labourer and the wealthy smallholder that owned some slaves and produced for the market.⁸⁴

Under these conditions, risk-minimisation concerning family subsistence needs does not have to be opposed to profit-maximisation by means of a lucrative production. Indeed, the small producers could sometimes obtain a marketable surplus consistent with the cycles already mentioned, or could reserve it to deal with the risk of famine. So, poor households might adopt an intensive cultivation to assure their subsistence, while the rich ones might develop an intensive farming to get a profit. Between both behaviours, there was a range of possibilities derived from the cyclical tendencies and those circumstances that rural economies could not control (nature, markets, political situation, etc.). This does not imply that we must define as farmer the cultivator who was able to make money, and as peasant the one who was not able to do so, but rather the existence of two patterns of behaviour derived from the adaptation strategies.

Accordingly, it is acceptable to use one category or another, or even to propose conjunctions such as peasant-farmer or farmer-peasant. But the important question is to think through dynamic models that allow taking into account the social and economic mobility that the family units could develop.⁸⁵

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⁸⁴ The complete working pattern is that proposed by Hanson 1995, who compares ancient Greek smallholders with American farmers and suggests that both are small entrepreneurs exploiting themselves and achieving this way a profit in the market.

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