

THE DEPENDENT TENANT: LAND LEASING AND LABOUR IN ITALY AND GREECE

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(Plate III)

'Farm' sites of various kinds have been a striking feature of survey archaeology in most areas of Greece and Italy in recent years, and a number of such sites dating to the Roman period have been located. In many parts of Greece there seem to be particularly large numbers of later Roman sites, with fewer which can be firmly dated to the earlier imperial period, while in a few areas the Imperial Roman period is one of dense occupation.¹ In Italy, too, there seems to be considerable regional variation in peak periods of rural settlement, so that in some areas numbers of small sites are greatest for the Republican period (second to first centuries B.C.), while in other areas there are many small sites of the first century A.D. or even later.² The tendency of archaeologists working in both Greece and Italy, especially in the early years of the survey boom in the late 1970s and early 1980s, was to categorize these smaller sites as peasant farms (generally assuming peasant free-holders), while larger, more opulent sites were classed as 'villas'.³ This encouraged both archaeologists and historians to jump to the conclusion that the development of large estates attested in the literary record from the later second century B.C. onward had not effected the complete demise of small-scale, free subsistence farmers.⁴

In this paper I wish to raise other possibilities for the interpretation of these small-scale and medium-scale sites, within the framework of a general discussion of tenancy as a source of labour in Roman farming. This analysis is based on three premises. The first is that tenants were a vital source of agricultural labour in the Roman world in all periods. Second, tenants operated within a framework of social and economic dependency relationships which can be roughly reconstructed using a combination of the ancient record and analogous modern situations. Third, not all tenants were subsistence farmers. A wide range of types of tenant can be both postulated and documented. These would have endured varying degrees of exploitation and would have covered a wide socio-economic spectrum. Nor can tenants be clearly separated from other labourers: debt bondsmen, slaves, 'serfs', wage labourers and even 'independent' peasants may also have been entangled in some kind of

¹ For example, the following surveys all found a comparative dearth of later hellenistic and earlier Roman Imperial sites, and most noted a substantial recovery of site numbers in the later Roman period. This general pattern is, of course, subject to regional variation. Southern Argolid: T. H. van Andel and C. Runnels, *Beyond the Acropolis* (1987), 110-17, 162-3; eadem, 'The Evolution of Settlement in the Southern Argolid, Greece: An Economic Explanation', *Hesperia* 56 (1987), 309, 318-19. Boeotia: J. Bintliff and A. Snodgrass, 'The Cambridge/Bradford Boeotian Expedition: The First Four Years', *Journal of Field Archaeology* 12 (1985), 123-61; eadem, 'Mediterranean Survey and the City', *Antiquity* 62, no. 234 (March 1988), 57-71. Kea: J. F. Cherry, J. L. Davis and E. Mantzourani, *The Archaeological Landscape of Northern Keos* (forthcoming); eadem, *National Geographic Society. Research Reports* 21 (1984), 109-16. Megalopolis: J. A. Lloyd, E. J. Owens and J. Roy, 'The Megalopolis Survey in Arcadia', in D. R. Keller and D. W. Rupp, *Archaeological Survey in the Mediterranean Area* (1983), 267-9; *AR* 30 (1983-4), 26-7. Lakonia: *AR* 30 (1983-4), 27-8; *AR* 32 (1985-6), 30, and personal communication from W. Cavanagh. Methana: *AR* 31 (1984-5), 21-2; *AR* 32 (1985-6), 28; *AR* 33 (1986-7), 19-20. Nemea Valley: J. Cherry *et al.*, *AJA* 89 (1985), 327; *AJA* 90 (1986), 204-5; *AJA* 91 (1987), 327. In contrast, C. Renfrew and J. M. Wagstaff (eds), *An Island Polity. The Archaeology of Exploitation in Melos* (1982), 13, 51-2, 145-6, found the island of Melos most densely occupied in the Roman period,

though most sites seem to have had commercial or mining functions. Also 'Roman' and 'Late Roman' sites were considered together, 3, 13.

² Well summarized by J. R. Patterson, 'Crisis: What Crisis? Rural Change and Urban Development in Imperial Apennine Italy', *PBSR* 55 (1987), 134-46.

³ For example, S. Dyson, 'Settlement Patterns in the *Ager Cosanus*', *Journal of Field Archaeology* 5 (1978), 251-68; G. Barker, J. Lloyd and D. Webley, 'A Classical Landscape in Molise', *PBSR* 46 (1978), 35-51; J. Lloyd and G. Barker, 'Rural Settlement in Roman Molise: Problems of Archaeological Survey', in G. Barker and R. Hodges (eds), *Archaeology and Italian Society* (1981); Van Andel and Runnels, *op. cit.* (n. 1).

⁴ It might be noted that this tendency had been more pronounced among scholars working in Italy than among those working in other parts of the Mediterranean, and can be observed even as recently as Patterson, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 139-40 (on the *Ager Capenas* and the *Ager Cosanus*); Dyson, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 263; D. W. Rathbone, 'The Development of Agriculture in the *Ager Cosanus* during the Roman Republic: Problems of Evidence and Interpretation', *JRS* 71 (1981), 14-23, who mentions tenant labour (14), but concentrates on the comparative cost and efficiency of slave versus free peasant labour; P. Brunt, 'The Army and the Land in the Roman Revolution', *JRS* 52 (1962), 69-86, revised in idem, *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (1988), 240-80, especially 246-50. See also the references cited in nn. 1 and 3.

tenancy relationship.⁵ Certainly these variations, including fluctuations in the importance of tenancy overall, must incorporate chronological and regional variations, as agro-economic systems and their degree of integration to major economic and political centres changed over time and space. The implication for archaeologists, especially those doing regional surveys, is that generally we should be looking toward far more complex, internally diverse and integrated models of land use for the Roman period than most of us have hitherto considered.

I. HISTORICAL AND LEGAL APPROACHES TO ROMAN AGRICULTURAL LABOUR AND THE ROLE OF TENANCY

Often tenancy has entered into discussions of labour in the Roman world only to slip to one side. Most of the arguments have revolved around the importance of slave versus free wage labour and/or the substitution of tenancy for slave labour.⁶ Italian and French scholars inspired by Marxist ideas, especially Carandini and his associates, have perceived a florescence of tenancy in the first century A.D. as a result of agrarian and economic crisis which was the logical culmination of the slave mode of production.⁷ Specialist studies of tenancy have been made in recent years by Finley,⁸ Frier,⁹ and de Neeve.¹⁰ Whittaker¹¹ has made a useful contribution with more relevance to the Principate than the title suggests. One of the best presentations of the evidence for tenancy is that of Brunt, encompassed in his work on the allotment of land to ex-soldiers, and largely relevant to the late Republican and Augustan period.¹²

The non-problem of the beginnings of tenancy has been prominent in many discussions. As already noted, Marxian scholars see its rise, if not its origins, in the first century A.D., in response to *la crisi dell'agricoltura schiavistica*. This dating was the generally accepted one until recently.¹³ De Neeve prefers a date of about 100 B.C. for the beginnings of tenancy, but also argues for its increased importance in the first century A.D.¹⁴ However, it is now well established that references to agricultural tenancy go back well into the Republican period, though obviously the importance and conditions of tenancy change both regionally and over time.¹⁵ The problem is not relevant to the approach to tenancy taken here, which is concerned rather to demonstrate the possible range of that variation and its impact on the analysis of Roman economies.

Several methodological problems are shared by many of these studies. Often tenants are discussed as a separate category, as if they are easily distinguishable from slaves or wage labourers. Most specialist studies of tenancy have concentrated on the legal rather than the social aspects of the institution. Similarly, the economic effects of tenancy at the macro-scale (i.e. for the whole Roman or Italian economy) have been

⁵ A good start to tackling this problem was made by P. D. A. Garnsey, 'Non-slave labour in the Roman world', in P. D. A. Garnsey (ed.), *Non-slave Labour in the Greco-Roman World* (1980), ch. 6. For a comparable situation of such overlap in Greece see S. Hodkinson, 'Spartiates and Helots: Landlords and Tenants in Lakonia and Messenia', *Hector Calling Festschrift* (forthcoming).

⁶ Rathbone, op. cit. (n. 4); M. S. Spurr, *Arable Cultivation in Roman Italy* (1986), 133–44; Patterson, op. cit. (n. 2); A. Giardina and A. Schiavone, *L'Italia: Insedimenti e Forme Economiche* (1981), to mention but a few more recent examples.

⁷ A. Carandini, *Schiavi in Italia* (1988); idem, *L'anatomia della scimmia* (1979), 128 ff.; A. Giardina and A. Schiavone, *L'Italia: Insedimenti e Forme Economiche* (1981), in particular the articles by M. Corbier, 'Proprietà e gestione della terra: grande proprietà fondiaria ed economia contadina', 427–44, and L. Capogrossi Colognesi, 'Proprietà agraria e lavoro subordinato nei giuristi e negli agronomi latini tra repubblica e principato', 445–54.

⁸ M. I. Finley, 'Private Farm Tenancy in Italy before Diocletian', in M. I. Finley (ed.), *Studies in Roman*

Property (1976), 103–21.

⁹ B. W. Frier, 'Law, Technology and Social Change: the Equipping of Italian Farm Tenancies', *ZRG* 96 (1979), 204–28.

¹⁰ P. W. de Neeve, *Colonus: Private Farm Tenancy in Roman Italy during the Republic and Early Principate* (1984).

¹¹ C. R. Whittaker, 'Circe's Pigs: from Slavery to Serfdom in the Later Roman Empire', *Slavery and Abolition* 8.1 (1987), 88–122.

¹² Brunt, op. cit. (n. 4).

¹³ W. E. Heitland, *Agricola: A Study of Agriculture and Rustic Life in the Graeco-Roman World from the Point of View of Labour* (1921), 252 ff.; K. D. White, *Roman Farming* (1970), 366–7.

¹⁴ De Neeve, op. cit. (n. 10), 45 f., 54, 73, 75 ff.

¹⁵ Brunt, op. cit. (n. 4); P. D. A. Garnsey and G. Woolf, 'Patronage of the Rural Poor in the Roman World', in A. Wallace-Hadrill (ed.), *Patronage in Ancient Society* (1989), 160; de Neeve, op. cit. (n. 10), 45; Whittaker, op. cit. (n. 11), 91–4; Garnsey, op. cit. (n. 5), 38. On regional variation see Patterson, op. cit. (n. 2).

more thoroughly examined than the effects at the micro-scale, that is, on household economies and localized farming sub-systems.

The most fundamental of these problems is the narrow view of 'economic rationality' taken in most studies.¹⁶ Thus de Neeve, Finley and Corbier have been hard put to think of reasons why potential landlords would have wanted tenants, and vice versa. From a modern point of view Roman leases seem to offer fairly unappealing prospects for the tenant and do not always appear to be an 'economically rational' form of land management for proprietors. Finley has assumed that 'the main objective', from the landowners' point of view, 'was finding labour for the land'.¹⁷

The upper strata of Italian society were rich, some very rich, throughout this period. A substantial portion of their income—to put it no more strongly than that—came from the land. Their choice of methods of organization was essentially restricted to two. Which they preferred, I conclude, depended primarily on the availability of either slaves or tenants, perhaps on local or family tradition (habit), not on notions of comparative profitability, of the comparative quality of the two types of work force, or of greater freedom from care for themselves¹⁸

In contrast to Finley, both de Neeve and scholars taking up Marxian approaches such as Carandini and Corbier assume that large-scale farmers use maximizing strategies exclusively. De Neeve argues that tenancy was rarely profitable for large-scale landowners until a supposed rise in grain prices around A.D. 100 which made detached, tenant-run farms which produced grain a profitable acquisition. Similarly, he has assumed that the relationship of tenancy consisted only of the legal contract between tenant and landlord. So, for example, he comments on the references in Sallust and Caesar to prominent men of the late Republican period conscripting their tenants (*coloni*) into private armies that 'it is difficult to see why tenants, bound to their lessor only by contract of lease, should follow their *locator* into battle'.¹⁹ To evade the problem he argues that these *coloni* were both clients and in debt.²⁰ If so, the comparative material discussed below would suggest that tenancy is also likely to have been part of such a multi-stranded dependency relationship.

Corbier similarly views tenancy as a purely businesslike relationship between proprietor and tenant. Thus, she argues, short-term lease contracts and the costs of management and other inputs in addition to rent make leasing a farm a high-risk speculation, not suitable for peasant farmers.²¹ Given the likelihood that tenancy relationships also entailed complex social relationships in many cases, Corbier is probably wrong to view tenancy as a high-risk enterprise. I shall show below that risks for tenant farmers are likely to be lower than for small-scale independent proprietors in many cases.

Carandini and Corbier also share a 'bisectorial' view of the Roman/Italian economy. This view, derived from Kula's work on farming under the feudal system in sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Poland, postulates that complex pre-industrial economies have two sectors, a subsistence ('natural') sector and a market-orientated ('capitalist') sector. The subsistence sector is the realm of peasants. It is static, tradition-bound, economically 'irrational', and exists only at the fringes of the

¹⁶ The 'economic rationality' (or not) of ancient economic behaviour has been a central debate in the study of the ancient economy since at least Polanyi (e.g. K. Polanyi, *Primitive, Archaic and Modern Economies* (ed. G. Dalton, 1968)). The theme was catapulted into prominence by Finley's *The Ancient Economy* (1973, 2nd ed. 1985) and the reactions to it (for example, G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (1981); A. Carandini, op. cit. (n. 7); R. Duncan-Jones, *The Economy of the Roman Empire: Quantitative Studies* (2nd ed., 1982)).

¹⁷ Finley, op. cit. (n. 8), 110.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 117–18.

¹⁹ De Neeve, op. cit. (n. 10), 177.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 179 ff.

²¹ Corbier, op. cit. (n. 7), 439: 'Senza dubbio il

proprietario e il suo affittuario non si trovano, di fronte ai rischi dell'agricoltura, nella stessa situazione. Il *dominus* che accumula, in caso di gestione diretta, la rendita fondiaria e il profitto dell'azienda, può permettersi di perdere denaro per alcuni anni, di guadagnare meno, di calcolare il suo reddito su un periodo più lungo di un semplice *lustrum*. Egli è anche incoraggiato, come abbiamo visto (Plinio, 9, 37, 3) dal sistema dei valori sociali e morali dominanti. La situazione dell'affittuario è più netta: alle spese di gestione si aggiungono i canoni, fissi o proporzionali al raccolto, che egli deve al proprietario; un deficit ripetuto si traduce in catastrofe. La sua gestione mantiene sempre un carattere *speculativo*, legato alle oscillazioni dei raccolti e dei prezzi' (her emphasis).

monetary economy. The market-orientated sector is the realm of the proprietor with large estates. This sector is 'economically rational', geared to maximum profits, and holds the monopoly of commercial production and activity. According to this view there is little crossover between the two sectors of the economy.²² As will be argued below, such a model does not properly allow for complex, vertically-integrated economic relationships in which both subsistence and the market are important at all levels.

Carandini, Corbier and de Neeve, despite differing theoretical orientations, all apply modern ideas of 'economic rationality' to ancient farming, in particular attributing to ancient estate-owners the aim of profit maximization. A major theme of the arguments that follow is that this approach is misguided. This is not to say that Pliny and Columella were not interested in making profits, clearly they were. But under the ecological, economic and political conditions in which ancient agronomic systems operated, capitalistic-type, maximizing economic strategies may not be optimal. Paradoxically, Finley's approach also falls down for the same reason, because in upholding the economic irrationality of ancient farmers, he disallowed them any alternative rationality that could indeed be economic.

II. SYSTEMS OF EXPLOITATION: ROME AND THE MODERN THIRD WORLD

Analogous situations from modern, non-industrialized economies in the Third World can be used to illuminate the possible implications of landlord-tenant relationships in the Roman world. By attempting to understand the depth and complexity of these relationships, it is possible to see many niches where tenancy and similar relationships could have fitted in the Roman economy. Comparative material also reveals the benefits for both parties of landlord-tenant relationships, and allows questions such as the efficiency of tenant-worked plots to be examined in more concrete terms. Such an analysis sheds considerable light on why the institution of tenancy existed and persisted to become a dominant form of agricultural exploitation in many parts of the Roman world by the late Empire. However, it must be stressed that the comparative analysis presented here is not intended to give a full picture of tenancy at any one time or place in the Roman Mediterranean, nor yet to trace its development. The purpose is to explore the full range of social and economic implications of tenancy and similar contractual relationships, in order that they can be viewed in their proper perspective in historical contexts.

Under pre-industrial conditions, economies of scale do not operate in the same way as for modern, capital-intensive, large-scale farmers. That is, very large operational units of agricultural land may not be the most efficient or productive. For example, in modern Andalusia (similar to some parts of ancient Sicily)²³ the really large tracts of land that are operated as a single unit are areas of scrub and cork-oak forest, exploited for livestock (mostly pigs in this case) and cork. Good quality irrigable land is exploited in small units, even when it is owned in large units.²⁴

²² W. Kula, *An Economic Theory of the Feudal System. Towards a Model of the Polish Economy 1500-1800* (trans. L. Garner, 1976), from the Italian translation, *Teoria economica del sistema feudale. Proposta di un modello* (1972), of the original Polish edition, *Teoria ekonomiczna ustroju feudalnego* (1962). Carandini's best known presentation of this argument is his defence of Columella's vineyard calculations (and thus large Roman slave-run estates in general) as economically rational and maximally profitable, 'Columella's Vineyards and the Rationality of the Roman Economy', *Opus* 2 (1983), 177-203. In fact, the scholars who have applied Kula's model to the ancient Roman economy have insisted on a greater separation of the two sectors of the 'ideal type' than Kula himself does when he actually applies the model to his own data (though Kula does differentiate the sectors sharply when he lays out the parameters of the model). On this point Corbier, op. cit. (n. 7), 427-8, 442-4 is especially relevant.

Paradoxically, Kula's model itself (20-7, 40-1) is based on economic analyses of the 1950s which would now be considered by many to be explicitly western and colonialist in outlook, especially W. A. Lewis, *Theory of Economic Growth* (1955). For more fruitful approaches to Third World economics which avoid the class-bound, paternalistic ethnocentrism of the 1950s see the now classic book by E. Boserup, *Conditions of Agricultural Growth* (1965), and especially P. Richards, *The Indigenous Agricultural Revolution* (1985).

²³ M. Mazza, 'Terra e lavoratori nella Sicilia tardo-repubblicana', in Giardina and Schiavone, op. cit. (n. 7), 19-51.

²⁴ J. Pitt-Rivers, *The People of the Sierra* (2nd ed., 1971), 36-8, 43-5. See also J. Martinez-Alier, *Labourers and Landowners in Southern Spain* (1971); idem 'Sharecropping: some illustrations', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 10 (1983), 94-105.

Similarly, Taussig has argued in relation to the Cauca Valley area of Colombia that large landowners can operate their estates efficiently only because they have used their political muscle (which comes from having acquired large landholdings in the first place) to reduce peasant farms to a size that is below subsistence level in many cases. Large size and availability of technology do not automatically lead to higher productivity. Instead they allow wealthy landowners 'to coerce a labour force into being, as well as [providing] the discipline and authority necessary to exact surplus value from that labour'.²⁵ The owners of large, inherently inefficient farms take advantage of the efficiency and high labour inputs of peasant production and mobilize it to their own advantage. There is no 'bisection' of the economy. On the contrary, the system continues in operation precisely because of the combined social and economic articulation between large and small farmers.

Cooper's study of landlord-tenant relationships in Bengal between the 1930s and the 1950s reached similar conclusions regarding articulation. What allowed landlords to exploit sharecroppers and tenants so effectively was precisely the fact that the economic relationship was also one of social dependency and vertical integration.²⁶ Another interesting feature of share agreements in Bengal which parallels the Roman world is the normality of the short-term contract (the Roman term of lease was usually five years).²⁷ In both situations, tenants often seem to have occupied the same plot continuously for much longer periods than the actual contracts (see n. 27). But in the Bengali case landowners seem to have used short-term contracts as a means of intimidating tenants and wielding power over them, even when they never actually expelled them from the land.²⁸ It is likely that less beneficent Roman proprietors were guilty of the same practice.

Landlords and tenants are thus bound together into a single system by vertically integrated and socially embedded economic relationships, exploitation of land in small units and oppressive powers of intimidation enhanced by legal institutions such as short-term contracts.

Comparative material in conjunction with the Roman sources suggests that in antiquity, too, large and small cultivators were bound into a single system. The relationships of exploitation were complex, multi-stranded and varied. Consequently, sources of labour for the land were also varied and fluctuating. This theme will be expanded in more detail below.

The efficiency of tenants and the benefits for the landlord

The question of the relative efficiency of cultivation by tenants and sharecroppers as opposed to wage labour and owner-occupiers (in the case of the modern Third World),²⁹ or wage labour and slaves (in the case of the Roman world) has been much

²⁵ M. Taussig, 'Peasant Economics and the Development of Capitalist Agriculture in the Cauca Valley, Colombia', in J. Harriss (ed.), *Rural Development. Theories of Peasant Economy and Agrarian Change* (1982), 181.

²⁶ A. Cooper, 'Sharecroppers and Landlords in Bengal', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 10 (1983), 245: 'I would stress that neglecting these [non-economic structures] in any treatment of sharecropping renders an analysis inadequate. Non-economic mechanisms made possible and acceptable the surplus appropriation by the landlords and explains how sharecroppers succumbed to their own oppression. Concentrating on sharecropping merely as a formal rental contract between two neutral parties is a rather sterile approach. The sharecropper-landlord relationship existed in a complex political structure which tended to empower the landlord *vis-à-vis* the sharecropper. Social and religious hierarchies inclined to parallel economic structures, sanctioning the landlord's authority and validating their sharecropper's dependency'.

²⁷ According to the *Digest*, agricultural tenancies were assumed to be automatically renewed as long as the tenant remained on the land and neither party

terminated the lease (19. 2. 13. 11, 19. 2. 14). See also, Finley, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 106, 109, 114-15; de Neeve, *op. cit.* (n. 10), 10.

²⁸ Cooper, *op. cit.* (n. 26), 235-6.

²⁹ The debate in relation to the modern world is vast, but comes down basically to the 'Marshallian' versus the 'non-Marshallian' views of the efficiency of tenancy. Probably the bulk of the modern studies take a 'non-Marshallian' view: that other things being equal, tenants or sharecroppers when monitored and/or intimidated by landlords are more productive than wage labourers or even owner-occupiers in some cases. For the terms of this debate see, S. N. S. Cheung, *The Theory of Share Tenancy* (1968); J. D. Reid, 'Sharecropping and Agricultural Uncertainty', *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 24 (1976), 549-76; *idem*, 'The Theory of Share Tenancy Revisited—Again', *Journal of Political Economy* 85 (1977), 403-7; J. Maria-Caballero, 'Sharecropping as an Efficient System: Further Answers to an Old Puzzle', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 10 (1983), 107-19; Radwan Ali Shaban, 'Testing between Competing Models of Sharecropping', *Journal of Political Economy* 95 (1987), 893-920.

discussed by historians and economists.³⁰ Central to the question of the efficiency of tenants for the Roman world have been Pliny's complaints about his labour troubles. Why, asks Finley, did a landlord like Pliny:

not normally take the obvious and permissible step of removing bad tenants, or even contemplate it ... Such behaviour requires explanation, and I suggest that it lies not in Pliny's kind heart but in his rich purse, which was regularly replenished from his estates in the face of *penuria colonorum*.³¹

Finley suggested that landlords sought continuity of tenancy and were willing to put up with bad tenants as long as they stayed. Both Finley and de Neeve³² have argued that landowners like Pliny were so rich that they had no need to squeeze the maximum profits out of every last square centimetre and that this was a barrier to efficient exploitation.

It has been repeatedly shown in studies of the modern, less developed world that in many circumstances productivity on plots cultivated by tenants or sharecroppers is higher than on similar plots cultivated by wage labourers or even owner-occupiers.³³ The specific reasons for this vary from case to case, but at the heart of most of them is the 'whip of hunger' on the backs of tenants and sharecroppers. In order to gain a livelihood from the land and still be able to hand a share of the produce over to the landlord they must work harder. Obviously this is highly advantageous for the landlord. For India Bharadwaj argues:

Given the superior bargaining position of the big landlord, he may choose to parcel out land—especially when irrigated—to the very small tenants, who in turn, will be compelled by economic necessity to cultivate their small plots intensively, applying owned inputs (particularly labour) far beyond the point of maximum net return. The landlord by so parcelling out land may be in a position to extract a maximum return.³⁴

Such systems must obviously operate to the disadvantage of peasant farmers, particularly if the élite can manipulate access to land so that poorer farmers must regularly work plots too small for subsistence. This ensures a supply of wage labour for large landowners, as well as very high labour inputs on tenanted plots: Cooper's study in Bengal documents the use of tenants (sharecroppers) for wage labour and other labour services particularly well.³⁵ Slaves, who would be fed, clothed and housed regardless of how hard they worked, might not have the same levels of motivation as tenants, sharecroppers or other contracted labourers who work for survival. There is a vivid statement of this principle in the work of the elder Pliny (18. 38):

To cultivate well is necessary, to cultivate superlatively is disastrous, except in the case of a farmer [or tenant?] cultivating for his own household or someone else he must feed.

In addition, the management difficulties, especially security and supervision, of using slaves to cultivate very large units of land might sometimes have proven insurmountable for absentee Roman proprietors.

The large, slave-run estates well documented in the ancient Roman literary sources (and referring almost exclusively to Italy) used both slave and non-slave

³⁰ The efficiency of slave labour is at the heart of the arguments over Columella's vineyard (3. 3), Duncan-Jones, *op. cit.* (n. 16), 39–59; Carandini, *Opus* 2 (1983), 186–201. See also Rathbone, *op. cit.* (n. 4); Spurr, *op. cit.* (n. 6), ch. 8; Patterson, on Pliny's letters, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 118–23; Brunt, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 246–53.

³¹ Finley, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 115.

³² De Neeve, *op. cit.* (n. 10), 159–67.

³³ For example, Cooper, *op. cit.* (n. 26), 227–8; Harriss, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 215–16; K. Bharadwaj, 'Production Conditions in Indian Agriculture', in Harriss, *op. cit.* (n. 25), 269–88, K. Finkler, 'Agrarian Reform and Economic Development: When is a Landlord a

Client and a Sharecropper His Patron?', in P. F. Barlett (Ed.), *Agricultural Decision Making. Anthropological Contributions to Rural Development* (1980), 265–88; R. J. Herring, 'Chayanovian Versus Neoclassical Perspectives on Land Tenure and Productivity Interactions', in E. P. Durrenberger (ed.), *Chayanov, Peasants and Economic Anthropology* (1984), 133–50. Cf. D. Kehoe, 'Allocation of Risks and Investment on the Estates of Pliny the Younger', *Chiron* 18 (1988), 34. See also the references cited in n. 29.

³⁴ Bharadwaj, *op. cit.* (n. 33), 272.

³⁵ Cooper, *op. cit.* (n. 26), 237–8

labour.³⁶ A combination of slaves, wage labourers and tenants seems to have cultivated Horace's Sabine property.³⁷ Columella 1. 7 implies a similar combination of exploitation strategies in his discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of using slaves and tenants to work different types of land.³⁸

In situations where part of a large landed property was run by a slave bailiff, he may have become an important agent in negotiating for the owner with tenants. As such the bailiff may have become a powerful patron figure in his own right to some small tenants; presumably not all landlords were as conscientious as Pliny claims to have been in seeing to *querelae rusticae*. Such estate managers formed the basis for patronage networks in Andalusia,³⁹ and were the builders of the Mafia organization in nineteenth-century Sicily.⁴⁰ These men manipulated both their inferiors and superiors by virtue of their position as mediators and negotiators. Both absentee estate owners and poor peasants were dependent upon them for services and lines of communication, and the agents reaped the profits of such dependence. Some of the wealthy freedmen known from the Roman world might well have attained their positions in this way. The Verus who managed the farm that Pliny gave his old nurse might well be such a personage.⁴¹

The profiles of the ideal bailiff in the agricultural treatises imply that real-life bailiffs were prone to develop such low-level patronage networks. Cato's instructions (*RR* 5. 3-4) are aimed at preventing this. Most explicitly, the bailiff must not have a 'client' (*parasitum*). He must consider the master's friends his own friends. He must not hire the same worker for longer than a day. He is not to extend credit without orders from the master and he must collect loans which the master has made; nor is he to loan out staple foods. These last injunctions suggest the existence of small, free farmers in the neighbourhood whose affairs are economically entangled with a large proprietor (though often handled by the bailiff) in some of the ways we have already seen: by tenancy, debt, patronage and dependency. The bailiff serves as a crucial step in the hierarchical ladder of patronage.⁴²

Landlords garnered other benefits besides the cultivation of a piece of land from their tenants. As is the case with many modern tenants,⁴³ Roman tenants were in many cases effectively dependants. That they could therefore be called upon for physical and political support is well documented in the literary sources, especially in relation to the later Roman Republic.⁴⁴ But Frier's suggestion, based on evidence from the *Digest* and applicable to the turn of the second century A.D., that many larger-scale tenants were in fact freedmen is very appealing in this context, especially if it can be extended to other periods.⁴⁵ He suggests that some of these freedmen might have managed *fundi* as slaves under their *peculium*. And it has been suggested by Purcell that in the late Republic and early Empire freedmen may have been important as managers in viticulture, especially for small-scale vineyards.⁴⁶ That some were also tenants or sharecroppers is a reasonable possibility. Freedmen/tenants bound to a former master/landlord by ties of obligation and dependency had the potential to play a major role in upholding the reputation of their patron. And any tenant, bound in a

³⁶ Spurr, op. cit. (n. 6), 139; Rathbone, op. cit. (n. 4), 19, 22; Garnsey, op. cit. (n. 5), 36.

³⁷ Horace, *Ep.* 1. 14. 1-3; cf. Finley, op. cit. (n. 8), 106.

³⁸ cf. Spurr, op. cit. (n. 6), 133-4.

³⁹ Pitt-Rivers, op. cit. (n. 24), 39-40; Martinez-Alier, op. cit. (n. 24); D. Gilmore, 'Patronage and Class Conflict in Southern Spain', *Man* 12 (1977), 446-58.

⁴⁰ A. Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village, 1860-1960* (1974), 42-57. For a similar group documented in the Lebanon see M. Gilsenan, 'Against Patron-Client Relations', in E. Gellner and J. Waterbury, *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (1977), 167-83.

⁴¹ Pliny, *Ep.* 6, 3.

⁴² Columella (*RR* 1. 8) is in agreement with Cato, adding that a bailiff should not entertain his own guests, employ farm slaves for his own business nor hang about in the town or the market. Varro (*RR* 1. 17.

5-6) is more idealistic and stresses the patronal relationship between bailiff and owner, and the special privileges which the bailiff should be allowed. Significantly both Cato (*RR* 5. 3; 143. 1) and Columella (*RR* 1. 8. 5) stress that the bailiff (and his wife) should not perform religious rites without express permission: the implications of expropriation of patronal privilege are clear.

⁴³ For a good case study of patronage and tenancy in combination see Pitt-Rivers, op. cit. (n. 24), 141 ff. See also n. 26.

⁴⁴ Sallust, *Cat.* 59. 3; Caesar, *BC* 1. 34. 56; Appian, *Iberike* 6. 14 [84]. See also Finley, op. cit. (n. 8), 115; Brunt, op. cit. (n. 12), 246-7; de Neeve, op. cit. (n. 10), Appendix 1; Garnsey and Woolf, op. cit. (n. 15), 158-61.

⁴⁵ Frier, op. cit. (n. 9), 216.

⁴⁶ N. Purcell, 'Wine and Wealth in Ancient Italy', *JRS* 75 (1985), 11.

relationship of obligation, might similarly be manipulated to enhance the status of a landlord.

Patterson⁴⁷ has argued convincingly that under the Empire the Italian *alimenta* schemes were concentrated in areas of rural poverty and that access to such schemes was influenced by patronage links. In the light of the arguments about agrarian tenancy presented here, it would not be surprising to find that areas where rural poverty was prevalent also had large numbers of tenant cultivators whose own plots (if they existed) were too small for subsistence. Tenancy relationships, with their implications of dependency, could have been important in determining participation in *alimenta* schemes. Landlords could have used such rewards to exert pressure on tenants or encourage potential tenants to contract with them. Accordingly, tenants might also be leaned upon to supply commodities and labour to large landowners.⁴⁸

III. TYPES OF TENANCY RELATIONSHIPS

Most of the modern scholarship on Roman tenancy has considered tenants primarily as subsistence farmers.⁴⁹ The arguments presented here suggest that tenancy relationships were highly variable, and thus fitted into a wide range of niches in the overall agronomic system. However, the evidence only allows the consideration of tenants in two broad categories, large and small, though within these broad groupings other variations can sometimes be picked out. Conditions of tenancy relationships, and concomitant variations, must of course have been temporally and regionally highly specific.

Smaller-scale tenants: peasant cultivators

The evidence for small tenants is indirect, elusive and scanty. Chayanov⁵⁰ pointed out that leasing small parcels of land provided a means for small-scale farmers who were short on land but long on labour to make use of that potential labour to attain adequate levels of subsistence, and Osborne⁵¹ has applied this principle to Classical and Hellenistic Greece. For the Roman world, the allotments of Roman veterans must immediately come to mind. The sizes were army standard issue, regardless of the amount of labour a veteran had at his disposal. Furthermore, all farming units are liable to change in size and configuration over the long term. Some may have dwindled in size after two or three generations of partible inheritance (assuming population stability or increase). For others, dowry or inheritance outside the direct line of succession might add parcels of land. Labour shortages might also be short-term, resulting from changes in the household composition over time, the temporary absence of workers, or even the rental or assignment of a larger plot of land than the household could manage alone. Thus the leasing of small plots not only allowed households an outlet for employing surplus labour, but also allowed those households who were short on labour in relation to the amount of land they controlled to utilize it productively. Small-scale farmers may have gained other benefits by leasing land, such as access to ecologically diverse plots (discussed below, p. 112).

The need of large estates, even those which were slave-staffed, for extra labour suggests that large landholders might also profit. The apparently small size of some peasant holdings,⁵² and the location and size of some (though by no means all) veterans' allotments might be viewed cynically as being as much for the benefit of the local gentry—the *veteres possessores* of the *agrimensores*,⁵³ or the centurions who received larger amounts of land⁵⁴—as for the veterans. The supply of wage labourers

⁴⁷ Patterson, *op. cit.* (n. 2), 124–33.

⁴⁸ e.g. Columella, *RR* 1. 7. 2.

⁴⁹ e.g. de Neeve, *op. cit.* (n. 10); C. Wickham, 'Marx, Sherlock Holmes and Late Roman Commerce', *JRS* 78 (1988), 183–93; C. R. Whittaker, *op. cit.* (n. 11); Garnsey, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 37–9.

⁵⁰ A. V. Chayanov, 'Peasant Farm Organization' (1925), trans. R. E. F. Smith in D. Thorner, B. Kerblay and R. E. F. Smith (Eds), *A. V. Chayanov on*

the Theory of Peasant Economy (1986), 68.

⁵¹ R. Osborne, 'Social and Economic Implications of the Leasing of Land and Property in Classical and Hellenistic Greece', *Chiron* 18 (1988), 318–23.

⁵² See Garnsey, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 37.

⁵³ L. Keppie, *Colonisation and Veteran Settlement in Italy, 47–14 B.C.* (1983), 102.

⁵⁴ Brunt, *op. cit.* (n. 4), 271–2; Keppie, *op. cit.* (n. 53), 92.

for large estate holders could be secured, particularly if colonists were regularly under-provided with land. This labour would include not only the men for such jobs as cereal harvests, the vintage and olive picking and processing,⁵⁵ but also women's labour for such tasks as food processing, preparation on major festive occasions and textile production.⁵⁶ That no records exist of such small-scale lease transactions is not surprising if many were handled by bailiffs rather than by landlords directly (see above, p.103).

Cereals must have been an important product of many small rented plots.⁵⁷ In one case of a tenant farm in the *Digest* (19. 2. 19. 3) part of the rent is paid in grain. Similarly, Columella's evaluation of tenant farms (1. 7) also suggests that cereals might be an important product of leased arable land, though both of these sources refer to larger-scale farms. For subsistence farmers, even those growing for the market as well, the most vital crop must normally have been cereals, irrespective of whatever land might be rented.

It can be argued that some kinds of large slave-staffed enterprises did not grow much grain for human consumption.⁵⁸ If so, cereals to feed slaves may often have been obtained from elsewhere. Grain could have been bought on the open market, though this could be risky given seasonal and inter-annual fluctuations in price. It could have been produced by another farm owned by the estate owner. Or, it could have been supplied by tenants. It is suggestive that Cato mentions arrangements for sharecropping cereals in Venafrum, the same area as the probable location of his olive farm which, I would argue, produced little grain for human consumption in most years (see n. 58). Tenants might have the advantage of being close at hand, dependable, and easily exploitable.⁵⁹

Small-scale tenancy for the market

Not all tenanted plots are farmed for subsistence. Comparative examples from the modern world suggest that the small-scale leasing of cash-producing, market-orientated agricultural enterprises may have been quite common. In many parts of the world much of the land rented to tenants or sharecroppers is not poor, marginal land, but the very best (often irrigated) land.⁶⁰ Particularly where sharecropping is involved the agreements between landowner and tenant are often complicated, with the inputs provided by each party divided into many categories and small fractions. In small-scale farming enterprises, cash crops are treated differently from subsistence crops if both are cultivated: higher risks are sometimes undertaken with cash crops in hopes of greater profits.⁶¹ In Bharadwaj's Indian study very small, poor farmers were often forced to cultivate tiny plots very labour-intensively with crops of high market value. Slightly larger-scale, less poor tenants preferred to concentrate on subsistence crops (which they did not usually sell) and *not* to be forced to live at the mercy of the

⁵⁵ e.g. Cato, *RR* 144. 3; Varro, *RR* 17. 2. See Garnsey, *op. cit.* (n. 5), 41-2.

⁵⁶ In Cooper's Bengali study (see n. 26), this was one of the most important ways in which landlords took advantage of a tenancy relationship to exploit tenants. The evidence of the agricultural writers, largely Cato, *RR* 143 and Columella, *RR* 12, on the duties of the *vilica*, is not easy to interpret. Relatively few slave women seem to have resided on large slave-staffed farms. Columella rewarded slave women for bearing several sons (*RR* 1. 8. 19). Cato mentions buying clothing for slaves (*RR* 135) and selling wool (*RR* 2. 7, 150. 2), implying his *vilica* did little textile work. However, Columella's *vilica* wove for a select few of the slaves, and was instructed to advise others on weaving as well as to take advice from more experienced weavers herself (*RR* 12. 3. 6, 8). Whether her assistants were slave residents or free hired help is impossible to determine. But many of the tasks of the *vilica*, particularly those involving the large-scale storing of food, 'spring cleaning' of storage areas and equipment, major festive occasions (Columella, *RR* 12. 1. 4), and preparations for

the vintage (e.g. flail and basket making, Columella, *RR* 12. 18), look as though they would need additional female assistance, perhaps more than the farm had on hand. Certainly *vilicae* are instructed not to entertain local women, or spend too much time socializing with them (Cato, *RR* 143. 1; Columella, *RR* 12. 1. 5).

⁵⁷ Though I do not agree with de Neeve, that almost all tenant farmers were practising 'extensive' cereal cultivation.

⁵⁸ See Appendix (p. 114).

⁵⁹ Note here Garnsey's observation (*op. cit.* (n. 5), 39) that tenants were normally locals.

⁶⁰ Spain: Pitt-Rivers, *op. cit.* (n. 24), 40-1, 141 ff.; Martinez-Alier, *op. cit.* (n. 24). Sri Lanka: Herring, *op. cit.* (n. 33). India: Bharadwaj, *op. cit.* (n. 33); Cooper, *op. cit.* (n. 26), 232. Mexico: Finkler, *op. cit.* (n. 33); J. Gledhill, *Casi Nada: Capitalism, the State and the Campesinos of Guaracha* (forthcoming).

⁶¹ e.g. Taussig, *op. cit.* (n. 25); H. A. Forbes, *Strategies and Soils: Technology, Production and Environment in the Peninsula of Methana, Greece* (1982), 365-6, 168-75.

market. And, as mentioned earlier, leasing out such good-quality land in small parcels may be very profitable for large landowners, taking advantage of the small tenant's propensity to maximize output per unit area by providing 'uneconomically' large inputs of labour.⁶²

Two Mexican studies—Kaja Finkler's work in the Mezquital Valley area, supplemented by John Gledhill's forthcoming study of land reform—provide interesting food for thought in considering the possibilities for complex share and tenancy contracts in the Roman world.⁶³ The land in question here is *ejido* land, which is handed out by the government in small allotments to peasant farmers for cultivation under Mexico's land reform legislation. In the area of Finkler's study this was all fertile, irrigated and highly productive land. Both subsistence and cash crops were grown. Land was also in short supply relative to demand. Plots allotted under the *ejido* system are inalienable, and if they are left uncultivated for over two years the title lapses and is handed over to another farmer. This means that peasant farmers go to great lengths to retain control of *ejido* plots. One major reason for taking on sharecroppers is shortage of labour in the landholding household. Sharecropping helps to even out labour gluts and shortfalls resulting from changes in household composition through time over the course of its life-cycle. Significantly, the most common sharecropping arrangement is the provision of labour only by the tenant (Fig. 1). Almost no households (1.4 per cent) were uninvolved in a sharecropping

FIG. 1. SHARECROPPING ARRANGEMENTS ON *EJIDO* LAND FOR ONE MEXICAN COMMUNITY

Labour	Traction	Water	Seed	Tenant's share of production	Frequency (N = 133)	% of total no. of arrangements
Factors supplied by tenant						
I				18.75	42	31.6
I	I	0.5		50.00	34	25.5
	I			18.75	20	15.0
I	I			37.50	7	5.3
0.5				9.37	7	5.3
			I	18.75	4	3.0
I		0.5		31.25	4	3.0
0.5	I			28.12	3	2.3
	I		I	37.50	2	1.5
	0.33	I		50.00	2	1.5
I	I	0.33		45.83	I	0.7
	I	0.5		31.25	I	0.7
	I	0.25		25.00	I	0.7
I	I	I		62.50	I	0.7
I	I		0.5	46.87	I	0.7
	0.5			9.37	I	0.7
0.5	0.5			18.75	I	0.7
I	I	I	I	81.25	I	0.7

Source: K. Finkler, 'Agrarian Reform and Economic Development: When is a Landlord a Client and Sharecropper his Patron?' in P.F. Barlett (ed.), *Agricultural Decision Making. Anthropological Contributions to Rural Development* (1980), 275.

⁶² Bharadwaj, op. cit. (n. 33).

⁶³ Finkler, op. cit. (n. 33), 265–88; Gledhill, op. cit. (n. 60).

arrangement. But nearly 10 per cent of households had share tenants on their own land and simultaneously sharecropped as tenants on the land of others.⁶⁴ This suggests there are other reasons for the prominence of sharecropping besides labour supply and a shortage of land owned by farm households.

The situation in this Mexican study was complex, and in many respects totally unlike anything in the Roman world. But one point which suggests comparison is that farmers became involved in sharecropping arrangements for access to factors of production beyond those of land and labour. Five factors of production are formally recognized in sharecropping arrangements: land, seed, water, labour and traction. The two parties involved may agree to provide these inputs in many different combinations (Fig. 1). The most important reasons, besides labour supply, why farmers become involved in share tenancies are, (1) access to water-rights and the formal and informal bureaucratic infrastructures which control them, (2) access to animal and mechanical traction and transport—the provision of traction only by the share tenant is the third most common arrangement (Fig. 1) and (3) access to ready cash.⁶⁵

For Roman Italy, complex share arrangements of the type described by Finkler appear in Cato's work, in particular his sample contracts for sharecropping cereals and legumes (Cato, *RR* 136), a farm specializing in vines (Cato, *RR* 137) and the harvesting and processing of olives (Cato, *RR* 144, 145). Some of the small vineyard proprietors Purcell⁶⁶ discusses might well be lessees cultivating small plots intensively for the market. The Pompeian urban and suburban gardens and vineyards, documented by the excavations of Jashemski, are good candidates for this sort of arrangement: small, fertile plots with the potential to command high rents because of their prime locations.⁶⁷ Some of the tax/census records from late Roman Greece may include properties of this sort.⁶⁸

The structural similarities between Mexican *ejido* plots and Roman veterans' allotments may also be significant. Similar conditions of formal inalienability of tenure (at least in the earlier periods) and compulsory cultivation held good.⁶⁹ In the Roman case this might well have encouraged small proprietors to enter into share and tenancy agreements. Gledhill's work on *ejido* cultivation further emphasizes that it is via tenancy and sharecropping arrangements that the wealthy manage to gain access to *ejido* land to which they are not legally entitled. Large Roman landowners could have similarly manipulated tenancy agreements and relationships.

Also crucial is the provision of traction animals. If traction were regularly provided by one party in a lease or share arrangement (cf. Cato, *RR* 137, where the traction animals are provided by the landlord), then the academic debate⁷⁰ over how ancient peasants supported a yoke of oxen on a very small holding shrivels.

Small-scale tenants in the archaeological record

Most of the problems of identifying the smallest-scale farmers in the archaeological record were identified by P. D. A. Garnsey ten years ago.⁷¹ Although there is now much more evidence for rural settlement in the Roman Mediterranean than when Garnsey's paper appeared, the problems of identification remain. As will emerge below, I believe that most of this body of archaeological evidence relates to larger-

⁶⁴ Finkler, op. cit. (n. 33), 273. The simultaneous 'renting in' and 'renting out' of land is not unusual. For a south-east Asian case see, J. C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985), 70.

⁶⁵ Finkler, op. cit. (n. 33), 274. The importance of a wide range of factors of production and concomitantly complex tenancy agreements is found in other case studies as well, e.g. Cooper, op. cit. (n. 26), 231-4; Pitt-Rivers, op. cit. (n. 24), 43-4.

⁶⁶ Purcell, op. cit. (n. 46), 11.

⁶⁷ W. Jashemski, *The Gardens of Pompeii* (1979), chs. 10-13; cf. also *The Gardens of Pompeii* (forthcoming).

Cf. P. D. A. Garnsey, 'Where Did Italian Peasants Live?', *PCPhSoc* 25 (1979), 10.

⁶⁸ A. H. M. Jones, 'Census records of the later Roman Empire', ch. 10 in *The Roman Economy* (1974), 231, 233 ff. These inscriptions record a mixture of whole farms and small isolated plots, many of which were occupied by tenants.

⁶⁹ Brunt, op. cit. (n. 4), 271; Keppie, op. cit. (n. 53), 95-6.

⁷⁰ See, most recently, P. Halstead, 'Traditional and ancient rural economy in Mediterranean Europe: plus ça change?', *JHS* 107 (1987), 77-87.

⁷¹ Garnsey, op. cit. (n. 67), 1-25.

scale farmers. The remains of even the smallest 'farmsteads' discovered by archaeological survey are probably too grand for the poorest peasants.

For Italy, I am convinced by Patterson's arguments, building on Garnsey's work,⁷² that the rural poor in many regions lived in more or less nucleated settlements, in *pagi* and *vici*. While such centres served as permanent bases for many families, occupation may have fluctuated seasonally, with farmers living on or near the fields they cultivated for at least part of the year in temporary (and archaeologically invisible?) accommodation. The idea that such families subsisted by a combination of renting small plots (either for food crop or cash crop cultivation), by working their own land, and by wage labour, fits in well with the arguments about tenancy presented here.⁷³

For Greece, the later Hellenistic and earlier Roman periods (second century B.C. to second century A.D.) seem to be phases of nucleated settlement in many regions. Although isolated farmsteads are found, their numbers are much lower than in either the Classical (fifth to fourth centuries B.C.) or late Roman (third to sixth centuries A.D.) periods. This trend, with local variations, is documented in the southern Argolid, Methana, Boeotia, Kea, Lakonia, Messenia and Megalopolis.⁷⁴ Towns are certainly occupied, though the extent varies regionally. For example, the 'city' site of Methana apparently expands during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, perhaps at the expense of village sites on the other side of the peninsula. Likewise, the small city of Phlius in the Nemea Valley was thriving in the Roman period, though site numbers are down in much of the surrounding countryside compared to earlier periods.⁷⁵ On Kea increased nucleation may be indicated by the incorporation of Ioulis and Koressos early in the second century B.C., but both the city site and the territory of Koressos are reduced in this period.⁷⁶ In Boeotia, Askra and Haliartos are practically abandoned during the later Hellenistic and earlier Roman periods and Thespieae is much reduced, but all recover to a greater or lesser extent in the later Roman period (fourth to sixth centuries A.D.).⁷⁷ Again, systems of land exploitation in which many of the poor lived in a nucleated settlement (perhaps periodically moving to seasonal habitation) and gained a livelihood from a combination of economic strategies would seem to be in accord with the present state of our archaeological knowledge.

Larger-scale tenant farmers

There is more evidence for the leasing of whole farms by larger-scale tenants, mostly from the *Digest*. As a source for the actual practice of agricultural tenancies, its use is clearly problematic. None the less, it is likely that at least the general principles of farm leasing which can be derived from it were part of genuine practice in some parts of the Roman Mediterranean for a relatively long period of time.⁷⁸

Often farms were leased with their equipment (*Digest* 19. 2. 3; 19. 2. 19. 2).⁷⁹ This arrangement must have been attractive to farmers who could not afford the large capital investment entailed in purchasing major items of farm equipment, even if they already owned some land. For a freedman or a veteran with a cash 'pension' large enough to rent a farm but not to buy or equip one this might have been an attractive option. Normally in the examples in the *Digest*, the equipment provided by the landlord was the largest and most expensive: buildings, olive and wine presses, olive crushers, grain mills and so forth. Since tenant-occupied farms supported the occupier's household as well as producing a surplus for rent, it is likely that better quality land with greater potential for cash cropping might have been the norm for

⁷² Though Garnsey does not himself believe these were 'agrotowns', op. cit. (n. 67), 6, 9, 16-17.

⁷³ cf. Patterson, op. cit. (n. 2), 146; Garnsey, op. cit. (n. 67), 2.

⁷⁴ Messenia: W. A. MacDonald and G. R. Rapp, *The Minnesota Messenia Expedition* (1972), 146, though Roman and Late Roman sites may not be differentiated. For other areas see n. 1.

⁷⁵ S. Alcock, 'Survey at Phlius, 1986' (unpublished manuscript), 9; *AJA* 90 (1986), 327.

⁷⁶ J. Cherry *et al.*, *AJA* 89 (1985), 326; J. Cherry and J. Davis, 'The Ptolemaic Base at Koressos on Keos', in G. Reger and L. Foxhall (Eds), *The Ptolemies in the Aegean* (forthcoming) and op. cit. (n. 1), Kea.

⁷⁷ J. Bintliff and A. Snodgrass, *Antiquity* 62 (1988), 57-71; *Journal of Field Archaeology* 12 (1985), 145.

⁷⁸ Frier, op. cit. (n. 9), 204.

⁷⁹ J. A. Crook, *Law and Life of Rome* (1967), 158; K. D. White, *Farm Equipment of the Roman World* (1975), s.v. *instrumentum fundi*; Frier, op. cit. (n. 9).

these farms. The range of scale of these enterprises seems to have been very wide. Some of the examples from the documentary record are certainly from the large end of the spectrum. Mention of tenants using agricultural slaves appears in Pliny's letters and the *Digest*, as well as in other sources.⁸⁰ Some tenants, presumably of very large and productive farms, even had sub-tenants (*Digest* 19. 2. 24. 1).

Larger-scale tenants in the archaeological record

It is farm units of this type, but at the smaller end of the scale, which I suggest might be visible in the archaeological record. In the Methana survey, in the eastern Peloponnese of Greece, a few Roman farmsteads have been found for which it is at least highly probable—and one can push the data no further—that they were tenant-occupied at one or more stages of their existence (Fig. 2). MS 109 was first occupied in the second century A.D. and continued into the fifth/sixth century. The site is located about 500 m above sea level. Even today it is remote, and can only be reached by narrow, steep and twisting mule tracks. There is a sizeable building, approximately 28.5 m by 9 m, on top of which a modern structure is built (Pl. III, 1). (The ancient structure is much larger.) It is constructed of reasonably well-finished ashlar blocks, and there is some roof tile near the site centre, suggesting that the roof was at least partially tiled. It is located at the edge of a small volcanically-formed basin, well suited for viticulture; there are vines presently growing there. The surrounding land is good for cereal cultivation, and the site is within easy reach of good grazing higher in the mountains. Olives were certainly grown on land that was part of the farm, but not located here. There is excellent olive-pressing equipment, including a crusher, which is not used in wine pressing (Pl. III, 2). However, the site is situated above the level of modern olive cultivation; and in the absence of any evidence for major climatic change, it is simplest to assume that the olives were grown at a lower altitude and hauled up to the farmstead for processing.

The case of MS 211 is similar. The site is located close to the highest point of Methana (around 700 m above sea level). It is several hours walk from almost anywhere. It was first occupied in the first century A.D. and continued in operation until the end of the sixth century. There are extensive architectural remains of good quality (at least for Methana), including a courtyard with a cistern and substantial amounts of roof tile, suggesting a tiled roof. There is also well-made pressing and olive-crushing equipment, although the site is again much higher than the parts of the peninsula where olives can be grown today (Pl. III, 3). Again the site is located close to land that is good for cereals and other land that is especially well suited for vines.

That these sites might be tenant-run farms is suggested by (1) the remote locations and (2) the fact that although the masonry and the capital equipment are of excellent quality, the pottery is poor. Little or no fine wares appear, in contrast to sites of the same period below 200 m (which may also have been farm sites in some instances) where good-quality imported pottery is regularly found.⁸¹ The kind of buildings and equipment on these sites which are of such surprisingly good quality are precisely the same kinds of things which are specified in the *Digest* which date to this period.⁸² Many of the examples of leases which included equipment in the legal texts dating to the second and third centuries A.D. specified that the landlord provide large durable items such as presses, crushers, big pithoi, bronze cauldrons, screws, etc. The tenant supplied the smaller, more ephemeral items.⁸³ The landlord was also responsible for the upkeep of any buildings on the land (e.g., *Digest* 19. 2. 25. 2, 19. 2. 24. 2, 19. 2. 19. 4.). However, this interpretation is obviously speculative: an independently operating group of slaves under a slave bailiff cannot be ruled out.

Similarly, the three small farmsteads studied by Barri Jones on the Monte Forco

⁸⁰ For the main references see Finley, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 105–6, 108, 114.

⁸¹ C. B. Mee, H. A. Forbes, D. Gill and L. Foxhall, 'Rural Settlement Change in the Methana Peninsula, Greece', in G. Barker (ed.), *Roman Agrarian Structure*

(forthcoming).

⁸² e.g. *Digest* 19. 2. 19. 2 is attributed to Ulpian, a lawyer active in the third century A.D.

⁸³ Frier, *op. cit.* (n. 9), 209.

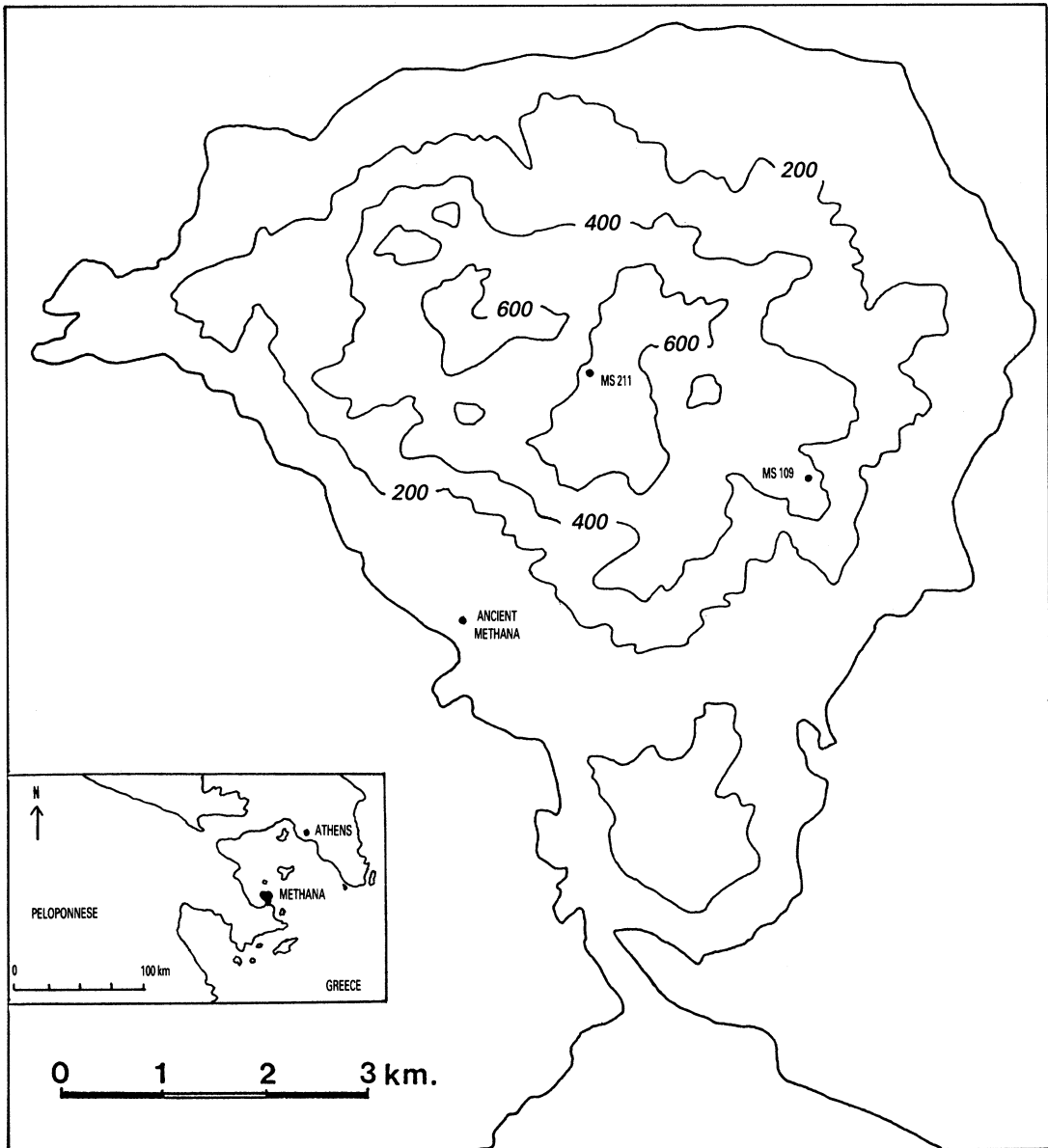


FIG. 2. THE PENINSULA OF METHANA, GREECE, SHOWING ROMAN FARM SITES DISCUSSED IN THE TEXT AND THE SITE OF THE ANCIENT CITY OF METHANA

ridge, one of which (Site 154) was excavated, may be Italian examples of the same phenomenon.⁸⁴ Jones was surprised at the good quality of the reticulate and ashlar masonry on the excavated site.⁸⁵ But the building itself was very small, only about 10 m by 5 m, though there may have been a lean-to extension on the eastern side. Only two fine-ware sherds were discovered amidst sizeable quantities of coarse pottery, though the finds were sufficient to ascertain that the site was in use between the later first century B.C. and the second century A.D.⁸⁶ Jones associated the construction of these farms with veteran settlement in the Ager Capenas, and thus assumed they were inhabited by independent smallholders.⁸⁷ However, the same

⁸⁴ G. D. B. Jones, 'Capena and the Ager Capenas, pt. 2', *PBSR* 31 (1963), 100-58.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 50.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 155-7.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 157.

combination of good buildings with comparatively scanty and poor quality pottery appears as in the Methana examples. If a landlord had been responsible for the construction and upkeep of buildings, while most of the rest of the fittings were the responsibility of a low-status, dependent farmer, whether free tenant (perhaps freedman?) or slave, the contrasting quality of structure and ephemera might be explained.⁸⁸

IV. THE ATTRACTION OF TENANCY FOR TENANTS

Despite the strong evidence for the ubiquitousness of tenancy, both Finley and Corbier have doubted that landlords could attract tenants.

Where would we expect to find, in Italy, and especially in peaceful Italy, large numbers of skilled free men ... willing to engage themselves in the 'draconic' *locatio-conductio* agreements of Roman law and practice?⁸⁹

Why, Finley continues, 'did tenants of Pliny's who had lost hope of ever paying up ... not clear out' and 'take advantage of the chronic labour shortage on the land to improve their terms'?⁹⁰ The answer that he supplies is that a significant proportion of these tenants might have been in debt to the landlord and thus unable to clear out because of the threat of legal action.⁹¹ This is true as far as it goes, but the argument flattens what must have been a multi-dimensional relationship into a one-dimensional legal contract. Corbier argues that given the risks of taking on a short-term tenancy, the arrangement was not feasible for small farmers (see n. 21).

The legally disadvantageous position of Roman tenants cannot be ignored. Indeed, it is similar to the legal position of many of the tenants in the comparative examples cited in this study.⁹² The primary reason that tenants enter into such agreements must be that they have little alternative for survival—it is a 'least worst' option. Moreover, as Finley noted, the relationship is likely to become more complex and more binding over time and thus to become more inescapable. Despite the obvious disadvantages, tenancy offers tenants access to survival strategies in three important areas: power networks, agricultural inputs and risk reduction.

Access to power networks

Access to power networks is highlighted in the modern case studies already discussed. In Finkler's study one of the main reasons for entering into sharecropping arrangements (here with a higher status person) was to obtain access to the bureaucracy that controlled irrigation water. A high-status landlord may be able to provide his tenant with valuable 'ins' with governmental officials and the legal system. He may have easier access to markets and marketing opportunities, especially if the state takes a hand in market regulations, or if the market is subject to political influences.⁹³ And he may have access to important information that a low-status farmer might not. In the Roman world, vertical access to the political infrastructure, especially for those who might not be fully enfranchised (e.g. freedmen), might be vital to the survival of the small farmer.

Access to agricultural inputs

Again, the importance of costly inputs and services, especially those of large capital value can be vital but unobtainable for the small farmer. This too constitutes a

⁸⁸ See also D. J. Mattingly, 'The Olive Boom. Oil Surpluses, Wealth and Power in Roman Tripolitania', *Libyan Studies* 19 (1988), 29, for the same phenomenon (similarly explained) in Roman North Africa. See R. Hingley, *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain* (1989), 82–3, 105–8, for comparable analyses in Roman Britain.

⁸⁹ Finley, *op. cit.* (n. 8), 114.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 115.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 115–17.

⁹² For a particularly good example, see Cooper, *op. cit.* (n. 26), 229–31.

⁹³ For a modern Mediterranean example see D. Gilmore, *People of the Plain* (1980), 40.

major reason for entering share agreements in many parts of the world, and a Mexican case study has been detailed above (p. 106). Clearly such an impetus might have been important in the Roman world. Traction animals, pressing equipment or use of it, loans of cash and commodities, even slaves in some cases might have been supplied by a landlord to a smaller-scale tenant farmer.⁹⁴

Reduction of risk and avoidance of hazard

It has long been argued in the literature on subsistence cultivators that tenancy and sharecropping reduce risks for the tenant.⁹⁵ Most obviously, a tenant was likely to be kept from starvation in the worst years by the intervention of a landlord, a means of self-preservation not available to the independent peasant. Cooper points out in her Bengali study that such a practice is very much in the landlord's own interests—working tenants are better than starving ones.⁹⁶ In less catastrophic circumstances, a landlord could provide essential inputs in the event of a shortfall in the small-scale enterprises, i.e. seed corn if the peasant household were driven to eating part or all or what it had saved, or the replacement of a dead draught animal on credit. Although the rates charged for such 'services' might be exorbitant, survival is at least possible.

In the Roman case this was clearly a consideration. *Digest* 19. 2. 19. 4, discussed in detail by de Neeve,⁹⁷ describes how landlords might remit rent on account of poor harvests. Both this passage, and more casual references to the practice by other writers, some of them quite early, imply that it was normally expected that landlords would remit rent in poor years.⁹⁸

Moreover, for a farmer with only one or two plots of land of restricted size, tenancy provides a way of increasing the variety of the landscape he farms, and thus decreasing the potential hazards of putting all his eggs in one environmental basket, or all his vines on one plot (with only one kind of soil, moisture retention, exposure, etc.) in the face of varying weather conditions. Finkler's study in Mexico provides a modern case in point: for the families who acted as both 'landlords' and 'sharecroppers' simultaneously, the number and variety of the plots they cultivated was considerably increased over what their own holdings offered. Tenancy could enhance a trend already implicit in the norm of partible inheritance that existed in the Roman Mediterranean region—the importance of access to a wide variety of plots, and thus micro-environments.

Risk reduction would have been a consideration for Roman landlords as well as for tenants.⁹⁹ It is not surprising, then, that spread of risk is also covered by the sample leases in the *Digest*.¹⁰⁰ The landlord bore the brunt of the 'extraordinary' hazards such as marauding flocks of birds, landslides and plundering armies. The tenant took on the 'expectable' hazards such as wine turning to vinegar, weeds, bugs in the wheat. Landlords could only shift the responsibility for 'extraordinary' risks onto the tenant if it was specifically agreed beforehand in the contract (*Digest* 19. 2. 19. 2).

Landlords could expect a steady background income from tenants.¹⁰¹ This might have allowed large entrepreneurs added security in speculating on other, riskier enterprises that carried potentially high profits. Tenants also might offer some protection from the risks of long supply lines and the erratic provisioning of markets. For all that Pliny complained about his tenants, he did not opt for another strategy for working his land. Instead he planned to switch over to sharecropping, a system in which security is a paramount consideration for both parties.

⁹⁴ cf. Garnsey and Woolf, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 157–8.

⁹⁵ J. C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976), 37, 41, 45–9; cf. Scott, *op. cit.* (n. 64). See also the references cited in n. 29.

⁹⁶ Cooper, *op. cit.* (n. 26), 243. Cf. Garnsey and Woolf, *op. cit.* (n. 15), 157.

⁹⁷ P. W. de Neeve, 'Remissio mercedis', *ZRG* 100 (1983), 296–339.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 297, 308–18.

⁹⁹ See Kehoe, *op. cit.* (n. 33), 15–42.

¹⁰⁰ *Digest* 19. 2. 25. 6; 19. 2. 15. 2. Discussed by O. Robinson, 'Casus in the Digest', *Acta Juridica* (1977), 337; de Neeve, *op. cit.* (n. 97).

¹⁰¹ Cicero, *Pro Caec.* 10. 7; de Neeve, *op. cit.* (n. 10), 85–6.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Tenancies in the Roman world were complex, multi-faceted relationships between two (or more) parties. Such relationships frequently had social and political aspects, as well as the more generally recognized legal and economic ones. However much small farmers might have preferred to be isolated from the market economy, it is likely that most tenants (and indeed all peasant farmers) were integrated into market structures, frequently to their detriment. The separation of the Roman economy into 'modernizing' market-orientated and 'traditional' subsistence sectors provides an inadequate model for interpreting the intricate, vertically-integrated economies of the Roman Mediterranean region. Both production for subsistence and production for exchange must have been vital for farmers at all levels, though of course configurations of production strategies varied with the wealth, scale and type of particular enterprises.

Though the balance of power must have favoured the large landowner because he usually possessed higher rank and greater economic resources, even very exploitative leases may have been a 'least worst' alternative for tenants or sharecroppers. If tenants benefited from the arrangement it was primarily because it allowed them access to power networks and agricultural inputs, and decreased risks in the event of crop failures or the disruption of farming for some other reason. The environmental hazards which threaten the small-scale farmer emanate not only from the natural environment, but from the political and economic environments as well.

Landlords benefited first and foremost because the arrangement was profitable. One should not underestimate the ability of the Roman élite to exploit underlings effectively. Accordingly, the institution of tenancy aided in the creation of a class of dependants. Given the complexity and scale of the agro-economic systems that prevailed in Greece and Italy in the Roman period it is probable that such dependency relationships were hierarchical. Bailiffs or similar agents may have occupied the nodal points of dependency networks and derived considerable power from the position. For landlords, tenants both enhanced their status and were useful for political, moral and physical support. Tenancy relationships must often have overlapped with relationships of debt-bondage and patronage. At the level of the agronomic system, tenancy could offer decreased risks, potentially very high levels of productivity and stability of income for the landlord. Inputs of goods and services which were needed only at intervals, or which were not so reliably obtainable via directly worked, slave-staffed farms, might also be provided by tenants and their families.

The arguments presented here also suggest that proper appreciation of the complexity of land-use systems in Roman Greece and Italy is essential to the development of more sophisticated interpretative models for regional archaeological surveys. Tentative suggestions have been made regarding the interpretation of some Roman farmsteads, and further work along these lines is needed. The corollary of the fact that many 'small' sites may be tenant-occupied is that land-owners need not live on site, or even in the region. Hence, site hierarchies and their development between the second century B.C. and the sixth century A.D., including intra-regional and extra-regional economic relationships, need further clarification.

Much of this paper is admittedly speculative, and the modern comparisons I have used can be no more than suggestive. Not all the features of tenancy relationships which I have highlighted are characteristic of all times and places in the Roman world. But the combination of different lines of evidence strongly suggests that tenancy and similar contractual relationships were a vital part of the exploitation of land in both Italy and Greece in the Roman period, not only in North Africa and Egypt where tenancy has long been well documented. Such an enquiry also suggests the concern of historians with 'economic rationality' or its absence has been misplaced. Non-modern economies have rationalities that are perfectly economic, but all their own.

APPENDIX. CEREALS FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION ON LARGE ESTATES: THE CASE OF CATO'S OLIVE FARM (RR 10)

Cato's olive grove is a good example of a large, slave-run estate that may not have been self-sufficient in cereals, if it can be assumed that it represents a genuine operational unit (and admittedly this may entail a fairly sizeable leap of faith). A close examination of the text (Fig. 3) suggests that fodder crops, not wheat or other cereals normally grown for human consumption, were planted in the portions of the farm available for arable cultivation (probably mostly between the trees).

FIG. 3. GRAIN STORAGE ON CATO'S OLIVE FARM

Storage capacity: 20 <i>frumentaria</i> . If these are 30 amphora dolia (773.7 l each), then
Total storage capacity = 15,474 l = 11,946 kg wheat
Personnel = 13 (10 workers + 3 'administrators')
Rations: ¹⁰² workers: 319 kg p.a. (winter rate), 359 kg p.a. (summer rate) = mean annual ration 339 kg
'administrators': 240 kg p.a.
(10 × 339) + (3 × 240) = 4110 kg wheat total subsistence
4110 kg total subsistence = 34% of 11,946 total storage capacity (i.e. one year's food supply fills about one third of storage space available)
Storage capacity = c. 3 years' supply of wheat.

Total land area = 240 iugera = 61 ha
If land is polycropped and 30% taken up by trees, then 30% to 50% would be available for cereals in any one year = 20 to 30 ha
Sowing rate ¹⁰³ = 6 modii/iugerum = 159 kg/ha
Conservative estimate of yield ¹⁰⁴ = 4:1
159 × 4 × 20 = 12,720 kg hypothetical average production for 1 year
774 kg (6.5%) > TOTAL grain storage capacity! ¹⁰⁵

The clue comes in the storage capacities allowed for cereals. Storage capacities must always represent or exceed *maximum* expectable production, not minimum production. The *frumentaria* (assuming they are large capacity dolia) would easily hold enough grain to feed the slaves resident on the farm as well as the seasonal workers for two to four years. However, if the *olivatum* were polycropped with cereals, even assuming a biennial rotation with one third to one half the available arable land under cereals at any one time, and using low estimates for sowing and yield ratios, in a 'average' year wheat production would have over-run the available storage capacity by 6.5 per cent. In a good year they would have been swamped. If Cato had been aiming at growing wheat for subsistence, the available storage capacity ought to have been larger. Though cereals may have been grown in some years, the quantities planted must have been fairly small.

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¹⁰² Cato, RR 56; L. Foxhall and H. A. Forbes, 'Sitometreia: The Role of Grain as a Staple Food in Classical Antiquity', *Chiron* 12 (1982), 63.

¹⁰³ Sowing rates: Columella, RR 2. 9. 1, 4 modii/iugerum in good land, 5 modii/iugerum in not so good land, as high as 8 modii/iugerum recommended for good land. Land planted in *arbusta* needs 20 per cent more seed (2. 9. 5).

¹⁰⁴ Columella, RR 3. 3. 4. This is probably much too low given the relatively high inputs of capital and labour on Cato's farms, but serves to make the point that storage capacity is inadequate if large quantities of cereals were grown. Obviously, if higher yields are postulated, the storage capacity is even more inadequate!

The best recent discussion of Roman Italian cereal yields is Spurr, op. cit. (n. 6), 82-8.

¹⁰⁵ Even if larger storage vessels are assumed (see Spurr, op. cit. (n. 104), 81-2), storage facilities are inadequate if the farm aimed to grow grain for subsistence. 20 dolia of 40-amphora capacity gives a total storage capacity of c. 20,800 l = 16,058 kg wheat. Subsistence needs of 4110 kg = 26 per cent of total storage capacity. Hypothetical production for 1 year of 12,720 kg (and this is a *low* estimate) would practically fill all available storage capacity for grain leaving only 21 per cent of storage free. At this rate Cato could have expected to over-shoot his storage space regularly.



DOMUS SOLLERTIANA, EL DJEM: DAMNATUS MAULED BY LEOPARD. *Photo Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Rome.*



DOMUS SOLLERTIANA, EL DJEM: LEOPARD LUNGING AT DAMNATUS. *Photo Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Rome.*