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THE MAFIA OF EARLY GREECE

Violent exploitation in the seventh and sixth centuries BC

Hans van Wees

The aristocratic families of early Greece had something in common with the mafia families of New York and Palermo: they accumulated wealth by violent, deceitful, and otherwise illegitimate means. As Solon put it in the strongest, but by no means only, condemnation of the ruling classes to survive from the seventh and sixth centuries BC: 'the leaders of the people...grow rich, trusting in acts of injustice... Sparing neither sacred nor public property, they steal and rob left and right' (F 4.7–13 West).

A comparison between archaic aristocrats and modern mafiosi may seem eccentric at first, but the parallels turn out to be striking, particularly when one looks at Sicily and its mafia-dominated rural elites, as they emerged in the 1860s and survived for about a century until the rise of the urban, drug-trafficking *nueva mafia* in the 1960s. Both the early Greek and the traditional Sicilian regimes controlled agricultural communities; both used force and intimidation to acquire land, livestock, and other resources; both exploited labour and credit with extreme severity and provoked repeated outbreaks of social unrest. The mafia analogy casts a bleak new light on the history of archaic Greece: it helps us to make sense of the forms of oppression alluded to by ancient sources, and to explain what caused the crises which led to *coups d'état* by tyrants all over Greece, to calls for the redistribution of land in Sparta, and to the reforms of Solon in Athens.

Since the mid-1960s, it has been common opinion that exploitation in archaic Greece was not particularly severe, and that it was resisted more as a matter of principle than as a matter of survival: the 'middle classes' who sought social and political equality with the aristocracy were embarrassed at being treated as inferiors, rather than seriously threatened in their livelihoods. Solon's 'shaking off of burdens', in

particular, is supposed to have been a reform concerned more with social status than with economic hardship, and to have been demanded primarily by the same people who were also calling for political reform.¹ Against this, I shall argue that the exploitation we encounter imposed a barely tolerable material burden on its victims, that these victims were above all the poorest farmers and labourers struggling to make ends meet, as opposed to the better-off sections of the population seeking political power, and that resistance by the very poor against the depredations of the rich was one of the major forces for change in archaic Greece.²

Heroic mafiosi: exploitation and legitimation

The rural towns of Sicily used to be dominated by narrow local elites known as *signori*, *civili*, or *galantuomini*, 'gentlemen', which meant those who were substantial landowners or made an equally good living from management positions on the estates of absentee landlords, as leaseholders (*gabelloti*), armed guards (*campieri*), or supervisors of herds. These people monopolized both wealth and political power: 'mayors, judges, tax collectors, priests, notaries, and *gabelloti* were recruited from a handful of interrelated families' (Blok 1974, 115). The politically disenfranchised and economically exploited lower classes ranged from hired labourers at the bottom of the hierarchy, via sharecroppers, to independent and comparatively prosperous smallholders.

Mafiosi, far from belonging to some dark underworld, typically were respected members of leading families; they might well be next-of-kin to several town dignitaries, or be local officials themselves. Only two things distinguished 'one of them', as people would coyly refer to a mafioso, from other members of the elite: his greater readiness to use violence, which made him a 'man of respect' (*uomo di rispetto*), and his network of connections with other violent men, which made him 'a friend of the friends' (*amico degli amici*). By means of intimidation and violence, mafiosi not only acquired wealth for themselves, but also supported the interests of their relatives and friends among the elite, and indeed of the elite at large, in the face of lower-class unrest. As well as being a criminally exploitative force in their own right, mafiosi thus propped up a legitimate yet exploitative regime.³

In the communities of early Greece, as in Sicily, power was monopolized by the wealthiest owners of landed estates and herds – known as 'princes' (*basileis*/βασιλῆες) and as 'good' or 'fine' men (*agathoi*/ἀγαθοί or *esthloi*/ἐσθλοί) – to the exclusion of a population of labourers, sharecroppers, and smallholders.⁴ We shall see that the poems and

laws of Solon leave no doubt about the oppressiveness of this regime in Athens around 600 BC, and suggest that at least some 'fine men' were engaged in organized violence. The poems of Theognis and the Theognid corpus paint a similar picture for neighbouring Megara, later in the sixth century.⁵

Earlier evidence, by contrast, is ambivalent: around 700 BC, Hesiod has harsh words for the princes in his *Works and Days* but eulogizes them in his *Theogony*, and Homer's epics hint at exploitation but give an overwhelmingly favourable impression of aristocratic rule.⁶ The obvious inference, one might think, is that the Greek ruling classes were better liked and in greater harmony with their subjects at the beginning of the seventh century than they were at the beginning of the sixth. Yet we should be careful not to jump to conclusions. As comparison with the images and self-images of mafiosi will demonstrate, even the most oppressive regime may be presented in a highly flattering light.

To us, mafia activity seems an extreme case of the self-interested pursuit of profit: it literally goes over people's dead bodies. Nevertheless, mafiosi – traditional and modern, Sicilian and American – justify the worst of crimes as inspired by the most admirable of motives. They see themselves as putting their lives on the line to protect the interests of others. It is in such terms that Joseph Bonanno, in his autobiography *Man of Honour*, describes the motives of his father, Salvatore, in becoming *capo* of the mafia of Castellammare, around the turn of the century:

Salvatore had the choice of thinking only of himself or of *taking care of others*. Since he was studying for the priesthood [!], he had a perfect excuse for shunning the *grimmer duties* that awaited him. He could have remained in cloistered selfhood and gone on to become a rosy-cheeked pastor. He could have been more self-centered, placing personal tranquillity over *sacrifice*. Instead, he chose to *help* his family. If we were to ask a man such as my father who he was *responsible* for, he might answer, as I would answer, '*For as many people as need me*'. (1983, 27; emphasis added)

Bonanno prides himself on maintaining what he calls 'my Tradition' even in America. Of his own accession to the leadership of his Family, in New York, 1931, he writes:

The day came when the Family met to choose a new Father. I had overcome my *reluctance* and now looked forward to the challenge... Henceforth... I always had to keep in mind that my personal sentiments did not matter as much as the interests of the Family. *I had lost the privilege of selfishness*. (1983, 139; emphasis added)

The heart attacks and cerebral haemorrhages suffered by top mafiosi are held up as proof of 'the pressures, the anxiety, the tension' inherent in such a position of responsibility:

People tell me they wish they were Joe Bonanno, that they had Joe Bonanno's power, his influence, his wealth... None of the people who say they want to be Joe Bonanno has ever told me that he'd like to have Joe Bonanno's blood pressure. (1983, 222, 291)

All this may seem blatantly dishonest – and it is true that *Man of Honour* is a work of self-justification, not a confession – but the rhetoric of self-sacrifice is not just for public consumption. John 'The Dapper Don' Gotti – the very model of a modern American godfather, and hardly someone who cares about upholding Sicilian tradition – even uses it in private conversation with his subordinates, as recorded by FBI bugs:

I'm sick, Frankie... I had twenty *capodecimas* ['group leaders'] with us... [Then] I went to the hospital to see Sammy's son. I gotta get myself double sick... The next morning, triple sick, we're at the cemetery. Then go *make other guys happy*... Then go to the fuckin' wake... *I'm not doing nothing fuckin' selfish here*, know what I mean?

You see this sandwich here? This tuna sandwich? That's all I want – a good sandwich... I would be a billionaire if I was looking to be a selfish boss. That's not me. (*The Gotti Tapes*, 46, 49, 58; emphasis added)

The language is less eloquent but the message is the same: mafiosi exercise their power for the good of others. They like to think of themselves as 'men of honour' (*uomini d'onore*) and 'men of order' (*uomini di ordine*), and claim, in the words of a one-time leader of the Corleone mafia, Dr Michele Navarra, that 'only a saint, a mother, and a man of honour are capable of acting disinterestedly' (*Man of Respect*, 204).⁷

There is *some* basis in reality for the high self-regard of mafiosi. Often, they use their power not only in purely one-sided exploitation, but also – at a price – in troubleshooting and mediation on behalf of 'friends'. In Sicily, this role used to be particularly prominent, since in the absence of a strong state the local *capo mafia* was often the only one with the resources needed to intervene effectively.

Even today, bosses may be asked to resolve a dispute between a young man and his fiancée, or find jobs for the unemployed. In Catania, meeting such demands became a full-time occupation for the boss Pippo Calderone. He ran an office where he could receive the dozens of people who called on him every day. When the stream of petitioners became a flood, Calderone was forced to rent a flat next door to his office to serve as a waiting room. (Follain 1995, 73)

Calderone's services were allegedly free, but he did expect 'generous presents at Christmas' (ibid.). Some mafiosi thus tried to live up to their self-image and helped others for a reward which by the mafia's exacting standards was modest. Such men could become widely and genuinely respected figures. Giuseppe Genco Russo, for instance, was so popular that during his trial 'seven thousand notables and peasants from three villages' signed a petition in which they 'swore to his honesty and civic virtues'.⁸ Admiration for the model *don*, however, coexisted with disapproval of the many others who fell short of the ideal and with popular resentment at the oppressiveness of mafia regimes in general.

If a mafioso is a hero in his own eyes, and can be a hero even in the eyes of others, could it be that mafiosi lurk behind the heroic princes of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*? Their power, too, is presented as legitimate because they put their wisdom and their lives at the disposal of others. They maintain law and order and carry the burden of defending their communities against external enemies. The ideal is sketched in a single line about Sarpedon: 'he protected Lycia with his judgments and his strength' (*Il.* 16.542).⁹

The princes' judicial powers are presented as legitimate and divinely sanctioned: they are 'men who safeguard the laws on behalf of Zeus' (*Il.* 1.238–9), to whom it is said that 'Zeus has entrusted you with the sceptre and the laws' (*Il.* 9.98–9; cf. 2.205–6). In the *Odyssey*, a prince who upholds justice and thereby ensures the prosperity of his community is an emblem of 'good reputation' (19.109–14). The *Iliad* alludes to gifts rewarding the princes. Akhilleus' future subjects 'will honour him with gifts, as if he were a god, and bring to completion shining law cases under his sceptre' (9.155–6, 297–8); the same hero's shield is adorned with a scene of princes settling disputes in an orderly manner, featuring 'two talents of gold in the centre, to give to the one amongst them who would utter the straightest verdict' (18.497–508). These gifts appear to be fair payment for a fair judgment.

In war, the role of the *basileis* seems so effective that they dominate battle scenes to the almost total exclusion of common soldiers. They feel that their privileged position obliges them to give their all on the battlefield (*Il.* 12.310–21), and their ambitions are matched by their prowess: many are described as the best fighters in their own contingents and are shown performing great feats of strength and bravery. Common men, by contrast, are scorned as useless in battle: 'You are no warrior. You have no strength. You are of no account at all in war or in counsel' (*Il.* 2.198–201). The material rewards cited here consist of

prominent public seating places, food and drink at public expense, large shares of booty, and even sizeable landed estates. Again, all this is generally presented as well-deserved.¹⁰

However, there are cracks in the veneer. Impartial justice turns out to be the *exception* rather than the rule when it is claimed that Odysseus 'never did or said anything improper to anyone among the people, as is the way [δίκη] of godlike princes: enemy to one man but friend to another' (4.689–92). The partisan ways of the 'godlike princes' are mirrored by the ways of the gods themselves, who frequently allow personal considerations to override the demands of justice.¹¹ That personal interests may be upheld by means of violence or intimidation is evident from a simile which speaks of 'men who, by force, judge crooked law cases in the agora, and drive out justice' (Il. 16.385–92).

The princes' role in war is the target of several loud complaints: according to his followers, Odysseus gets a larger share of booty than he deserves (Od. 10.40–2), and Agamemnon gets booty without contributing to the fighting at all (Il. 1.163–8; 2.226–38; 9.318–19, 328–33). A similar accusation lies hidden in the words of Priam when, distraught by the death of Hektor, he turns against his surviving sons:

Worthless children! Shameful creatures! If only all of you had been killed together... I begat the best sons in Troy, and I tell you not one of them is left... But all these shameful ones are still here, these boasters and dancers, the best men of the dancefloor, robbers of sheep and goats among their own people. (Il. 24.248–62)

The context shows that the old king is not, out of the blue, accusing his sons of literally raiding or burgling the farms of fellow-Trojans. His point is, rather, that unlike Hektor and other model princes, they are poor warriors, good only at boasting and dancing, and therefore incapable of doing anything to *earn* the gifts of sheep and goats presented to them by their subjects. This makes them, in effect, 'robbers among their own people', just as taking an undeservedly large cut of the booty makes Agamemnon a 'prince who devours his people' (δημοβόρος βασιλεύς, 1.231).

It would be wrong to dismiss these hostile comments as unjustified or as rare exceptions which do not detract from the general picture of harmony. Present in every battle scene of the *Iliad*, implicitly or explicitly, is a great mass of men playing a decisive role in the fighting. In mass warfare, not even the most willing, best trained, and best equipped *basileus* could contribute much more than any other individual. There was thus a gap between ideal and practice: ideally, princes received gifts and privileges, and offered protection in

exchange; in practice, they received gifts and privilege, but their subjects largely protected themselves. In the fictional world of the epics, the gap could be bridged, because legendary heroes had super-human strength, supernatural assistance, and a little help from the poet, who disguised the role of the masses. In the real world, however, the gap was unbridgeable. The inability of princes to live up to their claims was a structural problem, and comments about men 'robbing' and 'devouring' their people reflect this.¹²

A final positive image of princely power portrays Odysseus as 'gentle as a father' in his dealings with his subjects (Od. 2.234 = 5.12). The way in which his local rivals harass his defenceless family suggests that Odysseus is again a shining exception, but we may wonder whether even his 'paternal' rule is necessarily benign. Joe Bonanno always refers to himself as the 'Father' of his Family, in the Sicilian manner, rejecting the normal American title 'Boss' as too businesslike (1983, 147–9, 188–9, 290). The most powerful pre-war Sicilian *capo*, Calogero Vizzini, insisted on being called *Zu Calò*, 'Uncle Calo' (Arlacchi 1986, 43). These self-images, moreover, were projected with some success: a low-ranking associate of Genco Russo's remembers him as 'just like a father' (*Man of Respect*, 26).

We should not be taken in by our first impression of the rule of Homer's princes as based on popular admiration and gratitude for their wisdom, fairness, courage, and strength. Nor should we infer that the government of contemporary 'big men', chieftains, or aristocrats was non-violent and non-exploitative.¹³ As in the world of the mafia, this is merely the ideal, shared by rulers and subjects but rarely if ever achieved. Homer's heroes bear much the same relation to the reality of early Greece as the heroes of Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* or of Bonanno's memoirs do to the reality of the New York mafia: both are idealized versions of contemporary men of power, whose paternalistic and benevolent sides are highlighted, but whose exploitative natures show through all the same.

Hesiod is capable of painting a glowing picture of the princes to match anything found in Homer. In his *Theogony*, he digresses to praise them gratuitously and at length.

Whomever among the *basileis* [the Muses] honour and behold at birth, upon his tongue they pour sweet dew. Gentle words flow from his mouth. All the people look at him while with straight judgments [δικας] he settles law cases [θέμιστες]. Speaking fluently, he will quickly and expertly put an end even to a great dispute. For this is why there are wise *basileis*: so that in the agora they may with ease put things right for people who have

been harmed, persuading them with soft words. When he goes through the assembly, with gentle respect they seek his favour, as if he were a god, and he stands out among those assembled. (*Theogony* 81–92)

Here we have the princes as the only power to which people can turn to get justice for themselves, as 'men of order', respected for their skill in settling disputes.

The picture in *Works and Days* could not be more different. There, Hesiod speaks as a common man who has lost part of his inheritance to his brother in a dispute judged by the local princes, and he launches into a series of warnings about divine punishment for rulers who pass 'crooked' judgments (220–73). Three times he calls princes in general 'gift-eaters' (δωροφάγοι, 39, 221, 264), implying that they take gifts from their subjects but fail to uphold justice in return.¹⁴ The threat of force underpinning their rule is described in a story meant to make the princes realize the brutality of their own behaviour.

Now I will tell a fable for *basileis*, and they can think for themselves. Thus spoke the hawk to the nightingale with speckled throat, carrying her very high into the clouds, gripped in his claws. Pierced by the bent claws, she cried pitifully, but he addressed her in a superior manner: 'Silly thing, why do you scream? One much stronger has hold of you now. You are going wherever I may take you, even if you are a singer. If I want to, I may make you my meal. Or I may let you go. Only a fool wants to resist the stronger: he will not win, and he will suffer pain as well as shame.' Thus spoke the swift-flying hawk, the long-winged bird. (202–12)

Like the hawk, princes rely on superior force to 'eat' their victims' gifts and indeed their victims; like the songbird, the singer Hesiod is powerless to resist. These princes are men of violence, no better than animals. 'Eating one another' is 'the law of the fish, the wild beasts, and the birds', not of human beings (276–9).¹⁵

As in Homer, the difference between the two perspectives is that between ideal and common practice. In the context of a poem about the origins of the gods and the universe, the princes are reminded of what role they are supposed to play in the scheme of things; in a poem which deals with the struggles of everyday life, they stand revealed as falling far short of their own ideals. What Hesiod both praises and rages against is evidently a ruling class which, in common with mafia leadership, likes to claim that it maintains 'order' within the community through effective mediation, but demands a price in 'gifts' for doing it, and in practice often relies on violent means to achieve their ends.

Favourable representations of princes in our earliest sources thus conceal a regime which was already exploitative, and was seen as

exploitative by its subjects. They do not prove that the ruling classes were less oppressive at the time than they were a century later.

Conversely, in the mid-sixth century, Theognis may blame exploitation on social climbers who had only recently joined the ranks of the 'good men' (*agathoi*), but we cannot simply infer from this that exploitation was a recent phenomenon. The poet's insistence that he and his friends constitute the true, deserving ruling class while the new arrivals are really mere 'bad men' (*kakoi*/κακοί) with money and connections, an untrustworthy lot who 'ruin the people' and give unjust verdicts 'for the sake of private profit and power' (esp. 43–60), is reminiscent of the way in which mafiosi demonize their more successful rivals as enthusiastically as they canonize themselves. Joe Bonnano complains that Joe 'The Boss' Masseria attained his dominant position in 1920s New York 'through a combination of intimidation, strong-arm tactics, bullying and tenacity', rather than by winning general 'respect' as one should (1983, 85); yet he himself was better known as Joe Bananas, 'a dangerous flat-nosed hood' credited with Napoleonic ambitions and with the invention of the split-level coffin, designed to accommodate a legitimate 'stiff' on top and a murder victim underneath (*Mafia*, 120). A proficient Sicilian hitman, writing his autobiography under the pseudonym Giovanni, would have us believe that his own employers 'had always been able to command respect without using violence, which is how it used to be years ago' (59), whereas the 'new mafia' which ousted them was led by a man rightly nicknamed 'The Beast' and employed 'a bloodthirsty brute' as its chief assassin. 'Men like him,' says Giovanni about his rival, 'became successful in only a year or two by using fear. No one trusted them... They were wild beasts' (*Man of Respect*, 95–6).

The methods of the 'new mafia' do seem to be even more ruthless than those of its predecessors, and the new elite of Theognis' day may well have been more oppressive than the old ruling families. But it is worth noting that Giovanni fancies himself 'rather gentlemanly' compared with the new generation just because he kills people with a pistol instead of a machine-gun (189). For all his protestations, he and other traditional mafiosi were violent exploiters. For all Theognis' complaints, he and his family may well have been violent exploiters, too. We shall come across episodes in the history of Megara, two or three generations earlier, which show that oppression was hardly a novelty.

The evidence of Solon thus does not stand alone. From their different perspectives, the poems of Homer, Hesiod, and Theognis all indicate strained relations between ruling elites and their subjects.

Exploitation is in evidence from the moment we have written sources and remains in evidence throughout the archaic period. But if oppression and popular resentment were constant factors, they took different forms and varied in intensity over time and from one city to the next. It will take a close look at the exploitation of land, labour, credit, and patronage to demonstrate that the strain did indeed often become severe enough to provoke active resistance and spark off a political crisis.

Rapacious landowners: the exploitation of resources

In the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the local elites of Sicily displayed a growing 'voracity for land', and the mafiosi among them 'chiefly aimed at and engaged in the control over land by violent means' (Blok 1974, 33, 97, 147). Rival buyers and rival applicants for leaseholds were killed or frightened off, owners were intimidated into selling or leasing their property cheaply, and the capital with which to buy land was often raised through robbery, cattle rustling, or kidnapping. Connections in the judiciary were used not only to escape punishment but to seize property through 'legal' channels.

A powerful acquisitiveness is well attested in archaic Greek poetry. Hesiod actively encourages it, so long as it remains within legal bounds. He hammers away at the theme of unremitting toil, and, combined with a few exhortations to 'avoid hunger' (299–302, 363, 403–4), it sounds as if he is addressing subsistence farmers, struggling just to make ends meet. However, the agricultural calendar of the *Works and Days* reveals that slaves and hired labourers do most of the work, and the rest of the poem tells their employers to set their sights much higher than mere survival. The goal is competitive: to become richer than one's neighbours (20–4, 376–82), thereby attaining 'excellence and glory' (289, 313) which will inspire self-confidence (319), as well as envy (312) and admiration (482) in others.¹⁶ In Homer, too, keen acquisitiveness is treated as an admirable heroic trait.¹⁷

Later poets share the sentiment, but strike a more philosophical note. 'There is not a single mortal soul who does not think that, this time next year, he will be a friend to wealth and high society' (Semonides F 1.9–10 West). 'For Aristodemos, they say, once put it very effectively in Sparta: "A man is what he owns, and not a single poor man is noble [*esthlos*] or respected" ' (Alcaeus F 360 L–P). According to Solon, 'no clear limit to wealth is set for men; those of us who now have the greatest livelihood double their efforts' (F 13.71–3), and he is quoted with a slight variation in the Theognid corpus: 'those of us who now have the greatest livelihood are eager to double it. Who could

satisfy all?' (227–9). The detached and worldly-wise tone of these poets was suitable to the elegiac genre in which they composed, but perhaps also indicates that the dangers of unbridled acquisitiveness were becoming more apparent.

It hardly needs spelling out that land is the prime object of acquisition in an agricultural society such as ancient Greece: 'if you desire wealth, you should run a fertile farm, for a farm is a horn of plenty, they say' (Phokylides F 7 Diels). The ultimate reward for hard work and a pious life, according to Hesiod, is 'that you may buy another man's plot of land, rather than he yours' (*W&D* 341). Alternatively, property may be extended by bringing new land under cultivation, as in the case of 'the fine farm of Laertes, which Laertes once acquired himself as a result of very hard labour' (*Od.* 24.205–7). Increasing the size of one's herds is likely to have been a prominent goal as well: there is some evidence for herds too large to be maintained within the territory and therefore pastured abroad on the basis of a profit-sharing arrangement with a foreign landowner.¹⁸

A remarkable feature of archaic poetry are the constant warnings against obtaining wealth illegitimately. These warnings, although often cited as evidence that there were social problems and that attempts were made to formulate solutions, have been given surprisingly little weight in the debate about the causes of unrest in archaic Greece. I would argue that they get to the heart of the problem: a general scramble to obtain land and other resources – as much as possible and by any conceivable means, legitimate or illegitimate – leading to increasing monopolization of resources in the hands of the elite.¹⁹

Hesiod accuses his brother, Perses, of 'robbing' the greater part of the land they had inherited (38), and habitually 'looking and listening in on disputes in the agora', 'raising disputes and contests over the property of others' (29–34). He implies that Perses acts in 'hybris' (213–18), resorts to 'force' (275), and 'lies in giving testimony, deliberately swearing a false oath' (219, 282–3). Perses, it seems, is a man of his time, for Hesiod characterizes his contemporaries as an 'Iron Race' going from bad to worse; they will end up knowing only 'the law of fists' and disregarding oaths (189–94). He concludes:

Property is not to be robbed; it is much better when god-given. For if a man takes a great fortune by the force of his hands, or if he acquires it by means of his tongue, as often happens when profit addles people's thinking and shamelessness follows on the heels of inhibition, the gods will easily consign him to oblivion and diminish that man's house, and the fortune will be his for a short time. (320–6)

Such sentiments are echoed by Solon, who declares: 'I yearn [ἡμείρω] to have property' – note the intense desire expressed by the verb – 'but I do not want to obtain it illegitimately [ἀδίκως]... The wealth given by the gods remains intact from the top to the very bottom,' but wealth acquired 'by deeds of injustice' and acts of 'hybris' (F 13.7–28, 74–6) will not last. Poems in the Theognid corpus take precisely the same line: 'a possession that comes to a man from Zeus, with justice and by pure means, will turn out to be forever durable, but if a man acquires it illegitimately, before his time and in a spirit of greed, or if he takes it under oath contrary to what is right,' the gods will ruin him (197–203). The message is clear: 'you must acquire property legitimately' (753), 'profit which would be shameful must never win you over' (466), 'you should wish to live as a pious man with few possessions rather than become rich by acquiring property illegitimately' (145–6).

Since the gods often ruin, not the offender, but his descendants, it is not surprising if these constant warnings have little effect. Tyrtaeus in Sparta, Theognis in Megara, and Solon in Athens all predict that greed will destroy their cities.²⁰ In the worst case,

everything has gone to the dogs and lies in ruins: ...the violence and vile profits and hybris of men have cast us from great prosperity into misery. (Theognis 833–6)

The race of pious men has become extinct; laws and good order are no longer recognized. [Every day of one's life, one must] beware of the crooked words of unjust men, who...always have designs on other people's property. (Theognis 1141–9)

The feeling that property is under constant threat is a theme of epic fiction, too. Even members of the most powerful families worry that their households will come under attack when they are not there to protect them. Akhilleus imagines that in his absence close neighbours will 'grind down' his aged father (*Il.* 24.489–90; *Od.* 11.494–503), Sarpedon expresses concern about the safety of his 'many possessions, which someone in need might desire' (*Il.* 5.481), and Andromakhe laments the fate of her son after the death of his father: 'others will take away his farmlands' (*Il.* 22.489). In the *Odyssey*, of course, the worst fears come true, as more than a hundred local princes invade the hero's home in his absence, under the pretext of courting his 'widow'. They devour his livestock and stores, and ultimately plot to kill his only son and divide his property amongst themselves.²¹

They also threaten to enslave visitors from abroad for no reason other than that these are 'worthless guests'. 'Laughing at the strangers,

one of the arrogant young men would say: ...“Let us throw these strangers in a ship with many benches and send them to the Sicilians, where they will fetch a good sum”' (*Od.* 20.374–83). One of their cronies mimics them despite being himself a slave: 'One of these days I shall send him far from Ithaka on a ship...so that he will bring me much sustenance' (17.249–50). Neither threat appears to be meant seriously, but a reference in Solon to 'many' who had been sold abroad 'illegally' (ἐκδικῶς; F 36.9–10) can only mean that there were indeed violent, powerful men, who seized and sold people without any justification, purely for the sake of raising revenue – just as mafiosi used to kidnap people purely for the sake of the ransom money.

The behaviour of the villains of the *Odyssey* is apparently not untypical of the upper classes, since a beggar tells them, by way of warning, that 'I too seemed destined to be a prosperous man once, and I committed many outrages, indulging in violence and power' (*Od.* 18.138–9). In the poems of Solon and Theognis the finger is clearly pointed at members of the elite as the worst offenders in the aggressive pursuit of wealth. We have already met Solon's denunciation of 'the leaders of the people' who, motivated by greed, commit 'great hybris' and 'grow rich by illegitimate means' (F 4.6–11), as well as Theognis' claim that, although 'the townsfolk here are still sensible', 'the leaders' commit 'bad hybris' and 'ruin the people and give verdicts in favour of the unjust for the sake of private profit and power' (39–46).²² Both poets warn that this will lead to civil war and to the destruction of the community (Solon F 4.1–6, 17–30; Theognis 47–52). The constant references to 'hybris' – unprovoked, arrogant aggression – reinforce the point that it is not the poor who are forced to resort to theft, but the powerful who seize property out of greed and disregard for their inferiors. Hesiod's hopeful remark that 'hybris is bad for a lowly man [*deilos*], and not even a man of high standing [*esthlos*] can carry it off easily' (*W&D* 214–16), assumes that, unlike the poor, members of the elite often get away with it.²³

The beggar in the *Odyssey* says that he used to commit his violent outrages 'relying on my father and my brothers' (18.140), and most of Odysseus' rivals receive unconditional physical support from their relatives, despite the evident injustice of their actions. Since such partisan behaviour is also attributed to those charged with upholding justice, as we saw earlier, it is obvious why the poets always invoked divine retribution, never secular justice: as in Sicily, the chief offenders faced courts run by their own families. Moreover, one poem in the Theognid corpus claims that men who are after 'other people's property'

'conclude shameful *agreements* [σύμβολα] to commit evil deeds' (1150). Solon's warning that the leading men who enrich themselves will ruin the city 'in *meetings* [σύνοδοι] for those who commit injustice against their own people' (F 4.22) is best understood in the same sense: upper-class crimes against property, rather than merely perpetrated by individuals with the passive backing of their families, are somehow *organized*.²⁴

It is perhaps the seriousness of the threat posed by many of the most powerful men, acting in concert, which explains the extraordinary detail in which the law in Athens tried to ensure the protection of property rights. A law attributed to Solon regulated minutely against the slightest form of encroachment on a neighbour's land, stipulating that dry-stone walls should not cross the boundary, that more substantial walls should be set back at least one foot from the border, houses two feet, most trees five feet, wells six feet, olive and fig trees nine feet, ditches and pits as far back as they are deep. Beehives were to be kept at least 300 feet apart.²⁵

Precise regulations were drawn up also for those other vital agricultural resources, manure and water. 'The law in the *axones* of Solon punishes even those who steal cow dung', and the law regulating access to water said that

wherever there is a public well within a *hippikon* [i.e. less than about half a mile away], [they must] use it; wherever it is farther away, [they must] look for private water. If, after digging to a depth of sixty feet, they do not find it on their own land, then they must take it from their neighbour, filling a waterjar of six *choes* [c. 20 litres] twice every day. (Plutarch, *Solon* 23.6; Solon, *Laws* F 63)

Although this law, as it is cited out of context by Plutarch, sounds as if it prohibits the use of private wells anywhere near public ones, this cannot be its meaning.²⁶ Virtually the entire city of Athens came within a radius of half a mile from the public fountain-house in the south-east corner of the agora, and compelling many thousands of people to use a single water source would have been courting disaster. In any case, dozens of wells, spanning the whole of the archaic period, have been found in the agora alone. What the law did, rather, was surely to define the *right* to water of those who did not have a supply of their own: they were *entitled* to take from a public source if it was close enough, and to take a specified amount from a private source if nothing else was available.

Again, it is the exceptional precision in formulating rules which shows that access not only to land, but also to water, and indeed manure, must have been a constant source of trouble. There may well

have been an absolute scarcity of these resources, but the problem is likely to have been much aggravated by the aggressive acquisitiveness, especially on the part of the upper classes, signalled by our sources.²⁷

It may be difficult to contemplate with a straight face the possibility of a manure racket – later Greeks were so amused that 'a cow dung case' became proverbial for a petty prosecution – but control over the supply of water is another matter. There are 'many places in Sicily where people are forced to buy their water from private wells owned by the mafia', and mafia manipulation has made public water in Palermo three or four times as expensive as anywhere else in Italy (Stille 1995, 10–11, 138). One of the most successful mafiosi in Sicilian history, Michele 'The Pope' Greco, 'along with other mafia families around Palermo, controlled a large portion of the city's water supply ... In the hottest months of summer... Greco sold water in canisters at exorbitant prices' (Stille 1995, 62, 132; cf. 52–3). It was a dispute over the supply of water, not drugs, which led Luciano Liggio to assassinate his predecessor and create the 'new mafia' of Corleone (*Man of Respect*, 49–53). Early Greek aristocrats, too, could quite conceivably have taken control of public wells and springs and charged for their use, or for the use of their private water supplies. Solon's water law may have been an attempt to limit the exploitation of what was potentially as great a source of power and revenue as land.

The most explicit, and I believe most important, charge levelled by Solon against 'the leaders of the people' has already been cited: 'sparing neither sacred nor public property, they steal and rob left and right' (F 4.12–13). The accusation may well include peculation from state and temple stores of silver and other movables, but the main form of sacred property was the landed estate (*temenos*) generally attached to sanctuaries, while there existed no doubt also large tracts of 'public' land, in the sense of land in common use for grazing, foraging, and the like.²⁸ Solon's prime concerns in this passage, therefore, are likely to have been encroachment on temple estates and enclosure of common land for private exploitation – the latter perhaps exemplified by Laertes' farm, newly carved out with 'very great labour'.²⁹ Here again we find a parallel with developments in nineteenth-century Sicily, where 'voracity for land resulted in encroachments on the common use rights the peasant population exercised'; as a result, 'communities became fully dependent' on those who increasingly monopolized the land, since the majority of the population could not make ends meet without access to common land for 'grazing, sowing, collecting wood and stones, hunting, ... manufacturing

lime and chalk, and collecting wild fruits, herbs, and acorns' (Blok 1974, 33, 40, 119). In this light, we can see what Solon meant when he said of the illegal appropriation of sacred and public property that 'this inescapable blow hits the entire *polis*, and quickly it comes to a miserable slavery' (F 4.17–18): it created hardship and growing dependence on the rich.

Around the turn of the century, parliamentary enquiries into the condition of the Sicilian peasant noted that 'large estates predominate' and 'the land is in the hands of a few' (Blok 1974, 50–1). The situation in Attica around 600 BC is described in the same terms in *The Athenian Constitution*: 'the entire land was in the hands of a few' (*Ath. Pol.* 2.2; 4.5). It will become evident that this work, attributed to Aristotle but probably written by one of his students, offers an account of conditions in Attica which is not internally consistent and therefore cannot be accepted wholesale. This particular bit of information, however, is likely to be near the mark, despite smacking of exaggeration. A heavy concentration – not a complete monopoly – of land ownership in few hands is precisely what the evidence from archaic poetry would lead us to expect, not only for Attica, but also for Theognis' Megara, and Hesiod's Boeotia. We should therefore accept that this was indeed a consequence of illegal appropriation and a major cause of trouble.

The Sicilian solution, adopted in an agrarian reform act of 1950, was to set a legal limit to the amount of landed property one was allowed to own, and to redistribute the excess among the peasants – albeit with limited success (Blok 1974, 76–81). Aristotle tells us that 'some men of olden times' made laws 'which forbade anyone to possess as much land as they liked', and cites Solon as a lawgiver who sought to ensure relative 'equality of property', which may imply that he promulgated a similar law.³⁰ A ban on, or a least hostile reaction to, large livestock holdings features in the story of Theagenes of Megara gaining popular support by 'slaughtering the cattle of the rich, which he seized as it grazed by the river', perhaps infringing common pasture (*Politics* 1305a25–6).

As for redistribution of land, Aristotle cites Tyrtaios as evidence that there were calls for it in archaic Sparta (*Politics* 1306b37–1307a2). Solon is quoted as rejecting similar demands in Athens: 'it did not please me...that of the fat soil of our fatherland the lower classes [*kakoi*] should have an equal share with the elite [*esthloi*]' (*Ath. Pol.* 11.2–12.3; Solon F 34.7–9). Solon's rejection of a total redistribution of land does not exclude measures of more limited scope, of the kind attempted in Sicily, and I believe that a few of his own verses show that at least some

expropriation of land did indeed take place. He lists, as the first 'of the things for which I gathered the people' that 'from the black earth I once lifted the *horoi* [ὅροι] which were fixed in many places; she who had been enslaved is now free' (F 36.1–7). The normal meaning of *horoi* is 'boundary stones' and a straightforward interpretation of these verses is that lifting boundary markers means the expropriation of land, that this land had been 'enslaved' because it had been occupied illegitimately, and that 'setting it free' meant returning it to the rightful owners, which most probably involved returning to common (or sacred) use land upon which private individuals had encroached.³¹

This is not, however, what 'Aristotle' (*Ath. Pol.* 12.4), followed by Plutarch (*Solon* 15.6), took this passage to mean: he quoted it as evidence that Solon cancelled debts, evidently assuming that the *horoi* removed were not ordinary boundary stones, but *horoi* of a different kind, familiar to fourth-century Athenians, namely 'mortgage stones', markers which recorded that a piece of land had been designated as security for a loan or other obligation. His reasons for adopting this interpretation are not difficult to see. In the fourth century, cancellation of debt and redistribution of land had become widespread popular demands which horrified the upper classes. In this political climate, conservative authors did not like to associate a statesman of Solon's stature with such radical measures. Some, like Androtion (*FGrH* 324 F 34), even tried to argue away an evidently very strong tradition that Solon had indeed cancelled debts. For 'Aristotle', the attraction of taking Solon's *horoi* as 'mortgage stones', rather than as simple boundary markers, was twofold: it provided an apparent piece of evidence for the cancellation of debts, to cite against the extreme views of Androtion, and it offered a way round having to treat it as a piece of evidence for that most radical of reforms, the redistribution of land.

But his interpretation cannot stand. First, 'Aristotle' himself says that before Solon all loans were on the security of the person, not on the security of land, so archaic *horoi* could not have marked the 'mortgaging' of land, as they came to do later. Secondly, hundreds of 'mortgage stones' from the fourth century BC and later have been found and they are regularly mentioned in literary evidence for this period, but not a single one dates to, or is mentioned, before c. 400 BC. Stone boundary markers, on the other hand, did exist at a much earlier date: some have been found, and they are mentioned already in the *Iliad*.³² These objections ought to be reason enough to reject our source's reading of Solon's lines as incorrect, and politically motivated. Yet most modern scholars have tried to save it, by postulating that

archaic *horoi* recorded different kinds of obligations, owed by the cultivators of the land to creditors, landlords, or patrons, and that it is an accident of survival that no such stones are attested in any form. These hypotheses have been advanced because scholars have wanted to see a direct link between Solon's removal of *horoi* and his liberation of various kinds of dependent labourers.³³ This is a problem to which we shall turn presently, but for now it will suffice to say that no such connection is made either in Solon's poem or in the discussions of it by 'Aristotle' and Plutarch.

There is thus nothing in the evidence to stop us taking Solon's words at face value, and we may conclude that he did indeed resort to limited expropriation of land, primarily in restoring plots illegally occupied by private individuals to sacred and common ownership – which would not have constituted the kind of radical land redistribution which he rejects elsewhere in his poems.³⁴ This measure, combined with legislation to restrict the size of estates, to protect property rights against even the smallest transgression, and to guarantee access to water, must have been designed to make life easier for the poorest farmers being squeezed by the mafia-style depredations of large landowners, and it will have done much to help. Archaic poetry leaves no doubt that aggressive acquisition and exploitation of resources was a problem elsewhere, too, and there is some evidence that measures not unlike Solon's were demanded and implemented in several Greek states.

Ruthless employers: the exploitation of labour

Since land was 'in the hands of a few', it was inevitable that both in modern Sicily and in parts of ancient Greece the poor should end up working on the land of the rich. *The Athenian Constitution* and Plutarch envisaged the situation in Attica as follows:

The poor – the men, their children, and their wives – were in servitude to the rich, and they were called *pelatai* (πελάται) and *hektēmoroi* (ἐκτίμοροι), for against this payment (*misthōsis*/μισθωσις) they cultivated the fields of the rich...and if they did not make the payment, they and their children became liable to enslavement. And all loans were on the security of the person. (*Ath. Pol.* 2.2)

The whole population was obligated to the rich, for either they cultivated land and handed over to them a sixth of the produce, and were called *hektēmorioi* [sic] and *thētes* (θῆτες), or they borrowed on the security of the person and were liable to enslavement by the lenders. (Plutarch, *Solon* 13.4)

These passages have caused major problems of interpretation, which the Sicilian analogy will help resolve. It may be noted that both sources

clearly distinguish two problems: the exploitation of labour, and the issue of debt. The latter will be treated in the next section.

A survey of modern Mediterranean agriculturalists portrays 'a typical figure' as:

a man with a little property, and a small tenancy, a little land share-cropped, who sells his labour from time to time; ...at harvests, if he cannot get enough manpower from his family and kin, he employs labourers. ... Even when property is extremely concentrated...and most tillers of the soil till other men's soil, it is rare for the population to be divided neatly into landowners and a homogeneous mass of labourers. (Davis 1977, 46–7)

The economic position of the family of 'Giovanni' may serve as a Sicilian example. 'My father hired himself out by the week, but we also had two *tumoli* of arable land [c. 1 acre or 0.4 ha]. ... There was no house in the fields, only a reed hut', so the family lived as tenants on an annual lease in a windowless house on the estate of a wealthy *cavaliere*, who employed the father 'throughout the summer and in the winter, too, whenever possible', since 'the two *tumoli* alone couldn't provide all the necessities of life'. Two older sons tried to find casual work 'in building or herding goats', while the youngest was sent to work for

a market gardener, no pay, just a bag of vegetables every now and then. He gave me very little to eat, and if I made a mistake I got a taste of the whip. But when he wanted to give me a taste of something else I left. My father beat me for it...

So precarious was this existence that the death of the mule counted as a 'tragedy', and helped convince the oldest son to emigrate. The second son soon followed suit.³⁵

In Sicily, smallholders who found further employment as sharecroppers (*metatieri*) found that their 'position with regard to employment did not basically differ from that of the landless labourer'. While elsewhere in Italy farmers enjoyed the relative security of the *mezzadria* system, whereby landlords let them cultivate sizeable farms in exchange for half of the crops, in Sicily the majority of sharecropping contracts allowed the cultivator to take only a quarter of the crops. Then there were various fixed surcharges to be paid, which would swallow up as much as 5% of the harvest when it was good, and more when it was not: the *terrapiuolo* (1%), the *addito* (1 or 2%), the *lordura* (1%), and the *cuccia*, for 'protection' (1%). To make things worse, seed grain was provided by the landlord in a small measure but had to be repaid in a larger one. In sum, 'from an abundant though rare yield...the sharecropper obtained scarcely 20 per cent'.³⁶

The existence of widespread smallholding despite a high concentration of property, the general need among smallholders for additional income from employment on the land of others, and the harshness of the terms on which such employment was offered, all had close parallels in early Greece.

The use of hired labourers, *thētes* or *erithoi* (ἐριθοί) or *latreis* (λάτρεις), is well attested. Plutarch's assertion that there were numerous *thētes* in Attica is confirmed by the Athenian system of property ranking, apparently going back to before Solon, which gave this label, 'hired hands', to the bottom census class. According to Homer, even 'a man without land, who earns no great livelihood' may employ a hired hand (*Od.* 11.489–90). Annual contracts appear to have been the norm, but a day-labourer is mentioned in a couplet attributed to both Theognis (485–6) and Euenos (F 8); hired work spans the whole range from ploughing, planting, and harvesting to herding and building dry-stone walls.³⁷ Hesiod's advice is to 'employ a *thēs* without a household and seek an *erithos* without a child' (*W&D* 602–3). The implication is that hiring a *thēs* with a household of his own is a real, but less attractive, alternative, just as it is quite possible to employ a woman who has children, although she is bound to be 'difficult' (603). In other words, there were men and women who had families and some land of their own, yet hired themselves out.

As for the terms of their employment, Homer paints an ambivalent picture. On the one hand, we find a mock offer to a beggar of work for a 'sure wage' as well as 'abundant food', clothes, and sandals (*Od.* 18.357–61), and, to encourage the princes, the poet holds up an ideal image of *erithoi* harvesting on the estate of a *basileus*, whose servants prepare for them a generous meal of bread and meat (*Il.* 18.550–60). On the other hand, Akhilleus famously says that there is no worse lot than that of a hired labourer, except death (*Od.* 11.489–91), and this suggests that many employers fell short of the ideal and treated their workers as, in myth, Laomedon dealt with the gods who had worked for him as *thētes*:

When the seasons brought the end of our service, then the terrible Laomedon forcibly deprived us of our entire wages and sent us on our way with threats. He threatened to bind our feet and hands and to sell us in distant islands, and he even declared that he was going to lop off our ears. So we went back...furious about the wage which he had promised but did not pay. (*Il.* 21.450–7)

Hesiod urges that 'an agreed wage should be sure' (370), and that a – probably hired – ploughman should be well fed (442). Evidently these things cannot be taken for granted.

The evidence for the existence in seventh-century Attica of the other two groups, the *hektēmoroi* and *pelatai*, must have been a mention in Solon's laws or poems, as is suggested by the comments of 'Aristotle' and Plutarch that in Solon's day the poor 'were called' by those names. The nature of their position is less obvious.

Although rarely mentioned, *pelatai* were familiar enough in classical Greece to be mentioned without explanation in one of Plato's dialogues: 'he was a *pelatēs* of mine and...worked for us as a hired hand'. For the benefit of later readers, an ancient commentary explained the meaning of the word as 'one who approaches another as a result of poverty, and one who serves for wages'. Roman and Byzantine lexicographers expand a little on this. Julius Pollux tells us that '*pelatai* and *thētes* are names for *free* men who on account of their poverty serve for pay'; the patriarch Photius repeats that they 'serve for pay' but adds that *pelatai* are 'those who work for people *nearby*', a plausible comment since the word could also be used to mean simply 'neighbour'.³⁸ The implication is that a *pelatēs* was someone with a settled place of residence and thus presumably some land of his own, but dependent upon a larger landowner in the vicinity for extra income from work as a labourer. It is probably this custom of providing employment for poorer neighbours which is reflected in two lines of Theognis: 'be bitter and sweet and gentle and harsh to hired labourers (*latreis*) and slaves and neighbours at your door' (301–2).³⁹

The status of *hektēmoroi* has been debated since antiquity, despite their seemingly straightforward name. The ending *-moros* means 'having a share', as in *isomoros*, 'having an equal share', or *geomoros*, 'having a share of land'. *Hektē* means 'a sixth' and, more specifically, the *hekteus* was a standard measure of grain and other dry produce, one-sixth of a *medimnos* ('bushel'). A literal translation of *hektēmoros* thus reads 'one whose share is a sixth of every bushel'. Photius' *Lexicon* accordingly says that '*pelatai* were also known as *hektēmoroi* because they worked the land for a sixth part of the crops'.⁴⁰

The existence of a sharecropping arrangement is confirmed by two further terms attested in Solon's laws, *epimortos* (ἐπίμορτος) and *mortē* (μορτή). We are given several definitions. '*Epimortos* land, in Solon, is that which is cultivated for a share, and *mortē* is the share of the cultivators', according to Pollux. Hesychius' entry under *epimortos* reads: 'arable land divided into shares; one who works for a share is also called this, for the share is called *mortē*'. The important point is that these definitions, and therefore presumably the law on which they draw, envisage the contract in terms of the landowner ceding a share to the cultivator, rather than the cultivator giving up a share to the

owner. The few sources who mention *epimortos* land all link it implicitly or explicitly with *hektēmoroi*, and if this is right then a 'sixth' must indeed be the share which their landlords let them keep. Eustathios says so explicitly: "the *mortē*" is another dialect phrase: they say that it is the sixth share of the crops which was given to the *hektēmoroi* [sic].⁴¹

So far, the sources paint a picture of early sixth-century sharecropping which is coherent and based on concepts found in contemporary texts. But there are two problems. First, could anyone have survived on a mere sixth of the crops cultivated by his own hand? Comparative evidence has been adduced from at least the mid-nineteenth century onwards to show that this idea was 'a ridiculous mistake'. 'Nowhere on earth are fields so fertile that farmers could cope with such conditions. On the island of Java, [cultivators] used to give up one part of the entire harvest and kept four parts for themselves.'⁴² Our Sicilian example, however, shows that much harsher conditions are indeed possible. If the *metatieri* could manage on a fifth, and if, like them and like many *thētes* and *pelatai*, *hektēmoroi* cultivated their own small pieces of land as well as engaging in sharecropping for extra income, surely they could have struggled by even on as little as a sixth.

The second problem is that, as we have seen, *The Athenian Constitution*, again followed by Plutarch, presents a different scenario. Both say that it was not the landlord who ceded a share to the *hektēmoros*, but the *hektēmoros* who handed over a share of one-sixth to the landlord.⁴³ This notion has also crept into a couple of the lexicon definitions of *mortē* already cited. Two of the manuscripts of Pollux have been altered to read 'the share handed over by the cultivators', which is inconsistent with the rest of the entry, and Hesychius concludes his definition with the comment that '*hektēmoroi* are those who pay a sixth part', which is inconsistent not only with what precedes it, but also with his earlier entry for *hektēmoros*: 'those who work the land for a sixth part'.⁴⁴ These inconsistencies are surely the result of an attempt to incorporate both the evidence from Solon's laws and the views attributed to the authoritative Aristotle, even though they are incompatible.

Aristotle's interpretation has been quite widely accepted in modern times, too, but its weaknesses are obvious. It ignores the implications of what little contemporary evidence we find cited, and offers no arguments or supporting evidence of its own. Worse, it posits a sharecropping or tenancy agreement highly favourable to the cultivator. Such generous terms are unheard of anywhere in the modern Mediterranean, and could have given *hektēmoroi* no cause for complaint. If one assumes, for the sake of argument, that Aristotle was right to claim

that these cultivators kept the bulk of the crop for themselves, he and our other sources must have been wrong to think that they worked on land belonging to others. We might speculate, as many have done, that *hektēmoroi* perhaps worked their own land, paying a sixth either to their creditors or to local men of power for 'protection', or else that they cultivated public land, handing over a sixth to local overlords, or to public stores for use in communal feasting.⁴⁵

In all likelihood, however, Aristotle did not arrive at his view on the basis of solid, or even tenuous, evidence, but, like so many modern scholars, simply refused to believe that a farmer could have lived on a sixth of his crops. This would have been especially difficult to accept for someone familiar with the rosy image of the past developed by fourth-century conservatives, one feature of which was the notion that the rich used to let the poor cultivate their land 'at moderate rents' (Isocrates, *Areopagitikos* 7.32). By that standard, a 'rent' of five-sixths would have been inconceivable; one-sixth would seem steep enough, and Aristotle accordingly plumped for this as the only other conceivable interpretation of *hektēmoros*: one who pays a sixth. As with his interpretation of the *horoi*, Aristotle's account is nothing but a politically-slanted theory, which is implausible in itself and flies in the face of a straightforward explanation of *hektēmoros*, *epimortos*, and *mortē*, terms used by Solon himself. Rather than salvage part of this shaky construct by multiplying hypotheses, we should reject it.⁴⁶ *Hektēmoroi* were sharecroppers allowed to keep only a sixth part of the harvest, which left them slightly worse off than Sicilian *metatieri*, and, presumably, only slightly better off than hired labourers.⁴⁷

Casting around for some evidence on how Solon improved the lot of these badly exploited sharecroppers, scholars have generally imagined that the *horoi* mentioned by him must have recorded the terms on which *hektēmoroi* served, and that the removal of these markers must have symbolized the abolition of *hektēmoros* status.⁴⁸ We have already seen, however, that it is much more likely that Solon was speaking of simple boundary stones, since there is no evidence for markers recording encumbrances on land or obligations of service in archaic Athens. If the *horoi* had no bearing on the position of *hektēmoroi*, there is nothing in either Solon's work or later sources to tell us how this group of sharecroppers came into being or how it came to be dissolved, as it evidently had been by the classical period.

There was probably nothing to tell. It is a common assumption that *hektēmoroi* were always *hektēmoroi* and nothing but *hektēmoroi*, that a section of the Athenian population had been somehow – through

debt or a need for protection – permanently and exclusively reduced to this status, from which they were subsequently ‘liberated’. But the sources do not say so. Rather, by assimilating *hektēmoroi* to hired labourers, they imply that a *hektēmoros*, like a *thēs* or *pelatēs* or Sicilian *metatiere*, was a man who might well own some land, but did not have enough to live on and so needed to work the land of wealthier men on a *short-term, contractual* basis. Hired labourers, and perhaps *pelatai*, received a fixed payment in kind, while *hektēmoroi* and *metatieri* received a share of the produce, but there was not otherwise a fundamental difference between them. Many no doubt sharecropped the same plots year after year, but in principle they could change employers, or turn to wage labour instead. If their own small properties flourished, they might even be able to stop working for others altogether. As in Sicily, a high concentration of land, backed up by a willingness to resort to intimidation, would have placed the landowners ‘in a strong bargaining position from which to dictate the terms of employment’ (Blok 1974, 55). In Athens, this resulted in large numbers of poor farmers accepting the worst possible sharecropping contracts, a sixth part being the smallest share negotiable under a system of measurement which divided the standard measure of grain into ‘sixths’ (*hekteis*).

Solon could not and did not, therefore, ‘liberate’ *hektēmoroi*, any more than he liberated hired labourers or *pelatai*. A ban on sharecropping would not have helped the poor, but merely deprived them of a source of income. What would have been helpful was legislation to ban the most exploitative contracts and set as the legal minimum a share of, say, two or three sixths. Since there was evidently a law which mentioned *epimortos*, ‘sharecropped’, land, it is just conceivable that Solon did take such a step.

In Sicily, however, there was no legislation to ameliorate sharecropping conditions, but simply a renegotiation of terms on an *ad hoc*, local basis. While landowners continued to try to impose the harshest terms, their employees, owing to a general improvement in the economic position of the poor and a slight change in the balance of power, were often able to demand and get as much as fifty percent of the crops (Blok 1974, 77, 124, 195). In the same way, it is likely that it was the general improvement of the condition of the poor effected by Solon’s reforms and reinforced by subsequent developments⁴⁹ which made it harder for landlords to impose the most exploitative contracts, and which ensured that the status of *hektēmoros* gradually became obsolete.

Loan sharks: the exploitation of credit

Agricultural workers with minimal access to land and minimal wages for their labour are almost inevitably forced to borrow grain, just to survive until the next harvest. With equal near-inevitability, the lenders will be those disposing of the largest surpluses of grain, that is, the same large landowners and estate managers who are putting the squeeze on the poor in the first place. In Sicily, the interest on this sort of loan in kind could vary from 25 to 100%, also to be paid in kind. Such demands were often impossible to meet, of course, which placed the peasant ‘permanently in debt’ and made him virtually ‘a serf’ to the *padrone* who lent him wheat.⁵⁰ Calls for ‘more favourable credit facilities’ were an unsurprising feature of peasant resistance (Blok 1974, 53). In Greece, indebtedness took different forms, but played much the same part in compounding the problems of smallholders, sharecroppers, and labourers.

Among the goals of Hesiod’s farmer in the *Works and Days* is not only ‘the avoidance of hunger’, but also the ‘discharge of debts’ (403–4). Trade is considered one way to ‘escape from debts and hunger’ (646–7). Hesiod warns against relying on neighbours for loans of oxen or wagons (451–7) or other farm implements (407–9) – giving detailed instructions on how to make one’s own mortar and pestle, parts of a wagon, and a couple of ploughs, the second to be kept in reserve (420–36) – but such items can hardly have been the source of serious debt, since they would simply be returned after use. The main thing borrowed was evidently ‘sustenance’ (*biotōs*/βίωσις, 400): grain and other staples for consumption if stores ran out before the next harvest, and for use as seed.

A neighbour, in Hesiod, may provide grain as a gift – which he will expect to be returned some day, but which the rules of reciprocity do not allow him to claim back⁵¹ – or he may provide grain as a loan, conditional upon the explicit promise of a return. The distinction is expressed in the verb ‘to measure out’ (*metreō*/μετρέω), used when Hesiod tells his brother: ‘I will give you nothing further, nor will I measure out anything else. Work, foolish Perses!’ (396–7). The word itself indicates precise accounting, since ‘what you give, you do not need to measure’ (Korver 1934, 73), but what you want back does need to be specified and quantified; its occurrences elsewhere and its definitions in lexicæ confirm that it means making a loan in kind.⁵² Hesiod’s advice is to ‘take correct measure from a neighbour and make a correct return with the same measure – or a better one, if you can – so that whenever you are in need you may be sure of him in future,

too' (359–51). This recalls the Sicilian custom of returning loans literally in a larger measure (Blok 1974, 66), except that in Sicily this is compulsory, whereas for Hesiod it is strictly voluntary.

In the *Works and Days*, therefore, loans do demand an exact return, but there is no question of demanding interest; nor is there any hint of securing loans by taking pledges, or of a legal, as opposed to moral, obligation to repay. Even so, Hesiod not only urges farmers to avoid borrowing, but, true to his acquisitive ethos, also hints at the possibility of putting others in one's debt by lending grain. A good harvest, he points out, will ensure that 'you will reach the bright spring in possession of abundance, and you will not be fixing your gaze upon others, but another man will be in need of you' (477–8). Although under the conditions implicit in the *Works and Days* one would derive little or no material benefit from placing others in one's debt, one would of course gain informal power over the debtors and prestige within the community.

The introduction of interest, pledges, and legal backing for the creditor transformed lending into first and foremost a source of *wealth* rather than power. By the end of the seventh century BC, borrowing in Attica was 'on the body', which is to say that creditors could by law enslave defaulting debtors. The same state of affairs came to prevail in many other Greek states, according to the late fourth-century author Hekataios of Abdera, who commented that it was odd how 'most of the lawgivers of the Greeks...prohibited taking as security for loans weapons, or a plough, or other things which are most indispensable, yet allowed those who *use* these things to be liable to enslavement' (*FGrH* 264 F 25; Diodorus 1.79.4). This is indeed peculiar, unless early Greek law sought to ban the practice of seizing property to recover a loan, yet allowed enslavement as a bodily *punishment* for defaulting.⁵³ Solon's poems repeatedly stress that the enslaved were *sold*, usually but not always abroad:

These evils dwell among our people, but many poor men end up in a foreign country, sold and bound in shameful chains. (F 4.23–5)

I brought back to Athens, their divinely created fatherland, many who had been sold, some unjustly, others justly. (F 36.8–10)

Clearly, creditors in Athens were not out to gain greater power over their debtors or to employ them as cheap labour, but primarily concerned to make a profit out of them.

That the transition to profit-making, legally-enforceable loans was by no means an obvious or uncontested development is suggested by an obscure law and an even obscurer custom, as elucidated by Paul

Millett. The law, attributed to Zaleukos of Locri, who is traditionally dated to the seventh century, decreed that loans should not involve written agreements: evidently 'an attempt to preserve the gift element in loans and prevent their development into formal obligations enforceable at law' (Millett 1991, 42; Zenobius, *Prov.* 4). The custom, current in Knossos, was that borrowers should pretend to 'snatch' from the lender the goods loaned, and this is probably 'a legal fiction designed, in the absence of laws relating to the breaking of agreements, to differentiate between a loan and an outright gift. By symbolically assimilating loan to theft, a legal sanction was established against defaulting debtors' (Millett 1991, 42; Plutarch, *Mor.* 303c [= *QG* 53]).

One text may give us a clue as to how enslavement for debt became legal in Athens:

If you have suffered a terrible fate [δεινά; or: 'ruin', λυγρά] because of your weakness [κακότης], you must not attribute any part of it to the gods, for you yourselves have increased the power [ἠυξήσατε] of these men by giving them pledges [ρύσια; or: 'means of protection', ρύματα] and because of this you have evil slavery. Each individual amongst you walks in the tracks of the fox, but collectively you have an empty head, for you look at the tongue and the tricky words of a man, but you do not watch the deeds he does. (Solon F 11)

The sources which quote these verses of Solon's believe that the poet was referring to an event that took place more than thirty years after his reforms: Peisistratos' seizure of tyrannical power with the aid of a bodyguard which, so the story goes, he had obtained from the people of Athens by deceit. Although this is chronologically just about possible, it is something of a stretch, and there are several points in the text which speak against it. For one thing, Peisistratos was in his time a popular figure with a reputation for ruling mildly and fairly, and the people who granted him his bodyguard are unlikely to have seen his *coup d'état* as a 'terrible thing' or a reduction to 'evil slavery'. Secondly, only one of the different versions of the text contains a possible reference to a bodyguard, in the unique and odd phrase 'means of protection'; the other version cannot be made to mean the same thing. Lastly, even if we do read 'means of protection', these are granted to 'men' in the plural, not to a person, Peisistratos, in the singular.⁵⁴ In all probability, the fragment was taken out of context and adapted to fit a story – itself surely too good to be true – of how Solon, the man who might have been tyrant but famously turned down the opportunity, continued to resist tyranny a generation later, in extreme old age.⁵⁵

Its original context was presumably a poem composed *before* the reforms, like the elegy cited in *The Athenian Constitution*, in which Solon tried to mediate between rich and poor by pointing out to each the error of their ways.⁵⁶ If so, the passage must refer to the literal slavery into which many Athenians were falling as a result of debt, and its message to the debtors of Athens was that they only had themselves to blame for what was happening, since they had given creditors greater power by giving them 'pledges', or alternatively 'means of protection', i.e. the means to recover their loans. The next lines show that the poet attributed this fatal mistake not to individuals, but to a collective decision. In other words, according to Solon, the common people of Athens had been foolish to agree (or not to resist) when their leaders put to them a proposal (or confronted them with a decision) to give creditors greater power by allowing them to seize defaulting debtors and sell these into slavery. Since the poet blames his contemporaries, this development must have taken place within living memory, and the publication of notoriously severe laws by Drako, in about 620 BC, seems a plausible occasion.⁵⁷

Charging interest is probably an innovation of the same period. By the early fifth century, it was so widespread that *The Battle of Frogs and Mice* could have fun with the notion of the goddess Athena borrowing from a fellow-craftsman to finance her weaving only to find herself unable to repay him when mice ruin her work: 'the cobbler is chasing me and demanding his interest, which is a horrible thing for immortals' (178–86).⁵⁸ Earlier evidence is thin, but there is a story that, around the time of Solon, the people of Megara 'enacted a decree whereby they took back from the lenders the interest they had given. They referred to the affair as *palintokia*, "the return of interest"'.⁵⁹ Apart from showing that interest was being charged, the fact that interest payments were recovered, rather than debts cancelled altogether, suggests that the problem was not debt as such, but resentment against a recent practice still regarded as an unjust, exploitative imposition. Our sources on early Athens say hardly anything about interest, but that the principle was accepted early on is apparent from an archaic law, possibly dating back to Solon, allowing the lender to charge as much as he wishes. It is likely that interest charges were already contributing to the hardships of the Athenian poor by the early sixth century.⁶⁰

Solon pictures for us not only many poor men being sold abroad, but also 'some of necessity running away from their debts and wandering so far and wide that they no longer spoke the Attic language, and

others here at home putting up with shameful slavery, trembling in fear of their masters' habits' (F 36.10–14). The Athenian elite appears to have outdone all but the most exploitative mafiosi, whether traditional agricultural lenders or baseball-bat-toting urban loan sharks. The reaction in Athens was accordingly more radical than elsewhere. In abrogating the law authorizing enslavement for debt, which may have been in force for less than a generation, Solon was probably doing no more than bringing Athens into line with other Greek states, but in cancelling all debts he went beyond his contemporaries in Megara, and further than upper class Greeks of the classical period found respectable. The action was euphemistically labelled *seisakhtheia*, 'shaking off burdens', but elite hostility to it was reflected in a blunt nickname for Solon and his supporters: *khreōkopidai*, 'debt-cutters'.⁶¹ Equally radical was an amnesty law which set free all those who had been enslaved, by restoring to citizenship everyone who had been deprived of it in the past (except men convicted of murder or of attempting to seize power).⁶² All this must have brought much relief in the short term, and for the future it reduced the pressure that could legally be brought to bear on debtors. Interest rates, however, were apparently left entirely to the discretion of the lender, and there was nothing to prevent the wealthy from resuming the exploitation of their neighbours and employees by extending credit at a high price.⁶³

Racketeers and patrons: exploitation and reciprocity

Apart from cheap labour and high interest, the rich received extreme deference from their employees and debtors, and from other common men. In Sicily, all 'gentlemen' demanded from their inferiors the elaborate show of respect now familiar from mafia novels and films: 'their numerous employees, both actual and potential, used to call them *Don*, addressed them with *Vossia* (*Vossignoria*, Your Lordship), and saluted them with *Bacio la mano* (I kiss your hand)'.⁶⁴ The Greek equivalent was for 'the people' to 'seek the favour' of a prince 'as if he were a god' (*Theogony* 91), to 'look at' him 'as if he were a god' (*Il.* 12.312; cf. *Od.* 7.71), and most often to 'honour him as if he were a god'.⁶⁵ In both Sicily and Greece, respect was expressed not only in looks and gestures, but also in gifts and favours. These were in principle reciprocal, which is to say that rich and powerful men, including mafiosi, who accepted gifts or favours from their inferiors, obliged themselves – at least nominally – to make some sort of return. On the one hand, the balance of power was such that this opened yet another avenue for the extraction of wealth from the poor; on the other hand,

reciprocity in personal relations did militate against entirely unrestrained exploitation.⁶⁶

Several types of gift-giving can be directly paralleled. Some gifts were presented to superiors on special occasions, with an view to creating goodwill. For example, in Homer, a prince setting out on a journey might expect to receive gifts from 'friends' (19.237–9); when Joe Bonanno travelled to Sicily, so many of his friends gave him 'cigars as *bon voyage* gifts' that he ended up with 'perhaps a thousand, of all lengths and thicknesses' which 'entirely filled a valise', carried past customs for him by an obliging official (1983, 196). Again, the hospitality extended to guests in Homer is famously lavish, and much exploited by visiting princes;⁶⁷ Bonanno expected so many people to want to make him welcome in Sicily that he 'rented an entire small motel to accommodate the many friends and relatives who came to see [him], often bringing gifts of fresh food and delicacies' (1983, 201).

Other gifts are instrumental in gaining access to resources controlled by *basileis* and *civili*. The Sicilian postmaster who only paid out old age pensions 'after he had "seen" (received) substantial shares of almonds grapes or olives according to the season in which peasants called at his office' (Blok 1974, 200), is not a million miles away from the commanders-in-chief of the Greek army in the *Iliad*, who graciously accepted a gift of 'a thousand measures' of wine from merchants wishing to be allowed to trade the rest of their cargo with the soldiers in exchange for booty.⁶⁸

What set mafiosi apart from other *civili* was their demand for a type of gift known as *pizzo* or *cuccia*, and more widely known as protection money: 'the sharecropper had to cede various "gifts" to the *gabelloto*, who distributed them among the *campieri*. These gifts were in fact tributes the peasant paid for protection' (Blok 1974, 55, 66). *Pizzo*, 'beak', suggests a bird-like portion; *cuccia* alludes to a small meal of boiled grain given to visitors on the feast of Santa Lucia; the actual quantity of grain claimed amounted to about 1% of the harvest. Despite being represented as a small gift, the *pizzo* 'was always a racket: it was forced upon people by intimidation and violence'. Punishment for non-payment 'involved theft, arson, and destruction: crops were set on fire or stolen; trees and vines were cut down; and animals either disappeared, or were wounded or killed on the spot' (Blok 1974, 151–2).

In Homer, as we have seen, princes receive gifts from their subjects in return for which they are meant to protect their communities from enemy assault – even though they would in reality contribute little

more to the war effort than any common man. They receive gifts for upholding justice within the community – even though it is said that as a rule princes are arbitrary in their sympathies. Most tellingly, they receive large shares of war booty, notionally as a gift from the army,⁶⁹ whether or not they have taken part in the fighting, and they will resort to violence if their claims are challenged. Akhilleus has his 'prize' slave woman taken away as a punishment for objecting to the way Agamemnon dealt with the booty; Agamemnon threatens that any attempt to resist will be met with force: 'I will come with more men and take her myself' (*Il.* 1.324–5). When Thersites, a man of very low status, echoes Akhilleus' complaints, he is dealt with even more brusquely: on Agamemnon's behalf he is beaten so hard that he bleeds (2.265–9).

Other direct evidence for the use of violence to extract 'gifts' or 'favours' is rare, but the princes of Ithaka do seem to give the game away when they ask a man who has lent a ship to Telemakhos: 'Did he take the black ship from you against your will, by force, or did you give it to him willingly?' (*Od.* 4.646–7). The likelihood of a violent response to a refusal to present gifts or perform favours may be inferred from the general ferocity with which the heroes treat those who show them the slightest disrespect,⁷⁰ and in particular from the comment that 'when he is angry with a lesser man, a prince is the more powerful of the two; even if he swallows his anger for that day, he afterwards nurses his resentment until he has satisfaction' (*Il.* 1.80–3). Finally, given that princes are said to be 'honoured with gifts as if they were gods' (*Il.* 9.155, 297) and that Homer's gods in most respects behave very much like mortals, it seems reasonable to draw inferences about human behaviour from Artemis' reaction to being deprived of a 'gift' due to her: when Oineus failed to offer her a sacrifice of the first fruits of his orchard, she retaliated by sending a giant boar to uproot his fruit trees (*Il.* 9.533–42). It is hard to imagine a closer mythical equivalent of sending an enforcer like Giovanni 'with some friends to "chop firewood" in the orchard of a certain man who had refused to pay for protection' (*Man of Respect*, 46).

Behind the flattering picture of *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Theogony*, then, we can discern a not-too-distant relative of a mafia racket: the extortion of a range of 'gifts' in exchange for largely notional protection against one's enemies, in battle and in court. It is this racket which in the *Works and Days* is denounced in Hesiod's favourite phrase 'gift-eating princes'.

By contrast, neither Solon nor Theognis, for all their harsh words about elite greed, ever complains that the upper classes 'eat' gifts. The exploitation of gift-giving was evidently no longer a major issue by the

end of the seventh century. A probable reason for the change is that gifts given to private patrons became gradually less significant than gifts contributed to public funds, which in turn developed into regular payments of taxes.

Already in Homer, we find that the people at large make contributions in kind to communal stores, to be used for communal purposes. The leaders of the Greek army at Troy are addressed as 'you who drink at public expense' (δήμια, *Il.* 17.249–50), which suggests that what is elsewhere called 'the wine of the elders' (γερούσιον οἶνον, *Il.* 4.259; *Od.* 13.8), consumed at meetings of the princes, is provided by a regular levy from the people.⁷¹ Emergency levies are also attested. 'I exhaust the people with [demands for] gifts and food' to 'swell the spirit' of the allied troops, says Hektor (*Il.* 17.225–6; cf. 18.288–92), while Aithon is proud of having provided in the same way for the crews of a fleet putting in at Amnisos on its way to Troy: 'I gave them barley-meal, and wine, and cattle to sacrifice, collecting from the people [δημόθεν ἀγείρας]' (*Od.* 19.197–8). Even the cost of gifts presented to a visitor from abroad may be passed on to the public, as it is by the generous princes of Phaiakia: 'We will recompense ourselves afterwards by collecting among the people, for it is hard for one man to do free favours' (*Od.* 13.14–15).

In Athens, Solon's laws spoke of 'the silver of the *naukrariai*', indicating that these bodies, which apparently played a role in the administration of Athens at least as far back as 630 BC, disposed of public funds. The actual uncoined silver would presumably have been contributed by wealthy men, but in all likelihood these compensated themselves, in the Phaiakian manner, by levies from the poor.⁷² When Solon complained about theft from public property (*F* 4.12–13), he may thus have been thinking not only of enclosures of common land, but also of peculation from public funds, and any contributions to such funds which remained outstanding may have constituted the 'public debts' which, according to several sources, Solon cancelled along with private ones.⁷³ In the mid-sixth century, Peisistratos exacted a 'tithe' from all produce (*Ath. Pol.* 16.4) and his sons are credited with asking 'only one-twentieth' (Thucydides 6.54). The fact that these levies are adduced as proof of the mildness and popularity of their rule confirms that some form of taxation had by then been in existence for some time; had Peisistratos been the first to impose taxes, his tithe would surely have been remembered as an intolerable imposition.⁷⁴

Taxation was only one aspect of a more general centralization and formalization of power, which tended to undermine the personal

power of aristocrats. Most significant in terms of the position of the poorest members of society was greater regulation in judicial matters. To cite only some key developments in the Athenian legal system, Solon, in his own words, 'wrote down laws for high and low alike, creating straight justice for each' (*F* 36.18–20). His aim was evidently to restrict the arbitrary use of judicial power, and to this end he also introduced the innovations listed by Aristotle as two of Solon's 'most popular' measures: his grant of the right to prosecute to 'anyone who wishes' and his institution of the right to contest verdicts by appealing to the assembled people (*Ath. Pol.* 9.1). These reforms will have significantly altered the balance of power in favour of the common man. The subsequent introduction by Peisistratos of travelling judges to try cases in the villages of Attica further curtailed the power of the local gentry to settle disputes in their own interests (*Ath. Pol.* 16.5). Such changes meant that the poor had a little less reason to cultivate powerful patrons, as their legal position, at least, became slightly more secure.

No doubt individuals continued to give gifts to their superiors in power and wealth when it was expedient to do so, but it would seem that the structural role of such private gift-giving declined in the course of the seventh century as a result of the centralization of power. One would expect patrons to be accordingly less willing to make gifts or extend favours to their clients, and there is some evidence to support this.

The key form of patronage in Sicily involved providing work, and providing it on a regular and relatively favourable basis. In hiring labourers and allocating contracts to sharecroppers, the estate managers and their staff would give preference to kinsmen and 'friends'. 'The more personal the relationship...the less onerous the contract. The verbal agreements on which these contracts were based were then "respected for friendship" and involved the exchange of small services and favours' (Blok 1974, 62–3). Next to this, the most important favour was for the patron to make concessions in time of crisis: 'mafiosi were ruthless...[but] at times, they paid heed to the request of the poor peasant and allowed for a slight reduction, especially when harvests failed' (Blok 1974, 153–4). Finally, a wealthy man might simply make small gifts to his employees. Giovanni's father, who late in life was reduced to being a day-labourer, had worked regularly on weekly contracts while he enjoyed the patronage of a local *cavaliere*, who also extended other minor kindnesses vividly remembered by Giovanni himself. On the patron's estate,

there were nearly always guests coming for supper...and after the meal

the *Cavaliere* put aside a plate for my father and the farm manager with the skin, the heads and any bones that still had a little meat on them. I was crazy about the heads...

The first time he saw me he asked my father to tell him my name and gave me ten lira as a present. That was forty years ago and I can still remember the feel of the banknote in my hand.⁷⁵

In Athens, we hear of the patronage extended by Peisistratos in the sixth century and Kimon in the fifth. According to Theopompos (*FGrH* 115 F 135; Athenaeus 12.532 f.), Peisistratos 'did not station guards either on his farms or in his orchards', so that the needy might help themselves to his produce. According to *The Athenian Constitution* (16.2–3), he also 'loaned money' to struggling farmers; this must be an anachronistic version of the story in Aelian that Peisistratos told those in need: 'If your span of oxen has died, take one from me, and go and work. If you have no seedcorn, you will have it from me' (*VH* 9.25). The implication is surely that he provided these things free, or at least free of interest.⁷⁶ Kimon, the only other person in Athenian history to be credited with extending patronage of this kind, made himself a name for generosity by providing 'a simple meal' for his poorer neighbours on a daily basis, allowing people to help themselves to his crops, and handing out clothing and coins to the needy.⁷⁷ Presumably there were other landowners who exercised generosity on a smaller scale, but the rarity of references to patronage suggests that it was rather limited and mean in archaic Greece. Theognis, in a couple of lines cited earlier, declared that the way to deal with 'hired labourers and slaves and neighbours at your door' was to 'be bitter and sweet and gentle and harsh' (301–2). His advice, apparently, is to mix sweet patronage and bitter exploitation in equal measure.

Just before passing the decree demanding the 'return of interest', the Megarians are said to have resorted to another remarkable measure against the rich, which suggests that there had been a time when patronage had been more common and more generous:

Among the shocking acts of misconduct towards the wealthy, the poor would enter their homes and insist on being entertained sumptuously. But if they did not receive what they demanded, they would treat all the household with violence and insult.⁷⁸

This episode has been described as 'a deliberate distortion of the patron-client relationship, reversing the roles of exploiters and exploited' (Millet 1991, 49), but it can be more plausibly understood as a hostile account of what was simply an attempt by the poor to *reinstate*

a form of patronage in the form of occasional free meals – not necessarily much more lavish than the left-over chickenheads which made such an indelible impression on Giovanni – which had traditionally been extended to them, but had more recently been cut off by employers and landlords bent on minimizing their outgoings. The rebellion against interest payments will have had the same goal: a return to the old system of interest-free loans extended by patrons to help clients through hard times.

Perhaps we may infer a shrinking of patronage in other parts of the Greek world, too, partly because clients were less concerned to cultivate patrons as a result of the centralisation of power, but surely in at least equal part because of the spiralling acquisitiveness which we have encountered throughout.

Compared to the hardship created by the monopolization of resources and the exploitation of labour and credit, a reduction in patronage may seem of marginal significance, but its effect should not be underestimated. It has been observed that in many societies patronage is vital to maintaining a degree of social harmony. Trends towards reducing it, even slightly, have repeatedly been the cause of riots and rebellions in European history.⁷⁹ Whatever other conditions were represented in archaic Megara, the shrinking of patronage was apparently the last straw, and it may have been the last straw in many another part of Greece.

Conclusion: exploitation and resistance

The poor suffered extreme economic hardship as well as social indignities, and their sufferings were not due to prolonged drought and famine, or to overpopulation, as has sometimes been suggested,⁸⁰ but were imposed on them by the ruling elites of their communities, who sought to monopolize landownership by any means they could, encroached on common use rights vital to the survival of those at subsistence level, forced poorly paid wage labour and harshly exploitative sharecropping contracts upon those desperate for income, extorted high interest from those forced to borrow, and demanded gifts from those dependent on their favour, while offering little patronage in return.

Some aspects of this mafia-style regime had a long history, and are already detectable behind the glamorous façade of the Homeric world or forcibly brought to our attention by Hesiod. The most important of these was the increasing concentration of landownership, which might by itself have sparked off a crisis eventually. The situation was brought to a head, however, by the changes in patronage which occurred later

in the seventh century. The kind of relationship implied by Hesiod, which was less concerned with wealth than with power – both the power acquired by the patron over those who accepted his interest-free loans and the judicial power exercised by the patron on behalf of his clients – was replaced with a relationship in which the acquisition of wealth was the main concern, in which loans served exclusively to raise revenue for the lender, and traditional forms of generosity were reduced or abandoned.

So far as we can tell, it was often only fierce factional rivalry within the ruling classes which gave the poor a chance to resist exploitation. Some members of the elite, looking to establish themselves as 'tyrants', sought to advance their own power-struggles by winning the backing of the people at large. Under oppressive conditions, it does not take much to stand out as a friend of the people. In Sicily, the mere agreement of two local mafiosi, the Jaconi brothers, to lease some of their estates to a peasant collective, inspired the grateful members of the collective to stage a march 'through the village without music or banner, crying "Long live the King, the Queen, Garibaldi, the *Fascio*, the Mayor, and the brothers Jaconi!"' (Blok 1974, 126). Greek tradition suggests that one could win popular support on the strength of a reputation for being an effective leader in war, a defender of justice at home, and a generous patron to one's clients – a reputation, in short, for coming closer than most to the princely ideal of Homer and Hesiod.⁸¹ Once in power, the tyrant would have to ensure his continued popularity by opposing the worst excesses of exploitation.

Athens and Megara, too, experienced tyrannies, but events in the early sixth century took a different turn. The stories about the Megarians' demands for the return of interest paid and the reinstatement of patronage withheld suggest a widespread uprising in which the masses took matters into their own hands. *The Athenian Constitution* speaks of a 'severe' conflict between the elite and the masses in Athens which went on for 'a long time' and culminated in Solon's reforms (2.1; 5.1–2). This, too, must refer to a violent popular uprising, for surely only this would have posed enough of a threat to their rule to force the Athenian elite to agree to the appointment of a 'mediator', let alone to accept that their exploitative practices needed to be drastically restricted.

The case of Athens demonstrates that resistance to exploitation could be effective. By restoring public land to common use and imposing a limit on the amount of land anyone could own, Solon counteracted the concentration of land in a few hands; by cancelling debts and outlawing the most severe sanction for defaulting, he reduced pressure

on the poor; and through reform of the judicial system he made it considerably more difficult even for the rich and powerful to seize property by force or deceit. An indirect result of all this was a better bargaining position for agricultural labourers and less extortionate sharecropping contracts. Championing of the poor by the tyrants improved the situation still further. Extensive personal patronage for struggling farmers, the introduction of additional legal protection, a probable reduction in taxes and complete tax exemption for the poorest,⁸² made it easier to keep one's smallholding intact. Extensive building projects, moreover, provided hundreds of farming families with a supplementary income from casual labour. All these things will have done much to ensure that more and more small farmers could survive and become ever less dependent on wealthy neighbours.

By the classical period, landownership had become quite widespread in Athens. The process was no doubt helped along by Athenian settlement abroad, from the late seventh century onwards, which took some of the pressure off those being squeezed dry at home, and, later on, by the benefits of the Athenian Empire trickling down to the lower classes. It may be true that peasant resistance would not have erupted, or would not have achieved so much, if it had not been for such external factors and for other political conflicts raging at the same time, whether rivalry within the elite or agitation by prosperous farmers, traders, and craftsmen for a greater share in political power. But conversely, without peasant unrest to draw on for support, these political conflicts would not have taken the same course or have had the same impact.⁸³ The struggle of the poor to curtail the greed and violence of their superiors was among the first and most decisive steps towards a less exploitative and more egalitarian society.

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Keith Hopwood, Anton Powell, and especially Nick Fisher have contributed incisive comment and helpful advice which has done much to improve this paper. They do not, of course, necessarily agree with the views expressed in it.

Notes

¹ This view goes back at least as far as Fustel de Coulanges' *La cité antique* of 1864 (1980, 253–7), and was stated emphatically by e.g. Naphtali Lewis 1941, 151–4, before it was made popular by Finley 1965 (1981, 156–7), Forrest 1966, 147–74, and Andrewes 1967 (1991, 114–17). More recently, it has been adopted in various forms by e.g. Murray 1980 (1993, 192–4); Rhodes 1981, 96; Gallant 1982, 123–4; Morris 1987, 207; Hanson 1995, 122–5; Osborne

1996, 222–3; and Foxhall 1997, 129–32. Some treatments (including Woodhouse 1938, esp. 55, 64; Andrewes 1982, 381; and Fisher 1992, 69–76; 1993, 15–20) adopt the notion of a 'social' crisis, but do accept the severity of some forms of exploitation.

² This position is in several important respects close to that taken by Filippo Cassola (1964, 1973), specifically with regard to Solon's reforms. His views have been generally dismissed or ignored; I hope to give them added plausibility by using different arguments in support, by including ancient sources dealing with parallel developments in Greek communities other than Athens, and by introducing comparative evidence.

³ Some of these points are developed in detail below; for traditional Sicilian society and the role of the mafia within it, see Graziano 1973, Blok 1974, Arlacchi 1986.

⁴ Well-attested instances of (groups of) families monopolizing power are the Eupatridae in Athens (Rhodes 1981, 75–6) and the Bacchiads in Corinth (Salmon 1984, 55–74). For the ownership of cattle (as well as land) on a large scale the evidence is limited, but suggestive: see below, n. 18. Prosperous smallholders are envisaged in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (Walcot 1970, Millett 1984); for sharecroppers and labourers, see below, pp. 18–24. There are clearly a number of significant differences between archaic Greece and nineteenth-century Sicily, but I do not believe that these invalidate the comparisons drawn here. Note above all that the local elites of Sicily, unlike those of Greece, were subordinate to distant landlords and even more distant central state authorities (although in practice they were largely independent in their exercise of power at the local level), and that the exploited labour force in Greece, but not in Sicily, also included chattel slaves. See also below, n. 9.

⁵ The *floruit* of Theognis is placed in the 540s by ancient sources, and the influential arguments of West (1974, 65–71) for an earlier date (in the late seventh century) do not seem compelling to me. It is, however, almost certain that the corpus contains the work of other poets, too, some of which is of much earlier or later date.

⁶ Although the world of Homer includes elements of fantasy, and the poet does consciously attempt to recreate a world of the past, it is largely an idealized version of the poet's own world, which I would date to 700–650 bc. For stimulating recent treatments of the general relation between Homer and history, see Patzek 1992; Morris and Powell 1997, 511–713; Raaflaub 1998. For my own views, see Van Wees 1998b.

⁷ For the mafia ideology of self-sacrifice see also Arlacchi 1986, 21–6.

⁸ Follain 1995, 72; for other instances of mafiosi regarded as benefactors, see *ibid.* 70–4, and compare the demonstration in favour of the Jaconi brothers cited below, p. 36.

⁹ The parallel is not perfect: for mafiosi this is the only justification available, while *basileis* can appeal to noble birth and divine sanction as well; yet the claim that they offer protection in law and war does seem to count for most in Homer, too.

¹⁰ See also 4.257–64, 340–8; 8.161–3; for discussion, see Van Wees 1992, 294–8 (landed estates), 299–310 (booty); 1995b, 165–6 (food and drink); and

below, n. 12.

¹¹ On personal obligations overriding justice among the gods, see Van Wees 1992, 138–48; Bremmer 1994. In Homer, one's first impression is of voluntary submission to arbitration by princes and of giving gifts by choice, but this is probably an idealization of a system much like the one implied by Hesiod (n. 14 below). For a plausible interpretation of Homeric dispute-settlement, see Carlier 1984, 172–7 (cf. Van Wees 1992, 34, 327–8 n. 34).

¹² For the role of *basileis* in war: Van Wees 1988, 15–22; 1992, 79–80, 85–8; 1995a, 166–9. The main point is that, contrary to first appearances, the princes' gifts and privileges are not conditional upon performance. Furthermore, there are hints that princes might resort to violence if gifts were not presented: see below, p. 31.

¹³ A degree of exploitation is accepted by e.g. Stein-Hölkeskamp 1989, 39–40 (gifts to princes 'by no means always entirely voluntary and uncontested'), but several influential analyses argue that relations between rulers and subjects were, in practice as well as in theory, characterized by generosity and reciprocity: e.g. Donlan 1980, esp. 19–20 (an 'easy alliance' between elite and mass), 1982; Ulf 1990, 191–212. In Qviller 1981 and 1995 the emphasis oscillates between exploitation and generosity.

¹⁴ Walcot 1970, 100–5, is surely right that this is not a specific accusation of bribery, but a comment on a regime in which gift-giving to patrons is a vital element (see below); on the other hand, as West 1978, 151 ad 39, points out, the context suggests that it is meant to be derogatory (unlike the neutral or even 'envious' Sarakatsani remarks about 'eating' officials cited as an analogy: Campbell 1964, 235, 257). The princes apparently do not merely arbitrate when asked, but *demand* that disputes are submitted to them (hence Perses, by causing trouble, 'greatly exalted the gift-eating princes who *want* to judge this dispute', *W&D* 38–9), and demand gifts whether or not litigants like the verdict.

¹⁵ The closing words of the hawk have been widely regarded as the moral of the fable (and as such were *athetized* by Aristarchus), but that makes no sense: Hesiod would then in effect have been encouraging the princes to make him stop protesting about injustice (e.g. West 1978, ad 202–12 and 210–11). Surely the point of the comment that the princes 'can think for themselves' is that the moral has been left implicit. We are left to infer that the princes behave like beasts of prey, and that such behaviour is not acceptable. The message of the fable is subsequently reinforced by the remark that only animals eat one another (cf. Walcot 1970, 115–16).

¹⁶ Brief comments on Hesiod's acquisitiveness: Walcot 1970, 82–3, Millett 1984, 94–6.

¹⁷ See Finley 1978, 121–2; Van Wees 1992, 105–6.

¹⁸ *Od.* 4.634–7, 14.100–2; Pausanias IV.5; there appears to be no later evidence for such arrangements: Hodkinson 1988. Aristotle, *Politics* 1305a25–6 (cited below, p. 16) offers evidence for aggressive pasturing at home.

¹⁹ It is not uncommon to treat the poets' complaints as general reflections on the importance of social justice in all areas of life, rather than as denunciations of a real and specific type of illegitimate behaviour: e.g. Murray 1980

(1993, 181–200); Manville 1990, 46–53, 153–4; Osborne 1996, 217–19. Those who do see acquisitiveness at the expense of the poor as a real problem often focus only on the exploitation of credit (e.g. Starr 1977, 46–54, 163–4, 181–7; 1982, 421–4), and the few who have acknowledged that land was seized by the rich usually consider only *public* land – which is admittedly of vital importance, but not, I think, the whole story; see below, n. 29.

²⁰ Tyrtaeus: in a forthcoming paper, I hope to show that the line ‘love of silver will destroy Sparta, but nothing else’ is indeed from Tyrtaeus’ *Eunomia* (and rightly included as such in the edition by Bergk, contra all subsequent editors). Theognis and Solon, see below, pp. 13–14. Punishment of descendants: Solon F 13.29–32; Theognis 204–8, 373–92, 731–52.

²¹ *Od.* 2.334–6, 16.383–6. For an explanation of the suitors’ complex motives, see Van Wees 1992, 285–92.

²² The ‘leaders of the people’ are not ‘demagogues’ here (contra West 1974, 68). For a discussion of the meaning of both passages, see Fisher 1992, 69–74, 207–13; Nagy 1985, 43.

²³ For the meaning and upper-class associations of *hybris*: Fisher 1992, esp. 7–35, and this volume. On the Hesiod passage: *ibid.*, 194–5.

²⁴ Fisher 1992, 70 n. 109 offers the alternative explanation that Solon is referring to ‘small groups plotting against each other’ in a situation of ‘imminent civil war’.

²⁵ *Digest* 10.1.13; Plutarch, *Solon* 23.7 = Solon, *Laws* F 60ab, 62. Possible evidence for similar detailed regulations elsewhere, see Van Effenterre and Ruzé 1994, nos. 45–6.

²⁶ Contra Crouch 1993, 244–5.

²⁷ Rather than by acute long-term drought, as some have thought: see below, n. 80.

²⁸ For the existence of sacred and common land: Cassola 1964, 37–9; Rihll 1991, 104–10. Land belonging to groups such as *phratries* may also have been involved: Hammond 1961; Manville 1990, 111–12, 117–18. Hesiod suggests that uncultivated land in mountainous areas was in common use, and that it was a vital resource for grazing animals (*Theogony* 22–3) and gathering wood (*W&D* 428: ‘look in the *mountainside* or in the field’ for a piece of wood to make a plough-beam). There is also some epic evidence for a ‘common field’ (*ἐπιξύνος*), plots of which are assigned to individuals (who fight over them ‘with measuring rods’, *Il.* 12.421–3; cf. the apparently collective ploughing of a field, 18.541–9).

²⁹ Laertes’ farm is ‘far from the city’ (*Od.* 24.212), and it may be no coincidence that its workers are engaged in building walls (222–5), literally enclosing the land; Eurymakhos’ farm is similarly ‘remote’ (*ἐπ’ ἐσχατιῇς*, 18.358) and he proposes to hire a labourer to ‘gather stones’, evidently to build a wall (359). These points are made by Cassola (1964, 44), who was the first to highlight the importance of Solon’s lines (*ibid.*, 35–41; cf. Gallant 1982, 124; Fisher 1992, 72). To Rhodes’s objection that two lines is not enough evidence to ‘suppose that this happened on so large a scale as to be the chief cause of distress’ (1981, 95), I would reply that many more lines make similar complaints about illegitimate acquisition of land: these two verses are merely more

specific than the others. The idea that new land was being brought under cultivation is now quite widely accepted, but it is rarely noted that this would have happened at the expense of the poor. In fact, it is often suggested that the poor benefited from this process (Sakellariou 1979, 108; Gallant 1982, 122–4; Andrewes 1982, 378–81; Manville 1990, 111–14, 117–18, 123; Rihll 1991, 114–21; Sancisi 1993, 20–4), but this is clearly not what Solon suggests. See also below, n. 45.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Politics* 1266b14–17; Solon, *Laws* F 66. The historicity of this law is summarily dismissed by Andrewes (1982, 384), and it is indeed surprising that a law of such evident importance is not mentioned either in *Ath. Pol.* or in Plutarch. Nick Fisher points out to me that Aristotle may be alluding to Solon’s legislation on inheritance, heiresses, and adoption, which contributed to the stability of property ownership, and which may indeed have been designed to close off some of the avenues by which powerful men could accumulate property. On the other hand, a law fixing a ceiling for land ownership makes good sense in itself, and would help explain the drastic improvement of the lot of the small farmer by the classical period. I would therefore support Manville’s view (1990, 115) that the law is historical, and suggest that the absence of other references to it is due to fourth-century reluctance to associate Solon with any kind of land redistribution (below, p. 17).

³¹ This interpretation is also adopted by Cassola (1964, 41–4; 1973, 76–7), against the vast majority of scholars. Sancisi (1993, 22) and Harris (1997, 104–7) contribute further arguments for regarding Solon’s *horoi* as boundary markers, but the former nevertheless suggests that they are specifically placed on land worked by dependent labourers, as most scholars do (see below, nn. 45, 48), and the latter argues unconvincingly that the boundaries marked are not real, but metaphorical.

³² *Il.* 12.421–2; 21.403–5; for early archaeological evidence, see Cassola 1964, 42–3; for the fourth-century evidence, see Harris 1997, 104.

³³ See below, nn. 45, 48.

³⁴ Solon’s solemn personification of the liberated Earth as a powerful goddess (‘the greatest mother of the Olympian gods’, F 36.4) could be taken as a hint that the land in question was of a particularly ‘sacred’ nature, as Nick Fisher has attractively suggested to me.

³⁵ *Man of Respect* 1991, 3, 6–7, 4, 9–10.

³⁶ Blok 1974, 44, 55, 59–67, 152; quotations from pp. 67 and 66. Blok gives the extra charges in absolute weights of produce; I have converted them into percentages of the figure given for an ‘abundant’ harvest (66). For southern Italy as a whole, Graziano (1973, 376 n. 27) cites a share of one-third for the sharecropper as common; for the Mediterranean at large, Davis (1977, 73) surveys the very wide variety of sharecropping contracts.

³⁷ Many *thētes* in Solon’s Attica: also Diogenes Laertius 1.45, 113. Annual contract: *Il.* 21.444 (building a wall and herding, 446–9); Solon F 13.47–8 (ploughing); an annual contract is also implied by Hesiod 602–3 (as convincingly explained by West 1978 ad 602). Other hired labour: *Il.* 18.550–60 (harvesting); *Od.* 18.357–61 (gathering stones for wall and planting); Hesiod’s

comments about the ideal ploughman also suggest a hired labourer (*W&D* 441–7, with West 1978 ad 441).

³⁸ Plato, *Euthyphro* 4c, and schol. ad loc.; Pollux 3.82; Photius s.v. πελάται. 'Neighbour': Aeschylus, *Persians* 49. *Pelatai* in Solon's time: also *Etymologicum Gudianum* 498, 12 Sturz.

³⁹ Dependent status made *pelatēs* a suitable Greek equivalent of Latin *cliens*; see Woodhouse 1938, 52–3; Hahn 1983. Millett 1989 convincingly argues that (mention of) the relationship was 'avoided' in democratic classical Athens.

⁴⁰ Photius s.v. πελάται; so too Hesychios s.v. ἐκτῆμορος, and Eustathios 1854, 31, both cited below. Pollux 4.165 equates *hektēmoroi* with *pelatai*. This etymology is briefly discussed in Oliva 1988, 24; among those who accept it are Woodhouse 1938, 43, 47–50; Cassola 1964, 50, 55; 1973, 81–2; Gallant 1982, 123–4; Hanson 1995, 122. The majority of scholars choose to follow Aristotle's alternative interpretation, that the *hektēmoroi* gave away one-sixth, and kept five-sixths of the crops (see below), usually without bothering to explain away the obvious meaning of their name, or at best referring to the observation by Von Fritz (1940, 56) that the words δεκατευτής in Greek, *decumanus* in Latin, 'tither' in English, and 'Zehntner' in German can refer both to someone paying a tenth and to someone collecting a tenth – which does not mean that the same is true of *hektēmoros*, or that, if it were true, the sixth was indeed paid rather than collected by the *hektēmoros*.

⁴¹ Quotations from, respectively, Pollux 7.151 (Solon, *Laws* F 67); Hesychios s.v. ἐπίμορτος; Eustathios 1854, 31, on *Odyssey* 19.28, citing 'an anonymous rhetorical lexicon'. Although these terms are often cited, their implication that a *hektēmoros* is the *recipient* of a share has been generally overlooked.

⁴² Naber 1864, 56–7; on the other hand, Woodhouse 1938, 47–8, and Foxhall 1997, 119, warn against relying too heavily on comparative evidence. For the view that five-sixths is intrinsically too high a proportion, see e.g. Forrest 1966, 147; Andrewes 1967 (1991, 115); Rhodes 1981, 91.

⁴³ 'Aristotle' is clearly thinking in terms of tenants paying rent (who were common in the fourth century, although unfortunately we cannot tell how their rents compared with the share of the *hektēmoroi*: Osborne 1988; Burford 1993, 177–81). Those who favour the view that the *hektēmoros* handed over five-sixths of the crops, sometimes interpret the passage in 'Aristotle' differently to make it fit their views (Woodhouse 1938, 48–9; Gallant 1982, 123–4). The phrase 'against this payment', taken by itself, could indeed equally well mean a payment of one-sixth made by the landlord to the cultivator; in context, however, this is unlikely, since the text goes on to explain what happened to the *cultivator* if he 'did not make the payment'. One could argue that the second 'payment' is not the same as the first (as Gallant does), but this is strained, and it is better to accept that 'Aristotle' is thinking throughout of a payment of one-sixth made by the *hektēmoros* to the landlord. Woodhouse goes so far as to suggest a tentative emendation of Plutarch (1938, 49 n. 10).

⁴⁴ Pollux 7.151, in the reading of mss. F, S (see Bethe's edition of 1931; rejected in Dindorf's edition of 1824, but adopted in Bekker's of 1846); Hesychios s.v. ἐκτῆμορος.

⁴⁵ According to the long-popular view that *hektēmoroi* were debt-bondsmen,

they worked on their *own* land and paid one-sixth of their crops towards their debts: e.g. Linforth 1919, 63–4; Hammond 1961, 90–1; and most recently Starr 1977, 182–4, and Snodgrass 1980, 93, 144. According to the currently popular view that the problems of *hektēmoroi* were of a social rather than economic nature, they were 'clients' paying one-sixth of their *own* crops as a 'tribute' to long-established patrons: see the literature cited above, n. 1; also Harris 1997, 107–10, who argues that this 'tribute' is a form of mafia-style 'protection money'. The idea that *hektēmoroi* were a category of agricultural labourers who worked on newly cultivated *public* land, and made payments to local men of power who, in some way, were in charge of the process of expansion, is found in Cassola 1964, 49–51, and is the only major aspect of his interpretation with which I would disagree; it is also the only part of his interpretation which has gained popularity: Sakellariou 1979, 108; Andrewes 1982, 380–1; Gallant 1982, 124; Manville 1990, 111–14; Sancisi 1993, 20–4. A variation devised by Rihll 1991, 115–18, has the *hektēmoroi* paying shares into communal stores. In order to reconcile all this with 'Aristotle', it is usually argued that he misunderstood a (hypothetical) archaic property regime which did not have a clear-cut notion of private ownership (indeed, Manville 1990, 127–9, attributes to Solon a pivotal role in creating private property). Osborne (1996, 222–3) is exceptional in following 'Aristotle' all the way and suggesting that *hektēmoroi* did work the land of the rich and did pay a rent of only one-sixth.

⁴⁶ We should also, I think, reject the notion of 'Aristotle' that non-payment of the sixth would lead to enslavement: he is thinking in terms of falling behind with payments of monetary rent, but in the archaic system the landlord would simply take his share and leave the rest for the cultivator: the *hektēmoros* might starve, but the problem of non-payment could not arise. I imagine that 'Aristotle' added this clause in order to explain why even such low 'rent' payments could lead to resentment; he says emphatically that it was 'the slavery' to which the people really objected (*Ath. Pol.* 2.3).

⁴⁷ *Hektēmoroi* took a greater share of the risk than hired labourers: the latter received a fixed wage, while *hektēmoroi*, taking a percentage, might do much better than hired labourers in a good year, or much worse in a bad year. In a bad year, they might conceivably be *better* off than Sicilian *metatieri* since the latter were obliged to pay fixed surcharges which might constitute much more than 5% of a poor harvest, bringing their share down to well below 20%.

⁴⁸ Both 'Aristotle' and Plutarch cite the removal of the *horoi* *only* as evidence for the cancellation of debts, without any reference to *hektēmoroi*. When it was believed that *hektēmoroi* were enslaved debtors, scholars were entitled to infer that the removal of the *horoi* entailed amongst other things the liberation of the *hektēmoroi*, but now that it is generally and rightly recognized that both 'Aristotle' and Plutarch distinguish the 'sixth-parters' from debt-slaves (see esp. Finley 1965 [1981, 156 n. 27]), there is nothing in the sources to link *hektēmoroi* and *horoi*. Perhaps it is testimony to the force of habit that this link is nevertheless still made almost universally (Sakellariou 1979, 104–6, is an honourable exception) at the cost of inventing *horoi* which served as 'record stones' (Woodhouse 1938, 109) of a type unattested in literature or archaeology.

⁴⁹ See below, pp. 32–4, 37.

⁵⁰ Quotations from Blok 1974, 55 and Graziano 1973, 363–4. Similar conditions, of course, prevail in many agricultural societies, perhaps most notoriously in parts of modern India.

⁵¹ On reciprocity, see van Wees 1998a.

⁵² Millett 1991, 257 n. 20, 261–2 n. 33; Korver 1934, as cited by Millett (*non vidi*).

⁵³ See further Millett 1991, 256 n. 18, with examples of such laws, including the 'law of Oxylos' prohibiting using particular plots of land as security. Enslavement as punishment rather than security: Finley 1965 (1981, 152, 160–1); Woodhouse 1938, 67–73. This is confirmed by the Knossian custom discussed below, and by an episode in the *Odyssey*: when Poseidon offers to stand security for a debt owed by Ares, Hephaistos is worried about the risk of having to put Poseidon in chains (8.344–56).

⁵⁴ These points are well made by Rihll 1989, 279, who adds a few other, less persuasive, objections. Another fragment (F 9) in which Solon refers to the danger of tyranny is also likely to predate his reforms. Rihll takes it as a specific reference to Drako (1989, 282–3), which would date this fragment to almost thirty years before Solon's reforms, at which time Solon would have been very young; more probably it was a generic warning of what might happen.

⁵⁵ Plutarch says that Solon formally opposed the motion to grant a body-guard and 'said many things similar to what he said in his poems' (*Solon* 30.2); this suggests that the fragment was at first used to illustrate the sort of thing Solon might have said against Peisistratos, without necessarily implying that in his poems these arguments were in fact directed against the tyrant. Subsequently, this developed into the view that the poems were indeed composed in response to the *coup*.

⁵⁶ *Ath. Pol.* 5.2 (Solon FF 4a, 4b, 4c); in most editions, this elegy is assumed to be the same as a poem on *Eunomia* cited by Demosthenes (F 4). However, the long extract given by Demosthenes features only accusations against the rich, and nothing to suggest an attempt to allocate responsibility equally to the rich and poor (cf. Spahn 1977, 121–8), so it seems more likely that these were two separate poems, both written before the reforms, but each taking a different line on what caused the crisis.

⁵⁷ A very similar argument was proposed by Rihll (1989, 286; 1991, 117–18), except that she related the law to the introduction of *hektēmoroi*, which could not have been the case on my interpretation of that status. Note that Plutarch actually uses the verb 'to seize pledges' (ὑποσῆζω) for seizing debtors in Rome (*Coriolanus* 5.3).

⁵⁸ There is a view, well represented by Wölke 1978, 46–70, that this poem is a late Hellenistic composition, which is presumably why the passage has been generally ignored. However, some ancient evidence suggests a date in the early fifth century, and it is difficult to see how any poem composed much later could still find itself attributed to Homer.

⁵⁹ Plutarch, *Moralia* 295cd = *QG* 18; see Millett 1991, 49 for the date (contra Legon 1981, 115; Asheri 1969, 14–16; Figueira 1985, 146–9) and discussion.

⁶⁰ Solon, *Laws* F 68 (Lysias 10.18); see below n. 63. Otherwise, only Androtion (*FGrH* 324 F 34; Plutarch, *Solon* 15.4) mentions interest: Solon did not cancel debts but reduced interest payments; this is almost certainly no more than an imaginative way of making Solon seem less radical, and little weight can be attached to it.

⁶¹ *Ath. Pol.* 6; Plutarch, *Solon* 15–16 (for the many other brief references in other sources, see the collection of testimonia in Martina 1968, 141–6, nos. 274–96). The term 'debt-cutters' is explained by the sources as referring to friends of Solon's who deliberately incurred debts shortly before the reform in the knowledge that they would be able to 'cut' them soon, but it seems likely that it was originally a hostile term for all those who supported Solon in advocating a cancellation of debts.

⁶² Plutarch, *Solon* 19.4 (Solon, *Laws* F 70); it is likely to be authentic, in view of the very precise reference to it as 'the eighth law in the thirteenth axon of Solon', and it is no doubt this law to which Solon refers when he claims to have 'brought back' those who had been sold abroad, and to have 'set free' those in slavery at home, while his claim to have brought back those who had fled the country must be a reference to the cancellation of debts which allowed them to return safely (F 36, 8–15).

⁶³ An early law on interest, cited above in n. 60, stipulated that 'silver is to be placed out [i.e. lent] at whatever rate the lender may want' (Lysias 10.18; see Millett 1991, 50). If 'silver' means 'money', this law can be no earlier than the late sixth century, but the quaint vocabulary does suggest an early date and perhaps it referred to uncoined silver. It is conceivable that there was some limit to the interest that could be charged on loans in grain, and that this law was meant to exempt 'silver' from these constraints, but more probably there were no restrictions on interest rates on any kind of loan.

⁶⁴ Blok 1974, 128; cf. 49. For *borgesi* (*burgisi*), see Blok 1974, 113; Graziano 1973, 363.

⁶⁵ *Il.* 5.78, 9.603, 11.58, 16.605; *Od.* 5.36, 11.484–5, 14.205.

⁶⁶ Graziano 1973, 363: 'There is no contradiction between the violence which permeates Sicilian clientelism and the accentuated paternalism which characterizes it. Simply, when the power differential is so great and the client socially isolated, a highly affective relationship is the best strategy to soften the terms of an unequal exchange.' On exploitation within reciprocity in general, see Van Wees 1998a, 44–6.

⁶⁷ See Walcot 1970, 82; Van Wees 1992, 228–37.

⁶⁸ *Il.* 7.467–75. Homer does not say that access to the market was *conditional* upon this gift, but in my view this is another instance of the poet idealizing the princes and ignoring the inherent exploitation.

⁶⁹ See Van Wees 1992, 299–310.

⁷⁰ See Van Wees 1992, 109–25.

⁷¹ See Van Wees 1992, 32–3; 1995b, 165–6.

⁷² *Ath. Pol.* 8.3; there is another reference to naukraric silver in Androtion (*FGrH* 324 F 36), and to naukraric funds in Pollux, *Onomasticon* 8.108. A further law concerning *naukrariai* is attributed to Solon in Photius, *Lexicon* s.v. *naukraria*; cf. Schol. Ald. ad Aristophanes, *Clouds* 37. Herodotus credits the

leaders of the *naukrariai* with an active role in foiling the coup of Kylon in c. 630 BC (5.71.2; a passage to which I would attach more value than to the denial by Thucydides 1.126). Under the classical liturgy system, of course, the rich were forced to pay for the maintenance of ships and crews *without* the option of recovering their expenses from the poor, but this system reflects the balance of power in democratic Athens, and should not be projected back into the archaic age. See further Rhodes 1981, 151–3; Figueira 1986; Jordan 1992; Gabrielsen 1994, 19–24.

⁷³ *Ath. Pol.* 6.1; Photius and Hesychios s.v. *σεισάχθεια*.

⁷⁴ 'Tithe' also in Diogenes Laertius 1.53, explicitly said to go into a public, not private, fund; Herodotus (1.64) is presumably thinking of a tax when he mentions 'revenues' raised from Athens. Rhodes 1981, 215, doubts that Peisistratos merely continued an established practice of taxation; cf. Pleket 1969, 45–7. Sancisi 1993, 25–30, and Harris 1997, 110–11, both see the tithe as a direct development from the one-sixth payments of the *hektēmoroi*; in my view, of course, these are payments of a fundamentally different kind.

⁷⁵ *Man of Respect*, 3–4; quotations from 7 and 5–6.

⁷⁶ See Millett 1991, 50–1. Both sources claim that these loans were made to prevent people from 'idling', which betrays an upper class view of the deprivations suffered by the poor. Peisistratos' actions as reported by Aelian are exactly what one would expect from a patron in an agricultural society, and Cawkwell (1995, 75 with n. 13) is therefore surely wrong to reject both versions as 'pure fabrication' and 'a piece of fiction'. For Peisistratos' grant of tax-exemptions, see below, n. 82.

⁷⁷ Kimon: Theopompus *FGrH* 115 F 89 (Athenaeus 12.532f–533c); Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.* 27.3; Plutarch, *Kimon* 10.1–2; discussed by Millett 1989, 23–5.

⁷⁸ Plutarch, *Moralia* 295cd = *QG* 18. Translation and discussion: Millett 1989, 21–2; 1991, 48–50.

⁷⁹ See Silverman 1977, esp. 12–13, and Scott 1977, esp. 29–35, briefly discussed in Van Wees 1998a, 45–6.

⁸⁰ Drought: Camp 1979 (contra Morris 1987, 160–1). Overpopulation: e.g. Rhodes 1981, 95–6 (contra Forrest 1966, 150–4; Osborne 1996, 222; Foxhall 1997, 122–8).

⁸¹ Kypselos is an example of a popular leader who combined all three characteristics. His oracular propaganda stressed his mission to bring justice to Corinth (Herodotus 5.92β.2), and we are told that in his position as the city's *polemarkhos*, commander-in-chief, he was also one of its chief judges, in which capacity he displayed both fairness of judgment and exceptional generosity in not claiming the share of fines which he himself was entitled to take, and in not enforcing instant payment of what was owed to the state, but personally standing guarantee for those who could not afford to pay at once (Nikolaos of Damascus *FGrH* 90 F 57, 4–5). As Salmon (1984, 188–90) shows, there are too many peculiar circumstantial details in this story for it to have been a late invention: 'we should conclude (with surprise) that the outlines of this part of Nicolaus' account rest on genuine tradition' (190). Aristotle's claim that Kypselos (like Peisistratos) was a popular leader who seized power (*Pol.* 1310b29–31) is borne out by this, and popular leadership is likely to have

been a common route to tyrannical power, given widespread popular discontent (contra Cawkwell 1995).

⁸² A tax reduction by Peisistratos would help explain how taxation could have made him popular, and a further reduction by his sons would explain the discrepancy between the figure given by Aristotle for Peisistratos and the figure given by Thucydides for his sons (see above, p. 32). It has been plausibly suggested that the story about the grant of tax exemption to a single hard-up farmer (*Ath. Pol.* 16.6) reflects a wider policy of exempting the poor, and more speculatively that the tax raised on others might have funded the loans of seedcorn and oxen (Millett 1991, 50–1).

⁸³ The interaction between peasant unrest and both urban political struggles and internal mafia rivalries in nineteenth-century Sicily is noted by Blok (1974, 97–8, 121–7).

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